This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

WIDENER LIBRARY
HX DZFM 6

TOWARDS KHARTOUM

1896.

Aft 3735.8

Harvard College Library.

FROM THE

BRIGHT LEGACY.

Descendants of Henry Bright, jr., who died at Watertown, Mass., in 1686, are entitled to hold scholarships in Harvard College, established in 1880 under the will of

JONATHAN BROWN BRIGHT

of Waltham, Mass., with one half the income of this Legacy. Such descendants failing, other persons are eligible to the scholarships. The will requires that this announcement shall be made in every book added to the Library under its provisions.

Received 23 July, 1897.

TOWARDS KHARTOUM, 1896

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR HERBERT KITCHENER, K.C.M.G., C.B.
Sirdar of the Egyptian Army.

TOWARDS KHARTOUM

THE STORY OF THE SOUDAN WAR OF 1896

BY

A. Hilliard Atteridge

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT OF THE "DAILY CHRONICLE" WITH THE DONGOLA EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

WITH MAPS, PORTRAITS, AND NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY THE AUTHOR

LONDON

A. D. INNES & CO.

BEDFORD STREET

1897

~~I. 5297~~
4 fr. 37 3578
HARVARD COLLEGE
JUL 23 1897
LIBRARY.
Bright fund.

Preface.

IN the following pages I have tried to give some account of how the new Egyptian Army did its work in the most important campaign in which it has yet been engaged—a campaign which seems likely to be the prelude to still greater events.

The materials for the book I collected while attached to the Dongola Expeditionary Force as the Special Correspondent of the *Daily Chronicle*, but the work is not a mere reprint of my letters to that paper. For the events that occurred after I left headquarters at Kosheh I have used the official despatches, supplemented and explained by what I had already learned in the Soudan of the arrangements for the final advance.

The half-page illustrations are from photographs which I took in the opening weeks of the campaign. In its later stage my camera was disabled by the extreme heat and dryness of the Soudan summer, and a second camera, which was to have replaced it, arrived only as I was coming down the river.

I have to thank Messrs. Stewart and Son, of the Blackwall Ironworks, for photographs and technical details of the new Nile gunboats.

Major Oldfield, the assistant-editor of the Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, and Dr. Eugene Oswald, have kindly read the proofs of the book with me, and I have to thank them for many useful suggestions.

A. H. A.

London, *January* 25, 1897.

Contents.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

At Cairo 3

My start from London—Arrival at Ismailia—Interviews at Cairo—Rumours of disaster—The Mahmal procession—The house of the Soudan mission—A talk with Padre Rossignoli—Story of his captivity and escape from Omdurman—What he had to tell about the Dervishes of Dongola.

CHAPTER II.

Up the River to Assouan 14

Departure from Cairo—Meeting with Mr. Garrett of the *New York Herald*—Embark for Assouan at Girgeh—Balliana, the river-base of the expedition—Scenes at the riverside—Embarking camels—The voyage up the river—Luxor—Visit to Karnak—Special service officers *en route* for Suakin—Esneh—Temple of Kom Ombos—Arrival at Assouan.

CHAPTER III.

A Friendly Sheikh and his Tribe 27

Activity at Assouan—Troops in camp—Departure of Bedawin irregulars to hold the wells at Haimur—The Arab camp—Sheikh Bishir—March of the Ababdeh Arabs—The commandant and the Sheikh—Our parting with the tribe.

CHAPTER IV.

PAGE

FROM ASSOUAN TO WADI HALFA 35

Stay at Assouan—Visit to Philæ—Captain Lyons' researches—Departure for Wadi Halfa—Scenes at Shellal—On board the *Amara*—The gunners of the 3rd Artillery—The Nile above the First Cataract—Pass of Kalabsheh—A shipwreck—Temple of Dekka—Korosko—Visit to Khulusi Bey—The wire to Murat cut by the enemy — At the commandant's house — Voyage resumed—Kasr Ibrim—An agent of the Intelligence Department—Toski and Abu Simbel—Arrival at Wadi Halfa—Meeting with Major Wingate and Slatin—Our "Nile Villa" at Halfa.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST STAGE OF THE CAMPAIGN 50

Retrospect of the first month of the campaign—Italian disaster at Adowa—Decision of the British Government to make an advance on the Nile—It comes as a surprise to Egypt—Orders to occupy Akasha—The situation on the frontier—The first column starts for Akasha—The place occupied without resistance—The second column under MacDonald reaches Akasha—The plan for the first stage of the campaign—The Sirdar leaves Cairo for the front—The North Staffordshire Regiment and a British Maxim battery sent up the river—Railway and transport arrangements—Results obtained by the end of March.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGHTING ROUND SUAKIN 66

Lines of action open to the Dervishes—Osman Digna's raid against Suakin—Wires cut in the Korosko desert—Inactivity of the enemy along the convoy route in the Batn-el-Hagar—Dervish scouts near Akasha—The first

PAGE

cannon-shot of the war—The situation at Suakin—Skirmishes with the enemy—The Suakin Field Force organised under Colonel Lloyd—Order of march—Taroi Wells occupied—Cavalry driven in by the Dervishes—Gallant conduct of Fenwick—Night attack on the zereba at Taroi—Fenwick's party beats off the enemy—Sidney with the column from Tokar defeats the enemy in Khor Wintri—The Field Force returns to Suakin—Collapse of Osman Digna's enterprise.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SITUATION AT THE FRONT 76

Force at Wadi Halfa in the middle of April—Garrison of Akasha—Convoy route and line of communication through the Batn-el-Hagar—The guard of the rail-head—Posts and patrols on the desert flank of the expedition—The garrison at Murat Wells—Dervish advance to Mograka—Hammuda Idris and Osman Azrak—Dervish scouting party reported to have passed Akasha.

CHAPTER VIII.

RAILWAY MAKING IN THE DESERT 83

The train for Sarras—Lieutenant Manifold and the new telegraph line—The 3rd Battery on the march—The fort of Gemai—Desert scenery—Sarras fort and camp—To the rail-head on an engine—The railway battalion at work—Our "furthest south"—Return to Sarras—Meeting with Colonel Hunter—"Nothing stirring at Akasha."

CHAPTER IX.

WAITING AT WADI HALFA 92

Description of Wadi Halfa—Military activity—At the Intelligence Department—A first deserter from the

PAGE

enemy—News from Bishir Bey—Adul Azim's reconnaissance from Murat Wells—The "Friendlies" at Halfa—Progress of the railway and telegraph line—Improvement of the convoy route—Distribution of the Egyptian forces at the end of April—Broadwood's activity at Akasha—Excellent organisation of the medical service—The Sirdar's tour of inspection.

CHAPTER X.

THE CAVALRY FIGHT ON MAY-DAY 104

Situation at Akasha—Arrival of the Sirdar—Reports of intended movements of the enemy—A friendly post surprised by the Dervishes—They are reported in sight—Burn-Murdoch ordered to reconnoitre southward with three squadrons—Broadwood's reconnaissance on the west bank—The 11th Soudanese march out in support of Burn-Murdoch—The first contact with the enemy—The fight with the Dervish main-body—Retreat of the Dervish force—Results of the engagement.

CHAPTER XI.

A DESERT EXCURSION 113

A second visit to the rail-head—Lieutenant Girouard, R.E., in charge of the work—The journey beyond Sarras—The story of the Soudan railway—State in which the line was left by the Dervishes—Wild scenery of the Batn-el-Hagar desert—Jebel Bringo—The railway camp—Colonel Fathi Bey—Visit to Murrat Wells—How the railway was relaid—The protection of the line—A cavalry outpost—A night at the railway camp—Moving camp next morning—Return to Halfa with the Sirdar's party—Trophies of the May-day fight.

CHAPTER XII.

PAGE
To Akasha with a Convoy 128

Permission given to visit Akasha—Departure from Halfa—Our camp at Gemai—A desert march—A halt by the river—Arrival at Sarras—The convoy starts—A ride with the cavalry escort—Difficult ground—Fort and camp of Wadi Atira—March to Ambigol by the mountain road—Ambigol camp—The Camel Corps headquarters—The march to Alimula by the river bank—Rumours of Dervish activity—The march through the passes to Sonki—Arrival at Akasha.

CHAPTER XIII.

In Camp at Akasha 142

The mosque tomb at Akasha—Relics of the former British occupation—Defects of Akasha as a military position—The garrison—The defences of Akasha—Major MacDonald in command—Arrangement of the camp—Deserters from the enemy's camp at Ferkeh—Broadwood's reconnaissance to the south of Ferkeh—More deserters—A cheerful camp—Expected advance against the Dervishes—Departure from Akasha.

CHAPTER XIV.

On the Eve of the Advance. 155

Return to Halfa—Camels on a railway train—The new garrison at Sarras—Collecting material for the railway beyond Akasha—Signs of an early advance—The Indian troops at Suakin—The Egyptian garrison of Suakin ordered to the Nile—The Sirdar leaves Halfa for the south—Military situation at the end of May—The railhead at Ambigol Wells—The convoy route—The telegraph—Progress of the railway delayed by an accident beyond Ambigol Wells—Dervish raiders approach the

PAGE

rail-head—Concentration of Egyptian troops towards Akasha—Preparations for the passage of the gunboats through the cataracts.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CONCENTRATION FOR BATTLE 166

The Intelligence Department and the Correspondents leave Halfa—The night bivouac at Ambigol Wells—A waterless camp—Early breakfast with Girouard—The ride to the Nile—In the deserted camp at Melik-en-Nasr—A thunderstorm—Ride to Tanjor Camp; a ghastly sight—Arab hospitality—A night-march with the 7th Battalion—Deaths on the line of march—The gathering of the army—The Sirdar's headquarters at Okmeh—A great camp along the Nile—Arrival at Akasha—The infantry organised in brigades—Practising the attack—The time named for the advance.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE NIGHT MARCH 176

Information about the enemy collected by the Intelligence Department—Organisation of Hammuda's force at Ferkeh—Horsemen—Camel-men—Jehadia—Sword and Spearmen—The Dervish position—Object aimed at by the Sirdar—Routes from Akasha to Ferkeh—The desert column under Burn-Murdoch—The river column—Orders for the Correspondents—The 9th Soudanese march off—The start of the river column—Arrangements made by myself and Garrett—The march through Khor Shargosheh—A halt by the river—Night comes on—Difficult ground—The march between Dal Mountain and the river—Signs of the Dervishes—A long halt—March resumed—A difficult defile—A plucky Egyptian—On a shelf of rock—The bivouac near Sarkamatto—Difficulties about supper—A short sleep on the sand.

CHAPTER XVII.

PAGE
THE BATTLE OF FERKEH 197

Progress of the desert column—The early morning start—The Third Brigade on the march—The first shots—Under fire—Ferkeh village and the Dervish position—Plan of our attack—Dervish counter-attacks—The Jehadia in action—A critical moment—The advance against the village—The Sirdar and his staff—Capture of Ferkeh—The Maxim battery—Garrett's narrow escape — Surgeon-Captain Hunter and the Dervish wounded—End of the battle—Conduct of the Egyptian troops—Their fire discipline—Losses on both sides.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER THE BATTLE, THE PURSUIT; SUARDA . . . 214

Beginning of the pursuit—My first message from the battlefield—Despatched by my servant to Akasha—I return to Ferkeh village—The Sirdar's headquarters—Slatin and the Sheik El Obeid—News of Hammuda's death—My ride back to Akasha—Appearance of the battlefield—The Dervish women—The Soudanese and the prisoners—The dead on the battlefield—The defile by the river—A Dervish straggler—The ride through the desert—At the telegraph tent—How I got my letter through—The story of the pursuit—The pursuers received as friends by the villagers—Wounded Dervish Emirs—Escape of Osman Azrak—Capture of Suarda—Dervish losses—Important results of the battle of Ferkeh—Moral effect of the victory.

CHAPTER XIX.

BEHIND THE SCENES OF MAHDISM 235

Dervish papers captured at Ferkeh and Suarda—Bishara's orders for the Adendam raid—Hamza Enge-

PAGE

riabi's report on the raid—Bishara and the Egyptian Intelligence Department — Hassan Wad Nejumi — Dervish reports about the Akasha garrison—And the progress of the railway—Story of the Sirdar's prediction — Vouchers for ammunition—Warnings not to waste it—Curious scale of rations—False reports of victories sent by Hammuda to Dongola—Bishara's congratulations—His proposed plan of campaign—Dissensions in the Dervish camp at Ferkeh—Bishara's exhortation to concord — Commissioners despatched from Dongola to Ferkeh—Bishara loses patience, and deprives Hammuda of his command.

CHAPTER XX.

THE HALT AT SARGUN CAMP 254

I rejoin headquarters—A convoy of wounded—Ferkeh battlefield—Appearance of the country south of Ferkeh —The camp near Sargun Island—Distribution of the Egyptian forces after Ferkeh—Work resumed on the railway—The telegraph line laid to Suarda—The mounted troops sent northwards to Ambigol—Their triumphal march past Sargun camp—Trophies of the pursuit—The prisoners; their accounts of the battle—The Sirdar visits Suarda—Desolation of the Sukkot district by the Dervishes—How the news of Ferkeh was carried to Dongola—Alarm among the Dervishes there—Bishara calls for a levy *en masse*—The people of the Mahassa take refuge with our outposts—Impression produced by Ferkeh among the prisoners—Work started for the railway south of Ferkeh—The situation a week after the battle—The Dervish posts near the Kaibar Cataract—Mahon's reconnaissance—Dervishes abandon Kedden and Kedurma—Their stores destroyed or captured—State of the country beyond Suarda—The district cleared of the Dervishes up to the Hannek cataract—Resistance to Bishara's levy *en masse*—Crowds

PAGE

of refugees at Suarda—Backward state of the Nile—Progress of the railway—A false alarm in camp—I leave Sargun to revisit Halfa.

CHAPTER XXI.

HALFA AND KOSHEH 274

Ride to Akasha by the desert route—Scene of the May-day fight—Changes at Akasha—By railway from Akasha to Halfa—The cholera on the Upper Nile—The Dervish prisoners at Wadi Halfa—Movements of troops—Quarantine on the river—Difficulties of dealing with cholera in Egypt—The epidemic at Halfa—The North Staffordshire Regiment moved out to Gemai—I leave Halfa for the front—"Roddy" Owen at Ambigol Wells—Quarantine at Akasha—A stormy night—The quarantine camp at Ambigol Wells—A letter from Owen—Cholera at Ambigol and Akasha—Journey to Akasha—Progress of the cholera—I receive permission to rejoin headquarters—Voyage up the river to the Dal portage—A night at the portage camp—March to Kosheh—The headquarters camp—Battlefield of Ginnis—The military situation—Waiting for the high Nile—News of Major Owen's death—Owen as a soldier—Illness of Mr. Garrett—Cholera at Kosheh; the camp moved to the desert hills—Relics of the battle of Ginnis—My illness at Kosheh—I ask for a permit to go to Halfa for a rest—And try to arrange to have Garrett sent there also—Arrangements for my journey; Garrett refuses to go—A moonlight ride across Ferkeh battlefield—The rail-head in Ferkeh khor—Meeting with Trask—By rail to Akasha and Halfa—Ordered by Surgeon-Captain Hunter to go down to the sea—Arrangements for the voyage to Assouan—The naval officers at Halfa—News of the deaths of Fenwick and Trask—Garrett brought in from Kosheh to Halfa hospital—My last meeting with him—His death at Halfa—Voyage to Assouan in the *Semneh* with Lieu-

PAGE

tenant Henley—Stay at Assouan—To Balliana by the mail steamer—Cairo and San Stefano—I am recalled to England—Sources of my narrative of the close of the expedition.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CAPTURE OF DONGOLA 307

Dervish position at the end of July—Serious resistance to the Egyptian advance improbable—The gunboats a decisive factor on our side—The railway reaches Kosheh—The new gunboat—The passage of the cataracts—Description of the Nile from Kosheh to Dongola—Amara to the Kaibar Cataract—The Kaibar to Hannek—Hannek to Dongola—The gunboat flotilla—Occupation of Absarat—The general advance begins—The great storm; destruction on the railway line—The advance stopped to repair the railway—The advance resumed; the Staffords sent to the front—March from Fereig to Abu Fatmeh—Kerma abandoned by the Dervishes—Action at Hafir—The gunboats at Dongola—The Dervishes evacuate Hafir—The army crosses the Nile—Gunboats bombard the Dervish works at Dongola—The army advances on Dongola in battle array—The Dervishes abandon the place without fighting—Submission of Emirs—Successful pursuit; Debbeh occupied—And Merowe—The Dongola province cleared of the enemy—General result of the Sirdar's operations.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE OUTLOOK IN THE SOUDAN 328

Immediate advance from Dongola on Khartoum impracticable—Military situation on the Upper Nile—Reorganisation of the Dongola province—Railways on the Upper Nile—The routes to Khartoum—A possible plan of campaign—The Korosko Abu-Hamed route—

PAGE

Importance of Berber—Capture of Khartoum will be a serious operation—Notwithstanding the decline of Mahdism—Slatin Pasha on the situation in the Soudan —Our advance on the Nile a war of liberation for North-Eastern Africa.

APPENDICES.

1. The Egyptian Army 339
2. The Armed Strength of Mahdism 342
3. The Emirs who commanded the Dervish Army at Ferkeh 351
4. Description of the three armed stern-wheel Gunboats built for the Dongola Expedition 354
5. The Health of the British Troops engaged in the Expedition 357

List of Maps and Illustrations.

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR HERBERT KITCHENER, K.C.M.G., C.B., SIRDAR OF THE EGYPTIAN ARMY ... ... *frontispiece*

PAGE

SKETCH MAP—DISTANCES AND PRINCIPAL POINTS IN THE NILE VALLEY 2

THE NILE FROM THE GHEZIREH GARDENS, CAIRO 6

CHURCH OF THE SOUDAN MISSIONARIES, CAIRO 9

PADRE ROSSIGNOLI 12

NILE VILLAGE—DATE PALMS AND PIGEON-HOUSE TOWERS . . 15

CAMEL BARGES AT BALLIANA 18

NILE VILLAGE... 20

AT THE LANDING-PLACE, KENEH 22

NILE STEAMER, "PRINCE ABBAS," TOWING CAMEL BARGES... 23

RUINS OF KOM OMBOS 25

IN A NILE BOAT—ASSOUAN 28

MAP 29

RUINS OF ROMAN BATH, ASSOUAN 31

LOADING STEAMERS AT SHELLAL—TEMPLE OF PHILÆ IN THE BACKGROUND 36

SHOVING OFF A STEAMER—SHELLAL 38

CAMELS ON A BARGE 41

RUINS OF THE FORTRESS—KASR IBRIM 44

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN TOMBS IN THE FACE OF THE CLIFF—KASR IBRIM 45

MAJOR-GENERAL ARCHIBALD HUNTER, D.S.O. 55

UNLOADING STORES—WADI HALFA 58

BALLIANA—THE FIRST RIVER BASE OF THE EXPEDITION ... 60

PAGE

LIEUT.-COLONEL WINGATE, C.B., D.S.O. 63

IN THE BATTERY, AKASHA—THE GUN THAT FIRED THE FIRST SHOT OF THE CAMPAIGN 68

SCENE OF THE FIGHTING NEAR SUAKIN 71

SKETCH SHOWING MILITARY SITUATION AT THE FRONT, APRIL 2, 1896 77

THE HEADQUARTERS OFFICES, WADI HALFA 79

FRIENDLIES (ABABDEH FUGGARA ARABS) RECROSSING THE NILE AFTER RECEIVING GOVERNMENT ARMS AT WADI HALFA 81

AN ANGLE OF THE FORTIFICATIONS, WADI HALFA 84

SARRAS FORT—CAVALRY CAMP IN FOREGROUND 87

THE RAILWAY BATTALION AT WORK IN THE DESERT ... 89

FORT NO. 2, WADI HALFA 93

BRITISH SERGEANT-INSTRUCTOR DRILLING SOUDANESE RECRUITS, WADI HALFA. "MARK TIME." 95

LOCOMOTIVE UNDER REPAIR, HALFA ARSENAL 96

"FRIENDLY" PATROLS ON THE DESERT FLANK OF THE EXPEDITION 97

ON THE NILE BANK—WADI HALFA... 101

A CORNER OF MY HOUSE—WADI HALFA 102

CAVALRY OUTPOST IN THE DESERT 105

SCENE OF THE MAY-DAY CAVALRY FIGHT 107

EGYPTIAN CAVALRY HORSES IN CAMP 109

EGYPTIAN CAVALRY CHARGER SHOWING THE STICK TIED IN THE MOUTH TO PREVENT THE HORSE EATING SAND ... 112

IN THE DESERT LOOKING TOWARDS JEBEL BRINGO—CONVOY TRACK IN FOREGROUND 115

WATER-HOLE—MURRAT WELLS 120

CAVALRY OUTPOST IN THE HILLS NEAR MURRAT WELLS—TROOPER HOLDING THE HORSES 122

CAVALRY OUTPOST NEAR MURRAT WELLS—DISMOUNTED SENTRY ON THE RIDGE 123

AN "IRREGULAR" 124

THE RAILWAY BATTALION MOVING CAMP 126

PAGE

Our Camp at Gemai 129
Head of the Convoy in the Desert near Sarras ... 132
A Long Drink 135
Camels in Camp 139
Plan of Akasha—May, 1896 143
Blockhouse—Post No. 3, Akasha 149
Inside Post No. 3—Soudanese Guard 153
Major Wingate's House, Wadi Halfa 156
Railway Siding, Halfa—Nile Boat hauled up for Transport by Rail to Gemai... 158
Egyptian Position at the end of May 161
Third Class Soudan Railway 167
Watch Tower in the Desert on the Railway Line ... 170
Major-General Rundle, C.M.G., D.S.O.... 179
The Night March, June 6–7, 1896 185
Colonel Fathi Bey, 7th Egyptians 199
Battle of Ferkeh, June 7, 1896 202
Soudanese Sword, Shield, and Jibba 207
Wooden Tablet inscribed on both sides with Verses of the Koran carried into Action at Ferkeh by a Dervish Emir... 221
Lieut.-Colonel Burn-Murdoch 227
The Pursuit after Ferkeh, June 7–8, 1896 231
Slatin Pasha 239
Dervish Coins (10 Piastre Pieces, Silver alloyed with Copper) Struck by the Khalifa at Omdurman ... 249
The 3rd Battery in Camp... 256
Egyptian Gunners, 3rd Battery 260
Sketch Map—Kosheh to the Third Cataract 268
The Sirdar and his Staff 271
South Gate, Wadi Halfa 276
At a Stopping-place—Soudan Railway 281
My Riding Camel and Syce 298
Railway Gate, Wadi Halfa 300
On the River Bank—Assouan 305

PAGE

THE FINAL ADVANCE ON DONGOLA 311

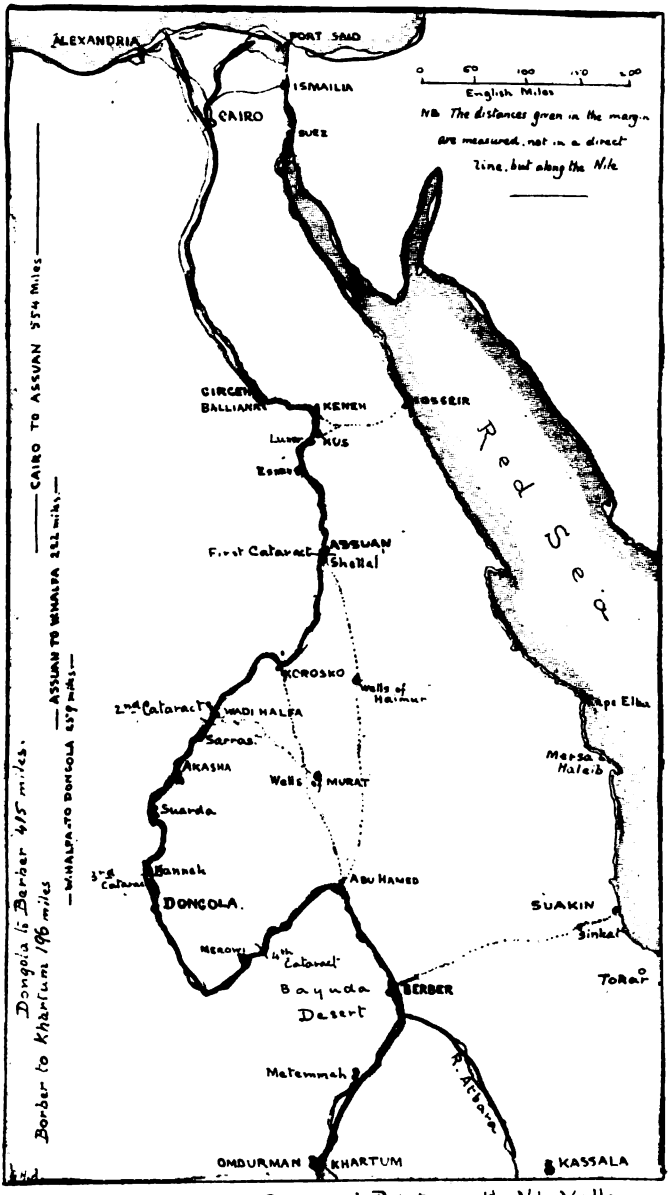
ENGINES OF THE NEW STERN-WHEEL GUNBOATS 315

THE NEW STERN-WHEEL GUNBOAT IN THE SHIPYARD AT WYVENHOE 319

THE STERN-WHEEL GUNBOAT "TAMAI," THE FLAGSHIP OF THE FLOTILLA 323

THE ROUTES TO KHARTOUM 331

SKETCH MAP SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF DERVISH FORCES BEFORE OPENING OF THE CAMPAIGN 343



Sketch Map – Distances & Principal Points in the Nile Valley.

TOWARDS KHARTOUM.

CHAPTER I.

AT CAIRO.

I LEFT Charing Cross, bound for Cairo, on the evening of Friday, March 20, 1896. My orders were to proceed to the Nile Frontier, and follow the fortunes of the coming Soudan expedition as correspondent of the *Daily Chronicle*, if I should ascertain in Egypt that there was something more serious in hand than the mere relaying of the old railway line to Akasha. At the moment when I left England the Government was still speaking with an uncertain voice as to the objects of the expedition, and it had been officially stated, on at least one occasion, that Akasha, and not Dongola, was the objective aimed at. As the train ran down to Dover I read in the evening papers that Akasha had just been occupied without resistance. It looked at first sight as if it was rather late to start for the Soudan.

At Brindisi I embarked on the P. and O. steamship *Victoria*, and on Wednesday evening we were steaming slowly through the Canal. In the chilly early morning

of Thursday we were in Lake Timsah, off Ismailia, where the passengers for Cairo were transferred to the tender *Ibis*. In the party were Mr. H. S. Pearse, the artist-correspondent of the *Graphic*, a veteran who had shared the dangers of the march through the Bayuda desert in 1885; Mr. Gwynne, the representative of Reuter's agency, just back from the Ashanti campaign; and Captain S. F. Judge, D.S.O., and Lieutenant A. R. Hoskins, two young officers attached to the coming expedition. As the express for Cairo did not leave Ismailia till the afternoon, we had to spend some hours in that most uninteresting town, a place which is a fragment of what it once hoped to be, a lakeside city of avenues, boulevards, and squares, that exist chiefly in the surveyor's plans, and are mostly indicated only by his marks and boundary stones—a city with the sandy desert at the end of every unfinished street.

I spent five days in Cairo. I had a number of visits to make, and once I decided on going up the river I had to complete my preparations. My first call was upon Lord Cromer. As I anticipated, he would not be "interviewed" in the journalistic sense of the word, but when I made it clear that I was not bent on "interviewing," he spoke freely, and told me much that I subsequently found very useful. At the War Office I found Colonel Rundle, R.A., D.S.O., the chief of the Egyptian staff, in charge. Everywhere there were signs of that quiet activity, "without haste and without rest," which indicates that well-organised machinery is at work. The Colonel told me that correspondents were for the present detained at Assouan,

but that the embargo on their further progress would soon be removed. He introduced me to Colonel Lloyd, D.S.O., who was soon to replace him as base commandant, and who gave me a letter to the commandants at Balliana and Assouan asking them to do what they could to help me on my way up the river.

As for the political situation, I soon found that nothing about it was to be learned in Cairo. Plot and counterplot were being worked elsewhere; the wires were being pulled from London and Paris. Meanwhile Cairo was full of rumours. On the Sunday evening I was enjoying an after-dinner cigarette, when one of my fellow-guests at the Ghezireh told me he had important news for me; it would soon be public, but if I would wire it to England at once I would perhaps be the only correspondent who would have it in time for the Monday morning paper; the Government was trying to keep it quiet, but he had it from "a perfectly reliable source." The story was that the first fight of the campaign had taken place that morning; one of the outposts on the frontier had been surprised; there had been a panic, and twenty-nine Egyptians had been killed by the Dervishes. Now luckily I had made up my mind that at this early stage of my expedition it was better to miss a possible piece of news than send what was most likely an alarmist canard; so, to my obliging friend's disappointment, I told him I would not wire anything to London. Next morning I heard from Lord Cromer that the only news from the front was that one of our patrols had exchanged a few long-range shots with some Dervish scouts, without any damage to either party! "I am glad," he said,

"that you did not send on that story to England." Later on I heard that some one else had sent it.

It was at this interview that, on my telling him I was puzzled whether I ought to prolong my stay in Cairo or go at once up the river, he strongly advised me to start for Assouan. "There is nothing here,"

THE NILE FROM THE GHEZIREH GARDENS, CAIRO.

he said, "but on the Upper Nile there may be interesting events very soon." He kindly gave me a letter of introduction to Major Wingate, the chief of the Egyptian Intelligence Department, and I arranged to start for the front by the next available train, the mail on Tuesday evening, March 31st.

There had been no time for mere sight-seeing, but

I was luckily able to see one of the characteristic spectacles of Cairo—the Mahmal procession—on the Saturday morning after my arrival. The ceremony took place in the great square of Mohammed Ali, below the citadel, but by the absence of the troops it was shorn of much of its usual splendour. So reduced was the native garrison that the guard of honour was formed by a company of cadets. The Khedive's carriage had a small mounted escort, and the guns of the horse battery, which were a few weeks later to rouse the echoes of Ferkeh Mountain, thundered out the salute. Thousands of spectators in many-coloured robes thronged the four sides of the square, the splendid mosques and the walls of the old citadel forming the background to this picturesque crowd. They looked on, for the most part, in solemn silence, while the camel with its embroidered tent, representing the litter in which the pilgrim-queen of Egypt was borne to Mecca six hundred years ago, went by, followed by groups of shouting devotees bearing the rolls of the sacred carpet. As the Khedive drove by there arose from the crowd what I took for a cheer; but alas! it was only an appeal for *backsheesh*.

On my last day in Cairo I had an interesting interview, which deserves more than a passing allusion. In the Sharia Deir-el-Benat, on the west side of the city, between the German and the English hospitals, by the bank of the Ismailiyeh Canal, stands a little Roman Catholic chapel, with a garden and a house on each side of it, white-walled buildings, with a porch and a wooden verandah in front, and over each doorway an escutcheon painted with the arms of

Austria. The house nearest to the canal is a convent That on the other side of the chapel is the residence of "the missionaries of the Soudan." The whole group of buildings forms an establishment founded years ago, long before the tragedy of Khartoum, by Bishop Comboni, the pioneer of the Roman Catholic missions of the Soudan, the same man who built the chapel and planted the mission garden at Khartoum, so often mentioned in General Gordon's journals. These houses near the canal in Cairo were intended to serve as a kind of base of operations for the missions of the Upper Nile. Here the missionaries and the sisters were to reside for awhile, in order to become used to the conditions of life in a tropical climate, and to learn Arabic. Assuredly all who admire heroic endeavour and long-enduring patience under dire distress, will look with a feeling akin to reverence at the threshold from which so many brave women and men have set forth to meet death, and slavery worse than death, in the far-off lands they hoped to win to the Cross of Christ.

Italian is the language of the house, for the missionaries were originally recruited from the Italian-speaking provinces of the Austrian Empire. I asked a porter, a dark-faced Nubian, if I might see the "Padre Administratore." I was shown into a small parlour, carpetless, plainly furnished, the windows half-shuttered to keep out the hot afternoon sun, and on the walls a few religious pictures, some photographs, the portrait of the Emperor-King Francis Joseph, and a copy of our Intelligence Department map of Upper Egypt and the Soudan.

The "Padre Administratore" bade me welcome, and we were fast friends from the moment I explained that I was bound for the Soudan. Would I like to see Father Rossignoli, who had been for twelve years a captive among the Dervishes? Yes, it was for that I had come. And he went away to look for the late slave of the Khalifa.

CHURCH OF THE SOUDAN MISSIONARIES, CAIRO.

Left alone, I imagined to myself what he would be like—prematurely aged, no doubt, white-haired, broken in health. I could hardly believe my eyes when the Father Superior came back accompanied by a vigorous looking man of about fifty, with a few grey hairs sprinkling his long black beard, but with no other sign of age about him. Sunburnt, as most Europeans

are in Egypt, the lines of his face are those of a strong man in good working condition. He walks with a brisk, erect carriage, and there was a pleasant ring in his voice as he grasped my hand with both of his and said in Italian, "You are going to the Soudan. Welcome! and may God give you good fortune there. Do you speak Italian?" "Yes, a little." Then with a smile, "Perhaps you would prefer Arabic?" "No, my Arab studies are only just beginning." So we went on in Italian, seated near the big map on the wall, on which Father Rossignoli pointed out each place as he mentioned it.

He told me how he was for twelve long years a prisoner of the Dervishes. Captured in 1883 at El Obeid, he was not brought to Omdurman till after the Mahdi's death; but he had seen him when the so-called prophet was just beginning to be famous as a religious leader, though no one as yet could foresee in him the future ruler of the Soudan. Father Rossignoli escaped from Khartoum, or rather Omdurman, after Father Ohrwalder and before Slatin Pasha. Ohrwalder had made his way to the nearest Egyptian outpost at the Wells of Murat on the camel track that crosses the bend of the Nile between Korosko and Abu Hamed. "My Arab guides," said Father Rossignoli, "were afraid to take the Murat route. Since Father Ohrwalder's escape that way was guarded. We struck across the desert more to the eastward, then through a wild mountain tract (pointing to the map as he spoke) so that we reached the Nile below Korosko. They told me that in the old times, before the war, caravans had done this journey in thirty-five days. We finished it

in thirteen. It was a terrible time—fierce heat, hardly any water, the shortest sleep, and all the while the fear of pursuit and a worse captivity or a cruel death."

He spoke in high praise of the courage, resource, and fidelity of his Arab guides, men in the service of the Egyptian Intelligence Department. One curious point he noted about the fate of the captives at Khartoum. The mortality among the European residents before the siege was, he said, much higher than the death-rate among the prisoners in the following period. When they were free, he explained, they tried to live in European fashion, taking meat several times a day. As captives they were reduced to the native diet, and they were none the worse for it.

He asked me if I could tell anything of the plans of the expedition. I replied that we knew nothing, or next to nothing; even the Government at home did not yet seem to have clearly made up its mind as to how much was to be attempted.

"Well," said Father Rossignoli, "I know something of the Soudan; and if the re-conquest of Khartoum is intended, it means not a small expedition but a great war. The Egyptians are at Akasha, and they can hold it easily enough, of course; but even a march to Dongola will cost a battle, for the Mahdists have always kept a stronger force at Dongola than at Berber. The existence of that bit of railway at Wadi Halfa makes them anxious. They connect it with the idea of another great expedition coming up the Nile. So they have always kept about ten thousand men in the Dongola province. It is no new thing. They are always there. It may be they will retire up the river

before the advance of the expedition to concentrate for the defence of Omdurman, but a battle is more likely."

"We are told," I said, "that, if serious resistance is likely to be met with, the advance on Dongola will not be attempted till the autumn. But some say the divisions among the Mahdists will prevent their opposing us."

"I attach very little importance to these rumours of divisions," replied the Padre. "There are malcontents under the Khalifa's rule, it is true; but who are they? Not the fighting men, but the traders and workers in the towns, men who have not the weapons, and what is more important have not the courage to rise against their oppressors. As for the fighting population, they are still fanatics, ready to forget all local quarrels and unite against any army, English or Egyptian, that comes up the river."

PADRE ROSSIGNOLI.

"But this Egyptian army marches under a Moslem standard."

"True," said Father Rossignoli, "but remember for the Mahdists the Egyptians are corrupt Mohammedans, contaminated by intercourse with Christians. There may not be much fighting this year; but the Khalifa, once he feels Khartoum and Omdurman are threatened, can rouse vast tribes to the old fanatical enthusiasm of the first years of the war. Take my word for it, the re-conquest of the Soudan will be no trifling undertaking."

The Dervishes, he went on to say, had no idea of the

power that a great empire like England could marshal against them. They knew of Cairo and Constantinople, but the lands beyond are a mysterious region. What the Italians were and whence they came, and how they differed from the English, used to be a standing puzzle even to prominent men in the court at Omdurman. Father Rossignoli told me there were still some forty or fifty European prisoners in the Khalifa's capital, some of them Greek shopkeepers, a few Italian builders, and some Jews. The chance of their escape was very slight. He would be glad to see Khartoum again in civilised hands and the work of the missions restored, but he seemed to think the re-conquest must come in some far-off year.

He showed me the portraits of his fellow captives who had escaped—Father Ohrwalder, who was then at Suakin, and Father Bonomi, who was acting as a chaplain to the Italian troops at Asmara. I asked him for his own portrait, and as he had not got one, I made an attempt to photograph him; but the light was not good in the verandah, so it is not a very satisfactory performance as a picture, though it is a very fair portrait. Then we parted, and he wished me heartily God-speed, and a safe return.

CHAPTER II.

UP THE RIVER TO ASSOUAN.

I LEFT Cairo by the night mail train on the last evening of March. At the railway station I met Mr. H. Garrett, the correspondent of the *New York Herald*, and this chance meeting made us comrades for the campaign. The other passengers were a few belated tourists who were going no further than Luxor, some officers attached to the Egyptian army, and Major "Roddy" Owen, on leave from India, and on his way to Assouan to offer his services to the Sirdar, after having won a steeplechase at the Ghezireh race meeting during his short stay in Cairo.

The railway was open for general traffic as far as Girgeh, but the newly completed section to Balliana was being worked by the military authorities, and from that point the transport work of the expedition on the river began. I had a horse and a native servant on the train, and at Girgeh, where we arrived next morning, I arranged to have them sent on to Balliana with a note to the commandant, requesting that he would pass them on to Assouan. The party from the train embarked on the *Queen Hatasoo*, one of Messrs. Cook's mail steamers, and it was near 5 p.m. when we reached the busy landing-place at Balliana. My servant was there

NILE VILLAGE—DATE PALMS AND PIGEON-HOUSE TOWERS.

waiting for me, with the good news that he had been promised a place for himself and the horse on a barge that was going up the river next day with a cargo of army horses.

The scene at the riverside at Balliana was decidedly animated. The village stands on a high clay bank with, close to the edge of the little bluff over the water, a group of houses dignified with the tower-like structures characteristic of this part of Upper Egypt. These towers, with their battlemented crests, are really peaceful dovecots built on a large scale and inhabited by flocks of pigeons. Just beyond the houses the landing-stage was moored, and then, along the river bank, a whole flotilla of steamers, launches, Nile boats, with long lateen yards, and great barges on which sheds of white wood had been erected to serve as floating stables for camels and horses. Above the bank one saw the tops of the white tents where a small party of the 2nd Battalion Connaught Rangers and some Egyptian infantry were encamped as a guard for the station.

Between the camp and the village all was noise, dust, and apparent confusion. A fatigue party of the Egyptians in their khaki uniform, assisted by a motley throng of Arab camel-drivers, were busy embarking camels on the barges. The camels, with a load of equipment hanging pannier-fashion across their backs, were driven down to a place on the bank just above the barge. There they were unloaded and stripped of all but a halter. The camel was then allowed a few minutes' rest with a crowd of others, which stood craning their long necks hither and thither, as if

interested in the fate of their comrades; for one by one the beasts were being taken down the steep slope of the bank and across the broad gang-boards to their floating stable. One man might lead a camel to the river's edge, but it took at least twenty to get him on to the barge. He resisted violently. Three or four men would hang on to his halter, fifteen or eighteen

CAMEL BARGES AT BALLIANA.

more would pull or shove from various points of vantage, while a driver used a stick vigorously. There would be a pause at the top of the slope. For a moment it would seem that the whole mass of shouting, struggling men, with the reluctant camel in the midst of them, must roll into the water, a living avalanche. But the camel, with bent legs wide sprawling, and with

some help from the men, always managed to keep erect, his head and neck projecting far in front, and suddenly went skating down the bank in a dense cloud of reddish dust. His very impetus rushed him across the gang-boards, and once on the barge he seemed to recognise that it was a comfortable stable, and quietly took his place among his fellow-camels, which stood tethered along both sides of the shed, tails outward, heads inward, twenty-five on a side, the central gangway of the loaded boat presenting a strange spectacle, with the long row of snaky necks and rough, hairy heads flanking on either side, and half overarching the narrow path.

On the landing-stage an Army Service Corps man, who was superintending the work, asked me if I had any news. "Here we know absolutely nothing," he said. I told him that just before we left Cairo there was a rumour that Osman Digna was moving towards Sinkat. All along the line of communications there was the same dearth of news. They were buying camels to send up the river; that was all they could tell us. We left Balliana at last, towing a barge and a steam-launch, and held on long after dark to make up for lost time. It was ten o'clock when we tied up for the night at Farshout. The river was very low. Great banks of mud were bare in the middle of the stream, and some of these the industrious fellahin were busily cultivating, contriving thus to snatch a crop before the waters should rise again and fill the wide channel from bank to bank. There was so little water now that we were three times aground during the day's run.

We started at daylight next day, and we were in

luck—nothing to tow, and the steamer never once aground all day, so that we made a good run. Early in the morning we passed the steamer *Prince Abbas* going up the river with a few khaki-uniformed officers and soldiers on board, and two camel barges, with their load of fifty camels to each, towing astern.

All day we steamed slowly up the now sluggish

NILE VILLAGE.

river, stopping from time to time to deliver the mails and take letters on board at a village landing-place. From under the awning we watched the long panorama of the river banks, the red-grey, terraced hills, the green belt of fields with scattered palms, now narrow where the desert hills closed in upon the river, now expanding into a plain ten or twelve miles across. Along the shore the poles of the *shadoofs* were swinging up

and down as the peasants, looking like living statues of dark bronze, laboriously raised the water for their fields by two stages from the low level of the Nile to the top of the bank. Here and there a village of yellowish-white, mud-walled houses, with their pigeon towers decorated with notched battlements, looked out from a cluster of tall date palms. The landscape has an air of quiet and peace. One feels that it has been all unchanged, not for centuries only, but for thousands of years. The towered village houses, the palm groves, the swinging *shadoofs*, the men and women, the cattle and sheep, are all just what one sees painted on the tomb and temple walls of dynasties that ruled before European history had even begun.

We tied up early in the evening at Luxor, where our tourist friends bade us good-bye. They were going to stay there to see the ruins of Thebes. We correspondents and officers had to be content with a hurried visit to Karnak. First we were entertained with coffee and cigarettes in the house of the courteous "Effendi" who represents Her Britannic Majesty as consul at Luxor. Then we rode off to Karnak on donkeys with a plentiful supply of magnesium tape to compensate for the absence of the moon. The Luxor donkeys are some of the best in Egypt, and they carried us at a wild gallop over some very rough ground in utter darkness. We saw the glorious forest of giant pillars in the great hall by the white glare of the magnesium light, and then visited a spot beyond it near the main wall of the temple, where a row of sphinxes, sheep-headed monsters in red stone, had just been uncovered. Till last month three hundred men

had been at work excavating under the orders of one of the officials of the Department of Antiquities, which with slender resources (chiefly provided by the fee paid by tourists for visiting the temples) is doing a large amount of valuable work in Egypt. The low price of

AT THE LANDING-PLACE, KENEH.

labour makes a little money go a long way, and temple after temple is being thoroughly explored and secured against further injury.

As we rode back to Luxor we heard the women in the village wailing in Arab fashion. I asked if there had been a death, and was told by our guide that they

were lamenting for the departure of some reservists called back to the colours for the Soudan campaign. At the hotel we heard a rumour that all further purchases of camels were to be stopped, and all officers who could be spared from the line of communications were to go up to the front. This was encouraging. It looked as if something was going to happen before long.

We were on the move again before dawn on Good

NILE STEAMER, "PRINCE ABBAS," TOWING CAMEL BARGES.

Friday morning. Early in the day we passed a steamer hurrying down the river with two officers on board. One of them I recognised as Captain Judge of the Egyptian army, who had been a passenger with me on the *Victoria*. As we passed he shouted to us that he was going back to get across to Suakin. What more he said was lost in the whistle with which the two steamers saluted each other. This meeting led to an anxious talk over the map on the deck of the *Hatasoo*. All the officers except Major Owen had their orders to

go up the river, but he and we two correspondents were free to go where most was to be seen. The question was whether it would not be better to try to get back to Suakin, and was the desert route by Keneh and Kosseir quicker than the long journey by Cairo. The decision was to adjourn the debate until we heard at Assouan what prospect there was of a movement on the Nile beyond Akasha.

At Esneh, which is the chief town and Government centre of the most southern province of Egypt, Captain T. E. Hickman, who had been in command there, came on board the *Hatasoo*, bound for the front. He had no news from up the river. On the contrary, like all the men on the line of communication, he rather expected news from us who were fresh from Cairo. One of the officers who had come up with us had orders to land at Esneh and purchase as many camels as possible, but a telegram was waiting for him telling him to come on at once to Assouan. We were told that the original orders to the base commandant were to obtain four thousand good camels, but so far not more than fifteen hundred had been secured. This would not be enough for any prolonged operations in the Nile valley, and it looked as if the original plan of the campaign was being very considerably cut down.

We tied up for the night at Seloua. After dark the *Cleopatra*, crowded with soldiers and towing two barges, made fast to the bank astern of us. As we had nothing to tow, we left her far behind when we started again on the Saturday, which was to be the last day of our voyage. On this upper reach of the river the green strip of cultivation along the banks

was a narrow one. The hot sandy hills were in many places close to the stream. But there were plenty of palms, and the *sakkiyeh*, a wooden wheel, with a belt of earthen jars acting like the buckets of a dredger, replaced the *shadoof* for raising water from the river. Flocks of white pelicans were flying in the air or floating on the stream. One felt quite

RUINS OF KOM OMBOS.

sorry to think that in a few hours the cool awning-covered deck of the steamer would have to be left for a hotel.

We had just a glimpse of the great portico of the Crocodile Temple at Kom Ombos, as we steamed below the high bank from which it overlooks the river. There are no crocodiles now within hundreds

of miles of the place, indeed the only one I saw in the Nile during all my stay was some weeks later at Akasha. The Department of Antiquities has lately cleared out the temple, and built a wall round it to prevent it from being again half buried in sand.

We reached Assouan early in the afternoon. The river was so low, that it was not possible for the steamer to go up to the ordinary landing-place. She tied up to the bank at "North End," a place nearly two miles below the town. The military authorities had laid a short railway down for the purpose of getting up stores. Garrett and I transferred our belongings from the *Hatasoo* to a small Nile boat, the long lateen sail was set, and we ran up-stream to the little bay above the ruined Roman bath just in front of the hotel, where we found comfortable temporary quarters. The last of the tourists left that afternoon by the steamer that had brought us up, and at the hotel we met only the officers stationed in the town, or waiting for a chance of going higher up the river.

CHAPTER III.

A FRIENDLY SHEIKH AND HIS TRIBE.

FROM Assouan southwards, everything—steamers, telegraphs, river and land traffic—was under the control of the military authorities. Major D. F. Lewis was in command of the place, and his head-quarters were the centre of restless activity. Stores were arriving by boat and steamer, and were being passed up to Shellal at the head of the First Cataract, by the short piece of railway that connects that place with Assouan. At Shellal they were embarked on barges and little stern-wheel steamers for Wadi Halfa. Railway sleepers for the new Akasha line were piled in hundreds along the Nile bank near the Assouan railway station. Camels were still being purchased here for the Government, and every morning there was a noisy camel market outside the hotel. I secured my camels with the help of the courteous officer who was buying for the army. Then I hired a camel syce, or groom, a Korosko Arab, to take care of them, and as it was not possible to get river transport for them, I sent him to march them up to Wadi Halfa with a convoy of Government camels, which were going up by the river-bank.

The troops in camp at Assouan were a mountain

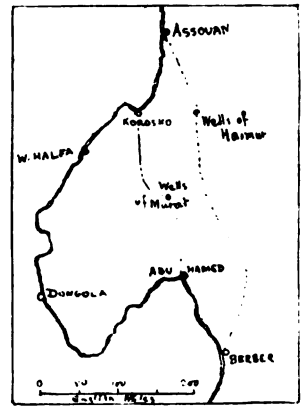
battery of Krupp guns (the 3rd Artillery); two squadrons of Egyptian cavalry; the Khedive's camel guard, forming a company of the Camel Corps, 75 strong; and some infantry, chiefly reservists and recruits. The fatigue work at the store depôts, the wharves and the railway station, was being partly

IN A NILE BOAT—ASSOUAN.

done by gangs of convicts. They marched into the town in the early morning with chains clanking at their ankles, but they seemed contented enough at their work, and one sometimes saw a couple of them tramping off to do some errand without any guard to take care of them.

On the morning after my arrival the Commandant,

Major Lewis, invited me to accompany him to see the departure of a force of Bedawin irregulars, who had undertaken to hold the Wells of Bir-el-Haimur, on the desert route from Assouan to Berber; not that the present expedition had any designs on Berber, but a small force at Bir-el-Haimur would help very effectually to guard the left of our coming theatre of operations. As water is scarce along that line no large force can use the desert caravan route from Berber to Assouan, and the occupation of the wells by the Friendlies would block that road against small raiding parties. It would also supply a starting-point for patrols that would guard the flank of the line of communication and the telegraph between Korosko and the Wells of Murat against the enterprise of Dervish raiders, who might otherwise come down the Berber route and strike at the line Korosko-Murat from the eastward.



The Bedawin were camped in the desert about a mile and a half south-east of the town. We rode out along the railway. Early as it was the sun was blazing with more than the heat of an English midsummer, and as we left the small cutting beyond the town, and began to traverse the waste of sand and red rocks that forms the edge of the desert, the hot wind came in our faces like the blast from a furnace.

We passed some Arab tombs—upright stones half-buried in sand, and little domed buildings of sun-dried

brick. Then suddenly, as we topped a low, sandy ridge, we saw the Friendlies all ready to march. The Arab is very cunning in the art of hiding hundreds of men and camels in some small depression of the ground. A couple of minutes before we rode in among them no one would have supposed that there was anything but sand and rocks in our immediate front.

The Arabs belonged to the Ababdeh tribe, whose territory is the edge of the desert and the oases east of the Nile from Assouan to the south of the bend of the river near Korosko. Their neighbours beyond this are the Bisharin of the Nubian desert. The sheikh who commanded the motley gathering before us was Bishir Bey, one of the most important of the chiefs who took our side in the campaign of 1884–5. It is difficult for a European to judge the age of an Arab, but I should say he was nearer sixty than fifty; a strong, wiry-looking man, with a short beard, and dark almost to blackness. He rode a very tall camel—the biggest in the tribe. His saddle seemed to be a mass of rugs, and on one side hung his Soudanese weapons —the round shield of hippopotamus hide, with a boss like a deep bowl, and the long sword, cross-hilted and with a leaf-shaped scabbard of red leather. On the other side of the saddle was a Remington rifle, provided by the Egyptian Government. As he had also pistols, and at least one long knife, he had plenty of "fighting gear" at his disposal. Beside him a camel-rider displayed on a spear a red flag with the Egyptian crescent and three stars, and an Arabic text in white letters.

Behind the sheikh and his standard came a mass of camels and men. The arms and many-coloured robes and turbans of the riders; the nodding heads and snake-like necks of their mounts; the footmen marching, rifle on shoulder, beside the beasts of burden, or those that carried the veiled women of the tribe; in

RUINS OF ROMAN BATH, ASSOUAN.

front the chief on his tall camel and the fluttering red flag; and for a background the waste of sand and red rock under a cloudless sky—this was the picture. As they moved the grouping was always changing a little, for there was no attempt at military order; but every change seemed, from the picturesque point of view,

more effective than the last. And it was not by any means a silent picture, for the camels were muttering and grunting and complaining in hoarse, deep voices, as is their custom, and the men greeted the appearance of the Commandant with what was meant for a cheer, but to Western ears sounded like a short, loud wail.

We rode in amongst them, for the Commandant wished to say a few parting words to the Sheikh Bishir. It was curious to see the British officer looking up to the Arab on his lofty saddle as he spoke to him, and stretching up to grasp his hand. During the conversation I had a nearer look at our Bedawin allies. There seemed to be several types of face among them. Of some the features were sharp and fine ; others had the thickened lips and prominent jaws that suggested a thoroughly African strain. Most of them wore turbans, but several of the footmen had only their hair for a head covering. It was stiffened with some kind of paste, and kept short on the forehead and at the sides, but it fell on the neck in a mass of long, close ringlets that must be a very effectual protection against the sun. All had some native weapon—spear, long sword, or short, broad knife—but they seemed specially proud of their Remingtons, which were all in splendid order, the lock-plates and the bright barrels polished till they shone. Two hundred fighting men were actually with the chief, and he expected to be joined by a hundred more on the march—a force amply sufficient to account for any Dervish scouting parties or raiders that might appear within reach of Bir-el-Haimur.

After watching from a rock the tribe march by, we

rode to the head of them, and for about half a mile we accompanied Sheikh Bishir. He and his tribesmen had a desert march of a hundred miles before them, but they seemed to be all in holiday humour, and especially pleased to have the Commandant of Assouan with them. Scanty as was the knowledge that these wild fellows possessed of the great world that lies away beyond their deserts and the borderland of Egypt, the little man in the red tarboosh and the white uniform, with the crown and stars on his shoulder-straps, represented to them a vast, ill-defined power—not the Khedive's, but England's—and they had taken his word that good service would be generously rewarded, and they had no doubt that they had thrown in their lot on the winning side. Granted that their motives had self-interest at the base of them, it was still something to know that the lapse of years had made it clearer and clearer to these Bedawin that it was better to be on the side of the handful of white soldiers from England than of the fanatics who had built up the Mahdist Empire; and this though England is for the Arab a far-off land, vaguely known by mere report, and the Mahdist realm was close at hand, and had till lately on its side the prestige of what must have seemed to him all but miraculous victories.

At last it was time to part. First the Commandant, and then I, shook hands with Bishir. He leaned down from his saddle and gave us a grip like that of a steel vice. "Good-bye!" he said, as he grasped my hand, perhaps his only word of English. The camel-men opened out a wide lane for us to ride back through their ranks. There was again a kind of wailing cheer;

many salutes as we passed ; many farewells, only intelligible to me by the look and gesture that accompanied them ; and then we were trotting back along the railway line, and far off one saw disappearing among the rocks the Ababdeh warriors, reduced by distance and the large background of the desert to what seemed a mere handful of camels and men.

CHAPTER IV.

FROM ASSOUAN TO WADI HALFA.

I HAD to spend six days at Assouan, waiting till Major Lewis could give me a passage up to Wadi Halfa on one of the stern-wheelers plying between Shellal and the frontier garrison. During our Sunday morning ride he told me that he thought it could be managed on Wednesday the 8th, but it was not till Friday, April 10th, that I actually got away.

My enforced stay at Assouan was, however, by no means either an unpleasant or a wasted time. I was learning to know something of the people, and a little —a very little—of their language, and I managed to see something of Ancient Egypt as represented in the neighbourhood of the First Cataract. One day I paid a visit to "Grenfell's tombs," crossing the Nile in a sudden hurricane of a sandstorm, in which our boat had more than one narrow escape. Another day I rode my horse by the desert track to Shellal, handed him over to the local transport officer to be sent up on a barge to Halfa, and then spent the afternoon with Captain Lyons, R.E., at Philæ.

He was just completing a thorough survey of the world-famous island and its temples—"the gem of the Nile." His temporary quarters were on board of a

dismantled steamer, the saloon of which he had fitted up as an office. All who came to Philæ, officers and correspondents, were made welcome on board of this craft, which a jocular Major at Assouan used to call "The Philæ Arms." After lunch under the awning I was rowed across to the island, and the soldier archæologist showed me something of the work he

LOADING STEAMERS AT SHELLAL—TEMPLE OF PHILÆ IN THE BACKGROUND.

had done. The foundations and walls of a small temple hitherto known only by name had been laid bare; the ancient Coptic church at the north end of the island, largely built out of the materials of that temple, had been cleared out; lanes had been cut through the mass of *débris* forming the ruins of the Coptic village, with the result that a fine *stele* and

several other interesting objects had been discovered; the great temple of Isis itself had been thoroughly cleared, and a number of fallen columns, sculptures, and stones restored to their original positions, thus adding a great part of a colonnaded court to the beautiful building. Finally, a complete series of accurate plans and record photographs of the whole had been prepared.

One important result of Captain Lyons' researches had been to show that the foundations of the temples were of such a kind that the construction of the proposed Nile reservoir at Philæ would probably involve their downfall. It was now certain, he told me, that the scheme would be abandoned, so far as the neighbourhood of the First Cataract was concerned; and the reservoir, if made at all, would be placed much higher up, probably in the territory soon to be restored to Egypt by the Dongola Expedition.

His work at Philæ, he said, would be completed within the week, with the exception of some careful observations to fix the latitude and longitude. Then he had to prepare for a greater task—the geological survey of Egypt. As enthusiastic a geologist as an antiquarian, Captain Lyons is singularly well fitted to be the director of this great enterprise. He is a man of superabundant energy, and seems to revel in work. "This *is* a glorious climate," he said, "a man can't get sick here, even if he tries." Unhappily all in Egypt have not his thorough fitness for work, and a good many get ill after trying their best to keep well. At parting he told me he had asked in vain to be employed at the front during the coming advance southward,

"just for a bit of a change." He was told he had more important work to do elsewhere.

There were several officers at Assouan quite as anxious as I was to secure a passage to Wadi Halfa, but not at all as certain about being able to accomplish the journey. One pushed on as far as Korosko, only to be summarily sent back for further waiting at

SHOVING OFF A STEAMER—SHELLAL.

Assouan. Another, still more unlucky, was officially informed that he must go back to Cairo. Mr. Garrett and I were therefore rather envied by some of our friends at the hotel when they were told that passages were assigned to us on the stern-wheeler *Amara*, to leave Shellal on Friday morning.

At half-past eight we left Assouan by the train for

Shellal, and we were at the place of embarkation soon after nine o'clock, but it was near noon before we got away. The Nile bank at Shellal, where in the season the tourist takes boat for Philæ and the Cataract, presented a busy scene during those April days. The sloping shore and the ground above were covered with picketed horses, troops waiting to embark, heaps of stores just unloaded by fatigue parties from the railway trucks, groaning camels, shouting men, whistling engines. Along the river margin gunboats, stern-wheelers, clumsy two-decked barges, and graceful Nile boats with their slender lateen yards, were being loaded by gangs of transport men. On the morning I embarked, no fewer than six steamers were getting ready to start. One got off before the *Ímara*; another followed us almost immediately. Each steamer had a barge fastened on either side, and one or more Nile boats towing astern.

In their half-dismantled out-of-season condition, even the best of the little stern-wheel steamers that run between the First and Second Cataracts were a very comfortless method of transit, especially in hot weather. In the tiny upper deck cabins only the mattresses had been left. In the narrow saloon over the stern-wheel the cupboard was bare. One had to bring on board one's own provisions and find one's own servants to cook them, and it was lucky if a shady corner could be found on the baggage-encumbered deck where one could have lunch or dinner with a packing-case for a table. The passengers were Achmet Effendi Hafiz, commanding the 3rd Battery, his officers, Mr. Garrett of the *New York Herald*, Mr. Mavrocordato, a Greek,

gifted with many languages, going up to act as an interpreter, and myself. A barge with an awning-covered upper deck supported on iron uprights, was lashed on each side of the steamer. On the upper decks of the barges were the gunners and non-commissioned officers of the 3rd Battery ; on the lower the crowd of camels, that were to convey it across the desert. In the shallow holds of the steamer and the barges were the guns and sundry cases of live shell, gunpowder, and small-arm ammunition, which did not prevent cigarette smoking all over the place and cooking at open fires lighted on a heap of sand in a box at both ends of the lower decks. Towing astern on the starboard quarter was a Nile boat laden with 170 sleepers for the railway.

A merry lot were the Egyptian artillerymen—tall strong men, who looked as if they could give a good account of any enemy who might try to rush their guns. Twice a day there was an inspection, when, after carefully cleaning up arms and accoutrements, they stood for a few minutes drawn up under the awning in full uniform. At all other times most or them were in an easier fitting native dress. When they were not cooking, sleeping, or quietly smoking, they were playing games, with much clapping of hands and singing, one man beating time in the middle of a circle of seated comrades, till—why or wherefore I could never discover—he dropped down amongst them amid a general burst of laughter, and another took his place. Then there was laughing, talking, and story-telling, with many a merry jest. They were like a pack of schoolboys out for a holiday excursion.

For many a mile south of the First Cataract the

scenery of the Nile banks is monotonously desolate. The green strip of cultivation is of the narrowest—not more than a hundred yards wide, sometimes on one bank only, and often entirely interrupted as the desert hills came down close to the water—bare rock, with streams of yellow sand in their hollows. One realises that fertile Egypt has been left behind, and that one has entered upon the "wretched country of Kush," as

CAMELS ON A BARGE.

the old inscriptions call this Nubian frontier land. The really beautiful scenery of the Upper Nile does not begin till one reaches the mountainous region beyond the Second Cataract and south of Halfa.

We got through the narrows of the pass of Kalabsheh (where the river runs between bold precipices) before sunset, and we held on for some hours after dark. At last our further progress was arrested by an accident. A strong north wind had sprung up, ruffling the surface of the Nile into small choppy waves, the wash

from the steamer ahead helping to work up this miniature storm in the shallows. The Nile boat towing astern began to pitch and roll. Her long yard had been fastened nearly horizontally across her mast, and suddenly the end of it came like a battering-ram through our upper deck rail, then as she dropped astern with a jerk her towing ropes broke and she went on her beam ends, with all her spars and rigging in the Nile, into which some scores of the railway sleepers went floating, while just before the upset her crew of two men and a boy scrambled on board of the barge on our starboard side.

To leave the boat adrift in the track of the steamers was out of the question. One of the gunners promptly stripped, dived into the dark water, a rope in his hand, swam to the boat, and made it fast to her. She had drifted down-stream, and the *Amara* went astern, lanterns being held over side to discover where the wreck was. Soon we found the overturned boat aground near a half-bare sandbank. Immediately all the gunners went into the water, delighted with the impromptu bath. Some with loud shouts unloaded the boat, righted her, and got her into deeper water. Meanwhile to the pile of sleepers on the sandbank others were added that were rescued from the river by enterprising swimmers. The bulk of the working party were wading about for a good hour, some of them up to their necks in the water, the light being supplied by numerous lanterns and torches. When at last the boat was afloat, minus her yard, which was stowed on one of the barges, 120 of the sleepers were reloaded into her. The other fifty had gone down-

stream, and doubtless came as a welcome prize to the riverside villagers, who would find in them splendid material for repairing or strengthening their water-wheels.

We spent the night near the scene of the shipwreck, but we were under way before dawn on Saturday. Early that day we passed the temple of Dekka, with its grand pylon towers, very like those of Edfu. After dark we reached Korosko, and while the steamer tied up to take on board fuel for the engines, Garrett and I landed to pay a visit to the Commandant Yussef Bey Khulusi, the colonel of the 8th Egyptian infantry, then in garrison there.

Khulusi is a Turkish officer with a good fighting record. We found him waiting at the top of the steep ascent from the landing pontoon, with a soldier carrying a lantern, and one of his subalterns, who spoke French, ready to act as interpreter—for the colonel himself only knows Arabic and Turkish. As we walked to his house, he told us that the wire to Murat Wells had been cut that afternoon, and, looking southwards into the dim darkness of the desert, one realised that we were at last nearing the borderland of Egyptian and Mahdist rule. At every turn we came upon vigilant sentinels. At last we reached Khulusi's house, and, passing through a deep porch or verandah, found ourselves in its principal room.

The floor was of earth, the walls roughly plastered, the ceiling of unpainted timber, and the windows had no glass, only rough wooden shutters, now half open to admit the cool night breeze. There was little furniture, and that of the plainest; but there was a certain

dignity in the very simplicity of the frontier commandant's house. He sat with us at the table, European fashion; coffee and cigarettes were brought in, and then water icy-cold from the *zeir*,[1] and red with a syrup of pomegranates. The doctor of the place joined us, and told us the health both of the garrison

RUINS OF THE FORTRESS—KASR IBRIM.

and of the troops passing up the river was excellent. The only other local news was of some of our fellow correspondents. We had heard at Assouan how the day before our arrival there, four of them, including a well-known traveller and a still better known novelist,

[1] The *zeir* is the large porous earthenware jar used for storing and cooling drinking-water in Egyptian houses.

impatient of the delays of the river, had formed a caravan, and marched off with their camels, intending to reach Wadi Halfa by the river bank. The start was made on April 3rd, and Khulusi Bey told us how the day before (the 10th) the correspondents had arrived, tired out with a difficult march, and gladly accepted a passage on the steamer, leaving their camels

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN TOMBS IN THE FACE OF THE CLIFF—KASR IBRIM.

to complete the journey by land. Loud whistling called us back to the boat, and we bade the hospitable Bey and his officers "*Au revoir* at the front."

When I left my cabin at seven a.m. on Sunday morning I found the *Amara* had run aground close

under a steep cliff on the east bank. In the face of the cliff were the square doorways of several ancient Egyptian tombs, and the rocks above were crowned by the towers of a ruined fortress—Kasr Ibrim—once a Roman frontier post, and last garrisoned by the Mamelukes in the early part of the century. Going to the upper deck, formed by the cabin roofs, to take a photograph of the ruins, I found an Ababdeh Arab had been spending the night there. His rugs and prayer-carpet, his camel saddle-bags, and a long Soudanese sword in its red scabbard lay beside him on the deck. He wore a small turban and loose robes of black and white. He had come on board at Korosko, having ridden in from Murat Wells, and he was now on his way to Wadi Halfa to report to Major Wingate the results of some scouting beyond Murat towards the Mahdist borders. He was, in fact, one of the *mukhuburut*,[1] the daring agents of the Egyptian Intelligence Department.

With the help of long poles and the reversed action of the stern-wheel, the *Amara* was at last got afloat. To be aground like this is a very frequent incident of river travel at the season of low Nile, and the boats seldom receive any damage thereby. South of Ibrim the hills on both banks recede from the river. At half-past eight we were off Toski, the scene of Wad-en-Nejumi's defeat by General Grenfell, on 3rd August, 1889. In the afternoon we passed Abu Simbel. Our engineer was so obliging as to slow down and go as close in as the channel would allow, so as to enable us to have a good look at the marvellous façade of the

[1] That is, those who bring *khubur*, *i.e.*, information.

rock-temple, with its four giant statues of Rameses the Great, which have sat for nigh four thousand years staring across the rushing waters, and the desert waste beyond. One of the earliest pictures I remember as a boy was a steel engraving of the Abu Simbel façade, and as I looked at it now in the full light of the tropical afternoon, there was a curious feeling of seeing an old friend again.

One of the artillery officers told us that in 1889, during the advance to Toski, a large Dervish force camped in front of the temple, and the commanders of the river gunboats were ordered not to fire on them while they remained there, for fear of possible damage to the four *colossi* of the façade. Of course these orders were "strictly confidential" at the time.

We had hoped to be at Halfa on the Sunday evening, but the navigation was difficult and our progress slow, and we had at last to tie up for the night. Early on Monday we passed Argin village, the scene in 1889 of one of the hottest fights in Soudanese warfare. A few minutes after noon we reached Halfa. I reported my arrival to Major Maxwell, of the Black Watch, the Commandant of the place, who promised to find me quarters, and meanwhile took me to Major Wingate's house, where I met the chief of the Intelligence Department and his right-hand man, Slatin Pasha.

Major Wingate did me the first of many kindnesses by asking me to stay for lunch, and having my baggage brought up to his house till I could transfer it to a place of my own. After lunch he gave me a general outline of the position of affairs on the frontier, and he

also provided me with the following document, dated back to the day of my arrival at Assouan :—

> MR. A. HILLIARD ATTERIDGE,—I am directed by the Sirdar to inform you that your name has been duly registered as special correspondent for *The Daily Chronicle*, London, and that you are attached to the Dongola Expeditionary Force from 4th April.
>
> (*Signed*) F. R. WINGATE,
> Miralai,
> *Director, Military Intelligence.*
>
> Wadi Halfa,
> 13/4/96.

Major Wingate, an officer of the Royal Artillery, has been for ten years employed with the Egyptian Army. He combined the offices of Press Censor and Director of the Intelligence Department, and never was censor more popular with pressmen than he was with the correspondents. He was the friend and helper of them all.

In the afternoon the Commandant found me quarters in a one-roomed house with a little verandah looking out upon the Nile. I was to share it with Garrett. We had done the journey from Cairo together, and we were now for awhile to keep house together at Halfa. Our villa on the Nile seemed a comfortless place when we took possession of it—bare mud walls, a floor deep in sand, broken windows, and for furniture a small brick-built divan, and a large piece of wood. But with our camp equipment, a little hanging up of maps, and driving of nails to hold our other belongings, and the purchase of a table to write at, we made

ourselves fairly comfortable. It was our headquarters till the advance in June, though we made more than one excursion southwards together to vary the monotony of the long "waiting for it to begin."

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST STAGE OF THE CAMPAIGN.

BEFORE describing the military situation as I found it on my arrival at Halfa in the middle of April, it will be well to briefly sum up what had occurred before that date. The Dongola expedition was just a month in progress. As to its diplomatic history I have very little to say. It was undertaken under the most adverse conditions, suddenly resolved upon by the politicians, and as it were improvised at the briefest notice by the soldiers, and this at a time of the year recognised as the most unfit for operations in such a climate and country. Further, it had to be carried through to a successful issue with only the slenderest resources in the way of the sinews of war, for the expedition was financially starved from the outset. All the more credit to the commander who, though thus handicapped from the start, made such a thoroughly good piece of work of the undertaking.

The first alleged object of the expedition was to make a diversion in favour of the Italians. General Baratieri had had his army cut to pieces by the Shoans at the battle of Adowa on Sunday, March 1st, a blow to European prestige in North-east Africa that might

well bring the Dervishes out on the war-path. They were actually threatening the Italian advanced post at Kassala, when it was announced that a movement would be made from the Egyptian frontier on the Nile, with a view to making the Khalifa devote some of his attention to the Dongola province. The defence of the latter might diminish the force available for the attack on Kassala.

The news was first published in England in the form of a telegram dated from Cairo, which appeared in the *Times* of March 13th. It announced the probability of a movement. The local gossip was that no one was more surprised at the information than the gentleman who represents the *Times* in Cairo. The Italians too seem to have been unprepared for it. Certainly they were making arrangements for the evacuation of Kassala, and the ministry some days later explained to the Italian Parliament that they held on to that advanced and exposed position in order to co-operate with the British by keeping the Dervishes occupied in that direction. In other words, they changed their plans in order to make a diversion in favour of the Dongola expedition!

The defence of the frontier was alleged as a secondary motive for the advance, but the news was all the more a surprise both to England and to Egypt because Lord Cromer in his annual report, published in the first days of March, had spoken of the general security of the Nile frontier, and of the insignificance of the Dervish attempts to disturb it. Even in the highest circles in Cairo nothing was known of an impending movement till the news came from London. The various military

departments were engaged in their ordinary routine duties. The Nile was not far from its lowest. The hot weather was close at hand. It was the worst time of the year for beginning a Soudan campaign.

It was near midnight on Thursday, March 12th, that Sir Herbert Kitchener, the Sirdar, or Commander-in-chief of the Egyptian army, received by telegraph from London definite orders for the Nile expedition, or at least for the movement in which it originated ; for at the outset the Government had only ordered the occupation of Akasha, and the prolongation of the Soudan railway to that point. Subsequent operations were to depend on "the amount of resistance met with." But from the first Dongola was the ultimate object of the advance, and the little army assembled on the frontier was from the outset known as "the Dongola Expeditionary Force."

On the morning of the 13th the Khedive's ministers met in council to formally vote the decree for an enterprise in the acceptance or rejection of which they had no real voice. All day the Egyptian War Office was busy preparing to meet the unexpected emergency. On the 14th the reserves were called out ; and on the 15th the first troops were despatched to the front.

When the Dongola province was evacuated in 1885 the frontier had been fixed at Wadi Halfa. The level sandy plain round its mud walls made it strong against a Dervish attack. The hundred miles of rocky desert to the south of it was supposed to be an obstacle to the advance of any considerable force from the Mahdist territory. Stern-wheel steamers on the river kept up communication all the year round with Philæ and

Assouan, for it is only a little above Halfa that the long series of cataracts begin, which for a great part of the year bar the further navigation of the Nile. Below Halfa there is only the one cataract at Assouan.

There was a railway through the desert from Halfa to Akasha, a relic of Lord Wolseley's Nile Expedition. For awhile advanced posts were maintained south of the rail-head at Akasha and along the line. But these were gradually withdrawn until the long sandy hollow of Khor Moussa, five miles south of Halfa, became the actual border-line. North of the khor, a fort built of sun-dried mud, flew the Egyptian flag; but on the south side of it, at times, the Mahdist scouts showed themselves nearly every day. Once they surprised and almost captured the fort. In 1889 Wad-en-Nejumi's army tried to avoid Wadi Halfa by marching down the west bank. It was destroyed at Toski, and after the victory Sarras, thirty-five miles south of Halfa, was occupied as an advanced post in the desert of the Batn-el-Hagar, and the railway as far as Sarras was put in working order. South of Sarras, along nearly the whole fifty miles to Akasha, the Dervishes had gradually destroyed the line, pulling up the metals, and leaving them on or near the road-bed, using the sleepers as firewood, and carrying off most of the smaller and more portable ironwork, such as fish-plates, bolts, nuts, and spikes.

Sarras Fort, garrisoned by Soudanese infantry and Egyptian gunners, was thus the extreme southern point held on the Nile in March last, when Colonel Hunter, the Governor of the Frontier District, who had his headquarters at Wadi Halfa, received telegraphic orders

from Cairo to re-occupy Akasha without delay, as it had been decided to relay the railway line, and make the place the advanced base of operations for the march upon Dongola.[1]

On Sunday, the 15th, Hunter issued orders that a column composed of the 13th Soudanese under Major Collinson,[2] Captain Broadwood's[3] squadron of Egyptian cavalry, Captain King's[4] company of the Camel Corps, and the 2nd Mountain Battery should march to occupy Akasha.

The start was made by the mounted troops, who marched from Wadi Halfa on the afternoon of Monday, the 16th, and camped for the night on the river bank near the fort of Gemai. On Tuesday, the 17th, Collinson's Soudanese infantry were entrained at Wadi Halfa, and conveyed by railway to Sarras, whence they marched to Semneh. There they found Broadwood, King, and the guns waiting for them, and thus the column was complete. The next three days were occupied with a difficult march through wild country, by what was afterwards improved into a practicable convoy route; but it then led over a series of boulder-strewn passes, where men and beasts had often to move for hours slowly in single file. The cavalry and camel-men scouted in advance and explored the rocky khors on the desert flank of the track.

[1] For an account of the organisation, numbers, &c., of the Egyptian army, see Appendix, No. I., p. 339.

[2] Major J. Collinson, Northamptonshire Regiment, and Egyptian Army.

[3] Captain R. G. Broadwood, 12th Lancers, and Egyptian Army.

[4] Captain A. J. King, Royal Lancaster Regiment, and Egyptian Army.

MAJOR-GENERAL ARCHIBALD HUNTER, D.S.O.

Except where the bank had to be left in order to secure a somewhat easier road, the Nile covered the right of the advance, and as the halting places were by the river side there was abundance of good water.

Wadi Atira was reached on the 18th; Tanjor on the 19th; Akasha was occupied on Friday the 20th. It had been expected that there would be some resistance, but there was no sign of the presence of the Dervishes, though there were evidences, some of them ghastly enough, of the destruction they had wrought during their occupation of the Akasha valley. The old British fort and a number of houses erected in 1884 were in ruins; the railway iron lay scattered along the track; and a little beyond the site of the old station, near the river bank, a rail had been fixed nearly upright to serve as a gallows. A piece of cord dangled from one of the holes for the fish-plate bolts at the top, and at its base lay the skull and bones of some poor wretch, whose body had doubtless hung there till it fell to pieces.

On the island below the cataract six of the *mukhuburut*, or friendly Arab scouts, were found encamped in straw-built huts or *tukkuls*. They had taken refuge there from the Dervishes, and were heartily glad of the arrival of their friends.

The Camel Corps and cavalry returned to Sarras on the 22nd to act as the advanced guard of a second column with a heavy convoy of stores. This column marched on the 24th. It was under the command of Major MacDonald,[1] who was going up as commandant

[1] Major H. A. MacDonald, D.S.O., Royal Fusiliers, and Egyptian Army.

of Akasha. The troops were Broadwood's cavalry, King's Camel Corps, the 11th Soudanese under Major Jackson,[1] and the 12th under Major Townshend,[2] the defender of Chitral. The convoy consisted of six hundred camels. In some of the wild passes, where even the infantry had to march in single file, the column with its convoy was more than two miles

UNLOADING STORES—WADI HALFA.

long. It was anxious work moving such a force over such ground, and the Dervishes would have caused endless trouble and delay if they had even seriously threatened an attack. But the column reached Akasha

[1] Captain (local Major) H. W. Jackson, Gordon Highlanders, and Egyptian Army.

[2] Major C. V. F. Townshend, C.B., Indian Staff Corps, and Egyptian Army.

on the 28th, after four days of hot and dusty marching, without having seen an enemy; and MacDonald, with his cavalry and camel scouts to watch the country in his front and three Soudanese battalions and a mountain battery for a garrison, could feel tolerably safe at this advanced post on the Nile bank, deep in the stony wilderness of the Batn-el-Hagar.

The plan of the first stage of the campaign was briefly this :—

1. A fortified camp was to be formed at Akasha, where supplies were to be accumulated for the subsequent advance southwards.

2. The railway was to be reconstructed from Sarras to Akasha, to form the eventual line of communications between Wadi Halfa and the advanced base of the expedition.

3. Meanwhile camel convoys were to convey stores from Sarras by route in the main following the river, the halting places being fortified posts at the end of each day's march.

4. Nearly the whole effective force of the Egyptian army was to be concentrated at the front as soon as supplies were available in sufficient quantity, and with this end in view a British regiment was to be moved up to set free the garrison of Wadi Halfa, and two battalions of reservists were to be formed. One of them (the 15th) would hold Assouan and Korosko, acting as line of communication troops; the other (the 16th) would be sent to Suakin, in order that the 9th and 10th Soudanese in garrison there might be transferred to the Upper Nile.

5. Friendly Bedawin tribesmen were to be organised as scouts to act on the desert flank of the expedition and on the west bank of the river, and the advanced post of Murat Wells, on the Korosko-Abu-Hamed route was to be used as a starting-point for reconnaissances into the enemy's country.

BALLIANA—THE FIRST RIVER BASE OF THE EXPEDITION.

6. Cairo, 776 miles north of Wadi Halfa, was the first base of the expedition. The railway gave a good line of communication to Girgeh and Balliana, this last place being the river base. For transport from Balliana to Assouan Messrs. Cook's fleet of steamers was available (the tourist season was just closing), and a number of barges were available to be towed by the steamers and by small tug-boats. A number of native sailing

craft were also employed. Everything had to be transhipped at Assouan, in order to pass the First Cataract, by means of the Shellal railway. At Shellal a second flotilla of gunboats, steamers, barges, and Nile-boats was collected to convey men and stores to Wadi Halfa.

7. About four thousand camels were to be purchased at various points, carried on barges to Assouan, and thence marched up to the front.

8. The troops from Suakin were to be conveyed by transports to Kosseir, on the Red Sea coast, marched across the desert to Keneh, and there embarked on the Nile.

On March 22nd the Sirdar left Cairo for Assouan by the mail train. After a short stay at Assouan he embarked at Shellal on the 27th, reaching the frontier garrison on the 29th. Colonel Rundle,[1] his chief of the staff, remained in Cairo for a week after his departure and then followed him up the river, leaving Colonel Lloyd[2] in charge of the base.

The 1st Battalion North Staffordshire regiment, actually stationed at Cairo, was the British battalion selected for garrison duty on the frontier. It was sent up by the river to Assouan, where it arrived on the 28th. Thence it was marched across to Shellal by the desert route and embarked for Halfa. The machine-gun sections of the Staffords and the Connaught Rangers were

[1] Colonel H. M. L. Rundle, C.M.G., D.S.O., R.A., and Egyptian Army.

[2] Major (temp. Lieut.-Colonel) G. E. Lloyd, D.S.O., South Staffordshire Regiment, and Egyptian Army.

united so as to form a Maxim battery of four guns, which was sent up the river. A railway construction battalion of seven hundred men armed with Remington rifles was assembled at Assouan under the command of Lieut. A. G. Stevenson, R.E., and sleepers for the line were forwarded by boatloads. A transport corps of camel drivers was formed, and friendly Arabs were enrolled as auxiliaries and supplied with arms and ammunition. The whole of the arrangements worked out in a way that did infinite credit to the staff and organisation of the Egyptian army. The reserves came in freely, in marked contrast to the old days, when men were dragged in chains to the recruiting depôts.

By April 1st, only eighteen days after the sudden message ordering the expedition, the situation was this :—All the battalions had been brought up to full war strength, and two new battalions had been formed and despatched to the Red Sea coast and the Upper Nile. Akasha had been occupied and was held by a Soudanese brigade of three battalions. Several transport companies of camel men and camels had been enrolled, and supplies were being pushed on from Wadi Halfa to Sarras by rail, and thence by camel convoys to Akasha. The river line of communications, from Cairo by Balliana and Assouan to Wadi Halfa—a line nearly eight hundred miles long—had been fully organised and provided with transport. A thousand British troops with a British Maxim battery were on their way to the frontier, and a number of special service officers had arrived or were coming from England and India.

LIEUT.-COLONEL WINGATE, C.B., D.S.O.

At Wadi Halfa there were four Egyptian battalions; at Assouan the railway battalion, a reserve battalion, a battery of artillery and part of the Camel Corps. The 9th Soudanese, under Major Hacket Pain,[1] had reached Kosseir, and made a record march across the desert to Keneh, doing thirty miles in one day. During this march the men had the experience, rare in Egypt, of being drenched by the rain of two thunderstorms. They were on the river, well up towards Assouan, on April 1st. Their comrades of the 10th Soudanese were to have followed them immediately, but at the last moment news arrived that led to some alterations in the orders for the opening of the campaign.

[1] Major G. W. H. Pain, Worcestershire Regiment, and Egyptian Army.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGHTING ROUND SUAKIN.

WHILE these first movements were in progress there were three directions in which the Dervishes might have attempted to strike a blow against the Egyptians.

1. They had a force in the Dongola province with an advanced post at Suarda, from which they could either have tried to "rush" Akasha, or made raids upon the convoys in the difficult country between that place and Sarras.

2. The isolated post at Murat Wells, in the Korosko desert, was within striking distance of Abu Hamed.

3. Suakin, on the Red Sea coast, with its advanced posts at Handub, Tambuk, and Tokar, might be menaced from Berber and the Atbara country.

Osman Digna was with the army which was threatening Kassala. To his mind an expedition on the Nile meant also, as in the past, a probable movement from Suakin, and the last days of March brought news to Cairo that he was hurrying towards Sinkat with a considerable force. Orders were at once telegraphed that the 10th Soudanese were to remain in the Suakin district, and Colonel Lloyd, who had recently been Governor there, was sent to resume command on the

Red Sea coast, being replaced as base commandant at Cairo by Colonel Parsons.[1]

In the Korosko desert small parties of Dervish scouts succeeded in cutting the telegraph wire north of Murat Wells two or three times before the Bedawin guard of the line was fully organised. It was always repaired within twenty-four hours. On the Nile, had the Dervishes displayed a little more energy in the first weeks of the campaign, they might easily have given a good deal of trouble, and they would certainly have been able to delay considerably the movements of the convoys, and thus retard the beginning of active operations. In war it is the unexpected that happens, and assuredly it was utterly unexpected that these long strings of hundreds of laden camels would be allowed to plod for weeks through the passes of the Batn-el-Hagar, without a single attempt at interference by the Dervishes.

Nor was there much activity beyond Akasha. On March 27th a scouting party of some sixty of the enemy was seen to the south-eastward. A couple of mountain guns had been placed in battery near a blockhouse which was being erected on the rocky ridge south of the camp, and from one of these guns a shell was fired at the Dervish patrol. They at once took to flight, and the general impression was that the shot was a miss, and there was some talk about the folly of wasting valuable ammunition in scaring a handful of camel-men. But it was afterwards ascertained that one of them had been killed on the spot

[1] Major (temp. Lieut.-Colonel) C. S. B. Parsons, R.A., and Egyptian Army.

and two others seriously wounded. This lucky shot made the enemy's scouts very cautious about approaching Akasha, but they were sometimes seen in the distance by the Egyptian patrols, and a few harmless rifle-shots were exchanged at long range.

But on the Suakin side there was soon much more

IN THE BATTERY, AKASHA—THE GUN THAT FIRED THE FIRST SHOT OF THE CAMPAIGN.

serious work. So far as drawing away the enemy from Kassala, the expedition had almost immediate results, for in the first days of April Osman Digna, instead of assisting with his followers in the furious attacks which were made upon the Italian garrison, was far away on the scrub-covered hills near Tokar. Colonel Lloyd at Suakin had two Egyptian battalions (the 1st and 5th)

and a reserve battalion (the 16th), with the 10th Soudanese at Tokar, some mountain-guns at Suakin, and a force of cavalry, camel-men, and garrison artillery at both places. He had also at his disposal some fifteen hundred friendly Arabs, most of them belonging to tribes that had fought against us in former years, but whose chiefs now recognised that to stand by Mahdism was to be on the losing side.

On April 3rd the Friendlies got in touch with Osman Digna's scouts on the plains west of Sinkat, and fired upon them. The Dervishes retreated, leaving four wounded camels on the ground. Four days later the Dervish cavalry appeared near Tamanieb, and the Friendlies had a successful skirmish with the enemy in the direction of Erkowit. This desultory skirmishing went on for some days, and then it became evident that the Friendlies alone had not the energy to drive Osman Digna out of the district, and as there were even signs that his continued presence was making some of the sheikhs waver in their allegiance to the Government, Colonel Lloyd decided to take the field with his regular troops. In the second week of April the "Suakin Field Force" was organised, and on Tuesday the 14th it paraded outside the fortifications of the town at 5 p.m., and bivouacked in the open, ready to march at daybreak next morning.

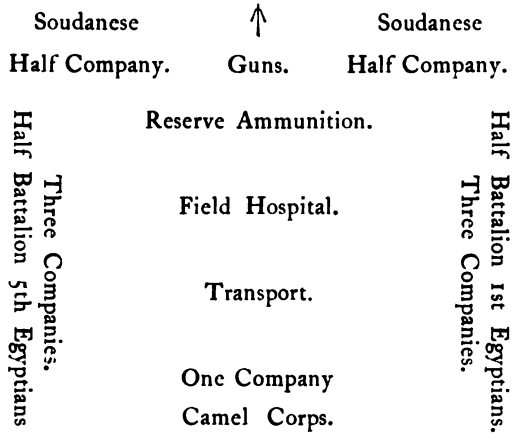
The force that took the field under Colonel Lloyd consisted of—

One squadron Egyptian cavalry (the 8th).
Two mountain guns.
Half battalion (three companies) 1st Egyptians.
Half battalion (three companies) 5th Egyptians.

One company of Soudanese (formed of the depôts of the 9th and 10th.)
One company of the Camel Corps.
Field hospital, reserve ammunition, and transport.

The whole force was about twelve hundred strong. For the march every man was mounted, about a thousand camels being requisitioned for the purpose, as well as a number of mules and donkeys. Two hundred friendly Arabs marched with the column, their special duty being to hold and guard the camels when the infantry dismounted for action.

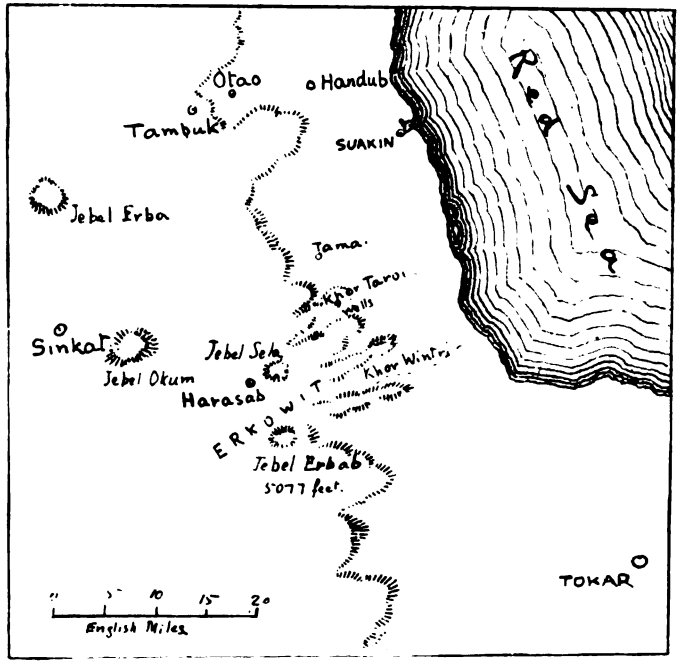
At dawn on the 15th the troops started for the wells in Khor Taroi, the order of march being a square, with the transport in the centre, thus :—



The cavalry scouted to the front. The Camel Corps, while the force was on the move, supplied scouts to the flanks, as well as forming the rearguard. When the column halted it formed the rear face of the square.

The general direction of the march was southwards, and a large body of Friendlies, under the Sheikh Tita,

had been ordered to hold the heights above Khor Wintri, in order to cover the movement against an attack from the direction of Osman Digna's camp, which was reported to be at or near Harasab, in the Erkowit district. A smaller force, consisting of half a battalion of the 10th Soudanese, under Major Sidney,[1]



SCENE OF THE FIGHTING NEAR SUAKIN.

was to move up northwards from Tokar to Khor Wintri, and join hands with the Suakin column.

Colonel Lloyd reached the Taroi Wells in the afternoon of the 15th, after a difficult march of nineteen

[1] Captain (temp. Major) H. M. Sidney, Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry and Egyptian Army.

miles. Progress had been very slow, for during the greater part of the distance the column had had to move across hilly, broken, and scrub-covered ground, where scouting was no easy matter, and where more than once small parties of Dervishes showed themselves in the bush, so that it was necessary to use all precautions.

On reaching Taroi the cavalry, with Captain Fenwick [1] (of the 10th Soudanese), who was acting on the staff, were sent forward towards Khor Wintri, with orders to reconnoitre, try to get touch with Sidney's column from Tokar, and let them know that the Suakin force was in bivouac at Taroi Wells. It soon became evident that Tita's Friendlies were not doing their work efficiently, for as the cavalry (about one hundred sabres) were marching through the difficult ground towards Khor Wintri, it came in contact with a force of some two hundred Dervish horsemen, supported by a large body of infantry. A warning of the presence of the enemy in force ought to have been received from the Friendlies, but it appears that they had abandoned the positions assigned to them.

The cavalry were ordered to retire at a trot, but in the rough ground the Dervish horsemen gained upon them, and the trot became for most of the squadron a disorderly gallop. Horses fell and their riders were speared by the pursuers. The affair was terribly near being a disaster, so far as one can judge from the commonly received reports of what occurred. But the situation was saved by the dogged courage of Fenwick. Rallying thirty-eight officers and men of the Egyptian

[1] Captain M. A. C. B. Fenwick, Royal Sussex Regiment and Egyptian Army, afterwards died of cholera.

cavalry, he occupied a rocky and isolated hillock, which he held during the evening and all through the hours of darkness. Four times the Dervishes tried to storm it and four times they were driven back by the steady volleys of the little band. Fenwick himself fired 140 rounds during the night, aimed shots at objects dimly seen approaching in the darkness. It was a splendid fight.

Meanwhile an Egyptian cavalry officer, with thirty-two men, had ridden into the Taroi bivouac. He reported that the rest of the squadron had either been cut up or had got away in the direction of Tokar, and had probably joined Sidney, adding that his own party had been followed close in to Taroi by a strong force of horse and foot. Scouts were at once sent out, and confirmed this last statement, reporting that there were a considerable number of hostile Arabs in the bush. A thorn zereba was now formed round the bivouac, the work being completed before nightfall, and two mounted men, both volunteers for the perilous duty, were sent out to try to find the position of Fenwick and Sidney's forces. Both these scouts were hunted down and killed by the Dervishes.

About midnight the enemy ventured to close in upon the zereba. Dark as it was, a body of horsemen were seen coming down the khor opposite the right face of the square, and at the same time the loud cries of another body of Dervishes were heard on the opposite side of the bivouac. The men sprang to their arms. The guns fired up the valley, and the rifles blazed away on all sides. It was some time before this wild firing was stopped. It was then found that the Dervishes had

retired, and a wounded enemy was picked up close to the square.

The roar of the guns was heard by Fenwick and his men at their isolated post, and this sign that their friends were at hand and on the alert greatly encouraged the garrison of the hillock. The repulse of the night attack was equally discouraging to the Dervishes, and those in Fenwick's front drew off shortly before daybreak.

Meanwhile what had the Tokar column been doing? Marching early on the 15th Sidney and his Soudanese, 250 bayonets, had reached Khor Wintri in the afternoon, and surprised the Dervish post in the khor. He was almost immediately after attacked by a Mahdist force of ninety horsemen and five hundred foot, but after a sharp fight the enemy fled up the khor, carrying off a number of wounded men, and leaving thirty dead and many wounded on the ground. The Dervish riflemen shot very badly, and the loss of the Soudanese in this affair was only three men wounded.

Early on Thursday morning (the 16th) Fenwick rejoined Lloyd at Taroi, and the column then moved on to Khor Wintri, where it formed a junction with Sidney's force. The scouts reported that the Dervishes had everywhere retired to the hills, carrying many wounded men with them. Pursuit in such ground would have been difficult, and the column had started with only six days' supplies, further transport not being available. It was therefore resolved to return to Suakin. Taroi Wells were reached on the 17th, and the column re-entered Suakin on the 18th, having fought the first fight of the campaign.

The following days brought news that Osman Digna was at Harasab, with about a hundred wounded and many sick in his camp. It was further reported that supplies were short at Harasab, and that general discouragement prevailed. Deserters from the camp began to come into Suakin, and it was evident that the Dervish raid on the district had ended in utter failure.

Osman Digna had counted not so much on the force he had brought with him from the Atbara, as upon his supposed power of bringing about a rising of the local tribesmen, the Hadendowas, against the Egyptian Government. But he found that his influence was now only a shadow of what it had been in former times, and his failure in the field at Khor Taroi and Khor Wintri put an end to the last vestige of it. By the close of the month he had retired from the Suakin district. To add to his humiliation, his home at Adarama on the Atbara river, had in his absence been raided by Friendly Arabs acting with the Italians from Kassala.

The collapse of the Dervish enterprise against Suakin allowed the Sirdar to devote all his attention and resources to the campaign against Dongola. Later on, as we shall see, the arrival of a small force of Indian troops to garrison Suakin and Tokar during the summer enabled him to transfer nearly all the Egyptian and Soudanese troops employed on the Red Sea coast to the Upper Nile.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SITUATION AT THE FRONT.

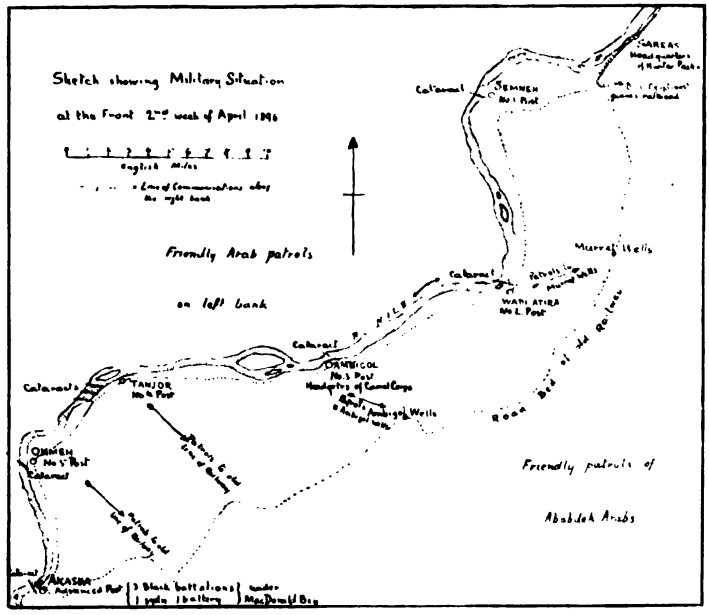
IN the last two chapters I have noted the course of events before my arrival at Halfa, and shown what was the result of Osman Digna's raid into the Suakin district. I now come back to the date of my arrival at the front, and proceed to describe the military situation on the Nile at that period, the end of the second week in April.

Including the North Staffordshire regiment, which occupied the mud-walled barracks known as the British lines, there were about three thousand troops at Wadi Halfa. Eight thousand more were at Sarras and Akasha and at various fortified posts along the river between these points. But though most of the troops required for the expedition were thus well up to the front, the amount of supplies and transport available would have to be very much increased before any serious advance was possible.

Colonel Hunter Pasha, always on the move, but with his headquarters at Sarras, commanded the district known as "Sarras and South," extending to and including Akasha, where Major MacDonald was the local commandant. MacDonald's garrison consisted of three Soudanese regiments (the 11th, 12th, and 13th), a

squadron of cavalry (the 9th, Broadwood's), a battery of artillery, and some camel scouts—altogether about two thousand men.

The annexed sketch map shows what were the arrangements for holding and keeping up communications through the district between Akasha and the advanced base at Sarras, to which the railway was



working. The district is part of the desert of low rocky hills known as the Batn-el-Hagar (the "Belly of Rocks"). The Nile as it traverses this desolate region is broken into a number of short reaches by a succession of cataracts or rapids, from the Second Cataract between Halfa and Sarras to the Cataract of Dal just above Akasha. With the Nile as low as it

was in April it was no easy matter to get even an empty river boat up the cataracts, but by persevering efforts a number of small craft had been placed upon all the reaches between Sarras and Akasha, though the navigation was so difficult that communication from post to post along the Nile was kept up almost entirely by the camel convoys.

Ultimately Akasha, the advanced post and depôt of stores for our march southwards, was to communicate with Sarras by means of the railway, the relaying of which had been some days in progress when I reached Halfa. But the convoy route, both for the sake of the water supply and for greater security, kept near the river, where it was further protected by a chain of fortified posts, one for each halting-place. The first of these intermediate posts was at Semneh, a point which its very position made safe from Dervish raids. It had therefore only a company for its garrison. All the posts beyond were more strongly held, and, besides acting as links in the chain along the river, they had to furnish patrols eastward to points along the track of the demolished railway. Thus the post at Wadi Atira sent regular patrols out to the Wells of Murrat [1] (not to be confounded with the somewhat similarly named Wells of Murat in the Korosko desert), and the post at Ambigol on the river sent patrols to Ambigol Wells. At none of these points along the Nile were there any villages. The district was almost without inhabitants. There were a few squatters only on the river bank near Sarras.

[1] Called Moghrat on the older maps of the British Intelligence Department.

A battalion—the 7th Egyptian regiment—was specially told off for the important duty of guarding the head of the railway as it was pushed south from Sarras, and further protection to the line of communications was afforded by the continual movement of patrols of friendly Bedawin, eastward of the railway line, and on the west bank of the river.

THE HEADQUARTERS OFFICES, WADI HALFA.

Even before the advance to Akasha was decided upon, the Egyptian Intelligence Department had information that the Dervishes contemplated extensive raids upon the border. Care was therefore taken to at once guard the settled districts on the upper river from attack, and to cover the desert flank of the expedition by watching all the caravan routes lying between the Red Sea coast, and the reach of the Nile

from Assouan to Halfa. The Suakin garrison had a detached post at Mersa Halaib, near Cape Elba, which formed the extreme left of this series of desert outposts. Bishir Bey's Ababdeh Arabs, who held the wells of Haimur, had pushed forward an advanced post to El Ongat (also on the Berber-Assouan route); and another post at the wells known as Bir-el-Koleib watched the camel-tracks running down to the Nile bank on the upper part of the Korosko-Assouan reach, a region the Dervishes had often raided in previous years.

These desert posts also served to guard the flank of the route from Korosko to Murat Wells. At Murat a detachment of the Camel Corps and some Soudanese infantry held a post fortified with strongly-placed blockhouses, between which were the wells. The chief use of Murat was as a place from which to watch the Upper Nile, between Abu Hamed and Merowi, a starting-place for scouts and spies. Accordingly the sheikh, Abdul Azim, a good soldier, a younger man than Bishir, and his rival for the headship of the Ababdeh tribes, had been sent there with some of his clansmen, to help in reconnoitring on the enemy's borders.

Osman Digna was before Suakin on the eve of the defeats described in the last chapter. As for the Mahdists on the Upper Nile, at the outset of the campaign they had a permanent advanced post at Suarda, fifty-four miles from Akasha. They had lately pushed forward a force of about three thousand men, including a large number of black riflemen, and some six hundred cavalry, to Mograka, about twenty-

one miles south of Akasha. The Emir Hammaud Idris, a veteran sheikh, and one of the companions of the Mahdi in the old days of victory, commanded this advanced guard. He had for his lieutenant and right-hand man the Emir Osman Issa, generally known as Osman Azrak (that is, "Dark Osman"), a chief

FRIENDLIES (ABABDEH FUGGARA ARABS) RECROSSING THE NILE AFTER RECEIVING GOVERNMENT ARMS AT WADI HALFA.

who had commanded at Suarda before him, and had organised most of the raids on the Nile villages in the last few years. He had also commanded a Dervish division at Toski. Hammuda received his orders and supplies from Mohammed Wad Bishara, the Emir of Dongola, who was said to have about ten thousand

men with him, chiefly near the capital of the province, where he had formed a large camp.

Subsequent events showed that the force at Dongola was, probably, not nearly as large as was first reported, and it would seem that the pick of the Dervish levies in the province were those pushed forward under Hammuda. So far he had confined himself to some cautious scouting towards Akasha. The day after I reached Halfa it was reported that our Friendlies had found the tracks of some sixty hostile camel-men, who had passed to the east of Akasha, beyond the old railway-line, and then moved northwards. It was conjectured that the party would make a dash at the railway works, or try to raid a convoy, but in a few days news came that the Dervish scouts had retired southwards.

CHAPTER VIII.

RAILWAY MAKING IN THE DESERT.

HAVING reached Halfa, my first idea was to make an excursion as far south as possible. Akasha was as yet forbidden ground to the correspondents, Sarras being the furthest point to which they were supposed to have access, but the railway works had not got much beyond Sarras, so on the second day after my arrival I got permission to go as far as the rail-head, and so have a first glimpse of the Batn-el-Hagar Desert.

I went down to Sarras by the morning train. It consisted of a number of trucks loaded with stores and railway material, chiefly sleepers, and one of the two passenger carriages possessed by the Soudan Railway. On top of several of the trucks were seated the soldiers who guarded the train, smart black fellows in khaki uniform, with rifle ready in hand, and bandoliers well filled with cartridges. The train was an hour late in starting, but made up for the delay by maintaining the high speed of ten miles an hour.

Among my few fellow-travellers was Lieutenant Manifold, R.E., M.G.E., ranking locally as a Bimbashi, or Major, in the Egyptian army. He had charge of the telegraphic work of the campaign, and he was going

down to Sarras to carry on the telegraph line from that place along the river to Akasha. He had got together a staff of sixteen civilian workmen for the laying of the line. The wire came from the Egyptian Telegraph Department, but no instruments suitable for a military line were to be had. They had been ordered from England, but it would still be three weeks before they

AN ANGLE OF THE FORTIFICATIONS, WADI HALFA.

could arrive. But the ingenious sapper-officer had found at Halfa two electric bells and a couple of telephone receivers, and out of these he had improvised a couple of sounding instruments with roughly made Morse keys attached. They were very clumsy looking, but they worked, and they would save three weeks and allow the line to be used as each section was laid down.

Bimbashi Manifold kept his precious instruments under his own eyes in the carriage. A telegraph engineer in Europe would not have thought much of them, but it was difficult to estimate their value in the Soudan.

It is thirty-four miles and a half to Sarras, and we did remarkably well in accomplishing our hot and dusty journey in a little over three hours. It was not quite without incident. Just beyond the fort of Khor Moussa, as we steamed towards the bridge over the khor, or valley (from which the fort takes its name), we saw the 3rd Battery marching south in a long line, by the caravan track which runs beside the railway, bound, like ourselves, for Sarras. The officers who had travelled with me from Assouan on the *Amara* rode at the head of the column, with their chief, Ahmed Effendi Hafiz, all mounted on hardy Arab ponies. Behind them came the long line of camels, some carrying the six Krupp guns and their carriages, some the ammunition and stores, others the gunners. They were marching well closed up, with no stragglers. It was a little before nine when we left Halfa. It was twenty minutes past ten when we reached the fort of Gemai, the half-way halting-place on the line, sixteen miles from the start. Just before we reached the station between the river and the bold rock crowned by the fort, we passed a long line of camels—two hundred in all—going up to Sarras. They were expected to complete their march next day.

Sarras was reached a little after twelve. During a great part of the journey the river had been in sight, its bank being never without clumps of palms here and

there. At one or two points there was a little patch of cultivation round a native hut. In the numerous rapids one could sometimes make out two rocks painted, one a bright red, the other a brilliant indigo. These marks had been put on a few days before, to show the native boatmen, who were getting a few boats up, the best way through the various cataracts. The pass was always between the painted rocks, keeping red on the port side and blue on the starboard. The rock scenery of the river was in many places very beautiful, but on the other side of the line one saw only fantastically shaped red and black volcanic rocks rising out of drifts of grey and orange sand, and forming long ridges or bold isolated masses, through which, here and there, a sandy wadi stretched for a mile or more. It was absolute desolation—not a blade or a leaf of green—nothing but a hard rock and hot sand. At times, when we left the river for awhile, this was the scene on both sides of the line. Such is the Batn-el-Hagar Desert, which extends to Akasha, and beyond it as far as Ferkeh on the Nile. It was the scene of the first stage of the Dongola campaign. It would be difficult to find anywhere a wilder and more desolate region, a more fitting background for the grim game of war.

Sarras Fort, an extensive building, is perched on a great knob of black rock. A wall runs down the southern slope of the crag; its northern and eastern sides fall sharply, in places precipitously. From each end of the rock another wall runs back to the Nile bank, and in the space thus formed the camp was pitched. A hundred yards in front of the land side

of the fort there was a well-constructed high wire entanglement that would have stopped the wildest of rushes. The fort could hold its own against any number of Dervishes.

Just south of the camp a railway siding ran down to the river, so that the engines could get water. It was from this point southwards that the line was abandoned and destroyed. Lieut. Stevenson was in charge of the work of relaying it. His railway battalion was mostly

SARRAS FORT—CAVALRY CAMP IN FOREGROUND.

made up of labourers quite new to the work, a few platelayers from the Egyptian Railway Department acting as foremen. They carried Remington rifles for self-defence ; but the general protection of the railway works was entrusted to the 7th Battalion, whose pickets formed a strong outpost line on the low hills round the rail-head. At Lieut. Stevenson's invitation I travelled down to the furthest point the railway had reached.

It was a curious journey. The engine which had

brought us from Halfa was going down to the rail-head with three truckloads of sleepers and some supplies for the railway battalion camp. We climbed on to the foot-plate of the engine, and got out on the side of it, standing just over the cylinder, and holding (with a handful of waste to protect our hands) the steel rail that runs along by the side of the boiler. To hold on by the boiler and stand on a foot-plate heated by the cylinder, with the thermometer at 100 degrees in the shade, was rather a warm experience. It was some compensation that we had a capital view of the line. Our speed was about four miles an hour, and four or five times we stopped while a small mound of drifted sand, accumulated since morning, was cleared off the metals. Our armed escort travelled with us; and as we got nearer the front we saw we had the further protection of the pickets of the 7th Battalion, which we could see posted among the rocks.

The whole distance along the line from Sarras to Akasha is just fifty-one and a half miles. On April 15th, the day of my visit, about four and a half miles had been relaid, leaving forty-seven still to be covered. But there were near Ambigol Wells about nine miles of the old line intact—merely buried in sand, which would have to be shovelled away; so that the actual amount of line to be relaid was thirty-eight miles. As to the speed at which it was being done, at first the workmen did very little—they were learning their work; but on a good day that week the record progress of 750 yards was made. At half a mile a day the work would still take two months, but every few miles completed would increase the facili-

ties for getting up stores to the front. At present the line was working only to Sarras, and from that point all supplies were carried forward by the camel convoys. But as the railway advanced the starting-point for these convoys would be carried further south, and their journeys shortened in distance and increased in number, thus practically multiplying our transport

THE RAILWAY BATTALION AT WORK IN THE DESERT.

resources. Once there was a good supply of stores at the forward stations, the Dongola Expedition would move.

To return to my short journey on the new line; two miles from Sarras we saw the railway battalion camp pitched in a sheltered hollow. The convoy track ran for three miles beside the railway, marked

out by lines of stones placed right and left in the sand. At the third mile it diverged to the west towards the river. The train now climbed a gradient, and crossed a hollow by a low embankment, and then we turned round a mass of crags and a wild stony valley opened before us, with a sandy level going south-west through the hills on the right. This was the way by which the convoys went down to Wadi Atira. Here the train stopped, for the next quarter mile of the track, though laid, was not ballasted. We climbed down from the engine and walked along the sleepers. Here was the rail-head.

The men were having their mid-day rest. They sat or lay in groups about the line—some sleeping, others eating, smoking, chatting—men of many races, and in a strange variety of costume, but all of them Africans. The thick-lipped Soudanese and Berberis predominated, but the hard-working fellahin of far-away Lower Egypt had their representatives also. A dignified old man, with a short white beard, a turban, and flowing robes was pointed out as the foreman platelayer. Not far from the groups of workmen their Remington rifles were piled, and close to the rail-head was a post of Martini-armed regulars. Other posts, these being small pickets with outlying sentinels, held the hills right and left and the valley in front. It was railway making in face of the enemy, for it was expected then that sooner or later the Dervishes would have sufficient enterprise to try to rush the rail-head, and the platelayers would have to drop pick and crow-bar and take up the rifles that were always piled within easy reach.

We walked past the last rails and sleepers, and halted between the rail-head and the advanced picket. "You are now further south than any of the other correspondents have been," said Stevenson. This was, however, no slur on the enterprise of my colleagues. They had made their visit a few days ago when the line had not got quite so far. There was perhaps half a mile less of it, and this was the measure of my "furthest south."

The sleepers we had brought up having been unloaded beside the track, we returned to Sarras in an empty truck. A convoy of some hundred unloaded camels had just come in from Ambigol, with its escort of cavalry in front and rear—lancers with fluttering pennons of red and green. Colonel Hunter had come in with them, after a brief visit to Akasha. I met him at a late lunch at the officers' mess in Sarras Camp. Then we discovered we had met before. "You were at the French manœuvres near Beauvais two or three years ago," he said to me. "Yes." "Do you remember lunching with a couple of other men at a very poor café in a tumbledown village?" "Yes; it was near Magny." "So it was. Well, I was one of that party," said Hunter.

"There was nothing stirring at Akasha," he told me; and another officer, whose experience of Soudanese warfare extended over many years, expressed the opinion that the Dervishes were no longer the dashing fellows they used to be.

CHAPTER IX.

WAITING AT WADI HALFA.

IF the importance of a place could be measured by its river frontage, Wadi Halfa would be one of the most considerable cities on the Nile. It extends for rather more than three miles along the eastern bank of the river, but there are some breaks of continuity, and nowhere is it more than four hundred yards wide, often it is not forty, so that the whole inhabited area is really small.

At its north end is Tewfikiyeh (formerly known as Dabrosa), a group of fairly well-built houses, with a handsome modern mosque and minaret, the whole surrounded by a slight enclosing wall. Tewfikiyeh contains the bazaar (two streets of small shops) and the post office, and is thus the local business centre. South of Tewfikiyeh runs a suburb of scattered mud huts and straw shelters with little gardens between them; and then one reaches the cantonments, rather less than a mile long, barrack huts, officers' cottages along the river front, an hospital, some workshops, stores and offices, with railway sidings at the south end of the place. The cantonment is protected by a ditch and a mud wall with heavy Krupp field-pieces on little bastions, where the ends of the rampart

rest upon the river, and five small detached forts strengthening the land front. On the top of a sandy ridge on the other side of the Nile there are three blockhouses.

Along the Nile front of the cantonment runs the sloping riverbank, with half-way up a footpath that crosses by rough wooden bridges the channels of the

FORT NO. 2, WADI HALFA.

shadoofs which are used for lifting water from the river. One of these bridges crosses a gully containing what looks at first sight like a giant stair of big blocks of stone. An inscription explains that this is the Nilometer constructed by Colonel Wodehouse,[1] when

[1] Colonel J. F. Wodehouse, R.A., C.B., C.M.G., eleven years connected with the Egyptian Army.

Governor of the Frontier, for the purpose of measuring the annual flood.

South of the cantonment there is another mile and a half of Arab mud-walled houses. Between these and the railway there is some cultivation, and at one point the cultivated ground extends beyond the line, this being the place where an enterprising landowner has a steam-pump at the river side, which brings him up a plentiful supply of water even during low Nile. The caravan track, marked by the wide footprints of the camels, runs south beside the railway. Beyond the line there is one large group of native houses, and many graves, marked by mere shallow mounds of sand or pebbles, with a stone or an earthen pot half sunk at the head and foot. Then comes an expanse of undulating sand, bounded eastward by a low range of red, rocky hills traversed by numerous khors.

During the weeks I lived in my cottage on the river bank at Halfa the frontier garrison was a busy place. As each steamer arrived, with its attendant barges, it was rapidly unloaded, generally by fatigue parties of Egyptian soldiers, sometimes by gangs of convicts. Every morning one or two heavy train-loads of stores were sent off to Sarras. At the arsenal workshops in the cantonment engines were being repaired, and large trucks, brought up piecemeal on the steamers, were being put together. Camels were being collected, and transport companies organised and marched up by the desert track beside the railway to strengthen the convoys from Sarras. Troops were passing through to the front, and infantry recruits and reservists were drilling in the sandy desert outside the ramparts under

the superintendence of smart British sergeant-instructors. Detachments of cavalry and Camel Corps men were also manœuvring on the same wide parade ground. The Sirdar had his headquarters near the railway station, and there was little rest in the various offices where his staff were at work. Finally, at Major Wingate's house on the river bank, where the Intelligence De-

BRITISH SERGEANT-INSTRUCTOR DRILLING SOUDANESE RECRUITS, WADI HALFA. "MARK TIME."

partment had its centre, there was a coming and going of picturesque Arab agents bringing information, and of newspaper correspondents anxious to get their share of it.

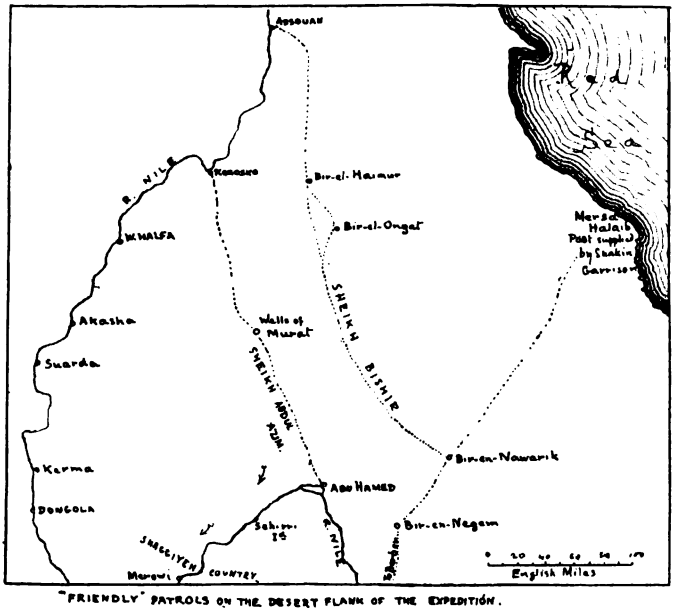
News came at intervals of the Dervish movements, though they seemed, on the whole, to show a curious and, to the eager journalist, disappointing want of enterprise. For days there would be absolutely no

news. But towards the end of April we learned that they had established their camp at Ferkeh, to which deserted village Hammuda had brought up his vanguard, a picked force, with quite a crowd of fighting Emirs to lead it. A first deserter, an old camel-man, came in. But he could tell us little news, for his dialect was all but unintelligible even to the polyglot

LOCOMOTIVE UNDER REPAIR, HALFA ARSENAL.

experts of Major Wingate's department. Our scouts along the river told us of a flotilla of Dervish boats, grain-laden, lying near Mograka—the supplies for the Ferkeh camp. The low Nile and the barrier presented to our boats by the three miles of rocks and rapids at Dal allowed the Dervishes to use the river safely in this way.

On April 19th we had very satisfactory news from our Bedawin allies on the desert flank of the expedition. When I went round to Major Wingate's house that morning to ask him what reports had come in, three camels, each with a Remington rifle hanging at its saddle, were kneeling in the sandy space before his garden gate. Their riders, bronzed and bearded Arabs, squatted beside them, resting after a long



"FRIENDLY" PATROLS ON THE DESERT FLANK OF THE EXPEDITION.

desert journey. They were three of the tribe which I had seen ride out from Assouan on Easter Sunday morning—Ababdeh Arabs of Bishir Bey's branch—and Bishir had sent them to report that from Haimur Wells he had marched to El Ongat, and pushed scouting parties thence towards Abu Hamed, and along the Berber route east of the great bend of

the Nile. They had seen a Mahdist force near the Wells of Bir-en-Negem,[1] but it appeared to be only a small scouting party watching the road.

But news had also come, by wire from Korosko and Murat, that another of the friendly Ababdeh sheikhs—no other than Bishir's rival, Abdul Azim—had successfully carried out a still more important reconnaissance. Starting from the Wells of Murat, on the Abu Hamed route, Abdul A. Azim, with two hundred of his Ababdeh camel-men, had marched towards the reach of the Nile between Abu Hamed and Korti. His orders were to make a demonstration in that direction, and find out what the Dervishes were doing along the river.

He reached the Nile at Sehirri Island. There were no Dervishes in the neighbourhood, and the people received him and his Bedawin irregulars as friends. They expressed great pleasure at hearing that the expedition was on its way to Dongola, and told Abdul that they hoped it would come on further and deliver them from the tyranny of the Baggaras, the Khalifa's tribe, who were now ruling the Soudan in the name of Mahdism and grinding the other tribes in a way that made even the worst days of the Pashas to be regarded as a time of peace and comfort. The people at Sehirri said a considerable number of men had passed down to Dongola. They themselves would be glad to help us, but could do nothing till we were close at hand.

From Sehirri Abdul Azim and his brave scouts rode

[1] Bir-en-Negem is a well, or group of water-holes, to the south-east of Abu Hamed. On many maps it is not marked, and on our Intelligence Department map it is placed some miles too far north.

south-westward along the river bank for some eighty miles, and entered the Shaggiyeh country. To their own great surprise they met with no Dervishes, and were everywhere hailed as friends, the continual question being, "When was the expedition coming?" From the Shaggiyeh country Abdul returned to Murat, and the welcome news of his ride along the Upper Nile was sent on to headquarters by telegraph, through Korosko. That such a reconnaissance was possible was taken to be one more sign of the waning power of Mahdism.

The Friendlies were a picturesque element in the life of Wadi Halfa. In one week more than two hundred arrived to receive arms and ammunition from the Government stores, and then reinforced our scouts on both banks. Those for the west side of the river crossed in boats, embarking near my house, and looking for all the world like river pirates setting out in search of prey.

Meanwhile, the railway grew in length beyond Sarras. The convoys came and went. The telegraph, rapidly laid by Manifold, in a single week was working to Akasha. I asked to be allowed to visit the advanced post, but was told that no correspondent would be allowed to go up until the Sirdar had made a tour of inspection along the convoy route to Akasha at the end of the month.

A new post was established at Alimula, between Tanjor and Sonki, and the direct route across the hills between Alimula and Sonki was made practicable for loaded camels. The amount of labour expended on improving the convoy route during these first weeks

was enormous. Heavier loads could now be carried on each journey, and supplies began to accumulate at Akasha and Ambigol, with the result that the force well up to the front was increased.

The following table shows the distribution of the infantry battalions at the end of April :—

Battalion.	Commander.	Station.
1st Egyptians.	Heygate.[1]	Suakin.
2nd „	Shekleton.[2]	Sarras.
3rd „	Sillem.[3]	Ambigol.
4th „	Sparkes.[4]	Wadi Atira.
5th „	Abd - el - Gouwad Borhan.	Suakin.
6th „	Mohammed Baligh.	Wadi Halfa.
7th „	Ibrahim Fathi.	Rail-head.
8th „	Yussef Khulusi.	Sarras.
9th Soudanese	Hackett Pain.[5]	Tanjor.
10th „	Sidney.[6]	Suakin.
11th „	Jackson.[7]	Akasha.
12th „	Townshend.[8]	„
13th „	Collinson.[9]	„
14th Depôt Battalion Soudanese.		Tourah and Wadi Halfa.
15th Egyptians, Reservists.		Korosko.
16th Egyptians, Reservists		Suakin.

[1] Major R. H. G. Heygate, Border Regiment.

[2] Captain (temp. Major) H. P. Shekleton, *p.s.c.*, South Lancashire Regiment.

[3] Captain (temp. Major) J. Sillem, Welsh Regiment.

[4] Captain (temp. Major) W. S. Sparkes, Welsh Regiment.

[5] Major G. W. H. Pain, Worcestershire Regiment.

[6] Captain (temp. Major) H. M. Sidney, Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry.

[7] Captain (local Major) H. W. Jackson, Gordon Highlanders.

[8] Brev.-Major C. V. F. Townshend, C.B., Indian Staff Corps.

[9] Major J. Collinson, Northamptonshire Regiment.

The 9th, at Tanjor, had an outpost at Sonki to guard the outlet of the defile that formed the convoy track. The 4th, at Wadi Atira, had an outpost at Murrat Wells. The cavalry headquarters were at Sarras, those of the Camel Corps at Ambigol, with a permanent outpost at Ambigol Wells.

Of the three batteries of artillery, one was at Akasha

ON THE NILE BANK—WADI HALFA.

and one at Sarras, and the horse battery had not yet been sent up. Three of the Maxim guns were at Akasha, and the fourth at Tanjor. One cavalry squadron, the 9th, was permanently stationed at Akasha, and its chief, Major Broadwood, was engaged in constant reconnaissances, till the ground south and east had been carefully mapped, this work being varied with an occasional

scouting expedition, down the west bank to a point where from some high ground a powerful glass gave a good view of what was being done at Ferkeh. The Camel Corps scouts, sent out from Ambigol Wells, patrolled the desert beyond the old railway line, and communicated daily with camel patrols sent out from

A CORNER OF MY HOUSE—WADI HALFA.

Akasha. Several squadrons of cavalry were engaged in escort duty with the convoys.

The large base hospital had been organised at Wadi Halfa by Hunter Bey,[1] who, till Gallwey Bey came up the river in June, acted as principal medical officer at the front. Surgeon-Major Sloggett, the principal

[1] Surgeon-Major G. D. Hunter, Army Medical Staff.

medical officer in charge of the British troops, arranged a small hospital for British officers in the Halfa lines. There were also hospitals of some extent at Ambigol and at Akasha, and camel saddles were fitted with cacolets for bringing convoys of sick and wounded across the desert. The medical service was altogether admirably organised and worked most efficiently, the only drawback was the small number of British medical officers available. They were all hopelessly overworked in consequence. A few more surgeons would have been of incalculable value to the expedition.

On April 28th the Sirdar, accompanied by his aide-de-camp, Captain Watson,[1] and by Major Wingate, left Halfa for a tour of inspection southwards. He reached Akasha on the morning of the 1st of May, which proved to be one of the eventful days of the campaign.

[1] Captain J. K. Watson, K.R., R.C.

CHAPTER X.

THE CAVALRY FIGHT ON MAY-DAY.

THE first fight of the Dongola Expedition took place near Akasha on the 1st of May. The garrison had just been strengthened by the arrival of Major Hackett Pain's battalion, the 9th Soudanese, and now consisted of four black battalions, a squadron of cavalry, a detachment of the Camel Corps, a field battery, a battery of four Maxim guns, and some Arab Friendlies. With this force to hold the central fort and the circle of outlying posts, Major MacDonald, the commandant, was more than ready for any attempt that might be made upon Akasha by Hammuda and his Dervish vanguard at Ferkeh.

But so far the Dervishes had only ventured to reconnoitre the place from a respectful distance; once the battery near post No. 3 got a shot at them; once they crept close up to and fired into post No. 1; twice their fires were seen at night on far-off hills to the south and east. But all this only seemed to show that they knew better than to attempt anything serious against Akasha.

In the middle of April the tracks of some sixty camel-men had been seen to the east and north of the place. They had swept round it well out of sight of its advanced posts, but though they were not actually

seen by our scouts, it was ascertained they had not ventured far before retiring again towards Ferkeh. The fight on May 1st appears to have been the result of a much larger force attempting to get round Akasha on the line followed by these camel-men, probably with the intention of raiding the railway works or the line of communications.

CAVALRY OUTPOST IN THE DESERT.

Curiously enough it happened that this first fight coincided in point of time with the Sirdar's visit of inspection to Akasha. On that May-day morning he arrived with a squadron of cavalry as his escort. Major Burn-Murdoch,[1] the commander of the Egyptian cavalry, was with the party. The day before a convoy

[1] Major J. F. Burn-Murdoch, *p.s.c.*, 1st Royal Dragoons.

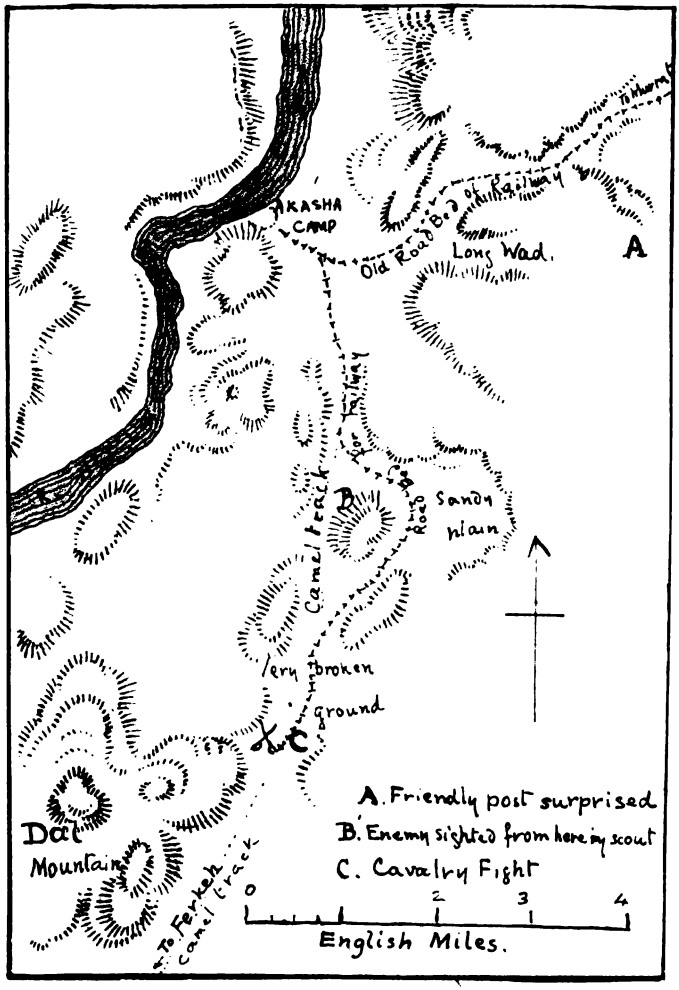
had arrived, guarded by another squadron, so that there were two extra squadrons at Akasha in addition to the squadron permanently in garrison there. The Intelligence Department had received warning from its spies some days before that the Dervishes would probably attempt something about the end of the week. They said that the Emir Wad Bishara, who commanded at Dongola, had been sending messages to the Emir Hammuda, asking him why he was doing nothing with the large force placed at his disposal. Papers captured after the action at Ferkeh proved the accuracy of this information about the messages from Dongola.[1]

On May morning the first tidings of the actual approach of the enemy were brought in by a party of friendly Arabs. They reported that they had been surprised in the early morning as they lay beside their camels in a khor four miles to the eastward. Some twenty of the enemy's camel-men had suddenly rushed upon them, killing one man and capturing another. The rest mounted and got away. This news came in at 8 a.m., about an hour after the Sirdar's arrival. Soon after this an Arab scout brought in the further news that from his post, three miles to the southward, he had seen a party of about eighty Dervish camel-men on the move. It was resolved to attempt to cut off this party, and to reconnoitre the country to the south, and Major Burn-Murdoch was ordered to take out the three squadrons of cavalry available—the 2nd, the 7th, and the 9th.

It so happened that two of the squadrons were temporarily deprived of their usual leaders: Mahon[2] of

[1] See Chap. XIX. [2] Captain B. T. Mahon, 8th Hussars.

the 7th was ill, suffering from a touch of the sun ; and Broadwood, of the 9th, the man in Akasha who best



SCENE OF THE MAY-DAY CAVALRY FIGHT.

knew all the ground in the neighbourhood, had crossed the Nile early in the day with a reconnoitring patrol,

and ridden southward along the left bank. He passed Dal, and reached the high ground opposite Ferkeh without meeting any enemy. From the hills on the west bank he could see into Ferkeh camp. It was a Friday, the Moslem Sabbath, and he saw that after the assembly for the public prayers a force of more than a thousand men moved out of Ferkeh, going northwards. He hurried back to Akasha with the news, but when he arrived there Burn-Murdoch and the cavalry had started some time, and half a battalion of the 11th Soudanese, under Major Jackson, had been sent after them, to act as a support in case they met with something more formidable than a mere party of camel scouts.

The three squadrons were soon out of sight of the infantry, though the Soudanese pushed on eagerly, anxious to have their share in the day's work. The ground south of Akasha is difficult—sandy valleys, rock-strewn and rock-encircled—and the day was one of the hottest of the year. In the shade at Wadi Halfa the thermometer registered 118 degrees, and it must have been much hotter among the rocks near Akasha. Some idea of what it was may be gathered from the fact that one of the Soudanese died on the march of what the doctors call "heat apoplexy"—in other words, sunstroke.

Scouting to the southward, Burn-Murdoch's cavalry found the tracks of the enemy's camels a little more than three miles out. Three and a half miles further on they came on very fresh traces of them. This was in the sandy valley through which runs the desert route to Ferkeh, and near the end of the road-bed prepared for the proposed southern extension of the railway in

1884. Just here the ground is very broken, and most unsuited for the action of cavalry. There was a slope in front, and with a small escort Burn-Murdoch rode forward to the crest of it, and saw as he passed the summit, not, as he had anticipated, a party of camel scouts, but about 250 Dervish cavalry, with the camel-men behind them, and still further back a great mass of

EGYPTIAN CAVALRY HORSES IN CAMP.

infantry, some of them riflemen, others armed with sword or spear and shield. The entire force was about fifteen hundred strong.

He took a good look at the enemy, and then rode back over the rising ground, rejoined his squadrons, and gave them the order to retire in column, wishing, it would seem, to have his infantry support nearer before

engaging the enormously superior force of the enemy. His own effective strength was about 240 sabres, the front rank of each squadron having lances, and all carrying the Martini carbine.

The squadrons were retiring, when suddenly the Dervish cavalry appeared galloping over the swell of ground which hid the rest of their force. They were closing rapidly on the Egyptians, when Burn-Murdoch ordered his squadrons to wheel round and charge. The order was promptly and steadily obeyed. It says something for the discipline and spirit of the Egyptian cavalry that it was possible thus to convert a retirement into an advance in the face of the Dervish charge.

The manœuvre was executed in the midst of a dense cloud of sand and dust, in which some of the Dervishes came into contact with part of one of the squadrons, grazing past it with some exchange of cut, thrust, and pistol-shot. One officer told afterwards how in the darkness of the dust-cloud he suddenly realised that a Dervish was riding beside him, the Arab apparently not recognising the Englishman as a foe. As the squadrons advanced it was seen that the bulk of the Dervish horsemen were in rapid retreat, but a handful of desperadoes, who showed fight, were ridden over. Reaching the high ground, it was seen that the enemy's cavalry and camel-men had retired behind the infantry, some of them in their precipitate retreat even riding through the ranks of their friends. The Egyptian cavalry halted some six or seven hundred yards from the enemy's lines.

The fight having thus opened, Burn-Murdoch was resolved to hold the ground he had gained, and seeing

the enemy's infantry beginning to move forward, he dismounted most of his men, each squadron occupying one of a line of three rocky knolls, with the horses sheltered in its rear. The Dervishes came on, firing as they advanced, and the cavalry with their carbines opened a well-directed fire in reply. The enemy got to within three hundred yards of the position, and then halted, wavered, and retired, followed by the volleys of the Egyptians.

About a score of the enemy's horsemen fell in the charge, and during the firing they were seen to be carrying off dead and wounded men. The Egyptians had one man killed and eight wounded, of whom one subsequently died. Of the nine casualties three were sword or spear wounds, and six bullet wounds. Captain Fitton,[1] of the staff, was slightly wounded by a bullet, but had not to go into hospital. Six horses were badly hit.

It was about 2 p.m. when the last Dervish moved away southwards, and Burn-Murdoch remained on the ground for another hour, during which he was joined by the Soudanese infantry. The blacks were terribly disappointed at finding the action was all over before they could come up. There was no pursuit, because men and horses were alike exhausted by the intense heat of the afternoon. Six captured horses and a large number of spears were brought back as trophies to Akasha, where, during this "reconnaissance in force," the garrison had manned the works, so as to be prepared for all eventualities.

Deserters from the Mahdist camp afterwards told

[1] Captain H. G. Fitton, *p.s.c.*, Royal Berkshire Regiment.

how, when the Dervish horsemen rode back into Ferkeh camp, many of them were so exhausted that they flung down their spears, dismounted, and threw themselves on the ground beside their horses. They further said that Hammuda sent to Bishara at Dongola a despatch in which, notwithstanding his retreat, he claimed to have won a brilliant victory over the Akasha garrison.

EGYPTIAN CAVALRY CHARGER SHOWING THE STICK TIED IN THE MOUTH TO PREVENT THE HORSE EATING SAND.

The fight was a small affair in itself, but it was of importance, as showing that the Mahdists of to-day were not quite of the same stamp as the reckless warriors who broke into the square at Abu Klea twelve years ago. Fifteen hundred Dervishes of the old type would not have retired before 240 Egyptian troopers. It was satisfactory, too, as marking the improvement that had taken place in the Egyptians. Would a British officer have ventured in 1884 or 1885 to advance against six-fold odds at the head of a purely Egyptian force? Altogether the little fight was most encouraging, and the news of it had an excellent effect on the army at the front.

CHAPTER XI.

A DESERT EXCURSION.

IN the first week of May the railway was approaching Murrat Wells, and in order to vary the monotony of waiting at Halfa, I obtained permission to again visit the rail-head, and make a second excursion into Batn-el-Hagar. Altogether I went about fifty miles from Wadi Halfa, and further south than any correspondent had yet been allowed to go in the Akasha direction. I started on Monday, May 4th, by the train that went out every morning to convey stores and railway material to Sarras. Though the train started a little after 8 a.m., it was near noon when we stopped on the narrow dusty plain below the fort-crowned rocks of Sarras.

In a former chapter I have described the route to Sarras and the northern portion of the Batn-el-Hagar, as I saw it on my first visit to the rail-head on April 15th. The rail-head was then a little beyond the point where the camel track strikes off towards Semneh, about four miles from Sarras. On May 4th it had reached Murrat Wells, so that by its means I was able to go some ten miles further up the wild Khor Ahrusa to the Murrat valley, and then on foot some two miles further

along the railway grading, and over the rocky hills from which the outposts guarded the line.

At Sarras I met Lieutenant Girouard, R.E., who was now in charge of the railway works. Girouard is a French Canadian, and made his studies at the Kingston Military College, which has already given some eighty officers to the British army, besides those it has educated for the Canadian forces. He is an expert in railway matters, and for the last two years he had been engaged in railway work in England. He was going to take on some truck loads of material to the rail-head, and he had attached to the short train a railway carriage, which he had fitted up with lockers and shelves, as a kind of movable office. I was thus able to travel down to the rail-head much more comfortably than on the last occasion, when I occupied a very hot place on the footplate of an engine. Another improvement on my previous experience was that the journey was not interrupted, by having to stop and put down men to clear the line of sand; for small parties of workmen were now regularly detailed to keep the line in order, and in some places special arrangements were made to prevent the flow of sand on to the track.

From Sarras the line followed the convoy route for four miles, then the camel-track, marked on each side with stones, and the line of telegraph poles trended away to the westward towards the river, while the railway turned away inland in order to follow a succession of valleys and sandy basins, where, by having recourse to a few long gradients, rock cutting could be almost entirely avoided. The line of country, though the best for the railway, was impracticable for large camel convoys, on

account of the all but complete absence of water. The supply at Murrat and Ambigol Wells was insignificant. The fifteen hundred men engaged in laying and guarding the line had therefore to depend for their daily supply on the railway itself. First thing each morning a short train of trucks carrying water-tanks ran back to Sarras, where the tanks were filled from the Nile. It

IN THE DESERT LOOKING TOWARDS JEBEL BRINGO—CONVOY TRACK IN FOREGROUND.

was a three hours' job to fill them, as only one small hand-pump was available.

The line was surveyed in the Seventies, and laid as far as Sarras, the grading being continued to a point beyond Akasha. It was intended that it should run to Abu Fatmeh, so as to supply a railway portage past

the Second and Third Cataracts, and the numerous minor cataracts and rapids between them. The Khedive Ismail hoped it would some day be part of a great Central and South African system, and he chose for its gauge that of the Cape Railways—one more proof that he was a man of large ideas. When Lord Wolseley was up the Nile in 1884–85 the railway was laid to Akasha, but the work was done too late to be used in sending up many of the troops. On this occasion some rolling stock was also obtained from the Cape Railway department, and at Sarras I saw some of these Cape Railway trucks still at work.

By the way, before I left England I saw it stated in a London paper that when the Dervishes tore up the line they twisted and bent the rails precisely after the manner recommended by Lord Wolseley himself in the section of his "Soldier's Pocket Book" which treats of the demolition of railways. This is a legend. I have seen hundreds of rails lying along the track, and only two or three out of the whole lot were bent, and even those had apparently been damaged by being used as levers, with which to start other rails from the sleepers to which they were spiked. The Dervishes after getting the sleepers out, carried off nearly all the smaller and more handy iron-work, leaving the rails near the track. In Europe, even a railway siding that is not much used is soon red with rust, but in the dry air of the Batn-el-Hagar Desert these rails, after lying on the sand for ten or eleven years, were nearly all perfectly free from rust, and indeed looked quite new. The very few that showed any rust had probably had water thrown on them at the time when the line was

working. To make the railway now, all that was necessary was to shovel the drifted sand off the track, and relay the metals which were lying on or beside it. Sleepers, spikes, fishplates, screw bolts, and nuts, and a few extra rails to replace the damaged ones, were the materials required. If it had been necessary to bring up the hundreds of tons of railway iron for fifty miles of line, it would have been impossible even to start the work in the low state of the river at that time.

From Sarras the line ascends by a long easy gradient, or succession of gradients, for more than ten miles, and then descends to the Murrat valley. Its course is not at all so straight as that shown on the Intelligence Department maps. There are few straight runs of any length, and there is an almost continual succession of little curves, for every obstacle is turned, every spur that runs out from the black and red volcanic rocks on either side is out-flanked by a sharp bend, where in England it would be directly attacked by a cutting.

Wild and fantastic are these rocks of the Batn-el-Hagar, traversed by dykes of black basalt, lightened a little in colour at times by a shining reef of quartz, and shooting up to ragged ridges and sharply pointed peaks, none of them of any great height, but all deriving a certain dignity from their boldness of outline. In every hollow, like snow and glacier ice among the *arêtes* of an Alpine peak, one sees the beds and streams of sand, here a golden yellow or almost orange, there a dull grey. Sand fills the bottom of every wide valley, every wadi and khor—sand mostly strewn with blocks of stone or small pebbles.

Soon a grand summit, overtopping all the rest, comes

in sight in front. It is a hill with an almost flat top, though the summit plateau has a well-defined rise, something like a low-pitched roof. Round all that portion of the summit which first comes in sight, the hill falls away in a sheer precipice of red rock, fifty to a hundred feet deep. From its base the hillside slopes at a steep angle, strewn with streams of large stones that for ages have been falling from the cliff above. Southward, separated by a deep valley, is a lower summit, but the two hills form a mass divided from the ridges round them, above which they soar with a grandeur that is not to be measured merely by their 1,540 feet of altitude.

The mountain is Jebel Bringo, three miles north of Murrat Wells. Its summit was now occupied as a signal station, from which, except when dust storms darkened the air, the heliostat could flash its messages southward to the Camel Corps headquarters at Ambigol, and its outpost at Ambigol Wells, or northward to Sarras, whence the wire was at work to Halfa. Jebel Bringo is one of the highest, and also one of the finest summits in the Batn-el-Hagar. As we ran round the sharp curves of the railway it came in sight, now to the left, now to the right, and at last as we issued from the narrow valley into the sandy plain from which Bringo rises, we saw the mountain in its full majesty as a background to the white tents of the railway camp.

The railway battalion, now under Girouard's command, was encamped west of the line. On the other side was the camp of the 7th Egyptian infantry, commanded by Colonel Fathi Bey, one of the most dis-

tinguished native officers in the Khedive's army. The 7th Battalion, with the help of a few cavalry soldiers and camel-men, formed the guard of the rail-head, and already as we steamed up the valley we had seen one of its pickets near the line, with its sentries on a bold rocky ridge to the eastward. But Fathi Bey's stalwart infantry men, originally detailed only as a covering party for the railway extension, were now doing more than merely protecting the line. They furnished every day strong fatigue parties, that took their share in the work, and the battalion thus rendered a double service to the expedition.

At the camp the railway carriage and a truck-load of stores were detached and run into a temporary siding. The engine was to go some three miles further with two waggon-loads of sleepers. I mounted on the water-tank of the tender, Girouard clambered up beside me, and then up climbed a portly looking officer, with a smiling pleasant face, and a row of medal ribbons on his khaki jacket. This was Fathi Bey, who was going down to see his men at work at the rail-head. He speaks both French and English remarkably well, and was ready to give me full information on every point about which I asked him. His battalion was one of the smartest at the front. The fact that it was charged with the protection of the rail-head, and thus posted on the desert flank of the advance, was in itself a proof of the good opinion the Sirdar had formed of the regiment and of its commander.

Jebel Bringo looks down on a sandy flat, a little plain encircled by low hills, which has all the appearance of an old lake basin. A rocky valley connects

this basin with another similar plain, in which a few grey sunt trees, with more thorns than leaves, indicate the presence of water ; and some holes, in which at a depth of six or eight feet below the surface one sees a brownish fluid, represent the Murrat Wells. The bottom of the valley has a clayey crust, cracked by the heat into thousands of minute fissures, giving it the

WATER HOLE—MURRAT WELLS.

appearance of a very recently dried-up lake bottom. The trees are only four or five in number, one solitary bush about ten feet high in the middle of the valley, the rest much smaller, near its entrance. There is not a blade of grass. The place is, strictly speaking, an oasis, but its utter desolation is in miserable contrast with the desert oasis of poetry—the island of palms—that over-

shadow rippling fountains, or deep cool wells, in the midst of the sandy sea.

In the water-holes, west of the line, a number of soldiers were bathing, the water there being considered unfit for drinking purposes. But the two holes east of the line were guarded by a sentry, and Fathi Bey said that though the supply was limited, the water was good. A man climbed down into one of the holes and brought up a bucketful. It was dark brown—the colour, I hear, being partly due to iron. The Bey drank some, and declared it excellent, and invited me to try it. I told him I would take his word for its good qualities.

Where the valley opened on the little plain the railway men were busy making a siding. The line came up to, and passed them, during the afternoon. The system of working was this. First the rails were laid end to end on the bank, sufficiently far apart for the sleepers to be put down between them. Every four or five rails were fastened together, but only one bolt was screwed through each fishplate and rail-end. The sleepers were meanwhile placed in position, pegs driven beforehand at every hundred yards, marking the centre of the track. Gangs of men then lifted the rails on to the sleepers, and an officer saw the gauge was correct. No chairs were used, the rail being single-headed with a wide base. The hammer-men spiked them down direct on to the sleepers, and the second bolts were put through the fishplates. Then the last gang of all came along with shovels and crow-bars, and the rails and sleepers were lifted where necessary, and the ballast shovelled in and packed. When the work was in full swing one could see the line creeping steadily on, for it

was now growing at the rate of about a mile a day. While I was at the works Murrat Wells were reached by the line, that is, fourteen miles had been constructed from the starting-point, and the rails were laid ready on the bank for five miles further on towards Ambigol Wells.

As for the protection of the line, a small fort and a

CAVALRY OUTPOST IN THE HILLS NEAR MURRAT WELLS—TROOPER HOLDING THE HORSES.

blockhouse had been built on the spur of the hills and a neighbouring summit north-west of the wells. There was another fortified outpost, a low, round tower of dry stone, on an isolated knoll east of the line near where it left the Murrat valley. The workmen had their arms piled near the track, and every train had its

guard of riflemen. A semicircle of pickets, supplied by the 7th Battalion, with sentries on the high ground, covered the rail-head. There were also a number of outlying "Cossack posts" of cavalry.

I visited one of these posts on a hill on the western margin of the Murrat valley. Half-way up on a kind of shoulder I found the three horses held by one of the

CAVALRY OUTPOST NEAR MURRAT WELLS—DISMOUNTED SENTRY ON THE RIDGE.

men, the lances of his comrades lying on the stones beside the little group. Climbing by a steep ascent to the narrow ridge of black rock which formed the summit, I found the two sentries lying down with their carbines beside them, looking out to the south and east. I stayed there about a quarter of an hour.

The view was magnificent. We looked out over a sea of low, rocky hills, with long, sandy valleys between them. We could see ten, perhaps fifteen, miles to the southward, and the whole course of two valleys could be followed by the eye in the clear air and bright sunlight. Once I thought I was going to have the good luck to see the Dervishes on the move. One of the sentries sprang up into a kneeling position, grasped his carbine, and pointing to a moving cloud of dust in the

AN "IRREGULAR."

valley some three miles away, asked his comrade if that was not cavalry. The other seemed to think it was; but my telescope soon showed that it was only one of those whirling eddies of dust that are known as "devils" in Egypt and the Soudan.

At six work stopped on the railway, and I ran back on an engine to the camp below Jebel Bringo to enjoy the hospitality of Girouard and his two assistants—

Lieutenants Polwhele and Pritchard, R.E., both ranking as Egyptian Bimbashis, and the latter just returned from Ashanti. The most curious sight in the camp was the bivouac of a number of camp followers and civilian workmen on its western side. In the gathering darkness one saw them moving in the red glare of their fires, which showed, instead of tents, a collection of ingeniously constructed huts and shelters of straw, odds and ends from the railway line, scraps of canvas, and a few palm leaves. Every race in Upper Egypt and the northern Soudan was represented. Some of them were provided with Remingtons, but most of them had only spears and other native weapons.

It was a splendid starlight night, the Southern Cross showing up well—the first time I had seen it here in the Soudan. At ten I lay down on an improvised bed of rugs on one of the lockers in Girouard's railway carriage office. Before he wished me good-night he pointed out a round-topped bit of rising ground just east of the camp as the rallying-point in case of a night attack. Fathi Bey's men, who were camped between it and the railway, would get into position there, with the railway battalion and the camp followers behind them.

Camp was to be shifted next day to Murrat Wells, and at the first sign of light the 7th marched off with their bugles playing, having struck camp in the short twilight. I turned out at half-past five, had a cup of tea, and whilst waiting for breakfast climbed Jebel Bringo as far as the slope that leads to the final precipice. After breakfast the railway battalion struck its camp, and the irregulars came prowling round,

looking for empty bottles, tin boxes and other objects that might be added to their slender camp equipment. I got a snapshot photograph of one of them with a rifle in one hand and a bottle in the other; but it is only right to say that the bottle was empty, and was probably destined to contain nothing stronger than water.

THE RAILWAY BATTALION MOVING CAMP.

I returned to Sarras and Halfa by a special train which was bringing the Sirdar back from his expedition to the front. Escorted by a squadron of cavalry, one of those which took part in the May-day fight, he had marched in the early morning from Wadi Atira to Murrat Wells, where the train was waiting for him. I got on when it stopped at the railway camp. The

cavalry acted as an escort to the train, half the squadron taking advantage of the long stop near Jebel Bringo to gallop on in advance, while the rest followed at a more leisurely pace.

Majors Wingate, Burn-Murdoch and Hickman, Captain Watson, Lord Edward Cecil, and Lord Fincastle travelled with the Sirdar. The escort which stayed at Sarras led into the camp three of the captured Dervish horses and carried with them a number of the spears taken in the fight. We made a long halt at Sarras, and it was late in the afternoon when we reached Wadi Halfa.

CHAPTER XII.

TO AKASHA WITH A CONVOY.

ALL through the month of May the preparations for an advance went steadily on. First the station of Murrat and then that of Ambigol Wells was made the point of departure for the convoys, thus shortening the journey and accelerating the accumulation of supplies at the front. The troops were gradually closed up towards Akasha, the main concentration beginning in the last days of the month. The Arab auxiliaries on both banks of the river were reinforced, and all the while the Dervishes made no attempt to interfere with the work.

After the Sirdar's return from Akasha, the veto was removed, which had so far prevented any of the correspondents visiting the advanced post. I took the very first opportunity to go south, marching to Akasha with the last convoy that left Sarras before Murrat became the advanced transport base.

I left Wadi Halfa at four in the afternoon of Sunday, May 10th, having sent on my servants with the camels, camp equipment, and stores two hours' earlier. I camped that night in a clump of palms just north of the fort of Gemai, my companions being Mr. Garrett and a small detachment of Egyptian cavalry. On the Monday

morning the cavalry men marched at 5 a.m. I and my colleague moved off at half-past six, and by ten we had got over twelve miles of very difficult country. Our horses had to go most of the way at a walk. At times the only track was upon the railway line, and as it often ran through narrow rock clefts, or along a ledge with rocks above and a steep slope to the river below,

OUR CAMP AT GEMAI.

we had to keep a sharp look-out for the early trains. Had we met one in a bad place it would, however, have been more inconvenient for the train than for us, as it had to travel at a slow rate of speed, and would of course stop if any one was seen on the line at a point where it was impossible to leave it.

When the track was not upon the line it lay, as often as not, along the rock-strewn slopes so characteristic of the Batn-el-Hagar Desert. So long as we were near the Nile there was some vegetation, but after crossing the deep hollow of Khor Sigada, we had to strike off through the hills across a bend of the river, and it was a slow four miles' march amid hopeless desolation. The hills were bare slopes with long streams of fantastically piled-up boulders; the valley bottoms, sand strewn with stones, as if these had fallen in showers—not a blade of grass, not a leaf, but here and there, perhaps once in half a mile, some dwarfed grey sunt bushes, a mass of thorns. A few small birds, the colour of the sand, flew up as they heard the ring of our horses' tread among the stones, and, flying as strongly as the birds, big locusts dashed past us two or three at a time. It was a dreary ride; and when at last we got to the summit of the long pass, by which the river is reached once more, the blue water reflecting the cloudless sky, and a few green palms along the bank, seemed by contrast like a glimpse of Eden.

Yet even by the river bank the stony ledges came down to the water, and only a few patches of sandy soil between them had been made to bear a crop when the Nile was high, by means of a couple of *sakkiyehs* (water-wheels), whose earthenware buckets were now piled beside them, while the little fields were all dry sand and stubble. But below the steep bank from which the water had receded for some sixty yards there was a belt of cultivation, and the peasants were getting a crop in before the rise of the river would cover this temporary farm, accessible only at low Nile.

We tied our horses to the posts of a *tukkul* or straw shelter, and waited nearly an hour for the arrival of our slower moving camels. Then we camped during the heat of the day, and started again in time to march into Sarras just at sundown. Our Arab servants bivouacked outside with the camels, and we were given temporary quarters in a straw-built hut in the permanently fortified camp.

Réveillée sounded on the Tuesday morning at four o'clock, for the convoy was to march at five. The bugle notes and drum-taps had hardly ceased, when from the little stretch of rocky plain south of the fort there arose a strange din, the groaning and complaining of hundreds of camels, roused in the dark from their sleep to receive their loads. The camel protests with deep moans and shrill wailing when he is made to rise or to kneel, or when his load is put upon him. If one did not know the ways of the beast one would think he was seriously ill or badly hurt. But it is only one of his curious customs. When a whole camp full of camels is uttering a unanimous protest, the din is simply indescribable.

As the darkness gave place to the twilight, one saw the camels gathered in two great masses on the plain, with the transport men busy loading them, and nearer the fort three squadrons, lance in hand, standing by their horses ready to mount. There were 580 Government camels in the convoy, besides a number belonging to officers and correspondents, which brought the number up to over six hundred. Besides the cavalry escort there were three companies of transport troops—*i.e.*, camel-men armed with Remington rifles, and half a

battalion of infantry which was moving up to the next station in advance.

At five the camels began to move off slowly in single file. It must have been an hour before all were on the march; and within sight of the starting-place several had to be halted and made to kneel down in order to have their loads readjusted or more firmly secured. But meanwhile the cavalry had started,

HEAD OF THE CONVOY IN THE DESERT NEAR SARRAS.

Major Burn-Murdoch in command. The three squadrons took the same road as the camels, by the side of the railway up to the point where the convoy route turned away to the right towards Semneh. The cavalry then held on for some miles along Khor Ahrusa, the valley through which the railway runs, leaving it only once to pass through a deep narrow

gorge of black rocks, out of which at first sight there seemed to be no passage for man or horse. Moving thus along the general direction of the railway the cavalry was on the left of the convoy, and effectually protected it against any possible attack by raiders coming down the desert khors to the eastward.

I rode with the cavalry escort, and so far my visits to the railway works had made me fairly well acquainted with the ground we were traversing. We had gone some ten miles, our horses moving at a brisk walk over rock, sand and stones, when the steep-sided summit of Jebel Bringo began to rise high in our front. Then we bore to the right across a sandy plain, where the cavalry formed up into a column of squadrons, and broke into a brisk trot and then a gallop, a great relief after the slow march of the last two hours and a half. As we swept along the dust and sand rose round us in a dense black cloud. Riding close to the flank of one of the squadrons, I could at times barely see like a shadow the rider on my right. It was easy now to understand how in the cavalry skirmish near Akasha one of the officers did not recognise for awhile that the horseman who rode next him was a Dervish.

So far the escort had protected the convoy by riding along the valleys on its exposed flank, further protection being afforded by the presence of friendly Arab scouts well away to the eastward. When we began to move to the right, the outposts of the rail-head, now beyond Murrat and the fort at the Wells provided an additional screen towards our left flank and rear. Gradually the sandy plain on which we rode narrowed to a wadi bounded by rocky steeps, which were climbed

by the flankers of our advanced guard. Had we followed the wadi a few miles further we should have struck the flank of our convoy, and the horsemen would find themselves on the same narrow riverside path as the long train of loaded camels. But how were we to avoid this? Simply by making our horses scramble up the rocky ridge on our left. I doubt if three English squadrons could have done what was taken as a matter of course by this column of Egyptian cavalry, and I am quite sure many cavalry officers would have reported the pass impracticable for their arm. But the Arab horses of the Egyptian squadrons fairly climbed the steep and stony slopes.

From the summit of the rocks we got a glimpse of the Nile and its fringe of green palm trees. But between us and the river lay a steep descent, almost precipitous in places, and then a stretch of sand and another ridge lower than that which we were traversing. For awhile we descended the zigzag path in single file, but soon the order was given to dismount and lead the horses. They got down into the valley even more cleverly than they had climbed up. It was a sight to see the horses stepping from foothold to foothold, here poising themselves for a moment with all four feet on a stone, there letting themselves slip down a bit of almost smooth rock surface. "They climb like cats," said one of the English officers. It was a pardonable exaggeration. The track was one that most people would have declared bad for mules.

A smart canter across the sandy bottom, and the second ridge was climbed like the first, but we made the descent mounted, though part of it was down a

projecting shelf of blue volcanic stone, with a sheer descent on the one hand and a rough rock face on the other. From this ridge we saw the post of Wadi Atira, with its white tents and straw huts, some of them inside the fort, which was built on a rocky knoll, some of them among the palms between the fort and the Nile.

A LONG DRINK.

In twenty minutes we had reached the halting-place, far in advance of the slow, plodding camels, notwithstanding the detour we had made. I received a hearty welcome from Khulusi Bey, Colonel of the 8th Battalion, who was in command of the fort, and whose acquaintance I had made at Korosko on my way up the Nile.

I camped with the convoy by the river just below

the cataract of Wadi Atira. On both sides of the Nile spurs of red and black rock ran down to the water, and in the river itself there was an archipelago of islands and ledges and isolated upright masses of black porphyry. On either bank the hills rose rapidly into peak and precipice and boulder-strewn declivity. The fort with its stone breastworks and mud walls, and the zigzag pathway to its gate, looked down upon the far-spreading camp—the citadel of a temporary city. Two months ago there was not even a straw hut at Wadi Atira.

On Wednesday, May 13th, the second day's march of the convoy brought us to Ambigol. *Réveillée* sounded just after three, so that we had two hours, mostly of darkness, before the start was made. To get some breakfast, and see the horses saddled and the camels loaded is not two hours' work, and the early *réveillée* was due to the mistake of a bugler.

The convoy had for its escort half a squadron of cavalry and half a battalion, its way to Ambigol being what is known as the mountain road. The riverside path was left to the squadrons not on escort duty which were pushing on to Ambigol. We had, of course, a body of efficient scouts in the half-squadron, and a reliable escort in the infantry, but during the first part of the march our best protection lay in the fact that we were inside the barrier to Dervish raids afforded by Fathi Bey's battalion, and Girouard's Railway Corps, with their posts, pickets, and armed working parties along the line to the eastward between Murrat and Ambigol Wells. For the second part of the journey we had a similar screen, though not quite such a strong

one, provided by the network of posts and patrols supplied by the Camel Corps and radiating from Ambigol. Nevertheless we moved with all due precautions, for the country was difficult, and a handful of desperadoes slinking up a khor might inflict some damage on the long and necessarily somewhat straggling line of heavily laden camels.

At Ambigol, where we arrived about ten o'clock, I found Hunter Pasha in command. Our tents were pitched on a kind of grassy undercliff below the river bank, and when the heat of the day had gone off we were able to enjoy a dip in the Nile at our very tent doors. The place was the headquarters of Major Tudway's[1] Camel Corps, the mounted infantry of the desert. They ride *heggins*, or swift camels, bearing the same relation to the *gimel*, or baggage camel, that a thorough-bred English hunter does to a cart-horse. They can mount and dismount without making their animals kneel, and they send them along at a wild gallop over rock and sand in a way which makes the average white man regard their sticking to the saddle as a kind of miracle. Add to this that their mounts can, if need be, go for three days without food or water, that when they start on an expedition they carry a week's supplies for man and beast, and that sixty miles in the day is not a distressing march for them, and one can realise their value for warfare in the Soudan.

Next day, Thursday, we had an easy ride of fourteen miles from Ambigol to Alimula Camp. After the first mile, the track was for a considerable part of the way

[1] Captain (temp. Major) R. I. Tudway, Essex Regiment.

a broad sandy stretch, rising and falling in gentle declivities, with on the left the low outlying hills of the desert, and on the right a broad belt of green vegetation along the river bank. There was halfa grass in abundance, palms, bushy tamarisks, thorny sunt, or gum-trees, and great masses of Dead Sea apples, with their grey-green foliage and their profusion of poisonous fruit. Beyond this green belt, for mile after mile, we heard and saw the rushing waters of the long cataract of Tanjor—bright lines of foam creaming over slanting shelves of rock, here and there a swirl and rush like a mill-race among lofty rocks, and with it all the never-ceasing sound of many waters, the sight of green trees, a deep refreshment after the long marches through stony valleys where there was no sign of life. On our left a couple of minutes' ride was enough to take one again into the land of desolation where camel-men and cavalry scouts were protecting our flank.

I rode with the point of the advanced guard along the sandy road. It was ground where one might hope to see something of the enemy, for throughout this day's journey, and for the first part of the next, our left flank was open to the desert, numerous khors and wadis coming down to the river, and attack was quite possible.

We passed Tanjor Camp, with its little forts of dry, stone walls, topped by straw sun-screens for the sentinels. Then we trotted on to Alimula, and bivouacked on the edge of a clump of thorn trees till the camels and the tents arrived. The camp at Alimula was fortified with rough stone breastworks, a

redoubt, and a large thorn-protected zereba. Not long after our arrival Colonel Hunter rode in on his way back from a flying visit to Akasha. He told me there were persistent rumours that the Dervishes were going to attack our advanced post. The Emir Hammuda had, it appeared, sent to Dongola accounts of an alleged victory on the 1st of May, with the result that Wad

CAMELS IN CAMP.

Bishara had sent him back a message that if part of his army could fight so well he ought to be able to turn the "Turks" and the infidels out of Akasha.

We made an early start from Alimula on the Friday morning, and got into Akasha between ten and eleven. The road had its difficult bits, and there was one point where the danger of the march was increased by our

convoy having to let another long train of camels pass it in a narrow space between two defiles. The ground was an hour's march from Alimula Camp. The road ran by bold zigzags over a spur of the hills some five hundred feet high, and then descended as rapidly to a plain about half a mile long, with a belt of trees by the river on the right; on the left a tangle of rocky ravines and khors opening on the plain, and in front Sonki mountain, traversed by a narrow path commanded by soaring precipices, and known as the Sonki defile. It was on this little plain that the convoy coming down from Akasha had to pass us. Most of its camels were going light, but a few of them carried invalids in cacolets slung, pannier fashion, on each side of the hump.

While we waited for the descending convoy, our camels formed up, kneeling in three squares, with the transport men, Remington rifle in hand, drawn up round each group of animals. Half a company of regulars was posted near the opening of the defile, holding a ridge of rocks that formed a natural breastwork. Other infantry men held similar ridges looking up the khors on the left, and the rear guard, when it came up, acted as a reserve. It was nearly three-quarters of an hour before the descending convoy was through the pass, and the cavalry, which had pushed on to look for possible enemies, sent back word that all was clear in front and flank.

We had to move in single file through the Sonki ravines. A few weeks before they were like dry torrent beds, full of giant boulders; but after the first few convoys had gone up to Akasha, making

a detour to avoid this pass, an Egyptian battalion cleared the way through the ravine in two days, saving all subsequent convoys miles of marching. For this work the soldiers had only picks—no crowbars, hammers, or chisels. But they took the huge stones, sang one of their unmusical songs, hove together at the weight and sent it, not down, but up the slope, where it had to be securely propped up with smaller stones.

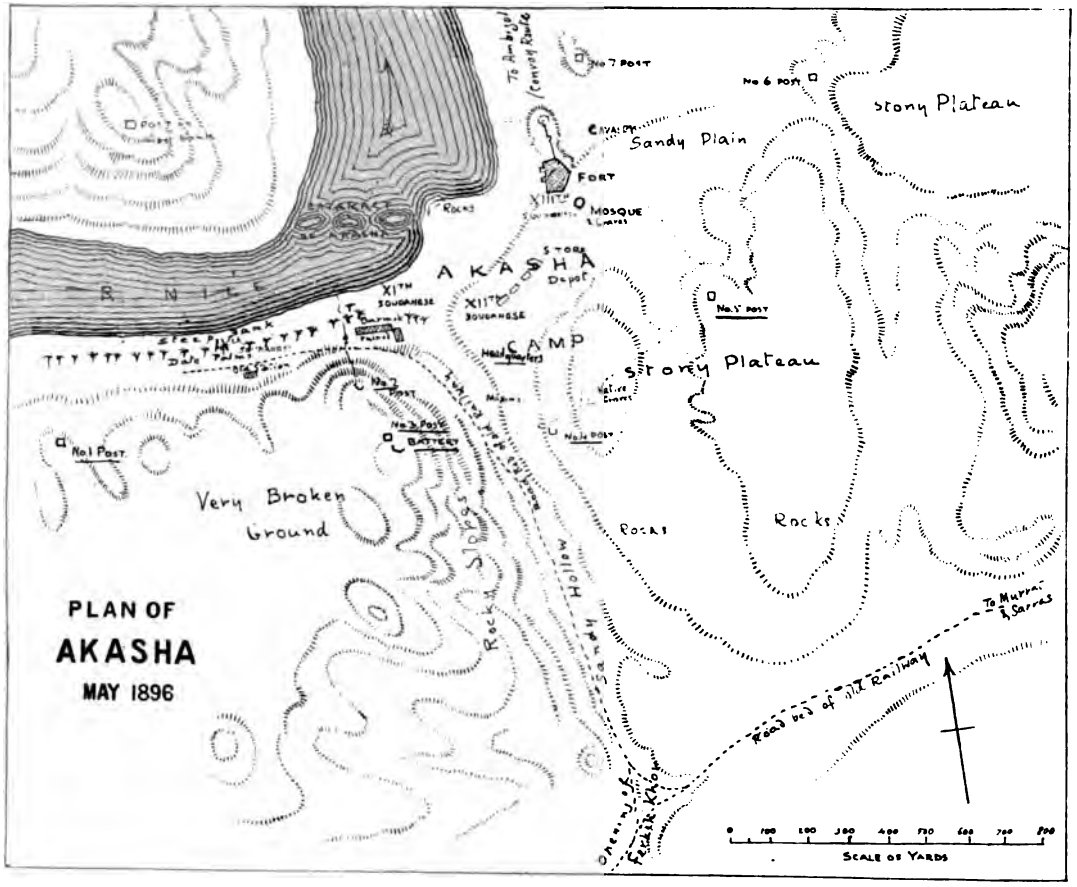
As we marched through no attempt was made to crown the precipitous ridges above with infantry, before passing the defile, because it was quite certain that the Mahdists would not care to attack unless they had an easy line of retreat for their camels and horses, and there was no such way from the wild heights above the pass. Only one important khor runs into the Sonki defile from the land side. It was blocked by half a company of infantry, which afterwards followed the convoy as a rear guard. At the end of the defile a stony plain runs south between the river and the hills. At this point the escort turned away to the right to the river bank, where it was to form a fortified post. The convoy was apparently left to its own resources, but really it was more completely guarded than it had been anywhere else on the route, for all the khors opening on the plain through the hills were now held by strong posts. I therefore trotted on alone across the plain, and a little after ten I was in Akasha and sitting in his tent with Major Townshend, commanding the 12th Soudanese, the first officer I met as I rode into the fortified camp.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN CAMP AT AKASHA.

WE were between three and four days at Akasha. I would have liked to have made a longer stay. But the Sirdar's orders were positive. It was to be only a flying visit. Then back to Wadi Halfa till the headquarters moved southwards.

However, a stay extending over the greater part of four days was sufficient to make one fairly well acquainted with a place like Akasha, which was not a village, but a small fortified camp and depôt for the accommodation of stores. Of the former village of Akasha only one relic remained, a small mosque tomb with a low white dome. There is a native cemetery around it, very humble graves, with a rough piece of stone to mark head and foot, and a few pebbles strewn between. For the Mohammedans of all the district the mosque of Akasha is a peculiarly sacred place, and it is supposed to be a good thing to have a grave in front of its dome. The local legend says that the tomb is that of a companion of the Prophet, who was still a mere boy at the time of Mohammed's death. When, just before the closing scene, the Prophet asked if there was any one present whom he had injured or wronged, the young man stepped forward and told his


PLAN OF
AKASHA
MAY 1896
NILE
AKASHA
CAMP
Stony Plateau
Sandy Plain
Stony Plateau
Very Broken Ground
Rocks
Rocks
Rocks
FORT
MOSQUE
No 1 Post
No 2 Post
No 3 Post
No 4 Post
No 5 Post
No 6 Post
No 7 Post
To Murrat & Sarras
Road bed of W.R. Railway
SCALE OF YARDS

master that he had once blamed him harshly and unjustly. "But you forgive me now, my son?" asked the Prophet, humbly, and, on receiving a reply in the affirmative, he blessed the young man and prophesied that his tomb should be famous for ages, declaring that a visit to it should be second only to the Mecca pilgrimage in merit. Such is the local tradition, and it saved the mosque of Akasha from destruction when the Mahdists made a clean sweep of the village.

Next in age to the mosque (but by how many centuries who can say?) come the remains of the brief British occupation twelve years ago. There was the mud-walled fort, not a very formidable citadel, which had been put into a state of repair, and was now garrisoned by Collinson's Soudanese. Then there were some ruinous buildings with thick walls of sun-dried brick, which once were offices and stores, and the road-bed of the railway curved round the valley to the river bank. Here and there lay the old metals; the sleepers were all gone. Close to the river stood the framework of an engine-shed made of railway iron, and some small bridge girders were lying by what was once a siding. The line had never been laid beyond Akasha, but the road-bed was prepared in 1884 for more than six miles southwards along the valley that leads to Ferkeh.

Akasha lies in a small amphitheatre of hills running up to scarped precipices and soaring peaks of dark-reddish rock. From the river bank a kind of stony plateau runs up to an inner circle of much lower heights, and this was the line of defence. Northwards between the hills and the river the narrow strip of plain extends to Okmeh and the mouth of the Sonki

defile. Several khors, deep rocky ravines, open on this plain. A little further from the river a long khor, running first east and then north-eastward, gives entrance for the railway into the Akasha amphitheatre. Other smaller khors open on the south-east, and southward a long sandy valley leads through the desert behind Dal Mountain to Ferkeh.

When I was hurriedly preparing to leave London an officer in the Guards gave me as a parting word of advice a warning never to sleep in Akasha if it could be avoided. "It is a place," he said, "that is sure to be rushed some dark night. It is a wretched hole with big hills and confused khors all round it. No outpost line in the world could make it safe." A less exaggerated opinion as to the unsoundness of Akasha as a military position may be read in Major Wingate's standard work on "Mahdism and the Egyptian Soudan." Speaking of the campaign of Ginnis in 1885, after saying that Kosheh, forty-two miles south of Akasha, was occupied as the advanced post, he writes :—

"It had been decided the railway must be protected. Akasha, the railway terminus, was an impossible military position; surrounded on all sides by hills, it would have been quite untenable. From Akasha for nearly forty miles the country is a confused mass of rugged hills and boulders. . . . Kosheh was therefore chosen as the first open spot." [1]

While at Halfa I asked Major Wingate if this was still his opinion. He replied, "If we had in front of us an enemy like the Mahdists of 1885, and in the same force, I should still say that Akasha was a bad

[1] "Mahdism and the Egyptian Soudan" (London, 1891), p. 269.

position. A place hemmed in by hills as it is must be a bad position. But with the strong garrison we have there now and the works they have constructed, and with such enemies as we have to deal with, the place is quite safe." I go into this matter here only because I know there was in some quarters in England an impression that the Egyptian advanced post was a very risky place to hold.

The garrison consisted of four black battalions, the 9th (Hackett Pain), the 11th (Jackson), the 12th (Townshend), and the 13th (Collinson), a squadron of cavalry (Broadwood), an Egyptian battery of six Krupp guns, and the battery of four Maxims manned by British soldiers—altogether a force of about 3,500 men, all splendid fighting material. The nearest reserves were at Okmeh and Sonki, an easy ride north of Akasha by the plain between the hills and the Nile. At these points there were the 3rd Egyptian infantry (Sillem) and two squadrons of cavalry.

Hammuda's four thousand men at Ferkeh and Mograka would be throwing their lives away if they tried conclusions with the force at Akasha, even if the place were not fortified; but the inner circle of heights, the edge of the plateau fairly bristled with works. About half a mile south there was a detached post garrisoned by the 9th Soudanese—a small closed work on the hill. Across the river, just above the point where the Nile makes a sharp bend and a long ridge of rocks produces a roaring rapid, another little fort crowned a prominent hill, from which otherwise Mahdist marksmen might easily disturb the camp by firing across the river at night. Just south of the

cataract the inner circle of works began—screens of railway iron, dry stone walls topped with sandbags, wide zereba fences of desert thorn, little redoubts with walls of clay and stone, and north and south of the camp, at the highest points of the line, a solidly built two-floored blockhouse that would be impregnable against anything but artillery. The southern blockhouse looked down the long khor towards Ferkeh, and on its south side there was a sandbag battery where an officer and some gunners were always ready to bring the Krupp guns into action. It was from this battery the first—and so far the only—cannon shot of the Nile campaign had been fired six or seven weeks before my visit, dispersing a party of Mahdist cavalry scouts with a loss of one killed and two badly wounded by the bursting shell—a proof that the Egyptian artillerymen knew how to lay a gun.

Day and night Arab scouts and Broadwood's cavalry patrols were watching the khors well to the front. Surprise was practically out of the question, and an attack on these works held by veteran Soudanese infantry backed up by artillery and Maxim fire would have been a piece of madness. Yet such an act of madness was just possible. Our spies told us that Wad Bishara at Dongola had been repeatedly taunting Hammuda with leaving Akasha in undisturbed possession of the Egyptians, especially since the boastful leader of the Dervish vanguard sent in his lying report of a great victory on May 1st. Major MacDonald, who commanded at Akasha, is a soldier of long and varied experience. He fought his way up from the ranks, and a long row of medal ribbons on his jacket

tells of war services in many lands. He was careful that the improbability of a Mahdist attack should not lead to any lack of vigilance. His garrison was always ready, always on the alert, and every day added something to the strength of the defences. While I was there the men were working at the formation of a wide abattis of thorny branches in advance of the fortified

BLOCKHOUSE—POST NO. 3, AKASHA.

posts and blockhouses. Looking out from any prominent point in the line, one could see here a little cairn of boulders, there a stick with a fluttering rag fixed among the stones. These marked the distances, measured in hundreds of yards, so that, if the enemy ever tried to rush the works, the shooting of the defence would be like that of the rifle range. At

every post and blockhouse water-tanks and boxes of Martini ammunition were kept ready, so that the little garrison would have a good supply of what the soldier most needs in action.

The hospital, with its red crescent on a white ground flying over it, was at the northern end of the works. Collinson's 13th Battalion held the fort and the north side; Townshend's 12th the eastern part of the line; Jackson's 11th the southern blockhouse and the works near there. Hackett Pain and the 9th were camped on the river bank outside the works, between them and the southern advanced post. Two Krupp guns were up at the blockhouse battery, four more in camp ready to go wherever they might be wanted. The Maxims, each in a straw-built *tukkul*, and carefully covered up to keep out sand and dust, were close to the long breastwork which blocked the hollow leading to Ferkeh Khor. Just behind the Maxim battery was the headquarters' camp pitched on a stretch of level ground covered with short green grass, that, rough as it was, reminded one of an English lawn. There were a few thorn trees among the white tents; into one of these tents ran the telegraph wire. On the stony level between the fort and the camp great mounds of sacks and cases were accumulating, every convoy adding to the mass.

The day we arrived at Akasha there was no news of the enemy, but on the Saturday a deserter—a woman—came in to the outposts of the 9th Soudanese. She said she had been cruelly beaten and had run away from the Mahdist camp at Ferkeh. She had marks on her which testified to the truth of the first part of her story. There is a good deal of bush along the river bank,

which at Akasha itself is graced with a row of fine date-palms. It was through this belt of riverside growth that the fugitive escaped. She told the Intelligence officer that the Dervishes at Ferkeh had been reinforced from Mograka. Natives are always vague as to numbers, so no definite information as to the force in our front could be obtained from her, but she said there was talk in the camp of an attempt soon to be made to rush Akasha. As to recent events, she told how, after the May-day fight, the Dervish cavalry rode into Ferkeh utterly exhausted with heat and thirst. The story soon spread through Akasha that a Dervish attack was imminent, with the result that after dark our servants, contrary to orders, brought the camels in from the camel lines, in order to pass the night near our tents on the river bank.

Major Broadwood spent the night between Saturday and Sunday with a patrol of three cavalrymen among the hills to the southward. The ground as far as Ferkeh had been carefully reconnoitred and mapped on the scale of two inches to the mile some three weeks before this. What Broadwood now wanted was to get a good look at the ground to the south of Ferkeh, the other side of the enemy's position. He rode round the place to the eastward in the grey of the morning, and then got to the south and found open, rolling country, with low hills practicable for cavalry on that side. He found a Mahdist outpost south of Ferkeh on the alert, and as he had the enemy between him and home, and had to act cautiously, he could not go near enough to see the Dervish camp. He got back safe to Akasha early in the morning, bringing a

report that was of the utmost use when Ferkeh was attacked.

While he was delivering his report seven Dervish horsemen were scurrying away from a point about two miles and a half south of our outpost line, where some of our scouts saw them turn and retreat rapidly. They had come along the river side in pursuit of three more deserters, a man and two women. One of the latter was unfortunately captured ; the others got safely into the advanced post of the 9th Soudanese. I saw them being brought up to the headquarters' camp. The man was dressed in the Dervish jibba (a sort of loose white blouse ornamented with coloured patches). He was blindfolded, and one of the 9th led him along. The woman walked beside him. A soldier carried the man's rifle and his bandolier containing twenty-nine cartridges, for he had brought in his arms and ammunition with him. They were surrounded by an excited crowd of Soudanese soldiers and camp-followers, all talking together. These had to stop outside the headquarters' camp, while the fugitives were taken to a tent, given a meal, and then questioned by Captain Fitton, the Intelligence officer.

Major MacDonald told me that they confirmed the story of the previous deserter. The man had been a bugler in Gordon's army, and had acted as bugler to Wad-en-Nejumi in the Toski campaign. The woman was his wife. They said that many more were anxious to desert from Ferkeh. Food was scarce in the Dervish camp, and there was a rumour that any man getting away to Akasha would receive a "guinea" (that is, an English sovereign) on arrival there, and a second

guinea if he brought his rifle. Major MacDonald promptly paid the ex-bugler the cash he expected. The rumour was well founded, for it was the commandant of Akasha himself that had found means to set it in circulation about three weeks before, sending back one of the first deserters to spread it about, the

INSIDE POST NO. 3—SOUDANESE GUARD.

man telling Hammuda that he had been captured by the Egyptians but had escaped from their hands.

But for the appearance of the deserters it was very hard to realise at Akasha that we were in touch with a savage enemy. There was plenty of work going on, but no one seemed to expect a fight till we chose to advance, and the Soudanese were in a cheerful state of enjoying alike their work, their drill, and their play,

and were telling each other that the Mahdists must be a very poor lot not to have done something long ago. Both Soudanese and Egyptians, especially since the 1st of May, felt a certain sense of superiority over their enemies, which was sure to count for much when the fighting began. As for the officers, they had perfect confidence in their men, and not the least doubt of what would be the result of the first general engagement whenever it might come. The luckiest of the lot was Townshend, fresh from his Chitral triumphs, and with a fine black battalion to lead in the coming campaign. He had brought with him the banjo with which he used to cheer the spirits of the Chitral garrison, and the night we arrived there was a "sing-song" at the mess of the 12th. The success of the evening was a topical song, which predicted that, "with MacDonald to lead it," the black brigade would do its fair share of the work; and in its recurring chorus summed up the general state of mind of every one about the campaign. "We wonder how long it will last?" Was it Khartoum this time, or only Dongola? Was there a British expedition coming in the autumn? These were the questions most eagerly discussed all along the line, but at the front at Akasha there was the minor question, "When were we going for Ferkeh?" And persistent rumour answered that it would be at an early date, probably in the first week of June.

On the Monday we left Akasha. As one of the officers wished me good-bye he said, "You will be back very soon. You will only have a few days in Halfa, for of course you will be here to see us clear those fellows out of Ferkeh."

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE EVE OF THE ADVANCE.

THE journey back to Halfa was much more rapid than the march up. The railway was now working to Murrat Wells. So leaving Akasha late on Monday afternoon, we bivouacked that night at Sonki, reached Ambigol on the river on Tuesday evening, and next day, guided by one of the Camel Corps, we made an early march up the wild pass of Khor Turguman, and thence across the hills to Murrat Wells, whence the train took us into Wady Halfa the same afternoon. Major Owen [1] and four of his camel scouts travelled with us as far as Sarras. Their camels were driven into a couple of trucks, made to kneel down despite their loud protests, and then tied at the knee so that they could not rise. It was a strange mingling of East and West to see the camels travelling in a railway truck, and craning their hairy necks hither and thither to see the novel sights of the desert railway line.

Sarras was all but utterly deserted now that Murrat had become the starting-point of the convoys. The cavalry camp was gone. There were half a dozen camels on the plain below the fort, where they used

[1] Brevet Major E. R. Owen, D.S.O., Lancashire Fusiliers.

to be assembled in hundreds. The great mass of stores by the railway siding had almost all been cleared away. The fort was held by about three hundred line-of-communication troops, recruits armed with old Remington rifles. There was time enough for them to learn their business, for there was now no fear of any sudden Dervish raid on Sarras; but what a raw

MAJOR WINGATE'S HOUSE, WADI HALFA.

lot they were may be gathered from a story I heard about the first night they took over garrison duty at Sarras, when the line battalion they relieved had marched away southwards. The new garrison was drawn up in line. "Any men who know how to shoulder and present arms will step to the front," said the commander. About a dozen men marched

out proudly, rifle at the shoulder, from various parts of the line. "Capital!" said the officer; "you will be the guard for to-night." The dozen efficients looked unhappy. The gallant three hundred no doubt rejoiced secretly that their ignorance had secured for them another night's unbroken rest.

There was a change too in the appearance of the railway sidings at Wadi Halfa. The first thing that we noticed on arriving there were great heaps of railway iron, collected since our departure. These rails we were told were destined for the Akasha-Ferkeh extension of the Soudan railway. An enormous quantity of rails, enough for about twelve miles of single line, had been collected at Halfa in 1885, and was lying there when the construction of the railway was stopped. This material had been used for purposes for which it was never intended, chiefly as supports to roofs, balconies, and verandahs, and occasionally for mere fences and boundary marks. It was now being collected, not without much destruction or house property. This haste in getting the railway iron ready *for the line beyond Akasha* was one more welcome indication that the Dervishes were not to be left much longer in undisturbed possession of Ferkeh.

Though the headquarters' staff observed to the last moment a diplomatic silence about coming events, there were soon further signs that the moment for the long-wished-for advance was near at hand. At the Intelligence Department office in Major Wingate's house the maps were taken from the walls, and the books and papers were being transferred to boxes and

cases. The correspondents were told that it would be well to send their camels up to rail-head, and get a small reserve of forage collected at Akasha. Then the horse battery arrived from Assouan, not a battery of horse artillery, but the one battery in the Egyptian army that had its guns and waggons fully horsed.

RAILWAY SIDING, HALFA—NILE BOAT HAULED UP FOR TRANSPORT BY RAIL TO GEMAI.

The pieces were heavy Krupps, something like our own 12-pounders. The battery had been left at Assouan till the last moment, as there it was easier to keep the teams supplied with forage. The two batteries already at the front had only small mountain guns carried on mules and camels.

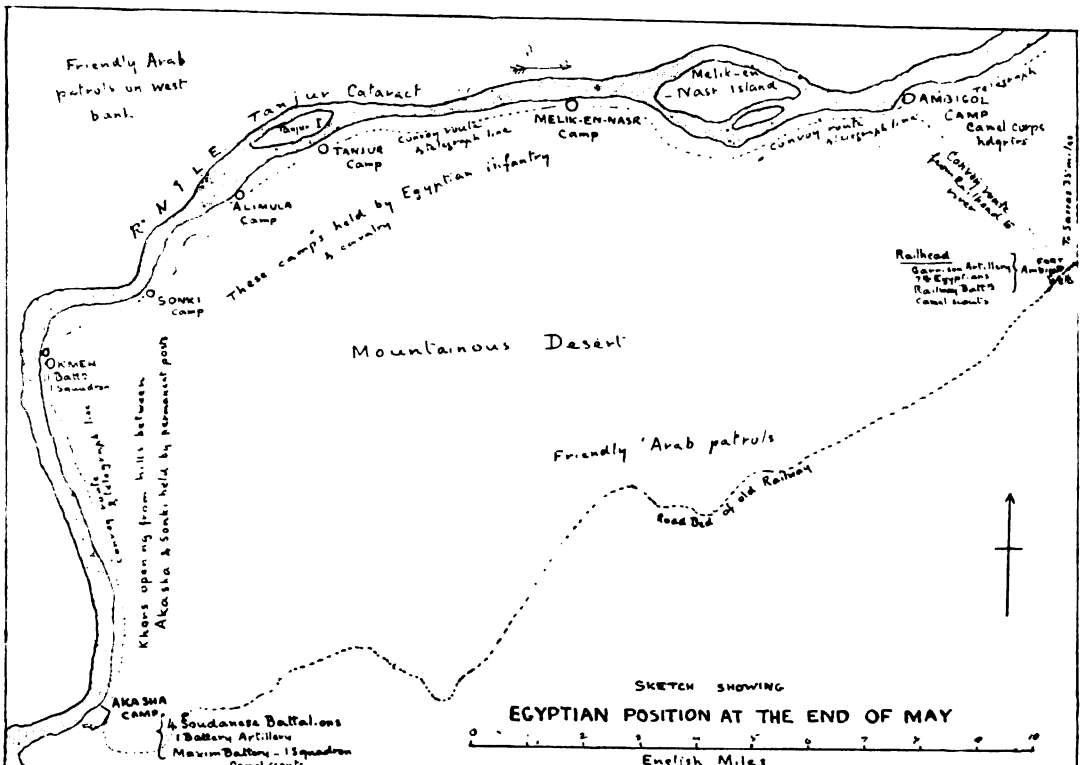
Further reinforcements were promised from Suakin,

where a brigade of Indian troops was now being disembarked in order to set the garrison free for service on the Nile, and the 10th Soudanese were already on the way to Halfa by the Kosseir-Keneh route. Although there were rumours of an intended advance from Suakin against Berber, Colonel Egerton's Indian brigade was really only sufficiently strong to hold Suakin and its outlying posts, and had not any transport for a desert campaign. But the mere presence of these Indian troops on the Red Sea coast no doubt created a very useful impression at Omdurman and Berber, and probably kept idle at the latter point Dervish forces that might otherwise have been used to reinforce Dongola. But the immediate service done for the expedition by the arrival of the Indian regiments was the placing of some two thousand Soudanese and Egyptian troops at the disposal of the Sirdar for the advance on the Nile.

On May 28th the heavy baggage of the headquarters was loaded on a train at Halfa station. That evening the large tent, which had for some weeks been occupied by the headquarters' guard near the Sirdar's house, was struck. But it was not till the 31st that we were told that the General was going south next day, and that on June 2nd we correspondents would be given places in the train which would convey Major Wingate, Slatin Pasha, and the staff of the Intelligence Department to Ambigol Wells (to which the railway was now working), *en route* for Akasha. Our servants and baggage would be conveyed on the train, but we had to send our horses on in advance by the old convoy road.

We were all heartily glad to be at last leaving Wadi Halfa—doubly glad because we were given to understand that we would not be many days at Akasha before there was a further advance southwards. I have described in an earlier chapter the military situation as I found it on my first arrival at Halfa in the middle of April. I may here sum up the changes which had taken place in the six busy weeks which had since elapsed, and show what was the military situation at the end of May, on the eve of the advance. The accompanying sketch map will save a good deal of lengthy description.

It will be noticed that Akasha was still the advanced post. In the middle of April the railway had just got beyond Sarras, and that place was the starting-point of the convoys which were accumulating supplies at the front. The railway had now been pushed to a little beyond Ambigol Wells. Sarras, instead of being a busy secondary base, was now a riverside station held by three companies of recruits. The trains ran up to Ambigol Wells, where there was a station and a depôt protected by a strong fort on one of the surrounding hills. A detachment of garrison artillery held the fort, and supplied fatigue parties for unloading the trains on arrival at the Wells. A trainload was about 260 to 300 tons, and these men, without cranes or other gear to help them, could unload a train in twenty minutes. Major Lewis was in command at Ambigol Wells; the Railway Battalion, under Girouard, was camped near there; and the 7th Egyptians, under Fathi Bey, still acted as the guard of the rail-head.


Friendly Arab patrols on west bank.
Tanjur Cataract
R. NILE
Tanjur I.
TANJUR Camp
Convoy route & telegraph line
MELIK-EN-NASR Camp
Melik-en-Nasr Island
DAMBICOL Camp
Camel corps hdqrtrs
Convoy route & telegraph line
ALIMULA Camp
These camps held by Egyptian infantry & cavalry
SONKI Camp
Railhead
Garrison Artillery
1 Egyptian Battn
Railway Battn
Camel scouts
Post Ambigol
Mountainous Desert
OKMEH
1 Battn
1 Squadron
Convoy route & telegraph line
Khors opening from hills between Akasha & Sonki held by permanent posts
Friendly Arab patrols
Road Bed of old Railway
AKASHA CAMP
4 Soudanese Battalions
1 Battery Artillery
Maxim Battery - 1 Squadron
Camel scouts
SKETCH SHOWING
EGYPTIAN POSITION AT THE END OF MAY
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
English Miles

The convoys went down a khor leading to the camp at Ambigol on the Nile, and then followed the usual convoy route along the river bank to Akasha. But they were now saved all the heavy marching from Sarras by Wady Atira to Ambigol. The escort duty hitherto done by the cavalry and Camel Corps had also been much lightened by placing permanent posts along the route, especially along the section from Sonki to Akasha, where all the khors leading up into the hills from the river bank were held by small detachments.

There was no telegraph beyond Sarras in the middle of April. But a line now ran by the convoy route and the river bank to Akasha, and a second line, worked on the telephone system, connected Sarras with the rail-head at Ambigol Wells. The railway could have been pushed further but for an unfortunate accident in the last week of May, when a couple of engines went off the line, blocking it at a difficult point, and stopping the further sending on of railway material beyond Ambigol Wells. To raise the engines was no easy matter, and the accident shows that in a country like the Batn-el-Hagar an improvised railway is not an absolutely reliable line of communication.

Up to the Wells the railway ran generally north and south, that is, directly towards the enemy, but south of Ambigol it bore away to the south-westward, running to a flank, and it would therefore be much more open to Dervish attacks from this point. The enemy had just been showing some signs of activity. Early on Saturday, May 30th, firing was heard in a khor near Ambigol Wells. Major Tudway turned out with a detachment of the Camel Corps, and found that a party

of the enemy's camel-men had approached the Wells by the desert track that runs from Mograka by Bir-el-Khanak. At the point where the firing had been heard he found a number of empty cartridge cases on the sand. What the Dervishes had been firing at could only be conjectured. Apparently they had had a panic or false alarm. He followed their retreating foot-prints for some miles, but could not come up with them.

The concentration towards the front had on our side made considerable progress. There were already four Soudanese battalions at Akasha, and with the 10th Regiment, now on its way, the Sirdar would have some four thousand Soudanese troops at the front. The Egyptian battalions and the cavalry were mostly echeloned along the river bank at Okmeh, Sonki, Alimula, Tanjor, and Melik-en-Nasr. The Camel Corps headquarters were at Ambigol, where there were also some cavalry. The 6th Egyptian battalion was at Halfa. There was a battery at Akasha, and two more were on the way up.

At this time no one expected that there would be "a bad Nile," so it was thought the gunboats would be able to ascend the cataracts in July. To simplify the ascent a party of sappers under Hunter-Weston [1] and Elkington were meanwhile going to round off dangerous corners and clear away obstructive rocks with the help of guncotton. A number of machine guns had been ordered, and it was proposed to mount them on some of the stern-wheelers now engaged in trans-

[1] Brevet-Major A. G. Hunter-Weston, R.E., Special Service Officer.

port work. As artillery was not the enemy's strong point, they would be able to do good service in patrolling the river. It was expected that the advance on Dongola would begin so early that the new steamers from England would hardly be available.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CONCENTRATION FOR BATTLE.

IN company with most of the other correspondents, I left Wadi Halfa on Tuesday, June 2nd, going by train to Ambigol Wells. It was one of the hottest days we had had, and we were exactly twelve hours in a crowded railway carriage at a temperature of something above 120 degrees. At 10 a.m. we took our places in the train, and we were told it would start "in a few minutes." The "few minutes" lengthened out to four and a half hours, and the choice was between standing in the blazing sunlight at the railway siding, or sitting in an over-heated carriage, playfully labelled in official letters of gold as the "wagon-salon" of the Soudan railway. A suggestion that the special correspondents and the Intelligence Department officers should adjourn for lunch was met by the authorities with a warning that if we went away for even a few minutes the train would probably start in our absence. So we sat for hours in that rabbit-hutch on wheels and were nearly baked alive.

The train was the usual string of trucks, every one of them piled high with stores, and with a crowd of soldiers of the 10th Soudanese on top of each heaped-up waggon. The officers travelled with us. The regi-

ment, after leaving Suakin, had done the desert march from Kosseir to Keneh, whence it had been brought up the Nile to Wadi Halfa. Less than half the battalion was on the train, the rest had to wait till a later hour.

We started at half-past two. There was a long delay at Sarras, and it was 10 p.m. on a hot, cloudy night, when at last we ran into the siding at Ambigol Wells.

THIRD CLASS SOUDAN RAILWAY.

The first thing we were told was that the camp was short of water—a piece of bad news for thirsty men who had emptied their water-bottles *en route*. A kind-hearted engineer officer, whose acquaintance I had made during one of my visits to the rail-head, got me a bottle of soda-water, and I rolled myself in a rug and lay down on the sand near his tent.

It was a noisy camp, for two more trains came in—one at midnight, the other at 2 a.m.—bringing the rest of the 10th Soudanese. As our train and one that had arrived late on Monday evening were still on the sidings, all the efficient locomotives, and most of the rolling-stock of the Soudan Railway, was thus concentrated at Ambigol Wells. The unloading of the trains went on all night. There was the puffing of engines, many voices of men at work, moaning and groaning of camels—yet somehow I got a little sleep, half an hour at a time. Just after 3 a.m. I woke. It was now a bright starlight night, and I could see the dark lines of a battalion falling in, not far from my bivouac. I subsequently found that it was Fathi Bey's regiment, the 7th Egyptians, who till now had guarded the rail-head, starting for the front to take their share in the fighting.

Nearer me Girouard, the chief engineer officer of the railway, was having an early breakfast by the light of a lantern, and seated on a packing-case at a camp table. "Get up and have some of this tea," was his welcome invitation when he saw I was awake, and I was right glad to accept it. He told me he was just off to Wadi Halfa by the early train. Work on the railway, he said, would be now suspended till after the first advance from Akasha. Nothing had been done for nearly a week on account of the two overturned engines blocking the way in front, and now, in order to get every available fighting man up to the front, the greater part of the railway battalion was to be temporarily used to guard various points on the line of communication. Some of them would stay at Ambigol Wells to help the garrison to hold the four-gun fort that protected the railway station.

I got two hours more of sleep, and then turned out, had some breakfast and saw my baggage packed on the camels, which had been sent on in advance some days before. My horse had also been sent up to the Wells, so at eight o'clock when a party of officers started to ride over to Alimula on the river I was able to join them, leaving the servants to follow with the camels as part of a small convoy that was bringing up the baggage of the Intelligence Department. My comrade, Mr. Garrett, of the *New York Herald*, rode with the camels, as his horse had got knocked up.

Our party consisted of seven horsemen, namely, Major Wingate, Slatin Pasha, and three other officers, and two correspondents (myself and Mr. Pearse, of the *Graphic*), with an escort of ten Friendlies, mounted on camels, under the command of the Sheikh Abdul Azim, of whose daring reconnaissance along the Nile, between Abu Hamed and the Shaggiyeh country, I have had something to say in an earlier chapter. We rode by the sandy valleys that run westward and southward from Ambigol Wells to the Nile, upon which they open near Melik-en-Nasr camp, between Ambigol and Tanjor. We reached Melik-en-Nasr at a quarter-past ten. I had told Garrett that I would wait for him there, and arranged that we would camp through the hot hours of the day, march on to Tanjor in the cool of the evening, spend the night there, and reach Akasha next day. Accordingly I halted at Melik-en-Nasr while the rest of the party rode on southwards.

Melik-en-Nasr Camp, a collection of straw *tukkuls*, along the river bank, was now almost deserted. All

that was left of the garrison was a company of the 8th Egyptian infantry, and they were about to march off to Alimula. The officers gave me a welcome drink of cool water, and sent a soldier to take my horse down to the river. Then I chatted with them for awhile under the shade of a sunt tree, till the time came for them to move off, and I found myself in

WATCH TOWER IN THE DESERT ON THE RAILWAY LINE.

possession of the deserted camp. I stabled my horse in one empty *tukkul* and had an hour's sleep in another, with my saddle for a pillow. It was not till noon that Garrett arrived with the camels, and our servants began to cook luncheon.

It was well we camped during that hot afternoon. The thermometer in the shade in the hospital at

Alimula marked 129 degrees. At Melik-en-Nasr the air was like a furnace. About three o'clock there were heavy peals of thunder, and then came a storm of wind, with driving clouds of hot dust and sand. Melik-en-Nasr happened to be between two thunder-storms; north and south of us we could see the dark rain clouds, and later on we heard that north of us at Ambigol and to the south at Tanjor there had been a regular deluge—a rare event in the Soudan. Six miles of poles and wires on the telegraph line were blown down, and many of the khors were flooded.

By four o'clock the storm was over and the air became cooler. At five we had the camels loaded and started for Tanjor. We made a short cut, diverging at times from the regular convoy track. Vultures were exceptionally rare this year in the Soudan, but in one of the khors there was perched on a rock one of the largest birds of the kind I have ever seen, and another black vulture rose wheeling from the sandy hollow below. The next moment I knew why they were there. A couple of hundred yards in front of the point we had reached, no fewer than nineteen dead transport camels lay in a straggling line across the khor. They were in every stage of decay, in every attitude of grimly grotesque distortion. The air was sickening. My horse, which generally took no notice of dead animals, shied badly, and our camels had to be almost dragged past the ghastly group of their dead comrades.

At Tanjor, which we reached just before dark, the 7th Battalion was in garrison, with Fathi Bey, their colonel, in command of the camp. When we went

to report our arrival to him, we found him seated with his officers at their dinner, set out on a cloth laid on the ground near the river bank. He invited Garrett and myself to join the party. We hesitated, and said our servants would soon have some dinner ready for us. The fact was that we knew that on the march it is not always easy to provide for two unexpected guests. But he would take no refusal. "We are Arabs," he said, "and when we ask a man to eat with us and he refuses, we say he must be a bad man or an enemy." Of course we sat down beside him on the grass, and during dinner it was agreed that when the regiment started southwards at 3 a.m. next morning we should accompany it.

On Thursday *réveillée* sounded at half-past one, and the 7th Battalion marched off a little before three, by the light of a half-clouded moon. The desert march by moonlight was decidedly picturesque—the long dark column on the sandy track among the rocks, the misty sky overhead, and the roar of the Tanjor rapids mingling with the tramp of the marching men. I rode beside the Colonel, just behind the point of the advanced guard. At dawn we found that the 6th Battalion and a mountain battery were in front of us, and as we passed Alimula Camp we saw the 8th Regiment parading to follow us. On the sandy plain between the two wild passes south of Alimula we halted for the men to refill their water-bottles. The night had been terribly hot, and most of the water had been used up in the first hour and a half. There we heard of two tragedies. A man of the 6th, who had been slightly unwell from a touch of the sun the

day before, but who had marched off with his regiment, had died at the foot of the pass we had just crossed ; another of the 6th shot himself soon after. Suicide is a very rare crime among the Egyptian soldiers, and perhaps in this case also "a touch of the sun" was the beginning of the mischief.

While we halted the transport of the battery was passing. One camel had just died, another was stripped of his load and saddle and left to die—a pathetic sight. So far as I could see the beast was not in pain. It was exhausted and seemed to like the rest it was being given, though the camel-men said it would soon collapse ; it was too far gone.

On the plain beyond the next pass—the Sonki defile —we found ourselves part of a little army. Three infantry battalions, two squadrons of cavalry, a battery of artillery, and a long line of loaded camels were moving southwards together between the mountains and the river. The 7th marched on towards Akasha, but I stopped till late in the afternoon at Okmeh, where the headquarters' camp was pitched on the bank of the Nile, in the shelter of a splendid grove of palms. From Okmeh to Akasha, a distance of three miles, there was an almost continuous camp, one portion of it being devoted to the lines occupied by some three thousand transport camels. Any one seeing the camp from the other bank would have imagined it contained a much larger force than the ten thousand men of all arms whom the Sirdar had concentrated there.

I rode into Akasha in the evening and camped on the river bank, near the 9th Soudanese. Since my

visit in the middle of May the place had been strengthened by the construction of loop-holed mud-walled barracks along the desert front.

Everything pointed to an immediate advance, though to the last moment the staff was discreetly silent as to both the date and plan of attack on Ferkeh. All the special-service officers had been called up to Akasha, the new-comers being attached as gallopers to the head-quarters' and other staffs. On Friday we heard that the 6th Battalion, under Baligh Bey, was to garrison Akasha, all the rest of the infantry being formed into a division under Hunter Pasha, who would thus have under his command ten battalions, five of them Egyptian and five Soudanese. The distribution of the brigades as first given out was as follows :—

1ST BRIGADE.	2ND BRIGADE.	3RD BRIGADE.
Lewis Bey.	*MacDonald Bey.*	*Maxwell Bey.*
3rd Egyptians.	11th Soudanese.	2nd Egyptians.
4th „	12th „	7th „
9th Soudanese.	13th „	8th „
10th „		

This "order of battle" was afterwards considerably modified when the 12th Soudanese were transferred to Major Burn-Murdoch's command, reducing the infantry division to three brigades of three battalions each. The other troops in camp were seven squadrons of Egyptian cavalry, three batteries of artillery, the Maxim battery of four guns manned by officers and men of the 2nd Battalion Connaught Rangers and the 1st Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment, Major Tudway's Camel Corps, and a number of friendly Arab scouts.

On Friday morning, when I rode down to Okmeh to get some information from Major Wingate, I saw several battalions practising an attack in line upon the plain. But still nothing was said as to when the real business would begin. It was only on Saturday towards noon that we were informed that the force concentrated at Akasha would march late that afternoon, bivouac in the desert, and attack the Dervishes at dawn on the Sunday morning.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE NIGHT MARCH.

BEFORE describing the night march from Akasha and the battle of Ferkeh, it may be well to say something of what was known at head-quarters as to the strength, organisation, and armament of the enemy who was to be attacked. The Intelligence Department had obtained the most complete information on these points, and Major Wingate was able to issue to every officer in the little army a rough plan of Ferkeh camp, a list of the Emirs and the troops under their command, and a memorandum on their organisation and usual dispositions. The force collected at Ferkeh was about four thousand strong. They were mostly Baggara Arabs, but there were a certain number of Jaalin, a warlike tribe belonging to the neighbourhood of Berber, and of Danagla—that is, Arabs of the Dongola province. There was also a strong force of Soudanese blacks. The chief divisions of the Dervish army were :—

1. *Horsemen.*—These were all Baggara Arabs, armed with sword and spear. They were usually commanded by Hammuda's lieutenants, Gebir, Yehia, and Wadi, all three Emirs belonging to his own tribe.

2. *Camel-men.*—These were all Danagla and Jaalin,

under the command of the Emir Kadoma, who had for his lieutenant the Emir Ismail Khater.

3. *Jehadia—i.e.*, troops enrolled for the Jehad, or Sacred War, and regularly drilled and armed with rifles. They were divided into two bodies under the Emirs Yusef Angara and Dudu Wad Badr, both of them Taaisha Baggaras. The majority of the Jehadia were blacks of the Central Soudan, but there were a certain number of Arabs, and a few Baggara chiefs told off to look after the conduct of the black troops.

4. *Sword and Spearmen.*—These formed the main body of the Dervish army. They were divided into four "Rubs" or battalions, and were armed with swords, spears, and a few rifles. Their Emirs were mounted and each had a flag. The first and second Rubs were composed entirely of Baggaras. Hammuda, with his brothers Mohammed Hanif and Hammad, commanded the first Rub in person. The second was under the Emir Abu el Gasem, or sometimes under Hammuda's lieutenant the Emir Nuer, both Habbania Baggaras. The third Rub was mainly composed of Jaalin, under the Emir Haj Abd el Kader; but as the loyalty of the Jaalin was suspected, the battalion was leavened with a considerable number of the trusty Baggaras. The fourth Rub, commanded by Osman Azrak, was in the main a Danagla force; but here too, and for the same reasons as in the third division, there was a large contingent of Baggara Arabs. In all the divisions the chief Emir had a number of mounted Emirs to assist him, so that there were a considerable number of banners to lead the sword and spearmen.

The Dervish main camp was reported to be at some distance from the river bank, near the point where the two routes to Ferkeh from Akasha met to the south of Ferkeh mountain. The Jehadia were on the right, the Jaalin on the left. There were at night four detached posts of twenty footmen, each supplying two sentries to guard the camp, but these outposts were close in to it. In the daytime the footmen were relieved by camel-men, who sent patrols northwards. All the horses and camels were said to be kept picketed south of Ferkeh village. The sheep and goats were sent to graze along the river bank near Sarkamatto village in the daytime. The cattle were kept in the other direction, towards Mograka.

The following further information about Hammuda's force was contained in Major Wingate's memorandum:—

"Most of the rifles possessed by the Dervishes are cut short to decrease the weight, and the ammunition, which is mostly made at Omdurman, is of bad quality, and badly gauged. The supply available appears, however, to be ample.

"Many men of the Jaalin and other Nile tribes are said to be anxious to side with the Government, and desirous of surrendering on the first opportunity.

"The natives of Sukkot and Mahass [1] are impressed for service, but some have been allowed to go free on payment of money; a considerable number, however, are said to have been unwillingly forced to join the Dervish ranks, and these will no doubt attempt to desert if occasion offers.

[1] Sukkot and Mahass are the northern districts of the Dongola province.

MAJOR-GENERAL RUNDLE, C.M.G., D.S.O.

"The Dervish supplies at Firket [1] are inconsiderable, but they are said to have food reserves at Suarda.

"There are very few Dervishes between Mograka and Suarda, and only sufficient at Suarda to guard the Beit-el-Mal,[2] and look after the women and children collected there.

"On the west bank at Gubbet Selim, opposite Suarda, is a force of Jaalin under Hassan-Wad-en-Nejumi, and opposite Firket there is said to be a post of twenty Baggaras.

"There are a few boats at Firket, and a few more plying between Suarda and Firket."

On this information the Sirdar based his plans for the coming fight. His object was not merely to drive the Dervish force from Ferkeh. For a purpose so limited a much smaller force than he had concentrated at Akasha would have sufficed. He meant to thoroughly break up, destroy, and make prisoners of Hammuda's force.

There are two routes from Akasha to Ferkeh, known respectively as the "desert route" and the "river route." Both start by the same sandy valley, the Ferkeh Khor, which runs nearly south out of the semi-circle of rocky hills that surrounds Akasha. About a mile out another valley, Khor Shargosheh, strikes off the right towards the Nile, and it is at this point the river route begins; so called, not because it follows the river bank, but because at three points it touches it. For a great part of the way it runs through the broken

[1] In official documents Firket, Ferkeh, and Firka are various forms of the name for the same place.

[2] The Treasury storehouses.

ground between Dal Mountain and the river. Dal Mountain is the highest point of a mass of hills, of which the mountains just south of Akasha form the northern, and Ferkeh Mountain the southern extremity. Along the valley eastward of this mass, and dividing it from another range of low hills, runs the desert route, which joins the river route close to Ferkeh.

The whole distance from Akasha to Ferkeh is about eighteen miles. The desert route was fairly easy ground for an army to traverse. But the river route, which at one point north of Sarkamatto village, ran along a mere shelf of rock above the river, must have seemed to the Dervishes all but impossible. This was doubtless one reason why the Sirdar chose it for the line of his main advance—for surprise was a large element in his plan.

His idea was to attack the Dervishes in two columns, one by the desert, the other by the river route. The desert column was composed chiefly of mounted troops, and was placed under the orders of his cavalry commander, Major Burn-Murdoch. It was made up of the following troops :—

Captain Young's[1] Horse Battery, 6 guns.
The 1st North Staffordshire Machine Gun Section, 2 Maxims.
Six Squadrons of Cavalry, 800 sabres.
Major Tudway's Camel Corps, 670 rifles.
The 12th Soudanese (Townshend), 717 officers and men, mounted on transport camels till they reached the scene of action.

In all, Major Burn-Murdoch had about 2,400 men in his column. His orders were that they were to be

[1] Captain N. E. Young, R.A., and Egyptian Army.

in position on the hills east of Ferkeh by half-past four o'clock on Sunday morning. The hour of sunrise was eighteen minutes past five; and they were told that about five o'clock they would hear the fire of the river column as it came into action. Burn-Murdoch was to keep his own force well back, so as to be out of the field of fire of the river column, and as soon as he heard it he was to open with his artillery on the Dervishes. He was especially to use his guns and Maxims, to prevent and break up by flank fire any attempt of the enemy to mass for a charge. As soon as Ferkeh village was taken he was to have his cavalry and camel-men ready to fall upon the retiring Dervishes, and pursue them southwards, preventing them rallying, and destroying or capturing as much as possible of their force.

The Sirdar took personal command of the river column. It was made up of two batteries of mountain guns (twelve pieces), two Maxims, manned by the 2nd Connaught Rangers, a few cavalry-men for scouting purposes, and for its main body Hunter Pasha's infantry division of three brigades of three battalions each.

The transfer of the 12th Soudanese to the desert column led to a modification of the original arrangement of the brigades. The division was actually constituted as follows :—

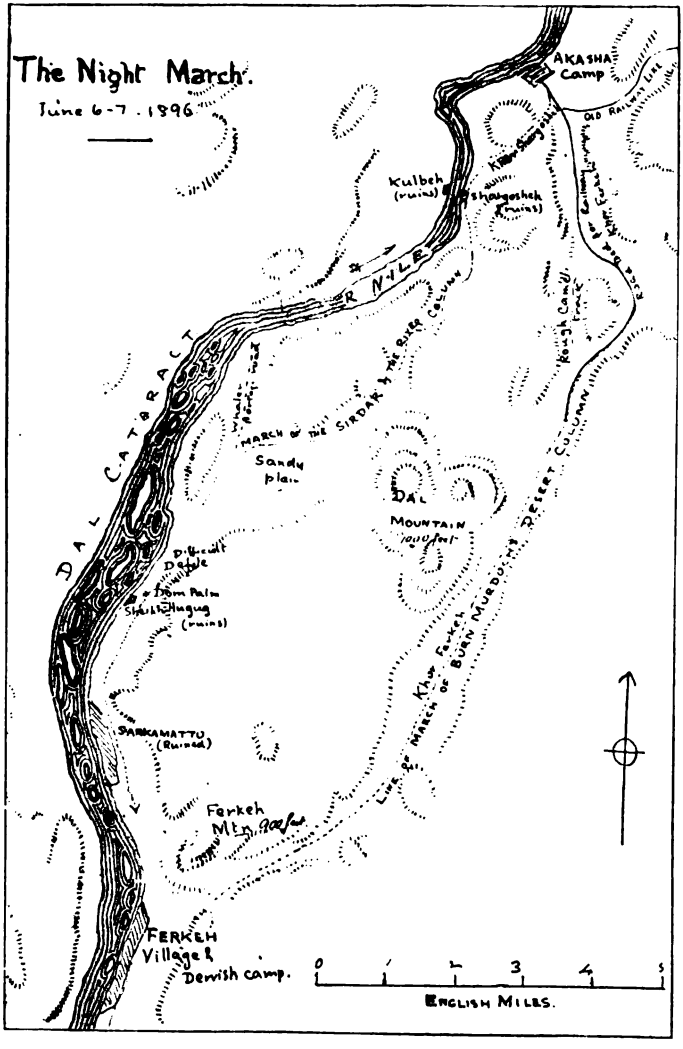
1st Brigade.	2nd Brigade.	3rd Brigade.
Lewis Bey.	*MacDonald Bey.*	*Maxwell Bey.*
3rd Egyptians.	9th Soudanese.	2nd Egyptians.
4th „	11th „	7th „
10th Soudanese.	13th „	8th „

The total strength of the river column would be

about seven thousand men. In the rear of the Third Brigade marched the field hospital, carried by one hundred camels, and another hundred camels laden with the reserve ammunition.

The correspondents were told that their place on the march would be in the rear of the Third Brigade, with the hospital and reserve ammunition. We were ready to march at 4.30 p.m. The place assigned to us meant that we would have to march in the midst of a crowd of camels, and I am tolerably sure that every one made the same mental resolution that I did—to get on to the infantry column as soon as might be after starting. The 9th Soudanese, near which I was camped, marched off from their quarters on the river bank between three and four, moving into Akasha Camp in order to reach the rendezvous of their brigade at the entrance of the khor. Their band was playing at the head of the long column of fours, and the men seemed delighted at being at last on the move. Of course there was no music once the real work began.

The infantry division started about four. At first sight it would seem rather an early hour to begin a night march, as a prelude to an attack at dawn next morning. But starting at this hour secured about three hours of daylight to get the column well on the way through the broken ground near Akasha, and so difficult was one defile further on that it took hours for for the division to get past it. So the early start was well warranted—as the event proved. For, as we shall see, the division did not reach its bivouac, twelve miles from Akasha, till between midnight and 1 a.m., having to march for more than five hours after sundown, and


The Night March.
June 6-7. 1896.
AKASHA Camp
OLD RAILWAY LINE
Kulbeh (ruins)
Shalgoshek (ruins)
R. NILE
DAL CATARACT
MARCH OF THE SIRDAR & THE RIVER COLUMN
Sandy plain
DAL MOUNTAIN
Difficult Defile
Doum Palm
Shellal
Singung (ruins)
SARKAMATTU (Ruins)
Ferkeh Mtn.
FERKEH Village & Dervish camp.
0 1 2 3 4 5
ENGLISH MILES.

averaging rather less than two miles an hour over the whole distance. It must have been nearly two hours later before the hospital and reserve ammunition got to its bivouac, though that was a mile nearer Akasha.

I have heard the night march before Ferkeh compared to the now famous night march of Tel-el-Kebir. The two operations had very little in common, as any one would admit at once who had seen the ground over which both marches were made. The march to Tel-el-Kebir was across a tolerably level stretch of hard sand, where the troops were able to move practically in battle array. The move of the two columns on Ferkeh was through a series of narrow, rocky valleys, with more than one dangerous defile.

I rode down to the entrance of the khor at 4.30, and found most of my colleagues of the press already waiting there. Mr. Garrett's horse had unfortunately not yet recovered, and he very pluckily resolved to ride a camel. We had two other camels with us, one ridden by my servant Abdul Mulla, who was to ride in with the first despatch in the morning, after the battle; for the telegraph office remained at Akasha, and correspondents had been warned that after their telegrams had received the official visa from Major Wingate, they must make their own arrangements for getting them in to the wire. Garrett was not going to send a telegram, and his servant Hassan took with him on his camel a small supply of provisions and a couple of rugs—our joint luggage beyond what we had on our belts and in our haversacks. Each of the camels carried a full water-skin, as, although the route we were to follow struck the river bank more than once,

I was not at all certain about the possibility of getting water from it during the night march. A steep bank or a crowd of soldiers refilling their water-bottles might prevent that. A canvas bucket was hung to one of the camel saddles, so that we could anywhere give my horse a drink. I thought everything had been arranged for a fairly comfortable supper, bivouac, and breakfast; but the "best-laid schemes gang aft agley," and so it was to be in this instance.

When I reached the khor the Third Brigade was marching off, rifles at the slope, the long "column of fours" descending into Khor Ferkeh from the camp, and, just beyond where we stood, ascending the rocky track that led into Khor Shargosheh. As the last company passed, some of us put our horses in movement to follow, but we were called back by Major Hunter-Weston, who was superintending the march-off; and when we suggested that our place was behind the Third Brigade, he told us that was so, but it was also with the camels. And the camels were a long time coming. The last soldier of the infantry division had disappeared among the rocks a good twenty minutes, when we saw two masses of camels—one coming down the slope to the left rear, the other marching by the sandy valley that led towards the headquarters' camp. One caravan was laden with boxes of ammunition, the other with tents and cases marked with the red crescent on a white ground. Only when the camels, in single file, were moving up the slope towards Khor Shargosheh were we able to make a start.

The first two miles and a half took us about an hour. The track led over a rocky spur, then down

into the sandy hollow of Khor Shargosheh, through the greater part of which the camels were able to move two or three deep, and I managed to gradually make my way to the front. As we approached the southern end of the khor we had glimpses of the steep-sided summit of Dal Mountain away to our left front. At last, a little after six, we reached the river bank, where a grove of neglected date palms and a number of ruined mud huts marked the deserted village of Shargosheh. There was another village—Kulbeh—on the opposite bank. Both of them were fair samples of the ruin and depopulation of the Nile villages resulting from the long-continued presence of the Dervish vanguard at Suarda, their base for plundering raids along the river valley.

At Shargosheh village there was a halt to give the horses a drink and refill water-bottles, and then we started again, bearing away from the river bank. The next four miles took us more than four hours, and the sun was down before we had completed them. To begin with, the ground was very difficult. A number of small khors, with low, rocky ridges between them, come down from the main mass of Dal Mountain to the river. It is impossible to follow any one of them for long, as that would mean going uphill and working towards the mountain, instead of keeping it to the left. So it is a continual process of clambering up and down the ridges from one khor into another, an occasional relief being afforded by being able to follow for awhile, now the winding hollow of a valley that takes the same direction as the general line of march, now the top of a bit of high ground between two valleys.

Most of the way the camels worked in single file, and there were some awkward bits for the horses, especially as the light began to fail rapidly after sunset.

It was dark, but with some starlight, when we began to descend into the sandy plain that lies on the west of Dal Mountain—the plain the western part of which is crossed by the "whaler portage road" of the Dal Cataract marked out in 1884. The lines of stones are there to this day undisturbed.

By this time I was riding beside a battalion of the Third Brigade, and on the plain I gradually worked my way close up to the front of the column of fours. At its head a couple of Arab guides mounted on camels showed the way. In the starlight the sandy level seemed endless. The nature of the ground made the tread of the marching battalions almost noiseless, and the soldiers moved along in perfect silence. A night march is a severe test of discipline, and the Egyptians stood the test admirably. At a short distance from the line of march one could hardly perceive that one was not alone. The thousands gathered so near might have been miles away. Lights, of course, there were none. For once officers and men had to do without even the cigarette in which they seem to find so much consolation. I was told afterwards that Hunter Pasha had passed the word that any one striking a light would be shot for it next morning. Though the middle of this plain is nearly ten miles from Ferkeh village, it could not have been crossed in the daylight without warning the Dervishes of the blow that was about to fall upon them, for the surrounding hills are very low, and the bold, precipi-

tous summit of Ferkeh Mountain commands a view of a good mile of the ground we were tramping across in the darkness.

A little before sunset in one of the khors, Mr. Pearse, of the *Graphic*, who had had a good deal of experience of Soudanese warfare in the first Nile campaign showed me some marks on the sand, and told me he was sure they meant a Dervish patrol had passed that way not long before. We afterwards learned that in the afternoon of Saturday, not long before our vanguard marched out, a mounted patrol had come close into Akasha, but thanks to the vigilance of our outposts learned nothing of the activity that then prevailed in the camp, and returned to Ferkeh and reported all quiet in front.

Our advance through the darkness was covered by scouts, who must at the outset have been close on the track of the retiring Dervishes. Their orders were that if they came upon any Mahdist patrols there was to be no firing on any account, but the enemy were to be disposed of with the bayonet.

Half way across the plain there was a halt which seemed endless. The Egyptians formed up into company columns, and sat down to eat some supper from their haversacks. The halt was in any case unavoidable, for the front of the long column of march in advance of us was now slowly making its way across the difficult defile that lay some three miles in front of us. The track leaves the plain on which we were halted by a wide pass between two rocky heights. This turns towards the river, narrows, and gradually descends into a small valley which is flooded at high Nile, and unlike

the surrounding desert khors is green with halfa grass, Dead Sea fruit, and thorn bushes. By this valley, following a narrow track, one gets down to the river bank, beside the upper course of the Dal Cataract. To advance further one must get round the rocks on the river bank, and the only way is along a narrow ledge where even the infantry had to march in single file. In places it is not six feet wide, and the rocks of which it is composed are very irregular. To reach it at either end one has to cross ground that is so rocky and broken as to be by no means easy in the daylight. On the reconnaissance map of the line of march the pass is described as "one hundred yards impassable for transport, might be blasted, very rocky." But over the ledge thus reported "impassable" three divisions of infantry, the staff, two batteries carried on camels and mules, the Maxim guns, and the two hundred camels of the hospital and ammunition and reserve ammunition columns were to make their way by starlight.

This was a work of some time, and even when after our halt we began to move forward again towards the pass in column of fours there was soon another check. After this there were again and again long and weary halts, short, slow movements, when we would gain a few yards, and have to halt again for ten minutes, and then advance another twenty or thirty yards. At the entrance of the pass which leaves the plain, I think I must have been a good twenty minutes walking my horse up and down on the flank of the halted column. As we moved on a company officer of the 8th Egyptians, whom I had met before, asked me in a whisper what the hour was, he could not make out the figures on his

own watch, and I was just able to read mine. We shook hands and I remarked in a low voice that he did not seem well, his hand was very hot. "Yes," he said, "I have fever. If there was not a battle coming to-morrow I would be in hospital."

This slow halting march was for all a tiring experience, coming as it did after a long busy day. I doubt if any one had slept since four on the preceding morning, and no one was to get much sleep that night. How long we were getting across the defile I fear to say. It was an anxious piece of work for those who had horses with them. One had to dismount, and even then the rocks were so irregular that it was no easy matter to lead the horse across them without accident. At one point I and my mount simply slid down a sloping stone, and I was very glad when I was able to steady myself and the horse at the end of it. On our left the rocky river bank rose steep above us. On our right there was a sharp drop to the river, where in the darkness we could hear the rapids of the Dal cataract, roaring down over the ridges that here interrupt the stream. There was some noise of stumbling men, horses, and camels as we get across the shelf-like track on the rocks, but it could not have been heard at any distance, for it all mingled and was lost in the sound of the rushing cataract.

Beyond the pass we climbed up a steep path to the top of the river bank, and then crossed a sandy hollow, where it was difficult not to lose touch of the column, for the men, as they reached level ground after the first ascent, pushed on rapidly, and those who came after them arrived, so to say, in mere driblets a few at a

time, all moving on at once, by a stony broken track until the river was reached again at the ruined village of Sheik Hugug, whence a belt of palms ran south along the Nile, and there was a broad sandy track between it and the hills.

In the broken ground the men had massed together again. There is no doubt that if the Dervishes had kept a strong post permanently at Sheik Hugug, and watched the defile to the northward of that point, the advance of a hostile force by the river route would have been impossible. By leaving this narrow gate open and unguarded they made the attack in two columns possible.

Near Sarkamatto, a large ruined village on the river bank, three miles north of Ferkeh, the infantry division was to bivouac. It was about midnight when the First Brigade took up its position there, throwing forward a screen of outposts towards Ferkeh. They were to spend part of the night on the very ground on which the slaves of the Dervish Emirs had been tending their sheep and goats the day before. It was much later when the two other brigades reached the dark and fireless bivouac. As for myself, I pulled bridle after 1 a.m., in the rear of the infantry bivouac, and near the curious eight-branched dom palm, which forms a landmark on the track. It stands north of Sarkamatto, and separate from the general belt of palms on the river bank. Just north of it a steep pass ascends to a kind of amphitheatre among the rocks, a well-marked ridge which the pass traverses running down from the hills to the river. Most of this topography I made out on my way back next day. I would

have pushed on a little further, but I wanted to make sure of picking up my colleague, Mr. Garrett, as he came down the pass, and I was also anxious to get some supplies from our servants, who were to halt above the pass with the transport.

Garrett and his camel soon arrived, and Mr. Sheldon, of *Black and White*, also rode up, and spent some time with us. He was so tired that he lay down on the sand and slept with the bridle of his horse round his arm. Later on he went to look for a better bivouac. Meanwhile there was no sign of our servants coming down the pass, though it was near 2 a.m. At last I heard from a passing officer that no more camels would be allowed to come through, so I made my way up the pass again on my horse and found our servants lying beside their camels in the bivouac of the hospital and reserve ammunition column. The officer in charge of the transport told me that he had had orders to let no camels go any further. They were kept back here as, in case of attack by the enemy, the ridge would be easily held as a kind of natural fortification for the transport gathered behind it. Also it was considered safer to keep such noisy brutes as two hundred camels well to the rear. With some difficulty I persuaded him to let our servants come down with me and bring Garrett and me our supper.

And then came a disappointment. The servants had cooked some meat for us to eat cold, but it had gone so bad that neither of us could touch it. Some bread, a biscuit, and some cold tea made up a very poor supper. I sent my horse away with my servant, telling him to give him a drink and bring him back

to me at the dom palm in an hour. That hour's sleep was all that either I or Garrett had that night. I lay on the sand near the palm, with my arm for a pillow. I was so tired that I slept at once, a deep dreamless sleep that would have gone on for hours, had I not been shaken up by my servant pulling at my shoulder a little after 3 a.m.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BATTLE OF FERKEH.

THE Sirdar had marched with the artillery and Maxims just behind our First Brigade, and had reached the bivouac at midnight. More than once on the way he had received reports of the progress of the Desert Column, for there are tracks, north and south of Dal Mountain, by which messages were carried safely across by Arab scouts who knew the ground well. A month later, when I was in quarantine camp at Ambigol Wells with Captain Broadwood, he told me something of the experiences of the desert march. The track followed was a fairly easy one, and the troops were able to reach their bivouac in Ferkeh Khor in good time for a fair rest for man and beast. But many of the officers expected that the Dervishes who had so frequently sent patrols along the khor would almost certainly discover the approach of the cavalry guns and Camel Corps, and attempt a fight well up the valley. In the morning as the advance was resumed and there was no sign of opposition, there was an impression that Ferkeh was perhaps abandoned by the enemy at the last moment.

The River Column was in motion before 4 a.m.,

having still a good hour of darkness to conceal its advance. Refreshed a little by an hour's sleep, I had a couple of biscuits and some cold tea, a poor breakfast, and then mounted my horse and rode southward. I told my servant that as he would carry my first despatch into Akasha, and I must be quite clear where to look for him after the fight, he was to remain with the field hospital. Garrett on his camel rode off with me, but we agreed that we would separate as soon as we came up with the troops, he riding on the right and I on the left of the column, so that if there was a battle we would see it from different parts of the field and be able to compare notes later.

I soon came up with the Third Brigade marching silently in the dark over very rough ground. I asked one of the company officers which battalion I was with. He told me it was the 8th Egyptians, and pointed out its colonel, Khulusi Bey, riding at the head of the regiment. I stopped to exchange a friendly greeting with him, and then rode on, slowly making my way further up the column as opportunity offered, till I found myself at the head of the next regiment, the 7th Egyptians. My friend Fathi Bey was leading it, and we rode side by side for awhile, conversing in a low voice. The dawn was beginning to whiten the east, and one could dimly see against the sky in front the bold plateau of Ferkeh Mountain on the left, and the shadowy line of palms along the river on the right. Between was a narrow sandy plain with scattered rocks that often made marching difficult.

I passed on after wishing the Egyptian colonel good morning and good luck, and at five I was riding on the flank of the 2nd Egyptians, the leading regiment of the thin brigade. All was silent in front. I must have been then about a mile and a half from Ferkeh village, and the leading brigade must have been a good half mile nearer. The hour of the attack had come,

COLONEL FATHI BEY, 7TH EGYPTIANS.

but there were no signs of it. It struck me the place must have been evacuated during the night. But the explanation of all this quiet was that the Dervish outposts on the hillside in our front did not see our leading brigade till it was almost upon them, and the thousands in the camp behind them were only just rousing themselves from their morning sleep. On

our side, all unseen in the darkness, the Second Brigade had formed up on the left of the First, so that Lewis's battalions were ready to move direct on the village, while MacDonald's Soudanese regiments worked round between the mountain and the enemy's camp, extending the line of battle to the left. The Third Brigade formed for the present the reserve. The 9th Soudanese, the leading regiment of MacDonald's Brigade, were the first to come in contact with the enemy, being fired at from an outpost on the hillside, where a handful of the enemy's riflemen held a small walled enclosure. The Soudanese promptly and effectually replied, and so the fight began.

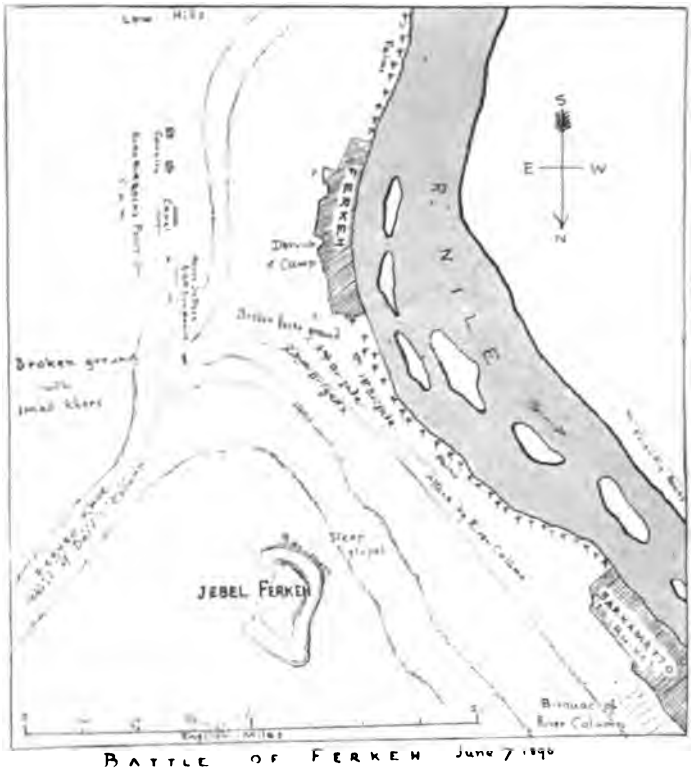
The light was increasing rapidly, when suddenly out in front I heard this pattering rifle fire, and then almost at once the deep boom of one of Burn-Murdoch's guns from beyond Ferkeh Mountain, showing that the Desert Column was in position and ready to lend us a hand. I looked at my watch ; it was six minutes past five. The day before, at Akasha, I had had a talk with Major Lewis, who commanded the First Brigade, a soldier of long experience in Soudanese warfare. I asked him how long he thought it would take us to turn the Dervishes out of Ferkeh. "Not more than a quarter of an hour," he replied confidently, adding, "I shall send my Soudanese in first, and I only hope the enemy will stand long enough to give my Egyptian battalions a shot at them, so that they can feel they have had a share in the fight." Considering our overwhelming force and superior armament, it seemed very likely that Lewis was right, and my first feeling was one of anxiety at seeing that the firing was so far in

front of me, with a lot of rough ground between, so that I feared the action would be over before I could reach the actual battlefield. By a piece of bad luck I had left my spurs on the sand where I bivouacked, taking them off when I lay down to sleep, and forgetting them when I mounted in the darkness, and my horse was inclined to be lazy if there were not spurs on my heels.

Happily, as soon as I heard the shots I was able to get him into a smart canter, and was quickly away in front of the brigade. As I passed along the column it was pleasant to see how the men were stepping out and lengthening their stride. They evidently meant business. Two Arabs on camels rode near the front of the leading regiment, the "Friendly" guides who had been with us through the night. Raising themselves in their saddles they were eagerly looking to the front, watching the first movements of the fight; and as they thus no longer urged their camels forward, one saw the wide stream of khaki clad men and sloping rifle barrels flowing past them, like the rapids of the river past a rock. Away to the right front one could now hear the rifles of Lewis's Brigade near the Nile bank. From the broken ground in our left front rang out the volleys of the advancing Soudanese. Away still further the heavy battery was hard at work; and nearer, the mountain batteries of the River Column were coming into action on a spur of the hill close to the infantry attack. Through it all came the rapidly increasing noise of the enemy's irregular rifle fire.

Soon the ground was so rough that I had almost to walk my horse. I was bearing towards the left front,

up the slope at the base of the mountain, hoping to reach the point where the long flashes against the sky told that the heavy battery was in action, a point from which there would be a good view of the whole fight. But it was much further off than I thought, and I had



BATTLE OF FERKEH June 7 1896

presently to alter my plans. But now I was near enough to our attack to see the dull brown lines of our advancing infantry, and beyond the white puffs of smoke along a rocky spur that showed where the enemy were making a first serious stand. And now I heard

the "whit whit!" of bullets in the air, and one of them sent the pebbles flying not ten feet in front of my horse. I looked at my watch; it was just 5.14, eight minutes after I had heard the first shot.

I was riding along the slope between the mountain and the village, making for the artillery position, from which I expected to have a good general view of the engagement, but I soon found that to get there would take much more time and effort than I had expected. The ground on this high slope was strewn with boulders, and cut up with little stony ravines, and more than once I had to dismount to get my horse across one of these obstacles. At last I gave up the attempt to go any further in this direction, and turned to ride down the slope towards the left centre of our infantry attack.

The village ran for about a mile along the river—well-built, mud-walled houses, with numerous straw *tukkuls* to supply shelter for the large force that had been gathered there. On an island in the Nile one could see among the palms a castellated structure partly in ruin. Three large dome-shaped mounds, apparently of clay, rose on the land side of the village. The enemy were holding some large houses that formed a kind of suburb to the north of it, and a long ridge or spur of rocks that ran across its land front and up to the desert hills. They had to be cleared out of these positions before Ferkeh itself could be attacked.

The plan of attack was briefly this. Lewis with the First Brigade moving nearest the river bank was to push for the north end of Ferkeh. MacDonald, with his three Soudanese battalions of the Second Brigade, was to form the left attack nearer the hills, going for

the Mahdist position on the rocky spur. Maxwell, with the Third Brigade, held in reserve at the outset, was to take post between the two other brigades as the opportunity offered. The whole line was then to pivot on its right, wheeling round against the desert front of Ferkeh village, its extreme left getting touch with Burn-Murdoch's column.

So far, the first part of this plan was being worked out, and there was a good deal of sharp fighting before the Third Brigade came into action. From the first the Dervishes made a sturdy stand, disputing every bit of the ground. Surprised they might be, but there was no sign of panic. On the right, as Lewis advanced along the level by the river, his Egyptians near the bank, with the 3rd in front, and the 10th Soudanese to their left, the Dervish horsemen tried to charge the Egyptians, but were driven back by a good volley. A little later there was a rush of horsemen and footmen mixed, and some hand-to-hand conflicts for a few moments; but the Egyptians stood their ground, and the Maxims effectually prevented the Dervish attack being reinforced by pouring their fire into the enemy's supports who tried to issue from the village. Away to the left a handful of desperate men tried to rush Burn-Murdoch's guns, charging up the slope by one of the small khors that furrowed the hillside. The volleys of the 12th Soudanese,[1] who held the ground on both flanks of the battery and a little to its front, disposed of this attack. Further still to the south, and quite out of sight from the ground occupied by the main

[1] The 12th Soudanese was, it will be remembered, the battalion transferred from Hunter's infantry division to the desert column.

advance, Tudway's [1] Camel Corps was in action against a strong force of Dervish riflemen, and Broadwood [2] and Legge,[3] each at the head of three squadrons, charged and broke up a force of Dervish camel-men that was moving up from the south along the river to reinforce Ferkeh.

In the centre, just below the slope on which I was riding, the Dervishes were being driven from their advanced position in the broken ground on the desert front of the village, against which the Soudanese Brigade was advancing, the 9th Battalion leading. The puffs of smoke at various points along the rocky ridge showed where the Dervishes were in action. But now the fire grew heavier as the Jehadia, their trained black troops, tried to advance against our left centre. It seemed to me that there were over a thousand of them. They had a front about as long as that of a battalion, and, as far as I could make out, it was three deep at least in places. For a few minutes their rifle fire was heavy and rapid. They came boldly out of cover, and along their dark line one saw the ceaseless blaze of fire from right to left, each man loading and pulling trigger as fast as he could. It was the critical moment of the fight. Would our long thin line hold its own? Yes, steady volleys answered the fire of the Jehadia, and from the hills came the rattling din of the Maxims, and the deeper voice of the guns,

[1] Captain (temp. Major) R. J. Tudway, Essex Regiment and Egyptian Army.

[2] Captain R. G. Broadwood, *p.s.c.*, 12th Lancers and Egyptian Army.

[3] Captain N. Legge, 20th Hussars and Egyptian Army.

and the shrapnel burst in rings of white smoke just in front of the Dervish line. Such a storm of fire was never seen in the Soudan before, and the wonder was that the Jehadia held their own even for a few minutes. As a spectacle it was magnificent. The village, the palm trees by the bank, and the bright river all bathed in the morning sunlight ; the contending lines, bright with fire-flashes and wreathed in smoke, whilst Ferkeh Mountain sent back the echoes of the guns from its dark precipices.

Soon the Jehadia were retiring, not in rout or panic, but slowly through the rocky ground towards the village, and on went our line after them, the Third Brigade coming up in the nick of time, to close the gap between the First and Second. An officer of the Second Brigade told me afterwards that for him the most anxious moment of the day was that in which the brigade moved forward, with its right still exposed, before Maxwell's battalions came up. "My men were somewhat scattered," he said, "as we got into the rocky ground. Some, being less tired than others, got on quickly ; others, though quite as eager, could not keep up. I suddenly realised that a rush of spearmen from behind the nearest rocks might give us an awkward time, and so anxious was I to make sure there was no such danger in front, that for the moment I quite forgot the risk and urged my horse well forward up the rocks to get a view over and behind them. It was a relief to find there was no enemy lying in wait for us."

Having thus cleared the Dervishes out of the broken ground, the wheeling movement against the village

began. The lines were dressed as if at some great review. Under the heavy fire from the edge of the village the infantry pressed forward, the Egyptian battalions moving as steadily as the Soudanese, though the latter had many veterans in their ranks, and the

SOUDANESE SWORD, SHIELD, AND JIBBA.[1]

men of the former first saw the flash of an enemy's rifles on this June morning. Moving shoulder to

[1] The jibba is the Dervish uniform. It is a white coat of native fabric, ornamented with patches of coloured material. The Mahdi told his followers that they were to be poor men, having no treasure in this world, and to patch their old clothes rather than buy new ones. It is now the practice to make the new jibbas with bright coloured patches disposed in ornamental patterns.

shoulder, in close formation, the Egyptian instinct for drill, the habit of obedience to orders stood them in good stead, and be it remembered that two of the battalions were entirely commanded by native officers. The artillery was bombarding the village, the shells bursting among the mud houses, and in one place setting fire to a group of *tukkuls* from which a great column of bright flame rose high in air. The Dervish rifle fire from the borders of the village was well maintained. They had abundance of ammunition, and were evidently relying more on the rifle than the spear. An officer of long experience in the Soudan told me he had never seen so heavy a fire from the Dervishes. But happily most of it went high, the bullets whistling over the fighting lines and ricocheting on the rocks beyond. Once or twice I heard among the general "whit, whit" of the bullets a deeper sound, like the buzzing hum of an old-fashioned round shot. One of the British sergeants told me afterwards he had remarked the same thing, and like me expected we should find a small swivel or wall piece in the village. Probably the noise was made by large slugs from a heavy smooth-bore musket.

The volley firing of our troops was wonderfully good. The rifles seemed to go off with one report. But neither the rifle fire nor the artillery preparation for the attack were allowed to last long. The word was given to storm the village. The whistle of the officers stopped the firing, and in our fellows went with the bayonet, first at the north end of the village, then nearer its centre. It was thus cleared from north to south. The bullet was used freely even in the storm-

ing, and there was a good deal of firing among the houses and in the lanes and open spaces between them. There were some tough hand-to-hand fights, for the Baggara Emirs disdained to ask for quarter and threw their lives away in desperate onslaughts upon the advancing Egyptians and Soudanese.

Before the final advance on the village I had ridden down the rear of the line, towards the point where, on a low mound, the Sirdar with his staff were watching the attack. A large red flag carried by a mounted orderly indicated his position, and I have no doubt drew a good deal of the enemy's fire. We correspondents had been told in the orders handed to us at Akasha that we were not to join the staff during the action, so about fifty yards to the left of the group I pulled bridle, and then, as my horse was a little restive, walked him round in a small circle. Once our fellows had got through the north part of the village, the Sirdar and his staff rode forward to enter it by a wide opening towards its centre. I rode with them into the village, meeting my comrade, Mr. Garrett, just before we went in. It was twenty minutes to seven; the battle had lasted more than an hour and a half, and was not over yet. It was very different from the anticipated quarter of an hour's work.

To our left rose the three mounds I had remarked in my first view of the village from the hill. I believe they were rocks plastered over with Nile mud, with what object it is hard to say. The centre and largest of them seemed to offer a tempting position for the Maxims, and the Connaughts were soon dragging the guns, the ammunition, and the water-tanks for keeping

the barrels cool, up the steep side of the mound. It was terribly hard work. The men carrying the guns had to be relieved every few paces even on the level, but in a shorter time than one could have expected the guns were in position on the top. The Sirdar and his staff came riding up at a slow walk, and seeing the guns in position ready to open on the enemy as they retired from the south end of the village, the Sirdar called out to the officer in command of the section that he was not to open fire. "I don't want to waste ammunition," he said; "I shall be ceasing fire everywhere presently." "All right, sir," came the answer from the top of the mound; and immediately after I heard a voice with a rich brogue murmuring up above, "Sure, it's a sin for you to spoil the poor boys' fun after all the trouble they've had." There was a laugh. The Sirdar either did not hear or wisely pretended not to have caught the words of the sorely disappointed Connaught Ranger. I had been talking to the Connaughts just before, and one of the men had said, "It's been a poor day for us, we've only had just a few minutes' fun with the guns," and I thought I recognised the voice.

Isolated parties were still holding out here and there in the village. Garrett came up to me near the big mounds, and told me he had had a narrow escape. He had ventured in among the houses hoping to get a photograph of one which was damaged by our shells. As he stopped to set his camera he saw a door open, out came a rifle barrel, and a shot was fired at him at twenty yards' range. The bullet whistled unpleasantly near, and he bolted, pursued by another shot. Garrett was a plucky fellow, and he laughed as he told me of his adventure.

Following the staff, I reached at last the south end of the village, which by this time had been fairly well cleared from end to end. As we came out from the houses I saw Surgeon-Captain Hunter, the chief medical officer present, go personally to the aid of some of the Dervish wounded. There was the risk of being attacked by the man one tried to help in this way, and I noticed that one of the stretcher men who went with him unslung his Martini and kept it ready. The Sirdar halted on a bit of rising ground above the river, at the south end of Ferkeh. Some of the Dervishes had got across a dry, or nearly dry, arm of the river, and taken refuge on an island, from which a party of the Soudanese were dislodging them. Shots on the opposite shore told that our Friendlies were hunting down those who had crossed the Nile. Southwards we heard the fire of the pursuit rolling away towards Mograka. It was just seven o'clock. The battle of Ferkeh had been won. Hammuda's army had ceased to exist, and all doubt as to the fighting qualities of our Egyptian troops was at an end.

The Soudanese had already made themselves a splendid reputation as fighting men, but in many quarters it had been the fashion to sneer at the fellahin battalions. No one who saw their ideal steadiness in action could doubt for a moment their sterling value. From the officers who led them I heard nothing but praise of their conduct. One who had previously served with the Soudanese said he personally preferred the cool steadiness of the fellahin to the dash of their black comrades. Another, who commanded a battalion, said that he was struck by the way in which, after

halting under cover of the rocks to pour in a final shower of bullets at a range of about 150 yards, on the word being given to advance his men all sprang up and left cover without a moment's hesitation. Another officer told me how he noticed that the man beside him had been hit in the arm and was still advancing, and he told him he had better go to the rear and get his wound dressed. "I have not fired a shot yet, let me stay on awhile and do something to-day," was the answer, and the brave fellow moved on a few paces and fell exhausted. The stretcher bearers and "Red Crescent" men did their work splendidly. An officer of the 3rd Battalion told me how he saw a wonderful display of cool courage on the part of two soldiers of the 2nd Egyptians. They were carrying off a wounded comrade on a stretcher when suddenly three Dervish horsemen, who had been hiding among the rocks, rushed out and dashed at them. They halted, laid down the stretcher, unslung their Martinis, slipped in the cartridges, and shot down two of the horsemen. The third turned and galloped off, on which the two plucky fellows coolly reslung their rifles, took up the stretcher, and tramped off to the dressing station as if nothing particular had happened.

As to the fire discipline of the force generally, the volleys were good, the whistle signal to cease fire was always instantly obeyed, the bullet marks on the walls of the village were low, and the total consumption of ammunition was small, the average being between fifteen and sixteen cartridges per man. This shows that there was no wild firing on our side.

The Egyptians had lost twenty men killed in the fight

and some eight wounded. Wonderful to say, although the Dervish fire was high, none of the British mounted officers were hit. Two of them had their horses killed, and several had their saddlery or accoutrements cut up by the enemy's bullets. They had remained mounted in the firing line, and ridden forward at the head of their men under close fire from the enemy. The only mounted officer actually hit was the native adjutant-major of the 9th, a brave soldier who had fought his way up to a commission. He was mortally wounded.

The enemy's losses were enormous. How great they were we only gradually learned, but the field was strewn with their dead, wounded, and dying, and they lay in heaps in the village. In one corner of it there were 126, in one large courtyard that had been defended *à outrance* there were sixty. But it must be remembered that this was not a case of villagers defending their homes. Ferkeh was really a camp, and a camp of brigands. There had been no massacre. Quarter had been given to all who would accept it. The wounded were not only spared but taken care of. As for the Emirs and Baggaras who fell in such numbers, the destruction that fell upon them was a deliverance for the peaceful villages for hundreds of miles along the Nile, which they had again and again alarmed by their murderous raids. Remembering this one could feel but little regret for the fallen foe at Ferkeh.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER THE BATTLE, THE PURSUIT, SUARDA.

THERE seems to be some difference of opinion as to the precise hour at which the battle ended. In my despatches to my paper I put it at seven; another correspondent fixed it as late as half-past seven. The explanation of course is that, according to the point of view, one could describe what occurred just to the south of us, after the village was cleared, as the last phase of the battle or the first part of the pursuit. At seven I was on the bit of rising ground among the palms near the river bank, where the Sirdar and his staff had halted at the south end of Ferkeh. There was still a good deal of firing going on, but we were no longer ourselves under fire. On the other bank the Friendlies were firing on the Dervishes who had got across the river. Some of the Soudanese were clearing a number of the enemy out of the island opposite the village. Southward on the ground between the low hills and the river, and on the slopes towards the desert, the Camel Corps and the cavalry were breaking up the last attempts of the retreating enemy to rally.

The pursuit had begun, and as the most important point for me was to get the news to Akasha, I wrote my first telegram sitting on the ground near my horse.

It was, according to regulations, limited to two hundred words, but into these I managed to compress some account of the night march and the fight, and I then handed it to Major Wingate for his *visa* as censor. He seemed to be very busy, so as I expected to have a few minutes to wait I rode over to the 10th Soudanese, exchanged a few words with one of their officers, and got a Dervish spear from one of the men, as a momento of the fight. Then having got the *visa* for my despatch I rode back across the field to the entrance of the level ground leading towards Sarkamatto, on the look-out for my servant, who was to meet me north of Ferkeh. Mr. Garrett rode back with me on his camel. His paper did not want a telegram, but depended on "Reuter" for the first news, so he intended to ride back to Akasha with his servant.

On the level ground north of the village we met the baggage camels coming up with the field hospital and the reserve ammunition. They had got orders to move up from Sarkamatto as soon as it was clear that the battle was won. Our servants were riding in front of the mass of camels, and under a tree near where the first Dervish dead were lying we halted to get some refreshment. My servant, Abdul, had soon a small fire lighted, and we had a cup of beef tea and some bread, then while Garrett and I were making some tea, and getting a little more food, and while Hassan took my horse down to the river for a drink, Abdul rode off alone with my despatch. On Hassan's return from the river I gave him my spear to carry in, and he rode away north with Garrett. By that time quite a little crowd of camel-men with despatches and two or three

horsemen were on their way to Akasha. I mounted again and rode back across the field to Ferkeh village to get some points for a second despatch, with which I intended to ride back to the telegraph office myself. By waiting for the rest of the day at Ferkeh, and collecting information from the officers of the various regiments engaged, I could no doubt have compiled a very full and accurate account of the fight. But what I was anxious to do was to be at the place where the mail for the north would be made up, as soon as might be, in order to catch the Monday morning camel post ; so I determined from the first that I would ride into Akasha with a second telegram, and complete there a letter which would give simply my personal impression of the fight. I hoped thus that I might perhaps have the good fortune to get my narrative to London a few days before those of my colleagues who were staying on at Ferkeh.

When I reached the southern end of the village for the second time I found that the Sirdar and his staff had occupied some of the houses, and the field hospital had been established close by under the palms by the river. There was still a dropping fire going on upon the west bank, where the Friendlies were skirmishing. It was about nine o'clock. Outside the Sirdar's temporary quarters Slatin was just dismounting after a hurried ride over the field to identify some of the dead Emirs. As he stood outside the house there rode up on a donkey one of the captured Dervish chiefs. A soldier escorted him, but he needed no guard for in the first place a bullet had injured his right arm, which was bandaged and hanging in a sling, and in the second his

intentions were distinctly friendly. He was a heavy, rather fat, man, with a fringe of white beard to his chin, and a good-humoured expression on his round face. As he came near Slatin, he slipped off his donkey, ran to the Pasha, and throwing the sound left arm round his neck kissed his cheek. Slatin grasped his hand, his face bright with smiles, as they spoke together in Arabic. "You have found an old friend," I said to Slatin. "Yes," he answered, "this is the Sheikh El Obeid, who was so kind to me when I was a prisoner in Omdurman." A curious turn of the wheel of fortune was now giving Slatin the chance of repaying the Emir's kindness.

At the temporary headquarters I had a short talk with Major Wingate, who very kindly let me see the copy of the orders issued to Burn-Murdoch the night before, as well as the detailed orders for the infantry column. These and other papers I studied, seated under a palm tree outside. The only news of importance he could give me, in addition to what I had myself gathered during the fight, was that Hammuda Idris, the enemy's commander, had been recognised among the dead, and that several important Emirs had shared his fate. There could be no news from the pursuing cavalry for a good twenty-four hours, if then; but when the news came it would probably be the capture of Suarda. I wrote a short second telegram, got it signed, and, mounting again, prepared for my ride back to Akasha.

The field was being rapidly cleared—no light work considering the extent of ground over which the wreckage of the fight was scattered. The first rough

estimate was that the enemy had lost in the actual battle some eight hundred dead, and some five hundred prisoners, wounded and unwounded. Most of their wounded had been already collected at the main field hospital and the dressing stations. I have said Ferkeh was a camp, not a village in the ordinary sense of the word. One result of this was that happily there were comparatively few women and children in the place, and of these nearly all had escaped injury from our fire. Two women were, I believe, among the wounded, and as I rode in I saw in an open space a boy lying dead beside a man, both apparently killed by a bursting shell. By the way, a carelessly-worded phrase in a despatch sent by one of my colleagues, led to the rumour being spread at home that the women taken at Ferkeh became at once the prize of war for the Soudanese soldiers. Nothing of the kind took place. The women were collected and put under guard as soon as the village was captured, and many of them were employed, later in the day, in cooking for, and taking care of, the Dervish wounded. When we first got into the village at the end of the battle I saw a group of women standing at the corner of an open space. Only a few minutes before the village had been exposed to the fire of our batteries, and even now the fighting was not over; but these Dervish dames, many of them widows by the morning's work, seemed to have no nerves. They were laughing and chatting cheerily, and seemed to be chaffing the soldiers as they passed by.

None of these people can be judged by our European standards. The battle was hardly over when many of

the black prisoners were asking to be enrolled in the Soudanese battalions, in which they had many old friends. One of the black sergeants of the 9th was a mounted Emir on the enemy's side seven years ago at Toski, and this is no solitary instance of the readiness with which these wild fellows transfer their allegiance to the winning party. One result of this presence of ex-Mahdists in the Soudanese battalions is that, once the fight is over, the black soldiers, who have been foremost in the slaughter, are the readiest to fraternise with and perform little acts of kindness for the prisoners. Many a drink from a water-bottle, many a cigarette, did the captured Dervishes receive as they passed by the ranks of a Soudanese battalion, and with these courtesies came endless inquiries about friends on both sides. At times, too, there are more tragic incidents. Thus after Ferkeh a soldier of one of the black battalions told his white officer that he had recognised his own father among the enemy's dead. He did not seem much moved by the discovery, but said in a matter-of-fact way, "He was always a bad man, but then he was my father, so I think I should like to wash his body and bury it." Of course he was at once given leave to perform these last rites for the dead Dervish.

When I rode slowly back across the field with my second despatch, taking mental note of the various aspects of the village and the ground about it, most of the wounded had been removed, but the dead still lay where they had fallen. All through the village one saw them lying in or near the houses, mostly with a look of repose on their faces, which had not the

collapsed and worn appearance of men who have died of disease. Even where the wounds were terrible the face had this look of repose. On a sloping path at the north end of the village a big bearded man lay dead, his back to the slope, so that he seemed to face me as I urged my horse up the incline. The right side of his forehead was simply blown out by a Martini bullet, but, despite the gaping wound, there was no sign of pain, terror, or excitement on the dead features. If the wound had been covered one might almost have thought he was resting. Of course there is not the ashy paleness of a dead European face, and this takes away something of the impression of death. One hears of the rivers of blood shed on the battlefield. That is poetry. There was very little blood on most of the dead; sometimes, indeed, it was hard to say where the wound was that had laid them low. Outside the village, on the ground traversed by the advance of the First Brigade, here and there a dead Egyptian lay where he had fallen. A number of dead horses showed where the Dervish cavalry had charged, and well to the front, beside a fallen Baggara, I picked up a large wooden tablet, inscribed on both sides with verses of the Koran, which had apparently been carried with the charge as a talisman of victory.

As I rode down the narrow plain between the hills and the Nile, after leaving the battlefield behind me, I had to face a blinding sandstorm. It was fearfully hot, for it was near eleven, and the sun was high overhead. I had had only an hour's sleep since 4 a.m. on Saturday, and very little to eat for more than twenty hours. I was therefore hardly quite fit for the long ride before

WOODEN TABLET INSCRIBED ON BOTH SIDES WITH VERSES OF THE KORAN CARRIED INTO ACTION AT FERKEH BY A DERVISH EMIR.

me over ground which I only knew by having traversed it in the dark. For most of the way I could not get my tired horse out of a walk. After I got to the north of Sarkamatto village the hot blasts of sand-laden wind ceased, and the ride became much more endurable.

I did not realise the full boldness of our night march till I saw in the daylight the rough stony track and the narrow ledge of rock above the river which we had traversed in the darkness of Saturday night. As I was approaching this pass, and not quite sure as to the best point at which to try to descend to the river bank, I more than once went inside the belt of palms by the Nile in order to take a look along the shore. Once, as I thus rode into the palms, a man in a very suspicious dress rose up out of the bush. He wore a bandolier, and his coat looked very like the ornamental jibbas I had seen on the prisoners at Ferkeh. I loosed my pistol in its holster, and then, affecting a coolness I did not feel, rode towards him, wishing him good-day. He returned my greeting and saluted me, and then I used my very scanty stock of Arabic to exchange a few words with him. He expressed great delight at hearing of the morning's victory, but I suspected that he was a Dervish fugitive waiting for a chance to get across the river. As I rode away I looked back more than once, and saw that he had crouched down in hiding among the undergrowth. I learned afterwards that a Dervish with a bandolier but no rifle was found dead near this place, killed by the Friendlies.[1]

[1] At Akasha next day some of the Friendlies told my servant that they had seen, further on in my journey, a Dervish horseman,

About half way in I was overtaken by a cavalry soldier carrying a despatch. At first I thought this a piece of good luck, as my horse went much better with a companion, but unfortunately when we came to the difficult ground between Dal Mountain and the river I let him choose the way, and he missed it utterly, descending to the river bank and following it till we were stopped by a sheer precipice. It took us more than a mile of hard riding to get back to where we had started on this unfortunate "short cut." He seemed then so bewildered that, as he would not follow my lead, I left him, and, working by my compass and passing over some very rough ground, I at last got into Khor Shargosheh. We met again half way down the khor. It was after five o'clock when at last I rode into Akasha.

I ascertained that my first despatch had been put on the wire about 2 p.m. The telegraphist in charge told me that they had been expecting all day that the wire would have been cut to the northward, as a party of Dervish raiders, who had apparently gone north by the outer desert track (the Bir-el-Khanak route), had appeared near Ambigol. There had been messages from the fort and camp asking for help to drive them off, but the wire had not been touched,

probably a scout cut off by our advance, following on my track all unseen by me; that they had given chase to him, but that he had escaped up one of the khors into the hills. As they asked for no reward, and their tale told of their own failure, I believed it at the time, and alluded to it in my letter to my paper. They belonged to the small parties which scoured the country south of Akasha on the day of the battle, and which, I was told, brought in some prisoners.

though it was at their mercy. They seem to have got news of Ferkeh early in the day, for they tried to retire by the route by which they had come, with what results I shall presently have to tell.

At our tents by the river bank I met Garrett. I had an hour's sleep and then a good dinner, with a bottle of champagne in honour of the victory. We turned in early, and all next morning, up to 11 a.m., when the Monday camel post started, we were busy completing our letters.

I sent off early in the day a camel rider to Ferkeh, with a skeleton message asking Major Wingate to fill in the names of chiefs that had been killed and taken, the statistics of losses, and any news received of the pursuit, in fact to give me in writing the information he would have given verbally if I were with him, and then to *visa* the telegram and send it back. I promised the messenger a sovereign if he got back by 6 p.m., but only a quarter of that sum if he were later. He made a good ride, and so I provided for my Monday despatch. I sent Wingate word that I hoped to rejoin headquarters on Tuesday. My temporary return to Akasha worked out well. My letters describing the fight were printed in London on June 25th. No other letter from the battlefield appeared in any paper till July 2nd—a week later.

So much for my personal experiences after the battle. Now for what is more important, the story of Burn-Murdoch's pursuit of the defeated Dervishes, of which I did not get the first details till the Tuesday.

His orders were to move south with the horse

battery, cavalry, and Camel Corps, as soon as Ferkeh was captured, fall on the enemy as they cleared out of the place, cut up and disperse any parties that tried to rally, and then ride, first to Koyekeh and then on to Suarda, endeavouring to seize both places. He was informed that the 12th Soudanese would be sent on after him, to support him if necessary, and to form the garrison of Suarda after its capture. According to the reports of spies and deserters the enemy had only weak detachments in both that place and Koyekeh.

The pursuit lasted just twenty-two hours, from 7 a.m. on Sunday till dawn on Monday. The whole distance covered was thirty-eight miles, so the rate of marching was not very high, but then the troops had been on the move already since the afternoon of Saturday. The Dervishes never had a chance of rallying. The river bank and the border of the desert were strewn for miles with their dead. Wherever they attempted a stand the lances of the cavalry, the rifles of the Camel Corps, and the guns that had spoken so effectually from the slopes of Ferkeh Mountain were soon upon them. Between Ferkeh and Mograka there were a good many of these skirmishes, the cavalry repeatedly charging and coming to close quarters with the enemy. While leading one of these charges, Captain Legge received a lance wound in the arm, from an Emir whom he cut down. He was the only British officer wounded, and though the injury was at first considered slight it had some serious after effects. Tudway, of the Camel Corps, shot another Dervish chief, who led a desperate charge

LIEUT.-COLONEL BURN-MURDOCH.

against his men. The loss was not all on the Dervish side. Some of the more eager pursuers in the broken ground on the margin of the desert were cut off by superior numbers. Thus a few days after, a cavalry sergeant, who had been missing, was found dead in one of the little ravines beyond Mograka. His pistol was in his hand, and five Dervishes lay dead around him. He had fought to the last, and sold his life dearly.

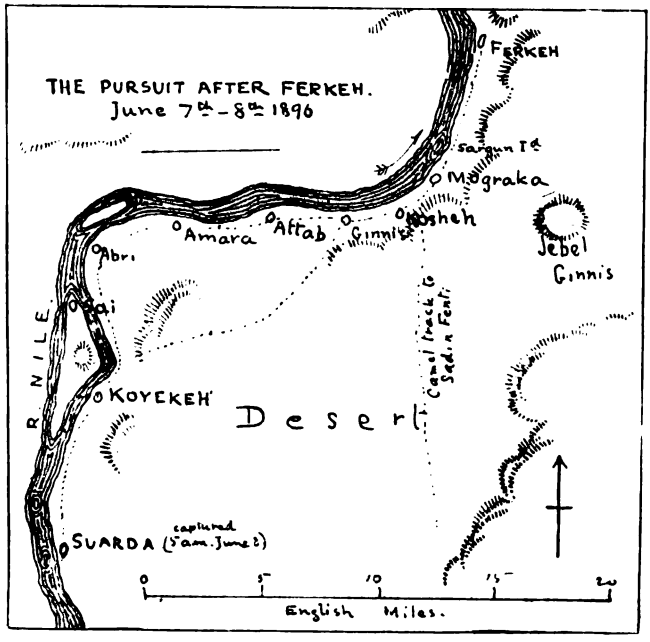
Until Amara was reached there were no people in the river-side villages; but from Amara onwards there was a certain amount of settled population. Everywhere the villagers welcomed our men as friends and deliverers. They brought them food and milk, and told how the routed Dervishes had been passing by the villages all Sunday afternoon and evening, and then through the night. Many of them were wounded; some had thrown away their arms; others were carrying on their camels three or four rifles, anxious to save the weapons for another day. Most of them seemed tired out and utterly depressed. Some four or five of the Emirs were being carried along badly wounded on camels. One of these was Hamza Wad Engeriabi, the leader of the cruel raid on Adendam. He died on the march. Another was the famous Emir Karamallah, for years the Dervish governor of Equatoria and the Bahr-el-Ghazal, and Emin Pasha's opponent in that region. He died at Koyeh. Many of the villagers recognised Osman Azrak among the fugitives. He was unwounded, carried a Martini-Henry rifle on his camel, and wore a revolver. Most of the Dervishes rode silently past the villages, but some called out,

"We are going away for awhile, but we shall come back and retake all this country." The poor folk along the river were, for once, able to listen to the threats of the Dervishes without any fear for the future. The sight of their fallen oppressors, flying in hopeless rout, and the rushing pursuit of Burn-Murdoch's lances and rifles were enough to reassure them.

Quarter was freely given, and many prisoners were taken during the pursuit. Perhaps the most important was the Emir Ismail Wad Khetar, who was captured near Mograka. He had been for some years keeper of the *Beit-el-Mal* at Dongola, that is, treasurer of the province, and he was able to give a large amount of valuable information to Wingate and Slatin. Koyekeh was found deserted on Sunday night. Before this point was reached a number of Dervish camel-men had come down one of the desert tracks, and, evidently to their great surprise, they were promptly attacked and killed or captured by Tudway's men. They were the party that had been raiding towards Ambigol, and they had struck well to the south in the hope of getting to Suarda unmolested. They did not reckon on such active pursuit.

Suarda was reached at dawn on Monday. The garrison, the fugitives from the battlefield, and many of their women and children who had been left in the village, had been crossing all night in boats to the west bank. As the pursuers came up the last boat-loads were crossing the Nile. No boats were available in which to follow them, but the battery unlimbered and sent a few well-aimed shells into the mass of horse and camel-men whom Osman Azrak had rallied

on the far side of the river, and soon the Dervishes were hurrying again to the southwards. One of the bursting shells wounded the Emir Hassan Wad-en-Nejumi, the bearer of a famous name, for he was a cousin of the more celebrated Mohammed Abderrahman Wad-en-Nejumi, the "Bayard of Mahdism," who planned the destruction of Hicks at Kashgil, led



the assault at Khartoum, and fell at Toski in the attempt to invade Upper Egypt.

A considerable store of grain was captured in Suarda, where Hammuda's house became the headquarters of the vanguard of the expedition, which had thus established itself fifty-four miles south of Akasha, and just half-way from Wadi Halfa, the

starting-point, to Dongola, the objective of the expedition.

The full extent of the enemy's losses will probably never be precisely known. At a very moderate estimate a thousand fell in the fight and pursuit. The numbers were more likely nearer fifteen hundred. Over five hundred were taken prisoners. Everything pointed to the four thousand men concentrated at Ferkeh being a picked force. It was well armed, and well provided with ammunition. More than a thousand rifles were collected on the field; Remington breechloaders, many of them cut down to carbine length to decrease the weight and make them more handy. This operation, however, destroyed the sighting arrangements of the rifle, and helped to throw the bullet high in action. The Dervishes trusted to their rifle-fire at Ferkeh, but, like many other people, evidently they thought that fire was something formidable, even without fire discipline, and that men with rifles are soldiers. Of the Emirs shown on Major Wingate's list as commanding at Ferkeh,[1] forty-four were killed, four made prisoners, and fourteen got away. They fought splendidly, and no praise is too high for their reckless courage. But one cannot pity their fate; for there was perhaps not one of them whose hands were not stained with the blood of hapless villagers—men, women, and children. Some of them had been the scourge of the Nile valley with their murderous raids. Others had been slave-hunters further south, in the far interior. Many of them were

[1] See Appendix III.

famous for deeds of fiendish cruelty. Their downfall was a gain to the world.

Briefly, the results of the battle of Ferkeh were that —(1) in twenty-four hours, from 5 a.m. on Sunday, June 7th, to 5 a.m. on Monday, the 8th, more than fifty miles of the Nile valley had been cleared of the Dervishes, and had passed into the secure possession of the Egyptian army; (2) all doubt of the fighting qualities of the purely Egyptian elements of that army had been cleared away by the brilliant and steady conduct of the artillery and infantry on the field, while the cavalry and the Camel Corps had proved their value in the fight and in the pursuit; (3) the one fully organised army the Dervishes possessed on the Nile frontier had been utterly destroyed, nearly fifty of their fighting Emirs, and some two thousand killed or captured; (4) Suarda, for years the starting-point of cruel raids on the Nile villages, had become the advanced post of the Egyptian army, and all the country north of it was safe; (5) the Dongola expedition traversed successfully the last of the difficult Batn-el-Hagar country, for Ferkeh is the southern gate of the stony desert, and the army had now before it the more open districts of the Dar Sukkot and the Mahassa, where every advantage was on the side of disciplined troops and modern weapons.

Finally, on both sides the moral effect of this ideally complete victory for the one, this crushing defeat for the other, were enormous. It was the first time that the new Egyptian army had taken the initiative in any fighting in the Nile valley. All previous Nile campaigns, since Khartoum fell, had begun with a Mahdist

advance. Here the Egyptian army had both challenged the trial of strength and struck the first blow. The news of the destruction of Hammuda's army was a warning to every tribe in the Soudan that the Khalifa's tyranny was toppling to its fall, and that to stand by the Dervishes any longer was to be on the losing side in the struggle.

Practically the fight of Ferkeh decided the fate of Dongola, for the Dervishes never made a real stand again during the campaign.

CHAPTER XIX.

BEHIND THE SCENES OF MAHDISM.

THE Arab has a curious reverence for written paper. He hardly ever destroys a document. Letters and memoranda are kept for years. Thus it was that on the bodies of several of the slain Emirs, in their baggage at Ferkeh and in Hammuda's house at Suarda, a number of documents and despatches were found which throw some interesting sidelights on the story of the campaign. The mass of documents that came into the hands of the Intelligence Department was enormous. It is only possible here to select a few which may serve as characteristic samples of the whole.

First of all, let us take a couple of documents relating to one of the frontier raids before the advance of the expedition. Towards the end of 1895 some preliminary work was done towards the laying of a railway in the desert from Korosko southwards. The Dervishes were then in possession of the country up to Sarras, and Wad Bishara at Dongola heard that there would be camel convoys on the move with railway material in the desert near Halfa, and thought it was a good opportunity for Hammuda, then commanding his advanced post at Suarda, to organise

a raid. He wrote from Dongola at the end of November, 1895:

"In the name of God the Merciful. Praised be our God the Bountiful, prayer for our lord Mohammed and his descendants.

"From the servant of his God, Mohammed Bishara, to the beloved Hammuda Idris. May God have him in His care!

"With my salutations, and under the mercy of God, I have to inform you that after writing the letter enclosed in the envelope sent to you herewith, news has been received that the enemies of God have lately detailed some camel-men, escorted by soldiers, to transport wood for the railway between Akasha and Ambigol. We must not lose this opportunity. You will please, therefore, beloved, on the arrival of this, detail for duty all the horsemen available in your camp, including those recently sent to you, and place at their head one of the brethren whom you believe to be brave, active, and determined in battle for the cause of the faith. You will also send with him all your camel-men except those you require for scouting and carrying messages. By your orders, and relying upon the help of God, this force will march against those of the enemy who are engaged in transporting the wood. If they succeed in coming upon them they will defeat them. But if they cannot find them they will march on till they get to the river to the south of Sarras, where, no doubt, there are some inhabitants. These people must be attacked and plundered. The attack should be made at noon. After it our men will

retire, marching all through the night. They should leave a hundred horses waiting at Ambigol, so as to have them ready and rested when they return that way, especially if the Evil Spirit should move the enemy to pursue them. They will then rest an entire day either at Akasha or at Ferkeh, as may be most convenient.

"It is important, beloved, that this party should start at once, before the enemy can know anything about it. Let them set off with good heart and confidence. Impress upon the brother whom you appoint as their leader that he must be always vigilant and on the alert, both by day and night, so that, with the help of the worshipful God, we may accomplish this work.

"Meanwhile you will continue to send out scouts, and to collect information, which you will forward to me regularly as you receive it. Keep your communications with me uninterrupted.

(Signed) "MOHAMMED BISHARA."

Two postscripts are added to the letter. The first directs that the hundred reserve horses are to be walked, not galloped, after the party, so as to be quite fresh. The second bids Hammuda to impress upon the leader of the raid that he must spare no precautions against being captured during the retreat.

Hammuda chose the Emir Mohammed Hamza-Engeriabi (commonly known as Wad Hamza) to lead the raiders. They found no camel convoys in the Batn-el-Hagar. (It was the first half of December, 1895.) But they had orders not to return with

unblooded weapons. If there were no soldiers to attack they were to fall upon a village. So they swept round to the north of Sarras. There was no village to raid south of it. All that country had been cleared already. They succeeded in surprising the village of Adendam, in the Halfa district, massacring not men only, but also some of the women and children. Here is the letter in which the murderous fanatic who led the raiders reported his deed of brigandage :—

"*Mohammed Hamza Engeriabi to Hammuda Idris.*

"After salutations, I beg to inform you that God has given victory to His faith and brought His enemies to naught. On Tuesday, the 22nd inst., we raided the village of Adendam, and God has destroyed all His enemies who were in that village. After burning their houses, cutting the telegraph line, and pulling up the poles, we returned well pleased.

"To-day we reached Mograka, and heard you were at Akasha. Thanks be to God who has made you a refuge for the Ansar (*i.e.*, the Mahdist army), which upholds the religion of God, and a barrier to the infidels who have been defeated by God. May God accept your deeds and fulfil your hopes in this world and in the world to come!

"Seal of WAD HAMZA.

"26 Tamad Tani, 1313 (= Dec. 14, 1895)."

Let it be noted that the raider speaks of these harmless villagers as "the enemies of God"—people who were to be ruthlessly destroyed—and this months

SLATIN PASHA.

before the advance from Wadi Halfa. Wad Hamza was, as we have seen, among the Emirs who fought at Ferkeh. He got away badly wounded with a bullet in his chest, and died during the pursuit. Had he been captured alive he would very likely have been taken to Adendam and hanged on the scene of his "victory."

A letter from Bishara to Hammuda, dated 27 Shawal, 1313 (= April 8, 1896)—that is, in the first month of the campaign—tells him of the despatch of reinforcements northwards, and warns him against the movements of the Mukhuburut—the friendly Arabs acting as scouts for the Egyptian Intelligence Department.

"I wrote," he says, "to-day to Hassan Wad Nejumi to move with all his force from Kerma to Kedurma to guard the stores at the latter place against the enemy, and to collect information. I also told him that if anything occurs to you to make his presence necessary, he must at once go to your help."

Hassan Wad Nejumi was wounded in the flight from Suarda, on June 8th, just two months after the date of this letter. Kerma, from which he marched, is a few miles south of Abu Fatmeh, at the head of the Third Cataract. Kedurma, to which he moved, is just below the Kaibar Cataract. Stores were collected there to be sent by boats to Suarda, Mograka, and Ferkeh, to which the navigation was open. How little confidence Bishara had even then in his position in the Dongola province is shown by his having at so

early a stage of the campaign thought it necessary to station a force at Kedurma, and by his idea that hostile scouts, perhaps coming by way of the Selima Oasis, had penetrated almost to Argo Island, between the Third Cataract and Dongola, for he wrote further to Hammuda :—

"You are well aware, beloved, that the baffled enemies of God are cunning and deceitful. You should therefore be always watchful and on the alert. And if anything occurs that makes the help of Hassan-en-Nejumi and his men needful, send for him at once. Let me have your news regularly, and continue to send out spies both by the east and west banks, and give strict orders to your wakeel at Suarda to be watchful as to the west bank, for in these days the tracks of four spies on camels have been found on the west side coming to Argo. I have sent El Wad el Ghali with the necessary force, all on camels, to reconnoitre as far as Selima.

"Seal of BISHARA.

"27 Shawal, 1313 (= April 8, 1896)."

On April 14th Bishara wrote again, addressing the letter jointly to Hammuda and to his right-hand man, Osman Azrak. He tells them he has news from Akasha. He hears that the garrison consists largely of "Soudanese Jehadia," many of whom "were with the martyr Abderraham en-Nejumi";[1] and he expresses a hope that they will desert. He bids Hammuda make an early attack upon Akasha.

[1] The Dervish leader killed at Toski.

Seven days later (8 El Kida, 1313 = April 21, 1896) Bishara writes again to the two Emirs to tell them that he has information that—

"The enemies of God are doing their utmost to extend the railway up to Akasha before the 10th of the month" (= April 23rd).

Also that the line has already reached Murrat, and they have fourteen boats at Akasha to keep up communication with the post established on the west bank. He warns them to be cautious and keep scouts moving on both sides of the river. His information, however, was not quite correct. Murrat was not reached by the railway till the first week in May. As for the future plans of the expedition, this is what he had to say :—

"You must be quite prepared and on the watch, as I have received information that the God-forsaken Sirdar says that he will occupy the district of Dar Sukkot in seven weeks. Such is his false belief, for he is deceived by the number of his men, who are devoid of the help of God the Almighty. But even if they were as the grains of sand, their numbers and equipment are of no consequence against the power of God. We pray to God to frustrate them, and to have them brought to destruction by their own devices."

It is curious to note that seven weeks from the date of this letter carries one to June 9th, the second day

after the battle of Ferkeh and the morrow of the capture of Suarda, the two events which put the Dar Sukkot province in the possession of the Sirdar and his army.

Amongst the papers were several vouchers for ammunition, showing that, whatever might be the case at Dongola, the force pushed forward to Ferkeh had plenty of cartridges. On May 21st Dudu Badr, one of the Emirs commanding the Jehadia, gives Hammuda a receipt for twenty-five boxes of Remington ammunition. The unbroken boxes captured at Ferkeh contained each 700 cartridges, so this consignment represented 17,500 rounds. A receipt dated June 3rd (the Wednesday before the battle) accounts for thirty-one boxes—that is, about 21,700 more cartridges. With a letter dated May 9th Bishara sends Hammuda twenty-seven boxes, or 18,900 rounds.[1] But apparently he has not very much more to spare, for he warns him to "take good care of them, and expend none of them unless it is absolutely necessary." In another of these letters Bishara tells Hammuda to impress on his men that they must not open fire till the enemy has already begun firing, otherwise they will probably be wasting ammunition on a mark that is out of range. They must imitate the cool fire tactics of the Egyptians, or, to put it in his own words—

"Haste to fire before the enemy is well within range is a waste of ammunition. If the enemies of God, who

[1] A considerable quantity of the captured ammunition consisted of old solid-drawn brass cartridge cases, refilled at Omdurman arsenal. Some of the bullets were very clumsy, and looked as if they had been hammered into shape.

are most careful for their own safety and have no wish for death, do not hurry on the firing, why should the Ansar, whose best wish is for death in battle, hurry with the firing."

A very curious and significant document is a memorandum setting forth the scale of rations for the issue of grain to the fighting men at Ferkeh. The allowance is given in fractions of an ardeb of grain [1] issued monthly, and the proportions were :—

	For each man.	For his family.
Arab troops	$\frac{3}{24}$	$\frac{3}{48}$ of an ardeb
Jehadia (black riflemen)	$\frac{4}{24}$	$\frac{2}{24}$,,
Taaisha Baggaras ...	$\frac{6}{24}$	$\frac{3}{24}$,,

Note that the black troops were better fed than the Arabs in general, while the Taaisha Baggara (the men of the Khalifa's own tribe) received one-third more than the Jehadia and just twice as much food as the rest of the Arabs.

An important letter from Bishara to Hammuda dated April 17th shows that mendacious reports of alleged victories were sent to Dongola. The night attack referred to must have been one of the occasions when a few harmless shots were fired into the outposts at Akasha. Just before the date of this letter some Dervishes crept up the sandy khor below post No. 1 at Akasha and fired a volley into it. There were no casualties, and the enemy ran when the first shots were fired in reply. This was almost certainly the incident

[1] An ardeb, the measure for grain used in Egypt and the Soudan, = 5·6 bushels.

on which Hammuda built up his report of a victory. The result was the following letter from Bishara to Hammuda and Osman Azrak :—

"In the name of the merciful and bountiful God—praise to God, the generous, the Almighty—prayers and salutations to our lord Mohammed and his descendants.

"From the servant of his God, Mohammed Bishara, to the beloved Hammuda Idris and Mohammed Issa—may God have them in His care.

"With my salutations, and by the mercy and blessing of God, I inform you, beloved, that the letter of one of you—Hammuda Idris—has brought me the news that our brave and energetic brethren who were sent under the command of Osman Issa to attack the enemy in compliance with my order to you,[1] have—may God grant them a good reward—done their duty, defeated the enemy in a night attack, and returned victorious and without loss except two wounded. We have thanked Him and prayed to Him to grant a good reward to the warriors of the faith, and to shower upon them His blessings and recognise their service. They are efficient soldiers—yea, more than efficient."

One almost pities Bishara for being thus hoodwinked by Hammuda's ingenious narratives. The letter reveals the fact that two of the shots fired back from the Akasha outpost took effect, of which no one in the garrison had any idea till these papers

[1] A reference to the letter of April 14th, quoted *supra*.

were captured. Bishara's letter went on to recommend a plan of campaign :—

"Now, my brethren, that you have by the help of God dealt a blow to those wretches, be always on the alert and watchful against them. Try to beat them down and fill their hearts with fear. You have now a sufficient number of camels. Mount on them those of our brethren who can be depended upon for their boldness and activity, and direct them to proceed to the north of Akasha, follow the river route, and drive the enemy from the river side. Your attacking them from all directions will fill them with alarm and fear. When, therefore, you send off this camel force, arrange that while they are attacking the enemy you will be moving against him from Ferkeh, while a party of horsemen attacks his convoys from another direction. Engaging them thus from all sides, you will throw them into panic and disorder. You have, however, to decide what are the best means to be taken for the advancement of our cause. If you should think it better to send out the camel-men to the north of your camp do so. Those on the spot see better than those at a distance. In any case it is most necessary that you should harass the enemy."

The result of this appears to have been the raid that was repulsed by the Egyptian cavalry in the May-day fight near Akasha. That also was reported to Dongola as a victory. But it was impossible for Hammuda to conceal entirely the state of affairs at the front, and there is a series of letters which reveals indirectly the

existence of serious dissensions in the Dervish camp at Ferkeh, and the growing dissatisfaction of Bishara with Hammuda. Thus there is a letter from Wad Bishara dated only with the month and year, "El Hegga, 1313." This year the month of El Hegga began on May 13th, so the letter must have been written either in the second half of May or in the first days of June, immediately before the battle. A letter of Bishara's, dated May 28th (El Hegga, 15), to be presently quoted, shows that the former of these suppositions is the correct one. This letter then, written, we may take it, in the third week of May, is addressed jointly to Hammuda Idris and Osman Issa (more generally known as Osman Azrak). Osman had held the Suarda command before Hammuda's arrival, and Bishara's earnest exhortations to concord between them, and his mention of the despatch of commissioners to report on the state of affairs at Suarda and Ferkeh suggest that the relations between the two Emirs were seriously strained. Men who have had long experience of the Soudan consider that these dissensions in the Ferkeh camp were the real cause of the almost complete inaction of this picked Dervish force with its crowd of Emirs during the weeks that preceded the Sirdar's advance.

Bishara's letter of advice and exhortation ran as follows :—

"From the servant of his God, Mohammed Bishara to the beloved Hammuda Idris and Osman Mohammed Issa. May God have them in His care.

"My salutations to you and my wishes for the

DERVISH COINS (10 PIASTRE PIECES, SILVER ALLOYED WITH COPPER) STRUCK BY THE KHALIFA AT OMDURMAN.

mercy and blessings of God. You are, thank God, of good understanding and thoroughly acquainted with the rules of our religion, which enjoin upon you mutual love, concord, and union. Thanks be to God that nothing but good news comes to me about you. But now that you are close to the enemies of God, and have, with the help of God, a sufficient number of troops, I beg of you to be united, and to have, through mutual union and love, the heart as of one single man. Consult together over all you do so as to ensure success, to the advancement of our religion and the confusion of the infidels, the enemies of God. Do not make the least movement without consulting together, and also taking the advice of those with you who are full of wisdom and good sense. Use their knowledge in stratagems of war, especially when it comes to arranging a general action. Your army is, thank God, a numerous one, so if you will but be united and act as one hand, your operations will be well directed and you will achieve victory, with the help of God, gaining your ends against the enemies of God, and setting at ease the mind of the Khalifa, peace be upon him. Take this advice and do not allow intrigues to separate you. Rely upon God in all you do, and be vigorous in your action against the enemy, so that they may not find any weak point in your dispositions. Be always vigilant and on the alert, for they are very cunning—may God destroy them. Now let it be seen that you are vigorous and energetic, and keep me regularly informed of all that takes place.

"Our brethren, Babokra Mohammed Koka, Ibrahim el Hag, and Hamid Belula are going to you. They

are in my confidence and will inform me on their return whether you are in good concord. Let them find you—as our religion directs—in good heart, doing your utmost to secure the victory of the faith.

"Remember, my brethren, that what moves me to urge you to mutual love and concord is my own affection for you and desire for your good. This is a time of war, when concord and agreement are of the utmost importance. You were among those who stood by the Mahdi—peace be with him—when men were all like one soul in one body. When the enemy hears that you are closely united, he will be much afflicted. Try, then, to afflict the enemies of our religion. May God give you all you desire.

(Signed) "MOHAMMED BISHARA.

"El Hegga, 1313."

Another letter from Bishara to Hammuda dealt with the difficulties which had arisen between the latter and the Emirs of the Jehadia, the black regulars. But the exhortations to concord and the repeated call for vigorous action "against the enemies of God," seem to have had very little result. Hammuda's boastful despatches could not explain away the fact that the invaders remained in possession of Akasha, and that their railway was creeping steadily southwards. A few prisoners, a few heads of slain camel-men and Egyptian soldiers, a few Martini rifles taken in a raid would have been more convincing than many letters, but no such proofs of victory reached Dongola. At last Bishara's patience was exhausted. On May 28th he wrote a

letter to Osman Azrak, bidding him deprive Hammuda of the command and take his place.

"I appointed Hammuda," he wrote, "with the hope that he would carry on his work in a satisfactory way, but he has not acted according to my orders, nor has he done his work to my satisfaction. He has therefore been deposed, and you have been given his place."

Although it was written nine days before the battle it would seem that this letter either had not reached the Ferkeh camp, or had not been acted upon when the Sirdar advanced to the attack. Hammuda appears to have been in command, though not for long. Early in the fight an Egyptian bullet struck down the unsuccessful Dervish commander, on whose hopeless mismanagement of the campaign these despatches throw so interesting a light.

CHAPTER XX.

THE HALT AT SARGUN CAMP.

I LEFT Akasha on Tuesday, June 9th, to rejoin headquarters at the camp near Sargun Island, south of Ferkeh. I had with me Mr. Garrett and our servants and camels. Delays in striking camp and packing up stores kept us from starting till nearly seven o'clock, and as it was a hot day the long ride by the river route to Ferkeh and Sargun was a trying march for us both.

In one of the khors about four miles out we met Surgeon-Captain Trask, marching down with a convoy of wounded. They were carried two and two on iron cacolets, slung pannier-fashion to a camel saddle, and they seemed fairly comfortable. The first two were Egyptian officers. We stopped and gave them cigarettes, and they seemed very glad to have them.

Our track took us across the battlefield of Ferkeh and through the village. The field had been cleared of dead and of the *débris* of the fight. The chief sign that there had been a battle was to be seen on the once cultivated land at the north end of the village, where on the grey sandy soil one could see line after line of brass cartridge cases shining in the sun, the lines indicating the successive stages of the Egyptian

advance. The great wheeling movement, pivoting on the right, was marked out as if on a map.

Ferkeh village showed many tokens of the bombardment, but fewer of the houses than one would expect were seriously damaged. All were now deserted. It was like a silent city of the dead. Under the palms by the river at its south end there was still a field hospital, full of wounded, chiefly Dervishes. The headquarters and camp had been moved out to Sargun on the Sunday afternoon, as owing to the occupation of Ferkeh for some weeks by an army of Dervishes who knew little and cared less about the most ordinary sanitary precautions, the village, the river bank, and the watering-places were in a dangerously foul condition.

The stony desert of the Batn-el-Hagar may be said to end at Ferkeh, and the level ground widens out on both sides of the river, with, further in, low gently undulating hills, above which here and there one sees a cone-shaped summit, or one of the high table-topped mountains characteristic of the district. The Nile runs smoothly, its surface dotted with a number of small rocky islands, for we are here on the open water between the cataracts of Dal and Hannek.

I found the camp at Sargun between three and four miles south of Ferkeh pitched partly under the belt of palms along the steep river bank, partly on the sloping ground below, most of which would be under water when the Nile rose. There was a good deal of grass on both banks, and some of the islands higher up might be said to be thickly wooded. There was thus abundance of material for the fatigue parties of

Egyptians and Soudanese who were at work along the river erecting *tukkuls*, marvellous structures with a frame-work of branches, and walls and roofs of palm leaves and straw mats, only possible as habitations in a rainless country like this. In the middle of the camp were the roofless houses of the village that had evidently been without inhabitants for years,

THE 3RD BATTERY IN CAMP.

and the level ground up to the desert hills showed water channels and other signs of former cultivation. The white tents of the headquarters' camp and the Intelligence Department showed up brightly against a background of palms by the river side. As we were likely to stay a good month at Sargun waiting for the railway, the rise of the river, and the arrival of the

gunboats, a lot of hard work was done to make the camp as comfortable as might be. It was spread out along nearly a mile and a half of the river bank, and every one had plenty of room. There was a screen of outposts on a low ridge of sand and stones on the land side, and a post to the south on the river, and the sentries were always on the alert. But we all felt as safe as if we were at Aldershot. The real guard of our camp was the Suarda garrison thirty-five miles away to the southward. It was held by the 12th Soudanese under Townshend, the 13th under Collinson, two squadrons of cavalry under Mahon, the Maxim battery and a company of the Camel Corps. The desert on either side of the river was patrolled well to the front by our Arab Friendlies.

Several battalions of infantry were sent back to Akasha and Okmeh in the two days after the battle, in order to lighten the strain on the transport, and facilitate the accumulation of supplies at the front. On the very day of the fight Fathi Bey's regiment, the 7th, was ordered to march back to the rail-head. It was at Ambigol Wells again by Tuesday, having done two long marches and taken part in the battle, a six days' work of which any infantry might be proud. They were joined at Ambigol Wells by the railway battalion, and Girouard began to push on the line. The engineers had very little rest. Manifold got his telegraph wire up to Sargun on the Tuesday morning. He had told the Sirdar at Akasha that if he liked he could have it up to Ferkeh during the battle, but his offer was not accepted. Laying a telegraph line was in one way fairly easy work. There was no trouble

about insulation. The dry sand was almost as good as a sheet of glass for the purpose, so a strong galvanised wire was simply laid along the ground. Later on it was raised on poles to keep it out of the way of accident from passing camels, but even then no insulators were used. Lying on the ground the wire gave far better results than the most carefully insulated English lines. The difficulty was really to get it "to earth," and the only way of doing this was to run some yards of the wire into the river. All the land was too dry. Having got the wire up to Sargun, Manifold proceeded to run it on to Suarda, and having now received a good supply of instruments from England he was able to work three circuits, two over the single wire from Sargun to Halfa, and one on another wire to Suarda. The telephone system was still used along the railway.

With the object of facilitating the supply of forage for the great number of horses and camels, most of the cavalry and the Camel Corps were ordered to march back from Suarda after the pursuit, and return to the old camp at Ambigol on the river. There was no danger in thus dispersing the expeditionary force, as in the improbable event of the Dervishes assuming the offensive from Dongola, we could concentrate again for battle long before they had reached even Suarda.

On the Thursday after the battle the mounted troops, the horse battery, the cavalry, and the Camel Corps marched past our camp on their way northwards. It was something like a triumphal procession. The men turned out, and gathered along the land side of the camp, and as the guns went rattling by and troop after

troop of horsemen and camel-men rode past, each detachment was greeted with ringing cheers. The men, horses, and camels looked thoroughly fit after their long march. They led with them a number of camels taken from the Dervishes, and the poor beasts had evidently lived on hard and scanty fare for some time back. One camel carried four huge war-drums taken in the pursuit. Nor were these the only trophies. Here and there a trooper or a camel-man held aloft a fluttering Dervish standard, generally a pale blue pennon with an Arabic inscription in white letters, and a white border. The sight of these captured banners always called forth a louder cheer. Then, too, many of the men carried, besides their own weapons, Dervish arms captured in the pursuit, broad-bladed spears, lighter javelins, and long cross-hilted swords, in dull red leather scabbards, the characteristic sword of the Soudan, modelled, there is little doubt, on the sword of the Crusaders. Bundled together on a camel there were three suits of ancient chain armour, worn by the Dervish Emirs, not in battle but at their reviews after prayers on the Friday mornings.

The march seemed endless, and the excitement of the soldier spectators rose steadily. After a while the cheering ceased, and gave place to a loud, monotonous song, accompanied with much clapping of hands, while here and there some more enthusiastic soldier danced and shouted in front of his comrades. The Camel Corps men seemed to catch the excitement, and cheered back, rising in their saddles, waving their rifles and the captured spears above their heads, and throwing showers of dates among the spectators, calling out that they

were from the palms of Suarda. Burn-Murdoch rode at the head of the cavalry, Tudway led the Camel Corps, and they, and indeed all the other British officers, were everywhere wildly cheered by the troops, both Egyptians and Soudanese.

The cavalry brought in some prisoners with them, others were sent up from Suarda, forty or fifty at a

EGYPTIAN GUNNERS—3RD BATTERY.

time. From them we learned some details of the fight at Ferkeh, as seen from the Dervish side. One man told how he was sent out to the mouth of the desert khor at dawn on outpost duty. He went with five comrades on foot, none of them Baggaras; but three Baggara horsemen rode with them to see they did not desert. Suddenly the firing began, and they found

themselves close to the advancing Egyptians, and ran back to the rocks. Another told how when the first shots were fired, the Baggaras at once rushed to their posts, but the Jaalin and Danagla tribesmen (the minority of the Ferkeh force) hesitated. Some wished to retire, others were looking for an opportunity to surrender, but the Baggara Emirs, who had the disciplined Jehadia and their own tribesmen at their command, threatened all who hesitated with death. It is even said that two or three of the Jaalin were speared by the Baggaras. One Emir did not lead, but drove, his reluctant soldiery into action, riding after them sword in hand, swearing he would cut down the first spearman who turned. The surprise was complete. "The soldiers of the Government were innumerable, and came upon us from all sides. The fight was hard; the slaughter terrible." This was the brief story of the battle told by one of the first fugitives to reach Suarda.

The prisoners were sent on to Halfa after a short stay in camp, during which they were carefully interrogated by Major Wingate, Slatin Pasha, and other officials of the Intelligence Department, which had a very busy time. It had not only to complete the record of what had been so far done, but still more important was its duty of preparing as complete an account of the enemy's forces at Dongola as possible.

On the Saturday after the fight (June 13th), the Sirdar, accompanied by Major Wingate and his aide-de-camp, Captain Watson, left the Sargun camp to pay a short visit to the advanced posts at Suarda. No correspondents accompanied the party, but Wingate on his

return gave me some interesting information, gathered during the expedition. It appears that at Suarda the Dervish Emirs had taken possession of all the best houses, and forced the people to cultivate the ground in the neighbourhood for them. Northward along the river the few peasants who remained in the villages had not for years ventured to fully cultivate their fields. They raised a small crop in fear and trembling, knowing that any surplus store would probably be carried off by a foraging party from Suarda. From Amara northwards the villages were nearly all deserted and in ruins, and cultivation had practically ceased everywhere.

I myself saw all along the Nile bank, from Sarkamatto to Mograka and thence on to Kosheh and Ginnis, village after village in ruins, their desolation being not of yesterday, for there were no signs of recent occupation, and the plots of land in the once cultivated ground and the raised water channels between them were overgrown with rough halfa grass and tall masses of desert thorn. The water-wheels by the river side, that once fertilised these fields, had long since been broken up and burned in the camp fires of the Baggara brigands. Yet only twelve years ago, before the Dervish advance, this northern portion of the Dar Sukkot district was one of the richest tracts in the Upper Nile valley. "I have ridden here for hours, among rich wide fields of dhurra," said Major Wingate, "and every village had its long range of date plantations." Other officers who were up the Nile in 1884–85 told me the same thing. Happily hundreds of the date palms survive, a green belt along the river margin; but roofless houses and thorn-grown fields show how much will have to be

done before the Dar Sukkot becomes again what it was in years gone by—one of the gardens of the Nile valley.

But to return to the Sirdar's visit to Suarda. While he was there a Suarda villager arrived from Dongola with important news. He was in the town, and actually with Wad Bishara, when the tidings of the fight at Ferkeh arrived. As soon as he learned that his native place was in the possession of the Government troops he managed to escape from Dongola, and made his way with all speed to Suarda. He said that it was on the Tuesday after the fight that the first news was brought to Wad Bishara by a runner sent on by Osman Azrak. His report was merely that the Dervishes had been driven out of Ferkeh at dawn on the Sunday, by an overwhelming force of Egyptians, and had lost heavily. A few hours later another messenger came in, and showed Bishara a list of the Emirs killed in the fight, "a list as long as a man's arm," to use the very words of the Dongola refugee. Wad Bishara was greatly agitated. He stood up, plucking nervously at his short beard, and plying the messengers with questions. Then it became known that the victors were at Suarda, and the wildest rumours spread through Dongola. It was said that the Egyptian army had attacked some sixty thousand strong, and that twenty thousand had pushed on to Suarda. There was something like a panic. The Jaalin, whose devotion to Mahdism had been of late somewhat doubtful, seemed inclined to withdraw southwards. They like fighting as much as any Soudanese tribe, and had their full share in the early victories of the Mahdist movement; but they are

not so keen about fighting for the sole profit of the Baggaras, at whose hands they have suffered insult and ill-treatment in the person of some of their greatest chiefs.

Other news gathered at Suarda was that Wad Bishara had called for a levy *en masse* of all the men capable of bearing arms in the Dongola province. The first result of this report was that the people of the Dar Mahassa, the district extending from Abu Fatmeh at the head of the Third Cataract, to near Suarda, began to move northwards in large numbers to get inside our outposts, hoping thus to escape the levy, and to return to their homes under our protection, when we advanced. This movement was especially pronounced on the west bank. The Dar Mahassa tribes used once to supply good fighting men to the Mahdist armies, and their defection was a serious loss to the enemy—one more result of the victory at Ferkeh.

The impression produced in the Soudan by the fight was evidently out of all proportion to the numbers engaged. One of the prisoners at Suarda said he had been in every fight on the Nile except Abu Klea, and he had never had to face such a fire as that of our attack. Another, asked by Major Wingate what he thought of the battle, replied, bending down and partly covering his eyes and ears with his hands, "Do not talk of it. It is too terrible. I cannot bear to think of it." To a third prisoner, not a Baggara, Wingate said, "Would you like to go back to your own country?" And the man answered, "No, no, I would rather remain here, even if it were as your slave." Many of the prisoners were eager to be enrolled in

the Egyptian army. The Danagla and Jaalin especially spoke with fierce hatred of the Baggaras. "Give us guns," they said, "and we will fight them for you to-morrow."

While the Sirdar was away at Suarda the work of preparing the road-bed for the railway from Ferkeh to Kosheh was begun. The latter point was selected as the temporary terminus of the line as it was thought to be a good place for embarking stores and fitting out the steamers. The engineers marked out the line with stones, and raised at intervals small banks of sand to show the exact level of the future track, which for most of the way was only a foot or two above the neighbouring ground. Then on the afternoon of June 14th fatigue parties from the various battalions in camp paraded, some with spades, others with hoes and baskets, the latter being the local substitute for a wheelbarrow. Colonel Rundle, the chief of the staff, who commanded in the absence of the Sirdar, rode out with a party of officers to a point just north of the camp, and at three o'clock, having ascertained that all was ready, gave the signal to begin. The men fairly rushed at the work. I noticed that the hoe and basket made much more rapid progress than the spade. The worker bent down, tilted his palm-leaf basket on one side, filled it by pulling the sand and stones in with his short adze-like hoe, raised it to his shoulder, carried it to the line, and poured the contents on to the accumulating heap of the road-bed. It was exactly what one sees painted on the temple walls in pictures that show us the fellahin at work thousands of years ago. The spade is a comparatively modern and mushroom

invention, and the Egyptians in a few centuries have not had time to get really used to it. So they cannot do so well with it as an English sapper or navvy. But with their old-fashioned hoe and basket they can work wonders.

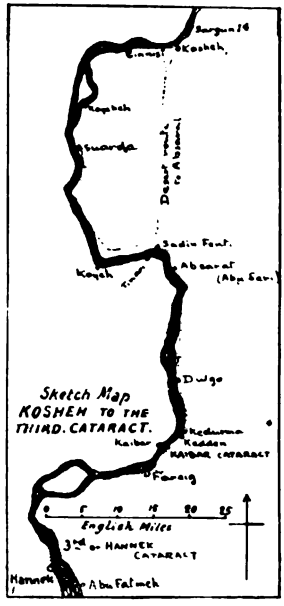
Thus a week after Ferkeh the Sirdar was inspecting the advanced post, the railway had passed Ambigol Wells, and was expected to reach Akasha in a few days, and though the section between that place and Ferkeh was yet untouched, the road-bed on the level nearer the front had been begun. A fleet of seventeen boats, taken from the Dervishes, was doing transport work on the river from Ferkeh to Amara and Suarda, and camel convoys were working between Ambigol Wells and Sargun, with lighter convoys on to the advanced post. About half the troops that fought at Ferkeh had been temporarily dispersed. On June 14th this was the actual distribution of our forces at the front. Suarda was held by the 12th and 13th Soudanese, with the 5th and 7th squadrons of cavalry and the 2nd mounted battery and Maxims. MacDonald had taken command there, holding the most forward post, as he had done at Akasha before the march on Ferkeh. No. 1 Company of the Camel Corps was at Amara. The 11th Soudanese, the 4th squadron and the 3rd Battery were at Mograka. In the main camp between Sargun and Ferkeh we had the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Egyptians, and the 9th and 10th Soudanese, the horse battery, and some cavalry. The Friendlies were well forward on both banks of the river, and on our flank in the desert.

As for the enemy, after the abandonment of Suarda

they kept for a few days a small post at the bend of the Nile at Sadin Fenti, but before the week was out this post was withdrawn, and their nearest outposts were at the villages of Kedden and Kedurma, just below the Kaibar cataract. At these places they had accumulated stores of grain from which supplies used to be carried down by boats to the camp at Ferkeh, the only obstacle to the navigation being the small cataract at Amara, one of the easiest to pass on the whole river. It was resolved to reconnoitre up to these points, and accordingly on Tuesday, June 16th, Captain Mahon rode southwards from Suarda with two squadrons of Egyptian cavalry and a small detachment of the Camel Corps. I got an account of the expedition a week later from Lieutenant Smyth of the Bays, who was attached to the Intelligence Department, and rode with the party. Mahon's orders were to try if possible to capture the stores accumulated at Kedurma and Kedden. He was to march by the east bank, a ride of some sixty miles along the Nile, while a force of friendly Arabs marched parallel with him up the west bank, so as to be ready to attack the Dervishes if they crossed the Nile. Starting early on the 16th, Mahon did the distance in two marches, with a good rest between, and Kedden was occupied without resistance on the 17th.

It was hoped that the place would be surprised, but Osman Azrak, who commanded there, got a very brief warning of the approach of our cavalry. He had some horse and camel-men, but instead of making a stand he hastily evacuated both Kedurma and Kedden, setting fire to the stores of grain at the two villages, and only trying to carry off what was lying in some boats on

the river. He was pursued for some distance, but his horses were fresh and those of the Egyptians were tired with their long march, so he got away easily. Once it looked as if he meant to fight, and some very long range shots were exchanged without any result. But the pause was only momentary. The pursuit forced him to abandon his boats at the Kaibar cataract, and seven or eight of them, loaded with a very welcome supply of grain, were brought down the river to Suarda by the Friendlies.



The people of Kedden said that about an hour before Mahon's arrival an Emir with forty horsemen had come in from Dongola to carry out forced recruiting in the villages. The Dervish press-gang fled with Osman Azrak's party. Evidently the panic produced by the crushing blow at Ferkeh had not been exaggerated by the refugees, for here was a handful of Egyptian cavalry penetrating to within sixty miles of Dongola, and meeting with no resistance, a Dervish force, which certainly was not inferior in numbers, taking to flight at its approach.

Having accomplished its chief objects in destroying or capturing the Dervish supplies, driving in their advanced posts, and reconnoitring the country, Mahon's party returned to Suarda. My informant told me that between Suarda and Kedden nearly all the riverside

villages were either deserted and in ruins, or had only a handful of people living in them. There were miles of uncultivated fields and water-courses that had been dry for years. The villagers told a tale of grinding exactions, gradual impoverishment, and utter insecurity of life and property under the Baggara rule. The only place along the line of march where any considerable population remained was Dulgo, on the east bank, about ten miles below the Kaibar cataract, where there were about four hundred men and one thousand women and children. On the west bank there were several inhabited villages. Perhaps the explanation is that the movements of the Mahdists northward below Hannek have almost invariably been by the east bank, along which they had their chain of posts up to and beyond Suarda.

Let me note, for the sake of naturalists, that so far we had seen no crocodiles in the river, but several were sighted near Kedden, including two big fellows about twelve feet long. One was shot, but sank and could not be recovered.

This ride to Kedden cleared the country of the enemy up to the Hannek cataract, for they made no attempt to reoccupy the village near the Kaibar rapids, contenting themselves with forming two advanced posts above the Third Cataract at Karma on the east bank and Hafir on the west. News brought in to Sargun camp in the second half of June told of the difficulties Bishara had met with in his attempt to raise a levy *en masse*. The crowd of refugees at Suarda increased daily, and as they brought hardly any supplies with them, our cavalry and Friendlies had to make many

a long ride to bring in their stores which they had abandoned in their flight. The feeding of this impoverished multitude was for a while a serious problem. From Argo, the rich island below Dongola, came a message urging us to advance as soon as possible, as the villagers were afraid they would be reduced to starvation by the Dervishes, who were carrying off their stores. A refugee from Dongola itself told that among other desperate attempts to obtain recruits, Bishara had sent a strong force into the Wadi el Kab, to the west of the city. It is a valley with many wells and numerous fixed settlements of the Kabbabish tribe, who under their famous chief, Saleh, were our friends in 1884–85. Bishara ordered the wells to be filled up, in order to force the tribesmen to come in to Dongola. Whether this kind of coercion was largely adopted I cannot say. Certainly it had not much success. One sheikh was reported to have replied to Bishara's summons: "Are we your slaves? Do you want us to come and be killed as you got your people killed at Ferkeh?"

With all this good news, and with so much of the country to the southwards at our mercy and eager to welcome our advance, we had to possess our souls in peace, and wait as patiently as might be for the completion of the railway and the rise of the river. Without these only an insignificant force could have been pushed on to the front, and after so much had been accomplished it would not do to risk disaster even on a small scale. In May, the early date of the slight rise, known as the "false Nile," had led us to hope that the flood would come early. In the first week

of June there was a rise of a few inches. By the middle of the month the rise seemed to come to a standstill. It was a late Nile and a poor one, just at the time when a high and early flood would have saved weeks of weary waiting.

As for the railway, the line reached Akasha on the 21st. By that time the road-bed was completed from

THE SIRDAR AND HIS STAFF.

Ferkeh to just beyond Sargun Island, and the troops in our camp were ordered to send fatigue parties to camp in the desert khor, between Ferkeh and Akasha, and get the road-bed ready, from the point where the work was abandoned in 1885, up to the battlefield. Meanwhile, Girouard's railway battalion would be laying the line along the six miles of road-bed that

already existed south of Akasha. But the actual laying of the line could not be pushed on as rapidly as it had been done north of Akasha. There most of the railway iron required was lying ready beside the track. Here every rail had to be brought up from Wadi Halfa and carried out to the rail-head. There, it was relaying an old line ; here, it was making a perfectly new one.

The night before work was started on the road-bed in the Ferkeh Khor we had a false alarm in Sargun Camp. There was a shot, and a general turn out of officers and men. One gallant Major rode out in a suit of pyjamas, helmet, and belts, a costume that would have been rather awkward if the alarm had been followed by a long march. The servants appeared armed with Dervish weapons from the loot of Ferkeh, and it says something for the discipline of the camp that none of them were shot by the soldiers. All was quiet again in twenty minutes, the origin of the whole affair being, as far as I can gather, that a couple of camels broke loose, and at the same time that they crossed the front of the sentry line, one of the soldiers on duty there noticed a strong force of our own troops moving out of camp. Forgetting that two hundred Egyptian infantry were going to move down to Ferkeh by a night march, to begin work in the khor next day, or not having understood the warning on the subject that had been given to him, he jumped to the conclusion that the camels in front belonged to Dervishes, and that some other regiment had already been alarmed, and he turned out his own people, with the result that the alarm spread through the camp. There was no

noise or confusion whatever, and if the Dervishes had really ventured into the neighbourhood, they would have had a very warm reception.

In the last days of June I got leave to go down to Halfa for a short visit. I was tired of waiting idly on the river bank at Sargun, and since the middle of the month had been feeling by no means well. I thought the journey and the change might set me up again. There was a further reason for making a visit to Halfa in the fact that in this campaign we correspondents had to look after our own commissariat and transport. All we got from Government stores was forage, and this only after the advance to Ferkeh. I wanted to get some stores for myself and Mr. Garrett, and letters on the subject to the contractors had had no result. We had either got what we did not want, or had vague tidings that our orders would soon be executed. So on Friday the 26th I started for Akasha and Halfa, expecting to return about the following Wednesday. I did not foresee what a long absence and what curious experiences I had before me.

CHAPTER XXI.

HALFA AND KOSHEH.

I DID the journey from Sargun Camp to Akasha on my camel, riding in by the desert route, which I now saw for the first time. I was riding along the track followed by Burn-Murdoch's column the night before the battle. Indeed, in places one could see the marks of his gun wheels. Now, scattered here and there along the khor, one saw the white tents of the camps formed for various detachments of the railway battalion and the large working parties supplied by the 2nd and 7th Egyptians. To see the tents and stores with only an occasional sentry looking after them, made one realise how great was the change since a month ago, when this long, sandy valley was debateable ground traversed daily by the Dervish patrols, while far away to the northward, near Ambigol Wells, the railway was being pushed through the Batn-el-Hagar, under the unceasing guard of a strong outpost line.

Now the work was being done under very different conditions. A couple of miles from Ferkeh I found one of the Engineer officers, with an English sapper and a couple of Egyptians busy with a level, marking out the course of the future line. Further on at various points gangs of Egyptians were building up the road-

bed. It was a great advantage to be able thus to take in hand several sections of the track at the same time; and already, though the work had only been started about a week, a good half of the formation level was ready for the rails and sleepers. But we saw no sign of these till we were close in to Akasha.

In the northern part of the khor I had to cross the ground which was the scene of the May-day fight. It certainly was most unfit for a cavalry action, being one of the roughest and rockiest bits in the whole valley. Some dead horses still lay among the rocks, but eight weeks of the dry heat of the desert had turned them into something like mummies. One of them had lost most of its hair in the process, and looked as if it was made of brown paper. On another the birds had been busy. All the dead horses seemed to have belonged to the Dervishes.

I found Akasha greatly changed since I had last left it. The place might now be described as an important railway centre, for it possessed two stations—one (locally known as "the triangle") south of the fortified camp, at the point where the line branched off to Khor Ferkeh; the other close to the ground occupied by the old station in 1885, near the river bank. This was the spot where the engines got their water supply, and beside the line a couple of huge water-tanks had been raised upon a kind of dwarf pyramid, and the Nile water was raised into them by a powerful pump, worked by fly-wheel gear, and manned by fatigue parties of Egyptian soldiers.

I slept at the camp, and went on to Wadi Halfa next day, leaving Akasha by train at ten in the

morning, and reached Halfa at midnight. There were two stoppages of half an hour on the way—at Ambigol Wells and at Sarras—at both of which points the engine had to renew its supply of water. There were shorter halts at Murrat Wells and Gemai. Considering how newly and roughly laid most of the track was, and that our engine was an old-fashioned and much patched-up

SOUTH GATE, WADI HALFA.

machine, built in 1881, the performance was not a bad one for the Soudan railway. It was a new sensation to travel thus rapidly and safely through the Batn-el-Hagar—the four days' journey reduced to fourteen hours, and no armed guard upon the train, no pickets watching the line. Of course, like every other portion of our long line of communication, it was not really

left without protection. The garrison at Akasha, the forts at Ambigol Wells and Sarras, and the patrols of Friendlies in the desert, made it impossible even for a handful of raiders from Abu Hamed to approach it with much prospect of either damaging the line or escaping with their lives.

Wadi Halfa had fallen from the dignity of the frontier fortress to the position of a mere link in our line of communication. Colonel Cochrane was in command, his district extending southwards past Assouan to Balliana, more than three hundred miles away. He had a most difficult and anxious duty to perform, for he had to arrange to bring up supplies and reinforcements to the front, and at the same time to try (with the help of the medical officers) to prevent the dreaded cholera coming with them. It had broken out at Alexandria and Cairo in April, and had then made its way rapidly into Upper Egypt. In former outbreaks it had never passed Assouan, but in the middle of June it had reached Korosko, and was now devastating some of the Arab villages in the neighbourhood. But it was still hoped that Halfa and the camps of the Expeditionary Force would be kept free from it.

Nearly all the Dervish prisoners had been sent down to Halfa. Many of them were in the hospital recovering from their wounds. About a hundred were at work under an Egyptian guard unloading the steamers on the river front. They still wore their patched jibbas, the Dervish uniform, and only two or three dangerous characters were in chains. Most of them worked cheerfully enough. It was a curious sight to see them marching down to the river in fours, with

only a couple of policemen to guard them. Seventy other ex-Dervishes had been enlisted for the Soudanese battalions, and were drilling regularly on the plain outside the walls. Though they had been only a week under instruction their drill sergeant, an Englishman, had already made very smart soldiers of them, and there was clearly plenty of time to get them ready for the march against their old comrades.

The 1st and 5th Battalions, both from Suakin, after having reached the Nile at Kuft by the Kosseir route, and travelled up to Assouan, were suspected of having been infected with cholera there. They were therefore being brought up by easy stages to Halfa along the west bank, moving by half battalions, and being kept continually in what might be described as quarantine conditions. Other detachments of the Suakin garrison, a squadron of cavalry, a company of the Camel Corps, and a company of garrison artillery, had already passed safely through Halfa in June. The new Soudanese battalion, the 14th, was also on its way up from Cairo, and the reserve battalion at Korosko, the 15th, was ordered to go south. Surgeon-Colonel Gallwey, who had stopped at Assouan on his way up in order to fight the cholera, had organised an elaborate system of safeguards on the river. No one was allowed to travel south unless he belonged to the army or some department connected with the expedition, and every one embarking was medically inspected at the beginning of his voyage, at some point during its progress, and on landing. But it was impossible to keep the native boatmen under such strict supervision, and transport necessities forbade the entire cessation of boat traffic.

Then, too, in the riverside villages there was a conspiracy of concealment. The natives did not believe in the white men's precautions against cholera, and only regarded them as irksome formalities to be evaded at any risk. Officers who had been in the villages on cholera duty told me that it was not uncommon for the Arabs and Berberis to bury a dead cholera patient under the earthen floor of their huts, and then try to make out he had simply left the village—anything to avoid the quarantine regulations. No wonder that under these circumstances the pestilence made its way past all our barriers.

The North Staffordshire Regiment was still at Halfa, patiently waiting for the long-wished-for orders to proceed to the front. Many of the rank and file were young fellows who hardly had the physique to resist the trying Soudan summer, and there was a good deal of enteric fever in the lines. Any move would be welcome, and they were warned that if the cholera reached Halfa they would be promptly sent out to a new camp to be formed at Gemai. On the Tuesday morning after my arrival I had done most of my work at Halfa. I had got some stores from the contractors, and I went over to Tewfikiyeh to make some miscellaneous purchases at a Greek shop in the bazaar, which was a kind of local Whiteley's. On my return I was chatting with some of my friends among the Stafford officers, when one of them came into the hut and reported that a suspicious case had been taken to the hospital. An hour after I was on my way back to the mess-house, where I had temporary quarters, when I met Surgeon-Captain Hunter, and asked him if the

report was true. "Yes," he said, "it has come. We have two dead already, and two more well on the way to it." Shortly after word was passed round that the Staffords were to move out to Gemai, and Tewfikiyeh was also declared to be infected, and the bazaar was put out of bounds. I had only just made my purchases there in time. Before evening the record was eight cases and four deaths, and the most disquieting fact was that one of the cases was that of a railway man who had come in ill during the day, not from the river, but from Akasha by train. It looked as if, all unknown to the authorities, the cholera had not only reached Wadi Halfa, but passed well to the south of it.

The Staffords thus got their orders to move out as soon as possible on June 30th, but it was not till July 2nd that they got away. They had a busy two days of preparation; fatigue parties moving up tents, equipment, and stores to the railway sidings, and loading them on the trains. All the work was done by the men themselves, as the moment it was ascertained that the cholera was in the town, orders were given that no natives were to come into the British lines, otherwise strong fatigue parties could have been supplied by the Egyptian troops. The arrangement was not a very wise one, as the white soldiers, many of them very young, were thus forced to do a lot of trying work under the burning sun. The stores and the advance party to pitch the camp were sent up by train. The regiment marched up by night, leaving Halfa a little before sunset under the command of Major Currie.

I had left Halfa the same morning to try to get back to the front. Before leaving the place I saw both

Surgeon-Major Sloggett, who was in charge of the British lines, and Surgeon-Captain Hunter, who was the chief medical officer of the expeditionary troops at the station. I wanted to be sure that there would be no quarantine difficulties on the way up. Both said they thought the question would not be raised, and I started by train for Akasha, my purchases loaded on

AT A STOPPING PLACE—SOUDAN RAILWAY.

one of the trucks, and a fellow-traveller being Captain Broadwood of the cavalry, who had been spending a couple of days in the town. Stevenson, who was now in charge of the working of the railway, told me it was better in any case to get away towards the front, as the service of trains might be interrupted for a few days. At Ambigol Wells, which we reached that afternoon,

Broadwood got out to ride down to a cavalry camp he had established near Sonki. Bekker Bey, of the Egyptian artillery, was in command of the fort, and Major Owen was with him, having a party of Ababdeh Fuggara Friendlies in the neighbourhood under his command.

I had tea at Owen's tent, and he went on with me to Akasha. It somehow happened that on almost every journey in the Soudan I met him, and we had become very good friends. It was after dark when we reached the khor by which the railway enters the Akasha valley. Shortly after, a little before coming to the "triangle," the train was stopped, and an Egyptian officer came to the carriage door and asked me if I was Mr. Atteridge, from Halfa, and, on my admitting my identity, told me I could not be allowed to go on to Akasha, but must alight here and do ten days' quarantine in the khor. As I climbed down from the railway carriage I saw dimly a white tent close by among the rocks, and a young British officer came out of it saying, "I am sorry for your sake that they have stopped you, but I am glad for my own. I have been twenty-four hours here in quarantine with nobody but these niggers near me, and it's luck to have another white man come in." He was Lieutenant Blakeney of the Royal Engineers. He had been sent to Suakin to prepare landing-stages and quarters there for the Indian contingent. Then he had come across to the Nile by Kosseir, and had already done five days' quarantine in a cholera camp on the river between Assouan and Halfa. Now he was doing a second quarantine at Akasha.

Owen got out of the train to have a few words with

me before going on to the camp. I could see at once that the khor would be a very unpleasant place to spend ten days in. The tent was pitched close to the line. Within a stone's throw there was a camp of railway workers, Berberis and other camp followers, and the ground about was foul. I suggested to Blakeney that we should send in a note to the commandant asking that if we were to do quarantine we should be allowed to go back to Ambigol Wells, where we could camp in the khor on the other side of the line from the fort, with at least cleaner surroundings, and some chance of keeping away from the miscellaneous crowd that was camped or squatted about the Akasha junction. He agreed to my proposal, which Owen thought a very good one, and I wrote a note on one of my cards addressed to Major Maxwell, the commandant, and Owen kindly promised to take it in and to back up our petition. I also asked to have some of my stores, which were on the train, sent back to me, but I could only get my pack containing some personal belongings.

Owen returned to the train and it moved off. Blakeney and I had some dinner just outside the tent, and as we finished it an orderly brought out from the camp orders that we were to go back as far as Ambigol Wells by a train that would leave Akasha at 5 a.m., and complete our quarantine there. So we resolved to make the best of our bad luck, and after a chat over the situation, as it affected us personally, we turned in for the night, sleeping inside the tent, on the ground, one on each side of the pole.

It was a wretched night. There had been signs in

the evening of a threatening storm. Just after midnight it burst upon us. I was in a deep sleep, when I was aroused by Blakeney shaking me up and asking me to help him to save the tent from coming down. The wind was roaring through the khor, driving quantities of sand along and making the night pitch dark, and the strain on the tent ropes was drawing the pegs. I held the tent-pole up, while Blakeney and his Arab servant secured the pegs. I had been holding on to the pole, throwing all my weight upon it for about ten minutes, when Blakeney called out, "You can let go now, the pegs are all safe." I had not let go, in fact he had hardly done speaking, when the pole seemed to spring out of the ground, and knocked me down, with the folds of the tent on top of me. A blast of such violence that nothing could resist it had struck us. Two of the ropes had broken, one in the middle and one near the peg, and a third had been torn out of the canvas. I struggled out from under the tent, and to save our kit which was underneath it we both threw ourselves on top of the bellying canvas, calling to the servant to add his weight to ours. We crouched like this in the dark khor for a good quarter of an hour, the wind howling and driving along showers of sand and rolling pebbles, while all along the hollow by the railway track we could hear the cries of the Arabs, Berberis, and negroes of the railway battalion, in distress like ourselves. Once a flaring light from the main camp suggested that it had caught fire, but whatever it was the flame soon disappeared. Then the wind began to get down a little and we put some stones on the tent, each of us going in turn to

bring one in. Still later we lay down among the canvas folds and got some sleep. The very violence of the storm seemed to have exhausted its strength, and it was all over in an hour.

I was the first to wake in the morning. It was near five, but there was no sign of the train moving up from the triangle. We set to work to clear the tent, and get our belongings out from under it. Luckily nothing had been lost and very few things had been damaged. When the train came along about half-past five we were ready to take our places in it.

We spent five days at Ambigol Wells, camped in the sandy desert khor. The day after our arrival we were joined by Captain Broadwood. He had been sent back from Sonki to do quarantine with us. He said he had told the authorities that if they meant to be logical in their proceedings they should also send into quarantine the two squadrons of cavalry with whom he had been camped for twenty-four hours. Owen was back at his quarters at the fort, and was very helpful.[1] He sent us books and papers, arranged for a supply of milk, and came round once or twice a day to see how we were getting on. He and Bekker Bey, the local commandant, and the Egyptian doctor attached to the fort, did all they could to lighten this

[1] Here is a characteristic letter from him, one of the last poor "Roddy" Owen ever wrote :—

"DEAR ATTERIDGE AND BLAKENEY,—Herewith some milk and melon. If you are in want of anything let me know. It's no use fussing, but I'm d——d sorry for you. Also the good well water is run short. Must have it widened. So my servant says. I'll see.—R. O."

dreary waiting in the desert khor, where we had absolutely nothing to do but wait till it was considered safe for us to go on to the front. The doctor arranged that our little camp of three army tents should be kept quite separate from the other quarantine camp of natives that was being formed in the khor, so that an outbreak of cholera there should not condemn us to further detention. And all the time that we three white men were supposed to be a danger to the garrisons to the southward if we went on, trains were passing up and down from Halfa to the front, and again and again there was an outbreak of cholera among the natives employed in the railway service while the trains were on their journey. But red tape can find its way even into the desert, and the strict quarantine regulations were applied to the two officers and the correspondent, while natives seemed to be passing up and down freely on the trains.

On the second day of our stay cholera broke out at Ambigol, and we heard that there were cases at Akasha and a severe outbreak at Halfa, where there were more than fifty cases in the twenty-four hours. On Monday, the 6th, orders arrived for the breaking up of the Ambigol quarantine camp. Broadwood was to rejoin the cavalry at Sonki, Blakeney was to go on to the rail-head and begin work under Girouard, I was to go to Akasha, join the camp there, but go no further south. The headquarters' camp had been moved south from Sargun and Ferkeh to Kosheh, and it was cut off from everything to the north of it by a quarantine barrier. But from the rail-head in Ferkeh Khor and from Akasha Camp to Halfa the whole district was

declared infected, and one could move about within these limits. Owen came down to our camp that day, and with the help of some provisions which he contributed we arranged a lunch for the four of us in a *tukkul* that had been built near our tents. It was a very pleasant party. We were glad to be on the move again. Little did we think it was the last time we were to see our genial host alive.

At two o'clock Owen and Broadwood rode off together towards Sonki. Blakeney and I were to go up to Akasha together. The train arrived from Halfa, and the soldiers who had acted as our temporary servants put our baggage into the railway carriage, which was already half full of mail-bags for the front. Our tents were struck and removed by a fatigue party; even our *tukkul* was thrown down. The little camp in the desert khor had ceased to exist. Bekker Bey told us our train would start in a few minutes. But he was reckoning without taking due account of the peculiarities of the Soudan railway. News came in that an engine was off the line between us and Akasha, and presently we were told we should have to wait till a train with a breakdown gang passed on to the south to set the line in order. We might perhaps start at midnight. So we spent the rest of the day in Owen's tent in the fort, and after dark came back to the train, and slept through the night on beds improvised out of mail-bags. It was not till sunrise next morning that the train went slowly on to Akasha.

I was camped there for the greater part of three days. Maxwell, the commandant, was doing his best to stamp out the cholera locally, with Surgeon-Captain

Hill-Smith for his chief assistant. Throughout the expedition, but especially at this trying stage of its progress, the services rendered to it by the European doctors were beyond all praise. There were only five of them at the front, including Halfa, in the month of July, and each of these five had to do the work of many. Thus, for example, Hill-Smith's district extended north of Akasha as far as Sonki, and southwards it included the rail-head in Ferkeh Khor. He had thus daily to ride over miles of country, and the miscellaneous collection of workmen and camp followers on the railway works were a cause of much greater anxiety than a camp full of regulars would have been.

During my stay at Akasha the only tidings were of the cholera. From Halfa the news was that there were numerous cases in the town, and at Tewfikiyeh. The former was the headquarters of the Camel Corps, and they had left their families in the rows of barrack-like huts outside the north wall. The cholera made a large number of victims among these poor women and children. Mr. Vallum, the engineer in charge of the arsenal workshops, was the first European to die of it. His death was a serious loss to the expedition to which his untiring energy and resourceful ingenuity had rendered important services. I remember his saying, when we were at Halfa, that he had spent twelve years in the Soudan, that that was quite long enough, and he meant to go home after this expedition. There was also an outbreak among the Staffords in their camp at Gemai, where there were at the same time several deaths from enteric, doubtless contracted at Halfa before they moved out. At Ambigol and in Akasha

there were a number of cholera cases, and nearly every case meant a death. In fact, confidential orders to station commandants told them to get a grave ready as soon as a man was taken ill. In the khor the outbreak in the rail-head camps was very severe, and lasted after most of the other stations were free. As a rule the epidemic in any given centre seemed to die out in about ten days from its first appearance. The doctors would have made shorter work of it if they had had to deal with a European population or army, which could understand and act upon the simple precautions they suggested. The difficulty in Egypt and the Soudan was that the natives did not believe in what they evidently regarded as the white men's peculiar superstitions about the disease. In the purely military camps it was possible to secure the observance of sanitary precautions by the threat of punishment, and as far as possible the camps were cleared of the non-military native element.

On Thursday, the 9th, I received by telegraph from Major Wingate permission to go up to the front, provided I did not pass through the camps in the railway khor. The route I was to take was by boat on the river to the foot of the Dal Cataract. There my servant was to meet me with camels, and we were to march on to Ferkeh and Kosheh by the river bank. The distance from Akasha to the Dal Cataract is only ten miles, but it took the boat from a little after eleven in the morning till near sunset to make the voyage, for we had to work against the strong current of the rising Nile, and in the upper part of the reach the river was like a rapid. The crew of four Nubians tracked the

boat with a tow-line for most of the way, but sometimes, when the wind served, they spread the long lateen sail, and once they took to their oars. The *reis*, or captain, a grey-bearded man, did his full share of the towing, and once, when a jutting point of precipitous rock prevented his further progress along the bank, he dived into the rapid river, swam round the point holding the line with one hand, landed beyond it, and resumed his steady tramp with the rope over his shoulder. Twice the boat was run ashore on the west bank, and we all landed to rest under the bushes that fringed the riverside. The crew had not a word of English among them, and I could hold very little communication with them, but they seemed to anticipate all my wishes. They rigged up an awning for me, and shifted it as the boat changed her course, so as to give me always a welcome shadow, for the day was fearfully hot; one of them took care to dip my water-bottle in the river from time to time to keep it cool; and when we landed for awhile, they brought a rug ashore for me to rest upon. A few cigarettes during the voyage and a few piastres at its close called forth expressions of unbounded gratitude.

I spent the night and next morning at a camp at the foot of the Dal Cataract, where a captain of the 8th Battalion, the Yuzbashi Mohammed Farad, was in command. I found him a most courteous and kindly host, and the little camp, occupied only by his company, was a model of military order—the neatest camp I have ever seen. His men were engaged in getting stores, chiefly telegraph poles, along the portage road, which runs from the foot of the cataract

to the open water at the head of it. In the course of the day my servants arrived with the camels, and I marched by the portage and the river route, through Ferkeh, which we reached at sunset, and on to the neighbourhood of our old camp at Sargun, now deserted. There we bivouacked for the night, and, marching soon after sunrise, arrived at Kosheh Camp early on Saturday, July 11th. I had been away from headquarters for just a fortnight.

The camp was pitched along the river bank on ground that must be well remembered by many English soldiers, for it was the north end of the battlefield of Ginnis, the scene of General Grenfell's victory in December, 1885. The river was rising steadily, and quite a small fleet of Nile boats was moored to the bank just below the ruins of Kosheh village. The camp was a long line of *tukkuls* and tents, mostly under the palms by the Nile bank. It was covered on the land side by a number of small posts on the low hills of the desert margin, the hills along which Grenfell moved to the attack of Ginnis, and which really form a kind of plateau furrowed by small khors and hollows of no great depth. The chief khor running southwards is the beginning of the camel track across the bend of the Nile to Sadin Fenti and Absarat. The outlying posts formed two lines, one on the edge of the plateau nearest the camp, the other some five hundred yards further into the desert. In both lines low breastworks of stones had been erected with straw shelters for the sentries.

The railway had not yet reached Ferkeh, but the road-bed was ready up to Mograka, and for a consider-

able part of the section between Mograka and Kosheh. At the latter place the ground had been prepared for extensive sidings at the point chosen for the railway terminus and the temporary dockyard, where the gunboats were to be put together. There was no change in the enemy's position in front. His nearest posts were at Kerma and Hafir beyond the Third Cataract. On our side the troops set free by the arrival of the Indian garrison at Suakin were being slowly moved up to the front, and the 15th reserve battalion had been pushed on from Korosko, now supposed to be quite safe from serious attack. Thus on July 4th the new 14th Soudanese battalion reached Korosko from Cairo. Next day the 5th Egyptian battalion moved up to Sarras; on the 10th it was joined there by the 15th Egyptian (Reservists), and the same day the 1st Egyptian battalion was complete at Halfa, the second half-battalion joining from quarantine camp lower down the river. The North Staffordshire Regiment was still at Gemai. The additional troops which the Sirdar had thus within call for his next advance were the British battalion, one Soudanese and three Egyptian battalions, a company of the Camel Corps, and a squadron of cavalry.

There was, however, no prospect of any advance southwards for some weeks to come. The rise of the Nile, though marked, was still slow, and without the high Nile, the railway complete to Kosheh and the gunboats above the cataracts, nothing serious could be attempted. So we had still to wait patiently, under conditions that made patience no easy matter.

On going to Major Wingate for some news the

morning after my arrival I heard very sad tidings. Major Owen had died of cholera at Ambigol Wells the day before. His illness had only lasted a few hours, but there was time for an English doctor and two of his soldier friends to be with him before he died. I had to thank him for so much kindness ever since we started up the river together, and especially during the weary days in Ambigol Khor, that I felt I had lost a friend. "Roddy" Owen was much more than the keen and successful sportsman; he was a soldier full of zeal, and always studying his profession —a born leader of men, with much experience in many lands. In the Soudan he wore himself out with restless activity, and he had been ill more than once in other ways before the cholera struck him down. Sometimes he would have only two or three hours' sleep in the twenty-four. And yet he found time for a lot of reading of no light kind. At Ambigol he sent me some newly arrived Transactions of the Royal Geographical Society and of the Colonial Institute, with passages marked in articles on Africa and the northern borderlands of India. In Central Asian and Central African questions he was keenly interested. As another token of his studious bent, let me note that in a long, hot, railway journey from Akasha to Ambigol I noticed the book he was reading was a history of the balance of power in Europe in the eighteenth century. He was greatly disappointed at not being allowed to do something with his Friendlies on the day of Ferkeh. He met me only two days before, as I rode towards Okmeh, and I congratulated him on being attached to the staff for

the battle. He told me he looked on it as a bit of bad luck. He did not care to be galloping with orders; he wished he could be allowed to do something else. What the "something else" was he told me later. He had asked to be allowed "to go rattling down the west bank with the Friendlies," as he put it himself. I believe if he had been given the work he wished for, the garrison of Suarda would not have got across the river. At Ambigol Wells he was hoping to be sent to join Abdul Azim in a dash towards Abu Hamed when the actual move on Dongola began. His death was a heavy loss to the army and the empire. He was a man who, if he had lived, would have made history. His daring voyage from Uganda to Lado had given solid proof already of what was in him.

I was soon to lose another friend. My colleague, Mr. Garrett, was absent on a boat excursion up the river to Abri when I returned to camp. He did not come back till the Monday, and when he did I saw he was anything but well. I spoke to him about it, but he said he knew what was the matter with him; it was nothing serious; a little attention to diet would settle it. I asked him what the doctor said, and he answered that he had not troubled him, and that he would take it as a favour if I did not say anything about his being unwell. Next day he was no better, and, although he was moving about, he was suffering in a way that suggested the beginning of dysentery, so I asked Surgeon-Captain Spong, then in medical charge of the camp, to come round to our *tukkul* as if by accident, and ask Garrett how he was, and try

to get him to do what might be necessary. He paid us a visit, but I am afraid Garrett told him very little. Two days after the cholera broke out in Kosheh Camp, and no one who could help it troubled the overworked doctors, who were toiling day and night to stamp it out, two men doing what would have been work for ten.

At the end of the week the camp was broken up and moved to a number of detached camps a mile from the riverside, and ranged along the desert plateau, a much healthier situation, though on account of its complete exposure to the hot sun it was in some ways more trying than under the palms by the Nile bank. All over the plateau little heaps of the old-fashioned Boxer cartridge-cases were lying on the sand, marking the spots where the volleys had been fired at the battle of Ginnis more than ten years before. There was no verdigris on the brass, no rust on the iron bases—a testimony to the dryness of the Soudan climate during that period.

Garrett was now much weaker, and I myself was unwell. The desert camp in Ambigol Khor had not improved my general health to begin with, and I had a sharp and painful attack of illness at Kosheh the day before we moved camp to the hills. It left me very weak and for some time after that I could neither sleep by night nor stand the sun by day. Under these conditions work was impossible. To add to our discomfort there was for some days a difficulty about rebuilding the *tukkul* we had occupied upon the river bank. Our servants, and even a party of experts from a Soudanese battalion, failed to get proper holding

ground for its uprights, and it would fall down as soon as it was roofed. So Garrett and I spent the early hours of the day together near our tents, and had also some time together after dark before turning in, but when the sun was well up in the sky, a small tent became uninhabitable, so Garrett found shelter during the heat of the day in a large *tukkul* belonging to two of our colleagues, who had a spare *angareb*, or native bed, on which he lay, while I generally found shelter under the straw roof of my friend Pearse's hut. I more than once tried to persuade Garrett to go down to Halfa, where he could have the shelter of a good house, in the quarters vacated by the Staffords, or stay awhile at the British hospital established there by Surgeon-Major Sloggett. But he protested that his illness was not really serious, and would not hear of going into hospital.

I had myself decided on paying another visit to Halfa. In this desert camp, unable to sleep by night or to work by day, I was useless to my paper. To see Major Wingate or Slatin meant a ride of about a mile and a half to the Intelligence Department camp and the same back again, an effort now impossible for me once the sun was well up. Accordingly, early in the morning of Wednesday the 22nd, I rode over to Wingate's tent, walking my horse there and back (I could not go at a more rapid pace) in order to arrange for this temporary absence from headquarters.

When I asked him for news he told me the camps round Kosheh were now all but free from cholera, there had been no new cases for twenty-four hours, though it was still bad at the rail-head in Ferkeh

Khor; and that at Halfa, the naval officers were preparing to get the gunboats up the cataract. I told him how unwell I was, but said that if I could get permission to travel right through to Halfa and spend ten days or a fortnight in a house there, with the help of Surgeon-Captain Hunter, I was sure I should be all right and fit for work again. That meanwhile I could probably get some news from the officers at Halfa, and as for the censorship I would wire my messages to him and ask him to pass and forward them to London. This would really be easier for me than coming over from the press camp across the Kosheh-Ginnis plateau.

I also spoke of what I took to be Garrett's critical condition. I said it had been no use my trying to persuade him to go down the river for awhile as he took such an optimist view of his illness, but I suggested that the principal medical officer might see him, and order him to go down to the Halfa hospital while he was still fit for a journey. Major Wingate promised to send me the necessary permit, and as there were no means of knowing when one of the trains that brought up materials would be at the rail-head, he suggested that I should ride down to Ferkeh Khor that evening in the moonlight, so as to avoid a journey in the sun, and then camp near the rail-head till a train came up, which would, at latest, be some time next day.

The permit arrived in the afternoon, and I saw Garrett and urged him strongly to go in with me, telling him that to avoid hurrying his preparations I would wait till next evening, if he would go with me then. He was able to walk about, and I thought that with some rests on the way he might manage fairly

easily the ten miles' camel ride to Ferkeh Khor. But he would not agree to my proposal. He said he would perhaps go in next week, "he would be better then," and very likely he would go right on to Cairo for a rest there; the voyage on the river would do him good; and, he added, I could be of service to him if I would find him temporary quarters at Halfa and

MY RIDING CAMEL AND SYCE.

arrange with Hunter to have some ice from the hospital store put on board the steamer for him. After sunset we had another long talk together, sitting near our tents, while the servants were packing the camels. I left my tent standing, and did not intend to take a servant with me beyond Ferkeh Khor, but I took him

so far to cook for me in the expected bivouac there next day, and the camel syce to look after our three camels. Even when they were being loaded I told Garrett again that if he would come I would defer the start till next day, but it was of no use.

I started a little after eight o'clock, the camels moving at an easy walk past Mograka, and on by Sargun to Ferkeh. We were several times challenged by the sentries of the scattered camps, and once by a patrol of Friendlies. It would have been a pleasant ride if I had been less utterly tired out and weak, for there was a weird picturesqueness in this night march along the margin of the desert. I little suspected it was to be my last march in the Soudan for some time to come. Just at midnight we rode over Ferkeh battlefield and through the silent village, where the houses, all white in the moonlight, still showed plainly the gaps made by our bursting shells. There were no fleeting spectres of dead Emirs to be seen as I rode with my two Arab servants across the lonely stretch of ground where so many of the enemy were buried, but there was a ghastly enough reminder of the slaughter in the heavy air that made me hold my breath and urge my camel faster forward.

About half a mile up the khor we came on the first signs of work on the railway, new sleepers laid along the sandy road-bed. Then we heard the whistle of an engine, a strange but welcome sound in such surroundings. Then, after riding another half-mile and passing an outpost line, we came upon the rail-head camp, and saw a train standing on line beside it. "*Min iligai?*" came the challenge of some one who had just come out

from behind it. "Who is coming?" though spoken in Arabic was pronounced as Englishmen speak the language, and I answered back in English and found the speaker was Surgeon-Captain Trask, who had just been ordered by telegraph to come up to the front as soon as possible. He was very glad to accept the offer of

RAILWAY GATE, WADI HALFA.

my three camels and two servants to see him safe up to Kosheh.

Leaving the rail-head by train about 2 a.m., wrapped in my rug on the floor of a brake waggon, I reached Akasha about sunrise. Lieutenant Pritchard, R.E. came so far with me. He was going to take a breakdown gang out to a point just north of Akasha, where an engine had got off the line, and after my train passed north traffic might be suspended for some time

during the process of getting the engine on again. So I was very lucky in having caught it in Khor Ferkeh. Beyond Akasha I travelled alone most of the way. At Ambigol Wells, where we stopped for some time to get water for the engines, I sat awhile with Bekker Bey, the commandant, and we talked of my stay in the khor and poor Owen's death. I reached Halfa late in the afternoon, after a tiring journey, and found temporary quarters at the mess-house, hoping to have one of the vacant officers' huts assigned to me next day.

But it is the unforeseen that happens. In the morning I saw Surgeon-Captain Hunter, and after examining me he said I must at once go down to the sea and to cooler air than that of the Soudan, suggesting San Stefano, near Alexandria, as the place. I asked him if he could not let me stay on at Halfa for a fortnight; "peg me up" with tonics, and then let me go back to the front. "Yes," he said, "we could do that, and in a week you would be back here again more run down than ever. Take my advice, and go at once to the sea air.' The commandant will give you a pass by the steamer which starts in the morning, and you can catch the mail steamer at Assouan on Tuesday." [1] I said that I was afraid that this meant giving up Dongola. "Not necessarily," he said; "Dongola will not be taken till past the middle of September. If you get properly set up by the sea air at San Stefano you can get back in time." There was nothing for it but to agree, though I feared that, in any case, if I went down the river my work would be transferred to other hands.

[1] This would be Tuesday, July 28th.

I telegraphed to my paper, reporting the state of affairs; to Wingate, asking him to send my servant down after me with some additional kit, as I was not prepared for so long a journey or so prolonged an absence; and to one of my colleagues, asking him to telegraph to my paper for me in case anything startling occurred. He was one of the artists, and did not usually telegraph to his paper, so that I was not "seducing him from his allegiance." The commandant, Colonel Cochrane, sent me the pass, with a kind letter telling me I had better not go by next day's steamer, as it would be crowded with Egyptian invalids, but wait till the stern-wheeler *Semneh* started on the Sunday morning. Hunter at first objected to this delay even of a day, he was so anxious to have me *en route* for the sea, but he saw the force of the commandant's suggestion and consented to my waiting. I was afterwards very glad he did so, as it enabled me to see my colleague Garrett again.

At the mess I met a number of the naval officers, and I heard from them something of the arrangements for getting the steamers through the "Great Gate" of the Second Cataract. The boats were now being disarmed, unloaded, and partly dismantled in order to lighten them as much as possible. After mess on the Saturday evening Hunter beckoned to me, and we went from the verandah, where the rest were sitting, into the ante-room. "I have very bad news," he said. "I have not mentioned it at the mess, for Heaven knows we have had plenty of bad news lately. Trask and Fenwick have died of cholera at the rail-head, and Polwhele of the Engineers and your friend Garrett

have been brought in by train in what I am afraid is a dying condition." I asked at once if I might go up to the hospital to Garrett. He said I might, but first he wanted to arrange about a telegram to his people, and I was able to give him an address for it. Garrett had resided for some time in Cairo, where he was the regular correspondent of the *New York Herald*, but during the expedition his wife had gone home to England. The day before Ferkeh the poor fellow had given me a letter to her, addressed to the care of a friend in London, and asked me to send it on if anything happened to him. After the battle I had offered to give it back to him, but he told me to keep it, saying, "Something may happen yet." So I was able to find it in my despatch-box. We went over to Hunter's quarters, wrote the telegram, and then walked on to the hospital to see Garrett.

He lay in the large outer room, looking very weak and worn. The change in the few days since we had parted at Kosheh was terrible. He was said to be suffering from enteric fever. He had been brought down the evening before from Kosheh Camp to Ferkeh on a bed carried by a party of the Soudanese, the other correspondents riding with him. There he and Polwhele, who was also very ill with fever, had been made as comfortable as might be on beds in the train that was to convey them to Halfa.

He took my hand, and said in a low voice, "Oh, Atteridge, I *am glad* to see you again." And then, "It *is* comfortable here." I stayed with him about half an hour, kneeling by his bed in order that we might converse more easily. I told him I had to go

down by the steamer in the morning, but I would try and come again before she started. We both recognised the situation in our talk—that there was just a chance of his recovery under the favourable conditions in which he was now placed, but that the danger of his death was serious. Hunter had told me he had "just a chance," and that the first question was, Would he have a good night to recover somewhat from the fatigue of the journey? I saw Garrett again early next day, but he was sleeping peacefully. The hospital orderly told me he had had a good night. Just before the *Semneh* started I heard he was awake, but it was then too late to get round to the hospital. I had to be content to send him a message by Hunter. On my way down the river I received a telegram announcing his death—one more name added to the long list of journalists who have lost their lives in our Soudan campaigns. He was a good comrade and a brave man.

My chief telegraphed to me to go on to Alexandria and await instructions there. I travelled down the river from Halfa to Cairo with Lieutenant Healey, of the Gordon Highlanders, who was going down ill. We were the only passengers on the stern-wheeler *Semneh*. He was very sick the whole time, and even for a man in good health an out-of-season stern-wheeler does not afford much comfort in travelling. We parted at Assouan railway station. He had his servant with him, but I had to go at once to requisition some Arabs to carry my belongings to the hotel. It was partly closed, for Assouan was too hot for tourists. Surgeon-Captain Whiston looked me up there, told me he had

sent Healey on to the hospital, as he would be more comfortable there than at the hotel, and kindly asked me to come over to the mess at the commandant's house. It was a small mess—Colonel Parsons, the doctor, a transport officer, and myself.

Next day I rejoined my travelling companion on

ON THE RIVER BANK—ASSOUAN.

board the mail steamer, *Amenartas*. Healey was much better by the time we reached Balliana. It was a rapid and pleasant voyage down the river, but saddened by the news of Garrett's death which reached me by wire on the second day. On the way we were joined by a third traveller, Mr. Shepherd, one of the railway engineers on his way home on leave. We three were

the only travellers in the sleeping-car train from Balliana to Cairo—such is Egypt out of the season.

I reached San Stefano on Friday evening, and had for my host at the hotel "Luigi" of the Ghezireh. It was like meeting an old friend. Colonel Beale of the Staffords was staying there also. He had come down the river after a bad attack of fever at Halfa.

I found still the same difficulty about sleep, and had very little strength, but I still hoped to get back up the river. I asked Wingate to let me know the latest date for starting to catch up with the advance, and inquired if it would be possible to get a lift on a gun-boat or stern-wheeler from the new rail-head on the river bank at Kosheh. On August 8th I got definite orders from home. I was to come home by the next steamer taking the long sea route by Gibraltar, my paper had arranged for telegrams with Mr. Sheldon of *Black and White*, no stranger to the *Chronicle*, to which he had contributed many striking drawings.

I embarked for home on the P. and O. steamer *Arcadia* at Ismailia on August 12th, reaching England in the last week of that month. What more I have to tell of the Soudan Dongola Expedition may be very briefly set forth. The final advance did not take place till September, and my short summary of its story is based on the Sirdar's detailed despatch and on what I knew before I left Egypt of the resources available and the arrangements made for the last stage of the expedition.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CAPTURE OF DONGOLA.

WHEN I left the camp at Kosheh the nearest Dervish posts were reported to be at Kerma on the east bank of the Nile and at Hafir on the west bank. They had then no large force at either place, but held these two points above the Third Cataract as outposts for the force collected at Dongola. A small steamer plied on the river between these advanced posts and their main camp. Wad Bishara was said to be still at Dongola, Osman Azrak commanding at Kerma and Hafir. North of these points the country was clear of the enemy. There was no reliable information that he had received any reinforcements from Omdurman, but it was quite certain that if any had come down the river they were only small parties. Further it was reported that the enemy was greatly dispirited, and that the Dongola men, the Jaalin and a number of the black Jehadia were anxious to surrender at the first opportunity.

Under these circumstances a serious fight at or near Dongola was not very likely. I remember discussing the probabilities of the campaign with Captain Broadwood when we were in quarantine camp together at Ambigol Wells. Even then he was positive that the

Dervishes would not make another stand of any importance in the Dongola province. "They fought their fight at Ferkeh," he said; "they were thoroughly beaten, and will not try conclusions again with us in this campaign." But even if they had been disposed to make a serious stand their chance of anything like a long resistance was negatived by the Sirdar's having a powerful gunboat flotilla to act with him. The fight at Ferkeh would not have lasted for two hours, as it did, if the river had been high that Sunday morning, and four steamers had been sending a shower of shells and a hail of machine-gun bullets into the Dervish flank and rear, and threatening to sweep their line of retreat with this murderous fire. On the Upper Nile he who holds the river holds the country on both sides to an extent that is probably not the case with any other river. Until Berber is passed there is not a single tributary stream flowing into the Nile. Except at the desert wells which have usually a scanty supply, every drop of drinking water must come out of the river. Only small parties can trust to the desert wells, and these are all far away from the banks. Where there is a belt of cultivated land the water is supplied by irrigation channels fed by *sakkiyeh* wheels on the river bank. To stop these wheels is to force whoever wants water to come down to the bank for it, and an army cannot draw water for its thousands of men and beasts under the fire of a hostile fleet of gunboats, whose electric lights can watch the banks even during the hours of darkness. To retire along the river with a gunboat fleet on the flank or steaming ahead would therefore be destruction, and it was a safe

prediction that once the flotilla passed any Dervish position it would be promptly evacuated by the enemy.

The railway reached Kosheh on August 4th, and some of the first work it did was to bring up the sections of the new stern-wheeler *El Zaffir* (the Victorious), and her engines, armament, fittings, and stores. These were riveted and fitted together at an improvised dockyard on the river bank. The cholera had gone, but it was a trying time, for there were frequent storms, accompanied by deluges of rain—weather which had not been experienced in the Soudan for fifty years, and for which the camp was quite unprepared. The rise of the Nile was so late and so low that it was not till August 2nd that the first serious attempt was made to pass the first of the older gunboats up the Second Cataract from Halfa. It was originally expected that this operation would have been carried through by the middle of July. With great labour, and with the help of the naval officers,[1] the native cataract pilots, and some thousands of soldiers and labourers to work the cables, the four gunboats and three stern-wheel steamers, all of them partly dismantled, were got up to Kosheh. On August 23rd, after three weeks' hard work, the seven old steamers were in the river at Kosheh, and the new steamer was far advanced towards completion.

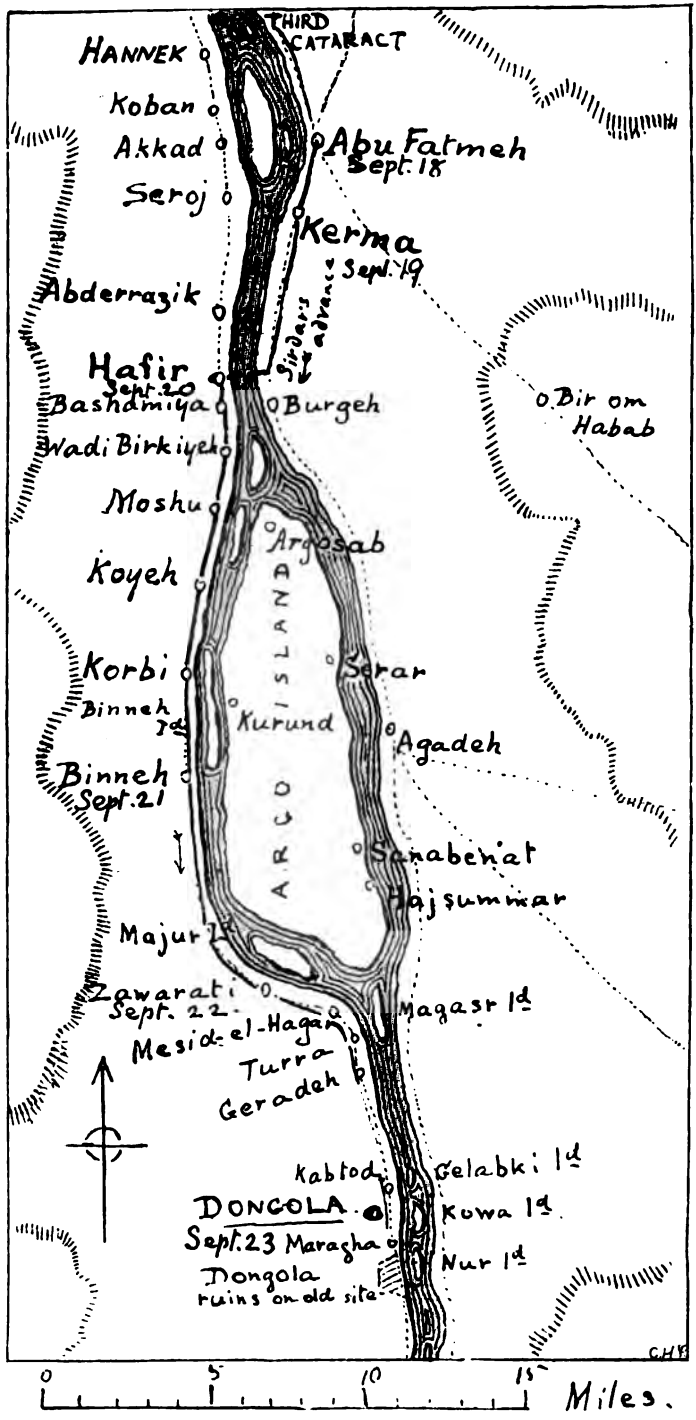
The character of the river navigation and of the

[1] The naval officers, Commanders Colville and Robertson, and Lieutenant Beatty, R.N., with Captain Oldfield, R.M.A., and a small detachment of Royal Marine Artillery, had arrived in June.

Nile banks between Kosheh and Dongola may be very briefly described. The whole distance by river is 162 miles. In moving up by land marches more than forty miles could be saved—thirty by crossing the great bend of the river directly by the camel-track from Kosheh almost due south to Sadin Fenti, and eleven and a half miles more by striking across the angle from Fereig to Abu Fatmeh. This would reduce the distance to be marched to 120½ miles, or about eight days if there were no halts. On the river the obstacles to navigation were the smaller cataracts at Amara and Kaibar, and the long cataract at Hannek.

The Amara Cataract, ten miles beyond Kosheh, is described in reconnaissance reports as the easiest of any between the Second and Third Cataracts. Steamers can ascend it without assistance, and boats sail up it with a fair wind. The broken water and rapids extend for about a mile, but while we were at Kosheh the boats went up easily with a north wind, and carried a considerable amount of stores with them to Suarda. On the reach of the river between Kosheh and Amara the banks are low, with a stretch of level ground on both sides of the river—the right bank fringed with palms, the left a barren desert, with sand drifts, between the low hills, over which rises one great conical peak of volcanic rock, a landmark for miles.

From Amara to the Kaibar Cataract there are sixty-five miles of open water. There are villages on both sides of the river, and several ruined temples (some of them of great extent) on the left bank. Below the bend of the river at Sadin Fenti the hills begin to close again upon the river, and above Sadin Fenti, in



THE FINAL ADVANCE ON DONGOLA.

places, they prevent the path from following the river bank. Then the hills recede, the country opens out, and there are palms and villages on both banks. The Kaibar Cataract is formed by a broad reef of rocks crossing the course of the Nile. There are several channels through it. Except when the river is very low it is as easy to pass as the Amara rapids, and at high Nile it ceases to be any obstacle to the navigation.

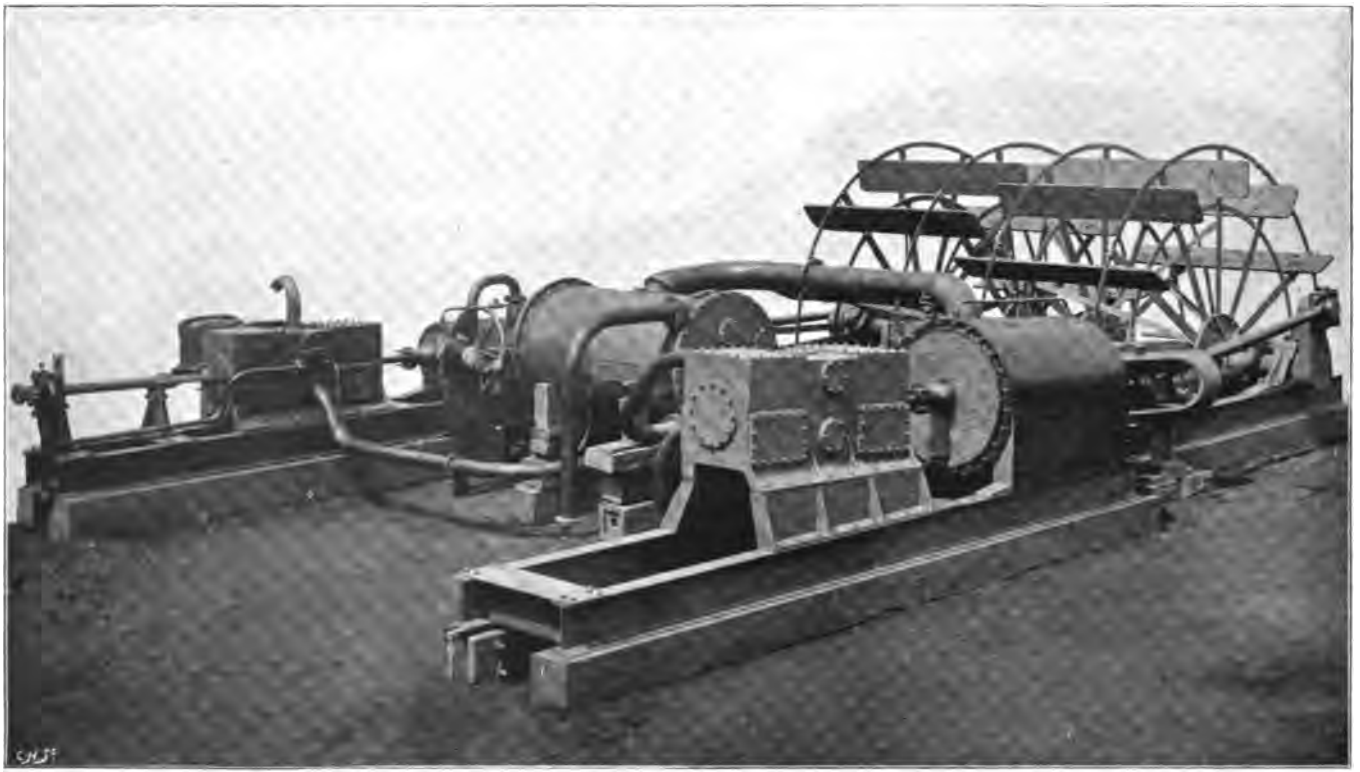
The three miles of islands, rocks, rapids, and broken water that form the Third Cataract at Hannek are for a great part of the year a barrier at least as formidable as the Tanjor Cataracts. From Kaibar to Hannek the river is open for about thirty miles. Then granite islands, reefs, and ridges of rock running out from the hills form the rapids, which are impassable for steamers except at or near high Nile. From the head of the cataract at Abu Fatmeh there is open water for more than two hundred miles to Merowi, and this long reach is navigable all the year round. As for the character of the river banks from the Kaibar to beyond the Third Cataract, the following brief description is taken from Commander Hammil's report :—

"The banks are low for a considerable portion of the distance, and there is a thin strip of cultivation on them, but the hills gradually close in, though they are not so high, nor are the banks so precipitous as at other places lower down. Towards Hannek the country again opens out, and when the Third Cataract is passed the river flows through a plain of apparently considerable extent."

From Hannek southwards the villages are chiefly on the west bank. The plain of Dongola and the great island of Argo have always been renowned for their fertility, and the city of Dongola used to be formerly a great centre of trade. But the Dongola of 1884-5 was in ruins, and the Dervishes had built a new "dem," or town, about three miles further north, and at some distance from the bank. Close to the village of Maragha, north of the old town, they had their stores of grain and dates, and about three miles still further north, near Kabtod village, a collecting camp for their fighting men.

The time during which the steamers could pass the Third Cataract and co-operate in the advance on Dongola was now limited to a few weeks. Once September was over, it would probably have been a very difficult operation to get them up. Matters were made fairly easy for the advance by the fact that the Dervishes had been scared out of all the country below the cataract. If they had been well advised they would have chosen to make their stand, not at Kerma and Hafir, above the broken water, but at some point in the difficult three miles below Hannek, where it would have been no easy matter for the gunboats to come into action.

The fleet was to have consisted of (1) the four Nile gunboats, *Tamai*, *Abu Klea*, *El Teb*, and *Metemmeh*, all of which had already been in action during the Toski campaign, and had ever since been patrolling the river between Assouan and Wadi Halfa; (2) three larger and more powerful stern-wheel gunboats, which had been built in England and sent out in sections to



ENGINES OF THE NEW STERN-WHEEL GUNBOATS.

be put together at Kosheh. The old gunboats were 90 feet long, these were 140 feet. Their speed was to be sixteen miles an hour. They had an armoured conning-tower 30 feet above the river, an upper-armoured citadel carrying a 12-pounder quick-firing gun capable of throwing twelve shells in a minute, and making good practice up to three miles, and two 6-pounder quick-firers. Besides these there were a howitzer and twelve Maxims, all protected by shields, and a double tier of loopholed steel plates to shelter riflemen. The conning-tower carried a powerful electric searchlight. Unhappily only one of these steamers was ready in time, and at her trial trip she burst her cylinder, so that when the flotilla advanced she had to stay behind to have a cylinder originally intended for one of her consorts fitted into her broken-down engine in place of the damaged one. By great efforts she was repaired in time to take some share in the operations of the last day of the campaign and in the pursuit. [1]

On August 23rd the Suarda garrison marched up the river bank and occupied Absarat, thus securing the southern end of the direct or desert route from Kosheh. Till then patrols had been sent regularly from Suarda to Sadin Fenti to make sure that there were no Dervish raiders moving in that direction, but the seizure and permanent occupation of Absarat was a necessary prelude to the general advance. It was thought to be advisable to support the vanguard thus pushed towards the enemy as rapidly as possible, and water depôts having been formed by carrying tanks and water-skins on camels to

[1] A full description of these gunboats will be found in Appendix IV.

two points in the desert, and keeping the supply up with daily convoys, the movement of the army from Kosheh to Sadin Fenti and Absarat began on the 27th, when the 1st Brigade started southwards, a storm in the desert making the march an unexpectedly trying piece of work.

That storm of August 27th was not the least of the difficulties that seemed to imperil the success of the expedition. It raged with fearful violence at various points along the river valley, extending as far north as Sarras. Such a day had not been known in the Soudan in living memory. The evening brought the Sirdar at Kosheh the news that miles of the railway had been swept away, chiefly between Murrat Wells and Sarras. Altogether twenty miles were demolished more or less completely. In a country where rain is an ordinary event, the engineer lays his railway line not in the bottom of a valley, but at a higher level on one slope or the other. Where he passes across branching side valleys, he takes care to leave in all his embankments large culverts to carry off flood-water. But here, in what was thought to be the rainless Soudan, the line south of Sarras, followed for mile after mile the bottom of the long valley of Khor Ahrusa, and no provision had been made, or had been thought necessary, for culverts in the embankments where minor hollows were crossed. Thus when the flood came it was not merely that the railway was cut through here and there by the rushing flood. It was covered deep in water, the ballast swept away, and some of the banks so destroyed that in places rails and sleepers were left hanging in the air across a wide gap.

THE NEW STERN-WHEEL GUNBOAT IN THE SHIPYARD AT WYVENHOE.

The advance had to be again delayed, while five thousand men, including some of the Staffords, the railway battalion, Egyptian soldiers, transport men, and gangs of labourers were rapidly concentrated to repair the line as the water fell. They were still at work when a fresh storm destroyed eight miles more of the railway, and what was most serious, the "triangle" at Akasha, which formed the junction between the Sarras-Akasha and Akasha-Kosheh sections. By September 6th the troops had completed the repairs of the line. "I cannot speak too highly," wrote the Sirdar, "of the cheerful manner and endurance displayed by them in carrying out this most laborious duty, during which long and rapid marches under exceptionally difficult conditions were necessary, and work proceeded day and night." General Kitchener is a "sapper," and during this final crisis of the expedition he superintended the work himself.

At last all was ready for the closing stage of the advance. On September 5th, the First and Second Brigades were pushed on to Dulgo, and the Third and Fourth crossed the desert from Kosheh to Absarat. Three of the brigades were under the same commanders that had led them at Ferkeh. The Fourth was commanded by Major David, R.M.L.I. There was even a more valuable reinforcement than this Fourth Brigade available in the Staffordshire Regiment, which after long waiting was now brought up to the front. It was conveyed by train from Sarras to Kosheh on September 12th, and embarking there on the steamers was carried on to Dulgo, where the little army, now 13,000 strong, was concentrated for the advance against the Dervish

positions. So far the only signs of the enemy's presence had been a few mounted patrols with which the Egyptian cavalry had a successful skirmish. But they were said to be gathering in force at Kerma, where they had built a fort, and it was supposed they would make a stand there.

Fereig was occupied on the 14th, and the Expeditionary Force then marched on to Barji, following the river, with the four gunboats on the Nile on its flank. The fleet was under the orders of Commander the Hon. C. Colville, R.N., and its Krupps and machine guns were manned by picked gunners of the Royal Marine Artillery under Captain Oldfield, R.M.A., the navy thus having its share in the expedition. At Barji the line of march left the river to take a shorter line by the desert to Abu Fatmeh. In the Hannek Cataract the fleet was reduced from four to three, the *El Teb* unfortunately getting fast on a rock. It was some days before she was afloat again.

The gunboats and the army were at Abu Fatmeh, above the cataract, on Friday, September 18th. The Dervish position at Kerma was less than three miles away, and arrangements were made to march upon it in the "small hours" of Saturday, and attack at dawn, the object being this time not so much surprise as to avoid the hot sun during the march and the battle, and have a long day for the pursuit. But when Kerma was reached early on Saturday morning, it was found that the Dervish garrison of Kerma had abandoned the place and crossed the river the evening before.

But the day was not to pass without a fight, although it was mainly left to the gunboats to deal with the

enemy, the only part of the army that had any active part in the action of Hafir being the artillery and machine-gun detachments. From the high ground at Kerma strong bodies of Mahdists could be seen on the opposite bank, and towards Hafir there were entrenchments near the river, and a Dervish steamer with some

THE STERN-WHEEL GUNBOAT "TAMAI," THE FLAGSHIP OF THE FLOTILLA.

Nile boats suggested a naval engagement. The Sirdar now ordered his artillery to move up the river opposite the enemy's works, and open fire, while Commander Colville was ordered to take his flotilla past them and go boldly on to Dongola. As the gunboats advanced to pass Hafir they "were received by a very heavy fire from guns placed in cleverly screened batteries, and from

riflemen entrenched in deep pits at the water's edge." Colville was hit in the wrist, but pluckily stuck to his steamer, and led a second attempt to pass the enemy's batteries, in which, supported by the fire of the Egyptian artillery from the east bank, he was successful. It was stated afterwards that the Dervish guns (Krupp breech-loaders) were worked by gunners who had been taken prisoners years before in the defeat of Hicks Pasha's army and at Khartoum, and that forced, under pain of death, to fire upon their old comrades, they took care to make the fire do as little damage as possible by omitting to put any fuses into the shells.

Running past Hafir Colville sunk the enemy's one steamer, and then went on full speed to Dongola. All day the Egyptian guns kept up a bombardment of the enemy's works and position. The firing ceased at nightfall. Next morning the enemy's works were abandoned. Bishara had retreated in the darkness. He dared not hold his ground with the gunboats south of his position. Once they passed Hafir the enemy had to go.

From Hafir to Dongola is a little over thirty-six miles. The small garrison left there by Bishara fled on the approach of the gunboats, which captured a number of boats on the river, and then, according to the Sirdar's orders, steamed back to the neighbourhood of Hafir. All day on Sunday and part of Monday the thirteen thousand men and 3,200 horses and camels of the army were being ferried across the river. By Monday afternoon they were ready to resume the advance. Rumour said the enemy had rallied at his camp north of Dongola. Lieutenant Beatty, R.N., was therefore

sent early on Monday with a gunboat, with orders to reconnoitre and keep the enemy occupied, while that evening the march southwards was resumed, the troops halting at Binneh, seventeen miles from Dongola.

Beatty had found the town reoccupied by the enemy, who had thrown up earthworks and dug shelter-trenches. These works he bombarded during the day, and being reinforced with another gunboat next morning, he kept up the bombardment all through the Tuesday. That day the army advanced to the south end of Sowarat (Zawarati on the Intelligence Department map), six miles from the Dervish camp. The Sirdar's information was that the enemy meant to stand and fight.

All was now ready for a grand attack on the Mahdist positions. The new gunboat had steamed up from Kosheh. Four armed steamers, one of them the most formidable that had ever floated on the Nile, were thus available for the attack on the river side. The land force drew up for the advance, the four brigades abreast in battalion columns, with their left on the river, their right protected by the mounted troops, the cavalry, and Camel Corps ; the three batteries, the Maxims, and the Staffords, armed with their long-range repeating-rifles, well to the front.

At early daylight on Wednesday, September 23rd, the advance in battle array began. The gunboats on the river flank were already shelling the enemy's position. The cavalry scouts, riding in advance of the Sirdar's army, reported the Dervishes ready to fight, and had, indeed, exchanged a few shots with them. But as the long array of British, Egyptian, and Soudan-

ese troops came on, it was seen that the enemy was everywhere retiring. Bishara would not risk a battle. The horse battery, the cavalry, and the Camel Corps, united under Burn-Murdoch's command, were at once launched in pursuit, and the retreat became a hopeless rout. The gunboats promptly landed a party to occupy Dongola, and the Egyptian flag was hoisted on the ruins of the old Government buildings. The army had meanwhile marched through the Dervish position and camps, and Dongola was won at last. Those who predicted a desperate defence of the place were badly mistaken. It fell almost without a blow.

Four guns had been left in the abandoned works at Hafir. Three more were found at Dongola. Large quantities of arms and ammunition, and an immense quantity of dates and grain, were also the spoil of the victors. Many of the enemy were taken prisoners, but hundreds came in voluntarily to surrender. Among these were a number of the Jaalin, with their Emir, Hassan Wad-en-Nejumi, the brother of the famous leader who fell at Toski. A large number of the Jehadia, the black regulars, also surrendered, most of them eager to transfer their services to the Soudanese battalions.

The gunboats were ordered to continue the pursuit. They reached Debbeh at noon on the 24th, the day after the capture of Dongola, just in time to rescue a number of the leading men of the Dongola province, who were being carried off as prisoners by the enemy. The fort of Debbeh was evacuated by its garrison, and occupied by a small party from the flotilla. One gunboat pushed on to Merowe, at the head of the open

water, which was reached at dawn on Saturday, the 26th. A few of the enemy fled into the desert as the steamer approached. The Camel Corps pushed southwards by land with some of the cavalry, and it was soon found that the enemy had broken up into small parties, and that the Dervish army of Dongola, which appears to have never been very numerous, had ceased to exist. Bishara was reported to be badly wounded, and a later rumour says that Osman Azrak, escaping from this second *débacle*, had got a small force together, with which he was holding the wells of Abu Klea, on the route across the Bayuda Desert to Metemmeh, apparently expecting that the fall of Dongola would be followed by a dash for Khartoum.

But this formed no part of the Sirdar's plans. On the day after the capture of Dongola, the Staffords were sent down the Nile *en route* for Cairo, and the expeditionary force began to break up. A garrison was detailed for Dongola, with advanced posts at Debbeh and Merowe, and the gunboats to patrol the river. The rest of the force began to return northwards, and the Dongola Expedition was at an end.

I cannot better conclude this account of the fall of Dongola, than with the words of the Sirdar's despatch. "The result of these operations has been to completely stop the constant Dervish raids on the villages between Assouan and Wadi Halfa, to add some 450 miles of the Nile valley to Egyptian territory, three hundred miles of which may be described as of great fertility, and to relieve, to their intense delight, the large and suffering population of Dongola from the barbarous and tyrannical rule of savage and fanatical Baggaras."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE OUTLOOK IN THE SOUDAN.

LET me say a few words in conclusion on the actual situation and the outlook on the Nile frontier and in the Soudan. In the early days of the Dongola Expedition, public opinion at home in England seemed to regard it as a somewhat rash enterprise. But after Ferkeh, and still more after the collapse of Bishara's forces at Dongola, there was a curious reaction, and instead of warnings about possible disaster there was a cry for an immediate advance upon Omdurman and Khartoum. To those who knew the real facts of the situation, it was strange to hear the light-hearted way in which stay-at-home tacticians arranged the immediate destruction of the Khalifa's power. They seemed to forget that a mere detachment of his forces had been engaged in the Dongola province, and that although our gunboats held the river up to Merowe, all progress beyond that point was barred by the terrible cataracts of the Monassir country, one hundred and fifty miles of the worst water on the Nile. When the Sirdar was in London in November, he was asked by an interviewer "Do you suppose that the Khalifa's power is in any way broken?" and his emphatic answer was "It is

quite a mistake to suppose so." To put the matter in a few words, one of the outworks of that power has been broken down by the conquest of Dongola, but the citadel of Mahdism is yet intact.

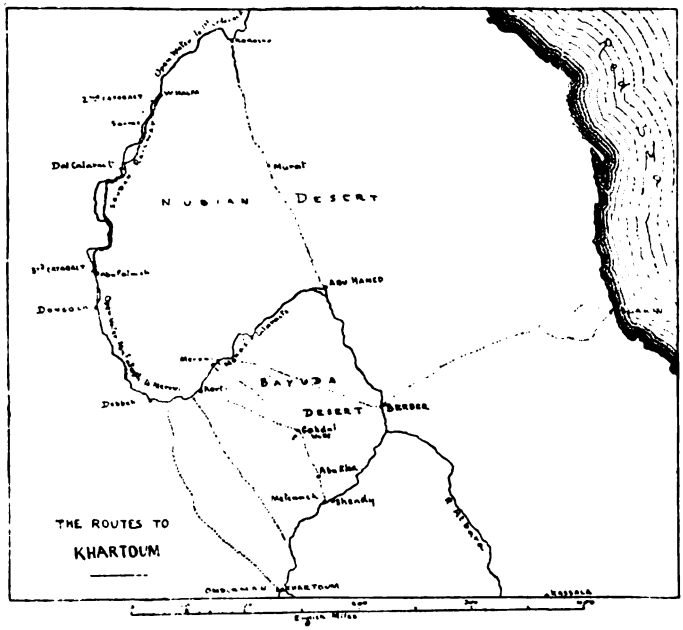
Debbeh held by a garrison of three battalions, two companies of the Camel Corps, two squadrons and a battery, with outposts at Korti and Merowe, is now the advanced post of Egypt on the Nile. Southward extends the Bayuda Desert, in which the nearest hostile post seems to be a small force watching the wells of Abu Klea. Metemmeh at the end of the Bayuda route is strongly garrisoned by the Dervishes. Berber is held, and Abu Hamed has been reinforced. Between Abu Hamed and Merowe the river is now impassable. Only for a brief period at high Nile, and only then with difficulty can these cataracts be passed. But below Merowe the gunboats hold secure possession of the Nile, and command its banks. Dongola, with General Hunter for its governor, is the administrative centre of the new frontier province. Very wisely everything is so far left in the hands of the military governor and his assistants, and the province shows the first signs of returning to its old prosperity. The refugees are coming back, villages are being rebuilt, wells dug, *sakkiyehs* fixed on the river banks, fields brought under cultivation. Efforts are being made to revive trade with the interior, and make the bazaar of Dongola again a mart for the caravans from the oases and the interior.

There is no fear now of any attack by the enemy upon the frontier. He is standing strictly on the defensive and apparently still expecting an advance

during the winter. On the Egyptian side the railway is creeping up steadily to Abu Fatmeh, at the foot of the long stretch of open water that extends past Dongola to Merowe. It is being laid at the rate of a mile a day, and it is expected that it will be open to Abu Fatmeh in February or March. The railway of Upper Egypt is working to Nagh Hamadi, south of Balliana, the piers for the great bridge that is to cross the Nile are complete, and many miles of earthwork beyond. This year the river terminus will not be far from Assouan. There is question also of laying a light railway from Korosko to Murat. Thus the communications of Egypt with the Nile frontier are being rapidly improved, and in any future expedition, even though the advanced base is so far to the southward, the task of supply will be much lighter than it was during the march on Dongola.

As for the plans for the next advance in the Soudan so far all that has been published in various quarters or that can be said, must be set down as conjecture based on certain well-known data. The possible lines of attack on the centre of the Dervish power are not so numerous as to make such conjectural plans of campaign difficult to draw up. It may safely be said that the Suakin–Berber route will not be used as a line of operations against the Upper Nile till Berber itself is again in Egyptian hands. It is therefore not available for the first stage of our next advance. The route across the Bayuda Desert from Korti to Metemmeh was only adopted by Lord Wolseley on the occasion of Sir Herbert Stewart's march with the Desert Column in 1885, because it was all-

important to take the shortest possible line even at some risk; and it must also be remembered that Gordon's steamers were known to be ready to co-operate at the southern end of the line when the Nile was again reached by the adventurous band. We have left, then, the original line of operations selected by Lord Wolseley, along the river by Berber and Shendy



to Metemmeh, Omdurman, and Khartoum. The open question appears to be by what precise route Berber will be reached. There is a desert track by which it might be attacked from the advanced posts now occupied by the Egyptian army below the Fourth Cataract. For a brief period about high Nile gunboats might be got through the Monassir Cataracts, though it is

doubtful if this could be done with the large new type of gunboat, and even with the older steamers it would probably cost as much labour and time as had to be expended this year in getting them up from Halfa to Abu Fatmeh.

There is, however, an alternative plan of campaign of which I heard some talk in Egypt. It has been alluded to more than once in the newspapers, so it is violating no secret to set it forth in detail. The Egyptian army already holds the Wells of Murat, on the Korosko-Abu-Hamed caravan track. Murat is about half-way to Abu Hamed, and there are on the whole route no serious engineering difficulties in the way of laying a light railway. A full-gauge railway was laid for a short distance from Korosko southwards last January; but there is no doubt that a light line, of perhaps the Decauville type, would be more quickly laid, and would be quite as effective for the object in view. Once the line reached Murat, that place could be made to serve as a starting-point for an advance to Abu Hamed, much as Akasha was used in the march on Dongola, with this difference—that a much smaller force would probably suffice for the capture of Abu Hamed, the Dervishes on this side being much more likely to concentrate for a stand near Berber. Once Abu Hamed was in Egyptian hands the railway would be pushed on to that place, giving access to the Nile *above* the sixty or seventy miles of broken water in the Monassir cataracts. Gunboats transported in sections across the desert route by the railway could then be launched at Abu Hamed, which would become the advanced river base of the expe-

dition. It was at Abu Hamed that nearly thirty years ago Sir Samuel Baker launched his gunboats for the Ismailia expedition, having conveyed the sections on wheeled waggons across the Korosko desert.

With a railway to Abu Hamed and gunboats on the Upper Nile at that point, the capture of Berber would be no serious matter, and this would enable the short route by Suakin to be opened for the arrival of Anglo-Indian reinforcements for the final move by Shendy and Metemmeh to Khartoum. The garrisons in the Dongola province would, in the first stage of the advance to Abu Hamed and Berber, protect the flank of the expedition, and at the same time form such a standing menace to Omdurman that it would not be likely that any large force would be sent down to strengthen Berber. Demonstrations on the side of the Bayuda Desert would make the Khalifa or his successor anxious about an attack in that direction, for Abu Klea and Gubat are no more forgotten by the Dervishes than by ourselves. Once Metemmeh was occupied the Bayuda route would also be useful. Kassala in friendly hands might also be made the starting-point of a demonstration towards the Atbara, though this would only be effective at a later stage of the expedition, after the main flood in the river had gone down. When the Atbara rises after the rains in the highlands from which it draws its waters, it becomes a foaming torrent that effectually guards the centre of the Dervish power from any attack in that direction.

It is not at all certain that the immediate object of

the next advance (whenever it takes place) will be Omdurman. It may well be limited to Berber. The recapture of that important centre and the reopening of the Suakin route might well be the work of another expedition, the avenging of Khartoum being reserved for the third and final effort. Much will of course depend on the general situation elsewhere, but if we had our own time to choose, it might well be that this leisurely advance, patient and inevitable as fate, would so impress the leaders of Mahdism and their adherents as to very much diminish the resistance they would be able or inclined to make in what has so far been the citadel of their power.

It would, however, be a mistake to expect that Omdurman will fall before the mere challenge of the Egyptian trumpets. In an Appendix[1] to this work will be found a careful estimate of the fighting strength of Mahdism, and it will be seen that it exists chiefly at its centre. The policy of the Khalifa has concentrated about his residence the picked and trained forces of the Dervish army, and the Mulazemin, once a mere handful of personal attendants, have developed into a numerous and powerful Pretorian guard. On them he chiefly depends for the support of his own personal power and for securing the succession of his favourite son. Such a succession is against the ideal of an organisation like that of Mahdism, and the Khalifa's death or a revolution ending in his downfall might substitute for him a more enterprising, capable, and aggressive leader. So long as Abdullahi reigns there will be no serious resistance to any invader until Omdurman itself is

[1] See Appendix II., p. 342.

menaced. But resistance such as may then be expected, with the picked troops of the Dervish Ansar fighting, so to say, with their backs against a wall, will be a thing that cannot be disposed of by a mere handful of troops, however good. The reconquest of Khartoum will cost at least one great battle—a battle more serious than a Toski or a Ferkeh.

And in saying this I do not overlook the undoubted fact that Mahdism is far from being the power it once was. It is declining, so that it is difficult to imagine any revival of its former vigour. Yet it will not fall to pieces of itself, and the warlike Baggara tribesmen will not bow without a struggle to the inevitable fate that awaits their ill-gotten power. And in that struggle, strange as it may seem to our Western ideas, thousands will fight under their banners who on the morrow will be the first to welcome the rule of the victors. This is especially true of the black Jehadia, one of the most formidable elements in the Dervish forces.

As to the decline of Mahdism, I cannot do better than use the words of a much greater authority on such questions than I can ever hope to be. Talking with me at Halfa a few days before our advance to Ferkeh, Slatin Pasha said: "It is difficult for those who have not, like me, seen it with their own eyes to realise the enormous change that has come over the Mahdist movement in the Soudan. At first it was a general uprising of the tribes, under the impulse partly of discontent with the way they were ruled, partly of a real religious enthusiasm; but now the whole position is altered. The enthusiasm of twelve or fifteen years

ago has quite died out; men have forgotten whatever grievances they had against the old government in their sense of what they are suffering at the hands of the Khalifa and his Emirs; there is no longer an alliance of the tribes, for Abdullahi has gradually concentrated all the power in the hands of his own Baggara kinsmen. Some of the other tribes he has cruelly exterminated; others he has disarmed; all have been shorn like sheep to fill his treasury. Yes, Mahdism is going downhill fast, and it is good news for all who hate cruelty, oppression, slavery, and organised imposture, for these are the bases of the Dervish power. It would be amusing, if it were not so serious a matter, to hear men talk of establishing friendly relations with Omdurman, friendly relations with a bloodstained savage power that is toppling to its fall—a fall that will be welcomed by nine-tenths of the tribes from here to the Great Lakes."

Since these words were spoken at Halfa last May, the Egyptian flag—in this case the flag of freedom and deliverance—has been carried by the Sirdar and his gallant army to Ferkeh, Dongola, and Merowe. When this war of liberation for North-eastern Africa is to be resumed is one of the secrets of the future, but even those who are the greatest friends of peace must join in the hope that the final blow against this "bloodstained savage power" will not be long delayed.

APPENDICES.

APPENDIX I.

THE EGYPTIAN ARMY.

THE present organisation of the Egyptian army dates from the end of the year 1882, when, on December 20th, less than three months after Tel-el-Kebir had been fought and won, a decree of the Khedive Tewfik disbanded the old army and appointed Sir Evelyn Wood Sirdar, or Commander-in-chief, of the new army, which was at first to consist of only 6,000 men. It was then supposed that its duties would be limited to the maintenance of internal order, and such operations as might at times be necessary against some unruly Bedawin tribe. The long frontier warfare against the Mahdists was not then foreseen by any one, and it was on account of this new development that the strength of the army was gradually increased to more than threefold its original numbers, and various new elements were introduced into its organisation.

A number of British officers on full pay were appointed to staff and regimental commands in the new army. The service in the ranks was at first for four years followed by four years in the police and four in the reserve, the police being always available as a first reserve. The native officers were at first selected from the old army. The future officers of this class were to be trained at the military school, to which they were to be admitted by competition. The rank and file were recruited by conscription, but the numbers required were a very light tax on the large population of Egypt, and it has always been possible to obtain easily the full number of healthy, well-grown men for the Egyptian portion of the army.

In 1888 the term of service was extended to six years with the active army, five in the police and four in the reserve.

In 1884 the first Soudanese regiment (the 9th Battalion) was

raised. It was largely composed of deserters from the enemy's ranks and refugees from the territory he had overrun. The experiment was such a success that several other black regiments were subsequently added. The Soudanese regiments are raised by voluntary enlistment, and the men serve for an indefinite period, making soldiering their life-work. Thus the Soudanese regiments are largely composed of veterans.

Of the infantry regiments of the Egyptian army the first four (Nos. 1–4) have an English commanding officer, and three other British officers, having generally the local rank of major (Bimbashi). The company officers are natives, the battalion always having six companies, whose war strength is about 120 bayonets each.

The next four battalions (5–8) are entirely officered by natives.

The 9th to the 13th Battalion are Soudanese, with British field-officers.

The 14th was originally a training battalion for recruits. It was formed into a Soudanese battalion chiefly by means of recruits from the depôts of the other Soudanese battalions during the late war.

The drill is nearly identical with our British drill-book. The words of command are given in Turkish.

The rank in the army is also expressed in Turkish. The following table of ranks is taken from the official "Sudan Almanac" of 1896 :—

EGYPTIAN RANK.	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT.	BADGES OF RANK.
Sirdar.	Commander-in-Chief.	Crown, 2 stars, crossed sword, and bâton.
Ferik.	General of Division.	Crown, 1 star, crossed swords, and bâton.
Lewa.	Major or Brigadier-General.	1 star, crossed swords.
Miralai.	Colonel.	Crown and 3 stars.
Kaimakan.	Lieut.-Colonel.	Crown and 2 stars.
Bimbashi.	Major.	Crown and star.
Saghkolaghasi.	Adjutant - Major (native).	Crown.
Yusbashi.	Captain.	3 stars.
Mulazim Awal.	Lieutenant.	2 stars.
Mulazim Tani.	2nd Lieutenant.	1 star.

The strength of the Egyptian army at the beginning of the year was :—

	OFFICERS.	N.C.O.'s & MEN.	TOTAL.
Cavalry (8 squadrons, Egyptian).	51	1,202	1,253
Artillery (1 horse and 2 mountain batteries and one garrison battalion).	37	914	951
Camel Corps (2 Egyptian and 4 Soudanese companies).	18	600	618
Infantry (8 Egyptian battalions, Nos. 1–8).	208	6,362	6,570
„ (5 Soudanese battalions (Nos. 9–13).	135	4,010	4,145
Staff, departments, &c.	224	1,377	1,601
Total...	673	14,465	15,138
Irregular troops.	21	921	942
Guns of all sorts, 182.			
Grand Total...	...	...	16,080

The following additional troops were raised in March and April, on the orders being received for the Dongola expedition :—

Two battalions of Egyptian Reservists, Nos. 15 and 16.
One battalion Soudanese, No. 14.
One Company Khedive's Camel Corps (Blacks, Shaggieh, &c.).
Ten transport companies of 200 men each.
One railway battalion of 600 men.

In all about 4,800 additional men, besides irregular Bedawin levies.

The Egyptian artillery is armed with Krupp guns. The infantry and the camel corps are armed with the Martini rifle. The transport companies, railway battalion, and irregulars carried the Remington, the rifle of the old army. The cavalry were armed with swords and Martini carbines, the first rank having also lances.

APPENDIX II.

THE ARMED STRENGTH OF MAHDISM.

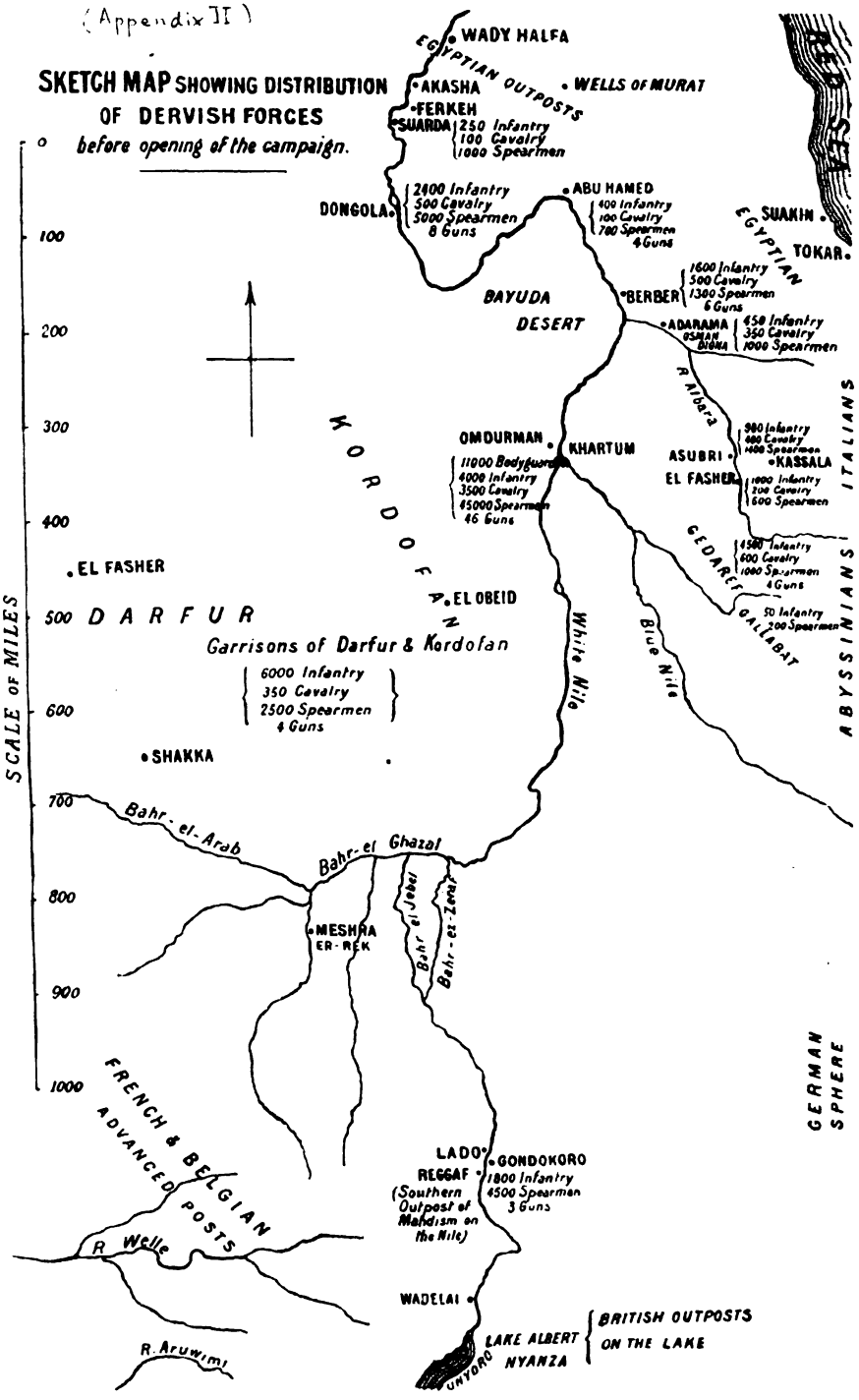
AT the beginning of the Dongola campaign some very alarmist accounts of the armed strength of Mahdism were published in England. For instance, Mr. Leonard Courtney described the Dongola Expedition as a very rash undertaking, telling his audience that a mere handful of Egyptian troops were being sent against a power that could command 45,000 fanatical warriors. On the 29th of April I sent home from Wadi Halfa to the newspapers I represented an estimate of the forces of Mahdism, which has a double interest, in the first place as showing what was a very liberal estimate of the utmost force that could be brought against the Egyptian advance into the Dongola province, and secondly as showing the forces that the Khalifa could still command in the event of future operations in the direction of Berber and Khartoum. I therefore reproduce here the substance of the article and the map which accompanied it. I may mention that although they were in no way responsible for them, I went over the map and my calculations with Major Wingate and Slatin Pasha before sending them to England. They appeared in the *Daily Chronicle* of May, 1896, It must be clearly understood that the map gives as a basis for the subsequent estimates the Dervish garrisons and resources in armed men, before there was any movement either of the Egyptian army up the Nile, or of the Dervishes towards Suakin, Kassala, and Ferkeh.

My letter ran as follows :—

"Perhaps it will be interesting (and it may be reassuring) to our friends in England if I explain what well-informed men here at the front think of the enemy's fighting strength. And first let me refer to some points in the map which accompanies this letter.

"It shows the distribution of the Dervish forces before the move

(Appendix II)


SKETCH MAP SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF DERVISH FORCES
before opening of the campaign.
WADY HALFA
EGYPTIAN OUTPOSTS
AKASHA
WELLS OF MURAT
FERKEH
SUARDA
250 Infantry
100 Cavalry
1000 Spearmen
DONGOLA
2400 Infantry
500 Cavalry
5000 Spearmen
8 Guns
ABU HAMED
400 Infantry
100 Cavalry
700 Spearmen
4 Guns
SUAKIN
EGYPTIAN
TOKAR
BAYUDA DESERT
BERBER
1600 Infantry
500 Cavalry
1300 Spearmen
6 Guns
ADARAMA
OSMAN DIGNA
450 Infantry
350 Cavalry
1000 Spearmen
R. Atbara
ITALIANS
OMDURMAN
KHARTUM
11000 Bodyguard
4000 Infantry
3500 Cavalry
45000 Spearmen
46 Guns
ASUBRI
EL FASHER
KASSALA
980 Infantry
400 Cavalry
1400 Spearmen
1000 Infantry
200 Cavalry
600 Spearmen
KORDOFAN
GEDAREF
1500 Infantry
600 Cavalry
1000 Spearmen
4 Guns
50 Infantry
200 Spearmen
GALLABAT
EL FASHER
EL OBEID
DARFUR
Garrisons of Darfur & Kordofan
6000 Infantry
350 Cavalry
2500 Spearmen
4 Guns
White Nile
Blue Nile
ABYSSINIANS
SHAKKA
SCALE OF MILES
0
100
200
300
400
500
600
700
800
900
1000
Bahr-el-Arab
Bahr-el Ghazal
MESHRA ER-REK
Bahr el Jebel
Bahr-ez-Zeraf
GERMAN SPHERE
FRENCH & BELGIAN ADVANCED POSTS
LADO
GONDOKORO
REGGAF
(Southern Outpost of Mahdism on the Nile)
1800 Infantry
4500 Spearmen
3 Guns
R. Welle
WADELAI
R. Aruwimi
LAKE ALBERT
NYANZA
BRITISH OUTPOSTS ON THE LAKE

against Kassala opened the present campaign, or series of campaigns. The statistics are those collected by Slatin Pasha last summer for the Egyptian Government, and published in his book, 'Fire and Sword in the Soudan.' I take these figures as the basis of the calculations and deductions which follow.

"It will be noticed that from Suarda, which was the extreme northern outpost of Mahdism before the war, to Reggaf, its most southern garrison, is a distance of over 1,100 miles in a direct line, or about 1,700 miles along the river; while the distance from El Fasher, the most westerly garrison in Darfour, to Gallabat, on the Abyssinian border, is about 800 miles. Over the enormous tract thus marked out communications are in many directions difficult. Men cannot be moved from one part of the Mahdist empire to another in the way to which we are accustomed in Europe and in India—an obvious fact, yet one that seems to be sometimes forgotten.

"The *aggregate* force of the Dervishes is considerable, and far exceeds the modest 45,000 of Mr. Courtney's speech. The total is a little over 100,000, made up as follows:—

Cavalry	6,600
Infantry (Jehadia), armed with rifles and smooth-bores	34,350
Sword and spear men	64,000
Total	104,950

"This is at first sight a very formidable force, but such first impressions are often misleading, and a closer inspection of the figures, especially if they are studied in connection with the map, reveals the real weakness of Mahdism.

"First we have to deduct from the grand total the forces that, for one reason or another, cannot be moved northwards for the defence of the Dongola provinces. The garrisons of the south and south-west—Reggaf, Shakka, El Fasher, and El Obeid—amounted last year to 15,150 men, and not one of these can leave his present post. The garrisons of Darfour and Kordofan have to keep down hostile negro tribes, and these, as well as the outpost at Reggaf, have also to be on the watch against ever-recurring alarms of French and Belgian inroads from the Ubanghi and the Congo, or a British movement from the great lakes. Indeed, the chances are that instead of being able to draw upon these garrisons for help the

Khalifa has had to reinforce his south-western borderlands from Omdurman. Considerable as is the distance, it is easy to send troops up the White Nile to the Bahr-el-Ghazal region. In the old days steamers ran regularly at high Nile up to Meshra-er-Rek, nearly 800 miles above Khartoum.

"Now turn to the line of posts from Gallabat along the Atbara to Berber. These amount to a total of 15,950 (or let us say in round numbers 16,000) men. And of these, again, not a man is available for the northern theatre of war. Adarama is Osman Digna's fortified camp on the Atbara, whither he retires to enjoy a little domestic felicity in the intervals of his raids on the Suakim country. Asubri and the Eastern El Fasher are two posts formed on the Atbara to cover Omdurman to the eastward, after Kassala fell into the hands of the Italians. It is from this line of garrisons, with the help of a small reinforcement from Omdurman, that the army was raised which marched upon Kassala on the news of the Italian disaster at Adowa. Osman Digna was with these invaders of the Italian sphere, and only struck off towards Suakim and Tokar when the news came that the Egyptians were on the move.

"About 30,000 men were sent from Omdurman to reinforce the line of the Atbara. As for Omdurman itself, the infantry who were in and around the place last year numbered 15,000. Of these 11,000 were the Mulazemin, a *corps d'élite* which has grown into a kind of Pretorian legion out of a small bodyguard originally intended to act as the escort of the Khalifa. They are now the standing army of Mahdism, the main prop of the personal power of its head. They are partly black troops under Arab emirs, partly Arabs, all of these being Baggaras, and many of them belonging to the Khalifa Abdullahi's own branch of the tribe, the Taaisha Baggara. They are well armed, but they are practically tied to Omdurman by the Khalifa's fears for his own personal safety. Possibly even these picked cohorts may prove a danger rather than a defence, for there has always been a friction between the Arab and the black elements in the Mulazemin, and what is considered a reliable message from Omdurman by way of Suakim informed the Intelligence Department a few days ago that there had been fighting among the guardsmen, and a good deal of bloodshed. But however this may be, it may be safely asserted that the Mulazemin will be brought into action against an invader only when Omdurman itself is in danger.

"Slatin Pasha tells me that the numbers of this corps have been increased since last year, and there are probably now at least 15,000 of them. The men could be found by enrolling and arming some of the other troops at Omdurman, who numbered last year some 3,500 cavalry, 4,000 infantry, or Jehadia (that is, troops enrolled for the Jehad, or sacred war), and the 45,000 spearmen. These last really represent the possible *levée en masse* of the central provinces of the Mahdist empire. According to Slatin Pasha, at least 25 per cent. of them are either too old or too young to be considered effective for a campaign.

"If, then, we consider only the northern theatre of war, we have to strike off the grand total of the Dervish armies the following large figures :—

Southern and south-western garrisons.....	15,150
Eastern garrisons	15,950
Recent reinforcements from Omdurman	3,000
Mulazemin (Omdurman).....	15,000
Ineffectives (sword and spear men).....	10,000
	59,100

This still leaves some 40,000 men to be accounted for, and the question is how many of these may be considered as available for resisting an advance to Dongola.

"The map shows that last year there were 1,200 men with four guns holding Abu Hamed at the head of the desert route from Korosko ; 7,900 men with eight guns at Dongola, and an advanced post of 1,350 men at Suarda. This gives a total of 9,250 on the river at and below Dongola, or, adding the flank guard at Abu Hamed, 10,450 men facing northwards. When the advance against Dongola began, the Abu Hamed garrison appears to have been so far reinforced that it had some 1,500 camel-men available for raids by the desert routes and eastwards towards the Red Sea. Our post at Mersa-Halaib, on the Red Sea shore, and the Ababdeh posts at Haimur and En Ongat, and our permanent garrison at Murat Wells, with the continual movement of scouting parties along the desert routes, have so far held these raiders in check. The Suarda force has been pushed on to near Ferkeh, and reinforced by nearly 3,000 men from Dongola, while the Dongola garrison has received some 4,000 men from Omdurman, the only point from which Wad

Bishara, who commands at Dongola, can now expect any help. Between the troops sent to the Atbara line and those pushed on to Abu Hamed and Dongola, Omdurman must have now sent forward about 8,000 men.

"How were these men obtained? They most certainly are not Mulazemin. They probably represent the greater part of the 4,000 Jehadia infantry, some of the 3,500 cavalry, and some spearmen. Possibly some of the latter have been enrolled as Jehadia, and armed out of the reserve of 6,000 rifles which are kept at Omdurman. But it looks as if the Khalifa had already exhausted his small reserve of well-armed troops in order to send this slender reinforcement to the lower river. Any further force he can send will be made up of spearmen, and if he can get down, say, 6,000 of these, he will have sent a larger force down to Dongola than the Mahdists have ever yet been able to send down the river. In the most determined attempt they ever made to invade Egypt, in the Toski campaign of 1889, at a time when Mahdism was far more powerful than it is at present, they only succeeded in getting 5,000 fighting men and 8,000 camp followers past Wady Halfa, which was then the frontier. It is quite possible that the 14,000 men now between Dongola and Ferkeh represent the utmost effort of which Mahdism is at present capable, and even supposing 6,000 spearmen are added, the force will still be one that (even if it were arrayed on one field) 10,000 regulars, led by British officers, and armed with Martinis, Krupp guns, and Maxims, can meet with perfect confidence as to the result.

"Possibly it will be said that I am making very small account of the 34,000 spearmen put to the credit of Omdurman, even after 11,000 ineffectives have been struck off the original figures. But the question is not as to how many men there are in the central region of the Dervish power who are capable of turning out with shield and spear or sword. The question is not even how many of these men could be rallied to the defence of Omdurman. The question is how many of them are at all likely to be got down to Dongola, 500 miles lower down the river.

"I have heard it suggested that the Khalifa will see in the advance to Dongola a direct threat to Omdurman, and will march with his picked troops and every fanatic spearman he can muster to the rescue of the threatened river oasis. But what he and his emirs will do in the immediate future can best be judged by what he did

in the past. When the news came that Kassala was in Italian hands, although its fall directly threatened Omdurman, what did he do? Slatin has told the story of how the great ivory trumpets were sounded, the war-drums beat, and at the head of the Mulazemin the Khalifa rode into the Nile till it was up to his horse's knees, and how, drawing his sword and pointing eastward towards the lost city, he shouted out in a loud voice, 'Allahu akbar! Allahu akbar!' ('God is most great') and then—marched to the reconquest of Kassala? Nothing of the kind—but turned his horse back to the bank, told the people he meant to retake the place, dismissed the troops, and went home. He then busied himself with establishing a defensive line on the Atbara to check any further Italian advance, and he has never yet been able to send even as many as 20,000 to attack Kassala. The Khalifa Abdullahi has ceased to be a warrior. Of the Emirs who did the hard fighting of the earlier days of Dervish conquest only Osman Digna remains. The rest have fallen like Wad Nejumi, in battle, or died like Zeki Tummal and many more at the hands of their jealous master's executioners. The days are gone when, at the call of these once famous chiefs, whole tribes would rush enthusiastically to arms. Riven by internal strife, dominated by the reign of terror of the Khalifa's own adherents, hated by many of those who dwell within its borders, the Mahdism of to-day is no longer the power that once sent in its tide of conquest, like a rising Nile, rolling from Darfour and Kordofan to Khartoum, Dongola, and the Second Cataract.

"As for the arms with which the Dervishes will meet our advance, the infantry (Jehadia) carry firearms. They have no really modern weapons. Their rifles are chiefly old Remingtons; there are a few heavy elephant rifles, and a good many smooth-bore muskets. Ammunition is scanty in quantity, and defective in quality. They have neither rifles nor cartridges that can shoot at the ranges at which the Egyptian Martinis will be already effective. Their artillery consists of a few Krupps captured at Khartoum, and some smooth-bore brass guns. The ammunition for these is even scantier and worse than their small-arm supplies. Their most formidable weapons are still the sword and spear, but it is very doubtful if the fanatic impulse which drove home the Dervish charge at Tamai and Abu Klea is still alive and active, and even if it is a charge of sword and spear, men will count for little against breechloading

field-guns, Martinis, and Maxims, these last manned by picked soldiers of our own army, and the whole directed by British officers who have had years of experience of desert warfare.

"To sum up, the aggregate forces of Mahdism are not enormous, and even these have to be directed to the protection of such widely distant frontiers and the holding of such vast tracts that the force which can be brought to bear on any one point is relatively small."

APPENDIX III.

LIST OF THE EMIRS IN COMMAND OF THE DERVISH FORCES AT FERKEH.

THE following list is not precisely the same as that circulated by the Intelligence Department before the advance from Akasha. A few names have been added, obtained by Major Wingate and Slatin Pasha from the Dervish prisoners at Sargun camp, and communicated by them to me. The fourth column which I have added to the list gives the fate of the Emirs so far as it was known at Sargun on June 10th, the date of the memoranda on which I base the notes in this column.

TRIBE.	SUB-TRIBE.	EMIR.	FATE AT FERKEH, JUNE 6.
Baggara.	Habbania.	Hammuda Idris.	Killed.
,,	,,	Nuer.	,,
,,	,,	Gebir.	,,
,,	,,	Wadi.	,,
,,	,,	Yehia.	,,
,,	,,	Manzel Gelda.	Escaped.
,,	,,	Abu el Gasem.	Killed.
,,	,,	Nur Derir.	Escaped.
,,	,,	Abdullahi.	Killed.
,,	,,	Ahmed Golfan.	,,
,,	,,	Rahma.	,,
,,	,,	Ali Wad el Haj.	,,
,,	,,	Yusef abu Seid.	Escaped.
,,	Taaisha.	Yusef Angara.	Killed.
,,	,,	Saleh Zubeir.	,,
,,	,,	Sherif Safarok.	,,
,,	,,	Wad Mid el Helu.	Escaped.

TRIBE.	SUB-TRIBE.	EMIR.	FATE AT FERKEH, JUNE 6.
Baggara	Taaisha	Dudu Wad Badr.	Killed.
,,	,,	Daboya Hamed.	,,
,,	Rizighat.	Gimeh.	,,
,,	,,	Yasin.	Escaped.
,,	,,	Hamed.	,,
,,	Gimeh.	Danab el Gemel.	Killed.
,,	,,	Wad el Bedri.	,,
,,	Aulad Hemed.	Hamed Hagger.	Escaped.
,,	Beni Hossein.	Abd el Fares.	,,
Camel Tribes, but at present serving with the Baggaras.	Maalia.	Wad Abu Kafir.	Killed.
	Kenana.	Abu Khuei Dem.	,,
	,,	Beshir.	Escaped.
	,,	Mahla.	,,
	,,	El Kenani.	Killed.
	Zaghawa.	Taher Wad Ishaak.	,,
	,,	Abkr Kheiralla.	,,
	Danagla.	Musa Kazem.	,,
Danagla.	Danagla.	Osman Azrak.	Escaped.
,,	,,	Osman Abdul Mutalleb.	Prisoner.
,,	,,	Kerimalla Keresawi.	Escaped.
,,	,,	Wad Omar el Khand a Gawi.	Killed.
,,	,,	Et Tager.	,,
,,	,,	Kadoma.	Escaped.
,,	,,	Ali Wad el Amin.	Killed.
,,	,,	Wad el Fahl.	,,
,,	,,	El Khedr Wad Malek.	,,
Jaalin.	Jaalin.	Haj Abd el Kader.	,,
,,	,,	Taher Wad el Obeid.	Prisoner.
,,	,,	Mohammed el Amin.	Killed.
,,	,,	Taher Wad Gubara.	Escaped.
,,	,,	Wad Rizig.	,,
,,	,,	Mohammed Wad Karrar.	Killed.
,,	,,	Mohammed Ali el Gabi.	,,
,,	,,	Ahmed Wad Mohammed Kheir (Shaigi).	,,
,,	,,	Mohammed Wad Hamza el Engeriabi.	,,
,,	,,	Wad Kuku.	,,

TRIBE.	SUB-TRIBE.	EMIR.	FATE AT FERKEH, JUNE 6.
Jehadia (Blacks).	Sudani.	Abdulla Id.	Escaped.
,,	,,	Gaber Abd el Maged.	Killed.
,,	,,	Ambar Yasin.	,,
,,	,,	Said Fur.	Escaped.
,,	,,	Surur Amarna.	Prisoner.
,,	,,	Hasaballa Furawi.	,,
,,	,,	Beshir Abu Gerid.	Killed.
,,	,,	Allagabu Bangawa.	,,
(Arabs).	Halawin.	Ahmed Wad el Besir.	,,
,,	,,	Mohammed Wad Haboba.	Escaped.
,,	Shaigia.	Wad Abu Duga.	Killed.

ANALYSIS OF THE ABOVE LIST.

Emirs present	64
Killed	42
Prisoners	4
Total disposed of	46
Escaped	18
	64

APPENDIX IV.

THE NEW NILE STEAMERS.

Description of the Three Armed Stern-wheel Gunboats built for the Dongola Expedition 1896.

MESSRS. JOHN STEWART & SON, of the Blackwall Ironworks have kindly furnished me with the following details of the new type of river gunboat supplied by them for the Dongola Expedition.

These three vessels were designed by Mr. E. B. Thubron, of the Nile Engine Works, Cairo (a North countryman, not a German as stated), and the order to build them was given to Messrs. John Stewart & Son, Limited, of the Blackwall Ironworks, London, E. They had to be delivered at Alexandria by the 5th of September, 1896, but the first one, by strenuous effort and working overtime, was got ready for the advance this year, and reached Alexandria on the 23rd of July, being about eleven weeks from date of signing contract (leaving about eight weeks for actual construction).

The hulls were built by Messrs. Forrestt & Son, Limited, at Wyvenhoe, of steel in ten sections for convenience of transport, and were of the following dimensions, viz :—

Length ...	...	...	...	140 feet.
Breadth	...	...	...	24 „
Depth	...	...	...	54 inches.

with a draft of water of 24 inches. They had three decks of teak, viz :—the main, upper and battery, and above the battery deck was a protected conning tower, some 30 feet from the water-line, which sheltered the steering-gear and engine telegraph, and

in which was also placed a powerful electric-search light, and the two Maxim guns mentioned below. The hatches to the main deck were arranged to lift outwards, so as to form shields for the infantry, shutters being provided to fire through.

The armament was very heavy, consisting of :—

One 12 pounder quick-firing gun, placed forward.

Two 6 pounder quick-firing guns, one placed at the two fore corners of the battery deck.

One Howitzer, placed aft.

Ten Maxim guns on battery deck.

Two Maxim guns in conning tower.

The guns were served in action by an inner protected lift, and a protected ladder led to the magazines.

The machinery, which was constructed by Messrs. John Stewart & Son, Limited, at the Blackwall Ironworks, London, was well protected, and consisted of one set for each vessel of horizontal direct acting compound surface condensing engines, indicating 400 horse power, the diameters of the cylinders being :—high pressure 18", and the low pressure 40", with a stroke of the piston of 48", working the paddle wheel at the stern of the vessel ; also two steel loco-marine boilers, working at a pressure of 150 lbs. per square inch. The boilers were placed forward and the engines aft, and a speaking tube connected same for the conveyance of messages, &c. The vessels were fitted with the electric light and steam capstans.

Messrs. John Stewart & Son, Limited, sent out three engineers to supervise the re-erection at Kosheh on the Nile, but unfortunately the chief one, who had superintended the building at the works, Mr. F. W. L. Shaw, died at Baliana from the effects of a case of machinery falling on him when superintending the transportation there. Another one, Mr. M. Nicholson of Newcastle-on-Tyne, died from cholera at Wady Halfa, but the third one, Mr. McDonald, is still out there doing good service.

The names of the three vessels are as follows :—

El Zaffir (i.e. *Victorious*).
En Nazer (i.e. *Majestic*).
El Fateh (i.e. *Conqueror*).

The vessels and the machinery were constructed and erected in the works, marked, numbered, then taken to pieces, and shipped

on board various steamers in London, delivered at Alexandria and Port Said, conveyed up the Nile by water and train, and finally put together at Kosheh, after being transhipped seven times and travelling over 4,000 miles without the loss of a single important piece. Captain the Hon. Stanley Colville, R.N., C.B. (then Commander Colville), arranged for the Nile conveyance with Captain Gordon, now Major Gordon.

APPENDIX V.

THE HEALTH OF THE BRITISH TROOPS ENGAGED IN THE EXPEDITION.

CONSIDERING the trying season of the year in which the Expedition took place, the health of the British contingent engaged in it was excellent, and reflects great credit on Surgeon-Major (now Surgeon-Lieutenant Colonel) Sloggett, and his colleagues of the British Medical Department on the Upper Nile, who had charge of the North Stafford Regiment during the campaign. Till the end of June there was very little sickness, but during July, August, and September, the long-continued heat and other unfavourable conditions began to tell, and there were a good many cases of enteric fever; but even so, if it had not been for the unfortunate outbreak of cholera, which caused twenty-one deaths, the death-rate compared with former campaigns would have been extraordinarily low. The following are the precise statistics of the deaths in the North Stafford Regiment from the date of its departure from Cairo for Halfa, March 22nd, to the day of its arrival back at Cairo, October 9th.

Total number of deaths		47
From cholera	21	
Enteric fever	20	
Dysentery	1	
Pneumonia	1	
Heat apoplexy at action of Hafir ...	1	
Accidentally drowned in Nile	3	
	47	

The Gresham Press.
UNWIN BROTHERS,
WOKING AND LONDON.

SOME RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ISSUED BY

A. D. INNES & Co.

HISTORICAL AND MILITARY WORKS.

By Dr. WILHELM BUSCH, Professor at the University of Freiburg, in Baden.

ENGLAND UNDER THE TUDORS.

Vol. I. Henry VII. (1485—1509). Translated from the German by Miss ALICE M. TODD and the Rev. A. H. JOHNSON, sometime Fellow of All Souls' College, Oxford, under the supervision of, and with an Introduction by, Mr. JAMES GAIRDNER, Editor of the "Paston Letters." Demy 8vo, cloth, 16s. net.

"Bids fair to be by far the most important contribution to English history that has appeared of late years. The style of the book is as attractive as its substance is weighty." —*Morning Post.*

By Lieut.-General J. J. McLEOD INNES, V.C.

THE SEPOY REVOLT.

A Critical Narrative, covering the whole field of the Indian Mutiny, its causes and course, till the final suppression. With numerous Maps and Plans. Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

By General Sir CHARLES GOUGH, V.C., G.C.B., and ARTHUR D. INNES.

THE SIHKS AND THE SIHK WARS.

With 12 Maps and Plans. Demy 8vo, 16s.

By Lieutenant-Colonel ROSS-OF-BLADENSBURG, C.B., late Coldstream Guards.

Including an Account of the Political Events and Campaigns with which the Regiment has been associated.

A HISTORY OF THE COLDSTREAM GUARDS from 1815 to 1885.

With numerous Coloured Plates, Drawings, and Maps, by Lieutenant NEVILE R. WILKINSON. Crown 4to, blue cloth, gilt top, 2 guineas net.

By ARTHUR D. INNES, Author of "Seers and Singers," etc.

A Study of British Expansion and Naval Supremacy.

BRITAIN AND HER RIVALS. 1713—1789.

With numerous Plans, Maps, etc. Large crown, buckram, 7s. 6d.

The *Pall Mall Gazette*, in a review headed "History as it should be Written," says: "The book is indeed just what was most wanted: . . . a great deal more than a popular work in the usual sense of the term, seeing that it is accurate and thoughtful, besides being eminently readable."

By C. R. B. BARRETT.

Compiled from a thorough examination of the authorities and personal inspection of the ground.

BATTLES AND BATTLEFIELDS IN ENGLAND.

With an Introduction by H. D. TRAILL, profusely Illustrated by the Author. Super royal 8vo, red buckram, gilt top, 18s.

By J. S. RISLEY, M.A., B.C.L.

THE LAW OF WAR.

A Study of the Legal Obligations and Conditions applying to Belligerents or Neutrals in times of War. Demy 8vo, cloth, 12s.

New and Revised Edition.

By Lieutenant-General McLEOD INNES, R.E., V.C.

A critical Narrative of the Causes and Course of the Mutiny, with special details as to Lucknow and Oude, from personal knowledge.

LUCKNOW AND OUDE IN THE MUTINY.

A Narrative and a Study. With numerous Maps, Plans, etc., and an Index. Demy 8vo, cloth, 12s. net.

"A most valuable contribution to the history of the great crisis."—*Times.*

"Recent literature concerning the Indian Mutiny has brought us nothing so valuable. . . . His knowledge of India and her people is accurate and profound. . . . The facts are marshalled with consummate skill. In this book General Innes has rendered invaluable service in regard to the military history of the Mutiny and of the Indian Empire."—*Army and Navy Gazette.*

By Rev. W. F. COBB, D.D.

ORIGINES JUDAICÆ.

An Inquiry into Heathen Faiths as Affecting the Birth and Growth o. Judaism. Demy 8vo, cloth, 12s.

"We cannot help feeling very grateful to our author. He has obtained a competent knowledge of what recent investigation has revealed in Egyptology and Assyriology, and he has brought his stores of knowledge to interpret the Old Testament religion and history, and by his conception of 'Menotheism,' if not by the coining of the word, he has brought a welcome illumination to the obscure subject of the primitive Hebrew religion."—*Daily Chronicle.*

NEW AND RECENT WORKS OF TRAVEL, ETC.

By GWENDOLEN TRENCH GASCOIGNE.

An Account of a Tour through Burma.

AMONG PAGODAS AND FAIR LADIES.

With numerous Illustrations from Photographs. Medium 8vo, buckram, 12s.

"Whoever wants to tread in imagination 'the road to Mandalay,' and visit that 'cleaner, greener land' of which Mr. Kipling sings so alluringly, could not do better than take the authoress of this book for his guide."—*Glasgow Herald.*

By G. F. SCOTT ELLIOT, F.L.S., F.R.G.S.

An Account of a Journey to the Mountains of the Moon and Tanganyika.

A NATURALIST IN MID AFRICA.

With numerous Illustrations from Photographs and Sketches by the Author, and three Coloured Maps. Medium 8vo, buckram, 16s.

"Mr. Scott Elliot is a good geographer, and a first-rate naturalist, and his book is a worthy addition to the library which has already been written on East Africa."—*Times.*

"All will find in this volume information for which they should be grateful. . . . We have rarely seen a travel-book of more general interest and more practical value."—*Yorkshire Post.*

OCT 1 1897
OCT 4 1897
NOV 18 1897
NOV 22 1897
DEC 2 1897
HALL USE
NOV - 6 '51 H