

Donovan Pasha And Some People Of Egypt, Volume 3.

Gilbert Parker

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DONOVAN PASHA AND SOME PEOPLE OF EGYPT

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 3.

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL A TYRANT AND A LADY

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL

Wyndham Bimbashi's career in Egypt had been a series of mistakes. In the first place he was opinionated, in the second place he never seemed to have any luck; and, worst of all, he had a little habit of doing grave things on his own lightsome responsibility. This last quality was natural to him, but he added to it a supreme contempt for the native mind and an unhealthy scorn of the native official. He had not that rare quality, constantly found among his fellow-countrymen, of working the native up through his own medium, as it were, through his own customs and predispositions, to the soundness of Western methods of government. Therefore, in due time he made some dangerous mistakes. By virtue of certain high-handed actions he was the cause of several riots in native villages, and he had himself been attacked at more than one village as he rode between the fields of sugar-cane. On these occasions he had behaved very well--certainly no one could possibly doubt his bravery; but that was a small offset to the fact that his want of tact and his overbearing manner had been the means of turning a certain tribe of Arabs loose upon the country, raiding and killing.

But he could not, or would not, see his own vain stupidity. The climax came in a foolish sortie against the Arab tribe he had offended. In that unauthorised melee, in covert disobedience to a general order not to attack, unless at advantage--for the Gippies under him were raw levies--his troop was diminished by half; and, cut off from the Nile by a flank movement of the Arabs, he was obliged to retreat and take refuge in the well-fortified and walled house which had previously been a Coptic monastery.

Here, at last, the truth came home to Wyndham bimbashi. He realised that though in his six years' residence in the land he had acquired a command of Arabic equal to that of others who had been in the country twice that time, he had acquired little else. He awoke to the fact that in his cock-sure schemes for the civil and military life of Egypt there was not one element of sound sense; that he had been all along an egregious failure. It did not come home to him with clear, accurate conviction--his brain was not a first-rate medium for illumination; but the facts struck him now with a blind sort of force; and he accepted the blank sensation of failure. Also, he read in the faces of those round him an alien spirit, a chasm of black misunderstanding which his knowledge of Arabic could never bridge over.

Here he was, shut up with Gippies who had no real faith in him, in the house of a Sheikh whose servants would cut his throat on no provocation at all; and not an eighth of a mile away was a horde of Arabs--a circle of death through which it was impossible to break with the men in his command. They must all die here, if they were not relieved.

The nearest garrison was at Kerbat, sixty miles away, where five hundred men were stationed. Now that his cup of mistakes was full, Wyndham bimbashi would willingly have made the attempt to carry word to the garrison there. But he had no right to leave his post. He called for a volunteer. No man responded. Panic was upon the Gippies. Though Wyndham's heart sickened within him, his lips did not frame a word of reproach; but a blush of shame came into his face, and crept up to his eyes, dimming them. For there flashed through his mind what men at home would think of him when this thing, such an end to his whole career, was known. As he stood still, upright and confounded, some one touched his arm.

It was Hassan, his Soudanese servant. Hassan was the one person in Egypt who thoroughly believed in him. Wyndham was as a god to Hassan, though this same god had given him a taste of a belt more than once. Hassan had not resented the belt, though once, in a moment of affectionate confidence, he had said to Wyndham that when his master got old and died he would be the servant of an American or a missionary, "which no whack Mahommed."

It was Hassan who now volunteered to carry word to the garrison at Kerbat.

"If I no carry, you whack me with belt, Saadat," said Hassan, whose logic and reason were like his master's, neither better nor worse.

"If you do, you shall have fifty pounds--and the missionary," answered Wyndham, his eyes still cloudy and his voice thick; for it touched him in a tender nerve that this one Soudanese boy should believe in him and do for him what he would give much to do for the men under him. For his own life he did not care--his confusion and shame were so great.

He watched Hassan steal out into the white brilliance of the night.

"Mind you keep a whole skin, Hassan," he said, as the slim lad with the white teeth, oily hair, and legs like ivory, stole along the wall, to drop presently on his belly and make for some palm-trees a hundred yards away.

The minutes went by in silence; an hour went by; the whole night went by; Hassan had got beyond the circle of trenchant steel.

They must now abide Hassan's fate; but another peril was upon them. There was not a goolah of water within the walls!

It was the time of low Nile when all the land is baked like a crust of bread, when the creaking of the shadoofs and the singing croak of the sakkia are heard the night long like untiring crickets with throats of frogs. It was the time succeeding the khamsin, when the skin dries like slaked lime and the face is for ever powdered with dust; and the fellaheen, in the slavery of superstition, strain their eyes day and night for the Sacred Drop, which tells that the flood is flowing fast

from the hills of Abyssinia.

It was like the Egyptian that nothing should be said to Wyndham about the dearth of water until it was all gone. The house of the Sheikh, and its garden, where were a pool and a fountain, were supplied from the great Persian wheel at the waterside. On this particular sakkia had been wont to sit all day a patient fellah, driving the blindfolded buffaloes in their turn. It was like the patient fellah, when the Arabs, in pursuit of Wyndham and his Gippies, suddenly cut in between him and the house, to deliver himself over to the conqueror, with his hand upon his head in sign of obedience.

It was also like the gentle Egyptian that he eagerly showed the besiegers how the water could be cut off from the house by dropping one of the sluice-gates; while, opening another, all the land around the Arab encampments might be well watered, the pools well filled, and the grass kept green for horses and camels. This was the reason that Wyndham bimbashi and his Gippies, and the Sheikh and his household, faced the fact, the morning after Hassan left, that there was scarce a goolah of water for a hundred burning throats. Wyndham understood now why the Arabs sat down and waited, that torture might be added to the oncoming death of the Englishman, his natives, and the "friendlies."

All that day terror and ghastly hate hung like a miasma over the besieged house and garden. Fifty eyes hungered for the blood of Wyndham bimbashi; not because he was Wyndham bimbashi, but because the heathen in these men cried out for sacrifice; and what so agreeable a sacrifice as the Englishman who had led them into this disaster and would die so well --had they ever seen an Englishman who did not die well?

Wyndham was quiet and watchful, and he cudgelled his bullet-head, and looked down his long nose in meditation all the day, while his tongue became dry and thick, and his throat seemed to crack like roasting leather. At length he worked the problem out. Then he took action.

He summoned his troop before him, and said briefly: "Men, we must have water. The question is, who is going to steal out to the sakkia to-night, to shut the one sluice and open the other?"

No one replied. No one understood quite what Wyndham meant. Shutting one sluice and opening the other did not seem to meet the situation. There was the danger of getting to the sakkia, but there was also an after. Would it be possible to shut one sluice and open the other without the man at the wheel knowing? Suppose you killed the man at the wheel--what then?

The Gippies and the friendlies scowled, but did not speak. The bimbashi was responsible for all; he was an Englishman, let him get water for them, or die like the rest of them--perhaps before them!

Wyndham could not travel the sinuosities of their minds, and it would not have affected his purpose if he could have done so. When no man replied, he simply said:

"All right, men. You shall have water before morning. Try and hold out till then." He dismissed them. For a long time he walked up and down the garden of straggling limes, apparently listless, and smoking hard. He reckoned carefully how long it would take Hassan to get to Kerbat, and for relief to come. He was fond of his pipe, and he smoked now as if it

were the thing he most enjoyed in the world. He held the bowl in the hollow of his hand almost tenderly. He seemed unconscious of the scowling looks around him. At last he sat down on the ledge of the rude fountain, with his face towards the Gippies and the Arabs squatted on the ground, some playing mankalah, others sucking dry lime leaves, many smoking apathetically.

One man with the flicker of insanity in his eyes suddenly ran forward and threw himself on the ground before Wyndham.

"In the name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful--water!" he cried. "Water--I am dying, effendi whom God preserve!"

"Nile water is sweet; you shall drink it before morning, Mahommed," answered Wyndham quietly. "God will preserve your life till the Nile water cools your throat."

"Before dawn, O effendi?" gasped the Arab. "Before dawn, by the mercy of God," answered Wyndham; and for the first time in his life he had a burst of imagination. The Orient had touched him at last.

"Is not the song of the sakkia in thine ear, Mahommed?" he said

"Turn, O Sakkia, turn to the right, and turn to the left.
The Nile floweth by night and the balasses are filled at dawn--
The maid of the village shall bear to thy bed the dewy grey
goolah at dawn
Turn, O Sakkia!"

Wyndham was learning at last the way to the native mind.

The man rose from his knees. A vision of his home in the mirkaz of Minieh passed before him. He stretched out his hands, and sang in the vibrating monotone of his people:

"Turn, O Sakkia, turn to the right, and turn to the left:
Who will take care of me, if my father dies?
Who will give me water to drink, and the cucumber vine at my door--
Turn, O Sakkia!"

Then he crept back again to the wall of the house, where he huddled between a Berberine playing a darabukkeh and a man of the Fayoum who chanted the fatihah from the Koran.

Wyndham looked at them all and pondered. "If the devils out there would only attack us," he said between his teeth, "or if we could only attack them!" he added, and he nervously hastened his footsteps; for to him this inaction was terrible. "They'd forget their thirst if they were fighting," he muttered, and then he frowned; for the painful neighing of the horses behind the house came to his ear. In desperation he went inside and climbed to the roof, where he could see the circle of the enemy.

It was no use. They were five to one, and his Gippies were demoralised. It would be a fine bit of pluck to try and cut his way through the Arabs to the Nile--but how many would reach it?

No, he had made his full measure of mistakes, he would not add to the list. If Hassan got through to Kerbat his Gippies here would no doubt be

relieved, and there would be no more blood on his head. Relieved? And when they were relieved, what of himself, Wyndham bimbashi? He knew what men would say in Cairo, what men would say at the War Office in London town, at "The Rag"--everywhere! He could not look his future in the face. He felt that every man in Egypt, save himself, had known all along that he was a complete failure.

It did not matter while he himself was not conscious of it; but now that the armour-plate of conceit protecting his honest mind had been torn away on the reefs of foolish deeds, it mattered everything. For when his conceit was peeled away, there was left a crimson cuticle of the Wyndham pride. Certainly he could not attack the Arabs--he had had his eternal fill of sorties.

Also he could not wait for the relief party, for his Gippies and the friendlies were famishing, dying of thirst. He prayed for night. How slowly the minutes, the hours passed; and how bright was the moon when it rose! brighter even than it was when Hassan crept out to steal through the Arab lines.

.....

At midnight, Wyndham stole softly out of a gate in the garden wall, and, like Hassan, dropping to the ground, crept towards a patch of maize lying between the house and the river. He was dressed like a fellah, with the long blue yelek, and a poor wool fez, and round the fez was a white cloth, as it were to protect his mouth from the night air, after the manner of the peasant.

The fires of the enemy were dying down, and only here and there Arabs gossiped or drank coffee by the embers. At last Wyndham was able to drop into the narrow channel, now dry, through which, when the sluice was open and the sakkia turned, the water flowed to the house. All went well till he was within a hundred yards of the wheel, though now and again he could hear sentries snoring or talking just above him. Suddenly he heard breathing an arm's length before him, then a figure raised itself and a head turned towards him. The Arab had been asleep, but his hand ran to his knife by instinct--too late, for Wyndham's fingers were at his throat, and he had neither time nor chance to cry Allah! before the breath left him.

Wyndham crept on. The sound of the sakkia was in his ears--the long, creaking, crying song, filling the night. And now there arose the Song of the Sakkia from the man at the wheel:

"Turn, O Sakkia, turn to the right, and turn to the left;
The heron feeds by the water side--shall I starve in my onion-field!
Shall the Lord of the World withhold his tears that water the land--
Turn, O Sakkia!"

. . . The hard white stars, the cold blue sky, the far-off Libyan hills in a gold and opal glow, the smell of the desert, the deep swish of the Nile, the Song of the Sakkia. . . .

Wyndham's heart beat faster, his blood flowed quicker, he strangled a sigh in his breast. Here, with death on every hand, with immediate and fearful peril before him, out of the smell of the desert and the ghostly glow of the Libyan hills there came a memory--the memory of a mistake he had made years before with a woman. She had never forgiven him for the

mistake--he knew it at last. He knew that no woman could ever forgive the blunder he had made--not a blunder of love but a blunder of self-will and an unmanly, unmannerly conceit. It had nearly wrecked her life: and he only realised it now, in the moment of clear-seeing which comes to every being once in a lifetime. Well, it was something to have seen the mistake at last.

He had come to the sluice-gate. It was impossible to open it without the fellah on the water-wheel seeing him.

There was another way. He crept close and closer to the wheel. The breath of the blindfolded buffalo was in his face, he drew himself up lightly and quickly beside the buffalo--he was making no blunder now.

Suddenly he leapt from behind the buffalo upon the fellah and smothered his mouth in the white cloth he had brought. There was a moment's struggle, then, as the wheel went slower and slower, and the patient buffalo stopped, Wyndham dropped the gagged, but living, fellah into a trench by the sakkia and, calling to the buffalo, slid over swiftly, opened the sluice-gate of the channel which fed the house, and closed that leading to the Arab encampment.

Then he sat down where the fellah had sat, and the sakkia droned its mystic music over the river, the desert, and the plain. But the buffalo moved slowly--the fellah's song had been a spur to its travel, as the camel-driver's song is to the caravan in the waste of sands. Wyndham hesitated an instant, then, as the first trickle of water entered the garden of the house where his Gippies and the friendlies were, his voice rose in the Song of the Sakkia:

"Turn, O Sakkia, turn to the right, and turn to the left:
Who will take care of me, if my father dies?
Who will give me water to drink, and the cucumber vine at my door
Turn, O Sakkia!"

If he had but one hour longer there would be enough water for men and horses for days, twenty jars of water pouring all the time!

Now and again a figure came towards the wheel, but not close enough to see that the one sluice-gate had been shut and the other opened. A half-hour passed, an hour, and then the end came.

The gagged fellah had managed to free his mouth, and though his feet were bound also and he could not loose them, he gave a loud call for help. From dying fires here and there Arab sentries sprang to their feet with rifles and lances.

Wyndham's work was done. He leapt from the sakkia, and ran towards the house. Shot after shot was fired at him, lances were thrown, and once an Arab barred his way suddenly. He pistoled him and ran on. A lance caught him in the left arm. He tore it out and pushed forward. Stooping once, he caught up a sword from the ground. When he was within fifty yards of the house, four Arabs intercepted him. He slashed through, then turned with his pistol and fired as he ran quickly towards the now open gate. He was within ten yards of it, and had fired his last shot, when a bullet crashed through his jaw.

A dozen Gippies ran out, dragged him in, and closed the gate.

The last thing Wyndham did before he died in the grey of dawn--and this is told of him by the Gippies themselves--was to cough up the bullet from his throat, and spit it out upon the ground. The Gippies thought it a miraculous feat, and that he had done it in scorn of the Arab foe.

Before another sunrise and sunset had come, Wyndham bimbashi's men were relieved by the garrison of Kerbat, after a hard fight.

There are Englishmen in Egypt who still speak slightly of Wyndham bimbashi, but the British officer who buried him hushed a gossiping dinner-party a few months ago in Cairo by saying:

"Lightly they'll talk of the spirit that's gone,
And o'er his cold ashes upbraid him;
But little he'll reek, if they let him sleep on
In the grave where his Gippies have laid him."

And he did not apologise for paraphrasing the famous ballad. He has shamed Egypt at last into admiration for Wyndham bimbashi: to the deep satisfaction of Hassan, the Soudanese boy, who received his fifty pounds, and to this day wears the belt which once kept him in the narrow path of duty.

A TYRANT AND A LADY

When Donovan Pasha discovered the facts for the first time, he found more difficulty in keeping the thing to himself than he had ever found with any other matter in Egypt. He had unearthed one of those paradoxes which make for laughter--and for tears. It gave him both; he laughed till he cried. Then he went to the Khedivial Club and ordered himself four courses, a pint of champagne and a glass of '48 port, his usual dinner being one course, double portion, and a pint of claret. As he sat eating he kept reading a letter over and over, and each time he read he grinned--he did not smile like a well-behaved man of the world, he did not giggle like a well-veneered Egyptian back from Paris, he chuckled like a cabman responding to a liberal fare and a good joke. A more unconventional little man never lived. Simplicity was his very life, and yet he had a gift for following the sinuosities of the Oriental mind; he had a quality almost clairvoyant, which came, perhaps, from his Irish forebears. The cross-strain of English blood had done him good too; it made him punctilious and kept his impulses within secure bounds. It also made him very polite when he was angry, and very angry when any one tried to impose upon him, or flatter him.

The letter he read so often was from Kingsley Bey, the Englishman, who, coming to Egypt penniless, and leaving estates behind him encumbered beyond release, as it would seem, had made a fortune and a name in a curious way. For years he had done no good for himself, trying his hand at many things--sugar, salt, cotton, cattle, but always just failing to succeed, though he came out of his enterprises owing no one. Yet he had held to his belief that he would make a fortune, and he allowed his estates to become still more encumbered, against the advice of his solicitors, who grew more irritable as interest increased and rents further declined. The only European in Egypt who shared his own belief

in himself was Dicky Donovan. Something in the unfailing good-humour, the buoyant energy, the wide imagination of the man seized Dicky, warranted the conviction that he would yet make a success. There were reasons why sugar, salt, cotton, cattle and other things had not done well. Taxes, the corvee, undue influence in favour of pashas who could put his water on their land without compensation, or unearthed old unpaid mortgages on his land, or absorbed his special salt concession in the Government monopoly, or suddenly put a tax on all horses and cattle not of native breed; all these and various other imposts, exactions, or interferences engineered by the wily Mamour, the agent of the mouffetish, or the intriguing Pasha, killed his efforts, in spite of labours unbelievable. The venture before the last had been sugar, and when he arrived in Cairo, having seen his fields and factories absorbed in the Khedive's domains, he had but one ten pounds to his name.

He went to Dicky Donovan and asked the loan of a thousand pounds. It took Dicky's breath away. His own banking account seldom saw a thousand --deposit. Dicky told Kingsley he hadn't got it. Kingsley asked him to get it--he had credit, could borrow it from the bank, from the Khedive himself! The proposal was audacious--Kingsley could offer no security worth having. His enthusiasm and courage were so infectious, however, though his ventures had been so fruitless, that Dicky laughed in his face. Kingsley's manner then suddenly changed, and he assured Dicky that he would receive five thousand pounds for the thousand within a year. Now, Dicky knew that Kingsley never made a promise to any one that he did not fulfil. He gave Kingsley the thousand pounds. He did more. He went to the Khedive with Kingsley's whole case. He spoke as he had seldom spoken, and he secured a bond from Ismail, which might not be broken. He also secured three thousand pounds of the Khedive's borrowings from Europe, on Kingsley's promise that it should be returned five-fold.

That was how Kingsley got started in the world again, how he went mining in the desert afar, where pashas and mamours could not worry him. The secret of his success was purely Oriental. He became a slave-owner. He built up a city of the desert round him. He was its ruler. Slavery gave him steady untaxed labour. A rifle-magazine gave him security against marauding tribes, his caravans were never over powered; his blacks were his own. He had a way with them; they thought him the greatest man in the world. Now, at last, he was rich enough. His mines were worked out, too, and the market was not so good; he had supplied it too well. Dicky's thousand had brought him five thousand, and Ismail's three thousand had become fifteen thousand, and another twenty thousand besides. For once the Khedive had found a kind of taxation, of which he got the whole proceeds, not divided among many as heretofore. He got it all. He made Kingsley a Bey, and gave him immunity from all other imposts or taxation. Nothing but an Egyptian army could have removed him from his desert-city.

Now, he was coming back--to-night at ten o'clock he would appear at the Khedivial Club, the first time in seven years. But this was not all. He was coming back to be married as soon as might be.

This was the thing which convulsed Dicky.

Upon the Nile at Assiout lived a young English lady whose life was devoted to agitation against slavery in Egypt. Perhaps the Civil War in America, not so many years before, had fired her spirit; perhaps it was pious enthusiasm; perhaps it was some altruistic sentiment in her which

must find expression; perhaps, as people said, she had had a love affair in England which had turned out badly. At any rate she had come over to Egypt with an elderly companion, and, after a short stay at the Consulate, had begun the career of the evangel. She had now and then created international difficulty, and Ismail, tolerant enough, had been tempted to compel her to leave the country, but, with a zeal which took on an aspect of self-opinionated audacity, she had kept on. Perhaps her beauty helped her on her course--perhaps the fact that her superb egotism kept her from being timorous, made her career possible. In any case, there she was at Assiout, and there she had been for years, and no accident had come to her; and, during the three months she was at Cairo every year, pleading against slavery and the corvee, she increased steadily the respect in which she was held; but she was considered mad as Gordon. So delighted had Ismail been by a quiet, personal attack she made upon him, that without malice, and with an obtuse and impulsive kindness, he sent her the next morning a young Circassian slave, as a mark of his esteem, begging her through the swelling rhetoric of his messenger to keep the girl, and more than hinting at her value. It stupefied her, and the laughter of Cairo added to her momentary embarrassment; but she kept the girl, and prepared to send her back to her people.

The girl said she had no people, and would not go; she would stay with "My Lady"--she would stay for ever with "My Lady." It was confusing, but the girl stayed, worshipping the ground "My Lady" walked on. In vain My Lady educated her. Out of hearing, she proudly told whoever would listen that she was "My Lady's slave." It was an Egyptian paradox; it was in line with everything else in the country, part of the moral opera bouffe.

In due course, the lady came to hear of the English slave-owner, who ruled the desert-city and was making a great fortune out of the labours of his slaves. The desert Arabs who came down the long caravan road, white with bleached bones, to Assiout, told her he had a thousand slaves. Against this Englishman her anger, was great. She unceasingly condemned him, and whenever she met Dicky Donovan she delivered her attack with delicate violence. Did Dicky know him? Why did not he, in favour with Ismail, and with great influence, stop this dreadful and humiliating business? It was a disgrace to the English name. How could we preach freedom and a higher civilisation to the Egyptians while an Englishman enriched himself and ruled a province by slavery? Dicky's invariable reply was that we couldn't, and that things weren't moving very much towards a higher civilisation in Egypt. But he asked her if she ever heard of a slave running away from Kingsley Bey, or had she ever heard of a case of cruelty on his part? Her reply was that he had given slaves the kourbash, and had even shot them. Dicky thereupon suggested that Kingsley Bey was a government, and that the kourbash was not yet abolished in the English navy, for instance; also that men had to be shot sometimes.

At last she had made a direct appeal to Kingsley Bey. She sent an embassy to him--Dicky prevented her from going herself; he said he would have her deported straightway, if she attempted it. She was not in such deadly earnest that she did not know he would keep his word, and that the Consulate could not help her would have no time to do so. So, she confined herself to an elaborate letter, written in admirable English and inspired by most noble sentiments. The beauty that was in her face was in her letter in even a greater degree. It was very adroit, too, very ably argued, and the moral appeal was delicate and touching, put with an eloquence at once direct and arresting. The invocation with which the

letter ended was, as Kingsley Bey afterwards put it, "a pitch of poetry and humanity never reached except by a Wagner opera."

Kingsley Bey's response to the appeal was a letter to the lady, brought by a sarraf, a mamour and six slaves, beautifully mounted and armed, saying that he had been deeply moved by her appeal, and as a proof of the effect of her letter, she might free the six slaves of his embassy. This she straightway did joyfully, and when they said they wished to go to Cairo, she saw them and their horses off on the boat with gladness, and she shook them each by the hand and prayed Heaven in their language to give them long plumes of life and happiness. Arrived at Cairo these freemen of Assiout did as they had been ordered by Kingsley--found Donovan Pasha, delivered a certain letter to him, and then proceeded, also as they had been ordered, to a certain place in the city, even to Ismail's stables, to await their master's coming.

This letter was now in Dicky's hand, and his mirth was caused by the statement that Kingsley Bey had declared that he was coming to marry My Lady--she really was "My Lady," the Lady May Harley; that he was coming by a different route from "his niggers," and would be there the same day. Dicky would find him at ten o'clock at the Khedivial Club.

My Lady hated slavery--and unconsciously she kept a slave; she regarded Kingsley Bey as an enemy to civilisation and to Egypt, she detested him as strongly as an idealistic nature could and should--and he had set out to marry her, the woman who had bitterly arraigned him at the bar of her judgment. All this play was in Dicky's hands for himself to enjoy, in a perfect dress rehearsal ere ever one of the Cairene public or the English world could pay for admission and take their seats. Dicky had in more senses than one got his money's worth out of Kingsley Bey. He wished he might let the Khedive into the secret at once, for he had an opinion of Ismail's sense of humour; had he not said that very day in the presence of the French Consul, "Shut the window, quick! If the consul sneezes, France will demand compensation!" But Dicky was satisfied that things should be as they were. He looked at the clock--it was five minutes to ten. He rose from the table, and went to the smoking-room. In vain it was sought to draw him into the friendly circles of gossiping idlers and officials. He took a chair at the very end of the room and opposite the door, and waited, watching.

Precisely at ten the door opened and a tall, thin, loose-knit figure entered. He glanced quickly round, saw Dicky, and swung down the room, nodding to men who sprang to their feet to greet him. Some of the Egyptians looked darkly at him, but he smiled all round, caught at one or two hands thrust out to him, said: "Business--business first!" in a deep bass voice, and, hastening on, seized both of Dicky's hands in his, then his shoulders, and almost roared: "Well, what do you think of it? Isn't it all right? Am I, or am I not, Dicky Pasha?"

"You very much are," answered Dicky, thrust a cigar at him, and set him down in the deepest chair he could find. He sprawled wide, and lighted his cigar, then lay back and looked down his long nose at his friend.

"I mean it, too," he said after a minute, and reached for a glass of water the waiter brought. "No, thanks, no whiskey--never touch it--good example to the slaves!" He laughed long and low, and looked at Dicky out of the corner of his eye. "Good-looking lot I sent you, eh?"

"Oosters, every one of 'em. Butter wouldn't melt in their mouths. I

learnt their grin, it suits my style of beauty." Dicky fitted the action to the word. "You'll start with me in the morning to Assiout?"

"I can start, but life and time are short."

"You think I can't and won't marry her?"

"This isn't the day of Lochinvar."

"This is the day of Kingsley Bey, Dicky Pasha."

Dicky frowned. He had a rare and fine sense where women were concerned, were they absent or present. "How very artless--and in so short a time, too!" he said tartly.

Kingsley laughed quietly. "Art is long, but tempers are short!" he retorted.

Dicky liked a Roland for his Oliver. "It's good to see you back again," he said, changing the subject.

"How long do you mean to stay?"

"Here?" Dicky nodded. "Till I'm married."

Dicky became very quiet, a little formal, and his voice took on a curious smoothness, through which sharp suggestion pierced.

"So long?--Enter our Kingsley Bey into the underground Levantine world."

This was biting enough. To be swallowed up by Cairo life and all that it involves, was no fate to suggest to an Englishman, whose opinion of the Levantine needs no defining. "Try again, Dicky," said Kingsley, refusing to be drawn. "This is not one huge joke, or one vast impertinence, so far as the lady is concerned. I've come back-b-a-c-k" (he spelled the word out), "with all that it involves. I've come back, Dicky."

He quieted all at once, and leaned over towards his friend. "You know the fight I've had. You know the life I've lived in Egypt. You know what I left behind me in England--nearly all. You've seen the white man work. You've seen the black ooster save him. You've seen the ten-times-a-failure pull out. Have I played the game? Have I acted squarely? Have I given kindness for kindness, blow for blow? Have I treated my slaves like human beings? Have I--have I won my way back to life--life?" He spread out a hand with a little grasping motion. "Have I saved the old stand off there in Cumberland by the sea, where you can see the snow on Skaw Fell? Have I? Do you wonder that I laugh? Ye gods and little fishes! I've had to wear a long face years enough--seven hard years, seven fearful years, when I might be murdered by a slave, and I and my slaves might be murdered by some stray brigade, under some general of Ismail's, working without orders, without orders, of course--oh, very much of course! Why shouldn't I play the boy to-day, little Dicky Donovan? I am a Mahommedan come Christian again. I am a navvy again come gentleman. I am an Arab come Englishman once more.

"I am an outcast come home. I am a dead man come to life."

Dicky leaned over and laid a hand on his knee. "You are a credit to Cumberland," he said. "No other man could have done it. I won't ask any

more questions. Anything you want of me, I am with you, to do, or say, or be."

"Good. I want you to go to Assiout to-morrow."

"Will you see Ismail first? It might be safer--good policy."

"I will see My Lady first. . . . Trust me. I know what I'm doing. You will laugh as I do." Laughter broke from his lips. It was as though his heart was ten years old. Dicky's eyes moistened. He had never seen anything like it--such happiness, such boyish confidence. And what had not this man experienced! How had he drunk misfortune to the dregs! What unbelievable optimism had been his! How had he been at once hard and kind, tyrannical and human, defiant and peaceful, daring yet submissive, fierce yet just! And now, here, with so much done, with a great fortune and great power, a very boy, he was planning to win the heart of, and marry, his avowed foe, the woman who had condemned him without stint.

II

On her wide veranda, a stone's-throw from the banks of the Nile, My Lady sat pen in hand and paper-pad upon her knee. She had written steadily for an hour, and now she raised her head to look out on the swift-flowing, muddy water, where broad khiassas floated down the stream, laden with bersim; where feluccas covered the river, bearing natives and donkeys; where faithful Moslems performed their ablutions, and other faithful Moslems, their sandals laid aside, said their prayers with their faces towards Mecca, oblivious of all around; where blue-robed women filled their goolahs with water, and bore them away, steady and stately; where a gang of conscripts, chained ankle to ankle, followed by a crowd of weeping and wailing women, were being driven to the anchorage of the stern-wheeled transport-steamer. All these sights she had seen how many hundred times! To her it was all slavery. The laden khiassas represented the fruits of enforced labour; the ablutions and prayers were but signs of submission to the tyranny of a religion designed for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many, a creed and code of gross selfishness--were not women only admitted to Heaven by the intercession of their husbands and after unceasing prayer? Whether beasts of burden, the girl with the goolah, women in the harem, or servants of pleasure, they were all in the bonds of slavery, and the land was in moral darkness. So it seemed to her.

How many times had she written these things in different forms and to different people--so often, too often, to the British Consul at Cairo, whose patience waned. At first, the seizure of conscripts, with all that it involved, had excited her greatly. It had required all her common-sense to prevent her, then and there, protesting, pleading, with the kavass, who did the duty of Ismail's Sirdar. She had confined herself, however, to asking for permission to give the men cigarettes and slippers, dates and bread, and bags of lentils for soup. Even this was not unaccompanied by danger, for the Mahommedan mind could not at first tolerate the idea of a lady going unveiled; only fellah women, domestic cattle, bared their faces to the world. The conscripts, too, going to their death--for how few of them ever returned?--leaving behind all hope, all freedom, passing to starvation and cruelty, at last to be cut down by

the Arab, or left dying of illness in the desert, they took her gifts with sullen faces. Her beautiful freedom was in such contrast to their torture, slavery of a direful kind. But as again and again the kavasses came and opened midnight doors and snatched away the young men, her influence had grown so fast that her presence brought comfort, and she helped to assuage the grief of the wailing women. She even urged upon them that philosophy of their own, which said "Malaish" to all things--the "It is no matter," of the fated Hamlet. In time she began to be grateful that an apathetic resignation, akin to the quiet of despair, was the possession of their race. She was far from aware that something in their life, of their philosophy, was affecting her understanding. She had a strong brain and a stronger will, but she had a capacity for feeling greater still, and this gave her imagination, temperament, and--though it would have shocked her to know it--a certain credulity, easily transmutable into superstition. Yet, as her sympathies were, to some extent, rationalised by stern fact and everlasting custom, her opposition to some things became more active and more fervid.

Looking into the distance, she saw two or three hundred men at work on a canal, draining the property of Selamlik Pasha, whose tyrannies, robberies, and intrigues were familiar to all Egypt, whose palaces were almost as many as those of the notorious Mouffetish. These men she saw now working in the dread corvee had been forced from their homes by a counterfeit Khedivial order. They had been compelled to bring their own tools, and to feed and clothe and house themselves, without pay or reward, having left behind them their own fields untilled, their own dourha unreaped, their date-palms, which the tax-gatherer confiscated. Many and many a time--unless she was prevented, and this at first had been often--she had sent food and blankets to these poor creatures who, their day's work done, prayed to God as became good Mahommedans, and, without covering, stretched themselves out on the bare ground to sleep.

It suggested that other slavery, which did not hide itself under the forms of conscription and corvee. It was on this slavery her mind had been concentrated, and against it she had turned her energies and her life. As she now sat, pen in hand, the thought of how little she had done, how futile had been all her crusade, came to her. Yet there was, too, a look of triumph in her eyes. Until three days ago she had seen little result from her labours. Then had come a promise of better things. From the Englishman, against whom she had inveighed, had been sent an olive branch, a token--of conversion? Had he not sent six slaves for her to free, and had she not freed them? That was a step. She pictured to herself this harsh expatriated adventurer, this desert ruler, this slave-holder--had he been a slave-dealer she could herself have gladly been his executioner--surrounded by his black serfs, receiving her letter. In her mind's eye she saw his face flush as he read her burning phrases, then turn a little pale, then grow stern.

She saw him, after a sleepless night, haunted by her warnings, her appeal to his English manhood. She saw him rise, meditative and relenting, and send forthwith these slaves for her to free. Her eye glistened again, as it had shone while she had written of this thing to the British Consul at Cairo, to her father in England, who approved of her sympathies and lamented her actions. Had her crusade been altogether fruitless, she asked herself. Ismail's freed Circassian was in her household, being educated like an English girl, lifted out of her former degradation, made to understand "a higher life"; and yesterday she had sent away six liberated slaves, with a gold-piece each, as a gift from a free woman to free men. It seemed to her for a moment now, as she sat musing and

looking, that her thirty years of life had not been--rather, might not be--in vain.

There was one other letter she would write--to Donovan Pasha, who had not been ardent in her cause, yet who might have done so much through his influence with Ismail, who, it was said, liked him better than any Englishman he had known, save Gordon. True, Donovan Pasha had steadily worked for the reduction of the corvee, and had, in the name of the Khedive, steadily reduced private corvee, but he had never set his face against slavery, save to see that no slave-dealing was permitted below Assouan. Yet, with her own eyes she had seen Abyssinian slaves sold in the market-place of Assiout. True, when she appealed to him, Donovan Pasha had seen to it that the slave-dealers were severely punished, but the fact remained that he was unsympathetic on the large issue. When appealed to, the British Consul had petulantly told her that Donovan Pasha was doing more important work. Yet she could only think of England as the engine of civilisation, as an evangelising power, as the John the Baptist of the nations--a country with a mission. For so beautiful a woman, of so worldly a stock, of a society so in the front of things, she had some Philistine notions, some quite middle-class ideals. It was like a duchess taking to Exeter Hall; but few duchesses so afflicted had been so beautiful and so young, so much of the worldly world--her father was high in the household of an illustrious person. . . . If she could but make any headway against slavery--she had as disciples ten Armenian pashas, several wealthy Copts, a number of Arab sheikhs, and three Egyptian princes, sympathetic rather than active--perhaps, through her father, she might be able to move the illustrious person, and so, in time, the Government of England.

It was a delightful dream--the best she had imagined for many a day. She was roused from it by the scream of a whistle, and the hoonch-hoonch of a sternwheel steamer. A Government boat was hastening in to the bank, almost opposite her house. She picked up the field-glass from the window-sill behind her, and swept the deck of the steamer. There were two figures in English dress, though one wore the tarboosh. The figure shorter and smaller than the other she recognised. This was Donovan Pasha. She need not write her letter to him, then. He would be sure to visit her. Disapprove of him as she did from one stand-point, he always excited in her feelings of homesickness, of an old life, full of interests--music, drama, art, politics, diplomacy, the court, the hunting-field, the quiet house-party. He troubled her in a way too, for his sane certainty, set against her aspiring credulity, arrested, even commanded, her sometimes.

Instinctively she put out her hand to gather in flying threads of hair, she felt at the pearl fastening of her collar, she looked at her brown shoes and her dress, and was satisfied. She was spotless. And never had her face shone--really shone--to such advantage. It had not now the brilliant colours of the first years. The climate, her work in hospital building, her labours against slavery, had touched her with a little whiteness. She was none the less good to see.

Who was this striding along with Donovan Pasha, straight towards her house? No one she had ever seen in Egypt, and yet in manner like some one she had seen before--a long time before. Her mind flashed back through the years to the time when she was a girl, and visited old friends of her father in a castle looking towards Skaw Fell, above the long valley of the Nidd. A kind of mist came before her eyes now.

When she really saw again, they were at the steps of the veranda, and Donovan Pasha's voice was greeting her. Then, as, without a word but with a welcoming smile, she shook hands with Dicky, her look was held, first by a blank arrest of memory, then by surprise.

Dicky turned for his office of introduction but was stayed by the look of amusement in his friend's face, and by the amazed recognition in that of My Lady. He stepped back with an exclamation, partly of chagrin. He saw that this recognition was no coincidence, so far as the man was concerned, though the woman had been surprised in a double sense. He resented the fact that Kingsley Bey had kept this from him--he had the weakness of small-statured men and of diplomatic people who have reputations for knowing and doing. The man, all smiling, held out his hand, and his look was quizzically humorous as he said:

"You scarcely looked to see me here, Lady May?" Her voice trembled with pleasure. "No, of course. When did you come, Lord Selden? . . . Won't you sit down?"

That high green terrace of Cumberland, the mist on Skaw Fell, the sun out over the sea, they were in her eyes. So much water had gone under the bridges since!

"I was such a young girl then--in short frocks--it was a long time ago, I fear," she added, as if in continuation of the thought flashing through her mind. "Let me see," she went on fearlessly; "I am thirty; that was thirteen years ago."

"I am thirty-seven, and still it is thirteen years ago."

"You look older, when you don't smile," she added, and glanced at his grey hair.

He laughed now. She was far, far franker than she was those many years ago, and it was very agreeable and refreshing. "Donovan, there, reproved me last night for frivolity," he said.

"If Donovan Pasha has become grave, then there is hope for Egypt," she said, turning to Dicky with a new brightness.

"When there's hope for Egypt, I'll have lost my situation, and there'll be reason for drawing a long face," said Dicky, and got the two at such an angle that he could watch them to advantage. "I thrive while it's opera boufe. Give us the legitimate drama, and I go with Ismail."

The lady shrank a little. "If it weren't you, Donovan Pasha, I should say that, associated with Ismail, as you are, you are as criminal as he."

"What is crime in one country, is virtue in another," answered Dicky. "I clamp the wheel sometimes to keep it from spinning too fast. That's my only duty. I am neither Don Quixote nor Alexander Imperator."

She thought he was referring obliquely to the corvee and the other thing in which her life-work was involved. She became severe. "It is compromising with evil," she said.

"No. It's getting a breakfast-roll instead of the whole bakery," he answered.

"What do you think?" she exclaimed, turning to Kingsley.

"I think there's one man in Egypt who keeps the boiler from bursting," he answered.

"Oh, don't think I undervalue his Excellency here," she said with a little laugh. "It is because he is strong, because he matters so much, that one feels he could do more. Ismail thinks there is no one like him in the world."

"Except Gordon," interrupted Kingsley.

"Except Gordon, of course; only Gordon isn't in Egypt. And he would do no good in Egypt. The officials would block his way. It is only in the Soudan that he could have a free hand, be of real use. There, a man, a real man, like Gordon, could show the world how civilisation can be accepted by desert races, despite a crude and cruel religion and low standards of morality."

"All races have their social codes--what they call civilisation," rejoined Kingsley. "It takes a long time to get custom out of the blood, especially when it is part of the religion. I'm afraid that expediency isn't the motto of those who try to civilise the Orient and the East."

"I believe in struggling openly for principle," she observed a little acidly.

"Have you succeeded?" he asked, trying to keep his gravity. "How about your own household, for instance? Have you Christianised and civilised your people--your niggers, and the others?"

She flushed indignantly, but held herself in control. She rang a bell. "I have no 'niggers,'" she answered quietly. "I have some Berberine servants, two fellah boatmen, an Egyptian gardener, an Arab cook, and a Circassian maid. They are, I think, devoted to me."

A Berberine servant appeared. "Tea, Mahommed," she said. "And tell Madame that Donovan Pasha is here. My cousin admires his Excellency so much," she added to Kingsley, laughing. "I have never had any real trouble with them," she continued with a little gesture of pride towards the disappearing Berberine.

"There was the Armenian," put in Dicky slyly; "and the Copt sarraf. They were no credit to their Christian religion, were they?"

"That was not the fault of the religion, but of the generations of oppression--they lie as a child lies, to escape consequences. Had they not been oppressed they would have been good Christians in practice as in precept."

"They don't steal as a child steals," laughed Dicky.

"Armenians are Oriental through and through. They no more understand the Christian religion than the Soudanese understand freedom."

He touched the right note this time. Kingsley flashed a half-startled, half-humorous look at him; the face of the lady became set, her manner delicately frigid. She was about to make a quiet, severe reply, but something overcame her, and her eyes, her face, suddenly glowed. She

leaned forward, her hands clasped tightly on her knees--Kingsley could not but note how beautiful and brown they were, capable, handsome, confident hands--and, in a voice thrilling with feeling, said:

"What is there in the life here that gets into the eyes of Europeans and blinds them? The United States spent scores of thousands of lives to free the African slave. England paid millions, and sacrificed ministries and men, to free the slave; and in England, you--you, Donovan Pasha, and men like you, would be in the van against slavery. Yet here, where England has more influence than any other nation--"

"More power, not influence," Dicky interrupted smiling.

"Here, you endure, you encourage, you approve of it. Here, an Englishman rules a city of slaves in the desert and grows rich out of their labour. What can we say to the rest of the world, while out there in the desert"--her eyes swept over the grey and violet hills--"that man, Kingsley Bey, sets at defiance his race, his country, civilisation, all those things in which he was educated? Egypt will not believe in English civilisation, Europe will not believe in her humanity and honesty, so long as he pursues his wicked course."

She turned with a gesture of impatience, and in silence began to pour the tea the servant had brought, with a message that Madame had a headache. Kingsley Bey was about to speak--it was so unfair to listen, and she would forgive this no more readily than she would forgive slavery. Dicky intervened, however.

"He isn't so black as he's painted, personally. He's a rash, inflammable sort of fellow, who has a way with the native--treats him well, too, I believe. Very flamboyant, doomed to failure, so far as his merit is concerned, but with an incredible luck. He gambled, and he lost a dozen times; and then gambled again, and won. That's the truth, I fancy. No real stuff in him whatever."

Their hostess put down her tea-cup, and looked at Dicky in blank surprise. Not a muscle in his face moved. She looked at Kingsley. He had difficulty in restraining himself, but by stooping to give her fox-terrier a piece of cake, he was able to conceal his consternation.

"I cannot--cannot believe it," she said slowly. "The British Consul does not speak of him like that."

"He is a cousin of the Consul," urged Dicky. "Cousin--what cousin? I never heard--he never told me that."

"Oh, nobody tells anything in Egypt, unless he's kourbashed or thumb-screwed. It's safer to tell nothing, you know."

"Cousin! I didn't know there were Kingsleys in that family. What reason could the Consul have for hiding the relationship?"

"Well, I don't know, you must ask Kingsley. Flamboyant and garrulous as he is, he probably won't tell you that."

"If I saw Kingsley Bey, I should ask him questions which interest me more. I should prefer, however, to ask them through a lawyer--to him in the prisoner's dock."

"You dislike him intensely?"

"I detest him for what he has done; but I do not despise him as you suggest I should. Flamboyant, garrulous--I don't believe that. I think him, feel him, to be a hard man, a strong man, and a bad man--if not wholly bad."

"Yet you would put him in the prisoner's dock," interposed Kingsley musingly, and wondering how he was to tell her that Lord Selden and Kingsley Bey were one and the same person.

"Certainly. A man who commits public wrongs should be punished. Yet I am sorry that a man so capable should be so inhuman."

"Your grandfather was inhuman," put in Kingsley. "He owned great West Indian slave properties.

"He was culpable, and should have been punished--and was; for we are all poor at last. The world has higher, better standards now, and we should live up to them. Kingsley Bey should live up to them."

"I suppose we might be able to punish him yet," said Dicky meditatively. "If Ismail turned rusty, we could soon settle him, I fancy. Certainly, you present a strong case." He peered innocently into the distance.

"But could it be done--but would you?" she asked, suddenly leaning forward. "If you would, you could--you could!"

"If I did it at all, if I could make up my mind to it, it should be done thoroughly--no half measures."

"What would be the whole measures?" she asked eagerly, but with a certain faint shrinking, for Dicky seemed cold-blooded.

"Of course you never could tell what would happen when Ismail throws the slipper. This isn't a country where things are cut and dried, and done according to Hoyle. You get a new combination every time you pull a string. Where there's no system and a thousand methods you have to run risks. Kingsley Bey might get mangled in the machinery."

She shrank a little. "It is all barbarous."

"Well, I don't know. He is guilty, isn't he? You said you would like to see him in the prisoner's dock. You would probably convict him of killing as well as slavery. You would torture him with prison, and then hang him in the end. Ismail would probably get into a rage--pretended, of course--and send an army against him. Kingsley would make a fight for it, and lose his head--all in the interest of a sudden sense of duty on the part of the Khedive. All Europe would applaud--all save England, and what could she do? Can she defend slavery? There'll be no kid-gloved justice meted out to Kingsley by the Khedive, if he starts a campaign against him. He will have to take it on the devil's pitchfork. You must be logical, you know.

"You can't have it both ways. If he is to be punished, it must be after the custom of the place. This isn't England."

She shuddered slightly, and Dicky went on: "Then, when his head's off, and his desert-city and his mines are no more, and his slaves change

masters, comes a nice question. Who gets his money? Not that there's any doubt about who'll get it, but, from your standpoint, who should get it?"

She shook her head in something like embarrassment.

"Money got by slavery--yes, who should get it?" interposed Kingsley carefully, for her eyes had turned to him for help. "Would you favour his heirs getting it? Should it go to the State? Should it go to the slaves? Should it go to a fund for agitation against slavery? . . . You, for instance, could make use of a fortune like his in a cause like that, could you not?" he asked with what seemed boyish simplicity.

The question startled her. "I--I don't know. . . . But certainly not," she hastened to add; "I couldn't touch the money. It is absurd--impossible."

"I can't see that," steadily persisted Kingsley. "This money was made out of the work of slaves. Certainly they were paid--they were, weren't they?" he asked with mock ignorance, turning to Dicky, who nodded assent. "They were paid wages by Kingsley--in kind, I suppose, but that's all that's needed in a country like the Soudan. But still they had to work, and their lives and bodies were Kingsley's for the time being, and the fortune wouldn't have been made without them; therefore, according to the most finely advanced theories of labour and ownership, the fortune is theirs as much as Kingsley's. But, in the nature of things, they couldn't have the fortune. What would they do with it? Wandering tribes don't need money. Barter and exchange of things in kind is the one form of finance in the Soudan. Besides, they'd cut each other's throats the very first day they got the fortune, and it would strew the desert sands. It's all illogical and impossible--"

"Yes, yes, I quite see that," she interposed.

"But you surely can see how the fortune could be applied to saving those races from slavery. What was wrung from the few by forced labour and loss of freedom could be returned to the many by a sort of national salvation. You could spend the fortune wisely--agents and missionaries everywhere; in the cafes, in the bazaars, in the palace, at court. Judicious gifts: and, at last, would come a firman or decree putting down slavery, on penalty of death. The fortune would all go, of course, but think of the good accomplished!"

"You mean that the fortune should be spent in buying the decree--in backsheesh?" she asked bewildered, yet becoming indignant.

"Well, it's like company promoting," Dicky interposed, hugely enjoying the comedy, and thinking that Kingsley had put the case shrewdly. It was sure to confuse her. "You have to clear the way, as it were. The preliminaries cost a good deal, and those who put the machinery in working order have to be paid. Then there's always some important person who holds the key of the situation; his counsel has to be asked. Advice is very expensive."

"It is gross and wicked!" she flashed out.

"But if you got your way? If you suppressed Kingsley Bey, rid the world of him--well, well, say, banished him," he quickly added, as he saw her fingers tremble--"and got your decree, wouldn't it be worth while? Fire

is fought with fire, and you would be using all possible means to do what you esteem a great good. Think of it--slavery abolished, your work accomplished, Kingsley Bey blotted out!"

Light and darkness were in her face at once. Her eyes were bright, her brows became knitted, her foot tapped the floor. Of course it was all make-believe, this possibility, but it seemed too wonderful to think of --slavery abolished, and through her; and Kingsley Bey, the renegade Englishman, the disgrace to his country, blotted out.

"Your argument is not sound in many ways," she said at last, trying to feel her course. "We must be just before all. The whole of the fortune was not earned by slaves. Kingsley Bey's ability and power were the original cause of its existence. Without him there would have been no fortune. Therefore, it would not be justice to give it, even indirectly, to the slaves for their cause."

"It would be penalty--Kingsley Bey's punishment," said Dicky slyly.

"But I thought he was to be blotted out," she said ironically, yet brightening, for it seemed to her that she was proving herself statesmanlike, and justifying her woman's feelings as well.

"When he is blotted out, his fortune should go where it can remedy the evil of his life."

"He may have been working for some good cause," quietly put in Kingsley. "Should not that cause get the advantage of his 'ability and power,' as you have called it, even though he was mistaken, or perverted, or cruel? Shouldn't an average be struck between the wrong his 'ability and power' did and the right that same 'ability and power' was intended to advance?"

She turned with admiration to Kingsley. "How well you argue--I remember you did years ago. I hate slavery and despise and hate slave-dealers and slave-keepers, but I would be just, too, even to Kingsley Bey. But what cause, save his own comfort and fortune, would he be likely to serve? Do you know him?" she added eagerly.

"Since I can remember," answered Kingsley, looking through the field-glasses at a steamer coming up the river.

"Would you have thought that he would turn out as he has?" she asked simply. "You see, he appears to me so dark and baleful a figure that I cannot quite regard him as I regard you, for instance. I could not realise knowing such a man."

"He had always a lot of audacity," Kingsley replied slowly, "and he certainly was a schemer in his way, but that came from his helpless poverty."

"Was he very poor?" she asked eagerly.

"Always. And he got his estates heavily encumbered. Then there were people--old ladies--to have annuities, and many to be provided for, and there was little chance in England for him. Good-temper and brawn weren't enough."

"Egypt's the place for mother-wit," broke in Dicky. "He had that anyhow. As to his unscrupulousness, of course that's as you may look at it."

"Was he always unscrupulous?" she asked. "I have thought him cruel and wicked nationally--un-English, shamefully culpable; but a man who is unscrupulous would do mean low things, and I should like to think that Kingsley is a villain with good points. I believe he has them, and I believe that deep down in him is something English and honourable after all--something to be reckoned with, worked on, developed. See, here is a letter I had from him two days ago"--she drew it from her pocket and handed it over to Dicky. "I cannot think him hopeless altogether . . . I freed the slaves who brought the letter, and sent them on to Cairo. Do you not feel it is hopeful?" she urged, as Dicky read the letter slowly, making sotto voce remarks meanwhile.

"Brigands and tyrants can be gallant--there are plenty of instances on record. What are six slaves to him?"

"He has a thousand to your one," said Kingsley slowly, and as though not realising his words.

She started, sat up straight in her chair, and looked at him indignantly. "I have no slaves," she said.

Kingsley Bey had been watching the Circassian girl Mata, in the garden for some time, and he had not been able to resist the temptation to make the suggestion that roused her now.

"I think the letter rather high-flown," said Dicky, turning the point, and handing the open page to Kingsley. "It looks to me as though written with a purpose."

"What a cryptic remark!" said Kingsley laughing, yet a little chagrined. "What you probably wish to convey is that it says one thing and means another."

"Suppose it does," interposed the lady. "The fact remains that he answered my appeal, which did not mince words, in most diplomatic and gentlemanly language. What do you think of the letter?" she asked, turning to Kingsley, and reaching a hand for it.

"I'll guarantee our friend here could do no better, if he sat up all night," put in Dicky satirically.

"You are safe in saying so, the opportunity being lacking." She laughed, and folded it up.

"I believe Kingsley Bey means what he says in that letter. Whatever his purpose, I honestly think that you might have great influence over him," mused Dicky, and, getting up, stepped from the veranda, as though to go to the bank where an incoming steamer they had been watching was casting anchor. He turned presently, however, came back a step and said "You see, all our argument resolves itself into this: if Kingsley is to be smashed only Ismail can do it. If Ismail does it, Kingsley will have the desert for a bed, for he'll not run, and Ismail daren't spare him. Sequel, all his fortune will go to the Khedive. Question, what are we going to do about it?"

So saying he left them, laughing, and went down the garden-path to the riverside. The two on the veranda sat silent for a moment, then Kingsley spoke.

"These weren't the things we talked about when we saw the clouds gather over Skaw Fell and the sun shine on the Irish Sea. We've done and seen much since then. Multitudes have come and gone in the world--and I have grown grey!" he added with a laugh.

"I've done little-nothing, and I meant and hoped to do much," she almost pleaded. "I've grown grey too."

"Not one grey hair," he said, with an admiring look. "Grey in spirit sometimes," she reflected with a tired air. "But you--forgive me, if I haven't known what you've done. I've lived out of England so long. You may be at the head of the Government, for all I know. You look to me as though you'd been a success. Don't smile. I mean it. You look as though you'd climbed. You haven't the air of an eldest son whose way is cut out for him, with fifty thousand a year for compensation. What have you been doing? What has been your work in life?"

"The opposite of yours."

He felt himself a ruffian, but he consoled himself with the thought that the end at which he aimed was good. It seemed ungenerous to meet her simple honesty by such obvious repartee, but he held on to see where the trail would lead.

"That doesn't seem very clear," she said in answer. "Since I came out here I've been a sort of riverine missionary, an apostle with no followers, a reformer with a plan of salvation no one will accept."

"We are not stronger than tradition, than the long custom of ages bred in the bone and practised by the flesh. You cannot change a people by firmans; you must educate them. Meanwhile, things go on pretty much the same. You are a generation before your time. It is a pity, for you have saddened your youth, and you may never live to see accomplished what you have toiled for."

"Oh, as to that--as to that . . ." She smoothed back her hair lightly, and her eyes wandered over the distant hills-mauve and saffron and opal, and tender with the mist of evening. "What does it matter!" she added. "There are a hundred ways to live, a hundred things to which one might devote one's life. And as the years went on we'd realise how every form of success was offset by something undone in another direction, something which would have given us joy and memory and content--so it seems. But--but we can only really work out one dream, and it is the working out--a little or a great distance--which satisfies. I have no sympathy with those who, living out their dreams, turn regretfully to another course or another aim, and wonder-wonder, if a mistake hasn't been made. Nothing is a mistake which comes of a good aim, of the desire for wrongs righted, the crooked places made straight. Nothing matters so that the dream was a good one and the heart approves and the eyes see far."

She spoke as though herself in a dream, her look intent on the glowing distance, as though unconscious of his presence.

"It's good to have lived among mountains and climbed them when you were young. It gives you bigger ideas of things. You could see a long way with the sun behind you, from Skaw Fell."

He spoke in a low voice, and her eyes drew back from the distance and

turned on him. She smiled.

"I don't know. I suppose it gives one proportion, though I've been told by Donovan Pasha and the Consul that I have no sense of proportion. What difference does it make? It is the metier of some people of this world to tell the truth, letting it fall as it will, and offend where it will, to be in a little unjust maybe, measure wrongly here and there, lest the day pass and nothing be done. It is for the world to correct, to adjust, to organise, to regulate the working of the truth. One person cannot do all."

Every minute made him more and more regretful, while it deepened his feelings for her. He saw how far removed was her mind from the sordid views of things, and how sincere a philosophy governed her actions and her mission.

He was about to speak, but she continued: "I suppose I've done unwise things from a worldly, a diplomatic, and a political point of view. I've--I've broken my heart on the rock of the impossible, so my father says. . . . But, no, I haven't broken my heart. I have only given it a little too much hope sometimes, too much disappointment at others. In any case--can one be pardoned for quoting poetry in these days? I don't know, I've been so long out of the world--

'Bruised hearts when all is ended,
Bear the better all after-stings;
Broken once, the citadel mended
Standeth through all things.'

I'm not--not hopeless, though I've had a long hard fight here in Egypt; and I've done so little." . . . She kept smoothing out the letter she had had from Kingsley Bey, as though unconsciously. "But it is coming, the better day. I know it. Some one will come who will do all that I have pleaded for--stop the corvee and give the peasants a chance; stop slavery, and purify the harem and start the social life on a higher basis; remove a disgrace from the commerce of an afflicted land; remove--remove once for all such men as Kingsley Bey; make it impossible for fortunes to be made out of human flesh and blood." She had the rapt look of the dreamer. Suddenly she recovered her more worldly mood: "What are you doing here?" she added. "Have you come to take up official life? Have you some public position--of responsibility? Ah, perhaps,"--she laughed almost merrily,--"you are the very man; the great reformer. Perhaps you think and feel as I do, though you've argued against me. Perhaps you only wanted to see how real my devotion to this cause is. Tell me, are you only a tourist--I was going to say idler, but I know you are not; you have the face of a man who does things--are you tourist or worker here? What does Egypt mean to you? That sounds rather non-conformist, but Egypt, to me, is the saddest, most beautiful, most mysterious place in the world. All other nations, all other races, every person in the world should be interested in Egypt. Egypt is the lost child of Creation--the dear, pitiful waif of genius and mystery of the world. She has kept the calendar of the ages--has outlasted all other nations, and remains the same as they change and pass. She has been the watcher of the world, the one who looks on, and suffers, as the rest of the nations struggle for and wound her in their turn. What does Egypt mean to you? What would you do for her--anything?"

There was no more satirical laughter in his eyes. He was deeply in earnest, disturbed, even excited. "Egypt means everything in the world

to me. I would do what I could for her."

"What has she done for you?"

"She has brought me to you again--to make me know that what you were by Skaw Fell all those years ago, you are now, and a thousand times more."

She parried the dangerous meaning in his voice, refused to see the tenderness in his manner.

"I'm very sorry to hear that," she added in a tone vainly trying to be unconcerned. "It is a pity that our youth pursues us in forms so little desirable. . . . Who are they?" she added quickly, nodding towards the shore, from which Dicky was coming with an Egyptian officer and a squad of soldiers.

"H'm," he responded laughing, "it looks like a matter of consequence. A Pasha, I should think, to travel with an escort like that."

"They're coming here," she added, and, calling to her servant, ordered coffee.

Suddenly Kingsley got to his feet, with a cry of consternation; but sat down again smiling with a shrug of the shoulders.

"What is it?" she asked, with something like anxiety, for she had seen the fleeting suspicion in his look.

"I don't know," he answered lightly, and as though the suspicion had gone. He watched Dicky and his companions closely, however, though he chatted unconcernedly while they stood in apparent debate, and presently came on. Dicky was whistling softly, but with an air of perplexity, and he walked with a precision of step which told Kingsley of difficulty ahead. He had not long to wait, and as Dicky drew nearer and looked him in the eyes, he came to his feet again, his long body gathering itself slowly up, as though for deliberate action. He felt trouble in the air, matters of moment, danger for himself, though of precisely what sort was not clear. He took a step forward, as though to shield the lady from possible affront.

"I fancy they want to see me," he said. He recognised the officer--Foulik Pasha of the Khedive's household.

The Pasha salaamed. Dicky drew over to the lady, with a keen warning glance at Kingsley. The Pasha salaamed again, and Kingsley responded in kind. "Good-day to you, Pasha," he said.

"May the dew of the morning bring flowers to your life, Excellency," was the reply. He salaamed now towards the lady, and Kingsley murmured his name to her.

"Will you not be seated," she said, and touched a chair as though to sit down, yet casting a doubtful glance at the squad of men and the brilliant kavass drawn up near by. The Pasha looked from one to the other, and Kingsley spoke.

"What is it, Pasha? Her ladyship doesn't know why she should be honoured."

"But that makes no difference," she interposed. "Here is coffee--ah, that's right, cigarettes too! But, yes, you will take my coffee, Pasha," she urged.

The insolent look which had gathered in the man's face cleared away. He salaamed, hesitated, and took the coffee, then salaamed again to her.

She had caught at a difficulty; an instinctive sense of peril had taken possession of her; and, feeling that the danger was for the Englishman who had come to her out of her old life, she had interposed a diplomatic moment. She wanted to gain time before the mystery broke over her. She felt something at stake for herself. Premonition, a troubling of the spirit, told her that she was in the presence of a crisis out of which she would not come unchanged.

Dicky was talking now, helping her--asking the Pasha questions of his journey up the river, of the last news from Europe, of the Khedive's health, though he and Kingsley had only left Cairo a half-day before the Pasha.

The officer thanked the lady and salaamed again, then turned towards Kingsley.

"You wished to speak with me, perhaps, Pasha," said Kingsley.

"If a moment of your time may have so little honour, saadat el bey."

Kingsley moved down the veranda shoulder to shoulder with the Pasha, and the latter's men, responding to a glance, moved down also. Kingsley saw, but gave no heed.

"What's up, Pasha?" he asked in a low voice. "The Khedive commands your return to Cairo."

"With you?"

"So, effendi."

"Compulsion, eh? I don't see quite. I'm an Englishman, not a fellah."

"But I have my commands, saadat el bey."

"What's the row, Pasha?"

"Is it for the servant to know the mind of his master?"

"And if I don't go?"

The Pasha pointed to his men, and motioned towards the boat where forty or fifty others showed. "Bosh, Pasha! That's no reason. That's flummery, and you know and the Highness knows it. That would have been all very well in the desert, but this is not the desert, and I'm not doing business with the Highness any more. What's the penalty if I don't go?"

"Twenty men will lose their heads to-morrow morning, a riot will occur, the bank where much gold is will be broken into, some one will be made poor, and--"

"Come, never mind twaddle about my money--we'll see about that. Those twenty men--my men?"

"Your men, saadat el bey."

"They're seized?"

"They are in prison."

"Where?"

"At Abdin Palace."

Kingsley Bey had had a blow, but he was not dumfounded. In Egypt, the wise man is never surprised at anything, and Kingsley had gone from experience to experience without dismay. He realised the situation at once. The Khedive had been worked upon by some one in the circle, and had put on this pressure, for purposes of backsheesh, or blackmail, or whatever it might be called. His mind was made up at once.

"Very well, Pasha. Though there's no reason why I should go with you except to suit myself. You'll excuse me for a moment, please." He turned back. Meanwhile, Dicky had been distracting the mind of the lady with evasive and cheerful suggestions of urgent business calling Kingsley to Cairo. He saw the plot that had been laid, and it made him very angry, but nothing could be done until he met the Khedive.

He guessed who had filled the Khedive's mind with cupidity. He had seen old Selamlik Pasha, who had lent the Khedive much money, entering the palace as he left with Kingsley Bey thirty-six hours before. He had hope that he could save the situation, but meanwhile he was concerned for the new situation created here at Assiout. What would Kingsley do? He knew what he himself would do in the circumstances, but in crises few men of character do the necessary thing in exactly the same way. Here was comedy of a high order, a mystery and necessary revelation of singular piquancy. To his thinking the revelation was now overdue.

He looked at the woman beside him, and he saw in her face a look it never had had before. Revelation of a kind was there; beauty, imagination, solicitude, delicate wonder were there. It touched him. He had never been arrested on his way of life by any dream of fair women, or any dream of any woman. It did not seem necessary--no one was necessary to him; he lived his real life alone, never sharing with any one that of himself which was not part of the life he lived before the world. Yet he had always been liked by men, and he had been agreeable in the sight of more women than he knew, this little man with a will of iron and a friendly heart. But he laughed silently now as he saw Kingsley approaching; the situation was so beautifully invented. It did not seem quite like a thing in real life. In any other country than Egypt it would have been comic opera--Foulik Pasha and his men so egregiously important; Kingsley so overwhelmed by the duty that lay before him; the woman in a whimsically embarrassing position with the odds, the laugh, against her, yet little likely to take the obvious view of things and so make possible a commonplace end. What would she do? What would Kingsley do? What would he, Dicky Donovan, do? He knew by the look in Kingsley's eyes that it was time for him to go. He moved down to Foulik Pasha, and, taking his arm, urged him towards the shore with a whispered word. The Pasha responded, followed by his men, but presently turned and, before Dicky could intervene--for he wanted Kingsley to make his own revelation--said

courteously:

"May the truth of Allah be with you, I will await you at the boat, Kingsley Bey."

Dicky did not turn round, but, with a sharp exclamation of profanity, drew Foulík Pasha on his imbecile way.

As for Kingsley Bey, he faced a woman who, as the truth dawned upon her, stared at him in a painful silence for a moment, and then drew back to the doorway of the house as though to find sudden refuge. Kingsley's head went round. Nothing had gone according to his anticipations. Foulík Pasha had upset things.

"Now you know--I wished to tell you myself," he said.

She answered at once, quietly, coldly, and with an even formal voice: "I did not know your name was Kingsley."

"It was my grandmother's name."

"I had forgotten--that is of no consequence, however; but--" she stopped.

"You realise that I am--"

"Yes, of course, Kingsley Bey--I quite understand. I thought you Lord Selden, an English gentleman. You are--" she made an impatient gesture--"well, you are English still!"

He was hit hard. The suggestion of her voice was difficult to bear.

"I am not so ungentlemanly as you think. I meant to tell you--almost at once. I thought that as an old friend I might wait a moment or two. The conversation got involved, and it grew harder every minute. Then Foulík Pasha came--and now. . . ."

She showed no signs of relenting. "It was taking advantage of an old-acquaintance. Against your evil influence here I have been working for years, while you have grown rich out of the slavery I detest. You will pardon my plain speaking, but this is not London, and one has had to learn new ways in this life here. I do not care for the acquaintance of slave-drivers, I have no wish to offer them hospitality. The world is large and it belongs to other people, and one has to endure much when one walks abroad; but this house is my own place, a little spot all my own, and I cherish it. There are those who come to the back door, and they are fed and clothed and sent away by the hand of charity; there are those who come to the front door, and I welcome them gladly--all that I have is theirs; there are those who come to a side door, when no one sees, and take me unawares, and of them I am afraid, their presence I resent. My doors are not open to slave-drivers."

"What is the difference between the letter from the slave-driver's hand and the slave-driver himself?"

She started and flushed deeply. She took the letter slowly from her pocket and laid it on the table.

"I thought it a letter from a man who was openly doing wrong, and who repented a little of his wrongdoing. I thought it a letter from a

stranger, from an Englishman who, perhaps, had not had such advantages of birth and education as came to you."

"Yet you had a good opinion of the letter. There seemed no want of education and all that there--won't you be reasonable, and let me explain? Give me half a chance."

"I do not see that explanation can mend anything. The men you sent me to free: that was a--well, call it a manoeuvre, to achieve what, I cannot tell. Is it not so? The men are not free. Is it not so?"

"I am afraid they are not free," he answered, smiling in spite of himself.

"Your coming here was a manoeuvre also--for what purpose I do not know. Yet it was a manoeuvre, and I am--or was to be--the victim of the plot." She smiled scornfully. "I trust you may yet be the victim of your own conduct."

"In more ways than one, maybe. Don't you think, now that the tables are turned, that you might have mercy on 'a prisoner and a captive'?"

She looked at him inquiringly, then glanced towards the shore where Dicky stood talking with Foulik Pasha. Her eyes came back slowly and again asked a question. All at once intelligence flashed into them.

"You wished to see Kingsley Bey a prisoner; you have your wish," he said smiling.

"Whose prisoner?" she asked, still coldly. "The Khedive's."

A flash of triumph crossed her face. Her heart beat hard. Had it come at last, the edict to put down slavery? Had the Khedive determined to put an end to the work of Kingsley Bey in his desert-city-and to Kingsley Bey himself? . . . Her heart stopped beating now. She glanced towards Dicky Donovan, and her pulses ran more evenly again. Would the Khedive have taken such a step unless under pressure? And who in Egypt could have, would have, persuaded him, save Dicky Donovan? Yet Dicky was here with his friend Kingsley Bey. The mystery troubled her, and the trouble got into her eyes.

"You are going to Cairo?" she said, glancing towards the boat.

"It would seem so."

"And Donovan Pasha goes too?"

"I hope so. I am not sure."

"But he must go," she said a little sharply.

"Yes?"

"He--you must have somebody, and he has great power."

"That might or might not be to my benefit. After all, what does it matter?"--He saw that she was perturbed, and he pressed his advantage.

She saw, however, and retreated. "We reap as we sow," she said, and made

as if to go inside the house. "You have had the game, you must pay for the candles out of your earnings."

"I don't mind paying what's fair. I don't want other people to pay."

She turned angrily on him, he could not tell why. "You don't want others to pay! As if you could do anything that doesn't affect others. Did you learn that selfishness at Skaw Fell, or was it born with you? You are of those who think they earn all their own success and happiness, and then, when they earn defeat and despair, are surprised that others suffer. As if our penalties were only paid by ourselves! Egotism, vanity! So long as you have your dance, it matters little to you who pays for the tune."

"I am sorry." He was bewildered; he had not expected this.

"Does a man stoop to do in a foreign land what he would not do in his own country--dare not do?--One is so helpless--a woman! Under cover of an old friend ship--ah!" She suddenly turned, and, before he could say a word, disappeared inside the house. He spoke her name once, twice; he ventured inside the house, and called, but she did not come. He made his way to the veranda, and was about to leave for the shore, when he heard a step behind him. He turned quickly. It was the Circassian girl, Mata.

He spoke to her in Arabic, and she smiled at him. "What is it?" he asked, for he saw she had come from her mistress.

"My Lady begs to excuse--but she is tired," she said in English, which she loved to use.

"I am to go on--to prison, then?"

"I suppose. It has no matter. My Lady is angry. She has to say, 'Thank you, good-bye.' So, goodbye," she added naively, and held out her hand.

Kingsley laughed, in spite of his discomfiture, and shook it.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am My Lady's slave," she said proudly.

"No, no--her servant. You can come and go as you like. You have wages."

"I am Mata, the slave--My Lady's slave. All the world knows I am her slave. Was I not given her by the Khedive whose slave I was? May the leaves of life be green always, but I am Mata the slave," she said stubbornly, shaking her head.

"Do you tell My Lady so?"

"Wherefore should I tell My Lady what she knows? Is not the truth the truth? Good-night! I had a brother who went to prison. His grave is by Stamboul. Good-night, effendi. He was too young to die, but he had gold, and the captain of the citadel needed money. So, he had to die. Malaish! He is in the bosom of God, and prison does not last forever. Goodnight, effendi. If you, effendi, are poor, it is well; no man will desire your life. Then you can be a slave, and have quiet nights. If you are rich, effendi, remember my brother. Good-night, effendi. May sacrifices be yours . . . and My Lady says good-night." Kingsley gave her a gold-piece and went down to Foulík Pasha.

As they steamed away Kingsley looked in vain to the house on the shore. There was no face at window or door, no sign of life about the place.

"Well, my bold bey," said Donovan Pasha to him at last, "what do you think of Egypt now?"

"I'm not thinking of Egypt now."

"Did the lady deeply sympathise? Did your prescription work?"

"You know it didn't. Nothing worked. This fool Foulik came at the wrong moment."

"It wouldn't have made any difference. You see you were playing with marked cards, and that is embarrassing. You got a certificate of character by--"

"Yes, I know. That's what she said. Never mind. I've played as I meant to play, and I'll abide the result. I said I'd marry her, and I mean to, though she gently showed me the door--beautiful, proud person!"

"She is much too good for you."

"What does that matter, if she doesn't think so?"

"My opinion is she'll never touch you or your slave-gold with a mile-measure."

Dicky did not think this, but it was his way of easing his own mind. Inwardly he was studying the situation, and wondering how he could put Kingsley's business straight.

"She thinks I'm still a 'slave-driver,' as she calls it--women are so innocent. You did your part, as well as could be expected, I'm bound to say. I only wish I wasn't so much trouble to you. I owe you a lot, Dicky Pasha--everything! You got me the golden shillings to start with; you had faith in me; you opened the way to fortune, to the thing that's more than fortune--to success."

"I'm not altogether proud of you. You've messed things to-day."

"I'll set them right to-morrow--with your help. Ismail is going a bit large this time."

"He is an Oriental. A life or two--think of Sadik Pasha. Your men--"

"Well? You think he'd do it--think he'd dare to do it?"

"Suppose they disappeared? Who could prove that Ismail did it? And if it could be proved--they're his own subjects, and the Nile is near! Who can say him nay?"

"I fancy you could--and I would."

"I can do something. I've done a little in my day; but my day, like Ismail's, is declining. They are his subjects, and he needs money, and he puts a price on their heads--that's about the size of it. Question How much will you have to pay? How much have you in Cairo at the bank?"

"Only about ten thousand pounds."

"He'd take your draft on England, but he'll have that ten thousand pounds, if he can get it."

"That doesn't matter, but as for my arrest--"

"A trick, on some trumped-up charge. If he can hold you long enough to get some of your cash, that's all he wants. He knows he's got no jurisdiction over you--not a day's hold. He knows you'd give a good deal to save your men."

"Poor devils! But to be beaten by this Egyptian bulldozer--not if I know it, Dicky"

"Still, it may be expensive."

"Ah!" Kingsley Bey sighed, and his face was clouded, but Dicky knew he was not thinking of Ismail or the blackmail. His eyes were on the house by the shore, now disappearing, as they rounded a point of land.

"Ah" said Donovan Pasha, but he did not sigh.

III

"Ah!" said a lady, in a dirty pink house at Assiout, with an accent which betrayed a discovery and a resolution, "I will do it. I may be of use some way or another. The Khedive won't dare--but still the times are desperate. As Donovan Pasha said, it isn't easy holding down the safety-valve all the time, and when it flies off, there will be dark days for all of us. . . . An old friend--bad as he is! Yes, I will go."

Within forty-eight hours of Donovan Pasha's and Kingsley Bey's arrival in Cairo the lady appeared there, and made inquiries of her friends. No one knew anything. She went to the Consulate, and was told that Kingsley Bey was still in prison, that the Consulate had not yet taken action.

She went to Donovan Pasha, and he appeared far more mysterious and troubled than he really was. Kingsley Bey was as cheerful as might be expected, he said, but the matter was grave. He was charged with the destruction of the desert-city, and maintaining an army of slaves in the Khedive's dominions--a menace to the country.

"But it was with the Khedive's connivance," she said. "Who can prove that? It's a difficult matter for England to handle, as you can see."

This was very wily of Dicky Donovan, for he was endeavouring to create alarm and sympathy in the woman's mind by exaggerating the charge. He knew that in a few days at most Kingsley Bey would be free. He had himself given Ismail a fright, and had even gone so far as to suggest inside knowledge of the plans of Europe concerning Egypt. But if he could deepen the roots of this comedy for Kingsley's benefit--and for the lady's--it was his duty so to do.

"Of course," he made haste to add, "you cannot be expected to feel

sympathy for him. In your eyes, he is a criminal. He had a long innings, and made a mint of money. We must do all we can, and, of course, we'll save his life--ah, I'm sure you wouldn't exact the fullest penalty on him!"

Dicky was more than wily; he was something wicked. The suggestion of danger to Kingsley's life had made her wince, and he had added another little barbed arrow to keep the first company. The cause was a good one. Hurt now to heal afterwards--and Kingsley was an old friend, and a good fellow. Anyhow, this work was wasting her life, and she would be much better back in England, living a civilised life, riding in the Row, and slumming a little, in the East End, perhaps, and presiding at meetings for the amelioration of the unameliorated. He was rather old-fashioned in his views. He saw the faint trouble in her eyes and face, and he made up his mind that he would work while it was yet the day. He was about to speak, but she suddenly interposed a question.

"Is he comfortable? How does he take it?"

"Why, all right. You know the kind of thing: mud walls and floor--quite dry, of course--and a sleeping-mat, and a balass of water, and cakes of dourha, and plenty of time to think. After all, he's used to primitive fare."

Donovan Pasha was drawing an imaginary picture, and drawing it with effect. He almost believed it as his artist's mind fashioned it. She believed it, and it tried her. Kingsley Bey was a criminal, of course, but he was an old friend; he had offended her deeply also, but that was no reason why he should be punished by any one save herself. Her regimen of punishments would not necessarily include mud walls and floor, and a sleeping-mat and a balass of water; and whatever it included it should not be administered by any hand save her own. She therefore resented, not quite unselfishly, this indignity and punishment the Khedive had commanded.

"When is he to be tried?"

"Well, that is hardly the way to put it. When he can squeeze the Khedive into a corner he'll be free, but it takes time. We have to go carefully, for it isn't the slave-master alone, it's those twenty slaves of his, including the six you freed. Their heads are worth a good deal to the Khedive, he thinks."

She was dumfounded. "I don't understand," she said helplessly.

"Well, the Khedive put your six and fourteen others in prison for treason or something--it doesn't matter much here what it is. His game is to squeeze Kingsley's gold orange dry, if he can."

A light broke over her face. "Ah, now I see," she said, and her face flushed deeply with anger and indignation. "And you--Donovan Pasha, you who are supposed to have influence with the Khedive, who are supposed to be an English influence over him, you can speak of this quietly, patiently, as a matter possible to your understanding. This barbarous, hideous black mail! This cruel, dreadful tyranny! You, an Englishman, remain in the service of the man who is guilty of such a crime!" Her breath came hard.

"Well, it seems the wisest thing to do as yet. You have lived a long

time in Egypt, you should know what Oriental rule is. Question: Is one bite of a cherry better than no bite of a cherry? Egypt is like a circus, but there are wild horses in the ring, and you can't ride them just as you like. If you keep them inside the barriers, that's something. Of course, Kingsley made a mistake in a way. He didn't start his desert-city and his slavery without the consent of the Khedive; he shouldn't have stopped it and gone out of business without the same consent. It cut down the Effendina's tribute."

He spoke slowly, counting every word, watching the effect upon her. He had much to watch, and he would have seen more if he had known women better.

"He has abandoned the mines--his city--and slavery?" she asked chokingly, confusedly. It seemed hard for her to speak.

"Yes, yes, didn't you know? Didn't he tell you?" She shook her head. She was thinking back--remembering their last conversation, remembering how sharp and unfriendly she had been with him. He had even then freed his slaves, had given her slaves to free.

"I wonder what made him do it?" added Dicky. "He had made a great fortune--poor devil, he needed it, for the estates were sweating under the load. I wonder what made him do it?"

She looked at him bewilderedly for a moment, then, suddenly, some faint suspicion struck her.

"You should know. You joined with him in deceiving me at Assiout."

"But, no," he responded quickly, and with rare innocence, "the situation was difficult. You already knew him very well, and it was the force of circumstances--simply the force of circumstances. Bad luck--no more. He was innocent, mine was the guilt. I confess I was enjoying the thing, because--because, you see he had deceived me, actually deceived me, his best friend. I didn't know he knew you personally, till you two met on that veranda at Assiout, and--"

"And you made it difficult for him to explain at once--I remember."

"I'm afraid I did. I've got a nasty little temper at times, and I had a chance to get even. Then things got mixed, and Foulik Pasha upset the whole basket of plums. Besides, you see, I'm a jealous man, an envious man, and you never looked so well as you did that day, unless it's to-day."

She was about to interrupt him, but he went on.

"I had begun to feel that we might have been better friends, you and I; that--that I might have helped you more; that you had not had the sympathy you deserved; that civilisation was your debtor, and that--"

"No, no, no, you must not speak that way to me," she interposed with agitation. "It--it is not necessary. It doesn't bear on the matter. And you've always been a good friend--always a good friend," she added with a little friendly quiver in her voice, for she was not quite sure of herself.

Dicky had come out in a new role, one wherein he would not have been

recognised. It was probably the first time he had ever tried the delicate social art of playing with fire of this sort. It was all true in a way, but only in a way. The truest thing about it was that it was genuine comedy, in which there were two villains, and no hero, and one heroine.

"But there it is," he repeated, having gone as far as his cue warranted. "I didn't know he had given up his desert-city till two days before you did, and I didn't know he knew you, and I don't know why he gave up his desert-city--do you?"

There was a new light in her eyes, a new look in her face. She was not sure but that she had a glimmering of the reason. It was a woman's reason, and it was not without a certain exquisite egotism and vanity, for she remembered so well the letter she had written him--every word was etched into her mind; and she knew by heart every word of his reply. Then there were the six slaves he sent to her--and his coming immediately afterwards. . . . For a moment she seemed to glow, and then the colour slowly faded and left her face rather grey and very quiet.

He might not be a slave-driver now, but he had been one--and the world of difference it made to her! He had made his great fortune out of the work of the men employed as slaves, and--she turned away to the window with a dejected air. For the first time the real weight of the problem pressed upon her heavily.

"Perhaps you would like to see him," said Dicky. "It might show that you were magnanimous."

"Magnanimous! It will look like that--in a mud-cell, with mud floor, and a piece of matting."

"And a balass of water and dourha-cakes," said Dicky in a childlike way, and not daring to meet her eyes.

He stroked his moustache with his thumb-nail in a way he had when perplexed. Kingsley Bey was not in a mud-cell, with a mat and a balass of water, but in a very decent apartment indeed, and Dicky was trying to work the new situation out in his mind. The only thing to do was to have Kingsley removed to a mud-cell, and not let him know the author of his temporary misfortune and this new indignity. She was ready to visit him now--he could see that. He made difficulties, however, which would prevent their going at once, and he arranged with her to go to Kingsley in the late afternoon.

Her mind was in confusion, but one thing shone clear through the confusion, and it was the iniquity of the Khedive. It gave her a foothold. She was deeply grateful for it. She could not have moved without it. So shameful was the Khedive in her eyes that the prisoner seemed Criminal made Martyr.

She went back to her hotel flaming with indignation against Ismail. It was very comforting to her to have this resource. The six slaves whom she had freed--the first-fruits of her labours: that they should be murdered! The others who had done no harm, who had been slaves by Ismail's consent, that they should be now in danger of their lives through the same tyrant! That Kingsley Bey, who had been a slave-master with Ismail's own approval and to his advantage, should now--she glowed with pained anger. . . . She would not wait till she had seen

Kingsley Bey, or Donovan Pasha again; she herself would go to Ismail at once.

So, she went to Ismail, and she was admitted, after long waiting in an anteroom. She would not have been admitted at all, if it had not been for Dicky, who, arriving just before her on the same mission, had seen her coming, and guessed her intention. He had then gone in to the Khedive with a new turn to his purposes, a new argument and a new suggestion, which widened the scope of the comedy now being played. He had had a struggle with Ismail, and his own place and influence had been in something like real danger, but he had not minded that. He had suggested that he might be of service to Egypt in London and Paris. That was very like a threat, but it was veiled by a look of genial innocence which Ismail admired greatly. He knew that Donovan Pasha could hasten the crisis coming on him. He did not believe that Donovan Pasha would, but that did not alter the astuteness and value of the move; and, besides, it was well to run no foolish risks and take no chances. Also, he believed in Donovan Pasha's honesty. He despised him in a worldly kind of way, because he might have been rich and splendid, and he was poor and unassuming. He wanted Kingsley Bey's fortune, or a great slice of it, but he wanted it without a struggle with Dicky Donovan, and with the British Consulate--for that would come, too, directly. It gave him no security to know that the French would be with him--he knew which country would win in the end. He was preying on Kingsley Bey's humanity, and he hoped to make it well worth while. And all he thought and planned was well understood by Dicky.

Over their coffee they both talked from long distances towards the point of attack and struggle, Ismail carelessly throwing in glowing descriptions of the palaces he was building. Dicky never failed to show illusive interest, and both knew that they were not deceiving the other, and both came nearer to the issue by devious processes, as though these processes were inevitable. At last Dicky suddenly changed his manner and came straight to the naked crisis.

"Highness, I have an invitation for Kingsley Bey to dine at the British Consulate to-night. You can spare his presence?"

"My table is not despicable. Is he not comfortable here?"

"Is a mud floor, with bread and water and a sleeping-mat, comfortable?"

"He is lodged like a friend."

"He is lodged like a slave--in a cell."

"They were not my orders."

"Effendina, the orders were mine."

"Excellency!"

"Because there were no orders and Foulik Pasha was sleepless with anxiety lest the prisoner should escape, fearing your Highness's anger, I gave orders and trusted your Highness to approve."

Ismail saw a mystery in the words, and knew that it was all to be part of Dicky's argument in the end. "So be it, Excellency," he said, "thou hast breathed the air of knowledge, thine actions shine. In what quarter of

the palace rests he? And Foulik Pasha?"

"Foulik Pasha sits by his door, and the room is by the doorway where the sarrafs keep the accounts for the palaces your Highness builds. Also, abides near, the Greek, who toils upon the usury paid by your Highness to Europe."

Ismail smiled. The allusions were subtle and piercing. There was a short pause. Each was waiting. Dicky changed the attack. "It is a pity we should be in danger of riot at this moment, Highness."

"If riots come, they come. It is the will of God, Excellency. But in our hand lies order. We will quiet the storm, if a storm fall."

"There will be wreck somewhere."

"So be it. There will be salvage."

"Nothing worth a riot, Highness."

The Khedive eyed Dicky with a sudden malice and a desire to slay--to slay even Donovan Pasha. He did not speak, and Dicky continued negligently: "Prevention is better than cure."

The Khedive understood perfectly. He knew that Dicky had circumvented him, and had warned the Bank.

Still the Khedive did not speak. Dicky went on. "Kingsley Bey deposited ten thousand pounds--no more. But the gold is not there; only Kingsley Bey's credit."

"His slaves shall die to-morrow morning."

"Not so, Highness."

The Khedive's fingers twisted round the chair-arm savagely.

"Who will prevent it?"

"Your Highness will. Your Highness could not permit it--the time is far past. Suppose Kingsley Bey gave you his whole fortune, would it save one palace or pay one tithe of your responsibilities? Would it lengthen the chain of safety?"

"I am safe."

"No, Highness. In peril--here with your own people, in Europe with the nations. Money will not save you."

"What then?"

"Prestige. Power--the Soudan. Establish yourself in the Soudan with a real army. Let your name be carried to the Abyssinian mountains as the voice of the eagle."

"Who will carry it?" He laughed disdainfully, with a bitter, hopeless kind of pride. "Who will carry it?"

"Gordon-again."

The Khedive started from his chair, and his sullen eye lighted to laughter. He paced excitedly to and fro for a minute, and then broke out:

"Thou hast said it! Gordon--Gordon--if he would but come again!--But it shall be so, by the beard of God's prophet, it shall. Thou hast said the thing that has lain in my heart. Have I had honour in the Soudan since his feet were withdrawn? Where is honour and tribute and gold since his hand ruled--alone without an army? It is so--Inshallah! but it is so. He shall come again, and the people's eyes will turn to Khartoum and Darfdr and Kordofan, and the greedy nations will wait. Ah, my friend, but the true inspiration is thine! I will send for Gordon to night--even to-night. Thou shalt go--no, no, not so. Who can tell--I might look for thy return in vain! But who--who, to carry my word to Gordon?"

"Your messenger is in the anteroom," said Dicky with a sudden thought.

"Who is it, son of the high hills?"

"The lady at Assiout--she who is such a friend to Gordon as I am to thee, Highness."

"She whose voice and hand are against slavery?"

"Even so. It is good that she return to England there to remain. Send her."

"Why is she here?" The Khedive looked suspiciously at Dicky, for it seemed that a plot had been laid.

Thereupon, Dicky told the Khedive the whole story, and not in years had Ismail's face shown such abandon of humour.

"By the will of God, but it shall be!" he said. "She shall marry Kingsley Bey, and he shall go free."

"But not till she has seen him and mourned over him in his cell, with the mud floor and the balass of water."

The Khedive laughed outright and swore in French. "And the cakes of dourha! I will give her as a parting gift the twenty slaves, and she shall bring her great work to a close in the arms of a slaver. It is worth a fortune."

"It is worth exactly ten thousand pounds to your Highness--ten thousand pounds neither more nor less."

Ismail questioned.

"Kingsley Bey would make last tribute of thus much to your Highness."

Ismail would not have declined ten thousand centimes. "Malaish!" he said, and called for coffee, while they planned what should be said to his Ambassadors from Assiout.

She came trembling, yet determined, and she left with her eyes full of joyful tears. She was to carry the news of his freedom and the freedom of his slaves to Kingsley Bey, and she--she, was to bear to Gordon, the

foe of slavery, the world's benefactor, the message that he was to come and save the Soudan. Her vision was enlarged, and never went from any prince a more grateful supplicant and envoy.

Donovan Pasha went with her to the room with the mud floor where Kingsley Bey was confined.

"I owe it all to you," she said as they hastened across the sun-swept square. "Ah, but you have atoned! You have done it all at once, after these long years."

"Well, well, the time is ripe," said Dicky piously. They found Kingsley Bey reading the last issue of the French newspaper published in Cairo. He was laughing at some article in it abusive of the English, and seemed not very downcast; but at a warning sign and look from Dicky, he became as grave as he was inwardly delighted at seeing the lady of Assiout.

As Kingsley Bey and the Ambassadors shook hands, Dicky said to her: "I'll tell him, and then go." Forthwith he said: "Kingsley Bey, son of the desert, and unhappy prisoner, the prison opens its doors. No more for you the cold earth for a bed--relieved though it be by a sleeping-mat. No more the cake of dourha and the balass of Nile water. Inshallah, you are as free as a bird on the mountain top, to soar to far lands and none to say thee nay."

Kingsley Bey caught instantly at the meaning lying beneath Dicky's whimsical phrases, and he departed himself accordingly. He looked inquiringly at the Ambassadors, and she responded:

"We come from the Khedive, and he bids us carry you his high considerations--"

"Yes, 'high considerations,' he said," interjected Dicky with his eye towards a fly on the ceiling.

"And to beg your company at dinner to-night."

"And the price?" asked Kingsley, feeling his way carefully, for he wished no more mistakes where this lady was concerned. At Assiout he had erred; he had no desire to be deceived at Cairo. He did not know how he stood with her, though her visit gave him audacious hopes. Her face was ruled to quietness now, and only in the eyes resolutely turned away was there any look which gave him assurance. He seemed to hear her talking from the veranda that last day at Assiout; and it made him discreet at least.

"Oh, the price!" murmured Dicky, and he seemed to study the sleepy sarraf who pored over his accounts in the garden. "The price is 'England, home, and beauty.' Also to prop up the falling towers of Khedivia--ten thousand pounds! Also, Gordon."

Kingsley Bey appeared, as he was, mystified, but he was not inclined to spoil things by too much speaking. He looked inquiry.

At that moment an orderly came running towards the door--Dicky had arranged for that. Dicky started, and turned to the lady. "You tell him. This fellow is coming for me. I'll be back in a quarter of an hour." He nodded to them both and went out to the orderly, who followed his footsteps to the palace.

"You've forgiven me for everything--for everything at Assiout, I mean?" he asked.

"I have no desire to remember," she answered. "About Gordon--what is it?"

"Ah, yes, about Gordon!" She drew herself up a little. "I am to go to England--for the Khedive, to ask Gordon to save the Soudan."

"Then you've forgiven the Khedive?" he inquired with apparent innocence.

"I've no wish to prevent him showing practical repentance," she answered, keenly alive to his suggestion, and a little nettled. "It means no more slavery. Gordon will prevent that."

"Will he?" asked Kingsley, again with muffled mockery.

"He is the foe of slavery. How many, many letters I have had from him! He will save the Soudan--and Egypt too."

"He will be badly paid--the Government will stint him. And he will give away his pay--if he gets any."

She did not see his aim, and her face fell. "He will succeed for all that."

"He can levy taxes, of course."

"But he will not-for himself."

"I will give him twenty thousand pounds, if he will take it."

"You--you!--will give him--" Her eyes swam with pleasure. "Ah, that is noble! That makes wealth a glory, to give it to those who need it. To save those who are down-trodden, to help those who labour for the good of the world, to--" she stopped short, for all at once she remembered--remembered whence his money came. Her face suffused. She turned to the door. Confusion overmastered her for the moment. Then, anger at herself possessed her. On what enterprise was she now embarked? Where was her conscience? For what was she doing all this? What was the true meaning of her actions? Had it been to circumvent the Khedive? To prevent him from doing an unjust, a despicable, and a dreadful thing? Was it only to help the Soudan? Was it but to serve a high ideal, through an ideal life--through Gordon?

It came upon her with embarrassing force. For none of these things was she striving. She was doing all for this man, against whose influence she had laboured, whom she had bitterly condemned, and whose fortune she had called blood-money and worse. And now...

She knew the truth, and it filled her heart with joy and also pain. Then she caught at a straw: he was no slave-driver now. He had--

"May I not help you--go with you to England?" he questioned over her shoulder.

"Like Alexander Selkirk 'I shall finish my journey alone,'" she said, with sudden but imperfectly assumed acerbity.

"Will you not help me, then?" he asked. "We could write a book together."

"Oh, a book!" she said.

"A book of life," he whispered.

"No, no, no--can't you see?--oh, you are playing me like a ball!"

"Only to catch you," he said, in a happier tone.

"To jest, when I am so unhappy!" she murmured.

"My jest is the true word."

She made a last rally. "Your fortune was made out of slave labour."

"I have given up the slaves."

"You have the fortune."

"I will give it all to you--to have your will with it. Now it is won, I would give it up and a hundred times as much to hear you say, 'Come to Skaw Fell again.'"

Did he really mean it? She thought he did. And it seemed the only way out of the difficulty. It broke the impasse.

It was not necessary, however, to spend the future in the way first suggested to her mind. They discussed all that at Skaw Fell months later.

Human nature is weak and she has become a slavedriver, after all. But he is her only slave, and he hugs his bondage.

GLOSSARY

Aiwa, effendi----Yea, noble sir.

Allah----God.

Allah-haly 'm alla-haly----A singsong of river-workers.

Allah Kerim----God is bountiful.

Allshu Akbar----God is most Great.

A'l'meh----Female professional singers

Antichi----Antiquities.

Backsheesh----Tip, douceur, bribe.

Balass----Earthen vessel for carrying water.

Basha----Pasha.

Bersim----Grass.

Bimbashi----Major.

Bishareen----A native tribe.

Bismillah----In the name of God.

Bowab----A doorkeeper.

Corvee----Forced labour.

Dahabeah----A Nile houseboat with large lateen sails.
Darabukkeh----A drum made of a skin stretched over an earthenware funnel.
Doash----(Literally) Treading. A ceremony performed on the return of the Holy Carpet from Mecca.
Dourha----Maize.

Effendina----Highness.
El aadah----The ordinary.
El Azhar----The Arab University at Cairo.
Fantasia----Celebration with music, dancing, and processions.
Farshoot----The name of a native tribe.
Fatihah----The opening chapter of the Koran, recited at weddings, etc.

Feddan----The most common measure of land--a little less than an acre.
Also dried hay.
Fellah (plu. fellaheen)----The Egyptian peasant.
Felucca----A small boat, propelled by oars or sails.
Fessikh----Salted fish.
Ghaffirs----Humble village officials.
Ghawdzee----The tribe of public dancing-girls. A female of this tribe is called "Ghazeeyeh," and a man "Ghazee," but the plural Ghawazee is generally understood as applying to the female.
Ghimah----The Mahomedan Sunday.

Gippy----Colloquial name for an Egyptian soldier.
Goolah----Porous water-jar of Nile mud.
Hakim----Doctor.
Hanouti----Funeral attendants.
Hari-kari----An Oriental form of suicide.
Hashish----Leaves of hemp.
Inshallah----God willing.
Jibbeh----Long coat or smock, worn by dervishes.
Kavass----An orderly.
Kemengeh----A cocoanut fiddle.
Khamsin----A hot wind of Egypt and the Soudan.
Khedive----The title granted in 1867 by the Sultan of Turkey to the ruler of Egypt.
Khiassa----Small boat.
Khowagah----Gentleman.
Koran----The Scriptures of the Mahomedans.
Kourbash----A stick, a whip.

La ilaha illa-llah----There is no God but God.
Mafish----Nothing.
Magnoon----Fool.
Malaish----No matter.
Mamour----A magistrate.
Mankalah----A game.
Mastaba----A bench.
Mejidieh----A Turkish Order.
Mirkaz----District.
Moghassils----Washers of the dead.
Moufetish----High steward.
Mudir----A Governor of a Mudirieh or province.
Muezzin----The sheikh of the mosque who calls to prayer.
Mushrabieh----Lattice window.

Naboot----Quarter staff.

Narghileh----The Oriental tobacco-pipe.
Nehar-ak koom said----Greeting to you.
Omdah----The head of a village.
Ooster----One of the best sort.

Ramadan----The Mahomedan season of fasting.
Reis----Pilot.

Saadat el basha----Excellency.
Sais----Groom.
Sakkia----Persian water-wheel.
Salaam----A salutation of the East; an obeisance, performed by bowing
very low and placing the right palm on the forehead and on the
breast.
Sarraf----An accountant.
Shadoof----Bucket and pole used by natives for lifting water.
Sha'er----A reciter. (The singular of Sho'ara, properly signifying a
poet.)
Sheikh-el-beled----Head of a village.
Shintiyah----Very wide trousers, worn by the women of the middle and
higher orders.
Sitt----"The Lady."

Tarboosh----Fez or native turban.
Tarah----A veil for the head.
Ulema----Learned men.

Waled----A boy.
Wekeel----A deputy.
Welee----A favourite of Heaven; colloquially a saint.

Yashmak----A veil for the lower part of the face.
Yelek----A long vest or smock, worn over the shirt and shintiyah.

Zeriba----A palisade.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

As if our penalties were only paid by ourselves!
Credulity, easily transmutable into superstition
Paradoxes which make for laughter--and for tears
What is crime in one country, is virtue in another
Women only admitted to Heaven by the intercession of husbands

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