

THE WHITE PROPHET, VOLUME II

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Title: The White Prophet, Volume II (of 2)

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Release Date: June 15, 2016 [eBook #52343]

Language: English

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VOLUME II (OF 2) ***

Produced by Al Haines.

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IT WAS HE; IT WAS GORDON!

THE WHITE PROPHET

BY
HALL CAINE

ILLUSTRATED BY R. CATON WOODVILLE

IN TWO VOLUMES
VOL II.

LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN
1909

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ILLUSTRATIONS

It was he! It was Gordon . . . Frontispiece

Helena was in the gallery

”Yes; conspiracy against you and against England”

The Consul-General . . . was hurling his last reproaches upon his enemies

THE WHITE PROPHET

BOOK THREE—*Continued* THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

CHAPTER XI

When Helena awoke next morning she was immediately conscious of a great commotion both within and without the house. After a moment Zenoba came into the bedroom and began to tell her what had happened.

"Have you not heard, O Rani?" said the Arab woman, in her oily voice. "No? You sleep so late, do you? When everybody is up and doing, too! Well, the Master has news that the great Bedouin is at Omdurman and he is sending the people down to the river to bring him up. The stranger is to be received in the mosque, I may tell you. Yes, indeed, in the mosque, although he is English and a Christian."

Then Ayesha came skipping into the room in wild excitement.

"Rani! Rani!" she cried. "Get up and come with us. We are going now—this minute—everybody."

Helena excused herself; she felt unwell and would stay in bed that day; so the child and the nurse went off without her.

Yet left alone she could not rest. The feverish uncertainty of the night before returned with redoubled force, and after a while she felt compelled to rise.

Going into the guest-room she found the house empty and the camp in front of it deserted. She was standing by the door, hardly knowing what to do, when the strange sound which she had heard on the night of the betrothal came from a distance.

"*Lu-lu-lu-u-u!*"

It was the zaghareet, the women's cry of joy, and it was mingled with the louder shouts of men. The stranger was coming! the people were bringing him on. Who would he be? Helena's anxiety was almost more than her brain and nerves could bear. She strained her eyes in the direction of the jetty, past the Abbas Barracks and the Mongers Fort.

The moments passed like hours, but at length the crowd appeared. At first sight it looked like a forest of small trees approaching. The forest seemed to sway and to send out monotonous sounds as if moved by a moaning wind. But looking again, Helena saw what was happening—the people were carrying green palm branches and strewing them on the yellow sand in front of the great stranger.

He was riding on a white camel, Ishmael's camel, and Ishmael was riding beside him.. Long before he came near to her, Helena saw him, straining her sight to do so. He was wearing the ample robes of a Bedouin, and his face was almost hidden by the sweeping shawl which covered his head and neck.

But it was *he!* It was Gordon! Helena could not mistake him. One glance was enough. Without looking a second time she ran back to her bedroom, and covered her eyes and ears.

For a time the voices of the people followed her through the deadening walls.

"Lu-lu-u-u!" cried the women.

"La ilaha illa-llah! La ilaha illa-llah!" shouted the men.

But after a while the muffled sounds died away, and Helena knew that the great company had passed on to the mosque. It was like a dream, a mirage of the mind. It had come and it was gone, and in the dazed condition of her senses she could almost persuade herself that she had imagined everything.

Her impatience would not permit her to remain in the house. She, too, must go to the mosque, although she had never been there before. So putting on her Indian veil she set out hurriedly. When she came to herself again she was in the gallery, people were making way for her, and she was dropping into a place. Then she realised that she was sitting between Zenoba and little Ayesha.

The mosque was a large, four-square edifice, full of columns and arches, and with a kind of inner court that was open to the sky and had minarets at every corner. The gallery looked down on this court, and Helena saw below her, half in shadow, half in sunshine, the heads of a great concourse of men in turbans, tarbooshes, and brown felt skull-caps, all kneeling in rows on bright red carpets. In the front row, with his face to the Kibleh (the niche towards Mecca), Ishmael knelt in his white caftan, and by his side, with all eyes upon him, as if every interest centred on that spot, knelt the stranger in Bedouin dress.

It was Friday, and prayers were proceeding, now surging like the sea, now silent like the desert, sometimes started, as it seemed, by the voice of the unseen

muezzin on the minarets above, then echoed by the men on the carpets below. But Helena hardly heard them. Of one thing only was she conscious—that by the tragic play of destiny *he* was there while *she* was here!

After a while she became aware that Ishmael had risen and was beginning to speak, and she tried to regain composure enough to listen to what he said.

"My brothers," he said, "it is according to the precepts of the Prophet (peace to his name!) to receive the Christian in our temples if he comes with the goodwill of good Moslems and with a heart that is true to them. You know, O my brothers, whether I am a Moslem or not, and I pray to the Most Merciful to bless all such Christians as the one who is here to-day."

More of the same kind Ishmael said, but Helena found it hard, in the tumult of her brain, to follow him. She saw that both the women about her and the men below were seized with that religious fervour which comes to the human soul when it feels that something grand is being done. It was as though the memory of a thousand years of hatred between Moslem and Christian, with all its legacy of cruelty and barbarity, had been wiped out of their hearts by the stranger on whom their eyes were fixed—as though by some great act of self-sacrifice and brotherhood he had united East and West—and this fact of his presence at their prayers was the sign and symbol of an eternal truce.

The sublime spectacle seemed to capture all their souls, and when Ishmael turned towards the stranger at last and laid his hand on his head and said—

"May God and His Prophet bless you for what you have done for us and ours," the emotions of the people were raised to the highest pitch, and they rose to their feet as one man, and holding up their hands they cried, the whole congregation together, in a voice that was like the breaking of a great wave—

"You are now of us, and we are of you, and we are brothers."

By this time the women in the gallery were weeping audibly, and Helena, from quite other causes, was scarcely able to control her feelings. "Why did I come here?" she asked herself, and then, seeing that the Arab woman was watching her through the slits of her jealous eyes, she got up and pushed her way out of the mosque.

Back in her room, lying face down upon the bed, she sought in vain to collect her faculties sufficiently to follow and comprehend the course of events. Yes, it was Gordon. He had come to join Ishmael. Why had she never thought of that as a probable sequel to what had occurred in Cairo? Had he not been turned out by his own? In effect cashiered from the army? Forbidden his father's house? And had she not herself driven him away from her? What sequel was more natural—more plainly inevitable?

Then she grew hot and cold at a new and still more terrifying thought—Gordon would come *there!* How could she meet him? How look into his face? A

momentary impulse to deny her own identity was put aside immediately. Impossible! Useless! Then how could she account to Gordon for her presence in that house? Ishmael's wife! According to Mohammedan law and custom not only betrothed but married to him!

When she put her position to herself so, the thread of her thoughts seemed to snap in her brain. She could not disentangle the knot of them. A sense of infidelity to Gordon, to the very spirit of love itself, brought her for a moment the self-reproach and the despair of a woman who has sinned.

In the midst of her pain she heard the light voices of people returning to the house, and at the next moment Ayesha and Zenoba came into her room. The child was skipping about, full of high spirits, and the Arab woman was bitterly merry.

"Rani will be happy to hear that the Master is bringing the stranger home," said Zenoba.

Helena turned and gazed at the woman with a stupefied expression. What she had foreseen as a terrifying possibility was about to come to pass! She opened her mouth as if to speak but said nothing.

Meantime the Arab woman, in a significant tone that was meant to cut to the core, went on to say that this was the highest honour the Moslem could show the unbeliever, as well as the greatest trust he could repose in him.

"Have you never heard of that in your country, O Rani? No? It is true, though! Quite true!"

People supposed that every Moslem guarded his house so jealously that no strange man might look upon his wife, but among the Arabs of the desert, when a traveller, tired and weary, sought food and rest, the Sheikh would sometimes send him into his harem and leave him there for three days with full permission to do as he thought well.

"But he must never wrong that harem, O lady! If he does the Arab husband will kill him! Yes, and the faithless wife as well!"

So violent was the conflict going on within her that Helena hardly heard the woman's words, though the jealous spirit behind them was piercing her heart like needles. She became conscious of the great crowd returning, and it was making the same ululation as before, mingled with the same shouts. At the next moment there came a knock at the bedroom door and Abdullah's voice, crying—

"Lady! Lady!"

Helena reeled a little in rising to reply, and it was with difficulty that she reached the door.

"Master has brought Sheikh Omar Benani back and is calling for the lady. What shall I say?"

Helena fumbled the hem of her handkerchief in her fingers, as she was

went to do in moments of great agitation. She was asking herself what would happen if she obeyed Ishmael's summons. Would Gordon see through her motive in being there? If so, would he betray her to Ishmael?

Already she could hear a confused murmur in the guest-room, and out of that murmur her memory seemed to grasp back, as from a vanishing dream, the sound of a voice that had been lost to her.

She felt as if she were suffocating. Her breathing was coming rapidly from the depth of her throat. Yet the Arab woman was watching her, and while a whirlwind was going on within she had to preserve a complete tranquillity without.

"Say I am coming," she said.

The supreme moment had arrived. With a great effort she gathered up all her strength, drew her Indian shawl over her head in such a way that it partly concealed her face, and then, pallid, trembling, and with downcast eyes she walked out of the room.

CHAPTER XII

Gordon had that day experienced emotions only less poignant than those of Helena. In the early morning, after parting with Osman, the devoted comrade of his desert journey, he had encountered the British Sub-Governor of Omdurman, a young Captain of Cavalry who had once served under himself but now spoke to him, in his assumed character as a Bedouin, with a certain air of command.

This brought him some twinges of wounded pride, which were complicated by qualms of conscience, as he rode through the streets, past the silversmiths' shops, where grave-looking Arabs sold bracelets and necklets; past the weaving quarter, where men and boys were industriously driving the shuttle through the strings of their flimsy looms; past the potter's bazaar and the grain market, all so sweet and so free from their former smell of sun-dried filth and warm humanity packed close together.

"Am I coming here to oppose the power that in so few years has turned chaos into order?" he asked himself, but more personal emotions came later.

They came in full flood when the ferry steamer, by which he crossed the river, approached the bank on the other side, and he saw standing there, near to the spot on which the dervishes landed on the black night of the fall of Khartoum,

a vast crowd of their sons and their sons' sons who were waiting to receive him.

Again came qualms of conscience when out of this crowd stepped Ishmael Ameer, who kissed him on both cheeks and led him forward to his own camel amid the people's shouts of welcome. Was he, as a British soldier, throwing in his lot with the enemies of his country? As an Englishman and a Christian was he siding with the adversaries of religion and civilisation?

The journey through the town to the mosque, with the lu-lu-ing and the throwing of palm branches before his camel's feet, was less of a triumphal progress than an abject penance. He could hardly hold up his head. Sight of the bronze and black faces about him, shouting for him,—for him of another race and creed—making that act his glory which had led to his crime—this was almost more than he could bear.

But when he reached the mosque; when he found himself, unbeliever though he was, kneeling in front of the Kibleh; when Ishmael laid his hand on his head and called on God to bless him, and the people cried with one voice, "You are of us and we are brothers," the sense of human sympathy swept down every other emotion, and he felt as if at any moment he might burst into tears.

And then, when prayers were over and Ishmael brought up his uncle, and the patriarchal old man, with a beard like a flowing fleece, said he was to lodge at his house; and finally when Ishmael led him home and took him to his own chamber and called to Abdullah to set up another angerib, saying they were to sleep in the same room, Gordon's twinges of pride and qualms of conscience were swallowed up in one great wave of human brotherhood.

But both came back, with a sudden bound, when Ishmael began to talk of his wife, and sent the servant to fetch her. They were sitting in the guest-room by this time, waiting for the lady to come to them, and Gordon felt himself moved by the inexplicable impulse of anxiety he had felt before. Who was this Mohammedan woman who had prompted Ishmael to a scheme that must so surely lead to disaster? Did she know what she was doing? Was she betraying him?

Then a door on the women's side of the house opened slowly and he saw a woman enter the room. He did not look into her face. His distrust of her, whereof he was now half ashamed, made him keep his head down while he bowed low during the little formal ceremony of Ishmael's presentation. But instantly a certain indefinite memory of height and step and general bearing made his blood flow fast, and he felt the perspiration breaking out on his forehead.

A moment afterwards he raised his eyes, and then it seemed as if his hair stood upright. He was like a man who has been made colour-blind by some bright light. He could not at first believe the evidence of his senses that she who appeared to be before him was actually there.

He did not speak or utter a sound, but his embarrassment was not observed

by Ishmael, who was clapping his hands to call for food. During the next few minutes there was a little confusion in the room—Black Zogal and Abdullah were laying a big brass tray on tressels and covering it with dishes. Then came the ablutions and the sitting down to eat—Gordon at the head of the table, with Ishmael on his right and old Mahmud on his left, and Helena next to Ishmael.

The meal began with the beautiful Eastern custom of the host handing the first mouthful of food to his guest as a pledge of peace and brotherhood, faith and trust. This kept Gordon occupied for the moment, but Helena had time for observation. In the midst of her agitation she could not help seeing that Gordon had grown thinner, that his eyes were bloodshot and his nostrils pinched as if by physical or moral suffering. After a while she saw that he was looking across at her with increasing eagerness, and under his glances she became nervous and almost hysterical.

Gordon, on his part, had now not the shadow of a doubt of Helena's identity, but still he did not speak. He, too, noticed a change—Helena's profile had grown more severe, and there were dark rims under her large eyes. He could not help seeing these signs of the pain she had gone through, though his mind was going like a windmill under constantly changing winds. Why was she there? Could it be that the great sorrow which fell upon her at the death of her father had made her fly to the consolation of religion?

He dismissed that thought the instant it came to him, for behind it, close behind it, came the recollection of Helena's hatred of Ishmael Ameer and of the jealousy which had been the first cause of the separation between themselves. "Smash the Mahdi," she had said, not altogether in play. Then why was she there? Great God! could it be possible ... that after the death of the General ... she had—

Gordon felt at that moment as if the world were reeling round him.

Helena, glancing furtively across the table, was sure she could read Gordon's thoughts. With the certainty that he knew what had brought her to Khartoum she felt at first a crushing sense of shame. What a fatality! If anybody had told her that she would be overwhelmed with confusion by the very person she had been trying to avenge, she would have thought him mad, yet that was precisely what Providence had permitted to come to pass.

The sense of her blindness and helplessness in the hands of destiny was so painful as to reach the point of tears. When Gordon spoke in reply to Ishmael's or old Mahmud's questions the very sound of his voice brought memories of their happy days together, and, looking back on the past of their lives and thinking where they were now, she wanted to run away and cry.

All this time Ishmael saw nothing, for he was talking rapturously of the great hope, the great expectation, the near approach of the time when the people's sufferings would end. A sort of radiance was about him, and his face shone

with the joy and the majesty of the dreamer in the full flood of his dream.

When the meal was over the old man, who had been too busy with his food to see anything else, went off to his siesta, and then, the dishes being removed and the servants gone, Ishmael talked in lower tones of the details of his scheme—how he was to go into Cairo, in advance, in the habit of a Bedouin such as Gordon wore, in order to win the confidence of the Egyptian Army, so that they should throw down the arms which no man ought to bear, and thus permit the people of the pilgrimage, coming behind, to take possession of the city, the citadel, the arsenal, and the engines of war, in the name of God and His Expected One.

All this he poured out in the rapturous language of one who saw no impediments, no dangers, no perils from chance or treachery, and then, turning to where Helena sat with her face aflame and her eyes cast down, he gave her the credit of everything that had been thought of, everything that was to be done.

"Yes, it was the Rani who suggested it," he said, "and when the triumph of peace is won God will write it on her forehead."

The afternoon had passed by this time, and the sun, which had gone far round to the West, was glistening like hammered gold along the river, in the line of the forts of Omdurman. It was near to the hour for evening prayers, and Helena was now trembling under a new thought—the thought that Ishmael would soon be called out to speak to the people who gathered in the evening in front of the house, and then she and Gordon would be left alone.

When she thought of that she felt a desire which she had never felt before and never expected to feel—a desire that Ishmael might remain to protect her from the shock of the first word that would be spoken when he was gone.

Gordon on his part, too, was feeling a thrill of the heart from his fear of the truth that must fall on him the moment he and Helena were left together.

But Black Zogal came to the open door of the guest-room, and Ishmael, who was still on the heights of his fanatical rapture, rose to go.

"Talk to him, Rani! Tell him everything! About the kufiah you intend to make, and all the good plans you proposed to prevent bloodshed."

The two unhappy souls, still sitting at the empty table, heard his sandalled footsteps pass out behind them.

Then they raised their eyes and for the first time looked into each other's faces.

CHAPTER XIII

When they began to speak it was in scarcely audible whispers.

"Helena!"

"Gordon!"

"Why are you here, Helena? What have you come for? You disliked and distrusted Ishmael Ameer when you heard about him first. You used to say you hated him. What does it all mean?"

Helena did not answer immediately.

"Tell me, Helena. Don't let me go on thinking these cruel thoughts. Why are you here with Ishmael in Khartoum?"

Still Helena did not answer. She was now sitting with her eyes down, and her hands tightly folded in her lap. There was a moment of silence while he waited for her to speak, and in that silence there came the muffled sound of Ishmael's voice outside, reciting the *Fatihah*—

"Praise be to God, the Lord of all creatures—"

When the whole body of the people had repeated the solemn words there was silence in the guest-room again, and, in the same hushed whisper as before, but more eagerly, more impetuously, Gordon said—

"He says you put this scheme into his mind, Helena. If so, you must know quite well what it will lead to. It will lead to ruin—inevitable ruin; bloodshed—perhaps great bloodshed."

Helena found her voice at last. A spirit of defiance took possession of her for a moment, and she said firmly—

"No, it will never come to that. It will all end before it goes so far."

"You mean that he will be ... will be *taken*?"

"Yes, he will be taken the moment he sets foot in Cairo. Therefore the rest of the plan will never be carried out, and consequently there will be no bloodshed."

"Do you *know* that, Helena?"

Her lips were compressed; she made a silent motion of her head.

"How do you know it?"

"I have written to your father."

"You have ... written ... to my father?"

"Yes," she said, still more firmly. "He will know everything before Ishmael arrives, and will act as he thinks best."

"Helena! Hel—"

But he was struck breathless both by what she said and by the relentless strength with which she said it. There was silence again for some moments, and once more the voice of Ishmael came from without—

"There are three holy books, O my brothers—the book of Moses and the Hebrew prophets, the book of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, and the plain book of the Koran. In the first of these it is written: 'I know that my Redeemer liveth

and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.”

Gordon reached over to where Helena sat at the side of the table, with her eyes fixed steadfastly before her, and touching her arm he said in a whisper so low that he seemed to be afraid the very air would hear—

”Then ... then you are sending him *to his death!*”

She shuddered for an instant as if cut to the quick; then she braced herself up.

”Isn’t that so, Helena? Isn’t it?”

With her lips still firmly compressed she made the same silent motion of her head.

”Is that what you came here to do?”

”Yes.”

”To possess yourself of his secrets and then—?”

”There was no other way,” she answered, biting her under-lip.

”Helena! Can it be possible that you have deliberately—”

He stopped, as if afraid to utter the word that was trembling on his tongue, and then said in a softer voice—

”But why, Helena? Why?”

The spirit of defiance took possession of her again, and she said—

”Wasn’t it enough that he came between you and me, and that our love—?”

”Love! Helena! Helena! Can you talk of our love *here ... now?*”

She dropped her head before his flashing eyes, and again he reached over to her and said in the same breathless whisper—

”Is *this* love ... for me ... to become the wife of another man? ... Helena, what are you saying?”

She did not speak; only her hard breathing told how much she suffered.

”Then think of the other man! His wife! When a woman becomes a man’s wife they are one. And to marry a man in order to ... to ... Oh, it is impossible! I cannot believe it of you, Helena.”

Suddenly, without warning, she burst into tears, for something in the tone of his voice rather than the strength of his words had made her feel the shame of the position she occupied in his eyes.

After a moment she recovered herself, and, in wild anger at her own weakness, she flamed out at him, saying that if she was Ishmael’s wife it was in name only, that if she had married Ishmael it was only as a matter of form, at best a betrothal, in order to meet his own wish and to make it possible for her to go on with her purpose.

”As for love ... *our* love ... it is not *I* who have been false to it. No, never for one single moment ... although ... in spite of everything ... for even when you were gone ... when you had abandoned me ... in the hour of my trouble, too ...

and I had lost all hope of you ... I—”

”Then why, Helena? You hated Ishmael and wished to put him down while you thought he was coming between you and me. But why ... when all seemed to be over between us—”

Her lips were twitching and her eyes were ablaze.

”You ask me why I wished to punish him?” she said. ”Very well, I will tell you. Because—” she paused, hesitated, breathed hard, and then said, ”because *he killed my father.*”

Gordon gasped, his face became distorted, his lips grew pale, he tried to speak but could only stammer out broken exclamations.

”Great God! Hele—”

”Oh, you may not believe it, but *I know,*” said Helena.

And then, with a rush of emotion, in a torrent of hot words, she told him how Ishmael Ameer had been the last man seen in her father’s company; how she had seen them together and they were quarrelling; how her father had been found dead a few minutes after Ishmael had left him; how *she* had found him; how other evidence gave proof, abundant proof, that violence, as a contributory means at least, had been the cause of her father’s death; and how the authorities knew this perfectly, but were afraid, in the absence of conclusive evidence, to risk a charge against one whom the people in their blindness worshipped.

”So I was left alone—quite alone—for you were gone too—and therefore I vowed that if there was no one else *I* would punish him.”

”And that is what you—”

”Yes.”

”O God! O God!”

Gordon hid his face in his hands, being made speechless by the awful strength of the blind force which had governed her life and led her into the tragic tangle of her error. But she misunderstood his feeling, and with flashing, almost blazing eyes, though sobs choked her voice for a moment, she turned on him and said—

”Why not? Think of what my father had been to me and say if I was not justified. Nobody ever loved me as he did—nobody. He was old, too, and weak, for he was ill, though nobody knew it. And then this ... this barbarian ... this hypocritical ... Oh, when I think of it I have such a feeling of physical repulsion for the man that I can scarcely sit by his side.”

Saying this she rose to her feet, and standing before Gordon, as he sat with his face covered by his hands, she said, with intense bitterness, as if exulting in the righteousness of her vengeance—

”Let him go to Damietta or to death itself if need be. Doesn’t he deserve it? Doesn’t he? Uncover your face and tell me. Tell me if ... if ... tell me if—”

She was approaching Gordon as if to draw away his hands when she began to gasp and stammer as though she had experienced a sudden electric shock. Her eyes had fallen on the third finger of his left hand, and they fixed themselves upon it with the fascination of fear. She saw that it was shorter than the rest, and that, since she had seen it before, it had been injured and amputated.

Her breath, which had been labouring heavily, seemed to stop altogether, and there was silence once more, in which the voice of Ishmael came again—

”When the Deliverer comes will he find peace on the earth? Will he find war? Will he find corruption and the worship of false gods? Will he find hatred and vengeance? Beware of vengeance, O my brothers! It corrupts the heart; it pulls down the pillars of the soul! Vengeance belongs to God, and when men take it out of His hands He writes black marks upon their faces.”

The two unhappy people sitting together in the guest-room seemed to hear their very hearts beat. At length Gordon, making a great call on his resolution, began to speak.

”Helena!”

”Well?”

”It is all a mistake—a fearful, frightful mistake.”

She listened without drawing breath—a vague foreshadowing of the truth coming over her.

”Ishmael Ameer did not kill your father.”

Her lips trembled convulsively; she grew paler and paler every moment.

”I know he did not, Helena, because—” (he covered his face again) ”because I know who did.”

”Then who ... who was it?”

”He did not intend to do it, Helena.”

”Who was it?”

”It was all in the heat of blood.”

”Who was—”

He hesitated, then stammered out, ”Don’t you see, Helena?—it was I.”

She had known in advance what he was going to say, but not until he had said it did the whole truth fall on her. Then in a moment the world itself seemed to reel. A moral earthquake, upheaving everything, had brought all her aims to ashes. The mighty force which had guided and sustained her soul (the sense of doing a necessary and a righteous thing) had collapsed without an instant’s warning. Another force, the powerful, almost brutal force of fate, had broken it to pieces.

”My God! My God! What has become of me?” she thought, and without speaking she gazed blankly at Gordon as he sat with his eyes hidden by his injured hand.

Then in broken words, with gasps of breath, he told her what had happened, beginning with the torture of his separation from her at the door of the General's house.

"You said I had not really loved you—that you had been mistaken and were punished and ... and that was the end."

Going away with the memory of these words in his mind, his wretched soul had been on the edge of a vortex of madness in which all its anger, all its hatred, had been directed against the General. In the blind leading of his passion, torn to the heart's core, he had then returned to the Citadel to accuse the General of injustice and tyranny.

"'Helena was mine,' I said, 'and you have taken her from me, and broken her heart as well as my own. Is that the act of a father?'"

Other words he had also said, in the delirium of his rage, mad and insulting words such as no father could bear; then the General had snatched up the broken sword from the floor and fallen on him, hacking at his hand—see!

"I didn't want to do it, God knows I did not, for he was an old man and I was no coward, but the hot blood was in my head, and I laid hold of him by the throat to hold him off."

He uncovered his face—it was full of humility and pain.

"God forgive me, I didn't know my strength. I flung him away; he fell. I had killed him—my General, my friend!"

Tears filled his eyes. In her eyes, also, tears were gathering.

"Then you came to the door and knocked. 'Father!' you said. 'Are you alone? May I come in?' Those were your words, and how often I have heard them since! In the middle of the night, in my dreams, O God, how many times!"

He dropped his head and stretched a helpless arm along the table.

"I wanted to open the door and say, 'Helena, forgive me, I didn't mean to do it, and that is the truth, as God is my witness.' But I was afraid—I fled away."

She was now sitting with her hands clasped in her lap and her eyelids tightly closed.

"Next day I wanted to go back to you, but I dared not do so. I wanted to comfort you—I could not. I wanted to give myself up to justice—it was impossible, there was nothing for me to do except to fly away."

The tears were rolling down his thin face to his pinched nostrils.

"But I could not fly from myself or from ... from my love for you. They told me you had gone to England. 'Where is she to-night?' I thought. If I had never really loved you before I loved you now. And you were gone! I had lost you for ever."

Emotion choked his voice; tears were forcing themselves through her closed eyelids. There was another moment of silence and then, nervously, hes-

itatingly, she put out her hand to where his hand was lying on the table and clasped it.

The two unhappy creatures, like wrecked souls about to be swallowed up in a tempestuous ocean, saw one raft of hope—their love for each other, which had survived all the storms of their fate.

But just as their hands were burning as if with fever, and quivering in each other's clasp like the bosom of a captured bird, a voice from without fell on their ears like a trumpet from the skies. It was the voice of the muezzin calling to evening prayers from the minaret of the neighbouring mosque:—

[image]

Music fragment: God is Most Great! God is Most Great!

It seemed to be a supernatural voice, the voice of an accusing angel, calling them back to their present position. Ishmael—Helena—the betrothal!

Their hands separated and they rose to their feet. One moment they stood with bowed heads, at opposite sides of the table, listening to the voice outside, and then, without a word more, they went their different ways—he to his room, she to hers.

Into the empty guest-room, a moment afterwards, came the rumbling and rolling sound of the voices of the people, repeating the Fatihah after Ishmael—

”Praise be to God, the Lord of all creatures.... Direct us in the right way, O Lord ... not the way of those who go astray.”

CHAPTER XIV

That day the Sirdar had held his secret meeting of the Ulema, the Sheikhs and Notables of Khartoum. Into a room on the ground floor of the Palace, down a dark, arched corridor, in which British soldiers stood on guard, they had been introduced one by one—a group of six or eight unkempt creatures of varying ages, and of different degrees of intelligence, nearly all wearing the farageeyah.

They sat awkwardly on the chairs which had been ranged for them about a mahogany table, and while they waited they talked in whispers. There was a tense, electrical atmosphere among them, as of internal dissension, the rumbling

of a sort of subterranean thunder.

But this subsided instantly, when the voice of the sergeant outside, and the clash of saluting arms, announced the coming of the Sirdar. The Governor-General, who was in uniform and booted and spurred as if returning from a ride, was accompanied by his Inspector-General, his Financial Secretary, the Governor of the town, and various minor officers.

He was received by the Sheikhs, all standing, with sweeping salaams from floor to forehead, a circle of smiles and looks of complete accord.

The Sirdar, with his ruddy and cheerful face, took his seat at the head of the table and began by asking, as if casually, who was the stranger that had arrived that day in Khartoum.

"A Bedouin," said the Cadi. "One whom Ishmael Ameer loves and who loves him."

"Yet a *Bedouin*, you say?" asked the Sirdar, in an incredulous tone, and with a certain elevation of the eyebrows.

"A Bedouin, O Excellency," repeated the Cadi, whereupon the others, without a word of further explanation, bent their turbaned heads in assent.

Then the Sirdar explained the reason for which he had called them together.

"I am given to understand," he said, "that the idea is abroad that the Government has been trying to introduce changes into the immutable law of Islam, which forms an integral part of your Moslem religion, and is therefore rightly regarded with a high degree of veneration by all followers of the Prophet. If anybody is telling you this, or if any one is saying that there is any prejudice against you because you are Mohammedans, he is a wicked and mischievous person, and I beg of you to tell me who he is."

Saying this, the Sirdar looked sharply round the table, but met nothing but blank and expressionless faces. Then turning to the Cadi, who as Chief Judge of the Mohammedan law-courts had been constituted spokesman, he asked pointedly what Ishmael Ameer was saying.

"Nothing, O Excellency," said the Cadi; "nothing that is contrary to the Sharia—the religious law of Islam."

"Is he telling the people to resist the Government?"

The grave company about the table silently shook their heads.

"Do you know if he has anything to do with a conspiracy to resist the payment of taxes?"

The grave company knew nothing.

"Then what is he doing, and why has he come to Khartoum? Pasha, have you no explanation to make to me?" asked the Sirdar, singling out a vivacious old gentleman, with a short, white, carefully oiled beard—a person of doubtful repute who had once been a slave-dealer and was now living patriarchally, under

the protection of the Government, with his many wives and concubines.

The old black sinner cast his little glittering eyes around the room and then said—

”If you ask me, O Master, I say, Ishmael Ameer is putting down polygamy and divorce and ought himself to be put down.”

At that there was some clamour among the Ulema, and the Sirdar thought he saw a rift through which he might discover the truth, but the Pasha was soon silenced, and in a moment there was the same unanimity as before.

”Then *what* is he?” asked the Sirdar, whereupon a venerable old Sheikh, after the usual Arabic compliments and apologies, said that, having seen the new teacher with his own eyes and talked with him, he had now not the slightest doubt that Ishmael was a man sent from God, and therefore that all who resisted him, all who tried to put him down, would perish miserably. At these words the electrical atmosphere which had been held in subjection seemed to burst into flame. In a moment six tongues were talking together. One Sheikh, with wild eyes, told of Ishmael’s intercourse with angels. Another knew a man who had seen him riding with the Prophet in the desert. A third had spoken to somebody who had seen angels, in the form of doves, descending upon him from the skies, and a fourth was ready to swear that one day, while Ishmael was preaching in the mosque, people heard a voice from heaven crying, ”Hear him! He is My messenger!”

”What was he preaching about?” said the Sirdar.

”The last days, the coming of the Deliverer,” said the Sheikh with the wild eyes, in an awesome whisper.

”What Deliverer?”

”Seyidna Isa—our Lord Jesus—the White Christ that is to come.”

”Is this to be soon?”

”Soon, O Excellency, very soon.”

After this outburst there was a moment of tense and breathless silence, during which the Sirdar sat with his serious eyes fixed on the table, and his officers, standing behind, glanced at each other and smiled.

Immediately afterwards the Sirdar put an end to the interview.

”Tell your people,” he said, ”that the Government has no wish to interfere with your religious beliefs and feelings, whatever they may be; but tell them also, that it intends to have its orders obeyed, and that any suspicion of conspiracy, still more of rebellion, will be instantly put down.”

The group of unkempt creatures went off with sweeping salaams, and then the Sirdar dismissed his officers also, saying—

”Bear in mind that you are the recognised agents of a just and merciful Government, and whatever your personal opinions may be of these Arabs and

their superstitions, please understand that you are to give no anti-Islamic colour to your British feelings. At the same time remember that we have worked for the redemption of the Soudan from a state of savagery, and we cannot allow it to be turned back to barbarism in the name of religion."

Both the Ulema and the other British officials being gone, the Sirdar was alone with his Inspector-General.

"Well?" he said.

"Well?" repeated the Inspector-General, biting the ends of his close-cropped moustache. "What more did you expect, sir? Naturally the man's own people were not going to give him away. They nearly did so, though. You heard what old Zewar Pasha said?"

"Tut! I take no account of that," said the Sirdar. "The brothers of Christ Himself would have put Him down, too—locked Him up in an asylum, I dare say."

"That's exactly what I would do with Ishmael Ameer, anyway," said the Inspector-General. "Of course he performs no miracles, and is attended by no angels. His removal to Torah, and his inability to free himself from a Government jail, would soon dispel the belief in his supernatural agencies."

"But how can we do it? Under what pretext? We can't imprison a man for preaching the second coming of Christ. If we did, our jails would be pretty full at home, I'm thinking."

The Inspector-General laughed. "Your old error, dear Sirdar. You can't apply the same principles to East and West."

"And your old Parliamentary cant, dear friend! I'm sick to death of it."

There was a moment of strained silence, and then the Inspector-General said—

"Ah well, I know these holy men, with their sham inspirations and their so-called heavenly messages. They develop by degrees, sir. This one has begun by proclaiming the advent of the Lord Jesus, and he will end by hoisting a flag and claiming to be the Lord Jesus himself."

"When he does that, Colonel, we'll consider our position afresh. Meantime it may do us no mischief to remember that if the family of Jesus could have dealt with the founder of our own religion as you would deal with this olive-faced Arab there would probably be no Christianity in the world to-day."

The Inspector-General shrugged his shoulders and rose to go.

"Good-night, sir."

"Good-night, Colonel," said the Sirdar, and then he sat down to draft a dispatch to the Consul-General—

"Nothing to report since the marriage, betrothal, or whatever it was, of the 'Rani' to the man in question. Undoubtedly he is laying a strong hold on the

imagination of the natives and acquiring the allegiance of large bodies of workers; but I cannot connect him with any conspiracy to persuade people not to pay taxes or with any organised scheme that is frankly hostile to the continuance of British rule.

"Will continue to watch him, but find myself at fearful odds owing to difference of faith. It is one of the disadvantages of Christian Governments among people of alien race and religion, that methods of revolt are not always visible to the naked eye, and God knows what is going on in the sealed chambers of the mosque.

"That only shows the danger of curtailing the liberty of the vernacular press, whatever the violence of its sporadic and muddled anarchy. Leave the press alone, I say. Instead of chloroforming it into silence give it a tonic if need be, or you drive your trouble underground. Such is the common sense and practical wisdom of how to deal with sedition in a Mohammedan country, let some of the logger-headed dunces who write leading articles in England say what they will.

"If this man should develop supernatural pretensions I shall know what to do. But without that, whether he claim divine inspiration or not, if his people should come to regard him as divine, the very name and idea of his divinity may become a danger, and I suppose I shall have to put him under arrest."

Then remembering that he was addressing not only the Consul-General but a friend, the Sirdar wrote—

"'Art Thou a King?' Strange that the question of Pontius Pilate is precisely what we may find in our own mouths soon! And stranger still, almost ludicrous, even farcical and hideously ironical, that though for two thousand years Christendom has been spitting on the pusillanimity of the old pagan, the representative of a Christian Empire will have to do precisely what he did.

"Short of Pilate's situation, though, I see no right to take this man, so I am not taking him. Sorry to tell you so, but I cannot help it.

"Our love from both to both. Trust Janet is feeling better. No news of our poor boy, I suppose?"

"Our boy" had for thirty years been another name for Gordon.

CHAPTER XV

Grave as was the gathering in the Sirdar's Palace at Khartoum, there was a still graver gathering that day at the British Agency in Cairo—the gathering of the wings of Death.

Lady Nuneham was nearing her end. Since Gordon's disgrace and disappearance she had been visibly fading away under a burden too heavy for her to bear.

The Consul-General had been trying hard to shut his eyes to this fact. More than ever before, he had immersed himself in his work, being plainly impelled to fresh efforts by hatred of the man who had robbed him of his son.

Through the Soudan Intelligence Department in Cairo he had watched Ishmael's movements in Khartoum, expecting him to develop the traits of the Mahdi and thus throw himself into the hands of the Sirdar.

It was a deep disappointment to the Consul-General that this did not occur. The same report came to him. again and again. The man was doing nothing to justify his arrest. Although surrounded by fanatical folk, whose minds were easily inflamed, he was not trying to upset governors or giving "divine" sanction for the removal of officials.

But meantime some mischief was manifestly at work all over the country. From day to day Inspectors had been coming in to say that the people were not paying their taxes. Convinced that this was the result of conspiracy, the Consul-General had shown no mercy.

"Sell them up," he had said, and the Inspectors, taking their cue from his own spirit but exceeding his orders, had done his work without remorse.

Week by week the trouble had deepened, and when disturbances had been threatened he had asked the British Army of Occupation, meaning no violence, to go out into the country and show the people England's power.

Then grumblings had come down on him from the representatives of foreign nations. If the people were so discontented with British rule that they were refusing to pay their taxes, there would be a deficit in the Egyptian treasury—how then were Egypt's creditors to be paid?

"Time enough to cross the bridge when you come to it, gentlemen," said the Consul-General, in his stinging tone and with a curl of his iron lip.

If the worst came to the worst England would pay, but England should not be asked to do so because Egypt must meet the cost of her own government. Hence more distraining and some inevitable violence in suppressing the riots that resulted from evictions.

Finally came a hubbub in Parliament, with the customary "Christian" prattlers prating again. Fools! They did not know what a subtle and secret conspiracy he had to deal with while they were crying out against his means of killing it.

He *must* kill it! This form of passive resistance, this attack on the Treasury,

was the deadliest blow that had ever yet been aimed at England's power in Egypt.

But he must not let Europe see it! He must make believe that nothing was happening to occasion the least alarm. Therefore to drown the cries of the people who were suffering not because they were poor and could not pay, but because they were perverse and would not, he must organise some immense demonstration.

Thus came to the Consul-General the scheme of the combined festival of the King's Birthday and the —th anniversary of the British Occupation of Egypt. It would do good to foreign Powers, for it would make them feel that, not for the first time, England had been the torch-bearer in a dark country. It would do good to the Egyptians, too, for it would force their youngsters (born since Tel-el-Kebir) to realise the strength of England's arm.

Thus had the Consul-General occupied himself while his wife had faded away. But at length he had been compelled to see that the end was near, and towards the close of every day he had gone to her room and sat almost in silence, with bowed head, in the chair by her side.

The great man, who for forty years had been the virtual ruler of millions, had no wisdom that told him what to say to a dying woman; but at last, seeing that her pallor had become whiteness, and that she was sinking rapidly and hungering for the consolations of her religion, he asked her if she would like to take the sacrament.

"It is just what I wish, dear," she answered, with the nervous smile of one who had been afraid to ask.

At heart the Consul-General had been an agnostic all his life, looking upon religion as no better than a civilising superstition, but all the same he went downstairs and sent one of his secretaries for the Chaplain of St. Mary's—the English Church.

The moment he had gone out of the door Fatimah, under the direction of the dying woman, began to prepare the bedroom for the reception of the clergyman by laying a side-table with a fair white cloth, a large prayer-book, and two silver candlesticks containing new candles.

While the Egyptian nurse did this the old lady looked on with her deep, slow, weary eyes, and talked in whispers, as if the wings of the august Presence that was soon to come were already rustling in the room. When all was done she looked very happy.

"Everything is nice and comfortable now," she said, as she lay back to wait for the clergyman.

But even then she could not help thinking the one thought that made a tug at her resignation. It was about Gordon.

"I am quite ready to die, Fatimah," she said, "but I should have loved to see

my dear Gordon once more."

This was what she had been waiting for, praying for, eating her heart and her life out for.

"Only to see and kiss my boy! It would have been so easy to go then."

Fatimah, who was snuffling audibly, as she straightened the eider-down coverlet over the bed, began to hint that if her "sweet eyes" could not see her son she could send him a message.

"Perhaps I know somebody who could see it reaches him, too," said Fatimah, in a husky whisper.

The old lady understood her instantly.

"You mean Hafiz! I always thought as much. Bring me my writing-case—quick!"

The writing-case was brought and laid open before her, and she made some effort to write a letter, but the power of life in her was low, and after a moment the shaking pen dropped from her fingers.

"*Ma'aleysh*, my lady!" said Fatimah soothingly. "Tell me what you wish to say. I will remember everything."

Then the dying mother sent a few touching words as her last message to her beloved son.

"Wait! Let me think. My head is a little ... just a little ... Yes, this is what I wish to say, Fatimah. Tell my boy that my last thoughts were about him. Though I am sorry he took the side of the false prophet, say I am certain he did what he thought was right. Be sure you tell him I die happy, because I know I shall see him again. If I am never to see him in this world I shall do so in the world to come. Say I shall be waiting for him there. And tell him it will not seem long."

"Could you sign your name for him, my heart?" said Fatimah, in her husky voice.

"Yes, oh yes, easily," said the old lady, and then with an awful effort she wrote—

"Your ever-loving Mother."

At that moment Ibrahim in his green caftan, carrying a small black bag, brought the English chaplain into the room.

"Peace be to this house," said the clergyman, using the words of his Church ritual, and the Egyptian nurse, thinking it was an Eastern salutation, answered, "Peace!"

The Chaplain went into the "boys' room" to put on his surplice, and when he came out, robed in white, and began to light the candles and prepare the vessels which he placed on the side-table, the old lady was talking to Fatimah in nervous whispers—

"His lordship?" "Yes!" "Do you think, my lady——"

She wanted the Consul-General to be present and was half afraid to send for him; but just at that instant the door opened again, and her pale, spiritual face lit up with a smile as she saw her husband come into the room.

The clergyman was now ready to begin, and the old lady looked timidly across the bed at the Consul-General as if there were something she wished to ask and dared not.

"Yes, I will take the sacrament with you, Janet," said the old man, and then the old lady's face shone like the face of an angel.

The Consul-General took the chair by the side of the bed and the Chaplain began the service—

"Almighty, ever-living God, Maker of mankind, who dost correct those whom Thou dost love—"

All the time the triumphant words reverberated through the room the dying woman was praying fervently, her lips moving to her unspoken words and her eyes shining as if the Lord of Life she had always loved was with her now and she was giving herself to Him—her soul, her all.

The Consul-General was praying too—praying for the first time to the God he did not know and had never looked to—

"If Thou art God, let her die in peace. It is all I ask—all I wish."

Thus the two old people took the sacrament together, and when the Communion Service came to a close, the old lady looked again at the Consul-General and asked, with a little confusion, if they might sing a hymn.

The old man bent his head, and a moment later the Chaplain, after a whispered word from the dying woman, began to sing—

"Sun of my soul, Thou Saviour dear,
It is not night if Thou be near ..."

At the second bar the old lady joined him in her breaking, cracking voice, and the Consul-General, albeit his throat was choking him, forced himself to sing with her—

"When the soft dews of kindly sleep
My wearied eyelids gently steep..."

It was as much as the Consul-General could do to sing of a faith he did not feel, but he felt tenderly to it for his wife's sake now, and with a great effort he went on with her to the end—

"If some poor wandering child of Thine
Have spurned to-day the voice divine ..."

The light of another world was in the old lady's eyes when all was over, and she seemed to be already half way to heaven.

CHAPTER XVI

All the same there was a sweet humanity left in her, and when the Chaplain was gone and the side-table had been cleared, and she was left alone with her old husband, there came little gleams of the woman who wanted to be loved to the last.

"How are you now?" he asked.

"Better so much better," she said, smiling upon him, and caressing with her wrinkled hand the other wrinkled hand that lay on the eider-down quilt.

The great Consul-General, sitting on the chair by the side of the bed, felt as helpless as before, as ignorant as ever of what millions of simple people know—how to talk to those they love when the wings of Death are hovering over them. But the sweet old lady, with the wisdom and the courage which God gives to His own on the verge of eternity, began to speak in a lively and natural voice of the end that was coming and what was to follow it.

He was not to allow any of his arrangements to be interfered with, and, above all, the festivities appointed for the King's Birthday were not to be disturbed.

"They must be necessary or you would not have them, especially now," she said, "and I shall not be happy if I know that on my account they are not coming off."

And then, with the sweet childishness which the feebleness of illness brings, she talked of the last King's Birthday, and of the ball they had given in honour of it.

That had been in their own house, and the dancing had been in the drawing-room, and the Consul-General had told Ibrahim to set the big green arm-chair for her in the alcove, and sitting there she had seen everything. What a spectacle! Ministers Plenipotentiary, Egyptian Ministers, ladies, soldiers! Such

gorgeous uniforms! Such glittering orders! Such beautiful toilets!

The old lady's pale face filled with light as she thought of all this, but the Consul-General dropped his head, for he knew well what was coming next.

"And, John, don't you remember? Gordon was there that night, and Helena—dear Helena! How lovely they looked! Among all those lovely people, dear.... He was wearing every one of his medals that night, you know. So tall, so brave-looking, a soldier every inch of him, and such a perfect English gentleman! Was there ever anything in the world so beautiful? And Helena, too! She wore a silvery silk, and a kind of coif on her beautiful black hair. Oh, she was the loveliest thing in all the room, I thought! And when they led the cotillion—don't you remember they led the cotillion, dear?—I could have cried, I was so proud of them."

The Consul-General continued to sit with his head down, listening to the old lady and saying nothing, yet seeing the scene as she depicted it and feeling again the tingling pride which he, too, had felt that night but permitted nobody to know.

After a moment the beaming face on the bed became clouded over, as if that memory had brought other memories less easy to bear—dreams of happy days to come, of honours and of children.

"Ah well, God knows best," she said in a tremulous voice, releasing the Consul-General's hand.

The old man felt as if he would have to hurry out of the room without uttering another word, but, as well as he could, he controlled himself and said—

"You are agitating yourself, Janet. You must lie quiet now."

"Yes, I must lie quiet now, and think of ... of other things," she answered.

He was stepping away when she called on him to turn her on her right side, for that was how she always slept, and upon the Egyptian nurse coming hurrying up to help, she said—

"No, no, not you, Fatimah—his lordship."

Then the Consul-General put his arms about her—feeling how thin and wasted she was, and how little of her was left to die—and turning her gently round he laid her back on the pillow which Fatimah had in the meantime shaken out.

While he did so her dim eyes brightened again, and stretching her white hands out of her silk nightdress she clasped them about his neck, with the last tender efforts of the woman who wanted to be fondled to the end.

The strain of talking had been too much for her, and after a few minutes she sank into a restless doze, in which the perspiration broke out on her forehead and her face acquired an expression of pain, for sleep knows no pretences. But at length her features became more composed and her breathing more regular,

and then the Consul-General, who had been standing aside, mute with anguish, said in a low tone to Fatimah—

”She is sleeping quietly now,” and then he turned to go.

Fatimah followed him to the head of the stairs and said in a husky whisper—

”It will be all over to-night, though—you’ll see it will.”

For a moment he looked steadfastly into the woman’s eyes, and then, without answering her, walked heavily down the stairs.

Back in the library, he stood for some time with his face to the empty fireplace. Over the mantelpiece there hung a little picture, in a black-and-gilt frame, of a bright-faced boy in an Arab fez. It was more than he could do to look at that portrait now, so he took it off its nail and laid it, face down, on the marble mantel-shelf.

Just at that moment one of his secretaries brought in a despatch. It was the despatch from the Sirdar, sent in cypher but now written out at length. The Consul-General read it without any apparent emotion and put it aside without a word.

The hours passed slowly; the night was very long; the old man did not go to bed. Not for the first time, he was asking himself searching questions about the mystery of life and death, but the great enigma was still baffling him. Could it be possible that while he had occupied himself with the mere shows and semblance of things, calling them by great names—Civilisation and Progress—that simple soul upstairs had been grasping the eternal realities?

There were questions that cut deeper even than that, and now they faced him one by one. Was it true that he had married merely in the hope of having some one to carry on his name and thus fulfil the aspirations of his pride? Had he for nearly forty years locked his heart away from the woman who had been starving for his love, and was it only by the loss of the son who was to have been the crown of his life that they were brought together in the end?

Thus the hoofs of the dark hours beat heavily on the great Proconsul’s brain, and in the awful light that came to him from an open grave, the triumphs of the life behind him looked poor and small.

But meantime the palpitating air of the room upstairs was full of a different spirit. The old lady had apparently awakened from her restless sleep, for she had opened her eyes and was talking in a bright and happy voice. Her cheeks were tinged with the glow of health, and her whole face was filled with light.

”I knew I should see them,” she said.

”See whom, my heart?” asked Fatimah, but without answering her, the old lady, with the same rapturous expression, went on talking.

”I knew I should, and I have! I have seen both of them!”

”Whom have you seen, my lady?” asked Fatimah again, but once more the

dying woman paid no heed to her.

"I saw them as plainly as I see you now, dear. It was in a place I did not know. The sun was so hot, and the room was so close. There was a rush roof and divans all round the walls. But Gordon and Helena were there together, sitting at opposite sides of a table and holding each other's hands."

"Allah! Allah!" muttered Fatimah, with upraised hands.

The old lady seemed to hear her, for an indulgent smile passed over her radiant face and she said in a tone of tender remonstrance—

"Don't be foolish, Fatimah! *Of course* I saw him. The Lord said I should, and He never breaks His promises. 'Help me, O God, for Christ's sake,' I said. 'Shall I see my dear son again? O God, give me a sign.' And He did! Yes, it was in the middle of the night. 'Janet,' said a voice, and I was not afraid. 'Be patient, Janet. You shall see your dear boy before you die.'"

Her face was full of happy visions. The life of this world seemed to be no longer there. A kind of life from the other world appeared to reanimate the sinking woman. The near approach of eternity illumined her whole being with a supernatural light. She was dying in a flood of joy.

"Oh, how good the Lord is! It is so easy to go now! ... John, you must not think I suffer any longer, because I don't. I have no pain now, dear—none whatever."

Then she clasped her wasted hands together in the attitude of prayer and said in a rustling whisper—

"To-night, Lord Jesus! Let it be to-night!"

After that her rapturous voice died away and her ecstatic eyes gently closed, but an ineffable smile continued to play on her faintly-tinted face, as if she were looking on the wings that were waiting to bear her away.

The doctor came in at that moment, and was told what had occurred.

"Delirium, of course," he said. A change had come; the crisis was approaching. If the same thing happened at the supreme moment the patient was not to be contradicted; her delusion was to be indulged.

It did not happen.

In the early hours of the morning the Consul-General was called upstairs. There was a deep silence in the bedroom, as if the air had suddenly become empty and void. The day was breaking, and through the windows that looked over to the Nile the white sails of a line of boats gliding by seemed like the passing of angels' wings. Sparrows were twittering in the eaves, and through the windows to the east the first streamers of the sunrise were rising in the sky.

The Consul-General approached the bed and looked down at the pallid face on the pillow. He wanted to stoop and kiss it, but he felt as if it would be a profanation to do so now. His own face was full of suffering, for the sealed chambers

of his iron soul had been broken open at last.

With his hands clasped behind his back he stood for some minutes quite motionless. Then laying one hand on the brass head-rail of the bed, he leaned over his dead wife and spoke to her as if she could hear.

"Forgive me, Janet! Forgive me!" he said in a low voice that was like a sob.

Did she hear him? Who can say she did not? Was it only a ray from the sunrise that made the Egyptian woman think that over the dead face of the care-worn and weary one, whose sweet soul was even then winging its way to heaven, there passed the light of a loving smile?

CHAPTER XVII

Within three days the softening effects on the Consul-General of Lady Nuneham's death were lost. Out of his very bereavement and the sense of being left friendless and alone he became a harder and severer man than before. His secretaries were more than ever afraid of him, and his servants trembled as they entered his room.

It heightened his anger against Gordon to believe that by his conduct he had hastened his mother's end. In his absolute self-abasement there were moments when he would have found it easier to forgive Gordon if he had been a prodigal, a wastrel, prompted to do what he had done by the grossest selfishness; but deep down in some obscure depths of the father's heart the worst suffering came of the certainty that his son had been moved by that tragic earnestness which belongs only to the greatest and noblest souls.

Still more hardening and embittering to the Consul-General than the memory of Gordon was the thought of Ishmael. It intensified his anger against the Egyptian to feel that having first by his "visionary mummery," by his "manoeuvring and quackery," robbed him of his son, he had now, by direct consequence, robbed him of his wife also.

All the Consul-General's bull-necked strength, all his force of soul, were roused to fury when he thought of that. He was old and tired and he needed rest, but before he permitted himself to think of retirement, he must crush Ishmael Ameer.

Not that he allowed himself to recognise his vindictiveness. Shutting his eyes to his personal motive, he believed he was thinking of England only. Ish-

mael was the head-centre of an anarchical conspiracy which was using secret and stealthy weapons that were more deadly than bombs; therefore Ishmael must be put down, he must be trampled into the earth, and his movement must be destroyed.

But how?

Within a few hours after Lady Nuneham's funeral the Grand Cadi came by night, and with many vague accusations against "the Arab innovator," repeated his former warning—

"I tell you again, O Excellency, if you permit that man to go on it will be death to the rule of England in Egypt."

"Then prove what you say—prove it, prove it," cried the Consul-General, raising his impatient voice.

But the suave old Moslem judge either could not or would not do so. Indeed, being a Turkish official, accustomed to quite different procedure, he was at a loss to understand why the Consul-General wanted proof.

"Arrest the offender first and you'll find evidence enough afterwards," he said.

An English statesman could not act on lines like those, so the Consul-General turned back to the despatches of the Sirdar. The last of them—the one received during the dark hours preceding his wife's death—contained significant passages—

"If this man should develop supernatural pretensions I shall know what to do."

Ha! There was hope in that! The charlatan element in Ishmael Ameer might carry him far if only the temptation of popular idolatry were strong enough.

Once let a man deceive himself with the idea that he was divine, nay, once let his followers delude themselves with the notion of his divinity, and a civilised Government would be bound to make short work of him. Whosoever and whatsoever he might be, that man must die!

A sudden cloud passed over the face of the Consul-General as he glanced again at the Sirdar's despatch and saw its references to Christ.

"How senseless everybody is becoming in this world," he thought.

Pontius Pilate! Pshaw! When would religious hypocrisy open its eyes and see that, according to all the laws of civilised states, the Roman Governor had done right? Jesus claimed to be divine, His people were ready to recognise Him as King; and whether His kingdom was of this world or another, what did it matter? If His pretensions had been permitted they would have led to wild, chaotic, shapeless anarchy. Therefore Pilate crucified Jesus, and, scorned though he had been through all the ages, he had done no more than any so-called "Christian"

governor would be compelled to do to-day.

"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Why would not people understand that these words were written not in derision but in self-defence? There could be only one authority in Palestine then, and there could be only one authority in Egypt now.

"If this visionary mummer, with his empty quackeries, should develop the idea that he is divine, or even the messenger of divinity, I will hang him like a dog!" thought the Consul-General.

CHAPTER XVIII

Five days after the death of Lady Nuneham the Consul-General was reading at his breakfast the last copy of the *Times* to arrive in Cairo. It contained an anticipatory announcement of a forthcoming Mansion House Banquet in honour of the King's Birthday. The Foreign Minister was expected to speak on the "unrest in the East, with special reference to the affair of El Azhar."

The Consul-General's face frowned darkly, and he began to picture the scene as it would occur. The gilded hall, the crowd of distinguished persons eating in public, the mixed odours of many dishes, the pop of champagne corks, the smoke of cigars, the buzz of chatter like the gobbling of geese on a green, and then the Minister, with his hand on his heart, uttering timorous apologies for his Proconsul's policy, and pouring out pompous platitudes as if he had newly discovered the Decalogue.

The Consul-General's gorge rose at the thought. Oh, when would these people, who stayed comfortably at home and lived by the votes of the factory-hands of Lancashire and Yorkshire, and hungered for the shouts of the mob, understand the position of men like himself, who, in foreign lands, among alien races, encompassed by secret conspiracies, were spending their strength in holding high the banner of Empire?

"Having chosen a good man, why can't they leave him alone?" thought the Consul-General.

And then, his personal feelings getting the better of his patriotism, he almost wished that the charlatan element in Ishmael Ameer might develop speedily; that he might draw off the allegiance of the native soldiers in the Soudan and break out, like the Mahdi, into open rebellion. That would bring the Secretary

of State to his senses, make him realise a real danger, and see in the everlasting "affair of El Azhar" if not light, then lightning.

The door of the breakfast-room opened and Ibrahim entered.

"Well, what is it?" demanded the Consul-General with a frown.

Ibrahim answered in some confusion that a small boy was in the hall, asking to see the English lord. He said he brought an urgent message, but would not tell what it was or where it came from. Had been there three times before, slept last night on the ground outside the gate, and could not be driven away—would his lordship see the lad?

"What is his race? Egyptian?"

"Nubian, my lord."

"Ever seen the boy before?"

"No ... yes ... that is to say ... well, now that your lordship mentions it, I think ... yes I think he came here once with Miss Hel ... I mean General Graves's daughter."

"Bring him up immediately," said the Consul-General.

At the next moment a black boy stepped boldly into the room. It was Mosie. His clothes were dirty, and his pudgy face was like a block of dark soap splashed with stale lather, but his eyes were clear and alert and his manner was eager.

"Well, my boy, what do you want?" asked the Consul-General.

Mosie looked fearlessly up into the stern face with its iron jaw, and tipped his black thumb over his shoulder to where Ibrahim, in his gorgeous green caftan, stood timidly behind him.

At a sign from the Consul-General, the Egyptian servant left the room, and then, quick as light, Mosie slipped off his sandal, ripped open its inner sole, and plucked out a letter stained with grease.

It was the letter which Helena had written in Khartoum.

The Consul-General read it rapidly, with an eagerness which even he could not conceal. So great, indeed, was his excitement that he did not see that a second paper (Ishmael's letter to the Chancellor of El Azhar) had fallen to the floor until Mosie picked it up and held it out to him.

"Good boy," said the Consul-General—the cloud had passed and his face bore an expression of joy.

Instantly apprehending the dim purport of Helena's hasty letter, the Consul-General saw that what he had predicted and half hoped for was already coming to pass. It was to be open conspiracy now, not passive conspiracy any longer. The man Ishmael was falling a victim to the most fatal of all mental maladies. The Mahdist delusion was taking possession of him, and he was throwing himself into the Government's hands.

Hurriedly ringing his bell, the Consul-General committed Mosie to

Ibrahim's care, whereupon the small black boy, in his soiled clothes, with his dirty face and hands, strutted out of the room in front of the Egyptian servant, looking as proud as a peacock and feeling like sixteen feet tall. Then the Consul-General called for one of his secretaries and sent him for the Commandant of Police.

The Commandant came in hot haste. He was a big and rather corpulent Englishman, wearing a blue-braided uniform and a fez—naturally a blustering person with his own people, but as soft-voiced as a woman and as obsequious as a slave before his chief.

"Draw up your chair, Commandant—closer; now listen," said the Consul-General.

And then in a low tone he repeated what he had already learned from Helena's letter, and added what he had instantly divined from it—that Ishmael Ameer was to return to Cairo; that he was to come back in the disguise of a Bedouin Sheikh; that his object was to draw off the allegiance of the Egyptian army in order that a vast horde of his followers might take possession of the city; that this was to be done during the period of the forthcoming festivities, while the British army was still in the provinces, and that the conspiracy was to reach its treacherous climax on the night of the King's Birthday.

The Commandant listened with a gloomy face, and, looking timidly into the flashing eyes before him, he asked if his Excellency could rely on the source of his information.

"Absolutely! Infallibly!" said the Consul-General.

"Then," said the Commandant nervously, "I presume the festivities must be postponed?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Or perhaps your Excellency intends to have the British army called back to Cairo?"

"Not that either."

"At least you will arrest the 'Bedouin'?"

"Not yet at all events."

The policy to be pursued was to be something quite different.

Everything was to go on as usual. Sports, golf, cricket, croquet, tennis-tournaments, polo-matches, race-meetings, automobile-meetings, "all the usual fooleries and frivolities"—with crowds of sight-seers, men in flannels and ladies in beautiful toilets—were to be encouraged to proceed. The police-bands were to play in the public gardens, the squares, the streets, everywhere.

"Say nothing to anybody. Give no sign of any kind. Let the conspiracy go on as if we knew nothing about it. But——"

"Yes, my lord? Yes?"

"Keep an eye on the 'Bedouin.' Let every train that arrives at the railway-station and every boat that comes down the river be watched. As soon as you have spotted your man, see where he goes. He may be a fanatical fool, miscalculating his 'divine' influence with the native soldier, but he cannot be working alone. Therefore find out who visit him, learn all their movements, let their plans come to a head, and, when the proper time arrives, in one hour, at one blow we will crush their conspiracy and clap our hands upon the whole of them."

"Splendid! An inspiration, my lord!"

"I've always said it would some day be necessary to forge a special weapon to meet special needs, and the time has come to forge it. Meantime undertake nothing hurriedly. Make no mistakes, and see that your men make none."

"Certainly, my lord."

"Investigate every detail for yourself, and above all hold your tongue and guard your information with inviolable secrecy."

"Surely, my lord."

"You can go now. I'm busy. Good-morning!"

"Wonderful man!" thought the Commandant, as he went out at the porch. "Seems to have taken a new lease of life! Wonderful!"

The Consul-General spent the whole of that day in thinking out his scheme for a "special weapon," and when night came and he went upstairs—through the great echoing house that was like the bureau of a department of state now, being so empty and so cheerless, and past the dark and silent room whereof the door was always closed—he felt conscious of a firmer and lighter step than he had known for years.

Fatimah was in his bedroom, for she had constituted herself his own nurse since his wife's death. She was nailing up on the wall the picture of the little boy in the Arab fez, and, having her own theory about why he had taken it down in the library, she said—

"There! It will be company for your lordship, and nobody will ask questions about it here."

When Fatimah had gone the Consul-General could not but think of Gordon. He always thought of him at that hour of the night, and the picture of his son that rose in his mind's eye was always the same. It was a picture of Gordon's deadly white face with its trembling lower lip, as he stood bolt upright while his medals were being torn from his breast, and then said, in that voice which his father could never forget: "General, the time may come when it will be even more painful to you to remember all this than it has been to me to bear it."

Oh, that Gordon could be here now and see for himself what a sorry charlatan, what a self-deceived quack and conspirator, was the man in whose defence he had allowed his own valuable life to rush down to a confused welter of wreck

and ruin!

As the Consul-General got into bed he was thinking of Helena. What a glorious, courageous, resourceful woman she was! It carried his mind back to Biblical days to find anything equal to her daring and her success. But what was the price she had paid for them? He remembered something the Sirdar had said of "a marriage, a sort of betrothal," and then he recalled the words of her first letter: "I know exactly how far I intend to go, and I shall go no farther. I know exactly what I intend to do, and I shall do it without fear or remorse."

What had happened in the Soudan? What was happening there now? In what battle-whirlwind had that splendid girl's magnificent victory been won?

CHAPTER XIX

Meantime Helena in Khartoum was feeling like a miserable traitress.

She had condemned an innocent man to death! Ishmael had *not* killed her father, yet she had taken such steps that the moment he entered Cairo he would be walking to his doom!

One after another sweet and cruel memories crowded upon her, and in the light of the awful truth as Gordon had revealed it, she began to see Ishmael with quite different eyes. All she had hitherto thought evil in his character now looked like good; what she had taken for hypocrisy was sincerity; what she had supposed to be subtlety was simplicity. His real nature was a rebuke to every one of her preconceived ideas. The thought of his tenderness, his modesty, his devotion, and even the unselfishness which had led to their betrothal, cut her to the heart. Yet she had doomed him to destruction. The letter she had written to the Consul-General was his death-warrant.

That night she could fix her mind on nothing except the horror of her position, but next morning she set herself to think out schemes for stopping the consequences of her own act.

The black boy was gone; it was not possible to overtake him; there was no other train to Egypt for four days, but there was the telegraph—she could make use of that.

"I'll telegraph to the Consul-General to pay no attention to my letter," she thought.

Useless! The Consul-General would ask himself searching questions and

take his precautions just the same.

"I'll telegraph that my letter is a forgery," she thought.

Madness! The Consul-General would ask himself how, if it was a forgery, she could know anything about it.

"I'll go across to the Sirdar and tell him everything, and leave him to act for both of us as he thinks best!"

Impossible! How could she explain her position to the Sirdar without betraying Gordon's identity and thereby leading to his arrest?

That settled everything. There was no escape from the consequences of her conduct, no way to put an end to the network of dangers by which she had surrounded Ishmael. Mosie was now far on his way to Cairo; he carried to the Consul-General not only her own letter but also the original of Ishmael's letter to the Chancellor of El Azhar. The hideous work was done.

Two days passed, during which her over-excited feelings seemed to paralyse all her powers of thought. Then a new idea took possession of her, and she set herself to undo what she had done with Ishmael himself. Little by little, in tremulous tones, and with a still deeper sense of duplicity than before, she began to express halting doubts of the success of their enterprise.

"I have been thinking about it," she said nervously, "and now I fear——"

"What do you fear, O Rani?" asked Ishmael.

"I fear," said Helena, trembling visibly, "that the moment the Government learn from the Sirdar, as they needs must, that the great body of your people have left Khartoum, and are travelling north, they will recall the British army to protect the capital and thus——"

But Ishmael interrupted her with a laugh.

"If the day of the Redeemer has come," he said, "will human armies hinder him? No!"

It was useless! Ishmael was now more than ever an enthusiast, a fanatic, a visionary. His spiritual ecstasy swept away every obstacle, and made him blind to every danger.

Helena felt like a witch who was trying to undo the effects of her charm. She could not undo them. She could not destroy the potency of the spell she herself had raised, and the effort to do so put her into a fever of excitement.

Two days more passed like this, and still Helena was in the toils of her own actions. From time to time she saw Gordon as he sat at meals or moved about the house. He did not speak to her, and she dropped her head in shame as often as they came close together. But at length she caught a look in his face which seemed to her to say, "Are you really going to let an innocent man walk into the jaws of death?"

That brought her wavering mind to a quick conclusion. Gordon was wait-

ing for her to speak. She must speak! She must confess everything! She must tell Ishmael what she had done, and by what tragic error she had done it. At any cost, no matter what, she must put an end to the false situation in which she lived, and thus redeem herself in Gordon's eyes and in her own.

At noon that day, being Friday, Ishmael preached in the mosque, delivering a still more fervent and passionate message. The kingdom of heaven which the Lord Isa had foretold was soon to come! When it came God would lend them legions of angels, if need be, to protect the oppressed and to uphold the down-trodden! Therefore let the children of God fear nothing from the powers and principalities of the world! Their pilgrimage was safe! No harm could come to them, for however their feet might slip the arms of the Compassionate would bear them up!

As Ishmael's ecstasy had increased so had the devotion of his people, and when he returned home they followed him in a dense crowd through the streets shouting the wildest acclamations.

"Out of the way! The Master is coming! The Messenger is here! Allah! El Hamdullillah!"

Helena heard them, but she did not hear Ishmael reprove them, as in earlier days he had been wont to do. She was standing in the guest-room, and the noise of the approaching crowd had brought Gordon from his bedroom, at the moment when Ishmael, surrounded by a group of his people, stepped into the house.

Ishmael was in a state of excitement amounting to exaltation, and after holding out hands both to Helena and Gordon he turned to his followers to dismiss them. "Go back now," he said, "and to-night, two hours after sunset, let the Ulema and the Notables come to me that we may decide on the details of our pilgrimage."

"Allah! El Hamdullillah!" cried the people.

More than ever they were like creatures possessed. Hungry and ragged as many of them were, the new magnificence that was to be given to their lives appeared to be already shining in their eyes.

Helena saw this, and her heart was smitten with remorse at the thought of the cruel confession she had decided to make. She could not make it in sight of the hopes it must destroy. But neither could she look into Gordon's searching face and remain silent, and as soon as the crowd had gone, she made an effort to speak.

"Ishmael," she said, trembling all over, "there is something I wish to say—if it will not displease you."

"Nothing the Rani can say will displease me," said Ishmael.

He was looking at her with the expression of enthusiastic admiration which she had seen in his eyes before. It was hard to go on.

"Your intentions are now known to everybody," she said. "You have not hidden them from any of your own people. That has been very trustful, very noble, but still—"

"Still—what, my sister?"

"If somebody ... should betray your scheme to the Government, and ... and the moment you set foot in Cairo—"

Again Ishmael interrupted her with a laugh.

"Impossible!" he said, smiling upon her with his bright and joyous eyes. "Islam has only one heart, one soul, one mind."

Then taking her quivering hand and leading her to the door, he pointed to the camp outside and said—

"Look! Ten thousand of our poor unhappy people are there. They have come to me from the tyrannies of cruel taskmasters and have been true to me through the temptations of hunger and thirst. Some of them are from Cairo and are waiting to return home. All are the children of Islam, and are looking for the coming of the Expected who brings peace and joy. Is there one of them who will betray me now? Not one! Treachery would injure me, but it would hurt the betrayer more."

Then with the same expression of enthusiastic admiration, and in a still tenderer and softer voice, he began to laugh and to rally her, saying he knew well what was going on in his sweet sister's mind—that though her brave spirit had devised the plan they had adopted, yet now that the time was near for carrying it into execution her womanly heart was failing her, and affectionate anxiety for his own safety was making her afraid.

"But have no fear at all," he said, standing behind her and smoothing her cheek with a light touch of his tapering fingers. "If this is God's work will God forget me? No!"

With a sense of stifling duplicity Helena made one more effort and said—

"Still, who knows, there may be some one—"

"None, O Rani!"

"But don't you know—"

"I don't want to know anything except one thing—that God guides and directs me."

Again he laughed, and asked where was the kufiah (the Bedouin head-dress) which she had promised to make for his disguise.

"Get to work at it quick," he said; "it will be wanted soon, my sister."

And then, clapping his hands for the mid-day meal, he went into his room to prepare for it, leaving Gordon and Helena for some moments alone together.

Gordon had been standing aside in the torment of a hundred mixed emotions, and now he and Helena spoke in whispers.

"He is determined to go into Cairo," she said.

"Quite determined."

"Oh, is there *no* way to prevent him?"

"None now—unless—"

"Unless—what?" she asked eagerly.

"Let us ... Let us wait and see," said Gordon, and then Abdullah came in to lay the table.

CHAPTER XX

As soon as the mid-day meal was over Gordon escaped to his room—the room he shared with Ishmael—and throwing himself down on the angerib with his hands clasped across his face, he tried to think out the situation in which he found himself, to gaze into the depths of his conscience, and to see where he was and what he ought to do.

So violent was the state of his soul that he sat there a long time before he could link together his memories of what had happened since he arrived in Khartoum.

"Am I dreaming?" he asked himself again and again, as one by one his thoughts rolled over him like tempestuous waves.

The first thing he saw clearly was that Ishmael was not now the same man that he had known at Alexandria; that the anxieties, responsibilities, and sufferings he had gone through as a religious leader had dissipated his strong common sense; and that as a consequence the caution whereby men guard their conduct had gone.

He also saw that Ishmael's spiritual ecstasy had reached a point not far removed from madness; that his faith in divine guidance, divine guardianship, divine intervention had become an absolute obsession.

Therefore it was hopeless to try to move him from his purpose by any appeals on the score of danger to himself or to his people.

"He is determined to go into Cairo," thought Gordon, "and into Cairo he will go."

The next thing Gordon saw, as he examined the situation before him, was that Helena was powerless to undo the work which by the cruel error of fate she had been led to do; that her act was irrevocable; that there was no calling

it back, and that it would go from its consequences to the consequences of its consequences.

Helena's face appeared to him, and his heart bled for her as he thought of how she passed before him—she who had always been so bold and gay—with her once proud head bent low. He remembered her former strength and self-reliance; her natural force and grace; her fearless daring and that dash of devilry which had been for him one of her greatest charms; and then he thought of her false position in that house, brought there by her own will, held there by her own act—a tragic figure of a woman in the meshes of her own net.

"She cannot continue to live like this. It is impossible. Yet what can the end be?" he asked himself.

Hours passed like this. His head under his hot hands burned and his temples throbbed, yet no ray of light emerged from the darkness surrounding him.

But at length the man in him, the soldier and the lover, swept down every obstacle, and he told himself that he must save Helena from the consequences of her own conduct whatever the result might be.

"I must! I must!" he kept on repeating as Helena's face rose before him; and after a while this blind resolution brought him at one stride to a new idea.

Ishmael was determined to go into Cairo, but there was one way to prevent him doing so—that he, Gordon himself, should go instead!

When he first thought of that his temples beat so violently that it seemed as if they would burst, and he felt as if he had been brought to the very brink of despair. Seeing nothing before him but instant arrest the moment he entered the city, it seemed to be a pitiful end to his long journey across the desert, a poor sequel to his fierce struggle with himself, and to the mystic hopes with which he had buoyed up his heart, that immediately after he had reached Khartoum he should turn back to his death.

Work, mission, redemption—all that had so recently had a meaning for him had disappeared. But his heart rose when he remembered that if he did what he had determined to do he would break the cruel error of fate whereby Ishmael had been doomed to die for an offence he did not commit.

What was the first fact of this cruel situation? That Helena had believed Ishmael to be guilty of the death of her father. But Ishmael was innocent, whereas he, Gordon, was guilty! Could he allow an innocent man to die for his crime?

That brought him to the crisis of his conscience. It settled everything. Destiny, acting under the blind force of a poor girl's love for her father, was sending Ishmael to his death. But destiny should be defeated! He should pay his own penalty! Ishmael should be snatched from the doom that threatened him, and Helena should be saved from lifelong remorse.

"Yes, yes, I must go into Cairo instead," he told himself.

It had grown late by this time, and the bedroom had become dark when Abdullah knocked at the door and said that the Sheikhs were in the guest-room and Ishmael was asking for Omar.

Under its roof thatched with stalks of durah, lit by lamps suspended from its rafters, the Ulema and Notables of Khartoum—the same that visited the Sirdar—had gathered soon after sunset, and squatting on the divans covered by carpets and cushions, had drunk their coffee and talked in their winding, circuitous Eastern way of the business before them, and particularly of the White Lady's part in it, while they waited for Ishmael, who was still at the mosque.

"Yes," the vivacious old Pasha had said, "no matter how great a man may be, when he undertakes an enterprise like this he should always consult ten of his friends."

"But great ones are not great in friends," said a younger Sheikh. "What if he has not got ten?"

"Then let him consult one friend ten times over."

"Nay, but if he stands so high that he has not got even one friend?"

"Then," said the old man, with a sly look over his shoulder towards the women's side of the house, "let him consult his wife, and, whatever she advises, let him do the contrary."

When Gordon in his Bedouin dress entered the guest-room, Ishmael was sitting in the midst of his people, and he called to him to take the seat by his right side.

"But where is the Rani?" he asked, looking round, whereupon Abdullah answered that she was still in her room, and the old Pasha hinted that in the emancipation of the Eastern woman perhaps women themselves would be the chief impediment.

"I know! I know!" said Ishmael. "But all the same we must turn our backs on the madness of a bygone age that woman is inferior to man, and her counsel is not to be trusted. Bring her, Abdullah."

A few minutes afterwards Helena, wearing her Indian veil but with her face uncovered, entered the guest-room with downcast eyes, followed by the Arab woman and the child.

It cut Gordon to the heart to see her look of shame and of confusion, but Ishmael saw nothing in Helena's manner except maidenly modesty under the eyes of so many men, and making a place for her on his left, he began without further delay on the business that had brought them together.

They were about to win a dear victory for God, but it was to be a white war, a bloodless revolution. The heartless festivities that were to be held in honour of the birthday of the King who lived across the seas while people perished in Egypt, were to reach their climax something more than a month hence. Therefore the

great caravan of God's children who were to cross the desert by camel and horse and ass, in order that they might meet the Expected One when he appeared in Cairo, should start within a week. But the messenger of God who had to prepare the path before them must go by train, and he ought to leave Khartoum in four days.

Other preliminaries of the pilgrimage there were to arrange, and after the manner of their kind the Sheikhs talked long and leisurely, agreeing finally that Ishmael should go first into Cairo in the disguise of a Bedouin Sheikh to make sure of the success of their mission, and that Omar (Gordon) should follow him in command of the body of the people.

At length there was silence for a moment, and then Ishmael said—

"Is there anything else, my brothers?"

And at that Gordon, who had not spoken before, turned to him and answered, in the style as well as the language of the Arabs—

"Listen, I beg of you, to my words, and forgive me if what I say is not pleasing to you or yours."

"Speak, Omar Benani, speak," said Ishmael, laying his right hand, with an affectionate gesture, on Gordon's left.

There was a moment of silence, in which Gordon could distinctly hear the sound of Helena's breathing. Then he said—

"Reverse your order, O my brother, and let me go first into Cairo."

A tingling electrical current seemed to pass through the air of the room, and again Gordon heard the sound of Helena's laboured breathing, but no one spoke except Ishmael, who said in a soft voice—

"But why, Omar, why?"

Gordon braced himself up and answered—

"First, because it best becomes a messenger of God to enter Cairo in the company of his people, not alone and in disguise."

"And next?"

"Next, because I know Cairo better than Ishmael, and all that he can do I can do, and more."

There was another moment of tense silence, and then Ishmael said—

"I listen to your sincere proposal, O my brother, but before I answer it I ask for the counsel of my friends."

Then raising his voice he cried, "Companions, you have heard what Omar Benani has said—which of us is it to be?"

At that the tense atmosphere in the room broke into eager and impetuous speech. First came, as needs must in an Eastern conclave, some gusts of questions, then certain breezes of protest, but finally a strong and unbroken current of assent.

"Master," said one of the Sheikhs, "I have eaten bread and salt with you, therefore I will not deceive you. Let Omar go first. He can do all that Ishmael can do and run no risk."

"Messenger of the Merciful," said another, "neither will I deceive you. Omar knows Cairo best. Therefore let him go first."

After others had answered in the same way Ishmael turned to Mahmud, his uncle, whereupon the old man wiped his rheumy eyes and said—

"Your life is in God's hand, O son of my brother, and man cannot escape his destiny. If it is God's will that you should be the first to go into Cairo you will go, and God will protect you. But speaking for myself, I should think it a shame and a humiliation that the father of his people should not enter the city with his children. If Omar says he can do as much as you, believe him—the white man does not lie."

No sooner had the old man concluded than the whole company with one voice shouted that they were all of the same opinion, whereupon Ishmael cried—

"So be it, then! Omar it shall be! And do not think for one moment that I grudge your choice."

"El Hamdullillah!" shouted the company, as from a sense of otherwise inexpressible relief.

Meantime Gordon was conscious only of Helena's violent agitation. Though he dared not look at her, he seemed to see her feverish face and the expression of terror in her lustrous eyes. At length, when the shouts of the Sheikhs had subsided, he heard her tremulous voice saying hurriedly to Ishmael—

"Do not listen to them."

"But why, my Rani?" Ishmael asked in a whisper.

She tried to answer him and could not. "Because ... because—"

"Because—what?" asked Ishmael again.

"Oh, I don't know—I can't think—but I beg you, I entreat you not to let Omar go into Cairo."

Her agitated voice caused another moment of silence, and then Ishmael said in a soft, indulgent tone—

"I understand you, O my Rani. This may be the task of greatest danger, but it is the place of highest honour too, and you would fain see no man except your husband assigned to it. But Omar is of me and I am of him, and there can be no pride nor jealousy between us."

And then, taking Gordon by the right hand, while with his left he was holding Helena, he said—

"Omar, my friend, my brother!"

"El Hamdullillah!" cried the Sheikhs again, and then one by one they rose to go.

Helena rose too, and with her face aflame and her breath coming in gusts she hurried back to her room. The Arab woman followed her in a moment, and with a mocking smile in her glinting eyes, she said—

”How happy you must be, O lady, that some one else than your husband is to go into that place of danger!”

But Helena could bear no more.

”Go out of the room this moment! I cannot endure you! I hate you! Go, woman, go!” she cried.

Zenoba fled before the fury in her lady’s face, but at the next moment Helena had dropped to the floor and burst into a flood of tears.

When she regained possession of herself, the child, Ayesha, was embracing her and, without knowing why, was weeping over her wet cheeks.

CHAPTER XXI

Now that Gordon was to take Ishmael’s place, Helena found herself deeper than ever in the toils of her own plot. She could see nothing but death before him as the result of his return to Cairo. If his identity were discovered, he would die for his own offences as a soldier. If it were not discovered, he would be executed for Ishmael’s conspiracies as she had made them known.

”Oh, it cannot be! It must not be! It shall not be!” she continued to say to herself, but without seeing a way to prevent it.

Never for a moment, in her anxiety to save Gordon from stepping into the pit she had dug for Ishmael, did she allow herself to think that, being the real cause of her father’s death, he deserved the penalty she had prepared for the guilty man. Her mind had altered towards that event since the man concerned in it had changed. The more she thought of it the more sure she became that it was a totally different thing, and in the strict sense hardly a crime at all.

In the first place, she reminded herself that her father had suffered from an affection of the heart which must have contributed to his death, even if it had not been the principal cause of it. How could she have forgotten that fact until now?

Remembering her father’s excitement and exhaustion when she saw him last, she could see for the first time, by the light of Gordon’s story, what had afterwards occurred—the burst of ungovernable passion, the struggle, the fall, the death.

Then she told herself that Gordon had not intended to kill her father, and whatever he had done had been for love of her. "Helena was mine, and you have taken her from me, and broken her heart as well as my own." Yes, love for her and the torment of losing her had brought Gordon back to the Citadel after he had been ordered to return to his quarters. Love for her, and the delirium of a broken heart, had wrung out of him the insults which had led to the quarrel that resulted in her father's death.

In spite of her lingering tenderness for the memory of her father, she began to see how much he had been to blame for what had happened—to think of the gross indignity, the frightful shame, the unmerciful and even unlawful degradation to which in his towering rage he had subjected Gordon. The scene came back to her with horrible distinctness now—her father crying in a half-stifled voice, "You are a traitor! A traitor who has consorted with the enemies of his country!" and then tearing Gordon's sword from its scabbard and breaking it across his knee.

But seeing this, she also saw her own share in what had occurred. At the moment of Gordon's deepest humiliation she had driven him away from her. Her pride had conquered her love, and instead of flinging herself into his arms as she ought to have done, whether he was in the right or in the wrong, when everybody else was trampling upon him, she had insulted him with reproaches and turned her back upon him in his disgrace.

That scene came back to her, too—Gordon at the door of the General's house, with his deadly white face and trembling lips, stammering out, "I couldn't help it, Helena—it was impossible for me to act otherwise," and then, bareheaded as he was, and with every badge of rank and honour gone, staggering across the garden to the gate.

When she thought of all this now it seemed to her that, if anybody had been to blame for her father's death, it was not Gordon, but herself. His had been the hand, the blind hand only, but the heart that had wrought the evil had been hers.

"Oh, it cannot be! it shall not be!" she continued to say to herself, and just as she had tried to undo her work with Ishmael when he was bent on going into Cairo, so she determined to do the same with Gordon, now that he had stepped into Ishmael's place. Her opportunity came soon.

A little before mid-day of the day following the meeting of the Sheikhs, she was alone in the guest-room, sitting at the brass table that served her as a desk—Ishmael being in the camp, Zenoba and the child in the town, and old Mahmud still in bed—when Gordon came out of the men's quarter and walked towards the door as if intending to pass out of the house.

He had seen her as he came from his bedroom, with one of her hands pressed to her brow, and a feeling of inexpressible pity and unutterable long-

ing had so taken possession of him, with the thought that he was soon to lose her—the most precious gift life had given him—that he had tried to steal away.

But instinctively she felt his approach, and with a trembling voice she called to him, so he returned and stood by her side.

"Why are you doing this?" she said. "You know what I mean. Why are you doing it?"

"You know quite well why I am doing it, Helena. Ishmael was determined to go to his death. There was only one way to prevent him. I had to take it."

"But you are going to death yourself—isn't that so?"

He did not answer. He was trying not to look at her.

"Or perhaps you see some way of escape—do you?"

Still he did not speak—he was even trying not to hear her.

"If not, why are you going into Cairo instead of Ishmael?"

"Don't ask me that, Helena. I would rather not answer you."

Suddenly the tears came into her eyes, and after a moment's silence she said—

"I know! I understand! But remember your father. He loves you. You may not think it, but he does—I am sure he does. Yet if you go into Cairo you know quite well what he will do."

"My father is a great man, Helena. He will do his duty whatever happens—what he believes to be his duty."

"Certainly he will, but all the same, do you think he will not suffer! And do you wish to put him into the position of being compelled to cut off his own son? Is that right? Can anything—anything in the world—make it necessary?"

Gordon did not answer her, but under the strain of his emotion he tightened his lips, and his pinched nostrils began to dilate like the nostrils of a horse.

"Then remember your mother, too," said Helena. "She is weak and ill. It breaks my heart to think of her as I saw her last. She believes that you have fled away to some foreign country, but she is living in the hope that time will justify you, and then you will be reconciled to your father, and come back to her again. Is this how you would come back? ... Oh, it will kill her! I'm sure it will!"

She saw that Gordon's strong and manly face was now utterly discomposed, and she could not help but follow up her advantage.

"Then think a little of me too, Gordon. This is all my fault, and if anything is done to you in Cairo it will be just the same to me as if I had done it. Do you wish me to die of remorse?"

She saw that he was struggling to restrain himself, and turning her beautiful wet eyes upon him and laying her hand on his arm, she said—

"Don't go back to Cairo, Gordon! For my sake, for your own sake, for our love's sake——"

But Gordon could bear no more, and he cried in a low, hoarse whisper—
 "Helena, for heaven's sake, don't speak so. I knew it wouldn't be easy to do what I intended to do, and it isn't easy. But don't make it harder for me than it is, I beg, I pray."

She tried to speak again, but he would not listen.

"When you sent the message into Cairo which doomed Ishmael to death you thought he had killed your father. If he had really done so he would have deserved all you did to him. But he hadn't, whereas I had. Do you think I can let an innocent man die for my crime?"

"But, Gordon—" she began, and again he stopped her.

"Don't speak about it, Helena. For heaven's sake, don't! I've fought this battle with myself before, and I can't fight it over again—with your eyes upon me too, your voice in my ears, and your presence by my side."

He was trying to move away, and she was still clinging to his arm.

"Don't speak about our love, either. All that is over now. You must know it is. There is a barrier between us that can never—"

His voice was breaking and he was struggling to tear himself away from her, but she leapt to her feet and cried—

"Gordon, you *shall* hear me—you *must!*" and then he stopped short and looked at her.

"You think you were the cause of my father's death, but you were not," she said.

His mouth opened, his lips trembled, he grew deadly pale.

"You think, too, that there is a barrier of blood between us, but there is no such thing."

"Take care of what you are saying, Helena."

"What I am saying is the truth, Gordon—it is God's truth."

He looked blankly at her for a moment in silence, then laid hold of her violently by both arms, gazed closely into her face, and said in a low, trembling voice—

"Helena, if you knew what it is to live for months under the shadow of a sin—an awful sin—an unpardonable sin—surely you wouldn't ... But why don't you speak? Speak, girl, speak!"

Then Helena looked fearlessly back into his excited face and said—

"Gordon, do you remember that you came to my room in the Citadel before you went in to that ... that fatal interview?"

"Yes, yes! How can I forget it?"

"Do you also remember what I told you then, that whatever happened that day I could never leave my father?"

"Yes, certainly, yes."

"Do you remember that you asked me why, and I said I couldn't tell you because it was a secret—somebody else's secret?"

"Well?" His pulses were beating violently; she could feel them throbbing on her arms.

"Gordon," she said, "do you know what that secret was? I can tell you now. Do you know what it was?"

"What?"

"That my father was suffering from heart-disease, and had already received his death-warrant."

She waited for Gordon to speak, but he was almost afraid to breathe.

"He didn't know his condition until we arrived in Egypt, and then perhaps he ought to have resigned his commission, but he had been out of the service for two years, and the temptation to remain was too much for him, so he asked me to promise to say nothing about it."

Gordon released her arms and she sat down again. He stood over her, breathing fast and painfully.

"I thought you ought to have been told at the time when we became engaged, but my father said, 'No! Why put him in a false position, and burden him with responsibilities he ought not to bear?'"

Helena's own voice was breaking now, and as Gordon listened to it he was looking down at her flushed face, which was thinner than before but more beautiful than ever in his eyes, and a hundredfold more touching than when it first won his heart.

"I tried to tell you that day, too, before you went into the General's office, so that you might see for yourself, dear, that if you separated yourself from my father I ... I couldn't possibly follow you, but there was my promise, and then ... then my pride and ... and something you said that pained and wounded me——"

"I know, I know, I know," he said.

"But now," she continued, rising to her feet again, "now," she repeated, in the same trembling voice, but with a look of joy and triumph, "now that you have told me what happened after your return to the Citadel, I see quite clearly—I am sure—perfectly sure—that my dear father died not by your hand at all, but by the hand and the will of God."

"Helena! Helena!" cried Gordon, and in the tempest of his love and the overwhelming sense of boundless relief he flung his arms about her and covered her face with kisses.

One long moment of immeasurable joy they were permitted to know, and then the hand of fate snatched at them again.

From their intoxicating happiness they were awakened by a voice. It was only the voice of the muezzin calling to mid-day prayers, but it seemed to be

reproaching them, separating them, tearing them asunder, reminding them of where they were now, and what they were, and that God was over them.

[image]

Music fragment

Their lips parted, their arms fell away from each other, and irresistibly, simultaneously, as if by an impulse of the same heart, they dropped to their knees to pray for pardon.

The voice of the muezzin ceased, and in the silence of the following moment they heard a soft footstep coming behind.

It was Ishmael. He did not speak to either of them, but seeing them on their knees, at the hour of mid-day prayers, he stepped up and knelt between.

CHAPTER XXII

When Gordon had time to examine the new situation in which he found himself he saw that he was now in a worse case than before.

It had been an inexpressible relief to realise that he was not the first cause of the General's death, and therefore that conscience did not require him to go into Cairo in order to protect Ishmael from the consequences of a crime he did not commit. But no sooner had he passed this great crisis than he was brought up against a great test. What was it to him that he could save his life if he had to lose Helena?

Helena was now Ishmael's wife—betrothed to him by the most sacred pledges of Mohammedan law. If the barrier of blood which had kept him from Helena had been removed, the barrier of marriage which kept Helena from him remained.

"What can we do?" he asked himself, and for a long time he saw no answer.

In the fierce struggle that followed, honour and duty seemed to say, that inasmuch as Helena had entered into this union of her own free will—however passively acquiescing in its strange conditions—she must abide by it, and he must leave her where she was and crush down his consuming passion, which was an unholy passion now. But honour and duty are halting and timorous guides in the

presence of love, and when Gordon came to think of Helena as the actual wife of Ishmael he was conscious of nothing but the flame that was burning at his heart's core.

Remembering what Helena had told him, and what he had seen since he came to that house, he reminded himself that after all the marriage was only a marriage *pro formâ*, a promise made under the mysterious compulsion of fate, a contract of convenience and perhaps generosity on the one side, and on the other side of dark and calculating designs which would not bear to be thought of any longer, being a result of the blind leading of awful passions under circumstances of the most irresistible provocation.

When he came to think of love he was dead to everything else. Ishmael did not love Helena, whereas he, Gordon, loved her with all his heart and soul and strength. She was everything in life to him, and though he might have gone to his death without her, it was impossible to live and leave her behind him.

Thinking so, he began to conjure up the picture of a time when Ishmael, under the influence of Helena's beauty and charm, might perhaps forget the bargain between them, and claim his rights as a husband, and then the thought of her beautiful head with its dark curling locks as it lay in his arms that day lying in the arms of the Arab, with Ishmael's swarthy face above her, so tortured him that it swept away every other consideration.

"It must not, shall not, cannot be!" he told himself.

And that brought him to the final thought that since he loved Helena, and since Helena loved him and not her husband, their position in Ishmael's house was utterly false and wrong, and could not possibly continue.

"It is not fair even to Ishmael himself," he thought.

And when, struggling with his conscience, he asked himself how he was to put an end to the odious and miserable situation, he concluded at once that he would go boldly to Ishmael and tell him the whole story of Helena's error and temptation, thereby securing his sympathy and extricating all of them from the position in which they were placed.

"Anything will be better than the present state of things," he thought, as he reflected upon the difficult and delicate task he intended to undertake.

But after a moment he saw that while it would be hard to explain Helena's impulse of vengeance to the man who had been the object of it, to tell him of the message she had sent into Cairo would be utterly impossible.

"I cannot say anything to Ishmael about that," he thought, and the only logical sequence of ideas was that he could not say anything to Ishmael at all.

This left him with only one conclusion—that inasmuch as it was impossible that he and Helena could remain any longer in that house, and equally impossible that they could leave it with Ishmael's knowledge and consent, there was nothing

for them to do but to fly away.

He found it hard to reconcile himself to the idea of a secret flight. The very thought of it seemed to put them into the position of adulterers, deceiving an unsuspecting husband. But when he remembered the scene in the guest-room that day, the moment of over-powering love, the irresistible kiss, and then the crushing sense of duplicity, as Ishmael entered and without a thought of treachery knelt between them, he told himself that at any cost whatsoever he must put an end to the false position in which they lived.

"We must do it soon—the sooner the better," he thought.

Though he had lived so long with the thought of losing Helena, that kiss had in a moment put his soul and body into a flame. He knew that his love was blinding him to certain serious considerations, and that some of these would rise up later and perhaps accuse him of selfishness or disloyalty or worse. But he could only think of Helena now, and his longing to possess her made him dead to everything else.

In a fever of excitement he began to think out plans for their escape, and reflecting that two days had still to pass before the train left Khartoum by which it had been intended that he should travel in his character as Ishmael's messenger, he decided that it was impossible for them to wait for that.

They must get away at once by camel if not by rail. And remembering Osman, his former guide and companion, he concluded to go over to the Gordon College and secure his aid.

Having reached this point, he asked himself if he ought not to obtain Helena's consent before going any further; but no, he would not wait even for that. And then, remembering how utterly crushed she was, a victim of storm and tempest, a bird with a broken wing, he assumed the attitude of strength towards her, telling himself she was a woman after all, and it was his duty as a man to think and to act for her.

So he set out in haste to see Osman, and when, on his way through the town, he passed (without being recognised) a former comrade in khaki, a Colonel of Lancers, whose life had been darkened by the loss of his wife through the treachery of a brother officer, he felt no qualms at all at the thought of taking Helena from Ishmael.

"Ours is a different case altogether," he said, and then he told himself that their life would be all the brighter in the future because it had had this terrible event in it.

It was late and dark when he returned from the Gordon College, and then old Mahmud's house was as busy as a fair, with people coming and going on errands relating to the impending pilgrimage, but he watched his opportunity to speak to Helena, and as soon as Ishmael, who was more than commonly animated

and excited that night, had dismissed his followers and gone to the door to drive them home, he approached her and whispered in her ear—

"Helena!"

"Yes?"

"Can you be ready to leave Khartoum at four o'clock in the morning?"

For a moment she made no reply. It seemed to her an incredible happiness that they were really to go away together. But quickly collecting her wandering thoughts she answered—

"Yes, I can be ready."

"Then go down to the Post Landing. I shall be there with a launch."

"Yes, yes!" Her heart was beating furiously.

"Osman, the guide who brought me here, will be waiting with camels on the other side of the river."

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"We are to ride as far as Atbara, and take train from there to the Red Sea."

"And what then?"

"God knows what then. We must wait for the direction of fate. America, perhaps, as we always hoped and intended."

She looked quickly round, then took his face between her hands and kissed him.

"To-morrow morning at four o'clock," she whispered.

"At four," he repeated.

A thousand thoughts were flashing through her mind, but she asked no further questions, and at the next moment she went off to her own quarters.

The door of her room was ajar, and the face of the Arab woman, who was within, doing something with the clothes of the child, seemed to wear the same mocking smile as before; but Helena was neither angry nor alarmed. When she asked herself if the woman had seen or heard what had taken place between Gordon and herself, no dangers loomed before her in relation to their flight.

Her confidence in Gordon—his strength, his courage, his power to protect her—was absolute. If he intended to take her away he would do so, and not Ishmael nor all the Arabs on earth could stop him.

CHAPTER XXIII

Gordon could not allow himself to sleep that night, lest he should not be awake when the hour came to go. The room he shared with Ishmael was large, and it had one window looking to the river and another to Khartoum. Through these windows, which were open, he heard every noise of the desert town by night.

Sometimes there was the dead, measured thud of a camel's tread on the unpaved streets; sometimes the light beat of a donkey's hoofs; at intervals there were the faint and distant cries of the night watchmen from various parts of the town, intersecting the air like cross currents of wireless telegraphy, and once an hour there was the guttural voice of Black Zogal at the door of their own house, calling the confession of faith.

"There is no god but God—no god but God!"

It had been late when Ishmael came to bed, and even then, being excited and in high spirits, and finding Gordon still awake, he had talked for a long time in the darkness of his preparations for the forthcoming pilgrimage and his hopes of its progress across the desert—three and a half miles an hour, fourteen hours a day, making a month for the journey altogether. But finding that Gordon did not reply, and thinking he must be sleepy, he wished him a good night and a blessed morning, and then, with a few more words that were trustful, affectionate, warm-hearted and brotherly, he fell asleep.

It was after twelve by this time, and though Gordon intended to rise at three it seemed to him that the few hours between would never end. He listened to the measured breathing of the sleeping man and counted the cries outside, but the time passed as if with feet of lead.

It was never quite dark, and through the luminous dark blue of the southern night, fretted with stars, nearly everything outside could be dimly seen. Of all lights that is the one most conducive to thought, and in spite of himself Gordon could not help thinking. The obstinate questions which he had been able to crush down during the day were now rising to torment him.

"What will happen when this household which is now asleep awakes in the morning?" he asked himself.

He knew quite well what would happen. He would soon be missed. Helena would be missed too, and it would be concluded that they had gone together. But after he had banished the picture which rose to his mind's eye of the confusion that would ensue on the discovery of their flight, he set himself to defend it.

It was true that he was breaking the pledge he had made to the people when he undertook to go into Cairo, but he had made his promise under a mistake as to his own position, and therefore it was not incumbent upon him to keep it, now that he knew the truth.

It was true that Helena was breaking the betrothal which she had entered into with Ishmael, but she, too, had acted under an error, and therefore her mar-

riage was not binding upon her conscience.

But do what he would to justify himself, he could not shake off a sense of deceit and even of treachery. He thought of Ishmael, and how he had heaped kindness and honour upon him since he came to Khartoum. He thought of Helena, and of the shame with which her flight would overwhelm the man who considered himself her husband.

"Go on!" something seemed to say in a taunting whisper. "Fly away! Seek your own happiness and think of nothing else! This is what you came to Khartoum for! This is what your great hopes and aims amount to! Leave this good man in the midst of the confusion you have brought upon him! Let him go into Cairo, innocent though he is, and die by the cruel error of fate! That's good! That's brave! That's worthy of a man and a soldier!"

Against thoughts like these he tried to set the memory of old Mahmud's words at the meeting of the Sheikhs: "Man cannot resist his destiny. If God wills that you should go into Cairo you will go, and God will protect you!"

But there was really only one way to reconcile himself to what he intended to do, and that was to think of Helena and to keep her beautiful face constantly before him. She was on the other side of the wall, and she would be awake now—the only other person in the house who was not asleep—thinking of him and waiting for the hour when they were to escape.

The luminous dark blue of the air died into the soft red of the early dawn, the "Wahhed!" of the night watchmen became less frequent, and the call of Black Zogal stopped altogether. It was now three o'clock, and Gordon, who had not undressed, rose to a sitting position on his bed.

This brought him face to face with Ishmael, whose angerib was on the opposite side of the room. The Arab was sleeping peacefully. He, too, had lain down in his clothes, having to rise early, but he had unrolled his turban, leaving nothing on his head but his Mecca skullcap, which made him look like the picture of a saintly Pope. The dim light that was filtering through the windows rested on him as he lay in his white garments under a white sheepskin. There was a look of serenity, of radiance, almost of divinity, in his tranquil face.

Gordon felt as if he were a thief and a murderer—stealing from and stabbing the man who loved and trusted him. He had an almost irresistible impulse to waken Ishmael there and then, and tell him plainly what he was about to do. But the thought of Helena came back again, and he remembered that that was quite impossible.

At length he rose to go. He was still wearing Hafiz's slippers, but he found himself stepping on his toes to deaden the sound of his tread. When he got to the door he opened it carefully so as to make no noise; but just at that moment the sleeping man stirred and began to speak.

In the toneless voice of sleep, but nevertheless with an accent of affection which Gordon had never heard from him before, Ishmael said—

”Rani! *My Rani!*”

Gordon stood and listened, not daring to move. After a moment all was quiet again. There was no sound in the room but Ishmael’s measured breathing as before.

How Gordon got out at last he never quite knew. When he recovered his self-possession he was in the guest-room, drawing aside the curtain that covered the open doorway, and feeling the cool, fresh, odourless desert air on his hot face and in his nostrils.

He saw Black Zogal stretched out at the bottom of the wooden steps, fast asleep and with his staff beside him. The insurgent dawn was sweeping up, but all was silent both within and without. Save for the Nubian’s heavy snoring there was not a sound about the house.

Feeling his throat to be parched, he turned back to the water-niche for a drink, and while he was lifting the can to his lips his eye fell on a letter which had been left for him there, having come by the train which arrived late the night before, and then been specially delivered after he had gone to bed.

The letter, which was in a black-bordered envelope, was addressed—

”SHEIKH OMAR BENANI,
”*In the care of* ISHMAEL AMEER.”

At first sight the handwriting struck him like a familiar face, but before he had time to recognise it he was conscious of a crushing sense of fatality, a vague but almost heart-breaking impression that while he had been spending the long, black hours of the night in building up hopes of flying away with Helena, this little packet of sealed paper had all the time been waiting outside his door to tell him they could not go.

He took it and opened it with trembling fingers, and read it at a glance as one reads a picture. It was from Hafiz, and it told him that his mother was dead.

Then all the pent-up pain and shame of the night rolled over him like a breaking wave, and he dropped down on the nearest seat and wept like a child.

CHAPTER XXIV

Contrary to Gordon's surmise, Helena had slept soundly, with the beautiful calm confidence of one who relied absolutely upon him and thought her troubles were over; but she awoke at half-past three as promptly as if an alarm-clock had wakened her.

The arms of Ayesha were then closely encircling her neck, and it was with difficulty that she liberated herself without awakening the child, but as soon as she had done so she could not resist an impulse to kiss the little one, so boundless was her happiness and so entirely at that moment had she conquered the sense that Ishmael's innocent daughter had been a constant torture to her.

Then dressing rapidly in her usual mixed Eastern and Western costume, and throwing a travelling cloak over her shoulders instead of her Indian veil, but giving no thought to the other belongings which she must leave behind, she stepped lightly out of the sleeping room.

The moment she entered the guest-room she heard a moan, and before realising where it came from, she said—

"Who's there?"

Then Gordon lifted his tear-stained face to her face, and, without speaking, held out the letter which hung from his helpless hand.

She took it and read it with a sense of overwhelming disaster, while Gordon, with that access of grief which, at the first moment of a great sorrow, the presence of a loved one brings, heaped reproaches upon himself, as if all that he had done at the hard bidding of his conscience had been a sin and a crime.

"Poor mother! My poor, dear mother! It was I who made her last days unhappy."

Half-an-hour went by in this way, and the time for going passed. Helena dared not tell him that their opportunity for flight was slipping away—it seemed like an outrage to think of that now—so she stood by his side, feeling powerless to comfort him, and dazed by the blow that had shattered their hopes.

Then Black Zogal, being awakened by the sound of Gordon's weeping, came in with his wild eyes, and after him came Abdullah, and then Zenoba, who, gathering an idea of trouble, went off to awaken Ishmael and old Mahmud, so that in a little while the whole of the Arab household were standing round Gordon as he sat doubled up on the edge of a divan.

When Ishmael heard what had happened he was deeply moved, and sitting down by Gordon's side he took one of his hands and smoothed it, while in that throbbing voice which went to the heart of everybody, and with a look of suffering in his swarthy face and luminous black eyes, he spoke some sympathetic words.

"All life ends in death, my brother. This world is a place of going, not of staying. The mystery of pain—who can fathom it? Life would be unbearable

but for one thought—that God is over all. He rules everything for the best. Yes, believe me, everything. I have had my hours of sorrow too, but I have always found it so.”

After a while Gordon was able to control his grief, and then Ishmael asked him if he would not read his letter aloud. With some reluctance Gordon did so, but it required all his self-control to repeat his mother’s message.

Leaving out the usual Arabic salutations he began where Hafiz said—

”With a heavy heart I have to tell you, my most dear brother, that your sweet and saintly mother died this morning. She had been sinking ever since you went away, but the end came so quickly that it took us all by surprise.”

Gordon’s voice thickened, and Ishmael said—

”Take your time, brother.”

”She had the consolations of her religion, and I think she passed in peace. There was only one thing clouded her closing hours. On her deathbed she was constantly expressing an earnest hope that you might all be re-united—you and she and your father and Helena, who are now so far apart.”

”Take time, O my brother,” said Ishmael, and seeing that Helena also was moved, he took her hand too, as if to strengthen her.

Thus he sat between them, comforting both, while Gordon in a husky voice struggled on—

”Not long before she died she wished to send you a message, but the power of life was low in her, and she could not write, except to sign her name (as you see below), and then she did not know where you were to be found. But my mother promised her that I should take care that whatever she said should come to your hands, and these were the words she sent: ’Tell my boy that my last thoughts were about him. Though I am sorry he took the side of the false ... the false prophet—’”

”Go on, brother, go on,” said Ishmael in his soft voice.

”Say I am certain he did what he thought was right. Be sure you tell him I died happy, because ... because I know I shall see him again. If I am never to see him in this world I shall do so in the world to come. Say ... say I shall be waiting for him there. And tell him it will not seem long.”

It was with difficulty that Gordon came to the end, for his eyes were full of tears and his throat was parched and tight, and he would have broken down altogether but for the sense of Helena’s presence by his side.

Ishmael was now more deeply moved than before.

”How she must have loved you!” he said, and then he began to speak of his own mother, and what she had done for him.

”She was only a poor, ignorant woman perhaps, but she died to save me, and I loved her with all my heart.”

At that the two black servants, Abdullah and Zogal, who had been standing before Gordon in silence, tried to utter some homely words of comfort, and old Mahmud, wiping his wet eyes, said—

”May God be merciful to your mother, my son, and forgive her all her sins.”

”She was a saint—she never had any,” replied Gordon, whereupon the Arab nurse, who alone of all that household had looked on at this scene with dry and evil eyes, said bitterly—

”Nevertheless she died as a Christian and an unbeliever, therefore she cannot look for mercy.”

Then Helena’s eyes flashed like fire into the woman’s face, and Gordon felt the blood rush to his head, but Ishmael was before them both.

”Zenoba, ask pardon of God,” he said, and before the thunder of his voice and the majesty of his glance the Arab woman fell back.

”Heed her not, my brother,” said Ishmael, turning back to Gordon; and then he added—

”We all serve under the same General, and though some of us wear uniform of red, and some of brown, and some of blue, he who serves best is the best soldier. In the day of victory will our General ask us the colour of our garments? No!”

At that generous word Gordon burst into tears once more, but Ishmael said—

”Don’t weep for one who has entered into the joys of Paradise.”

When Gordon had regained his composure Ishmael asked him if he would read part of the letter again, but knowing what part it would be—the part about the prophet—he tried to excuse himself, saying he was not fit to read any more.

”Then the Rani will read,” said Ishmael, and far as Helena would have fled from the tragic ordeal she could not escape from it. So in her soft and mellow voice she read on without faltering until she came to her own name, and then she stopped and tears began to trickle down her cheeks.

”Go on,” said Ishmael; ”don’t be afraid of what follows.”

And when Helena came to ”false prophet,” he turned to Gordon and said—

”Your dear mother didn’t know how much I love you. But she knows now,” he added, ”for the dead know all.”

There was no further interruption until Helena had finished, and then Ishmael said—

”She didn’t know, either, what work the Merciful had waiting for you in Khartoum. Perhaps you did not know yourself. Something called you to come here. Something drew you on. Which of us has not felt like that? But God guides our hearts—the Merciful makes no mistakes.”

Nobody spoke, but Gordon’s eyes began to shine with a light which Helena, who was looking at him, had never seen in them before.

"All the same," continued Ishmael, "you hear what your mother says, and it is not for me to keep you against your will. If you wish to go back now none shall reproach you. Speak, Omar; do you wish to leave me?"

There was a moment of tense silence, in which Gordon hesitated and Helena waited breathlessly for his reply. Then with a great effort Gordon answered—

"No."

"El Hamdullillah!" cried the two black servants; and then Ishmael sent Zogal into the town and the camp to say that the faithful would bid farewell to Omar in the mosque the following night.

That evening after sunset, instead of delivering his usual lecture to the people squatting on the sand in front of his house, Ishmael read the prayers for the dead, while Gordon and Helena and a number of the Sheikhs sat on the divans in the guest-room.

When the service was over, and the company was breaking up, the old men pressed Gordon's hand as they were passing out and said—

"May God give you compensation!"

As soon as they were gone Gordon approached Helena and whispered hurriedly—

"I must speak to you soon—where can it be?"

"I ought to go to the water-women's well by the Goods Landing to-morrow morning," said Helena.

"At what hour?"

"Ten."

"I shall be there," said Gordon.

His eyes were still full of the strange wild light.

CHAPTER XXV

At ten o'clock next morning Helena was at the well by the Goods Landing where the water-women draw water in their earthen jars to water the gardens and the streets, and while standing among the gross creatures who, with their half-naked bodies and stark-naked souls, were crowding about her for what they could get, she saw Gordon coming down in his Bedouin dress with a firm, strong step.

His flickering, steel-blue eyes were as full of light as when she saw them

last, but that vague suggestion of his mother which she had hitherto seen in his face was gone, and there was a look of his father which she had never observed before.

"Let us walk this way," he said, indicating a road that went down to the empty and unfrequented tongue of land that leads to the point at which the Blue Nile and the White Nile meet.

"Helena," he said, stepping closely by her side, and speaking almost in her ear, "there is something I wish to say—to ask—and everything depends on your answer—what we are to do and what is to become of us."

"What is it?" said she, with trembling voice.

"When our escape from Khartoum was stopped by the letter telling me of my mother's death, I thought at first it was only an accident—a sad, strange accident—that it should arrive at that moment."

"And don't you think so now?" she asked.

"No; I think it was a divine intervention."

She glanced up at him. "He is going to talk about the betrothal," she thought.

But he did not do so. In his intense and poignant voice he continued—

"When I proposed that we should go away together I supposed your coming here had been due to a mistake—that my coming here had been due to a mistake—that your sending that letter into Cairo and my promising to take Ishmael's place had been due to a mistake—that it had all been a mistake—a long, miserable line of mistakes."

"And wasn't it?" she asked, walking on with her eyes to the sand.

"So far as we are concerned, yes, but with God ... with God Almighty mistakes do not happen."

They walked some paces in silence, and then in a still more poignant voice he said—

"Don't you believe that, Helena? Wasn't it true, what Ishmael said yesterday? Can you possibly believe that we have been allowed to go on as we have been going—both of us—without anything being meant by it?—all a cruel, stupid, merciless, Almighty blunder?"

"Well?"

"Well, think of what would have happened if we had been allowed to carry out our plan. Ishmael would have gone into Cairo as he originally intended, and he would have been seized and executed for conspiracy. What then? The whole country—yes, the whole country from end to end—would have risen in revolt. The sleeping terror of religious hatred would have been awakened. It would have been the affair of El Azhar over again—only worse, a thousand-fold worse."

Again a few steps in silence, and then—

"The insurrection would have been suppressed of course, but think of the bloodshed, the carnage! On the other hand—"

She saw what was coming, and with difficulty she walked steadily.

"On the other hand, if I go into Cairo, as I have promised to do—as I am expected to do—there can be no such result. The moment I arrive I shall be arrested, and the moment I am arrested I shall be identified and handed over to the military authorities to be tried for my offences as a soldier. There will be no religious significance in my punishment, therefore there will be no fanatical frenzy provoked by it, and consequently there can be no bloodshed. Don't you see that, Helena?"

She could not answer; she felt sick and faint. After a moment he went on in the same eager, enthusiastic voice—

"But that's not all. There is something better than that."

"Better—do you say better?"

"Something that comes closer to us at all events. Do you believe in omens, Helena? That some mystic sense tells us things of which we have no proof, no evidence?"

She bent her head without raising her eyes from the sand.

"Well, I have a sense of some treachery going on in Cairo that Ishmael knows nothing about, and I believe it was just this treachery which led to the idea of his going there at all."

She looked up into his face, and thinking he read her thought, he said quickly—

"Oh, I know—I've heard about the letters of the Ulema—that those suggestions of assassination and so forth were signed by the simple old Chancellor of El Azhar. But isn't it possible that a subtler spirit inspired them? ... Helena?"

"Yes," she faltered.

"Do you remember that one day in the Citadel I said it was not really Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus, and that there was somebody in Egypt now who was doing what the High Priest of the Jews did in Palestine two thousand years ago?"

"The Grand Cadi?"

"Yes! Something tells me that that subtle old scoundrel is playing a double sword game—with the Ulema and with the Government—and that his object is not only to destroy Ishmael, but, by awakening the ancient religious terror, to ruin England as well—tempt her to ruin her prestige, at all events."

They had reached the margin of the river, and he stopped.

"Well?" she faltered again.

"Well, I am a British soldier still, Helena, even though I am a disgraced one, and I want to ... I want to save the good name of my country."

She could not speak—she felt as if she would choke.

"I want to save the good name of the Consul-General also. He is my father, and though he no longer thinks of me as his son, I want to save him from ... from himself."

"I can do it too," he added eagerly. "At this moment I am perhaps the only man who can. I am nobody now—only a runaway and a deserter—but I can cross the line of fire and so give warning."

"But, Gordon, don't you see—"

"Oh, I know what you are going to say, Helena—I must die for it. Yes! Nobody wants to do that, if he can help it, but I can't! Listen!"

She raised her eyes to his—they seemed to be ablaze with a kind of frenzy.

"Death was the penalty of what I did in Cairo, and if I did not stay there to be court-martialled and condemned, was it because I wanted to save my life? No; I thought there was nothing left in my life that made it worth saving. It was because I wanted to give it in some better cause. Something told me I should, and when I came to Khartoum I didn't know what fate was before me, or what I had to do, but I know now. *This* is what I have to do, Helena—to go back to Cairo instead of Ishmael, and so save England and Egypt and my father and these poor Moslem people, and prevent a world of bloodshed."

Then Helena, who in her nervousness had been scraping her feet on the sand, said in a halting, trembling voice—

"Was this what you wanted to say to me, Gordon?"

"Yes, but now I want you to say something to me."

"What is that?" she asked, trembling.

"*To tell me to go.*"

It was like a blow. She felt as if she would fall.

"I cannot go unless you send me, Helena—not as things stand now—leaving you here—under these conditions—in a place like this—alone. Therefore tell me to go, Helena."

Tears sprang to her eyes. She thought of all the hopes she had so lately cherished, all the dreams of the day before of love and a new life among quite different scenes—sweet scenes full of the smell of new-cut grass, the rustling of trees, the swish of the scythe, the songs of birds, and the ringing of church bells, instead of this empty and arid wilderness—and then of the ruin, the utter wreck and ruin, that everything was falling to.

"Tell me to go, Helena—tell me," he repeated.

It was crushing. She could not bear it.

"I cannot," she said. "Don't ask me to do such a thing. Just when we were going away, too ... expecting to escape from all this miserable tangle and to be happy at last—"

"But should we be happy, Helena? Say we escaped to Europe, America,

Australia, anywhere far enough away, and what I speak of were to come to pass, should we be happy—should we?”

”We should be together at all events, and we should be able to love each other—”

”But could we love each other with the memory of all that misery—the misery we might have prevented—left here behind us?”

”At least we should be alive and safe and well.”

”Should we be well if our whole life became abominable to us, Helena? ... On the other hand—”

”On the other hand, you want us to part—never to see each other again.”

”It’s hard—I know it’s hard—but isn’t that better than to become odious in each other’s eyes?”

A cruel mixture of anger and sorrow and despair took possession of her, and, choking with emotion, she said—

”I have nobody but you now, yet you want me to tear my heart out—to sacrifice the love that is my only happiness, my only refuge.... Oh, I cannot do it! You are asking me to send you into the jaws of death itself—that’s it—the very jaws of death itself—and I cannot do it. I tell you I cannot, I cannot! There is no woman in the world who could.”

There was silence for a moment after this vehement cry; then in a low tone he said—

”Every soldier’s wife does as much when she sends her husband into battle, Helena.”

”Ah!”

She caught her breath as if a hand from heaven had smitten her.

”Am I not going into battle now? And aren’t you a soldier’s daughter?”

There was another moment of silence in which he looked out on the sparkling waters of the Blue Nile and she gazed through clouded eyes on the sluggish waves of the White.

Something had suddenly begun to rise in her throat. This was the real Gordon, the hero who had won battles, the soldier who had faced death before, and she had never known him until now!

A whirlwind of sensation and emotion seemed to race through her soul and body. She felt hot, she felt cold, she felt ashamed, and then all at once she felt as if she were being lifted out of herself by the spirit of the man beside her. At length she said, trying to speak calmly—

”You are right, quite right; you are always right, Gordon. If you feel like that about going into Cairo you must go. It is your duty. You have received your orders.”

”Helena!” he cried, in a burst of joy.

"You mustn't think about me, though. I'm sorry for what I said a while ago, but I'm better now. I have always thought that if the time ever came to me to see my dearest go into battle, I should not allow myself to be afraid."

"I was sure of you, Helena, quite sure."

"This doesn't look like going into battle, perhaps, but it may be something still better—going to save life, to prevent bloodshed."

"Yes, yes!" he said; and struggling to control herself, Helena continued—

"You mustn't think about leaving me here, either. Whatever happens in this place, I shall always remember that you love me, so ... so nothing else will matter."

"Nothing—nothing!"

"And though it may be hard to think that you have gone to your death, and that I ... that in a sense I have been the cause of it—"

"But you haven't, Helena! Your hand may have penned that letter, but a higher Power directed it."

She looked at him with shining eyes, and answered in a firmer voice and with a proud lift of her beautiful head—

"I don't know about that, Gordon. I only know that you want to give your life in a great cause. And though they have degraded you and driven you out and hunted you down like a dog, you are going to die like a man and an Englishman."

"And you tell me to do it, Helena?"

"Yes, for I'm a soldier's daughter, and in my heart I'm a soldier's wife as well, and I shouldn't be worthy to be either if I didn't tell you to do your duty, whatever the consequences to me."

"My brave girl!" he cried, clutching at her hand.

Then they began to walk back.

As they walked they encouraged each other.

"We are on the right road now, Helena."

"Yes, we are on the right road now, Gordon."

"We are doing better than running away."

"Yes, we are doing better than running away."

"The train leaves Khartoum this evening, and I suppose they want to say farewell to me in the mosque at sunset.... You'll be strong to the last and not break down when the time comes for me to go?"

"No, I'll not break down ... when the time comes for you to go."

But for all her brave show of courage, her eyes were filling fast and the tears were threatening to fall.

"Better leave me now," she whispered. "Let me go back alone."

He was not sorry to let her go ahead, for at sight of her emotion his own was mastering him.

"Will she keep up to the end?" he asked himself.

CHAPTER XXVI

As the hours of the day passed on, Helena became painfully aware that her courage was ebbing away.

Unconsciously Ishmael was adding to her torture. Soon after the midday meal he called on her to write to his dictation a letter which Gordon was to take into Cairo...

"One more letter, O Rani, only one, before our friend and brother leaves us."

It was to the Ulema, telling them of the change in his plans and begging them to be good to Gordon.

"Trust him and love him. Receive him as you would receive me, and believe that all he does and says is according to my wish and word."

Helena had to write this letter. It was like writing Gordon's death-warrant.

Later in the day, seeing her idle, nibbling the top of the reed pen which she held in her trembling fingers, Ishmael called for the kufiah.

"Where is the kufiah, O Rani—the kufiah that was to disguise the messenger of God from his enemies?"

And when Helena, in an effort to escape from that further torture, protested that in Gordon's case a new kufiah was not essential, because he wore the costume of a Bedouin already, Ishmael replied—

"But the kufiah he wears now is white, and every official in Khartoum has seen it. Therefore another is necessary, and let it be of another colour."

At that, with fiendish alacrity, the Arab woman ran off for a strip of red silken wool, and Helena had to shape and stitch it.

It was like stitching Gordon's shroud.

The day seemed to fly on the wings of an eagle, the sun began to sink, the shadows to lengthen on the desert sand, and the time to approach for the great ceremony of the leave-taking in the mosque. Helena was for staying at home, but Ishmael would not hear of it.

"Nay, my Rani," he said. "In the courtyard after prayers we must say farewell to Omar, and you must clothe him in the new kufiah that is to hide him from his foes. Did you not promise to do as much for me? And shall it be

said that you grudge the same honour to my friend and brother?"

Half-an-hour afterwards, Ishmael having gone off hand in hand with Gordon, and old Mahmud and Zenoba and Ayesha and the two black servants having followed him, Helena put on a veil for the first time since coming to Khartoum, and made her way to the mosque.

The streets of the town, as she passed through them, seemed to be charged with an atmosphere of excitement that was little short of frenzy; but the courtyard, when she had crossed the threshold, was like the scene of some wild phantasmagoria.

A crowd of men and women, squatting about the walls of the open space, were strumming on native drums, playing on native pipes, and uttering the weird, monotonous ululation that is the expression of the Soudanese soul in its hours of joy.

A moment later Helena was in the gallery, the people had made way for her, and she was sitting as before by the Arab woman and the child. Overhead was a brazen, blood-red Southern sky; below were a thousand men on crimson carpets, some in silks, some in rags, all moving and moaning like tumultuous waves in a cavern of the sea.

[image]

Helena was in the gallery

The Reader, in the middle of the mosque, was chanting the Koran, the muezzin in the minaret was calling to prayers, the men on the floor were uttering their many-throated responses, and the very walls of the mosque itself seemed to be vibrating with religious fervour.

A moment after Helena had taken her seat Ishmael entered, followed by Gordon, and the people gathered round them to kiss their hands and garments. Helena felt her head reel, she wanted to cry out, and it was with difficulty she controlled herself.

Then the Reader stood up in his desk and recited an invocation, and the people repeated it after him.

"God is Most Great!"

"God is Most Great!"

"There is no god but God! ...

"Mohammed is His Prophet! ...

"Listen to the preacher! ...

"Amen!"

"Amen!"

After that Ishmael rose from his knees before the Kibleh, took the wooden sword at the foot of the pulpit, ascended to the topmost step, and, after a preliminary prayer, began to preach.

Never had Helena seen him so eager and excited, and every passage of his sermon seemed to increase both his own ecstasy and the emotion of his hearers.

Helena hardly heard his words, so far away were her thoughts and so steadfastly were her eyes fixed on the other figure in front of the Kibleh, but a general sense of their import was beating on her brain as on a drum.

All religions began in poverty and ended in corruption.

It had been so with Islam, which began with the breaking of idols and went on to the worship of wealth, the quest of power, the lust of conquest—Caliphs seeking to establish their claim not by election and the choice of God but by theft and murder.

It had been so with Christianity, which began in meekness and humility and went on to pride and persecution—Holy Fathers exchanging their cells for palaces and their poverty for pomp, forgetting the principle of their great Master, whose only place in their midst was in pictured windows, on vaporous clouds, blessing with outstretched arms a Church which favoured everything he fought against and a world which practised everything he condemned.

"What is the result, O my brothers? War, wealth, luxury, sensuality, slavery, robbery, injustice, and oppression!

"Listen to the word of the Holy Koran: 'And Pharaoh made proclamation among his people, saying, Is not this Kingdom of Egypt mine and the rivers thereof?'

"But not in Egypt only, nor alone under the Government of the King who lives across the seas, but all the world over, wheresoever human empires are founded, wheresoever men claim the earth and the fruits of the earth and the treasures that lie in the bowels of the earth—impoverishing the children of men to obtain them, or destroying their souls that they may deck and delight their bodies—there the Pharaohs of this world are saying, 'Is not this Kingdom of Egypt mine and the rivers thereof?'

"But the earth and the fruits of the earth and the treasures of the earth are God's, my brothers, and He is coming to reclaim them, and to right the wrongs of the oppressed, to raise up the downtrodden, and to comfort the broken-hearted."

The mosque seemed to rock with the shouts which followed these words, and as soon as the cries of the people had subsided, the voice of Ishmael, now louder and more tremulous than before, rang through its vaults again.

"Deep in the heart of man, my brothers, is the expectation of a day when the Almighty will send His Messenger to purify and pacify the world and to banish

intolerance and wrong. The Jews look for the Messiah, the Christians for the divine man of Judæa, and we that are Moslems for the Mahdi and the Christ.

"In all climes and ages, amid all sorrows and sufferings, sunk in the depths of ignorance, sold into slavery, the poorest of the poor, the most miserable among the most miserable of the world, humanity has yet cherished that great expectation. Real as life, real as death, real as wells of water in a desert land to man on his earthly pilgrimage is the hope of a Deliverer from oppression and injustice—and who shall say it is vain and false? It is true, my brothers, true as the sky rolling overhead. Our Deliverer is coming! He is coming soon! He is coming now!"

Ishmael's tremulous voice had by this time broken into hysterical sobs, and the responses of his hearers had risen to delirious cries.

More of the same kind followed which Helena did not hear, but suddenly she was awakened to full consciousness of what was going on about her by hearing Ishmael speak of Gordon and the people answering him with rapturous shouts.

"He is not of our race, yet no doubt enters into our hearts of his fidelity."

"El Hamdullillah!"

"He is not of our faith, yet he will be true to God and His people."

"Allah! Allah!"

"For us he has left his home, his country, and his kindred."

"Allah! Allah! Allah!"

"For us he is going into the place of danger."

"Allah! Allah! Allah!"

"What says the Lord in the Holy Koran?—'They therefore who had left their country and suffered for My sake I will surely bring them into gardens watered by rivers—a reward of God.'"

"Allah! Allah! Allah!"

"The Lord bless the white man to whom the black man is a brother! Bless him in the morning splendour! Bless him in the still of night! Bless him with children—the eye of the heart of man! Bless him with the love of woman—the joy and the crown of life!"

"Allah! Allah! Allah!"

"And may the Lord of majesty and might who has hitherto covered his head in battle protect and preserve him now!"

At this last word the whole company of men on the floor below—men in silks and men in rags—rose to their feet, as if they had been one being animated by one heart, and raising their arms to heaven, cried—

"Allah! Allah! Allah! Allah!"

Helena felt as if some one had taken her by the throat. To see these poor, emotional Eastern children, with their brown and black faces, streaming with

tears and full of love for Gordon, shouting down God's blessing upon him, was stifling her.

It was like singing his dirge before he was dead.

During the next few minutes Helena was vaguely aware that Ishmael had come down from the pulpit; that the Reader was reciting prayers again; that the men on the crimson carpets were bowing, kneeling, prostrating themselves and putting their foreheads to the floor; and finally that the whole congregation was rising and surging out of the mosque.

When she came to herself once more, somebody by her side—it was Zenoba—was touching her shoulder and saying—

"The Master is in the Courtyard and he is calling for you—come!"

The scene outside was even more tumultuous. Instead of the steady solemnity of the service within the mosque there were the tum-tumming of the drums, the screeing of the pipes, and the lu-luing of the women.

The great enclosure was densely crowded, but a space had been cleared in the centre of the courtyard, where the Ulema of Khartoum, in their grey farageeyahs, were ranged in a wide half-circle. In the mouth of this half-circle Gordon was standing in his Bedouin dress with Ishmael by his side.

Silence was called, and then Ishmael gave Gordon his last instructions and spoke his last words of farewell.

"Tell our brothers, the Ulema of Cairo," he said, "that we are following close behind you, and when the time comes to enter the city we shall be lying somewhere outside their walls. Let them therefore put a light on their topmost height—on the minaret of the mosque of Mohammed Ali—after the call to prayers at midnight—and we shall take that as a sign that the Light of the World is with you, that the Expected One has appeared, and that we may enter in peace, injuring no man, being injured by none, without malice towards any, and with charity to all."

Then seeing Helena as she came out of the mosque, veiled and with her head down, he called on her to come forward.

"Now do as you have always designed and intended," he said. "Cover our friend and forerunner with the kufiah you have made for him, that until his work is done and the time has come to reveal himself, he may, like the angel of the Lord, be invisible to his foes."

What happened after that Helena never quite knew—only that a way had been made for her through the throng of wild-eyed people and that she was standing by Gordon's side.

Down to that instant she had intended to bear herself bravely for Gordon's sake if not for her own, but now a hundred cruel memories came in a flood to sap away her strength—memories of the beautiful moments of their love, of the

little passages of their life together that had been so tender and so sweet. In vain she tried to recover the spirit with which he had inspired her in the morning, to think how much better it was that he should die gloriously than live in disgrace, to feel the justice, the necessity, the inevitableness of what he was going to do.

It was impossible. She could think of nothing but that she was seeing Gordon for the last time, that he was leaving her behind him, among these Allah-intoxicated Arabs, that he was going away, not into battle—with its chance of victory and its hope of life—but to death, certain death, perhaps shameful death, and that, say what he would about Fate and Destiny or the will of God, she herself was sending him to his doom.

She felt that the tears were running down her cheeks under her thin white veil, and that Gordon must see them, but she could not keep them back; and though she had promised not to break down, she knew that at that last moment, in the face of the death that was about to separate them, the dauntless heroine of the morning was nothing better than a poor, weak, heart-broken woman.

Meantime the drums and the pipes and the lu-luing had begun again, and she was conscious that under the semi-savage din Gordon was speaking to her and comforting her.

"Keep up! Be brave! Nobody knows what may happen. I'll write. You shall hear from me again."

He had taken off the white kufiah which he had hitherto worn, and she could see his face. It was calm—the calmest face in all that vast assembly.

The sight of his face strengthened her, and suddenly a new element entered into the half-barbaric scene—an element that was half human and half divine. These poor, half-civilised people thought Gordon was going to risk his life for them; but he was going to die—deliberately to die for them—to save them from themselves, from the consequences of their fanaticism, the panic of their rulers, and the fruits of the age-long hatred that had separated the black man from the white.

Helena felt her bosom heave, her nerves twitch, her fingers dig trenches in her palms, and her thoughts fly up to scenes of sacrifice which men talk of with bated breath.

"If he can do it, why can't I?" she asked herself, and taking the red kufiah, which the Arab woman was thrusting into her hands, with a great effort she put it on Gordon—over his head and under his chin and across his shoulders and about his waist.

It was like clothing him for the grave.

Every eye had been on her, and when her work was done, Ishmael, who was now weeping audibly, demanded silence and called on the Ulema to recite the first Surah—

"Praise be to God, the Lord of all creatures—"

When the weird chanting had come to an end the hoarse voices of the people broke afresh into loud shouts of "Allah! Allah! El Hamdullillah!"

In the midst of the wild maëlstrom of religious frenzy which followed—the tum-tumming of the drums, the screeing of the pipes, and the ululation of the women—Helena felt her hand grasped, and heard Gordon speaking to her again.

"Don't faint! Don't be afraid! Don't break down at the last moment."

"I'm not afraid," she answered, but whether with her voice or only with her lips she never knew.

Still the drums, the pipes, the zaghareet, and the delirious cries of "Allah!" And to show Gordon that she felt no fear, that she was not going to faint or to break down, Helena also, in the fierce tension of the moment, cried—

"Allah! El Hamdullillah!"

"That's right! That's brave! God bless you!" whispered the voice by her side. And again a moment later—

"God bless and protect you!"

After that she heard no more. She saw the broad gate of the Courtyard thrown open—she saw a long streak of blood-red sand outside—she saw Gordon turn away from her—she saw Ishmael embrace and kiss him—she saw the surging mass of hot and streaming black and brown faces close about him—and then a loud wind seemed to roar in her ears, the earth seemed to give way under her feet, the brazen sky seemed to reel about her head, and again she felt as if she were falling, falling, falling into a bottomless abyss.

When she recovered consciousness the half-barbaric scene was over, and she was being carried into the silence of her own room in the arms of Ishmael, who with many words of tender endearment was laying her gently on her bed.

CHAPTER XXVII

That day, under the two crackling flags, the Crescent and the Union Jack, Lady Manning had given a party in the garden of the Palace of the Sirdar.

The physiognomy of the garden had changed since "the martyr of the Soudan" walked in it. Where scraggy mimosa bushes and long camel grasses had spurted up through patches of sand and blotches of baking earth there were the pleasant lawns, the sycamores, the date-trees, and the blue streams of run-

ning water. And where the solitary soldier, with his daily whitening head, had paced to and fro, his face to the ground, smoking innumerable cigarettes, there were a little group of officers of the military administration, with their charming wives and daughters, a Coptic priest, a Greek priest, a genial old Protestant clergyman, and a number of European visitors, chiefly English girls, wearing the lightest of white summer costumes, and laughing and chattering like birds.

In pith helmets and straw hats, Lady Mannering's guests strolled about in the sunshine or drank tea at tables that were set under the cool shadow of spreading trees, while, at a little distance, the band of a black regiment, the Tenth Soudanese (sons and grandsons of the very men who in the grey dawn of a memorable morning had rushed in a wild horde into those very grounds for their orgy of British blood), played selections from the latest comic operas of London and New York.

The talk was the same all over the gardens—of the new Mahdi and his doings.

"Married to an Indian Princess, you say!"

"Oh yes! Quite an emancipated person, too! A sort of thirty-second cousin of the Rani of Jhansi. It seems she was educated by an English governess, kicked over the traces, became a sort of semi-religious suffragette, and followed her holy man to Egypt and the Soudan."

"How very droll! It is *too* amusing!"

The Sirdar, who had gone indoors some time before, returned to the garden dressed for a journey.

"Going away, your Excellency?"

"Yes, for a few weeks—to the lower Nile."

His ruddy, good-natured face was less bright than usual, and his manner was noticeably less buoyant. A few of his principal officials gathered about him, and he questioned them one by one.

"Any fresh news, Colonel?" he said, addressing the Governor of the city.

"No, sir. A sort of sing-song to-day in honour of the Bedouin Sheikh—that's all I hear about."

But the Financial Secretary spoke of further difficulties in the gathering of taxes—the land tax, the animal tax, and the tax on the date-trees not having yet come in—and then the Inspector-General repeated an opinion he had previously expressed, that everything gave evidence of a projected pilgrimage, presumably in a northerly direction and almost certainly to Cairo.

The Governor of the city corroborated this, and added that his Zabit, his police officer, had said that Ishmael Ameer, on passing to the mosque that day, had been saluted in the streets by a screaming multitude as the "Messenger" and the "Anointed One."

"It's just as I say," said the Inspector-General. "These holy men develop by degrees. This one will hoist his flag as soon as he finds himself strong enough—unless we stop him before he goes further—and the Soudan is lost to civilisation."

"Well, we'll see what Nuneham says," said the Sirdar, and at that moment his Secretary came to say that the launch was ready at the boat-landing to take him across the river to the train.

The Sirdar said good-bye to his guests, to his officers, and to his wife, and as he left the garden of the palace the Soudanese band, sons of the Mahdi's men, played the number which goes to the words—

"They never proceed to follow that light,
But always follow me."

Half-an-hour afterwards, while the Sirdar's black body-guard were ranged up on the platform of the railway station, and his black servant was packing his luggage into his compartment, the Governor-General was standing by the door of the carriage, with his Aide-de-camp, giving his last instructions to his General Secretary.

"Telegraph to the Consul-General and say ... but please make a note of it."

"Yes, sir," said the Secretary, taking out his pocketbook and preparing to write.

"Think it best to go down myself to deal personally with matter of suspected mutiny in native army. Must admit increasing gravity of situation. Man here is undoubtedly acquiring name and influence of Mahdi, so time has come to consider carefully what we ought to do. Signs of intended pilgrimage, probably in northerly direction, enormous numbers of camels, horses, and donkeys having been gathered up from various parts of country and immense quantities of food-stuffs being bought for desert journey. Am leaving to-night, and hope to arrive in four days."

"Four days," repeated the Secretary, as he came to an end.

At that moment a tall man in the costume of a Bedouin walked slowly up the platform. His head and most of his face were closely covered by the loose woollen shawl which the sons of the desert wear, leaving only his eyes, his nose, and part of his mouth visible. As he passed the Sirdar, he looked sharply at him; then, pushing forward with long strides until he came to the third-class compartments, he stepped into the first of them, which was full of coloured people, strident with high-pitched voices and pungent with Eastern odours.

"Who was that?" asked the Sirdar.

"I don't know, sir," replied the Secretary. "I thought at first it was their

Bedouin Sheikh, but I see I was mistaken.”

Then came the whistle of the locomotive, and its slow, rhythmic, volcanic throb. The guard saluted, and the Sirdar got into his carriage.

”Well, good-bye, Graham! Don’t forget the telegram.”

”I’ll send it at once.... In cypher, sir?”

”In cypher certainly.”

At the next moment the Sirdar and Gordon Lord, travelling in the same train, were on their way to Cairo.

END OF THIRD BOOK

FOURTH BOOK

THE COMING DAY

CHAPTER I

The Consul-General had taken a firm grasp of affairs. Every morning his Advisers and Under-Secretaries visited him, and it seemed as if they could not come too often or say too much. He who rules the machine of State becomes himself a machine, and it looked as if Lord Nuneham were ceasing to be a man.

Within a week after the day on which he received Helena’s letter, he was sitting in his bleak library walled with Blue-Books, with the Minister of the Interior and the Adviser to the same department. The Minister was the sallow-faced Egyptian Pasha whom he had made Regent on the departure of the Khedive; the Adviser was a tall, young Englishman with bright red hair on which the red tarboosh sat strangely. They were discussing the ”special weapon” which had been designed to meet special needs. The Consul-General’s part of the discussion was to expound, the Adviser’s was to applaud, the Minister’s was to acquiesce.

The special weapon was a decree. It was to be known as the Law of Public Security, and it was intended to empower the authorities to establish a Special Tribunal to deal with all crimes, offences, and conspiracies committed or con-

ceived by natives against the State. The Tribunal was to be set up at any time and at any place on the request of the Agent and Consul-General of Great Britain; its sentences, which were to be pronounced forthwith, were not to be subject to appeal; and it was to inflict such penalties as it might consider necessary, including the death penalty, without being bound by the provisions of the penal code.

"Drastic!" said the Pasha, with a sinister smile.

"Necessary," said the Consul-General, with a frown.

The Pasha became silent again while the virtual ruler of Egypt went on to say that the state of the country demanded that the Government should be armed with special powers to meet widespread fanaticism and secret conspiracy.

"No one deplores more than I do," he said, "that the existing law of the land is not sufficient to deal with the new perils by which we are threatened, but it is not, and therefore we must make it stronger."

"Certainly, my lord," said the red-headed figure in the fez, and again the sinister face of the Pasha smiled.

"And now tell me, Pasha," said the Consul-General, "how long a time will it take to pass this law through the Legislative Council and the Council of Ministers?"

The Pasha looked up out of his small, shrewd eyes, and answered—

"Just as long or as short as your lordship desires."

And then the Consul-General, who was wiping his spectacles, put them deliberately on to his nose, looked deliberately into the Pasha's face, and deliberately replied—

"Then let it be done without a day's delay, your Excellency."

A few minutes afterwards, without too much ceremony, the Consul-General had dismissed his visitors and was tearing open a number of English newspapers which Ibrahim had brought into the room.

The first of them, *The Times*, contained a report of the Mansion House Dinner, headed "UNREST IN THE EAST. Important Speech by Foreign Minister."

The Consul-General found the beginning full of platitudes. Egypt had become the great gate between the Eastern and Western hemispheres. It was essential for the industry and enterprise of mankind that that gate should be kept open, and therefore it was necessary that Egypt should be under a peaceful, orderly, and legal Government.

Then, lowering the lights, the Minister had begun to speak to slow music. While it was the duty of Government to preserve order, it was also the duty of a Christian nation in occupation of a foreign country to govern it in the interests of the inhabitants, and, speaking for himself, he thought the executive authority would be strengthened, not weakened, by associating the people with the work

of government. However this might be, the public could at least be sure that as long as the present Ministry remained in power it would countenance no policy on the part of its representatives that would outrage the moral, social, and, above all, religious sentiments of a Moslem people.

The Consul-General flung down the paper in disgust.

"Fossils of Whitehall! Dunces of Downing Street!"

For some minutes he tramped about the room, telling himself again that he didn't care a straw what any Government and any Foreign Minister might say because he had a power stronger than either at his back—the public.

This composed his irritated nerves, and presently he took up the other newspapers. Then came a shock. Without an exception the journals accepted the Minister's speech as a remonstrance addressed to him, and reading it so they sympathised with it.

One of them saw that Lord Nuneham, however pure and beneficent his intentions might be, had no right to force his ideals upon an alien race. Another hinted that he was destroying England's prestige in her Mohammedan dominions, and, if permitted to go on, he would not only endanger the peace of Egypt, but also the safety of our Indian Empire. And a third, advocating the establishment of representative institutions, said that the recent arbitrary action of the Consul-General showed in glaringly dangerous colours the faults of the One-Man Rule which we granted to the King's representative while we denied it to the King himself.

The great Proconsul was, for some moments, utterly shaken—the sheet-anchor of his public life was gone. But within half-an-hour he had called for his First Secretary and was dictating a letter to the Premier, who was also the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

"Having read the report of your lordship's speech at the Mansion House," he said, "I find myself compelled to tell you that so great a difference between your lordship's views and mine makes it difficult for me to remain in Egypt.

"I take the view that nine-tenths of these people are still in swaddling-clothes, and that any attempt to associate them with the work of government would do a grave injustice to the inarticulate masses for whom we rule the country.

"I also take the view that Egypt is honeycombed with agitators, who, masquerading as religious reformers, are sowing sedition against British rule, and that the only way to deal with such extremists is by stern repression.

"Taking these views and finding them at variance with those of your lordship, I respectfully beg to tender my resignation of the post of H.M.'s Agent, Consul-General and Minister Plenipotentiary, which I have held through so many long and laborious years, and at the same time to express the hope that

my successor may be a man qualified by knowledge and experience of the East to deal with these millions of Orientals who, accustomed for seventy centuries to the dictation of imperial autocrats, are so easily inflamed by fanatics and yield so readily to the wily arts of spies and secret conspirators.”

Having finished the dictating of his letter, the Consul-General asked when the next mail left for England, whereupon the Secretary, whose voice was now as tremulous as his hand had been, replied that there would be no direct post for nearly a week.

”That will do. Copy out the letter and let me have it to sign.”

With a frightened look the Secretary turned to go.

”Wait! Of course you will observe absolute secrecy about the contents of it?”

With a tremulous promise to do so the Secretary left the room.

Then the Consul-General took up a calendar that had been standing on his desk and began to count the days.

”Five—ten—fifteen, and five days more before I can receive a reply—it’s enough,” he thought.

England’s eyes would be opened by that time and the public would see how much the Government knew about Egypt. Accept his resignation? They dare not! It would do them good, though—serve as a rebuke, and strengthen his own hands for the work he had now to do.

What was that work? To destroy the man who had robbed him of his son.

CHAPTER II

Early the next morning the Consul-General received a letter from the Princess Nazimah, saying she had something to communicate, and proposed to come to tea with him. At five o’clock she came, attended by sais, footmen, and even eunuch, but wearing the latest of Paris hats and the lightest of chiffon veils.

Tea was laid on the shady verandah overlooking the fresh verdure of the garden, with its wall of purple bougainvillea, and thinking to set the lady at ease the Consul-General had told Fatimah, instead of Ibrahim, to serve it. But hardly had they sat down when the Princess said in French—

”Send that woman away. I don’t trust women. I’m a woman myself, and I know too much of them.”

A few minutes afterwards she said, "Now you can give me a cigarette. Light it. That will do. Thank you!" Then squaring her plump person in a large cane chair, she prepared to speak, while the Consul-General, who was in his most silent mood, composed himself to listen.

"I suppose you were surprised when this woman who blossomed out of a harem wrote to say that she was coming to take tea with you? Here she is, though, and now she has something to say to you."

Then puff, puff, puff from the scarlet lips, while the powdered face grew hard, and the eyes, heavily shaded with kohl, looked steadfastly forward.

"I have always suspected it, but I discovered it for certain only yesterday. And where did I discover it? In my own salon!"

"What did you discover in your own salon, Princess?" asked the Consul-General in his tired voice.

"Conspiracy!"

Trained as was the Consul-General's face to self-command it betrayed surprise and alarm.

"Yes, conspiracy against you and against England."

[image]

"Yes, conspiracy against you and against England"

"You mean, perhaps, that the man Ishmael Ameer—"

"Rubbish! Ishmael indeed! He is in it, certainly. In a country like Egypt the holy man always is. Religion and politics are twins here—Siamese twins, you may say, for you couldn't get a slip of paper between them.... What's that? The Mahdist movement political? Perhaps it was, but politics on the top of religion—the monkey on the donkey's back, you know. Always so in the East. The only way to move the masses is to make an appeal to their religious passions. *They* know that, and they've not scrupled to use their knowledge, the rascals! Rascals, that's what I call them. Excuse the word. I say what I think, Nuneham."

"*They?* Who are *they*, Princess?"

"The *corps diplomatique*."

Again the stern face expressed surprise.

"Yes, the *corps dip-lo-ma-tique!*" with a dig on every syllable. "Half-a-dozen of them were at my house yesterday and they were not ashamed to let me know what they are doing."

"And what *are* they doing, Princess?"

"Helping the people to rebel!"

Then throwing away her cigarette the Princess rose to her feet, and pacing to and fro on the verandah, with a firm tread that had little of the East and not much of the woman, she repeated the story she had heard in her salon—how Ishmael Ameer was to return to Cairo, with twenty, thirty, forty thousand of his followers, and some fantastic dream of establishing a human society that should be greater, nobler, wider, and more God-like than any that had yet dwelt on this planet; how the diplomats laughed at the ridiculous hallucination, but were nevertheless preparing to support it in order to harass the Government and dishonour England.

"But how?"

"By finding arms for the people to fight with if you attempt to keep their Prophet out! Ask your Inspectors! Ask your police! See if rifles bought with foreign money are not coming into Cairo every day."

By this time it was the Consul-General who was pacing up and down the verandah, while the Princess, who sat to smoke another cigarette, repeated the opinions of the foreign representatives one by one—Count This, who was old and should know better if white hairs brought wisdom; Baron That, who was as long as a palm tree but without a date; and the Marquis of So-and-So.

"They tell *me* because I'm a Turk; but a Turk need not be a traitor, so I'm telling you."

The iron face of the Consul-General grew white and rigid, but, saying nothing, he continued to pace to and fro.

"Why don't you turn them all out? They are making nothing but mischief. The head of the idle man is the house of the devil, and the best way is to pull it down. Why not? Capitulations! Pooh! While the meat hangs above, the dogs will quarrel below. Dogs, that's what I call them. Excuse the word. I speak what I think."

"And the Egyptians—what are they doing?"

"What are they always doing? Conspiring with your enemies to turn you out of the country on the ground that you are trampling on their religious liberty."

"Which of them?"

"All of them—pashas, people, effendis, officials, your own Ministers—everybody."

"Everybody?"

"Everybody! The stupids! They can't see farther than the ends of their noses, or realise that they would only be exchanging one master for fourteen. What would Egypt be then? A menagerie with all the gates of the cages open. Oh, I know! I say what I think! I'm their Princess, but they can take my rank to-morrow if they wish to."

The second cigarette was thrown away, and a powder-puff and small mirror

were taken from a silver bag that hung from the lady's wrist.

"But serve you right, you English! You make the same mistake everywhere. Education! Civilisation! Judicial reform! Rubbish! The Koran tells the Moslem what to believe and what to do, so what does he want with your progress?"

The powder-puff made dabs at the white cheeks, but the lady continued to talk.

"Your Western institutions are thrown away on him. It's like a beautiful wife married to a blind husband—a waste!"

The sun began to set behind the wall of purple creeper and the lady rose to go.

"No news of your Gourdan yet? No? He was the best of the bunch, and I simply lost my heart to him. You should have kept him more in hand though... You couldn't? You, the greatest man in... Well, there's something to say for the Eastern way of bringing up boys, it seems."

Passing through the drawing-room the Princess came upon the portrait of Helena, which used to stand by Lady Nuneham's bed.

"Ah, the moon! The beauty! Bismillah! What did Allah give her such big black eyes for? Back in England, isn't she? My goodness, there was red blood in that girl's veins, Nuneham! God have mercy upon me, yes! You should have heard her talk of your Ishmael!"

The Princess put the portrait to her lips and kissed it, then closed her eyes and said with a voluptuous laugh—

"Ah, *mon Dieu*, if this had only been a Muslemah, you wouldn't have had much trouble with your Mahdi!"

Hardly had the Consul-General returned to his library after the departure of the Princess when his Secretary brought him a telegram from the Sirdar—the same that he had dictated at Khartoum, telling of the intended visit to Cairo, of the preparations for Ishmael's projected pilgrimage, and of the danger that was likely to arise from the growing belief in the Prophet's "divine" inspiration.

"So our friend is beginning to understand the man at last," he said, with an expression of bitter joy. "Meet him on his arrival. Tell him I have much to say."

That night when the Consul-General went up to his bedroom—the room in which alone the machine became the man—he was thinking, as usual, of Gordon.

"Such power, such fire, such insight, such resource! My own son too, and worth all the weaklings put together! Oh, that he could be here now—now, when every hand seems to be raised against his father! But where is he? What is he doing? Only God can say."

Then the Consul-General remembered what the Princess had said about Helena. Ah, if those two could have carried on his line—what a race! So pure, so clean, so strong! But that was past praying for now, and woe to the day when

they had said to him, "A man child is born to you."

After that the Consul-General thought of Ishmael, and then the bitterness of his soul almost banished sleep. He had known from the first that the man could not be working alone; he had known, too, that some of England's "allies" were her secret enemies, but a combination of Eastern mummery with Western treachery was more than he had reckoned upon.

"No matter! I'll master both of them!" he thought.

A great historical tragedy should be played before the startled audience of disunited Europe, whose international jealousies were conspiring with religious quackeries to make the government of Egypt impossible, and when the curtain fell on that drama England would be triumphant, he would himself be vindicated, and the "fossils of Whitehall" would be ashamed.

Last of all he thought of the Egyptian Ministers. These were the ingrates he had made and worked with, but they were no fools, and it was difficult to understand why they were throwing in their lot with a visionary mummer who was looking for a millennium.

"I am at a loss to know what to think of a world in which such empty quackery can be supported by sane people," he thought.

There was one sweeter thought left, though, and as the Consul-General dropped off to sleep he told himself that, thanks to Helena, he would soon have Ishmael in his hands, and then he would kill him as he would kill a dangerous and demented dog.

CHAPTER III

During the next few days the Consul-General was closely occupied. The Law of Public Security being promulgated, he called upon the Minister of the Interior to call upon the Commandant of Police to issue a warrant for the arrest of Ishmael Ameer.

"But where *is* Ishmael Ameer?" asked the Minister.

When this was reported to the Consul-General his stern face smiled, and he said—

"Let him wait and see."

Early one morning his Secretary came to his room to say that the Sirdar had arrived from Khartoum, and had gone on to headquarters, but would give

himself the pleasure of calling upon his lordship before long.

"Tell him it must be soon—there is much to do," said the Consul-General.

Later the same day the Commandant of Police came, with a knowing smile on his ruddy face, to say that the Bedouin had reached Cairo, and that he had been followed to the Serai Fum el Khalig, the palace of the Chancellor of El Azhar, where he had already been visited by the Grand Mufti, some of the Ministers, certain of the Diplomatic Corps and nearly the whole of the Ulema.

"Was he alone?" asked the Consul-General.

"Quite alone, your lordship, and now he is as safely in our hands as if he were already under lock and key."

"Good! What did you say his address was?"

"Serai Fum el Khalig."

"Palace Fum el Khalig," repeated the Consul-General, making a note on a marble tablet which stood on his desk.

Later still, very late, the Grand Cadi came with the same news. The suave old Moslem judge was visibly excited. His pale, lymphatic, pock-marked cheeks, his earth-coloured lips, his base eyes, and his nose as sharp as a beak, gave him more than ever the appearance of a fierce and sagacious bird of prey. After exaggerated bows, he began to speak in the oily, half-smothered voice of one who lives in constant fear of being overheard.

"Your Excellency will remember that when on former occasions I have had the inestimable privilege of approaching your honourable person in order to warn you that if you did not put down a certain Arab innovator the result would be death to the rule of England in Egypt, your Excellency has demanded proofs."

"Well?"

"I am now in a position to provide them."

"State the case precisely," said the Consul-General.

"Your Excellency will be interested to hear that a person of some consequence has arrived in Cairo."

Trained to self-control, the Consul-General conquered an impulse to say, "I know," and merely said, "Who is he?"

"He calls himself Sheikh Omar Benani, and is understood to be the wise and wealthy head of the great tribe of the Ababdah Bedouins who inhabit the country that lies east of Assouan to the Red Sea."

"Well?"

"The man who calls himself Omar Benani is—Ishmael Ameer."

At that the base eyes glanced up with a look of triumph, but the Consul-General's face remained immovable.

"Well?"

"No doubt your Excellency is asking yourself why he comes in this disguise, and if your Excellency will deign to give me your attention I will tell you."

"I am listening."

"Ishmael Ameer pretends to be a reformer intent upon the moral and intellectual regeneration of Islam, and he preaches the coming of a golden age in which unity, peace and brotherhood are to reign throughout the earth.

"Well?"

"With this ridiculous and impracticable propoganda he has appealed to many wild and ardent minds, so that a vast following of half-civilised people whom he has gathered up in the Soudan are to start soon—may have started already—for this city, which they believe to be the Mecca of the new world."

"Well?"

"Ishmael Ameer pretends to have come to Cairo in advance of his followers to prepare for that millennium."

"And what has he really come for?"

"To establish a political State."

Down to that moment the Consul-General had been leaning back in his chair in the attitude of one who was listening to something he already knew, but now he sat up sharply.

"Is this a fact?"

"It is a fact, your Excellency. And if your Excellency will once more deign to grant me your attention, I will put you in possession of a secret."

"Go on," said the Consul-General.

Instinctively the suave old judge drew his legs up on his chair and fingered his amber beads.

"Your Excellency will perhaps remember that owing to differences of opinion with the Khedive—may Allah bless him!—you were compelled to require that for a while he should leave the country."

"Well?"

"He went to Constantinople with the intention of laying his grievances against England before His Serenity the Sultan—may the Merciful give him long life!"

"Well?"

"The Sultan is a friend of England, your Excellency—the Khedive was turned away."

"And then?"

"Then he went to Paris, as your Excellency is probably aware."

"Well?"

"Perhaps your Excellency supposes that he occupied himself with the frivolities of the gay capital of France—dinners, theatres, dances, races? But no!

He had two enemies now, England and Turkey, and he presumed to think he could punish both."

"How? In what way?"

"By founding a secret society for the conquest of Syria, Palestine and Arabia, and the establishment of a great Arab Empire with himself as its Caliph and Cairo as its capital."

"Well? What happened?"

"Need I say what happened, your Excellency? By means of his great wealth he was able to send out hundreds of paid emissaries to every part of the Arabic world, and Ishmael Ameer was the first of them."

The Consul-General was at length startled out of all his composure.

"Can you prove this?" he said.

"Your Excellency, if I say anything I can always prove it."

The Consul-General's brow grew more and more severe.

"And his name—his assumed name—what did you say it was?"

"Sheikh Omar Benani."

"Sheikh Omar Benani," repeated the Consul-General, making another note on his marble tablet.

"That is enough for the present," he said. "I have something to do to-night. I must ask your Eminence to excuse me."

After the Grand Cadi had gone, with many sweeping salaams, various oily compliments, and that cruel gleam in his base eyes which proceeds only from base souls, the Consul-General rang sharply for his Secretary.

"We have not yet made out our invitations for the King's dinner—let us do so now," he said.

He threw a sheet of paper across the table to his Secretary, who prepared to make notes.

"First, the Diplomatic Corps—every one of them."

"Yes, my lord."

"Next, our Egyptian Ministers and the leading members of the Legislative Council."

"Yes, my lord."

"Next, the more prominent Pashas and Notables."

"Yes!"

"Of course our own people as usual, and finally——"

"Yes?"

"Finally, the Ulema of El Azhar."

The Secretary looked up in astonishment.

"Oh, I know," said the Consul-General. "They have never been invited before, but this is a special occasion."

"Quite so, my lord."

The Consul-General fixed his eyeglass and took up his marble tablet.

"In writing to the Chancellor of El Azhar at the Palace Fum el Khalig," he said, "enclose a card for the Sheikh Omar Benani."

"Sheikh Omar Benani."

"Say that hearing that one so highly esteemed among his own people is at present on a visit to Cairo, I shall be honoured by his company."

"Yes, my lord."

"That will do. Good-night!"

"Good-night, my lord."

It was early morning before the Consul-General went to bed. The Grand Cadi's story, being so exactly what he wanted to believe, had thrown him entirely off his guard. It appeared to illuminate everything that had looked dark and mysterious—the sudden advent of Ishmael, the growth of his influence, the sending out of his emissaries, his projected pilgrimage, and the gathering up of camels and horses in such enormous quantities as even the Government could not have commanded in time of war.

It accounted for Ishmael's presence in Cairo, and his mission (as described by Helena) of drawing off the allegiance of the Egyptian army. It accounted, too, for the treachery of the Ministers, Pashas and Notables, who were too shrewd and too selfish (whatever the riff-raff of the Soudan might be) to risk their comfortable incomes for a religious chimera.

Yes, the Khedive's money and the substantial prospect of establishing a vast Arab Empire, not the vague hope of a spiritual millennium, had been the power that worked these wonders.

It vexed him to think that his old enemy whom he had banished had been more powerful in exile than at home, and it tortured him to reflect that Ishmael had developed, with the religious malady of the Mahdi, his political mania as well.

But no matter! He would be more than a match for all these forces, and when his great historical drama came to be played before the eyes of astonished humanity, it would be seen that he had saved, not England only but Europe, and perhaps civilisation itself.

Thus, for three triumphant hours, the Consul-General saw himself as a patriot trampling on the enemies of his country; but hardly had he left the library and begun to climb the stairs of his great, empty, echoing house, switching off the lights as he ascended, and leaving darkness behind him, than the statesman sank back on the man—the broken, bereaved human being—and he recognised his motives for what they were.

A few minutes after he had reached his bedroom Fatimah entered it with a

jug of hot water, and found him sitting with his head in his hands, looking fixedly at the portrait in the black-and-gilt frame of the little lad in an Arab fez.

"Ah, everybody loved that boy," she said, whereupon the old man raised his head and dismissed her brusquely.

"You ought to be in bed by this time—go at once," he said.

"Dear heart, so ought your lordship," said the Egyptian woman.

The Consul-General could dismiss Fatimah, but there was some one he could not get rid of, the manly, magnificent, heart-breaking young figure that always lived in his mind's eye, with its deadly white face, its trembling lower lip, and its quivering voice, which said, "General, the time may come when it will be even more painful to you to remember all this than it has been to me to bear it."

Where was he now? What was he doing? His son, his only son, all that was left to him!

There was only one way to lay that ghost, and the Consul-General did so by telling himself with a sort of fierce joy that wherever Gordon might be he must soon hear that Ishmael, in a pitiful and tricky disguise, had been discovered in Cairo, and then he would see for himself what an arrant schemer and unscrupulous charlatan was the person for whom he had sacrificed his life.

With that bitter-sweet thought the lonely old man forced back the tears that had been gathering in his eyes and went to bed.

CHAPTER IV

I

"SERAI FUM EL KHALIG, "CAIRO.

"MY DEAREST HELENA,—Here I am, you see, and I am not arrested, although I travelled in the same train with the Sirdar, met him face to face on the platform at Khartoum, again on the platform at Atbara, again on the landing place at Shelal, and finally in the station at Cairo, where he was received on his arrival by his officers of the Egyptian army, by my father's first Secretary, and by the Commandant of Police.

"I was asking myself what this could mean, whether your black boy had reached his destination, and if your letter had been delivered, when suddenly I

became aware that I was being observed, watched and followed to this house, and by that I knew that in this land of mystery my liberty was to be allowed to me a little longer for reasons I have still to fathom.

"This is the home of the Chancellor of El Azhar, and I have delivered Ishmael's letter announcing the change of plan whereby I have come into Cairo instead of him, but I have pledged the good old man to secrecy on that subject, for the present at all events, giving him my confident assurance that in common with the best of the Ulema he is being wickedly deceived and made an innocent instrument for the destruction of his own cause.

"My dear Helena, I was right. My vague suspicions of that damnable intriguer the Grand Cadi were justified. Already I realise that after fruitless efforts to inveigle Ishmael into schemes of anarchical rebellion it was he who conceived the conspiracy, which has taken our friend by storm, in the form of a passive mutiny of the Egyptian army. The accursed scoundrel knows well it cannot be passive, that somewhere and somehow it will break into active resistance, but that is precisely what he desires. As I told you, it is the old trick of Caiaphas over again, and that is the lowest, meanest, dirtiest thing in history.

"Query, is he playing the same game with the Consul-General? I am sure he is, and when I think that England and my father may be in as much danger as Egypt and Ishmael from the man's devilish machinations, I am more than ever certain that Providence had a purpose in bringing me to Cairo, and I feel reconciled to the necessity of living here in this threefold disguise, being one thing to Ishmael, another to the Grand Cadi and Co., and a third to the Government and police. I feel reconciled too, or almost reconciled, to the necessity of leaving you where you are, for the present at all events, although it rips me like a sword-cut as often as I think of it.

"I have sent for Hafiz and expect to hear through him what is happening at the Agency, but I am hoping he will not come until morning, for to-night I can think of nothing but ourselves. When I left you at Khartoum I felt that higher powers were constraining and controlling me, and that I was only yielding at last to an overwhelming sense of fatality. I thought I had made every possible effort, had exhausted every means and had nothing to reproach myself with, but hardly had I got away into the desert when a hand seemed to grasp me at the back of my neck and to say, 'Why did you leave her behind?'

"In Ishmael's house and in that atmosphere of delirious ecstasy in the mosque it was easy to think it necessary for you to remain, otherwise my purpose in going away must from the first be frustrated, but awakening in the morning in my native compartment, with men and boys lying about on sacks, the sandy daylight filtering through the closed shutters of the carriage and the train full of the fetid atmosphere of exhausted sleep, I could not help but protest to myself

that at any cost whatever I should have found a way to bring you with me.

"Thank God, if I have left you behind in that trying and false position it is with no Khalifa, no corrupt and concupiscent fanatic, but a man of the finest and purest instincts, who is too much occupied with his spiritual mission, praise the Lord, to think of the beautiful woman by his side, so I tell myself it was the will of Providence, and there is nothing to do now but to leave ourselves in the hands of fate.

"Good-night, dearest! *D.V.* I'll write again to-morrow."

II

"Have just seen Hafiz. The dear old fellow came racing up here at six o'clock this morning, with his big round face like the aurora borealis, shining in smiles and tears. Heavens, how he laughed and cried and swore and sweated!

"He thought his letter about my mother's death had brought me back, and when I gave him a hint of my real errand he nearly dropped with terror. It seems that among my old colleagues in Cairo my reputation is now of the lowest, being that of a person who was bribed—God knows by whom—to do what I did. As a consequence it will go ill with me, according to Hafiz, if I should be discovered, but as that is pretty certain to happen in any case I am not too much troubled, and find more interest in the fact that your boy Mosie is staying at the Agency and that consequently my father must have received your letter.

"My dear Helena, my 'mystic sense' has been right again. The Grand Cadi continues to pay secret visits to the Consul-General. That much Hafiz could say from his intercourse with his mother, and it is sufficient to tell me that, by keeping a running sore open with my father, the scoundrel counts on destroying not only Ishmael but England, by leading her to such resistance as will result in bloodshed, and thus dishonour her in the eyes of the civilised world and leave Egypt a cockpit in which half the foreign Powers will fight for themselves, no matter who may suffer.

"What should I do? God knows! I have an almost unconquerable impulse to go straight to my father and open his eyes to what is going on. He is enveloped by intrigues and surrounded by enemies in high places—his Egyptian Ministers, the creatures of his own creation; some of the foreign diplomats, the European leeches who suck his blood while they pretend to be his friends, and above all this rascally Cadi, with his sleek face and double-sword game.

"But what can I say? What positive fact can I yet point to? Will my father

believe me if I tell him that Ishmael's following which is coming up to Cairo is not, as he thinks, an armed force? That the Grand Cadi & Co. are a pack of lying intriguers, each one playing for his own hand?

"My father is a great man who probably does not need and would certainly resent my compassion, but, Lord God, how I pity him! Alone, in his old age, after all he has done for Egypt! As for his Secretaries and Advisers, he has not brought them up to help him, and I would enlarge the Biblical warning about not putting one's trust in princes to include parvenus as well.

"My dear Helena, where are you now, I wonder? What is happening to you? What occurred after I left Khartoum? These are the questions which during half the day and nearly the whole of the night are hammering, hammering, hammering on my brain. Ishmael was to follow me in a few days, so I suppose you are on the desert by this time. The desert! In the midst of that vast horde! The scourings of a whole continent! Poor old Hafiz had something like a fit when I told him you were not in England but in the Soudan, yet as a fatalist he feels bound to believe that everything will work out for the best and he asks me to send his high regard to you.

"It gives one a strange sensation, and is almost like seeing things from another state of existence, to be here in Cairo walking about unrecognised amid the familiar sights, and hearing the gun fired from the Citadel every day; but the sharpest twinge comes of the hacking thought of where *you* are and what circumstances surround you. In fact, memory is always playing some devilish trick with me and raking up thoughts of the condition in which I found you in Khartoum.

"Helena, my dear Helena, I have an immense faith in your strength and your courage. You are mine, mine, mine—remember that! *I* do—I have to—all the time. That is what sets me at ease in my dark hours and gives sleep, as the Arabs say, to my eyelids. For the rest, we must resign ourselves and continue to wait for the direction of fate. The fact that I was not arrested in the character of Ishmael immediately on my arrival in Cairo makes me think Hafiz may be right—that, *D.V.* one way or another, God knows how, everything is working out for the best. It's damned easy to say that, I know, but, upon my soul, dearest, I believe it. So keep up heart, my poor old girl, and God bless you! GORDON.

"*P.S.*—I'll hold this letter back until I think you must be nearing Assouan, and then send it *D.V.* by safe hands to be delivered to you there.

"*P.P.S.*—I open my envelope to tell you of a new development! I am invited with the Chancellor of El Azhar to the Consul-General's dinner in honour of the King's Birthday. This, in the character of Sheikh Omar Benani, who is, it seems, the chief of the tribe of the Ababdah, inhabiting the wild country between Assouan and the Red Sea, a person with a great reputation for wealth and wisdom,

and a man whose word is truth.

"What does it mean? One thing certainly—that acting on the information contained in your letter the authorities are mistaking me for Ishmael Ameer, and proposing some scheme to capture me. But why don't they take me without further ado? What unfathomable reason can there be for the delay in doing so? Intrigue on intrigue! I must wait and see.

"Meantime I am asking myself where the real Ishmael is and what he is doing now? Is the belief in his 'divine' guidance increasing? Is he acquiring the influence of a Mahdi? If so, God help him! God help his people! God help my father! God help everybody!

"But sit tight, my girl! Something good is going to happen to us! I feel it, I know it! All my love to you, Helena! Maa-es-salamah!"

CHAPTER V

I

"KHARTOUM.

"MY DEAR, DEAR GORDON,—Gone! You are actually gone! I can hardly believe it. It must be like this to awaken from chloroform after losing one's right hand, only it must be something out of my heart in this instance, for though I have not shed a tear since you went away and do not intend to shed one, I have a wild sense of weeping in the desolate chambers of my soul.

"Writing to you? Certainly I am. Gordon, do you know what you have done for me? You have given me faith in your 'mystic senses,' and by virtue of certain of my own I am now sure that you are not dead, and that you are not going to die, so I am writing to you out of the chaos that envelops me, having no one here to speak to, literally no one, and being at present indifferent to the mystery of what is to become of my letter.

"It seems I fainted in the mosque after that wild riot of barbaric sounds, and did not come back to full consciousness until next morning, and then I found the Arab woman and the child attending on me in my room. Naturally I thought I might have been delirious and I was in terror lest I had betrayed myself, so I asked

what I had been saying in my sleep, whereupon Zenoba protested that I had said nothing at all, but Ayesha, the sweet little darling, said I had been calling upon the great White Pasha (meaning General Gordon) whose picture (his statue) was by the Palace gates. What an escape!

"Of course my first impulse was to run away, but at the next moment I saw that to do so would be to defeat your own scheme in going, and that as surely as it had been your duty to go into Cairo, it was mine to remain in Khartoum. But all the same I felt myself to be a captive—as surely a captive as any white woman who was ever held in the Mahdi's camp—and it did not sweeten my captivity to remember that I had first become a prisoner of my own free will.

"If I am a captive I am under no cruel tyrant, though, and Ishmael's kindness is killing me. I was certainly wrong about him in Cairo, and his character is precisely the reverse of what I expected. Little Ayesha tells me that during the night I lay unconscious her father did not sleep at all, but kept coming into the guest-room every hour to ask for news of me, and now he knocks at my door a dozen times a day, asking if I am better, and saying 'To-morrow, please God, you will be well.' It makes me wretched, and brings me dreadfully near to the edge of tears, remembering what I have done to him and how certainly his hopes will be destroyed.

"Naturally his people have taken his cue, and last night Black Zogal gathered up a crowd of half-crazy creatures like himself to say a prayer for me at the Saint's house which is just outside my window.

"Thou knowest our White Lady, O Father Gabreel, that she is betrothed to our Master, and that his heart is low and his bread is bitter because she is sick. Make her well if it please God, O Father Gabreel!' Thus the simple-hearted children of the desert called down God's spirit to their circle of fire for me, and after loud cries of 'Allah! Allah!' going on for nearly an hour, they seemed to be content, for Zogal said—

"Abu Gabreel hears, O my brothers, and to-morrow, please God, our sister will be well.'

"I had been reaching up in bed to look and listen, and when all was over I wanted to lay down my head and howl.

"The time has come for the people to start on their pilgrimage, but Ishmael insists upon postponing the journey until I have quite recovered. Meantime Zenoba is trying to make mischief, and to-day when the door of my room was ajar, I heard her hinting to Ishmael that the White Lady was not really ill but only pretending to be—a bit of treachery for which she got no thanks, being as sharply reproved as she was on the morning of your mother's letter.

"That woman makes a wild cat of me. I can't help it—I hate her! Of course I see through her, too. She is in love with Ishmael, and though I ought to pity her

pangs of jealousy there are moments when I want to curse her religion and the dawn of the day of her birth and her mother and her grandmother.

"There! You see I have caught the contagion of the country; but I am really a little weak and out of heart to-night, dear, so perhaps I had better say good-night! Good-night, my dearest!"

II

"Oh dear! Oh dear! I could not bear to play the hypocrite any longer, so I got up to-day and told Ishmael I was well, and therefore he must not keep back his pilgrimage any longer. Such joy! Such rejoicing! It would break my heart, if I had any here, but having sent all I possess to Cairo I could do nothing but sit in the guest-room and look on at the last of the people's preparations for the desert journey—tents and beds being packed, and camels and horses and donkeys brought in to a continuous din of braying and grunting and neighing.

"We are to start away to-morrow morning, and this afternoon when that fact was announced to me I was so terrified by the idea of being dragged over the desert like a slave that I asked Ishmael to leave me behind. His face fell, but—would you believe it?—he agreed, saying I was not strong enough to travel and Zenoba should stay to nurse me. At that I speedily repented of my request and asked him to allow me to go, whereupon his face lightened like a child's, and with joy he agreed again, saying the Arab woman should go to take care of me, for Ayesha was a big girl now and needed a nurse no longer. This was jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire, and I protested that I was quite able to look after myself; but, out of his anxiety for my health, Ishmael would not be gainsaid, and the Arab woman said, 'I'll watch over you like my eyes, my sister.' I am sure she will, the vixen!"

III

"We have left Khartoum and are now on the desert. The day had not yet dawned when we were awakened by a tattoo of pipes and native drums—surely the weirdest sound in the darkness that ever fell on mortal ear, creeping into the pores and

getting under the very skin. Then came a din, a roar, a clamour—the grunting and gurgling and braying of five thousand animals and as much shouting and bellowing of human tongues as went to the building of the tower of Babel.

”The sun was rising, and there was a golden belt of cloud in the Eastern sky by the time we were ready to go. They had brought a litter on a dromedary for me, and I was almost the last to start. It was hard to part from the child, for though her sweet innocence had given me many a stab and I felt sometimes as if she had been created to torture me, I had grown to love her, and I think she loved me. She stood as we rode away, with a big tear ready to drop on to her golden cheek and looked after me with her gazelle-like eyes. Sweet little Ayesha, creature of the air and the desert, I shall see her no more!

”Crossing the Mahdi’s open-air mosque at Omdurman, where we said morning prayers, we set our faces northward over the wild halfa grass and clumps of mimosa scrub, and as soon as we were out in the open desert with its vast sky I saw how gigantic was our caravan. The great mass of men and animals seemed to stretch for miles across the yellow sand, and looked like an enormous tortoise creeping slowly along.

”We camped at sunset in the Wadi Bishara, the signal for the bivouac being the blowing of a great elephant-horn which had a thrilling effect in that lonesome place. But more thrilling still was the effect of evening prayers, which began as soon as the camels and horses and donkeys had been unsaddled, and their gruntings and brayings and gurglings, as well as the various noises of humanity, had ceased.

”The afterglow was flaming along the flat sand, giving its yellow the look of bronze, when all knelt with their faces to the East—Ishmael in front with sixty or seventy rows of men behind him. It was really very moving and stately to see, and made me understand what was meant by somebody who said he could never look upon Mohammedans at prayers, and think of the millions of hearts which at the same hour were sending their great chorus of praise to God, without wishing to be a Moslem. I did not wish to be that, but with the odious Arab woman always watching me, I found myself fingering my rosary and pretending to be a good Muslemah, though in reality I was repeating the Lord’s Prayer.

”It is dark night now, the fires at which the people baked their durah and cooked their asida are dying down, and half the camp is already asleep in this huge wild wilderness, under its big white stars.

”I must try to sleep too, so good-night, dearest, and God bless you! I don’t know what is to be the end of all this, or where I am to dispatch my letter, or when you are to receive it, but I am sure you are alive and listening to me—and

what should I do if I could not talk to you? HELENA.”

CHAPTER VI

I

”SOUDAN DESERT (*somewhere*).

”It is ten days, my dear Gordon, since I wrote my last letter, and there has never been an hour between when I dared pretend to this abomination of Egypt (she is now snoring on the angerib by my side, sweetheart) that I must while away an hour by writing in my ‘Journal.’

”Such a time! Boil and bubble, toil and trouble! Every morning before daybreak the wild peal of the elephant-horn, then the whole camp at prayers with the rising sun in our faces, then the striking of tents and the ruckling, roaring, gurgling and grunting of camels which resembles nothing so much as a styful of pigs *in extremis*; then twelve hours of trudging through a forlorn and lifeless solitude with only a rest for the midday meal; then the elephant-horn again and evening prayers, with the savage sun behind us, and then settling down to sleep in some blank and numb and soundless wilderness—such is our daily story.

”My goodness, Ishmael is a wonderful person! But all the same the ‘divine’ atmosphere that is gathering about him is positively frightening. I suspect Black Zogal of being the author and ‘only begetter’ of a good deal of this idolatry. He gallops on a horse in front of us, crying, ‘There is no god but God,’ and ‘The Messenger of God is coming,’ with the result that crowds of people are waiting for Ishmael at every village, with their houses swept, their straw mats laid down, and their carpets spread on the divans, all eager to entertain him, to open their secret granaries to feed his followers, or at least to kiss the hem of his caftan.

”Every day our numbers increase, and we go off from the greater towns to the beating of copper war-drums, the blowing of antelope horns, and sometimes to the cracking of rifles. It is all very crude in its half-savage magnificence, but it is almost terrifying, too, and the sight of this emotional creature, so liable to spasms of religious ecstasy, riding on his milk-white camel through these fiercely fanatical people like a god, makes one tremble to think of the time that will surely

come when they find out, and *he* finds out, that after all he is nothing but a man.

"What sights, what scenes! The other day there was a fearful sand-storm, in which a fierce cloud came sweeping out of the horizon, big with flame and wrath, and fell on us like a mountain of hell. As long as it lasted the people lay flat on the sand or crouched under their kneeling camels, and when it was over they rose in the dead blankness with the red sand on their faces and sent up, as with one voice, a cry of lamentation and despair. But Ishmael only smiled and said, 'Let us thank God for this day, O my brothers,' and when the people asked him why, he answered, 'Because we can never know anything so bad again.'

"That simple word set every face shining, and as soon as we reached the next village—Black Zogal as usual having gone before us—lo, we heard a story of how Ishmael had commanded a sand-storm to pass over our heads without touching us—and it had!

"Another day we had stifling heat, in which the glare of the sand made our eyes to ache and the air to burn like the breath of a furnace. The water in the water-bottles became so hot that we dared not pour it on to the back of our hands, and even some of the camels dropped dead under the blazing eye of the sun.

"And when at length the sun sank beneath the horizon and left us in the cool dark night, the people could not sleep for want of water to bathe their swelling eyelids and to moisten their cracking throats, but Ishmael walked through their tents and comforted them, telling them it was never intended that man should always live well and comfortably, yet God, if He willed it, would bring them safely to their journey's end.

"After that the people lay down on the scorching sand as if their thirst had suddenly been quenched; and next day, on coming to the first village, we heard that in the middle of a valley of black and blistered hills, Ishmael smote with his staff a metallic rock that was twisted into the semblance of a knotted snake, and a well of ice-cold water sprung out of it, and everybody drank of it and then 'shook his fist at the sun.'

"Nearly all last week our people were in poor heart by reason of the mirages which mocked and misled them, showing an enchanted land on the margin of the sky, with beautiful blue lakes and rivers and green islands and shady groves of palm, and sweet long emerald grasses that quivered beneath a refreshing breeze; but when, from their monotonous track on the parched and naked desert, the poor souls would go in search of these phantoms, they would find nothing but a great lone land, in the fulness of a still deeper desolation.

"Then they would fling themselves down in despair and ask why they had been brought out into the wilderness to die, but Ishmael, with the same calm smile as before, would tell them that the life of this world was all a mirage, a troubled dream, a dream in a sleep, that the life to come was the awakening, and

that he whose dream was most disturbed was nearest the gates of Paradise.

"Result—at the next town we came to, we were told that when we were in the middle of the wilderness Ishmael had made an oasis to spring up around us, with waving trees and rippling water and the air full of the songs of birds, the humming of bees, and the perfume of flowers, and we all fell asleep in it, and when we awoke in the morning we believed we had been in Heaven!

"Good-night, my dear—dear! Oh, to think that all this wilderness divides us! But ma'aleysh! In another hour I shall be asleep, and then—then I shall be in your arms."

II

"Oh my! Oh my! Two incidents have happened to-day, dearest, that can hardly fail of great results. Early in the morning we came upon the new convict settlement, a rough bastioned place built of sun-dried bricks in the middle of the Soudan desert. It contains the hundred and fifty Notables who were imprisoned by the Special Tribunal for assaults on the Army of Occupation when they were defending the house of your friend the Grand Cadi. How Ishmael discovered this I do not know, but what he did was like another manifestation of the 'mystic sense.'

"Stopping the caravan with an unexpected blast of the elephant-horn, he caused ten rows of men to be ranged around the prison, and after silence had been proclaimed, he called on them to say the first Surah: 'Praise be to God, the Lord of all creatures.'

"It had a weird effect in that lonesome place, as of a great monotonous wave breaking on a bar far out at sea, but what followed was still more eerie. After a breathless moment, in which everybody seemed to listen and hold his breath, there came the deadened and muffled sound of the same words repeated by the prisoners within the walls: 'Praise be to God, the Lord of all creatures.'

"When this was over Ishmael cried, 'Peace, brothers! Patience! The day of your deliverance is near! The Redeemer is coming! All your wrongs will be righted, all your bruises will be healed! Peace!'

"And then there came from within the prison walls the muffled answer, 'Peace!'

"The second of the incidents occurred about midday. When crossing a lifeless waste of gloomy volcanic sand, we came upon a desert graveyard, with those

rounded hillocks of clay which make one think that the dead beneath must be struggling in their sleep.

"At a word from Ishmael all the men of our company who belong to that country stepped out from the caravan and riding round and round the cemetery, shouted the names of their kindred who were buried there: 'Ali!' 'Abdul!' 'Mohammed!' 'Mahmud!' 'Said!'

"After that Ishmael himself rode forward, and addressing the dead as if they could hear, he cried, 'Peace to you, O people of the graves! Wait! Lie still! The night is passing! The daylight dawns!'

"It was thrilling! Strange, simple, primitive, crude in its faith perhaps, but such love and reverence for the dead contrasted only too painfully with the vandalism of our 'Christian' vultures (yclept Egyptologists), who rifle the graves of the old Egyptians for their jewels and mummy beads, and then leave their bones in tons to bleach on the bare sand—a condition that is sufficient of itself to account for Jacob's prayer, 'Bury me not, I pray thee, in the land of Egypt.'

"And so say all of us! But seriously, my dear Gordon, I quite expect to hear at the next stopping-place a story of how Ishmael recited the Fatihah and the walls of a prison fell down before him, and how he spoke to the dead and they replied."

III

"It has happened! I knew it would! I have seen it coming, and it has come—without any help from Black Zogal's crazy imagination, either. There was only one thing wanted to complete the faith of these people in Ishmael's 'divinity'—a miracle, and it has been performed!

"I suppose it really belongs to the order of things that happen according to natural law—magnetism, suggestion, God knows what—but my pen positively jibs at recording it, so surely will it seem as if I had copied it out of a Book I need not name.

"This afternoon our vast human tortoise was trudging along, and a halt was being called to enable stragglers to come up, when a funeral procession crossed our track on its way to a graveyard on the stony hillside opposite.

"The Sheikh of a neighbouring village had lost his only child, a girl twelve years of age, and behind the blind men chanting the Koran, the hired mourners with their plaintive wail and the body on a bare board, the old father walked in

his trouble, rending his garments and tearing off his turban.

"It was a pitiful sight; and when the mourners came up to Ishmael and told him the Sheikh was a God-fearing man who had not deserved this sorrow, I could see that he was deeply moved, for he called on the procession to stop, and making his camel kneel, he got down and tried to comfort the old man, saying, 'May the name of God be upon thee!'

"Then thinking, as it seemed to me, to show sympathy with the poor father, he stepped up to the bier and took the little brown hand which, with its silver ring and bracelet, hung over the board, and held it for a few moments while he asked when the child had died and what she had died of, and he was told she had died this morning, and the sun had killed her.

"All at once I saw Ishmael's hand tremble and a strange contraction pass over his face, and at the next moment, in a quivering voice, he called on the bearers to put down the bier. They did so, and at his bidding they uncovered the body, and I saw the face. It was the face of the dead! Yes, the dead, as lifeless and as beautiful as a face of bronze.

"At the next instant Ishmael was on his knees beside the body of the girl, and asking the father for her name. It was Helimah.

"Helimah! Your father is waiting for you! Come,' said Ishmael, touching the child's eyes and smoothing her forehead, and speaking in a soft, caressing voice.

"Gordon, as I am a truthful woman, I saw it happen. A slight fluttering of the eyelids, a faint heaving of the bosom, and then the eyes were open, and at the next moment the girl was standing on her feet!

"God! what a scene it was that followed. The Sheikh on his knees kissing the hem of Ishmael's caftan, the men prostrating themselves before him, and the women tearing away the black veils that covered their faces, and crying, 'Blessed be the woman that bore thee!'

"It has been what the Arabs call a red day, and at that moment the setting sun catching the clouds of dust raised by the camels made the whole world one brilliant, fiery red. What wonder if these poor, benighted people thought the Lord of Heaven Himself had just come down!

"We left the village loaded with blessings (Black Zogal galloping frantically in front), and when we came to the next town—Berber, with its miles of roofless mud-huts, telling of Dervish destruction—crowds came out to salute Ishmael as the 'Guided One,' 'The true Mahdi,' and 'The Deliverer,' bringing their sick and lame and blind for him to heal them, and praying of him to remain.

"Oh, my dear Gordon, it is terrifying! Ishmael is no longer the messenger, the forerunner; he is now the Redeemer he foretold! I really believe *he* is beginning to believe it! This is the pillar of fire that is henceforth to guide us on our

way. Already our numbers are three times what they were when we left Khar-toum. What is to happen when thirty thousand persons, following a leader they believe to be divine, arrive in Cairo and are confronted by five thousand British soldiers?

"No! It is not bloodshed I am afraid of—I know you will prevent that. But what of the awful undeceiving, the utter degradation, the crushing collapse?"

"And I? Don't think me a coward, Gordon—it isn't everybody who was born brave like you—but when I think of what I have done to this man, and how surely it will be found out that I have betrayed him, I tell myself that the moment I touch the skirts of civilisation I must run away.

"But meanwhile our pilgrimage is moving on—to its death, as it seems to me—and I am moving on with it as a slave—the slave of my own actions. If this is Destiny, it is wickedly cruel, I will say that for it; and if it is God, I think He might be a jealous God without making the blundering impulse of one poor girl the means of wrecking the hopes of a whole race of helpless people. Of course it acts as a sop to my conscience to remember what you said about God never making mistakes, but I cannot help wishing that in His inscrutable wisdom He could have left me out.

"Oh, my dear-dear! Where are you now, I wonder? What are you doing? What is being done to you? Have you seen your father, the Princess, and the Grand Cadi? I suppose I must not expect news until we reach Assouan. You promised to write to me, and you will—I know you will. Good-night, dearest! My love, my love, my only love! But I must stop. We are to make a night journey. The camp is in movement, and my camel is waiting. Adieu!

"HELENA."

CHAPTER VII

"SERAI FUM EL KHALIG, "CAIRO.

"Salaam aleykoum! Ten days have passed, my dear Helena, since I wrote my last letter, and during that time I have learned all that is going on here, having in my assumed character of Ishmael in disguise interviewed nearly the whole of the Ulema, including that double-dyed dastard, the Grand Cadi.

"Under the wing—the rather fluttered one—of the good old Chancellor of

El Azhar I saw the oily reprobate in his own house, and in his honeyed voice he made pretence of receiving me with boundless courtesy. I was his 'beloved friend in God,' 'the reformer of Islam,' called to the task of bringing men back to the Holy Koran, to the Prophet, and to eternal happiness. On the other hand, my father was 'the slave of power,' the 'evil-doer,' the 'adventurer,' and the 'great assassin,' who was led away by worldly things, and warring against God.

"More than once my hands itched to take the hypocrite from behind by the ample folds of his Turkish garments and fling him like vermin down the stairs, but I was there to hear what he was doing, so I smothered a few strong expressions which only the recording angel knows anything about, and was compelled to sit and listen.

"My dear Helena, it is even worse than I expected. Some of the double-dealing Egyptian Ministers, backed by certain of the diplomatic corps, but inspired by this Chief Judge in Islam, have armed a considerable part of the native populace, in the hope that the night when England, in the persons of her chief officials, is merry-making on the island of Ghezirah, and the greater part of the British force is away in the provinces quelling disturbances and keeping peace, the people may rise, the Egyptian army may mutiny, and Ishmael's followers may take possession of the city.

"All this and more, with many suave words about the 'enlightening help of God,' and the certainty of 'a bloodless victory,' in which the Almighty would make me glorious and the English would be driven out of Egypt, the crafty scoundrel did not hesitate to propound as a means whereby the 'true faith might be established all over Europe, *Rome and London!*'

"Since my interview with the Grand Cadi I have learned of a certainty, what I had already surmised, that the Consul-General has been made aware of the whole plot, and is taking his own measures to defeat it. Undoubtedly the first duty of a Government is to preserve order and to establish authority, and I know my father well enough to be sure that at any cost he will set himself to do both. But what will happen?

"Mark my word, the British army will be ordered back to the Capital—perhaps on the eve of the festival—and as surely as it enters the city on the night of the King's Birthday there will be massacre in the streets, for the Egyptian soldiers will rebel, and the people who have been provided with arms from the Secret Service money of England's enemies will rise, thinking the object of the Government is to prevent the entrance of Ishmael and his followers.

"Result—a holy war; and as that is the only kind of war that was ever yet worth waging, it will put Egypt in the right and England in the wrong.

"Does Ishmael expect this? No; he thinks he is to make a peaceful entry into Cairo when he comes to establish his World State, his millennium of universal

faith and empire. Do the Ulema expect it? No; they think the Army of Occupation will be far away when their crazy scheme is carried into effect. Does my father expect it? Not for one moment, so sure is he—I know it perfectly, I have heard him say it a score of times—that the Egyptian soldier will not fight alone, and that Egyptian civilians can be scattered by a water-hose.

”Heaven help him! If ever a man was preparing to draw a sword from its scabbard it is my father at this moment, but it is only because he is played upon and deceived by this son and successor of Caiaphas the damned. I’ll go and open his eyes to the Grand Cadi’s duplicity. I’ll say, ’Bring your oily scoundrel face to face with me, and see what I will say. If he denies it, you must choose for yourself which of us you will believe—your own son, who has nothing to gain by coming back to warn you, or this reptile who is fighting for the life of his rotten old class.’

”The thing is hateful to me, and if there were any other possible way of stopping the wretched slaughter I should not go, for I know it will end in the Consul-General handing me over to the military authorities to be court-martialled for my former offences, and, as you may say, it is horrible to put a father, with a high sense of duty, into the position of being compelled to cut off his own son.

”Meanwhile I am conscious that the police continue to watch me, and I am just as much a prisoner as if I were already within the walls of a jail. For their own purposes they are leaving me at liberty, and I believe they will go on doing so until after the night of the King’s Birthday. After that, God knows what will happen.

”I am writing late, and I must turn in soon, so good-night, and God bless and preserve you, my own darling—mine, mine, mine, and nobody else’s, remember that! Hafiz continues to protest that the Prophet has a love for you, and will bring out everything for the best. I think so too—I really do, so you must not be frightened about anything I have said in this letter.

”There is only one thing frightens me, and that is the damnable trick memory plays me when it rakes up all you told me of the terms of your betrothal to Ishmael. I can bear it pretty well during the day, but in that dead grey hour of the early morning, when the moonlight slinks into the dawn, before the sparrows begin to chop the air and the Arabs to rend it, I find myself thinking that though Ishmael, when he proposed marriage to you, may have been thinking of nothing but how to protect your good name, being a pure-minded man who had consecrated his life to a spiritual mission, yet the constant presence of a beautiful woman by his side must sooner or later sweep away his pledge.

”He wouldn’t be a man if it didn’t, and, the prophet notwithstanding, Ishmael is that to his finger-tips. But heaven help me! I daren’t let my mind dwell on this subject, or I should have to fly back to you and leave my task here un-

fulfilled. So as often as I shut my eyes and see you trudging through the desert in Ishmael's caravan, I tell myself that Providence has something for you to do there—must have—though what the deuce it is, I don't yet see.

"No matter! *D.V.* I'll know some day, and meantime I'll nail my colours to the mast of your strength and courage, knowing that the bravest girl in the world belongs to me, and wherever she is, she is *mine*, and always will be. GORDON.

"*P.S.*—I am now dispatching my two letters to Assouan by Hamid Ibrahim—the second of the two Sheikhs who went with me to Alexandria—and if you find you can send me an answer, for God's sake, do! I am hungering and thirsting and starving and perishing for a letter from you—a line, a word, a syllable, the scratch of your pen on a piece of paper. Send it, for heaven's sake!

"I hear that hundreds of native boats are going up to Assouan to bring you down the Nile, so look out for my next letter when you get to Luxor—I may have something to tell you by that time."

CHAPTER VIII

I

"NUBIAN DESERT (*anywhere*).

"O MY GORDON,—Such startling developments! Ishmael's character has made a new manifestation. It concerns me, and I hardly know whether I ought to speak of it. Yet I must—I cannot help myself.

"I find there is something distinctly masculine in his interest in me! In Khartoum (in spite of certain evidences to the contrary) I was always fool enough to suppose that it was without sex—what milksops call Platonic—as if any such relation between a man and a woman ever was or ever will be!

"Oh, I know what you are saying! 'That foolish young woman thinks Ishmael is falling in love with her.' But wait, sir, only wait and listen.

"We left Berber at night, and rode for four hours in the moonlight. Goodness! What ghosts the desert is full of—ghosts of pyramids that loom large and then fade away. Such mysterious lights! Such spectral watch-towers standing on spectral heights! It was what the Arabs call 'a white night,' and besides the

moon in its splendour there was a vast star-strewn sky. Sometimes we heard the hyena's cry, sometimes the jackal's ululation, and through the silver shimmering haze we could see the wild creatures scuttling away from us.

"Thus on and on went our weary caravan—the camels like great swans with their steady upturned heads, slithering as if in slippers along the noiseless sand, and many of the tired people asleep on them. But I could not sleep, and Ishmael, who was very much awake, rode by my side and talked to me.

"It was about love, and included one pretty story of a daughter of the Bedawee who married a Sultan—how she scorned the silken clothes he gave her and would not live in his palace—saying she was no fellaha to sleep in houses—and made him come out into the desert with her and dwell in a tent. I thought there was a certain self-reference in the story, but that was not all by any means.

"At midnight we halted by a group of wells, and while our vast army of animals was being watered my tent was set up outside the camp, so that I might rest without noise. I suppose I had been looking faint and pale, for just as I was listening to the monotonous voice of a boy who, at a fire not far away, was singing both himself and me to sleep, Ishmael came with a dish of medida, saying, 'Drink this, it will do you good.'

"Then he sat down, and, with that paralysing plainness of speech which the Easterns have, began to talk of love again, especially in relation to the duty of renunciation, quoting in that connection 'the lord of the Christians,' who had said, 'There be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake.'

"It was more than embarrassing from the beginning, but it became startling and almost shocking when he went on to talk about Jesus in relation to Mary Magdalene (whom he supposed to be the sister of Martha), and of the home at Bethany as the only place in which He found the solace of female society, and how He had to turn His back on the love of woman for His work's sake.

"We are so accustomed to think of Jesus's inaccessibility to human affection as if it were a merit in Him to be superior to love, that it made my skin creep to hear this person of another faith talk like that. But I shivered a good deal more when he came to closer quarters, and said that renunciation was the duty of every one on whom God had laid a great mission *until his task was finished*, and then ... *then* it was just as much his duty *to live as a man!*

"He went away quite calmly, commending me to God, but he left me in a state of terror; and though I was nearly worn to death by the double journey, I did not sleep a wink that night for thinking of that accursed day of the betrothal, and what would happen if he ever broke his promise and came to me to claim the rights of a husband.

"The next day or two passed without any serious incident except that Ish-

mael, who had developed a pair of haunting, imploring eyes, was always riding his camel by its halter and nose-rein at the side of my litter, and talking constantly on the same subject. But then came an event of thrilling interest. Can I—shall I—must I tell you about it? Yes, I can, I shall, I must!

"Out here on the desert I always feel as if I were travelling in Bible lands, and if our caravan were to come upon 'Abram the Hebrew,' and Rachel and Rebecca flying away with some Bedouin Jacob, I should not be the least surprised, so it seemed natural enough that yesterday, in the country of the Bisharin Arabs, we lit upon Laban, living as a patriarch among his people.

"There were his sons and his sons' sons, big, brawny boys, strong and clean of limb, and with their loins well girt but hardly anything else covered, and there were 'the souls born of his house' in their felt skull-caps and blue galabeahs. But what most concerned me were his two splendid daughters. No corsetted women out of Bond Street, sir, but superbly fine and majestic young females, tall and straight, with big bosoms like pomegranates, ringletted black hair, clear oval faces, the olive skin of the purest Arab blood, and large black eyes that shone like gems.

"Such a woman, I thought, must Ruth have been when she lay at the feet of Boaz; but lo, it never occurred to me that the people's faith in Ishmael's 'divinity' did not forbid their ascribing to him the attributes of a man. Shall I go on? Yes, I will, for already you know that your Helena, your lady-love, is no mealy-mouthed miss—never was, and never can be.

"Well, last night, late, while I was looking at the shadowy forms of the camels coming and going in the light of the dying fires, I saw Laban, who had been pouring hospitalities upon us, leading one of his daughters, whose head was low, to Ishmael's tent. It was like something horrible out of the Old Testament, but I had to watch—I simply could not help it—and after a while I saw Laban and Rachel going away together, and then the old man's head as well as the girl's was down.

"Act One being finished last night, Act Two began to-day. We are in the middle of the Nubian desert now, and as the heat is great under the red wrath of the fiery mountains on either side, we have to rest for three hours in the middle of every day. Well, at noon to-day Ishmael came to my tent and talked of love again. It was a heavenly passion. Surely God had created it. Yet the Christians had made 'monkery,' and were thus rebuking the Almighty and claiming to be wiser than He. The union of man and woman without love was sin. That was what made so many Moslem marriages sinful. Marriage was not betrothal, not the joining of hands under a handkerchief, not the repeating of words after a Cadi; marriage was the sacrament of love, and love being present and nothing else intervening, *renunciation was wrong*, it was against the spirit of Islam, and

no matter who he might be, *a man should live as a man.*

"I don't know what I said, or whether I said anything, but I do know that the blood left my heart and seemed long in making its way back again. My skin was creeping, and I had a feeling which I had never known before—a feeling of repulsion—the feeling of the white woman about the black man. Ishmael is not black by any means, but I felt exactly as if he were, for I could see quite well what was going on in his mind. He was thinking of his journey's end, of the day when his work would be finished, and he was promising himself the realisation of his love.

"That shall never, never be! No, not under any circumstances! My God, no, not for worlds of worlds! Good-night, Gordon! I may be betrothed to this man, but there is no law of nature that binds me to him. I belong to you, just as Rachel belonged to Jacob, and whatever I may be in my religion, I am no Trinitarian in my love at all events.

"Good-bye, dearest! Don't let what I have said alarm you. Oh, I know what you are *now*: 'That foolish young woman expects me to hear her when I am in Cairo and she is in the middle of the Nubian desert.' But you do, I am sure you do. And I hear you also. I hear your voice at this moment as clearly as I hear it when I awake in the middle of the night and it rings through my miserable tent and makes me wildly hysterical. So don't be alarmed; I can take care of myself, I tell you! My love, my love, my love!

II

"Mercy! I don't know who did it, or by whose orders it was done, but last night Ishmael's tent, which has hitherto been set up at a distance, was placed mouth to mouth with mine. More than that, the odious Arab woman, who has always afflicted me with her abominable presence, was nowhere to be seen. I was feeling by one of your 'mystic senses' that something was going to happen when late, very late, the last of the fires having died down and the camp being asleep, I heard Ishmael calling to me in a whisper—

"Rani!"

"I did not answer—I could not have done so if I had tried, for my heart was thumping like an anvil.

"Rani!" he whispered again, and again I did not reply. I knew *he* knew I was awake, and after a moment of silence that seemed eternal, he said—

"By-and-by, then! When we come to Cairo and my mission is at an end.

"O God, what tears of anger and despair I shed when he was gone and all was quiet! And now I ask myself if I can bear this strain any longer. After all, Ishmael is only an Oriental, and perhaps in spite of himself and the pledge he gave to me, the natural man is coming to the top. Then I am his *wife*, and he has *rights* in me, according to his own view and the laws of his religion! I am in his camp too, and we are in the middle of the desert!

"How did it happen—that betrothal? Are these things ordained? Gordon, you talk about Destiny, but why don't you see that what took me to Khartoum was not really the desire to avenge my father (though I thought it was) but to avenge myself for the loss of you. So *you—you—you* were the real cause of my hideous error, and if you had loved me as I loved you I could never have been put to that compulsion.

"... Forgive me, dear! I am feeling wicked, but I shall soon get over it. I have not been sleeping well lately, and there are dark rims under my eyes and I am a fright in every way.... I feel calm already, so good-night, dearest! We cannot be far from civilisation now, therefore there can be no need to run away from here."

III

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! We camped last night on the top of a stony granite hill, and this morning we can see the silver streak of the Nile with the sweet green verdure along its banks, and the great dam at Assouan with its cascades of falling water. Such joy! Such a frenzy of gladness! The people are capering about like demented children. Just so must the children of Israel have felt when God brought them out of the wilderness and they saw the promised land before them.

"Black Zogal galloped into the town at daybreak and has just galloped back, bringing a great company of Sheikhs and Notables—Egyptians, chiefly—who have come up the Nile to meet us, but many are Bedouins from the wild East country running to the Red Sea. Such fine faces and stately figures! Most of them living in tents, but all dressed like princes. They are saluting Ishmael as the 'Deliverer,' the 'Guided One,' the 'Redeemer,' and even the 'Lord Isa,' and *he is not reproving them!*

"But I cannot think of Ishmael now. I feel as if I were coming out of chaos and entering into the world. If anything has happened to you I shall know it soon. Shall I be able to control myself? I shall! I must!

"Oh, how my heart beats and swells! I can scarcely breathe. But you are

alive, I am sure you are, and I shall hear from you presently. I shall also escape from this false position and sleep at last, as the Arabs say, with both eyes shut. I must stop. My tent has to be struck. The camp is already in movement.

* * * * *

"One word. We were plunging into Assouan, through the cool bazaars with their blazing patches of sunlight and sudden blots of shadow when I saw your Sheikh sidling up to me. He slipped your letter into my hand and is to come back in a moment for mine. I am staying at a khan. Oh, God bless and love you! El Hamdullillah! My dear, my dear, my dear!

"HELENA."

CHAPTER IX

I

"THE NILE" (*between Assouan and Luxor*).

"OH, MY DEAR, DEAREST GORDON,—Mohammed's rapture when he received from the angel the 'holy Koran' was a mild emotion compared to mine when I read your letter. Perhaps I ought to be concerned about the contents of it, but I am not—not a bit of me! Having found out what the Grand Cadi is doing, you will confound his 'knavish tricks.'

"Never mind, my dear old boy, what the officials are saying. They'll soon see whether you have been a bad Englishman, and in any case you cannot compete with the descendants of *all* the creeping things that came out of the Ark.

"Don't worry about me either. Unparalleled as my position is, I am quite capable of taking care of myself, for I find that in the decalogue you delivered to your devoted slave on the day she saw you first, there was one firm and plain commandment, 'Thou shalt have no other love but me.' I dare say, being a woman, I am faithless to the first instinct of my sex in telling you this, but I have no time for 'female' fooleries, however delicious, and be bothered to them anyway!

"As you see, I did not run away from Ishmael's camp on reaching the railway terminus, and the reason was that you said you were writing to me again at Luxor. Hence, I was compelled to come on, for of course I would not have lost that letter, or let it go astray, for all the value of the British Empire.

"I was delighted with my day at Assouan though, with its glimpses of a green, riotous, prodigal, ungovernable Nature after the white nakedness of the wilderness: with its flashlight peep at civilised frivolities, its hotels for European visitors, its orchestras playing 'When we are married,' its Egyptian dragomans with companies of tourists tailing behind them, its dahabeahs and steam launches, and, above all, its groups of English girls, maddeningly pretty and full of the intoxication of life, yet pretending to be consumed by a fever of self-culture and devoured by curiosity about mummies and tombs.

"It's no use—these pink-white faces after the brown and black are a joy to behold, and when I came upon a bunch of them chattering and laughing like linnets ('Frocks up, children!' as they crossed a puddle made by the watermen) I could hardly help kissing them all round, they looked so sweet and so homelike.

"You were right about the boats. A whole fleet was waiting for us, which was a mercy, for the animals were utterly done up after the desert journey, and next morning we embarked under the strenuous supervision of a British Bimbashi who looked as large as if he had just won the battle of Waterloo.

"Of course the people were following Ishmael like a swarm of bees, and, much to my discomfiture, I came in for a share of reflected glory from a crowd of visitors who were evidently wondering whether I was a reincarnation of Lady Hester Stanhope or the last Circassian slave-wife of the Ameer of Afghanistan. One horrible young woman cocked her camera and snapped me—American, of course, a sort of half-countrywoman of yours, sir, shockingly stylish, good-looking and attractive, with frills and furbelows that gave a far view of Regent Street and the Rue de la Paix, and made me feel so dreadfully shabby in my Eastern dress and veil that I wanted to slap her.

"We are now two days down the river, five hundred to a thousand boatloads of us, our peaked white sails looking like a vast flight of seagulls and our slanting bamboo masts like an immense field of ripe corn swaying in the wind. It is a wonderful sight, this flotilla of 'feluccas' going slowly down the immemorial stream, and when one thinks of it in relation to its object it is almost magnificent—a nation going up to its millennium!

"They have rigged up a sort of cabin for me in the bow of one of the high-prowed boats, with shelter and shade included, so that I still have some seclusion in which to write my 'Journal,' in spite of this pestilent Arab woman who is always watching me. In the hold outside there must be a hundred men at least, and at the stern there are a few women who bake durali cakes on a charcoal stove,

making it a marvel to me that they do not set fire to the boat a dozen times a day.

"The wind being fair and the river in full flood—seven men's height above the usual level, and boiling and bubbling and tearing down like a torrent—we sail from daylight to dark, but at night we are hauled up and moored to the bank, so that the people may go ashore to sleep if they are so minded.

"Oh, these delicious mornings! Oh, these white, enchanting nights! The wide, smooth, flowing water, reflecting the tall palms, the banks, the boats themselves; in the morning a soft brown, at noon a cool green, at sunset a glowing rose, at night a pearly grey! Then the broad blue sky with its blaze of lemon and yellow and burnished gold as the sun goes down; the rolling back of the darkness as the dawn appears and the sweeping up of the crimson wings of day! If I dared only give myself up to the delight of it! But I daren't, I daren't, having something to do here, so my dear one says, though what the deuce and the dickens it is (except to stay until I receive that letter) I cannot conceive."

II

"The people are in great spirits now, all their moaning and murmuring being turned to gladness, and as we glide along they squat in the boats and sing. Strangely enough, in a country where religion counts for so much, there is hardly anything answering to sacred music, but there are war-songs in abundance, full of references to the 'filly foal' and of invocations to the God of Victory. These songs the men sing to something like three notes, accompanied by the beat of their tiny drums, and if the natives who stand on the banks to listen convey the warlike words to their Moudirs it cannot be a matter for much surprise that the Government thinks an army is coming down the Nile and that your father finds it necessary to prepare to 'establish authority.'

"As for Ishmael, he is in a state of ecstasy that is bordering on frenzy. He passes from boat to boat, teaching and preaching early and late. Of course it is always the same message—the great Hope, the Deliverer, the Redeemer, the Christ, the Kingdom or Empire that is to come, but just as he drew his lessons from the desert before so now he draws them from the Nile.

"The mighty river, mother of Egypt, numbered among the deities in olden days, born in the heights and flowing down to the ocean, rising and falling and bringing fertility, suckling the land, sustaining it, the great waterway from North to South, the highway for humanity—what is it but a symbol of the golden age so soon to begin, when all men will be gathered together as the children of one

Mother, with one God one Law one Faith!

"It becomes more and more terrifying. I am sure the people are taking their teaching literally, for they are like children in their delirious joy; and when I think how surely their hopes are doomed to be crushed, I ask myself what is to happen to Ishmael when the day of their disappointment comes. They will kill him—I am sure they will!

"Gordon, I go through hell at certain moments. It was good of you to tell me I need not charge myself with everything that is happening, but I am hysterical when I think that although this hope may be only a dream, a vain dream, and I had nothing to do with creating it, it is through me that it is to be so ruthlessly destroyed.

"Then there is that masculine development in Ishmael's relation to me, and the promise he has made himself that as soon as his task is finished he will live the life of a man!

"Thank God, we are close to Luxor now, and when I get that letter I shall be free to escape. Have you seen your father, I wonder? If so, what has happened? Oh, my dear-dear! It is four years—days, I mean—since I heard from you—what an age in a time like this! My love—all, all my love! HELENA."

CHAPTER X

I

"CAIRO.

"MY DEAKEST HELENA,—El Hamdullillah! Hamid brought me the letter you gave him at Assouan and I nearly fell on his neck and kissed him. He also told me you were looking 'stout and well,' and added, with an expression of astonishment, that you were 'the sweetest and most beautiful woman in the world.' Of course you are—what the deuce did he expect you to be?

"I am not ashamed to say that while I read your letter I was either laughing like a boy or crying like a baby. What wonder? Helena was speaking to me! I could see her very eyes, hear her very voice, feel her very hand. No dream this time, no dear, sweet, murderous make-believe, but Helena herself, actually

Helena!

"I am not surprised, dearest, at what you tell me of the development of the masculine side of Ishmael's interest in you. It was what I feared and foresaw, yet how I am to stay here, now that I know it has come to pass, heaven alone can say. I suppose I must, or else everything I have come for, lived for, hoped for, and fought for will be wasted and thrown away. Thank God, I have always hitherto been able, even in my blackest hours, to rely on your love and courage, and I shall continue to do so, and to tell myself that if you are in Ishmael's camp it must be for some good and useful purpose, although I know that in the dead waste of every blessed night I shall have some damnable pricks from the green-eyed monster, not to speak of downright fear and honest conscience.

"Neither am I at all surprised at what you say of the growth of the Mahdist element in and around Ishmael, though that is a pity in itself and a deadly misfortune in relation to the Government. Of course it is the old wretched story over again—the moment a man arises who has anything of the divine in him, an apostle of the soul of humanity, a flame-bearer in a realm of darkness, the world jumps on him, body and soul, and he finds he has brought not peace but a sword. The Governments of the world do not want the divine, for the simple reason that the divine begets divided authority, which begets divided allegiance, which begets riot and insurrection, so down with the divine!—hang it, quarter it, crucify it—which is precisely what they have been doing with it for two thousand years at all events.

"That, too, is a reason why I cannot carry out my first intention of going to my father, and another is that I see only too plainly now that he is playing for a *coup*. Not that I believe for a moment that like the authorities under arbitrary Governments (Russian, for example) my father would use provocation even if it were the only means by which peaceful work and life seemed possible, but I fear he is becoming a sort of conscientious collaborator with the accursed Grand Cadi, by acquiescing in conspiracy and permitting it to go on until it has reached a head in order to crush it with one blow.

"God forgive me if I am judging my own father, but I cannot help it. There is such a thing as being 'drunk with power,' as the Arabs say, and everything points to the fact that the Consul-General counts on making one surprising and overwhelming effort to suppress this unrest. That he did not take me (in my character of Ishmael) on my arrival in Cairo points to it, and that he has invited me to the dinner in honour of the King's Birthday puts it beyond the shadow of a doubt.

"How do I know that? I'll tell you how. Do you remember that when Ishmael's return was first proposed it was suggested that he should enter the city while the Consul-General and his officials were feasting on the Ghezirah,

the bridge of their island being drawn and the key of the Pavilion being turned on them? Well, that was the scheme of the Cadi, and I have reason to believe that having obtained Ishmael's consent to it, he straightway revealed it to my father.

"What is the result? The Consul-General has invited the conspirators to join him at his festivities, so that while they think they are to hold him prisoner on Ghezirah until Ishmael's followers have entered Cairo, he will in fact be holding them, the whole boiling of them, including myself, especially myself, thus arresting his enemies in a bunch at the very moment when their rebellion is being put down on the other side of the Nile.

"There is something tragic in the idea that if I go to that dinner my father may find that there has been one gigantic error in his calculations, and I hate the thought of going, but if I go I go, and (*D.V.*) I shall not shrink.

"Good-night, dearest! 'Where is she now?' I ask myself for the nine-hundredth time, and for the nine-hundred and first time I answer, 'Wherever she is she is mine and nobody else's.' In-sha-allah!"

II

"Whew! It's comic, and if I were not such a ridiculously tragic person I should like to scream with laughter. The Ulema are at a loss to know what to do about the invitation to the King's Dinner, and have been putting their turbaned heads together like frightened chickens in a storm. Never having been invited to such functions before, they suspect treachery, think their conspiracy has got wind, and are for excusing themselves on the ground of a general epidemic among grandmothers, which will require them to be present at funerals in various parts of the country.

"On the other hand, Caiaphas, who is giving himself the airs of a hero—a hero, mind you—counsels courage, saying that if there is any suspicion of conspiracy the only way to put it out of countenance is to accept the Consul-General's invitation, which is of the nature of a command, and that this argument applies especially to me (that is to say, Ishmael), who might otherwise expose myself to the inference that I am not the wise and wealthy chief of the Ababdah, but another person who dare not permit himself to be seen. The fox! All the same I may find that it suits my book to go to the King's Dinner."

III

"The day of the festivities is approaching, and already the preparations have begun. Placards on the walls announcing a military tattoo, officials flying about the town, workmen hanging up lanterns for the illumination of the public gardens, and police bands in the squares playing 'God save' and 'The Girl I left,' and meantime Ishmael with his vast following coming up the Nile, full of the great Hope, the great Expectation!

"Talk about Nero fiddling while Rome burned! that was an act of no particular callousness compared to the infectious merriment of the European population, though many of them know nothing about the tidal wave that is sweeping down, the English press having been forbidden to mention it, and the one strong man in Egypt waiting calmly at the Agency until the moment comes to dam it.

"Of course the official classes are aware of what is happening, and their attitude towards the mighty flood that is coming on is a wonderful example of our British pluck and our crass stupidity. Not a man will budge, that much I can say for my countrymen who are ready to face death any day under a vertical sun, amid deadly swamps and human beings almost as dangerous. But they will not see that while the fanaticism of one hallucinated individual (Ishmael, for example) may be a little thing, the soul of a whole nation is a big thing, and God help the Government that attempts to crush it.

"In order to realise the situation here at this moment one has to make a daring, audacious, almost impious comparison—to think of the day when Christ entered Jerusalem through a dense, delirious crowd that shouted 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' and (forgetting that soon afterwards they deserted Him when His divinity appeared to fail) ask oneself what would have happened *then* if the Roman Consul, prompted by the Chief Priests, had met that frenzied multitude with a charge of Roman steel!

"God keep us from such consequences in Cairo; but meantime, though the Arabic newspapers are suppressed, the natives know that Ishmael's host is coming on, and the effect of the rumour that has gone through the air like a breath of wind seems to be frantically intoxicating. I confess that the sense of that mighty human wave, sweeping down the red waters of the high Nile, coming on and on, as they think to the millennium, but as I know to death, sits on me, too, like a nightmare. It has the effect of the supernatural, and I ask myself what in the name of God I can do to prevent the collision that will occur between two forces that seem bent on destroying each other.

"Something I must do, that is certain, and seeing that I am now the only one who knows what is being done on both sides, and that it is useless to appeal

either to my father or to Ishmael, what I do must be done by me alone. Alone is a terrible word, Helena; but what I do I do, and the devil take the consequences.

"I expect to get further information from Hafiz to-morrow, so (*D.V.*) I'll write my last letter to Bedrasheen, where, as I hear, you are to encamp. Look out for it there—I see something I may want you to do for me with Ishmael. Meantime don't be afraid of him. Remember that you belong to *me*, to me *only*, and that I'm thinking of you every hour and minute, and then nothing can go seriously astray. Good-bye, my beloved, my dear, my darling! GORDON.

"*P.S.*—Is it not extraordinary, my dear Helena, that notwithstanding the torment I suffer at the thought of your position in Ishmael's camp I continue to ask you to remain in it? But wait—only wait! Something good is going to happen! In-sha-allah!"

CHAPTER XI

I

"THE NILE

"(*between Luxor and Bedrasheen*).

"MY DEAR, DEAR GORDON—I saw your Hamid Ibrahim the moment I set foot in Luxor, and the way he passed your letter to me and I passed mine to him would have done credit to Charlie Bates and the Artful Dodger in the art of passing 'a wipe.'

"I really think we escaped the eyes of this odious Arab woman, but I am bound to add that almost as soon as I got back to the boat, and began to read your letter and to weep tears of joy over it, I was conscious of a shadow at the mouth of my cabin, and it was she, the daughter of a dog!

"No matter! Who the dickens cares! I shall be gone from here before the woman can do me any mischief, and if I am still in Ishmael's camp it is only because you said you were sending your last letter to Bedrasheen, so, you see, I had no choice but to come on.

"What you tell me of the course of affairs in Cairo only fills me with hatred of the Grand Cadi ('whom Allah damn'), and I find that I exhaust my Christianity in finding names that seem suitable to 'his Serenity'—beginning, of course, with

the fourth letter of the English alphabet.

"I see already what you are going to do, and when I think of it I feel like a shocking coward. If you cannot work with the Consul-General I suppose you will work without him, perhaps against him, and a conflict between you and your father is the tragedy I always foresaw. It will be the end of one or both of you, and I am trembling at the bare thought.

"Oh, I know you are the bravest thing God ever made and at the same time the most unselfish, but I sometimes wish to heaven you were not—though I suppose in that event you would fall from your god-like pedestal, and I should not love you so much if I admired you less.

"We left Luxor immediately, for although there were still three days to spare before the day of the "festivities" and the river was racing down fast enough to carry a fleet of war, the people were in a fever to reach the end of their journey, so Ishmael consented to go on without a rest.

"I find the whole thing more frightening than ever now that we are so near to the end, for I suppose it is certain that whatever else happens, this vast horde of Ishmael's fanatical followers will never be allowed to enter Cairo, and it will be impossible to convince the Consul-General and the Government that they are not coming as an armed force. Then what will the people do? What will they say to Ishmael? And if Ishmael suspects treachery, what will he say? What will he say to *me*? But no matter—I shall be gone before that can occur.

"It is now eleven o'clock at night, yet I cannot sleep, so I shall sit up all night and see the rising of the Southern Cross. A silver slip of a moon has just appeared, and by its shimmering light our vast fleet seems to be floating down the river like ships in a dream. Such calm, such silence! Phantoms of houses, of villages, of funereal palms gliding in ghostly muteness past us. Sometimes an obelisk goes like a dark skeleton down the bank—vestige of a vanished civilisation as full, perhaps, of delusive faith as ours. What is God doing with us all, I wonder? Why does He—

II

"Another thrilling moment! I *must* tell you—I cannot help myself.

"You may have gathered that since the scene in the tent on the desert Ishmael has left me alone, but last night he came again.

"That grim woman had gone to her crib somewhere outside, and I was writing to you as you see above, when suddenly in the silence, broken by nothing

but the snores of the men in the hold, the lapping of the water against the side of the boat and the occasional voice of the Reis at the rudder, I heard a soft step which I have learned to know.

"Rani!' said a voice without, and in a moment the canvas of my cabin was drawn, and Ishmael was sitting by my side.

"There was a look in his eyes that told of depths of tenderness, not to speak of consuming emotion, but at first he talked calmly. He began by speaking of you. It seems he had had news of you at Assouan, that you were staying at the Chancellor of El Azhar's house, and that the old Chancellor had no words warm enough for your wisdom and courage. Neither had Ishmael, who said the whole Mohammedan world was praising you.

I really believe he loves you, and I was beginning to melt towards him, thinking how much more he would worship you if he only knew what you had really done for him, when—heigho!—he began to speak of me and to return to his old subject. Love was a God-given passion, and he was looking forward to the end of his work when he might give himself up to it. His vow of chastity and consecration would then be annulled and he could live the life of a man!

Very tender, very delicate, but very warm and dreadfully Oriental! My nerves were tingling all over, and I was feeling shockingly weak and womanish while the great powerful man sat beside me, and when he talked about children, saying a woman without them was like a tree without fruit, I found myself for the first time in my life in actual physical terror.

"At last he rose to go, and before I knew what he was doing he had flung his arms around me and kissed me, and when I recovered myself he was gone.

"Then all the physical repulsion I spoke of before arose in me again, and at the same moment, as if by a whirlwind of emotion, I remembered you, and my strength came back.

"I have often wondered what sort of horror it must be to the woman who is married to an unfaithful husband or to a drunkard, to have him come in his uncleanness to claim her, and now (though Ishmael is neither of these, but merely a man who has 'rights' in me) I think I know.

"No matter! I am not afraid of Ishmael any longer, so *you* need not be afraid for me. It is not for nothing that I have Jewish blood in me, and if Ishmael attempts to *force* me, as surely as I am a daughter of Zion I will ... well, never mind! Dreadful? Perhaps so. Jezebel? I cannot help it. My husband? No, no, no; and if destiny has put me into the position of his wife, I despise and intend to defy it.

III

"Of course I did not sleep a wink last night, but I crept out of my hiding-place under the high prow of the boat when the dawn came up like a bride robed in pearly grey and blushing rosy red. By that time we were nearing Bedrasheen, and now we are moored alongside of it, and the people are beginning to land, for it seems they are to camp at Sakkara, in order to be in a position to see the light which is to shine from the minaret of Mohammed Ali.

"Such joy, such rapture! Men with the madra pole sounding the depths of the water, men with sculls pushing the boats ashore; all shouting in strident voices, or singing in guttural tones.

"Soon, very soon, their hopes will be blighted. Will they never know by whom? I wonder if anybody will tell them about that letter! Where is Mosie? I trust the Consul-General may keep him in Cairo. The boy is as true as steel, but with this woman to question him...! My God, make her meet a fate as black as her heart, the hussy!

"But why do I trouble about this? It matters nothing to me what becomes of the Arab woman, or of the Egyptians, or of the Soudanese, or even of Ishmael himself—the whole boiling of them, as you say. I know I'm heartless, but I can't help it. The only question of any consequence is what is happening to you. After all, it was I who put you where you are, and it is quite enough for me to reproach myself with that.

"What is the Government doing to you? What has your father done? What is going on among the descendants of the creeping things that came out of the Ark?

* * * * *

"I cannot see Hamid among the crowd on the land, but I hope to find him as soon as I go ashore. If I miss him in the fearful chaos, I suppose I shall have to go on to the camp, for, besides my anxiety to receive your letter, I am living under the strongest conviction that there is something for me to do for you, and that it has not been for nothing that I have gone through the bog and slush of this semi-barbaric life.

"There! You see what you've done for me! You've given me as strong a belief in the 'mystic sense' as you have yourself, and as firm a faith in fatality.

* * * * *

"No sign of Hamid yet! Never mind! Don't be afraid for me—I am all right.

"Gordon, my dear, my dear-dear, good-bye!

"HELENA."

CHAPTER XII

For more than three weeks the Consul-General had kept his own counsel, and not even to the Sirdar, whom he saw daily, did he reveal the whole meaning of his doings.

When the Sirdar had come to say that through the Soudan Intelligence Department in Cairo he had heard that Ishmael and his vast company had left Khartoum, and that the Inspector-General was of opinion that the pilgrimage must be stopped or it would cause trouble, the Consul-General had said—

"No! Let the man come on. We shall be ready to receive him."

Again, when the Governor at Assouan, hearing of the approach of the ever-increasing horde of Soudanese, had telegraphed for troops to keep them out of Egypt, the Consul-General had replied—

"Leave them alone, and mind your own business."

Finally when the Commandant of Police at Cairo had come with looks of alarm to say that a thousand open boats, all packed with people, were sailing down the river like an invading army, and that if the pilgrims attempted to enter the city the native police could not be relied upon to resist them, the Consul-General had said—

"Don't be afraid. I have made other arrangements."

Meantime the great man who seemed to be so calm on the outside was white hot within. Every day, while Ishmael was in the Soudan, and every hour after the Prophet had entered Egypt, he had received telegrams from his Inspectors saying where the pilgrimage was and what was happening to it. So great indeed had been the fever of his anxiety that he had caused a telegraphic tape to be fixed up in his bedroom that in the middle of the night, if need be, he might rise and read the long white slips.

A few days before the date fixed for the festivities one of the Inspectors of the Ministry of the Interior came to tell him that there were whispers of a conspiracy that had been blown upon, with hushed rumours of some bitter pun-

ishment which the Consul-General was preparing for those who had participated in it. As a consequence a number of the Notables and certain of the diplomats were rapidly leaving the country, nearly every train containing some of them. A sombre fire shone in the great man's eyes while he listened to this, but he only answered with a sinister smile—

"The air of Egypt doesn't agree with them perhaps. Let them go. They'll be lucky if they live to come back."

As soon as the Inspector was gone the Consul-General sent for his Secretary and asked what acceptances had been received of the invitations to the King's Dinner, whereupon the Secretary's face fell, and he replied that there had been many excuses.

Half the diplomats had pleaded calls from their own countries, and half the Pashas had protested with apologetic prayers that influenza or funerals in their families would compel them to decline. The Ministers had accepted as they needs must, but, with a few exceptions, the Ulema, after endless invocations to God and the Prophet, had, on various grounds, begged to be excused.

"And the exceptions, who are they?" asked the Consul-General.

"The Chancellor of El Azhar, his guest the Sheikh Omar Benani, the Grand Mufti, and—"

"Good! All goes well," said the Consul-General. "Make a list of the refusals and let me have it on the day of the dinner."

Before that day there was much to do, and on the day immediately preceding it the British Agency received a stream of visitors. The first to come by appointment was the English Adviser to the Ministry of Justice.

"I wish you," said the Consul-General, "to summon the new Special Tribunal to hold a court in Cairo at ten o'clock to-morrow night."

"Ten o'clock to-morrow night? Did your lordship say ten?" asked the Adviser.

"Don't I speak plainly?" replied the Consul-General, whereupon the look of bewilderment on the Adviser's face broke up into an expression of embarrassment, and his desire to ask further questions was crushed.

The next visitor to come by appointment was the British Adviser to the Minister of the Interior, the tall young Englishman on whose red hair the red fez sat so strangely.

"I wish you," said the Consul-General, "to arrange that the gallows be got out and set up after dark to-morrow night in the square in front of the Governorat."

"The square in front of the Governorat?" repeated the Adviser in tones of astonishment. "Does your lordship forget that public execution within the city is no longer legal?"

"Damn it, I'll make it legal," replied the Consul-General, whereupon the red head under the red fez bowed itself out of the library without waiting to ask who was to be hanged.

The next visitor to come to the Agency by appointment was the burly Commandant of Police.

"You still hold your warrant for the arrest of Ishmael Ameer?" asked the Consul-General.

"I do, my lord."

"Then come to Ghezirah to-morrow night, and be ready to receive my orders."

Then came the Colonel who, since the death of General Graves, had been placed in temporary command of the Army of Occupation.

"Is everything in order?"

"Everything, my lord."

"All your regiments now in the country can arrive at Calioub by the last train to-morrow night?"

"All of them."

"Then wait there yourself until you hear from me. I shall speak to you over the telephone from Ghezirah. On receiving my message you will cause fifty rounds of ammunition to be issued to your men, and then march them into the city and line them up in the principal thoroughfares. Let them stay there as long as they may be required to do so—all night if necessary; and if there is unrest or armed resistance on the part of the populace, of the native army, or of people coming into the town, you will promptly put it down. You understand?"

"I understand, my lord."

"But wait for my telephone call. Don't let one man stir out of barracks until you receive it. Mind that. Good-bye!"

The better part of the day was now gone, yet so great had been the Consul-General's impatience that he had not even yet broken his fast, although Fatimah, who alone was permitted to do so, had repeatedly entered his room to remind him that his meals were ready.

At sunset he went up to the roof of his house. Every day for nearly a week he had done this, taking a telescope in his hand that he might look down the river for the mighty octopus of demented people who were soon to come. Yesterday he had seen them for the first time—a vast flotilla of innumerable native boats with white, three-cornered sails, stretching far down the Nile, as a flight of birds of passage might stretch along the sky.

Now the people were encamped on the desert between Bedrasheen and Sakkara, a sinuous line of speckled white and black on the golden yellow of the sand, looking like a great serpent encircling the city on the south. As a serpent

they fascinated the Consul-General when he looked at them, but not with fear, so sure was he that, by the machinery he had set to work, the vermin would soon be trampled into the earth.

There they were, he thought, an armed force, the scourings of the Soudan, under the hypnotic sway of a fanatic-hypocrite, waiting to fall on the city and to destroy its civilisation. In every saddle-bag a rifle; in every gebah a copy of the Koran; in every heart a spirit of hatred and revenge.

Since the Grand Cadi had told him of the conspiracy to establish an Arab Empire the Consul-General's mind had evolved developments of the devilish scheme. The practical heart of the matter was Pan-Islamism, a combination of all the Moslem peoples to resist the Christian nations. Therefore in the great historical drama which he was soon to play he would be seen to be the saviour not only of England and of Europe and of civilisation, but even of Christianity itself!

It would be a life and death struggle, in which cruel things could not fail to be done, but the issues were world-great, and therefore he would not shrink. He who wanted the end must not think too much about the means.

Ishmael? The gallows in the square of the Governorat? Why not? The man might have begun as a mere paid emissary of the Khedive, but having developed the Mahdist malady, a belief in his own divinity, he meant to throw off his allegiance to his master and proclaim himself Caliph. Therefore they must hang him—hang him before the eyes of his followers, and fling his "divine" body into the Nile!

As the Consul-General stepped down from the roof Ibrahim met him with a letter from the Grand Cadi saying he found himself suspected by his own people, and therefore begged to be excused from attendance at the King's Dinner, but sent this secret message to warn his Excellency that by the plotting of his enemies the Kasr-el-Nil bridge which connected Ghezirah with Cairo would be opened immediately after the beginning of the festival.

"The fox!" thought the Consul-General, but interpreting in his own way the dim purpose of the plot—that it was intended to imprison him on the island while Ishmael's followers entered the city—he merely added to his order for his carriage an order for his steam-launch as well.

Daylight had faded by this time, and as soon as darkness fell the Consul-General received a line of other visitors—strange visitors such as the British Agency had never seen before. They were women, Egyptian women, the harem, shrouded figures in black satin and the yashmak, the wives of the Ministers who had felt compelled to accept their invitations, but were in fear of the consequences of having done so.

Unexampled, unparalleled event, never before known in an Eastern country, the women, disregarding the seclusion of their sex, had come to plead for

their husbands, to make tacit admission of a conspiracy, but to say, each trembling woman in her turn, "My husband is not in it," and to implicate other men who were.

The Consul-General listened with cold, old-fashioned courtesy to everything they had to say, and then bowed them out without many words. Instinctively Ibrahim had darkened the Agency as soon as they began to come, so that veiled they passed in, veiled they passed out, and they were gone before anybody else was aware.

The dinner-hour was now near, and leaving the library with the intention of going up to dress, the Consul-General came upon two men who were sitting in an alcove of the hall. They were Reuter's reporters, who for the past ten years had been accustomed to come for official information. Rising as the Consul-General approached, they asked him if he had anything to say.

"Be here at ten o'clock to-morrow night and I shall have something to give you," he said. "It will be something important, so keep the wires open to receive it."

"The wires to London, my lord?"

"To London, Paris, Berlin—everywhere! Good-night!"

Going upstairs with a flat and heavy step but a light and almost joyous heart, the Consul-General remembered his letter of resignation, and thought of the hubbub in Downing Street the day after to-morrow when news of the conspiracy, and of how he had scotched it, fell like a thunderbolt on the "fossils of Whitehall."

In the conflagration that would blaze heaven-high in England it would be seen at last how necessary a strong authority in Egypt was, and then—what then? He would be asked to use his own discretion, unlimited power be reposed in him; he would hoist the Union Jack over the Citadel, annex the country to the British Crown, cast off all futile obligations to the Sultan, and so end for ever the present ridiculous, paradoxical, suicidal situation.

While Ibrahim helped him to dress for dinner, he was partly conscious that the man was talking about Mosie and repeating some bewildering story which the black boy had been telling downstairs of Helena's "marriage to the new Mahdi."

This turned his thoughts in another direction, and for a few short moments the firm and stern, but not fundamentally hard and cruel man, became aware that all his fierce and savage and candid ferocity that day had been no more than the wild ejaculation of a heart that was broken and trembling because it was bereaved.

It was Gordon again—always Gordon! Where was "our boy" now? What was happening to him? Could it be possible that he was so far away that he would

not hear of the weltering downfall, so soon to come, of the "charlatan mummer" whose evil influence had brought his bright young life to ruin?

CHAPTER XIII

That night the Sirdar dined with the Consul-General, and as soon as the servants had gone from the dining-room he said—

"Nuneham, I have something to tell you."

"What is it?" asked the Consul-General.

"Notwithstanding three weeks of the closest observation, I have found no trace of insubordination in the Egyptian army, but nevertheless, in obedience to your warning, I have taken one final precaution. I have given orders that the ammunition with which every soldier is entrusted shall be taken from him to-morrow evening, so that if Ishmael Ameer comes into Cairo at night with any hope of—"

"My dear Mannering," interrupted the Consul-General with his cold smile, "would it surprise you to be told that Ishmael Ameer is already in Cairo?"

"Already? Did you say—"

"That he has been here for three weeks, that he came by the same train as yourself, wearing the costume of a Bedouin Sheikh, and that—"

"But, my dear Nuneham, this is incredible," said the Sirdar, with his buoyant laugh. "It is certainly true that a Bedouin Sheikh travelled in the same train with me from the Soudan, but that he was Ishmael Ameer in disguise is of course utterly unbelievable."

"Why so?"

"Because a week after I left Khartoum I heard that Ishmael was still living there, and because every other day since then has brought us advices from our Governors saying the man was coming across the desert with his people."

"My dear friend," said the Consul-General, "in judging of the East one must use Eastern weights and measures. The race that could for fourteen centuries accept the preposterous tradition that it was not Jesus Christ who was crucified but some one else who took on His likeness and died instead of Him, is capable of accepting for itself and imposing upon others a substitute for this White Prophet."

"But you bewilder me," said the Sirdar. "Isn't the man Ishmael at this moment lying encamped, with fifty thousand of his demented people, on the desert

outside Cairo?"

"No," said the Consul-General.

And then in his slow, deep, firm voice, grown old and husky, he unburdened himself for the first time—telling of Helena's departure for Khartoum on her errand of vengeance; of her letter from there announcing Ishmael's intention of coming into Cairo in advance of his people in order to draw off the allegiance of the Egyptian army; of Ishmael's arrival and his residence at the house of the Chancellor of El Azhar; of the visit of the Princess Nazimah and her report of the conspiracy of the diplomatic corps, and finally of the Grand Cadi's disclosure of the Khedive's plot for the establishment of an Arab Empire.

"So you see," said the Consul-General, with an indulgent smile, "that all the bad concomitants of an Oriental revolution are present, and that while you, my dear friend, have been holding your hand in the Soudan for fear of repeating the error of two thousand years ago—troubling yourself about Pontius Pilate and moral forces versus physical ones, and giving me the benefit of all the catchwords of your Christian socialism and Western democracy—a conspiracy of gigantic proportions has been gathering about us."

The Sirdar's usually ruddy face whitened, and he listened with a dumb, vague wonder while the Consul-General went on, with bursts of bitter humour, to describe one by one the means he had taken to defeat the enemies by whom they were surrounded.

"So you see, too," he said at last, lifting unconsciously his tired voice, "that by this time to-morrow we shall have defeated the worst conspiracy that has ever been made even in Egypt—meted out sternly retributive justice to the authors of it; put an end to all forms of resistance, whether passive or active, silenced all chatter about Nationalism and all prattle about representative institutions, destroyed the devilish machinery of this accursed Pan-Islamism, crushed the Khedive, and wiped out his fanatic-hypocrite and charlatan-mummer, Ishmael Ameer."

The Consul-General had spoken with such intensity, and the Sirdar had listened so eagerly, that down to that moment neither of them had been aware that another person was in the room. It was Fatimah, who was standing, with the death-like rigidity of a ghost, near to the door, in the half-light of the shaded electric lamps.

The Sirdar saw her first, and with a motion of his hand he indicated her presence to the Consul-General, who, with a face that was pale and stern, turned angrily round and asked the woman what she wanted, whereupon Fatimah, with trembling lips and a quivering voice, as if struggling with the spirit of falsehood, said she had only come to ask if the Sirdar intended to sleep there that night and whether she was to make up a bed for him.

"No, certainly not! Why should you think so? Go to bed yourself," said the Consul-General, and with obvious relief the woman turned to go.

"Wait!" he cried. "How long have you been in the room?"

"Only a little moment, oh my lord," replied Fatimah.

After that the two men went to the library, but some time passed before the conversation was resumed. The Sirdar lit a cigar and puffed in silence, while the Consul-General, who did not smoke, sat in an arm-chair with his wrinkled hands clasped before his breast. At length the Sirdar said—

"And all this came of Helena's letter from Khartoum?"

"Was suggested by it," said the Consul-General.

"You told me she was there, but I could not imagine what she was doing—what her errand was. Good heavens, what a revenge! It makes one shiver! Carries one back to another age!"

"A better age," said the Consul-General. "A more natural and less hypocritical age at all events."

"The age of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, perhaps—the age of a hot and consuming God."

"Yes, a God of wrath, a God of anger, a God who *did* something, not the pale, meek, forgiving, anæmic God of our day—a God who does nothing."

"The God of our day is at least a God of mercy, of pity, and of love," said the Sirdar.

"He is a lay figure, my friend, who permits wrong without avenging it—in short, no God at all, but an illogical, inconsequential, useless creature."

The Sirdar made no further resistance, and the Consul-General went on to defend Helena's impulse of vengeance by assailing the Christian spirit of forgiveness.

"There was at least something natural and logical as well as majestic and magnificent in the old ideal of Jehovah, but your new ideal of Jesus is contrary to nature and opposed to the laws of life. 'Love your enemies.' 'Do good to them that hate you.' 'If a man smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.' 'Resist not evil!' 'If any man take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also!' Impossible! Fatal! If this is Christianity, I am no Christian. When I am hit, I hit back. When I am injured, I demand justice. The only way! Any other would lead to the triumph of the worst elements in humanity. And what I do everybody else does—everybody—though the hypocrisy of the modern world will not permit people to admit it."

The Consul-General had risen and was tramping heavily across the room.

"Is there one man alive who will dare to say that he actually orders his life according to the precepts of Christ? If so, he is either a liar or a fool. As for the nations, look at the facts. Christianity has been two thousand years in the world,

yet here we are competing against each other in the building of warships, the imposition of tariffs, the union of trades. Why not? I say, why not?"

The Consul-General drew up and waited, but getting no answer he continued—

"Civilisation requires it—I say requires it. What holds the world together and preserves peace among the nations is not Christianity but cast-iron and gunpowder. Yet what vexes me and stirs my soul is to hear people praying in their churches for peace and concord, while all the time they know that 'peace and concord' is an impossible ideal, that Christianity in its first sense is dead, and that Jesus as a practical guide to life—as a practical guide to life, mind you—has *failed*."

Then the Sirdar lifted his eyes and said—

"Do you know, my dear Nuneham, I once heard somebody else talk like that, though from the opposite standpoint—of sympathy, not contempt."

"Who was it?"

"Your own son."

"Humph!"

The Consul-General frowned and there was silence again for some moments. When the conversation was resumed it concerned the dangers of the Arab Empire, which, according to the Grand Cadi, the Khedive (with the help of Ishmael) expected to found.

"What would it mean?" said the Consul-General. "The utter annihilation of the unbeliever. Does not the word 'Ghazi' signify a hero who slays the infidel? Does not every Mollah, when he recites the Khuttab in the mosque, invoke divine wrath on the non-Moslem? What then? The establishment of an Arab Empire would mean the revolt of the whole Eastern world against the Western world, and a return to all the brutality, all the intolerance of the farrago of moribund nonsense known as the Sacred Law."

The Sirdar made no reply, and after a moment the Consul-General said—

"Then think of the spectacle of a conquering Mohammedan army in Cairo! If the Citadel and the Arsenal of the capital could be occupied by that horde outside, it would not be merely England's power in Egypt that would be ended, or the English Empire as a world force that would be injured—it would be Western civilisation itself that would in the end be destroyed. The Mohammedans in India would think that what their brethren in Cairo had done they might do. The result would be incalculable chaos, unlimited anarchy, the turning back of the clock ten centuries."

The Consul-General returned to his seat, saying—

"No, no, my friend, a catastrophe so appalling as that cannot be left to chance, and if it is necessary to blow these fifty thousand fanatics out of the

mouths of guns rather than lay the fate of the world open to irretrievable ruin, I ... *I will do it.*"

"But all this depends on the truthfulness of the Grand Cadi's story—isn't it so?" asked the Sirdar.

The Consul-General bent his head.

"And the first test of its truthfulness is whether or not these thousands of Ishmael's followers are an armed force?"

Again the Consul-General bent his head.

"Well," said the Sirdar, rising and throwing away his cigar, "I am bound to tell you that I see no reason to think they are. More than that, I will not believe that when our boy took his serious step he would have sided with this White Prophet if he had suspected that the man's aims included an attack upon England's power in Egypt, and I cannot imagine for a moment that he could be fool enough not to know."

Again the Consul-General frowned, but the Sirdar went on firmly.

"I believe he thought and knew that Ishmael Ameer's propaganda was purely spiritual, the establishment of an era of universal peace and brotherhood, and that is a world-question having nothing to do with England or Egypt, or Arab Empires, except so far as—"

But the Consul-General, who was cut to the quick by the Sirdar's praise of Gordon, could bear no more.

"Only old women of both sexes look for an era of universal peace," he said testily.

"In that case," replied the Sirdar, "the old women are among the greatest of mankind—the Hebrew prophets, the prophets of Buddhism, of Islam, and of Christianity. And if that is going too far, then Abraham Lincoln and John Bright, and, to come closer home, your own son, as brave a man as ever drew a sword, a soldier too, the finest young soldier in the King's service, one who might have risen to any height if he had been properly handled, instead of being—"

But the old man, whose nostrils were swelling and dilating like the nostrils of a broken-winded horse, leapt to his feet and stopped him.

"Why will you continue to talk about my son?" he cried. "Do you wish to torture me? He allowed himself to become a tool in the hands of my enemies, yet you are accusing me of destroying his career and driving him away. You are—you know you are!"

"Ah, well! God grant everything may go right to-morrow," said the Sirdar after a while, and with that he rose to go.

It was now very late, and when Ibrahim, in the hall, with sleepy eyes, hardly able to keep himself from yawning, opened the outer door, the horses of the Sirdar's carriage, which had been waiting for nearly an hour, were heard stamping

impatiently on the gravel of the drive.

At the last moment the old man relented.

"Reg," he said, and his voice trembled, "forgive me if I have been rude to you. I have been hard hit and I must make a fight. I need not explain. Good-night!" And he had gone back to the library before the Sirdar could reply.

But after a while the unconquerable spirit and force of the man enabled him to regain his composure, and before going to bed he went up on to the roof to take a last look at the enemy he was about to destroy. There it lay in the distance, more than ever like a great serpent encircling the city on the south, for there was no moon, the night was very dark, and the dying fires of the sinuous camp at Sakkara made patches of white and black like the markings of a mighty cobra.

Fatimah was at his bedroom door, waiting to bring his hot water and to ask if he wanted anything else.

"Yes, I want you to go to bed," he replied, but the Egyptian woman, still dallying about the room and speaking with difficulty, wished to know if it was true, as the black boy had said, that Miss Helena was in Khartoum and that she had betrothed herself to the White Prophet.

"I don't know and I don't care—go to bed," said the Consul-General.

"Poor Gordon! My poor boy! *Wah! Wah!* Everything goes wrong with him. Yet he hadn't an evil thought in his heart."

"Go to bed, I tell you!"

It was even longer than usual before the Consul-General slept.

He thought of Helena. Where was she now? He had been telling himself all along that to save appearances she might find it necessary to remain for a while in Ishmael's camp, but surely she might have escaped by this time. Could it be possible that she was kept as a prisoner? Was there anything he ought to do for her?

Then he thought of the speech he was to make in proposing the King's health the following day, and framed some of the stinging, ironical sentences with which he meant to lash his enemies to the bone.

Last of all he thought of Gordon, as he always did when he was dropping off to sleep, and the only regret that mingled with his tingling sense of imminent triumph was that his son could not be present at the King's Dinner to see—what he would see!

"Oh, if I could have him there to-morrow night—what I would give for it!" he thought.

At length the Consul-General slept and his big desolate house was silent. If any human eye could have looked upon him as he lay on his bed that night, the old man with his lips sternly set, breathing fitfully, only the tired body overcome, the troubled brain still working, it would have been a pitiful thing to think that

he who was the virtual master of millions appeared to be himself the sport of those inscrutable demons of destiny which seem to toss us about like toys.

His power, his pride, his life-success—what had he gained by them? His wife dead; his son in revolt against him; alone, enfeebled, duped, and self-deluded.

God, what a little thing is man! He who for forty years had guided the ship of State, before whose word Ministers and even Khedives had trembled, could not see into the dark glass of the first few hours before him.

Peace to him—until to-morrow!

CHAPTER XIV

"SERAI FUM EL KHALIG, "CAIRO.

"MY DEAREST HELENA,—I am going to that dinner! Yes, as Ishmael Ameer in the disguise of the Sheikh Omar Benani, chief of the Ababdah, I am to be one of my father's guests.

"This is the morning of the day of the festivities, and from Hafiz, by the instrumentality of one who would live or die or give her immortal soul for me, I have at length learned all the facts of my father's *coup*.

"Did you ever hear of the incident of the Opera House? Well, this incident is to be a replica of that, though the parts to be played in the drama are in danger of being differently cast.

"As this is the last letter I shall be able to send to you before an event which may decide one way or other the fate of England in Egypt, my father's fate, Ishmael's, and perhaps yours and mine, I must tell you as much as I dare commit to paper.

"The British army, as I foresaw from the first, is being brought back to Cairo. It is to come in to-night as quietly as possible by the last trains arriving at Calioub. The Consul-General is to go to Ghezirah as if nothing were about to happen, but at the last moment, when his enemies have been gathered under one roof—Ministers, Diplomats, Notables, Ulema—when the operation of their plot has begun, and the bridge is drawn and the island is isolated, and Ishmael and his vast following are making ready to enter the city, my father is to speak over the telephone to the officer commanding at Abbassiah, and then the soldiers, with fifty rounds of ammunition, are to march into Cairo and line up in the streets.

"Such is my father's *coup*, and to make sure of the complete success of it—that Ishmael's following is on the move, and that no conspirator (myself above all) escapes—he has given orders to the Colonel not to stir one man out of the barracks until he receives his signal. Well, my work to-night is to see that he never receives it.

"Already you will guess what I am going to do. I must go to the dinner in order to do it, for both the central office of the telephone and the office of the telegraph are now under the roofs of the Ghezirah Palace and Pavilion.

"I hate to do the damnable thing, but it must be done. It must, it must! There is no help for it.

"I cannot tell you how hard it is to me to be engaged in a secret means to frustrate my father's plans—it is like fighting one's own flesh and blood, and is not fair warfare. Neither can I say what a struggle it has been to me as an English soldier to make up my mind to intercept an order of the British army—it is like playing traitor, and I can scarcely bear to think of it.

"But all the same I *know* it is necessary. I also know *God* knows it is necessary, and when I think of that my heart beats wildly.

"It is necessary to prevent the massacre which I know (and my father does not) would inevitably ensue; necessary to save my father himself from the execration of the civilised world; necessary to save Ishmael from the tragic consequences of his determined fanaticism; necessary to save England from the possible loss of her Mohammedan dominions, from being faithless to her duty as a Christian nation, and from the divine judgment which will overtake her if she wantonly destroys her great fame as the one Western power that seems designed by Providence to rule and to guide the Eastern peoples; and necessary above all to save the white man and the black man from a legacy of hatred that would divide them for another hundred years and put back the union of races and faiths for countless centuries.

"If I am not a vain fool this is what I (*D.V.*) have got to do, so why in the name of God need I trouble myself about the means by which I do it? And if I am the only man who can, I must, or I shall be a coward skulking out of his plain responsibility, and a traitor not only to England but to humanity itself.

"God does not promise me success, but I believe I shall succeed. Indeed I am so sure of success that I feel as if all the recent events of my life have been leading up to this one. What I felt when I left Cairo for Khartoum, and again when I left Khartoum for Cairo—that everything had been governed by higher powers which could not err—I feel now more than ever.

"If I had delivered myself up to the authorities after your father's death my life would have been wasted and thrown away. Nay, if I had obeyed orders over the blunder of El Azhar I should not have been where I am now—between

two high-spirited men who are blindly making for each other's ruin, and the destruction of all they stand for.

"This reconciles me to everything that has happened, and if I have to pay the penalty of playing buffer I am ready to do so. I have great trust that God will bring me out all right, but if that is not His plan, then so be it. I am willing to give my life for England, whatever name she may know me by when she comes to see what I have done, and I am willing to die for these poor Egyptians, because I was born and brought up among them, and I cannot help loving them.

"Death has no terrors for me anyway. I think the experiences of the past months have taught me all that death has to teach. In fact I feel at this moment exactly as I have felt at the last charge in battle, when, fighting against frightful odds, it has not been a case of every man for himself, but of God for us all.

"Besides I feel that on the day of your father's death I died to myself—to my selfish hopes of life, I mean—and if God intends to crush me in order that I may save my country and these people whom I love and who love me I really wish and long for Him to do so.

"But *In-sha-allah!* It will be as God pleases, and I believe from the bottom of my heart that He is working out His wonderful embroidery of events to a triumphant issue. So don't be afraid, my dear Helena, whatever occurs to-night. I may be taken, but (*D.V.*) I shall not be taken in disgrace. In any case I feel that my hour has come—the great hour that I have been waiting for so long.

"This may be the last letter I shall write to you, so I am sending it by Mosie, lest Hamid should find a difficulty in getting into your camp. I hope to God you may get it, for I want you to know that my last thoughts are about yourself.

"Upon my soul, dear, I believe the end will be all right, but if it is to be otherwise, and we are to be separated, and our lives in this world are to be wasted, remember that deep love bridges death.

"Remember, too, what you said to me at Khartoum. 'I am a soldier's daughter,' you said, 'and in my heart I am a soldier's wife as well, and I shouldn't be worthy to be either if I didn't tell you to do your duty, whatever the consequences to me.'

"Good-bye, my dear, my dear! If anything happens you will know what to do. I trust you without fear. I have always trusted you. I can say it now, at this last moment—never, dearest, never for one instant has the shadow of a doubt of you entered into my heart. My brave girl, my love, my life, my Helena!

"May the great God of Heaven bless and protect you!

"GORDON.

"P.S.—Oh, how the deuce did I forget? There is something for you to do—

something important—and I had almost sent off my letter without saying anything about it.

”Do you remember that on the day I left Khartoum it was ordered by Ishmael that after the call of the muezzin to midnight prayers, a light was to be set up in the minaret of the mosque of Mohammed Ali as a sign that he might enter the city in peace?

”Well, if I fail and the British army comes into Cairo Ishmael must be kept out of it. He may be stubborn—a man who thinks God guides and protects him and makes a special dispensation for him is not easy to dissuade—but if the light does not appear he *must* be restrained.

”That is your work with Ishmael—why you are with him still. I knew it would be revealed to us some day. Once more, my dear, my dear, God bless and protect you!”

CHAPTER XV

”UNDER THE PYKAMIDS.

”MY DEAR GORDON,—Your letter has not yet reached me. What has happened? Has your messenger been caught? Who was it? Was it Hamid?

”Not having heard from you, I was of course compelled to come on with the camp and therefore I am with it still. We are under the shadow of the pyramids, with the mud-built village of Sakkara by our side and Cairo in front of us, beyond the ruins of old Memphis and across a stretch of golden sand.

”This is, it seems, the day of ‘the King’s Dinner,’ and at sunset when the elephant-horn was blown for the last time we gathered for prayers under a sea-blue sky on the blood-red side of the Step Pyramid.

”It was a splendid, horrible, inspiring, depressing, devilish, divine spectacle. First, Ishmael recited from the Koran the chapter about the Prophet’s great vision (the Surat er Russoul, I think), while the people on their knees in the shadow, with the sun slanting over their heads, shouted their responses. Then in rapturous tones he spoke, and though I was on the farthest verge of the vast crowd I heard nearly all he said.

”They had reached their journey’s end, and had to thank God who had brought them so far without the loss of a single life. Soon they were to go into

Cairo, the Mecca of the new world, but they were to enter it in the spirit of love, not hate, of peace, not war, doing violence to none and raising no rebellion. What said the Holy Koran? 'Whosoever among Moslems, Christians or Jews believe in God and in another life shall be rewarded.'

"Therefore let no man think they were come to turn the Christians out of Egypt. They were there on a far higher errand—to turn the devil out of the world! The intolerance and bitterness of past ages had been the product of hatred and darkness. The grinding poverty and misery of the present age was the result of a false faith and civilisation. But they were come to bring universal peace, universal brotherhood, and universal religion to all nations and races and creeds—one State, one Faith, one Law, one God!

"Cairo was the gate to the East. It was also the gate to the West. He who held the keys of that gate was master of the world. Who, then, should hold them but God's own, His Guided One, His Expected One, His Christ?

"More and yet more of this kind Ishmael said in his thrilling, throbbing voice, and of course the people greeted every sentence with shouts of joy. And then finally, pointing to the minarets of the mosque of Mohammed Ali, far off on the Mokattam hills, he told them that at midnight, after the call to prayers, a light was to shine there, and they were to take it for a sign that they might enter Cairo without injury to any and with goodwill towards all.

"Watch for that light, O my brothers! It will come! As surely as the sun will rise on you to-morrow, that light will shine on you to-night!"

"It is now quite dark and the camp is in a delirious state of excitement. The scene about my tent is simply terrifying. At one side there is an immense Zikr, with fifty frantic creatures crying 'Allah!' to a leader who in wild guttural tones is reciting the ninety-nine attributes of God. At the other side there is a huge fire at which a group of men, having slaughtered a sheep, are boiling it in a cauldron, with many pungent herbs, that they may feast and rejoice together in honour of the coming day. People are sitting in circles and singing hymns of victory; tambourines, kettle-drums, and one-stringed lutes are being played everywhere, and strolling singers are going about from fire to fire making up songs that describe Ishmael's good looks, and good deeds, and his 'divinity'—the wildest ditty being the most applauded.

"Where Ishmael himself is I do not know, but he must indeed be carried away by religious ecstasy if he is not trembling at the mere thought of to-morrow morning. What is to happen if these 'Allah-intoxicated Arabs' have to meet five thousand British bayonets? Or, supposing you can obviate that, what is to occur when they are compelled to realise that all their high-built hopes are in the dust? O God! O God!

II

"El Hamdullillah! Your letter has come at last! Perhaps I wish it hadn't been Mosie who brought it, but the boy was clever in riding into the camp unobserved, and now I have sent him outside to hide in the darkness while I scribble a few lines in reply. He is to come back presently, and meantime, please God, he will keep out of the sight of that she-cat of an Arab woman.

"You are doing right, darling—I am sure you are! Naturally you must be troubled with thoughts about England and your father, but both will yet see what motives inspired you, and whatever they do now they will eventually make amends.

"Bravo, my boy, bravo! Perhaps we shall all become Quakers some day, but let the peace-people croak as they please, it is war that brings out the truly heroic virtues, and though you are trying to prevent bloodshed you are really going into battle. Go, then, and God bless you!

"What wretched ink this is—it must have got mixed with water.

"Oh yes, certainly! I will stay here to the end, and if occasion arises I will do what you desire, though I have not the faintest hope of succeeding. The fact is that even if I could persuade Ishmael not to enter Cairo the people would not under any circumstances be restrained.

"To tell you the truth, I cannot help feeling sorry for him. He really began with the highest aims and the strongest common sense, but he has become the victim of his people's idolatry, and, being made an idol, he may no longer be a man.

"I cannot help feeling sorry for the people also, for I suppose they have only tried in their blind way to realise the dream of humanity in all ages, the dream of all the holy books and all the great prophets—the dream of a millennium.

"It seems, too, as if God, who puts beautiful ideals in people's hearts, always calls for a scapegoat to pay the price of them. That is what you are to be, dear, and when I think of what you are going to do to save these poor people I begin to see for the first time what is meant by the sacrificial blood of Christ.

"I suppose this is shocking, but I don't care a pin about that. Every heroic man who risks his life for his fellow-man is doing what Christ did. You are doing it, and I don't believe the good God will ask any question about ways and means.

"There! That's something out of my eyes splash on to the very point of my pen. Don't take it as a mark of weakness, though, but as the sign-manual of Helena's heart telling you to go on without thinking about her.

"Forget what I said about my Jewish blood and Jezebel and all that nonsense. Ishmael's 'work' will not be 'finished' until he enters into Cairo, so I run

no risk while I am here, you see.

"Of course I am in a fever of impatience to know what is happening on Ghezirah to-night, but you must not suppose that I am afraid. In any case, I shall stay here, having no longer the faintest thought of running away, and if there is anything to do I'll do it.

"This *may* be the last letter I am to write to you, so good-bye, my Gordon, and God bless you again! My dear, my dear, my dear! HELENA.

"P.S.—I suppose you are in the thick of it by this time, for I see that the illuminations on Ghezirah have already begun. My dear, my dear, my ... my—"

CHAPTER XVI

At eight o'clock that night the Pavilion of the Ghezirah Palace was brilliantly lit up for the "King's Dinner." A troop of British cavalry was mounted in front of it under the sparkling lights that swung from the tall palms of the garden, and a crowd of eager spectators were waiting to see the arrival of the guests.

The Consul-General came early, driving in his open carriage with two gorgeously clad saises running before him. When he stepped down at the door, in his cocked hat, laced coat, and gold-braided trousers, he was saluted like a sovereign. The band of a British regiment under the trees played some bars of the National Anthem, and the English onlookers cheered.

In the open court of the Pavilion, which was walled about by Oriental hangings, the Consul-General's own people were waiting to receive him. His old and weakened but still massive and even menacing personality showed out strongly against the shadowy forms of some of the Advisers and Under-Secretaries who stood behind him.

It was quickly seen that his manner was less brusque and masterful than usual, but that his tone was cynical and almost bitter. When his First Secretary stepped up to him and whispered that a Reuter's telegram, which had just come, announced that the Khedive had left Paris for Marseilles intending to take steamer for Egypt, he was heard to say—

"I don't care a — what the Khedive does or what he intends to do. Let him wait until to-morrow."

The Sirdar was one of the first of the guests to arrive, and after saying in a low tone that he had just taken the necessary steps to withdraw the ammunition

from the native troops, he whispered—

”The great thing is to keep calm—not to allow yourself to lose your temper.”

”I *am* calm, perfectly calm,” said the Consul-General.

Then the other guests came in quick succession, Envoys Extraordinary, Ministers-Plenipotentiary, Chancellors and Counsellors of Legation and Attachés, wearing all their orders; Barons, Counts, and Marquises—attired magnificently in a prodigious quantity of pad and tailor-work, silk stockings, white, blue, and red, coats with frogs and fur collars, stars, ribbons, silver shoe-buckles, tight breeches, and every conceivable kind of uniform and court-dress.

Among the diplomatic corps came Egyptian Ministers wearing the tarboosh and many decorations; the Turkish High Commissioner, a gorgeous and expansive person; a Prince of the Khedivial house, a long miscellaneous line of Pashas and Beys, and finally a few of the Ulema in their turbans and flowing Eastern robes.

The Consul-General received them all with smiles, and it was said afterwards that never before had he seemed to be so ceremoniously polite.

There was a delay in announcing dinner, and people were beginning to ask who else was expected, when the First Secretary was seen to approach the host and to say something which only he could hear. A moment later the venerable Chancellor of El Azhar entered the hall in his simple grey farageeyah, accompanied by a tall, strong, upright man in the ample folds of a Bedouin Sheikh, and almost immediately afterwards the guests went into the dining-hall.

Dinner was served by Arab waiters in white, and while the band in the gardens outside played selections from the latest French operas, some of the European guests consumed a prodigious deal of fermented liquor, and buzzed and twittered and fribbled in the manner of their kind. The Egyptian Ministers and Pashas were less at ease and the Ulema were obviously constrained, but the Consul-General himself, though he continued to smile and to bow, was the most preoccupied person in the room.

He passed dish after dish, eating little and drinking nothing, though his tongue was dry and his throat was parched. From time to time he looked about him with keen eyes, as if counting up the number of those among his guests who had conspired against him. There they were, nearly all of them, his secret enemies, his unceasing revilers, his heartless and treacherous foes. But wait! Only wait! He would soon see their confusion!

The Sirdar, who sat on the left of the host, seemed to be conscious of the Consul-General’s impatience, and he whispered again—

”The great thing is to be calm—perfectly calm.”

”I *am* calm,” said the Consul-General, but in a tone of anger which belied his words.

Towards the end of the dinner his Secretary stepped up to the back of his chair and whispered to him that the bridge had been opened, and after that his impatience increased visibly, until the last dish had been served, the waiters had left the room, the band outside had ceased playing, and the toast-master had called silence for the first toast. Then in an instant all impatience, all nervousness, all anxiety disappeared, and the Consul-General rose to propose "The King."

Never had any one heard such a bitter, ironical, biting speech. Every word stung, every sentence cut to the bone.

He began by telling his guests how happy he was to welcome them in that historic hall, "sacred to the memory of the glories of Ismail Pasha, whose princely prodigality brought Egypt to bankruptcy." Then he assured them that he took their presence there that night as a cordial recognition of what Great Britain had done through forty hard and sleepless years to rescue the Valley of the Nile from financial ruin and moral corruption. Next, he reminded them that England was now reaping the results of the education it had given the country, and among these results were certain immature efforts to found Western institutions on Eastern soil, not to speak of secret conspiracies to embarrass, disturb, and even destroy her rule in Egypt altogether.

"But I am glad to realise," he said in a withering tone, "that all such attempts to carry the country back from civilisation to barbarism have been repelled by the best elements in the community, European and Egyptian alike, and especially by the illustrious leaders by whom I am now surrounded."

Then his eyes flashed like the eyes of an old eagle, while, amid breathless silence, in the husky voice that came from his dry throat, turning from side to side, he thanked his guests, class by class, for the help they had given to the representative of the King in putting down political and religious fanaticism.

"Gentlemen of the diplomatic corps," he said, "you are satisfied with what England has done for Egypt, and you do not wish to see her rule disturbed. Between you and ourselves there are no animosities, no selfish interests to serve, no hostile groupings, no rival combinations. Knowing that we are the joint trustees of civilisation in a backward Eastern country, nothing could induce you so to act as if you wanted Egypt for yourselves. Gentlemen, in the name of the King, I thank you!"

Turning then to the Egyptian Ministers, he said in tones of blistering irony—

"Your Excellencies, it seems idle to thank you for your loyalty to the nation by whose power you live. You are far too intelligent not to see that a man cannot set fire to his house and yet hope to preserve it from being burnt to the ground, far too sensible of your own interests to listen to the extremists who would tear to pieces the country you govern and give it back to bankruptcy and

ruin. Gentlemen, in the name of the King, I thank you.”

Then facing the Notables he said, with a curl of his firm lip—

”It might perhaps be thought that you, of all others, had least reason to be grateful to the Power that took the *courbash* out of your hands, and deprived you of the advantages of forced labour; but you do not want to regain the powers you once held over the great unmoving masses of the people; you are willing to see all false ledgers showing unjust debts burnt in the public squares with your whips and instruments of the bastinado. Therefore, gentlemen, in the name of the King, I thank you.”

Finally, looking down the middle table to where the Chancellor of El Azhar sat with his Bedouin friend beside him, he said—

”And your Eminences of the Ulema, I thank you also. Your enemies sometimes say that you continue to live in the Middle Ages, but you are much too keenly alive to your interests in the present hour not to realise how necessary it is to you to be assured for the future against the possible recurrence of Mahdist raids and revolutions. You know that the hydra-headed monster called fanaticism would destroy you and your class, and therefore you support with all the loyalty of your eager hearts the Power which in the interests of true religion would crush and quell it. Gentlemen, in the name of the King, I thank you.”

The effect of the speech was paralysing. As, one by one, the Consul-General spoke to the classes represented by his guests, there was not a response, not a sound, nothing but silence in the room, with white faces and quivering lips on every side.

At length the Consul-General raised his glass and, in a last passage of withering sarcasm, called on the company to drink to the great sovereign of the great nation which, with the cordial sympathy and united help of the whole community, as represented by those who were there present, had done so much for civilisation and progress in the East—”The King!”

They could not help themselves—they rose, a lame, halting, half-terrified company, getting up irregularly, with trembling hands and pallid cheeks, and repeated after the toast-master in nervous, faltering, broken voices, ”The King!”

After the speaker sat down there was a subdued murmur which rose by degrees to a sort of muffled growl. The Consul-General heard it, and his keen eyes flashed around the company. Down to this moment he had done no more than he intended to do, but now, carried away by the excitement created within himself by his own speech, he wished to throw off all disguise, and fling out at everybody.

”Better be calm, though,” he thought, remembering the Sirdar’s advice, and at the next moment the Sirdar himself, whom he had missed from his side, returned and said, in a whisper—

"Afraid I must go. Just heard that some of the Egyptian soldiers have been knocking down the officers who were sent to remove their ammunition."

At that news, which appeared to confirm predictions and to be the beginning of everything he had been led to expect, the Consul-General lost all control of himself.

"Wait! Wait a little and we'll go together," he whispered back, and then, calling for silence, he rose to his feet again and faced full upon his guests.

"Your Highness, your Eminences, your Excellencies, and Gentlemen," he said in a loud voice, "I have one more toast. I have given you the health of the King, and now I give you 'Confusion to his Enemies.'"

If a bomb had fallen in the dining-hall it could scarcely have made more commotion. The Consul-General saw this and smiled.

"Yes, gentlemen, I say his enemies, and when I speak of the King's enemies, I refer to his enemies in Egypt, his enemies in this room."

The sensation produced by these words was compounded of many emotions. To such of the guests as were entirely innocent of conspiracy it seemed plainly evident that a kind of mental vertigo had seized the Consul-General. One of them looked round for a doctor, another rose from his seat with the intention of stepping up to the speaker, while a third took out his gold pencil-case and began to scribble a note to the Sirdar, asking him, as the best friend of their host, to remove the Consul-General from the room.

On the other hand, the persons who were actually participating in conspiracy had, by operation of that inscrutable instinct which compels guilty men to expose themselves, risen to their feet, and were loudly shouting their protests.

"Untrue!" "Disgraceful!" "False!" "Utterly false!"

"False, is it?" said the Consul-General. "We shall see."

Then glancing over them one by one as they stood about him, his eye fixed itself first upon a foreign representative whose breast was covered with decorations, and he said—

"Baron, did you not say in the Salon of a certain Princess that out of your Secret Service money you were providing arms for the Egyptian populace?"

The Baron gave a start of surprise, made some movement of the lips as if trying to reply, and sank back to his seat. Then the Consul-General turned to one of two Egyptian Ministers who, with faces as red as their tarbooshes, were standing side by side, and said—

"Pasha, will you deny that as recently as yesterday you sent somebody to me in secret to say that while you were innocent of conspiracy against British rule, your colleague, who stands at your right, was deeply guilty?"

The Pasha stammered out some confused words and collapsed.

Then the Consul-General faced down to one of the Ulema, the Grand Mufti,

who, in his white turban and graceful robes, was trying his best to smile, and said—

”Your Eminence, can it be possible that you were not present at the house of the Chancellor of El Azhar when a letter was sent to a certain visionary mummer then in the Soudan, asking him to return to Cairo in order to draw off the allegiance of the Egyptian army?”

The smile passed in a flash from the Grand Mufti’s face, and he, too, dropped back to his seat. Then one by one the others who had been standing, slithered down to their places, as if each of them was in fear that some secret he had whispered in the salon, the harem or the mosque, would in like manner be blurted from the housetops.

The Consul-General swept the whole company with a look of triumph and said—

”You see, gentlemen, I know everything, and it is useless to deny. In order to overthrow the authority of England in Egypt you have condescended to the arts of anarchists—you have joined together to provoke rebellion against law and order.”

All this time the Sirdar’s face had been stamped with an expression of sadness, and now he was seen to be addressing the Consul-General in a few low-toned words, but his warning, if such it were, seemed to be quite unheeded. With increasing excitement and intense bitterness the Consul-General turned hotly upon the foreign representatives and said—

”Gentlemen of the diplomatic corps, joint trustees with me of peace and civilisation in a backward country, you thought you were using the unrest of the Egyptians to serve your own ends, but listen, and I will tell you what you were really doing.”

Then, more fiercely than ever, his face aflame, his hoarse voice breaking into harsh cries, he disclosed his knowledge of the Egyptian plot as he understood it to be—how the final aim, the vast and luminous fact to which all Moslem energies were directed, was the establishment of an Arab Empire which should have for its first purpose to resist the Christian nations; how this Empire had originated in the mind of the Khedive, who wished to put himself at the head of it; and how, since it was necessary in an Eastern country to give a religious colour to political intriguing, Ishmael Ameer, the mock Mahdi, the fanatic-hypocrite, had been employed to intimidate the British authorities by bringing up the scourings of the Soudan to their very doors.

This fell on the whole company, innocent and guilty, like a thunderclap.

The great Proconsul, the strong and practical intellect which had governed the State so long, had been deceived on the main issue, had been fooled, and was fighting a gigantic phantom!

"Is this news to you, gentlemen of the diplomatic corps? Ask your friends, the Ulema! Is it news to you, too, gentlemen of El Azhar? Ask your Grand Cadi! But that is not all. You have had no scruples, no shame! In hitting at England you have not hesitated to hit at England's servant—myself. You have hit me where I could least bear the blow. By lies, by hypocrisies, by false pretences you have got hold of my son, my only son, my only relative, all that was left to me ... the one in whom my hopes in life were centred and—"

Here the old man's voice faltered, and it was afterwards remembered that at this moment the Bedouin Sheikh rose in obvious agitation, made some steps forward, and then stopped.

At the next instant the Consul-General had recovered himself, and, with increasing strength and still greater ferocity, was hurling his last reproaches upon his enemies.

[image]

The Consul-General was hurling his last reproaches upon his enemies

"But you are mistaken, gentlemen. I may be old but I am not yet helpless. In the interests not only of England but of Europe I have made all necessary preparations to defeat your intrigues, and now—now I am about to put them into execution."

Saying this he left his seat and directed his steps towards the door. Nearly the whole of the company rose at the same moment, and all stood aside to let him pass. Nobody spoke, nobody made a gesture. In that room there were now no longer conspirators and non-conspirators. There were only silent spectators of a great tragedy. Everybody felt that an immense figure was passing from the world's stage, and none would have been more surprised if the Pyramid of Gizeh had crumbled before their eyes.

On reaching the door the Consul-General stopped and spoke again, but with something of his old courageous calm.

"I understand," he said, "that it was part of the plan that to-night at midnight, while the British army was expected to be on the Delta, and I and my colleagues were to be held prisoners on Ghezirah, the horde of armed fanatics now lying outside on the desert were to enter and occupy the city. That was a foolish scheme, gentlemen, such as could only have been conceived in the cobwebbed brains of El Azhar. But whatever it was I must ask you to abide by its consequences. In the interests of peace and of your own safety you will remain

on this island until to-morrow, and in the morning you shall see ... what you shall see!"

Then saying something in a low voice to the Commandant of Police who was standing near, he passed out of the dining-hall and the door was closed behind him.

CHAPTER XVII

A few minutes afterwards the military band in the garden was playing again, red and white rockets were shooting into the dark sky from the grounds of the Khedivial Sports Club, and the Consul-General was entering the little insular telephone office of Ghezirah, which was under the same roof as the Pavilion.

"Call me up the Colonel commanding at Abbassiah and ask him to hold the line."

"Yes, my lord."

While the attendant put in the plug of his machine and waited for a reply, the Consul-General walked nervously to and fro between the counter and the door. He was expecting the Commandant of Police to come to him in a moment with news of the arrest of Ishmael Ameer. Without this certainty (though he had never had an instant's doubt of it) he could not allow himself to proceed to the last and most serious extremity.

"Not got him yet?"

"Not yet, my lord," said the attendant, and he plugged his machine afresh.

The Consul-General resumed his restless perambulation. He was by no means at ease about the unpremeditated developments of the scene in the dining-hall, but he had always intended to make sure that his enemies were safely housed on the island, and thereby cut off from the power of making further mischief, before he ordered the army into the city. The plugging of the machine was repeated.

"Not got him even yet, boy?"

"Cannot get an answer from the Central in Cairo, my lord."

"Try yet another line. Quick!"

The Consul-General thought the Commandant was long in coming, but no doubt the police staff had removed the supposed "Bedouin" to a private room, so that in making his arrest, and in stripping off his disguise to secure evidence of his identity, there might be no unnecessary commotion, no vulgar sensation.

The plugging of the machine ceased.

"Got him at last?"

"No, my lord. Think there must be something wrong with the wires."

"The wires?"

"They seem to have been tampered with."

"You mean—cut?"

"Afraid they are, my lord."

"Then the island—so far as the telephone goes—the island is isolated?"

"Yes, my lord."

The old man's face, which had been flushed, became deadly pale, and his stubborn lower lip began to tremble.

"Who can have done this? Who? Who?"

The attendant, terrified by the fierce eye that looked into his face, was answering with a vacant stare and a shake of the head when the Sirdar entered the office, accompanied by the Commandant of Police, and both were as white as if they had seen a ghost.

"Well, what is it now?" demanded the Consul-General, whereupon the Sirdar answered—

"The Commandant's men have got him, but—"

"But—what?"

"It is not Ishmael Ameer."

"Not Ishma ... you say it is not Ish—"

The Consul-General stopped, and for a long moment he stared in silence into the blanched faces before him. Then he said sharply, "Who is it?"

The Commandant dropped his head and the Sirdar seemed unwilling to reply.

"Who is it, then?"

"It is ... it is a British officer."

"A British ... you say a British—"

"A Colonel."

The old man's lips moved as if he were repeating the word without uttering it.

"His tunic was torn where his decorations had been. He looked like ... like a man who might have been degraded."

The Consul-General's face twitched, but in a fierce, almost ferocious voice he said, "Speak! Who is it?"

There was another moment of silence, which seemed to be eternal, and then the Sirdar replied—

"Nuneham, it is your own son."

CHAPTER XVIII

"From the Slave of the Most High, Abdul Ali, Chancellor of El Azhar, to Ishmael Ameer, the Messenger of God—Praise be to Him, the Exalted One!

"A word in haste to say that he who came here as your missionary and representative has within the hour been arrested by the officials of the Government, having, so far as we can yet learn and surmise, been most treacherously and maliciously betrayed into their hands by means of a letter to the English lord from one who stands near to you in your camp.

"In sadness and tears, with faces bowed to the earth and ashes on our heads, we send our sympathy to you and to your stricken followers, entreating you on our knees, in the name of the Compassionate, not to attempt to carry out your design of coming into Cairo, lest further and more fearful calamities should occur.

"This by swift and trusty messenger to your hands at Sakkara.—The Slave of your Virtues,

"ABDUL ALI."

END OF FOURTH BOOK

FIFTH BOOK

THE DAWN
CHAPTER I

The day that Ishmael had looked for, longed for, prayed for—the day that was to see the fulfilment not only of his spiritual hopes but of his rapturous dream of bliss, the day of his return to Cairo—had come at last.

But the Ishmael Ameer who was returning to Cairo was by no means the same man as the Ishmael who had gone away. In a few short months he had become a totally different person. Two forces had changed him—two forces which in their effect were one.

By the operation of the first of these forces he had become more of a mystic; by the operation of the second he had become more of a man; by the operation of both together he had become a creature who was controlled by his emotions alone.

When he left Cairo he had been a man of elevated spirit but of commanding common sense. He had looked upon himself as one whose sole work was to call men back to God and to righteousness. But little by little the tyranny of outward events, the pressure of responsibility, and, above all, the heartfelt and prostrate but dim and perverted adulation of his followers, had led him to believe that he was a being apart, specially directed by the Almighty and even permitted to be His mouthpiece.

Insensibly Ishmael had come to look upon himself as a "Son of God." When he first saw that the crowds who came to him from east and west were beginning to believe that he was the Redeemer, the Deliverer, the Expected One whom he foretold, he was shocked, and he protested. But when he perceived that this belief helped him to comfort and console and direct them, he ceased to deny; and when he realised that it was necessary to his people's confidence that they should think that he who guided them was himself guided by God, he permitted himself, by his silence, to acquiesce.

From allowing others to believe in his divinity, he had come to believe in it himself. His burning, boundless influence over his people had seemed to his deep heart to be only intelligible as a thing given to him from Heaven, and then the "miracle" in the desert, the raising of the Sheikh's daughter from the dead, had swept down the last of his scruples. God had given him supernatural powers and made him the mouthpiece of His will.

And now, at the end of his pilgrimage, if he did not accept the idea that he was in very fact the Redeemer who was to bring in the golden age, the Kingdom of God, he succumbed to a delusion that was nearly akin to it—that just as the lord of the Christians, being condemned by the Roman Governor, had permitted another to take his form and face and bodily presence and to die on the cross instead of him, so the Messiah, the Mahdi, the Christ who was to come, was now using him as His substitute to lead and control His poor, oppressed, and helpless people until the time came for Him to appear in His own person.

Such was the operation of the force that had made Ishmael more of a mystic; and the force that had made him more of a man had been playing in the same way upon his heart.

It had played upon him through Helena.

When Helena entered into his life and he betrothed himself to her, he honestly believed that he was doing no more than protecting her good name. For some time afterwards he continued to deceive himself, but the constant presence of a beautiful woman by his side produced its effect, and little by little he came to know that his heart was touched.

As soon as he became conscious of this he remembered the vow he had made when his Coptic slave-wife died, that no other woman should take her place, and he also reminded himself of his mission, his consecration to the welfare of humanity. But the more he tried to crush his affection for Helena, the more it grew.

He was like a boy in the first beautiful morning light of love. The moment he was alone, after parting from Helena at the door of her sleeping-room, he would kiss the hand that had touched her hand, and find a tingling joy in stepping afresh over the places on which her feet had trod. A glance from her beaming eyes made his pulse beat rapidly, and when, one day, he saw her combing out her hair, with her round white arm bare to the elbow, his breathing came quick and loud.

His passion was like a flower which had sprung up in the parched place of the desert of his desolate soul, and everything that Helena did seemed to water it. Reading her conduct by the only light he had, he thought she loved him. Had she not followed him from India, breaking from her own people to live by his side? Had she not betrothed herself to him without a thought of any other than spiritual joys?

Her pride in him, too, was no less than her affection. Had she not proposed that he should go into Cairo in advance, because that being the place of the greatest danger was the place of highest honour also? In her womanly jealousy for her husband's rank, had she not resisted and resented the substitution of another when it was decided by the Sheikhs that "Omar" should go instead? And, notwithstanding her illness at Khartoum, had she not insisted on following him across the desert and, weak as she was, enduring the pains of his pilgrimage in order to continue by his side?

Allah bless and cherish her! Was there anything in the world so good as a sweet, unselfish, devoted woman?

During the journey Ishmael's love for Helena grew hour by hour until it filled his whole being, and made his wild heart a globe of infinite radiance and hope. Her beauty, her gifts of mind as well as of body, took complete possession

of him. Whenever he saw her, everything brightened up. Whenever he turned on his camel, and caught sight of her dromedary at the tail of the caravan, he became excited. Whenever evil things befell, he had only to think of the Rani and his troubles died away. All that was good and beautiful in the world seemed to centre in the litter that held her by day and in the tent that covered her by night.

Then, in spite of his mission and the burden of his work, he began to remember that all this loveliness, all this sweetness, belonged *to him*. The Rani was *his wife*, and he could not help but think of the possibility of nearer relations between them.

When this thought first came to him he repelled it as a species of treachery. Had he not pledged himself to a spiritual union? Would it not be wrong to break that pledge—wrong to the Rani, wrong to his own higher nature, wrong to God?

But, nevertheless, the temptation to claim the rights of a husband became stronger day by day, and he struggled to reconcile his faith with his affection. He reminded himself that renunciation was no part of Islam, that it was a Christian error, that "monkery" had been condemned by the Prophet, that it was contrary to the clear law of nature, and that as soon as his task was finished it was his duty to live a human life, with woman and with children.

This seemed to solve the Sphinx-like problem of existence, but when he tried to talk of it to the Rani, in order to break the ground with her, his tongue would not utter the words that were in his heart, and something made him stop in confusion and hasten away.

Yet his self-denial only intensified his desire. Keeping away from Helena by day, he was with her in his dreams by night. One rapturous, incredible, almost impossible and even terrible dream of bliss was always stirring within him. A little longer, only a little longer. The hour in which he would lay down his task as leader, as prophet, would be the hour in which he would take up his new life as a man.

That hour was now near. He was outside the gates of Cairo. Nothing would, nothing could, intervene at this last stage to prevent him from entering the city, and once within, his work would be at an end. O God, how good it was to live!

All that day at Sakkara, Ishmael had been in the highest state of religious exaltation, and when night came he walked about the camp as if demented both in heart and brain.

The camp stretched from the hanks of the Nile at Bedrasheen over the black ruins of Memphis to the broad sands before the Step Pyramid, and everywhere the people sat in groups about their fires, eating, drinking, playing their pipes, tambourines and drums, and singing, to tunes that were like wild dance music, their songs of rejoicing.

They were singing about himself, his wise words, his miracles, his miraculous birth (born of a virgin), his good looks, which made all women love him, and his divinity, which would save him from death. Ishmael heard this, yet he had no misgivings, no fear of what the coming day would bring forth. A sort of spiritual lightning blinded him to possible danger, and his heart swelled with love for his people. God bless them! God bless everybody! Bless East and West, white man and black man, sons of one Father, soon to be united in one hope, one love, one faith!

Ishmael felt as if he wanted to take the whole world in his arms. Above all, he wanted to take the Rani in his arms. It was not that the lower man, the animal man, was conquering the higher man, the spiritual man, but that both body and soul were aflame, that a sense of fierce joy filled his whole being at the thought of entering into a new life, and that he wished to find physical expression for it.

Before he was aware of what he was doing, he was walking in the direction of Helena's tent. Striding along in the darkness, which was slashed here and there with shafts of light from the camp fires, he approached the tent from the back, the mouth being towards the city. Close behind it, he stumbled upon some one who was crouching there. It was a boy, and he rose hastily and hurried away without speaking, being followed immediately by a woman who seemed to have been watching him.

Ishmael's heart was beating so violently by this time that he had only a confused impression of having seen this, and at the next instant, treading softly on the silent sand, he was in front of the tent, looking at Helena, who was within.

She was sitting on her camp-bed, her angerib, writing on a pad that rested upon her lap, by the light of a lamp which hung from the pole that upheld the canvas. Though her face was down, Ishmael could see that it was suffused by a rosy blush, and when at one moment she raised her head, her bright and shining eyes seemed to him to be wet with tears, but full, nevertheless, of joy and love.

Ishmael thought he knew what she was doing. She was thinking of him, and writing, as she loved to do, the immortal story of his pilgrimage, happy in the near approach of his great triumph.

Standing in the darkness to look at her, he could hardly restrain himself any longer. He wanted to burst in upon her and to be alone with her.

Behind and about him were the lights of the camp and its many sounds of rejoicing, but he did not see or hear them now. His heart was afire. He was intoxicated with love. What had been for so long his almost unconquerable dream of bliss was about to be fulfilled.

"Rani!" he whispered, in a quivering voice, and then, plunging into the tent, he caught her up in his arms.

CHAPTER II

Half blind with tears which belied her brave words, Helena had been writing the letter to Gordon which Mosie was waiting to take away. She had told him not to think of her, for she was quite able to take care of herself whatever happened. Then wiping the tears from her eyes, she had smiled as she told him to forget the nonsense she had written about Jezebel and her Jewish blood, and to remember that until Ishmael's work was "finished" and he entered Cairo she ran no risk by remaining in his camp.

She had got thus far when she thought she heard a step on the sand outside, but raising her eyes to look and seeing nothing except the red and white stars from the rockets that rained through the air at Ghezirah, she resumed her letter, telling herself, as she did so, that if the worst came to the worst and matters reached an unexpected crisis with Ishmael, she could defeat him again, as she had done before, by diplomacy, by finesse, and by woman's wit.

"I suppose you are in the thick of it by this time, for I see that the illuminations at Ghezirah have already begun. My dear, my dear, my—"

Her last word was not yet written when she heard Ishmael's tremulous whisper of the name he knew her by, and, starting up as if she had received an electric shock, she saw the Egyptian coming into her tent with the glittering eyes of one who was about to accomplish some joyous task. At the next moment, before she knew what was happening, she found herself clasped in his arms.

"My life! My heart! My eyes! My own!" he was saying in hot and impetuous whispers, and, raising her face to his face, he was kissing her on the lips.

She struggled to liberate herself, but felt like a helpless child in his strong, irresistible grasp.

"Leave me! Let me go!" she said, with heat and anger, but he did not seem to hear her or to be conscious of her resistance.

"Oh, how glad I am!" he said. "Our journey is at an end! Our new life is about to begin! How happy we shall be!"

All the blood in Helena's body rushed to her cheeks, and, putting up her hands between their faces, she demanded angrily—

"What do you mean by this? What are you doing?"

Yet still he did not hear her, for his passion was overpowering him, its intoxicating voice was ringing through his whole being, and he continued to pour into her ears a torrent of endearing words.

"Yes, yes, our new life is about to begin! It is to begin to-night—now!"

Helena was overwhelmed with fear, but suddenly, by the operation of an instinct which she did not comprehend, she smiled up into Ishmael's smiling face—a feeble, frightened, involuntary smile—and, pointing to the open mouth of the tent, she said, with a sense of mingled cunning and confusion—

“Be careful! Look!”

Ishmael loosened his hold of her, and, stepping back to the tent's mouth, he began to close and button it.

While he did so, Helena watched him and asked herself what she ought to do next. Cry for help? It would be useless. There were none to hear her except Ishmael's own people, and they worshipped him and looked upon her as his wife, his property, his slave, his chattel. Escape? Impossible! More than ever impossible for what (at her own direction) he was doing now.

“Then what am I to do?” she asked herself, and before she had found an answer Ishmael, having sealed up the tent, was returning with outstretched arms, as if with the intention of embracing and kissing her again.

She read in his great wild eyes the light of a passion which she had never seen in a man's face before, but she put on a bold front in spite of the terror which possessed her, thrust out her right hand to keep him off, looked him full in the face, and cried—

“No, no! You shall not! On no account! No!”

At that he dropped his outstretched arms, but, still smiling his joyous smile, he continued to approach her, saying, as he did so, in a tone of affectionate surprise and remonstrance—

“Why, what is this, O my Rani? Have we not joined hands under the handkerchief? Are you not my wife? Am I not your husband? It is true that I pledged myself to renunciation. But renunciation is wrong. It is against religion—against God.”

He came nearer. She could feel his hot breath upon her face. It made her shiver with the race-feeling she had experienced before.

“And then, how can I continue to deny myself?” he said. “I am like one who has been dying of hunger in the sight of food. You are my joy, my flower, my treasure. God has given you to me. You are mine.”

With that he threw his irresistible arms about her again, and, bringing his glittering eyes close to her eyes, he whispered—

“My Rani! My wife!”

Helena knew that the hour she had looked forward to with dread had come at length; she saw that the diplomacy, the finesse, the woman's wit she had counted upon to save her, were useless to quell the passion which flashed from Ishmael's eyes and throbbed in his voice, and she made one last and violent effort to escape from his arms.

"Let me go! Let me go!" she cried.

"Am I doing wrong?" he said. "No, no! I would not harm you for all the kingdoms of the world. But every wife must submit to her husband."

"No, no, no!" she cried, in tones of repulsion and loathing.

"Yes, yes, yes!" he replied, still more tenderly, still more passionately. "But if she is a good woman she has her modesty, her shield of shame. That is only right, only natural. It makes her the more sweet, the more dear, the more charming—"

Helena felt his arms tightening about her; she knew that he was lifting her off her feet, and realised that she was being carried across the tent.

Then she remembered the assurances she had given to Gordon, the promises she had made to herself; and hardly conscious of what she did until it was done, or what she was saying until it was said, she brought her open hands heavily down upon his face, and cried in a fury of wrath and scorn—

"Let me go, I tell you! You shall! You must! Can't you see that you are hateful and odious to me—that you are a black man and I am a white woman?"

At the next moment she felt Ishmael's arms relax, and she found herself on her feet. A sense of immense, immeasurable relief came over her. A sense of triumph, too, for what she had said she would do she had done.

When she recovered herself sufficiently to look at Ishmael again, he was standing apart from her and his head was down. He could no longer deceive himself. A whirlwind of chaotic darkness had swept over him. The storm of his passion was gone.

Helena saw that he was deeply wounded, and, notwithstanding the aversion he had inspired in her a moment before, she pitied him from the bottom of her heart.

"I am sorry for what I said just now," she murmured in a low tone. "It was hateful of me, and I ask your pardon."

She was still panting, and she had to pause for breath, but he did not reply, and after a moment she began to excuse herself, saying falteringly—

"But you must see that ... that there could never have been anything between you and me, because ... because—"

Raising his eyes, he looked not into her face but at the veil that was fixed to her hair, and she found it difficult to go on.

"Did you not say yourself," she said, "that marriage was not joining hands under a handkerchief, or repeating words after a Cadi, but a sacrament of love, mutual love, and that everything else was sin? Therefore—"

"Well?"

"Therefore if ... if I do not love you—"

"And you do not?"

"No."

"Allah! Allah!" he muttered, in a voice that seemed to come up out of the depths of his soul, and at the next moment he sank down on to the angerib which was close behind him.

But hardly had he done so when he leapt to his feet again, and in a voice that rang with wrath he said—

"Then why did you betroth yourself to me? I put no constraint upon you. If you had told me that your heart was far from me, I should have gone no further. But I gave you time to consider, and you came to me of your own free will. Why was this? Answer me. I have a right to know that, at all events."

It came into her mind to reply that when they were betrothed he did not ask her if she loved him, and she did not understand that she was to belong to him. But what was the use of defending herself? On what ground could she justify her conduct?

"Or if," he said, and his voice shook with the intensity of his emotion—"if it was after our betrothal that your heart left me—if something I said or did lost me your love—why did you follow me from Khartoum? You might have stayed there. I was willing to leave you behind me. Why did you follow me over the desert? Why did you come with my company? Why are you here now?"

She found it impossible to answer him, and feeling how deeply she had wronged him, yet how impossible, how unthinkable, how inconceivable it was that she could have acted otherwise than she had, in the light of her great and undying love for Gordon, she clasped her hands in front of her face and burst into a flood of tears.

Her tears drove away his anger in a moment, for he mistook the cause of them, and, deeply and incurably wounded as he was, a wave of sympathy and compassion passed over him. Drawing her hands from her face and holding them in his own, he looked steadfastly into her wet eyes, and said in a softer voice—

"I see how it has been, O my Rani. You followed the teacher, not the man; the message, not the poor soiled volume it was written in, and perhaps you were right—quite right."

Every word he uttered went like iron into Helena's soul.

"I thought a woman lived by her heart alone," he said, "and that when she betrothed herself it must be for love, not from any higher and nobler motive, but it seems I was wrong—quite wrong. I thought, too," he said, "that where love was," and here his voice thickened and almost broke, "there was neither black nor white, neither race nor caste; but it seems I was wrong in that also. Forgive me, forgive me, forgive me!"

He lifted her hands in his own long and delicate ones and put them to his lips, and then gently let them fall.

"But God knows best what is good for us," he said, "and perhaps ... perhaps

He has sent me this as a warning and a punishment, lest ... lest I forget ... in the love of home and wife and children, the task the great task He has laid upon me. In-sha-allah! In-sha-allah!"

With that he turned to leave the tent, a shaken and agitated and totally different man from the man who had entered it; and Helena, notwithstanding that she was deeply moved, again felt a sense of immense, immeasurable relief.

But at the next moment a feeling akin to terror seized her, for while Ishmael was unbuttoning the canvas at the tent's mouth there came, over the dull rumble of many sounds outside, a clear, sharp voice, crying—

"Ishmael Ameer! Ishmael Ameer! Urgent news! Where are you?"

Helena's heart stood still. She seemed to know in advance what was coming. The hour of Ishmael's downfall had arrived, and he was to hear that he had been betrayed. She had escaped from her physical danger—what, now, of her moral peril?

CHAPTER III

A moment later Ishmael had torn the mouth of the tent open. An Egyptian was standing there in the turban and farageeyah of an Alim. The man, who was solemnly making his salaams, held a lantern in one hand and a letter in the other. Behind him, against the dark sky, were a number of Ishmael's own people. Their mouths were open, and fear was on their faces.

"What words are these, oh my brother?" asked Ishmael.

Without speaking, the Alim offered him the letter. It was that of the Chancellor of El Azhar, written immediately after the arrest of Gordon.

Ishmael took it, and standing under the lamp that hung from the pole of the tent he read it. For some moments he did not move or raise his eyes, but little by little his face assumed a death-like rigidity, and at length the paper crinkled in his trembling fingers.

So strong had been his faith in his mission, and so firm his conviction that God would not allow anything to interfere with its fulfilment, that it was almost impossible for him to take in the truth—that his cause was lost, that his pilgrimage was wasted, that his people could not enter Cairo, and their hope was at an end.

When at length he raised his eyes he looked with an expression of blank bewilderment into Helena's face.

"See," he said, in a tone of piteous helplessness, and he put the letter into her reluctant hand.

The blood rushed to Helena's head, stars danced before her eyes, and it was with difficulty that she could see to read. But there was little need to do so, for already she knew, as by a sense of doom, what the letter contained.

In a moment the people behind the Alim grew more and more numerous. The mouth of the tent became choked with them, and their faces were blotched with lights and shadows from the lamp within. They were talking eagerly among themselves, in low tones, full of dread. At length one of them spoke to Ishmael.

"Is it bad news, O Master?" he asked, but with the expressionless voice of one who knew already what the answer would be.

There was a moment of strained silence, and then Ishmael turned again to Helena, and said in the same tone of piteous helplessness as before—

"Read it to them. Let them know the worst, O Rani."

Helena could find no escape. With a fearful effort she began to read the letter aloud. But hardly had she finished the first clause of it—telling Ishmael that his messenger and missionary had been betrayed into the hands of the Government by means of a message sent into Cairo from some one who stood near to him in his own camp—than a deep groan came from the people at the mouth of the tent.

Black Zogal was there with his wild eyes, and by his side stood old Zewar Pasha with his suspicious looks.

"Who is the traitor, O Master?" asked the old man in his rasping voice, and it seemed to Helena that while he spoke every eye, except Ishmael's, was fixed upon her face.

Then a fearful thing befell. Ishmael, the man of peace, whom none had ever seen in any mood but one of tenderness and love, broke into a torrent of fierce passion.

"Allah curse him whoever he is!" he cried. "Curse him in his lying down, and in his getting up! Curse him in the morning splendour, and in the still of night! Curse him in the life that now is, and in the life that is to come!"

Helena felt as if the tent itself as well as the black and copper-coloured faces at the mouth of it were reeling around her. But it was not alone the terror of Ishmael's curse, with its unrevealed reference to herself, that created her confusion. She was thinking of Gordon. What did his arrest imply? Did it mean that he had succeeded in the perilous task he had undertaken? Or did it mean that he had failed?

When she recovered consciousness of what was going on about her she heard, above a wild tumult of voices outside, the voice of a woman and the voice of a boy. She knew that the woman was Zenoba and the boy was Mosie. At

the next moment both were coming headlong into the tent, the one dragging the other through a way that had been made for them. The boy's shaven black head was bare, his caftan was torn open at the breast, and his skin was bleeding at the neck as if vindictive fingers had been clutching him by the throat. The woman's swarthy face was bathed in sweat, twitching with excitement and convulsed with evil passions.

"There!" she cried. "There he is, O Master, and if you want to know who took the letter to the English lord, ask him."

"Who is he?" asked Ishmael.

"Your Rani's servant," replied the Arab woman, with a curl of her cruel lip. "He left Khartoum for Cairo a month ago and has not been seen until to-day."

Another deep groan came from the people at the tent's mouth, and again it seemed to Helena that every eye, except Ishmael's, was looking into her face.

Meantime Mosie, thinking the groan of the people was meant for him, and that his life was in danger from their anger, had broken away from the woman's grasp and flung himself at Ishmael's feet, crying—

"Mercy, O Master! I kiss your feet. I take refuge with God and with you. Save me, and I will tell you every thing."

Ishmael, who by this time had regained his self-command, motioned to the Arab woman to stand back. Then he questioned the boy calmly, and the boy answered him in a fever of fear, gasping and sobbing at every word.

"My boy, you have come out of Cairo?"

"Yes, O Master, yes."

"You went there from Khartoum?"

"Yes, yes, O Master, yes."

"You took a letter to the English lord?"

"Yes, Master, a letter to the English lord."

"From some one in Khartoum?"

"Yes, I will tell my Master everything—from some one in Khartoum."

"What treacherous man sent you with that letter?"

"No man at all, O Master. You see, I am telling my Master everything."

"Was it a woman?"

"Yes, Master, a woman. See, I kiss your feet. I keep nothing back from my Master."

Another groan came from the people at the tent's mouth, and the black boy clutched at Ishmael's white caftan as if to protect himself from their wrath. Ishmael himself had a confused sense of something terrible that had not yet taken shape in his mind. He looked round at Helena who was standing by the angerib at the back, but her head was down and her thoughts were far away.

"What woman, then?" he asked in a sterner voice.

"No, no, I cannot tell you that," said the boy.

"Speak, boy. You shall be safe. I will protect you from all harm. What woman was it?"

"Master, do not ask me. I dare not tell you."

"Listen," said Ishmael, and his voice grew hard and hoarse. "There is a traitor in my camp, and I must find out who it is. What treacherous woman sent you into Cairo with that letter?"

The boy struggled hard. His ugly black face under his shaven poll was distorted by fear. He hesitated, began to speak, then stopped altogether.

At that moment Helena came forward as if she had suddenly awakened from a dream, and Mosie saw her for the first time since he had been dragged into the tent. In another instant all fear had gone from his face and his eyes were blazing with courage.

"Tell me, I command you," said Ishmael.

"No, no, I will *never* tell you," said the boy.

Again a groan—this time a growl—came from the people at the tent's mouth.

"Torment would make his tongue wag," said one.

"Beat the innocent until the guilty confess—it is a good maxim, O Master," said Zewar in his rasping tones.

Black Zogal, with his wild eyes, stepped out as if to lay hold of the lad, but Ishmael waved him back.

"Wait!" he said.

He was looking at Helena again, and his face had undergone a fearful change.

"My boy," he said, still keeping his eyes on Helena, "if you do not tell me I must give you back to the people."

At that the boy broke into a paroxysm of hysterical sobs.

"No, no, my Master will not do that. But see," he said, tearing wider his torn caftan so as to expose his breast, "my Master himself shall kill me."

At the next moment Helena's hand was on Ishmael's arm.

"Let the boy go," she said. "I can tell the rest."

A gloomy chill traversed Ishmael's heart. He had a sense of spiritual paralysis—as if everything in the world were crumbling and crashing down to impotent wreck and ruin.

His people at the tent's mouth were muttering among themselves. He dismissed them, sending everybody away including the boy and the Arab woman. Most of them went off grudgingly, ungraciously, for the first time reluctant to obey his will.

Then he closed up the mouth of the tent, and was once more alone with

Helena.

CHAPTER IV

In spite of the dread with which, for more than a month, Helena had looked forward to the hour in which Ishmael should hear of his betrayal, she felt none of the terror from that cause which she had feared and expected.

She could think of nothing but Gordon. Where was he now? What were they doing to him? It seemed to be the only possible explanation of his arrest that his scheme for the salvation of the people had failed. Would he be handed over to the military authorities? Would he be tried by court-martial? And what would be the punishment of his offences as a soldier? Sinking down on the angerib she pressed her hands over her brow and over her eyes that she might think of this and shut out everything else.

Meantime the mind of Ishmael was going through a conflict as strange and no less cruel. Although the plain evidences of his senses had already told him that he had been betrayed by the woman he loved, yet the dread of discovering the traitor in his own tent, in his own wife, filled him with terror, and he tried to escape from it.

Having fastened up the tent, he walked to and fro for some moments without speaking, and then sitting down by Helena's side and taking her hand and smoothing it, he said, in his throbbing, quivering voice—

"Rani, we have eaten bread and salt together. Be faithful with me—what woman sent that letter?"

Helena hardly heard what he was saying. She was still thinking of Gordon. "They will condemn him to death," she told herself.

"Rani," said Ishmael again, "we have lived under the same roof; you have shared with me the closest secrets of my soul. Tell me—what woman sent that letter?"

Helena looked at him and tried to listen, but Gordon's doom was ringing in her ears, and it drowned all the other sounds of life.

"Rani," said Ishmael once more, "though you denied me the rights of a husband, yet you are my wife. Our lives have been united not by man but by God, and in the presence of Him, whose name be exalted—of Him who reads all hearts—I ask you—what woman sent that letter?"

Helena heard him, yet terrible as his question was, and perilous as she knew her answer must be, she felt no fear. "If I tell him," she thought. "Why not? It does not matter now."

"Rani," said Ishmael yet again, "God gives me the right to command you. I *do* command you. What woman sent that letter?"

"I did," said Helena, and though the words were spoken in a faltering whisper they seemed to Ishmael like a deafening roar.

"Allah! Allah!" he cried, leaping to his feet, for though he had expected that reply he reeled under it as under a blow.

Helena realised what her answer meant to him, and again, from the bottom of her heart, she pitied him, but at the next moment her thoughts swung back to her own trouble.

She remembered that her father had admitted that the British army in Egypt was always on active service, and she asked herself what would happen to Gordon if the military authorities lost their heads in fear of insurrection. Would they try him by Field General Court-Martial? In that case would the Court be called instantly? Would the inquiry last only a few minutes? Would the sentence be carried into immediate effect?

"O God, can it be possible that it is all over already?" she asked herself.

Meantime Ishmael, after moments of suffering which seemed hours of eternity, was again struggling to resist the only conclusion the facts had left to him. It was true that the Rani had confessed to sending the letter which had led to the arrest of his messenger, but all his heart rebelled against the inference that she had intended to betray his cause and his people. Had she not cast in her own lot with them? Had she not come from a distant country and a richer home to live in their poor house in Khartoum? And had she not endured the hardship of the desert journey in their company?

Like a man who has been shipwrecked in a whirlwind of darkness, he was groping blindly through tempestuous waves for some means of rescue. At length a sort of raft of hope came to him, a helpless, impotent thing, but he clung to it, and sitting down by Helena's side again, he said, in the same piteous voice as before—

"I see how it has been, O my Rani. You did not intend to betray my people—my poor people whose sufferings you have seen, whose faith and hopes and dreams you have shared and witnessed. It was Omar you were thinking of. Your heart has never forgiven him for taking the place you meant for your husband. You were jealous of him for my sake, and your jealousy got the better of your judgment. 'I will punish him,' you thought. 'I will make his mission of no effect.' And so you sent that letter. But you did not reflect that in destroying Omar you would be destroying my people also. It was wrong, it was cruel, but it was a

woman's fault, and you have seen it and suffered for it ever since. Jealousy of Omar, perhaps hatred of Omar—that was it, was it not, O my Rani?"

His voice was breaking as he spoke, for the pitiful explanation he had lighted upon was failing to bring conviction to his own mind, yet he fixed his sad eyes eagerly on Helena's face and repeated—

"Jealousy of Omar, perhaps hatred of Omar—that was what caused you to send that letter?"

Helena could not speak. The pathos of his error was choking her. But she replied to him with a look which it required no words to interpret.

"No?" he said. "Not of Omar? Of whom, then?"

Helena could not lie. "He must know some day," she thought.

"Of whom, then?" he repeated, in his helpless confusion.

"Yourself," she replied.

"Allah! Allah! Myself! Myself!" he said, in a breathless whisper, rising to his feet again and striding across the tent.

At the first moment after Helena's confession it seemed to Ishmael that both sun and moon had suffered eclipse and the world was in total darkness. Why had the Rani betrayed him? From what motive? For what object? He tried to follow her thoughts, and found it impossible to do so.

There was a short period of frightful silence, and then, feeling as if he wanted to cry, he drew up before Helena again, and said in a husky voice, his swarthy face trembling and twitching—

"But why, O Rani? I had done you no wrong. From the day you came to me I did all I could for you—all I could to make your nights peaceful and your mornings happy. Why has your heart been so far away from me?"

Helena felt that the time had come to tell him everything. Yet in order to do so she must begin with the death of her father, and she could not speak of that without involving Gordon. "But that is impossible," she thought, "absolutely impossible."

"Speak," said Ishmael. "When you sent your letter to the English lord, you must have known that you were dooming me to death—what had I done to deserve it?"

"I cannot tell you—I cannot, I cannot," she answered.

"It is unnecessary," said Ishmael.

In the moment of Helena's silence a terrible explanation of her conduct had come to him, and he thought he saw, as by flashes of lightning, into the dark abyss that was at his feet.

His manner, which had been gentle down to that moment, suddenly became harsh, and his voice, which had been soft, became hard.

"When did you send that letter?" he demanded.

She saw the stern closing of his lips, and for an instant she felt afraid.

"Was it before the meeting of the Sheikhs at which Omar was chosen?"

"Yes," she replied. If Gordon was to be condemned to death, it was of no consequence what became of her.

"You told the English lord that Ishmael was coming to Cairo?"

"Yes." His deep, impenetrable eyes seemed to be looking through and through her.

"With what object and in—in what disguise?"

"Yes." She knew she was dashing herself to destruction, but no matter.

"When you sent your letter you said to yourself, 'Ishmael will go into Cairo, but my letter shall go before him.' Yes?"

"Yes." In the lowest depths of her soul she felt that if he killed her now she did not care.

"And when Omar stepped into the place you had meant for me you thought, 'The letter I wrote to destroy Ishmael will destroy Omar instead'?"

"Yes."

"Was that why you tried to prevent Omar from going?"

"Yes." Tears were choking her utterance.

"Why you were unwilling to make the kufiah?"

"Yes."

"Why you fainted in the mosque?"

She bowed her head, being unable to utter another word.

"Then," said Ishmael, and his voice rose to a husky cry—"then it was love of Omar, not hatred of him, that inspired your letter?"

She made no reply. Filled as she was with shame for what she had done to Ishmael, the image of Gordon was still in her mind. Even at that moment, when terrible consequences threatened her, she could not help thinking of him. If he were tried by Field General Court-Martial to-night he might be executed in the morning!

That thought carried her back to the Citadel. She was on the drilling-ground in the dead grey light of dawn. A regiment of soldiers was drawn up in line. Six of them stood out from the rest with rifles to their shoulders. And before them, standing alone, with his back to the ramparts, was one condemned but dauntless man. "My last thoughts are about you," he was saying to her, and living in that cruel dream she burst into tears.

Again Ishmael misunderstood her weeping, and again a wave of compassion passed over him.

"It is possible I am wrong," he said. "I may be judging you unjustly. In that case tell me so, and I will kiss your feet. I will ask your pardon."

She could not speak. "This will end in some way," she thought.

"In the name of Heaven, speak! Tell me you do not love this man. Tell me I am wrong," he cried.

"No, you are not wrong," she said. "I do love him, and I am in despair. All you have said is true, but I cannot help it. I am a wicked woman, and my life by your side has been a deception from the first."

With that she burst into another flood of tears, and falling face downward on the angerib, she buried her head in the pillow.

"Allah! Allah!" said Ishmael, and all the blood in his body seemed to flush his heart. He was passing through the supreme phase of his agony—perhaps the cruellest that man can suffer—the agony of knowing that the woman he loved, the woman he worshipped, loved and worshipped another man.

In the cloud of maddening thoughts which sprang to his brain he imagined he read the mystery of Helena's conduct from the first. Remembering that she had called him a black man, the wild deep heart in him rose to a fever of jealous wrath.

"I see how it has been," he said. "The white man came to my tent. I welcomed him. I loved him. I trusted him. He was my brother, and he slept by my side. I made him free of my harem. I put my honour in his hands. And how did he repay me? By robbing me of the love that was my love, the heart that was my heart."

She tried to speak, to protest, but in a torrent of wrath he bore her down.

"Your white man has over-reached himself, though. 'I will outdo Ishmael in her eyes,' he thought. But he has only fallen into the pit that was dug for me. Let him perish there, and the curse of God be upon him!"

Again she tried to protest, and again in the blind hurricane of his anger he silenced her.

"And you—it was nothing to you that in betraying me you were betraying my people also—my poor people, who have suffered so much and followed me so faithfully."

His face was terrible—it had the sullen glow of the Western sky before a storm.

"You have wrecked my hopes in the hour of their fulfilment. You have made dust and ashes of the expectations of my people. You have uncovered my nakedness, and made me a thing to point the finger at and to scorn. You have turned my heart to stone."

Then the wild anguish of the jealous man became united to the fierce wrath of the fanatic, and going nearer to Helena, and leaning over her, he said—

"Worse than that—a hundredfold worse—you have made the plans and promises of God of no avail. You have allowed the Evil One to enter into your heart, and to use your guilty passions to defeat the schemes of the Most High.

Therefore," he said, raising his quivering voice until it rang through the tent like a tortured cry—"therefore, as the instrument of Satan you have no right to live. I say you have no right even to live. And I ... I, who have loved you ... I, whose heart has been wrapped about you like the rope about the wheel of the well ... I, whom you have betrayed and destroyed, and ... and my people with me ... it is I ... yes, it is I who must ... who must—"

Helena heard him stammering and sobbing over her. At the same time she felt that his trembling, ferocious hands were laying hold of her. She felt that the long Eastern veil that had hung down her back was being wrapped around her throat. She felt that its folds were growing tighter and yet tighter, and that she was being strangled and was losing consciousness.

Then suddenly she became aware that Ishmael's formidable grasp had slackened, that he had stepped back from the angerib on which she lay, and was saying to himself in a tremulous whisper—

"Allah! Allah! what is this I am doing? Allah! Allah! Allah!"

And at the next moment she realised that in horror of his own impulse he had turned and fled out of the tent.

CHAPTER V

Being left alone, Helena's emotions were so strange, so bewildering, so overpowering that she could not immediately make out clearly what she felt. The most contradictory thoughts and feelings crowded upon her.

First came a sense of suffocating shame, due to Ishmael's hideous misconception of her relation to Gordon, which put her into the position of an unfaithful wife. But would the truth have been any better—that she was not an Indian Rani, not a Muslemah, that she and Gordon had known and loved each other before Ishmael came into their lives, and that a desire to punish him for coming between them had been the impulse that had taken her to Khartoum?

Next came a sense of her utter degradation during the recent scene, in which her lips had been sealed and she had been compelled to submit to Ishmael's just and natural wrath.

Then came a sense of abject humiliation with the thought that Ishmael had been right from the beginning and she had been wrong, and therefore she had merited all that had come to her. "If he had killed me I could have forgiven him,"

she told herself.

Finally (perhaps from, some deep place in her Jewish blood) came the feeling that after all it was not so much Ishmael who had been shaming her for her treachery as the Almighty who had been punishing her for attempting to take His vengeance out of His hand. "Vengeance is Mine," saith the Lord, and her impious act had deserved the penalty that had overtaken it.

But against all this, opposing it, fighting it, conquering it, triumphing over it, was the memory of her love for Gordon. "I loved him, and I could not have acted otherwise," she thought.

More plainly than ever, she now saw that her love for Gordon had been the first cause and origin of all she had done. This single-hearted devotion left her nothing else to think about. It wiped out Ishmael and his troubles, and all the troubles of his people. "I may be selfish and cruel, but I cannot help it," she told herself again and again, as she continued to lie, where Ishmael had left her, face down on the angerib, shaken with sobs.

After a while she heard a step approaching. The Arab woman had entered the tent.

"So you are there, oh my beauty," said Zenoba, with a bitter ring in her voice.

Without raising her head to look, Helena knew that the usual obsequious smiles had gone from the woman's face, and that her eyes were full of undisguised contempt. In another moment all the impulses of hatred which had scoured through her jealous soul for months fell on Helena in bitter reproaches.

"I knew it would come to this. I always told him so, but he would not listen. 'Ask pardon of God, Zenoba,' he said. Now he will have to ask pardon of me."

Helena could hardly control herself, but with an effort she submitted in silence, and let the woman have her way.

"Anybody might have seen what was going on from the moment the white Christian came to Khartoum. But no, it was no use talking. When a man looks at a woman he sees her eyes, not her heart, and is blind to those that love and serve him."

Helena's own heart was beating violently and painfully, but she compelled herself to lie still. "It's no more than I deserve," she thought.

And then the Arab woman lashed her to the bone with reports of what the people in the camp were saying. All that had happened might have been foreseen. He who had tried to emancipate women had been the first to suffer for it. Good women did not wish to be emancipated, and the bad women who let their veils fall, and meddled with the affairs of men, only wanted to imitate the evil ways of the women of the West. "Our mothers did not do it, and neither shall our wives," said some, while others declared that it was better to have a thousand

enemies outside your house than one within.

The camp was utterly disorganised, utterly demoralised. Instead of the singing and rejoicing of an hour ago there was now wailing and lamentation; instead of prayer and praise there was cursing and swearing. Some of the people, in a state of panic, were saying that the soldiers of the Christian government would soon be upon them; that they would be shot dead with bullets; that they would be carried into Cairo as prisoners and crucified in the public streets; that the Christians would eat their flesh and suck their blood; that those who were not slain would be walking skeletons and talking images, and made to worship the wooden cross instead of their own God, their Allah. As a consequence many were packing their baggage hurriedly and turning the heads of their camels to the south. Boats were being unmoored at Bedrasheen, and boat-loads were preparing to push off.

Desolation was over the whole camp. The hopes of the people were in the dust. Some of the women were kneeling on the ground and throwing the sand over their heads and faces. Some of the men were heaping insults on Ishmael's name—their former love and reverence being already gone. "Where are the promises he made us?" they were asking. "Is it for this that he brought us from our homes?"

Others were calling and searching for the Master. His tent was empty. He was nowhere to be seen. Had he deserted them in their hour of trouble?

"Where is he?" they were crying. "What has become of him?" No one knew. Even Black Zogal could not say. And then some were crying, "Ela'an abu, abu, abu!" (Cursed be his father, and his father's father, and his father's father's father!)

But worse, far worse, because more fierce and terrible than the people's anger against Ishmael, was their wrath against the "White Woman." It was she who had betrayed them. But for her evil influence and secret schemes, they might have inherited Egypt and all the rich lands and treasures of the Valley of the Nile. Listen! They were gathering about the tent, and murmuring and shouting excitedly. Hark! That was Zogal's voice—he was persuading them to go away.

"But they'll come back, oh my beauty," said Zenoba. "Better get away before they return and tear you to pieces as a hungry jackal tears a dog."

With that merciless word the bitter-hearted woman took herself off, leaving Helena still lying face down on the angerib in her agony of mingled anger and shame.

Being once more left alone in the tent, Helena continued to know what was going on in the camp. The wailing of the women, who were throwing sand over their heads, seemed as if it would never cease. At length some of them began to sing. They sang songs of sorrow which contrasted strangely with the songs of

victory which the men had sung before. The weird and monotonous but moving notes that are peculiar to Arab music sounded like dirges in the depth of night.

The people were in despair. Their consoling and inspiring idea of divine guidance was gone, and the hope that had sustained their souls through the toils of the desert march was dead. The myth of Ishmael's divinity had already disappeared; the Master was no longer the Redeemer, the Mahdi, the Christ. All that had been a hideous illusion, a mirage of the soul, without reason or reality.

It was terrible; it was horrible; it was almost as if the whole people had died an hour ago in "the sure and certain hope," and then suddenly awakened in the other world to find that there was no God, no heaven, no reward for the pains of this life, and all they had looked for and expected had been the shadow of a dream.

Listening to this as she lay on the angerib, and thinking she was partly to blame for it, Helena asked herself if there was anything she could do to save Ishmael and his people.

"O God, is there *nothing* I can do?" she thought.

At first there came no answer to this question. Do what she would to fix her mind on the people's sufferings and Ishmael's downfall, her mind swung back to its old subject, and once again she thought of Gordon and his arrest.

Things in that regard were plainer to her now. The idea of a Field General Court-Martial, which had made her chill with fear, had been the figment of an over-excited brain. Whatever had happened to Gordon's efforts in the interests of peace—whether they had failed or succeeded—his own trial would take the ordinary course. A military court of the usual kind would have to be summoned, its sentence would have to be confirmed, and only the King could confirm it.

All this would take time, and therefore there was no need for panic. But meantime what was Gordon's position? He had been arrested in mistake for Ishmael, and consequently he would, one way or another, be liable to punishment for Ishmael's offence. That was to say, for the offence she had attributed to Ishmael. Yet Gordon had done no wrong, he had intended no evil.

"Is there nothing I can do?—nothing at ail?" she asked herself again.

Suddenly a light dawned on her. If the Consul-General could be made to see what Gordon's motives had really been—to save England, to save Egypt, to save the good name of his own father—and if he could be made to realise that Ishmael's aim was not rebellion, and his followers not an armed force, but merely a vast concourse of religious visionaries—what then?

Then as a just man, if a stern and hard one, he would be compelled to see that his own son was not punished, and perhaps—who could say?—he might even permit Ishmael's people to enter Cairo.

Vague, undefined, and unconsidered as this idea was, Helena leapt at it as a

solution of all their difficulties, and when she asked herself how she was to bring conviction to the Consul-General's mind, she remembered Gordon's letters.

Nothing could be better. Being written before the event, and intended for her eyes only, they must be convincing to anybody whatever, and absolutely irresistible to a father. Private? No matter! Intimate and affectionate and full of the closest secrets of the soul? Never mind! She would share them with one who was flesh of Gordon's flesh, for his heart must be with her, and the issue was life or death.

Yes, she would go into Cairo, see the Consul-General, show him Gordon's letters, and prove and explain everything. Thus she who had been the first cause of the people's sufferings, of Ishmael's downfall, and of Gordon's arrest, would be Gordon's, Ishmael's, and the people's deliverer! Yes, she, she, she!

But wait! Had she not promised Gordon that she would remain in the camp, whatever happened? She had; but that promise was annulled by this time, while this great errand must be precisely what she had been sent there for, and by flying away now she would be fulfilling her destiny in a wider and deeper sense than even Gordon himself could have conceived.

"I'll go at once," she thought, and she sprang up from the angerib to carry out her purpose.

As she did so she saw a little ugly black face, all blubbered over with tears, on the ground beside her. It was Mosie, and he was kissing the hem of her skirt and saying—

"Mosie very sorry. He not know. Will lady ever forgive Mosie?"

Helena's heart leapt up at sight of the boy. She wanted his help immediately, and his unexpected appearance at that moment was like an assurance from heaven that what she intended to do ought to be done.

Comforting the lad and drying his eyes, she asked him in breathless whispers a number of questions. Where was the donkey on which he had ridden into the camp? it was near by, tethered. Did he know the way to the railway-station at Bedrasheen? He did. Could he lead her there through the darkness? He could. It was now half-past nine—would there be a train to Cairo soon? Yes, for the Alim had just gone to catch one that was to go to Boukq Daorour at ten o'clock.

"The very thing," said Helena. "Bring your donkey to the back of the tent and wait there until I come."

"Yes, yes," said the boy, now ablaze with eagerness, and kissing both her hands alternately, he shot out on his errand.

Then Helena picked up a little locked handbag which contained Gordon's precious letters, added her own letter to them, and after extinguishing the lamp that hung from the pole, stepped out of the tent.

A few minutes later, mounted on a donkey that was led by a boy, a woman,

looking like an Egyptian with her black skirt drawn over the back of her head and closely clipped under her nose, was picking her way through the darkness.

All was quiet by this time. The weeping and wailing had at last come to an end, and from the vast encampment there rose nothing but the deep, somnambulant moan that ascends from a great city when it is falling asleep. The fires were smouldering out, and the people, such of them as remained, were lying, some in their tents, others outstretched on the sand, all weary and heart-broken in the misery of their dead hope, their dead dream, their dead faith.

A kind of soulless silence hung in the air. Even the call of the Night-watchman ("God is One!") was no more to be heard. Only the braying of donkeys at intervals, the ruckling of camels, and the barking of dogs.

There was no moon, but the stars were thick, and one of them was falling.

CHAPTER VI

Taking his steam-launch, which had been moored to the boat-landing of the Ghezirah Palace, the Consul-General returned home immediately after Gordon's arrest. He did not wait to say what was to be done with the prisoner, or to tell his officials what further steps, if any, were to be taken to prevent the expected insurrection. One overwhelming event had wiped everything else out of his mind. His plans had been frustrated; he had been degraded, made a laughing-stock, and by Gordon—his own son.

As his launch skimmed across the river in the darkness he could hear in the back-wash of the propeller the guffaws of the diplomatic corps, and in the throbbing of the engine the choking laughter of the whole world.

His mind was going like a weaver's shuttle, and he was asking himself by what sinister development of fate this devilish surprise had been brought about. He could find no answer. In the baffling mystery of events only one thing seemed clear—that Gordon, when he disappeared from Cairo after the affair of El Azhar, had not gone to America or India or Australia, as everybody had supposed, but straight to the man Ishmael's camp, and that he had allowed himself to be used by that charlatan mummer to further his intrigues. Against his own father, too! His father, who had been thinking of him every day, every night, and nearly all night, and was now, by his instrumentality, made an object of derision and contempt.

"Fool! Fool! Fool!" thought the Consul-General, and his anger against Gor-

don burnt in his heart like a fierce and consuming fire.

On reaching the Agency he went upstairs to his room and rang violently for Fatimah. Somebody within his own household had become aware of his plans and revealed them to his enemies. He had little doubt of the identity of the traitor, for he remembered Fatimah's unexpected appearance in the dining-room the night before, and her confusion and lame excuse when the Sirdar observed her presence.

Fatimah answered her bell cheerfully as one who had nothing to fear, but the moment she saw the Consul-General's face, with the deep folds in his forehead and the hard and implacable lines about his mouth, she dropped on her knees before he had uttered a word.

"What is this you have been doing, woman?" he demanded, in a stern voice, whereupon Fatimah made no attempt at disguise.

"I couldn't help it, O Master," she said, breaking into tears. "I would have given him my eyes. He was the same as my own son, and I had suckled him at my breast. Can a woman deny anything to her own?"

The Consul-General looked down at her for a moment in silence, and his drooping lower lip trembled. Then, with a gesture of impatience, he said—

"Get away to your room at once," and opening the door for her he closed and locked it when she was gone.

But the momentary spasm of tenderness towards Gordon which had come to the Consul-General at sight of the foster-mother's love disappeared at the next instant. The only excuse he could find for his son's conduct in duping his ignorant Egyptian nurse was that perhaps he had himself been duped.

After the first plans had been formed in Khartoum and Helena's letter had been dispatched, the "fanatic-hypocrite" had probably discovered that his intrigue had become known in Cairo. Then he had put Gordon into the gap, and Gordon had been so simple, so innocent, so stupid as to be deceived! There was small comfort in this reading of the riddle, and the Consul-General's fury and shame increased tenfold.

"Fool! Fool! Fool," he thought, and taking from the mantelpiece the portrait of the boy in the Arab fez, he looked at it for a moment and then flung it back impatiently. It fell to the floor.

Some minutes passed in which the infuriated man was unconscious of his surroundings, for great anger wipes out time and place, and then he became aware that there was a knock at the door of his room.

"Who's there?" he cried.

It was Ibrahim. He had come to tell his Excellency that two reporters from Reuter's Agency were below by appointment and wished to hear what his Excellency had to give them.

"Nothing. Send them away," said the Consul-General.

A moment afterwards there was another knock at the door.

"Who's there now?" cried the Consul-General.

It was his First Secretary. The Adviser to the Ministry of Justice had come to say that the Special Tribunal had been summoned and the Judges were waiting for further instructions.

"Tell them there will be no sitting to-night," said the Consul-General.

A little later there was yet another knock at the door. It was the Secretary again. The Adviser to the Ministry of the Interior had called him up on the telephone to say that, according to instructions, the gallows had been set up in the Square in front of the Governorat, and now he wished to know—

"Tell the men to take it down again at once, and don't come up again," said the Consul-General in a voice that was hoarse with wrath and thick with shame.

These interruptions had been like visitations of the spirits of the dead to a tormented murderer, and it was some time before the Consul-General could bring his mind back to the mystery before him. When he was able to do so he asked himself how it had come to pass that if Gordon had been in Khartoum, and if he had been duped into taking Ishmael's place, Helena had not informed him of the change? Where had she been? Where was she now? What had become of her? Could it be possible that she, too, by her love for Gordon, had been won over to the side of his enemies?

Thinking of that as a possible explanation of the devilish tangle of circumstance by which he was surrounded, the Consul-General's wrath against Gordon rose to a frenzy of madness. Fierce and wild imprecations broke from his mouth, such as had never passed his lips before, and then, suddenly remembering that they were directed against his own flesh and blood, his own son, he cried, in the midst of his fury and passion—

"No, no! God forgive me! Not that!"

Ibrahim knocked at the door again. The Grand Cadi had come, and begged the inestimable privilege of approaching his Excellency's honourable person.

"Say I can't see him," said the Consul-General, and then sitting down on a sofa in an alcove of the room he tried his best to compose himself.

In the silence of the next few minutes he was conscious of the ticking of the telegraph tape that was unrolling itself by his side, and to relieve his mind of the burden that oppressed it, he stretched out his hand for the long white slip.

It reported a debate on the Address to the Crown at the opening of a new session of Parliament. Somebody, a rabid, irresponsible Radical, had proposed as an Amendment that the time had come to associate the people of Egypt with the government of the country and the Foreign Minister was making his reply.

"This much I am willing to admit," said the Minister, "that there are two

cardinal errors in the governing of alien races—to rule them as if they were Englishmen, and to repress their aspirations by blowing them out of the mouth of a gun.”

The Consul-General rose to his feet in a new flood of anger. But for Gordon he would have silenced all such babbling. To-morrow morning was to have seen Downing Street in confusion, and in the conflagration that was to have blazed heaven-high on the report of the Egyptian conspiracy and how he had crushed it, he was to have found himself the saviour of civilisation.

But now—what now? Duped by his own son, who had taken sides against him, he was about to become the laughing-stock of all Europe.

”Fool! Fool! Fool!” he cried, and in the cruel riot of anger and love that was going on within him he felt for the first time in his life as if he wanted to burst into tears.

Another knock came to the door. It was Ibrahim again, to say that the Grand Cadi, who sent his humble salaams, had said he would wait, and now the Sirdar had come and he wished to see his Excellency immediately.

”Tell the Sirdar I can see no one to-night,” said the Consul-General.

”But his Excellency says his business is urgent and he must come upstairs if your Excellency will not come down.”

The Consul-General reflected for a moment and then replied—

”Tell the Sirdar I will be down presently.”

CHAPTER VII

Besides the Grand Cadi with his pock-marked cheeks and base eyes, and the Sirdar with his ruddy face (suddenly grown sallow), the plump person of the Commandant of Police was waiting in the library.

The Grand Cadi in his turban and silk robes sat in the extreme corner of the room, opposite to the desk; the Sirdar, in his full-dress uniform, stood squarely on the hearth-rug with his back to the empty fireplace, and the Commandant, in his gold-braided blue, stood near to the door.

No one spoke. There was a tense silence such as pervades a surgeon’s consulting-room immediately before a serious operation.

When the Consul-General came in, still wearing his court-dress, it was plainly apparent to those who had seen him as recently as half-an-hour before

that he was a changed man. Although perfectly self-possessed and as firm and implacable as ever, there was an indefinable something about his eyes, his mouth, and his square jaw which seemed to say that he had gone through a great struggle with his own heart and conquered it—perhaps killed it—and that henceforth his affections were to be counted as dead.

The Sirdar saw this at a glance, and thereby realised the measure of what he had come to do. He had come to fight this father for his own son.

Answering the salute of the Commandant, the salutation of the Sirdar, and the salaam of the Cadi with the curtest bow, the old man stepped forward to his desk, and seating himself in the revolving chair behind it, he said brusquely—

”Well, what is the matter now?”

”Nuneham,” said the Sirdar, with an oblique glance in the direction of the Cadi, ”the Commandant and I wish to speak to you in private on a personal and urgent matter.”

”Does it concern my son?” asked the Consul-General sharply.

”I do not say it concerns your son,” said the Sirdar, with another oblique glance at the Cadi. ”I only say it is personal and urgent and therefore ought to be discussed in private.”

”Humph! We’ll discuss it here. I’ll have no secrets on that subject.”

”In that case,” said the Sirdar, ”you must take the consequences.”

”Go on, please.”

”In the first place, the Commandant finds himself in a predicament.”

”What is it?”

”The warrant he holds is for the arrest of Ishmael Ameer, but the prisoner he has taken to-night is ... another person.”

”Well?”

”The Commandant wishes to know what he is to do.”

”What is it his duty to do?”

”That depends on circumstances, and the circumstances in the present case are peculiar.”

”State them precisely, please.”

The Sirdar hesitated, glanced again at the Cadi, this time with an expression of obvious repugnance, and then said—

”The peculiar circumstances in this case are, my dear Nuneham, that though the prisoner cannot possibly be held under the warrant by which he was arrested, he is wanted by the military courts for other offences.”

”Therefore——”

”Therefore the Commandant has come with me to ask you whether the man he has taken to-night is to be handed over to the military authorities or——”

”Or what?”

"Or allowed to go free."

The Consul-General swung his chair round until he came face to face with the Sirdar, and said, with withering bitterness—

"So you have come to me—British Agent and Consul-General—to ask if I will connive at your prisoner's escape! Is that it?"

The Sirdar flinched, bit the ends of his moustache for a moment, and then said, with a faint tremor in his voice—

"Nuneham, if the prisoner is handed over to the authorities he will be court-martialled."

"Let it be so," said the Consul-General.

"As surely as he is court-martialled his sentence will be death."

The old man swung his chair back and answered huskily: "If his offences deserve it, what matter is that to me?"

"His offences," said the Sirdar, "were insubordination, refusal to obey the orders of his General, and—"

"Isn't that enough?" asked the Consul-General, whereupon the Sirdar drew himself up and said—

"I plead no excuses for insubordination. I am myself a soldier. I think discipline is the backbone of the army. Without that everything must fall into chaos. But the General who exacts stern compliance with military discipline on the part of his officers has it for his sacred duty to see that his commands are just and that he does not provoke disobedience by outrageous and illegal insults."

The old man's face twitched visibly, but still he stood firm.

"Provoked or not provoked, your prisoner disobeyed the orders of his recognised superior—what more is there to say?"

"Only that he acted from a sense of right, and that he was right—"

"What?"

"I say he *was* right, as subsequent events proved, and if his conscience—"

"Conscience! What has a soldier to do with conscience? My servant Ibrahim, perhaps, any fellah, may have a right to exercise what he is pleased to call his conscience, but the first and only duty of an English soldier is to obey."

"Then God help England! If an English soldier is only a machine, a human gun-waggon, with no right to think about anything but his rations and his pay, and how to use his rifle, he is a butcher and a hireling, not a hero. No, no, some of the greatest soldiers and sailors have resisted authority when authority has been in the wrong. Nelson did it, and General Gordon did it, and if this one—"

But the old man burst out again in a quivering voice—

"Why do you come to tell me this? What has it got to do with me? The case before us is perfectly clear. By some tangle of devilish circumstances the wrong man has been arrested to-night. But your prisoner is wanted by the military

authorities for other offences. Very well, let him be handed over to them.”

The Sirdar now saw that he had not only to fight the father for his own flesh and blood, but the man for himself. He looked across the room to where the Grand Cadi sat in smug silence, with his claw-like hands clasped before his breast, and then, as if taking a last chance, he said—

”Nuneham, the prisoner is your son.”

”All the more reason why I should treat him as I should treat anybody else.”

”Your only son.”

”Humph!”

”If anything happens to him—if he dies before you—your family will come to an end when you are gone.”

The old man trembled. The Sirdar was cutting him in the tenderest place—ploughing deep into his lifelong secret.

”Your name will be wiped out. *You* will have wiped it out, Nuneham.”

The old man was shaking like a rock which vibrates in an earthquake. To steady his nerves he took a pen and held it firmly in the fingers of both hands.

”If you tell the Commandant to hand him over to the military authorities, it will be the same in the court of your conscience as if you had done it. *You will have cut off your own line.*”

The old man fought hard with himself. It was a fearful struggle.

”More than that, it will be the same—it will be the same when you come to think of it—as if with that pen in your hands you had signed your own son’s death-warrant.”

The pen dropped, as if it had been red-hot, from the old man’s trembling fingers. Still he struggled.

”If my son is a guilty man, let the law deal with him as it would deal with any other,” he said, but his voice shook—it could scarcely sustain itself.

The Sirdar saw that, deep under the frozen surface, the heart of the old man was breaking up; he knew that the shot that killed Gordon would kill the Consul-General also; and he felt that he was now pleading for the life of the father as well as of the son.

”It’s not as if the boy were a prodigal, a wastrel,” he said. ”He is a gentleman, every inch of him, and if he has gone wrong, if he has acted improperly, it has only been from the highest impulses. He has sincerity and he has courage, and they are the noblest virtues of the soul.”

The old man’s head was down, but he was conscious that the Cadi’s cruel eyes were upon him.

”He’s a soldier, too. In some respects the finest young soldier in the army, whoever the next may be. He saw his first fighting with me, I remember. It was at Omdurman. He had taken the Khalifa’s flag. The Dervish who carried it had

treacherously stabbed his comrade, and when he came up with fire and tears in his eyes and said, 'I killed him like a dog, sir,' 'My God,' I said to myself, 'here is a soldier born.'"

The old man was silent, but he was still conscious that the Cadi's cruel eyes were upon him, watching him, interrogating him, saying, "What will you do now, I wonder?"

"God has never given me a son," continued the Sirdar, "but from that day to this I have always felt as if that boy belonged also to myself."

The old man was breaking up rapidly; but still he would not yield.

"His mother loved him, too. Perhaps he was the only human thing that came between her and her God. She is dead, and they say the dead see all. Who knows, Nuneham?—she may be waiting now to find out what you are going to do."

The strain was terrible. The two old friends, one visibly moved and making no effort to conceal his emotion, the other fighting hard with the dark spirits of pride and wrath!

The Sirdar's mind went back to the days when they were young men themselves, at Sandhurst together, and approaching the Consul-General, he put one hand on his shoulder and said—

"Nuneham—John Nuneham—John—Jack—give the boy another chance. Let him go."

Then with a cry of agony and with an oath, never heard from his lips before, the Consul-General rose from his seat and said—

"No, no, no! You come here asking me to put my honour into the hands of my enemies—to leave myself at the mercy of any scoundrel who cares to say that the measure I mete out to others is not that which I keep for my own. You come, too, excusing my son's offences against military law, but saying nothing of the other crimes in which you have this very night caught him red-handed."

After that he smote the desk with his clenched fist and cried—

"No, no, I tell you no! My son is a traitor. He has joined himself to his father's and his country's enemies to destroy his father and to destroy England in Egypt, and if the punishment of a traitor is death, then death it must be to him as to any other, that the same justice may be dealt out to all."

Then to the Commandant who was still standing by the door he said—

"Go, sir! Let your prisoner be handed over to the military authorities without one moment's further delay."

It was like the breaking away of an avalanche, and after it there came the same awful stillness. No one spoke. The Commandant bowed and left the room.

The Consul-General returned to his seat at the desk, and, digging his elbows into the blotting-pad, rested his head on his hands. The Sirdar stood side-

ways with one arm on the chimney-piece. The Cadi sat in his smug silence with his claw-like hands still clasped in front of his breast.

They heard the Commandant's heavy step and the click of his spurs as he walked across the marble floor of the hall. They heard the front door close with a bang. Still no one spoke, and the silence seemed to be everlasting.

Then they heard the outer bell ringing loudly. They heard the front door opened and then closed again, as if somebody had been admitted. At the next moment, Ibrahim, looking as if he had just seen a ghost, had come, with his slippers feet, into the library, and was stammering—

"If you please, your Excellency ... if you please, your Ex—"

"Speak out, you fool—who is it?" said the Consul-General.

"It is ... it is Miss ... Miss Helena, your Excellency."

The Consul-General's face contracted for an instant as if he were trying to recover the plain sense of where he was and what was going on. Then he rose and went out of the room, Ibrahim following him.

The Sirdar and the Grand Cadi were left together. They did not speak nor exchange a sign. The Sirdar felt that the Cadi's presence had contributed to the late painful scene—that it had been a silent, subtle devilish influence against Gordon—and he was conscious of an almost unconquerable desire to take the man by the throat and wring his neck as he would wring the neck of a bird of prey.

A quarter of an hour passed. Half-an-hour. Still the two men did not speak. And the Consul-General did not return.

CHAPTER VIII

Meantime Helena, in another room, still wearing her mixed Eastern and Western dress, was sitting by a table in an attitude of supplication, with her arms outstretched and her hands clasped across a corner of it, speaking earnestly and rapidly to the Consul-General, who was standing with head down in front of her.

Pale, in spite of the heat of the South and the sun of the desert, very nervous, flurried, and a little ashamed, yet with a sense of urgent necessity, she was telling him all that had happened since she left Cairo—how she had gone to Khartoum under an impulse of revenge that was inspired by a mistaken idea of the cause of her father's death; how, being there, she had been compelled to accept the

position of Ishmael's nominal wife or go back with her errand unfulfilled; how she had come to know of the base proposals of certain of the Ulema, and how, at length, when Ishmael had succumbed to the last of them, she had written and dispatched her letter saying he was coming into Cairo in disguise.

Then in her soft voice, with its deep note, she told of Gordon's arrival in Khartoum; of his own tragic mistake and awful sufferings; of his confession to her; of her confession to him; and of how she realised her error, but found herself powerless to overtake or undo it.

Finally she told the Consul-General of Gordon's determination to take Ishmael's place, being impelled to do so by the firmest conviction that his father was being deceived by some one in Cairo, by the certainty that Ishmael could not otherwise be moved from his fanatical purpose, and that while the consequences of his own arrest must be merely personal to himself, the result of Ishmael's death at the hands of the authorities might be a holy war, which would put Egypt in the right and England in the wrong, and cover his father's honoured name with infamy.

The old man listened eagerly, standing as long as he could on the same spot, then walking to and fro with nervous and irregular steps, but stopping at intervals as if breathless from an overpowering sense of the hand of fate.

Having finished her story, Helena produced Gordon's letters from the little handbag which hung from one of her arms, and having kissed them, as if the Consul-General had not been present, she began with panting affection to read passages from them in proof of what she had said.

Being a woman, she knew by instinct what to read first, and one by one came the passionate words which told of Gordon's affection for the father whom he felt bound to resist.

"My father," she read, "is a great man who probably does not need and would certainly resent my compassion, but, Lord God, how I pity him! Deceived by false friends, alone in his old age, after all he has done for Egypt!"

The old man stopped her and said—

"But how did he know that—that I was being deceived? What right had he to say so?"

"Listen," said Helena, and she read Gordon's account of his visit to the Grand Cadi, when the "oily scoundrel" had called his father "the slave of power," "the evil-doer," "the adventurer," and "the great assassin."

"Then why didn't he come like a man and tell me himself?" asked the Consul-General.

"Listen again, sir," said Helena, and she read what Gordon had said of his impulse to go to his father, in order to disclose the Grand Cadi's duplicity, and then of the reasons restraining him, being sure that his father was aiming at a

coup, and that, acting from a high sense of duty, the Consul-General would hand him over to the military authorities before the work he had come to do had been done.

"But didn't he see what he was doing himself—aiding and abetting a conspiracy?"

"Listen once more, please," said Helena, and she read what Gordon had said of Ishmael's pilgrimage—that while his father thought the Prophet was bringing up an armed force, he was merely leading a vast multitude of religious visionaries, who were expecting to establish in Cairo a millennium of universal faith and empire.

"But, even so, was it necessary to do what he did?" demanded the Consul-General.

"Listen for the last time, sir," said Helena, and then in her soft, earnest, pleading voice, she read—

"It is necessary to prevent the massacre which I know (and my father does not) would inevitably ensue; necessary to save my father himself from the execrations of the civilised world; necessary to save Ishmael from the tragic consequences of his determined fanaticism; necessary to save England—"

"Give them to me," said the Consul-General, taking—almost snatching—the letters out of Helena's hands in the fierce nervous tension which left him no time to think of courtesies.

Then drawing a chair up to the table, and fixing his eyeglasses over his spectacles, he turned the pages one by one and read passages here and there. Helena watched him while he did so, and in the changing expression of the hitherto hard, immobile, implacable face she saw the effect that was being produced.

"I cannot say how hard it is to me to be engaged in a secret means to frustrate my father's plans—it is like fighting one's own flesh and blood, and is not fair warfare....

"Neither can I say what a struggle it has been to me as an English soldier to make up my mind to intercept an order of the British army—it is like playing traitor, and I can scarcely bear to think of it....

"But all the same I know it is necessary. I also know *God* knows it is necessary, and when I think of that my heart beats wildly....

"I am willing to give my life for England, whatever name she may know me by ... and I am willing to die for these poor Egyptians, because...

"This may be the last letter I shall write to you....

"May the great God of Heaven bless and protect you...."

The Consul-General was overwhelmed. The Grand Cadi's duplicity stifled him; Ishmael's innocence of conspiracy humiliated him, but his son's heroism crushed him, and made him feel like a little man.

Yet he had just now denounced his son as a traitor, handed him over to the military authorities, and, in effect, condemned him to death!

As the old man read Gordon's letters his iron face seemed to decompose. Helena could not bear to look at him any longer, and she had to turn her face away. At length she became conscious that he had ceased to read, and that his great, sad, humid eyes were looking at her.

"So you came here to plead with me for the life of my boy?" he said, and, as well as she could for the tears that were choking her, she answered—

"Yes."

He hesitated for a moment as if trying to summon courage to tell her something, and then, in a voice that was quite unlike his own, he said—

"Permit me to take these letters away for a few minutes."

And rising unsteadily, he left the room.

CHAPTER IX

When the Consul-General returned to the library he looked like a feeble old man of ninety. It was just as if twenty years of his life had been struck out of him in half-an-hour. The Sirdar stepped up to him in alarm, saying—

"What has happened?"

"Read these," he answered, handing to the Sirdar the letters he carried in his hand.

The Sirdar took the letters aside, and standing by the chimney-piece he looked at them. While he did so, his face, which had hitherto been grave and pale, became bright and ruddy, and he uttered little sharp cries of joy.

"I knew it!" he said. "Although I was at a loss to read the riddle of Gordon's presence at Ghezirah I knew there must be some explanation. If he had acted with a sense of conscience in the one case, he must have done so in the other.... Thank God! Splendid! Bravo! ... Of course you will stop the Commandant?"

The Consul-General, who had returned to his seat at the desk, did not reply, and the Sirdar, thinking to anticipate his objection, said eagerly—

"Why not? The Commandant will act as for himself, and nobody will know that you have been consulted.... That is to say," he added, with another oblique glance in the direction of the Grand Cadi, "nobody outside this room, and if anybody here should ever whisper a word about it, I'll ... I'll ... well, never mind;

nobody will, nobody dare.”

Then in the fever of his impatience the Sirdar proposed to call up the Commandant of Police on the telephone and tell him to consider his orders cancelled.

“Don’t stir,” he said. “I’ll do it. Your Secretary will show me the box.”

When, with a light step and a hopeful face, the Sirdar had gone out of the room on this errand the Cadi began for the first time to show signs of life. He coughed, cleared his throat, and made other noises indicative of a desire to speak, but the Consul-General, still sitting at the desk with the look of a shattered man, seemed to be unconscious of his presence. At length he said, in the hushed voice of one who was habitually afraid of being overheard—

“I regret ... sincerely regret ... that I have been again compelled to approach your Excellency’s honourable person ... especially at a time like this, ... but a certain danger ... personal danger ... made me think that perhaps your Excellency would deign—”

Before he could say any more the Sirdar had returned to the library, with a long face and a slow step.

“Too late!” he said. “I called up the Commandant at his office, and they said he had gone to the Citadel. Then I called him up there, thinking I might still be in time. But no, the thing was over. Gordon was under arrest.”

After that, there was silence for some moments while the Sirdar looked again at the letters which he was still holding in his hands. At one moment he raised his eyes, and turning to the Consul-General he said—

“You’ll not call down the troops from Abbassiah?”

“No.”

“And you’ll allow this man Ishmael and his visionary followers to come into Cairo if they’ve a mind to?”

The Consul-General bent his head.

“Good!” said the Sirdar. “At all events that will shut the mouths of the fine birds who must be getting ready to crow.”

But a look of alarm came into the Grand Cadi’s eyes, such as comes into the eyes of a hawk when an eagle is about to pounce upon it.

“Surely,” he said, “his Excellency does not intend to allow this horde of fifty thousand fanatics to pour themselves into the capital?”

Whereupon the Sirdar turned sharply upon the man and answered—

“That is exactly what his Excellency *does* intend to do.”

“But what is to become of *me*?” asked the Cadi. “This is exactly the errand I came upon. Already the people are threatening me, and I came to ask for protection. I am suspected of giving information to his Excellency. Will his Excellency desert me ... leave me to the mercy of this man Ishmael, this corrupter and destroyer of the faith?”

Then the Consul-General, who had sat with head down, the picture of despair, rose to his full height and faced the Grand Cadi.

"Listen," he said, with a flash of his old fire. "I give your Eminence twenty-four hours to leave Egypt. If the *people* do not dispose of you after that time, as sure as there is a British Minister in Constantinople, *I will!*"

The look of alarm on the Cadi's cunning face was smitten into an expression of terror. Not a word more did he say. One glance he gave at the letters in the Sirdar's hands, and then rising, with a low bow, and touching his breast and forehead, he turned to leave the room. Meantime the Sirdar had rung the bell for Ibrahim, and then stepping to the door, he had opened it. The ample folds of the Cadi's sleeves swelled as he walked, and he passed out like a human bat.

Being alone with the Sirdar, the Consul-General's mind went back to Helena.

"Poor child!" he said. "I hadn't the heart to tell her what I had done. Go to her, Reg. She's in the drawing-room. Give her back her letters, and tell her what has happened. Then take her to the Princess Nazimah. Poor girl! Poor Gordon!"

The Sirdar made some effort to comfort him, but it was hard to say anything now to the man who in the days of his strength had hated all forms of sentimentality. Yet the shadow of supernatural powers seemed to be over him, for he muttered some simple, almost child-like words about the Almighty permitting him to fall because he had wandered away from Him.

"Janet! My poor Janet!" the old man murmured, and his humbled head hung low.

The Sirdar could bear no more, and he quietly left the library.

As he approached the drawing-room he heard voices within. Fatimah was with Helena. All the mother-heart in the Egyptian woman had warmed to the girl in her trouble, and, forgetful of the difference of class, they were clasped in each other's arms.

The Sirdar could see by the tears that were trickling down Helena's cheeks that already she knew everything, but, all the same, he told her that Gordon had been handed over to the military authorities. She stood the fire of the sad news without flinching, and a few minutes afterwards they were in the Sirdar's carriage on their way to the Princess Nazimah's, the black boy on his donkey trotting proudly behind.

"We must not lose heart, though," said the Sirdar. "Now that I come to think of it, to be court-martialled may be the best thing that can happen to him. He'll have a good deal to say for himself. And whatever the sentence may be, there's the Army Council, and there's the Secretary of State, and there's the King himself, you know."

"Then you think there's some hope still?" she said faintly, but sweetly.

"I'm certain there is," said the Sirdar; and as the carriage passed under the electric arc-lamps in the streets he could see that Helena's wet eyes were shining.

After a while she asked where Gordon was imprisoned, and was told that he was at the Citadel, but that he was in officer's quarters, and that his Egyptian foster-brother, Hafiz Ahmed, was permitted to be with him.

Then she asked if Ishmael and his people would be permitted to come into Cairo, and was told that they would, and that they might encamp in El Azhar if they cared to, Ishmael being nothing to the Sirdar but an inoffensive dreamer with a disordered brain.

Helena's lovely face looked almost happy. She was thinking of the light that was expected to shine at midnight from the minaret of the mosque of Mohammed Ali, and was telling herself that as soon as she reached the house of the Princess she would call up Hafiz at the Citadel and see what could be done.

Meantime Fatimah, who had gone to the Consul-General's bedroom to see that everything was in order, had felt something crunching under her feet, and picking it up, she found that it was the portrait of Gordon as a boy in his Arab fez. With many sighs she was putting the pieces aside when the old man entered the room. He did not seem to see her, and though she lingered some little while, he did not speak.

Sitting on the sofa, he rested his head on his hands mid looked fixedly at the carpet between his feet. Half-an-hour passed—an hour—two hours—but he did not move. At intervals the telegraphic machine, which stood in an alcove of the room, ticked for a time and then stopped. The debate on the Amendment to the Address was still going on, but that did not matter now. Nothing mattered except one thing—that he, he himself, had sent his own son to his death, thus cutting off his line, ending his family, and destroying the one hope and lodestar of his life.

"All well! It's all over!" he thought, and at length, switching off the lights, he went to bed.

While the great Proconsul slept his restless, troubled sleep the telegraphic machine ticked out in the darkness on the long slip of white paper that rolled on to the floor the future history of Egypt, and, in some sense, of the world.

Far away in London the Foreign Minister was speaking.

"I am one of those who think," he was saying, "that just as religious leaders, Popes as well as Mahdis, may go to wreck under the mental malady which permits them to believe they are the mouthpieces of the Almighty, so statesmen may be destroyed by the seeds of dissolution which power, especially absolute power, carries within itself.

"Holding this opinion, I also hold that to place one person in sole charge of millions of people of a different race, creed, and mode of thought, is to put a

load on one man's shoulders which no man, whatever his power and influence, his integrity and the nobility of his principles, ought to be called upon to bear."

But the heavy-lidded house on the Nile was asleep. The Consul-General did not hear.

CHAPTER X

When Ishmael left Helena's tent he did not return to his own. In the torment of his soul he sought the solitude of the desert. For two hours he walked on the sand without knowing where he was going. The night was dark, save for an innumerable army of stars, an eastern night, still and fragrant, but the unhappy man was wandering in it like a creature accursed, a prey to the most terrible upheaval of the soul, the most bitter and sorrowful reflections.

His first thoughts were about Helena—that all the sweetness, all the loveliness which had been his joy by day and his dream by night belonged not to him, but to another.

"I am nothing to her," he told himself, and greater grief than he felt at that thought seemed to surpass the bounds of possibility.

But there was worse behind. At the next moment of his anguish he remembered that not only did Helena not love him, but he was repulsive to her. "Don't you see you are hateful and odious to me—that you are a black man, and I am a white woman?"

This was more than heartrending—it was physically excruciating, like poison creeping under the skin. But it had its spiritual torture also. He who had built his life on the belief that the sons and daughters of men were all children of one Father, had found out in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, within his own camp, in his own tent, that Nature gave the lie to his faith, and that he—he himself—was only as a black man to the white woman whom he called his wife.

"I thought that where love was there could be neither race nor colour, but I was wrong, quite wrong," he told himself again, and it seemed as if everything that had built up his soul was crumbling away.

But even worse than all this was the thought that Helena had betrayed him—she who had seemed to sacrifice so much. Pitiful delusion! Cruel snare!

It was maddening to think of the merely human side of his betrayal—that between the guilty wife and her lover he was only the husband who had to be

got rid of—but the spiritual aspect was still more terrible. He who had allowed himself to believe that he was specially guided by God, that the Merciful had made him His messenger, had been deceived and duped, and was no more than a poor, weak, helpless man, who had been led away by his love for a woman.

The shame of his betrayal was stifling, the sense of his downfall was crushing, but still more painful was the consciousness of the penalty which his people would have to pay for the pride and blind love which had misled him. They had followed him across the desert, suffering all the pains of the long and toilsome journey, buoyed up by the hopes with which he had inspired them; they had trusted and loved and looked up to him, hardly distinguishing between his word and the word of God, and now—their leader was deceived, their hopes were dead, the mirage of their dreams had disappeared.

Thinking of this in the agony of his despair, he asked himself why God had permitted it to come to pass that not himself only, but the whole body of his people should suffer. "Why, O God, why?" he cried, lifting up his arms to the sky.

For some moments a cloud passed between him and the faith which had so long sustained him. He began to deplore his lofty mission, and to remember with regret his earlier days in Khartoum with the simple girl who loved him and lay on the angerib in his arms. He had been humble then—content to be a man; and recalling one by one the touching memories of his life with Adila—in their prison, brightened by rays of love, in their poor desert home, illuminated more than a palace by the expectation of the child that was to come—his heart failed him, and he wanted to curse the destiny which had led him to a greatness wherein all was vain.

The wild insurrection in his soul had left him no time to think which course he was taking, but wandering across the Sakkara desert he had by this time come to the foot of the Sphinx.

Calm, immovable, tremendous, the great scarred face was gazing in passionless meditation into the luminous starlight, asking, as it had asked through the long yesterday of the past, as it will continue to ask through the long tomorrow of the future, the everlasting question, the question of humanity, the question of all suffering souls—

"Why?"

Why should man aim higher than he can reach? Why should he give up the joys of humanity for divine dreams that can never be realised? Why should he be a victim to the devilish powers, within and without, which are always waiting to betray and destroy him? Why should God forsake him just when he is striving to serve Him best?

"Allah! Allah! Why? Why?" he cried.

But his higher nature speedily regained its supremacy. It came to him as a

flash of light in his darkness that the true explanation of his downfall was that God was punishing him for his presumption in allowing the idolatry of his people to carry him away from his first humility—to forget his proper place as a man, and to think of himself as if he were a god.

This led him to thoughts of atonement, and in a moment the image of death came to him—his own death—as a sacrifice. He began to see what he had now to do. He had to take all that had happened upon himself. He had to call his people together and to say, "I lied to you! I was a false prophet! I deceived myself, and in deceiving myself I deceived you also! The wonderful world I promised you—the Redeemer I foretold—all, all is vain!"

And then—what then? What of himself—the betrayed, the betrayer? After he had parted from the people with their broken hearts, he would deliver himself up to the authorities. He had done no wrong to the Government, but he had sinned against his followers, and he had sinned against God, and God would accept the one punishment for the other.

Yes, he would go into Cairo and say, "I am here—you want me—take me!"

His regenerated soul saw in his death not only his own salvation, but, the salvation of his people also. It was not clear to him how this was to come to pass, but death had always been a gain to great causes, and God was over all!

Under this sublime resolution his heart became almost buoyant. He turned to go back to the camp, and as he walked he thought of Helena again. The tender love which had filled his whole being for months could not be banished in an hour, and he began to tell himself that perhaps after all she had not been to blame. Love could not be ruled by a rudder like a boat. The white woman could not help but love the white man. It was a woman's way to risk everything, to sacrifice everybody, to commit sin and even crime for the man she loved—how many good women had done so!

That was the temptation to which the Rani had succumbed, and he—yes, he also—must submit to the pains of it. They were hard, they were cruel, they cut to the core, but with the idea of death before him they could now be borne.

He remembered his unbridled wrath with the Rani, his ferocious violence, and he felt ashamed. It was almost impossible to believe that he had really laid hands upon her and tried to strangle her.

He remembered how he had left her, face down on the angerib, in her misery and remorse. The picture in his mind's eye of the weeping woman in her tent made his heart bleed with pity.

He must go back to her. His people might suspect that she was the author of their trouble, and in their fury they might threaten her. He must conceal her fault. He must take her sin upon himself.

"I must cover her with my cloak," he thought.

Thus thirsting with a desire to drink the cup of his degradation to the dregs, Ishmael got back to camp. It was full of touching sights. Instead of the flare of the lights and the tumult of the excited crowds which he had left behind him, there were now only the ashes of dying fires and the melancholy moanings of the people who were sitting about them.

He made his way first to Helena's tent, and, standing by the mouth of it, he called to her.

"Rani!"

A woman who had been lying on the angerib rose to answer him. It was Zenoba.

"Alas! Your Rani has gone, O Master," she said, with mock sympathy but ill-concealed tones of triumph.

"Gone?"

"She was afraid the people might kill her, so she fled away."

"Fled away?"

"I did my best to keep her for your sake, but she loves herself more than you, and that's the truth, O Master."

Ishmael groaned and staggered, but the woman showed no pity.

"Better have contented yourself with a woman of your own people, who would have been true and faithful," she said in a bitter whisper.

Covered with shame, Ishmael turned away. He looked for Zogal.

The black Dervish was at that moment struggling to sustain the people's faith in the Master and his mission by means of a pagan superstition.

"Give me a mutton bone," he had said, and having received one, he had looked at it long and steadfastly in order to read the future.

As Ishmael came up to the smouldering fire about which Zogal and his company were squatting, the wild-eyed Dervish was saying—

"It will be well! Allah will preserve His people, and the Master will be saved! Did I not tell thee the bone never lies?"

"Zogal," said Ishmael, "sound the horn, and let the people be brought together."

The sky was dark. The stars had gone out. It was not yet midnight.

CHAPTER XI

At the next moment the melancholy notes of the great horn rang out over the dark camp, and within a few minutes an immense multitude had gathered.

It was a strange spectacle under the blank darkness of the sky. Men carrying lanterns, which cast coarse lights upward into their swarthy faces, were standing in a surging and murmuring mass, while women, like shadows in the gloom, were huddling together on the outskirts of the crowd.

They were Ishmael's faithful people, all of them, broken-hearted believers in his spiritual mission, for at the shadow of disaster those who had followed him for personal gains alone had gone.

Ishmael caused the people to be drawn up in a great square, and then, mounting a camel, he rode into the midst of them. He was seen to be in a state of great excitement.

"Brothers," he said, "we have passed through many hard days together. You have shared with me your joys and your sorrows. I have shared with you my hopes and my dreams. We are one."

Touched to the heart by his voice as much as his words, the people cried—

"May God preserve thee!"

"Nay," he cried, "may God punish me, for I have permitted myself to be deceived."

The people thought he was going to speak of the woman who was understood to have betrayed him, but he did not do so.

"Look!" he cried, pointing towards the pyramid. "We stand amid the ruins of a pagan world. Where are the Kings and Counsellors who slept in these desolate places? Gone! All gone! Have not strangers from a far country taken away their bodies to wonder at? Where is the king who built this tomb? He thought himself the equal of God, yet what was he? A man, shaped out of a little clay! And I?" he said, "I, too, have been drunk with power. I have been living in the greatness of my own strength. I have permitted myself to believe that I was the messenger of God, and therefore God—God has brought me down. He has laid me in the dust. Blessed be the name of God!"

Only the broken ejaculations of the people answered him, and he went on without pausing—

"In bringing me down He has brought down my people also. Alas for you, my brothers! You cannot go into Cairo. The armed forces of the Government are waiting there to destroy you. Therefore turn back and go home. Forgive your leader who has led you astray. And God preserve and comfort you!"

"And you, O Master?" cried a voice that rose above the confused voices of the people.

Ishmael paused for a moment, and then said—

"In times of great war and pestilence God has accepted an atonement, and

perhaps He will do so now. I will go into Cairo and deliver myself to the Government. I will say, 'The man you hold was arrested instead of me. I am your true prisoner. Take me and let him—and let my poor followers—go free.'

The anguish of the people swelled into sobs, and some of them, full of zeal, swore that they would never return to their homes without the Master, but would follow him to prison and to death.

"If you go into Cairo, so will I!" cried one.

"And I too!" cried another.

"And I!" "And I!" "And I!" cried others, each holding up his hand and stepping out as he spoke, until the square in which Ishmael sat on his camel was full of excited men.

At that moment of deep emotion, while great tears were rolling down Ishmael's cheeks and the women on the outskirts of the crowd were uttering piercing cries, a loud, delirious shout was heard, and a man was seen to be crushing his way through the people.

It was Zogal, and his wild eyes were ablaze with frenzy.

"Wait! Wait!" he cried. "Has the Master forgotten his own message? He says the soldiers of the Franks and Turks are waiting in Cairo to destroy us. But isn't God greater than armies? We are weak and defenceless, but does He always give His victory to the armed and the strong? What!" he cried again, "are you afraid that the Christians will kill us with bullets? That they will eat our flesh and drink our blood? That they will make us worship the wooden cross? If God is with us what can our enemies do? It is not they who throw the javelin—it is God! Therefore," he cried, in a voice that had risen to a scream, "if the Master is to go into Cairo we will *all* go with him."

In vain Ishmael tried to stop the man. His protests were drowned in the rapturous responses of the crowd. People are as easily swayed to as fro; they regain confidence as rapidly as they lose it. In a moment the Master was forgotten, and only the wild-eyed Dervish seemed to be heard.

"Did not God promise us, through the mouth of His messenger, that we should go into Cairo—and will He break His word?"

"Allah! Allah!" shouted the crowd.

"Did he not tell us God would send us a sign?"

"Allah! Allah!"

"Shall we say it will not come, and call God a liar?"

"Allah! Allah!"

"'At the hour of midnight prayers,' he said, 'the light will shine.'"

"Allah! Allah! Allah!"

"Pray for it, my brothers, pray for it," cried Zogal, and in another moment, with the delirious strength of one possessed, he had cleared a long passage

through the people, and begun to lead a wild, barbaric Zikr, such as he had seen in the depths of the desert.

"The light! The light! Send the light, O Allah!" cried Zogal, striding up and down the long alley of bowing and swaying people, and tossing his sweating and foaming face up to the dark sky.

It has been truly said that everything favours those who have a special destiny—that they may become glorious against their own will and as if by the command of fate. It was so with Ishmael. At the very moment when Zogal on the desert was calling for the light which he believed God had promised, Hafiz, at the Citadel, having received the message which Helena had sent over the telephone from the house of the Princess Nazimah, was running with a powerful lantern up the winding stairway of one of the minarets of the mosque of Mohammed Ali.

"The light! The light! Send the light, O Allah!" cried the dervish, and at the next moment, while the breathless crowd about him were looking through the darkness towards the heights above Cairo, expecting to see the manifestation of God's sign in the sky, the light appeared!

In an instant the whole camp was a scene of frantic rejoicing. Men were shouting, women were lu-lu-ing, camels and asses were being saddled, tents were being struck, and everybody and everything was astir.

Oh, mysterious and divine power of destiny, that could make the fate of an entire nation hang on the accident of time and the unreasoning impulses of one poor demented man!

CHAPTER XII

Next day Ishmael entered Cairo. News of his coming had been noised abroad, and the police at their various stations had been told that beyond the necessary efforts to preserve order they were not in any way to interfere with his procession. Neither Ishmael nor any of his people were to be allowed to pose as martyrs. There was to be no resistance and no bloodshed. If possible there was to be no scene.

The guests at the King's Dinner had left the Ghezirah long before midnight. Such of them as were innocent of all participation in conspiracy (they were the majority) attributed the Consul-General's strange outbreak to an attack of mental vertigo in an old man whose health had long been failing from the pressure of

public work. Nothing was allowed to occur which would give the incident a more serious significance. The bridge which had been opened was closed, and the guests had returned to their homes as usual.

In the early hours of morning they were awakened by loud shoutings in the streets. Two hundred men from Ishmael's company had galloped ahead as heralds, and, flying down every thoroughfare to reassure the population of the nature of the vast procession that was coming, they were crying—

”Peace! Peace! It is Peace!”

After that the general body of the native people, who had been on the tiptoe of expectation, were speeding along the streets. They found mounted and foot police stationed at various points, but no military and no guns.

It was a triumphant entry. The procession came in by the Gizeh Bridge, and passing down the Kasr-el-Aini into the Place Ismailyah, it turned down the broad Boulevard Abul Aziz towards the heart of the city.

The sun was rising, and the scene was a blaze of colour. Banners were swinging from the houses like ships' pendants in stormy seas. The streets seemed to be carpeted with the tarbooshes and turbans of the great, moving, surging masses of humanity that were slowly passing through them. There were brown faces that were almost white from the fatigue of the long desert march, and white faces that were burnt brown by the tropical sun. It was a swarming, shifting, variegated throng, and over all was the dazzling splendour of the Eastern sunrise.

Before the procession had gone far, it seemed as if the whole population of Cairo had come out to it. Eternal children! There is nothing they love more than to look at a great spectacle except to take part in it, and they hastened to take part in this one. Every window and balcony was soon full of faces; every housetop was alive with movement and aflame with colour. People were thronging the footpaths on either side as the pilgrims passed between.

The wives and children of the hundred emissaries who left Cairo on Ishmael's errand had come out to look for their husbands and fathers returning home. Eagerly they were scanning the faces of the pilgrims, and loud and wild were their cries of joy when they recognised their own.

Many of those who had no personal interest in the procession fell into line with it. A company of Dervishes walked by its side playing pipes and drums. Other musicians joined them with strange-looking wooden and brass instruments. Bursts of wild Arab music broke out from time to time and then stopped, leaving a sort of confused and tumultuous silence.

Carts filled with women and children, who were laughing and lu-lu-ing by turns, jolted along by the pilgrims like trundling bundles of joy. And then there were the pilgrims themselves, the vast concourse of fully forty thousand from the Soudan, from Assouan, from the long valley of the Nile, some on horses,

some on camels, some on donkeys, some wearing their simple felt skull-caps and galabeahs, others in flowing robes and crimson head-dresses. The barbaric splendour and intoxicating arrogance of it all was such as the people of Cairo had never seen before.

To the great body of the Cairenes the entrance of Ishmael Ameer denoted victory. That the Government permitted it indicated their defeat. The great English lord, who had closed El Azhar, thereby damming up the chief fountain of the Islamic faith, had been beaten. Either the Powers, or God Himself, had suppressed him and rebuked England. Pharaoh had fallen. The children of Allah were crossing their Red Sea. Even as Mohammed, after being expelled from Mecca as a rebel, had returned to it as a conqueror, so Ishmael, after being cast out of Cairo as the enemy of England, was coming back as England's master and king. So louder and louder became their wild acclamations.

"Victory to Islam!"

"El Hamdullillah!"

"God has willed it!"

When Ishmael himself appeared the shouts of welcome were deafening. He had been long in coming, and the people had been waiting for him all along the line. He came at the end of the procession, and if he could have escaped from it altogether he would have done so.

In spite of all this glory, all this grandeur, a deep melancholy filled the soul of Ishmael. He was not carried away by what had happened. Nothing that had occurred since the night before had touched his pride. When the light appeared on the minaret he had not been deceived. He knew that by some unknown turn of the wheel of chance his people were to be allowed to enter Cairo, but all the same his heart was low.

The only interpretation he put upon the change in events was a mystic one. God had refused his atonement! God had taken the leadership of His people out of his hands! As punishment of his weakness in permitting himself to be betrayed, God had made him a mere follower of his own black servant! Therefore his glory was his shame! His hour of triumph was his hour of sorrow and disgrace! He was entering Cairo under the frown of the face of God!

When the camp had been ready to move he had mounted his white camel and ridden last, beset by melancholy pre-occupations. But when he came to the Gizeh Bridge and saw the crowds that were coming out to greet him, and met Zogal, who had galloped into the city and was galloping back to say that the people of Cairo were preparing a triumph for him, he made his camel kneel, and in the deep abasement of his soul he got down to walk.

He walked down the whole length of the Kasr-el-Aini with head down, like a man who was ashamed, shuddering visibly when the onlookers cheered, trem-

bling when they commended him to God, and almost falling when they saluted him as the Deliverer and Redeemer of Islam and its people.

Although of large frame and strong muscle, he was a man of delicate organisation, and the strain his soul was going through was tearing his body to pieces. At length, as he approached the Place Ismailyah, where the crowd was dense, he stumbled and fell on one knee.

Zogal, who was behind, leapt from the ass he was riding and lifted the Master in his arms, but it was seen that he could not stand. There was a moment's hesitation, in which the black man seemed to ask himself what he ought to do, and at the next instant he had thrown his white cloak over the donkey's back and lifted Ishmael into the saddle.

Meantime the people in the streets, in the balconies, on the housetops, were waiting for the new prophet. They expected to see him coming into Cairo as a conqueror—in a litter, perhaps, covered with gold and fringed with jingling coins and cowries—the central figure of a great procession such as would remind them of the grandeur of the Mahmal, the holy carpet returning from Mecca.

When at length he came his appearance gave a shock. His face was pale, his head was down, and he was riding on an ass!

But truly everything favours him who has the great destiny. After the spectators had recovered from their first shock at the sight of Ishmael, his humility touched their imagination. Remembering how he had left Cairo, and seeing how meekly he was returning to it, their acclamations became deafening.

"Praise be to God!"

"May God preserve thee!"

"May God give thee long life!"

And then some one who thought he saw in the entrance of Ishmael into Cairo a reproduction of the most triumphant if the most tragic incident in the life of the Lord of the Christians, shouted—

"Seyidna Isa! Seyidna Isa!" (Our Lord Jesus!)

In a moment the name was taken up on every side, and resounded in joyous accents down the streets. The belief of a crowd is created not by slow processes of reason but by quick flashes of emotion, and instantly the surging mass of Eastern children had accepted the idea that Ishmael Ameer was a reincarnation of that "divine man of Judæa" whom he had taught them to reverence, that "son of Mary" whom the Prophet himself had placed high among the children of men.

To make the parallel complete, people rushed out of the houses and spread their coats on the ground in front of him, and some, pushing their adoration to yet greater lengths, climbed the trees that lined the Boulevard and tearing away branches and boughs flung them before his feet.

The Dervishes ran ahead crying the new name in frantic tones, while a

company of grave-looking men walked on either side of Ishmael, chanting the first Surah: "Praise be to God, the Lord of all creatures," and the muezzins in the minarets of the mosques (blind men nearly all, who could see nothing of the boiling, bubbling, gorgeous scene below) chanted the profession of faith: "There is no god but God! God is Most Great! God is Most Great!" Men shouted with delight, women lu-lu-ed with joy, and the thousands of voices that clashed through the air sounded like bells ringing a joyful peal.

Nothing could have exceeded the savage grandeur of Ishmael's return to Cairo; but Ishmael himself, the white figure sitting sideways on an ass, continued to move along with a humbled and chastened soul. He was a sad man, with his own secret sorrow; a bereaved man, a betrayed man, with a heart that was torn and bleeding.

When he remembered that in spite of his betrayal, his predictions were being fulfilled, he told himself that that was by God's doing only, not by his in any way. When he heard the divine name by which the people greeted him he felt as if he were being burned to the very marrow. He was crushed by their mistaken worship. He knew himself now for a poor, weak, blind, deceived, and self-deluded man, whom the Almighty had smitten and brought low. Therefore he made no response to the frantic acclamations. Every step of the road as he passed along was like a purgatorial procession, and his suffering was written in lines of fire on his downcast face.

"O Father, spare me, spare me," he prayed as the people shouted by his side.

Once he made an effort to dismount, but Zogal, thinking the Master's strength was failing, put an arm about him and held him in his seat.

It took the whole morning for the procession to pass through the city. Unconsciously, as the blood flows back to the heart, it went up through the Mousky to El Azhar. All the gates of the University, which had been so long closed, were standing open. Who had opened them no one seemed to know. The people crowded into the courtyard, and in a little while the vast place was full. A platform had been raised at the further side, and on this Ishmael was placed with the chief of the Ulema beside him.

By one of those accidents which always attach themselves to great events it chanced that the day of Ishmael's return to Cairo was also the first of the Moulden-Naby—the nine days of rejoicing for the birthday of the Prophet. This fact was quickly seized upon as a means for uniting to the beautiful Moslem custom for "attaining the holy satisfaction" the opportunity of celebrating the victory for Islam which Ishmael was thought to have attained. Therefore the Sheikh Seyid-el-Bakri, descendant of the Prophet, and head of the Moslem confraternities, determined to receive his congregations in El Azhar, where Ishmael might share in their homage. They came in thousands, carrying their gilded banners which

were written over with lines from the Koran, ranged themselves, company after company, in half-circles before the dais, salaamed to those who sat on it, chanted words to the glory of God and His Prophet, and then stepped up to kiss the hands and sometimes the feet of their chief and his companions.

Ishmael tried to avoid their homage, but could not do so. Mechanically he uttered the usual response, "May God repeat upon you this feast in happiness and benediction," and then fell back upon his own reflections.

Notwithstanding the blaze and blare of the scene about him, his mind was returning to Helena. Where was she? What fate had befallen her? At length, unable to bear any longer the burden of his thoughts, and the purgatory of his position, he got up and stole away through the corridors at the back of the mosque.

When darkness fell, the native quarters of Cairo were illuminated. Lamps were hung from the poles which project from the minarets of the mosques. Ropes were swung from minaret to minaret, and from these, also, lamps were suspended. In the poorer streets people were going about with open flares in iron grills, and in the better avenues rich men were walking behind their lantern-bearers. Blind beggars in the cafés were reciting the genealogy of the Prophet, and at the end of every passage other blind beggars were crying, "La ilaha illallah!"

Late at night, when the vast following which Ishmael had brought into the city had to be housed, messengers ran through the streets asking for lodgings for the pilgrims, and people answered from their windows and balconies, "I'll take one," "I'll take two." Twenty thousand slept in the courtyard and on the roofs of El Azhar; the rest in the houses round about.

The trust in God, which had seemed to be slain the night before, awoke to a new life, and when at length the delirious city lay down to sleep, the watchmen walked through the deserted thoroughfares crying, "Wahhed! Wahhed!" (God is One!)

In the dead, hollow, echoing hours of early morning a solitary coach passed through the streets in the direction of the outlying stations of the railway to Port Said. Its blinds were down. It was empty. But on the box seat beside the coachman sat a nervous, watchful person with an evil face, wearing the costume of a footman.

It was the Grand Cadi. He had been the supreme orthodox authority of the Moslem faith, sent from Constantinople as representative and exponent of the spiritual authority vested in the Sultan of Turkey as the Caliph of Islam, but he was stealing out of Cairo like a thief.

CHAPTER XIII

A general Court-Martial was fixed for the following morning, and Helena was for going to it just as she was, in the mixed Eastern and Western costume which she had worn on the desert, but the Princess would not hear of that. She must wear the finest gown and the smartest Paris hat that could be obtained in Cairo, in order that Gordon might see her at her best.

"He may be a hero," said the Princess, "but he is a man, too, God bless him, and he'll want to see the woman he loves look lovely."

So the milliners and dressmakers were set to work immediately, and bound by endless pledges.

"Of course they'll promise you the stars at noonday," said the Princess, "but if they don't come up to the scratch they get no money. Keep your cat hungry and she'll catch the rat, you know."

In due time the costume was ready, and when Helena had put it on—a close-fitting silver-grey robe and a large black hat—the Princess stood off from her and said—

"Well, my moon, my sweet, my beauty, if he doesn't want to live a little longer after he has seen you in that, he's not fit to be alive!"

But at the last moment Helena called for a thick dark veil.

"I've no right to sap away his courage," she said; and the Princess, who had heard everything that Helena had to tell, and had swung round to Gordon's side entirely, could say no more.

Hafiz came to take the ladies to the Citadel, and as he was leaving them at the gate to go to Gordon in his quarters, Helena gave him the letter she had written at Sakkara.

"Tell him I mean all I say—every word of it," she whispered.

The Court-Martial was held in one of the rooms of the palace of Mohammed Ali—up a wide stone staircase across a bare court, through a groined archway, beyond a great hall which in former days had seen vast assemblies, and past a door labelled "Minister of War," into a gorgeously decorated chamber, overlooking a garden with its patch of green shut in by high stone walls. It had once been the harem of the great Pasha.

The room was already full when Helena and the Princess arrived, but places were found for them near the door. This position suited Helena perfectly, but to the Princess it was a deep disappointment, and as a consequence nothing pleased her.

"All English and all soldiers! Not an Egyptian among them," she said. "After

what he has done for them, too! Ingrates! Excuse the word. That's what I call them."

At that moment Hafiz entered, and the Princess, touching him on the arm, said—

"Here, you come and sit on the other side of her and keep up her heart, the sweet one."

Hafiz did as he was told, and as soon as he was seated beside Helena he whispered—

"I've just left him."

"How is he?"

"Firm as a rock. He sent you a message."

"What is it?"

"Tell her," he said, "that great love conquers death."

"Ah!"

At the next moment Helena's hand and Hafiz's found each other in a fervent clasp, and sweetheart and foster-brother sat together so until the end of the inquiry.

Presently the Judges of the Court entered and took their places at the table that had been prepared for them—one full Colonel and four Lieutenant-Colonels of mature age, from different British regiments.

"They look all right, but white hairs are no proof of wisdom," muttered the Princess.

Then the accused was called, and amid breathless silence Gordon entered with a firm step, attended by the officer who had him in charge. His manner was calm, and though his face was pale almost to pallor, his expression betrayed neither fear nor bravado. His appearance made a deep impression, and the President told him to sit. At the same moment it was observed that the Sirdar came in by a door at the farther end of the room and took a seat immediately in front of him.

The Court was then sworn and the charge was read. It accused the prisoner of three offences under the Army Act; first, that being a person subject to military law he had disobeyed the lawful command of a superior in such a way as to show a wilful disregard of authority (A.A. 9, 1); second, that he had been guilty of acts and conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline (A.A. 40); third, that he had deserted his Majesty's service while on active service (A.A. 12, 13).

"He heard it all yesterday morning," whispered Hafiz to Helena, whose nervous fingers were tightening about his own.

The charges having been read out to the accused, he was called upon to plead.

"Are you guilty or not guilty?" asked the President.

There was a moment of breathless silence, and then, in a measured voice without a break or a tremor, Gordon said—

”I do not wish to plead at all.”

A subdued murmur passed through the room, and Hafiz whispered again—

”He wanted to plead Guilty, and the Sirdar had all he could do to prevent him.”

”Enter a plea of ’Not guilty’ on the record,” said the President.

Then addressing Gordon, the President asked if he was represented by counsel. Gordon shook his head. Did he desire to conduct his own defence? Again Gordon shook his head. The President conferred for a moment with the other members of the Court and then said—

”It is within the power of the Court to appoint a properly qualified person to act as counsel for the accused, and in this case the Court desires to do so. Is there any officer here who wishes to undertake the task of Defender?”

In a moment it was plainly evident that the sympathies of Gordon’s brother-officers were with him. Twenty men in uniform had leapt to their feet and were holding up their hands.

”Lord God, how they love him!” whispered Hafiz, and Helena had to hold down her head lest she should be seen to cry.

The Defender selected was a young Captain of Cavalry who had brought a brilliant reputation from the Staff College, and in a moment he was in the midst of his duties.

”Does the accused desire a short adjournment of the Court in order to instruct his Defender?” asked the President.

Once more Gordon, who had stood passively during these proceedings, shook his head, and then, without further preliminaries, the trial began. The Prosecutor rose to make his opening address. He was an Artillery Officer of high reputation.

”He’ll make it no worse than he can help,” whispered Hafiz.

In simple words the Prosecutor stated his case, confining himself to the briefest explanation of the facts he was about to prove, and then he called the first of his witnesses. This was the Military Secretary, Captain Graham, who had been present at the prisoner’s interview with the late General Graves.

”Not a bad chap—he’ll do no more than he must,” whispered Hafiz.

Replying to the Prosecutor’s questions, the Military Secretary said that Gordon had refused to obey the order of his superior given personally by that officer in the execution of his office, and that his refusal had been deliberate and distinct, and such as showed an intention to defy and resist authority.

”I object,” said the officer who filled the post of Judge Advocate, and after he had shown that the latter part of the witness’s answer was not evidence but

inference which the Court alone could draw, the objection was allowed.

The Defender then rose to cross-examine the first witness, and in a few minutes the Military Secretary was made to prove, first, that the prisoner had tried to show his superior that the order he was giving him was contrary to humanity and likely to lead to an irreparable result; next, that when executed by another officer, it *had* led to an irreparable result, including bloodshed and loss of life; and, finally, that after the order had been disobeyed by the accused the most inexcusable and disgraceful and even illegal and unsoldierly insults had been inflicted upon him by his General.

"That's true! My God, that's true! Illegal and unsoldierly!" whispered Hafiz, forgetting to whom he was talking; and Helena, in the riot of her dual love, for her father and for Gordon, could do nothing but hold down her head.

Then the Prosecutor called Colonel Macdonald.

"A brute—he'll do his dam'dest," whispered Hafiz.

Amid scarcely suppressed murmurs Colonel Macdonald, speaking with manifest bitterness, proved the assault upon himself, and then went on to say that it was unprovoked, it was brutal, and it was conduct unbecoming the character of an officer and a gentleman.

"A lie like that has no legs to walk on," whispered Hafiz.

"No, but it has wings to fly with, though," said the Princess.

"Hush!" said Helena.

Again, like a flash of light, the Judge Advocate had leapt up to protest against an inference which the Court alone was entitled to draw, and again the objection was upheld and the inference was expunged.

Amid obvious excitement among the soldiers in Court, the Defender then rose to cross-examine the second witness, and in a moment Macdonald's freckled face had become scarlet, as he was compelled to admit that, at the instant before he was assaulted, he had ordered the shooting of a boy (who fell dead from the walls of El Azhar) and was then swearing at the boy's mother who was weeping over her son.

"Ah, his rage will be at the end of his nose now," whispered the Princess.

Finally, the Prosecutor called the officer who was temporarily commanding the Army of Occupation to show that the accused, after disobeying the order of his late General, had disappeared from Cairo and had not been seen since the riot at El Azhar until his capture two days before.

The evidence for the prosecution being now finished, the Court prepared itself for the defence. There was a certain appearance of anxious curiosity on the faces of the Judges, and a tingling atmosphere of expectancy among the spectators.

Then came a surprise. The young Defender, who had been holding a whis-

pered conference with Gordon, turned to the President and said—

"I regret to say that the accused has decided not to call any witnesses in defence."

"But perhaps," said the President, turning to Gordon, "you wish to give evidence for yourself. Do you?"

There was another moment of breathless silence, and then Gordon, after looking slowly round the room, in the direction of the place in which Helena sat with her head down, said calmly—

"No."

At that the murmuring among the spectators could hardly be suppressed. It was now plainly evident that Gordon's brother officers were with him to a man. They had been counting on an explanation that would at least palliate his conduct if it could not excuse his offences. The disappointment was deep, but the sympathy was still deeper. Could it be possible that Gordon *meant* to die?

"Lift up your veil, child," whispered the Princess, but Helena shook her head.

After the Prosecutor had summed up his evidence, the Defender addressed the Court for the defence. He pleaded extenuating circumstances, first on the ground that the order given to the accused, though not in opposition to the established customs of the army or the laws of England, was calculated to do irreparable injury and had done such injury, and next on the ground of outrageous provocation.

When the Defender had finished, the President announced that his Excellency the Sirdar had volunteered to give evidence in proof of the prisoner's honourable record, and that the Court had decided to hear him.

The Sirdar was then sworn, and in strong, affecting, soldierly words, he said the accused had rendered great services to his country; that he had received many medals and distinctions; that he was as brave a man as ever stood under arms, and one of the young officers who made an old soldier proud to belong to the British army.

There is no company more easily moved to tears than a company of soldiers, and when the Sirdar sat down there was not a dry eye in that assembly of brave men.

After a pause the President announced that the Court would be closed to consider the finding, but in order to assist the Judges in doing so it would be desirable that they should know more of the conditions under which the accused was arrested. Therefore the following persons would be asked to remain:—

His Excellency the Sirdar.

The Commandant of Police.

Captain Hafiz Ahmed of the Egyptian Army.

Helena, with the other spectators, was passing out of the room when the Sirdar touched her on the shoulder and said, haltingly—

”Have you perhaps got ... can you trust me with those letters for a little while?”

By some impulse, hardly intelligible to herself, Helena had brought Gordon’s letters with her, and after a moment’s hesitation she took them out of her pocket and gave them to the Sirdar, saying, very faintly, but very sweetly—

”Yes, I can trust them to *you*.”

Then with the Princess she went out into the great hall and sat there on a window-seat, while the Court was closed. There was a sad and solemn expression in her face, and seeing this, even through her dark veil, the officers, who were pacing to and fro, moved by that delicacy which is the nobler part of an English gentleman’s reserve—respect for the intimacies that are sacred to another person—merely bowed to her as they passed.

The strain was great, for she knew what was going on behind the closed door of the Court-room. The Judges were trying to find in the circumstances of Gordon’s arrest some excuse for his desertion. She could see the Sirdar and Hafiz struggling to show that, however irregular and reprehensible from a disciplinary standpoint, Gordon’s had been the higher patriotism; that, coming back under those strange conditions and in that strange disguise, he had deliberately returned to die. And she could see the Court powerfully moved by that plea, yet helpless to take account of it.

Half-an-hour passed; an hour; nearly two hours, and then a young officer came up to tell Helena that the Court was about to re-open.

”I think—I hope they intend to recommend him to mercy,” he said, blunderingly, and at the next moment he felt as if he would like to cut his tongue out. But Helena was unhurt. She held up her head for the first time that day, and, to the Princess’s surprise, when they re-entered the room, and the officers made way for her, she pushed through to the front and took a seat, back to the wall, immediately before the Sirdar and almost face to face with Gordon.

There was that tense atmosphere in the Court which always precedes a sentence, but there was also a sort of humid air, as if the Angel of Pity had passed through the place and softened it to tears.

Gordon was told to rise, and then the President, obviously affected, proceeded to address him. He might say at once that the Judges regretted to find themselves unable to take account of the moral aspects of the case. Nothing but its military aspects came within their cognisance. That being so, the Court, notwithstanding the able and ingenious defence, could find no excuse for insubordination—the first duty of a soldier was to obey. In like manner they could find no excuse for a savage personal attack by an officer in uniform upon

another officer in the exercise of his office—it was conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline. Finally, the Court could find no excuse for desertion—it was an act of great offence to the flag which a soldier was sworn to serve.

“Under these circumstances,” continued the President, “the Court have no alternative but to find you guilty of the crimes with which you have been charged, and though it is within the Court’s discretion to mitigate the penalty of your offences, they have decided, after anxious deliberation, remembering the grave fact that the force in Egypt is on active service, not to exercise that right, but, out of regard to your high record as a soldier and the great provocation which you certainly suffered, to content themselves with recommending you to mercy, thus leaving the issue to a higher authority. Therefore, whatever the result of that recommendation, it is now my duty, my very painful duty, to pronounce upon you, Charles George Gordon Lord, the full sentence prescribed by military law—death.”

There was a solemn silence until the President’s last word was spoken, when all eyes were turned towards. Gordon.

He bore himself with absolute self-possession. There was a slight quivering of the eyelids, and a quick glint of the steel-grey eyes in the direction of the opposite side of the Court—nothing more.

Then a thrilling incident occurred. Helena, whose head had been down, was seen to rise in her seat, and to raise her thick dark veil. One moment she stood there, back to the wall, with her magnificent pale face all strength and courage, looking steadily across at the prisoner as if nobody else were present in the room. Then, as quietly as she had risen, she sank back to her place.

Oh, sublime power of love! Oh, pitiful impotence of words! Everybody felt the thousand inexpressible things which that simple act was meant to convey.

Gordon was the first to feel them, and when his guard touched him on the arm he turned and went out with a step that rang on the marble floor—firm as a rock.

As the Court broke up, one of the officers was heard to whisper hoarsely—
“She’s worthy of him—what more is there to say?”

At the last moment the Sirdar turned to her and whispered—

“You must lend me these letters a little longer, my dear. And remember what I said before—there’s still the Secretary of State, and there’s still the King.”

CHAPTER XIV

The strength in Helena's face was not belied by the will behind it. Within an hour she was at work to save Gordon's life. Going to the officer who had acted as Judge Advocate, she learned that the sentence would not go to headquarters for confirmation until after two days. In those two days she achieved wonders.

First, she approached the President of the Court and made sure that the recommendation to mercy would go to London by the same mail that carried the report of the proceedings.

Next she visited the Lieutenant-Colonel of every regiment of the Army of Occupation and secured his signature and the signatures of his fellow-officers to a petition asking for the commutation of the sentence.

Two days and two nights she spent in this work, and everybody at Ab-bassiah and at the Citadel knew what the daughter of the late General was doing. A woman is irresistible to a soldier; a beautiful woman in distress is overpowering; all the Army was in love with Helena; every soldier was her slave.

When on the evening of the second day she returned to the house of the Princess, she found three "Tommys," two in khaki and one in Highland plaid, waiting for her in the hall. They produced a thick packet of foolscap, badly disfigured by finger-prints and smelling strongly of tobacco, containing four thousand signatures to her appeal.

Perhaps her greatest triumph, however, was with Colonel Macdonald.

"I must have his help, too," she said to the Princess, whereupon her Highness put a finger to her nose and answered—

"If you must, my heart, you must, but remember—when you want a dog's service address him as 'Sir.'"

She did. With a blush she told the Colonel (it was a dear, divine falsehood) that Gordon had said he had had no personal animosity against him, and was sorry if at a moment of undue excitement he had behaved badly.

The curmudgeon took the apology according to his kind, saying that in his opinion an officer who struck a brother-officer publicly and before his men deserved to be shot or drummed out of the army, but still, if Colonel Lord was ashamed of what he had done—

Helena's eyes flashed with anger, but she compelled herself to smile and to say—

"He is, I assure you he is." And before the big Highlander knew what he was doing he had written to headquarters at Helena's dictation, to say that inasmuch as his own quarrel with Colonel Gordon Lord had been composed, that count in

the offence might, so far as he was concerned, be wiped out.

The sweet double-face told him how good and noble and even Christ-like this was of him, and then, marching off with the letter, said to herself, "The brute!"

Meantime Hafiz, acting through his uncle the Chancellor, got the Ulema of El Azhar to send a message to the Foreign Minister saying, with many Eastern flourishes, that what General Graves had ordered Gordon to do, what his subordinate had done, was a deep injury to the religious susceptibilities of the Mohammedan people.

Besides this, the Sirdar sent a secretary with Gordon's letters, and reams of written explanations of his conduct to the permanent head of the War Office, a friend—a firm disciplinarian but a man of strong humanity. Why had the prisoner refused to plead? Because he did not wish to accuse his dead General. Why had he made no explanation of his desertion and of his conduct at the time of his arrest? Because he did not wish to impeach his father. Why had he intercepted an order of the Army? Because he had been inspired solely by a desire to prevent the tumultuous effusion of blood, and he had prevented it.

Finally, as a technical point of the highest importance, could it be deemed that the troops in Egypt were on active service when there was no such declaration to that effect as Section 189(2) of the Army Act required?

Within two days everything was done, and then there was nothing left but to await results. Helena wanted to go up to see Gordon, but she was afraid to do so. When sorrow is shared it is lessened, but suspense that is divided is increased.

After five days the Sirdar began to hear from London and to send his news to Helena over the telephone. The matter was to be submitted to his Majesty personally—had she any objection to the King seeing Gordon's letters? So very intimate? Well, what of that? The King was a good fellow, and there was nothing in the world that touched him so nearly as a beautiful woman, except a woman in love and in trouble.

Then came two days of grim, unbroken silence and then—a burst of great news.

In consideration of Colonel Lord's distinguished record as a soldier and his unblemished character as a man; out of regard to the obvious purity of his intentions and the undoubted fact that the order he disobeyed had led to irreparable results; remembering the great provocation he had received and not forgetting the valuable services rendered by his father to England and to Egypt, the King had been graciously pleased to grant him a free pardon under the Great Seal!

This coming first as a private message from the head of the War Office, threw the Sirdar into an ecstasy of joy. He called up the Consul-General immediately, and repeated the glad words over the telephone, but no answer came back to him except the old man's audible breathing as it quivered over the wires.

Then he thought of Helena, but with a soldier's terror of tears in the eyes of a woman, even tears of joy, he decided to let Hafiz carry the news to her.

"Tell her to go up to the Citadel and break the good tidings to Gordon," he said, speaking to Egyptian headquarters.

Nothing loath, Hafiz went bounding along to the house of the Princess and blurted out his big message, expecting that it would be received with cries of delight, but to his bewilderment, Helena heard it with fear and trembling, and, becoming weak and womanish all at once, she seemed to be about to faint.

Hafiz, with proper masculine simplicity, became alarmed at this, but the Princess began to laugh.

"What!" she cried. "You that have been as brave as a lion with her cub while your man's life has been in danger, to go mooing now—*now*—like a cow with a sick calf!"

Helena recovered herself after a moment, and then Hafiz delivered the Sirdar's mandate, that she was to go up to the Citadel and break the good news to Gordon.

"But I daren't, I daren't," she said, still trembling.

"What!" cried the Princess again. "Not go and get the kisses and hugs that ... Well, what a dunce I was to have that silver grey of yours made so tight about the waist! For two pins I would put on your black veil and go up myself and take all the young man has to give a woman."

Helena smiled (a watery smile) and declared she would go if Hafiz would go with her. Hafiz was ready, and in less than half-an-hour they were driving up to the Citadel in the Princess's carriage with the footmen and saises and eunuch which her Highness, for all her emancipation, thought necessary to female propriety in public.

Everything went well until they reached the fortress, and then, going up the stone staircase to Gordon's quarters, Helena began to tremble more than ever.

"Oh! Oh! I daren't! I must go home," she whispered.

"Lord, no! not now," said Hafiz. "Remember,—up there is some one who thinks he is going to die, while here are we who know he isn't, and that life will be doubly sweet if it's you that takes it back to him. Come, sister, come!"

"Give me your arm, then," said Helena, and, panting with emotion and perilously near to the point of tears, she went up, on shaking limbs, to a door at which two soldiers, armed to the teeth, were standing on guard.

At that moment Gordon, in the officer's bright room which had been given to him as a cell, was leaning on the sill of the open window looking steadfastly down at some object in the white city below. During the past six days he had known what was being done on his behalf, and the desire for life, which he had thought dead in him, had quickened to suspense and pain.

To ease both feelings he had smoked innumerable cigarettes and made pretence of reading the illustrated papers which his brother-officers had poured in upon him, out of their otherwise dumb and helpless sympathy. But every few minutes of every day he had leaned out of the window to look first, with a certain pang, at the heavy-lidded house which contained his father; next, with a certain sense of tears, at a green spot covered with cypress trees which contained all that was left of his mother, and finally, with a certain yearning, at the trellised Eastern palace of the Princess Nazimah, which contained Helena.

This is what he was doing at the moment when Helena and Hafiz were ascending the stairs, and just as he was asking himself for the hundredth time why Helena did not come to see him, he heard his guard's gruff tones mingled with a woman's mellow voice.

A deep note among the soft ones sent all the blood in his body galloping to his heart, and turning round he saw the door of his room open and Helena herself on the threshold.

One moment she stood there, with her sweet, care-worn face growing red in her passion of joy, and then she rushed at him and fell on his breast, throwing both arms about his neck, and crying—

"Such news, Gordon! Oh, my Gordon, I bring you such good, good news! Such news, dear! Such news, oh such good news!"

Thus trying to tell her tidings at a breath, she told him nothing, but continued to laugh and sob and kiss, and say what good news she brought him.

Yet words were needless, and before Hafiz, whose fat wet face was shining like a round window on an April day, could whisper "the King's Pardon," Gordon, like the true lover he was, had said, and had meant it—

"But you bring me nothing so good as yourself, dearest—nothing!"

CHAPTER XV

Helena was with Gordon the following morning when one of the guard came in hurriedly and announced, amid gusts of breath, that the Consul-General was coming upstairs.

Not without a certain nervousness Gordon rose to receive his father, but he met him at the door with both hands outstretched. The old man took one of them quietly, with the air of a person who was struggling hard to hold himself in

check. He took Helena's hand also, and when she would have left the room he prevented her.

"No, no," he said; "sit down, my child—resume your seat."

It seemed to Gordon that his father looked whiter and feebler, yet even firmer of will than ever, like a lion that had been shot and was dying hard. His lips were compressed as he took the chair which Gordon offered him, and when he spoke his voice was hard and a little bitter.

"First, let me give you good news," he said.

"Is it the Pardon?" asked Gordon.

"No, something else—perhaps, in a sense, something better," said the old man.

He had received an unofficial message from the War Office to say that the King, taking no half measures, intended to promote Gordon to the rank of Major-General, and appoint him to the command of the British Forces in Egypt.

Helena could hardly contain her joy at this fresh proof of good fortune, but Gordon made no demonstration. He watched the pained expression in the old man's face, and felt sure that something else was coming.

"It's a remarkable, perhaps unparalleled instance of clemency," continued the Consul-General, "and under the circumstances it may be said to open up as momentous a mission as was ever confided to a military commander."

"And you, father?" asked Gordon, not without an effort.

The old man laughed. A flush overspread his pale face for a moment. Then he said—

"I? Oh, I ... I am dismissed."

"Dismissed?"

Gordon had gasped. Helena's lips had parted.

"That's what it comes to—stated in plain words and without diplomatic flourishes. True, I had sent in my resignation, but ... the long and the short of it is that after a debate on the Address, and the carrying of an amendment, Downing Street has agreed that the time has come to associate the people of Egypt with the government of the country."

"Well, sir?"

"Well, as that is a policy against which I have always set my face, a policy I have considered premature, perhaps suicidal, the Secretary of State has cabled that, being unable to ask me to carry into effect a change that is repugnant to my principles, he is reluctantly compelled to accept my resignation."

Gordon could not speak, but again the old man tried to laugh.

"Of course the pill is gilded," he continued, clasping his blue-veined hands in front of his breast. "The Foreign Secretary told Parliament that my resignation (on the ground of age and ill health, naturally) was the heaviest blow that had

fallen on English public life within living memory. He also said that while other methods might be necessary for the future, none could have been so good as mine in the past. And then the King—

"Yes, father?"

A hard, half-ironical smile passed over the old man's face.

"The King has been graciously pleased to grant me an Earldom, and even to make me a Knight of the Garter."

There was a moment's painful silence, and then the Consul-General said—

"So I go home immediately."

"Immediately?"

"By to-night's train to take the P. & O. to-morrow," said the old man, bowing over his clasped hands.

"To-morrow?"

"Why not? My Secretaries can do without me. Why should I linger on a stage on which I am no longer a leading actor but only a supernumerary? Better make my exit with what grace I can."

Under the semi-cynical tone Gordon could see his father's emotion. He found it impossible to utter a word.

"But I thought I would come up before going away and bring you the good news myself, though it is almost like a father who is deposed congratulating the son who is to take his place."

"Don't say that, sir," said Gordon.

"Why shouldn't I? And why should I gird at my fortune? It's strange, nevertheless, how history repeats itself. I came to Egypt to wipe out the misrule of Ismail Pasha, and now, like Ismail, I leave my son behind me."

There was a moment of strained silence and then—

"I have often wondered what took place at that secret meeting between Ismail and Tewfik, when we made the son Khedive and sent the father back to Constantinople. Now I think I know."

The old man's emotion was cutting deep. Gordon could scarcely bear to look at him.

"I wish you well, Gordon, and only hope these people may be more grateful to you than they have been to me. God grant it!"

Gordon could not speak.

"I confess I have no faith in the proposed change. I think all such concessions are so many sops to sedition. I also think that to have raised the masses of a subject race from abject misery to well-being, and then to allow them to fall back to their former condition, as they surely will, and to become the victims of the worst elements among themselves, is not only foolish but utterly wrong and wicked."

The old man rose, and in the intensity of his feelings, began to pace to and fro.

"They talk about the despotism of the One-Man rule," he said. "What about the despotism of their Parliaments, their Congresses, their Reichstags—the worst despotisms in the world. Fools! Why can't they see that the difference between the democracy of Europe and America, and the government proper to the ancient, slavish, and slow-moving civilisation of the East is fundamental?"

The old man's lips stiffened and then he said—

"But perhaps I am only an antiquated person, behind the new age and the new ideas. If so, I'm satisfied. I belong to the number of those who have always thought it the duty of great nations to carry the light of civilisation into dark continents, and I am not sorry to be left behind by the cranks who would legislate for all men alike. Pshaw! You might as well tailorise for all men alike, and put clothes of the same pattern on all mankind."

Again the old man laughed.

"It's part and parcel of the preposterous American doctrine that all men are born free and equal—the doctrine that made the United States enfranchise as well as emancipate their blacks. May the results be no worse in this case!"

There was another moment of strained silence and then the Consul-General said—

"I suppose they'll say the man Ishmael has beaten me."

He made a contemptuous but almost inaudible laugh, and then added, "Let them—they're welcome; time will tell. Anyhow I do not lament. When a man is old his useless life must burn itself out. That's only natural. And after all, I've seen too much of power to regret the loss of it."

Still Gordon could not speak. He was feeling how great his father was in his downfall, how brave, how proud, how splendid.

The old man walked to the window and looked out. with fixed eyes. After a moment he turned back and said—

"All the same, Gordon, I am glad of what has happened for your sake—sincerely glad. You've not always been with me, but you've won, and I do not grudge you your victory. Indeed," he added, and here his voice trembled perceptibly, "I am a little proud of it. Yes, proud! An old man cannot be indifferent to the fact that his son has won the hearts of twelve millions of people, even though—even though *he* himself may have lost them."

Gordon's throat was hurting him and Helena's eyes were full of tears. The old man, too, was struggling to control his voice.

"You thought Nunehamism wasn't synonymous with patriotism. Perhaps you were right. You believed yourself to be the better Englishman of the two. I don't say you were not. And it may be that in her present mind England will

think that one secret withheld from me has been revealed to you—namely, that an alien race can only be ruled by ... by love. Yes, I'm glad for your sake, Gordon; and as for me—I leave myself to Time and Fate."

The old man's pride in his son's success was fighting hard with his own humiliation. After a while Gordon recovered strength enough to ask his father what he meant to do in England.

"Who can say?" answered the Consul-General, lifting one hand with a gesture of helplessness. "I have spent the best years of my life in Egypt. What is England to me now? Home? No, exile."

He had moved to the window again, and following the direction of his eyes Gordon could see that he was looking towards the cypress trees which shaded the English cemetery of Cairo.

A deep and profound silence ensued, and, feeling as if his mother's spirit were passing through the room, Gordon dropped his head and tears leapt to his eyes.

It was the first time father and son had been together since the tenderest link that had bound them had been broken, but while both were thinking of this, neither of them could trust himself to speak of it.

"Janet, your dream has come true! How happy you would have been!" thought the Consul-General, while Gordon, unable to unravel the intricacies of his emotions, was saying to himself, "Mother! My sweet mother!"

The last moment came, and it was a very moving one. Up from some hidden depths of the old man's oceanic soul there came a certain joy. In spite of all that he in his blindness had done to prevent it, by the operation of the inscrutable powers that had controlled his destiny, the great hope of his life was about to be realised. Gordon and Helena had been brought together, and as he looked at them, standing side by side when they rose to bid farewell to him, the man so brave and fearless, the girl so beautiful and superb, he thought, with a thrill of the heart, that, whatever might happen to himself—old, worn-out, fallen perhaps, his life ended—yet would his line go on in the time to come, pure, clean, and strong, and the name of Nuneham be written high in the history of his country.

Holding out a hand to each, he looked steadily into their faces for a moment, while he bade his silent good-bye. Not a word, not the quiver of an eyelid. It was the English gentleman coming out top in the end, firm, stern, heroic.

Before Gordon and Helena seemed to be aware of it, the old man was gone, and they heard the rumble of the wheels of his carriage as it passed out of the courtyard.

CHAPTER XVI

At nightfall the great Proconsul left Cairo. He knew that all day long the telegraphic agencies had been busy with messages from London about his resignation. He also knew that after the first thunderclap of surprise the Egyptian population had concluded that he had been recalled—recalled in disgrace, and at the petition of the Khedive to the King.

It did not take him long to prepare for his departure. In the course of an hour Ibrahim was able to pack up the few personal effects—how few!—which during the longest residence gather about the house of a servant of the State.

Perhaps the acutest of his feelings on leaving Egypt came to him as he drove in a closed carriage out of the grounds of the Agency, and looked up for the last time at the windows of the room that used to be occupied by his wife. At that moment he felt something of the dumb desolation which rolls over the strongest souls when, after a lifetime of comradeship, the asundering comes and they long for the voice that is still.

Poor Janet! He must leave all that remained of her behind him under the tall cypress trees on the edge of the Nile. Yet no, not all, for he was carrying away the better part of her—her pure soul and saintly memory—within him. None the less, that moment of parting brought the old man nearer than he had ever been to the sense of tears in mortal things.

The Sirdar had accompanied him, but though the fact of his intended departure had become known, having been announced in all the evening papers, there was nobody at the station to bid adieu to him—not a member of the Khedive's *entourage*; not one of the Egyptian Ministers, not even any of the Advisers and Under-Secretaries whom he had himself created.

Never had there lived a more self-centred and self-sufficient man, but this fact cut him to the quick. He had done what he believed to be his duty in Egypt, and feeling that he was neglected and forgotten at the end, the ingratitude of those whom he had served went like poison into his soul.

To escape from the sense of it he began to talk with a bitter raillery which in a weaker man would have expressed itself in tears, and seemed indeed to have tears—glittering, frozen tears—behind it.

"Do you know, my dear Reg," he said, "I feel to-night as if I might be another incarnation of your friend Pontius Pilate. Like him, I am being withdrawn, you see, and apparently for the same reason. And—who knows?—perhaps like him too, I am destined to earn the maledictions of mankind."

The Sirdar found the old man's irony intensely affecting, and therefore he

made no protest.

"Well, I'm not ashamed of the comparison, if it means that against all forms of anarchy I have belonged to the party of order, though of course there will be some wise heads that will see the finger of Heaven in what has happened."

The strong man, with his fortunes sunk to zero, was defiant to the very end and last hour of calamity. But standing on the platform by the door of the compartment that had been reserved for him, he looked round at length and said—all his irony, all his raillery suddenly gone—

"Reg, I have given forty years of my life to those people and there is not one of them to see me off."

The Sirdar tried his best to cheer him, saying—

"England remembers, though, and if—" but the old man looked into his face and his next words died on his lips.

The engine was getting up steam, and its rhythmic throb was shaking the glass roof overhead when Gordon and Hafiz, wearing their military greatcoats, came up the platform. They had carefully timed it to arrive at the last moment. A gleam of light came into the father's face at the sight of his son. Gordon stepped up, Hafiz fell back, Lord Nuneham entered the carriage.

"Well, good-bye, old friend," said the old man, shaking hands warmly with the Sirdar. "I may see you again—in my exile in England, you know."

Then he turned to Gordon and took his outstretched hand. Father and son stood face to face for the last time. Not a word was spoken. There was a long, firm, quivering hand-clasp—and that was all. At the next moment the train was gone.

The Sirdar stood watching it until it disappeared, and then he turned to Gordon, and, thinking of the England the Consul-General had loved, the England he had held high, he said, speaking of him as if he were already dead—

"After all, my boy, your father was one of the great Englishmen."

Gordon could not answer him, and after a while they shook hands and separated. The two young soldiers walked back to the Citadel, through the native streets. The "Nights of the Prophet" were nearly over, and the illuminations were being put out.

Hafiz talked about the Khedive—he had just arrived at Kubbeh; then about Ishmael—the Prophet had shut himself up in the Chancellor's house and was permitting nobody to see him.

"His Highness has asked Ishmael to be Imam to-morrow morning, but it is thought that he is ill—it is even whispered that he is going mad," said Hafiz.

Gordon did not speak until they reached the foot of the hill. Then he said—

"I must go up and lie down. Good-night, old fellow! God bless you!"

CHAPTER XVII

Half-an-hour earlier, Gordon's guard, now transformed into his soldier servant, had been startled by the appearance of an Egyptian, wearing the flowing white robes of a Sheikh, and asking in almost faultless English for Colonel Lord.

"The Colonel has gone to the station to see his lordship off to England, but I'm expecting him back presently," said the orderly.

"I'll wait," said the Sheikh, and the orderly showed, him into Gordon's room.

"Looks like a bloomin' death's-head! Wonder if he's the bloomin' Prophet they're jawrin' about!"

Since coming into Cairo Ishmael had been a prey to thoughts that were indeed akin to madness. Perhaps he was seized by one of those nervous maladies in which a man no longer belongs to himself. Certainly he suffered the pangs of heart and brain which come only to the purest and most spiritual souls in their darkest hours, and seem to make it literally true that their tortured spirits descend into hell.

Now that his anxiety for his followers was relaxed and their hopes had in some measure been realised, his mind swung back to the sorrowful decay and ruin that had fallen upon himself. It was no longer the shame of the prophet but the bereavement of the man that tormented him. His lacerated heart left him no power of thinking or feeling anything but the loss of Helena.

Again he saw her beaming eyes, her long black lashes, and her smiling mouth. Again he heard her voice, and again the sweet perfume of her presence seemed to be about him. That all this was lost to him for ever, that henceforth he had to put away from him all the sweetness, all the beauty, all the tenderness of a woman's life linked with his, brought him a paroxysm of pain in which it seemed as if his heart would break and die.

He recalled the promises he had made to himself, of taking up the life of a man when his work was done. His work was done now—in some sort ended, at all events—but the prize he had promised himself had been snatched away. She was gone, she who had been all his joy. An impassable gulf divided them. The infinite radiance of hope and love that was to have crowned his restless and stormy life had disappeared. Henceforth he must walk through the world alone.

"O God, can it be?" he asked himself, with the startled agony of one who awakes from single-pillowed sleep and remembers that he is bereaved.

If anything had been necessary to make his position intolerable, it came with the thought that all this was due to the treachery of the man he had loved and trusted, the man he had believed to be his friend and brother, the one being,

besides the woman, who had gone to his heart of hearts. The Rani had confessed to him that she loved "Omar," and notwithstanding that all his life he had struggled to liberate himself from the prejudices of his race, yet now, in the melancholy broodings of his Eastern brain, he could not escape from the conclusion that the only love possible between a man and the wife of another was guilty love.

When he thought of that both body and soul seemed to be afire, and he became conscious of a feeling about "Omar" which he had never experienced before towards any human creature—a feeling of furious and inextinguishable hatred.

He began to be afraid of himself, and just as a dog will shun its kind and hide itself from sight when it feels the poison of madness working in its blood, so Ishmael, under the secret trouble which he dared reveal to none, shut himself up in his sleeping-room in the old Chancellor's house.

It was a small and silent chamber at the back, overlooking a little paved courtyard containing a well, and bounded by a very high wall that shut off sight and sound of the city outside. Once a day an old man in a blue galabeah came into the court to draw water, and twice a day a servant of the Sheikhs came into the room with food. Save for these two, and the old Chancellor himself at intervals, Ishmael saw no one for nine days, and in the solitude and semi-darkness of his self-imposed prison a hundred phantoms were bred in his distempered brain.

On the second day after his retirement the Chancellor came to tell him that his emissary, his missionary, "Omar Benani," had been identified on his arrest, that in his true character as Colonel Lord he was to be tried by his fellow-officers for his supposed offences as a soldier at the time of the assault on El Azhar, and that the only sentence that could possibly be passed upon him would be death. At this news, which the Chancellor delivered with a sad face, Ishmael felt a fierce but secret joy.

"God's arm is long," he told himself. "He allowed the man to escape while his aims were good, but now he is going to punish him for his treachery and deceit."

Three days afterwards the old Chancellor came again to say that Colonel Lord had been tried and condemned to death, as everybody had foreseen and expected, but nevertheless the sympathy of all men was with him, because he was seen to have acted from the noblest motives, withstanding his own father for what he believed to be the right, and exposing himself to the charge of being a bad son and a poor patriot in order to prevent bloodshed; that he had indeed prevented bloodshed by preventing a collision of the British and Native armies; that it had been by his efforts that the pilgrimage had been able to enter Cairo in peace; and that in recognition of the great sacrifice made by the Christian soldier for the love of humanity, the Ulema were joining with others in petitioning his

King to pardon him.

At this news a chill came over Ishmael. His heart grew cold as stone, and when the Chancellor was gone, he found himself praying—

”Forbid it, O God, forbid it! Let not Thy justice be taken out of Thine awful hand.”

Four days later the old Chancellor came yet again to say that the King’s Pardon had been granted; that Colonel Lord was free; that the people were re-joicing; that everybody attributed the happy issue of the Christian’s case mainly to zealous efforts on his behalf of the woman who loved him, the daughter of the dead General whose unwise command had been the cause of all his trouble; and finally that it was expected that these two would soon heal their family feud by marriage.

At this news Ishmael’s tortured heart was aflame and his brain was reeling. The thought that ”Omar” was not to be punished, that he was to be honoured, that he was to be made happy, filled him with passions never felt before. Behind the strongest and most spiritual soul there lurks a wild beast that seems to be ever waiting to destroy it, and in the torment of Ishmael’s heart the thought came to him that, as his earthly judges were permitting the guilty one to escape, God called on him to punish the man.

Irresistible as the thought was, it brought a feeling of indescribable dread. ”I must be going mad,” he told himself, remembering how he had spent his life in the cause of peace. All day long he fought against a hatred that was now so fierce that it seemed as if death alone could satisfy it. His soul wrestled with it, battled for life against it, and at length conquered it, and he rose from his knees saying to himself—

”No, vengeance belongs to God! When did He ask for my hand to execute it?”

But the compulsion of great passion was driving him on, and after dismissing the thought of his own wrongs he began to think of the Rani’s. Where was she now? What had become of her? He dared not ask. Ashamed, humiliated, abased, he had become so sensitive to pain on the subject of the woman whom he had betrothed, the woman who had betrayed him, the woman he still loved in spite of everything, that he was even afraid that some one might speak of her.

But in the light of what the Chancellor had said about the daughter of the General, he pictured the Rani as a rejected and abandoned woman. This thought was at first so painful that it deprived him of the free use of his faculties. He could not see anything plainly. His mind was a battlefield of confused sights, half hidden in clouds of smoke. That, after all the Rani had sacrificed for ”Omar”—her husband, her happiness, and her honour—she should be cast aside for another—this was maddening.

He asked himself what he was to do. Find her and take her back? Impossible! Her heart was gone from him. She would continue to love the other man, whatever he might do to her. That was the way of all women—Allah pity and bless them!

Then a flash of illumination came to him in the long interval of his darkness. He would liberate the Rani, *and the man she loved should marry her!* No matter if she belonged to another race—he should marry her! No matter if she belonged to another faith—he should marry her! And as for himself—*his sacrifice should be his revenge!*

“Yes, that shall be my revenge,” he thought.

This, in the wild fire of heart and brain, was the thought with which Ishmael had come to Gordon’s door, and being shown into the soldier’s room he sat for some time without looking about him. Then raising his eyes and gazing round the bare apartment, with its simple bed, its table, its shelves of military boots, its stirrups and swords and rifles, he saw on the desk under the lamp a large photograph in a frame.

It was the photograph of a woman in Western costume, and he told himself in an instant who the woman was—she was the daughter of the General who was dead.

He remembered that he had heard of her before, and that he had even spoken about her to her father when he came to warn the General that the order he was giving to Colonel Lord would lead to the injury of England in Egypt and the ruin of his own happiness. From that day to this he had never once thought of the girl, but now, recalling what the old Chancellor had said of her devotion, her fidelity, her loyalty to the man she loved, he turned his eyes from her picture lest the sight of it should touch him with tenderness and make harder the duty he had come to do.

“No, I will not look at it,” he told himself, with the simplicity of a sick child.

Trying to avoid the softening effects of the photograph under the lamp, he saw another on the table by his side and yet another on the wall. They were all pictures of the same woman, and hastily as he glanced at them, there was something in the face of each that kindled a light in his memory. Was it only a part of his haunting torment that, in spite of the Western costume that obscured the woman in the photographs, her brilliant, beaming eyes were the eyes of the Rani?

A wave of indescribable tenderness broke over him for a moment, an odour of perfume, an atmosphere of sweetness and delicacy and charm, and then, telling himself that all this was gone from him for ever, and that every woman’s face would henceforth remind him of her whom he had lost, the hatred in his heart against Gordon gave him the pain of an open wound.

"O God, let me forget, let me forget!" he prayed.

Then suddenly, while he was in the tempest of these contrary emotions which were whirling like hot sand in a sandstorm about his brain, he heard a footstep on the stairs, followed by a voice outside the door. It was the voice of Colonel Lord's soldier servant, and he was telling his master who was within—an Arab, a Sheikh, in white robes and a turban.

"He's coming! He's here," thought Ishmael.

With choking throat and throbbing heart he rose to his feet and stood waiting. At the next moment the door was thrown open and the man he had come to meet was in the room.

CHAPTER XVIII

With all his heart occupied by thoughts of his father, Gordon had hardly listened to what Hafiz had been saying about Ishmael, but walking up the hill and to the Citadel he began to think of him, and of Helena, and of the bond of the betrothal which still bound them together.

"Until that is broken there can be nothing between her and me," he told himself, and this was the thought in his mind at the moment when he reached his quarters and his servant told him who was waiting within.

"Ishmael Ameer! Is it you?" he cried, as he burst the door open, and stepping eagerly, cheerfully, almost joyfully forward, he stretched out his hand.

But Ishmael drew back, and then Gordon saw that his eyes were swollen as if by sleeplessness, that his lips were white, that his cheeks were terribly pale, and that the expression of his face was shocking.

"Why, what is this? Are you ill?" he asked.

"Omar Benani," said Ishmael, "you and I are alone, and only God is our witness. I have something to say to you. Let us sit."

He spoke in a low, tremulous tone, rather with his breath than with his voice, and Gordon, after looking at him for an instant, and seeing the smouldering fire of madness that was in the man's face, threw off his greatcoat and sat down.

There was a moment in which neither spoke, and then Ishmael, still speaking in a scarcely audible voice, said—

"Omar Benani, I am a son of the Beni Azra. Honour is our watchword. When a traveller in the Libyan desert, tired and weary, seeks the tent of one of

my people, the master takes him in. He makes him free of all that he possesses. Sometimes he sends the stranger into the harem itself that the women may wash his feet. He leaves him there to rest and to sleep. He puts his faith, his honour, the most precious thing God has given him, into his hands. But," said Ishmael, with suppressed fire flashing in his eyes, "if the stranger should ever wrong that harem, if he should ever betray the trust reposed in him, no matter who he is or where he flies to, the master will follow him and *kill him!*"

Involuntarily, seeing the error that Ishmael had fallen into, Gordon rose to his feet, whereupon Ishmael, mistaking the gesture, held up his hand.

"No," he said, "not that! I have not come to do that. I put *my* honour in *your* hands, Omar Benani. I made you free of my family. Could I have done more? You were my brother, yet you outraged the sacred rights of brotherhood. You tore open the secret chamber of my heart. You deceived me, and robbed me and betrayed me, and you are a traitor. But I am not here to avenge myself. Sit, sit. I will tell you what I have come for."

Breathless and bewildered, Gordon sat again, and after another moment of silence, Ishmael, with the light of a wild sorrow in his face, said—

"Omar Benani, there is one who has sacrificed everything for you. She has broken her vows for you, sinned for you, suffered for you. That woman is my wife, and by all the rights of a husband I could hold her. But her heart is yours, and therefore ... therefore I *intend to give her up.*"

Involuntarily Gordon rose to his feet again, and again Ishmael held up his hand.

"But if I liberate her," he said, "if I divorce her, you must marry her. *That* is what I have come to say."

Utterly amazed and dumbfounded, Gordon could not at first find words to speak, whereupon Ishmael, mistaking his silence, said—

"You need not be afraid of scandal. My people know something about the letter that was sent into Cairo, but neither my people nor yours know anything of the motives that inspired it. Therefore nobody except ourselves will understand the reason for what is done."

He paused as if waiting for a reply, and then said in a voice that quavered with emotion—

"Can it be possible that you hesitate? Do you suppose I am offering to you what I do not wish to keep for myself? I tell you that if that poor girl could say that her feeling for me was the same as before you came between us.... But no, that is impossible! God, who is on high, looks down on what I am doing, and He knows that it is right."

Gordon, still speechless with astonishment, twisted about to the desk, which was behind him, and stretched out his hand as if with the intention of

taking up the photograph; but at that action, Ishmael, once more mistaking his meaning, flashed out on him in a blaze of passion.

"Don't tell me you cannot do it. You must, and you shall! No matter what pledges you may have made—you shall marry her. No matter if she is of another race and faith—you shall marry her. She may be an outcast now, but you shall find her and save her. Or else," he cried, in a thundering voice, rising to his feet, and lifting both arms above Gordon's head with a terrible dignity, "the justice of God shall overtake you, His hand shall smite you, His wrath shall hurl you down."

Seeing that all the wild blood of the man's race was aflame, Gordon leapt up, and laying hold of Ishmael's upraised arms he brought them, by a swift wrench, down to his sides.

The two men were then face to face, the Arab with his dusky cheeks and flashing black eyes, the Englishman with his glittering grey eyes and lips set firm as steel. There was another moment of silence while they stood together so, and then Gordon, liberating Ishmael's arms, said, in a commanding voice—

"I have listened to you. Now you shall listen to me. Sit down."

More than the strength of Gordon's muscles, the unblanched look in his face compelled Ishmael to obey. Then Gordon said—

"You believe you have been deceived and wronged, and you have been deceived and wronged, but not in the way you think. The time has come for you to learn the truth—the whole truth. You shall learn it now. Look at this," he said, snatching up the photograph from the desk and holding it out to Ishmael.

Ishmael tried to push the photograph away.

"Look at it, I say. Do you know who that is?"

At the next moment Ishmael was trembling in every limb, and without voice, almost without breath, he was stammering, as he held the photograph in his hand—

"The Rani?"

"Yes, and no," said Gordon. "That is the daughter of our late General."

It seemed to Ishmael that Gordon had said something, but he tried in vain to realise what it was.

"Tell me," he stammered, "tell me."

Then, rapidly but forcibly, Gordon told him Helena's story, beginning with the day on which Ishmael came to the Citadel—how she had concluded, not without reason, that he had killed her father, he being the last person to be seen with him alive, and how, finding that the law and the Government were powerless to punish him, she had determined to avenge her father's death herself.

Ishmael listened with mouth open, fixing on Gordon a bewildered eye.

"Was that why she came to Khartoum?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Why she prompted me to come into Cairo?"

"Yes."

"Why she wrote that letter?"

"Yes."

Overwhelmed with the terrible enlightenment, Ishmael fumbled his beads and muttered, "Allah! Allah!"

Then Gordon told his own story—how he, too, acting under the impulse of an awful error, had fled to the Soudan, leaving an evil name behind him rather than kill his dear ones by the revelation of what he believed to be the truth; how, finding the pit that had been dug for the innocent man, he had thought it his duty as the guilty one to step into it himself; and how, finally, being appeased on that point, he had determined to come into Cairo in Ishmael's place in order to save both him from the sure consequences of his determined fanaticism and his father from the certain ruin that must follow upon the work of liars and intriguers.

By this time Ishmael was no longer pale but pallid. His lips were trembling, his heart was beating audibly. Again without voice, almost without breath, he stammered—

"When you offered to take my place you knew that the Rani ... Helena ... had sent that letter?"

Gordon bowed without speaking.

"You knew, too, that you might be coming to your death?"

Once more Gordon bowed his head.

"Coming to your death, that I ... that I might live?"

Gordon stood silent and motionless.

"Allah! Allah!" mumbled Ishmael, who was now scarcely able to hear or see.

Last of all, Gordon returned to the story of Helena, showing how she had suffered for the impulse of vengeance that had taken possession of her; how she had wanted to fly from Ishmael's camp, but had remained there in the hope of helping to save his people, and how at length she *had* saved them by going to the Consul-General to prove that the pilgrims were not an armed force, and by ordering the light that had led them into the city.

Ishmael was deeply moved. With an effort, he said—

"Then ... then she was yours from the first, and while I hated you because I thought you had come between us, it was really I ... I who ... Allah! Allah!"

Gordon having finished, a silence ensued, and then Ishmael, looking at the photograph which was still in his trembling hands, said, in a pitiful voice—

"God sees all, and when He tears the scales from our eyes—what are we? The children of one Father fighting in the dark!"

Then he rose to his feet, a broken man, and approaching Gordon, he tried to kneel to him; but in a moment Gordon had prevented him, and was holding out his hand.

Nervously, timidly, reluctantly, he took it, and said, in a voice that had almost gone—

”God will reward thee for this, my brother—for kissing the hand of him who came to smite thy face.”

With that he turned and staggered towards the door. Gordon opened it, and at the same moment called to his servant—

”Orderly, show the Sheikh to the gate, please.”

”Yes, Colonel.”

”No, I beg of you, no,” said Ishmael, and, while Gordon stood watching him, he went heavily down the stairs.

CHAPTER XIX

That night at the house of the Chancellor of El Azhar Ishmael was missing. Owing to the state of his health the greatest anxiety was experienced, and half the professors and teachers of the University were sent out to search. They scoured the city until morning without finding the slightest trace of him. Then the servant who had attended upon him remembered that shortly before his disappearance he had asked if the English Colonel who had lately been pardoned by his King still lived on the Citadel.

This led to the discovery of his whereabouts, and to some knowledge of his movements. On leaving Gordon’s quarters he had crossed the courtyard of the fortress to the mosque of Mohammed Ali. It was then dark, and only the Sheikh in charge had seen him when, after making his ablutions, he entered by the holy door.

It was certain that he had spent the entire night in the mosque. The muezzin, going up to the minaret at midnight, had seen a white figure kneeling before the kibleh. Afterwards, when traditions began to gather about Ishmael’s name, the man declared that he saw a celestial light descending upon the White Prophet as of an angel hovering over him. There was a new moon that night, and perhaps its rays came down from the little window that looks towards Mecca.

The muezzin also said that at sunrise, when he went up to the minaret

again, the Prophet was still there, and that an infinite radiance was then around him as of a multitude of angels in red and blue and gold. There are many stained glass windows in the mosque of Mohammed Ali, and perhaps the rising sun was shining through them.

Certainly Ishmael was kneeling before the kibleh at eleven o'clock in the morning when the people began to gather for prayers. It was Friday, and the last of the days kept in honour of the birthday of the Prophet, therefore there was a great congregation.

The Khedive was present. He had come early, with his customary body-guard, and had taken his usual place in the front row close under the pulpit. The carpeted floor of the mosque was densely crowded. Rows and rows of men, wearing tarbooshes and turbans and sitting on their haunches, extended to the great door. The gallery was full of women, most of them veiled, but some of them with uncovered faces.

The sun, which was hot, shone through the jewelled windows and cast a glory like that of rubies and sapphires on the alabaster pillars and glistening marble walls. Three muezzins chanted the call to prayers, two from the minarets facing towards the city, the other from the minaret overlooking the inner square of the Citadel where a British sentinel in khaki paced to and fro.

While the congregation assembled, one of the Readers of the mosque, seated in a reading-desk in the middle, read prayers from the Koran in a slow, sonorous voice, and was answered by rather drowsy cries of "Allah! Allah!" But there was a moment of keen expectancy and the men on the floor rose to their feet, when the voice of the muezzin ceased and the Reader cried—

"God is Most Great! God is Most Great! There is no god but God. Mohammed is His Prophet. Listen to the preacher."

Then it was seen that the white figure that had been prostrate before the kibleh had risen, and was approaching the pulpit. People tried to kiss his hand as he passed, and it was noticed that the Khedive put his lips to the fringe of the Imam's caftan.

Taking the wooden sword from the attendant, Ishmael ascended the pulpit steps. When he had reached the top of them he was in the full stream of the sunlight, and for the first time his face was clearly seen.

His cheeks were hollow and very pale; his lips were bloodless; his black eyes were heavy and sunken, and his whole appearance was that of a man who had passed through a night of sleepless suffering. Even at sight of him, and before he had spoken, the congregation were deeply moved.

"Peace be upon you, O children of the Compassionate," he began, and the people answered according to custom—

"On you be peace, too, O servant of Allah."

Then the people sat, and, sitting himself, Ishmael began to preach.

It was said afterwards that he had never before spoken with so much emotion or so deeply moved his hearers; that he was like one who was speaking out of the night-long travail of his soul; and that his words, which were often tumultuous and incoherent, were not like sentences spoken to listeners, but like the secrets of a suffering heart uttering themselves aloud.

Beginning in a low, tired voice, that would barely have reached the limits of the mosque but for the breathlessness of the people, he said that God had brought them to a new stage in the progress of humanity. Islam was rising out of the corruption of ages. Egypt was having a new birth of freedom. God had whitened their faces before the world, and in His wisdom He had willed it that the oldest of the nations should not perish from the earth.

"Ameen! Ameen!" replied a hundred vehement voices, whereupon Ishmael rose from his seat and raised his arm.

It was an hour of glory, but let them not be vainglorious. Let them not think that with their puny hands they had won these triumphs. Allah alone did all.

"Beware of boasting," he cried, "it is the strong drink of ignorance. Beware of them that would tell you that by any act of yours you have humbled the pride or lowered the strength of the great nation under whose arm we live. Only God has changed its heart. He has given it to see that the true welfare of a people is moral, not material. And now, steadily, calmly, out of the spirit that has always inspired its laws, its traditions and its faith, it shows us mercy and justice."

"Ameen! Ameen!" came again, but less vehemently than before.

Then speaking of Gordon without naming him, Ishmael reminded his people that some of the great nation's own sons had helped them.

"One there is who has been our warmest friend," he cried. "To him, the pure of heart, the high of soul, although he is a soldier and a great one, may Peace herself award the crown of life! Christian he may be, but may God place His benediction upon him to all eternity! May the God of the East bless him! May the God of the West bless him! May his name be inscribed with blessings from the Koran on the walls of every mosque!"

This reference, plainly understood by all, was received with loud and ringing shouts of "Allah! Allah!"

Then Ishmael's sermon took a new direction. For thirteen centuries the children of men, forgetting their prophets, Mohammed and Jesus and Moses, had been given over to idolatry. They had worshipped a god of their own fashioning. That god was gold. Its temples were great cities given up to material pursuits, and under them were the dead souls of millions of human beings. Its altars were vast armies which spilled the rivers of blood which had to be sacrificed to its lust. As

men had become rich they had become barbarous, as nations had become great they had become pagan. Islam and Christianity alike had had to fight against some of the powers of darkness which called themselves civilisation and progress. But a new era had begun, and the human heart was raising its face to God.

"Once again a voice has gone out from Mecca, from Nazareth, from Jerusalem, saying, 'There is no god but God.' Once again a voice has gone out from the desert, crying, 'Thou shalt have no other god but Me!'"

At this the people were carried out of themselves with excitement, and loud shouts again rang through the mosque.

Then Ishmael spoke of the future. The world had been in labour, in the throes of a new birth, but the end was not yet. Had he promised them that the Kingdom of Heaven would come when they entered Cairo? Let him bend his knee in humility and ask pardon of the Merciful. Had he said the Redeemer would appear? Let him fall on his face before God. Not yet! Not yet!

"But," he cried, leaning out of the pulpit, with a look of inspiration in his upturned eyes, "I see a time coming when the worship of wealth will cease, when the governments of the nations will realise that man does not live by bread alone; when the children of men will see that the things of the spirit are the only true realities, worth more than much gold and many diamonds, and not to be bartered away for the shows of life; when the scourge of war will pass away; when, divisions of faith will be no more known; when all men, whether black or white, will be brothers, and in the larger destiny of the human race the world will be One.

"That time is near, O brothers," cried Ishmael, "and many who are with us to-day will live to witness it."

"You, Master, you!" cried a voice from below, whereupon Ishmael paused for a perceptible moment, and then said, in a sadder voice—

"No; with the eyes of the body I shall not see that time."

Loud shouts of affectionate protest came from the people.

"God forbid it!" they cried.

"God *has* forbidden it," said Ishmael. "I pass out of your lives from this day forward. Our paths part. You will see me no more."

Again came loud shouts of protest—not unusual in a mosque—with voices calling on Ishmael to remain and lead the people.

"My work here is done," he answered. "The little that God gave me to do is finished. And now He calls me away."

"No, no!" cried the people.

"Yes, yes," replied Ishmael; and then in simple, touching words he told them the story of the Prophet Moses—how, by reason of his sin, he was forbidden to enter the Promised Land.

"Many of us have our promised land which we may never enter," he said.

"This is mine, and here I may not stay."

The protests of the people ceased; they listened without breathing.

"Yet Moses was taken up into a high mountain, and from there he saw what lay before his people; and from a high mountain of my soul I see the Promised Land which lies before you. But to me a voice has come which says, 'Enter thou not!'"

The people were now deeply moved.

"We are all sinners," Ishmael continued.

"Not thou, O Master," cried several voices at once.

"Yes, I more than any other, for I have sinned against you and against the Merciful."

Then, raising his arms as if in blessing, he cried—

"O slaves of God, be brothers one to another! If you think of me when I am gone, think of me as of one who saw the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth as plainly as his eyes beheld you now. If I leave you I leave this hope, this comforter, behind me. Think that Azrael, the angel of death, has spread his wings over the desert track that hides me from your eyes. And pray for me—pray for me with the sinner's prayer, the sinner's cry."

Then, in deep, tremulous tones which seemed to be the inner voice of the whole of his being, he cried—

"O Thou who knowest every heart and hearest every cry, look down and hearken to me now! One sole plea I make—my need of Thee! One only hope I have—to stand at Thy mercy-gate and knock! Penitent, I kneel at Thy feet! Suppliant, I stretch forth my hands! Save me, O God, from every ill!"

The words of the prayer were familiar to everybody in the mosque, but so deep was their effect as Ishmael repeated them in his trembling, throbbing voice, that it seemed as if nobody present had ever heard them before.

The emotion of the people was now very great. "Allah! Allah! Allah!" they cried, and they prostrated themselves with their faces to the floor.

When the cold, slow, sonorous voice of the Reader began again, and the vast congregation raised their heads, the pulpit was empty and Ishmael was gone.

CHAPTER XX

Meantime the General's house on the edge of the ramparts was being made

ready for its new tenant. Fatimah, Ibrahim and Mosie, with a small army of Arab servants, had been there since early morning, washing, dusting, and altering the position of furniture. Towards noon the Princess had arrived in her carriage, which, with her customary retinue of gorgeously appraised black attendants, was now standing by the garden gate. Helena had come with her, but for the first time in her life she was utterly weak and helpless. Just as a nervous collapse may follow upon nervous strain so a collapse of character may come after prolonged exercise of will. Something of this kind was happening to Helena, who stood by the window in the General's office, looking down at the city and running her fingers along the hem of her handkerchief, while the Princess, bustling about, laughed at her and rallied her.

"Goodness me, girl, you used to have some blood in your veins, but now—*Mon Dieu!* To think of you who went down *there*, and did *that*, and used to drive a motor-car through the traffic as calmly as if it had been a go-cart, trembling and jerking as if you had got the jumps!"

Meantime the Princess herself, full of energy, was ordering the servants about, and, by a hundred little changes, was giving to the General's office a look that almost obliterated its former appearance.

"We'll have the desk here and the sofa there ... what do you say to the sofa there, my sweet?"

"Hadn't you better ask Gordon himself, Princess?" asked Helena.

"But the man isn't here, and how can I... Never mind, leave them where they are, Ibrahim. And now for the pictures—nothing makes a room look so fresh as a lot of pictures."

Ibrahim had brought up from the Agency a number of pictures which had belonged to Gordon's mother, and the Princess, using her lorgnette, proceeded to examine them.

"What's this? 'Charles George Gordon.' I know! The White Pasha. Put him over the General's desk. 'Ecce Homo.' Humph! A man couldn't wish to have a thing like this in his office, and a natural woman can't want it over her bed. Mosie! Take 'Ecce Homo' to a nice dark corner of the servants' hall."

At that moment Fatimah came from the kitchen, which had been shut up since the day after Helena's departure for the Soudan, to say that half the cooking-tins had disappeared.

"Just what I expected! Stolen by those rascally Egyptian cooks, no doubt. Rascally Egyptians! That's what I call them. Excuse the word, my dear. I speak my mind. They'd steal the kohl from your eyes—if you had any. And these are the people who are to govern the country! But I say nothing—not I, indeed! The virtue of a woman is in holding her tongue.... Fatimah, now that you are here, you might make yourself useful. Dust that big picture of the naked babies. What's

it called? 'Suffer little children.' Goodness! He looks as if he were giving away clothes. Helena, my moon, my beauty, you really must tell me where to put this one."

"But hadn't you better ask Gordon himself, Princess? It's to be his house, you know," repeated Helena, whereupon the Princess, wheeling round on her, said—

"Gracious me, what's come over you, girl? Here you are to be mistress of the whole place within a month, I suppose, and yet——"

"Hush, Princess!"

There were footsteps in the hall, and at the next moment, Gordon, in his frock-coat uniform, looking flushed and excited, and accompanied by Hafiz, whose chubby face was wreathed in smiles, had entered the room.

After he had shaken hands with the Princess the servants rushed upon him—Mosie, who had come behind kissing his sword, Ibrahim his hand, and Fatimah struggling with an impulse to throw her arms about his neck.

"So you've come at last, have you?" said the Princess. "Time enough, too, for here's Helena of no use to anybody. Your father has gone back to England, hasn't he? He might have come up to see me, I think. He wrote a little letter to say good-bye, though. It was just like him. I could hear him speaking. 'My goodness,' I said, 'that's Nuneham!' Well, we shall never see his equal again. No, never! He might have left Egypt with twenty millions in his pocket, and he has gone with nothing but his wages. I suppose they're slandering him all the same. Ingrates! But no matter! The dogs bark, but the camel goes along. And now that I've time, let me take a look at you. What a colour! But what are you trembling about? Goodness me, has *everybody* got the jumps?"

Helena was the only one in the room who had not come forward to greet Gordon, and seeing his sidelong look in her direction, the Princess began to lay plans for leaving them together.

"Ibrahim," she cried, "hang up these naked babies in the bathroom—the only place for them, it seems to me. Fatimah, go back and look if the cooking-tins are not in the kitchen cupboard."

"They're not—I've looked already," said Fatimah.

"Then go and look again. Mosie, you want to inspect my horses—I can see you do."

"No, lady, I *have* i'spected them."

"Then i'spect them a second time. Off you go! ... where's my lorgnette? Oh, dear me. I fancy I must have left it in the boudoir."

"Let me go for it, Princess," said Helena.

"Certainly not! Why should you? Do you think I'm a cripple that I can't go myself? Hafiz Effendi, where are your manners that you don't open this door

for me? That's better. Now, the inner one."

At the next moment Gordon and Helena were left together. Helena was still standing by the window looking down at the city which seemed to lie dazed under the midday sun. Gordon stepped up and stood by her side. It was hard to realise that they were there again. But in spite of their happiness there was a little cloud over both. They knew what caused it.

While they stood together in silence they could hear the low reverberation of the voices of the people who were praying within the mosque.

"They are chanting the first Surah," said Gordon.

"Yes, the first Surah," said Helena.

Their hands found each other as they stood side by side.

"I saw Ishmael last night. He came to my quarters," said Gordon in a low tone.

"Well?" asked Helena faintly.

"It was most extraordinary. He came to tell me that ... to compel me to—"

"Hush!"

There was a soft footstep behind them. It was the step of some one walking in Oriental slippers. Without turning round they knew who it was.

It was Ishmael. Notwithstanding his dusky complexion, his face was very pale—almost as white as his turban. His eyes looked weary, their light was almost extinct. Perhaps his sermon had exhausted him. It was almost as if there was no life left in him except the life of the soul. But he smiled—it was the smile of a spectre—as he stepped forward and held out his hand

Gordon's heart shuddered for pity. "Are you well?" he asked.

"Oh yes."

"But you look tired."

"It's nothing," said Ishmael; and then, with a touching simplicity, he added,

"I have been troubled in my heart, but now I am at peace and all is well."

They sat, Ishmael on the sofa, Helena on a chair at his right, Gordon on a chair at his left, the window open before them, the city slumbering below.

Ishmael's face, though full of lines of pain, continued to smile, and his voice, though hoarse and faint, was cheerful. He had come to tell them that he was going away.

"Going away?" said Gordon.

"Yes, my work here is done, and when a man's work is done he stands outside of life. So I am going back."

"Back? You mean back to Khartoum?" asked Helena timidly.

"Perhaps there, too. But back to the desert. I am a son of the desert. Therefore what other place can be so good for me?"

"Are you going alone?"

"Yes! Or rather, no! When a man has lived, has laboured, he has always one thing—memory. And he who has memory can never be quite alone."

"Still you will be very lone—"

Ishmael turned to her with an almost imperceptible smile.

"Perhaps, yes, at first, a little lonely, and all the more so for the sweet glimpse I have had of human company."

"But this is not what you intended to ... what you hoped to—"

"No! It's true I nourished other dreams for a while—dreams of living a human life after my work was done. It would have been very sweet, very beautiful. And now to go away, to give it up, never more to have part and lot in ... never again to see those who ... Yes, it's hard, a little hard."

Helena turned her head aside and looked out at the window.

"But that is all over now," said Ishmael. "Love is the crown of life, but it is not for all of us. Your great Master knew that as He knew everything. Some men have to be eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. How true! How right!"

His pallid face struggled to smile as he said this.

"And then what does our Prophet say (to him be prayer and peace)? 'The man who loves and never attains to the joy of his love, but renounces it for another who has more right to it, is as one who dies a martyr.'"

Still looking out at the window, Helena tried to say she would always remember him, and hoped he would be very happy.

"Thank you! That also will be a sweet memory," he said. "But happy moments are rare in the lives of those who are called to a work for humanity."

Then, coming gently to closer quarters, he told them he was there to say good-bye to them. "I had intended to write to you," he said, turning again to Helena, "but it is better so."

Then, facing towards Gordon, he said—

"I must confess that I have not always loved you. But I have been in the wrong, and I ask your pardon. It is God who governs the heart. And what does your divine Master say about that, too? 'Whom God hath joined together let not man put asunder.' That is the true word about love and marriage—the first, and the last, and the only one."

Then he rose, and both Helena and Gordon rose with him. One moment he stood between them without speaking, and then, stooping over Helena's hand and kissing it, he said, in a scarcely audible whisper—

"I divorce thee! I divorce thee! I divorce thee!"

It was the Mohammedan form of divorcement, and all that was necessary to set Helena free. When he raised his head his face was still smiling—a pitiful, heart-breaking smile.

Then, still holding Helena's hand, he reached out for Gordon's also, and

said—

"I give her back to thee, my brother. And do not think I give what I would not keep. Perhaps—who knows?—perhaps I loved her too."

Helena was deeply affected. Gordon found it impossible to look into Ishmael's face. They felt his wearied eyes resting upon them; they felt their hands being brought together; they felt Ishmael's hand resting for a moment on their hands; and then they heard him say—

"Maa-es-salamah! Be happy! Keep together as long as you can. And never forget we shall meet some day."

Then, in a voice so low that they could scarcely hear it, he said—

"Peace be with you both! Peace!"—and passed out of the room.

They stood where he had left them in the middle of the room, with faces to the ground and their hands quivering in each other's clasp until the sound of his footsteps had died away. Then Gordon said—

"Shall we go into the garden, Helena?"

"Yes," she replied in a whisper.

They went out hand in hand, and walked to the arbour on the edge of the ramparts. There, on that loved spot, the past rolled back on them like billows of the soul. The bushes seemed to have grown, the bougainvillea was more purple than before, the air was full of the scent of blossom, and everything was turning to love and to song.

They did not speak, but they put their arms about each other, and looked down on the wide panorama below—the city, the Nile, the desert, the Pyramids, and that old, old Sphinx whose scarred face had witnessed so many incidents in the story of humanity, and was now witnessing the last incident of one story more.

How long they stood there in their great happiness they never knew, but they were called back to themselves by a shrill, clear voice that came from a minaret behind them—

"God is Most Great! God is Most Great!"

Then, turning in the direction of the voice, they saw a white figure on a white camel ascending the yellow road that leads up to the fort on the top of the Mokattam hills and onward to the desert.

"Look," said Gordon. "Is it—?"

Without speaking, Helena bent her head in assent.

With hands still clasped and quivering, they watched the white figure as it passed away. It stopped at the crest of the hill, and looked back for a moment; then turned again and went on. At the next moment it was gone.

And then once more came the voice from the minaret, like the voice of an angel winging its way through the air—

[image]

Music fragment

EPILOGUE

Lord Nuneham lived ten years longer, but never, after the first profound sensation caused by his retirement, was he heard of again. The House of Lords did not see him; he was never found on any public platform, and no publisher could prevail upon him to write the story of his life.

He bought a majestic but rather melancholy place in Berkshire, one of the great historic seats of an extinguished noble family, and there, under the high elms and amid the green and cloudy landscape of his own country, he lived out his last years in unbroken obscurity.

It has been well said that deep tragedy is the school of great men, but there was one ray of sunshine to brighten Lord Nuneham's solitude. On a table, by his bedside, in a room darkened by rustling leaves, stood two photographs in silver frames. They were of two boys, one dark like his mother, the other fair like his father, both bright and strong and clear-eyed. Down to the end the old man never went to bed without taking up these pictures and looking at them, and as often as he did so, a faint smile would pass over his seamed and weary face.

After a while the world forgot that he was alive, and when he died the public seemed to be taken by surprise. "I thought he died ten years ago," said somebody.

Gordon held his post as General in command of the British army in Egypt for four successive terms, his appointment being renewed, first by the wish of the War Office, and afterwards at the request of the Egyptian Government. The civil occupation having become less active since his father's time (the new Consul-General being a pale shadow of his predecessor), the military occupation became more important, and except for his subjection to headquarters, Gordon appeared to stand in the position of a military autocrat. But in the difficult and delicate task of maintaining order in a foreign country without exasperating the feelings of the native people, he showed great tact and sympathy. While allowing the utmost liberty to thought, whether political or religious, he never for a moment permitted it to be believed that the Government could be defied with impunity in matters affecting peace, order, life, and property.

For this the best elements honoured him, and when the poor and illiterate,

who were sometimes the victims of extremists whose only aim was to throw flaming torches into pits of inflammable gas, saw that he was just as ready to put down lawlessness among Europeans as among Egyptians, they loved as well as trusted him. His life in Egypt lessened the gulf which Easterns always find between Christians and Christianity, and whenever he had to return to England, the streets of Cairo would be red with the tarbooshes of the people who ran to the railway-station to see him off. "Maa-es-salamah, brother!" they would say, with the simplicity of children, and then, "Don't forget we will be waiting for you to come back."

Gordon's love for the Egyptians never failed him, and he was entirely happy in his home, where Helena developed the summer bloom of beautiful womanhood, and where the light, merry sound of the voices of her two young boys was always ringing like music through the house.

It must be confessed that for a while Egypt had a hard and almost tragic time. After the Consul-General's departure she went through a period of storm and stress. There were both errors and crimes. These were the inevitable results of progressive stages of self-rule; and even anarchy, the travail of a nation's birth, was not altogether unknown. During the earlier years there were some to regret the absence of the mailed fist of Lord Nuneham, and to question the benefit of quasi-Western institutions in an Eastern country. But the atmosphere cleared at last, the sinister anticipations were falsified, a bold and magnanimous policy brought peace, and the destinies of Egypt were firmly united to those of the country that had given her a new lease of life and liberty.

England never regretted what she had done on that day, when, true to her high traditions, she decided that a great nation had no longer any right to govern, with absolute and undivided authority, another race living under another sky. And her reward seems likely to come in a way that might have been least expected. As "God chooseth His fleshly instruments and with imperfect hearts doeth His perfect work," He seems to have put it into the hearts of the Arab people to sink their tribal differences and to act at the prompting of the gigantic myth with which the Grand Cadi deceived the Consul-General.

Indeed, those who gaze into the future as into a crystal say that the time is near when the long drama of dissension that has been played between Arabs and Turks will end in the establishment of a vast Arabic Empire, extending from the Tigris and the Euphrates Valley to the Mediterranean, and from the Indian Ocean to Jerusalem, with Cairo as its capital, the Khedive as its Caliph, and England as its lord and protector. No one can foreshadow the future, but this was Napoleon's greatest dream, and the nation that can realise it will hold the peace of the world in the palm of its almighty hand.

And Ishmael?

After he left Cairo he was never seen again by any one who could positively identify him. Some say he returned to the home of his childhood on the Libyan desert, and that he died there; others that he went back to Khartoum and thence to the heart of the Sahara, and that he is still alive. However this may be, it is certain that his disappearance has had the effect of death, that it has deepened the impression of his life, and that a huge shadow of him remains on those among whom he lived and laboured.

It was said on the day of his departure that Black Zogal, who followed him to the last with the fidelity of a human dog, kept close at his heels until he came to the top of the Mokattam Hills, where the Master sent him back after strictly charging him to tell no one which way he was going. Since then, however, Zogal has given it out (with every appearance of believing his own story) that he saw Ishmael ascend to heaven from the Gebel Mokattam in a blinding whirlwind of celestial light, a flight of angels carrying him away.

A Saint's House has been built for Black Zogal on the spot on which he says he saw the ascent; the half-crazy Soudanese inhabits it, and its outer walls are almost covered with the small flags which devotees have brought and fixed to them in their childlike effort to show reverence.

Nothing could exceed the boundless affection which is still felt for Ishmael by those who came into immediate contact with him. He seems to have inspired them with a love which survives absence and could even conquer death. Everybody who ever spoke to him has a story to tell of his wisdom, his power, and his tenderness. The number of his "miracles" has increased tenfold, and though not described as sinless, he is always talked of as if he were divine.

His Moulded (his birthday, a conjectural date) is celebrated by ceremonies which almost outrival the "Nights of the Prophet." About the Saint's House on the Mokattam Hills a huge encampment of tents is made, and there, under the blaze of thousands of dazzling lights, the Dervishes hold their Zikrs amid scenes of frantic excitement due to exhibitions of hypnotic suggestion which even include the gift of tongues, while more serious-minded Sheikhs repeat a long record of Ishmael's genealogy. This is a very circumstantial story, with a vague resemblance to something which Christians speak of with bated breath—how, when his mother, who was a virgin, was bearing him, an angel appeared to her in a dream and said, "You carry the Lord of Man," and how, when the child was delivered, three great Sheikhs came from Mecca to pay reverence to him, having seen a star in the sky which told them where he was to be born.

In the course of years a great body of Ishmael's "Sayings" have been gathered up. Some of them are authentic, but most of them are out of the wisdom of the ages, and not a few are directly borrowed from the Christian gospels which the Moslems, as a whole, do not know. Whatever their sources, they are deeply

treasured. Women chant them to the children at their knees, and men lisp them, with their last breath and then die with brave faces.

Besides the impression he has produced upon the people, which is strong and likely to be enduring, Ishmael seems to have an almost unaccountable fascination for Arabic scholars and theologians. A number of the professors at El Azhar are already deep in metaphysical disputations about the inner significance of the words attributed to him, and it is whispered that the venerable Chancellor (now nearly a hundred years of age) is compiling a book, half biography and half commentary, that is full of mystical meanings.

More extraordinary still, it seems probable that a large and gorgeous mosque will be built in Ishmael's honour, and that he who loved best to worship in that temple of the open desert whereof the dome is the sky, he who cared so little about dogmatic theology that he never even wrote a line, may, by the wild irony of fate, become the founder of a sect in Islam which will teach everything he fought against and practise everything he condemned.

Chief among the subjects of disputation is Ishmael's expectation of a Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, though the Ulema, less concerned with the spirit than with the letter of the prophet's hope, are divided as to the source of it. Some say it is plainly indicated in the Koran and the traditions; others, more widely read, say it is borrowed from the Hebrew Bible, while a few refer it to a vague and misty antiquity.

Hardly less interesting to the theologians is the question of Ishmael's identity. Nearly all agree that there was an element of the supernatural about him, so hard is it to attribute to men of ordinary human passions the great movements that affect the world. But while there are those who believe him to have been the Mahdi, sent expressly to earth to destroy Anti-Christ, that is to say, the Consul-General, an influential group hold to the opinion that he was, and is, Seyidna Isa—our Lord Jesus.

About this latter view there gathers a strange and not unimpressive theory—that Jesus (who, according to the Islamic faith, did not die on the cross) reappears at intervals among different races—now among the Jews, now among the Indians, now among the Arabs—and that He will continue to make these manifestations until the world is ready for the greatest happiness obtainable by man—the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

But not all the disputations of the wise heads of El Azhar can rob the humble of the object of their veneration. Ishmael came from the people, and with the people he will always remain. His blameless life, his touching history, his deep humanity, his simple teaching, and above all his lofty hopes, have made him Sultan of a vast empire of souls—the empire of the poor, the oppressed, the down-trodden, and the broken-hearted. From the central heart of the East his spirit

came as a ray of sunlight, inspiring men in the dark places to live nobly, to die bravely, and to keep up their courage to the last.

And what of Ishmael's influence in the West?

Nothing! European historians have written since his time without saying a word about him. One of them, who devotes long chapters to accounts of the bombardment of Alexandria, the battle of Tel-el-Kebir, the craven flight of Arabi and his theatrical scene with the Khedive in Abdeen Square, and yet other chapters to the building of the Assouan dam and the construction of the Cape-to-Cairo railway, dismisses Ishmael's pilgrimage from Khartoum in five lines of a section dealing with "Mahdism and Sedition in the Soudan."

And indeed, so hard do we find it, in spite of our civilisation and Christianity, to believe that the things of the spirit may be more helpful in sustaining our steps and shaping our destinies than any forces we can weigh, measure, and calculate, that it is difficult to think of any real welcome in the cities of the West for one whose only teaching was that great wealth is an inheritance taken by force from the Almighty; that property beyond the proper needs of civilised human life is pillage; and that God so loves the world that He will come in person to govern it and to save mankind from its suffering and the consequences of its sins.

Certainly the mere thought of any one holding these opinions, least of all an Arab, the son of a boat-builder, born on the Libyan desert, brought up in the depths of the Soudan, educated in the stagnant schools of El Azhar, wearing sandals and a turban, and probably eating with his fingers—the mere thought of such a one, in the present year of grace, forcing his way into the Cathedrals and Parliament Houses of Westminster, Washington, Rome, Berlin, and Paris, where Archbishops officiate in embroidered copes and Ministers prepare budgets towards the re-paganisation of the world, would at least provoke a smile.

Nevertheless there are some who think that the world is not ruled by its great men but by its great ideas; that these ideas are few and very old; that when humanity needs to renew itself it has only to go back to them; and that it is not so often in the "sick hurry" of civilised communities as out of the calm solitude of the desert that we hear the sublime but simple notes of the World's One Voice.

THE END

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