Chapter 5.

The end of General Gordon.

I

Strachey writes of Gordon on one occasion, "The whole history of his life, the whole bent of his character, seemed to disqualify him for the task for which he had been chosen". In fact he builds up General Gordon's character upon these lines. Gordon was unsuccessful in life, Strachey contends because of his peculiar personality. Strachey attacks Gordon from various sides. He questions Gordon's religious beliefs, emphasises his habit of drinking, his impulsiveness and his tendency to disobey his superiors' orders. Strachey intends to prove that Gordon was a misfit and a nuisance everywhere. But the attacks are cleverly concealed under certain implications and innuendoes. Gordon's curiosity for the places mentioned in the Bible and his attempt to locate them in Jerusalem are ridiculous in Strachey's eyes. Similarly he attacks Gordon's love for Bible reading by juxtaposing it with his love for drinking wine. In his book we find Gordon drinking while reading the Bible. According to Strachey these are all religious pretentions. There are several references to Gordon as a 'Christian hero'. Strachey uses it with a definite purpose

1. E.V., p. 248.
to prove that Gordon was not at all a Christian hero. Strachey traces Gordon's connection with the two religious rebellions. He finds an affinity between the circumstances which changed Gordon and Hong-sin-tsuen of China into religious men. Both Hong and Mohammed Ahmed of Sudan, proclaimed themselves to be religious prophets. Then they changed to rebel leaders. Strachey hints that religion was a pretention with them. To hide their real intention they sought God.

When Gordon became the Governor of the Equatorial Provinces of the Sudan he reduced his own pay. This act appears hypocritical in Strachey's eyes. During the Lancashire famine Gordon gave away the enormous gold medal, given to him by the Chinese Government, by effacing the inscriptions. Strachey hints that Gordon wiped off the name purposely to glamorize the donor.

According to Strachey the marks of indiscipline, incivility and impulsiveness which characterized Gordon were carried over to his adult life from his childhood days. At the Woolwich Academy as a youngster he butted a senior corporal in the stomach and threw him down a flight of stairs. For this he was nearly dismissed and the captain of his company predicted that he would never make an officer. Again at the same place
when he became a senior we find him bullying a junior. He hit the junior on the head with a clothes brush for which he was held back for six months even after his term was over.

On his first mission to Egypt he in order to crush the slave trade executed Sulaiman, the son of his greatest enemy Zobeir. But during his second mission he not only gave permission to carry on the slave trade, he even took a great fancy for his previous enemy Zobeir.

As the head of the Ever Victorious Army Gordon on a sudden impulse attempted to kill Li Hung Chang the Chinese Governor, who offered him a gold medal which he declined to accept but did so at last. These are all acts which are cited by Strachey to prove that Gordon was from the very beginning of his life what he was in later life, only his superiors did not take heed of his nature.

Strachey's Gordon is inefficient as a military man and as a diplomat. He was sent to Gravesend to erect forts. There he spent his time in religious pursuits. Strachey probably hints that Gordon was unsuited for the post. Gordon came to India as the Private Secretary of Lord Ripon. But he went back to England soon after reaching Bombay. This situation naturally placed the Governor General in great difficulty, but it was characteristic of Gordon to create trouble everywhere.
When he was sent to China on his second assignment he placed the British Government in great embarrassment by being very outspoken.

Strachey raises a few questions in the minds of the readers regarding these missions of Gordon and especially about the last mission to Africa. Why was Gordon in Africa? Why was a British force there? Had it not been for Gordon the policy of British Imperialism would not have changed?

With Gordon's fall Gladstone's Government fell. When Gladstone came back to power he came back with a different outlook. Strachey was not an anti-imperialist. His grievance was against idealism. The people idealised Gordon. Strachey wants to break it because he did not like the idea. According to Strachey it was a great mistake to send Gordon, not very sane with previous records of disobedience, to Khartoum.

Though he agreed to carry out exactly what his Government wished him to do, but on reaching the site he bungled everything and brought about his own end.
Strachey elaborately discusses Gordon's views upon religion, his faith in God but omits the sincerely religious nature that the sources would seem to establish. In these sources, Gordon appears as a believer in God first and a soldier only next.

Strachey begins his essay by showing Gordon roaming in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, Bible in hand, with certain religious questions looming large in his mind. Gordon was also interested in identifying the site of the crucifixion and the garden of Eden. Strachey takes advantage of these facts to turn Gordon into an eccentric. From his sources we learn of Gordon's great interest in the actual Biblical sites. His brother Henry William Gordon tells us, "His notes upon several of the Scripture sites are of a very interesting nature". He also writes that General Gordon occupied himself with the details of the various Scriptural speculations, he wrote a long memoranda upon the land of Jerusalem being a type of the human figure.

Hake writes

... most of his time is devoted to research; and it is with an eagerness that is almost a passion

2. E.V., p. 209.
that he pursues the survey of the Holy Sepulchre, 
the Tabernacle and the walls of Jerusalem. Some 
of his theories are curious and surprising; they 
puzzle those who have made the exploration of 
Palestine their life-study; they perplex, they 
irritate, they confound and they end by almost 
persuading. He has taken the holy sites in hand 
to prove them not the holy sites at all; greatly 
to the horror and scandal of clerical tourists. 
But he is no mere iconoclast; he works as one 
seeing sermons in stones and good in everything —
with the faith of a Christian but the eye and 
brain of an engineer.4

Strachey follows Hake closely but concludes that Gordon 
gave up this state of complete retirement spent in theological 
pursuits as easily as he had given up his life of adventure to 
find solace in God. Strachey suggests that the frustrated army-
man sought God to help him out and once again, when chance of a 
worldly uplift came his way, he threw God and the Bible aside 
without any effort. To drive the charge of hypocrisy home, 
Strachey couples Gordon's love of the Bible with his love of 
drink. He makes Gordon drink while reading the Bible as if it 
were a light novel. He juxtaposes the Holy Bible with wine to 
dig at Gordon's sham. The seriousness of the man is at once 
lost, he no longer appears holy. Gordon is attacked for his 
fondness for wine in many places in the essay.

Strachey uses various means to put up Gordon as a person

pp. 400-401.
with whom religion was a pretention. Gordon was not at all serious about religion. If he was he could never have taken to brandy and soda so much. To establish his point Strachey first tells us that Gordon read and re-read the Bible, in fact the Bible was the only book that he read. This statement makes Gordon appear to be a profoundly religious man. At the same time there is an attack on his intellectual ability. An army General is expected to be a well-read and well-informed man and not like Gordon who was only conversant with the Bible.

Strachey relates that while Gordon was serving as the Governor of the Equatoria, the Bible was not his only consolation; he took a fancy "towards stimulants of a more material quality," and his drinking of pure water took a turn towards "water that was not so pure." Sometimes he shut himself up for days inside his tent doing no body knew what because a flag and a hatchet left by the door was an indication that he was not to be disturbed. After many days he would again appear at the door looking cheerful and bright. On one such occasion Colonel Long in desperate need of an advice burst into the tent quite ignoring the signal of non-entry and to his amazement found Gordon seated with an open Bible and an open bottle of brandy before him. Gordon instead of giving the necessary advice

reminded him that Long was the commander of the camp and had to deal with the situation as best as he could. The next morning Gordon offered his excuses and tried to make up with Long by wanting to have a good breakfast together along with "a little b. and s."\(^6\) This is a clear attack on Gordon's character. It appears again when Strachey declares that Gordon himself was the cause for the hue and cry raised over him by the public. Gordon was brought back into the limelight when his interview with Stead was published in the Pall Mall Gazette. Strachey writes that Gordon's interview was such a success because he had got into the mood after having taken "a little b. and s."\(^7\) just before it. When he got into these moods by taking b. and s. he won people over to his side easily with facile speech and his free and easy manners. Strachey's attack on Gordon is even more violent when he says that after being chosen for going to Egypt Gordon thought that at last the people had recognised his capacities. He also felt that God had kept him in reserve through all these long years of labour and pain only for this great task. The thought of this newly achieved power nearly drove him mad. How could the Mahdi dare "to stand up against him"?\(^8\) He imagined the wonderful things that were in store for him. And Strachey

\(^6\) Ibid., p. 226.
\(^7\) Ibid., p. 233.
\(^8\) Ibid., p. 256.
suggests that wine could no longer intoxicate him now, it was power and fame that intoxicated him now. He writes:

Yes; but how feeble were those gross resources of the miserable Abdul-Shakur! Rum? Brandy? Oh, he knew all about them; they were nothing. He tossed off a glass. They were nothing at all. The true drunkenness lay elsewhere. 9

Strachey means that he was such a veteran drinker that wine ceased to mean anything to him. Once attributed with power he grasped it to achieve his aim. It was more alluring than wine. Though Gordon attributed his appointment to Providence, he was really subject to earthly ambitions and addictions Strachey implies. Also there is a hint that he was drinking while making his battle plans. Tossing off a glass implies that.

This is how Strachey attacks Gordon. However this is not to be found in the other sources mentioned by Strachey; there the Bible and brandy are not juxtaposed. The Encyclopaedia Britannica states that:

The legend that he (Gordon) was a secret drinker, popularized by Lytton Strachey in his Eminent Victorians, was based upon the evidence, occasionally misquoted, of a discredited witness. 10

The 'discredited witness', it is evident from Strachey's essay, is none other than Colonel Chaille-Long. Simson thinks of all the adventurers in the Sudan, Chaille-Long is the most

9. Ibid., p. 257.
suspect. Simson states that he has this feeling after reading Long's book entitled *My Life on Four Continents*. In the book Long is only concerned about himself. He asserts his own importance by speaking highly of himself. No wonders he let down others and made Gordon a drunkard.

Strachey attacks Gordon's *loves* for the Bible when he writes that after having quarrelled with the Cape Government Gordon did not have any occupation. His mind was in a turmoil. He did not know whether to lead a life of renunciation or to go to war once more.

"He opened the Bible, but neither the prophecies of Hosea nor the epistles to Timothy gave any advice ...." Strachey's purpose in bringing in Gordon's Bible reading is meaningful. His readers are bound to form a wrong opinion of Gordon who appears frivolous. It also appears that Gordon read the Bible with a purpose to fulfil his personal interests. Most of his sources hold a different view. Gordon's brother tells us that because he spent much of his life alone he did not care much for church services and sermons; instead he developed the habit of reading the Bible and from it he drew his hopes of salvation.

11. Simson, p. 244.
Strachey also attacks Gordon by calling him "the Christian hero" more than once. On his second mission to Khartoum, he had reinstalled slavery for his convenience and Strachey digs at him by calling him a Christian hero in this connection. How could the Christian hero who had himself fought hard to abolish slavery on his first mission suddenly turn to set it up again by using his high powers? He implies that Gordon was not a true Christian at heart. The pretension also did him more harm than good, vexing, Strachey suggests, Gladstone among others. The Prime Minister thought that Gordon had enough chances to come away himself from Khartoum but since he did not accept these opportunities he was bound to think that Gordon had other motives playing behind his mind:

Why did not the man come back? He was a Christian hero, was he? Were there no other Christian heroes in the world? A Christian hero! Let him wait till the Mahdi's ring was really round him, till the Mahdi's spear was really about to fall! That would be the test of heroism! If he slipped back then, with his tail between his legs — ! The world would judge. 13

These are Gladstone's thoughts as imagined by Strachey. Some of Strachey's own disgust with Gordon must have gone into the soliloquy manufactured for the statesman. But in the same paragraph Strachey calls the Gladstones, Gordon match "some silent deadly game of bluff" and seems to blame both sides.

Two eminent Victorians are thus killed with one stone.

13. Ibid., p. 268.
By describing Gordon's meeting with Sir Samuel Baker at Barnes Vicarage, Strachey hints that though Gordon tried to give everyone an idea that he was highly religious his nature betrayed him at the slightest mention of worldly affairs. The conversation among the three was centred on religious matter when Baker suddenly spoke of the possibilities of Gordon's return to Sudan. At this Gordon fell silent "... but Mr. Barnes noticed that his blue eyes flashed, while an eager expression passed over his face." 14

Late that night Gordon walked into Mr. Barnes' room and asked him if the latter saw him in the carriage. When Mr. Barnes replied in the affirmative Gordon said, "... you saw me — that was myself — the self I want to get rid of." 15

Again Strachey makes Gordon an eccentric and a hypocrite by leaving out details and by cleverly stating that Gordon hid his desire for ambition by professing to be religious. When the Governorship of the Equatorial provinces of the Sudan was about to fall vacant at Sir Samuel Baker's departure, it was offered to Gordon who accepted. In Strachey's words:

In such circumstances it was only natural that Gordon should consider himself a special instrument in God's hand. To put his

14-15. Ibid., p. 245.
disinterestedness beyond doubt, he reduced his salary, which had been fixed at £10,000 to £2,000. 16

Strachey's Gordon was an instrument in the hands of the Almighty. It was God Who was doing everything through Gordon. On Gordon's part he could only reduce his pay to prove to the world that he had no motives other than carrying out God's Will.

But Hake explains matters in another way. He says that when Gordon refused to accept more than £2,000 his conduct gave rise to a great deal of controversies, comment and criticism...

... but to those who knew the man, and the way in which Ismail filled his treasury, the refusal was intelligible enough. ... He knew well, too, that the larger sum would in point of fact be blood money wrung from the wretches under his rule. He decided therefore to take no more than would pay for his expenses. 17

The reason why he asked for less pay is at once clarified to the readers, while Strachey puts his readers on a false track.

Strachey seems to suggest that Gordon was hypocritically covering his own motive by attributing his worldly ambitions to God's wishes. Though he had military ambitions yet he did not equip himself to be an able officer. On the contrary he wasted his time on psuedo religious pursuits. Strachey in order to

16. Ibid., p. 224.
unveil the hypocrite in Gordon says that every time he took up a new appointment he considered himself an instrument in God’s hand and the Almighty was forcing him on to do the work.

From Strachey’s essay we find that Gordon’s main activities were connected with two rebellions. Both rebellions were started in the name of religion by two men who conveniently went into trances, saw visions, performed miracles, prophesied; and claimed themselves God upon earth to serve their military ambitions. One was Hong-sin-tsuen of China whom Gordon succeeded in putting down and the other Mohammad Ahmed of Egypt whose men killed Gordon. By placing Gordon in the midst of these two men Strachey probably suggests that Gordon too was of the same feather, a victim of religious fanaticism like Hong and Mohammed. Just as religion was a sham with them, it was with him too. To hide his desire for fame and ambition from the world he took to being religious.

Strachey discusses the lives of Hong and Mohammed in great detail only to show that they were anything but religious. Similarly religious inclinations did not suit Gordon because he had desires for worldly things like power and position. By trying to put up a Christian image of himself he failed as a military officer nor could he succeed being a devout Christian for the temptations of a military life haunted him throughout.
As a result he was found to create trouble all around and place his superiors in awkward positions. We find Strachey attacking Gordon on this pseudo-religious issue over and over again all along the essay.

He tries to draw a comparison between the circumstances which drew Gordon and the rebel leader Hong into the realm of religion. Gordon wrote to his sister that the attack of smallpox he had in China brought him back to Christ and in future he proposed to be a better Christian than he had been before. Strachey makes this incident a parallel to Hong's illness which brought him into contact with God. Hong declared himself the chosen of God born to destroy the corrupt Manchu dynasty. It is implied that men like Hong and Gordon while in the plenty of health and wealth forget the existence of God but once they are in trouble or are taken ill they seek God to help them out. In other words they are not genuinely religious. By comparing Gordon with Hong Strachey seems to say that both were hypocrites. Hong enjoyed worldly things like power, money and wealth all in the name of God. He called himself the son of God so that none would question his authority. Similarly Gordon hid his love for ambition by posing himself as a devout Christian.

Simson thinks that Strachey's comparison cannot be justified because from Wingate and J. Ohrwalder it becomes clear that the Taipings and Mahdists were extremely cruel. Both Hong and the Mahdi were corrupt morally. Gordon was not so. He was an engineer and construction not destruction was his aim. In other words an important part of Gordon's character is left out by Strachey.

Regarding Gordon's ambition Strachey writes that more than one observer thought that ambition was an essential motive in Gordon's life, ambition not for wealth or titles but for fame, and influence. But this is not borne out by Hake who writes:

Had Gordon been touched with the ambition incident to successful men, he would have seized the opportunities so abundantly afforded him of mingling with the dignitaries of the world, whose invitations and courtesies were many. Had he accepted them, there can be little doubt that he would have been made to 'shine in use' till England had cause to bless him for one of the greatest of her sons; but to push and intrigue was impossible. The consequence was that he soon dropped out of the recollection of those in whose power it was to promote his professional and worldly interests. For his own part, he had no desire to enjoy advantages above the lot of his brother officers; he was content to rejoin his corps, and to resume his duty as a Royal Engineer.

It was also evident from the other sources that Gordon did not care for name and fame. But Strachey did not seem to agree with this. The medal incident reveals his mind. The Chinese authority not only praised Gordon for his contribution to China during the Taiping rebellion but presented him with an enormous gold medal with a special inscription upon it. But these honours in words or in kind meant nothing to him. While parting with the gold medal to help the famine-stricken people of Lancashire, he effaced the inscription to keep his name secret. This fact is plainly stated by Hake and Butler. They in their own terms expressed the magnanimity of Gordon’s heart that was revealed through this deed.

Strachey also states this fact but he adds the sentence "Special occasions demanded special sacrifices", before giving the details of Gordon’s giving away the medal. It is a short sentence but its implications may not be short to Strachey’s readers. May be Strachey’s own intention too was not a simple statement of fact only. He wished to say that though Gordon wished to remain anonymous in his heart of hearts he had a


desire to be known. On this special occasion the special sacrifice would at once tell who the donor was though he obliterated all marks of identity from it.

Strachey wishes to say that Gordon could not rise above the traits of his age. His actions were hypocritical in nature, they do not reveal the true nature of the man.

Though Strachey begins his essay by describing Gordon's zeal for religion he does not continue this for long. We find that the General failed as a religious man for his extraordinary passion for a life of action. Nor was he successful in an active life. To establish this point Strachey relates two incidents from Gordon's early life which reveal to the readers his impulsiveness and undisciplined behaviour. He beat up a senior corporal and, in another incident hit a newcomer to the Military Academy with a clothesbrush. 26 Indiscipline, Strachey suggests, was in the very nature of Gordon. Contrary to his captain's prediction that "he would never make an officer", Gordon became one. Strachey wishes that it would have been better if the prediction had come true because Gordon lacked the necessary competence to be a good officer. His deeds betrayed him. He often created

26. Ibid., p. 211.
27. Ibid.
trouble acting on his own, ignoring the orders of his superiors. He lacked the discipline of an army general probably because he was primarily an Engineer. We also find that he was on most occasions employed to do an Engineer's job. Hence it was a gross error to make him an army general. That he was placed in the Royal Engineers in the first place and not in the Artillery was, in turn, a punishment for the bullying incident. These incidents are related by Hake, Boulger and Butler. But none uses them for the purpose to which Strachey puts them. Boulger writes:

Gordon entered the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich in 1848, when he had not completed his sixteenth year, and during the four years he remained there he gave some evidence of the qualities that subsequently distinguished him, at the same time that he showed a lightness of disposition which many will think at strange variance with the gravity and even solemnity of his later years.  

Boulger further explains that to the end of his life there were two sides to his character:

Private grief, much disappointment, and a long solitary existence, contributed to make him a melancholy philosopher, and a sometime austere critic of a selfish world, but beneath this crust were a genial and generous disposition that did not disdain the lighter side of human nature, a heart too full of kindness to cherish wrath for long, and an almost boyish love of fun that could scarcely be repressed.

Butler writes:

One or two incidents of those early days are yet remembered, which seem to have had in them the germs of a nature afterwards to be noticeable enough. 30

Butler after describing the same incidents as Strachey seems to show indulgence towards Gordon. He writes that:

In the middle of the year 1852 young Gordon obtained his commission as a second lieutenant of engineers. To his father this appointment was a much greater source of satisfaction than it was to himself. 'While he is in the Academy I feel I am like one sitting on a powder-barrel,' the old officer used to say. He knew the fierce impatience that was in his son if wrong or injustice were put upon the boy; but he did not know that beneath the spirit of hatred against authority wrongly used there lay a nature certain to be great, whether any letters of rank or profession were coupled or were not coupled with his name. This unnoticed boy was of the stuff which no profession can add honour to, but which can do much to honour what it touches. 31

Unlike Strachey, Butler, Boulger and Hake see in the boy the qualities of future greatness. They do not seem to read in the incidents of Gordon's childhood pranks any signs of the future failures in the man.

On Gordon's first mission to Egypt he was determined to crush the slave trade along with its traders Zobeir and his son

30. Butler, p. 11.
31. Ibid., pp. 13-14.
Sulaiman. Zobeir himself was kept in a state of semi-captivity and finding that his son was still disobedient, Gordon rode through the hot desert alone upon a camel to Sulaiman's camp to teach him a lesson. His sudden appearance dumbfounded the rebels who dispersed at once and Sulaiman was later executed.

On his second mission he not only gave permission for the slave trade to continue but also took a great fancy towards his bitter enemy Zobeir. In Strachey's words:

The two men met face to face, and, as he looked into the savage countenance of his old enemy, an extraordinary shock of inspiration ran through Gordon's brain. He was seized, as he explained in a State paper, which he drew up immediately after the meeting, with a 'mystic feeling' that he could trust Zobeir. 32

Earlier Gordon himself had been convinced of the dangerous character of Zobeir. He had recommended his removal to Cyprus.

In Gordon's brother's book we find reasons why Gordon wished to take Zobeir with him. Gordon felt that it would be most unwise for him to go to Khartoum and leave Zobeir at Cairo because the latter was all powerful in the Sudan, and he would plot against him. With this in mind he telegraphed to Granville that Zobeir should be sent to Cyprus. 33

32. E.V., p. 255.
33. H.W. Gordon, p. 325.
He did not wish to quarrel with Zobeir rather he wanted to conciliate him to obtain his assistance in the Sudan. When the Government declined to send Zobeir to Cyprus, Gordon wanted to take Zobeir with him to Khartoum because Zobeir could not be safely left in Cairo.

Boulger too states that Gordon had a notion that the Mahdi was only a lay figure, and that the real author of the movement in the Sudan was Zobeir. So with this in mind he telegraphed to Lord Granville that Zobeir might be removed from Cairo to Cyprus, so that he would be incapable of mischief.

From the sources it appears that Gordon wanted Zobeir to be removed for purposes very different from Strachey's statement.

Strachey's Gordon on coming face to face with Zobeir feels a sudden shock, he is overcome by a mystic feeling he at once begins to like his once hated enemy. This is not a picture of a sane man. He appears eccentric. In Strachey's words:

... such considerations were utterly obliterated by that one moment of electric impact, of personal vision; henceforward there was a rooted conviction in Gordon's mind that Zobeir was to be trusted, ... that Zobeir's presence would paralyse the Mahdi, that Zobeir must succeed him in the government of the country after the evacuation.


35. E.V., p. 255.
Gordon was acting on an impulse; his Government was not. So when he wrote home to have Zobeir sent to Khartoum his wish was turned down at once. The "mystic feeling" and the "electric impact" meant nothing to them. In fact from this moment of Gordon’s fickle mindedness the Home Government started to turn a deaf ear to Gordon’s call for help. Strachey implies that Gordon’s inefficiency and impulsiveness was known to the Government which was justified in its act of not trusting him.

Hake reports in details the occasion for this meeting and its outcome. Gordon had intimated Baring his desire to meet the ex-slaver in the presence of others and Baring himself had arranged the interview accordingly. Hake does not mention the mystic feeling that arose in Strachey’s Gordon. Hake records the interesting conversation between Zobeir and Gordon. Gordon asked Zobeir to make any complaint against him which he might wish to make and added that his statements would be written down. Zobeir first complained about the confiscation of his property and wanted to know why his property in the Sudan was taken. Gordon explained that his property was taken because Zobeir had written a letter to his son Sulaiman, inciting him to revolt against Gordon. Zobeir denied the existence of any such letter. Gordon reminded him that the letter was produced at the court martial of Sulaiman and it was still with the Khedive. In case
that letter was not found Zobeir would be compensated. Next
Zobeir asked Gordon why he had signed the death warrant of his
son Suleiman when he had entrusted his son to Gordon and hence
he argued that by that act Suleiman was Gordon's son also.
Gordon replied that his son had killed two hundred black
Egyptian troops in the Bahr-Gazelle. Baring closed the discus­
sion by saying that he did not think that there was any need
to discuss these two points any further. 36

Gordon's weakness for Zobeir revealed during his second
meeting and which Strachey has projected may be explained in the
terms of Butler. He feels that though Gordon said that he had
no compunction about Zobeir's son's death, he was not expressing
his real feeling. He had compunction about the death of Suleiman.
So five years later when he asked his Government to send Zobeir
to Khartoum from Cairo and reinstate him in all his honours, he
was doing everything under the feeling of compunction which
earlier he said he did not feel. 37

Hake also gives in details the reasons why Gordon
thought it intelligible to renew slavery during his second
mission. Hake thinks it was purely a diplomatic stance on the
part of Gordon to win over his enemies. He was successful.

37. Butler, p. 156.
The people who were reeling under dissatisfaction on his arrival were transformed into his most obedient subjects the moment he announced in Khartoum that he was conscious of the inconvenience caused to the people by the severe measures adopted by the Government for the suppression of the slave traffic but he had come to set things right. He resolved that none should interfere with their property, and that henceforth whoever had slaves should enjoy full right to their service, and full control over them. The people concerned at once welcomed him as the bearer of justice, peace and their deliverer. The reaction was different in Europe. The law as well as the law giver was criticised. England considered it an insult to her honour. The people who had been praising Gordon a short while before were then blaming him the most. Yet that did not bother him much because he was far away from these people. What concerned him were the people who surrounded him then. The policy worked at once. Thousands of people who were getting ready to welcome the Mahdi became eager to show homage to Gordon. It also shows how well he knew the character of the people. Hake thinks that Gordon had done nothing wrong. He had gone to the Sudan to remove the Egyptians and to hand the country back to its own children, an operation which also involved the permission to keep slaves for ever. Hake explains that by the treaty of 1877 the Sudanese were permitted to hold their slaves until the year 1889, and this
treaty was made when Egypt had no notion of relinquishing her possession of the country. Now when the country was going to be handed over to the Sudanese, Gordon saw no point in telling them to hold their slaves until 1899. They would think him mad. That is why he saw more point in telling them that since they were going to be the future rulers they could hold their slaves as long as they liked. So in order to understand the real causes behind Gordon's sudden fancy for his once enemy Zobeir or his declaration that the slave traffic could flourish we have to consider Strachey's other sources. Hake tries to find the rationale for Gordon's concurrence with the continuation of slavery in Sudan. Strachey does not accept the rationale but follows his sources closely in depicting Gordon-Zobeir relations. Strachey's point seems to be that Gordon was not against slavery in principle and could compromise with it when diplomacy demanded. The point is not neutralised by his sources.

Strachey's Gordon is always impulsive and rash. When Li Hung Chang, the Chinese Governor, disregarded an agreement and beheaded the Wangs, Gordon became furious. In his rage he searched for Li everywhere with a loaded pistol in his hand. Li in order to please the infuriated Gordon offered him money and the Imperial medal. Gordon's brother, had called this version

of Strachey's statement a misrepresentation and gave another version:

It is not the fact, as stated by many writers, that Major Gordon sought the Putai with the intention of shooting him. It is a complete misrepresentation to say he did so. It is true he endeavoured unsuccessfully to have an explanation with Li Putai, but not of the nature asserted. 40

Strachey deliberately rejected H.W. Gordon's version. His sources do not relate Gordon searching for Li with a loaded pistol. This detail seems to have been imagined by Strachey. All the sources state that Gordon was moved by the incident. He even resigned his post. Li who did not know Gordon's character well before this came to know him from then on. He sent money and apologies to make up for his mistake. All these were refused by Gordon at first. He was so furious that he penned in an abusive letter which Macartney who represented Li thought best to conceal from Li. On reaching Gordon with the apologetic message from Li, Macartney found Gordon sobbing, holding Lairt Wang's severed head. Strachey also leaves out the character of Macartney. He played a great part in diverting Gordon's wrath and making him accept the bitter fact in a diplomatic manner. Boulger wrote of Macartney's role. Strachey omits it to emphasize his criticism of Gordon for accepting the medal and the

40. H.W. Gordon, p. 70.
honour which he had refused previously. Boulger writes that fortunately Gordon reflected on the situation and a sanguinary struggle was averted. In his words:

One of his chief characteristics was his quickness in seeing an alternative course of action when his original plan had either failed or been thwarted by others.  

About Gordon forgetting his rashness and forgiving Li Hake writes that in spite of his hitch with Li Hung Chang he completed his work of putting down the rebels because:

He knew that to waver was to fail; that on his action depended the lives of millions of innocent people. He therefore ignored the world's opinion, put aside his own feelings, and entered on terms of cordiality with Li Hung Chang once more.

Perhaps this will explain why he accepted the gold medal from Li which he had at first refused. But Strachey did not want to show that rational calm could prevail over Gordon's rash temper.

Simson quotes from Li Hung Chang's Memoirs to show that Li also regretted the effect on Gordon of his action of executing the Wangs. Li said: "I am not sorry they (the Wangs) are gone, but I regret the manner of their going." Strachey does not

43. Simson, p. 260.
mention this regret felt by Li Hung Chang, presumably because it would indirectly justify Gordon's first reaction.

Strachey writes that Gordon moved from one post to another rapidly. After his return from China he was sent on an easier job to Gravesend to supervise the erection of a system of forts at the mouth of the Thames. These forts were being constructed in anticipation of a supposed French invasion. They were actually useless. In Butler there is an idea that "Gordon was chafing under a sense of waste". Strachey does not mention Gordon's feelings; instead he says that he was not successful at his work. It was believed that Gordon had ample leisure hours and naturally he fell upon religion. He read nothing else besides the Bible. He realized that the just man always submitted to the will of God, that this Will was inscrutable and absolute, and it was man's plain duty to follow where God's hand led. He also formed an opinion that:

Human beings were the transitory embodiments of souls who had existed through an infinite past and would continue to exist through an infinite future. The world was vanity; the flesh was dust and ashes.

44. E.V., p. 219.
45. Butler, p. 77.
46. E.V., p. 221.
This was not a Christian conception. It was the religious thinking of the hermit and the fakir. Strachey comments here that one would imagine from such thoughts that Gordon would never accept another adventure in life. It is unexpected that an engineer, who was sent to erect forts should pursue his time in reading the Bible.

Wherever he went he quarrelled with his superior officials. On his way home from the first mission to Egypt he stopped in Paris, met the English Ambassador, Lord Lyons, and quarrelled with him over the Egyptian affairs.⁴⁷

He came to India as the Private Secretary of Lord Ripon only to resign after three days.⁴⁸ He said in this connection that if he continued as secretary he would only cause embarrassment and inconvenience to Lord Ripon and also to the people.

Strachey implies that most probably he could never accept another's authority and he was sure to clash with his superior by acting on his own. By his sudden resignation he placed the Governor General in great difficulty.

Hake tells us that Gordon hurried from post to post and from place to place because he was not fussy and accepted any

⁴⁷. Ibid., p. 229.
⁴⁸. Ibid., p. 230.
station in life, high or humble, provided some good came out of it. He was sent out to India with a motive — to establish a barrier between Russia and India which was of much importance. The vital task could not be left to committees or commissions because there might have been abundance of wisdom in these but no decisions could be reached. The charge was vested in Gordon with a freedom in preparing his plans. He was also chosen because he enjoyed the confidence of all parties, the admiration and love of the nation, moreover he was above all sorts of cliques, factions and favouritism. He fought well and he ruled well in the East. He was indifferent towards money, naturally he was the choice.

Gordon resigned on his arrival at Bombay and with perfect frankness said, which Hake quotes:

'Men, at times, owing to the mysteries of Providence, form judgements which they afterwards repent of. This is my case in accepting the appointment Lord Ripon honoured me in offering me. I repented of my act as soon as I had accepted the appointment, and I deeply regret that I had not the moral courage to say so at that time. Nothing could have exceeded the kindness and consideration with which Lord Ripon has treated me. I have never met anyone with whom I could have felt greater sympathy in the arduous task he has undertaken.'

Turnbull gives another reason for Gordon's resignation. He tells us that Gordon rejoiced when the conservative government

under Disraeli fell Gordon felt that Disraeli did not take the Egyptian problems seriously. Gordon hoped that Gladstone's Government would offer him a job when it came to power. He was offered to become the Private Secretary of Lord Ripon in 1880. The job did not suit his temperament. He was accustomed to give orders, not receive orders. This made him resign.

Gordon's appointment was accepted differently by the public, some thought him fitter for the Sudan or China where he was a king or a general, some thought him unfit for the post because to them he was mad and a little eccentric. Others were aggrieved at his suppression of his motives. When he heard of the last complaint he said that with a turbulent spirit like his, he would do more harm than good, and would hamper the work of the Viceroy and place him in difficulties.

In Butler's opinion Gordon could not continue as Lord Ripon's Private Secretary because he was of a different mentality. His views were diametrically opposite to those of the official classes, and as the British had so much vested interests in India he could not hope to do any good. Butler says that Gordon was not contented to take the accepted reasons of things. He looked

below the surface. Then Butler cites an example. If Gordon was
told that debt, famine and war were natural in India even under
a wise Government he would not accept it as true. To him, the
great amount of money taken out of the country annually in the
shape of pay for English employees, pensions, and cost of foreign
troops, all went together to cause such misery to the people. To
quote another point from Butler:

Statecraft, official tradition, the policy of
predecessors, all would have gone down before
the simple reality of the first village he
came to being in want of bread, while the
vessels at the nearest port were shipping
\$heat to England or sending rice to China.51

From India he went to China and there again he openly
expressed his displeasure at the Mandarins' views on Russian
problems. When war between Russia and China was imminent
Gordon was appealed to. He went to China and Strachey explains
that, when the Mandarins asked for Gordon's opinion, he opined
but the interpreter dared not translate it. Then Gordon him­
self seized a dictionary and pronounced the words loudly on the
Mandarins' face, at which they were startled.52 While Gordon was
going around China he was called back to England because the Home
Government felt uneasy at his movements. Such a person could never
be trusted with jobs which required great responsibility.

52. E.V., p. 231.
Hake writes that Russian opinion interpreted Gordon's visit to China as an attempt to organize another Ever Victorious Army. Gordon, anticipating trouble, had announced even before leaving India that his desire was to dissuade the Chinese from going to war with Russia, both in their own interests and those of the world and especially those of England. On arrival in China he announced that his visit was unofficial; he was taking a holiday to visit his old friend Li.

On being asked by some interviewers regarding his views as to the formation of an Anglo-Chinese force in case of war and also on being asked by Li for his advice, he gave a thorough, outspoken advice on what the Chinese should do or ought not to do in war from his previous experience. He was eager to bring about peace. To quote Gordon's words from Hake's book:

'Remember, with this programme China wants no big officer from foreign Powers; I say big officer, because I am a big officer in China. If I stayed in China it would be bad for China, because it would vex the American, French and German Governments, who would want to send their officers. Besides I am not wanted. China can do what I recommend herself. If she cannot, I could do no good.'

Strachey does not say these things about Gordon; these greatly help the readers to form a correct opinion of the man.

Strachey by writing about Gordon snatching the dictionary in this connection lets him down by making him melodramatic.

Butler, like Hake, explains how Gordon advised the Chinese to opt for peace with Russia; war would only bring her disaster. In his book we find how the interpreter feared to translate Gordon's straightforward answers to the highest Mandarins. Strachey borrows it from here. Strachey does not say how the word 'idiotcy' came into Gordon's speech. According to Butler, Gordon's sentence ran: "It would be sheer idiotcy to fight Russia". The interpreter refused to translate the word 'idiotcy' which Gordon did for him from an Anglo-Chinese dictionary lying on the table.

Gordon did not also fit into the job of carrying out the evacuation of the garrisons at Khartoum. Strachey writes that he was undoubtedly "a fighter, an enthusiast, a bold adventurer," but he also writes:

He was alien to the subtleties of civilised statesmanship, he was unamenable to official control, he was incapable of the skilful management of delicate situations; and he was now to be placed in a position of great complexity, requiring at once a cool judgement, a clear perception of fact, and a fixed determination to carry out a line of policy laid down from above.

54. Butler, p. 171.
55. E.V., p. 248.
56. Ibid., p. 248.
Gordon lacked all these qualities, it was a great mistake to select him for the job. Only Baring (later Lord Cromer) saw through Gordon's shortcomings and refused to have him. When Baring (Cromer) had to give in to higher pressures he agreed reluctantly adding the words:

He must also understand that he must take his instructions from the British representative in Egypt. ... I would rather have him than any one else, provided there is a perfectly clear understanding with him as to what his position is to be and what line of policy he is to carry out. Otherwise, not. 57

Gordon could have carried out the evacuation with ease had he willed to do it as soon as he arrived in Egypt. Instead he busied himself with other things like wanting to place Zobeir at the head of the administration. He contemplated on smashing up the Mahdi, and asked for British and Indian troops. These demands were not met with; besides much time was lost. The situation grew from bad to worse. The home Government refused to help when they realized that he was doing things contrary to their wish. He was left in the lurch. In a way he himself was to be blamed the most. When Gordon was instructed by Cabinet ministers regarding his appointment and the nature of the work that he was to carry out, he said "yes" to all the orders but once he was out of sight he ignored his official orders completely

57. Ibid., p. 247.
and did things on his own. As a result the end turned out to be something far from being a happy one. He was neither a clever diplomat nor an administrator; in short his life was a series of failures. Some other clever person, placed in his place could avert such an end.

Strachey describes Gordon's second Khartoum mission depending on Hake, Boulger, Butler, H.W. Gordon, Morley, Cromer, Holland and Fitzmaurice who presented this mission each from his own point of view. Hake, Boulger, Butler and H.W. Gordon speak in favour of Gordon. Morley tries to defend Gladstone, Holland defends Hartington while Cromer pleads himself not guilty. Strachey leaves out the details presented by these authors; as a result his readers fail to have a clear understanding of the whole affair. They see it from Strachey's angle only.

Strachey mentions in detail the correspondence between Sir Evelyn Baring (Cromer) and the home authority. Baring refused Gordon's services in the Sudan but the home authority pressed him to accept Gordon's appointment but he does not give reasons for Baring's refusal.

In this connection Boulger says that he himself had urged the Government to send Gordon to Khartoum as early as when the Mahdi's power was at its infancy but he says that he was then
told by a very able editor that Gordon was considered mad. Then he discussed why though Baring was eager to have an English Officer, he refused Gordon's services. According to Boulger Baring had undoubtedly served successfully in Egypt for many years but in the matter of Gordon's last Nile mission he let his personal feeling obscure his judgement. Boulger writes:

He (Baring) knew that Gordon was a difficult let it be granted an impossible, colleague; that he would do things in his own way in defiance of diplomatic timidity and official rigidity; and that, instead of there being in the Egyptian firmament the one planet, Baring there would be only the single sun of Gordon.58

It was his opposition alone that retarded Gordon's departure by seven weeks. Had he done his duty and given his consent in time this lapse of time would not have occurred. Gordon's life would have been saved as the Nile expedition was only two days late.

Baring or Lord Cromer himself had a different tale to tell. Cromer said that he did not know Gordon well when Lord Granville was pressing him to accept Gordon's services. He refused though he did not put forward his own objections which were based on Gordon's personal unfitness to tackle the situation in hand. Instead he replied to Lord Granville that the

Egyptian Government had objected mainly on the ground that the Sudan movement was religious and the appointment of a Christian in high command would alienate the tribes that were still not caught by the Mahdi. On the other hand it intended to send Abdul Kader, the new Minister of War to Khartoum. Unhappily Abdul Kader declined to go and Cromer officially asked Her Majesty's Government to send a well qualified British Officer to Khartoum. Privately he telegraphed to Granville suggesting Gordon.

Cromer says that in spite of his refusal to appoint Gordon twice he gave in the third time because Granville pressed him. He was alone against Gordon's employment besides Granville's telegrams contained such language from which it was clear that the Government wished to employ Gordon. Sir Evelyn Wood, Colonel Watson all spoke so highly of Gordon's ability that Cromer says he started to mistrust his own judgement. He gave a reluctant assent because he thought as everyone differed from him he must be in the wrong. He thought that he was being unconsciously prejudiced against Gordon whose habits of thought and modes of action in dealing with public affairs differed widely from his. In yielding Cromer said he made a mistake which he would never cease to regret. It might be that had he not yielded the result would have been the same. But this consideration did not constitute any consolation to him. He felt himself responsible for the valuable lives lost by yielding. To quote his words:
... the best service a Government official can render to his country is to place himself in opposition to the public view. Indeed, if he feels certain that he is right, it is his bounden duty to do so, especially in respect to questions as to which public opinion in England is ill informed. Such an occasion presented itself when there was a question of sending General Gordon to the Soudan. It was worth while to incur a good deal of unpopularity and misrepresentation in order to save the Government and the nation from making so great a mistake.... I repeat therefore, that I shall never cease to regret that I did not stand to my guns and maintain, to the best of my ability, my original objections to the Gordon mission. Had I known General Gordon better, I should certainly never have agreed to his employment.59

Cromer also blamed Gladstone's government for sending out Gordon. He says the government did not attempt to guide public opinion rather it followed the public.

Strachey's Evelyn Baring (Lord Cromer) appears selfish and unconcerned about Gordon's fate. Only a reading of Cromer's (Baring's) own account alters this view. The reader gets to know what Cromer had to say on the matter.

Gordon's coming into the picture of the Sudan issue for the second time is distorted by Strachey, to some extent.

Strachey does not mention a telegram of great importance from Baring (Cromer) which crossed a telegram from the Government.

On the contrary he gives an erroneous impression that Gordon was brought into the limelight by a journalistic stunt, in the name of an interview, carried out by W.T. Stead. This interview published in the Pall Mall Gazette dragged Gordon from obscurity and thrust him on the Government.

Strachey does this with a definite purpose. It helps to enhance his point of view. Gordon's tragic end becomes more appealing to his readers. The inefficiency of the English Government is made as clear as day light. The people were more conscious. The press had to point out to the Government its duty.

Reading Cromer it becomes clear that it was not the press that had initiated in the matter. Mr. Stead's paper was only echoing opinions already voiced in government circles. Correspondence was going on between Lord Granville, Foreign Secretary and Baring, Consul General at Cairo regarding Gordon's appointment ever since the month of December. Cromer makes an attempt to clear himself of all charges by blaming Granville and making him responsible for the disaster.

To understand Cromer's point properly it is required to start the discussion from the time of Hick's expedition.

Cromer writes that it behoved a wise statesman of Granville's stature to act more cautiously on matters regarding
the Sudan affairs. The line of action which Granville adopted was unfortunate. True the Egyptian Government lacked foresight. The consequences could be averted had Granville interfered timely. Had he acted on the views expressed by the British authorities in Egypt timely by stopping the despatch of the Hicks expedition to Kordofan, thousands of lives could be saved. Instead:

Lord Granville appears to have thought that he effectually threw off all responsibility by declaring that he was not responsible. There could not have been a greater error. The responsibility of the British Government for the general conduct of affairs in Egypt did not depend on a few phrases thrown into a despatch and subsequently published in a parliamentary paper. It was based on the facts that the British Government were in military occupation of the country, that the weakness and inefficiency of the native rulers were notorious, and that the civilised world fixed on England a responsibility which it was impossible to shake off so long as the occupation lasted .... Lord Granville failed to see this. Instead of recognising the facts of the situation, he took shelter behind an illusory abnegation of responsibility, which was a mere phantasm of the diplomatic and parliamentary mind. ... What was most of all required was that an alarm-bell should be rung to rouse the British Government from its lethargy, and show that the consequences of inaction might be more serious than those of action.60

Cromer further writes that by the policy of inaction the Egyptian Government headed towards its own destruction while the British Government

60. Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 366-367,
... vowing that they would ne'er consent to a policy of intervention in the Soudan, consented but a short time afterwards to a degree of intervention far greater than would have been necessary had the true facts of the situation been in the first instance recognised.61

The entire blame is heaped upon Granville while Cromer next tries to clear himself of all responsibilities. In this process he writes that he had to conform to the general policy adopted in London. Indirectly he holds the home Government responsible for his mistakes. He mentions that he kept Lord Granville informed frequently regarding the tense situation in Sudan but Granville kept telling him that whatever the situation might be the British Government, refused to intervene in the Sudan affairs. The government on the other hand advised to abandon all territory South of Assouan, or at least, of Wadi Halfa.

But Cromer states that the policy of withdrawal from the Sudan was very unpopular in Egypt. He attacks the British Government's vacillating and inconsistent policy: had the Government stepped into the affair at the right time the catastrophe could have been easily averted.

According to Cromer, Colonel Stewart was a better authority on Sudan affairs but unfortunately the public attached great

weight to Gordon's opinion which were by no means consistent. Gordon frequently expressed opinions which were opposed to each other. Cromer cites two examples when Gordon had condemned the British Government's policy of the evacuation. They appeared in two separate issues of the Pall Mall Gazette in 1884 and 1885. Yet on January 22, 1884 he voiced a different opinion that the Sudan was a useless possession and Her Majesty's Government was right in recommending evacuation. After arriving in Cairo he repeated the same opinion as the above. Cromer seems to suggest that nothing could be expected of this man who had no fixed opinion. In his official career of nearly fifty years Cromer says he had to work the hardest during the first three months of the year 1884. The Egyptian Government treasury was almost on the verge of bankruptcy. The Europeans were discontented because trade was depressed and the indemnities due to them for their losses during and after the Alexandria bombardment had not yet been paid. The Pashas were unhappy over the policy of evacuation. People were discontented because they were yet to reap the benefits which they had expected from the British occupation. The Government did not know its own mind. Every British Officer looked up to Cromer for all matters of his department, and every Department was full of troublesome affairs. While he

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himself was new to the work which had changed a lot since he last left it in 1880.

It was during this crucial period that Lord Granville entered upon the scene with the proposal of Gordon's appointment. Cromer writes that on December 1, 1883 he received the first of the three telegrams. On December 2 he sent his reply refusing Gordon's services. On January 10, 1884 he received a second telegram proposing Gordon's name again. On January 11 he again replied in the negative. So this only proves the statement which Strachey makes that the Press opened the eyes of the Government is not all true. Though the press published its interview of Gordon on the ninth January, official negotiation regarding Gordon's services had started much before the press came into the picture. The Government as well as Cromer were conscious of the situation. Only the two could not agree. We find from Cromer's own account that his position was a difficult one and the home Government failed to realize it from so far. Hence it kept forcing Gordon on him while he kept refusing because, as it has been pointed out already, he had formed an opinion of Gordon which was not at all a healthy one. He had somehow managed to get a scent of the real Gordon though the Government or the public had not. The difference of opinion between Cromer and the Home office is also mentioned by H.W. Gordon. Strachey states 63.

that after Granville's first telegram the entire business was hushed up until the Pall Mall Gazette took up the affair again. But we find from Cromer that it was far from it. Because on December, 22nd he had again telegraphed to Granville advising the British Government and insisting on the withdrawal of the Egyptian troops from Sudan. He indicated that Cherif Pasha would probably resign and added:

'Also it will be necessary to send an officer of high authority to Khartoum with full power to withdraw the garrisons and to make the best arrangements he can for the future of the country.'

So there was continuous correspondence between the two ends, both parties were aware of their duties.

On January 15, Granville telegraphed Cromer for the third time, this time informing him of Gordon's appointment.

On January 16, Cromer sent two telegrams to Granville — one official and the other private. In the official one he stated that since Abdul Kader, the new Minister of War, refused to go to the Sudan to quell the Mahdi's uprising, a well qualified British Officer ought to be sent at the earliest to carry out the job. Cromer had at last given up his obstinacy and in the private telegram he asked for Gordon's services claiming him to be the best man.

The contents of Cromer's telegrams show that it is certain that he could not have sent his telegram on the 16th as a reply to Granville's telegram of the 15th. So it only means that Cromer telegraphed on his own, and the two telegrams crossed one another on the way. Strachey is silent about the crossing of telegrams. This silence is meant to emphasise that Gordon was unwanted. That his name was ultimately agreed upon is suppressed.

The entire conversation which Gordon had with Mr. Stead of the Pall Mall Gazette on the 8th January regarding the Sudan is found in H.W. Gordon's book. Upon this conversation Strachey had so much to remark. According to Strachey before the interview Gordon had taken a little b and s and that had got him into the mood. When he got into such moods he won over people easily to his side by his free and easy manners and by the flow of his facile speech. From H. Gordon's book we find that it was a long conversation revealing at once that Gordon was not at all in favour of abandonment. He differed from the Government policy. To quote an extract from the book:

'You must either surrender absolutely to the Mahdi or defend Khartoum at all hazards. The latter is the only course which ought to be entertained. There is no serious difficulty about it. The Mahdi's forces will fall to pieces of themselves; but if in a moment of panic orders are issued for the abandonment of the whole of the Eastern Soudan,'
a blow will be struck against the security of Egypt and the peace of the East, which may have fatal consequences. 65

From the same interview we also gather that Gordon was for extending full support to Nubar because he thought that only Nubar could restore order to Egypt. How Nubar would restore peace Gordon did not know but he imagined that he would appoint a Governor General of Khartoum, with full powers. He named Sir Samuel Baker who could be made the Governor General. Gordon also said that the Government should not have announced its intention of evacuating Khartoum because that only helped to drive the people to the Mahdi's side. (Yet later he made the same mistake himself at Berber.) In conclusion Gordon added that in no way did he want to press his opinion upon the public or to say things that would embarrass the Government which was in a very difficult crisis; but he opened his lips to the press as the press appealed to him. He was moved at the thought of the poor Sudanese whom he knew so well and loved so much.

Judging from this long talk Strachey formed an opinion that brandy and soda did the job.

H.W. Gordon comments that had Gordon been sent as soon as his name was proposed in November the tragedy would not have

occurred. Cromer declined because he felt that Gordon would come into collision with all the Egyptian functionaries including himself so he kept Gordon at bay. 66

Henry Gordon does not say that the press moved the Government for Gordon's services as in Strachey. He writes that on 19th January 1884:

... there was not a daily metropolitan newspaper that had not eulogistic articles upon General Gordon's previous career, and all were unanimous in their opinions that the proposed mission was a step in the right direction. ... It is as well here to remark that General Gordon, whose former history was well known to the press, was, to the great mass of the people a person who was now heard of for the first time. 67

Hake states how the public was angered by the Government's policy regarding Gordon. They felt:

... that the sudden choice of so able a representative meant either a change in tactics or a desperate effort to obtain shelter from universal censure. ... 68

So infatuated were the public with the idea, they believed that no action would have been taken but for their clamour, and that even as it was, the Ministry were greatly to blame for not taking Gordon's advice sooner. Hake, however, thinks that "the

66. Ibid., p. 322.
67. Ibid., pp. 324-325.
English Government had acted with unnatural promptitude while the Egyptian Government had delayed. Hake does not attribute the credit of Gordon's appointment to the press and public wholly. The Government made the move first. He also mentions two telegrams sent by Baring.

_Butler_ writes:

It was at this moment of defeat and proposed evacuation that the English Government determined to call to its aid the one man who, in the wide Empire of England, had this Soudan at the end of his fingers. Too late, indeed, they called him in; but if history would be just it must acquit the actual Ministers of the crown of the negligence or the design of Gordon's exclusion. The men who had during many years kept at arms length from the councils of the Empire the one man whose counsel might have enabled the men at the helm to steer the ship of state safely through the quicksands of Egyptian politics, were not the governors themselves. It must manifestly be the interest of the highest governing officials that the best and clearest knowledge should be given to them by their servants. A highly-centralised system of government administering the affairs of an immense scattered Empire can only be saved from inevitable ruin by the possession of the very best advice. ... It is not necessary that the world should know now who are responsible for the fact, the most extraordinary in all the career of Gordon, namely that when, at the eleventh hour of disaster in Egypt, he was sent for to endeavour to set right the mass of ruin

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wrought by the mischievous advice of the men he had so long opposed, he was almost an unknown man to the English people. ... When Gordon's departure on his last dangerous mission to the Soudan had made him at once the centre of comment in the Press, a gentleman in Pembrokeshire remarked to a field-officer of the garrison at Pembroke Dock, 'I see the Government have just sent a Chinaman to the Soudan'.

Butler blames the Government for having ignored Gordon's calibre 'but he does not say that the press brought about his selection. The Government was slow to act but it acted on its own. He also criticizes the Government for keeping a man like Gordon unknown to the people. Learning of his selection from the press the people were at a loss regarding his particulars.

Cromer tries to find out the person responsible for sending Gordon. He writes that the press of England was mainly responsible and notably the Pall Mall Gazette. The people as were represented by the press insisted on sending Gordon and accordingly he was sent. To quote Cromer:

The attitude of the British press, however, though it may be pleaded in palliation of the mistake which was made, does not, of course exonerate the Government from responsibility. The truth is, that Mr. Gladstone's Government

did not fully realise the importance of the step they were taking. ... neither can it be any matter for surprise that they should have done so, for the one person who the Government were told on all sides was the highest authority on Soudan affairs, namely, General Gordon himself, did not share my apprehensions in any degree; neither was any danger signal hoisted by Colonel Stewart. ... it was natural that he should, quite unintentionally, have deceived the Government, and should have encouraged them in the optimism to which all Governments are somewhat prone. 71

Strachey discussing Gordon's second Khartoum mission stresses the British Government's policy of imperialism. He does not blame the entire Cabinet for being imperialist and opting in favour of their hold on Egypt. He picks out Lord Wolseley and Lord Hartington as the main instruments behind an active policy in the Sudan. He eliminates Cromer and Prime Minister Gladstone from the party of imperialists, but he makes Gordon, a party with Lord Wolseley and Lord Hartington by saying that he asked to be made Governor General of Sudan from the time he was appointed not merely to report home of the affairs there but with a definite intention to exert his power and do much more than reporting merely. Strachey also states that the sudden uproar started by the press was not at all genuine and that one would like to know more of the relations between Mr. Stead and the imperialist section of the Government. Strachey hints that

the imperialists had urged Mr. Stead to start an agitation for Gordon's services because Gordon was also pro-imperialist and he was not the type to follow the home Government's instructions.

Then Strachey explains that everything was neatly arranged by the pro-imperialist faction of the British Government even before Gordon reached Cairo. Gordon suggested that it be announced in Egypt that he was on his way to Khartoum to arrange for the future settlement of the Sudan for the best advantage of the people. He mentioned nothing about reporting; instead he said that besides accomplishing the evacuation he wanted to restore to the various Sultans of the Sudan their independence. Strachey concludes by writing:

Thus the mission 'to report' had already swollen into a Governor-Generalship, with the object, not merely of effecting the evacuation of the Sudan, but also of setting up 'various Sultans' to take the place of the Egyptian Government.72

It suggests to the readers that Gordon had brought about his own calamity by disobeying the Government's orders and acting in his own high-handed way. In this connection Cromer denies that his instructions to Gordon differed widely from those issued from London. He also denies that he did not consult London, as alleged by the press. He says it matters little what instructions General Gordon received, because he did not care at all for

72. E.V., p. 254.
instructions and was not bound by them. Secondly Cromer says that the Egyptian Government had asked for "a well qualified British officer to go to Khartoum with full powers, both civil and military, to conduct the retreat." It would be a mere mockery if instead of an executive officer, they had been given some one whose sole duty would have been to write a report. Already there were a number of reports on Sudan. The time had come to cease writing and to act instead. It would also be a farce to send General Gordon of all men in the world to merely report. The idea of reporting originated with General Gordon. On January 15, Lord Granville telegraphed to Gordon was prepared to go to Sudan on certain "rather vague terms" the principal of which was that he was to "report to Her Majesty's Government on the military situation of the Soudan". Even on February 14th, Sir Charles Dilke stated in the House of Commons:

"General Gordon drafted his own instructions. ... Believing him to be the highest authority, that he knew more of the conditions, and that he was better able to form a judgement on the subject than anybody else, we asked him to draft his own instructions." But the fact remains that Gordon never considered himself simply as a reporter. On January 18th when Gordon received his London instructions, Lord Granville telegraphed to Cromer:

76. Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 446-449.
Gordon suggests that it may be announced in Egypt that he is on his way to Khartoum to arrange for the future settlement of the Soudan for the best advantage of the people.77

Nothing was said of reporting; if Gordon was to arrange for "the future settlement of the Soudan," Cromer failed to see how Gordon could do so without exercising some executing authority.

Thirdly, the proposal that Gordon should be made Governor General did not emanate from any one in Cairo. It was made by Gordon himself while he was on the journey from Sudan to Egypt. Cromer moved the Khedive to make Gordon Governor General. He was instructed by Granville to do so. Further certain Proclamations were prepared and given to Gordon with discretionary power to use them should he think fit to do so. Gordon himself never for once told Cromer that his mission was only that of a reporter. So little importance did Cromer attach to the changes in the instructions that on January 28 he wrote to Granville:

'You will see that I gave Gordon, at his own request, additional instructions, of which I hope you will approve. They really amount to nothing more than what he had already received, but they give him a little latitude as to the time at which the troops shall be withdrawn.'78

Simson quotes from Blunt's book an important letter of Cromer to Gordon (dated Cairo, 22 January 1884) which Cromer

77. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 449.
suppressed in his book. The letter read as follows:

I think you had better go to Khartoum and arrange for the withdrawal of the Egyptian garrisons etc. as rapidly as is consistent with (1) the saving of life and so far is possible, property; (2) the establishment of some rough form of Government which will prevent, so far as is possible, anarchy and confusion arising on the withdrawal of the Egyptian troops. 79

This only proves that no matter how hard Cromer pleaded not guilty in Gordon's annihilation, he had a definite role to play. Only that there were others with him to make matters worse.

In this matter Morley has to say that:

When Gordon left London his instructions, drafted in fact by himself, were that he should 'consider and report upon the best mode of effecting the evacuation of the interior of the Soudan'. He was also to perform such duties as the Egyptian government might wish to entrust to him, and as might be communicated to him by Sir E. Baring. At Cairo Baring and Nubsr, after discussion with Gordon altered the mission from one of advice and report to an executive mission -- a change that was doubtless authorised and covered by the original reference to duties to be entrusted to him by Egypt. But there was no change in the policy at Downing Street or Cairo. Whether advisory or executive the only policy charged upon the mission was abandonment. When the draft of the new instructions was read to Gordon at Cairo, Sir E. Baring expressly asked him whether he entirely concurred in the 'policy of abandoning the

79. As quoted by Simson, p. 263.
Soudan', and Gordon not only concurred, but suggested the strengthening words, that he thought 'it should on no account be changed'. This despatch, along with the instructions to Gordon making this vast alteration, was not received in London until February 7. By this time Gordon was crossing the desert, and out of reach of the English foreign office.  

Morley goes on to write that the British cabinet sanctioned the evacuation of the whole of Sudan. Gordon's memorandum to Cromer also emphasised "abandonment", though mentioning the possible restoration of the petty Sultans who were "in existence before the Egyptian conquest".  

Morley writes that this point was full of controversy. Not only was Gordon the last man to follow official instructions, but the actual conditions of the case were too little known to allow to solve so desperate a problem. Two things at any rate were clear — one that Gordon should have faithfully adhered to the policy of evacuation and abandonment which he had formally accepted; the other that the British Government should have given him a free hand. Unfortunately neither of these two things were accepted by either of the parties. According to

82. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 395.
Motley, Gordon found himself in a very awkward position. He set out with a notion that he could easily settle the matter but when he reached Berber, he learned that the question of evacuation was interlaced with other questions. When he reached Khartoum he found that he was not accepted as a deliverer. This made him fling the policy of his mission overboard. In February Gordon suggested that the British Government should control Sudanese administration, with Zobeir as Governor General. In March he fell upon the policy of smashing up the Mahdi with the help of British and Indian troops. "This was a violent reversal of all that had been either settled or dreamed of, whether in London or at Cairo." Gladstone blamed Gordon for all this and declared that no British force should be employed in aid of his mission.

According to Boulger, Gordon had done nothing on his own. The British Government were only anxious to get rid of the Sudan, and to be saved of any worry in the matter. By thrusting the matter on Gordon the Government had got rid of a great responsibility. They sent him to rescue and withdraw the garrisons if he could do so, and were not all averse to his establishing any administration that he chose. But they laid stress on the fact that they were to be no longer troubled in the affair. This was

83. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 396.
all that they sought after and beyond it they had no definite thought or care as to how the remedy was to be discovered and applied. He writes further that the motives which induced Mr. Gladstone's Government to send General Gordon to Sudan were the selfish desire to appease public opinion and to shirk in the easiest manner a great responsibility. In fact they had no policy at all, but had one wish, that is to cut off the Sudan from Egypt. If England had remained quiet it would have damaged her position and reputation; besides it would only provoke other European countries into action. So she fell back on Gordon to carry out the evacuation because his outstanding reputation would induce the world to accept that Britain had no other interest. It is surprising, says Boulger, that the Government had sent a character like General Gordon who was well known for his independence and contempt for official etiquette. These qualities of Gordon were no secret at the Foreign and War Offices. He was most ill suited for the required job, yet he was sent hastily.

Slatin Pasha, an Austrian by birth and the Governor of Darfur, fell a captive in the Mahdi's hands and to save his life became a Muslim. He gives an authentic account of the situation then prevalent in Egypt. He states that the Egyptian

Government along with the British Government thought that if Gordon was sent to the Sudan he could at once check the agitation because he had a thorough knowledge about that country from his previous stay there. Unfortunately both these Governments and even Gordon himself failed to realize how serious the situation actually was. To put down the flames of fanaticism was beyond Gordon's power. Besides the people were not fond of Gordon because he had issued the ejection edict against the Gellabas of the southern districts, during the Suleiman Zobeir war against the Arabs. Many of them lost their fathers, brothers and sons and had been reduced to begging. Naturally they could never forgive Gordon easily. Slatin writes that Gordon made another fatal error by reading at Metemmeh the proclamation abandoning the Sudan. It upset everything, and was indirectly the cause of the fall of Berber. It ended all hopes of Gordon's settling the disorder in the country. The Mahdi had given a call to the people to unite in a religious battle and the people joined him at once. That Gordon had come to Khartoum without a force only revealed that he depended entirely on his personal influence which at this stage appeared to the people merely a drop in the ocean. Besides the Mahdi had proclaimed that if anybody dared to disobey him by not joining him not only would his property be

85. Ibid., p. 297.
confiscated but his wife and children would become the slaves of the Mahdi. Under these threats none came to the assistance of Gordon who was practically without arms or men. For their personal interest the people went on the side of the Mahdi.

Slatin sadly remarks that if for political or other reasons it was impossible for the Government to maintain the Sudan or to conquer it, it was a useless step to have sent Gordon there as a sacrifice. Any other military officer if despatched without delay could have with ease removed the garrisons and war materials safely by steamer to Berber. 86

Slatin's book is full of many interesting details which Strachey leaves out. Slatin though a captive of the Mahdi tried various means to save Gordon. The Mahdi obtained from various sources the condition of Gordon and his strength, and it was clear to him that he could soon overthrow the English General. Yet to be definite that his own strength was superior he relied on Slatin to translate for him all the papers captured by his men each time after the fall of a certain town. During the siege of Berber the military report describing the daily occurrences in Khartoum in Gordon's handwriting fell into the Mahdi's hands and when Slatin was asked for its contents he replied that he

86. Ibid., p. 299.
could not read it. But unfortunately a few letters in Arabic were captured along with the other papers and from it the Mahdi thoroughly grasped the situation in Khartoum. 87

Another note in Gordon's handwriting which fell into the Mahdi's hands read that he had about 10,000 men and he could hold Khartoum till the end of January; when Slatin was asked to translate the note, it was the end of December. Again he avoided translation by saying he could not read the French cypher language. Slatin was shocked and prayed that the rescue team would arrive within this one month's time. 88

Slatin also states that Gordon was let down by men whom he trusted; men who were apparently on his side but really traitors. More than once Gordon witnessed his officers communicating with the rival group, but he could do nothing, for the home Government proved equally negligent in its duty towards him. These details help the readers to understand Gordon's difficult position in Sudan. Probably his helplessness prompted actions which were considered eccentric by the Home Government. His Journals tell us that on reaching Sudan he found the situation quite different from what he had imagined. He at once asked

87. Ibid., p. 323.
88. Ibid., pp. 334-335.
for 3000 Turkish troops; but Her Majesty's Government, advised by Cromer, refused. He also realized that for the safety of Sudan some Government was essential and asked for the appointment of Zobeir as his successor, but the home Government did not comply with this wish. He also saw the necessity of smashing up the Mahdi but nothing was done to help him in this respect. He conveyed these messages in a series of eleven telegrams in which he explained his various difficulties. Cromer thought him to be mad and asked him to state precisely in one telegram what he recommended. Gordon telegraphed that the combination of Zobeir and himself was absolutely necessary for success, and this was to be done without delay. Another telegram followed: "Believe me, I am right; and do not delay." This appeal of combination too went unheeded. In Strachey's book we find no attempts on his part to explain reasons for these telegrams. The way he writes of Gordon dashing down telegram after telegram to Cromer makes him appear funny. The seriousness of these telegrams is missing in Strachey's account. Further ridicule follows when Strachey writes that Gordon sat late into the night and used empty telegraph forms to write out the Khartoum Journals.

Strachey writes that he was so much pre-occupied with the Sudan affairs that he forgot that his Home Government had sent him to carry out the evacuation. His thoughts were elsewhere. He poured them into his telegrams making Cromer sit aghast. The men who had left London a month before with instructions to report upon the best means of effecting the evacuation of the Sudan was now openly talking of smashing up the Mahdi with the aid of British and Indian troops. Cromer does not use the same style of ridicule, but the details in his account are faithfully followed by Strachey, in most cases. Moreover, Cromer damnas Gordon by faint praise. He writes that it was impossible not to be charmed by Gordon's simplicity and honesty. Yet he was afraid of Gordon's impulsiveness and flightiness. These two characteristics rendered Gordon unfit to carry out a work which preeminently required a cool and steady head. He used to receive some 20 or 30 telegrams from Gordon in the course of the day when he was at Khartoum. Those in the evening often giving opinions which it was impossible to reconcile with others despatched the same morning. As soon as Gordon was despatched Lord Granville who did not at first understand Gordon's character began to be alarmed at Gordon's impulsiveness. On February 8,Granville wrote to Cromer:

90. B.V., p. 259.
'His changes about Zobeir are difficult to understand. Northbrook consoles me by saying that he says all the foolish things that pass through his head, but that his judgement is excellent.'

Though Cromer was not prepared to say that Gordon's judgement was excellent, yet he found that there was some truth in the remark, for he writes:

... amidst a mass of irrelevant verbiage and amidst many contradictory opinions, a vein of sound common sense and political instinct ran through General Gordon's proposals. So much was I impressed with this, and so fearful was I that the sound portions of his proposals would be rejected in London on account of the eccentric language in which they were often couched, ...

On another occasion Cromer writes:

But the peculiarity of General Gordon was that, in great things as in small, his revulsions of opinion were so rapid and so complete that it was almost impossible to follow him. On March 11, Colonel Stewart wrote to me from Khartoum ...

'Yesterday, I told Gordon that his numerous communications might tend to confuse you, but he replied that he was merely giving you different aspects of the same question'. General Gordon's communications did, indeed, tend to confuse me .... I had to distinguish between such proposals of General Gordon as represented his matured opinions, and others which were mere bubbles thrown up by his imaginative brain, probably forgotten as soon as made, and, therefore, unworthy of serious attention.

Then, Cromer cites an example of Gordon's flightiness by relating an incident. While Gordon was on his way from Brindisi to Port Said, he left a certain message for Mr. Clifford Lloyd that he was going over to the Mahdi and may not be heard of for two months, for the Mahdi might keep him a hostage for Zobeir. He asked Lloyd to publish it in the right time if necessary. Now Lloyd was ill and Cromer came to know of it only when Gordon was half way to Khartoum. Knowing Gordon's character he thought it was not impossible for Gordon to visit the Mahdi. Had he done so he would be detained as a prisoner for life. Cromer at once telegraphed to Gordon not to dare such a thing and Gordon replied that he had no such idea. Cromer comments that it was only an idea which flashed through Gordon's brain for a moment. But the act was so serious both to Gordon and his country that Cromer was forced to elicit an assurance from Gordon that he would not give effect to this hare-brained project.\textsuperscript{94} Cromer's Gordon appears eccentric but his intention is not evil; he has a word of praise for Gordon. Strachey's Gordon does not receive his writer's sympathy.

Regarding the telegrams sent by Gordon Hake also does not make Gordon appear ridiculous. He gives the contents of each telegram and shows that Gordon often came out with

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 463-464.
contradictory statements which could have been the reason for
the Government's failure to decide correctly. In one telegram
he wrote that he asked for Zobeir for a just settled government.
Suddenly he changed note and wired that he required Zobeir for
the evacuation. The ministers were confused.

The seriousness in the situation that Gordon actually
found in Sudan is neglected by Strachey. He is out to prove
Gordon ambitious and a greedy power-loving imperialist. The
following passage is intended to serve this purpose:

As the days went by, he began to feel at home
again in the huge palace which he knew so well.
The glare and the heat of that southern atmos­
phere, the movement of the crowded city, the
dark-faced populace, the soldiers and the
suppliants, the reawakened consciousness of
power, the glamour and the mystery of the whole
strange scene— these things seized upon him,
engulfed him, and worked a new transformstion
of his intoxicated heart. England, with its
complications and its policies, became an empty
vision to him; Sir Evelyn Baring, with his
cautions and sagacities, hardly more than a
tiresome name. He was Gordon Pasha, he was the
Governor-General, he was the ruler of the Sudan.
He was among his people— his own people, and it
was to them only that he was responsible — to
them, and to God. Was he to let them fall with­
out a blow into the clutches of a sanguinary
impostor? Never! He was there to prevent that.
The distant governments might mutter something
about 'evacuation'; his thoughts were elsewhere.95

Something is lacking in this passage, the real Gordon is not
assessed. We know from Strachey's sources that personal comfort

95. E.V., pp. 258-259.
was unknown to Gordon. The palace of his position could not change him. If he forgot what was going on at home, the British Government also failed to realize his plight abroad. It would also naturally be his first concern to save the people there in the spirit of a true fighter and soldier. He spoke of smashing up the Mahdi because there was no alternative. May be even for the purpose of 'evacuation', it was necessary. Things had taken such a turn that he did not know what to do. Nor did the Government at home try to put itself in Gordon's place and see things in his light.

To understand Gordon's problems at the period a look at his Journals is necessary. Hake writes in his Introduction to the Journals that Gordon pointed out the great evil that was done by the policy of Britain in Africa. He did not have much faith in the politicians at home. In his Khartoum Journals under September 12th he writes: "We are an honest nation but our diplomatists are conies, and not officially honest." On September 17th, Gordon writes in his Journal:

Had Zubair Pasha been sent up when I asked for him, Berber would in all probability never have fallen, and one might have made a Soudan Government in opposition to the Mahdi. We choose to refuse his coming up because of his antecedents in the slave trade; granted that we had reason, yet as we take no precautions as to the future.

96. The Khartoum Journals, p. 22.
of these lands with respect to the slave trade, the above opposition seems absurd. I will not send up A., because he will do this, but I will leave the country to B, who will do exactly the same. 97

Again he writes:

I will only remark that Her Majesty's Government must not say, I was replaced, because I wished to keep the Soudan, FOR I DO NOT SAY SO, it is an useless country; what I say is, that it is shabby to abandon the garrisons, &c., &c. 98

Gordon speaks out his mind clearly in his Journals. His views on the Sudan issue is also discussed in detail. He writes:

Simmons and I agree on one subject — that Egypt is useless to us, unless we have command of the seas, and if we have command of seas, Egypt is ours; ... We will never be liked by its peoples; ... To my mind, if we looked after the Cape and Mauritius, &c., it would be far more beneficial, and less expensive, than wasting our money on Egypt and the Soudan; but because Egypt used to be important, we think it is always so. 99

There is a note of determination when he writes again on October 25th: "I do not advocate the keeping of the Soudan by us, ... it is simply a question of GETTING OUT OF IT with decency." 100

These writings only prove how seriously he thought of the matter while he was present at the site of the action which England could never dream of thinking being so far away. He was not for

97. Ibid., p. 46.
98. Ibid., p. 125.
100. Ibid., p. 238.
expanding England's power over Egypt, he was not backed by imperialistic tendencies. He was a true soldier; he only cared for decency and for leaving a good name behind so that none could criticize England's military power. This question of other people taking him and his men for cowards troubled his mind so much that he went on to say:

If you do not do this, then be prepared for a deal of worry and danger, and your campaign will be entirely unprofitable and devoid of prestige, for the day after you leave Khartoum the Mahdi will walk in and say he drove you out: which is not pleasant in India or elsewhere. 101

To understand Gordon's position a number of things has to be taken into consideration. There were contradictions among the politicians in Britain regarding the policy of imperialism. Some were concerned with protecting existing imperial interests without further expansion, while others argued that "existing imperial interests could only be safeguarded by formal extension of imperial rule". 102 Gladstone the Prime Minister belonged to the former group while Hartington belonged to the latter. It was Gordon's ill luck that he had fallen into the struggle between these expansionists and anti-expansionists. When the Prime Minister himself was averse to imperial expansion and when

101. Ibid., p. 239.
he disliked British rule over alien races Gordon's plight can at once be imagined. The situation was further aggravated when Gordon himself, on reaching Khartoum, began to act in opposition to the Government's policy of withdrawal. He inclined towards military action. Naturally all help was denied to him. Had Disraeli been Prime Minister then things might have worked out differently for Gordon. But with Gladstone it was different because — "From the first Mr. Gladstone's curious instinct for liberty disclosed to him that here was a case of 'a people rightly struggling to be free'." Morley writes that Gladstone himself said that he was not in favour of a domination exercised upon certain countries by certain other countries, he did not dream of exercising it ever, He looked upon the possession of the Sudan as the calamity of Egypt. It was a drain on Egypt's treasury and also on her men because as many as 100,000 Egyptians had laid down their lives in endeavouring to maintain that barren conquest. Gladstone was so unconcerned about the Sudan that from the time of Hicks' expedition he kept repeating that the British Government could never accept responsibility for a Sudan war nor could it give advice for or against the advance of Hicks. Since the Prime Minister was so vehement in his denial of the Sudan how could Gordon expect any help when he sought to follow an active policy?

Gordon was somewhat forced to take an active policy because prior to his departure he had no idea of the situation. He had stated that the danger at Khartoum was exaggerated and that he would be able to bring away the garrisons without difficulty but on reaching he found the situation quite different. Even mere getting out was difficult; he did not want just to get out of Sudan like a coward. He wanted to get out of Sudan with decency and honour. But the Prime Minister did not bother for decency or honour; his Government's policy was to get out of it, no matter how. Here the two clashed. Gordon was for expansion while Gladstone was against it. Had this position been reversed the story would be a different one. The Home Government then would have sent out troops hastily while Gordon would not have made use of them. But in reality it was different. He kept asking for troops. He needed them urgently. The British Government remained silent. It was a most pathetic condition. He was left in the lurch.

Morley thought that the cabinet avoided the annexation of the Sudan because it would mean the end of all the beneficient achievement obtained by Britain in Egypt. The reforms conducted by her would be clogged if the vast tract of the Sudan was attached to Egypt. Her officers would have to retain British troops there. Also the Egyptian Government was so weak
that all the responsibility would come on her shoulders. Hence the cabinet wanted to get rid of it.

To Gordon the expedition was an utter waste of money and life and he blames the Government's indecision for it. To quote Gordon's own words:-

Had they said from the first, We do not care — we will do nothing for the garrisons of the Soudan, they may perish; had they not relieved Tokar; had they not telegraphed to me as to the force to relieve me (vide telegrams, 5th May, from Suakin; 29th April, from Massowah). Had they telegraphed. ... 'SHIFT FOR YOURSELF', why, nothing could have been said; but Her Majesty's Government would not say they were going to abandon the garrisons, and therefore 'shift for yourself'. It is that which has hampered us so much. On the one hand, if I bolted I deserted them (Her Majesty's Government); on the other hand, by staying I have brought about this expedition. ... I think that Her Majesty's Government ought to have taken the bold step of speaking out and saying 'SHIFT FOR YOURSELF' in March, when I could have done so, and not now, when I am in honour bound to the people after six months' bothering warfare. 104

It is pathetic when we find in his Journals that though he knew that he had been abandoned, he still entertained a little hope somewhere in his heart that a British force was coming to relieve him and wished that it would arrive in time. In this connection he writes on October 24:

104. The Khartoum Journals, pp. 149-150.
If they do not come before 30th November the game is up, and Rule Britannia... I suppose a part of the force will go to attack Berber on the 10th November (when I calculate they will be at Metemma-Shehdy), and that a small party will come on here; so we have now 7 days in October and 15 days in November to wait = 22 days.... I asked only for 200 men to be sent there (vide my telegram in Stewart's Journal)... I do not know the date, but I declare that, if my telegrams to Baring are made known, it will be proved that Baring knew upto 12th March the exact position of affairs up here; and therefore, if there was an impression abroad that I did not say, 'Send troops (200) to Berber, or you will lose it;' he must have suppressed my telegrams.105

Unlike Strachey Hake explains that according to Gordon evacuation itself was impossible without smashing up the Mahdi. He then states that Her Majesty's Government did not care to listen to Gordon. She still continued to ask for evacuation and did not intend to smash the Mahdi in the Sudan. She would do so only if the Mahdi came into Egypt proper and threatened existing British interests. Hake here comments that "Our Ministers were ridiculous not in their indecision but their obstinacy."106 A little later he again writes about these politicians:

Had they been capable of a new departure, of recognizing the logic of events and preferring expediency to consistency, had they in a word been statesmen, the difficulty had been

105. Ibid., pp. 227-228.
overcome with ease, and Gordon still living.

Unhappily they would neither see nor hear, neither listen nor invent.107

The idea that we get from Hake is that Gordon was left to stand and act on his own. Gordon repeats time again that war is something hateful to him but he was fighting because there was no way out. Hake quotes a question asked by Gordon from Gordon's Journals. To quote it here:

'Is it right,' he asks, 'that I should have been sent to Khartoum with only seven followers after the destruction of Hick's army, and no attention paid to me till communications were cut?'108

Hake comments after this that the question was not personal. Gordon does not mean if it was right towards himself but he meant whether it was right towards the great cause in which he was engaged, and for which he has jeopardized his life. Hake sadly recalls how at one time only a handful of British soldiers at Wady Halfa could have settled the Sudan, or Zobeir's influence could have been successfully pitted against the Mahdi but now that time had passed the solution would cost the country millions of pounds, and the world thousands of lives, Gordon's life being the noblest among them.


It is understood from Hake that Her Majesty's Government suppressed certain facts to avoid the rage of the public. In this connection Hake writes:

Now in Gordon's letter of November 4th to Lord Wolseley, he said two things which (with others) H.M. Government thought fit to suppress. They were: that he had just enough provisions to last him forty days; and that he had sent certain of his steamers down the Nile towards Shendy to await the arrival of the expedition. These facts, hitherto not made known, are most important.109

A little later he writes:

Meantime Sir Charles Wilson had made a dash for the Nile, where he found steamers and reinforcements from Gordon, and the laconic message, 'All right at Khartoum.' Can hold out for years'. 110

Hake comments that Gordon meant just the opposite by it, it was also meant to deceive the enemies. The public foolishly rejoiced at his message, they were quite unaware that nearly two months before Gordon had said he had provisions enough for forty days. He had meant that he had come to his last biscuit while the public thought that the expedition was a sure triumph.

Another of Gordon's secret messages stated that he was besieged on three sides, Omdurman, Halfaya and Hojji-Ali, and therefore needed plenty of troops. The troops already in

Khartoum were suffering from lack of provisions. The message asked the troops to be sent quickly via Metemneh or Berber, keeping the enemy in the front. The public were again carefully kept in ignorance. So when the news of Gordon's death and capture of Khartoum by the Mahdi arrived on February 5 they were simply stupefied.

Strachey does not explain matters so vividly. He leaves out these happenings, he sees things from his own angle. He pours out his wrath on Gladstone, Lord Hartington and sometimes on Gordon. Though the result is a wonderful readable piece but it is devoid of many facts. Strachey dives into the depth of Gordon's mind and seems to come out with Gordon's opinion on Cromer. To Gordon, Cromer

was the embodiment of England, — or rather the embodiment of the official classes, of English diplomacy, of the English Government with its hesitations, its insincerities, its double-faced schemes. 111

Strachey comments that Gordon was wrong; Cromer was not to be blamed wholly for Gordon's disaster. Gordon had his own faults of antipathy and distrust towards Cromer. Strachey seems to have a soft corner for Cromer when he writes that by stopping Gordon's appointment he tried to do him good and by refusing to comply with Gordon's wish for troops or Zobeir he again tried to do the

111. E.V., p. 269.
General good. Any other person in Cromer's place would have yielded to Gordon's plans, or would have made a mess of the entire affair. Cromer did not harm Gordon nor did he side with the Government. Then there is a slight sarcasm on the part of Strachey when he writes that when the situation was most serious, suddenly Cromer absented himself and spent his time upon a financial conference in England: he had forgotten Gordon. 112

Then Strachey turns to Lord Hartington who becomes a most interesting person in the book. Lord Hartington's conscience pricked because he was one among the responsible for sending out Gordon. He tried to do something for the General. Hartington, Strachey writes, was much liked besides being influential, but he describes lengthily how forgetful he was. He was so dull that he could not follow the proceedings at cabinet meetings and later had to ask Granville to tell him. He was so slow that when Gladstone refused to send help to Gordon, he took three months to decide upon the question whether he should resign or not. Naturally, when this man thought of helping Gordon nothing much came out of it. He did arrange for help but then Gordon was dead.

Strachey probably wishes to tell his readers that when

112. Ibid., p. 273.
persons like Gladstone, Cromer and Hartington were concerned in the Gordon affair. Gordon's tragic end was inevitable.

Boulger does not blame Gladstone, Lord Hartington or Cromer for Gordon's disaster. He picks out Lord Wolseley. Major Kitchener suggested a small contingent which ought to go by the shortest route to rescue Gordon. If his advice was listened to, the force would have reached just in time to save Gordon. But his suggestion went unheeded. Lord Wolseley planned a huge force consisting of the elite of the British army and the troops were to go by the longest route in a slow, impressive, and overpoweringly scientific advance as if time was not the factor now that a rescue expedition was going. He knew very well Gordon's necessities, but he chose to delay. Hence Boulger blames him mostly. To some extent he blames Sir Charles Wilson (Wolseley's lieutenant and representative) for not sending out a smaller army on his own initiative. He leaves out Gladstone and Cromer on the point that Gladstone did something to send a rescue team and Cromer was opposed to Gordon's appointment because he understood that Gordon's temperament did not suit the job, and calamity was inevitable.

Boulger mostly criticises the Government for its having no policy at all concerning the Sudan, even after the expedition was sent it could not decide upon a policy. Things were in such
a jumble that Gordon's fall had to come about. To him;

No man who ever lived was called upon to deal with a greater number of difficult military and administrative problems, and to find the solution for them with such inadequate means and inferior troops and subordinates. 113

From Morley's book we feel Gladstone was unsympathetic towards Gordon. When the Queen on Gordon's death sent an angry telegram to Gladstone and Hartington blaming her ministers for what had happened, Gladstone replied (February 5, 1855) in bitter language that Lord Wolseley's force could have saved Khartoum easily, had not a large portion of it been detached by a circuitous route along the river upon the suggestion of Gordon himself. Gladstone agrees that the river route should have been chosen but the navigation of the Nile in its upper course was unknown; hence it took a long time to get a correct information respecting the Nile route. The Suakin and Berber route in spite of its difficulties was preferred. The correct information and preference for the Nile as a definite choice came much later. So he was not to be blamed in any way. Gordon was responsible for it all.

Writing on this issue to one of his former colleagues long afterwards Gladstone writes:

Jan. 10, '90 — In the Gordon case we all, and I rather prominently, must continue to suffer in silence, Gordon was a hero and a hero of heroes; but we ought to have known that a hero of heroes is not the proper person to give effect at a distant point, and in most difficult circumstances, to the views of ordinary men. It was unfortunate that he should claim the hero's privilege by turning upside down and inside out every idea and intention with which he had left England, and for which he had obtained our approval, ... My own opinion is that it is harder to justify our doing so much to rescue him, than our not doing more. Had the party reached Khartoum in time, he would not have come away (as I suppose) and the dilemma would have arisen in another form.114

That Hartington was slow to act is expressed by Holland, when he quotes the very words of his subject on the matter:

"All through life I have had to work with men who thought three times as quick as I did, and I have found this a great disadvantage."115

Holland writes that Hartington is not to be blamed for Gordon's death. The Gordon relief expedition could not be started in time because Hartington could not get the Prime Minister or the Cabinet to attend to the matter. They would not, partly because most of them, not only the Radicals but some Whigs, were averse to any expedition, and partly because their attention was absorbed by the vastly nearer and superior fascination of the dispute between the House of Lords and the


According to Holland, Gladstone, the leader of the Government, is to be blamed.

Fitzmaurice in his book writes that Gordon's instructions were ambiguous. He set off with the instruction that he was to remove the garrisons immediately. On his arrival in Egypt he was made the Governor General of the Sudan:

Both these steps were taken with the approval and sanction of the Government at home; but a calm judgement will not deny that the terms of the original commission and of the commission as Governor-General were difficult to reconcile altogether with each other; that the latter were of dangerous latitude, and that to these ambiguities most of the subsequent trouble is to be traced.117

What is interesting in the source books is that each writer tries to defend his subject from the blame that he played the key role in Gordon's destruction. Morley tries to defend Gladstone by making him a great defender of liberty, who did not believe in domination and so did not sympathise with Gordon's purpose in Sudan. Holland writes that his subject, Hartington though slow to act, cannot be blamed. It was Gladstone's fault that nothing was done to save Gordon. Hartington tried to send a rescue team but Gladstone was not moved. Cromer in his book


pleads not guilty and displays an anti-Gordon sentiment. He too blames Gladstone:

Mr. Gladstone's error of judgement in delaying too long the despatch of the Nile expedition left a stain on the reputation of England which it will be beyond the power of either the impartial historian or the partial apologist to efface.\textsuperscript{118}

To get a picture of the real Gordon and the real situation Strachey's essay is not sufficient. His sources are to be considered.

Describing the incident when the Mahdi sent Gordon clothes and words to become a Muslim, Strachey writes that Gordon threw the clothes on the floor and trampled upon them, then he went up to the palace roof "... and turned the telescope once more, almost mechanically, towards the north."\textsuperscript{119}

Again later he writes that Gordon spent his time on the palace roof gazing northwards, but the veil of mystery and silence was left unbroken.\textsuperscript{120} These details are surely Strachey's own. It is true that Gordon was at that time eagerly waiting for help which would come from the north, but that just at the moment when the Mahdi sent him the clothes he went up to the roof and

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{118} Cromer, Vol. II, p. 17. \\
\textsuperscript{119} E.V., p. 276. \\
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., p. 289.
\end{flushright}
turned his telescope mechanically towards the north is Strachey's way to capture his readers' interest. Strachey is also of the opinion that Gordon lingered in Khartoum only to force the Government to send an army to smash up the Mahdi, but this was not the case as it has been revealed how he detested war.

Strachey also quotes from Gordon's Khartoum Journals but these quotations are not those which Hake, Boulger, Butler and Gordon's brother use. Gordon's important and serious discussions are left out. He picks up lighter items. So much so he writes that many passages in the Journals at once recall the actual Gordon writing them out between the puffs of a cigarette. But such an imagination of Gordon puffing a cigarette while writing is Strachey's very own.

Simson states that Strachey draws from Neufeld's book the description of Gordon's death. Neufeld's description is based upon the story circulated among the Mahdists in Omdurman. He tells us that Gordon died a soldier's death, fighting to the last. Strachey also gives the other version found in Wingate's book where Gordon died a saint's death by putting up no resistance. Simson thinks that the differences in the sources do not suggest the saint-versus-soldier interpretation that Strachey uses. Strachey was right in questioning the exact nature but
he over-dramatizes in insinuating the two reports which were suggestions of Gordon's double nature. 121

Steevens' book on Kitchener supplies Strachey with the details of the description of Omdurman after it was re-captured in 1898. The Mahdi's empire was abolished for ever. A religious ceremony was held in honour of Gordon in the palace in which he was killed. 122 Thus Gordon's death was avenged by Kitchener's victory.

121. Simson, p. 279.