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*Dulcius ex Arduis*

"His life was gentle and the elements  
So mixed in him that Nature might stand up  
And say to all the world "This was a man".

Picture a man rather under average height,  
whose countenance bore a pleasant frank  
appearance, with keen blue eyes which seemed  
to compel the truth from all, abundant curly  
hair — such was the hero "Chinese Gordon",  
"the Good Pasha".

Charles George Gordon was born on the  
28<sup>th</sup> January 1833 at Woolwich where his father  
an officer in the Royal Artillery was stationed at  
the time. Of the five sons of William Henry Gordon,  
Charles was the fourth. He came of a gallant race, with  
a quick sense of honour, seeing clearly the obvious  
course of duty and never hesitating in its fulfillment.

At the age of ten he was sent to school at  
Launton where he remained for five years. He  
then entered the Royal Academy at Woolwich. During  
the four years he remained there he gave some evidence  
of the qualities that subsequently distinguished him.  
At the same time he showed a lightness of disposition  
which many will think at great variance with  
the gravity and even solemnity of his later years. Among  
his fellow students he was not distinguished by any  
special devotion to study. He was certainly no book worm.  
Years later his ideas on education were expressed  
in a letter to his sister, "If I had sons I would  
certainly teach them a little of most trades. A  
little carpentry, black and tin smithing, shoe-mak-  
ing and tailoring would be a great gift to a young man." The

time came, when without any teaching, Gordon had to turn his hand to all these trades.

At the Academy he was known rather for his love of sport, and high spirits than for attention to his studies. More than once he was involved in affairs that if excusable and natural in the score of youth stretched beyond the borders of discipline.

There were two sides to his character. Much disappointment and a solitary existence might have made him a ~~solitary~~ melancholy philosopher, but he possessed a genial and generous disposition that did not disavow the lighter side of human nature, a heart <sup>full</sup> too of kindness to cherish wrath for long and an almost boyish love of fun that needed only the occasion to reveal itself. Even in the midst of his escapades at the Academy something of the <sup>spirit of the</sup> future hero showed itself. However grave the offence or heavy the punishment he was never backward in taking his share of blame for any scrape into which he and his friends were brought by their excessive high spirits. On more than one occasion his sense of justice resulted in his being the scape-goat of worse offenders. His earnestness saved him from the frivolity into which a light heart and good health might have led him.

Four years after he entered the Royal Military Academy, Charles Gordon passed out with the rank of lieutenant in the Royal Engineers. In 1854 he was ordered to Pembroke Dock, then one of the busiest naval depots in the country. In December of the same year he left England for Crimea, where war had been declared between England and France on the one side and Russia on the other. Till the end of the Crimean campaign Gordon was continually under fire, displaying

zeal and energy and entirely careless of his own life.

He did not obtain any honour or promotion from Britain for his Burmese services. Though the French Government, more discerning than his own, awarded him the Legion of Honour.

At the termination of the Burmese War Gordon was one of the commission appointed to define the new frontiers of Bessarabia and Armenia. He returned to England but before the end of the year he was again sent to the East to arrange certain points in connection with the Russo-Armenian frontier. On his return he was gazetted captain and Field-work instructor and adjutant at Chatham. In 1860 he was ordered to China where an Anglo-French expedition had been sent to compel the Chinese to ratify the Treaty of Tientsin, after the signing of which he was stationed there for eighteen months. Here he did much <sup>good work</sup> among the Chinese and made explorations through parts of the country then unknown to Europe. In 1862 he was moved to Shanghai as chief of an Engineering corps against the rebel Taiping.

Gordon, now raised to the rank of major, was lent to the Chinese Government for the suppression of the rebellion. He took command of the Chinese force named the "Ever Victorious Army" which brought the war to a triumphant conclusion in May 1864.

Throughout the campaign, Gordon showed all gallantry to the resisting, and then mercy to the vanquished; taking no personal advantage, refusing all rewards offered to him by the Chinese Government, he who was now called "Chinese Gordon" proved himself a high-minded and unselfish man. In China he will be remembered for his rare modesty, for his noble disdain of money and for the spirit of tolerance with which he reconciled the incompatible part of "a British

officer and Chinese ~~mandarin~~ - mandarin."

After the exciting ten years which began in the Crimea and ended in China, Gordon spent six uneventful years in England. He had been appointed chief of the Engineering staff at Gravesend and there devoted himself to philanthropic work in the neighbourhood. It was his habit to gather waifs and not only to supply their wants but teach them himself during his spare time. When they were old enough he procured for them work, generally choosing the navy. All this practical philanthropy was affected by Gordon on his pay as an English colonel, for he had no private means and appealed to nobody for support.

In 1871 Colonel Gordon was appointed British Consul at Galatz with a salary of £2000 a year. However the Khedive wanted to increase it to £5000 but Gordon absolutely refused to accept it for, he said, "I wish to show the Khedive and his people that gold and silver idols are not worshipped by all the world. They are very powerful gods, but not so powerful as our God."

Later in 1874-79 he resided in Egypt, first as governor of the tribes of the Upper Nile and again as governor general of the Sudan. ~~Here~~ was there to suppress the slave trade and improve the means of communication in the Sudan and at the same time to act as mediator between Egypt and Abyssinia. He was quite alone - one man against fearful odds, but with God on his side. So often in his life was this the case that he has been named "The man who walked with God". His first address as Governor General to the people was short and very much to the point. It was, "with the help of God I shall keep the balance level." It was a speech understood by all and promised all they wanted, fairness and justice. He hated slavery and did much towards abolishing it,

though his difficulties were countless and at Home a section of the people were objecting to his methods.

His achievements in the Sudan, not less remarkable in themselves though obtained with far less help from others than his triumphs over the Sackings, roused no enthusiasm and received but scanty notice. It was not until his remarkable mission to Khartoum only four years later till public opinion of work woke up to a sense of all he had done and realised to its full extent the magnitude and splendour of his work as governor general of the Sudan. His appointment closed owing to intrigues of the official class at Cairo. It is remarkable that those whom he had served so long and well should have allowed him to depart without any manifestation of honour. Though greatly needing rest he acted for a few months as secretary to Lord Ripon in India and visited China to advise the Chinese Government which seemed on the verge of war with Russia. His going there was not approved of by the Home Government and he went under the displeasure of his superiors and in a penniless condition. He felt he had a mission to persuade the Chinese not to go to war with Russia, both in their own interest and for those of the world especially England. He accomplished his task and with this incident closed Gordon's connection with China, the country associated with his most brilliant feat of arms.

His next year was spent at Mauritius after which he went to South Africa in order that his military experience might be used for the purpose of overthrowing Masupha and of annexing Basutoland. Upon investigation Gordon claimed that justice was on the side of Masupha; that on no circumstances would he wage war on him, and that the origin of the trouble lay in the

bad policy of the Cape Government.

Gordon then spent a restful year at Jaffa studying Scripture. Following that, King Leopold of Belgium invited Gordon to become his adviser and to assist him in solving the problems of the Congo. At that time Britain was beset with difficulties in Egypt and the Sudan. As her ministers realised Gordon's ability to cope with them he was sent to Khartoum and the King of Belgium was asked to postpone his request until Gordon had arrested the progress of the Mahdi, the Mohammedan prophet, in what he termed a "Holy War".

At Khartoum the British and Egyptian garrisons were surrounded. The state of feeling there was verging on panic. Then came the message, "General Gordon is coming to Khartoum". The effect of that message was electrical. Confidence was restored for England had sent her greatest man as a pledge of her intended action and the garrison pulled itself together for one of the most brilliant defences in the annals of military sieges.

On February 18, 1884 Gordon entered Khartoum. The whole population turned out to meet him as a conqueror and deliverer. Even though he brought no troops and no money he was hailed on all sides as the one pre-eminent good man associated with the Sudan. In less than a fortnight after his arrival all communications with the outside world was cut off; but before that he had asked for reinforcements believing that the Government of the day, having sent him, would support him. His parting words had been "I will do what I can but you must send help when I require it." — but not so. For five and a half months no news came from Khartoum. Still he fought on defending

the Egyptians who had sought shelter with him with energy and resource, but to no purpose beyond protracting their trials. The beginning of 1885 found the garrison reduced to last extremities through famine, desertions and international treachery. Gordon's faith in his countrymen and in the Government which had availed themselves of his services, did not desert him. He believed that British troops were being pushed on to Khartoum and he made supreme efforts to hold the fort; but on January 28, 1885 the town, delivered over by treachery, was stormed and Gordon killed near or at his residence.

The tragic end at Khartoum of such a hero closed the career of Chinese Gordon who forever will be enshrined in the memory of the British nation, which he really died for and whose honour was dearer to him than life. He added a new chapter to the glorious story of British heroism and was a very gallant gentleman by whose death the world was left poorer and whose life should teach us lessons of courage and self-sacrifice for all times. He devoted himself heart and soul to his country, his Queen and his God.

"One who never turned his back but marched  
breast forward

Never doubted clouds would break,

Never dreamed, though right were wasted, wrong  
would triumph,

Aid we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,  
Sleep to wake."