

Adventures of a 19th Century American Muslim: The Strange Tale
of George Bethune English

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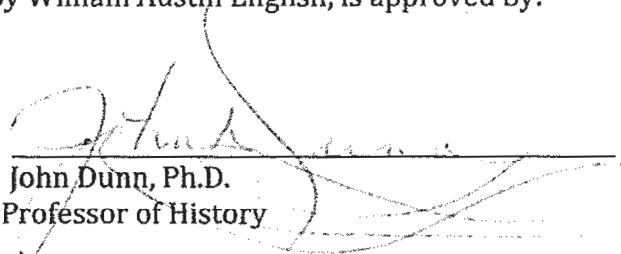
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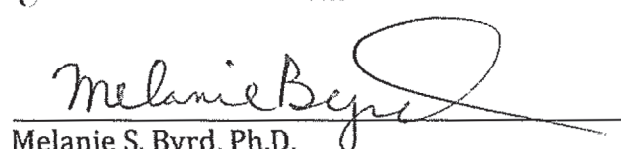
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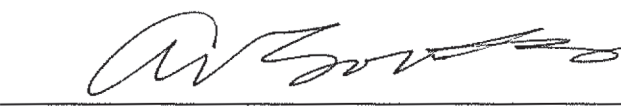


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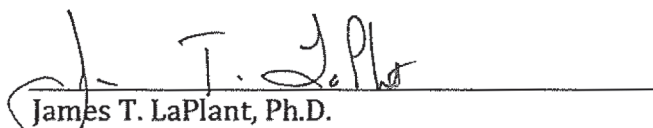


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ABSTRACT

George Bethune English was an important character in the history of multiple nations who has often been overlooked. His accounts of his journeys have widely been ignored until recent years. There are several reasons for his exclusion from history and most of the reasons center around tales of English's insanity or American's and European's feeling that English's actions made him a traitor to his own race. However, multiple sources take away any grounds these claims hold against English. Through an investigation into his life, a detailed account of English is presented. The account is built upon sources from English's early life as a college student at Harvard, and follow him to the Middle East. English's own account of his journey in the Sudan from Egypt is another valid source used to explore his life. From there, using dispatches between the Ottoman Empire and John Quincy Adams, the final part of English's life is observed as a diplomatic agent for the United States. It also provides a perspective in the Western world of the era, and how they viewed individuals such as English. The other unique perspectives which English's life reveal are those of a mercenary in Egypt and a diplomatic agent in the Ottoman working almost completely autonomously. This detailed depiction of his life grants an internal view into English's world and shows that he was not a man driven by insanity or a traitor to his home and race, but rather an inquisitive mind whose thirst for adventure and knowledge truly never ended.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

During the early 19th century, few Americans would expect a young collegian in his master's program to leave the country as a marine, and dash off to places hardly heard about even in books. Even stranger for this collegian to embrace Islam then work for the United States (U.S.) Government as a spy. George Bethune English (hereafter also written as G. B. English or George B. English) did all of this, and more. He was the first white American Muslim, an early explorer of the Sudan, and a diplomat/spy for John Quincy Adams (hereafter also written as J. Q. A or John Q. Adams).

What motivated this life of adventure and unusual religious conviction? Contemporaries who knew George English attributed this taste for adventure to insanity, but under closer inspection, it is clear he was not insane. Rather, he went to another world after realizing he no longer accepted the ideas and beliefs of his own. This journey away from the academic life is what set him down the path of an adventurer, and later, spy.

English spent the bulk of his early years studying at Harvard to become a preacher. He was not received well at the pulpit possibly due to his inclination to explore the Christian perspective with other religious views. His tendency to pursue religious perspectives led him to investigate much deeper into Christianity and Judaism.

The searching resulted in his infamous book criticizing the New Testament which earned him the spite of many of his colleagues and certain individuals throughout the course of his life.¹

Due to the lack of a personal account as to why he decided to leave behind the relatively quiet life of a college student at Harvard, this work will rely upon the letters he exchanged with Reverend Samuel Cary. In these letters he explained the scandal which led to the slander he suffered and his inevitable excommunication. His feelings on the topic of Christianity and his thesis which earned him the excommunication are also mentioned in these letters, all of which were possible reasons for his flight from the United States into a life of adventure. ²

The second part of Mr. English's life was spent in the service of Muhammad Ali Pasha as a chief of artillery. Pasha was a title given in the Ottoman Empire and it is the equivalent of a governor or lord. While in Northeast Africa, not only did English resign from the U.S. Marine Corps, he also became a Muslim. It is also very interesting that during this period, George English became fluent in the Ottoman Turkish language and obtained many acquaintances who would be of great assistance to him in his future career working in John Quincy Adams' employment. Later, while in the Pasha's employment, George English journeyed up the Nile into the Sudan as an officer with

¹ Samuel L. Knapp, *American Biography, or Original Biographical Sketches of Distinguished Americans in The Treasure of Knowledge and Library of Reference Vol. II: Containing A Million of Facts, or Common Place Book of Subject of Research and Curiosity in the Arts and Sciences, History, Chronology, And Literature; Embracing Sketches of Jewish History, American History, and History of American Literature* (New York: C. C. Childs, 1850), 93.

² George Bethune English, *A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Cary, containing remarks upon his review of the Grounds of Christianity Examined, by comparing The New Testament with the old* (Boston: Printed for the author, 1813), 3.

Ismail Pasha, the youngest son of Muhammad Ali. Most of this adventure was documented by his account of the Egyptian invasion into the Sudan. While travelling up the Nile and into the Sudan English documented a great deal of information pertaining to territories which western eyes had not seen. This journey also reveals a great deal about the personality of English.

After his adventure in the Sudan, English worked as a diplomatic agent for Secretary of State John Q. Adams, who sent him to the Ottoman Empire for brokering a trade agreement. English and Adams mainly worked together through diplomatic orders sent as dispatches and responses. These letters also revealed that English was in the Ottoman Empire as an undercover agent, and that he visited the Empire before he joined the Pasha's army in Africa. English was to travel multiple times between the U. S. and the Ottoman Empire to help achieve the trade agreement. He also used his previous connections to help the American agenda to be heard by the Sultan. The treaty which English helped to form would later be called the Treaty with the Sublime Porte, as many of the letters mentioned described and listed as correspondence which led to the treaty are written between G. B. English and John Q. Adams³. He later returned to Washington, D. C. where he resided for a short period before his death in 1828. The life he led in no way reflected a madman or someone who was living in a state of reckless abandon. Yet, his lifestyle was certainly eccentric for 1820s America. The best way to describe George English is to borrow the words of his friend Samuel L. Knapp who wrote a biographic entry about him.

³ "Treaty with the Sublime Porte," Message from the President of the United States, serial 221, Doc. 250, 2.

He took his own path to fame, and imitated no example. He could not complain that any one had led him astray. He was original and eccentric by nature, and he followed the dictates of his own judgment, and pursued every image his fancy created at pleasure. The character of such a man is liable to be misunderstood and misrepresented, because many will hear of his singularities, when but few will have an opportunity or a disposition to read his character fairly; and it must be confessed that is somewhat difficult for those who had a firm friendship for him, to do it thoroughly, as it abounded in hieroglyphics and seeming contradiction; not that he had any reserve about him, for he was as open as day, and spoke undisguisedly upon all subjects.⁴

⁴Samuel L. Knapp, 92.

Chapter II

LIFE IN AMERICA

G. B. English's early years are relatively obscure. He talks little about it in his written works. There is also very little information about G. B. English's life documented by others, creating a problem when searching for biographical data. He was the oldest of four siblings born in Cambridge, Massachusetts.⁵ English held his family in high regard, and was very affectionate towards his mother. He held his father's kindness very dearly even though he was known to be quite distant. His mother's name was Penelope Bethune and his father was Thomas English. They were married on the 11th of February in 1784.⁶ George English was born March 7, 1787.

Young English obtained an excellent education. He attended the best schools in Boston for his primary education. This continued when he entered Harvard University. His education reflects that George English came from a rather affluent family. The simple

⁵ Samuel L. Knapp, 96.

⁶ Town and City Clerks of Massachusetts, *Massachusetts Vital and Town Records* (Provo, UT: Holbrook Research Institute), 102.

fact that he attended a college, let alone Harvard University, shows that he came from a family which was at least financially comfortable.⁷

Since George English's education is lacking in documentation, some educated assumptions must be made based upon the background of the era. His education took place during a transitional era of Massachusetts history. Most children obtained little more than reading, and this was usually taught or instructed by the father, unless a local school was available. Towards the end of the colonial era, things changed in the instruction of children. Children were believed to be capable of impressive amounts of learning and comprehension at a young age; it was not uncommon for a child to be reading by the ages of three or four. Sometimes their education even involved learning classical languages such as Latin.⁸

Eighteenth century Massachusetts schools were primarily under religious influence, with a primary goal to ensure a child's ability to read the Bible. School was not the only place children learned these skills. "Puritans assumed that parents should educate their own children, but the state was willing to force negligent parents either to teach their children at home or to send them to a local school."⁹

At the end of the 18th century, religion lost most of the grip it once held on the state systems, and the schools were formed with a more secular intent. While the schools would still teach religion, there were far less denominational values. Education

⁷ Samuel L. Knapp, 92.

⁸ Carl F. Kaestle, *Education and Social Change in Nineteenth-century Massachusetts* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 49.

⁹ Carl F. Kaestle, 50.

also had a new goal, as Carl Kaestle, states: "The rationale for public schools by then included direct attention to the preservation of political and social order."¹⁰

While debates took place on the appropriate age for children to attend public schools, many started as young as four years of age. Some opponents of primary schooling even argued for primary education to be conducted by the parents.¹¹ George English was likely an early attendee of public schools due to his incredibly keen ability to learn and absorb information. One would also assume that by the way Samuel L. Knapp referred to George English's education that he was an attendee of private schooling. However this was not the case. "He was born in Boston, and received the first rudiments of his education in the excellent schools of that city. From public school he went to Harvard College, and was graduated with the class of 1807."¹²

While at Harvard, he was associated with multiple organizations which may have helped him later in life, due to the influential friends who were also a part of these organizations. The first of these was the fraternity *Phi Beta Kappa*, a distinguished fraternity, the oldest in the U.S. Its members included many future presidents who shared connections with English later in life, such as Thomas Jefferson, and more directly John Quincy Adams. The records for the fraternity at Harvard show that English became a member as early as 1807.¹³ A curious note about these records is that his residence is listed as U.S. Navy even though his involvement with the Navy was not until about a

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Carl F. Kaestle, 52.

¹² Samuel L. Knapp, 92.

¹³ Phi Beta Kappa, *A Catalogue of the fraternity of [Phi] B K, Alpha of Massachusetts. Harvard University, Cambridge. 1823* (Cambridge, Mass: University Press, Hillard & Metcalf, 1823), 16.

decade later. This was unlikely an error since the next two editions of the fraternity of *Phi Beta Kappa* also listed English's residence as U.S. Navy.¹⁴

To understand some the background and mindset of George English it is necessary to explore his associations. His fraternity, *Phi Beta Kappa*, was founded in 1776, and is widely considered to be the nation's most prestigious society. The organization itself did not reach Massachusetts, and more specifically Harvard until 1779, when Samuel Hardy and William Short, Jr. supplied Elisha Parmele with a charter due to their wish to expand membership.¹⁵

To add even more mystery to the character that was George B. English, he joined *Phi Beta Kappa* while it was still considered a secret society. The purpose of the organization was to hold discussions and debates on various topics. Much of the focus on the talks were for the purpose of improving public speaking. There was also a fairly strict code of conduct and character at the meetings. "The least appearance of intoxication or disorder of any single member, by liquor, at a session, would subject him to a heavy fine."¹⁶

The purpose of the meetings was to grant the society's members a chance to enjoy a freedom of speech that normally they were not allowed in their college classes. This most likely gave English ample opportunities to build up his superior ability in public speaking and discussion with other individuals, though this skill also was what earned him

¹⁴ *Phi Beta Kappa, A Catalogue of the fraternity of [Phi] B K, Alpha of Massachusetts. Harvard University, Cambridge. 1829* (Cambridge, Mass: E. W. Metcalf and Company, 1829), 15.

¹⁵ Richard Nelson Current, *Phi Betta Kappa in American Life: the first two hundred years* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990), 11-12.

¹⁶ Richard Nelson Current, 8.

an excommunication later in life. An early president of the society was noted greeting the initiates as such follows: "Now then you may for a while disengage yourself from the scholastic laws and communicate without reserve whatever reflections you have made upon various objects; remembering that everything transacted within this room is transacted *sub rosa*, and detested is he that discloses it."¹⁷ The intent behind this opening address was to remind the attendees that the meeting was about open speech and utter secrecy. This included controversial topics and most likely where English was able to first begin his debates on which his infamous book would later be based.

English also was involved in the Hasty-Pudding Club, which counted John Quincy Adams as a member as well. The club held social and intellectual events for undergraduates. The Hasty-Pudding Club records list English as a poet during his membership which lasted from 1805 to 1807.¹⁸ The last organization which English was involved with during his undergraduate career which may have set up many of his life's later connections and friends was the Porcellian Club. This was another social club which commonly counted influential and famous Americans as members throughout its history. Among these individuals was John Quincy Adams, Eli Whitney, Daniel Webster, and John Calhoun. Their records list English as a member from 1805 to 1807 as well.¹⁹ Connections with these influential clubs most likely made it easier for English to gain favor and positions with powerful people in Washington.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Hasty Pudding Club, *A Catalogue of the members of the Hasty-Pudding Club in Harvard University. Instituted 1795* (Cambridge, Mass: E. W. Metcalf and Company, 1829), 6.

¹⁹ Porcellian Club, *Catalogue of the honorary and immediate members of the Porcellian Club, of Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass* (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1822), 12.

English was respected as having a very strong love of learning and an interestingly refined sentiment of honor at Harvard. The first path he followed academically at college was that of law. Like most things he would do in his life, he dove head first into the studies of law. Unfortunately for English, he found that he did not agree with some of the base principles of common law. In his post graduate studies he wrote about these specifics he felt did not belong in common law, and while his writing was respected, the ideas were not popular. "If his criticism bore the mark of juvenility, still, it was acknowledged by all who read them, that they discovered uncommon research and much acuteness of mind."²⁰

Another issue he had with law was the practice itself. Regardless he fulfilled all of the requirements to be admitted to the bar and indeed he was. However, like many things in his life something strange happened. He never showed up to court at the bar of Suffolk, and he apparently completely gave up on the idea of pursuing the profession of law in its entirety. It was at this point that George English made his fateful decision to study for a degree in divinity.²¹

English was once again at Cambridge to expand his knowledge in the field of religion, specifically Christianity so that he could become a preacher. Yet again, he found trouble in the profession he sought. After becoming what Samuel L. Knapp calls a book-worm for three years at the university library, it was universally agreed among his peers

²⁰ Samuel L. Knapp, 92.

²¹ Ibid.

that never before had a preacher with so much biblical knowledge come forth. However, his speeches were not to the liking of his peers and superiors.

It was agreed on all hands, that no one in this country had ever presented himself as a preacher for the first time, with so much profound biblical knowledge as Mr. English, but his eloquence was not of a high order, nor his sermons of a very popular cast: in the former his friends were greatly disappointed; for he was a most admirable reader of the Bible, and also of Shakespeare and of poetry, in rhyme, or blank verse; but the loud tones of his voice had a sharpness in them better suited at the bar or any other place than the pulpit.²²

Samuel Knapp also explains that many of his peers most likely expected that his sermons would be very learned and filled with controversial material, as he was already known to be willing to argue and investigate into great detail on these topics. After discovering the feelings his peers felt towards his abilities he was disappointed that he did not meet their expectations and began to think more upon what route he should take in life. He soon doubted himself once again.²³

George English spent some time considering if he had been true to himself. According to Knapp, English could have easily corrected the problems with his sermons and worked on his delivery, but he must have felt some doubts within himself on the truth of the Christian religion since he did not try any corrections. The worst thing English could do, in his own mind, was to be a hypocrite to himself by pursuing a path in which he no longer believed.²⁴

On the whole, English was very successful academically at Harvard. He was able to obtain his master's degree in theology. In addition, he also received the coveted

²² Samuel L. Knapp, 92.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Samuel L. Knapp, 92-93.

Bowdoin Prize for his works in theology at Harvard in 1812. The work which earned him the esteemed prize was his dissertation titled "The Origin of the Masoretic Points, and their Subserviency to a thorough Knowledge of the Hebrew Language."²⁵ Few of his colleagues could have guessed English was rapidly heading for scandal.

The problems started after English began to research and produced a work concerning the validity of Christian doctrine. He knew very well this would be controversial, but he was in no way as crazy as some of his contemporaries argued. In the preface of his work, *The Grounds of Christianity Examined by Comparing The New Testament with the Old*, English addressed the possibility for controversy. He pointed out there are some doctrines which had not been publicly discussed due to the specified doctrine's sacred nature.

"It is a common opinion, that there are some Doctrines so sacred, and others of so bad a tendency, that no Publick Discussion of them ought to be allowed." Were this a right opinion, all the persecution that has ever been practised would be justified. For if it is a part of the duty of civil magistrates to prevent the discussion of such Doctrines, they must, in doing this, act on their own judgments of the nature and tendency of Doctrines; and, consequently, they must have a right to prevent the discussion of all Doctrines which they think to be too sacred for discussion, or too dangerous in their tendency; and this right they must exercise in the only way in which civil power is capable of exercising it; "by inflicting penalties upon all who oppose sacred Doctrines of who maintain pernicious opinions," In Mahometan countries, therefore, magistrates would have a right to silence, and punish all who oppose the divine mission of Mahomet, a doctrine there reckoned of the most sacred nature.²⁶

²⁵ Harvard University, *A list of the winners of academic distinctions in Harvard college during the past year together with lists of scholars of the first group since 1904 and of the winners of the Bowdoin prizes* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard, 1907), 21.

²⁶ George Bethune English, *The Grounds of Christianity Examined by Comparing the New Testament with the Old* (Boston: Printed for the author, 1813), 3.

His main point was to argue whether the New Testament held any validity, due to its validity being based upon the Old Testament. English argued that many things which were taken as proof of the New Testament's validity such as miracles should be called into question. He suggested that if these topics were so dangerous, then why were they not restricted by the civil authorities?²⁷ His explanation and examples to defend his opinion continue on, but his primary point remained the same.

After issuing his defenses of his right to argue this dangerous topic, he extended the preface into a well thought out explanation that he only explored these topics in search of truth and reason. His outlook opposed what many others have popularly suggested, English attempted to convey that this is not intended to be an attack on Christianity, but instead, an exploration and argument for the truth on whether the Christian doctrine taken from the New Testament holds any merit. He ends his preface with his wish that his readers will handle and perceive his work. "Finally, I commit my work to the discretion of the good sense of the reader, believing that if he is not convinced, he will at least be interested; and hoping that he will discover from the complexion of the book (what my own heart bears witness to) that the author is a sincere inquirer after the truth, and perfectly willing to be convinced that he is in error by any one who can remove the difficulties, and refute the arguments, now laid by him before the public, with deference and respect."²⁸ From the opening statements of English's work, it was made clear that he is neither mad, nor out to attack Christianity. English was

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ George Bethune English, *The Grounds of Christianity Examined by Comparing the New Testament with the Old*, 11.

attempting to put into a concrete form the thoughts on his findings during his research into religion and Christianity. As he was described to be a man who did not have any reservations about discussing any sort of subjects, this was the prime example of his life. However, he openly attempted to avoid any harsh criticisms of his character through his warning in the beginning of his book, though this would do little to protect him. He was simply attempting to avoid the type of scandal in which the book eventually embroiled him.

The problems which arose were numerous. Many of these were likely what drove George English away from his homeland, into a life of adventure and exploration. Originally, English was dissuaded from publishing the work by a Reverend William Ellery Channing. In a response to Reverend Samuel Cary's review of his work, English states his feelings on his book after discussing the possibility of publishing it with Mr. Channing. "I promised him I would not publish them, at least for the present, and I left him after our last conversation upon the subject, and with a resolved determination to withdraw silently from a profession whose duties obliged me to teach what I conceived to be untrue."²⁹ English at no point states that these were his reasons for abandoning his possible future as a scholar or a writer, but the events which transpired leading up to and after his infamous book's release in 1813 were significant enough to cause any man to look for a new direction in life. George English's unwillingness to suppress his ideas doomed his relationship with Mr. Channing.

²⁹ George Bethune English, *A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Cary, containing remarks upon his review of the Grounds of Christianity Examined, by comparing the New Testament with the Old* (Boston: Printed for the author, 1813), 6.

His friends warned him against publishing his beliefs and findings, but their pleas were eventually ignored. One of George English's previously mentioned friends reflected the possible opinion of his friends at the time of his publishing of the book in English's obituary. English's true friend Samuel L. Knapp described his fall, but in his own way attempts to exonerate him from any wrong doing from his own clearly Christian perspective.

Entangled in the mazes of the biblical criticism, he forgot to drink deeply of the humbler spirit of the Gospel, and in the pride of human learning he followed the phosphoric light of infidelity for his guide, instead of seeking, with that light which cometh from heaven, the straight and narrow way that leadeth to life eternal; but never was there a man more honest in his deviation from the true path way than George Bethune English. He was unfortunately not contented to stop here, and incarcerate his thoughts within his own breast, but erroneously believed it to be his duty to promulgate his opinions, which he seemed to consider as discoveries in part. In this he was in an error, for the infidels of a former age had anticipated most of his arguments; they had gone over much of the same ground, and some of them had paid more attention to the beauties of style than he had, and of course had been more dangerous to Christianity. In all this, if he had examined his own heart he would have found more of pride and vanity than he was ever willing to allow; but this cannot be remedied now; nor should it be regretted. Except as it relates to himself, for his book had done more good than harm. The ignorant and vulgar could not understand it, and the wicked who were intelligent did not relish it, for it was not seasoned with the wit and ribaldry of Voltaire or Paine.³⁰

From Samuel L. Knapp's description of George English's fall, it is clear that even his friends did not agree with his view on the matter of Christianity's doctrine, but they respected his pursuit and mental processes enough to realize that no harm was meant by the book. The fact that his friends disagreed with him to this extent hearkens to what troubles George English would face when his opponents began to speak out against him.

³⁰ Samuel L. Knapp, 93.

Unluckily for English, his decision to keep the book unpublished was not enough to stop the slander which was being spread about him. Firstly, he found that these rumors were implying that he was now an Atheist, which is why he withdrew from his profession and beliefs. Though this hardly contained any truth. "Still I found that these ridiculous and mischievous stories gained credit, till it was affirmed in the hearing of some of my dearest friends as received from the best authority, that I had become an Atheist, and had written a book against the being of a God, and the reality of moral obligation and of moral distinctions."³¹ The slander did not stop at claims of Atheism either, soon he began to hear of people calling him deranged for arguing such doctrine, rather than allowing him to defend the arguments which he attempted to put forth concerning Christianity's validity.³² These were the kinds of assumptions by which his mental state and character were constantly being scrutinized with throughout his life, and even long after his death.

English's primary opponents in the matter of the scandal his book caused were Reverend Samuel Cary, Reverend William Ellery Channing and Reverend Edward Everett. While some of these men were colleagues of English's, they still were unabashed in their criticism of his work. Their discourse upon the subject of religion might have left George English without too much social harm, but he was unfortunate in that these individuals had many followers, fans, and readers across the United States. Naturally, the Reverends

³¹ George Bethune English, *A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Cary, containing remarks upon his review of the Grounds of Christianity Examined, by comparing the New Testament with the Old*, 7.

³² George Bethune English, 9.

such as Channing, Cary, and Everett published pamphlets of all sorts, and people like George English were ripe opponents to discuss.

Cary and Everett, these two young clergymen, were the only opponents that the writer ever heard Mr. English mention. The productions of their pens were extensively read, and much admired by the public, particularly the work of Mr. Everett. This gentleman was then a preacher of high attainments, and the idol of a large circle of friends, and every thing he wrote told well. English acknowledged that Everett was learned, but complained that he was not fair, inasmuch as he treated him with asperity due only to those who attempt against their better judgments, to corrupt the public mind, which was not his case.³³

The difference in these opponents lies mainly in the timing of their criticisms. English began responding to Mr. Cary and Mr. Channing within a short time of his book being published, but English did not get a chance to respond to Mr. Everett's criticisms of him until after his time in Egypt.

English explains to Mr. Cary in his letter to him that he actually had the original intent of ignoring these rumors, but publishing his book and attempting to explain his reasoning for his actions seemed the only way to exonerate him from these petty accusations. He found that his only choice was to defend himself and to refute the claims of insanity being placed upon him. He finally decided to go through with publishing his work and make his writings known to the world. "The natural consequence was that I felt exasperated, and determined to exonerate myself from such imputations by making the real truth known, by publishing the reasons which had induced me to renounce my opinions and my profession."³⁴ In all of George English's responses to his opponents it is clear that he truly wished to hold open discourse about these topics which so interested

³³ Samuel L. Knapp, 93.

³⁴ George Bethune English, 7.

him, but unfortunately he was destined not to find brethren who shared his mindset among most of the westerners during this era.

The attacks on English's book and his ideas were not only coming from whispered slander and Samuel Cary, they also came from a more powerful source, the pulpit. He received open attacks in the same year his book was published from sermons delivered by William Channing. The sermons were focused on the topic of infidelity and English was the main topic in these speeches. According to English's book, he intended to invite any people doubting his opinions on the validity of the New Testament to argue in a fair and friendly setting. The early parts of Channing's sermon seemed to be offering just that as Mr. English quotes him in his letter concerning the matter.

It afforded me much pleasure, though it caused me no surprise, to perceive you to say in your introductory remarks, that these Sermons were designed to procure for the arguments for Christianity "a serious, and respectful attention;" and, that if you should "be so happy as to awaken candid and patient enquiry" your "principal object will be accomplished;" you wish "that Christianity should be thoroughly examined," you do "not wish to screen it from enquiry."³⁵

It was in this situation, which English hoped to have finally found some grounds for calm discussion about the doctrine of Christianity rather than being slandered for his supposed "blatant attacks" on Christianity. In reality, English probably knew better than to hope for a more rational discussion on his book since the origin of discussion this time was coming from a pulpit as a sermon rather than a personal exchange of letters or a friendly discussion. English's hope for a rational discussion concerning the Old and New Testaments was further dashed when he quoted Channing's view on the writings of

³⁵ George Bethune English, *A Letter Respectfully Addressed to the Reverend Mr. Channing, Relative to His Two Sermons on Infidelity* (Boston: Printed for the author, 1813), 3, 4.

infidels. In this case, the infidel was English. " You observe, p. 13, that the writings of Infidels, "have been injurious not so much by the strength of their arguments, as by the positive, and contemptuous manner in which they speak of Revelation, they about in sarcasm, abuse, and sneer, and supply the place of reasoning, by wit and satire."³⁶ Towards the end of his letter, English points out his disappointment in that the sermon is ended with an appeal to the emotions and feelings of the congregation rather than the logic of the arguments which English had so hoped for. In the end, the Channing did not scrutinize his work with close examination and a logical argument, instead, he viewed English's work as ridicule and sarcasm.³⁷

The excommunication of English came from the church of his baptism, the First Church of Christ at Cambridge, New England. In early 1814, multiple members of the First Church of Christ wrote to English concerning his publication. They were writing to inquire as to whether he stands by what he wrote in his book or if he would be willing to retract or reconsider his words.³⁸ After a meeting was set up later in the year, it is reported by the church records that English treated the committee with respect, but refused to retract his words. "The only concession he made was, that he had used some contumelious expressions which he did not entirely justify; but he did not retract any of the sentiments advanced in that book."³⁹ Unluckily for the church committee after these

³⁶ George Bethune English, 4.

³⁷ George Bethune English, *A Letter Respectfully Addressed to the Reverend Mr. Channing, Relative to His Two Sermons on Infidelity*, 21.

³⁸ *Records of the Church of Christ at Cambridge in New England 1632-1830: Compromising the Ministerial Records of Baptisms, Marriages, Deaths, Admission to Covenant and Communion, Dismissals and Church Proceedings*, ed. Stephan Paschall Sharples, S. B. (Boston: Eben Putnam, 1906), 389.

³⁹ *Records of the Church of Christ at Cambridge in New England 1632-1830*, 392.

proceedings, it seems that English decided to cut off communication with the church as he no longer pursued any meetings or councils with the Church of Christ which earned their ire rapidly. Once he cut off contact from the church his excommunication was inevitable.

Whereas George Bethune English, by a recent publication, entitled, 'The Grounds of Christianity examined by comparing the New Testament with the Old' ; has publicly & opprobriously assailed our holy religion, not less to the scandal of the Christian Community, than to the grief & scandal of this Church; and whereas by this conduct he has violated his own solemn covenant engagements, renounced his Christian profession, scandalized the Christian name, and proved himself to be, not merely an apostate from the Christian Church, but an enemy to the Christian religion; and whereas the faithful endeavors of the church to reclaim him have proved ineffectual; Voted, That George Bethune English be excommunicated.⁴⁰

With that incident drawn to a close on the 4th of November in 1814, English would now begin the next chapter of his life away from the theological world.

⁴⁰ *Records of the Church of Christ at Cambridge in New England 1632-1830*, 394.

Chapter III

JOURNEY TO EGYPT

The decision to publish *The Grounds of Christianity Examined* inevitably led to Mr. English's excommunication from the Church of Christ and likely had a hand in derailing him from his originally intended career as a teacher of the Christian faith. Also, he clearly was disheartened when each new attack came upon his work. While his intent with the book was to spark debate and conversation between defenders of the faith and himself, he only received the responses he was warned about. He was able to respond to many of the attacks from more prominent figures rapidly and thoroughly, but his reputation had suffered a blow. After much deliberation among other scholars and masters of the field of theology, he still was unable to calm the attacks and manage a rational approach and argument on his writings. "I desire no favour. I am not obliged to appeal to the feelings for the protection of my system. I ask nothing but justice, and that it may be examined with fairness, and with rigour. I wish to excite no interest in favour of the cause I defend, except on account of its importance, and its ability to bear scrutiny."⁴¹ His letters reflect a strong disappointment in every new charge which was placed upon him

⁴¹ George Bethune English, *A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Cary, containing remarks upon his review of the Grounds of Christianity Examined, by comparing the New Testament with the Old*, 10.

from multiple sources. English's tribulations in dealing with aggressive reprisals of his antagonists surprisingly did not end with his eventual exodus from the United States.

The time between George Bethune English's last days in America, and his arrival in Egypt, is another period for which very little data has been discovered to explain his actions during this time. First, he found problems with employment in New England, as he was completely blocked from any position which required even the smallest amount of a decent public opinion. English began to travel in search of employment. It is even suggested that he worked as an editor of an unnamed paper for a time. He is reported to have been travelling to see his father during a committee which was deciding his fate within the Church of Christ after he left Cambridge. During the middle months of 1814 when he was ignoring the Church's requests to meet with him once again, he was reported to have been in Brighton at his father's house, then set out for Virginia.⁴² Samuel Lorenzo Knapp suggests that English had once thought of entering the military profession earlier in his life. With this in mind, Mr. English studied in depth the ancient and modern warfare tactics and constantly trained himself in maneuvers on a blackboard. He is first mentioned to have applied for commission in the U.S. Army and earned no response, but after some work as an editor for an unnamed paper, he was commissioned into the Marine Corps. "His office in the Marine Corps, if the emolument was small, placed him amongst gentlemen, which was gratifying to his taste; and, it is said, he was a favorite with them."⁴³

He obtained a commission from Congress to join the U.S. Marine Corps as a Second Lieutenant (Lt.) and journey to North Africa. Unluckily, this writer has been

⁴² *Records of the Church of Christ at Cambridge in New England 1632-1830*, 393.

⁴³ Samuel L. Knapp, 93.

unable to find anything among English's works which make reference as to how he joined the Marine Corps or by what means he was able to get in as a Second Lieutenant. One source in particular shows the method in which he attained this rank. In the "Journal of the Executive Proceedings of the Senate of the United States of America," it is documented that President James Madison appointed George Bethune English along with many other individuals as Second Lieutenants in the Marine Corps of the United States on Monday, February 27th, 1815.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, it is unclear as to why President Madison would have appointed him to such a position. There is no real reference to their possible friendship in English's writings, but the possibility surely exists. In an article by Dr. Zulfiqar Ali Shah, the idea that President Madison was a friend of Mr. English is used as a reason for his appointment to the Marine Corps with the previously mentioned rank. "In 1815, English's friend president James Madison, who shared some of his concerns about the traditional Christian beliefs, appointed him to the United States' Marine Corps as a second lieutenant."⁴⁵ Sadly, the article is lacking supporting historical data even though it does bring about some interesting political and religious points on the topic of the President and George English. A much worthier documented source mentions that it was through John Quincy Adams, English's future employer, that he obtained the commission in the Marine Corps.⁴⁶ It is also worth noting that John Quincy Adams was

⁴⁴ *Journal of the Executive Proceedings of the Senate of the United States of America: From the commencement of the First, to the termination of the Nineteenth Congress. Volume II* (Washington: Duff Green, 1828), 623.

⁴⁵ Zulfiqar Ali Shah, "The Muslim Friend of President James Madison," in *Comparative Religion* (2011), <http://fiqhouncil.org/node/38> (accessed November 24, 2012).

⁴⁶ Alan Moorehead, *The Blue Nile* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1962), 174.

possibly linked to English through his previous involvement in the same college clubs in which English was involved. These include Phi Beta Kappa, and the Hasty-Pudding Club.

English's time in the military services was clearly one of the more interesting points of his life. While in the service of the Marine Corps, he was able to visit Istanbul and learn the customs and language skills which would undoubtedly help him later in his life. English was stationed aboard a ship called the *U.S.S. Peacock*. He sailed the Mediterranean from 1816-1817, then resigned his commission from the Marines. Lt. English left the military and stayed for a while in the Ottoman Empire.

It is not completely clear how, but Lt. English was allowed to resign from the United States Marine Corps when he was in Egypt. It is possible that he did not truly resign from the Corps or still considered himself a part of the United States military as well. Contention is evidenced by the fact that he signed his book written on his expedition into the Sudan; "By George Bethune English, General of Artillery in the U. S. Service."⁴⁷ His resignation took place at some point in the year 1817 in the Mediterranean in which he began his tour of the Levant, especially the city of Istanbul, which brought many useful skills into his possession.⁴⁸ It would make a great deal of sense for English to have actually already been a spy of sorts for the United States, and even more specifically for John Quincy Adams during this period. What is known is that

⁴⁷ George Bethune English, *A Narrative of the Expedition to Dongola and Sennaar, Under the Command of his Excellence Ismael Pasha, Undertaken by Order of his Highness Mehemmed Ali Pasha, Viceroy of Egypt: By an American in the Service of the Viceroy* (London: Bell Yard Temple Bar, 1822), 2.

⁴⁸ *List of Officers of the Navy of the United States and of the Marine Corps from 1775 to 1900: Comprising a Complete Register of all Present and Former Commissioned, Warranted, and Appointed Officers of the Marine Corps, Regular and Volunteer: Compiled from the Official Records of the Navy Department*, ed. Edward W. Callahan (New York: L. R. Hamersly & Co., 1901), 184.

George English left the Marines in the Mediterranean and continued journeying throughout the Levant and possibly in some parts of southern Europe. There are no current sources for his time abroad, but many things can be inferred by the descriptions of him a few years later in Egypt. While these particular features about him will be covered greater depth later, they are worth mentioning at this point.

During this unknown period he picks up the Ottoman Turkish language to the point where he was considered to be fluent enough to fool even other Turks that he was a native speaker. He also is rumored to have converted to Islam during this period, though the specifics of the event or the place is not clear. It is also apparent that he took up the Turkish garb during this time, as all reports of his appearance during his time in Africa point to him being dressed as a Mussulman or a Turkish man. The last thing that George English gained from his time in the Levant was personal relations. Later in his life some of these personal contacts and relations helped English accomplish his objectives as a diplomatic agent in the Levant. Soon after this journey, English joined Muhammad Ali Pasha's forces in Egypt as a mercenary military adviser in the year 1820 and was asked to tour with his son's army into the Sudan as the Chief of Artillery, or the rank of *Topgi Bashi*.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ George Bethune English, 3.
Topgi Bashi roughly means a great officer, in this case, Chief of Artillery.

Chapter IV

ENGLISH AND THE NILE

A small history of Egypt during this era is necessary for one to grasp fully the setting into which English was immersing himself. The most appropriate place to start is the makeup of Muhammad Ali Pasha's military. Setting is important to give a setting to George English's experience in Egypt.

English immersed himself into a turbulent point in the history of N. E. Africa. The French controlled Egypt from 1798-1801 and weakened the local Mamluk system. The British and the Ottomans were able to push the French out of Egypt in 1801.⁵⁰ The Ottomans retained a fair amount of power in the region but their efforts never solidified. Ottomans, Mamluks, and the British all were trying to consolidate some sort of power and stable government in Egypt by getting their personal candidates in power.

Mamluks and Ottoman soldiers ransacked Egypt, partially due to their poor pay, but mainly from a lack of discipline. While the Ottoman army destroyed the economy another issue was arising. The other factions were consolidating their efforts to wage open war against the Ottomans. If these problems weren't enough to throw the country and economy into turmoil, the British were simultaneously trying

⁵⁰ Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot, *A Short History of Modern Egypt* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 51.

to intervene and push their candidates for political office forward. According to Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot, "The situation could best be described as chaotic."⁵¹

Muhammad Ali, an Ottoman officer, had allies among the *Ulama*. The *Ulama* saw Muhammad Ali as a governor who could control the army and restore order. Once the *Ulama* were able to gain the Ottoman Empire's backing for their choice of Muhammad Ali as the leader of Egypt, the previous governor left his post.⁵²

Muhammad Ali attained this power in 1805, a good while before George Bethune English came to Egypt. Ali's intense policy of modernization was well underway around the time English arrived. The concept which will require more explanation at this point is why Muhammad Ali would be interested in George Bethune English's help in the first place.

Muhammad Ali's country was newly united. He remodeled the country from the ground up. The word which was used to describe his group which set out to reform the country industrially and militarily was *Nizam al-jadid*.⁵³

Since Muhammad Ali was intent on transforming the Egyptian army into a European model, he needed experts on western tactics and weaponry. Western discipline was also needed among his troops. His first attempts at conscripting mercenary military advisors focused on Mamluks and Ottomans. He ran into problems while asking the Mamluks, as there were very few of them left. The Ottomans were quite willing to

⁵¹ Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot, 52.

⁵² Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot, 53.

⁵³ John P. Dunn, "Missions or mercenaries? European military advisors in Mehmed Ali's Egypt, 1815-1848," in *Military advising and assistance: from mercenaries to privatization, 1815-2007*, ed. Donald J. Stoker (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1.

join, but they had little knowledge of modern military direction.⁵⁴ Thus Muhammad Ali began to gather western mercenaries from many European countries including America. George English was one of the mercenaries who earned a position in the new army. He journeyed to Egypt and seized an opportunity for adventure by joining up with the Pasha during the time of his when foreign military advisors were in demand.

The Pasha had been preparing the army for modernization since 1810. That year, he instituted new systems while updating programs he considered out of date or ineffective. He also tightened control of the government bureaucracy. Then he conducted a survey to determine the number, value, and ownership of land for taxing purposes. Also, he eliminated the tax immunities which farming and agricultural land and religious centers enjoyed.⁵⁵

One of the first steps that Muhammad Ali Pasha took to assure his complete control of Egypt was to eliminate a group which had been problematic for former Sultans and Pashas alike: the Mamluks. He was wise enough as a leader to see that the Mamluks were set on not changing the old system of the Mamluk caste in Egypt. If he was to implement a reformed military system, his efforts would most likely be met with violent resistance.⁵⁶ His aim was to eliminate the threat of the Mamluks altogether so that his modernization of the military could begin. The plan was to call the Mamluk leaders to a festival gathering in Cairo to celebrate the son of Muhammad Ali, Tusun Pasha, and his

⁵⁴ John P. Dunn, 3.

⁵⁵ Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, his army and the making of modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 9.

⁵⁶ Khaled Fahmy, 83.

appointment to fight the Wahhabi rebels in Arabia. Once the leaders arrived in Cairo, the plan was to ambush them in the streets and annihilate the leadership in one swift action. The plan which was carried out on the 1st of March, 1811 worked well. The Mamluks' longstanding power structure in Egypt was finally broken. "He invited the heads of all the Mamluk households to attend the festive celebration and once they were on their way up a narrow alleyway leading to his court in the Citadel, he ordered his Albanian soldiers to open fire on them. Over four hundred and fifty of the Mamluk emirs were killed in that incident. This was followed by a ferocious pogrom against any Mamluk leaders who had succeeded in escaping the massacre in the Citadel."⁵⁷ The Albanian troops were then allowed to seek and destroy the remaining Mamluks and their families wherever they were found. They were also pursued into Upper Egypt by the Pasha's son Ibrahim and destroyed while trying to reconsolidate power.

The next problem that Muhammad Ali Pasha faced was finding a way to manage his Albanian troops. While the solution he used to solve the Mamluk issue would have probably been the easiest way to rid his army of the disorganized and rowdy Albanian troops, Muhammad Ali was also Albanian, and these men were a large portion of his army. Muhammad Ali tried multiple ways to impose order among the Albanian troops. In 1815 he began by keeping track of their pay and expenses by putting it under an organized principle. He also implemented daily target practice and new training according to French methods, this included their dress and appearance. These changes were not effective and the result was a failed assassination attempt on the Pasha's life,

⁵⁷ Khaled Fahmy, 84.

and a riot that wrecked the streets and property of Cairo.⁵⁸ Muhammad Ali found a much more useful way to rid himself of the Albanian issue. The Sultan had recently ordered them to confront the Wahhabi rebels in Arabia, which provided as the perfect opportunity to send as many of the Albanians to their deaths as possible.⁵⁹ This strategy proved to be so effective that soon after, Muhammad Ali had his sights set on another source of troops for his modernizing army.

His new target was the people of the Sudan. The Pasha viewed them as exploitable and docile, hoping they could be molded into obedient soldiers and laborers for his new army. This campaign is where George English enters the scene in 1820.

The Pasha's intent was multifaceted. First, Muhammad Ali sent his army into the Sudan to gather soldiers and then, to exploit the gold mines with which the Sudan was supposed to be filled. Finally, it was his intention to destroy the last remnants of the Mamluk's power structure in Africa.⁶⁰ However, the recruitment of new soldiers were the top priority. "When Ismail Pasha wrote to Mehmed Ali informing him of the amount of taxes levied in the conquered areas, his father wrote back telling him to pay more attention to collecting men not money."⁶¹

English was well aware of what he was getting himself into. At the start of his book, he points out how well known Muhammad Ali already was throughout the world. "Egypt, once the home of discord and the headquarters of anarchy, under his

⁵⁸ Khaled Fahmy, 85.

⁵⁹ Khaled Fahmy, 86.

⁶⁰ Khaled Fahmy, 86.

⁶¹ Khaled Fahmy, 87.

administration has long enjoyed peace and prosperity; is permeable in all directions, and in perfect safety to the merchant and the traveler, and is yearly progressing in wealth and improvement."⁶²

English was able to actually join Muhammad Ali Pasha's forces through a friend, Henry Salt, Esq. "His Britannic Majesty's Consul General in Egypt." Salt influenced the Pasha to grant George English a position in the armed forces of Egypt. Through these actions English was able to become an artillery adviser to Ismail Pasha, the son of Muhammad Ali, and suggest plans of action.⁶³ The personal reason for George English's journey into Egypt and through the Sudan is an obvious one; he wanted to depart from the land in where he recently lost his ability to continue the profession which he was so intensely working upon. Not only that, by leaving the United States, he would for the time being be free of any religious scandals or open criticism concerning his ideas.

In preparation for an invasion into the Sudan, English decided to write one last response to a critic of his in the United States. In this case, it was a response to a Greek professor at Harvard University named Edward Everett. Everett wrote a book called *A Defense of Christianity* as an answer to English's book. English originally did not intend to write a response to the book, but, once in Egypt, he decided that the problematic situation he left in America might still be able to produce some good. His ideas were attracting some attention at the time, and he hoped to take advantage of the situation

⁶² George Bethune English, *A Narrative of the Expedition to Dongola and Sennaar, Under the Command of his Excellence Ismael Pasha, Undertaken by Order of his Highness Mehemmed Ali Pasha, Viceroy of Egypt: By an American in the Service of the Viceroy* (London: Bell Yard Temple Bar, 1822), 2.

⁶³ George Bethune English 3.

and use it to further the cause of truth and philanthropy.⁶⁴ His response was in the form of a book he wrote while in Egypt while waiting to undertake the conquest of the Sudan with Ismail Pasha. The other reason he wrote this book as a hope to better the search for truth was that he did not expect to live past the journey he would soon be undertaking.

The work was written in Egypt and forwarded to the U. States, while I was preparing to accompany Ismael Pacha to the conquest of Ethiopia; an expedition in which I expected to perish, and therefore felt it to be my duty to leave behind me, some from which my countrymen might learn what were my real sentiments upon a most important and interesting subject; and as I hoped would learn too, how grossly they had been deluded into building their faith and hope upon a demonstrated error.⁶⁵

Even though he sent off the book to America, it was not published until he returned from his tour with the Pasha. What does become clear is that he came to be one of the first known white Americans to convert to the Islamic faith. He states that he does not feel that infidel is a fair title to give to him, and that his journeys throughout the Old World including Europe, Asia, and Africa have solidified his reasoning for rejecting the New Testament. His thoughts do not stray to Atheism though; rather he mentions that he believes that the world was made by such a being as the Jehovah of the Old Testament.⁶⁶ It can also be noted that English's affinity towards Islam is quite detectable in the same book which responded to Professor Edward Everett. In a passage referring back to Everett's book, he counters a story in which Islam is discredited. He notes that a Roman history author named Grotius⁶⁷ relayed a story which involved the prophet Muhammad

⁶⁴ George Bethune English, *Five Pebbles from the Brook* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Author, 1824), 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ George Bethune English, *Five Pebbles from the Brook*, 3.

⁶⁷ This refers to Hugo Grotius 1583-1645, a Dutch jurist who wrote the *Mare Liberum* and multiple other writings on international law.

who trained a bird to peck at his ear so that he could fool his followers into believing that the bird was bringing him messages from God. English points out that this story is maintained in the versions of this book printed in Christian lands, but left out due to its ridiculousness among the Islamic peoples. When asked for the authority of this story, apparently Grotius only replied that he had none.⁶⁸

Another reason for George English's possible conversion into Islam, as likely as the possibility that he was a true believer, was that it would easily put him in a stronger leadership position with his troops going into the Sudan. It was not uncommon for the Pasha to reward those who embraced Islam. Several Europeans won special treatment and quick promotions during the reign of Muhammad Ali Pasha's via conversion. A good example was Octave Joseph-Anthelme Sève. A Napoleonic veteran, he met hostility and poor cooperation from his Egyptian unit. After he converted to Islam, Sève was promoted multiple times, until he was the chief-of-staff to Ibrahim, and given the title of Pasha.⁶⁹ It is quite possible that English took this route to avoid any unpleasant situations with his troops and his new benefactors. Another credible reason was that he seemed to have a true affinity for monotheistic religions, and he had recently denied the Christian doctrine. Though the idea of western men becoming Muslim was not popular among their western brethren, it was a religion that appealed to English. His western contemporaries usually regarded Muslim converts as pariahs, traitors, or mentally questionable.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ George Bethune English, 67.

⁶⁹ John P. Dunn, 7.

⁷⁰ John P. Dunn, 7, 8.

English was a Muslim, and while in Ismail Pasha's service, he clearly was worshiping and recognized as a Muslim. Upon seeking help on this matter the author was contacted by a helpful individual through e-mail from Turkey named Busranur Kocaer. He was a master's student who was also working on his thesis at the time and had been searching for answers about Muslim converts. He explained that there is an archival document on him in the National Archives of Turkey. The document apparently states that George B. English was converted to Islam in Cyprus. However the document is written in Ottoman Turkish.⁷¹ The possibility of English's conversion taking place in Cyprus seems plausible. During that time period English would have been near Cyprus or in the Levant.

English wrote on the purpose of his mission with Ismail Pasha, and defended the reasoning behind the invasion in his account of the campaign. Much like how he pointed out the method by which Muhammad Ali Pasha brought peace to the country of Egypt and facilitated its economic and military development, he also pointed out a similar intent for the invasion into the Sudan. "For several years past the inland commerce of this favored land has suffered great interruptions from the confusion and discord to which the countries on the Upper Nile have been prey."⁷² English describes the lords of these lands to have become little better than a band of organized brigands who pillaged the provinces and trade caravans without mercy in the slightest degree. Through these issues, trade from Sennar (the Eastern Sudan), which was very advantageous to Egypt,

⁷¹ Busranur Kocaer, e-mail message to author, September, 15, 2014.

⁷² George Bethune English, *A Narrative of the Expedition to Dongola and Sennar*, ix.

had completely stopped. It is with this reasoning that George English states that this mission is to bring order to the lands by bringing them under Muhammad Ali's dominion.⁷³ Whether he truly believed in Muhammad Ali's willingness to free the Sudan of these bandit kings is not clear, but English found his own reasons later in the campaign to not agree with the Pasha's son Ismail.

An interesting aside which points to English's ingenuity and willingness to work towards a goal he sets in mind is the tale of a war machine that George English attempted to bring into service under his artillery division under the Pasha. Samuel Knapp, English's friend relates that due to the type of combat that would be happening during the invasion into the Sudan, English had a chariot built based on an ancient scythed chariot model. He greatly changed the working model to be propelled by horses rather than drawn, not to mention a bullet proof cover. This would have made a mobile artillery platform that could have ridden into battle with confidence. In the end this device never saw combat and was sabotaged and destroyed before they could be produced in number against a wall in Cairo. It is suggested that this may have been due to a jealous cavalry unit.⁷⁴

His other strategy was the one that the Pasha accepted. Quite simply, rather than have the horses draw the artillery all the way through the desert and down to the invasion sites, they would train camels to do it as they were more suited to the environment and proved to be fully up to the task with a little training. The horses were

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Samuel L. Knapp, 94.

not to be used to draw artillery until a battle was imminent or planned. With this strategy, the artillery units under George B. English mobilized.⁷⁵

The actual journey into the Sudan is described in great detail. He begins by telling the reader about Ismail Pasha's goodwill towards the people he came across on the mission and why this behavior was so beneficial to his early military success. English even claims that in the early stages the journey was a complete success which cost the army less than two hundred soldiers' lives. "The principal cause of a success so extraordinary, at such a price, has been the humanity and good faith of the Pasha Ismael towards those provinces that submitted without fighting. Perfect security of person and property was assured to the peaceable, and severe examples were made of those few of the soldiery, who, in a very few instances, presumed to violate it."⁷⁶ Not only did these conquests open the way for more resources to flow into the newly reformed Egypt, but he also describes the way in which these newly pacified land had been opened up to researchers and geographers. The outside world knew nearly nothing about this area during this time. He believed that with this journey, the obscurity with which the Sudan was regarded and the uncertainty of the Nile's course would no longer be in question upon completion of their mission. His descriptions of the lands he was traversing tended to be written almost like a pilgrimage to the origin of humanity.

This expedition has laid open to the researches of the geographer and the antiquarian a river and a country highly interesting, and hitherto imperfectly known to the civilized world. The Nile, on whose banks we have marched for so many hundred miles, is the most famous river in the world, for the uncertainty of its source and the obscurity of its course. At present this obscurity ceases to exist;

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ George Bethune English, *A Narrative of the Expedition to Dongola and Sennaar*, x-xi.

and before the return of the pasha Ismael this uncertainty will probably be no more. The countries we have traversed are renowned in history and poetry as the land of ancient and famous nations, which have established and overthrown mighty empires, and have originated the religions, the learning, the arts, and the civilization of nations long since extinct; and who have been preceded by their own instructors in the common road which every thing human must travel.⁷⁷

In the narrative portion of his book on the Sudan, English includes great detail in almost everything he describes. He further states early on that there are portions that were written after the fact due to the condition from which he was suffering. The source of his suffering was a condition described as severe ophthalmia⁷⁸, with which he was stricken quite violently for long periods of time. This condition sometimes made it impossible for him even to write. The worst incident affected him for around fifteen months. Originally, this was the reason that prevented English from being able to travel with Ismail Pasha, and he instead had to leave at a later date.⁷⁹

George English's first orders were to rendezvous with Ismail Pasha at his camp in Wady Halfa on the Second Cataract of the Nile. Upon his arrival early in the September of 1820, English grants the reader an enumerated observation of the military force he would be taking into the Sudan. "This force may be thus enumerated: ten pieces of field artillery, one mortar 8 inch calibre, and two small howitzers, attached to which were one hundred and twenty cannoneers; three hundred Turkish infantry and seven hundred Mogrebin⁸⁰ ditto; the remainder of the army Turkish and Bedouin cavalry, together with

⁷⁷ George Bethune English, xii-xiii.

⁷⁸ A condition which often caused English to have extremely swollen eyes and eyelids, along with this came an array of other sicknesses. It was a common issue.

⁷⁹ George Bethune English, xv.

⁸⁰ Most likely referring to "Maghrebin", or people from North West Africa.

a corps of Abbadies mounted on dromedaries."⁸¹ In total he mentions counting about four thousand troops. Along with the troops were one hundred and twenty boats for the journey up the Nile.

Upon entering the camp, English presented himself to Ismail Pasha. His reception was very flattering, but he was informed that his orders were to wait until the ships were fitted to leave for their journey up the Nile currently. While awaiting orders, he studied the troops and the preparedness of the army. English seemed pleased with his finding as the soldiers appeared adequately trained for the positions given to them, though he makes it clear also that this drive to follow duty may have also been through fear of Muhammad Ali Pasha.⁸² Within days of his arrival at the camp, he was made incapable of journeying due to a first attack of ophthalmia. Combined with the laudanum he was using as medication, his ability to see or sleep was completely nil. Because of this malady, English was unable to accompany the Pasha on the beginning of the journey with the bulk of the army and was forced to begin his journey a few weeks later.⁸³

English was finally able to depart up the Nile with a crew of French surgeons around the Second Cataract with a fleet of fifteen boats to meet up with the main forces. He states that they left on the 3rd of Moharram, A. H. 1236. This is roughly the 11th of October, 1820. The Second Cataract is described by English as a succession of short falls and rapids that last for about one hundred miles.⁸⁴

⁸¹ George Bethune English, 1.

⁸² George Bethune English, 2-3.

⁸³ George Bethune English, 3.

⁸⁴ George Bethune English, 4.

The journey to meet with the Pasha was extremely dangerous, as the Nile boasts multiple deadly river features such as whirlpools and jagged rocks of all types. He tells of the multiple boats wrecked upon the rocks and sunken ships as they made their way up the Nile. The difficulties were so great that at a few points the men had to force the boats against the current. "To pass the fifth and ninth rapids, it was necessary to employ about a hundred men to drag the boats one after another against the current. At the fifth pass, several of the boats were damaged, and two soldiers and two boatmen drowned; At this pass, the river is interrupted by a ledge of rocks reaching nearly across, and over which the Nile falls."⁸⁵ George English includes thorough detail on how many times they almost lost their boat to these dangers. In a footnote, he even mentions that at nearly every pass along the Nile, there was the wreckage of at least one of their boats.⁸⁶

During the several months of travelling it took to reach the Pasha, he describes multiple landscapes which usually included small villages and verdant and healthy land the further he progressed down the Nile. Farm land and cattle seemed to be abundant on all sides throughout his journey past the Second Cataract. In some cases the crew along with English were reduced to eating rice and lentils for extended periods of time, to assuage this inevitably tiresome diet they took to shore and bought sheep for food such as when they were forced to stop due to unfavorable wind conditions. "About noon the wind fell and the *Rais* (A Turkish honorific for an aristocrat) put to shore; we immediately

⁸⁵ George Bethune English, 5.

⁸⁶ George Bethune English, 12.

sat our domestics about preparing the purchased meat, and shortly after we sat down to this regale, which appeared to me the most delicious meal I had eaten for many years."⁸⁷ The reasoning for such distress and lack of decent food during the journey was not poor preparation, as there was plenty of farmland and villages along the Nile as they ventured farther up it. The problem is described in a somewhat entertaining and telling footnote by English. In this anecdote he also grants the reader an example of how extreme the food situation grew at time. "I cannot help smiling in copying off this part of my journal, at the little account I made of "bread rice and lentiles," at the commencement of the campaign. Before I left Sennaar, I have been more than once obliged to take a part of my horse's rations of durra to support nature. He ate his portions raw and I boiled mine. The causes of such distress were that the natives of the Upper country would frequently refuse to sell us any thing for our dirty coloured piastres of ⁸⁸Egypt, and the Pasha would allow nobody to steal but himself."⁸⁹ With the lack of variety on his tour up the Nile and the locals unwilling to accept their money, it is not surprising that English and his crew were somewhat strained for a decent meal.

After a few weeks travelling up the Nile under incredibly dangerous circumstances, English and his crew found themselves in the territory known as Succoot. While he noted that the country was very beautiful and picturesque, his crew soon were forced to manage the problem of overpowering winds which prevented them from

⁸⁷ George Bethune English, 10-11.

⁸⁸ The local populations had no interest in the Egyptian monetary system, as they based their economy on trade.

⁸⁹ George Bethune English, 11-12.

traveling for the rest of the day.⁹⁰ It was here that English had his first experience with alternate practices of Islamic people beyond what he was accustomed to. "We saw here three men, of about twenty-five years of age, who had been circumcised but five days past, a thing I had never before known to have occurred to the children of Mussulmans."⁹¹ The majority of their journey through Succoot was pleasant and the landscape was plains and villages on both sides of the Nile. The villages in general are described to all have a similar layout, which English noted. Each seemed to have a central fortification and towers in each corner, while the rest of the village was usually filled with low or mud hut. The villages were governed by a patriarch who presided over the laws in the villages. English most likely noted this things for multiple reasons, as he genuinely was interested in things which he lacked in knowledge and the possible military application of knowing the general layout of these villages.⁹² The remainder of the territory of Succoot was also fertile and picturesque as the English made a few more observations about the land and its people. Within about a week his boat made its way beyond the territory.

A small aside which represented George English's curious nature occurred when the boat was making its way out of Succoot. After entering the province of Machass English noticed what appeared to be an ancient temple on the western bank of the Nile. He apparently had some difficulties convincing the Rais to take the boat to shore so that he might examine the ruins, but he was eventually able to convince him.

⁹⁰ George Bethune English, 18-19.

⁹¹ George Bethune English, 19.

⁹² George Bethune English, 23.

This temple is manifestly of Egyptian architecture; it is about two hundred feet long from east to west; ten of the columns only are standing; they are composed of separate blocks of a brown stone resembling that employed in the construction of the temples in the isle of Philoe. The walls of this temple are in ruins, except a part of the front which is in a very dilapidated state. The front faces the East; the pillars and the ruins of the walls are sculptured with hieroglyphics. It stands on the west bank of the river about two miles beyond the territory of Succoot.⁹³

This instance is a clear example of English's love of exploration. While he was already known for exploring thought and religion, this adventure was clearly an opportunity he was taking to explore much more.

While travelling up the Nile, English also notes the other methods of travel on the river that he observes people using. He describes two peculiar methods in particular. One method involved a man moving his entire family down the river on a raft fastened together by bundles of corn stalks. While the man guided the boat, his old wife pushed the boat from behind while swimming. His younger wife and her children sat on the raft. The other method he observed was the practice of attaching multiple empty gourds to a wooden frame made out of the branches of date trees. He describes it as very light, effective, and easily usable and able to be carried by one person.⁹⁴

The next few days were somewhat tranquil for English and his crew. The landscape remained the same for the most part and English noticed that the fortifications of the villages and towns that they passed were becoming more formidable and better designed. He surmised that these were built by the exiled Mamlukes, though the territory had fallen under the control of Ismail Pasha before their arrival.⁹⁵ The path

⁹³ George Bethune English, 27.

⁹⁴ George Bethune English, 29.

⁹⁵ George Bethune English, 33.

before between their boat and Dongola became quite hazardous multiple times. On more than one occasion the boat was put to shore due to insufficient wind to power the boat through swift rapids.⁹⁶ In one of the more dangerous rapids the boat of English and his crew was forced by the overpowering winds into another boat which was struggling to maintain control as well. The vessel's captain made a daring move to get away from a possibly dangerous collision with the other boat by driving directing the boat towards a part of the passage filled with possible rocks. Luckily for everyone on board they were grounded for a small period of time on a sand bank in the rapids rather than rocks. Even after they were free of the sand bank they found another issue in these rapids, a large whirlpool. The nearness to which the boat inched towards the whirlpool created one of the most dramatic moments of George English's journey up the Nile. "The side of the boat approached to within a yard of the white foam which covered this dreadful spot. Our *rais* tore his turban from his head, and lifted his clasped hands to Heaven, exclaiming, "We are lost!" The rest of the boatmen were screaming to God and the prophet for aid, when, I know not how, but by the good Providence that watched over us, the boat cleared this peril, and others that beset us in passing yet two more rapids almost as dangerous."⁹⁷ Within a day of passing the deadly rapids, they found a welcome sight of the broadening of the Nile and fertile plains on all sides. They were within a day's reach of Dongola.

⁹⁶ George Bethune English, 34, 37, 39.

⁹⁷ George Bethune English, 39-40.

English and his crew were of the assumption that Dongola was the name of a town at which they were hoping to catch up to the Pasha. Upon questioning the locals they found that the territory was actually called Dongola and the town which they were searching for was called New Dongola. Unfortunately for English and the crew, the Pasha was gone and left soldiers at the towns in Dongola. At the time, they were told the Pasha was three days march ahead of him.⁹⁸ A day later after successfully sailing farther up the Nile, they found a village which supplied his crew with a large amount of milk and vegetables in exchange for flour. They also learned that there was another town a few days up the Nile also known as Dongola (Old Dongola), and the Pasha was three days march past that town.⁹⁹ Which meant that they were slightly farther behind than they assumed earlier.

The rest of their journey through Dongola was relatively quiet. Almost every town they came across as they continued up the river was either abandoned or not populated enough to be of any real consequence. They were running short on provisions again due to the lack of villages to trade with until they found another group of people who had no interest in their currency, but were quite willing to trade for flour much like the previous villages.¹⁰⁰ Nearly a week had passed since they left New Dongola before English's boat found the ruins of what was Old Dongola. The people of the city informed him that the

⁹⁸ George Bethune English, 44.

⁹⁹ George Bethune English, 46.

¹⁰⁰ George Bethune English, 50.

Pasha and his men were encamped two days up the Nile. With this news, the crew decided it best to join up with Ismail Pasha rather than visit Old Dongola.¹⁰¹

The next few days were apparently filled with pain for George English since he is rather unhappy that he was unable to visit an ancient temple's ruins due to what he describes as a bloody flux. Luckily his friend on the journey Khalil Aga¹⁰², a fellow American, was able to describe the location to him. The temple apparently was mostly only ruins, but there did remain two colossal statues.¹⁰³ After two more days passed it seemed that English was recovering well as he soon found another set of ruins which held a reward for his curiosity. "Some large columns, of a beautiful stone, white intermixed red, are to be seen among the ruins. One of the cemeteries is evidently ancient, as the tombs are covered with hieroglyphics, intermixed with inscriptions. In one of the tombs one of our party found the remains of a mummy."¹⁰⁴

Within a few days or so of discovering the mummy, Mr. English was informed that two Englishmen had joined the crew of one of the boats ahead of his. Here he was destined to meet with an individual who was hardly pleased to have known him. His name was George Waddington. Waddington was an English clergyman traveling with Reverend Barnard Hanbury. The duo were journeying from Wadi Halfa to Meroe when they met up with George English's entourage. English and his crew recently were battling

¹⁰¹ George Bethune English, 52.

¹⁰² Agha or Aga is a Turkish title for an officer.

¹⁰³ George Bethune English, 53.

¹⁰⁴ George Bethune English, 56.

the notorious "S" shaped curve of the Nile and were ashore at the time. They met when the duo proceeded to get on the same boat as George English's crew.

Their meeting held great significance in that it was one of the few times a person recorded English as a follower of Islam and how a Westerner from the era would react to meeting a person who was also from the west but dressed, acted, and worshipped as a Muslim. Waddington's first impression of the men was that they were important looking Turkish men. Upon discovering that the men were actually westerners he discerned that two of them were American and one was Italian. His description of George English goes along with his explanation of how other westerners have "taken the turban".

Returning to the boat, after the execution of a cannibal vulture, we found our part of it occupied by three very important Turkish-looking men, one of whom saluted us in English. They proved to be an Italian and two Americans; the former, named Rossignoli, was a physician on the staff, and the others were renegades; the more consequential of the two is named Mahommed Effendi--it is said, that he is of a good family, and that after deliberately weighing, with all the advantages of education, the merits of the two religions, he declared in favour of the Mahometan. He then wrote a book, to prove to all the Christian world how well he had decided, and of which he greatly wishes, we were assured, to obtain the publication in England. He was now an officer of artillery in the Pasha's service; he is a pale, delicate-looking man, of above thirty, and has been successful in acquiring the grave and calm look of the Turks, and the slow motion of the head and roll of the eyes. Two other Americans followed his example, and also (to use the orthodox expression) "took the turban," and they have since been heard to express their repentance of an act performed (as they say) at his persuasion.¹⁰⁵

Along with his description of George English, he also mentions the process by which westerners have apparently been turning Muslim. The mentioned method is rather odd and mysterious, leaning heavily upon the ideas of foreign religions being shrouded in

¹⁰⁵ George Waddington and Rev. Barnard Hanbury, *Journal of a Visit to some parts of Ethiopia* (London, printed by William Clowes, 1822), 114-115.

a mystique. The process George Waddington recounts is from another individual, in which men are turning into Turks as if by a nearly miraculous process away from public eye. The thought may seem rather silly, but his view of these events and people like George English is probably an accurate reflection of how the average westerner felt towards English. "Of their conversion, or rather, transformation, (and it seems to have been almost miraculous,) I can give no better account than by a literal translation of one I received from an eye-witness: "One day, at Cairo, I saw pass by two Americans, dressed like common sailors (which they were) in a blue jacket and trowsers; and then, for eight or ten days, I saw no more of them. After that interval, I observe them again, dressed in red, with a white turban on, and I say, 'What thing is this?' (*Che cos' e questo?*) and I am told, that they have made Turks of themselves; and since, it seems, they have also made gentlemen of themselves."¹⁰⁶

Waddington's view of George English was not what most would call pleasant or friendly, but their relationship was bound to become even more tumultuous after he was told offhandedly that English was displeased with them. The third party described English's attitude as offended, and complaining severely of their reception of him. The statements supposedly said by George English later proved to not be true, but Waddington's first reaction to this reported affront was to launch into a bit of a tirade about English.

Presently the foragers returned unsuccessful, and the remaining morsel of bread furnished us with our temperate repast. This is mentioned, only because we heard, afterwards, that Mahommed Effendi had complained severely of our reception of him. Now it is difficult to say what reception a renegade has a right

¹⁰⁶ George Waddington, 115.

to expect from those whose religion he has deserted. We offered him neither insult nor reproach: did he expect cordiality and friendship? or was it in the presence of the corpses left to rot on the face of the earth by those whose faith he had from conviction embraced, that he thought us likely to respect him and his faith? We were, it is true, alike natives of a distant land, we spoke the same language, and were in the country of a common enemy; but the nature of crimes is not changed by the sun that burns, or the deserts that surround you; nor can any circumstances of hardship, difficulty, or danger, alter the feeling with which you approach an apostate. And yet it must be confessed, that, to the disgrace of the Christian residents of the East, renegades are, in general, much less despised by them than by the Turks themselves.¹⁰⁷

Waddington seemed to take the encounter more than personally as his criticism seemed to continue on for a time. It is already known that George English (at that time known as Mahommed Effendi) was not a well liked individual among Christians, and in many cases, western communities due to Mr. English's views on Christianity.

Waddington's criticisms appear to be a general interpretation on how the educated and religious community viewed him, though in his footnotes Waddington seems to stretch the truth about English's troubled religious history.

We afterwards learnt, from one of his fellow-countrymen, that he is a native of Boston, son of a merchant, and educated a Protestant. Since then, besides being for some time a Jew, he has adopted in succession nearly all the opinions that divide the Christian world. He is now an orthodox Mahometan; and, should he survive this expedition, will, of course, turn Wahabee. He will next offer his adorations to Vishnou, and to Fo; and after making the tour of the world and its religions, will be content to die an Atheist.¹⁰⁸

Unfortunately for Mr. English, Waddington's remarks were to continue after he returned to England from his time in Egypt and were published. It is unlikely that English shifted

¹⁰⁷ George Waddington, 117-118.

¹⁰⁸ George Waddington, 114.

religions that often as there is no real evidence beyond what an individual told

Waddington which ended up in his footnote.

English hardly mentions Waddington and Hanbury originally in his account of the journey. He does not actually name the men initially but rather refers to them as strangers and gentlemen in his writings. His first reaction was concern for the men. He was rather unhappy that since they both were in a situation where food and luxuries were scarce, he could do nothing to make their circumstances any easier.¹⁰⁹ While writing the book at a later date, English added in a footnote explaining that these men were indeed Waddington and Hanbury. He also explains the misunderstanding which had taken place between them and escaped into public view. It appears though, that due to his position as an officer of artillery, he was unable to attempt any ameliorations until he was out of Egypt and in London.

These gentlemen were Messrs. Waddington and Hanbury, who, after staying a short time in our camp, returned to Egypt. Mr. Waddington, on his return to England, published an account of his travels on the upper Nile, in which, having been misled by the tongue of some mischievous enemy of mine, he gave an account of me not a little fabulous. On my arrival in London, I wrote to Mr. Waddington what he was pleased to call a "manly and temperate letter," informing him of his error, representing to him the serious injury it might do me, and calling upon him for a justification or an apology. Mr. Waddington, in the manner best becoming of an English gentleman, frankly gave me both, concluding with the following expressions--" I feel the most sincere and profound sorrow for the unintentional injustice into which I have been betrayed by too hasty a belief of false information. For this I am as anxious to make you reparation, as I am incapable of doing any person a wilful injury. I will therefore cause the note in question to be erased in the following editions of my book; and in the remaining copies of the present, I will instantly insert a new page or sheet, if necessary; or should that be impossible, I will immediately destroy the whole impression." It was impossible for me, after this, to retain any of the angry feelings excited by this affair, except towards "the false tongue" that occasioned it, on which I

¹⁰⁹ George Bethune English, 59.

cordially imprecate a plentiful portion of the "sharp arrows of the mighty and coals of juniper."¹¹⁰

It became apparent to English that they were closing in on the Pasha's position, as they found the putrefying bodies of the men and animals which were covering the land from the recent engagements, they saw the grain and crops which were completely matured, but not harvested.¹¹¹ The country they were now in was known as Shageia. After traveling the next day they were able to find a great deal of survivors (though mostly peasants) inside villages around a recent battleground between the Pasha's forces and a brigand army. English was pleased to find that the Pasha was attempting to protect people who were not resisting his forces. Upon the soldiers' appearance, the townspeople produced papers given to them by the Pasha which protected them from the soldiers and allied them with the Pasha.¹¹² This type of treatment and control was somewhat new to the troops. Several incidents took place which caused English to have to take action against some of his men for their inappropriate actions. At one point some of his crew attempted to sneak away to perpetrate, as English put it, "licentious amusement" against some of the local women. These men soon learned that such activities could be hazardous.

They were somewhat surprized and terribly frightened on their arrival at this village, on finding themselves suddenly surrounded by about two hundred peasants armed with clubs, who fiercely demanded what they wanted, asking them if they had come, as others had before them to-day, to cudgel the men and violate the women, and ordered them to be off immediately to the boats. The luckless fornicators, confounded by this unexpected reception, were heartily glad to be allowed to sneak back to the boat in the confusion and terror. On their

¹¹⁰ George Bethune English, 60-61.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² George Bethune English, 64.

arrival, and this affair becoming known to me, I abused them with all the eloquence I could muster, first, for their villany, and then for their cowardice, as they were well armed, and had fled before the face of cudgels.¹¹³

English finally was within sight of the Pasha's camp, but he was stalled for the rest of the day due to wind conditions and the problem of the Pasha being on the other side of the Nile. Luckily for English's impeccable curiosity, there was a surprisingly large amount of ruins on his side of the river. Among the ruins he discerned that it was once a very large temple containing a great deal of dilapidated columns, multiple statues of varying decay and condition, and around seventeen pyramids.¹¹⁴ Upon one of the pyramids he gained a better view of the area and saw many more pyramids, he was informed that the place was known as Meroe.

¹¹³ George Bethune English, 67-68.

¹¹⁴ George Bethune English, 72-73.

Chapter V

ENGLISH AND THE NILE CONTINUED

When English finally caught up to the Pasha, he was informed on the progress of the Pasha's armies thus far. They had reached into New Dongala and faced down the Abbadies, a local group in power, but quickly defeated them with cavalry maneuvers. The country submitted and was quickly pardoned. Next, in Shageia, the Pasha's cavalry and firepower won the day in another decisive victory. The head chief named Malek Shouus brought together his local chiefs' entire armies in Shageia. English also notes that in front of the leaders and cavalry, they placed a group of pitifully armed peasants and forced them out in front in an attempt to counter the Pasha's firepower. He reports the battle in great detail, in which the old fashioned cavalry and peasants armed with lances were unable to stand up to the firepower and artillery of a modernized army. In the end, the army fled and the land was conquered like the previous territories.¹¹⁵

Upon meeting the Pasha again, English was told to wait a few days before he might obtain an audience. At his audience he apologized for his absence due to sickness, but he was informed that he should not worry as there is much more to be done. English and his men were told they would be outfitted with horses and camels for their upcoming instructions.¹¹⁶ English was forced to travel by boat up

¹¹⁵ George Bethune English, 84-85.

¹¹⁶ George Bethune English, 87.

The Nile once more due to the Pasha's inability to supply his crew with the camels he mentioned. The army was now moving into Berber territory.

The Third Cataract provided the crew of English's boat with challenges quite different than the Second Cataract's. Multiple factors made travelling up the Nile in this area difficult. The first issue is the multitude of rocks and islands in the area, which English describes as infinite. The second major issue was the speed at which the current pushed against the boats. "In some of the passages where the water was deep, the current was as swift as a mill-sluice, which made it necessary to employ the crews of perhaps twenty boats to drag up one at a time."¹¹⁷ The third issue was how shallow some parts of the river were, and the only way to overcome this was to drag the boats in force over the rocks.

The journey was harsh as the provisions were not plentiful and it was a voyage through the desert. Not only was the heat unforgiving, but the sunlight showed no mercy on English's complexion and his ophthalmia was still not fully recovered. He even mentions that the sun at one point had burned the skin off of his face.¹¹⁸ Upon reaching the Pasha's camp in the Berber territory, English mentions that it took eight days of forced marching to reach their location from the original campsite.¹¹⁹ It is also at this point that he mentions the "S" shaped curve of the Nile which most of his journey thus far has been upon. The treacherous parts of the Nile which he and his men have been

¹¹⁷ George Bethune English, 92.

¹¹⁸ George Bethune English, 103.

¹¹⁹ George Bethune English, 106.

battling were all upon the notorious bend of the Nile containing the cataracts which are considered so dangerous.

An interesting note that George English makes of the natives of this region is that they had never seen a sail-boat before their arrival. Considering how long this technology had been in use it is altogether surprising that this was possible. This instance also hearkens to how long it had been since societies outside of Africa had visited these lands, if at all. "They called it "a water mare," comparing it, by this appellation, to the swiftest animal with which they are acquainted. They ran in crowds to the river's edge to see it mount the current without the aid of oars."¹²⁰

In Berber, the Pasha attempted peace talks to force the enemy Maliks¹²¹ to surrender their horses and arms and have them return to their homes to live in peace rather than banditry. These talks failed and the Pasha began his march further into Berber territory to break the power of the Maleks in the country. In these lands they also found many of the exiled Mamluks who were more than willing to return to Egypt under the Pasha's assured protection.¹²²

English took advantage of his position in the Pasha's army to explore and document the people of Berber. This relatively peaceful part of his journey allowed him to settle many of his curiosities and meet with the local populations. He found that the current capital was known as Nousreddin. He especially noted that even though they used the traditional greeting of peace "*salaam aleikoum*", the women did not veil their

¹²⁰ George Bethune English, 108.

¹²¹ Malik is a title for a king.

¹²² George Bethune English, 112.

faces. The other peculiarity about their dress was the necessity to prepare their hair in a specific fashion, or they felt that they are not dressed. "Both men and women never consider themselves in full dress, unless the hair of the head has been combed sleek, then braided and platted together, and afterwards plentifully anointed with butter." Another practice which he noted was that all women, whether free or slaves in the community have undergone excision, also known as female genital mutilation.¹²³

In another instance, he found out in a way that some of his Islamic brethren differed in their stringency of beliefs. In the land of the Berbers, English was fortunate to stay at the house of a high ranking chief's family of the local area. Upon talking with these individuals and their learning that he was also a follower of the Islamic faith, they began to attempt to shower him with gifts. They even offered something to English which caused him some mild disturbance due to both men being Muslim. "I was offered, by the mother and mistress of the house, my choice of two of her daughters for a bedfellow. They were both young, and the handsomest women I have seen in Berber, but married to husbands whose houses were at the other end of town."¹²⁴ This caused George English some discomfort since, as Muslims, they treated their women in ways which even the most liberal Muslims would find shocking. Though in a footnote he mentions that truthfully he may not have been able to maintain his virtue were it not for a certain set of circumstances.

I feel myself, however, bound in conscience to tell the *whole* truth of this affair. In perambulating about the town, in the course of the day, which was very hot, I got affected by a *coup de soleil*, which gave me a violent fever and head-ache. I have

¹²³ George Bethune English, 115-116.

¹²⁴ George Bethune English, 120.

strong suspicions that this circumstance acted as a powerful "preventer stay" to my virtue, and enabled me to put the devil to flight on this trying occasion. The mother of these damsels appeared to be edified by the discourse I made to her upon the subject of her proposal, but the young women plainly told me, that I was "*rajil batal*," i. e. a man good for nothing. If they could have understood Latin, I should have told them, "*Quodcunque ostendes mihi sic-k, Invalidus odi*."

He even goes as far as to describe the length to which their behavior differed from the acceptable norm of Islamic culture. "They suffer them to go about with the face exposed--to converse with the other sex in the roads, the streets, and the fields; and if the women are accustomed to grant their favours to their countrymen as liberally and as frequently as they did to our soldiers, I should imagine that it must be more than commonly difficult, in this country, for a man to know his father."¹²⁵

The country of Berber seemed to be a center for English to witness the regional differences in the practice of Islam. Since George English was a studious and well-read man, he was able to pick out the discrepancies between what was forbidden and allowed in Muslim culture during the era. However, his knowledge and experience in the more populated areas of Islamic culture caused him to be continually caught off guard by the cultural norms of the Berber people. In one interesting situation, the Malek who attempted to offer his daughters to English came back to their camp by boat. While on this boat with English, the Malek and a soldier had a heated dispute over the Malek's ability to call himself a Muslim. The soldier attempted to exclude the Malek and insulted him by calling him many names and describing him as a pimp. English attempted to quiet the soldier by reminding him that the Malek was an honorable man, and was very

¹²⁵ George Bethune English, 121-122.

hospitable to the men of the army thus far. The soldier was unrelenting as he asked how the Malek could call himself a Muslim when the women of his country acted how they did, and the men get drunk on all manners of liquors.¹²⁶ If that was not enough, the soldier continued by probing the unfortunate chief's knowledge of the Koran. The questions he was asking proved to reflect a knowledge which even surprised English. The whole situation was relatively amusing to English due to the soldier's own actions previously in the town of Noursreiddin. "The Malek might, however, have had his revenge upon the edifying soldier, had he known as well as I did that he had gone over to the town of Noursreiddin expressly to amuse himself with the women of the country, and had doubtless paid as much attention to the bouza as the most sturdy toper in Berber."¹²⁷ The rest of the month in Berber, English waited for the rest of the artillery and ammunition to arrive. After a few days into the next month, they were able to march on.

The next territory known as Shendi was not to George English's liking. This was primarily because of the people which inhabited it which he referred to as ferocious and fraudulent.¹²⁸ However, the chief of Shendi was very accommodating and made a gift of an impressive quantity of camels to the Pasha. He made note of this by describing an incident when the army, which was low on food at the time, went into action over an incident at a local village. The chief of Shendi apparently set aside a storehouse of durra for the soldiers, but upon visiting this village, a few soldiers were killed by the townspeople and the rest were treated poorly. As a result the Pasha was unable to

¹²⁶ George Bethune English, 123.

¹²⁷ George Bethune English, 125.

¹²⁸ George Bethune English, 136.

prevent his army from falling upon the village in force and destroying it. Luckily, the Pasha was able to set things right with the local villages afterwards, but this incident was not surprising to English. He mentions that the durra was all that was required rather than money from the people, and the people were extorting the soldiery already with massive prices on every type of food. As a result he was not entirely shocked when the people acted aggressively towards the army even after the chief gave them access to the durra.¹²⁹

They met with similar success during the next few encounters on the way to Halfya. However George English was beginning to have differences of opinion with Ismail Pasha. The first sign that English may have had an issue with the Pasha is very small and impersonal but worth noting. Upon approaching Halfya, the Pasha asked that George English and a Frenchman named Frederic Cailliaud¹³⁰ go ahead of the army and seek out a good position to encamp the army. Apparently the task was handed entirely to English as Mr. Cailliaud admitted that he knew very little of military affairs and that English should probably handle the decision. English chose a position which he felt fulfilled many of the army's possible worries and issues, but the Pasha felt that he would do things his own way regardless.

I chose a fine position on the river about two miles above Halfya, in the rear of which was plenty of grass for the horses and camels. The Pasha, however, did not choose to come so far, but pitched his camp on the low sand flats before Halfya, near which there was no grass for camels, who during the five days following, perished in great numbers. He had undoubtedly his reasons for this, among which not the least important was, to be near enough to Halfya to have the town within

¹²⁹ George Bethune English, 138-139.

¹³⁰ A famous Frenchman who wrote on his travels in Africa while he searched for gold deposits. Along with conducting many surveys of Sudanese monuments he also was a curator later in life at museum of Nantes.

reach of his cannon, as the Malek of Halfya had not yet submitted. The Pasha, however, had like to have had a serious cause to repent of having taken this position, when the river rose, and threatened to inundate his camp. Luckily it did not reach the ammunition, otherwise we should probably have been left without means of defending ourselves.¹³¹

After Halfya, English followed the Pasha into Sennaar. His first action upon reaching the river known as the Bahar el Abiud in Sennaar was to drink from it, as he assumed in his writings and was most likely correct that he was the first man of Frank origins who ever tasted its waters.¹³² The army in its entirety was moved into Sennaar at this point, but English was able to witness a very peculiar and impressive mode of transportation which only one group of people in the army were able to manage. "The troops of Shouus and the Abbadies swam their horses and dromedaries over the river. Cogia Achmet, one of the chiefs of the army, in endeavouring to imitate the cavalry of Shageia, lost seventy horses and some soldiers. The rest of the horses and camels of the army were taken over by arranging them by the sides of the boats, with their halters held in hand by the people in the boats."¹³³ The troops of Shouus and Abbadies were quickly able to save many more horses by blowing up empty water skins with air and attaching them under the horses and around the camel's necks. Unfortunately for English, most of his provisions, utensils, and personal effects were lost by a careless caretaker of his camel, or possibly while crossing the river. Due to this, most of his subsistence was due to the kindness of Mr. Constant along with Mr. Cailliaud.¹³⁴

¹³¹ George Bethune English, 145.

¹³² George Bethune English, 147.

¹³³ George Bethune English, 149.

¹³⁴ George Bethune English, 153-154.

Shortly afterwards, the army began marching in a formation prepared for battle, though the first attempt by the Pasha was to bring about a peaceful surrender from the Sultan of Sennaar. Upon being approached by the emissary of the Sultan and his entourage, Ismail Pasha set up a tent and started negotiations with demonstrations of their military power.¹³⁵ Though the superiority of the Egyptian weaponry was enough to impress the ambassadors of Sennaar, they also lunched a few rockets and bombs to humble them further. "No language can do justice to their astonishment at the spectacle, which undoubtedly produced the effect intended by the Pasha--humility and a sense of inferiority."¹³⁶ Later that day, the Sultan came to visit the Pasha at his tent. The result of their audience was that the men all exited the tent dressed in a Turkish fashion, in clear submission, but laden with gifts.

George English and the armies' hopes that the city of Sennaar was going to be a great respite from the harshness of marching and travel were soon dashed by the appearance of the condition of the city. He describes its appearance as little more than a heap of ruins, rather than the once powerful city they were told about. After obtaining some food and rest at the city, English was able to explore the city in full. By questioning the natives on the state of the city and the open desecration of many of their more notable structures such as a large mosque, English was able to learn what happened to the city. "The natives told me that this place had been built eighteen years ago, by the late good Sultan that they had had, who had planted before it rows of trees, which had

¹³⁵ George Bethune English, 159.

¹³⁶ George Bethune English, 160.

been destroyed when the palace was ruined, as I understood them, in the wars between the different competitors for the throne during the last eighteen years."¹³⁷ In actuality, the city could probably have not defended itself very valiantly even if they stood up to the Pasha's army at the time. The entire structure of the city was in shambles.

It is mentioned in a Samuel L. Knapp's biographical entry of English that he asked to depart from the Pasha's service due to a dispute between the Pasha and himself. The source explains that English had become disenchanted with the Pasha and his attitude towards the Pasha led to quarrelling. This started apparently due to George English's successes with his artillery.¹³⁸ This was not an altogether surprising reaction from Ismail Pasha as he is generally described as an ineffective leader. Many of the problems which the campaign into the Sudan faced are blamed upon Ismail Pasha and his inability to lead and his tendency for harsh behavior. Ismail Pasha was originally having issues following his father's orders in acquiring as many slaves as possible to send back to Egypt. Rather than capture the inhabitants, he had a tendency to exploit and tax them harshly. This not only caused the entire region of Sennaar to revolt against the pasha's control, it also warranted a reprimanding letter from Muhammad Ali Pasha, Ismail's father, demanding that he send more slaves as jewels were not as precious as slaves to him.¹³⁹ This impetuous behavior would later cause Ismail Pasha much greater problems.

The majority of the journey through the Sudan happened in a similar fashion to the other encounters. Almost every time they would reach a new villages or local

¹³⁷ George Bethune English, 164.

¹³⁸ Samuel L. Knapp, 94.

¹³⁹ Khaled Fahmy, 87.

kingdom, they would quickly submit and present the Pasha with gifts and vice versa.

George English felt he had finally reached the end of his campaign once the leaders at Sennaar submitted before the Pasha after a demonstration of the Egyptian army's superior technology. It was here that English felt that his duty was done with the Pasha.

I represented to him, that all the critical operations of the campaign were now happily concluded, and crowned with the fullest success; and that, therefore, he could have no particular need of me any longer. I stated to him that repeated sickness during the campaign had rendered my health very infirm, and that a residence of four months at Sennaar, during the rainy season, would probably destroy me; and as my presence for that time at least could be no ways necessary, I requested him to grant me the permission demanding, telling him that if, after the rainy season was finished, he should think proper to recall me to camp, that I would obey the summons. The Pasha hesitated, and for several days declined granting my request; but on its being represented to him that the reasons I had stated were really just and sufficient causes for my return, his Excellence finally told me, that on the return of Cogia Achmet he should dispatch a courier to Cairo, and that I should accompany him.¹⁴⁰

This decision probably lengthened his life. The climate had treated him very poorly on his journey up until this point, and he had already suffered through three major attacks of ophthalmia and was rendered immobile on multiple occasions. Each bout seemed to be taking its toll on his life since he was at times rendered incapable of seeing or writing. This was likely going to get worse with the rainy season was beginning to start within Sennaar. The Pasha agreed to his terms and informed English that he would be permitted to return to Cairo along with a courier.

George English's problems with Ismail Pasha's behavior continued until he finally saw enough. The decline of his attitude most likely started when English witnessed a

¹⁴⁰ George Bethune English, 173.

scene in one of the three markets of Sennaar after the Pasha's army captured the territory. Some insurgents from Sennaar were being punished by the Pasha's soldier.

In one place a crowd collects around somebody or other lying on the ground without his head on, on account of some misdemeanour; a little farther on, thirty or forty soldiers are engaged in driving, with repeated strokes of heavy mallets, sharp pointed pieces of timber, six or eight inches square, up the posteriors of some luckless insurgents who had the audacity to endeavor to defend their country and their liberty; the women of the country meantime standing at a distance, and exclaiming, " that it was scandalous to make men die in so indecent a manner, and protesting that such a death was only fit for a Christian,"(a character they hold in great abhorrence, probably from never having seen one). Such was the singular scene presented to the view by the market-place of Sennaar.¹⁴¹

English did not express direct disgust with the act he witnessed in the markets within his book, but his sarcasm was clear in the soldiers' reasoning behind the severe method of execution. Unfortunately for English, he was soon to witness more of Ismail Pasha's brutality first hand.

The person whom English was waiting on to return to the Pasha so that he could take his leave was Cogia Achmet. This individual was described by English to be one of the roughest chiefs in the Pasha's service. Cogia Achmet was specifically called by Ismail Pasha to handle the problematic situation in Sennaar's surrounding villages after the submission of the Sultan. English explains that after the Sultan's submission, letters to all districts explaining to their chiefs the recent events at the capital. A few of the chiefs which read the document proclaimed the Sultan a traitor and a coward. In other cases the chiefs would not even read the letters or give them credit. "On this, the Pasha sent

¹⁴¹ George Bethune English, 168.

Cogia Achmet, one of the roughest of his chiefs, with thirteen hundred cavalry, escorting three brazen-faced lawyers, out of the ten the Pasha had brought with him in order to talk with the people of the upper country, to bring this man and his followers to reason."¹⁴² It would prove to be a while before he returned to the Pasha.

A few days later in Eastern Sennaar, the Pasha's army, including English, was reestablishing control over the region. The region contained multiple villages which George English noted were filled with very harmless people which were very anxious to know what had brought the army to Sennaar to bring them troubles. This is especially true since the most recent battle involved the resisting forces fighting with nothing more than lances. Regardless, three of their chiefs were taken prisoner and two were executed in public at the markets of Sennaar. The execution by impalement occurred because a group of chiefs attempted to resist the Pasha and failed to amount so much as a battle, but Ismail Pasha was clearly determined to stomp out all chances of insurrection by fear.

I must confess that I was much shocked and disgusted by this act on the part of the Pasha, especially as he had shown so many traits of humanity in the lower country, which was undoubtedly one of the principle causes of its prompt submission. This execution was excused in the camp, by saying, that it would strike such terror as would repress all attempts at insurrection, and would consequently prevent the effusion of much blood. It may have been consistent with the principles of military policy, but I feel an insurmountable reluctance to believe it.¹⁴³

¹⁴² George Bethune English, 172-173.

¹⁴³ George Bethune English, 178.

Clearly he was becoming unhappy with the Pasha's actions and perhaps saw the decline of his good judgment. Luckily for English, he would not be in the Pasha's service, or at least within his grasp, for much longer.

Within a few days, the Pasha bid English farewell, as Cogia Achmet returned, and allowed him to part from his services and commanded that he journey back to Cairo with a courier as they agreed upon previously.¹⁴⁴ Upon his return to Cairo, Muhammad Ali Pasha was not thrilled that English had left his sons army, even though Ismail Pasha allowed it. Originally Muhammad Ali promised a great reward for conquering down to a certain point in the Sudan by a certain date. This was accomplished without a doubt. Unfortunately for English, Muhammad Ali pasha was a very powerful man and sought a reason to not pay this prize. Leaving his sons army without what he saw as a justifiable cause must have seemed like the perfect reason and English's promised prize of twenty thousand dollars was turned down.¹⁴⁵ He also probably felt that there was some blame to place on George English as shortly before he came to Cairo to receive his money, Muhammad Ali received news of his son Ismail Pasha's death. The incident was the cost of his own nature among people from whom he constantly failed to gain respect. "His brutality, rashness, and impetuous nature ultimately cost him his own life in a tragic incident: he was burnt alive during a banquet that Nemr, the King of Shindi, ostensibly held in his honor. This was revenge for Ismail having previously humiliated him by slapping him on the face."¹⁴⁶ George English was denied his reward and quickly

¹⁴⁴ George Bethune English, 195.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Khaled Fahmy, 87,88.

attempted to find a way out of Egypt. This was difficult to do since he was at the time quite poor and no longer seen in the favor of the Pasha.

During the same time, English decided to have the last response he made to a critic published. He expressed in his book *Five Pebbles from the Brook* that he had not expected to live through the Pasha's campaign, but since he did, the first thing he set his sights on was finishing and publishing his response to Edward Everett, a professor from Harvard who wrote a very widely read and influential response to English's earlier work. English actually received a copy of Everett's book while he was in Egypt, and began writing a response, but it remained incomplete or unpublished until after his journey.¹⁴⁷ He realized that the manuscript he sent to America before his campaign in the Sudan was never published.¹⁴⁸ It would seem odd for a man who suffered through so much criticism, as English did, to repeat the same actions and possibly put himself in the same situation again. Regardless, his friends still advised against publishing another response as it would clearly not be well received by the Christian public. English originally thought this would be prudent, and decided to send a private copy to Everett hoping that he would make a private apology. Everett's decision to remain silent and belief that he was securely correct in his opinions was what finally convinced English that he must once again publish his works.¹⁴⁹

English's adventures in Northern Africa did not go unnoticed by important American's either. Though he surely fared well with John Quincy Adams, Thomas

¹⁴⁷ Samuel L. Knapp, 93.

¹⁴⁸ George Bethune English, *Five Pebbles from the Brook* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Author, 1824), 2.

¹⁴⁹ George Bethune English, 3.

Jefferson and John Adams directly discussed the prospects which English's journey might have opened up for America. Adams informed Jefferson in a letter that a Bostonian named Mr. English recently published a book on his expedition down the Nile. In his letter he expressed hope that this knowledge of the Nile which English described in detail might be the advantage they need to gain access to the ancient lands within Africa, and a new more direct route to India.¹⁵⁰ Adams goes on to suggest that this route could be made possible by American technology. "A few American steamboats and our Quincy Stone Cutters would soon make the Nile navigable as our Hudson Potomac or Mississippi."¹⁵¹ With individuals such as Thomas Jefferson and John Adams interested in his adventures, it is not all together surprising that he was able to attain another position with the American government fairly quickly.

¹⁵⁰ John Adams, "Adams to Jefferson, March 10, 1823," in *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, vol. II, ed. Lester J. Cappon (New York: Von Rees Press, 1959.), 591.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Chapter VI

LIFE AS A SPY

Soon after finishing the mission assigned to him by the Pasha, English decided to journey farther. The entirety of his travels in this period are not well known, but in his later writings he does mention Paris, and makes references to Levantine lands. Shortly after the conclusion of his service to Muhammad Ali Pasha, George English began writing to and meeting with J. Q. Adams early in 1823. At this point J. Q. Adams was the Secretary of State. There was limited information found to explain what the messages entailed, but by some correspondence, George English found himself back in American and soon visiting J. Q. Adams. From J. Q. Adams' diary it appears that English not only met him at his office, but also dined with him on the 26th of February, 1823 after his return to the United States.¹⁵² It appears that around the 3rd of April in 1823 George English saw J. Q. Adams for the last time before he was sent to begin his work in Constantinople. This can be drawn from J. Q. Adams' diary entry on the 3rd which mentions English as dispatched and then he is not mentioned again for quite some time.¹⁵³ A letter also shows that George English was given orders near this date and

¹⁵² John Quincy Adams, "February 1823," in *The Diaries of John Quincy Adams*, 380.

¹⁵³ John Quincy Adams, "April 1823," in *The Diaries of John Quincy Adams*, 382.

ordered to begin his work in Constantinople as a secret agent and to deliver correspondence undercover.

Sir: You are hereby authorized to proceed on the voyage suggested in your letters of the 26th and 28th ultimo, and for the purposes expressed in them. You will inform me, by private letters, of your progress and success; and will communicate, as often as you shall have convenient and safe opportunities, any information, commercial or political, which may come to your knowledge, and which may be interesting to the United States.¹⁵⁴

His first task appeared to be to travel to the Ottoman Empire to contact the American Consul currently working there so that he might begin his job as an executive agent. George English first received his orders and his authorization to travel to the Ottoman Empire in April of 1823.¹⁵⁵ He was also authorized to transfer other correspondence or letters undercover. "I have received a letter from Mr. George Bethune English dated Constantinople 20th December last in which he informs me he was authorized by your Excellency in April last to go to Constantinople on secret service for the United States and to forward his correspondence through my hands under cover to his father in Boston then at the same time received a packed directed to his father which I forward by this office."¹⁵⁶ The date for the letter lines up correctly with when English would have been sent out from John Quincy Adams to the Ottoman Empire as an undercover agent for the United States.

One such letter lends a hint as to what English intended to do in the Ottoman Empire. This letter describes a trade treaty made between the Ottomans under Emperor

¹⁵⁴ "Treaty with the Sublime Porte," Message from the President of the United States, serial 221, Doc. 250, Mr. Adams to Mr. G. B. English, April 2, 1823, 12.

¹⁵⁵ David Offley, "David Offley to John Quincy Adams, January 24, 1824," in microfilm *Despatches from United States ministers to Turkey, 1818-1906*, reel 1.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Mehmed and the King of France, Louis XV in the mid 18th century. The treaty was obtained by George English and primarily focuses on the agreement made at the Sublime Porte, or the Grand Vizier's office in Istanbul.¹⁵⁷ The letter also completely details the enumerated clauses and objects which were agreed upon during the treaty. The agreed upon topics include multiple points. Some of these are directly reflective of trade material, while others are of a different nature. In fact one of the stipulations of the agreement applies to amicable relations with French travelers to Jerusalem.¹⁵⁸ This letter was most likely the first document used by George English to help him prove his worth under the American consul in Istanbul. In an excerpt from the letter which also contained the translated treaty, English explains under what conditions he obtained the document.

I have had the good fortune to find in Marseilles a person who possesses a copy of the treaty or capitulation at present subsisting between France and the Porte. It is in Turkish, but I have engaged a competent person to translate it into French, and also the tariff established by the Ottoman Government. As soon as these translations are finished, I will forward them to you, and that *done*, shall embark for Constantinople by the first opportunity. As it would not perhaps be easy for me to obtain these pieces at Constantinople without incurring suspicion, I did not doubt that you would approve of my delaying fifteen or twenty days at Marseilles for the purpose of obtaining *quietly*, and *without observation*, translations of these documents, which may be of use to the Department of State in case the American Government should attempt to negotiate a treaty with the Ottoman Emperor.¹⁵⁹

His knowledge of the Turkish language and knowledge of how to adopt their traditional garb came from his earlier visits to Constantinople during his years in the

¹⁵⁷ George Bethune English, "George B. English to Secretary of State, August 6, 1823," in microfilm *Despatches from United States ministers to Turkey, 1818-1906*, reel 1.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Treaty with the Sublime Porte," Message from the President of the United States, serial 221, Doc. 250, Extract of a letter from Mr. English to Mr. Adams, August 6, 1823, 12,13.

Marine Corps.¹⁶⁰ Samuel Knapp describes English's years in Marine Corps in short detail. It was here that he became accustomed to the Turkish language and gained a greater knowledge of Judaism and Islam and he learned to mingle with the different classes of people. "Speaking the language, and wearing the Turkish costume, he mingled with every class of people, and of course, obtained in a short time, more information of the real state of affairs, political and domestic, than a legation who understood nothing of the language, could acquire in many years residence in the city."¹⁶¹

A greater understanding and explanation of the state of the Ottoman Empire during this period and how it came to be in this state is necessary to completely paint the picture of George Bethune English's life. The Ottoman's during this period for the most part were in a state of decline. This decline was the trend for most parts of the Empire, including trade practices, military organization and effectiveness, and political control. English's goal while in the Empire was to seek out the parameters by which a trade agreement could be reached in an Ottoman port, and what the general feeling of the Ottoman hierarchy was towards America. He was destined to find all the answers he sought while inside their borders. However, more explanation of the Ottoman Empire is necessary.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was noticeably changing its position in the world from a nation carefully playing a defensive role, to a nation quickly declining in many of its faculties. The Empire was no longer a power.

¹⁶⁰ Samuel L. Knapp, 95.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

Economically the country fared decently against its competitors during the eighteenth century. "The first sixty years saw credible if unspectacular beginnings in a number of new technologies: glass, soap, sugar, gunpowder and paper. After the 1760s these efforts seem to falter, and in some cases to decline."¹⁶² The problem was not trade, as trade with foreign powers actually expanded over this course of time. A large issue was that the Ottoman Empire was supplying mostly raw goods to Europe and barely turning a profit since they were buying back finished goods in return.¹⁶³ It did not help that Ottoman merchants were not viewed well by the authority. In general, they suffered the same levies as foreign traders on goods. The problem of trade refers to the over exportation of cotton and other goods with no real direction other than capital gain.¹⁶⁴ Even more problematically for the merchants, if they fared too well in the market, there was always a chance that their wealth would be seized by the ranking powers. "As a rule the Sultan was the wealthiest person in the empire, the Grand Vizier being second wealthiest. If any merchant should accumulate extraordinary wealth, confiscation would cut him down to size."¹⁶⁵ A balance was never sought by the government. Rather than seek control or create a system to manage the investments of merchants and their goods, problems were allowed to run amok with the unsure and often unstable financial status of merchants. The overbearing strategy of taxing the countryside while supporting the towns did not contribute much of a solution to these

¹⁶² Halil Inalcik and Donald Quataert, ed., *An economic and social history of the Ottoman Empire Volume 2: 1600-1914* (New York: NY, Cambridge University Press, 1997), 639.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Halil Inalcik, 710.

¹⁶⁵ Sina Akşin, *Turkey from empire to revolutionary republic: the emergence of the Turkish nation from 1789 to present*, trans. Dexter H. Mursaloglu (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 9.

issues. Taxing might have been a successful strategy to manage some of these issues, but the government ran a policy of fiscal conservatism and was very hesitant to increase taxes, even when their currency lost some of its base value.¹⁶⁶

The problems were not just financial or trade related. The Ottoman Empire was also reeling from a century of military issues in an age when they were attempting to take a more defensive role. The century saw wars with multiple European powers, while not ending in defeat, they still provided very little to the country in terms of productive gains. Another military issue was that of the decline of the legendary Janissaries. The last of these issues was the complete lack of effective rule or political upset in some of the Ottoman fringe nations such as the previously addressed country of Egypt.

The 18th century saw a multitude of wars between the Ottoman Empire and parts of Europe. A major problem the government faced while entering these wars was the over centralization of power which benefited the country in the previous centuries. Western society was allowing parts of their societies to keep what they produced and implemented more inclusionary law codes which, along with government protection as their interests were interwoven, also allowed for an expansion of technologies. The tendency to hoard money, which the central power of the Ottomans did as policy kept the country financially stable for the most part. However, when it came to prolonged warfare, they truly fell apart compared to other countries. This flaw in their economics left any possible gains from their wars open to re-conquest or a terrible lack of consolidation from the central government. Due to these circumstances, the once feared

¹⁶⁶ Halil Inalcik, 711.

Ottoman military faded to second rates. "Neglect of the military was matched by a short-sighted approach to provincial government that aimed only at keeping the imperial coffers filled without enough regard to long-term consequences. Fiscal expediency subverted the land regime. Office-holders, such as governors and judges, were squeezed and rotated as quickly as possible."¹⁶⁷

The Janissaries, a notorious and powerful warrior caste which had been a part of the Ottoman power structure for centuries were now little more than a semi-civilian militia who blended in with society in a way that was never intended. While the Janissaries were meant to be a professional warrior class which was untaxed and separate from the rest of the civilian problems, the opposite is what took place over the course of the eighteenth century. This was problematic when it came to things such as reform or implementing new programs as now the joint power of the Janissary class and the populace could oppose the sultan or the grand vizier together. "Usually if the grand vizier was relatively strong and backed by the sultan, the influences of the harem and of the crowd could be resisted. But when the grand vizier was weak, the *ulema* would join with the Janissary *agha* in blocking him, almost always in a conservative anti-reformist mode, opposed to any alteration of the inherited constitution of government."¹⁶⁸ This led in every way to a weakening of the financial, technological, and military growth and consolidation of the Ottomans as they entered the 19th century.

¹⁶⁷ Halil Inalcik, 643-644,

¹⁶⁸ Halil Inalcik, 640.

The remainder of the problems was associated with the lack of an effective ruler along with the other mentioned issues, as no one issue was purely at fault for the weakened state of the empire in the 19th century. In the later parts of the 18th century the Ottomans were attacked by their own people as provincial warlords were able to take considerable power from the taxed masses. Peace was eventually restored to the provinces, but out of these issues came more. Arabia was taken by the Wahhabi religious faction, which Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt was mentioned previously as attempting to handle. Egypt was at the mercy of the Mamluks at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Mamluks' power was broken by the French invasion, but this did little to consolidate the territory, especially not to the Ottoman's benefit.¹⁶⁹

European reform was attempted towards the turn of the century by Sultan Selim III and a well organized palace clique. He was the first sultan in some time which had been educated outside of the infamous harem "cage" system which held control of political authority for so long.¹⁷⁰ He was even prepared to undertake the measures which Muhammad Ali Pasha would use himself in a decade or so past this event. "He had early contact with Europeans and was ready to employ them as advisors on a large scale to advise a new-style army (the *Nizam-i cedid*), and a new style navy. But this reforming sultan did not have a firm commitment to reform and could not crush the inevitable resistance of the Janissary corps and its numerous allies."¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Halil Inalcik, 645.

¹⁷⁰ The "cage" system refers to the way in which possible heirs to the throne and successors were held in a literal prison to guarantee claimants to the throne.

¹⁷¹ Halil Inalcik, 645.

Selim III's reforms and attempted restructuring of the military set the stage for the word which George English was entering. The *Nizam-i Cedit* was created for many reasons, but one of the most pressing was to cement government authority. Creating a more effective army was also vital now that the Janissaries were little more than a glorified militia. The new army succeeded against Napoleon's forces at Acre in 1799, and was expanded near Edirne. Unfortunately, this increase at Edirne set off a rebellion. The new army set out to suppress the rebellion, but even further problems arose in another province. A second rebellion started in Tekirdag which forced Selim III to recall the troops and send them to handle that instead. The next year Janissaries started a coup in Istanbul. Selim III was deposed in 1807.¹⁷²

The remaining reformers including Alemdar Mustafa were able to escape, regroup, and once again assault the capital to win back the throne for reformers. Mustafa IV, the new Sultan, attempted to stop the reformers from regaining power by executing Selim III. He also tried to kill Mahmut, the remaining heir, but failed. Further maneuvers placed Mahmut on the throne in 1808. He continued Selim's reforms. He was able to give the provinces a code of rights, but also duties which in a way, wrangled them in on more strict terms.¹⁷³ The one faction in the country that refused to be reformed was the Janissaries. They went as far as to siege Alemdar's residence in protest at the military reforms and the creating of the *Sekban-i Cedit* army. Alemdar was killed in the battle and the Janissaries once again turned upon the Sultan. Mahmut II survived

¹⁷² Sina Akşin, 22.

¹⁷³ Sina Akşin, 22-23.

because he executed Mustafa IV, and thus was the last male member of the House of Osman who was eligible to serve as Sultan. Promising to halt reform, he appeased the Janissaries, and saved his throne.¹⁷⁴

Thus English was entering the Ottoman Empire once again. He was entering at a time of tense pressure. The Sultan at the time received considerable pressure to relent before reforms were able to be solidified. English may have had to deal with these problems while attempting to set up a trade agreement or find some information on how the Ottomans viewed the Americans. The intermediary between George English and J. Q. Adams in the Ottoman Empire during his stay as a spy was a man named David Offley.

David Offley was the Consul in the Ottoman Empire at the time of George English's appointment. He was already steps ahead of J. Q. Adams as he was investigating George Bethune English. He saw English as quite the oddity. In a diplomatic dispatch between J. Q. Adams and Offley, it is pointed out that he has been investigating this new individual known as George B. English, and he wanted to be sure he was completely trustworthy. Offley mentioned that he received a letter from English which was sent to warn him of his impending job near Constantinople that he received by the order of J. Q. Adams. Interestingly enough, he also mentions that English said the correspondence was to be handed through Offley's hands undercover directly to English's father's hands in Boston. Regardless, Offley was not completely trusting of English. This was likely due to the extreme oddity that he was. "It is proper that I should inform you Excellency that this person about six years ago when at Cairo became a mohometan and of course a subject

¹⁷⁴ Sina Akşin, 24.

of the Grand Signior, I am informed he has resumed his Turkish draf(s?) and name at Constantinople. Should your Excellency wish further information respecting this person I beg to refer you to L. Bradish Esq. of New York."¹⁷⁵ It was only natural for Offley to be wary of his new agent. The picture of a white man clothed in classical Turkish garb possibly worshipping and following the Islamic faith and mingling effectively with the different classes of eastern society during this era would have been a sight to behold for most westerners. Though, his background as a mercenary for Mehmet Ali Pasha and the fact that he resigned from the U. S. Marine corps most likely made him seem even more questionable.

Based on the diplomatic dispatches between John Quincy Adams and David Offley, it can be surmised that English was truly there on an undercover mission. It clearly stated in multiple letters between the men that English's correspondence should be handled covertly. In fact, Offley's earlier warning about English's oddities were probably what made him the perfect man for such a mission. He was already a man of the same local faith, or at least knew enough about Islam to pass himself off as a normal individual in a strange land, and he had a tendency to take the traditional Turkish garb. His Muslim name, Muhammad Effendi, which he used once more once he continued his work in the Ottoman Empire was likely another advantage he had over any other person that the Secretary of State might have sent. Another strength was his extensive language skills.

¹⁷⁵ David Offley, "David Offley to John Quincy Adams, January 24, 1824," in microfilm *Despatches from United States ministers to Turkey, 1818-1906*, reel 1.

G. B. English's linguistic abilities seem to resurface with each person that knew of him or had his company. It is clear that English was extremely gifted at learning languages and using them effectively but it is hard to discern exactly how many and what languages he was able to learn and use. English's friend Samuel Knapp suggests that his linguistic skills went far beyond that of English and Turkish languages. He suggests that he knew Arabic, Hebrew, multiple dialects of each, and also some Cherokee. He relates a story in which English proved his knowledge to a dissenting Turk while he was in the Mediterranean. A Turkish ambassador who was in Marseilles on his way home was at a dinner table claiming that no foreigner could ever acquire the Turkish language and speak it as their own. English heard the conversation and sought out the ambassador's company in his Turkish garb and became very close friends with him. After talking at length the ambassador introduced his friend as the most learned man in the East. After a short period, the ambassador left for England and English reverted back to his western garb and name. The entire time English was not only able to pass as a Turk, but also able to hold intellectual conversation and discussion.¹⁷⁶

Later in 1823, English sent another letter letting Adams know what he had been doing in the Ottoman Empire. He informed Adams that the present Captain Pasha, was actually an acquaintance of his from when he lived in Constantinople six years prior. English explains that he returns to Constantinople quite often and implies heavily that the Captain Pasha owes him a few favors. "The first visit will probably lead to others, during which I may find an opportunity of advancing step by step towards obtaining those

¹⁷⁶ Samuel L. Knapp, 97.

objects which I consider so important to the commercial interests of the United States, and which I believe to be, by proper management, attainable without extraordinary difficulty."¹⁷⁷ His closing remarks in the letter mention that he commonly observes the large profits that the French make at these ports, and that he was surprised that the United States had not made a more intense effort to gain trade to the Ottomans until now.

This individual was one of the important individuals he met while on tour in the Mediterranean with the Marine Corps. Though It is likely that his time in the Ottoman Empire was after his supposed resignation from the Marine Corps. It seems more likely that he was working undercover since his first journey to the Ottoman Empire. If he was already undercover working for John Q. Adams or possibly someone else, it would help explain many of the coincidences that were so fortunate to English's journey. Rather than coincidence, these happenstances would make perfect sense as each personal relationship or skill he developed was directed at attaining the goal of relations between the Ottoman Empire and the United States. Coincidence seems far too unlikely in the case of his fortunate friendship with the Captain Pasha whose rank is equivalent to the admiral of the navy. The ports he tended to stay at during this period were also filled with foreigners, as many of the traders among the Ottomans were not of Ottoman origin. His persona among these individuals probably had an even greater effect than on those of Ottoman society. Whether that is the case or not is unknown, what matters is that the

¹⁷⁷ Treaty with the Sublime Porte," Message from the President of the United States, serial 221, Doc. 250, Extract of a letter from Mr. English to Mr. John Q. Adams, dated, November 23, 1823, 13.

relationships and skills he developed on his previous voyage into the Mediterranean paid off in incredible form while he was undercover in the Ottoman Empire. The skills he managed to develop would pay off for America even after George English's death.

Nearly a month later, English wrote another letter to J. Q. Adams informing him of his progress and opinions on the situation. English told Adams that he has been unsuccessful in obtaining copies of the trade agreements between the Ottomans and England, Sweden, or the Netherlands due to his fear that he might be rousing suspicion and that he has not truly been able to make an attempt to obtain them yet. This was because surely any activity to retrieve any copies of the treaties while being under scrutiny would surely destroy his disguise. Regardless, he assures Adams that the French agreement which he sent earlier, is the model for all the other treaties and is the most favored at the Ottoman ports. The reasoning for wanting a trade treaty with these ports becomes clear when George English explains his observations on the difference between the duties which French and other European trading ships pay compared to the duties that the United States ships were forced to pay. He commented that European vessels never pay more than ten percent on duties, while the U. S. vessels have a standard rate of fifteen percent to be paid on duties. Beyond that, English believed that the superior American sailors and ships would give America an extreme advantage over the other European nations concerning trade with the Ottomans, and for this reason he felt that they were jealous at the idea that the U. S. might obtain a trade agreement. This put even more danger on English's shoulders as he was well aware that his activities would be of great interest to not only Ottoman officials, but also foreign trade officials in the

port towns. English felt that this treaty would help America overcome the monopoly the European powers have on Ottoman trading and their freedom of trade through Ottoman ports.¹⁷⁸

Within a few months of his previous letter, English was finally able to get an audience with the Captain Pasha. In his message to J. Q. Adams, he explained that after a cordial and ceremonial audience with the Pasha involving coffee and compliments, they began to talk business. English informed the Pasha that he was in Constantinople for pleasure, but he was asked to inquire about the disposition of the Porte toward the United States. He also specifically asked if there was any reason that amicable and commercial relations couldn't be established between the U. S. and Turkey.¹⁷⁹ English made a special point to mention how the other European nations have only proven themselves time and time again to be enemies of the empire, yet they retain superior trade rights, while American government, who has only had good relations with the Ottomans does not.

I stated to him, that, after the many proofs of good will he had shown my countrymen at Smyrna, and to myself, I felt encouraged to ask his opinion as to the disposition of the Porte towards the United States, and whether there existed any impediments to the formal establishment of amicable and commercial relations between them and Turkey. I represented that it was difficult to imagine any cause which should make the Porte, which had so many treaties of commerce and friendship with the European nations, that had so frequently shown themselves the enemies of the empire, indifferent towards a nation which had never been the foe of the Ottomans, and was so far from bearing towards them any political or religious prejudices, that, by the laws of the country, a mussulman

¹⁷⁸ Treaty with the Sublime Porte," Message from the President of the United States, serial 221, Doc. 250, Mr. English to Mr. Adams, Secretary of State---Extract, December 27, 1823, 13, 14.

¹⁷⁹ "Treaty with the Sublime Porte," Message from the President of the United States, serial 221, Doc. 250, Mr. English to Mr. Adams---Extract. On board the French galette Francois and Henriette, bound from Constantinople to Smyrna, February 8, 1824, 15.

citizen of the United States would have precisely the same privileges as a christian; a great and powerful nation, that was rapidly advancing in the path of prosperity, aggrandizing continually its population, its riches, and its strength.¹⁸⁰

The Captain Pasha agreed with English and replied that he had friendly feelings towards the Americans and highly respected the nation. However, he would not pursue the topic any further unless he found out why a previous attempt to set up a treaty under Mr. Bradish failed. He requested that English should come back in a few days to discuss this matter further.¹⁸¹

When English met with the Pasha once more, he was informed that a previous agent, Mr. Bradish failed due to the influence of a nameless European ambassador and because of this, setting up a negotiation for the treaty at Constantinople would be all but impossible. The Pasha had a different plan. "Let the Government of the United States, said he, secretly authorize the commandant of their squadron in the Mediterranean to meet me in the Archipelago, with instructions to inform me precisely what it is that the United States wish to obtain of the Sublime Porte. I will communicate this overturn to the Sultan himself, who will decide as he thinks proper, either to encourage or refuse the advances of the United States."¹⁸² After the satisfactory meeting, George English obtained a passport from the Pasha and began his journey to Smyrna.

Before he was able to leave for Smyrna he was warned that his actions recently may have compromised him, and one of his informants to an extent. Due to the delay he had while waiting on the Captain Pasha to receive him, he decided to reveal his position

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Mr. English to Mr. Adams---Extract "Treaty with the Sublime Porte," February 8, 1824, 15, 16.

somewhat to the dragoman (interpreter or guide) of the Porte, though he still maintained that he was visiting the Ottoman Empire purely for his own pleasure. The dragoman expressed his discontent with English rather directly.

It would have been better, however, if my impatience at the long delay of the Captain Pasha in giving me an audience had not induced me to open myself to the drogoman of the Porte: for, on the day that the confidential drogoman of the Captain Pasha presented me my passport, on my incidentally mentioning my visit of leave taking to the drogoman of the Port, he became very fretted, and gave me to understand that "I had compromised him and his patron." On my demanding his meaning, he replied, "that, if the enemies of the Captain Pasha should discover what had passed between him and me, that they would infallibly represent it to the Grand Seigneur as an intrigue carried on with the agent of a foreign power, without his knowledge, and that the consequences might be very serious."¹⁸³

English replied that he had only represented himself to both the dragoman and the Captain Pasha as a man travelling for his own pleasure and his questioning on whether the relations between the two countries was only a passing question, nothing more. ¹⁸⁴

While journeying he writes a suggested plan to J. Q. Adams and tried to impart his hope that he will accept the idea to meet clandestinely in the archipelago which the Pasha selected. He explained the necessary levels of intrigue required to pull off this treaty in a different manor should the meeting not appear the best option to the Secretary of State, but in the explanation George English assured him that the meeting previously suggested is the best possible route to take currently. First, because it would really not affect the United States negatively in any fashion to send the commander of the Mediterranean fleet to meet with the Captain Pasha in the archipelago near Istanbul.

¹⁸³ Mr. English to Mr. Adams---Extract "Treaty with the Sublime Porte," February 8, 1824, 16.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

The second reasons he suggested that this was a good plan was because even if the plan failed and no agreement could be made, neither country would suffer any loss of dignity or damage to their reputation as the discussion would be in private. He also mentioned that even if they were suspected of doing this, it is unlikely that anyone would believe it due to all of the European powers keeping a strong force near the area. The third and likely most important reason was that if America were to send an ambassador before they knew the position of the sultan or his advisors, they would most likely be drawn into a very complex and tedious political game. English described the game to J. Q. Adams in a very detailed format which went to great pains to describe just how tedious the process might be. To put it simply: the ambassador would have to deliver credentials, seek out a person at the port to act as a dragoman to the embassy, the dragoman then must visit the minister of the Ottoman port's treasurers, the good will of the minister's underlings must be secured, this procedure must be repeated with the next level of ministers as well up to the Divan. Afterwards he suggests that paying them a sum is also a wise idea to assure support, and after all of these things the Divan may be able to carry out the ambassador's intent to the sultan. However, almost all of these processes could be circumvented by working with the Captain Pasha.¹⁸⁵

He closes his letter with a description of why he changed the plan they had previously discussed in Washington. Originally the terms were apparently somewhat different, but certain conditions in the Ottoman Empire forced English to accept some changes the plans. He says that the Captain Pasha was not in a position to allow

¹⁸⁵ Mr. English to Mr. Adams---Extract "Treaty with the Sublime Porte," February 8, 1824, 16-17.

American vessels to any other ports but Smyrna currently unless a treaty could be made. Also the Pasha had undertaken an unsuccessful mission which recently made it critical that he stay very wary of his conduct.¹⁸⁶

Chapter VII

ENGLISH'S FINAL MISSION

Soon after this plan was suggested, English returned to the United States for a short period of time aboard the *U. S. S. Herald* from Smyrna to Boston.¹⁸⁷ John Quincy Adams' diary also lists English as visiting him around this time, most likely to discuss the progress of setting up the meeting between the Americans and the Captain Pasha.¹⁸⁸ There may have been some apprehension on the part of J. Q. Adams to move along with the plan suggested originally by the Captain Pasha. This can be surmised by the nature of English's next letter. The letter was written while in Washington waiting on his next assignment. He conveyed the notion that the advantages offered by using the Captain Pasha to push this treaty were many. This route would give them a direct line to the sultan's ears without the possibility of any foreign interference like what was said to have

¹⁸⁶ Mr. English to Mr. Adams---Extract "Treaty with the Sublime Porte," February 8, 1824, 17.

¹⁸⁷ *State Department Transcripts of Passenger Lists, October 1819-December 1832* (Microfilm publication T1219, Roll 1)

¹⁸⁸ John Quincy Adams, "May 1824," in *The Diaries of John Quincy Adams*, 395.

happened to Mr. Bradish. "It appears to me that the opportunity offered by the Turkish Grand Admiral, of bringing directly to the Sultan any overtures the Government of the United States may please to make, should not be slighted, because the measure proposed by him would lead immediately to a knowledge of the disposition of the Sultan towards the United States, and thereby certify the Government of the course best to be adopted towards Turkey for the future."¹⁸⁹ English also expressed that they in many ways owed the Captain Pasha for showing good will to the Americans at Smyrna, and he should be recognized as such. The primary concern shown by English in the letter is to have the American government write the Captain Pasha and acknowledge his friendly efforts to keep America in his good graces so that they may use his plan at a later date. The suggestions English lays before J. Q. Adams nearly write the message he hopes to be sent to the Pasha. ¹⁹⁰

A letter to the Captain Pasha, intimating to him that the Government of the United States is not insensible to the many proof of good will he has shown towards our country, and the favor and protection he has extended to our commerce with Smyrna, might be accompanied with the suggestion that, from his own observation, he may be aware of the high advantages which might result to the Ottoman Empire, from a free commercial intercourse between it and the United States; a representation that it would be difficult to imagine a reason which should exclude the United States, a great and flourishing nation, that has no prejudices or enmities, political, or religious, against the Ottomans, from the same commercial intercourse accorded by the Sultan to European nations who have been so frequently the enemies of the Empire; concluded by a request to him to ascertain whether the Ottoman Emperor would be disposed to receive an ambassador from the United States who should be authorized to negotiate with the Porte. Such a letter would be well calculated, in my opinion, to give the

¹⁸⁹ "Treaty with the Sublime Porte," Message from the President of the United States, serial 221, Doc. 250, Mr. English to Mr. Adams---Extract, May 14, 1824, 18.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Captain Pasha an opportunity to exert himself in behalf of our commercial interests in the east.¹⁹¹

The large portion of David Offley's work while in Istanbul was focused on dealing with American port issues such as unruly sailors and problematic tariffs. The other topic he discussed in his letters lends another clue as to what English may have been working on while in the Ottoman Empire. His other major project was attempting to broker some sort of trade agreement with the Turks. He also was informing J. Q. Adams how important it would be to get more ports in Turkey and how that would allow for expanded trade upon the Mediterranean and Black Sea. He felt that it would not only open up more trade to Russia, it would also allow much more exportation of southern crops and grain distribution among the Mediterranean countries. "The attainment of these advantages for the commercial and manufacturers of the United States appears to me an object worthy the attention and intelligence of (the) government."¹⁹² In this sense, he appeared to back George English's arguments wholeheartedly.

Another letter from George English shows that he may have been left in the dark often between letters waiting on the next step of the plan to occur. This letter most likely referred to the trade treaties they mentioned to each other in previous correspondence. It implied that he deeply wished to know the next step the president or the Secretary of State was taking in these treaty matters. He also asks to know the intentions of obtaining such a treaty as was discussed earlier between the men.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² David Offley, "David Offley to John Quincy Adams, July, 27, 1824," in microfilm *Despatches from United States ministers to Turkey, 1818-1906*, reel 1.

I have been in (?) three weeks, and have rigorously observed the instructions you prescribed to me when I was about leaving Washington. Not having heard (?) from you since then and as every successive arrival from Europe appears to confirm more and more the opinions I had the honor to express to you relative to the affairs of the East. I feel great anxiety to learn the ultimate intention of the President with regard to the subject which was the topic of the last conversation I was favored with by you.¹⁹³

Within the letter he also hopes that the intention of the President matches the goals that he and John Quincy Adams had discussed beforehand. It is clear within the letter that there is special care not to directly mention the actual context in which they are speaking as all references within the letter are not direct and nothing about the actual treaty or even the slightest hint of a trade agreement can be detected. Whether this is because English feared he was being followed is unknown, but it was rather odd that he chose this letter in specific to omit any details which he had no fear of mentioning in previous correspondence.

The letters between Offley and John Quincy Adams were directly questioning details about the trade agreements that the Ottoman Empire had forged with other countries. However, in one situation it appeared that English's cover was almost blown. The letter referred to English who came to the Consul to drop off information as usual from Constantinople to the port at Smyrna where Offley was stationed at the time. "On the day previous to his arrival enquiries were made of me from the Pacha whether he was known to me. To which enquiry my reply was that I only knew there was such a

¹⁹³ George Bethune English, "George Bethune English to John Quincy Adams, July 8, 1824," in microfilm *Despatches from United States ministers to Turkey, 1818-1906*, reel 1.

person."¹⁹⁴ While talking about the current affairs of his station he revealed what the trade agreement they were attempting to put into place stood to accomplish. The list of things this treaty might accomplish was impressive. The first of which was the extension of trade to all the ports of the Grand Segnior (the sultan). It was suggested in the letter that this includes the possibility of trade through a port on the Black Sea if all went well. The other benefits would be favorable tariffs of duties, and advantageous commerce with certain parts of Russia due to the Ottoman's access to the Black Sea ports.¹⁹⁵ The rest of his letter concerns the possible outcomes and problems which may occur when trying to achieve such a treaty between the two nations. One of the interesting hopes that David Offley seems to press more than once in his letter is that if the treaty were to gain acceptance, then dock jobs for Americans would open up across the Mediterranean and possibly the Black Sea.

Later in the same year, while in America, English and appeared to be meeting financial problems because of his lack of received funds and most likely due to the lack of a new task. In a letter to John Quincy Adams he mentioned his hopefulness that he still might learn the plans of the President towards the foreign trade agreement he had been putting so much effort into. Meanwhile, he mentioned that he has been handling his expenses with borrowed money and is in great need of the pay he had earned over the course of the last half year. There was also the possibility of problems for English if he were not able to get the money he mentioned for some reason. "As should I not on that

¹⁹⁴ David Offley, "David Offley to John Quincy Adams, July 27, 1824," in microfilm *Despatches from United States ministers to Turkey, 1818-1906*, reel 1.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

day be ready to meet any engagements my promise will be dishonored, and possible my personal liberty in danger of being compromised. You know Sir; how carefully I have avoided giving occasion to be (?) importunate, and I doubt not that the frank statement I have made of the cause which occasions my request will induce you not to neglect it."¹⁹⁶ Another source which mentioned the "miserable allowance" which agents like George English were dealt, points out how easy it would have been for English to be in financial trouble.¹⁹⁷ It is unknown if he was just having trouble managing his living conditions or whether he owed money to a debtor, but his tone and language clearly implied that he was in a sorry state financially.

English's waiting ended early in 1825. He had been writing and visiting J. Q. Adams in an attempt to push his position in the matter involving the treaty so that he would be given a place as interpreter and luckily for George English his insistence and perseverance paid off.¹⁹⁸ He was given orders to once again journey into the Mediterranean. This time he would be stationed on a vessel for his entire voyage under the command of Commodore John Rodgers. J. Q. Adams informed him of the type of job he might be expected to perform upon this journey.

Sir: By direction of the President of the United States, you are hereby authorized and required to repair forthwith to Norfolk, and embark on board the ship North Carolina, where you will place yourself under the command of Captain John Rodgers, to perform such services as he may assign to you in the execution of his duties, during the period of his absence from the United States as commander of their squadron in the Mediterranean, or until you shall receive further orders from this department. You will particularly be required, as the opportunity may

¹⁹⁶ George Bethune English, "George Bethune English to John Quincy Adams, December 30, 1824," in microfilm *Despatches from United States ministers to Turkey, 1818-1906*, reel 1.

¹⁹⁷ Samuel L. Knapp, 95.

¹⁹⁸ *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams: compromising portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848*, Vol. VI, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1876), 414.

occur, to perform the office of an *interpreter*, and such other services as the instructions of Commodore Rodgers will indicate to him as expedient and proper.¹⁹⁹

He closes the letter with a description of the earnings he would receive for this duty as two thousand dollars a year. He was also told that his task would continue until the Commodore, his successor, or J.Q. Adams himself discharged him from duty. To put into perspective how he was paid and treated as an agent, it is worth noting that he was expected to cover all of his own expenses including subsistence while on the boat or at shore with his own money.²⁰⁰

Luckily for the records, J. Q. Adams made sure that Commodore Rodgers understood the orders clearly and directly instructed him what to do should he by happenstance meet this Captain Pasha. He told Rodgers that it is probable that he will meet the Captain Pasha while in the Mediterranean and that he is friendly to the American cause of obtaining a trade agreement. Rodgers is instructed that if he and the Pasha talk, he should relay back to J. Q. Adams by what means the Pasha feels a treaty would be most favorable and what would be the most promising terms for making the treaty a success. Adams is also curious by what means access to the Black Sea could be secured for commercial shipping by a reciprocal treaty. After ascertaining the terms of the treaty he is instructed to report everything.²⁰¹ He closes his instructions to Rodgers with a warning to take all precautions to use secrecy in his actions. "You will

¹⁹⁹ "Treaty with the Sublime Porte," Message from the President of the United States, serial 221, Doc. 250, Mr. Adams, Secretary of State, to G. B. English, Esq., January 3, 1825, 19.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ "Treaty with the Sublime Porte," Message from the President of the United States, serial 221, Doc. 250, Mr. Adams, Secretary of State, to Commodore John Rodgers, February 7, 1825, 19.

communicate, with every proper precaution of secrecy, the result of this measure to this department; and in the contingency of your meet and conferring with the Captain Pasha, you will be specially careful, that neither the meeting, nor any movement consequent upon it, shall be made susceptible of any unfavorable operation upon the cause of the Greeks."²⁰²

Commodore Rodgers later received a copy of the treaties between the Ottomans and France which George English had procured later in the year of 1825. The new Secretary of State was Henry Clay, and thus who was now writing him. He was instructed to attempt to discuss terms similar to those allowed and granted by the aforementioned treaty. Rodgers is also informed that he may during this mission be invested with powers that he does not actually have, but that these circumstances are much more favorable than those of sending a minister to Constantinople as English clearly warned them about. Henry Clay laid out his goals directly. "Our wish is, first, to trade with all the ports of Turkey, in whatever quarter of the globe situated, on the footing of the most favored nation; secondly, to obtain a free ingress and egress through the Dardanelles to and from the Black sea; and thirdly, to be allowed to appoint consuls to reside at such ports as the interests of our commerce may require."²⁰³

After a few near misses, and multiple incidents of the Commodore and George English being unable to secure communication with the Captain Pasha, they were finally

²⁰² Treaty with the Sublime Porte," Message from the President of the United States, serial 221, Doc. 250, Mr. Adams, Secretary of State, to Commodore John Rodgers, February 7, 1825, 20.

²⁰³ "Treaty with the Sublime Porte," Message from the President of the United States, serial 221, Doc. 250, Secretary of State to Commodore Rodgers, September 6, 1825, 21.

able to send a letter to him. Rodgers imparted the friendly spirit that the countries should feel towards each other and that the European nations have most likely been what has blocked the American's ability to trade with them for so long. He detailed why America and the Ottoman Empire should be able to trade freely with one another and that the Europeans have done little except stymie each other's causes. His last request of the Captain Pasha was to know if the Grand Signeur would be against receiving an American ambassador to discuss sharing the protections and passages that the French and the English enjoy.²⁰⁴

Commodore Rodgers received the copies of the previously mentioned treaties in early November. Once again George English's stellar ability to work with languages came into play, as the translation of the document was reportedly rough. "Mr. English I shall employ to compare the two copies; by which means, as he is a good French scholar, I shall obtain a correct translation."²⁰⁵

While in the Commodore's fleet, English was intended to assist as an interpreter for the meetings at which the Commodore and the Captain Pasha discussed the possible treaty. The talks finally took place near the Dardanelles near an island named Tenedos. Commodore Rodgers reported every meeting with the Pasha as a pleasure and full of distinguished honors and signs of respect.²⁰⁶ The plan which English suggested seemed

²⁰⁴ Treaty with the Sublime Porte," Message from the President of the United States, serial 221, Doc. 250, Commodore Rodgers to the Captain Pasha, September 20, 1825, 43.

²⁰⁵ Treaty with the Sublime Porte," Message from the President of the United States, serial 221, Doc. 250, Commodore John Rodgers to Mr. Daniel Brent, November 5, 1825, 44.

²⁰⁶ "Treaty with the Sublime Porte," Message from the President of the United States, serial 221, Doc. 250, Captain Rodgers to Mr. Clay, July 19, 1826, 47.

to be a great success, as even the Commodore seemed surprised at the good will and nature of the Pasha.

I have the honor to inform you that I have at length had an interview with the Capudan Pasha of the Ottoman Fleet; and such, judging from the distinguished manner in which he received me, and the unrestrained scope he gave to his expressions of respect and good will towards our Government and country, as out to leave no doubt on my mind, but that the meeting will have the desired effect, and that it will hereafter prove to have been an important step towards the opening a negotiation that shall secure to the United States many important commercial advantages, which, owing to the sly, crooked policy of European ambassadors, and a host of other foreign agents, particularly, *****, they have not hitherto been permitted to enjoy.²⁰⁷

However, it appeared as though George English was not able to fulfill his task as translator to the discussions between the Captain Pasha and the Commodore, as the letter mentions that David Offley acted as interpreter. Whether this was Offley attempting to secure his spot in politics or whether English was unable to attend that day is unknown. The actual treaty would not be completed for a few more years due to political changes within the Ottoman Empire and the negotiations taking a great deal of time to decide upon what terms each party would abide by.

English was back in America looking for work around 1828 within Washington once again after his interpreting job for Rodgers. This is where the greatest mystery of George Bethune English's life takes place. Upon English's request for more work most likely, J. Q. Adams once again was preparing to dispatch English to the Mediterranean under a different Commodore with a new mission. "With Mr. Southard, I agreed on the arrangements for dispatching G. B. English as bearer of dispatches to Commodore W. M.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

Crane, in the Mediterranean. I gave him the draft of my letter to himself, and read to him the letters to Captain Crane and Mr. Offley."²⁰⁸ In his Memoirs, J. Q. Adams expresses that George English received the information to carry dispatches to the Commodore and read his instructions while expressing warm gratitude, but something went wrong.²⁰⁹ There is no record of what might have caused an issue, but for some reason J. Q. Adams completely revoked everything from English before his mission began.

In very bitter words he writes as if English had betrayed him in a most cruel fashion. "Life is full of disappointments, and among the most mortifying of them to me has been the misconduct of persons whom i have peculiarly befriended. This case of English is one of the most mortifying that have occurred. I have repeatedly procured employment for him in the public service, and, notwithstanding his eccentricities, approaching to insanity, have continued to favor him till now. I can now no longer sustain him. In consequence of the change of the messenger, it becomes necessary to alter almost every one of the papers that I had prepared." Along with this statement he makes it completely clear that no money has been sent to English and no appointment shall be granted. Their friendship ended on July 24th, 1828.²¹⁰

Soon after this breakdown between the two friends, English was reported to have become seriously ill. Samuel L. Knapp who wrote a short biography concerning George English appeared to know nothing about the disagreement that clearly happened between him and Adams and only reports that English grew very ill after he was offered a

²⁰⁸ *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, vol. VIII, 60.

²⁰⁹ *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, vol. VIII, 61.

²¹⁰ *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, vol. VIII, 62.

new job opportunity by J. Q. Adams.²¹¹ There appears to be no other record of what caused the incident, or what the incident was even about, but somehow within two days of receiving a new job from J. Q. Adams, an event so great as to completely destroy their friendship and English's chance to ever work for him took place. Unless new data is uncovered this event will continue to be doomed to obscurity.

Regardless, English was never able to see the job he started to completion in the Ottoman Empire since the treaty he had been working on was not put into action until a few years later. English lived out the rest of his short life in Washington, D. C. He was afflicted by a sickness which was not identified. He finally died September 20, 1828 at the age of 41. The somewhat early death was most likely attributed to the heavy bouts of sicknesses which he experienced in Africa while touring with the Pasha and on the return journey. There may be other reasons for his death due to the odd breakdown of relations with him and J. Q. Adams. If the breakdown between the two was truly as catastrophic as it seems, it is not unreasonable to think that J. Q. Adams was now truly concerned about the character of George Bethune English and concerned about his knowledge of clandestine activities which were still taking place. The idea that English could have been a victim of assassination or poisoning is not all that farfetched when the rest of his life is taken into account, however there is no evidence to point either way.

²¹¹ Samuel L. Knapp, 95.

Chapter VIII

CONCLUSION

George Bethune English's life was a constant adventure. While in his homeland, he was a rebel writing against a religion which he found he could no longer believe in. While travelling with the American military, he decided he would tour as a mercenary leading artillery squads under Ismail Pasha of Egypt. Finally, while in the Levant, George English was working as an undercover agent sending secret trade information to the Secretary of State. He was a man of many talents and a man of limitless ability until he finally met his end back in the United States. Most importantly, he was a man who reinvented himself according to his own plans. He was called deranged for his religious

views and he solved that issue by arguing the point every chance he was able to. He was also thought to be an odd, possibly mad, traitor due to his lifestyle and dress. These were also the reasons why many of his writings and adventures were not investigated and explored as in depth in history as he is deserved.

He was none of the things he was accused of being. In fact, he put himself in harm's way for his country by risking his life as an undercover agent to set up what would become a very lucrative trade agreement between the United States and the Ottoman Empire. George English's life was completely reinvented by his own means and direction. His ending statement in *Five Pebbles from the Brook* on what he hoped his writing would one day achieve described the good nature he actually had for the world.

Should what I have written have any tendency to promote union and friendly feelings, between the parties to a dispute which has for nearly eighteen hundred years occasioned such cruel oppressions and bloody persecutions to the side which is in the right, I shall not have lived in vain; and though the cause in which I have exerted myself has occasioned me much detriment and distress, and may possibly ultimately oblige me to die in a foreign land, without a friend to close my eyes; I comfort my heart with the hope, that I may have done somewhat for the great cause of truth, justice, and humanity, and for the promotion of mutual regard and friendly feelings, among a very large portion of the human race.²¹²

As one of the earliest sources mentioned him after his death, "He took his own path to fame, and imitated no example. He could not complain that any one had led him astray. He was original and eccentric by nature, and he followed the dictates of his own judgment, and pursued every image his fancy created at pleasure."²¹³ George Bethune English, the first known white American Muslim and explorer of the Sudan, died well

²¹² George Bethune English, *Five Pebbles from the Brook* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Author, 1824), 45.

²¹³ Samuel L. Knapp, 92.

thought of among his friends and it will be hoped that his strange tale will not be easily forgotten.

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