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During the Second British Empire, Britons actively supported the idealized conception that one lone British officer or civil administrator could accomplish strenuous and often dangerous tasks, through sheer determination and a charismatic personality. Charles George Gordon, during his ill-fated expedition to Khartoum, was portrayed by the majority of Britons as the epitome of this highly romantic image. The purpose of this research is to examine critically the growth and development of the so-called Gordon legend. In doing so, one must attempt to discover the individuals responsible for its creation, while simultaneously examining the social, political and economic environments of Great Britain and certain Oriental countries, which had a direct bearing on the legend itself. Contrary to popular and some scholastic opinion, Gordon was scarcely recognized by the British public during and after his exploits in China (1863-1864) and his early adventures in the Sudan (1874-1879). He only obtained enduring fame from an empire-minded public when he was sent to evacuate Egyptian troops during his second Sudanese mission in 1884.

It was necessary to examine letters, newspapers (both Liberal and Conservative) and diaries written during Gordon's life time, in order to trace the changing attitudes toward a British Empire and the officers and civil administrators who

strengthened British prestige overseas. It was also essential to examine these materials to ascertain the reasons for the fluctuation in Gordon's popularity between the 1860's and 1880's.

Gordon's name, reputation and numerous exploits obtained permanent glorification during the 1880's because they had been so closely interwoven with the "sacred" prestige of the Second British Empire. Even though attitudes toward empire greatly changed from the 1860's to the 1880's, the ethnocentric opinions of Britons with respect to the Oriental races remained the same. This underestimation of the Oriental's ability to change his seemingly stagnant environment cost Gordon his life. His death necessitated the continual glorification of his achievements in order to bolster a damaged imperial prestige among Orientals and Europeans alike.

CHARLES GEORGE GORDON: THE

EVOLUTION OF A

BRITISH HERO

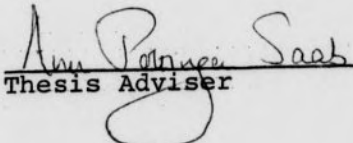
by

Bruce G. Kozak

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## INTRODUCTION

On 26 January 1885 Charles George Gordon, according to a popular account, was speared to death in the Governor's palace in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum, "while he stood in silence surveying his [Arab] antagonists."<sup>1</sup> During the past year, he had been portrayed by numerous pamphlets, books and the imperialist press as the heroic British officer and administrator abandoned by an indifferent Gladstone ministry. The British public, however, regardless of political affiliation, glorified Gordon as the Christian knight-errant who through his personal influence had quelled thousands of uncivilized savages. In the minds of British merchants and shopkeepers, Gordon was worshipped among the Arab nations almost as a demigod. More importantly, however, he symbolized to these Britons their imperial prestige throughout the Arab world; his death struck a serious blow to the standard theory of British superiority, not only in the Middle East but throughout Europe.

The British public came to accept Gordon as the epitome of British heroism as a result of an extended period of "indoctrination" which stressed the characteristics of the "ideal" British hero. An early and important contributor to British thought concerning heroism was Thomas Carlyle. In a series of lectures given in the 1840's, Mr. Carlyle expressed the belief that

"Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men. . . ."2 The hero was God's servant upon earth, but he had to depend upon his own resources to perform and accomplish his appointed task. This individual had to possess the important virtues of "originality, intellect, genius, inspiration, and insight," but above all "sincerity" in his sacred mission.<sup>3</sup> The ultimate form in Carlyle's evolutionary development of heroism was the "King". In his relationship with his subjects, the will of the people "[was]" to be subordinated and loyalty surrendered, . . . [while he was] to command over [the people], to furnish [the people] with constant practical teaching, to tell [the people] for the day and hour what [they] are to do."<sup>4</sup>

These influential concepts were seriously challenged by an increasing number of economists, sociologists and biologists who found no validity in this "Great Man" theory. What Mr. Carlyle envisioned as the eventual Utopia for Great Britain, Mr. Herbert Spencer looked upon as only a temporary stage in man's evolutionary development. This "military" form of society, according to Mr. Spencer, would eventually be replaced by a pure industrial state in which the welfare of the masses would take precedence over the luxury of a privileged few.<sup>5</sup> He lambasted the supposed virtues of Carlyle's "King". These worshipped individuals believed that "success in war [was]" the highest glory . . . [and identified] goodness with bravery and strength. Revenge [became] a sacred

duty with them," and they were willing to disregard their country's welfare for personal gain. "They must have a patriotism," continued Spencer, "which [regarded] the triumph of their society as the supreme end of action; they possess the loyalty whence flows obedience to authority; and that they may be obedient; they must have abundant faith [in human authority]." <sup>6</sup> Mr. Thomas Huxley (in a letter to Mr. Charles Kingsley) "look[ed] upon hero-worship as no better than any other idolatry, and [viewed] the attitude of the mind of the hero-worshipper as essentially immoral; [he believed] that it [was] better for a man to go wrong in freedom than to go right in chains. . . ." <sup>7</sup>

With the establishment of William Ewart Gladstone's first ministry, these hopeful expectations appeared to bear fruit. The philosophy of "free trade" no longer required the employment of Carlyle's "King" to man the military outpost or suppress rebellious tribes. Britain's industrialists would cooperate with other countries to manufacture abundant products to satisfy everyone's needs. Some statesmen, however, believed Gladstone's neglect of foreign affairs would seriously affect Great Britain's prestige and position as a colonial power. Spurred on by Germany's increased influence in European affairs, Benjamin Disraeli and the Conservative party commenced an active campaign to make the British public aware of their responsibility overseas. <sup>8</sup>

The essence of Disraeli's foreign aspirations was expressed in his Crystal Palace speech of 1872. Accusing the

Gladstone government of willful abandonment of Britain's overseas interests, Disraeli gave his countrymen two choices: either to stay bottled up in their small island kingdom, or to become "a great country where your sons when they rise, rise to paramount positions, and obtain, not merely the esteem of your countrymen but command the respect of the world."<sup>9</sup>

While Disraeli called for the appearance of the British imperial hero, Mr. Charles Kingsley reminded the British public of the essential characteristics of this special individual. Writing in 1873 just before Disraeli's government took office, Kingsley described Britons "as so many sheep; and, like so many sheep, [they have] no will or character of their own. . . ."<sup>10</sup> Complaining of the "pettiness and dullness of our modern life", Kingsley believed that this placid existence increased the demand for "sensational novels", in which people were anxious "to hear of people utterly unlike themselves, more noble, and able, and just, and sweet, and pure. . . ."<sup>11</sup> The hero struck out against the injustice which plagued mankind and had the moral and physical courage to carry out his convictions. This unusual individual not only accomplished his appointed task, but did "something beyond duty; something which is not in the bond, some spontaneous and unexpected act of self-devotion."<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, one must have "a perfectly simple, frank, unconscious character" in order to accomplish something of heroic value.<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting to note that Sir Garnet Wolseley, Commanding General of British forces, expressed similar thoughts fifteen years later. The true hero must have an utter disregard for death, and the "courage" to tackle any obstacle. He cited a few examples of British officers who calmly faced enemy fire in order to inspire their men. (Sir William Peel at Sebastopol would "walk about behind his battery on the natural plateau of the ground where he had little or no protection from the enemy's fire."<sup>14</sup>) Wolseley believed, as did Mr. Kingsley, that heroic deeds were not accomplished by "simply doing their duty, and restricting themselves exclusively to its simple performance." Someone must be willing to risk his life to perform a noteworthy accomplishment. He expressed more respect for the "dead lion" (i.e. the fallen hero) than for the "living donkey" (i.e. the soldier who accomplishes only what is expected from him).<sup>15</sup>

In 1874, with the election of the Conservative party, Britons were able to perform, and if not able to participate in, read about the heroic adventures of British soldiers and administrators in numerous travel journals and detailed newspaper accounts. Disraeli's "spirited foreign policy" became a reality with the purchase of controlling interest in the Suez Canal.<sup>16</sup> But public dissatisfaction over British involvement in the Balkans, Afghanistan and South Africa provided Gladstone with enough ammunition to agitate public opinion against the Conservatives' imperial program. In 1880,

Gladstone, preaching a policy of domestic reform with minimal foreign involvement, gained control over Britain's politics.

Even though dissatisfied with the imperial situation at that time, the British public never tired of the heroic accomplishments of British soldiers and civil servants. Along with this never-ending fascination, a new philosophy gained the attention of the British public: Muscular Christianity. A dynamic individual was not only physically active but also spiritually strong. One had to be able to undertake strenuous physical exertion without complaint, supported only by God's spiritual guidance. In this manner, Britons would carry the Christian word and the Anglo-Saxon culture to the less civilized countries under their "guidance" and "protection".

During the second half of the 19th century, Gordon was watched by a British public who expected the utmost from its public officials. He gained short-lived popularity during his assignment in China (1863-1864) as the commander of the "Ever-Victorious Army". Numerous authors believe that Gordon eventually faded from public notice because of his aversion to being lionized. The British public, however, seemed unprepared to appreciate the heroic overseas achievements of any British officer. Britons expressed little enthusiasm in the 1860's for either an imperial empire or officers who promoted and/or protected British mercantile interests in foreign countries.

After his demanding explorations and attempted suppression of the Sudanese slave trade (1874-1879), Gordon obtained less notice from press and public than he received after his earlier mission to China. It was only during and after the ill-fated Khartoum mission (1884-1885) that he achieved enduring fame. The legend which developed about Gordon and his exploits was a combination of astonishing fact interwoven with the ethnocentric fiction of the Briton's superiority over Oriental races. The Victorian was unable to distinguish this fact from the fiction; they were one and the same. Even though Gordon was the principal source of his legend, he was not its chief author. One must now examine the legend's growth and development. In doing so one will be able to examine not only the thoughts of Gordon but also those of the British public and politician throughout the different phases of his life. As the conception of a strong British Empire gained popularity during and after the 1870's, Gordon's reputation as the epitome of the British hero also increased in stature.

## FOOTNOTES

## INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup>Lytton Strachey, Eminent Victorians (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1918), pp. 346-347.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Carlyle, On Heroes and Hero-worship, ed. by John Chester Adams (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1907), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. xxxiii.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>5</sup>Herbert Spencer, The Principles of Sociology (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1897), I, Part II, 554; 629.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 602.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas Huxley to Charles Kingsley, November 8, 1866, quoted in Bernard Semmel, Jamaican Blood and Victorian Conscience (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1963), pp. 122-123.

<sup>8</sup>A. P. Newton, A Hundred Years of the British Empire (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1940), pp. 232-234.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>10</sup>Charles Kingsley, "Heroism," Cornhill Magazine, January, 1873, p. 40.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-30.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>14</sup>Garnet Wolseley, "Courage," Fortnightly Review, August, 1888, p. 286.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>16</sup>Newton, p. 238.



## CHAPTER I

## EARLY LIFE AND CAREER

Charles George Gordon was born at the military community of Woolwich Common on 28 January 1833. His father, General William Henry Gordon, was the Inspector of the Carriage Department at the Woolwich artillery supply depot, and Charles Gordon stemmed from a long and somewhat distinguished soldiering background. David Gordon, his great-grandfather, was captured by the Stuart army during the engagement at Prestonpans but fortunately was released. He eventually died (1752) in North America.<sup>1</sup> David's son, William Augustus Gordon, fought with General Wolfe at the battle of the Plains of Abraham.

His mother, Elizabeth Enderby, described as the ideal devoted Victorian mother, was descended from a well-known line of British shipping merchants and whalers.<sup>2</sup> Her family "came [from] that middle-class Puritan stock which had been untouched by the genial skepticism of the eighteenth century."<sup>3</sup> The Enderbys did not trust the established forms of worship and believed that all earthly problems could be solved through a strict interpretation of Biblical passages.<sup>4</sup>

Gordon, one of eleven children, experienced a typical Tom Brown upbringing. Gordon's father had to keep constant track of his son's actions and stated that he felt "like a man

sitting on a powder barrel."<sup>5</sup> When Gordon was ten, his father sent his "powder barrel" to Tauton Grammar School, probably with grateful thanks of the neighborhood. Five years later he was enrolled at the famous Woolwich Military Academy. Like Tom Brown, Gordon was completely bored with his studies, but "was rather known for his love of sport and boisterous high spirits. . . ."<sup>6</sup> He did, however, excel in sketching military fortifications and geographical details which served him in future military operations.<sup>7</sup>

At Woolwich, Gordon was always in some scrap with his superiors; he was well known among his classmates for an utter disregard for organized discipline. When a senior corporal prevented some younger cadets from leaving the mess room, Gordon "lowered his head and charged," hitting the astonished young man squarely in the stomach.<sup>8</sup> Bouncing down a flight of stairs, the corporal demolished a glass door, luckily without injury to himself. This incident almost ended Gordon's military career. About to graduate, he found himself in more hot water. An underclassman "asserted that Charles Gordon had struck him on the head with a clothes brush."<sup>9</sup> For this action, he had six months deducted from his place in class.

However, on 23 June 1852, he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Royal Engineers. In February 1854, Gordon, now a first lieutenant, was stationed at Pembroke Dock. In

keeping with the story of Tom Brown, Gordon, realizing his past conduct had violated the principles of a devoted Christian, took his first communion and swore to mend his ways.<sup>10</sup> His sudden conversion was primarily the responsibility of a certain Captain Drew who lent him a piece of religious writing entitled Priceless Diamond.<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that while most Britons had become uninterested or skeptical about their religious beliefs, Gordon's dependence on Scriptures intensified. Like Tom Brown, Gordon looked upon his Creator as "the King and Lord of heroes."<sup>12</sup>

One factor which enhanced Gordon's legend was his remarkable ability to undermine the defences of Chinese fortifications and his seemingly uncanny defensive operations at Khartoum. Unfortunately, few people attributed these amazing feats to his extensive military training, but believed that Gordon's charismatic influence over his soldiers was the principal reason for his numerous successes. As a Royal Engineer, Gordon participated in three training programs, conducted not only at Woolwich Academy but also at the Royal Engineer Establishment at Chatham.<sup>13</sup> All cadets received the customary doses of Greek and Latin while being trained in mathematics, fortifications, artillery, modern languages, natural sciences, and drawing.<sup>14</sup> After rigorous examinations, the successful cadets decided whether to join the prestigious Royal Artillery or the greatly underrated but equally important Royal Engineers. At Chatham, Gordon spent four and a half

months examining the fabrications of field works. Nine more months were devoted to

modelling various works in sand; spar-bridging; field-works of attack and defense; mining; floating bridges; railways; sundry practices, such as escalading with ladders and grapnels; the construction of field kitchens; and . . . schemes for the attack or defence of some neighboring height, for the bridging of some river or canal, [and] for the obstruction of some road or railway against an imaginary foe.<sup>15</sup>

Also required were topics dealing with surveying and military reconnaissance, architecture, chemistry, telegraphy, and submarine mining.<sup>16</sup> Even though the Royal Engineers suffered more casualties under combat conditions than any other military branch, positions of responsibility were not given to these officers "on account of their education."<sup>17</sup> This was due to the Victorians' lack of respect and trust for anyone who neglected classical studies to pursue an education in practical and scientific fields.

While Gordon was stationed at Pembroke, the Crimean War broke out. Gordon, itching for combat, arrived at Balaclava on 1 January 1855. His official duties were the surveying of enemy lines and the construction of winter shelters for allied soldiers dying of intensive cold. Even in the position of an R. E., he was noticed by his commanding officers. According to General Wolseley and Charles Kingsley, a true hero must not only accomplish his assigned tasks but perform deeds beyond the required "call of duty." Gordon, through his examples

of unusual bravery, many constantly cited after his death, made the heart-pounding adventures in so-called "sensational novels" take living shape.

Gordon once came upon a frightened sapper who was being brow-beaten by a corporal. The reluctant sapper had been directed to repair a damaged parapet while the corporal would supervise the assignment under cover. Gordon climbed out of the trench, commanding the astonished corporal to follow him. As Russian bullets whizzed past, Gordon yelled at the corporal, "Never order a man to do anything that you are afraid to do yourself."<sup>18</sup> In another example, General Charles Staveley recounted how he had been unfamiliar with some enemy positions due to illness. Gordon was more than willing to show him these trenches. "He explained every nook and corner," Staveley pointed out, "and took me along outside our most advanced trench, the bouquets (volleys of small shells fired from mortars) and other missiles flying about us in, to me, a very unpleasant manner, he taking the matter remarkably coolly."<sup>19</sup>

After the cessation of hostilities in the Crimea, Gordon was assigned to the delegation responsible for determining the newly created boundaries between Russia and the disputed territories of Wallachia and Moldavia. Early in 1859, Gordon, by now a captain, was stationed at Chatham as the Field-Work Instructor and Adjutant. But in little over a year's time,

Gordon's heroic exploits would be examined by an indifferent British public. The Gordon legend would obtain its basic foundations when Charles Gordon continued his noteworthy career in China as commander of the "Ever-Victorious Army."

1. James G. Halpern, The Life of Gordon (New York: Peter Rabson Collins & Co., 1887), pp. 2-3.

2. John G. Halpern, The Story of Chinese Gordon (London: Constable & Co., 1913), pp. 1-2.

3. John G. Halpern, Chinese Gordon (London: Constable & Co., 1913), pp. 21-22.

4. ibid., p. 23.

5. John G. Halpern, The Story of Chinese Gordon (London: Constable & Co., 1913), p. 2.

6. ibid., p. 3.

7. ibid., p. 4.

8. ibid., p. 5.

9. ibid., p. 6.

10. John G. Halpern, The Story of Chinese Gordon (London: Constable & Co., 1913), pp. 7-8.

11. ibid., pp. 9-10.

12. John G. Halpern, The Story of Chinese Gordon (London: Constable & Co., 1913), p. 11.

13. John G. Halpern, The Story of Chinese Gordon (London: Constable & Co., 1913), pp. 12-13.

14. ibid., p. 14.

15. ibid., p. 15.

16. ibid., p. 16.

17. ibid., pp. 17-18.

## FOOTNOTES

## CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup>Demetrius C. Boulger, The Life of Gordon (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier & Co., 1898), pp. 2-3.

<sup>2</sup>A. Egmont Hake, The Story of Chinese Gordon (London: Remington & Co., 1884), pp. 7-8.

<sup>3</sup>Hugh Evelyn Worthem, Chinese Gordon (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1933), pp. 22-23.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>5</sup>Lord G. E. Elton, Gordon of Khartoum (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1954), p. 6.

<sup>6</sup>Boulger, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup>Elton, pp. 8-9.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Letter, Charles Gordon to M. Auguste Gordon, Pembroke, 1854, cited from Charles George Gordon, Letters of General C. G. Gordon to His Sister, ed. by M. Auguste Gordon (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1902), p. 2.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 1-2.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas Hughes, Tom Brown's School Days, Intro. by W. D. Howell (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1911), p. 376.

<sup>13</sup>"The Royal Engineers and Permanent Fortifications," Quarterly Review, July, 1869, pp. 216-217.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 231-232.

<sup>18</sup>"General Gordon," The Times (London), February 12, 1885, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup>Boulger, p. 19.



## CHAPTER II

## CHINA: THE TAIPING REBELLION (1863-1864)

During Gordon's early life, the British government had become more involved in China's domestic matters. During the Opium War (1839-1842), Great Britain fought the Manchu Empire, and the Chinese, unable to compete with European military technology, were soundly defeated. The British government demanded twenty-one million dollars in war debts which meant that the provincial officials raised more revenue in taxes. This crushing burden fell largely upon the Chinese peasantry, eighty percent of the population.<sup>1</sup> Western intervention upset the social, political and economic balance of China, especially in the southern provinces of Kwangsi and Kwantung, where the Taiping rebellion originated. The important economic region in and surrounding Canton, located in Kwantung province, was seriously disrupted causing an increase in piracy. Different ethnic groups with varied life styles were now forcibly thrown together which touched off numerous petty wars.<sup>2</sup> Secret organizations such as the Triad Society developed to protect the commercial and political interests of these various groups. When not warring against each other, these fraternal organizations harassed the government officials who attempted to maintain control over the province's

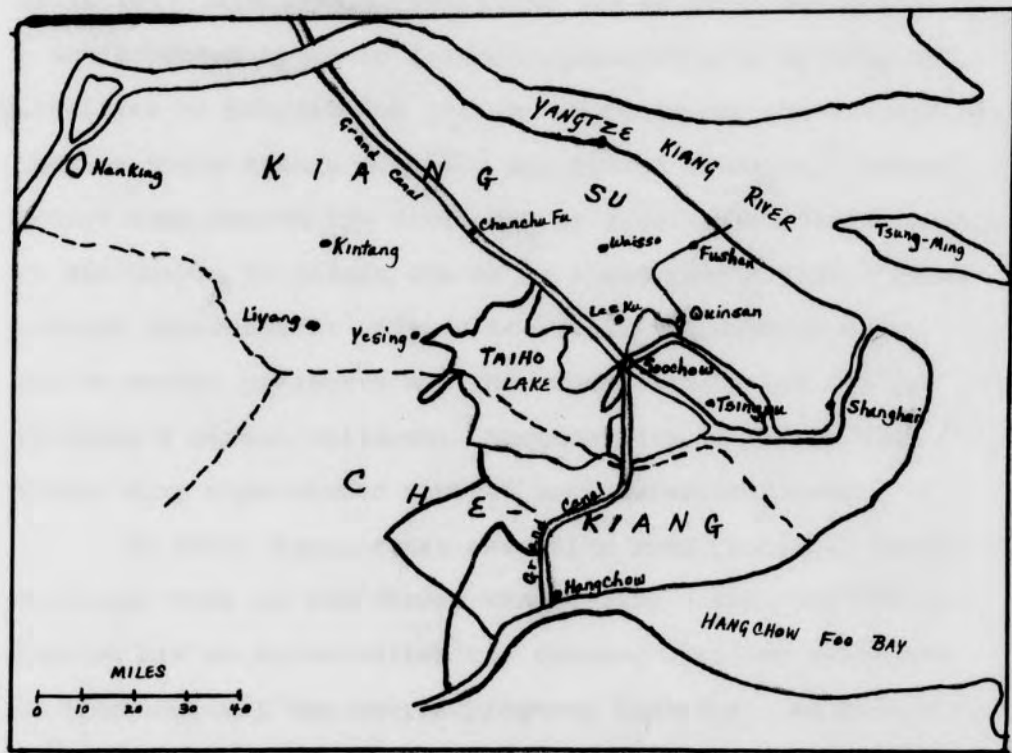


Fig. 1. Gordon's Operations in China (1863-1864).

Source: Hugh Evelyn Worthem, Chinese Gordon.  
 (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1933),  
 opposite p. 90.

salt industry.<sup>3</sup>

In this turbulent environment, the future leader of the Taiping rebellion was reared. Born of peasant stock, the young Hung Hsiu-ch'üan displayed remarkable intellectual abilities. His family, realizing the material advantages of a son accepted into the "scholar-gentry," gave up many necessities to prepare him for the examinations which would determine their future economic and social position.<sup>4</sup> Even though Hung passed the first set of scholastic examinations, he was unable to obtain the major sheng-yüan degree.<sup>5</sup> After several unsuccessful efforts to obtain the degree, Hung, due to mental pressures and the shame felt by his family, suffered a mental collapse. Succumbing to a trance-like state, Hung experienced several unexplainable dreams.

In 1843, Hung, after examining some Christian tracts, concluded that in his former trance-like state, God had requested him to re-establish His control over the earth and to drive out all the devils plaguing humanity. He also believed that he was the younger brother of Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup> He began to preach his pseudo-Christian philosophy throughout his province and had collected such a large following by 1850 that the government suffered several military defeats trying to dissolve his movement. After a major victory over government forces, Hung officially decreed the beginning of the T'ai-ping T'ien-kuo Dynasty ("The Heavenly Kingdom of Great

Peace.")<sup>7</sup> From 11 January 1851 to the early 1860's the Taiping rebels were constantly at war with Imperial troops and eventually with Anglo-French forces as well.

The Imperial government again had difficulties with the British government. Since the Chinese were unable to control piracy along their eastern coast, they found the British doing the job for them. Matters reached a violent climax in 1858 when the British boarded and captured the Chinese ship, Arrow, which had been flying the British colors. The Chinese, again no match for European soldiers, soon capitulated and agreed to sign the Treaty of Tientsin. Even though the Chinese tried to eliminate British influence by attempting to sink the British fleet at Peking,<sup>8</sup> Anglo-French forces finally compelled the Imperial government to accept the treaty in 1860.

Although the British government wished to maintain peaceful relations with Peking, the British authorities were not anxious to involve themselves in China's domestic problems such as the Taiping rebellion. Between 1853 and 1861, the British adopted a "wait and see policy of limited neutrality" in which military aid was supplied neither to the Peking government nor to the Taiping rebels.<sup>9</sup> In the early 1860's, however, this policy rapidly changed. Palmerston's government became uneasy at a Russian offer of naval aid against the Taipings.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the anti-Western Emperor Hsien-Feng had died, leaving his five-year-old son

under the influence of his mother, Tsu Hsi, who along with Prince Kung favored a pro-Western foreign policy.<sup>11</sup>

The most influential factor in the British decision to abandon neutrality was the increasing threat to the treaty ports by the Taiping rebels. The Imperial forces under Tseng Kuo-fan had occupied the important Taiping stronghold of Anking, forcing the rebels to move toward the coast.<sup>12</sup> With the successful capture of the treaty port of Ningpo and the important silk industry of Soochow, the British and foreign merchants at Shanghai realized that the Taiping rebels would soon move against Shanghai itself. (An important Taiping military officer felt that the occupation of Shanghai would stimulate immediate diplomatic correspondence with the Western powers.<sup>13</sup>)

In order to insure their investments, these Shanghai merchants hired an American adventurer, Fredrick Ward, who organized an "ad hoc" army of Americans, Chinese and Spanish,<sup>14</sup> and called this force Ch'ang an chün or the "Ever-Victorious Army."<sup>15</sup> The name supposedly acted as an incentive for recruitment.<sup>16</sup> Ward was first regarded as a trouble-maker and the Western powers had him arrested and tried for military misconduct, but the charges were later dropped.<sup>17</sup> His unpopular image changed when, early in 1862, he helped Anglo-French forces repulse the long expected Taiping attack on Shanghai. Since Ward was now "officially recognized" by the

European powers, he was permitted to obtain vital war supplies and to enlist foreign officers.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately for this make-shift army, Ward was mortally wounded in September 1862. The command devolved on Ward's chief officer, Henry Burgevine, an unscrupulous individual who wanted to use Ward's force for his own personal gain. Burgevine, however, along with his body guard, attacked a prominent Chinese banker who refused to pay the back wages of Ward's force and was relieved of his command.<sup>19</sup> Shortly after Burgevine's dismissal, General Charles Staveley, commander of British troops in China, proposed to Li Hung-chang, former governor of Kiangsu province, that his brother-in-law, Captain Gordon, should obtain the command. He had not proposed his relative because of family connections. Not only impressed with Gordon's courage under fire in the Crimea, Staveley had again witnessed his relative's bravery while Gordon surveyed the rebel fortification of Tsingpu. With no concern for his welfare, he crawled under enemy gunfire within close range of the fortification walls, took notes on the defenses, and returned unharmed to his command.<sup>20</sup> Because of this valuable information, the town was taken next day. On 24 March 1863 Gordon, now a brevet major, assumed command of the "Ever-Victorious Army." Unlike the Western forces which were only allowed to engage the rebels within a thirty-mile radius of Shanghai, Gordon

was permitted to operate beyond this set boundary.

Gordon's appointment, his unusual bravery and personality, and his continued successful invasion of Taiping fortifications lent credence to the widely accepted story that Gordon and his 3,000 disciplined troops had single-handedly crushed the Taiping rebellion. Many of Gordon's Victorian biographers, especially his relative A. Egmont Hake and his personal friend Demetrius C. Boulger, reinforced this myth.<sup>21</sup> Such individuals as Andrew Wilson, who believed the downfall of the rebellion was due primarily to the Imperial troops,<sup>22</sup> were only cited in order to provide examples of Gordon's personal bravery.

In Events in the Taiping Rebellion (1891), Hake stated in the chapter, "Gordon as Leader of Men," that Gordon had taken all major Taiping fortifications and had broken the back of the rebellion. "He had saved millions of money"; concluded Hake,

he had saved millions of men and women from famine, torture, and death; ay, he had saved a mighty Empire and a throne. He had written his name across the map of China; and as long as her dynasty endures, so long will he be held in reverence as the benefactor and savior of a race.<sup>23</sup>

Recent works by Chinese historians almost entirely disagree with this well-worn assumption; Gordon's force was a contributing, but certainly not a principal, factor in the

rebellion's collapse. Dr. S. Y. Teng, a leading expert on Taiping history, states that the rebels were defeated by "their own inadequacy. There were defeated neither by the Ever-Victorious Army nor by Tseng Kuo-fan, but rather by themselves."<sup>24</sup> The rebel leaders, including Hung himself, were incapable of creating and operating an effective military force. While being "stubborn and narrow-minded," these leaders were envious of each other's power and position. The result was the murder of important Taiping soldiers and civil servants and the mass extermination of their followers.<sup>25</sup> Taiping officials began to assume the airs of Peking nobles and abandoned their Christian teachings. With this example before them, "the morale and discipline of the army . . . degenerated sharply, and looting and rape became more common."<sup>26</sup>

Dr. Teng stresses that after 1857, the Taiping army was officered by few competent individuals.<sup>27</sup> When Gordon assumed command of the "Ever-Victorious Army" in March 1863, the Taiping rebels had been under this inefficient leadership for five years. The Taipings were further hampered by lack of manpower armed with inferior weapons. Provided only with swords, lances, spears, tridents, matchlocks, and jingals<sup>28</sup> the Taiping soldier, unable to compete with Imperial and European troops, found it impossible to patrol the vast extent of conquered territory. With few soldiers to garrison



captured fortifications, much of this hard-fought territory was eventually reoccupied by Imperial troops.<sup>29</sup> The rebels also lacked needed war material after 1857 because the Imperial fleet prevented any supplies from reaching rebel fortifications located near or on the Yangtze River.<sup>30</sup> With poor leadership, low morale, antiquated weapons, insufficient troops to man captured fortifications, and the additional obstacle of European war supplies and officers aiding the Imperial government, the Taiping cause had little chance of success.

J. S. Gregory, interested in British public opinion about the rebellion, attributes many of Gordon's victories to additional British troops around Shanghai. This city became a storehouse for war supplies and a recouping area for Gordon's troops.<sup>31</sup>

Several historians, contrary to Victorian beliefs, credit the Chinese forces with a significant role in the rebellion's downfall. Dr. Franz Michael believes that Gordon's unit "played only a supporting part in the last stages of military affairs, and its theater of operation was limited to the area around Shanghai."<sup>32</sup> Gordon's force quickened the rebellion's destruction but its actual fate had already been decided by the defeat of Taiping forces in the upper Yangtze valley.<sup>33</sup> The rebellion collapsed with the fall of Nanking, but at the time of the city's capture,

Gordon had already disbanded his force.

Dr. William Hail, probably the first Chinese historian to debunk the Gordon legend in China, believed that most credit should be given to Tseng Kuo-fan and his Imperial forces. While Gordon was active around Shanghai, Tseng bottled up the rebel forces, preventing them from invading Shanghai and overwhelming Gordon's smaller unit.<sup>34</sup>

Even though Gordon was portrayed as the ever-powerful savior of the Chinese people during his later life (1884-1885), it seems that his exploits caused little stir during the 1860's. Several historians attribute this lack of popularity to Gordon's aversion to any form of notoriety. Britons, however, in the 1860's were not interested in an imperial empire, and were probably less interested in the men who performed heroic deeds in order to advance the interests of the British government and British merchant class. Gordon's heroic actions in China had only a limited effect on the general British public in the 1860's, but the foundations of his legend were established at this time. These legend-making events would be exposed to an indifferent British public through British reporters in China and Andrew Wilson's classic study, The "Ever-Victorious Army." Even though Mr. Wilson believed the Chinese were greatly responsible in crushing the Taiping rebellion, he described in vivid detail many examples of Gordon's unusual bravery under

enemy fire. These exploits, recorded by Mr. Wilson, would constantly be cited by Gordon's admirers during and after his mission to Khartoum, but without reference to the ability of the Chinese to handle their own domestic problems without foreign intervention.

The British press probably became interested in the Taiping rebellion to the extent that it was concerned because of two factors: 1) General Ward and his forces broke the neutrality between Europeans and Chinese, and 2) General Gordon obtained command of the "Ever-Victorious Army" and so received "official British recognition" for his activities against the rebels.<sup>35</sup>

The clearest statement of British policy, defended by The Times and lambasted by The Daily News, was presented on 4 March 1864 by Lord Palmerston in the House of Commons. He declared that since a stable government under Taiping control was impossible, the present Manchu Dynasty had to be supported. Britain's course was clear: "It is very important," affirmed the Prime Minister, "for the commercial interests of this country as connected with China, that order and peace should be re-established there, that commerce may revive and be carried on without impediment."<sup>36</sup> However, as events would demonstrate, this did not mean the active participation of British troops against the rebels.

The Times, probably the strongest supporter of

Palmerston's Chinese foreign policy, defended the protection of legitimate British commerce in China. The Taiping movement, according to the paper, was "not a political party or a national party but simply a social disease [and a conglomeration of] the ideal, the destitute, and the ignorant congregated upon an enormous scale and plundering in great multitudes . . . [who] occasionally aid the least scrupulous and respectable of our merchants. . . ." <sup>37</sup> Even though Britons had benefited from commercial contact with China, The Times, however, did blame British merchants for involving British troops in seemingly needless wars. <sup>38</sup>

The Daily News, probably the most vocal paper against British intervention in Chinese affairs, likewise believed Britain's unfruitful involvement in Peking's domestic matters was the fault of "young merchants'" complaints about the Taipings' attempted invasion of Shanghai. Although the rebellion was an "extraordinary evil," British intervention was unnecessary because the rebellion was dying "from a natural process of exhaustion and from the slow conviction of the people of China that their support ought to be given to the Mandarins rather than to the new claimants of celestial power and wisdom." <sup>39</sup>

The British public was informed in the middle of April that Captain Gordon was to replace Captain Holland as permanent commander of the "Ever-Victorious Army." <sup>40</sup> (Captain

Holland had obtained temporary command of Ward's forces between the time of Burgevine's dismissal and Gordon's appointment as the force's commander.) Even though Gordon's military operations were highly successful in 1863, they achieved little notice compared to the long detailed accounts of the American Civil War. Some comment appeared about Gordon's capture of Fushan (4 April 1863), Taitan (2 May 1863), and the important rebel supply base of Quinsan (31 May 1863), but nothing was considered of editorial value.<sup>41</sup>

The only event that did create a sensation in the London press, tarnished Gordon's reputation instead of enhancing it. The Shanghai Daily Shipping and Commercial News and the North China Herald (printed in Shanghai) stated that reliable sources had informed them of inhuman tortures inflicted by Imperial soldiers upon seven Taiping prisoners after the capture of Taitan. According to a letter published in the North China Herald and written by a certain "Eye-Witness," the prisoners had "arrows . . . forcibly driven [into] various parts of the body, heads, region of heart, abdomen, etc.; from whence issued copious streams of blood. . . ." While "strips of flesh" had been "hacked" from the body, a "hewing, hacking and . . . sawing motion" was used to cut part of the head from the shoulders.<sup>42</sup> Even though these inhuman acts supposedly lasted for several hours, a British officer present examined the prisoners only ten minutes before their

execution. (The North China Herald had been an avid supporter of the Taipings in the early 1850's, but had completely changed their opinions about the validity of the rebels' cause during the early 1860's.<sup>43</sup>)

Gordon stated in a letter to the Shanghai Daily Shipping and Commercial News that many Taiping rebels were in his employ and fought along with Imperial troops. Gordon further indicated that former Taiping rebels and Imperial soldiers treated each other almost as brothers after the Taipings were captured.<sup>44</sup> The incident must have placed Gordon in a poor light, but the North China Herald hoped to smooth any ill feelings: "We desire not to be understood to cast any reflections on Major Gordon in the matter; the executions took place at Wyconsin a distance some miles from Taitan and no one will for a moment suppose that he could be cognizant of them."<sup>45</sup>

Even though General Staveley's replacement, General Brown, assured the British public that these cruelties would immediately cease or all British support would be withdrawn,<sup>46</sup> the British electorate was not satisfied. In an editorial in The Daily News, Goldwin Smith declared that a "few rapacious and unscrupulous adventurers" (i.e. some British merchants) had necessitated British officers to be involved in a "war, in which Englishmen, without any call of national duty, and against all laws of international justice, are instigated by

our government to take part." Taiping prisoners may have been murdered by Imperial soldiers, but when "put to death by the Imperial Government with our assistance [they are], in fact, murdered by the government of this country."<sup>47</sup>

The controversy over the prisoners' treatment eventually faded into the background; Gordon retained his command even though his reputation may have suffered, and he continued his successful advance against the Taiping fortifications. Colonel W. H. Sykes M.P., a vocal supporter of the Taiping cause, tried to place Gordon's efforts in a dim light by publishing a supposedly private letter stating that all Gordon's British officers had abandoned him because their wages had been halved. With no other European officers to support him, the letter added that Ward's former lieutenant, Henry Burgevine, had deserted with 500 "rowdies" to the Taiping army. It was Burgevine's intention to occupy Quinsan whereby he would "have more war supplies than the English in Shanghai." Gordon himself, supposedly tired of the whole affair, was contemplating resignation.<sup>48</sup>

Gordon remained in command, but Burgevine could not get along with his new Taiping allies. During a secret conference, Burgevine "proposed to Gordon to unite with him, and together to seize Soochow; to keep both Rebels and Imperialists out of it; and then to organize an army of 20,000 men, with which to march to Peking."<sup>49</sup> Gordon would have no part of the plan.

Burgevine returned to the rebels but was almost executed when his men deserted to Gordon, leaving him still in rebel hands. Gordon, however, persuaded the Taiping commanders to surrender Burgevine in exchange for weapons stolen by Burgevine's men during their flight from the rebel camp.<sup>50</sup>

These events probably excited the imagination of British residents in China, but at home they received scant notice. Government officials knew almost nothing about the Chinese insurrection and

intervention against the Taipings was not an issue upon which the Palmerston government felt very seriously challenged. Certainly there was no sense of urgency about these fairly frequent debates which, with one or two exceptions, were held before thin and disinterested houses [of Parliament] and which only once resulted in a division.<sup>51</sup>

The British public between 1862 and 1864 may have considered the Taiping rebellion as a deplorable evil but they were not willing to lend active troop support for its suppression.<sup>52</sup>

In the beginning of 1864, the Lay-Osborn, Anglo-Chinese Fleet, and not Gordon's offensive against the rebels, was under discussion by individuals interested in Chinese affairs. Mr. Horatio Nelson Lay, with the services of Mr. Robert Hart, had persuaded the Imperial government to acquire from Great Britain a squadron of steamers to eliminate piracy and deal with the Taipings. Staffed with British officers and men under the command of Captain Sherard Osborn, these ships would be under



the direct jurisdiction of Mr. Lay and not the Chinese government. Prince Kung, realizing that Mr. Lay would be able to wield enormous power in Chinese affairs, rejected the arrangement and the fleet returned to Great Britain.<sup>53</sup>

The Times, irritated by what seemed to them Chinese double-dealing, believed that

the hopes which we had encouraged of the pacification of China, and the consequent return to a trade in the prosperity of which not merely a vast amount of material wealth, but the best interests of civilization are involved, are doomed to complete disappointment . . . [on these men and ships] depended the destiny of some 400 millions of the human race.<sup>54</sup>

Little credit was given to Gordon's achievements and according to The Times, the Chinese were not disappointed over the fleet's failure because Chinese officials were satisfied with "the small successes of Gordon," demonstrating the belittling opinion of his achievements.<sup>55</sup>

The Lay-Osborn controversy soon faded from public view with the news of the fall of Soochow (5 December 1863) to Gordon's force and Imperial troops. Soochow had once been a thriving center for the production of silk but was presently a major Taiping fortification garrisoned by 40,000 men. If the need arose, the Taipings could muster 38,000 more soldiers. The Taipings were confronted by 10,000 Imperial troops, Gordon's force of 3,100 men and 400 French troops. About 25,000 more Imperial soldiers could be obtained in an emergency for a prolonged siege.<sup>56</sup> The Offensive was placed under Gordon's

supervision and he proceeded to disrupt all supply routes entering the city.<sup>57</sup> Even though Gordon's forces suffered several setbacks, the Taiping commanders or Wangs realized the town would soon fall and so began surrender talks with Gordon and the Imperial commander, General Ching. Gordon received the impression from the military governor, Li Hung-chang, that the Wangs would be pardoned if the city was surrendered, and he probably conveyed this notion to the Wangs.<sup>58</sup> Shortly after their capitulation, the Wangs were executed by Li Hung-chang's orders and the city was ransacked by Imperial troops. Franco-Chinese forces, however, prevented any attempt to exterminate the local population.<sup>59</sup> According to Mr. Hake, Gordon was so outraged over the murders that he searched for Li with gun in hand.<sup>60</sup>

Li believed the executions were unavoidable. The Wangs would not "shave their heads" (symbol of submission), demanded the permanent retention of Soochow and its troops, and their "general bearing was marked by extreme ferocity."<sup>61</sup> The British, however, viewed the executions as brutal and unmotivated. According to The Times reporter, the episode was an open-and-shut case. Li Hung-chang had sworn to Gordon that the Wangs would be spared and Gordon had given them a solemn promise that no harm would come to them. Li, without reason, had butchered the leaders, offending Gordon's honor as a British officer. The capture of Soochow had been marred by

"those foul acts of treacherous cruelty . . . [which] rendered it a subject of regret that we should have allowed British officers to associate themselves with a cause, the members of which are so utterly deficient in every feeling of honour and humanity."<sup>62</sup> Because of his actions, Gordon and his forces remained idle, refusing to undertake further action against the rebels. The Times added that "the news of Gordon's intended inactivity will quickly spread through the rebel districts and all thoughts of surrender will be abandoned."<sup>63</sup>

These unfortunate events immediately placed Gordon's name and military operations before the attention of interested British readers in Great Britain. Gordon was now considered the only means to disrupt the Taipings' eventual takeover of China. British and Chinese alike soon realized that Gordon was not interested in pecuniary gain at the expense of his personal honor. For his activities at Soochow, the Emperor of China presented Gordon with a generous reward of three thousand pounds. He also received an insignia comparable to Britain's Grand Cross of the Bath.<sup>64</sup> Gordon refused all signs of Imperial favor. This utter disregard for all rewards over a matter of personal honor stood out in contrast to the unsavory exploits of American adventurers and British profiteers.

After the fall of Soochow, Gordon and his troops remained inactive at Quinsan. Reports gave the impression that

without Gordon's assistance, the Taipings would shortly overwhelm the Imperial troops. Gordon, however, again decided to take the offensive against the Taipings for several reasons. His men, unable to participate in military operation, became extremely restless, and Gordon feared a possible mass desertion to the Taiping camp.<sup>65</sup> Gordon, in a letter (dated 6 February 1864) to Sir Frederick Bruce, British ambassador to China, provided further reason for returning to the field. He was afraid that Burgevine would again join the Taipings along with 300 Europeans. It is interesting to note, that Gordon himself sincerely believed that without his direct intervention the rebellion would last indefinitely. "I do not apprehend the rebellion will last six months," Gordon argued, "if I take the field. It may take six years if I leave, and the Government does not support the Imperialists. I propose to cut through the heart of the rebellion, and divide it into two parts by the capture of Yesing and Liyang."<sup>66</sup>

Shortly after Gordon's return to military operations (18 February 1864), Li Hung-chang, probably fearing the loss of British officers and war supplies, publicly announced that Gordon was not responsible for the death of the Taiping leaders.<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately, this statement did not placate British public opinion and many British statesmen; the Orders in Council allowing Gordon and other British officers to serve

under the Imperial government were rescinded. According to Andrew Wilson, this decision was taken on 1 January 1864.<sup>68</sup> J. S. Gregory, however, affirms that the orders were revoked in March, 1864.<sup>69</sup> Both authorities, however, failed to explain why Gordon was permitted to carry out offensives from 18 February 1864 until the fall of Chanchu Fu (11 May 1864).

After his return to action, the papers again reported one successful engagement after another. This, however, was not to last long. The Overland China Mail (printed in Hong Kong) stated on 1 April 1864 that Liyang and Kintang had surrendered without bloodshed. Upon Gordon's approach the rebel troops "shaved their heads in submission." The dispatch added that Chung Wang, "the [Taiping] military genius of the rebellion," realizing that Gordon would soon reach the Taiping capital of Nanking, was packing his belongings in order to evacuate the capital immediately.<sup>70</sup> Seven days later, a short news clip told a different story. Gordon had been defeated and wounded at Kintang (21 March 1864) and had lost many of his officers.<sup>71</sup> Soon after, The Times correspondent stated that previous reports of Gordon's bloodless occupation of Kintang had been "premature." After discussing the casualties among staff officers and enlisted men, and stating that rebel forces had not decreased in strength, the reporter wrote of another defeat suffered by Gordon's forces at the major Taiping fortification of Chanchu Fu. "A few such successes as these," the reporter lamented, "will teach the rebels the

strength which their numbers actually give them; and that dread of the disciplined troops which has hitherto been the great secret of Gordon's success will disappear."<sup>72</sup>

When Gordon's situation appeared its darkest and the opposition criticized his return to active duty, his brother, Sir Henry, sent The Times a letter from Sir Frederick Bruce approving Gordon's decision to return to active duty. "It would be a serious calamity," wrote Bruce,

and addition to our embarrassments in China were you compelled to leave your work incomplete, and were a sudden dissolution or dispersion of the Chinese force to lead to the recurrence of that state of danger and anxiety from which, during the last two years, Shanghai has suffered.<sup>73</sup>

Gordon, during the meantime, had recovered from his wound, by-passed Kintang, and after one unsuccessful onslaught upon Waissoo (31 March 1864), he eventually captured the city on 11 April 1864. The Waissoo garrison of 10,000 men evacuated in the direction of Chanchu Fu, but fortunately for Gordon, only 1,000 of these rebels reached Chanchu Fu with its war-hardened veterans numbering 20,000. The local inhabitants, realizing the rebels' plight, exterminated most of the panic-stricken soldiers.<sup>74</sup>

After Waissoo, Gordon attacked Chanchu Fu, the last major stronghold before Nanking. The Times reporter stated that even though Gordon had been temporarily repulsed with

heavy losses at Chanchu Fu (27 April 1864), the rebellion was "almost at its last gasp, and the rebels [were] fighting with courage of despair." The correspondent further claimed that the fortified city had a garrison of "nearly 70,000 men at or near the city."<sup>75</sup> If any avid China watcher was apprehensive about Gordon's position, he was relieved to learn that Gordon had overcome his last major obstacle; Chanchu Fu was in the possession of his forces and Imperial troops (11 May 1864).<sup>76</sup>

Shortly after the fall of Chanchu Fu, Gordon dissolved the "Ever-Victorious Army," visited Tseng Kuo-fan who was directing the attack on Nanking, and organized a training base for Imperial troops before leaving for England. It was the opinion of The Times correspondent (and eventually of the British public as well) that Gordon had "effectually crushed the rebellion," and further added that "unless the Imperialists are guilty of some gross blunders, the Taiping rebellion ought in another three months to be a matter of history."<sup>77</sup>

Palmerston's foreign policy had not been well received by the opposition and probably failed to obtain much response from the British public unless there was a chance of further British military involvement in China's domestic disputes. It could have only benefited the public image of his administration if Gordon's exploits were glorified. Was not the Prime Minister partly responsible for the suppression of this infamous rebellion by permitting Gordon and other British officers to serve under the Chinese government? If Palmerston nourished

such an idea, he was not disappointed with The Times' editorial comments analyzing Gordon's Chinese accomplishments.

Gordon and his achievements received nothing but praise from The Times. A "soldier of fortune" whose only concern was honor, duty and "the general interests of humanity" was almost impossible to find, but Gordon proved to be such an individual. With no desire for personal gain, Gordon "after all his victories [had] just laid down his sword." The beneficial results of his campaigns were numerous. Finding the southern Chinese provinces in complete desolation, he proceeded to "cut the rebellion in half, . . . recovered the great cities, . . . isolated and utterly discouraged the fragments of the brigand power, and [finally had] left the marauders nothing but a few tracts of devastated country and their stronghold at Nankin[g]." The Times editorial further claimed that modern European weapons had achieved the initial successes, but the "terror of his name" eventually accomplished a great deal more. Although wounded only once at Kintang, the article declared that "the frequency with which he [had] been wounded, [only proved] how necessary it was for him to inspire his followers by his example as well as to lead them with military skill."<sup>78</sup>

While most papers discussed Gordon's visit and advice to Tseng Kuo-fan during the attack on Nanking, and his training camp for Imperial troops, The Times discussed his numerous decorations from a grateful Imperial Emperor. Not only was he



presented with the highly prized "Yellow Jacket" only awarded for exceptional courage under fire, but he also received the "star and banner," the most distinguished award given by the Chinese government.<sup>79</sup>

Little has been said concerning Gordon's reaction toward all this praise, and how it affected his personality. He sincerely believed that he had crushed the rebellion and had resumed operations against the Taipings after the Wangs' execution partly because he felt with his aid, the rebellion would collapse within six months.<sup>80</sup> Gordon had even told close friends at Gravesend who had inquired about the rebellion that he had "put an end to it."<sup>81</sup> He did not, however, want to be honored for these achievements; he hoped people would eventually forget about his Chinese exploits. Before leaving China he wrote his mother, asking her not to announce his arrival, "for it would be a signal for the disbanded to come to Southampton."<sup>82</sup> Mr. Hake recounted how a British Minister (probably a short time after Gordon's return to England and without his prior knowledge) upon reading Gordon's Chinese journals sent the materials to be published. Learning of the action, Gordon regained his records from the publisher and demanded that all copies be immediately destroyed; his daily reports were no longer examined by anyone.<sup>83</sup> A further story described how Gordon, aboard his home-bound steamer, ordered a "ready-made suit" thrown over the ship's side in order to "age" it

before arriving home. By wearing "worn" clothes, he wouldn't be recognized as the hero of the Taiping rebellion.<sup>84</sup>

According to most historians, Gordon's popularity soon waned because of this aversion to hero-worship; if Gordon had desired notoriety, he would have been acclaimed a national hero. There is, nevertheless, a strong possibility that Gordon's popularity had declined considerably before his return to England in January 1865. One could easily obtain the impression from the highly complimentary editorials published in The Times that Gordon during the 1860's was looked upon as a national hero by all Britons. But since the British public was not in the proper state of mind to glorify the possession of an imperial empire or the heroic achievements of British officers overseas, any attempt to exalt Gordon's Chinese exploits would have met with little or no success. After 1868, however, Benjamin Disraeli, supported by the Tory party, would create the romantic image of Great Britain's overseas obligations. At the same time, these British imperialists would constantly emphasize the vital importance of military and civil administrators who defended and enlarged Britain's colonial possessions. In the receptive environment of the 1880's, the British public would readily accept and praise Gordon's past heroic accomplishments in China.

Upon Gordon's return home, The Daily News, The Morning

Post and even The Times, contrary to the accepted version, did not hail Gordon as China's savior and protector of British imperial prestige. Two and one-half months after his homecoming, The Times did recount his successful engagements as result of a letter of appreciation from Shanghai merchants.<sup>85</sup> The letter, however, was dated 24 November 1864 and most likely generated little public reaction.<sup>86</sup> When Gordon visited the War Office a few months after leaving China, "the Minister seemed hardly to have heard of his name, and to know nothing whatever of his successes."<sup>87</sup>

Throughout the 1860's very little was published about Gordon's exploits; the only major work was Andrew Wilson's The "Ever-Victorious Army": A History of the Chinese Campaign under Lt. Col. C. G. Gordon, C.B. R.E. and the Suppression of the Taiping Rebellion (1868). (A portion of this work had appeared previously in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine.<sup>88</sup>) Even though well researched, it probably did not stir much interest during the 1860's. But even to a limited reading public, Mr. Wilson's basic theme was probably objectionable to any ethnocentric views of British superiority. According to the author, Gordon would not have achieved his successes if Imperial soldiers had not garrisoned captured enemy positions or prevented large numbers from overwhelming Gordon's small force. Imperial commanders supposedly forced the rebels toward the treaty ports in order to involve the Western powers

in the rebellion.<sup>89</sup> The book presented to this limited reading public many of Gordon's heroics, often repeated during and after his ill-fated mission to Khartoum.

Gordon exemplified the highest ideals of British courage under fire; he faced death without batting an eye and constantly with his men, leading the assault. Taking a reluctant officer "by the arm [Gordon would] lead him into the thick of the fire." He "seemed to bear a charmed life, and never carried any arms, even when foremost in the breach. His only weapon . . . was a small cane with which he used to direct his troops, and in Chinese imagination this cane soon became magnified into Gordon's 'magic wand of victory'."<sup>90</sup> It is difficult to believe that Gordon, always in the forefront of the attack, was only wounded once, but even under extreme pain he represented the unconcerned, courageous British officer. Shot in the leg, Gordon, after quieting "one of his body-guard, who cried out that the commander was hit, . . . stood giving orders until he fainted from loss of blood, and was carried back to his boat."<sup>91</sup>

A British officer had to maintain control over his men at all times; he always had to be an example of supreme and absolute authority. When an officer in supplies was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, the majors demanded the same rank and rights. Gordon refused to consider their demands and accepted their resignations, placing himself in a difficult

situation. Only his personal body-guard would obey his orders. Gordon still refused to submit to such pressures and eventually the rebellious majors and delinquent soldiers gave in.<sup>92</sup>

Gordon also experienced serious problems with his non-commissioned officers. Unhappy about moving away from the riotous life at Sung-Kiang to Gordon's new base at Quinsan, "the artillery [N.C.O.'s] refused to fall in, and threatened to blow the European officers to pieces with the big guns, and the Chinese authorities with the small ones." Lining up his non-commissioned officers, Gordon demanded to know the instigator of this threat. When he received no reply, Gordon informed them that unless the guilty party came forward, one man out of every five would be executed. Upon hearing this, loud "groans" came from the group. "As it was absolutely necessary," explained Wilson, "to restore discipline, the commander ordered a corporal, one of the most prominent of the groaners, to be dragged out and shot, which was immediately done by two of the infantry who were standing by." Ordering the rest locked up, Gordon gave them an hour to change their minds, before his original intentions were carried out. The men, relenting, submitted the name of the executed corporal as the master-mind of the plot.<sup>93</sup> Even though this story demonstrated that Gordon would not bend to a demand contrary to his principles of military discipline, Wilson failed to mention the desertion of two thousand men from Gordon's camp after this trying episode. Gordon, however, enlisted former

Taiping rebels into his army to make up his loss.<sup>94</sup>

Even though Gordon and his exploits were forgotten by Britons of the 1860's, some essential characteristics of his legend, traits cited numerous times twenty years later, were established during his campaigns in China. As the years advanced, as the British public became more concerned with the creation of a strong and prestigious Empire, stories of how Gordon singlehandedly crushed the Taiping rebellion obtained new prominence. Unlike people of the 1860's, Britons of Gladstone's second administration believed that single British officers and civil administrators created their Empire and maintained its strength and prestige. When these empire-minded individuals examined Gordon's heroic adventures, they naturally concluded that he could again suppress another seemingly pseudo-religious rebellion, this time in the Sudan. Unfortunately, Britons, and even Gordon himself, did not realize until too late that all Oriental rebellions were not as easily suppressed as the former insurrection in China.

## FOOTNOTES

## CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup>S. Y. Teng, The Taiping Rebellion and The Western Powers, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 30-31.

<sup>2</sup>Franz Michael, The Taiping Rebellion (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), I, 19.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>William James Hail, Tseng Kuo-fan and the Taiping Rebellion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927; New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1964), pp. 33-35.

<sup>7</sup>Michael, I, 42.

<sup>8</sup>"Foreign Interference with the Taipings," Blackwood Magazine, December, 1866, p. 685.

<sup>9</sup>J. S. Gregory, Great Britain and the Taipings (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1969), p. 91.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>12</sup>Teng, p. 301.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 295.

<sup>14</sup>A. Egmont Hake, The Story of Chinese Gordon (London: Remington & Co., 1884), p. 68.

<sup>15</sup>Michael, I, 170.

<sup>16</sup>Teng, pp. 305-306.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 305.

<sup>18</sup>Boulger, p. 398.

<sup>19</sup>Andrew Wilson, The "Ever-Victorious Army": A History of the Chinese Campaign under Lt. Col. G. G. Gordon C.B. R.E. and the Suppression of the Taiping Rebellion (London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1868), p. 93.

<sup>20</sup>Bernard Allen, Gordon (London: Duckworth & Co., 1935), p. 21.

<sup>21</sup>Two recent works which support this theory are: Lord E. Elton, Gordon of Khartoum (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1954); and Hugh Evelyn Worthen, Chinese Gordon (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1933).

<sup>22</sup>Wilson, pp. 80-81.

<sup>23</sup>Hake, Events in the Taiping Rebellion, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup>Teng, p. 329.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 327.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 327.

<sup>28</sup>A primitive form of artillery or rifle usually connected to a platform.

<sup>29</sup>Teng, p. 332.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>31</sup>Gregory, p. 129.

<sup>32</sup>Michael, p. 171.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Hail, pp. 268-270; first published in 1927.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 245-246.

<sup>36</sup>Great Britain, Parliament, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3d ser., Vol. 173 (1864), p. 1472.

<sup>37</sup>Editorial, The Times (London), March 4, 1863, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup>Editorial, The Times (London), January 30, 1863, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup>Editorial, The Daily News (London), April 10, 1863, p.4.



- <sup>40</sup>Ibid., April 13, 1863, p. 6.
- <sup>41</sup>Fooshan--The Daily News (Longon), June 12, 1863, p. 5;  
[Fushan] The Times (London), June 12, 1863, p. 12.  
Quinsan--The Times (London), August 1, 1863, p. 12.  
Taitan--The Daily News (London), June 23, 1863, p. 5.
- <sup>42</sup>"Treatment of Rebel Prisoners," North China Herald  
(Shanghai), June 13, 1863, p. 94.
- <sup>43</sup>Gregory, pp. 54-55; p. 143.
- <sup>44</sup>Wilson, p. 156.
- <sup>45</sup>Editorial, North China Herald (Shanghai), June 13, 1863,  
p. 94.
- <sup>46</sup>The Times (London), September 23, 1863, p. 8.
- <sup>47</sup>Editorial, The Daily News (London), October 1, 1863,  
p. 5.
- <sup>48</sup>The Daily News (London), October 1, 1863, p. 5.
- <sup>49</sup>Wilson, pp. 176-177.
- <sup>50</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup>Gregory p. 149.
- <sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 152.
- <sup>53</sup>Wilson, pp. 260-262.
- <sup>54</sup>Editorial, The Times (London), January 5, 1864, p. 8.
- <sup>55</sup>Editorial, The Times (London), January 11, 1864, p. 6.
- <sup>56</sup>Wilson, pp. 186-187.
- <sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 168.
- <sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 198.
- <sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 200.
- <sup>60</sup>Hake, The Story of Chinese Gordon, p. 136.
- <sup>61</sup>Wilson, pp. 202-203.
- <sup>62</sup>"China," The Times (London), February 3, 1864, p. 9.

- <sup>63</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>64</sup>"China," The Times (London), February 27, 1864, p. 5.
- <sup>65</sup>Wilson, pp. 210-211.
- <sup>66</sup>Letter, Charles Gordon to Sir Frederick Bruce, February 6, 1864, quoted in Hake, The Story of Chinese Gordon, pp. 161-163.
- <sup>67</sup>"Proclamation," North China Herald (Shanghai), February 27, 1864.
- <sup>68</sup>Wilson, pp. 242-243.
- <sup>69</sup>Gregory, p. 129.
- <sup>70</sup>Excerpts of article quoted in The Times (London), May 13, 1864, p. 5.
- <sup>71</sup>"Major Gordon Wounded," The Daily News (London), May 20, 1864, p. 5.
- <sup>72</sup>"China," The Times (London), May 30, 1864, p. 10.
- <sup>73</sup>Letter, Sir Frederick Bruce to Charles Gordon, March 12, 1864, quoted in The Times (London), June 16, 1864, p. 11.
- <sup>74</sup>Elton, pp. 68-69.
- <sup>75</sup>"China," The Times (London), July 1, 1864, p. 5.
- <sup>76</sup>Ibid., July 14, 1864, p. 5.
- <sup>77</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>78</sup>Editorial, The Times (London), August 5, 1864, p. 6.
- <sup>79</sup>"China," The Times (London), August 17, 1864, p. 7.
- <sup>80</sup>Hake, The Story of Chinese Gordon, pp. 161-163.
- <sup>81</sup>Gerald French, Gordon Pasha of the Sudan (Glasgow: William Maclellan & Co., 1958), p. 85.
- <sup>82</sup>Worthern, p. 133.
- <sup>83</sup>Hake, The Story of Chinese Gordon, p. 222.
- <sup>84</sup>Elton, pp. 74-76.

<sup>85</sup>Editorial, The Times (London), March 16, 1865, p. 8.

<sup>86</sup>Printed in the North China Herald (Shanghai), December 24, 1864, p. 107.

<sup>87</sup>"General Gordon," Blackwood Magazine, August 1884, p. 252.

<sup>88</sup>"Colonel Gordon's Chinese Forces," Blackwood Magazine, February, 1867, pp. 165-191.

<sup>89</sup>Wilson, pp. 258-259.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., pp. 184-185.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>92</sup>"Colonel Gordon's Chinese Forces," Blackwood Magazine, February, 1867, pp. 183-184.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., pp. 186-187.

<sup>94</sup>Elton, p. 48.

## CHAPTER III

## GORDON AND THE SUDAN (1874-1879)

After returning home, Gordon spent the next six years in Gravesend on the outskirts of London, where he supervised the construction of river fortifications along the Thames. With the completion of his daily routine, Gordon returned to the Gravesend slums and participated in varied forms of charitable work. His greatest satisfaction was educating, clothing, feeding, and obtaining occupations for homeless boys, his so-called "Kings." An observer of Gordon's numerous exertions wrote: "The workhouse and the infirmary were his constant haunts and of pensioners he had a countless number all over the neighbourhood. Many of the dying sent for him in preference to the clergy and ever ready was he to visit them no matter what weather or at what distance."<sup>1</sup> Upon examining numerous accounts of Gordon's missionary work among the poor, one would eventually conclude that the above statement was no mere exaggeration.

After six years, Gordon was appointed (October 1871) British representative to the Danubian Commission. While in Constantinople, Gordon met Nubar Pasha, vizier to Ismail, the Khedive of Egypt. Nubar was searching for a British engineer to replace Sir Samuel White Baker, the previous governor of the



Fig. 2. Egypt and the Sudan During the 1870's and 1880's.

(---- denotes boundary of the Sudan)

Source: Hugh Evelyn Worthem, Chinese Gordon.  
(Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1933),  
p. 229.

Equatorial provinces in the southern Sudan. Early in 1874, Gordon offered to fill this position, occupying the governorship from 1874 to the end of 1876.

The Times, shortly after Gordon's appointment, informed the British public that the new governor, offered a yearly salary of ten thousand pounds, refused to accept anything higher than two thousand pounds.<sup>2</sup> Gordon hoped to show "the Khedive and his people that gold and silver idols are not worshipped by all the world. They are very powerful gods, but not so powerful as our God. . . ." <sup>3</sup> He could not comprehend being paid such a handsome salary while the Egyptian peasant starved through oppressive taxation.

With the African explorations of Burton, Speke, Stanley, and Livingstone, the British public had become more aware of the wonders, but also of the deplorable conditions of the "Dark Continent" such as cannibalism and the slave trade.<sup>4</sup> The Khedive suddenly found an anxious British public demanding an end to slavery throughout the Middle East. Realizing the possible economic advantages available from Great Britain, the Khedive attempted to placate British public opinion through the employment of Samuel Baker.<sup>5</sup> As Equatorial governor, Baker was to explore as far south as "the Great Lakes of the Equator, with a view to opening them to navigation and secondly to introduce legitimate commerce into these regions."<sup>6</sup> Unable to compete with foreign commerce, there was a strong chance that

the slave trade would cease.

Unfortunately, these high expectations failed, because Baker utilized brute force in dealings with the natives. Failing to farm the local staple, dourra, Baker and his troops were forced to harass surrounding natives for needed supplies. When Baker left the country, the natives developed a troublesome distrust of the Egyptian government.<sup>7</sup> In order to acquire closer relations with Great Britain while at the same time suppressing the slave trade, Ismail readily accepted Gordon as Baker's permanent replacement.<sup>8</sup> Gordon's objectives were essentially the same as those given to Baker, but he was especially "to be merciful toward [the natives], exerting himself all the time to attract them gradually to the appreciation of the sort of life, civilization can give to man."<sup>9</sup> If Gordon needed additional supplies, the Governor-General of the Sudan, having no jurisdiction over his activities, would be required to provide them. Even though all "articles of commerce" were to be sent to Khartoum, capital of the Sudan, Gordon was allowed to deduct all troop costs before sending them to the capital.<sup>10</sup> He would explore the Great Lakes region in order to introduce commerce and suppress the slave trade.

Upon his arrival at Khartoum, the Governor-General of the Sudan, Ismail Ayoub Pasha, greeted Gordon in the warmest manner. According to The Times, Gordon was impressed with the conditions of the city's schools, hospitals, troops, etc. The governor was reported to have prepared Gordon's expedition to

the capital of the Equatorial province, Gondokoro.<sup>11</sup> This cordial relationship, however, did not last. Ismail, jealous of Gordon's enormous authority, began to interfere with his administration and prevented the dispatch of necessary supplies.<sup>12</sup>

Gordon and his expedition faced additional problems. He was plagued by his own staff, which included the former slave dealer, Abou Saoud. Samuel Baker had blamed all his problems upon this devious individual.<sup>13</sup> It seems that Abou, in order to cripple Baker's efforts, had persuaded the local natives not to provide Baker's expedition with any vital supplies.<sup>14</sup> Baker had him arrested by the Cairo authorities and strongly urged that Abou should be judged in a community court of law instead of closed proceedings.<sup>15</sup> Gordon, however, realizing that a former slave trader could pacify as well as agitate the local natives, had him released.<sup>16</sup> Abou then became Gordon's vekil or deputy.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, Gordon placed too much trust in Abou's ability to mend his old ways; "his arrogance was aroused, and he began to lay claim to a power which could not be conceded to him."<sup>18</sup> Gordon recorded in his Sudanese journals how he eventually discovered that Abou was stealing ivory from the government's storehouses.<sup>19</sup> Upon his dismissal, Abou attempted to convince some of Gordon's Negro troops to disobey the Colonel's orders, but he did not succeed.<sup>20</sup> Gordon, against his better judgment, was persuaded by certain



individuals<sup>21</sup> to rehire Abou, but more problems arose in which he was suspected of precipitating a revolt against Gordon's expedition.<sup>22</sup> Abou was dismissed a second and final time.

While Gordon was governor, the outside world knew little of his explorations; daily reports of his activities were impossible because of difficult communications between his provinces and Cairo. Occasionally a free-lance correspondent such as Captain Fred Burnaby sent back a glowing description of Gordon's explorations and his friendly relationship with the natives.<sup>23</sup> Burnaby portrayed Gordon as a financial genius in his daily administration. Supposedly, Baker's expedition had cost the Egyptian government 1,170,247 pounds. Gordon, however, made a profit from the provinces' resources, paying all expenses incurred by his government.<sup>24</sup> According to Burnaby's descriptions, Gordon was highly respected by the local natives. He was known as the "Great Pasha," listening to all complaints no matter how small and handing down a fair judgment to everyone's satisfaction. Not flinching under the burden of his duties, "the Colonel went steadily ahead giving [numerous orders], administering justice, . . . ordering [punishments and rewards], all this through an Egyptian interpreter, who gravely rendered every word of Gordon's French into Arabic."<sup>25</sup> Burnaby, who greatly admired Gordon's efforts, helped to perpetuate Gordon's legend by creating the false impression that the Colonel was singlehandedly accomplishing his

daily tasks. Gordon was also being pictured as a demigod among the native population. Unfortunately, this and similar reports by other admirers strengthened these beliefs. Britons in the 1880's would sincerely believe that Gordon could undertake any difficult situation concerning Oriental peoples and resolve their problems without any British military support.

By the end of 1876, Gordon had accomplished much but at a great cost. Four of his European staff had died of either malaria or dysentery, while five others were too sick to work.<sup>26</sup> Fortunately, Romolo Gessi, Gordon's comrade-in-arms from the Crimea, performed many duties neglected by the others. After two years of this strenuous exploration, Gordon, weary of his duties, decided to return home. He had received no cooperation from the Governor-General of the Sudan who thwarted his attempts to halt the slave trade. (The Governor-General permitted the slave dealers to use Khartoum as their base of operation.<sup>27</sup>)

He had accomplished a great deal during his administration. Exploration steamers under Gessi's direction surveyed Lake Albert and the Egyptian colors flew over its shores, while peaceful coexistence was maintained with Kabaka Mutesa, King of Uganda.<sup>28</sup> According to The Times, Gordon had decreased the slave trade, "but its total extinction must be a work of time."<sup>29</sup> Through his tireless efforts, "a line of

ports 50 to 100 miles apart had been established from Khartoum to Gondokoro, and then to Lake Albert," with the result that communication between Cairo and the Great Lakes was now a reality. "Perhaps the best practical test of the completeness of this work," affirmed The Times correspondent, "is . . . the fact that the Colonel received his English newspaper with fair regularity seven weeks after the date of issue. . . ." <sup>30</sup>

The Times indicated that Gordon's achievements had been "undervalued" because little had been heard from him during the period of his exploration. <sup>31</sup> Instead of the constant use of firearms to maintain control, Gordon, through his upright personality, was able "to win the trust and affection of the natives." <sup>32</sup> The Times considered Gordon's methods of administration as an amazing feat. Understanding the natives' primitive customs, Gordon was able to apply "English ideals of equality to the disputes of people whose conception of justice may be as rude as those of our own Islands were three thousand years ago." With such a valuable talent, the paper believed that if Gordon were made governor of Bulgaria, the tensions initiated by the Turkish massacres would cease to exist. <sup>33</sup> Even though Gordon was again suggested for the post, nothing came of it. The British public, however, soon learned that Gordon had been appointed Governor-General of the Sudan. <sup>34</sup> He desired to return to the Sudan but realized his efforts would be useless without authority over the entire

Sudan. The Khedive raised no argument over the demand and Gordon obtained the governorship of the entire area.<sup>35</sup>

This appointment was viewed as a favorable sign by the British Liberal press. According to The Daily News, the Egyptian community did not desire an end to the traffic, but Gordon had convinced the Khedive to the contrary. "This remarkable man whose personal influence, even more than his warlike capacity, has been successful in tranquillizing turbulent populations and winning the confidence of savage tribes," the editorial affirmed, "will now be brought face to face with . . . the most cunning . . . [and] desperate hordes of ruffians who ever lived by pillage and murder." Even Gordon would have to use force against these individuals before they would surrender.<sup>36</sup> The Daily Telegraph applauded the Khedive's decision to eliminate the slave trade. Gordon, the "redoubtable" and "gallant" British officer, would most likely be successful. "His singular and well-tried gifts are a security that he will maintain order, encourage peaceful industry, provide easy communication [between the Sudan and Egypt] . . . and in every way," concluded the editorial, "promote the welfare of the people and the interests of civilization."<sup>37</sup>

Between December 1876 and February 1877, an important element in the Gordon legend gained a prominent position in the press. Not only was Gordon a competent administrator but, more importantly, he possessed a charismatic power over less

civilized peoples; he could control their actions without the needless use of weapons. The belief in this "one man army" would be a primary reason in Gladstone's decision to send Gordon back to the Sudan in 1884.

Gordon's responsibilities as Governor-General proved more demanding than the duties of Equatorial governor. The British public would be largely unaware of his hardships until the publication in 1881 of Colonel Gordon in Central Africa 1874-1879 by Dr. George Birkbeck Hill. Little information reached the British press. The Times reported that Gordon had ended construction on the Sudanese railroad largely contributing to the country's increasing debt.<sup>38</sup> News of crushing financial burdens was intermixed with accounts of Gordon's never-ending struggle with the slave-traders. An attempted revolt flared up in Darfur province, but the British public learned that Gordon's zealous efforts had ended the trouble.<sup>39</sup>

His final mission for the Egyptian government proved disappointing to both the British and Egyptians. The Khedive, unable to cooperate with his European creditors, was forced to abdicate by the Sultan of Turkey. The Sultan then placed Ismail's son, Tewfik, on the throne. The new Khedive persuaded a reluctant Gordon to attempt a peaceful settlement between Egypt and her hostile neighbor Abyssinia over increasing territorial disputes. Early comments in the papers expressed the hope that Gordon had obtained immediate success.<sup>40</sup> Late in

November, however, the Abyssinian king, Johannis, demanded outrageous territorial concessions from the Egyptian government and the negotiations collapsed. Gordon, mentally and physically exhausted, returned home.

Mr. John Marlowe, in his work Mission to Khartoum, supports the popular interpretation that during and after Gordon's first mission to the Sudan (1874-1879), he "became increasingly a public figure, . . . gaining a popular reputation as a quasi-miracle-working knight-errant and an official reputation as a mischievous and tiresome eccentric." To Britons, he became "a reincarnation of St. George; . . . [to] British officialdom, [however], he was . . . a meddling Don Quixote."<sup>41</sup> In Gordon's first encounter with Egypt's European creditors, he remained loyal only to Egyptian interests, irritating the Anglo-French creditors. In June 1878, Gordon, upon the Khedive's request, represented Egypt in a European conference analyzing the Egyptian budget. Gordon proposed that the country's upcoming deposit on her European loans should be used to rectify serious domestic problems. Ismail, afraid to offend his creditors, left Gordon to face the relentless censure of European diplomats.<sup>42</sup>

Gordon may not have been appreciated by imperial administrators and Anglo-French creditors, but, contrary to Mr. Marlowe's statement, Gordon was barely noticed by the British public. He would not be considered "a reincarnation of St.

George" until his second mission to Khartoum in 1884. Mr. Demetrius C. Boulger, Gordon's friend and biographer, gave a more accurate picture of Gordon's homecoming. The

public opinion at home, as reflected in the Press, seemed singularly blind to the fresh claim he had established on the admiration of the world. His China campaigns had earned him ungrudging praise. . . . [however], his achievements in the Soudan, not less remarkable in themselves, and obtained with far less help from others than his triumph over the Taepings, roused no enthusiasm, and received but scanty notice.<sup>43</sup>

Even though The Daily Telegraph believed that Gordon's efforts to crush the slave trade "have been duly appreciated," the paper confessed that the traffic was still active in the Sudan.<sup>44</sup> The Times expressed a pessimistic tone over the future suppression of the slave trade. Once the "European influence" exercised by Gordon left the Sudan, the slavers would again resume normal operations.<sup>45</sup> In an interview with The Times correspondent, Gordon summarized his feelings over his accomplishments: "I am neither a Napoleon nor a Colbert; I do not profess to have been either a great ruler or a great financier . . . [however] I have cut off the slave dealers in their strongholds and I made all my people love me."<sup>46</sup> He complained of the Egyptian government's never-ending demand for taxation upon the Sudan, blaming European creditors for

the Egyptians' unreasonable pursuit of additional income.

To The Times correspondent, however, Gordon's achievements were remarkable: "He has dealt a deadly blow to the slave trade on the White Nile and the Gazelle river. . . ." When the slave dealers revolted,

he . . . almost annihilated them and their leaders. Notwithstanding this long strife, which he conducted without a single soldier from Egypt, in spite of incessant revolt in Darfur, the frequent disputes on the Abyssinian frontier, Colonel Gordon has succeeded in establishing peace and order along the banks of the Nile [under his jurisdiction]. Tribes formerly hostile are now engaged in peaceful barter, and by means of a series of military stations regular communications have been established throughout his dominions.<sup>47</sup>

It is interesting to note that according to Mr. P. M. Holt and contrary to the statements of Gordon and The Times, Gordon was not viewed by the Sudanese as their savior. As Governor-General, Gordon had suppressed Egyptian corruption, but was considered by the Sudanese as the lesser of two evils. He did not endear himself to the Sudanese by disrupting their principal industry, the slave trade.<sup>48</sup> With a wrecked economy which weakened the whole structure of Sudanese society, the Sudanese became easy prey for renewed Egyptian corruption that again plagued the country after Gordon's departure. In this hostile environment, it was comparatively easy to stir the



Sudanese to rebel against the Egyptian government in the early 1880's.

There were several reasons why Gordon did not achieve any considerable amount of public notice upon his return home in 1879. Again, historians place too much importance on Gordon's aversion to notoriety in explaining why the British public soon forgot his accomplishments. Boulger, however, believed Gordon alienated the British Anti-Slavery Society through his purchase of captive slaves. (These slaves, many incapable of returning to their villages, were easy prey for slave-traders and Egyptian soldiers. Gordon used these slaves in his army as troops against the slave dealers.<sup>49</sup>) "Exeter Hall," commented Boulger, "could not resound with cheers for a man who declared that he had bought slaves himself."<sup>50</sup>

Why didn't Gordon use Egyptian troops extensively instead of black garrisons? The Arabs, according to Gordon, were "cowardly, cruel, and effeminate," only able to follow orders repeated several times, while the "blacks" were "patient, enduring, and friendly."<sup>51</sup> Gordon also provided additional reasons why Egyptian troops were useless in the Sudan. "The Arabs hate these parts," he explained, "and all the (Arab) troops are sent [to the Sudan] for punishment; their constitutions, unlike ours, cannot stand the wet and damp, or the dullness of their life."<sup>52</sup> In addition to these reasons, the Egyptian soldier was seemingly participating in the Sudanese

slave trade in order to compensate for his meager salary. Helping Gordon suppress the slave trade would only mean a serious loss of extra income for these Egyptian troops.

Gordon did not cherish the same biased ethnocentric attitudes of average Britons and imperial administrators, making it almost impossible to glorify his Sudanese achievements. British authors described the African Negro as a blood-thirsty, uncivilized cannibal who could only be controlled through the use of firearms. Samuel Baker held this attitude as Equatorial governor and the results were disastrous. Well-known explorers such as Dr. Schweinfurth seriously believed a Caucasian could trek unmolested from the East Coast to the West Coast of Africa if he was "not too fat; . . . for fatness, whether in black or white makes all cannibal tribes lick their lips and rub their abdomens. . . ."53 In another Edinburgh Magazine article, "Stanley's Discoveries and the Future of Africa," the Negro was described as "idle and clumsy . . . [and] his average pleasures in work and his average manual dexterity are low when measured by a European standard. . . ." If one looked hard enough, some Negroes of above-average intelligence could be found to be "labourers and artisans."54

Dedicated imperial officials operating under the above illusions probably adhered to what Dr. Faber called the "Exclusive" method of colonial interrelationships. According to Dr. Faber, these public officials were responsible for the

continual welfare of the subject peoples who were supposed to gaze upon these Britons as father-figures. The glaring differences between ruler and ruled were emphasized, which resulted in an exaggerated sense of British racial superiority.<sup>55</sup>

Gordon exemplified this stereotype image of a father-figure but did not believe that one should alienate oneself from the Negroes. Whereas, close interpersonal relationships were discouraged among "typical" British imperial administrators in Africa, Gordon found no fault in them; he even encouraged close communications through his intimate relationships with these supposed "savages." Even though close to his Negro subjects, Gordon maintained his distance with his own Egyptian soldiers and civil administrators. He believed the Egyptians were "incapable of civilising these natives" and could "generally be described as . . . a feeble race."<sup>56</sup>

In his daily interactions with the natives, Gordon displayed a sincere concern for their welfare, and he only used force in self-defense. His journals demonstrated several examples of helping suffering Negroes who were even rejected by their own people. Finding a half-dead 16-year-old girl, abandoned in a mud hole, Gordon placed her in front of a fire and "poured some brandy down her throat. . . ." On the next day the girl died and Gordon wrote in a letter, probably to his sister? "Your black sister departed this life, . . . deeply lamented by me: not so by her black brothers, who thought her a nuisance."<sup>57</sup> These expressions of sincere emotion did not belong to a man who believed that one must maintain a "proper distance" from his uncivilized subjects. Calling "savages"

your "brothers" and "sisters" caused many people to ignore, not glorify, Gordon's past accomplishments.

Gordon probably also alienated many imperial administrators through anti-imperialistic philosophy. The Creator, in Gordon's opinion, loved "all nations equally . . . He is perfectly impartial and has no favourites. . . ." Britain had achieved much because she thought God had meant it that way.<sup>58</sup> While serving Oriental nations, the British officer was responsible for only that nation's welfare; he was not to seek any political and/or economic advantages for his own country.<sup>59</sup> Not only must the officer respect the country's "peculiar habits and customs,"<sup>60</sup> but all beneficial reforms [supported by him] . . . must be the spontaneous desire of the mass of the people, and not forced like exotics, to perish in a day. . . ."<sup>61</sup> Gordon adhered to these beliefs, when he attempted to advance Egyptian interests during the European conference (June 1878) examining the Egyptian budget.

With these unconventional viewpoints, it would have been difficult for the Tory government to portray Gordon as a British hero; it meant upholding his anti-imperialistic ideals. Gordon supposedly had "gone native" which had been frowned upon after the Indian Mutiny of 1857. But even though his remarkable adventures were hardly noticed during the 1870's, these unusual traits would be openly romanticized and glorified during the 1880's. Gordon's opinions and personal character achieved limited public notice through the publication of Dr. Hill's

afore-mentioned collection of journals and letters, Colonel Gordon in Central Africa 1874-1879. The book, failing to gain popularity in 1881, was not widely read until Gordon's Khartoum mission in 1884-1885. "I had looked for a gale;" confessed Dr. Hill in February 1884, "there was not more than breeze enough to ruffle the waters."<sup>62</sup> During the 1880's when Gordon was hailed as the ideal British officer and administrator, Tory and Liberal alike would derive many examples of "heroic" British character from Hill's study. Tory politicians would especially cite these examples while ignoring any comments expressing his anti-imperialistic concepts.

Even though Dr. Hill never met Gordon, he was earnestly advised by Gordon's brother Henry against lauding his Sudanese achievements or slandering anyone's reputation. Dr. Hill complied with this desire, but partially ignored Gordon's wish concerning glorification. The author had no qualms in recounting Gordon's China adventures. In his introduction, Dr. Hill quoted extensively Mr. Wilson's passages concerning Gordon's "wand of victory," his heroic example after being wounded at Kintang, and the numerous tokens of gratitude from the Chinese government. He also included The Times' editorial of 5 August 1864 emphasizing the major part Gordon played in the suppression of the Taiping rebellion.<sup>63</sup>

The British public, for the first time, was exposed to Gordon's strong religious beliefs. According to Gordon, he looked upon himself as an "instrument" of God, only doing what was desired of him:

I have an enormous province (i.e. Sudan) to look after; but it is a great blessing to me to know that God has undertaken the administration of it, and it is His work and not mine. If I fail, it is His will; if I succeed, it is His work. Certainly He has given me the joy of not regarding the honours of this world, and to value my union with Him above all things. May I be humbled to the dust and fail, so that He may glorify Himself.<sup>64</sup>

Gordon was more concerned with advancing the work of God rather than imperialist desires of any country, especially the overseas ambitions of Great Britain. These religious beliefs came into conflict with the popular conceptions of heroism, derived by Thomas Carlyle. According to Mr. Carlyle, God had chosen certain individuals to accomplish important missions upon earth without His direct intervention; the Creator was only an interested observer, not an active participant in the hero's affairs. Gordon, however, believed that God controlled the actions and fate of man; without His direct intervention the hero was not able to perform any deeds of valor.

While viewing himself as an insignificant servant of God, Gordon expressed no apparent fear of death. Most British officers approached even a heroic death with bitter contempt while displaying no outward signs of emotion. Gordon, on the other hand, looked upon death as a "cheerful friend, who takes us from a world of trial to our true home. All our sorrows come from a forgetfulness of this great truth."<sup>65</sup> Many Britons, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, were able to understand Gordon's seemingly Methodist doctrines (i.e. one must

suffer in this world while accomplishing God's work in order to be rewarded in the afterlife), but found it difficult to appreciate his devout religious beliefs. The Evangelical Movement, which had adopted many Methodist concepts indigenous to the eighteenth century, had come in conflict with the new scientific and technological discoveries of the Victorian era. While the faith of many Britons had been shaken, Gordon's religious beliefs strengthened as he became older. One writer, after Gordon's death, felt the British public should give Gordon's religious concepts their "tender attention" and further added:

Whatever he says is full of divine love and consciousness, the very breath of holiness and truth. If we cannot follow him, what does it matter. . . . The treasury from which he brought that noble faith, that charity of his, must have been no less than the stores of Heaven.<sup>66</sup>

Mr. Francis G. Hutchins, in his study The Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India, believes that after the 1830's, the "traditional tenets of Christianity" were losing their spiritual significance for the British public. This "produced . . . a vast proliferation of surrogate faiths which it was hoped would fill the role conventionally played by Christianity as the support of personal morality and social obligation."<sup>67</sup> One of these "surrogate faiths," according to Mr. Hutchins, was the "cult of good conduct" in which "Duty became in itself a religion."<sup>68</sup> Games became an important factor in this way of life and a healthy constitution helped to reinforce a strict moral code among Britons throughout the Empire.<sup>69</sup>

Dr. Olive Anderson, however, would take exception to Hutchins' argument. She believes the "practices" and teachings of Christianity were a significant factor in reinforcing the heroic image not only of the British hero but the British army as well. Religious teachings became an important tool in strengthening the overall performance of the British military system. "After the Crimean upheaval," explains the author,

concern for military efficiency and an acute shortage of good recruits led to a real attempt to make army conditions generally comparable with those of the respectable working classes. In view of the widespread mid-nineteenth-century assumption that physical, mental and spiritual 'improvement' could not be separated, 'raising the tone of the troops' inevitably entailed the provision of chapels, Bibles and chaplains as much as the provision of schools, gymnasia and model barracks.<sup>70</sup>

According to this reasoning, Gordon and his exploits would have only enhanced this supposed Christian "image" perpetuated by the British military system.

Hutchins' "cult" coexisted with Charles Kingsley's concept of "Muscular Christianity," in which a strong moral character was also supported by a sound and active body but included was a vigorous spiritual faith. An adherent of "Muscular Christianity" most likely felt a greater comradeship with Gordon; he experienced a more sincere appreciation of Gordon's physical exertions for God's glorious mission (i.e. elimination of the slave trade) than followers of a "cult of conduct."

Supporters of these two somewhat related moral systems must have read Gordon's Sudanese exploits with profound



interest. Gordon constantly kept active and experienced no fear about becoming ill which he believed largely contributed to sound health.<sup>71</sup> (Unfortunately, his European and Egyptian staff did not hold the same attitudes.) Gordon must have fascinated the British public, no matter what their moral systems, through his seemingly super-human excursions on camel and mule. Dr. Hill informed his readers that between 1877 and 1879, Gordon travelled about 8,490 miles on camel and mule, averaging 32-1/2 miles daily on the former and 10 miles on the latter.<sup>72</sup> Dr. Allen stated a camel paced 3-1/2 miles an hour signifying that Gordon spent about 9-1/2 hours daily on his "ship of the desert."<sup>73</sup> According to Gordon, these extraordinary journeys even produced a startling effect on the Sudanese themselves. "I gain," he explained, "a great deal of prestige by these unheard-of marches. It makes the people fear me much more than if I were slow."<sup>74</sup>

A relaxing physical environment did not cultivate and/or reinforce a strict moral code. Mr. Hutchins believes that Britons "valued" such British possessions as India "not for its pleasures, or promise, but precisely because it was possible to be desperately unhappy there." This deplorable lifestyle was supposedly essential for one's "character building."<sup>75</sup> Gordon's own lamentable living conditions kept him in excellent standing with this rigorous cult of conduct, while to the followers of Muscular Christianity, he was able to tolerate his numerous tribulations through his devotion to God's plan

for the suppression of slavery. Along with the unbearable climate, Gordon co-existed with numerous rats, which "run over the mosquito nets, and scream and fight all night, . . . carrying off my shaving brush, soap, [tear] leaves out of books, and [eat] the tops of boots. . . ."76 He was further plagued with swarms of mosquitoes against which insect powders did little good,77 and harassed by scorpions hiding inside his boots78 and creeping inside his pants leg.79

Gordon's examples of personal bravery fascinated all Britons no matter what philosophy of life each followed and would be acclaimed as the truest illustrations of British heroism during the 1880's. The possibility of a violent death never concerned Gordon. In the center of a native attack, he astonished an Arab chief by calmly lighting a cigarette while spears fell around him.80 Gordon's greatest feat of personal bravery, cited numerous times after his death, was his seemingly single-handed suppression of the slave-traders' revolt in Darfur province (1877). His exceptional courage reinforced the romantic conception that one lone British officer, through sheer determination, could control untold hordes of natives.

In the province of Darfur, the son of Zobeir Pasha,81 Suleiman, had become chief Sudanese slave dealer. His father, lured to Cairo, was placed under house arrest. Suleiman and his numerous forces migrated from their base of operations at Shakka to Dara.82 Gordon believed that only immediate action on his part could prevent an open revolt. Upon his camel, he

travelled from Fufar to Dara in a day and a half, a total of eighty-five miles. Leaving his escort far behind, Gordon suddenly appeared at Dara. "Imagine to yourself," Gordon explained, "a single, dirty, red-faced man on a camel, ornamented with flies--arriving in the divan all of a sudden. The people were paralyzed, and could not believe their eyes."<sup>83</sup> Egyptian outposts in the Sudan were rarely visited by any high-ranking government official, let alone the Governor-General. The Egyptian troops would probably be shocked not only by the sudden appearance of Gordon, but on the immediate realization that one lone man had travelled unprotected into an area on the verge of revolt.

Early the next day (2 September 1877), according to his Sudanese journals, Gordon dressed in his gold-laced uniform, a gift of the Khedive, and with four Bashi-Bazouks,<sup>84</sup> entered Suleiman's camp containing three thousand men. He drank some water and then ordered Suleiman and his relatives to collect at the Egyptian outpost. He then informed them in "choice Arabic" that any ideas of rebellion must be abandoned and they must disassemble. Fortunately, they agreed to his terms, while he believed that God had intervened once again.<sup>85</sup> (Gordon believed that Suleiman, even though a "nice-looking boy of twenty or twenty-two," needed a "good flogging.")<sup>86</sup>

It is difficult to comprehend how Gordon singlehandedly prevented 3,000 Sudanese troops from rampaging Dara province, and returned alive to tell about it. Romolo Gessi, Gordon's

comrade-in-arms, provided readers in 1892 with a plausible explanation for the successful disbanding of the slavers. Even though the Arabs envisioned Gordon as a "supernatural being," the camp's leaders wished to execute him upon his arrival into their encampment. Nuer Anger, on the other hand, believed Gordon's death would mean future involvement of Anglo-Egyptian forces. If British forces had invaded Abyssinia (1867) to rescue their envoys, the British government would not hesitate to deploy troops for Gordon's safety.<sup>87</sup> Unwilling to encounter this threat, about half of Suleiman's allies (3,000) terminated their allegiance, leaving Suleiman in a difficult position.<sup>88</sup> If true, the Arabs were more afraid of what Gordon represented (i.e. British military power) than the dynamic personality of one lone British soldier. Early in 1884, the British public, press and government depicted Gordon as the epitome of Carlyle's "Great Man," with charismatic powers to pacify the savage emotions of all rebellious Sudanese. Gladstone and his Ministers believed in Gordon's ability to control these tribes. The Arabs, however, were more apprehensive of the unlimited destructive power supposedly at his command (i.e. British troops), than of his acclaimed "supernatural" qualities.

## FOOTNOTES

## CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup>Hake, The Story of Chinese Gordon, p. 224.

<sup>2</sup>The Times, February 15, 1875, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Letter, Charles Gordon to M. Auguste Gordon, November 17, 1873, quoted in Gordon, Letters to his Sister, p. 69.

<sup>4</sup>Elton, p. 120.

<sup>5</sup>Charles George Gordon, Equatoria under Egyptian Rule: The Unpublished Correspondence of Col. C. G. Gordon with Ismail, Khedive of Egypt and the Sudan, 1874-1876, ed. by M. F. Shukry (Cairo: Cairo University Press, 1953), pp. 22-23.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>The Times, April 29, 1874, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup>Gordon, Equatoria under Egyptian Rule, p. 29.

<sup>13</sup>"Heart of Africa and the Slave Trade," Edinburgh Review, January, 1875, p. 235.

<sup>14</sup>Romolo Gessi-Pasha, Seven years in the Sudan (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1892), pp. 81-82.

<sup>15</sup>Gordon, Equatoria under Egyptian Rule, p. 31.

<sup>16</sup>Elton, p. 123.

<sup>17</sup>Charles George Gordon, Colonel Gordon in Central Africa, 1874-1879 (London: T. De La Rue, 1885; New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1969), p. 39; hereinafter cited as Gordon, Journals 1874-1879.

- <sup>18</sup>Gessi-Pasha, p. 84.
- <sup>19</sup>Gordon, Journals, 1874-1879, p. 43.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 44.
- <sup>21</sup>The names have been omitted from the original text.
- <sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 51.
- <sup>23</sup>Bernard Allen, Gordon and the Sudan (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1931), p. 38.
- <sup>24</sup>"Colonel Gordon's Explorations," The Times (London), March 30, 1875, p. 3.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid., March 27, 1875, p. 10.
- <sup>26</sup>Bernard Allen, Gordon (London: Duckworth & Co., 1935), p. 56.
- <sup>27</sup>Gordon, Journals 1874-1879, p. 203.
- <sup>28</sup>Gordon, Equatoria under Egyptian Rule, pp. 103-104; p. 118.
- <sup>29</sup>"Colonel Gordon in Central Africa," The Times (London), December 28, 1876, p. 8.
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup>Editorial, The Times (London), December 29, 1876, p. 7.
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup>The Times (London), February 16, 1877, p. 5.
- <sup>35</sup>Elton, p. 194.
- <sup>36</sup>Editorial, The Daily News (London), February 19, 1877, p. 5.
- <sup>37</sup>Editorial, The Daily Telegraph (London), February 17, 1877, p. 5.
- <sup>38</sup>The Times (London), April 28, 1879, p. 13.
- <sup>39</sup>Editorial, The Times (London), April 5, 1879, p. 12.

- <sup>40</sup>The Daily Telegraph (London), October 24, 1879, p. 5.
- <sup>41</sup>John Marlowe, Mission to Khartoum: The Apotheosis of General Gordon (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1969), p. 8.
- <sup>42</sup>Worthern, p. 251.
- <sup>43</sup>Boulger, p. 201.
- <sup>44</sup>Editorial, The Daily Telegraph (London), January 16, 1880, p. 5.
- <sup>45</sup>Editorial, The Times (London), January 9, 1880, p. 7.
- <sup>46</sup>[Resignation of Charles Gordon], The Times (London), January 22, 1880, p. 5.
- <sup>47</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup>P. M. Holt, The Mahdist State in the Sudan (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 81-82.
- <sup>49</sup>Gordon, Journals 1874-1879, pp. 254-256.
- <sup>50</sup>Boulger, p. 201.
- <sup>51</sup>Gordon, Journals 1874-1879, p. 269.
- <sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 25.
- <sup>53</sup>"Heart of Africa and the Slave Trade," Edinburgh Review, January, 1875, p. 225.
- <sup>54</sup>"Stanley's Discoveries and the Future of Africa," Edinburgh Review, January, 1878, pp. 179-180.
- <sup>55</sup>Richard Faber, The Vision and the Need (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1966), p. 67; pp. 134-137.
- <sup>56</sup>Gordon, Journals 1874-1879, p. 128.
- <sup>57</sup>Ibid., pp. 28-29.
- <sup>58</sup>Gordon, Letters to his Sister, p. xiii.
- <sup>59</sup>Letter, written at Shakka, Darfur, April 24, 1879, quoted in Gordon, Journals 1874-1879, p. 437.
- <sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 438.

- <sup>61</sup>Ibid., 437.
- <sup>62</sup>Gordon, Journals 1874-1879, p. xi.
- <sup>63</sup>Ibid., pp. xxvi-xxix.
- <sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 229.
- <sup>65</sup>Gordon, Letters to his Sister, p. xii.
- <sup>66</sup>"General Gordon," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, August, 1885, p. 263.
- <sup>67</sup>Francis Hutchins, The Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University
- <sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 22.
- <sup>69</sup>Ibid., pp. 44-45.
- <sup>70</sup>Olive Anderson, "The Growth of Christian Militarism in Mid-Victorian Britain," English Historical Review, LXXXVI (January, 1971), p. 64.
- <sup>71</sup>Gordon, Journals 1874-1879, p. 42.
- <sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 427.
- <sup>73</sup>Allen, Gordon and the Sudan, p. 98.
- <sup>74</sup>Gordon, Journals 1874-1879, p. 286.
- <sup>75</sup>Hutchins, p. 29.
- <sup>76</sup>Gordon, Journals 1874-1879, p. 31.
- <sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 161.
- <sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 270.
- <sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 344.
- <sup>80</sup>Rudolf C. Slatin, Fire and Sword in the Sudan (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1896), pp. 60-61.
- <sup>81</sup>Also written as Zebehr but more correctly as al-Zubayr Rahma Mansūr as supplied by the Sudanese historian P. M. Holt.
- <sup>82</sup>Elton, p. 202.
- <sup>83</sup>Gordon, Journals 1874-1879, pp. 270-271.



<sup>84</sup>Gessi-Pasha, p. 249.

<sup>85</sup>Gordon, Journals 1874-1879, p. 272.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>87</sup>Gessi-Pasha, pp. 249-250.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 250.

## CHAPTER IV

## GORDON AND THE SUDANESE REBELLION

(1884-1885)

Upon his return from the Sudan, Gordon spent the early months of 1880 regaining his health in London and Lausanne, Switzerland. In the latter part of April, he became private secretary to Lord Ripon, Viceroy of India. Gordon immediately regretted his decision, however, and resigned his post on 2 June 1884. Shortly afterwards, he received a "totally unexpected telegram from Robert Hart, Inspector General of Chinese Maritime Customs," who hoped he would help alleviate growing tensions between Russia and China over Russian-controlled territory in northern Sinkiang.<sup>1</sup>

Some news sources feared British involvement if Gordon entered into the territorial dispute.<sup>2</sup> He provided the Chinese with sound military advice on defensive warfare and was willing to give up his British citizenship<sup>3</sup> to defend China's claims, if the capital was transferred to a strategically less dangerous position.<sup>4</sup> Gordon, however, stressed a peace platform which irritated the court's active war party. The court, partly due to Gordon's interference, decided against a direct confrontation with Russia.<sup>5</sup> He received no credit from the major British newspapers, while The Daily News only stated that "European

governments, England especially, brought influence to bear on China," in order to bring peace between the two nations.<sup>6</sup>

For the next three years (1881-1883), Gordon received little notice from press sources. Between 1881-1882, he commanded British troops in Mauritius and afterwards helped reorganize the military establishment of the Cape Colony government. In December 1883 he took leave and spent one year in the Holy Land engrossed in religious study. During his absence from public view, developments in Egypt had a devastating effect upon William Gladstone's "unspirited foreign policy."

Gladstone viewed Britain's energetic involvement in foreign affairs as a needless waste of time, men and money. "Our currency, our local government, our liquor laws, portions even of our taxation," affirmed Gladstone, "remain in a state either positively discreditable, or at the least inviting and demanding great improvement; but for want of time and strength, we cannot handle them. For the romance of political travel we are ready to scour the world, and yet of capital defect in duties lying at our door we are not ashamed."<sup>7</sup> Even though honor-bound to protect present possessions, Britain's military forces of "thirty millions of men [had] to bear . . . the burden of defending the countries inhabited by near three hundred millions."<sup>8</sup> Even though Egypt was not a British colony, it had become an unnecessary financial burden and furthermore was not vital to the protection of the Suez Canal. Further involvement

in Egyptian affairs would eventually mean the deeper penetration into Africa, bringing Great Britain into a "cold war" situation with other European powers (e.g. France).<sup>9</sup>

Gladstone hoped to evacuate Egypt in 1882, but the Egyptian domestic situation made him change his mind. Unable to cooperate with his Anglo-French creditors, Ismail was forced to abdicate the Egyptian throne by a "European-influenced" Ottoman Sultan. Ismail's son, Tewfik, was placed under the Dual Control system with Evelyn Baring and M. de Blignières as the system's administrators. To the Egyptians, Tewfik was a "Franco-British puppet, and a revolt against him was inevitable."<sup>10</sup> Colonel Arabi Pasha with other Egyptian army officers instigated a national movement to oust all European and Turkish intervention. When fifty Europeans were murdered in Alexandria, Gladstone was forced to summon the British fleet to crush further Egyptian resistance. Due to Gambetta's removal from the French government, the French fleet declined to undertake offensive operations against Egyptian fortifications in the Alexandria harbour. British guns demolished the Egyptian defenses and British troops occupied the city. When British troops under General Garnet Wolseley captured the Suez Canal and crushed the Egyptian army at Tel-el-Kebir, the Dual Control system collapsed. Lord Dufferin, commissioned to analyze the Egyptian domestic situation, reported that Great Britain would have to control the country's administration "for an indefinite

period of time" before British evacuation was possible.<sup>11</sup>

Gladstone's problems had just begun. In Egypt's only colonial possession, the Sudan, an obscure holy man, Muhammad Ahmad, proclaimed himself the Mahdi or "guided one."<sup>12</sup> He declared Holy War against Egyptian financial oppression and corruption. Mr. P. M. Holt believes that the "immediate cause" of the rebellion was the disruption of the slave trade, "which struck at an important source of wealth and the basis of the domestic and agrarian economy of the country . . . [and] affected all classes of society [throughout the Sudan]."<sup>13</sup> When Gordon left the Sudan in 1879, the slave trade again revived but to a lesser degree "since the great merchants of the previous decade were now either dead or powerless."<sup>14</sup>

Winning several small engagements, the Mahdi besieged the provincial capital of Kordofan, El-Obeid. After a disastrous frontal attack in which about 10,000 men were lost the dervish forces surrounded the city and starved it into submission.<sup>15</sup> The Khedive and his Ministers decided to take positive action, but the British government refused to offer any advice, fearing additional involvement in Egyptian affairs. British officers who were not on the active list, however, were permitted to serve the Egyptian government.<sup>16</sup> Colonel William Hicks, a former Indian Army officer, along with 7,000 foot soldiers, 500 cavalry, 400 mounted irregulars, and 2,000 camp followers, marched into the woods of Kordofan where all but

250 were massacred.<sup>17</sup> The rebellion had also engulfed the Eastern Sudan, where Osman Digma, a devoted follower of the Mahdi, attacked the important outposts of Suakim, Tokar, and Sinkat. An expedition sent to support the struggling troops at Tokar failed, resulting in the death of Captain Moncrieff, a British consul.

With the entire Sudan in revolt and two British officers killed, the British government realized that political un-involvement was impossible. The British ambassador in Cairo, Evelyn Baring, was requested by his government to urge the abandonment of the Sudan.<sup>18</sup> Even though the masses cared little, the Egyptian "influential and political classes" opposed the idea.<sup>19</sup> The present Egyptian Ministry would not accept the British suggestions and resigned. It was replaced with a pro-British cabinet under the direction of Nubar Pasha. Agreeing to abandon most of the Sudan, the Egyptian ministers nonetheless wished to maintain jurisdiction over Suakim.<sup>20</sup> Both governments now had to decide "how" the Sudan would be abandoned.

Gordon's employment in the Sudan was discussed among British officials several times between 1882 and 1884. Sir Harry Verney believed Gordon was the most appropriate choice because he displayed "a very remarkable influence over wild, uncontrollable, uncivilized peoples."<sup>21</sup> These thoughts were sent to Granville who, on 17 November 1882, interviewed Gordon

concerning his feelings. While suggesting an army of 8,000 Egyptians under Sir Charles Wilson and other British commanders, Gordon believed the Mahdi's revolt "had been immensely exaggerated."<sup>22</sup> Queen Victoria, in December 1882, suggested that either Sir Samuel Baker or Gordon could pacify the Arabs within two months.<sup>23</sup> Nothing came of these suggestions until 27 November 1883 after Colonel Hicks was killed. Lord Granville proposed the idea to Gladstone: "Do you see any objections to using Gordon in some way? He has an immense name in Egypt--He is popular at home--He is a strong but very sensible opponent of slavery."<sup>24</sup> Baring, however, thought the recommendation unsound because "the appointment of a Christian would probably alienate the tribes who remain faithful."<sup>25</sup> The matter again was dropped.

While the British public created an uproar over the Hicks massacre, Baring, realizing that conditions were worsening, requested immediate evacuation of all Egyptian troops and emphasized that "it [would] be necessary to send an officer of high authority to Khartoum with full authority to withdraw the garrisons and to make the best arrangements he can for the future of the country."<sup>26</sup>

Gordon, however, had concluded a contract with King Leopold of Belgium to suppress slavery in the Congo. Granville was opposed to Gordon's intentions and the latter, having made up his mind, resigned from the British army.<sup>27</sup> (King Leopold

decided to compensate Gordon for the loss of retirement pay.) The Times aroused public opinion by explaining that Gordon would lose rank and pension because he desired to crush slavery in the Congo.<sup>28</sup>

On 8 January 1884, twenty-four hours after his resignation, Gordon was visited by W. T. Stead, editor of the Pall Mall Gazette. After much persuasion, Gordon consented to air his opinions about the crisis in the Sudan. He believed the Eastern Sudan must be kept, while "Darfur and Kordofan must be abandoned."<sup>29</sup> He also believed troops from Khartoum, Darfur, Bahr-el-Ghazal, and Gondokoro would be wiped out if an evacuation was attempted. Commenting on the Sudanese capital, Gordon proposed two solutions: "You must either surrender absolutely to the Mahdi," he affirmed, "or defend Khartoum at all hazards."<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, Gordon's mistaken conviction about the religious character of the rebellion would have a direct bearing upon the Gordon legend. The Mahdi was "a mere puppet put forward by Ilyas, Zebehr's father-in-law, and the largest slave-owner in [El-]Obeid, and . . . he has assumed a religious title to give colour to his defense of the popular rights."<sup>31</sup> Gordon firmly believed that the Mahdi was not a spiritual leader but one who "personifies popular discontent. . . ."<sup>32</sup>

The next day, under the heading "Chinese Gordon for the Sudan," the Gazette published Gordon's plan of action. If Khartoum were surrounded, evacuation impossible and British



troops unavailable, the paper urged that Gordon must go to Khartoum with "absolute control of the territory, to treat with the Mahdi, to relieve the garrisons, and do what can be done to save what can be saved from the wreck in the Soudan."<sup>33</sup> Even though there was no total guarantee of complete success, "the attempt is worth making" but immediate action had to be taken.<sup>34</sup>

With increasing public and press demand for Gordon, Granville, apprehensive about the former's employment (probably because of his Gazette interview), again wrote to Gladstone about his employment. If Gordon "could by his personal influence excite the tribes to escort the Khartoum garrison and inhabitants to Suakim, a little pressure on Baring might be advisable."<sup>35</sup> Granville may have disagreed with Gordon's published opinions, but was still willing to send him if Gordon could accomplish the work which normally would require numerous British troops. Baring insisted that a British officer must carry out the evacuation and finally relented under the Cabinet's "pressure," but demanded in return full control over Gordon's actions.<sup>36</sup> General Garnet Wolseley met Gordon at the War Office and asked him "to go to Suakim to inquire into the conditions of affairs in the Sudan."<sup>37</sup> Gordon afterwards met with the Ministers (Gladstone not present), who asked him if he would undertake the evacuation and also report on the rebellion's progress. Gordon was told not to concern himself

with the formulation of a stable Sudanese government.<sup>38</sup> Even though he had previously stated that evacuation was impossible, Gordon consented to the mission. Granville, in written orders to Gordon, confirmed his executive powers but transferred the responsibility of these instructions upon Baring and the Egyptian government. "You will consider yourself authorized," Granville explained, "and instructed to perform such other duties as the Egyptian Government may desire to entrust to you by Sir E. Baring."<sup>39</sup>

Gladstone, however, was informed by Lord Hartington, Minister of War, only of Gordon's meeting with General Wolseley in which the matter of reporting upon the present "conditions of affairs in the Sudan" was discussed. Seemingly nothing was brought up about the Cabinet's meeting with Gordon concerning his evacuation of Egyptian garrisons.<sup>40</sup> Gladstone, under this misconception, gave his consent to Gordon's supposed "advisory" mission. When Gordon desperately needed troop support for 1) evacuation of troops or 2) to "smash the Mahdi," Gladstone would inform Baring, Queen Victoria and the British public that Gordon's original purpose was only to observe and that he had exceeded his orders. Matters became further complicated when Gordon, sailing to Egypt, suggested the creation of a stable Sudanese government under the country's former Sultans. The leaders supposedly loyal to the rebellion would desert, causing the rebellion to collapse.<sup>41</sup> Both Baring and the British

Ministers, believing Gordon's advice fairly sound, raised no objections to this suggestion.<sup>42</sup>

Gladstone had temporarily interrupted the searing criticism of his foreign policy by focusing the attention of the British public upon Gordon and his mission. The papers, both Conservative and Liberal, believed Gordon was the most competent individual, but his eventual success was a debatable issue. According to The Times, Gordon's "name" and "prestige" were well-known throughout the Sudan. Even though Gordon was the Mahdi's superior, the British public was not to "feel too great confidence at the outset as to the final issue of his enterprise." If any "serious mishap" befell Gordon, the Liberal Ministry might not withstand public reaction.<sup>43</sup>

The Daily Telegraph, once a staunch supporter of Gladstone's policies (since 1878), expressed a critical opinion of Gladstone's anti-imperial policies. Besides lambasting Gladstone's Egyptian program, the paper entirely disagreed with Gladstone's platform concerning Home Rule for Ireland. The gap between the paper and Liberal party became so great that "from 1886 onwards it supported, without swerving, the unionist and imperialist causes and a 'strong navy' policy."<sup>44</sup>

According to The Daily Telegraph, the dispatch of Gordon was "better late than never." But, continued the editorial, "we still fear that the British public must prepare itself to hear from the Sudan of a series of military catastrophes."

At times highly emotional in its editorial comment, the paper described the possible destruction of Khartoum with its "thousands of shrieking women and children." While many would either be "butchered" or "outraged," it was assumed that "the majority [would] be torn away from their hiding places for the slave yoke and even a worse fate."<sup>45</sup>

Other Liberal newspapers and journals, more strongly pro-Gladstone, were highly optimistic about Gordon's future success. The largest Liberal paper, The Daily News, blamed the Egyptian government for the Sudanese turmoil. Gordon, however, with his "large and intimate knowledge of the country and its people," and his name which to "every tribe [is] a source of fear or trust and confidence," was sent out to rectify the blunders of the Egyptian government. Even though the situation was "critical," "there was much reason to hope the very best results from the appointment of General Gordon."<sup>46</sup>

After 26 January, the British public realized that Gordon's mission was to include the evacuation of Egyptian troops. Any lingering doubts were dispelled on 12 February 1884, when Gladstone, facing an attempt by the Conservatives to censure his Egyptian policy, described Gordon's primary objectives. His purpose was not to "[reconquer] the Soudan, or . . . [persuade] the Chiefs of the Soudan again to submit themselves to the Egyptian government." Gordon was to evacuate the Egyptian garrisons and return "to those chiefs their

ancestral power . . . withdrawn or suspended during the period of the Egyptian government."<sup>47</sup>

During the mission's earliest stages, one of Gordon's most avid supporters was the Liberal political journal, The Spectator. Described almost as a supernatural being, Gordon exercised a "personal ascendancy over Asiatics and Africans which seems to be irresistible and self-derived, and which makes of the most treacherous and cowardly of mankind brave and loyal followers. . . ." <sup>48</sup> The slave-dealers, fearing a revolt from their own slaves due to Gordon's presence, would not approach Khartoum, but would permit him to carry out the evacuation without interference. If Gordon were unable to understand Arabic, his "magnetic power over dark men" would rectify this deficiency.<sup>49</sup> A Spectator article entitled "The Power of the Individual" reaffirmed this popular theme. Hailed "by all grades of society," Gordon,

without soldiers or followers, or forces of any kind, [was to enter] a mutinous city in the centre of Eastern Africa and there, by his personal influence, release garrisons numbering thirty thousand men, imprisoned in cantonments scattered over a territory two thousand miles square, by hordes of savages wild with hatred, new-born hope of deliverance, and religious excitement.<sup>50</sup>

Would Gordon be able to accomplish such a task? With little hesitation The Spectator indicated that Gordon "will, if it is ever wise to predict upon evidence, in all human probability succeed."<sup>51</sup>

Gordon, upon Baring's request, arrived at Cairo instead of Suakim, his original destination. The Khedive gave him the post of Governor-General of the Sudan, and presented Gordon with a proclamation outlining his orders concerning the evacuation and the creation of a stable Sudanese administration.<sup>52</sup> Baring also assured Gordon "that no effort will be wanting on the part of the Cairo authorities, whether English or Egyptians, to afford you all the cooperation and support in their power."<sup>53</sup>

From Cairo, he arrived at Berber, the last major Egyptian outpost before reaching Khartoum. While in Berber, Gordon announced the proposed evacuation and the suspension of all anti-slavery laws. Even though it was an unpopular stand, The Times believed an active campaign against slavery "at the very moment when General Gordon has undertaken to restore the country to independent native rulers and to withdraw the Egyptian garrisons would plainly be suicidal."<sup>54</sup> In a rare instance, The Times reprimanded Conservative members of Parliament and abolitionists who lambasted Gordon's declaration to abandon the country's anti-slavery laws. It was difficult to convince these people that once the Egyptian garrisons left the Sudan, slavery would again flourish.

This controversy was temporarily overshadowed with the announcement of Gordon's heroic entrance into Khartoum (arrived on 18 February 1884). The British public, if harboring any

doubts about Gordon's abilities now most likely agreed that their apprehensions were groundless. The Sudanese surrounded him, hailing the Governor-General as "Sultan," "Father" and "Savior of Kordofan." Upon his arrival, Gordon confessed that he came without troop support, but "with God on my side, to redress the evils of the Sudan. I will not fight with my weapons but [with] justice. . . ." Gordon then proceeded to burn old tax records, kourbashes (whips of animal hide) used to force payments, and released 200 men, women and children from deplorable prison conditions.<sup>55</sup>

The entire Sudan appeared to be in Gordon's hands, the rebellion seemed about to dissolve, and the Gladstone government strengthened by efforts of one British officer. Unfortunately, neither Gladstone nor Gordon comprehended the existing social and political climate of the Sudan. Gordon sincerely believed the Mahdi was only a symbol of political dissatisfaction but not a religious leader. His mistaken conceptions were supported by so-called "experts" on the Islamic faith. Mr. C. R. Conder, who supposedly spent six years among the Arabs, believed that "Turkish" oppression was responsible for the uprising.<sup>56</sup> (The Turks at this time had little if anything to do with the Sudan. Egyptian corruption, not Turkish interference, was a principal factor which generated ill-feelings between the Sudanese and the Egyptian government.) The Mahdi and his followers, according to the author, were incapable of

formulating religious doctrines comparable to Western creeds and these people were "utterly deficient in education and in power of thought."<sup>57</sup> The author, nonetheless, considered these "savages" a threat, making it essential to support Gordon fully. "Gordon's success will be England's success"; but, warns Mr. Conder, "Gordon's failure (but General Gordon does not fail) would be a most serious blow to the prestige of England."<sup>58</sup>

Gordon was now portrayed to the British public as the finest example of British officer and worshipped as a demi-god among the Arab nations. If Gordon were captured or killed, British prestige would suffer not only in Europe but throughout her colonial possessions. If the British public had been better informed about the radical changes in the Sudanese political and social climate, they would have been less optimistic about his chances of success. Mr. P. M. Holt believes the rebellion was "a movement of religious origin which was assisted in its development by political, social, and economic stresses in Sudanese society. . . ." The eventual result of these interacting elements was the creation "of an indigenous Islamic state."<sup>59</sup> Gordon and the British public had both overestimated his charismatic influence. As Governor-General, Gordon had suppressed Egyptian corruption, but seemingly he had been the lesser of two evils. Not only was the Mahdi of Sudanese origins, but he was also respected as a sincere religious leader who promised the complete and permanent



expulsion of Egyptian rule. Gordon had unintentionally alienated the Sudanese by destroying their major industry, the slave trade, and was blamed for the death of Zobeir's son, Suleiman.<sup>60</sup> His major influence over the Sudanese came not from the justice of his government nor his British-manufactured demigod personality, but from "the prospect of British troops coming to support him."<sup>61</sup>

Gordon eventually realized that he had overestimated his personal popularity among the Sudanese. His first request was for moral support through the employment of Zobeir Pasha, former slave-chief of the Sudan. While discussing future objectives with Baring during his brief stay, Gordon had a meeting with Zobeir. The former slave-dealer had been lured to Cairo to argue his claims against Egyptian administrators and was placed under house-arrest. Gordon, experiencing a "mystic feeling," implored Baring to permit Zobeir to help him establish a settled Sudanese government.<sup>62</sup> "Zobeir has a capacity of government far beyond any other man in the Soudan. All the followers of the Mahdi," Gordon wrote to Baring, "would, I believe, leave the Mahdi on Zobeir's approach, for the Mahdi's chiefs are ex-chiefs of Zobeir."<sup>63</sup> Gordon, however, faced two formidable problems with this idea: 1) Zobeir believed Gordon was responsible for his son's death (Suleiman revolted after Gordon's visit to his slaver's camp, but was captured and shot by Gordon's lieutenant, Romolo Gessi); and 2) the British

public could not comprehend the thought of sending the ex-chief slave dealer back into the Sudan. At the meeting, Baring and Colonel Stewart, Gordon's A.D.C. at Khartoum, observing Zobeir's hostility toward Gordon, refused to sanction the proposal. Baring, nonetheless, indicated that he would reconsider the suggestion if Gordon felt the same about Zobeir after his arrival in Khartoum.<sup>64</sup>

With the hope of obtaining Zobeir, Gordon left Cairo on 26 January 1884 and arrived at Khartoum on 18 February 1884 to be greeted with a hero's welcome. Meanwhile, events near the Red Sea coast created more problems for both Gladstone and Gordon. Valentine Baker, a former British army officer, (commanding a force of Egyptian gendarmerie), was defeated by a small Arab garrison with a loss of 2000 men while attempting to relieve Egyptian soldiers at Tokar. On 12 February 1884, the Egyptian garrison at Sinkat near Suakim was massacred. Suakim, the British and Egyptian outpost on the Red Sea littoral, faced the same fate and the British public demanded immediate action. In order to placate the Opposition and the public, Gladstone dispatched General Gerald Graham with four thousand British soldiers to relieve Tokar and provide further safeguards for Suakim. Even though General Graham defeated the Arabs in two major engagements, Gordon was feeling the pressure from the Suakim area. He repeatedly requested Zobeir, but the Liberal Ministry (excluding Mr. Gladstone) did not want to

aggravate a British public strongly opposed to Zobeir's employment.

On 23 February 1884, Gordon received a reply from Baring concerning his repeated requests for Zobeir. He informed Gordon that the British government had the "gravest objections" to sending the ex-slave trader. According to Baring, it was Lord Granville's conviction that "public opinion of this country would not tolerate the appointment of Zobeir Pasha."<sup>65</sup> Gordon immediately replied to Baring. Still holding the misconception that the Mahdi was "most unpopular" Gordon believed that, for the well-being of Egypt, the "Mahdi must be smashed up." To do the job, he needed one hundred thousand pounds and two hundred Indian troops.<sup>66</sup>

While the Ministers were fuming over his "smash the Mahdi" telegram, Gordon still hoped to obtain Zobeir. He openly admitted that his influence had waned and informed Baring that his major disadvantages were "being foreign and Christian and peaceful."<sup>67</sup> Finally on 8 March 1884, Gordon affirmed that without Zobeir the evacuation of the garrisons was "impossible."<sup>68</sup> Even though several Cabinet Ministers feared for their political hides, Gladstone was willing to dispatch Zobeir, but due to sickness was unable to use his influence in its fullest capacity.<sup>69</sup> Mr. Hamilton, Gladstone's private secretary, believed, however, that "the anti-slavery feeling in this country would be too strong even for Mr. G. [ladstone]."<sup>70</sup>

On 10 March 1884, The Times published Gordon's proposed solution to the Sudanese question. If immediate action were not taken (i.e. British troops and/or Zobeir), the Mahdi would become a serious threat to the entire country. By this time, General Graham (on 29 February 1884) had defeated the Arabs at El-Teb, the location of Baker's defeat of 5 February 1884. Gordon believed two squadrons from Graham's army would pacify the Khartoum-Berber area, while other troops dispatched to Dongola, Wady Halfa and Sennar would crush the last resistance. Gordon again called for Zobeir as the future governor, believing that his past involvement in the slave-trade was comparable to that of many Egyptians; "for the thief is no worse than the receiver." Above all, Gordon did not want "a British expedition to reconquer the Sudan."<sup>71</sup>

If the Ministers experienced any further doubts about Zobeir, these thoughts were quickly eliminated through press opinion. Both Liberal and Conservative papers voiced the Briton's intense distrust of the former slaver. The Times published a letter from the Anti-Slavery Society expressing violent disapproval of Zobeir's nomination. Any support given to an individual whose "career is specially marked by perfidy and crime would be a degradation for England and a scandal to Europe." The Society cited examples from Gordon's Sudanese journals to portray Zobeir's role in the slave-trade during the 1870's. In "the light of his writing, surely it seems impossible that the idea of placing Zebehr again in a sphere

of active mischief can be countenanced."<sup>72</sup> The Times saw only one solution to the intricate problems surrounding Egypt and the Sudan: declaration of a British protectorate.<sup>73</sup> The Daily Telegraph, siding with the Conservative viewpoint, suggested a British protectorate for seven years in order to prevent Khartoum from again becoming an important slave market.<sup>74</sup> Even though Gordon should be supported with "every assistance--moral and material--which he may require," the best means of controlling the country "would be [a] railroad between Berber and Suakim."<sup>75</sup> To Gladstone, trying to disentangle himself from Egyptian affairs, these proposals only meant further and more costly involvement.

Gordon's popularity at home was entering a period of transition. The Liberals, who once felt Gordon was the answer to all their difficulties, were now angry that he required troops for what appeared to them a war of reconquest. The Tories, however, realized that in his present situation, Gordon would need some reinforcements to accomplish his mission. This would enable them to demand a protectorate, partially to assist Gordon in his worsening condition.

The Liberal press expressed varied opinions concerning Gordon's requests for Zobeir. The Daily News at first denounced Zobeir's employment but suggested to "await" for Gordon's "reasons" for wanting the ex-slave chief.<sup>76</sup> The paper partly altered its opinion after its Cairo correspondent had interviewed

Zobeir. The reporter learned that he desired to assume the position offered by Gordon, considered the General his brother, and believed slavery "can be got rid of gradually when the Sudanese begin to appreciate civilization."<sup>77</sup> Commenting on Zobeir's nomination, The Daily News editorial stated: "[It is] not necessary in [a] moral sense to believe in Zebehr in order to recognize that a pliant and able man may be made useful in the hands of others for purposes nobler than his own."<sup>78</sup> However, the paper was not willing "to underrate or to rebuke" the surprise over or the heated opposition against Zobeir. It would be difficult, according to the paper, to take any positive action on Gordon's request, until he provided his "reasons" for Zobeir's employment.<sup>79</sup> The pro-Gladstone Spectator adopted a firmer position. Zobeir could handle the "half-caste tribes" of the Sudan, but he would also be a direct threat to Egypt. Gordon should govern Khartoum as an "independent potentate." Several other Europeans controlled Sudanese provinces (e.g. Slatin Bey in Darfur and Lupton Bey in Bahr-el-Ghazal), and Gordon would require "no further British help than a liberal supply of needed weapons at cost price, and liberty to officers on half-pay to join [him] in the interior."<sup>80</sup> These European governors, probably acting as a league, would create "new and trustworthy dynasties of European blood [with the result that] European culture would be dotted over Eastern Africa, holding the Nile from Egypt Proper to the Equatorial Lakes."<sup>81</sup>

Without Zobeir, Gordon pleaded for, and desperately needed, troop support, but according to him, not in large numbers if they were British soldiers. Even though Gordon was unable to quell the rebellion, the appearance or rumor of the presence of British redcoats would hopefully be sufficient. When Gladstone, after Baker's defeat at El-Teb, wanted to know from Gordon if British troops to Suakim would endanger his mission, Gordon replied: "I would care more for rumours of such an intervention than for forces. What would have the greatest effect would be rumours of British intervention."<sup>82</sup> On 26 February 1884, Gordon, realizing that General Graham's army was heading toward Suakim and hoping to pacify rebellious natives around Khartoum, stated to the local population that British troops would soon arrive at the city.<sup>83</sup> Gordon may have been under the impression that British troops would re-open the Arab-held road between Suakim and Berber. There is also the possibility that Gordon believed the supposed "fear" of British troops would calm the surrounding disturbances. (The Liberal Ministers, especially Gladstone, felt their representative's "licence of language" was beyond all reasonable comprehension.<sup>84</sup>) His misconception about native respect for British soldiers became only too clear, when he implored Baring (about 2 March 1884) to dispatch Zobeir and a detachment of only two hundred British troops to reopen the Suakim-Berber route. "It is not the number," Gordon explained, "but

the prestige which I need; I am sure the revolt will collapse if I can say that I have British troops at my back."<sup>85</sup> If British troops were unavailable, Gordon hoped that three hundred thousand pounds could be collected from "British and American millionaires" in order that 3,000 Turkish soldiers would be hired to end the rebellion.<sup>86</sup>

Gordon himself was able to leave his increasingly difficult position by travelling down the Nile on one of his penny steamers, but remained in the city. Why did he stay? The Ministers, supposedly not satisfied with Gordon's reasons for Zobeir, asked for additional explanations and hoped he would "remain for some time longer at Khartoum."<sup>87</sup> On 17 March 1884, Baring attempted to inform Gordon that Zobeir would probably not be sent as his replacement. If unable to establish a "settled government," Gordon was requested by the British Cabinet to proceed to Berber with the Egyptian garrison.<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately for all concerned, Gordon never received these orders; telegraph communication about five days before between Khartoum and Berber had been permanently disrupted by Arab troops. The Gordon legend would now grow rapidly due to newspapers playing on the emotions of the British public and the procrastination of Ministers who were more concerned with the domestic matters of Great Britain.

With the impression that Gordon's position was becoming more critical, the British public had their fears confirmed by a telegram (dated 23 March 1884) from Mr. Powers, The Times



correspondent in Khartoum. He stated that Gordon had received an invitation to adopt the Islamic faith. Gordon's penny steamers kept the Arab troops from becoming a major problem, but Powers included a desperate note which became the Tory battle cry against the Gladstone government: "We are daily expecting British troops." Powers explained, "We cannot bring ourselves to believe that we are to be abandoned by the English Government. Our existence depends on England."<sup>89</sup>

The Times editorial (1 April) was no April Fool's joke to either Conservative or Liberal. Unless something were done to rescue Gordon it "would be universally and justly regarded as the betrayal of a high-minded and devoted public servant."<sup>90</sup> Supposedly there was only one solution which met the approval of all Britons: a protectorate over Egypt to be extended to include the Red Sea littoral and Khartoum. This action would be "at once understood among the Arabs, and would draw off any dangerous pressure upon General Gordon." The reconstructed Sudanese government would also need a railroad between Suakim and Berber and possibly a garrison of British troops. Ignoring this plan, The Times concluded, meant a military force to save Gordon from his "fate."<sup>91</sup>

Gladstone, realizing his back was against the wall, was only able to defend his policy with temporary success. On 3 April 1884, Gladstone before Commons stated that at the "present time," Gordon was in no peril. Furthermore, Gordon " [was] under

no constraint and under no orders to remain in the Soudan."<sup>92</sup> Lord Hartington, Minister of War, further added that "General Gordon [had] never suggested, to my knowledge, the employment of troops for the relief of Khartoum." Even if an expedition from Suakim to Berber was contemplated, the lack of water, "intense heat" and the dire effects on British troops "would be enormous."<sup>93</sup> Lord Northcote, leader of the Conservative party, was not satisfied with the Ministers' explanations and continued to inquire about Gordon's uncertain situation.<sup>94</sup> Gladstone, complaining about the seventeenth debate on Egypt in the past two months, lambasted Lord Northcote. "He, the Leader of the Opposition," argued Gladstone, "has announced to the world the failure of the plan of General Gordon; is that beneficial?"<sup>95</sup> After blunting the Opposition's attack, Gladstone belittled the accusations of Mr. Powers and believed it a "farce" to consider Mr. Powers' viewpoint "as virtually equivalent to an official declaration probably conveying the mature conviction of General Gordon."<sup>96</sup>

The Prime Minister, nonetheless, again found his policies an object of attack on 17 April 1884. Another telegram from Mr. Powers, more desperate than the one of 23 March 1884, declared that Khartoum was "at present the centre of an enormous rebel camp." With limited ammunition, Khartoum's position was considered "very critical." The roads and river passages to Berber were blocked, and a telegram sent by the British

government to Berber stating that no "troops would be sent," would spread like wild-fire throughout the Sudan. Upon hearing this information, "the Arabs will learn that the members of the English government have turned down their thumbs while General Gordon is struggling here."<sup>97</sup>

While The Times attempted to inflame public opinion through the publication of emotional dispatches from Mr. Powers, some Liberal news sources only created more problems for Gladstone's administration by expressing caustic remarks about Gordon himself. The Spectator stated that the British Ministers, unable to send Zobeir, were waiting for Gordon's "alternative plan" for a more practical Sudanese settlement. The journal, however, suggested "that the public [had begun] to mistrust his judgment. The abject worship paid to [Gordon] by the Pall Mall Gazette and some other papers, which write as if he were a supernatural being, or the Destiny of Britain incarnate in the flesh, is enough . . . to make ordinary men pronounce him an over-estimated fanatic."<sup>98</sup> The Spectator editors, however, possessed short memories. Two months before they had believed that Gordon was the only hope of Great Britain. His power over "savage" natives was unexplainable: "The strength, wherever it comes from, is in him, in a personality so potent that it lifts him of himself up to the level of Kings."<sup>99</sup> But now the government, faced by public demand to send Gordon, may have "commit[ted] an imprudence

in so closely identifying itself with him." The public was also told how Gordon's once highly praised influence over the Arabs was no longer effective.<sup>100</sup> Indirectly the journal blamed the British public for forcing Gordon upon an unwilling Liberal Ministry. Britons, however, were unable to change opinions as radically as some newspapers or politicians. The government and its press support were alienating public opinion by attacking a popular hero whose legend had been significantly developed and reinforced through Conservative as well as Liberal news sources. The Tories used this increasing public agitation against Gladstone's administration to further their pro-imperialist designs in Egypt. Gordon must be saved and his desperate effort to establish a permanent government must be supported through a British protectorate over Egypt and the Sudan.

The Daily News followed the same line of thought as the Liberal Ministers: Gordon was in no "personal danger." British and Egyptian troops had not assisted Gordon because he proposed a "smash the Mahdi" policy. If Gordon could not safely evacuate the garrisons through peaceful means, "they must shift for themselves," and make "terms" with the Mahdi.<sup>101</sup> The Governor-General had blundered when he "over-estimate [d] . . . the extent to which personal ambition enter [ed] into the movement, and under-estimate [d] . . . the force and character of the religious enthusiasm which is its main support."<sup>102</sup>

The Daily Telegraph and The Times did not appeal to the Britons' powers of logic, but played upon their emotions. According to The Daily Telegraph, Britain's gallant hero, surrounded by barbaric Arabs and supported by rebellious and disloyal troops, had become "the scape-goat of the Ministry sent forth into the desert to perish." In an attempt to express public opinion, the paper warned the government of likely consequences:

Public attention has become so concentrated on the solitary and chivalrous figure of Gordon; the credit and power of England have grown to be so bound up with the success of his mission, or failing that, with his personal safety as an 'Englishman of Englishmen,' that no appeal to 'original arrangements,' no plea of material or military difficulties, no plausible official excuses or regrets, would save from an outburst of public condemnation the Government which should have to confess that it had suffered such an emissary to perish, without moving a man or issuing an order directed to his support or rescue. Heroes are never cheap.<sup>103</sup>

In both fiction and reality, a true-blooded British officer defended his post and fought with his men, never thinking of the approach of death. Rumors reached London concerning the desperate condition of Berber, the last major outpost before Khartoum. If Berber was captured, the Egyptian garrison would have no means of escape to the north. Evacuation south through the Equatorial provinces with Egyptian troops and their women and children would be extremely difficult if not impossible. The Spectator found no need of a relief expedition if Gordon left Khartoum with one of his penny steamers.<sup>104</sup> The Daily Telegraph did not foresee the possibility of this British

officer even contemplating this alternative. "How could a man like Gordon," inquired the editorial, "submit to the desert all these souls, or fail to declare that they must be either saved by force or left in safety by establishing a strong government?"<sup>105</sup> Throughout his Khartoum journals, Gordon, plagued with the decision of whether or not to save himself, decided not to leave until another person was appointed Governor-General. After much thought, he came to the conclusion that he would not leave, "until everyone who wants to go down [to Egypt] is given the chance to do so, unless a government is established, which relieves me of the charge; therefore if any emissary or letter comes up here ordering me to come down, I WILL NOT OBEY IT, BUT WILL STAY HERE, AND FALL WITH THE TOWN, AND RUN ALL RISKS."<sup>106</sup>

Public abuse turned increasingly against Mr. Gladstone. On the first day of the London Health Exhibition, the Prime Minister experienced, according to The Times, "a demonstration which is probably without precedent in recent times." Instead of a tumultuous welcome, Gladstone received "hisses . . . and other unmistakable signs of disapproval."<sup>107</sup> The Daily News complained of "an extreme and outrageous form of the tone which men of more pretensions of good sense and good manners have lately thought fit to assume." Commenting on the difficulty of military relief because of climatic conditions, the paper accused the Opposition of using Khartoum to discredit

the government.<sup>108</sup> Sir Hamilton believed the outbursts were played up by The Times. Even though Gladstone supposedly paid little attention to these gestures, he kept "on the look-out for hostile demonstrations."<sup>109</sup> Apparently Hamilton blamed "Society and the upper classes" for perpetuating the heated uproar over Gordon.<sup>110</sup> The Times, on the other hand, stated that a great deal of "anxiety" for Gordon's welfare was expressed in the newspapers of "all classes, those of the working men not excepted. . . ." <sup>111</sup>

On 2 May 1884, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach announced his intention to censure the Liberal administration because "the Government has not tended to promote the success of the mission of General Gordon, and that even such steps as may be necessary for his personal safety are still delayed."<sup>112</sup> (Berber was in immediate danger of capture. Mr. Baring, General Wood, Commanding General of British forces in Egypt, and General Frederick Stephenson had suggested to Lord Granville that British troops should be sent to relieve Berber.<sup>113</sup>) A vote of censure at this time could not only wreck Gladstone's proposed domestic reforms (e.g. Reform Bill), but also the upcoming European conference in London which was to examine the Egyptian debt.

Mr. John Marlowe refers to a memorandum received on 9 May 1884 by Lord Hartington from General Wolseley. According to Mr. Marlowe, Wolseley rejected the idea of a small expeditionary force sent from Suakim to Berber, if this support was not part of a major British task force dispatched to relieve

Khartoum. The General strongly urged immediate "preparations" for Gordon's rescue.<sup>114</sup> Sir Hamilton, however, presented the memorandum in a different light. General Wolseley was supposedly more interested in the "announcement" of a major rescue mission.<sup>115</sup> This "immediate show of preparation [would be] the most likely means of avoiding having to undertake so formidable an expedition."<sup>116</sup> There is a strong possibility that someone in the government adopted this suggestion to weaken the Opposition's attack on the Egyptian policy of the Liberal Ministry.

The Daily Telegraph believed the rumor, started in Egypt, was a political maneuver "to seek to justify reluctant votes by hints of forthcoming energy and courage, which cannot be earnest since they are accompanied by no overt sign of sincerity." In order to stir public feelings, the paper further described Gordon's lamentable conditions: a disloyal garrison except for his black troops, pro-Mahdi sympathizers among Khartoum's population, and the collapse of the city's defenses if besieged in a major offensive. Gordon could easily leave the city unharmed, but he would not desert his comrades. The British government must save both Gordon and the Egyptian troops.<sup>117</sup>

The Daily News, however, taunted the Tory opposition with an "I told you so" attitude. Gladstone's government had been planning this expedition for some time, but "premature



disclosures" could have had catastrophic effects upon Gordon's position. The paper continued to take the Tory Opposition over the coals. Gordon, praised as a hero upon his departure, received nothing but condemnation from the Conservatives over his slavery proclamation and request for Zobeir. His disagreement with the government over troop support, however, signalled a significant turning point. He then became "an almost sacred personage [to the Conservatives] whom it [was] profane to criticise in any way, and infamous not to support at all cost."<sup>118</sup>

During another defense of his ministerial policy, Gladstone discouraged all prospects of an immediate expedition to Khartoum. Furthermore, the use of British troops for Gordon's aid "would be a war of conquest against a people struggling to be free."<sup>119</sup> The Prime Minister also indicated that Gordon was probably disregarding the government's original orders for a peaceful evacuation.<sup>120</sup> An expedition would only be sent after every conceivable factor (e.g. climate, troop strength and supplies, etc.) had been taken into consideration.<sup>121</sup> On 13 May 1884, Lord Randolph Churchill demanded one solution: Gordon and all Egyptian troops must be evacuated<sup>122</sup> and Great Britain must proclaim a protectorate over Egypt.<sup>123</sup> After several attacks against Gladstone's policy from both the Liberal and Conservative benches, Lord Hartington tried to ease tensions between the two parties. He believed Gordon had exaggerated

the moral effect of two hundred men asked to be sent from Suakim to Berber. The possible beneficial result "is entirely a matter of supposition and is utterly incapable of proof."<sup>124</sup> Hartington led the Opposition to believe that plans were under way to rescue Gordon. If his situation demanded immediate action then "I believe that this country will be prepared to grudge no sacrifice to save the life and honour of General Gordon."<sup>125</sup> Even though the Ministers "admit [ted] and accept [ed] no responsibility" for the Egyptian garrisons, Hartington indicated an effort would also be attempted to save them.<sup>126</sup> The vote of censure met defeat by only twenty-eight votes (275 for, 303 against).

Gladstone paid a heavy price for his hard-fought battle. If someone in his Ministry had been responsible for planting rumors concerning possible arrangements for Gordon's rescue, this political tactic ultimately back-fired. Victorians were very stubborn people; if an idea was placed into their heads it was almost impossible to shake it loose. Through newspaper reports and ministerial assurances of eventual support, the British public expected Gordon and seemingly the Egyptian garrisons to be rescued by British redcoats.

Even though tensions had slackened with the outcome of the debates,<sup>127</sup> the Tory press refused to permit the public to forget their "moral" obligation toward Gordon. The Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine article "Fallen Britain and Her Politics"

spared no abuse in discussing Gladstone's foreign policies. He and his Ministers were guilty of "evasive and misleading answers," and pleading a lack of knowledge to avoid positive action. The Ministers were also responsible for Gordon's suicide mission and "the strain of having left him to his fate must remain first upon the Ministers who planned the base desertion. . . ." But the responsibility for Gordon's plight also lay with the British public, who "on being informed of it, did not express its discontent in such a way as to force the Government into a more creditable course."<sup>128</sup>

The pro-Conservative "Patriotic Association" also lambasted the noncommittal policy toward Gordon. In a pamphlet entitled "General Gordon and the British Ministry," Parliamentary debates and Blue Books, along with appropriate editorial comment, pictured Gordon as the ever-faithful British officer "hard-pressed by savage enemies, yelling for his life."<sup>129</sup> Mr. Gladstone had not only "thwarted, abandoned, and betrayed" Gordon but he, along with his Ministers, had slandered the powerful influence and prestige of the British soldier. Quoting an excerpt from Mr. George Goschen's speech in Commons (13 May 1884), the Association signified that the "prestige" of two hundred British redcoats could accomplish the seemingly impossible. Prestige "has been the talisman," stated Goschen, "by which we have been able to hold India, and by which single officers have been able to go under great difficulties to distant

places and achieve marvelous results."<sup>130</sup>

According to several sources, the Opposition's attempts to arouse public opinion by dramatizing Gordon's difficult situation achieved little success. At the end of April, Albert Morley, Under-Secretary for War, felt Gordon's death in February "would have turned out the Ministry, now people are tired of him. . . ." <sup>131</sup> From the end of May until August the Sudanese situation averaged "five minutes' hasty discussion at the fag-end of a Cabinet meeting." <sup>132</sup> (Gladstone's domestic policies overshadowed most questions of foreign affairs.)

It is difficult to believe that the British public remained completely apathetic about Gordon's desperate position. After the fall of Berber was announced in London (13 June 1884), the public was exposed to many conflicting rumors pertaining to Khartoum's position. On 4 June 1884, a Reuter telegram reported that Khartoum would shortly surrender to the Mahdi, <sup>133</sup> while on the previous day Gordon had supposedly saved Berber from destruction. <sup>134</sup> Again on 4 July 1884, The Daily Telegraph reported that Khartoum had fallen, no massacre had occurred and all Europeans except Gordon had adopted the Islamic faith. Gordon, refusing to desert his men, was captured and "allowed to move freely in the Mahdi's camp." <sup>135</sup> Five days later, the Khedive reported Khartoum was still under siege. <sup>136</sup>

While numerous rumors briefly described the defense or fall of Khartoum, the recapture of Berber, and the capture or

escape of Gordon, The Daily News considered the demands for a relief expedition as a "tiresome controversy." With the increase of the Nile, Gordon could leave the city at any moment by steamer. If he refused to leave the garrisons, a relief force of limited size could handle the situation.<sup>137</sup> The Times, however, warned the Liberal Ministry that Gordon was not forgotten by the public: ". . . the Government would be fatally mistaken if they imagined that the slumbering interest in his fate would not be quickly blown into a flame were it suspected that he had been finally abandoned." The paper also reminded the government of Lord Hartington's pledge to rescue both Gordon and the garrisons if the need arose.<sup>138</sup>

Even though Gladstone seemed unaffected by The Times' demands that former pledges be honored, Lord Hartington could not forget his 13 May 1884 speech which emphasized "the life and honour of General Gordon." Tired of the continual flow of excuses concerning "climatic conditions" and "lack of information," Hartington felt his "personal honor" was at stake. If Gladstone did "nothing even by way of preparation" for a relief force, Hartington would resign.<sup>139</sup> Gladstone realized that Hartington was the leader of the Whigs in Commons. If Hartington resigned Gladstone would probably lose his Whig support and his government would end.

On 5 August 1884, Gladstone asked Commons for not more than three hundred thousand pounds to cover expenses of an

expedition. The motion was approved by a large majority.<sup>140</sup> Lord Wolseley became the expedition's commander, but dispatch of troops was delayed for one month while Wolseley and other military authorities argued whether a land or river route should be used to reach the city. With the adoption of the river plan, Wolseley finally reached Cairo on 9 September 1884 to undertake command of desert forces.

The British public had now regained an interest in Sudanese affairs with the failure of the Egyptian debt conference in London and the beginning of the expedition's struggle up the Nile. Late in September, word arrived that Gordon, through an almost superhuman effort, had raised the siege and was planning to recapture Berber. In actuality, Gordon was still besieged in Khartoum and the Arab attacks were increasing daily. (On 9 September 1884, Gordon sent Mr. Powers and Colonel Stewart down the Nile to inform the authorities of his worsening situation. Unfortunately, they were murdered while attempting to obtain supplies from a local chief.)

The Liberal press reaffirmed its confidence in Gladstone's foreign policy. The Daily News stated that Gladstone and his Ministers had known all along about the actual situation in Khartoum; time had proven them right. The paper censured the Opposition which "[was] drawing . . . the fate awaiting General Gordon; and the predictions of an invasion of Egypt by naked savages drunk with victory and religious fanaticism, were all

attributable either to ignorance of the true nature of the Sudanese insurrection, or to an unpatriotic passion for discrediting a Liberal Ministry."<sup>141</sup> The Spectator, however, lowered its guns on Khartoum's British commander. An organized administration should be established in Khartoum but in its creation "General Gordon's finger [must be kept] out of the pie. He is certain to want something entirely opposed to the policy of Her Majesty's Government, and only obtainable by himself or a campaign. Could he not be exported to China?"<sup>142</sup> The Times also advocated the establishment of a stable Sudanese government under "an indefinite period of British rule." Khartoum could not be abandoned to either the slave trade,<sup>143</sup> or another European nation (e.g. Germany).<sup>144</sup> Even though the news appeared optimistic, Wolseley, nevertheless, quickened the pace toward Khartoum and the expedition's march seemed to be a race against time. The siege may have been raised, but no one could be sure of the actual condition of Gordon and his troops.

Public anxiety must have increased upon receiving several further telegrams from Mr. Powers. Dated 30 July 1884, one telegram stated that the city could survive for only two more months. Khartoum was under daily attack while Gordon's armed steamers continued to keep the Arabs at bay.<sup>145</sup> On 31 July 1884, Powers again asserted that Khartoum would fall in two months because of low food supplies, and the local population

had abandoned all "hope" of evacuation by British troops.<sup>146</sup> The Times took advantage of worsening conditions to stir up public emotion. While Gladstone had minimized Gordon's predicament, the gallant defenders "were daily engaged in a desperate fight for life." The paper further dramatized the devoted British servants ready to die for their country's honor. "We see the three Englishmen [i.e. Gordon, Stewart and Powers], knowing that their days are numbered unless the unforeseen and the improbable comes to pass, setting their backs to the wall and facing their hard fate without thought of flinching and even without abatement of their cheerfulness."<sup>147</sup> The Governor-General and his companions even became moral examples to the British troops. If the desert seemed unbearable, think of the three British defenders who had repelled repeated Arab attacks during the summer's hottest months.<sup>148</sup> Again, Gordon's sacrifices must not be wasted. The complete abandonment of Khartoum, reasoned The Times, would be "the sure way to lose every advantage won by General Gordon's splendid courage, and by the exertions of the army we are now pushing up the Nile."<sup>149</sup>

With the news of the death of Stewart and Powers, tensions intensified by pessimistic rumors of Khartoum's fall. French news sources provided detailed accounts of Gordon's forlorn attempt to reach Berber by steamer only to lose part of his fleet by artillery fire, while the remaining ships



along with Gordon himself were eventually captured.<sup>150</sup> This account was also confirmed by the Khedive who dispatched this dismal information to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.<sup>151</sup> The information was contradicted early in December by a report received by the Khedive. Five hundred Arabs had deserted the Mahdi and joined Gordon's forces.<sup>152</sup> Another message from an escaped Arab prisoner related Gordon's attempt to strengthen Khartoum's defenses and produce "his own [gun] powder."<sup>153</sup>

The public's belief that Gordon's rescue was only a matter of time seemed assured, when General Wolseley received a message the "size of a postage stamp" in which Gordon on 14 December 1884 stated that Khartoum was in sound shape.<sup>154</sup> Gordon's position, however, was rapidly deteriorating. The messenger bringing Gordon's note informed "Lord Wolseley privately that food [was] running short, that there [would] be some stiffish fighting, and that as large a force as possible should be sent and sent quickly."<sup>155</sup> (On 14 December 1884, Gordon placed the final entry into his Khartoum journals. He believed that if two hundred British soldiers did not relieve Khartoum within ten days, the Arabs would capture the city itself.<sup>156</sup>)

Confident that success had been achieved, The Daily News stated that "General Gordon and Sir Charles Wilson may have [already] shaken hands, and the banks of the Blue Nile, and the streets of the city, resounded, for the first time in their

strange history with the cheers of English soldiers."<sup>157</sup> Unfortunately, British soldiers commanded by Sir Charles Wilson never entered Khartoum. Boarding two penny steamers on 24 January 1885, British troops arrived near the outskirts of Khartoum four days later. Gordon's dwelling was in ruins and within a short distance of the city, the steamers, under intensive Arab gunfire, were forced to make a hasty retreat. One of the Mahdi's followers told the rescue party that Gordon had been captured and had adopted the Islamic faith.<sup>158</sup> The news reached Lord Wolseley on 4 February 1885 and in the early morning of 5 February, Britons learned that their overconfident expectations were "premature."

The immediate reaction in London and throughout Great Britain was one of despair, utter amazement, and uncontrollable anger against the Liberal government, especially the Prime Minister. Upon learning of the bulletins, the Queen departed from accepted diplomatic procedure and sent an uncoded telegram to Hartington, Granville and Gladstone: "The news from Khartoum are frightful, and to think that all this might have been prevented and many lives saved by earlier action is too frightful."<sup>159</sup> Gladstone informed the Queen that three major factors contributed to the disaster: The attempted rescue by river instead of advancing troops from Suakim to Berber and then on to Khartoum, climatic conditions and "the delivery of the town by treachery."<sup>160</sup> Sir Hamilton believed the

Government made two fatal errors: "their weakness [was] in not turning a deaf ear to the sentimental cry for interference in the Soudan, . . . and in not resisting the clamour for employing a lunatic on the most delicate of missions."<sup>161</sup>

Many Liberal politicians shared Hamilton's critical comments, but few were bold enough to put their heads on the chopping block by expressing them in public. Gordon was now a beloved hero, cut down by the barbaric Arabs and an unconcerned Liberal government. He had also been the principal symbol of British prestige in the Middle East. To attack Gordon was to further diminish this damaged prestige in the eyes of millions of Moslem subjects. Immediate action was demanded to determine both Gordon's fate, as yet unknown, and to reinforce Great Britain's position as a military power. On 6 February 1885, the Cabinet empowered Wolseley to rescue Gordon if he was not dead and "to check the advance of the Mahdi in districts as yet undisturbed."<sup>162</sup> (Lacking nothing, Wolseley would be supplied with men, guns and war supplies upon request.) The Cabinet Ministers further concluded that Wolseley's field of operation should also be extended to include the recapture of Khartoum.<sup>163</sup>

According to the papers, Gordon's fate was uncertain and several rumors circulated that he was dead, captured by the Mahdi, or still defending himself in a church within the city. The Daily Telegraph, severely critical of Gladstone's handling

of Gordon's mission, insisted that Gordon, if alive, must be saved no matter what the cost. Probably in a sincere desire of strengthening the weakened ties between Gladstone's administration and the once pro-Gladstone paper, The Daily Telegraph did not advocate the downfall of the Liberal Ministry. The Prime Minister, realizing his past errors and trying to amend them, must be supported by all Britons, not drummed out of office. Gordon's whereabouts were of great concern, but Britain's "imperial credit," symbolized by Gordon himself, almost seemed of greater concern to the news sheet. Khartoum must be retaken and

if Egypt is to be saved and if England is to remain the Ruler of her countless Mussulman subjects the Mahdi must be eventually smashed. . . . The honour of Great Britain stands as much committed to the recapture of Khartoum by the presence of Gordon in that city as if a garrison of the Queen's guards and Highlanders had fallen into captivity or death along with him. 164

The Times was almost in total agreement, but did not feel that the Government should escape condemnation for the mission's failure. All could have been prevented if the Liberal Ministry had displayed more concern. Not only the Government, but all Britons would experience "shame and sorrow at the result of the long and deliberate abandonment of General Gordon." Heavy emphasis was again placed on Britain's fallen prestige. Gordon, "that solitary figure holding aloft the flag of England in face of the hordes of Islam [ ] counted for more in maintaining the

prestige of [Great Britain] than experienced Parliamentary tacticians can easily conceive. . . . General Gordon must be saved or avenged and the honour of [Great Britain] must be vindicated no matter what the difficulties."<sup>165</sup>

In defense of the Government, The Daily News reaffirmed the theory of Khartoum's destruction through "treachery." Even though plagued by "some acrid partisan crying out that now is the time to turn national disaster to partisan account," both political parties would (hopefully) unite to meet the present crisis.<sup>166</sup> The paper attempted to make two points clear to the British public: 1) Total evacuation of Egypt and the Sudan was still the primary goal of Gladstone's government, but popular sentiment and Gordon's unknown fate would delay this objective, and 2) "that the dispatch of [Gordon] to Khartoum was as distinctly a national act as anything that has ever yet been inspired by the wish and sanctioned by the will of the English people."<sup>167</sup> The Liberal press indirectly tried to blame the British public not only for forcing Gladstone to send Gordon to Khartoum, but also for his supposed blunders. In agreement with other papers, The Daily News envisioned the collapse of British prestige among the Oriental nations. Throughout the East, non-Europeans were "sitting on the fence" wondering if British troops would retreat from the advance of the Mahdi and his followers. Sudden

abandonment would increase the number of his adherents to uncontrollable proportions.<sup>168</sup>

The British public, apprehensive about Gordon's safety, could only concur that Britain's symbol of Anglo-Saxon superiority over less civilized nations must either be saved or avenged. Constantly reminded of how Gordon had been dispatched with their fullest support, they were plagued with the Conservatives' pointed suggestion that they were primarily responsible for not demanding that troop support be sent earlier to the besieged capital. Unwilling to bear the entire blame for Gordon's fate, the British public would eventually seek a scapegoat to relieve any nagging sense of guilt.

Britons also faced the humiliating taunts of the foreign press and especially of French news sources extensively reported in The Times. Ever since the failure of the Dual Control system, Anglo-French relations in matters concerning Egyptian domestic and foreign affairs had been less friendly. With the collapse of the Egyptian debt conference in London, relations again took a turn for the worse. France, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, was attempting to become a powerful imperial nation, one which would decrease Britain's power and prestige overseas. Any gain in her imperial status at the expense of Britain's privileged position must have greatly irritated a British public who were extremely jealous of this cherished status. After the fall of Khartoum, France again

was able to ridicule Britain's overseas prestige, while pointing out to the British public and continental Europe the supposed culprit of Egypt's domestic and foreign distress and Gordon's death, Mr. Gladstone.

The Daily News seemingly provided little French comment concerning Britain's present difficulty. Excerpts from Le Soir expressed sincere regrets that General Wolseley had not been in time: "England has been imprudent more from ambition and egotism than humanity, but it must be admitted that the chastisement is immeasurably severe."<sup>169</sup>

The Times, nonetheless, did not spare the British public the full impact of adverse French opinion. A correspondent in Paris claimed that the fall of Khartoum and Gordon's fate was the only topic of political discussion. "The name of this hero is on everyone's lips . . . all nations regard him as a fellow citizen." The reporter further affirmed that "to the universal anguish . . . in believing that he is lost, is added a feeling that a terrible responsibility will rest on those who have exposed to this fate one of the most remarkable men in the 19th century. People are already recalling all the delays, hesitations, and precautions which were thought yesterday to be useless, but which are now regarded as culpable."<sup>170</sup> The Royalist Soleil believed that Gordon had become a legend among the Mussulman people and worshipped as a god. "[But] their idol has been cast down from its pedestal and has

crumbled to dust, and with it the prestige of England. . . . She lives on her prestige and if she loses this what will remain?"<sup>171</sup> Le Francais supported Tory sentiments, blaming one individual for Britain's deplorable situation in Egypt, the Prime Minister.<sup>172</sup>

While Tory and French editorials assailed the Gladstone government, the British public eagerly awaited any information concerning Gordon's fate. On 11 February 1885, the newspapers published a more extensive account of Sir Charles Wilson's frustrated attempts to rescue Gordon. Several rumors were prevalent about his situation: he was captured and had adopted the Islamic faith; he was defending himself in a fortified Roman Catholic mission; and he was killed while leaving his place of residence.<sup>173</sup> Practically all hope of his survival disappeared two days later. A document written by an Arab chief and recovered from the saddle-bags of a dead donkey claimed that the "traitor Gordon" was killed during the assault upon Khartoum.<sup>174</sup>

With this direct indication of Gordon's death, British prestige throughout its colonial possessions reached its lowest ebb; Britain's hero, supposedly loved by the primitive Sudanese people, had been killed by the tribes which, so everyone had believed, would never harm him. The British public was driven to two courses of action. First, their "ideal" British officer had to be defended against future attempts to discredit his



actions in Khartoum and to have his name, reputation and past achievements raised to new heights of glorification and respect. The second step would have been to search out the individual or persons responsible for Britain's loss of prestige and the untimely death of their Christian hero (i.e. the Liberal Ministry, and more specifically Mr. Gladstone). Except for the efforts of some Liberal journals (e.g. The Spectator) to vindicate Gladstone's reputation, these two courses of action were followed for the remainder of the Victorian Era until Lytton Strachey, in 1918, would attempt to reverse this trend, placing the blame for Khartoum's destruction upon Gordon himself.<sup>175</sup>

In order to lessen increasing guilt feelings, the British public vented its anger upon Mr. Gladstone. Formerly the "Grand Old Man," he was now known as "Gordon's Old Murderer"<sup>176</sup> and another "Nero fidelling."<sup>177</sup> Gladstone only created additional public resentment by attending the theater on 10 February 1885 before Wilson's description of Gordon's probable death was published in the papers on 11 February 1885. "The 'World,'" commented Hamilton, "seems to imagine that [the Prime Minister] should clothe himself in sackcloth and heap ashes on his head. The London Society mind is poisoned with hatred towards Mr. G. [ladstone]."<sup>178</sup>

When Parliament reconvened on 19 February 1885, Gladstone presented his four-point Sudanese plan to Commons: The

inhabitants of Khartoum must be sent relief, slavery eliminated in the fallen capital, a stable government created in Khartoum, and aid given to the remaining besieged Egyptian garrisons.<sup>179</sup> This did not alter the Tory opposition plan to again institute "vote of censure" proceedings. The Liberal Ministers throughout these debates endorsed these four major objectives, but would not agree to a permanent British occupation of Khartoum after the suppression of the insurrection. This provoked severe criticism from Liberals,<sup>180</sup> Home Rulers and Conservatives alike. The vote of censure was defeated by only 14 votes (302 against, 288 for). Forty Home Rulers and 12 Liberal members sided with the Tory opposition.<sup>181</sup>

During the heated debates, Gladstone, like many of his Liberal colleagues, paid homage to Gordon whom he personally believed was the direct cause of his present difficulties.

. . . devoted to his Sovereign, to his country, and likewise to the world. . . . [H]e seems to have deemed it his special honour to devote his energies and to risk his existence on behalf of those with whom he had no other tie than that of human sympathy. General Gordon was a hero and permit me to say he was still more--he was a hero among heroes. . . . [H]e proposed to himself not any ideal of wealth and power, or even fame, but to do good was [his] object. . . . I trust there will grow from the contemplation of that character and those deeds other men who in future time may emulate his noble and most Christian example.<sup>182</sup>

Fed by numerous journals, newspapers and books, the Gordon legend rapidly took hold of the British public. The Conservative press, after Gladstone's escape from censure, constantly

praised Gordon's numerous heroic exploits in order to discredit the Liberals. Two articles in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, "Our Egyptian Atrocities" and "General Gordon," served this purpose. The former portrayed Gordon as the innocent scapegoat of an ill-planned Egyptian policy. It explained to a pound-and-sixpence-minded British public how the Egyptian debt had skyrocketed under Gladstone's administration. In more than one melodramatic passage, the story attempted to explain in what way Gordon, "the oriflame of our Christian chivalry . . . [had been] sacrificed on the foul altar of stock-jobbery and cold-blooded statescraft!"<sup>183</sup> "General Gordon" described the General's past achievements in China and the Sudan (1874-1879). It provided several accounts of personal bravery in China, the generous rewards received from a grateful Chinese Emperor and his miraculous journey into a camp of 3,000 fanatical slave-dealers armed only with his charismatic personality.<sup>184</sup>

Mr. Stanley Leighton hoped to drive a lasting wedge between Britons and the Liberal party through his article, "Gordon or Gladstone." He placed the Prime Minister on trial before the British people for his part in the desertion of Gordon. Using assorted passages from Gordon's journals in Khartoum, the author tried through Gordon's own words to condemn Gladstone's lack of direct action. Before coming to his conclusion, Mr. Leighton exaggerated the possible scenes

of Gordon's last moments, in order to inflame public emotion.

Some say he was shot as he sat at his table reading the Bible. Some say he barricaded the palace and held out until all his ammunition was spent; then, throwing open the door, walked unarmed out, quietly smoking a cigarette. Some say he fell in a desperate hand-to-hand combat.<sup>185</sup>

After reaching this high-pitched climax, Mr. Leighton concluded that Britons would eventually have

to choose between vindicating Gordon and absolving the man who lured him to his death. To vote for Gladstone [in 1886] will be to sanction the desertion of Gordon. Will the English people pronounce so infamous a verdict, and thus accept the responsibility for the basest deed of modern times?<sup>186</sup>

The Spectator, after the publication of Leighton's article, described it as "one of the most discreditable electioneering appeals we have ever read . . . [and believed the article only indicated] one of the signs of the degeneration of [the Tory] party."<sup>187</sup> The author was accused of making it appear that Gordon was "personally" blaming Mr. Gladstone for his plight, when actually he was criticizing the British "government" in general. Gordon himself was not spared personal attack. Called "impulsive," he supposedly disobeyed his orders. The story also indicated that Gordon was responsible for his own death, because he had waged an offensive war on the Sudanese people. In doing so, the Sudanese seemingly accepted the Mahdi as their protector against Gordon's aggression.<sup>188</sup>

To a people devoted to preserving Gordon's memory and supporting his damaged prestige, such searing criticism by a Liberal journal could have only generated additional animosity between the public and the Government. As already demonstrated, Gordon's Khartoum journals were used either to smear the Liberals or condemn Gordon's actions. The complete set of journals were compiled for publication by Gordon's relative, A. Egmont Hake, author of the highly popular work, The Story of Chinese Gordon (1884). In his introduction attached to this edited work, Mr. Hake defended Gordon's conduct, while explaining that the General had been "constantly thwarted and never supported" by the British government.<sup>189</sup> The anger felt by the British public due to the Government's negative attitude toward Gordon's plight could have only increased, when they examined his parting words. He believed that Khartoum faced capture after ten days had elapsed, unless two hundred men came to the city's rescue. "I have done my best," he affirmed, "for the honour of our country."<sup>190</sup>

In order to keep Gordon's memory and heroic example alive in the minds of Britain's younger generation, such writers as Rev. S. A. Swaine published works directed toward children in which Gordon was portrayed as "a great and brave soldier and God-fearing man."<sup>191</sup> While Gordon's only concern was "to God and duty,"<sup>192</sup> Mr. Gladstone and Lord Granville are described as "un-English Englishmen" because of their

neglect of General Gordon and remaining Egyptian garrisons.<sup>193</sup>

For the next few months, the Tory opposition attempted to place the Liberals in a dim light because of their confusing Egyptian policy, while the Liberals, mindful of the upcoming 1886 elections, tried to quell the fervor over Gordon's death. Fortunately for Gladstone, Egyptian affairs soon faded into the background because of increased turmoil between Britons and Russians in Afghanistan. Wolseley soon evacuated his garrisons from the Sudan. British soldiers would not re-enter the Sudan until 1896. On 2 September 1898, the Arab Empire crumbled at the battle of Omdurman. With the destruction of countless Arab garrisons under murderous British rifle and machine-gun fire, the British public and politician finally regained their sacred prestige, needlessly sacrificed at Khartoum in 1885.

## FOOTNOTES

## CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup>Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, "Gordon in China," Pacific Historical Review, XXXIII (May, 1964), 147-148.

<sup>2</sup>The Daily News (London), June 14, 1880, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Hsu, pp. 156-157.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>6</sup>The Daily News (London), July 26, 1880, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup>W. E. Gladstone, "Aggression on Egypt and Freedom in the East," Nineteenth Century Magazine, August, 1877, p. 152.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 158-159; p. 161.

<sup>10</sup>Julian Symons, England's Pride: The Story of the Gordon Relief Expedition (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1965), p. 9.

<sup>11</sup>C. E. Carrington, The British Overseas (Cambridge: The University Press, 1950), pp. 732-733.

<sup>12</sup>Holt, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 24-25.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 54-56

<sup>16</sup>Marlowe, p. 89.

<sup>17</sup>Holt, p. 63.

<sup>18</sup>Sir Evelyn Baring, Modern Egypt (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1908), I, 373.

<sup>19</sup>Mekki Shibeika, British Policy in the Sudan 1882-1902 (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 131.

<sup>20</sup>Baring, I, 382-384.

<sup>21</sup>Shibeika, p. 146.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 146-147.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>24</sup>Lord Granville to Mr. Gladstone, November 27, 1883, quoted in Agatha Ramm, The Political Correspondence of Mr. Gladstone and Lord Granville, 1876-1886 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), II, 116.

<sup>25</sup>Baring, I, 423, 424.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>27</sup>Shibeika, pp. 148-150.

<sup>28</sup>Editorial, The Times (London), January 5, 1884, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup>"England, Gordon and the Sudan: A Narrative of Facts," Pall Mall Gazette Extra, February 2, 1884, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 16-17.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Lord Granville to Mr. Gladstone, January 14, 1884, quoted in Ramm, II, 149-150.

<sup>36</sup>Baring, I, 426.

<sup>37</sup>Allen, Gordon and the Sudan, p. 221.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>39</sup>Archibald Forbes, Chinese Gordon (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), p. 241.

<sup>40</sup>Marlowe, pp. 136-137.



- <sup>41</sup>Forbes, pp. 242-243.
- <sup>42</sup>Allen, p. 238.
- <sup>43</sup>Editorial, The Times (London), January 19, 1884, p. 11.
- <sup>44</sup>Dictionary of National Biography: 1912-1921 (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), p. 332.
- <sup>45</sup>Editorial, The Daily Telegraph (London), January 19, 1884, p. 4.
- <sup>46</sup>Editorial, The Daily News (London), January 19, 1884, p. 5.
- <sup>47</sup>Great Britain, Parliament, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3d., Vol. 284 (1884), p. 724.
- <sup>48</sup>"The Mission of General Gordon," The Spectator (London), January 26, 1884, p. 109.
- <sup>49</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup>"The Powers of the Individual," The Spectator (London), February 23, 1884, pp. 245-246.
- <sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 246.
- <sup>52</sup>Elton, p. 293.
- <sup>53</sup>Allen, p. 244.
- <sup>54</sup>Editorial, The Times (London), February 21, 1884, p. 9.
- <sup>55</sup>[Gordon's entrance into Khartoum], The Times (London), February 20, 1884, p. 5.
- <sup>56</sup>C. R. Conder, "The guide of Islam," Fortnightly Review, February, 1884, p. 272.
- <sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 269.
- <sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 274.
- <sup>59</sup>Holt, p. 3.
- <sup>60</sup>Ibid., pp. 80-81.
- <sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

- <sup>62</sup>Baring, I, 475.
- <sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 455.
- <sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 459.
- <sup>65</sup>Ibid., pp. 486-487.
- <sup>66</sup>Ibid., pp. 487-488.
- <sup>67</sup>Ibid., pp. 501-502.
- <sup>68</sup>Ibid., pp. 512-513
- <sup>69</sup>Elton, p. 315.
- <sup>70</sup>Diary entry, March 8, 1884, cited from Sir Edward Walter Hamilton, The Diary of Sir Edward Walter Hamilton 1880-1885, ed. by Dudley W. R. Bahlman (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 573.
- <sup>71</sup>"England, Egypt, and the Soudan," The Times (London), March 10, 1884, p. 5.
- <sup>72</sup>Edmund Sturge, "Zebehr Pasha," The Times (London), March 13, 1884, p. 8.
- <sup>73</sup>Editorial, The Times (London), March 13, 1884, p. 9.
- <sup>74</sup>Editorial, The Daily Telegraph (London), March 29, 1884, p. 5.
- <sup>75</sup>Editorial, The Daily Telegraph (London), March 15, 1884, p. 5.
- <sup>76</sup>Editorial, The Daily News (London), March 13, 1884, p. 4.
- <sup>77</sup>"Zobeir on the Soudan," The Daily News (London), March 15, 1884, p. 5.
- <sup>78</sup>Editorial, The Daily News (London), March 15, 1884, p. 4.
- <sup>79</sup>Editorial, The Daily News (London), March 17, 1884, p. 4.
- <sup>80</sup>The Spectator (London), March 15, 1884, p. 337.
- <sup>81</sup>ibid.
- <sup>82</sup>Allen, p. 266.

<sup>83</sup>"England, Egypt and the Soudan," The Times (London), March 1, 1884, p. 7.

<sup>84</sup>Mr. Gladstone to Lord Granville, February 27, 1884, quoted in Ramm, II, 161.

<sup>85</sup>Baring, I, 501-502.

<sup>86</sup>Elton, pp. 328-329.

<sup>87</sup>Baring, I, 497.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., pp. 525-526.

<sup>89</sup>"Egypt and the Soudan," The Times (London), April 1, 1884, p. 5.

<sup>90</sup>Editorial, The Times (London), April 1, 1884, p. 9.

<sup>91</sup>Editorial, The Times (London), April 2, 1884, p. 11.

<sup>92</sup>Great Britain Parliament, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3d Ser., Vol 286 (1884), p. 1511.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., pp. 1515-1516.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., pp. 1529-1534.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 1537.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., pp. 1540-1541.

<sup>97</sup>"Egypt and the Soudan," The Times (London), April 17, 1884, p. 5.

<sup>98</sup>"The Ministry and the Soudan," The Spectator (London), April 5, 1884, p. 432.

<sup>99</sup>"The Power of the Individual," The Spectator (London), February 23, 1884, p. 246.

<sup>100</sup>"Gordon and Garibaldi," The Spectator (London), April 26, 1884, p. 542.

<sup>101</sup>Editorial, The Daily News (London), April 28, 1884, p. 5.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., April 29, 1884, p. 4.

<sup>103</sup>Editorial, The Daily Telegraph (London), April 18, 1884, p. 5.

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108 Editorial, The Daily News (London), May 9, 1884, p. 5.

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## CONCLUSION

The Gordon legend, firmly established by the time of the General's death, had not grown at a uniform pace since the days of his first publicly noticed exploits in China. Before his last adventure at Khartoum, Gordon's popularity among the British public suffered several ups and downs. His adventures in China received some public notice in Great Britain, but his recognition as a British hero was extremely short-lived at best.

Several historians such as Hake and Elton attributed this fading popular appeal to Gordon's aversion to any kind of notoriety. Britons in the 1860's, however, were not in the proper "state of mind" either to appreciate an overseas empire or to glorify the men who performed heroic actions in order to strengthen these colonial territories. At this time only a small class of merchants displayed serious interest in Britain's colonial holdings, caring less for disseminating British culture and prestige than for obtaining substantial economic advantages. Gordon did, nonetheless, help to further perpetuate the "Anglo-Saxon Myth" of British superiority over less advanced peoples, while at the same time saving face for a weak British foreign policy in the 1860's. Unfortunately, both the British public and even Gordon himself would fail to recognize that the Imperial government had been on the verge

of crushing the Taiping rebellion when Gordon obtained the command of the "Ever-Victorious Army." Even though Britons in the 1860's displayed little interest in Gordon's supposed suppression of the Chinese insurrection, Britons twenty years later would readily acknowledge his single-handed effort in China.

Gordon again came to public notice during his activities as Equatorial Governor and Governor-General of the Sudan (1874-1879). Such historians as John Marlowe seemed to believe that during and after these early Sudanese exploits, Gordon's popularity among the British public began to steadily increase in stature. The British public learned through the efforts of free-lance reporters how Gordon was seemingly able to maintain control over large groups of savage cannibalistic natives through his charismatic personality. Unfortunately, the British public failed to realize that Gordon's awed subjects were much more apprehensive of possible intervention by British troops than of the dynamic personality of one man. Yet another element was added to the Gordon legend while again reinforcing the "Anglo-Saxon Myth."

Contrary to popular belief, Gordon's fame after his first Sudanese exploits was again temporary. While, according to Mr. Faber, the ideal British imperial administrator had to maintain his "distance" from his subjects, Gordon believed in and practiced close interpersonal relations with these so-called "savages," his "brothers" and "sisters." He in a sense had

"gone native" but in the 1870's, this practice was not looked upon as the "proper" British attitude. He further irritated British officials and statesmen by his sincere attempts to advance the economic and political interests of Oriental governments (i.e. Egypt and the Sudan). Acclaiming Gordon's Sudanese achievements would have meant acknowledging his methods of imperial administration which were contrary to the accepted and cherished beliefs of Britons overseas.

Gordon's anti-imperialist beliefs did not noticeably conflict with a Liberal administration which was more concerned with domestic reforms than with advancing British prestige in its colonial possessions (i.e. the "Little England" tradition). When the Mahdi threatened to engulf not only the Sudan but Egypt as well, Gladstone and his Ministers adopted the easy (but what probably appeared to them as the "practical") way out of a difficult situation. Gladstone hoped that Gordon's legendary charismatic personality would save him an extensive amount of time, money and men. Unfortunately for Gladstone's administration, Gordon was unable to fulfill any of these wishful expectations. Even though both men desired stable Arab governments without British interference, Gladstone was more concerned with creating an effective and lasting administration in Egypt, not the Sudan. Gordon, however, believed that Egypt could not maintain an organized government until the Sudanese people also enjoyed an ordered

system of rule. According to Gordon, Zobeir Pasha was the key to this established Sudanese administration, but the British government and public failed to comprehend Gordon's logic and so his attempts to maintain order came to nothing.

But if Gordon supposedly had crushed the Taiping rebellion, couldn't he pacify a group of less civilized and educated Arabs? Besides, weren't all Oriental rebellions of the same character? The British government, public, and even Gordon himself failed to notice the glaring differences between the Taiping and Arab insurrections. When Gordon obtained command of the "Ever-Victorious Army," the Taiping rebellion had long been on the decline. Supported by fresh Imperial armies and backed by modern weapons of European warfare, Gordon and his forces only hastened the rebellion's final destruction. The Sudanese uprising, on the other hand, was approaching the climax of strength and influence during Gordon's attempt to evacuate troops. While at Khartoum, Gordon was engaged in a defensive rather than an offensive war and was not supplied with British war goods or (with the exception of Colonel Stewart) European officers. While the Chinese were energetic, resourceful and accustomed to fighting on river plains, the Egyptians in the Sudan could barely shoot a rifle and were unable to function in the unbearable Sudanese climate. Even though Gordon did have access to modern European weapons throughout the siege of Khartoum, the Arab troops, unlike the

Taiping garrisons, were also well supplied with European weapons taken from captured Egyptian outposts and unsuccessful offensive expeditions (i.e. the Hicks massacre).

The Liberal Ministry realized that the success or failure of Gordon's mission would produce a definite impact on future Anglo-Egyptian policy. They failed to recognize, however, that Gordon had been portrayed by press and public as the incarnation of British "prestige" in the Middle East and throughout the rest of Europe. Other imperial powers were challenging Britain's treasured position of world leadership and, given the opportunity, would attempt to dispel the established "Anglo-Saxon Myth" which depicted Britons as worshipped and obeyed without question. Gordon's unexpected death would decrease British "prestige" while exposing this supposed Anglo-Saxon superiority in the eyes of Arab and European alike as little more than romantic wishful thinking.

While the Liberals contributed to Gordon's legend by depending too much upon his charismatic personality, the pro-imperialist news sources perpetuated the need and desire to glorify Gordon's past and present achievements. Even though these papers were able to predict the trend of public opinion to some extent, they also functioned as the principal instigators of public sentiment. While the Liberal news sheets attempted to vindicate Gladstone's foreign policy through logical arguments, the Opposition papers depended on emotional

editorials to agitate public feeling against Gladstone's government. The Liberal editorials alienated public opinion by blaming the public for compelling Gladstone and his Cabinet to send Gordon, while the Opposition's commentary stirred up guilt feelings by accusing Britons of abandoning a God-fearing Christian to hordes of blood-thirsty barbarians. Taking advantage of these increasing guilt feelings among the British electorate, such papers as The Times attempted to alleviate this public shame by directing Britons to the principal individual supposedly responsible for everyone's present difficulties: the Prime Minister.

Shortly after his arrival at the doomed capital, Gordon concluded that his personal influence was not enough to carry through a successful evacuation; he desired either British or Turkish troops and/or the notorious ex-slave dealer Zobeir Pasha.

Unwilling to sanction Zobeir, the pro-expansionist British press advocated a British protectorate over Egypt and the Sudan. If Gordon were supported by British troops, Gladstone's dream of eventual evacuation of Egypt would suffer a serious setback. The Opposition papers realized that Gordon's name, reputation, and present plight could be used to attack the Liberals' non-imperialist policy and to drive a permanent wedge between the existing government and a highly emotional British public. Reinforcing and perpetuating Gordon's heroic

image in the hearts and minds of Britons was, for the time being, the best method of reinforcing and perpetuating British involvement not only in Egypt and the Sudan, but eventually throughout Africa.

Knowledge of Gordon's death made it a patriotic necessity to glorify Gordon's present and past accomplishments in order to re-establish Britain's fallen prestige among her colonies. It also became necessary to display powerful military support against the Mahdi's forces to regain this tarnished prestige. This would not only entail the further use of British troops, but would also necessitate the additional involvement of British civil administrators in Egypt's domestic and foreign matters as well. One might venture to state that some Tory politicians relished the notion of Gordon's meeting a heroic death, defending the honor and glory of the British Empire. His name could then be used to motivate others to shoulder the burden that he left behind, the task of bringing British civilization and culture to "less fortunate" lands.

The British public of the 1880's, unlike Britons twenty years before, looked upon the Empire as a genuine and serious responsibility. Anyone or anything that weakened its power or prestige was a grave threat to the Empire's very existence. The public considered Zobeir a menace to Britain's position in Egypt and the Sudan, and so contributed to Gordon's legend by

refusing even to consider Zobeir's possible employment. It is only conjecture to state what might have been the "good" or "evil" results of a power struggle between this ex-slave chief and the "guided one" of Allah. The fact remains that Zobeir probably could have substantially weakened the Mahdi's influence among the Emirs who were once his old comrades-in-arms. Unfortunately for all concerned, the British public could not "stomach" the idea that a non-Christian slaveholder could succeed where their prime example of Christian manhood had failed. Not only would British prestige suffer in Egypt and the Sudan through the dispatch of Zobeir, but also throughout the entire Oriental world and Europe. The "Anglo-Saxon Myth" could only maintain its facade of reality through the solitary efforts of this Christian soldier, not by begging the help of an unscrupulous infidel.

Finally, Gordon himself was to a large extent responsible for strengthening his legend, one that throughout his active life he tried to prevent at every opportunity. Even though he was able to overcome many biased ethnocentric beliefs of his age, he nevertheless was still affected by others which probably stemmed from a military upbringing. He stoutly affirmed that the Sudanese revolt was not of a religious nature, but was a political revolt against Egyptian oppression. Gordon could have held the mistaken notion that the Sudanese insurrection could be dissolved as easily as the Taiping



rebellion. Comparing the Mahdi with Hung, Gordon could have concluded that both Oriental leaders came from the same mold and were motivated by the same political goals. Even though the Mahdi preached to the Sudanese about the renewal of the Islamic faith, Hung also had supposedly desired a Christian kingdom in China. According to British logic, if one pseudo-religious insurrection had failed, there should be no reason why another one, this time in the Sudan, should not also meet the same fate. With this belief in mind and realizing that Anglo-Egyptian policy would no longer affect the actions of the Sudanese, it is understandable why Gordon would have preferred to employ Zobeir as the country's permanent ruler. At least there was a positive chance that Zobeir would maintain and strengthen a stable Sudanese administration even at the cost of a revived slave trade. Britons, however, expressed a distinct distrust of any government brought about by radical and/or violent means. The Mahdi symbolized (to Gordon and the British public) the most dangerous threat to an established governmental order in the Sudan; he had to be prevented from obtaining control over its people or he would eventually become a direct menace to Egypt itself. Modern scholarship, through the efforts of such Sudanese historians as Mr. P. M. Holt, has conflicted with the standard European interpretation of how the Mahdi lacked the true motives of a national leader. To the Sudanese, it was the Mahdi, not Charles Gordon,

who would provide them with a stable government.

Since British military manpower and technology had supposedly ended one rebellion, there was no reason (from a Briton's point of view) why another Oriental insurrection could not be dissolved in a similar manner. While underestimating the Mahdi's religious influence, Gordon overestimated the assumed moral effect of a small detachment of British troops. Again, it is only conjecture whether a small detail of British soldiers could have dispelled the numerous Arab garrisons surrounding Khartoum, if these soldiers had approached Berber or even the capital itself.

It is ironic to note that Gordon, praised as the "ideal" British officer and administrator, would have readily given up his citizenship in order to resolve the international problems of China (1880). Not concerned with perpetuating British imperial prestige, Gordon wanted only to relieve human suffering while upholding the word of God. Even his personal friends could not appreciate his deep spiritual convictions. Mr. Boulger could not comprehend the image of Gordon trying to understand his every-day existence by continually depending upon the Scriptures as his principle guide. "This was not the true Gordon," argued Boulger, "but rather the grafting of a new character on the original stem of Spartan simplicity and heroism."<sup>1</sup>

To Mr. Boulger and his fellow Britons, Gordon had been able to accomplish his remarkable heroic feats because of the

noble virtues expounded by Carlyle, Kingsley and Wolseley. The General, however, would not have agreed with this "legendary" interpretation of his numerous successes. Without God's direct and continual intervention, he would have been helpless in the face of his many adversities. Unfortunately, he could not entirely escape the ethnocentric belief that a small detachment of British soldiers could dissolve a rebellion composed of thousands of devoted followers of the Mahdi.

To the present scholar these two interpretations of Gordon's triumphs are at best weak and partial explanations. The General's victories in China were possible because of military support provided by Imperial and European garrisons and supply bases. In the Sudan (1874-1879) the fear of intervention by British troops probably caused a possible revolt in Darfur to collapse. But in Khartoum (1884-1885) this needed troop strength was lacking and Gordon's attempts to crush another insurrection ended in complete failure. With the death of Gordon, the romantic and impractical theory of great events performed singlehandedly by "Great Men" suffered a serious and permanent setback. The British public would eventually realize that their ideal officer or civil administrator was only as influential as the number of well-armed "followers" who backed up his commands.

## FOOTNOTE

## CONCLUSION

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