

EL MAHDI TRIUMPHANT

THE PERIL OF THE BRITISH FORCES ON THE NILE.

GEN. GORDON BELIEVED TO BE DEAD—
GEN. STEWART'S DANGER AT GUBAT—
ANXIETY AT THE ENGLISH CAPITAL.

LONDON, Feb. 7.—While all news from the Soudan now places the date of El Mahdi's capture of Khartoum as Jan. 27 there still remains a painful uncertainty as to whether Gen. Gordon is dead or alive. At the War Office it is believed that he was killed, and several facts are given as confirming this opinion. When Col. Wilson was on his way from Gubat to Khartoum, on Jan. 26, natives told him that Gen. Gordon had been fighting hard for 15 days. The next day he was told that Gen. Gordon was dead. This news was amplified by reports which reached him while returning to Gubat. Gen. Gordon, the story was, and all the Coptic troops who had stood by him had been captured by El Mahdi's men and put to death. This statement was brought at different times by different Arabs.

Other stories deny that Gordon was put to death after having been made a prisoner, but assert that he was killed in action, having refused to give or take quarter. In support of this is the report of some Rhagiye men that Gordon, Consul Nicolis, 50 Greeks, and some soldiers, when pressed to desperation, shut themselves up in a Catholic church, whither they had removed a quantity of ammunition and provisions. On the other hand, El Mahdi, in a letter to the British officers at Abu Kru, implies that Gordon is still alive. But it has been proved that no trustworthy information can be obtained from the natives. The spy service organized by Lord Wolseley, and now directed by Col. Wilson, has misled the commander throughout the campaign. Gen. Gordon knew the treacherous Arab nature well, for some time ago he warned Lord Wolseley that he (Gordon) was in danger of treachery. It was on this account that Lord Wolseley expedited a small force across the Bayuda Desert, with orders to make all possible speed in reaching Khartoum. It is noted as a coincidence that the date of the reported fall of Khartoum was the anniversary of Gen. Gordon's departure from Cairo one year ago.

Advices received to-night from the British camp near Metemneh, dated Feb. 1, say: "It is reported that previous to the fall of Khartoum the Mahdi sent Gen. Gordon a uniform that at the same time informing him that Khartoum was in the Mahdi's power. Gen. Gordon frequently tried to make arrangements for the departure of himself and his comrades. The latter became disheartened over the non-arrival of the British, and anger and mistrust were rampant. The two Pashas who betrayed the city were formerly slaves whom Gen. Gordon made Pashas. There has been a further fall of the Nile of three feet at Gubat, and navigation is dangerous."

Gen. Wolseley's latest report was sent this afternoon. He was still without definite news of Gen. Gordon's fate. He had sent further spies to Khartoum, with the promise that they should be liberally rewarded if they could definitely ascertain whether Gordon is dead or alive.

Now, flushed with the success at Khartoum and the apparent helplessness of the beleaguered British forces, El Mahdi is daily increasing his already large army. The river above the sixth cataract fairly swarms with hostile Arabs. Men of the Rhagiye tribe told Col. Wilson that all their fighting men would join the rebels. Perhaps Arabi may be a good judge of the Mahdi's probable force. A dispatch from Ceylon credits him with saying that before the fall of Khartoum El Mahdi had, he believes, at least 150,000 soldiers in his army. By soldiers Arabi said he meant only men armed with spears. The Prophet's army, Arabi continued, varied in size according to the news of British success or reverse, upon which the disposition of the tribal chiefs depended. The capture of Khartoum, he believed, would draw all the Arab chiefs under the standard of El Mahdi. Around Khartoum, Arabi thinks, the Prophet has had at least 70,000 men. The Arabic journal, *Mubashir*, of Cairo, says that El Mahdi's council of war consists of the Ameer of El Rasher, El Aisgumer, El Obeid, and Tendelmi. All the war plans, it is stated, are formed by the Ameer of El Rasher. The Prophet's soldiers are paid every Friday by El Mahdi's uncle. The provisions for the army are under the care of the Ameer of El Aisgumer. Seventy-four dervishes act as prayer reciters for the camp. Eight hundred women and many children are with the Prophet's camp. It is stated in Cairo that while Osman Digna, the rebel chief in the Eastern Soudan, has heard of the capture of Khartoum, no great excitement has been caused among the tribes of the Red Sea shore.

Meanwhile Gen. Stewart's situation at Gubat is becoming very alarming. El Mahdi has threatened to attack the camp with an overwhelming force. Lord Wolseley telegraphs to the War Office that a courier who has just arrived from Gubat reports Col. Boscaawer, the commander at that place, seriously ill, and that the Mahdi's forces are preparing to attack the British camp. The Arabs have several heavy guns, which are being gradually moved up so as to bear on the British camp, and other field pieces are being manoeuvred for the same purpose. The Mahdi has 30,000 men scattered between Berber, Shendy, and Metemneh, and the force at the latter place is daily receiving reinforcements. The *Standard*, *Times*, and *Post* are still without telegrams from the front, and fears are expressed that ample time has already elapsed since the fall of Khartoum to allow the rebels to make a movement from Omdurman against the flank or rear of the isolated garrisons of Abu-Klea and Gubat. If such a movement has been made it will be absolutely necessary to depend on the Nile steamers to furnish those garrisons with supplies.

The most trustworthy news of the situation at Gubat left there Feb. 1, and gives a gloomy outlook. The men had been placed on three-quarter rations. These had, however, been once supplemented with a dole of beans and some fresh meat. The camels, however, had plenty of forage. Shendy, on the opposite bank of the Nile, and Metemneh, three miles from Gubat, were occasionally shelled by a steamer. The troops were busily employed in clearing the ground in front of the camp, and in detached work at the adjoining villages. The main earthworks erected for the protection of the camp from the river front had already been greatly strengthened, and it was calculated that they would be completed that night. Several of the men who had been wounded in the desert battles had died in camp since the arrival of the army at Gubat. The others were doing well. The remainder of the Royal Artillery and Naval Brigade, with 10 guns, including one Gardner, had arrived. A convoy had been sent back to Gakdul Wells for more stores, and had taken 40 of the wounded along. Nearly every night the pickets exchanged shots with unfriendly Arabs. The camp daily sends out foraging parties. These patrol the Nile on steamers, and take whatever forage and cattle they can procure. Whenever the owners of the supplies appear they are paid in money for the cattle and forage. With the single exception of the part of a small tribe four miles south of the camp and on the opposite bank of the river there are no natives in the vicinity of the camp who profess friendliness for the British and offer them cattle for sale. But even these fire after the English steamers when they leave, in order to deceive the hostile natives. Before Col. Wilson gave up the attempt to

reach Khartoum his little steamers sustained for four hours the fire of 7,000 riflemen, eight Krupp guns, and eight machine guns. The Arabs showed splendid practice in handling the large guns. The water in the Nile is rapidly falling, and navigation on the river above Metemneh will soon become impracticable. The troops at Gubat are cheerful, but their officers exhibit much fretfulness and disappointment over the absence of reinforcements and of Lord Wolseley.

A dispatch received to-day from Gen. Wolseley's headquarters states that couriers, accompanied by an escort, now on their way across the Bayuda Desert to Korti, are expected to arrive at Korti to-night. The couriers are carrying the report of Lord Beresford's attempt to rescue Col. Wilson and his party from the island in the Nile where, with a number of refugees from Khartoum, they had been hemmed in by hostile Arabs.

A dispatch from Merani says: "The Black Watch and Staffordshire Regiments have passed the Bahami Cataract. On their way they destroyed the houses of Suleiman Wad Gamz, who perpetrated the massacre of Col. Stewart and party. The rebels abandoned the Shakvok Pass and much ammunition and grain were found there. The Cornwall regiment is now passing the cataract."

The Cabinet meeting to-day was prolonged until 3:35 o'clock this afternoon. Messengers were dispatched every few minutes between Downing-street and the War Office and the Admiralty. Telegrams were received at short intervals from Lord Wolseley. In these Lord Wolseley expresses the belief that the entrenched garrisons at Abu-Klea and Gubat are not endangered, although the continued absence of news concerning Lord Charles Beresford's attempt to relieve Sir Charles Wilson causes anxiety. It is rumored that an order has been telegraphed to Lord Wolseley to ascertain if possible, before taking decisive action, whether Gen. Gordon is dead or alive. If he discovers that he still lives he is instructed to try to terminate the campaign without further fighting. This instruction is thought to imply a desire on the part of the Government to secure the release of Gen. Gordon and his companions by means of a ransom.

The War Office has summoned the heads of the Arsenal Department and of other departments to a consultation regarding what steps shall be taken. Great activity prevails at the various dockyards, and the employes are working overtime. The War Office continues to be visited by a constant stream of officers, who offer to enroll themselves for service in Egypt.

It is currently reported at Woolwich that a new army corps of 10,000 men will be sent to Khartoum by the way of Abyssinia, and that it will be accompanied by a siege train manned by two or three batteries of artillery, the guns and equipments of which are now ready at Malta and Alexandria. The fact that the Government is making inquiries concerning pack saddles for mules and in regard to tube saddles is believed to confirm the idea that a march through Abyssinia is contemplated. It is considered significant that Col. Inglis, who had charge of the fitting out of the expedition commanded by Lord Wolseley, has just arrived at Woolwich.

A dispatch from Cairo says that Sir Evelyn Baring, the British Consul-General, has telegraphed to the Government advising the dispatch of 20,000 Indian troops for service in Egypt.

The War Office reports that no troops can be spared from Ireland. It has been suggested that the Government call out a sufficient number of the militia to do garrison duty in place of the battalions to be sent to the Mediterranean. The *Army and Navy Gazette* considers that it would be insane to reduce the number of European soldiers at garrisons in Hindostan at the present moment. It says that if Gen. Earle succeeds in reaching Berber with his army he can hold the place and fortify it in such a way as to be able to await an advance from Suakin, and in the meantime drive Osman Digna from his present control of the route between Suakin and Berber. From Berber Gen. Earle, by controlling the line of march from Suakin, would command a better basis of supplies than now possessed by the English troops in the Soudan.

The dispatches which have passed between Lord Wolseley and the Government have contained no reference to the employment of Turkish troops in the Soudan, and the advisability of negotiating with Italy for help in the shape of troops has been discussed. No objection has been made to the employment of Indian troops to assist the British forces in Egypt, and the opinion has been expressed that several thousand of these troops might proceed from Bombay to Suakin in five days.

The Government has issued orders allowing the free transmission of news from the Soudan until Sunday night, after which fresh restrictions will be imposed.

The Queen has sent a message of sympathy to Gen. Gordon's relatives.