

lisp when their mothers told them that Gordon was dead, grown up now and appearing in the fulness of time to exact eleven thousand lives for one. Gordon may die—other Gordons may die in the future—but the same clean-limbed brood will grow up and avenge them.

The boats stopped plugging and there was silence. We were tying up opposite a grove of tall palms; on the bank was a crowd of natives curiously like the ¹⁰ backsheesh-hunters¹ who gather to greet the Nile steamers. They stared at us; but we looked beyond them to a large building rising from a crumbling quay. You could see that it had once been a handsome edifice of the type you know in Cairo or Alexandria—all stone and stucco,² two-storied, faced with tall regular windows. Now the upper storey was clean gone; the blind windows were filled up with bricks: the stucco was all scars, and you could walk up to the roof on rubble.³ In front was an acacia, such as grow in Ismailia⁴ or ²⁰ the Gezireh⁵ at Cairo, only unpruned—deep luscious green, only drooping like a weeping willow. At that most ordinary sight everybody grew very solemn. For it was a piece of a new world, or rather of an old world, utterly different from the squalid mud, the baking ²⁵ barrenness of Omdurman. A façade⁶ with tall windows, a tree with green leaves—the façade battered and blind, the tree drooping to earth—there was no need to tell us we were at a grave. In that forlorn ruin, and that disconsolate acacia, the bones of murdered civilisation ³⁰ lay before us.

¹ backsheesh-hunters—Beggars looking for tips or gratuities.

² stucco—A fine plaster used for the external ornamentation of buildings.

³ rubble—Rough pieces of plaster.

⁴ Ismailia—A small town on the Isthmus of Suez.

⁵ Gezireh—A palace at Cairo.

⁶ façade—The exterior face of a building.