

The Abd el-Kader Stage Project

By

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Commissioned by Kathy Garms for the Abdelkader Education  
Project  
[www.abdelkaderproject.org](http://www.abdelkaderproject.org)

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BOOKEND FRONT

*Either in front of the curtain or against a bare stage, the HISTORIAN steps out. The HISTORIAN will be our guide through the vignettes, providing additional follow up details as needed.*

HISTORIAN

It has been said that Abd el Kader was many things to many people. Today we are going to give you a small sample of some of those many people, telling their stories and, through them, telling his.

*BLACKOUT*

*The following vignettes can be presented in whatever order you choose. There are each stand-alone stories, not dependant on each other. The scene entitled BOOKEND BACK should be presented last as a closer.*

LITTLE AB

*SCENE: 1850, Aintree Racecourse near Liverpool, England.*

*ALCROFT gentleman in period clothing, upper class, stands at a railing. BAINSFORD, a second gentleman, similarly dressed, approaches him.*

BAINSFORD

Alcroft, old chap, is that you?

ALCROFT

Bainsford, old boy. How are you?

BAINSFORD

I'm just fine, simply smashing. I must admit, I certainly didn't expect to see you here today. I had no idea that your interests ran to the steeplechase.

ALCROFT

Normally they don't, of course, but there has been so much discussion of this Grand National that I decided I had to see for myself what the fuss was about.

BAINSFORD

And jolly good thing you did, too. This is the fifteenth year they've run the race here at Aintree. I daresay it's well established and may continue for a good few years yet. You need to keep up with the world. It's 1850, after all. The world is moving at a faster pace every day.

ALCROFT

I'm aware of that, old friend. I simply haven't had time for local affairs lately. I've just been more focused on world events. As you say, the world moves faster every day. One business interests in England can easily be impacted by events in some far off land.

BAINSFORD

True enough, Alcroft. True enough. So, have you ventured a wager on today's race or are you simply here to observe the excitement?

ALCROFT

Of course I wagered. I may be new to the sport but I understand that the wager is an integral part of the experience. No half measures with me.

BAINSFORD

In for a penny, in for a pound, eh wot?

ALCROFT

Well, a few shillings, nonetheless. I'm no madman.

BAINSFORD

Of course. Wise thinking. So, who's your choice. What fine steed carries the future of your wagered shillings?

ALCROFT

An Irish fellow's horse, a Mr. Osborne I believe. Named the horse Abd el Kader.

BAINSFORD

Good God, man, are you serious? That horse is not even quoted. The bookmakers can't be bothered listing odds, it's such a long shot.

ALCROFT

Oh, I know, but the name caught my attention.

BAINSFORD

Pshaw, poetic poppycock. The horse's name is nearly unpronounceable. It's meaningless gibberish, surely.

ALCROFT

Quite the contrary, old chum. The horse is named for Abd el Kader, an emir of Algeria. A brilliant leader who defended his people against the French colonials. Defied the odds, he did. He was truly inspirational.

BAINSFORD

Well, he's inspired you to part with your shilling at the very least. What odds are on your ticket?

ALCROFT

I wagered to win at thirty-three to one.

BAINSFORD

Oh, Alcroft, old boy, perhaps the steeplechase is not the sport you after all. There are thirty-two runners in this race and you chose that nag. That was a fool's bet, my lad. You need to research the horses as well as the jockeys, not simply be "inspired" by some foreigner. For instance, I wagered on Peter Simple. Locked in at seven to one. The horse won the Grand National last year and he's favored to do it again. That'll be a feat for the ages. No horse has ever won two years in a row. Peter Simple will be the one to do it. Mark my words.

ALCROFT

Of course, Bainsford. Whatever you say. I'm just enjoying the experience. Oh, the race has begun.

BAINSFORD

See there? Peter Simple, straight out of the gate. Now that's a horse.

ALCROFT

It certainly is impressive, I'll grant you that.

BAINSFORD

And where is your Abd el Kader?

ALCROFT

There he is. Looks like he's in third place, so far. Come on, Little Ab.

BAINSFORD

Little Ab? What are you talking about?

ALCROFT

That's what they were calling him earlier when I visited the stables. Little Ab.

BAINSFORD

I'll admit it's certainly easier on the diction, but still a poor wager.

ALCROFT

Don't be so sure. He's in second place now and gaining.

BAINSFORD

What? Balderdash. There's no way he could-- By God, he is. He's gaining fast on, who is that? Is that The Knight of Gwynne? It is. Where the blazes is Peter Simple?

ALCROFT

Is that him in fifth?

BAINSFORD

Good heavens, you may be right.

ALCROFT

Come on, Little Ab. You can do it. Coming into the home stretch now. There's the finish line. Yes! Abd el Kader won!

BAINSFORD

I don't believe it.

ALCROFT

If Abd el Kader can resist the French army for all those years, winning a horse race is simplicity itself.

BAINSFORD

Well, I suppose we should go collect your winnings,  
Alcroft.

*They start to walk off.*

ALCROFT

I may get to like this steeplechase, after all. Perhaps  
Abd el Kader will win again next year. What say you,  
Bainsford?

BAINSFORD

You got lucky, is all. Don't think him blessed.

*BAINSFORD and ALCROFT exit. The HISTORIAN enters  
from the opposite side.*

HISTORIAN

He did it again the following year. In 1851 Little Ab  
became the first horse to win the Grand National  
Steeplechase two years in a row. Unstoppable and  
inspiring, just like his namesake.

*BLACKOUT*

A GUARD'S REQUEST

*SCENE: Early 1850's, a military prison in France. A French OFFICER sits at a desk, reviewing paperwork. A GUARD enters, salutes and stands at attention, waiting to be acknowledged. Eventually looks up from his paperwork and returns the salute.*

GUARD

You sent for me, mon Capitaine?

OFFICER

Oui, Sergent, I did.

(shuffles papers till he finds the one  
he's looking for, holds it up)

You submitted a request for transfer.

GUARD

Oui, sir.

OFFICER

A very specific transfer.

GUARD

Oui, sir.

OFFICER

Are you unhappy here, Sergent?

GUARD

Non, mon Capitaine. Quite the opposite. The prisoners respect me. My fellow guards respect and support me, as I respect and support them. I have very much enjoyed my assignment here, sir.

OFFICER

Your performance record is admirable and, as you say, you are respected both among the staff and the prisoners. And yet you have requested a transfer to another prison entirely.

GUARD

Oui, sir.

OFFICER

More to the point, you have requested assignment to a particular prisoner, the Algerian. Abdel Kader.

GUARD

Oui. If that assignment is unavailable, I will gladly retain my post here, sir.

OFFICER  
Why?

GUARD  
Because, as I have said, I am quite happy here, sir.

OFFICER  
Non, Sergeant, I am asking why you wish to be assigned to guarding prisoner Abdel Kader. Surely, a guard with your rank and experience...

GUARD  
If I may speak freely, sir?

OFFICER  
By all means, s'il vous plaît. Proceed.

GUARD  
As I am sure you are aware, I served during the Algerian campaign. In fact, I was captured at Macta and held as a prisoner of war. I was a prisoner of Abdel Kader. My treatment as a prisoner had a... shall we say, notable effect on me.

OFFICER  
I see. And now that he is a prisoner of the French, you wish for the opportunity to present similar treatment to Abdel Kader himself.

GUARD  
Oui, mon Capitaine.

OFFICER  
Need I remind you, Sergeant, that revenge is not a trait encouraged by the French. However poorly and deplorably you were treated, we have standards of treatment in France.

GUARD  
I'm afraid you misunderstand. Revenge is not my intent. As you said, it is not a trait encouraged by the French. However, we do encourage returning a kindness. While a prisoner in Algeria I was treated humanely with kindness and comfort and the utmost humanity. During my time there, I only saw one guard attempt to mistreat a prisoner. That guard received significant discipline for his transgression.

OFFICER  
I see.



GUARD

The performance of my duties here has been significantly influenced by my time as a prisoner in Algeria. My request for transfer is simply so that I can return the kindness and do my part to ensure that during his incarceration in France the emir receives the same level of humane treatment that he ensured for me. My sense of honor and fairness demands nothing less.

OFFICER

(considers the GUARD for several moments)

Sergent, how could I deny such admirable intent?  
Request approved.

GUARD

Merci, mon Capitaine.

*The GUARD salutes and turns to leave. The OFFICER holds up a hand to stop him.*

OFFICER

And Sergent?

GUARD

Oui, mon Capitaine?

OFFICER

Please, pass along my thanks as well, to Mssr. Abdel Kader.

GUARD

Oui, mon Capitaine.

*GUARD exits.*  
*BLACKOUT*

HENRI DUNANT

*SCENE: February 1863, Geneva, Switzerland. JEAN HENRI DUNANT is sitting at a table with two other men, GUSTAVE MOYNIER and GENERAL HENRI DUFOUR.*

DUFOUR

As much as we admire your position on the matter, you must understand the challenges of proposing such an endeavor on an international scale.

MOYNIER

Hear him out, General. Go ahead, Mssr. Dunant. Tell us, what do you envision?

DUNANT

General, I understand how you might feel, from a military standpoint, that this is an unreachable goal, but I assure it is not. I know of just such measures being implimented and respected on a national scale in the past. To do so on an international scale would be simply a matter of agreeing on the importance of humanity.

DUFOUR

You make it sound effortless.

DUNANT

Oh, it will not be acheived without effort, significant effort, but the rewards will be well worth the toil and travail.

MOYNIER

You said that measures similar to what you propose have been implimented and maintained in the past. Where?

DUNANT

While pursuing various business interests in Algeria, I heard tell of a leader, an emir who lead his people in resistance to the French occupation two decades ago. This man was named Abdel Kader and, I was told, he took his inspiration from the Muslim holy book, the Koran. He sought to live by the Koranical passage, "Let not your hatred of other men turn you away from Justice. Be just... that is closer to piety." He had, among other military rules and regulations, specific guidelines for the proper treatment of prisoners of war. In the treatment of other under his control, he held himself and his men to a certain standard. Muslim, Christian, Jew, all were equal in his eyes, deserving of the same standard of treatment. Years later, when I witnessed firsthand the atrocities of war during my time in Solferino, my memory returned to thoughts of Abdel

(MORE)

DUNANT (cont'd)

Kader and his policies. Through his faith and devotion, he had found away to preserve humanity in the midst of battle. Can we strive for anything less?

DUFOUR

I daresay, you present a compelling argument.

MOYNIER

I concur. I would like you to meet with two colleagues of ours, Doctors Louis Appia and Théodore Maunoir. Next week, we have organized a meeting of what we hope will become a means of progress and change in this world. A committee of sorts to pursue the ideas you have proposed.

DUNANT

I would be most honored. What are you calling this committee?

*MOYNIER and DUFOUR look at each other then back at DUNANT.*

MOYNIER

Nothing has been confirmed yet, but as we are meeting under the Swiss flag, we were considering calling ourselves the International Committee of the Red Cross.

*HISTORIAN steps out.*

HISTORIAN

A week later, on February 17, 1863, the International Red Cross was formed. Also, as a result of this meeting, terms of guidelines were drafted for the first of the Geneva Conventions, providing regulations for the treatment of prisoner of war. The conventions were eventually ratified by 195 countries around the world.

*BLACKOUT*

ELECTION

*SCENE: 1849, Bordeaux, France. Two men, let's call them Pierre and François, are sitting at a table. A large wooden box with an open hinged lid is on the table. François has a notebook as well as a pen and inkwell. Pierre is removing election ballots from the box. Pierre reads off the candidate. François names the party and records the vote.*

PIERRE

DelaCroix.

FRANÇOIS

Party of Order.

PIERRE

DelaCroix.

FRANÇOIS

Party of Order.

PIERRE

Boudreau.

FRANÇOIS

The Mountain.

PIERRE

Lamoroeaux.

FRANÇOIS

Independent.

PIERRE

Abd el Kader.

FRANÇOIS

Inde-- What was that one?

PIERRE

Abd el Kader?

FRANÇOIS

He's not on the list. He's not a candidate for election.

PIERRE

He's a write-in vote. Lucky him. One vote. Bon chance, Mssr. Kader, whoever you are.

FRANÇOIS

Whoever? You don't know who Abd el Kader is? The imprisoned emir?

PIERRE

Imprisoned? Here in France?

FRANÇOIS

Oui.

PIERRE

Is he the Algerian? The one who finally surrendered to the Duke of Aumale, Henri d'Orléans? I read about him.

FRANÇOIS

Oui. He is a prisoner. And he has received a write-in vote. I don't understand this modern world.

PIERRE

I like the modern world. The occasional revolution is good for France. Mssr Bonabart has been elected President. We are having elections for the Parliament. These are exciting times. The people of France are excited.

FRANÇOIS

So excited that they are writing the name of a prisoner on their ballots?

PIERRE

Be calm, François, it is just one vote.  
(takes another ballot from the box)  
Ah. Two votes. Here's another one.

FRANÇOIS

What?

PIERRE

Another write in vote for Abd el Karder.

FRANÇOIS

What would the Duke of Aumale think of the enemy he captured getting two votes in free elections in France?

PIERRE

Three. Found another.

FRANÇOIS

Mon Dieu.

PIERRE

And your Duke of Aumale fled to England during the revolution. What he thinks no longer matters. Who he calls an enemy no longer matters.

FRANÇOIS

It is still unusual.

PIERRE

Oui, it is unusual but c'est la vie. The old rulers are gone and with them, their enemies. France is embracing the old enemies as new friends.

FRANÇOIS

I suppose.

PIERRE

And-- Oh, look. Another write-in vote for Abd el Kader.

*The HISTORIAN steps out.*

HISTORIAN

Abd el Kader received many more write-in votes during the French parliamentary elections in 1849. Despite being a prisoner at the time, his history had captured the imaginations of the French people as they fought against their own past. It has been noted with some degree of amazement that someone whose name was detested by the French would gain their admiration during his exile to that country.

*BLACKOUT*

OUR TOWN

*SCENE: Three men are sitting at a table, survey maps and various papers scattered about. Three short glasses sit ignored on the table. The men are TIMOTHY DAVIS, JOHN THOMPSON, and CHESTER SAGE.*

*The HISTORIAN steps out to address the audience.*

HISTORIAN

1846, the home on the banks of the Turkey River. Timothy Davis, a lawyer recently moved from Dubuque meets with John Thomson and Chester Sage to finalize plans for the platting of a new town in Clayton County.

DAVIS

So with Main Street running parallel to the river for a designated distance, that should allow for relatively even division of parcels of land on either side of the river.

THOMPSON

(pointing at a map)

With a general store there, the saw mill there, and the gristmill further along there, we should have no trouble attracting residents to our town.

SAGE

I have already had an inquiry from a blacksmith back east looking for a place to settle in the new frontier.

THOMPSON

All we need is a name for our little town and you can fill the registration papers and maps, Davis.

SAGE

Any thoughts on that?

DAVIS

Thoughts on a name for the town?

THOMPSON

Yes, should we consider naming it for one of us?

SAGE

Davisville? Thompsonston?

THOMPSON

As much as I appreciate the idea of Thompsonston, it does seem a bit... unwieldy to the tongue. What about Sageberg?

SAGE

Hmmmm.

DAVIS

Gentlemen, as flattering as those ideas are, I have a suggestion that involves another, possibly more worthy and inspiring gentleman.

THOMPSON

Do tell.

SAGE

Is it Mr. McGregor? I understand he is platting a town of his own east of here. Naming our town after him would seem redundant.

DAVIS

(chuckles)

No, Sage, it is not Mr. McGregor of whom I speak. Nor is it Mr. Guttenberg. As inspiring as both of their family histories may be.

THOMPSON

Then who, Davis? Who do you have in mind?

DAVIS

I assume you have been aware, however distantly, of events and activity in Algeria, these past fifteen or so years? The French colonization and the fierce resistance by the locals?

SAGE

I understand the French stance has been fierce at times as well.

DAVIS

Through it all, one man has led his people in defying the occupation. But his contentious defiance was tempered with gentle humanity. His name is Abd el Kader and he is, by all accounts, a wholly unique man. Although the circumstance here are vastly different that what he has faced, I put to you that the spirit of his intent matches the spirit of settlers in this great land. I propose, gentlemen that we could inspire and motivate the frontier spirit by naming our town in honor of Mr. Abd el Kader.

SAGE

You're suggesting we name the town Abd el Kader?

THOMPSON

As town names go, that's an even more daunting collection of syllables than Thompsonston.



DAVIS

Then we shorten it. Abdel? No.

SAGE

Kader?

THOMPSON

No.

DAVIS

Elkader?

THOMPSON

Elkader. Yes.

SAGE

I agree.

DAVIS

It is settled, then. I shall file the papers in the morning. Gentlemen, a toast.

*All three raise their glasses.*

DAVIS

To Abd el Kader the man and Elkader the village.

THOMSON AND SAGE

(together)

To Abd el Kader and Elkader.

*BLACKOUT*

A LETTER FROM DAMASCUS

*SCENE: August, 1860, the editorial offices of the New York Times. A REPORTER and the EDITOR are standing over a desk. The REPORTER holds a piece of paper in his hand.*

EDITOR

People are outraged. And rightly so. Calling it the massacre at Damacus sounds sensationalistic, but that's the reality of it. It is a massacre. But we need to find some way to provide people with perspective on this. We don't want any reactionary riots over here. Violence feeding violence isn't the solution.

REPORTER

I might have something. It's a letter from the exiled Emir, Abdelkader.

EDITOR

He's a muslim himself, is he not? So his letter supports the attacks on Christians?

REPORTER

No, actually. Quite the contrary. He places the blame squarely on extremists within his religion. Furthermore, and this is the interesting part, he is sheltering Christians from the attacks.

EDITOR

Sheltering them? Is it a trick? A trap?

REPORTER

Not at all. He appears as appalled by the events as the rest of the civilized world. In the letter he states that he is harboring Christians in his home, providing them protection from the rioting hordes.

EDITOR

Let me see that letter.

REPORTER

(handing him the page)

It is begins with a recounting of the events and the devastating effects. The latter half notes his actions.

EDITOR

(reading)

"Seeing matters were so desperate, I lost no time in taking under my protection these unfortunate Christians. I sallied forth, taking my Algerines with me, and we were able to save the lives of men, women and children, and bring them home with us."

REPORTER

It's remarkable that a man who ganed fame and infamy for resisting the French is now supporting French Christians and resisting his own people.

EDITOR

I daresay, while they may share a religion, it appears he would be loath to call the rioters "his own people."

REPORTER

I take your point.

EDITOR

Listen to this... "For me, I deplore the disaster which has befallen the Christians. The places where their houses stood cannot be recognized; all their dwellings are reduced to ashes. ... All the Europeans and Christians I have collected are in safety in my house. I provide them with all they want, and pray Allah to save the unfortunate Christians from those fanatics."

REPORTER

That seems clear enough as regards his stance. How do you want us to handle this? How do we present it?

EDITOR

(hands the latter back)

Present it exactly as it is. Write a short paragraph in regards to the origin and veracity of the letter, then run it verbatim.

REPORTER

I'll have it ready by press-time.

*The HISTORIAN steps out to address the audience.*

HISTORIAN

And so it was that on the morning of August 20, 1860 the readers of the New York Times had a first-hand account of event that had happened a world away, through the eyes, heart, and words of Abd el Kader.

*BLACKOUT*

BOOKEND BACK

*The HISTORIAN addresses the audience.*

## HISTORIAN

He was many things to many people. These were just some of the stories that show that. Abd el Kader was a fascinating and complex man with a fascintating and complex legacy, all borne out of one simple truth: We are all part of the same humanity.

Learn more about the emir and the Abd el-kader Education Project by visiting our website at [abdelkaderproject.org](http://abdelkaderproject.org). Also, talk to any of the students who have participated in the essay contest.