

From Khartoum to the Source of the Nile.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. ROBT. W. FELKIN.

A weird and extraordinary journey, containing many terrible episodes. Stories of Gordon and the mysteries of the darkest regions of Darkest Africa.

IN the spring of 1878 the Church Missionary Society learnt that two members of their expedition to the Victoria Nyanza had been murdered by Lukonge, King of Ukerewe. There remained only the Rev. Mr. Wilson, who was left alone in Uganda. The C.M.S. then resolved to send out a new party by way of the Nile, this route being chosen because Gordon—at that time Governor-General of the Soudan—had offered to defray the travelling expenses of a party of missionaries, and to give them safe conduct through the whole of the vast territory under his rule.

Dr. R. W. Felkin, whose portrait appears on this page, formed one of this new expedition; and on June 9th of the above-named year he found himself at Suakin, buying transport camels and making other necessary preparations for the great journey.

"On my way to Khartoum," remarked Dr. Felkin, "I had ample opportunity to ponder over the extraordinary regions I was about to visit, and this interesting train of thought was further assisted by the perusal of letters from the solitary Christian missionary left in Uganda. Mr. Wilson described how the King and chiefs of the Unyoro tribe considered obesity a sign of beauty, and on that account compelled their wives to fatten themselves with enormous quantities of milk in order to increase their charms. So fat did these poor women become eventually, that they were only able to crawl about on their hands and knees! In the same weird country earth-eating was practised—sometimes as a remedy for disease, but more often to satisfy a craving pure and simple."

Mr. Wilson's letters fairly teemed with interesting facts. In Uganda, at that time, a fat cow could be bought for two needles, and a

young boy slave for a hundred percussion caps. Wilson himself had formerly set out from Zanzibar in charge of part of the caravan, in a thirty-ton dhow, caulked with lime and fat. It leaked horribly, and the crew did little else but bale out the water. When at length Mr. Wilson and his party reached King Mtesa, they found that the most ordinary flowers produced from seeds created unbounded amazement. "Were they food?" asked the natives. "No." "Medicine?" "No—only to look at." This the natives flatly refused to believe. No

one, they said, would be such a fool as to cultivate plants which yielded no substantial return. For the most part, however, life in Uganda, according to Mr. Wilson's letters, passed pretty smoothly. Now and then King Mtesa would have one of his wives swallowed by a python, but a trifle like that was never allowed to interfere with the gaieties of the Court. Sometimes Emin Pasha would arrive, sent by Gordon on a diplomatic errand to Mtesa. Diversions were not numerous. "One form of sport was hunting for crocodiles' eggs, which have thick rough shells, and are very long in proportion to their breadth. They are about the size of swans' eggs, and when fresh are very palatable, having a slight musky

flavour." These things did Dr. Felkin ponder on his way to Khartoum.

"In fifteen days," he says, "our caravan of forty camels reached Berber from Suakin. We stayed a few days at Berber, and then pushed on to Khartoum, which we reached in nineteen days more, experiencing on the way a terrible sandstorm in the desert. We stayed five days in the famous city, and I well remember my first call at the Palace of the Governor-General. Our party entered the Palace, and of course we expected Gordon to be standing ready to

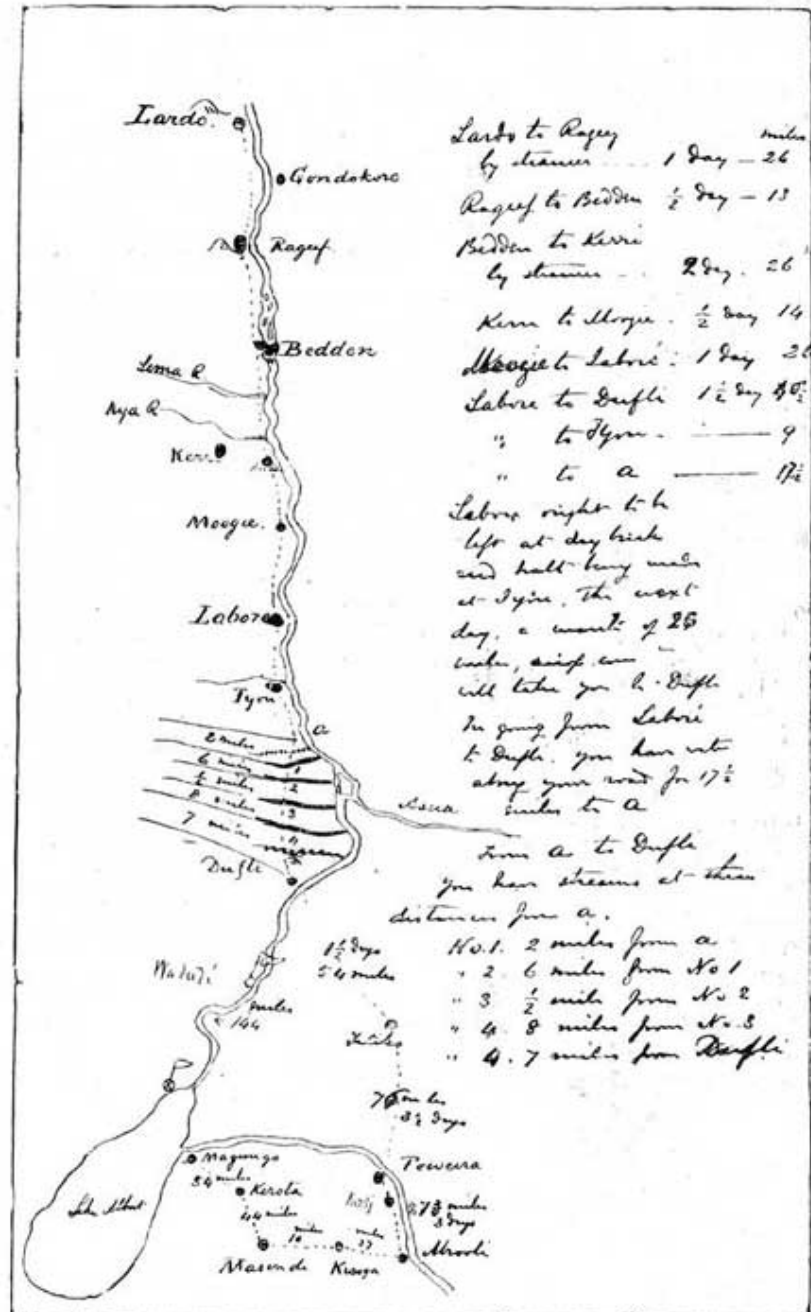


DR. ROBERT W. FELKIN.
Photo. by Barraud, Oxford Street.

receive us. Apparently he was not, however, for the only person we saw about the place was a little man in his shirt-sleeves, wearing a white apron, who was busy laying the table. We waited a few minutes, expecting the arrival of the great General, but no one came. We were just debating among ourselves what move we should make under the circumstances, when the active little 'waiter' cast off his apron, put on his coat, and then declared briskly he was ready to receive us. Of course, it was Gordon himself, who had been laying the table, and he told us, by way of explanation, that his experience had taught him that native servants never could set out the knives and forks and glasses to the satisfaction of Englishmen, so he had undertaken the task himself."

Dr. Felkin was very intimate with the immortal hero of Khartoum, and he possesses a series of interesting letters from him. More interesting than any letter, however, is the autograph map which Gordon drew with his own hand for Dr. Felkin's guidance, and which is here reproduced for the first time. It indicates the route, distances, etc., between Lado and the Lakes, showing in detail the course of the Nile and the Egyptian fortified stations as they existed in 1878. "It is interesting," says Dr. Felkin, "as showing Gordon's kindness and grip of detail, and it also illustrates how anxious he was to give us all the information that lay in his power. Curiously enough," Dr. Felkin goes on to say,

"Gordon was a real believer in the casting of lots, and he had a great idea that if this were done in a proper spirit, it was an excellent plan for settling doubtful points. When he gave us three servants at Khartoum he told us to draw lots for them, and I remember I was particularly lucky, for I got the best servant of



AUTOGRAPH MAP DRAWN BY GENERAL GORDON FOR DR. FELKIN'S GUIDANCE.

the three. Nothing could exceed Gordon's thoughtful and considerate care for our interests and comfort. Everything that was needful for our journey was provided, and there was no detail too small to be overlooked by him, whether the matter in question were the best method of 'taking' King Mtesa, or merely the proper feeding of our live stock."

Many valuable and practical little hints did Gordon give them. In bartering, he said, the cloth was usually measured by the length of the fore-arm, from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger; and he pointed out that the natives when selling cattle brought their biggest brothers, with abnormally long arms, to measure the cloth for them.

Here is reproduced the portrait of Suleiman Capsune, a slave-boy from Darfur, who was Dr. Felkin's personal servant during nearly the whole of his travels. Observe the tribal marks on the boy's face. This boy has a particularly remarkable history, not the least interesting fact in which is that he was rescued from slavery by Gordon himself. Capsune was presented to Dr. Felkin by Slatin Pasha, whom he met in Dara. It may here be stated that this boy always remembered Gordon because of "his kind face and crystal eyes."

When Slatin presented little Capsune to Dr. Felkin, the child was only six years of age, yet he had had many extraordinary adventures. Interviewed in the first place by Slatin, the boy said his home was far away from Dara, in a land of running water and trees and flowers. His father had many cows and sheep, and cultivated the ground. He also grew cotton. The men of Capsune's village were armed with lances and knives, but were peaceable enough folk until the slave-raiding Arabs came along. The boy himself was captured at night with many others, and confined in a hut. He was not chained, however, and when his captors were fast asleep he glided out into the darkness. Just as he got outside, however, a dog began to bark, and woke one of the Arab guards, who started in pursuit.

"The man was gaining on me," he told

Slatin, "so I turned aside and hid in the tall grass. Presently I ran on and on till I was frightened by the roaring of lions, and then I climbed a tree and rested. I then continued my flight, but lost my way in the darkness." At last, completely worn out, he took refuge in a tree, and slept until morning. Then, strangely enough, he reached his own home in some instinctive manner, to the great joy of his parents. Not for long, however.

In a week or two another party of slave-raiders appeared, and the child was again taken prisoner. This time his father and many other

men in the village were killed in the defence of their homes. The slave-dealers were about to secure the little fellow by a rope round his neck when one of them said, "He is but a little one, and will never run away." One night, therefore, an opportunity of escape presented itself, and little Suleiman made a dash for freedom. But he was brought back once more, and taken from place to place, and sold and resold again, until he became almost indifferent to his fate. By this time he had learnt the terrible meaning of the kurbatch, or murderous whip of hipopotamus hide, whose wounds the wretched sufferers heal with coffee-grounds. At last the boy

was sold to an Arab, starting for Omchanga with a caravan of slaves. These poor creatures suffered horribly on the way. No water was to be had, and so when they came to a patch of damp ground they tried to suck the moisture out of the mud. Suddenly the cry arose, "Gordon is upon us," and all was confusion. The slavers were in abject fear. Some escaped, while others tried to hide. Gordon's men searched everywhere, however, and all the slaves were gathered under a big tree, and food and water given them by the Pasha's orders. The captured raiders were bound and whipped, and then allowed to depart—as little Suleiman said, "Quickly, oh! so quickly—stop for nothing, but shut eyes and run." Gordon then came from under the tree where he had been sitting and inspected the slaves. Suleiman gazed with unspeakable amazement at the first European he had ever seen. Describing his sensations in his



SULEIMAN CAPSUNE—DR. FELKIN'S SERVANT.
RESCUED FROM THE SLAVE TRADERS BY
GENERAL GORDON.

Photo. by Mrs. Williams, Wolverhampton.

own quaint way, he said: "I think I finished to-day." Soon after this the boy came into the possession of Slatin Pasha, Governor of Dara, whose own subsequent adventure and escape from the Mahdi's clutches are thrilling to a degree.

Dr. Felkin's party left Khartoum on August 8th, 1878, *en route* to Fashoda. The journey from this place to Lado, the chief town of the Equatorial provinces, usually occupied twelve or thirteen days; "but we were fifty-six days, being hampered by the extraordinary grass islands floating down the Nile, which at length completely blocked it.

"All our wood was exhausted," Dr. Felkin tells us, "and for forty days we were held prisoners in the pestilential marshes of this part of the Nile. Imagine a space of clear water 100yds. broad and 300yds. long, bounded on each side by tall grass and reeds 20ft. or 30ft. above the water, so that nothing but water, grass, and sky were to be seen. Day after day, and night after night, during that awful imprisonment, the sickening smell of tropical plants and rotting vegetation prevailed everywhere. Absolutely the only break in the monotony was the floating past of dead fish, or perhaps the decaying body of a native. The air was alive with mosquitoes, and their attacks were continued by day as well as by night. Sleep was all but impossible. I can assure you that the people who only know the Nile at Cairo would be struck dumb with amazement could they see the river where it flows into mysterious Lake No. From the deck of the steamer it seems only to be a channel, varying from a hundred yards to a mile broad, but on mounting to the masthead you behold a sea of grass on either side of the water channel, and then you realize with a thrill of horror that the real banks of the river were four, eight, or even twelve miles distant on either side. The grass that floats on the top of the water is so thick that it is quite possible to walk upon it. Indeed, a great part of the Nuer tribe do actually live upon this floating mass of vegetation, their only food being fish and the stalks of a water-lily. I can-

not compare the situation to anything except a big steamer dumped down in the middle of an enormous meadow. Poor Gessi Pasha came by his death in this way. Coming down from the interior with a steamer and four boats, he was imprisoned in the floating vegetation for three months, and 400 of his men out of 500 died of fever or starvation. Gessi himself arrived at Khartoum eventually, a living skeleton, and in spite of the care and attention of devoted friends, he died at Suez."

The next photo. shows one of the villages at which Dr. Felkin halted during his journey up the Nile. The circular hut shown in the centre of the photo. is a sort of co-operative sleeping-place for the native babies, whose parents do not wish to be disturbed by their squalling during the night. Every evening, therefore, all the babies of the village are unceremoniously bundled in among the straw in this curious erection, and there left until the following



RAISED HUT IN WHICH THE NATIVE MOTHERS PLACED THEIR CHILDREN AT NIGHT, SO THAT THEIR OWN REST MIGHT NOT BE DISTURBED. [R. Buchta.

morning. The hut is raised from the ground in order to prevent rats finding their way into it. The roof is movable, and can be taken off when the time comes for the babies to be put to bed. The children, it must be said, take this kind of treatment very well, and simply coil themselves up where they fall and promptly go off to sleep.

"I arrived rather late one night at the village," says Dr. Felkin, "and as I had had a very tiring day, both myself and my followers were pretty well done up. All the inhabitants had already gone to bed, and they refused to turn out and provide us with a hut. There was, therefore, nothing else for it but to place my bedding underneath the babies' hut seen in the photo. Of its use, I was totally ignorant at the time, and if I thought about it at all, I probably concluded it was a granary or storehouse used by the

natives. In the night, however, I was awakened by a perfectly fiendish uproar above me, and other manifestations of the presence of the little ones above. I speedily shifted my quarters."

This reminds me that Dr. Felkin had many extraordinary adventures during his remarkable journey—few, however, more astonishing than the following:—

"I came across many medicine men and wizards; some of them claim to be able to transform themselves into lions, jackals, hyenas, etc., at night, and in this guise to travel immense distances in a remarkably short time. They are also said to have the power of divination, to restore lost cattle, tell fortunes, and perform other miraculous feats. In the morning they are supposed to return to their natural shape, and can give information concerning what has happened at any distance. Now, though I can offer no explanation whatever as to the methods of these wizards, I had ample opportunity of verifying, in a very startling way, the powers of one of their number, whose portrait I give you. In the first place, the wizard generally partakes of some root known only to himself, which induces a very heavy sleep. No one is allowed to touch him whilst in this condition, but when he wakes next morning he professes to be able to tell you all about the future. The experience

I am about to relate with one of these people happened at Lado, on my return from Uganda, in company with Emin Pasha.

"I had not received any letters from Europe for a year, and was, of course, very anxious to get some. I knew quite well that a good many must be waiting for me somewhere, but it was hardly likely that they would come to hand for some time, because the Nile was blocked by the floating islands of grass. One morning, however, a man came into our tent in a state of great excitement. The local *m'logo*, or wizard, he said, had been roaming the country the night

before in the form of a jackal. He had, the messenger went on, visited a place called Meschera-er-Rek (which was some 550 miles distant from Lado, our camping-place), and had seen two steamers, one of them with mails for our party. Also, the steamers were commanded by a white pasha, who was minutely described. Now, in the ordinary course of nature the man could not possibly have covered so vast a stretch of country in one night—nor even in twenty nights. I ridiculed the whole thing as absolutely absurd. We were having our coffee at the time, and Emin seemed

inclined to give credence to the story, for he suddenly rose up and said he would have the man brought before him. In due time the wizard (whose portrait is here reproduced) was marched into our tent, and Emin at once addressed him in Arabic, saying, 'Where did you go to last night?'

"'I was at Meschera-er-Rek,' he replied, in the same tongue

"'What were you doing there?'

"'I went to see some friends.'

"'What did you see?'

"'I saw two steamers arriving from Khartoum.'

"'Oh! this is nonsense. You could not possibly have been at Meschera-er-Rek last night.'

"'I *was* there,' came the tacit rejoinder, 'and with the steamers was an Englishman—a short man with a big beard.'

"'Well, what was he

doing—what was his mission?'

"'He says that the great Pasha at Khartoum has sent him, and he has got some papers for you. He is starting overland to-morrow to come to you, bringing the papers with him, and he will be here about thirty days from now.'

"As a matter of fact," concluded Dr. Felkin, "the *m'logo's* statement proved absolutely correct. In thirty-two days an Englishman *did* arrive in our camp, bringing letters for us from Khartoum. More than this, we knew from the wizard's description that Lupton Bey, and none other, was the man who was coming. We were



THE WONDERFUL MYSTERIOUS WIZARD QUESTIONED BY EMIN PASHA. [R. Buchta. Photo. by]



EMIN PASHA IN HIS TENT—TAKEN AT KHARTOUM IN 1882.
From a Photo.

disappointed at the news that Lupton brought, because, although he had removed twenty six miles of grass obstructions, there was still too much of it for us to think of returning to Khartoum by steamer. As to the wizard, I am quite satisfied in my mind that he had never in his life been very far outside his own village. The guess-work theory is quite out of the question, the circumstances being quite extraordinary and the overland journey most unusual."

Next is reproduced a portrait of Emin Pasha, taken at Khartoum in March, 1882, by the French Vice-Consul in that famous city. For years Dr. Felkin was continually in correspondence with this remarkable man, who was said to combine

in himself the functions of doctor, naturalist, scientist, diplomatist, administrator, and martyr.

On the 22nd March, 1883, in one of his letters to Dr. Felkin, Emin says: "Forgotten and abandoned by the Government, we have been compelled to make a virtue of necessity. Deprived of the most necessary things, for a long time without any pay, my men fought valiantly, and when at length hunger weakened them—when, after nineteen days of incredible privation and suffering, their strength was exhausted, and when the last torn leather of the last boot had been eaten—then they cut their way through the midst of their enemies and succeeded in saving themselves." "It was to Emin," remarked Dr. Felkin, "that we owed our escape from that ghastly imprisonment in the Nile, for he sent three or four hundred black soldiers to cut a canal through the grass to the open water."

Dr. Felkin, by the way, has a very interesting story to tell about the big "table" rock seen in the next photo. "On reaching Rejiaf, where the rock is, the natives told me a very curious superstition concerning it. They said that if anyone had the misfortune inadvertently to sleep beneath this rock, he would certainly be found dead in the morning. Strangely enough, this prophecy was fulfilled in at least one instance in a most astounding manner.

"An Italian priest—a Jesuit, I think—came to the place one day, and was, of course, given the customary warning about the fatal rock. Resolving, however, to win the confidence of the natives by proving the fallacy of their superstitions, the good man lay down to sleep one night under one side of the great stone. Amazing to relate, an enormous piece of the brittle stone became detached and fell during the night, and the unfortunate priest was found crushed to death beneath it in the morn-

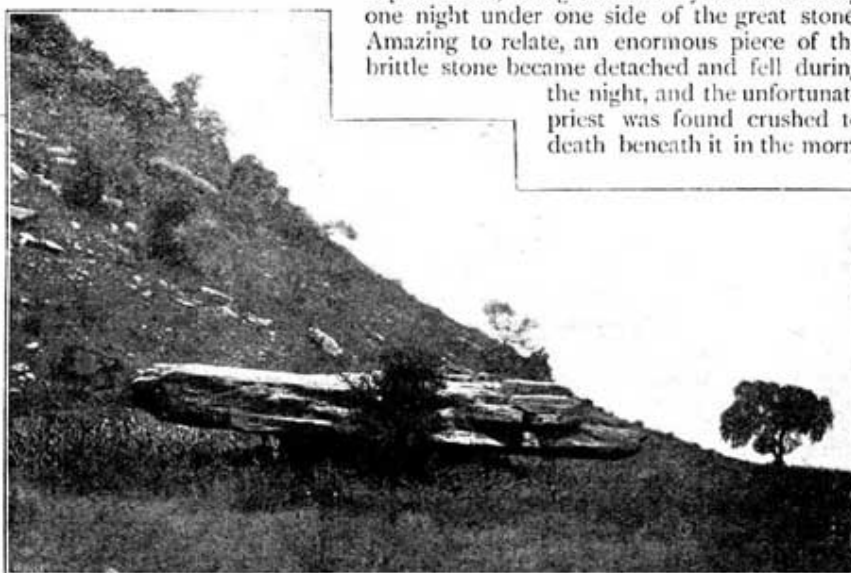


Photo. by]

THE FATAL STONE WITH A REMARKABLE HISTORY.

[R. Buchta,

ing." Needless to say, the rock was more feared than ever after this extraordinary occurrence.

When Dr. Felkin reached Uganda, he became Court Physician to the King during his three months' residence. The first remark King Mtesa made to Dr. Felkin was that the only monarchs in the world worthy of any consideration were our own Queen and himself. The doctor, by the way, was always obliged to take some of his own medicine before he gave it to the King. Mtesa, Dr. Felkin told me, was said to have

7,000 wives. "He himself told me that he had seventy sons and eighty-eight daughters. He wanted me to perform human vivisection in his presence, and was rather angry when I declined. He was constantly at war, and in order to see at a glance how many soldiers were available, he had a big board always before him, like the ones the Arabs read their prayers from; and on this were rows of holes, and in each hole a peg. A white peg represented ten, a black peg 100, and a red peg 1,000 warriors. When the King wanted to send out an expedition he took the requisite number of pegs from the board, and handed them to a chief, whose duty it

was to supply soldiers. At the close of a campaign the dead were calmly reckoned up and deducted from the sum total before the pegs were replaced. King Mtesa himself explained this curious contrivance to me."

On arriving at Lado, on the way back from Uganda, it was found impossible to continue the route by water, and so Dr. Felkin's party were obliged to make the long and important journey by land. They, therefore, went round by Dem Suleiman, Darfur, and Kordofan.

There were not many out-of-the-way adventures on the way back, but "at a place called Madi we heard that several chiefs who had

resisted the slave-dealers had first been mutilated and then buried alive up to the neck and left to die, food and water being placed just beyond their reach in order to increase their agony!"

The portrait next reproduced is absolutely unique, and cannot fail to excite much interest, it being the only photograph ever taken of the renowned Dervish Emir, Osman Digna. This photo. was sent to Dr. Felkin by Miss Gordon, for whom it was taken in Suakin. "At this time, of course, no one dreamt what a vast

amount of blood and treasure this cunning old slave-dealer would cost the British Government. Even in those days he had not by any means retired from the slave business, but retained a substantial interest in the living cargoes of dhows that were constantly being dispatched from Suakin to Jeddah."

On February 16th, Dr. Felkin's party came in sight of the tall minarets and flat-roofed houses of Khartoum; and our next reproduction is a very excellent general view of the famous city. Photographs of Khartoum are, of course, extremely rare, and we are fortunate in being able to present this one to our readers.

The next photo. shows us a view at

the back of Gordon's palace at Khartoum, from the roof of which he so often gazed down the Nile, on the look-out for the troops that never came. The palace was a fine building, and well fortified.

Dr. Felkin is convinced that the fall of Khartoum would never have taken place had his original suggestion been adopted of sending some troops from Berber to Suakin. He says that they could have found water at almost any point by boring for it. Gordon, the doctor says, was most fatally ignorant of Arabic. Naturally, then, his Arabic secretaries frequently interpreted his wishes according to their own idea of things, and



THE ONLY PHOTO. OF OSMAN DIGNA EVER TAKEN (SENT TO DR. FELKIN BY MISS GORDON).

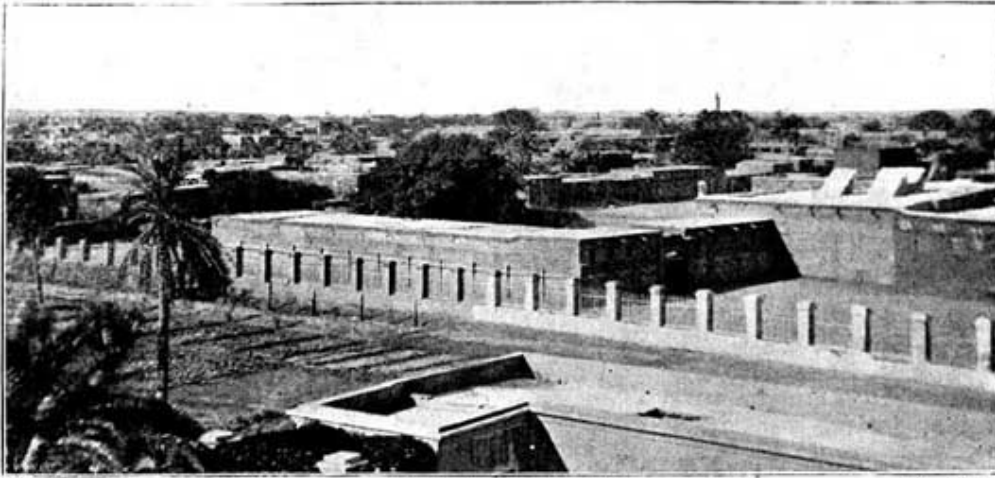


Photo. by]

GENERAL VIEW OF KHARTOUM.

[R. Buchta.

this inevitably brought trouble. "Had Gordon been able to read and speak Arabic with anything like fluency, he never would have put his name to many of the letters he signed."

Talking of the treachery of native writers, Dr. Felkin says that in his own case he took care to have each letter written by one man and then inspected privately by another, and in this way he detected many flagrant errors, and worse.

"Before long," says Dr. Felkin, "the whole of the White Nile must inevitably come under Egyptian or British influence. Supposing it were allowed to remain in the Khalifa's hands, one could never say when it might not be diverted into the Red Sea — the old course which tradition says it originally followed. As things are, it is quite possible to divert the river at the Sixth Cataract, and the Abyssinians have

threatened to do this very thing on more than one occasion. Gordon himself admitted its possibility to me, and said that anyone with a ton of dynamite could easily block up the passage through which the river flows at this spot. The Nile could then be diverted through the desert until it found its way into the Red Sea. And without the Nile, where would Egypt be?"



GORDON'S PALACE AT KHARTOUM, FROM WHICH THE HERO LOOKED DAILY FOR THE HELP THAT NEVER CAME.

Photo. by]

[R. Buchta.