

**LETTERS FROM
KHARTOUM: WRITTEN
DURING THE SIEGE**

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Letters from Khartoum: Written during the Siege by Frank Power

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FRANK POWER

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LETTERS FROM

KHARTOUM

WRITTEN DURING THE SIEGE

BY THE LATE

FRANK POWER

H.B.M.'S ACTING-CONSUL; CORRESPONDENT FOR THE "TIMES," ETC., ETC.

LONDON

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PREFACE.

I HAVE been induced to publish the following letters, not from any idea of their literary merit—they pretend to none—but because I feel certain that every Englishman at this moment is anxious to receive any items of information that can be gleaned about General Gordon and his gallant defence of Khartoum.

An account, however hastily written, and comprising however short a period, when given by one who was present and saw what things were done; who shared the dangers of the siege with England's latest hero and his brave lieutenant, Colonel Stewart; who enjoyed Gordon's confidence, and who was capable of understanding and appreciating what he saw, should surely be of great interest to every one. These conditions the account contained in my brother's letters fulfil. He was in Khartoum

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from the 1st August, 1883, until the 10th September, 1884, and, as stated in a recent article in the *Times*, "it was almost exclusively through Mr. Power's despatches that England and Europe first of all learnt of the disaster which befell Hicks Pacha's army, the triumph of the Mahdi, and the gradual closing of the enemy around Khartoum. Afterwards it was from him we had the graphic and stirring accounts of General Gordon's arrival, of his energetic efforts to establish order and to keep the hostile tribes around him at bay; of his victories and his misfortunes; of the valour of his Bedouin foes, and the treachery and cowardice of his Turkish and Egyptian troops." And, again, after nearly half a year's silence (and what message could tell of the closeness of the siege more than did that silence?) it was his voice, "which," says the *Globe*, "the English people had learned to trust for an authentic account of affairs at Khartoum," that once more made itself heard, and on the 29th September last a telegram from him was published in the *Times*, which carried the story of the siege down to the 31st July,

1884. Could, then, any further information from him, however slight, be without general interest ?

I have said the letters are free from any literary pretensions. Written for his home circle only—some of them in illness, some of them piecemeal and at intervals between daily duties, some of them in hurried moments to catch an unexpected post—they are naturally careless in style. Then so thoughtful of those at home was he, so ever present were they in his mind, that in many of his letters allusions to home and to us all are so intermixed (by comparisons with things in our knowledge only or otherwise) with the descriptive matter that in omitting these the continuity of the letters is broken, and they appear much more disconnected than they really were in their entirety.

Except for such references to family and private matters, and occasionally some expressions of opinion which were so mingled with as to be inseparable from them, I have omitted nothing, and not in even the slightest degree altered the text of the letters.

No doubt, amid the strange surroundings and in the stirring times in which he lived, he might have written more fully than he did ; but it should be borne in mind how he came to be in Khartoum at all, and his reasons for not doing so will be understood.

It was on May 17, 1883, that the late Edmond O'Donovan, the celebrated correspondent of the *Daily News*, whose name will be always associated with that of Merv, sailed from Gravesend in the Orient steamer *Cuzco*, en route for Khartoum, there to attach himself to Hicks Pacha's army, which, having beaten the Mahdi's lieutenants at Merebele, was resting there a breathing space before marching on the strongholds of the arch-rebel himself in Khordofan. My brother accompanied Mr. O'Donovan. Their objects were similar, their purpose was partly a joint one. Each was the correspondent of an English newspaper, and, as such, anxious to follow the fortunes of the campaign which Hicks Pacha was entering upon, and to chronicle its events. But, in addition, they had resolved to explore the country in the fullest manner, and to publish the result of

their observations in a book. In inviting my brother to join him in this undertaking, Mr. O'Donovan had selected one who was not without qualifications for the task: ready with his pen, my brother had gained also some reputation with his pencil, and, though but twenty-five years of age when he set out for Khartoum, he had already done duty as a war correspondent on the Bulgarian frontier in the late Russo-Turkish War.

How within twelve days they crossed the desert route from Suakim to Berber, and, never delaying, pushed on thence to Khartoum—how they found Hicks Pacha's army there, and after a short interval accompanied its march towards Khordofan—all this is told in the letters which follow. O'Donovan fell in the fatal field of El Obeid, but my brother, saved by an illness which had made his life despaired of, found himself back once more in Khartoum, and, never relinquishing his original design, from thence kept note and account of everything that passed around him. Trusting that some day his book would see the light, he saw no reason to relate all his experiences and observations in his letters, but