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But however difficult the management of Egypt itself, the ministers of England found, directly, the control of the nominally subordinate province of the Soudan to be doubly so. That rather irregularly defined region along the upper waters of the Nile had for sixty years been slowly drained of its resources by the extortionate rule of the Egyptian governors and the *razzias* of the slave hunters. In 1882 the inhabitants had reached the last state of wretchedness, and only waited the appearance of a leader to break into revolt. That leader presented himself, and was received with an enthusiasm that shook the corrupt Egyptian administration to its base. This was the so-called Mahdi.

The real Mahdi, a descendant of the family of Mahomet, had disappeared from the sight of men nearly a thousand years before, leaving the promise that he would one day return to subordinate the world to the authority of Islam. Mahomet Achemet, the son of a carpenter of Dongola, after becoming deeply versed in the theology of the Koran, gave himself out as the expected deliverer and proclaimed a holy war against the Infidel. It was the spark in the powder-magazine, and the Soudanese rose in thousands and rallied to his side. After defeating several bodies of Egyptian

troops sent to take him, he invaded the Province of Kordofan in 1883, and set up his own government over Upper Nubia.

There is no doubt but that the crimes of the Egyptian officials had been such as to excuse or to justify the most sanguinary vengeance, and for this reason among others, England declined to give any assistance in the recovery of the disaffected territory. However, the Khedive, on his own responsibility, despatched a force of Egyptian troops into the desert, under the command of the ill-fated Hicks Pasha. The result of the expedition is well known. Worn out by want of food, of water and of repose, the wretched Fellaheen troops were overwhelmed by the Mahdists and slain almost to a man, the British officers sharing their fate.

It now became clearly impossible to hold the Soudan against the tremendous power of the Mahdi, and England insisted that the garrisons should be withdrawn and the territory evacuated. Egypt was compelled to acquiesce, but the operation of withdrawal seemed likely to prove a difficult one. There were small but important garrisons at Berber, Dongola, and Suakin, at Kassala and at Khartoum, and, to arrange for their safe removal, it was judged most



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