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THE MESSENGER FROM KHARTOUM

BY ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE.

Author of "Dr. Jack," "Dr. Jack's Wife," "Miss Caprice," Etc., Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

The story opens at Cairo, where Mr. Grimes, who passes as an American silver king; Sandy Barlow, a newspaper correspondent; Mr. Tanner, a millionaire traveller, and his daughter Molly, all meet. Mr. Grimes informs Grimes that his daughter has been kidnapped by a messenger from Gordon. As both Grimes and Sandy know Joe they go down to the boat to find him. Joe gives them the first news of the fall of Khartoum and Gordon's death.

rested. The weeks passed us by in a way that was maddening. Our eyes were strained looking for succor that never came. Through it all Gordon was the same man I have ever known him, cheerful, sober and never flinching. If it was his fate to die at his post, death would find him there.

"I shall never, while I have breath, cease to remember that man with all the wonder and admiration my soul can express. God never made a human being more in the mould of a hero than when he gave us Gordon. The world will keep his memory green for ever."

"Thus, as the months passed away, our stores grew low, and a spirit of discontent arose. Money was scarce, and the soldiers were in a state of constant irritation bordering on frenzy. Mutiny would have long since broken out but for the astonishing power this man seemed to have over his subjects. I marvelled at it then, and it will never cease to be a source of wonder to me.

"At last came the fatal hour, when this magnificence could no longer hold the fragments of his little army together. I knew it was coming as well as I knew anything. Signs pointed to it from all quarters, and each morning as the sun arose in the east I wondered whether it would ever be my good fortune to look on its setting again.

"Gordon never despaired of a rescue. He had no doubt prepared for the worst, but his faith in the ultimate coming of his comrades was sublime. 'They will come to-morrow,' he would say each night as the darkness settled about us, and deep down in my heart I firmly believed that to-morrow would never arrive.

"Thus the days moved along, each sun showing me distinct that at its setting Gordon had managed to smooth over in a way that was simply marvellous; but each time I noticed that things looked worse, and it was only a question of how long it would be before certain matters came into conjunction and bore us asunder. What I most dreaded was a mutiny during one of the enemy's fierce assaults. Should a portion of our troops turn upon us, even the fierce order of the Bashi Bazouks, who remained faithful, could not keep Gordon's life sacred.

"My fears proved to be well grounded, as you shall soon see. It happened on the 26th of May, and that should be a day of mourning for all time to come in England.

"Gordon came from his room that morning as cheerful as was his wont, and ready to meet the duties of the day, whatever Heaven might send him. The storm was gathering, but his presence had chased away the clouds so often that all of us had come to believe him as invincible.

"We knew the enemy was about to make a desperate assault, but we had hurled them back from the walls of Khartoum so often in bleeding masses, that we did not doubt our ability to do the same thing again, although ammunition was beginning to grow scarce.

"I have since come to the conclusion that during the night of the 26th some arrangement had been made between our native troops and the Arabs who led the hordes of the Prophet. Certainly, the events of the day justified such a conclusion.

"Gordon, as usual, assembled his leaders and harangued them. Up to now he had never once failed to impart some of his own enthusiasm to those in charge of his men, so that they went to their several stations inspired to fight like heroes in the cause of this magnetic man.

"With wonder and uneasiness I saw that his words this morning appeared to fall upon deaf ears. The dark faces grew moody. As it happened, I was the only white man close by, though I could hear some of his officers giving orders near the Governor's house.

"One man threw the spark that exploded the whole magazine. He dared answer Gordon back and tell him it would be best to give up Khartoum while El Mahdi was willing to let them depart in peace, since the doom of the city was a settled thing anyhow.

"The general's face flamed up as he heard this cowardly plea. I can see him now as in seething terms he rebuked the officer. The man hung his head. I expected to see him fall on his knees and beg for pardon.

come can never forget what happened on that awful 26th of January. "I knew the brave Gordon had received his death wound at the hands of one who had even fought at his side, and the consciousness that the evil hour had come seemed to turn my very blood into molten lava.

"Fearful sounds arose all over Khartoum, for the signal had been given that was to indicate Gordon's downfall. The enemy assaulted the walls. A portion of the late defenders joined them, and Khartoum became the scene of a massacre too terrible for words.

"I assure you, my friends, I did not stand idle while all this was going on. No sooner did I see the falling hero at my side when, quick as lightning leaves the clouds, my sword leaped from its scabbard. Giving a true Yankee yell, I sprang at the assassin. The descending blade cleft his miserable skull to the chin, and through all time I shall never cease to rejoice that it was the arm of an American avenger Gordon's death.

"What happened after that is more like a dream than a reality to me, but I shall give it for what it is worth. I remember plunging into the thick of the fight. All around me rose the most fearful sounds of a desperate battle, while through Khartoum rang the shrieks of poor women and the shouts of exulting demons; for the black horde had swarmed over the walls, and in their great fury, seemed to spare none.

"More than one went down before my sword and revolver; for, expecting only death, I fought as a madman might. "In the midst of the melee, covered with grime and blood, I could hardly be distinguished from one of the traitor soldiers who had at last turned upon their general. Suddenly my body was clasped by a pair of arms from behind, and I found myself hurled to the ground.

"Naturally I expected instant death, when, to my surprise, a voice called in my ear:

"'Feign death! I would save the sahib!'"

"It was my faithful servant Kasseh, whom I had brought from Bombay. I hardly know why I obeyed him; it must have been because I had so little power to resist, for life did not seem worth any trouble just then.

"He dragged me into a house that overlooked the river, and there secreted me. All through the day I heard the shouts of the victorious hordes as they thronged through Khartoum. Something had come into my mind, and I found that I had an object to live for, a mission to perform. The news of Gordon's death must be carried to his people, and I had come to the conclusion that all the faithful within the walls of Khartoum, Joe Miner was the only living soul that remained.

"Night came, and faithful Kasseh made his appearance. He had disguised himself as one of the enemy, and thus escaped the common fate that befell the defenders of the city.

"From him I learned that a clever scheme had been arranged whereby we could make our escape down the river. The water was very low, but Gordon had several small, light-draught steamers for use upon the upper waters of the Nile. One of these lay not more than a stone's throw down the river, tied to the bank.

"Kasseh's bright plan was for us to drop up the river from the back of the house, wade down to the boat, climb aboard, and, aided by the darkness, cast her adrift. When some distance down the river, we could light a fire, start up steam, and, so soon as daylight came, make good progress north.

"There was something fascinating about the adventure, particularly as it promised to be our only chance. "Acting under the instructions of my faithful Kasseh I clambered through the slit of a window in the mud wall of the house, lowered myself by means of the convenient rope, and finally stood knee-deep in the waters of the Nile below, waiting.

"When the ex-spy joined me," continued Mynheer Joe, "we began to creep along down in the direction of the little steamer. It was guarded, but Kasseh knew where the sentry was posted, and he attended to his case while I got ready to unfurl the ropes.

"I heard a single splash, but not a cry. Then Kasseh came to me and declared everything was working all right. We pushed out into the stream and began to leave the doomed city behind. As yet discovery had not come.

"I will not dwell on this part of my trip. In the morning we got up steam and began to make good headway.

"Until half-way to the Second Cataract we were not molested. Then a troop of scouting followers of the Mahdi righted us, and, riding into the river, attempted to take the steamer.

"We had prepared for this. There was a small cannon on board, which we kept in readiness for just an emergency as this; and when we sent its contents into the midst of the black rascals they scattered to the winds.

"Below we had another fight, and this time they very nearly took the vessel; but our fire was a trifle too warm, and they finally allowed us to go on.



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hippopotami, and in a rage one of the monsters crushed our boat. It was in the night. I believe my poor Kasseh must have fallen a victim to the savage beasts, for I saw him no more.

"My own escape was very miraculous. I landed a mile down the stream. At break of day I pushed on. Fate threw me in with a native, who carried me as far as the First Cataract in his boat. Here I met an English hunter, a bold fellow, who, with some guides, had been up the river shooting river horses, as he called the hippopotami.

"He was horrified at my news, and gladly gave me a place in his comfortable boat, after which we set out for Cairo, hundreds of miles away.

"All went well until we were about two days' run above the city, when a sudden squall took us unawares; the boat capsized, and I found myself wrecked again in the darkness.

"I spent weary hours clinging to the hatch which had somehow come under my hands. Several times boats came near me in the morning, but no one would take me off. They pretended not to hear me; in fact, I might as well have yelled a thousand miles away, for all they noticed me. You see, they have a dread of being held as witnesses, and a part of a boat's crew is lost, there must be a legal inquiry, which will compel them to be in town and lose time from their work.

"As the day was passing, I felt I must leave my raft and try to gain the distant shore, where the railroad ran, unless, as you rescued. Just then, this boat came down the river, running close by. I called to the captain, telling him I was from Khartoum, with news of Gordon; he at once put about and came to my rescue. The rest you already know, friends."

Thus Mynheer Joe finishes his story. It has not taken a great while to tell the facts, but volumes could be filled with the details. He endeavors to control himself when speaking of Gordon's death, but it is evident that even he has made a powerful impression on the sturdy explorer, who so often has fought side by side with the Christian hero.

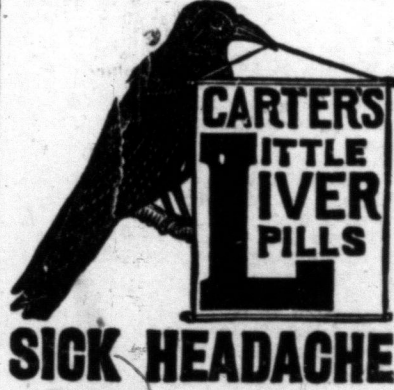
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