

"LIBERTY"

General Gordon.

538

1st Prize

78

1922

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

There are no lines more appropriate than these to illustrate the life-story of Charles George Gordon, born at Woolwich nearly ninety years ago, who afterwards became one of our most famous generals, and one of those gallant Englishmen who helped to build up the British Empire.

His one great ambition was to become a good soldier. Unfortunately he was not strong, but his great religious belief, combined with a strong determination, helped him to win through, though he must have strained every nerve to its utmost.

Gordon was just twenty-one when war broke out with Russia, and it was in the Crimea that he first saw active service. He was in the Royal Engineers, and spent many terrible months in the trenches. During the siege of Sebastopol he behaved with

conspicuous gallantry and was rewarded with the French "Legion of Honour." When peace was declared he was sent to Bessarabia to do frontier work.

Captain Gordon was not long to remain idle. In 1860 he was ordered to China, where he took part in the capture of Peking. Two years later he led the "Ever-Victorious Army" against the Tai-ping rebels, winning a series of victories — thirty-three in all — in less than two years. His troops, inspired with a great adoration of him, would willingly have followed him anywhere, and even the Tai-pings regarded him with awe and wonder. Carrying his "Magic Wand of Victory" (which was nothing more than a small cane) regardless of his own danger, he led his troops on fearlessly. He finally crushed the formidable rebellion "Chinese" Gordon was decorated by the Chinese Emperor, but refused a large sum of money offered him.

Thanks to his successful work China has always regarded Great Britain as her friend and standby, one to whom she could turn for advice and leadership in time of trouble. Thus was built up

the British prestige in the East which remains dominant to-day.

Returning home, he was stationed at Gravesend, where his chivalrous and sympathetic nature gave solace to many a weary soul, and out of his deep pity for the poor boys of that town he devoted all his spare time trying to better their destitute condition, finding them employment, and teaching them how to grow up good and useful men. There are old men living to-day who attribute their upright life to encouragement and advice from "The Gentleman from Fort House." Surely the gratitude of these poor people must have acted as a talisman during his later ventures in a dangerous land.

His next important task, as Governor of the Sudan, lay in endeavouring to suppress the slave-trade. He was tireless in his activities hunting the slave-raiders. His very name became a terror to them, so relentless was he in punishing them. His heart went out in sympathy with the poor natives. Their utter helplessness appealed to his great heart and he would willingly

have laid down his own life to better their piteous condition, for, black or white, caste or creed, made no difference to him. They were all God's children and as such he felt their claim upon him. He worked strenuously among them for three years.

Returning after a short rest as sole governor of the entire Sudan, he was now unrestricted, and was therefore able to do better work in subduing the wild tribes, and for the first time in history, law and justice reigned in the Sudan.

General Gordon resigned his command in 1880. He paid a visit to India; and visiting the scenes of his former enterprise in China, he was received with great joy by Li-hung-chang. After this he spent three years wandering about in unbroken quiet.

1884 found him once more in the Sudan. This time it was aflame with revolt, for a religious leader, the Mahdi, had gathered great armies together in the name of Mahomet, and said he was going to rid the Sudan for ever of Egyptian, Turk, and Englishman. Now we can realise the terrible task set before him, but his great

heart did not fail him. It was God's will and he would do his best.

His first thought was for the women and children. He got them away in safety and did his best for the garrisons. He tried to subdue the fanatical hordes of the Mahdi, relying solely on the good name which he had built up for himself among the natives but alas! he did not know how these poor people had suffered during his absence, so that they welcomed the Mahdi as their Saviour.

Gordon saw from the first how hopeless his task was. Surrounded by treachery, insufficiently equipped with men, no hope of reinforcements for months to come. Could he hold out?!

Day by day his forces diminished and the Mahdi's grew greater and drew closer and closer round the heroic little band till no loophole of escape remained. Surely this is the most tragic episode in English history; this lonely figure walking ^{calmly} out to his doom, the relief expedition coming only two days too late.

But his work was not in vain, for "Gordon's Magic Wand" in the able hands of Kitchener

and Allenby has worked wonders. Slavery is practically abolished; British science and British Engineering have made barren and unhealthy tracts of land into successful trading centres, and travel has been made quite easy to all parts. The Equatorial Provinces of the Sudan now have many prosperous British settlements, and native and Englishmen work side by side, while the "Old Flag," emblem of freedom and justice waves peacefully overhead.