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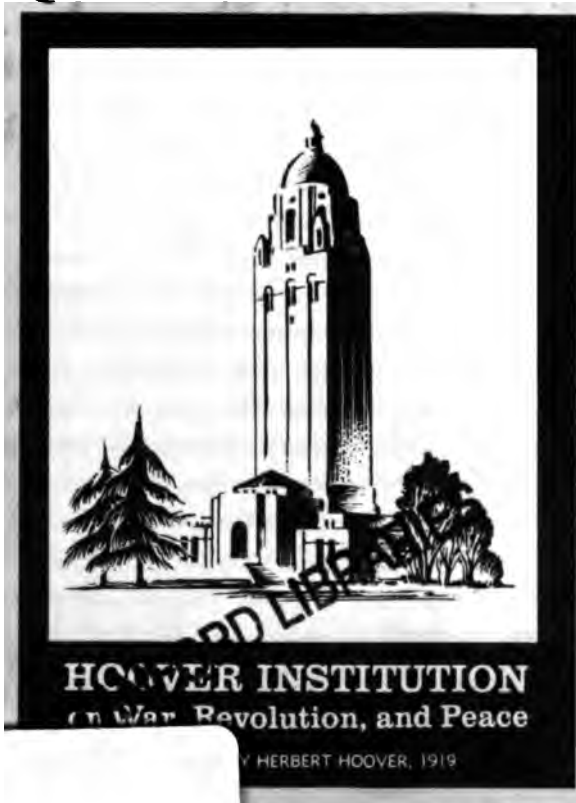
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SUDAN CAMPAIGN

by 'An Officer'



*My mother
Highland St. Ark.*



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SUDAN CAMPAIGN

1896—1899

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SUDAN CAMPAIGN

1896—1899

By 'AN OFFICER'

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS, MAPS, PLANS, ETC.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

	PAGE
Abyssinians defeat Italians at Adua—Dongola Expedition ordered—Situation on the Frontier—Previous events—Assault on Murat Wells—Wad Nejumi's Invasion—Dervish Raids—Fight at Sarras—Actions at Gemaizeh, Tokar, and Handoub .	1

CHAPTER II

Sirdar's Plan for Dongola Expedition—Advance to Akasheh—Cavalry and Camel Corps Work—Roddy Owen's birthday—Railway construction—Lieutenant Girouard, R.E.—The Transport Corps—Fighting near Suakim—Captain Fenwick's gallantry—Cavalry fight near Akasheh—Abortive Raid on Railway	10
--	----

CHAPTER III

Progress of the Railway—North Staffordshire Regiment—Concentration at Akasheh—Night march on Ferket—Battle of Ferket—Occupation of Suarda—Sirdar's Plans—Marching of 7th Battalion—Line of communications—Supply arrangements—Cholera—Railway reaches Kosheh—Pulling boats up Cataracts—Building new Gunboats—Trying desert march to Absarrat	27
---	----

CHAPTER IV

	PAGE
Railway broken by Floods—Sirdar's energy—Repairing Railway—More Floods and Accidents—Cylinder of new Gunboat bursts	49

CHAPTER V

Leaving Kosheh for Dongola—Strength of the Force—Cavalry reconnaissance—Wreck of a Gunboat—Action at Hafir—Crossing the river—Gunboats at Dongola—March on Dongola—Entry into Dongola—Occupation of Debbeh, Korti, and Merowi—Sirdar's Plans	56
--	----

CHAPTER VI

Reaction—Camel Corps in the Bayuda Desert—Quiet progress—Sirdar's plan—Desert Railway, Halfa to Abu Hamed—Reconnaissance of Desert—Camel riding	72
---	----

CHAPTER VII

Completion of Halfa-Kerma Railway—Cavalry Skirmish at Essalamat—Dervishes under Mahmud massacre Jaalin and occupy Metemmeh—Progress of Railway—Dervishes at Abu Hamed reconnoitred—Sirdar's Plan—General Hunter's Column starts for Abu Hamed—Capture of Abu Hamed	98
--	----

CHAPTER VIII

Critical position—Supply difficulties—Disaster to Camel Convoy—Gunboats in the Cataracts—Dervishes evacuate Berber—General Hunter reconnoitres Berber—Khalifa's Plans—Difficult line of communications—We occupy Berber—Desert Railway reaches Abu Hamed—Railway construction	112
---	-----

CONTENTS

vii

CHAPTER IX

	PAGE
Bombardment of Metemmeh—Dervish raids—Suakim-Berber route open—Progress of Telegraph—Italians hand over Kassala to the Egyptians	128

CHAPTER X

Critical situation—Rumours of a Dervish advance—Sirdar alters his dispositions—English Brigade to the front—Mahmud advances—Sirdar concentrates—Cavalry reconnaissance—Mahmud entrenches himself on the Atbara	134
--	-----

CHAPTER XI

Sirdar destroys Shendi—Reason for attack—General Hunter reconnoitres—Battle of Atbara	146
---	-----

CHAPTER XII

Altered situation after Battle of Atbara—Preparations for the final advance—Railway reaches Abadieh—New Gunboats erected—Railway construction—All Steamers and Boats collected at Atbara	162
--	-----

CHAPTER XIII

British Reinforcements—Advance to Wad Hamed commences—Whole Force concentrated at Wad Hamed—The Shabluka Pass—Detail of the Force—On the March	173
--	-----

CHAPTER XIV

Arrival at Kerreri Hill and Village Egaiga—Omdurman sighted—Gunboats and Howitzers bombard Omdurman—Advance of Dervishes—Awaiting a night attack—Dervishes	
--	--

	PAGE
attack in the morning—Manœuvring of Egyptian Cavalry— Camel Corps in danger—Dervishes driven off with great loss—We advance on Omdurman in echelon—21st Lancers charge—MacDonald's Brigade attacked by Khalifa's force— Dispositions to relieve MacDonald—MacDonald hotly engaged —Ali Wad Helu's force attacks rear of MacDonald's Brigade —Dervishes divided and surrounded—Rout of Dervishes— Pursuit—Entry into Omdurman—Surrender of its Garrison— Searching for Khalifa—Neufeld—The casualties on both sides	185

CHAPTER XV

Interior of Omdurman—The Dervish wounded—The Mahdi's Tomb—Dervish Steamer surrenders—White men at Fashoda—Flotilla leaves for Fashoda—Major Marchand at Fashoda—British troops return to Cairo	225
---	-----

CHAPTER XVI

The Eastern Sudan—Capture of Gedaref—Critical situation at Gedaref—Reinforcements sent—Ahmed Fedil attempts to cross Blue Nile at Roseires—Defeated with great loss by Colonel Lewis—Expedition against Khalifa unsuccessful— Conclusion	234
--	-----

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
Dervishes captured at Ferket	37
Artillery	39
<i>El Tahri</i> , Gordon's steamer	65
Sakiyeh at Dongola. Dervish prisoners alongside	69
Camel corps	79
Camel corps	81
Desert travelling, old style and new	83
Starting on a long desert ride	87
Arab desert police, Suakim	89
Spiking parties in front of train	117
Plate-laying party returning to camp after work	121
English troops arriving at Halfa	135
Sirdar's camp, Rasel Hudi on Atbara	142
Egyptian artillery	156
Sirdar inspecting guard of honour on his return to Halfa after battle of Atbara	159
Hut in Atbara fort	166
The gunboat in sections loaded on to train to go across to Abadiéh	167
Halfa workshops	170
<i>The Melik</i> with troops steaming up to Khartum	176
Carriage used by Gordon. Neufeld in background	222
<i>The Bordein</i> , Gordon's steamer captured at Khartum	232

M A P S

	PAGE
I. Showing situation at commencement of Campaign	
<i>To face page</i>	2
II. Showing positions of Dervish and Egyptian forces and rail-head just before attack on Ferket	29
III. Showing line of communications, Cairo to Suarda	41
IV. Illustrating advance on Dongola	<i>To face page</i> 56
V. Showing what was known of Nubian Desert when Sirdar decided to make Railway across it	<i>To face page</i> 77
VI. Showing what became known of Desert from reconnaissances	
<i>To face page</i>	79
VII. Showing situation just before advance on Abu Hamed	101
VIII. Line of communications, Cairo to Berber, when Berber was first occupied	<i>To face page</i> 119
IX. Mahmud's advance to the Atbara and the Sirdar's counter-moves	<i>To face page</i> 141
X. Showing situation just before Battle of Atbara	149
XI. Showing altered situation after Battle of Atbara	165
XII. Line of communications for Khartum Expedition	
<i>To face page</i>	174
XIII. Showing advance from river Atbara to Omdurman	183
XIV. The Sudan	<i>To face page</i> 260

DIAGRAMS

	PAGE
I. Advance on Ferket	31
II. Attack on Ferket	35
III. Action at Hafir	59
IV. Capture of Dongola	67
V. Attack on Abu Hamed	107
VI. Battle of Atbara	153
VII. Showing position on afternoon of 1st September	189
VIII. Battle of Omdurman	193
IX. Showing situation when Dervish first attack had been driven off, and Sirdar decided to move on Omdurman	199
X. Showing situation when MacDonald's Brigade was attacked by Khalifa	203
XI. Showing deployment of Col. MacDonald's Brigade	207
XII. Showing Lewis's Brigade coming into action against Khalifa's flank	209
XIII. Showing change of front of MacDonald's Brigade	211
XIV. Showing general advance of Anglo-Egyptians and rout of Dervishes	214
XV. Omdurman	221
Capture of Gedaref	245

NOTE.—The scales of the Diagrams and Maps are different to the ones ordinarily used, owing to the original drawings having to be reduced to fit the size of the book.

SUDAN CAMPAIGN

1896—1899

CHAPTER I

ON the 8th March, 1896, the Abyssinians defeated the Italians at the battle of Adua. This encouraged the Dervishes to attack the Italians at Kassala, where, after some severe fighting, the Italians were victorious.

Having, however, retreated from Abyssinian territory, the Italians considered that Kassala was of no further use to them, and not worth the expense and trouble of garrisoning. They therefore decided to evacuate it.

This decision having been made, it now became necessary for her Majesty's Government to decide whether they intended ever to reconquer the Sudan. If so, it was most undesirable that the important strategic point Kassala should fall into the hands of the Dervishes. The importance of Kassala will become evident when the tale of the operations is unfolded.

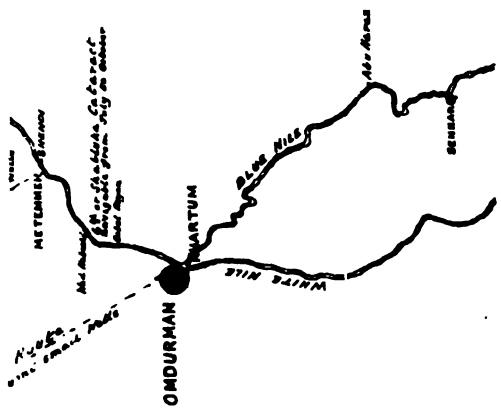
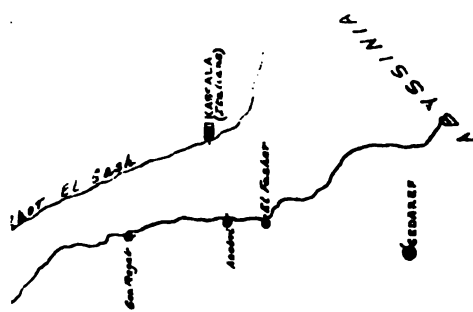
Her Majesty's Government, having decided to attempt the reconquest of the Sudan, prevailed upon the Italians to retain Kassala until we were in a position to take it over. Since the Italians wished to hand the place over as

soon as possible, the commencement of the reconquest of the Sudan was ordered forthwith.

It will be as well to give a brief summary of the events of the previous few years, and explain the relative positions of the Dervish and Egyptian forces.

Since 1886 the frontier station of the Egyptian army on the Nile had been at Wady Halfa, with later an advance post at Sarras, thirty-three miles further south and connected by rail with Halfa. Wady Halfa is at the northern end of the Second Cataract, which for over one hundred miles impedes communication on the river; consequently, with an advance post at Sarras it was difficult for the Dervishes to advance in any numbers, whereas our water communication was open right down to Shellal.

In the Nubian Desert on the east there was a caravan route from Abu Hamed to Korosko, but water could only be obtained at one place, Murat Wells, which were fortified and held by the friendly Ababdeh Arabs and a company of Egyptian troops. Further still to the east is a caravan route connecting Berber and Assouan, with wells every day's journey. These wells also were held by friendly Arabs, and would not supply a large force. These two caravan routes were the only lines on which the Dervish could have advanced through the Nubian Desert, while in the Libyan Desert on the west their only line of advance was the Arbain or forty days' route between Assiout in Lower Egypt, and Darfur. This route we had also blocked by holding the oasis of Sheb. On several occasions the Dervishes had tried either determined advances or else raids on these lines. At



one time they attempted to capture Murat Wells by a *coup-de-main*. Riding from Abu Hamed, they went a distance of about one hundred and thirty miles across the desert to Gebel Raffat, a hill about twenty miles to the west of Murat Wells, where some rain-water had collected. Murat Wells fort at this time had no regular troops in its garrison. Having watered and rested at Raffat, the Dervishes the next day stole up under cover of the hills to within a few hundred yards of the fort, and then attempted to rush the surprised garrison, several of whom were outside looking after their flocks. The Ababdeh though surprised rose to the occasion. The gate of the fort was slammed just as the leading Dervishes reached it, and after some hand-to-hand fighting, and a good expenditure of ammunition, the Dervishes retired to the opposite hills, from which they kept up a fusillade which prevented any one going to the wells for water all through that day and the following night. Again at sunrise the Dervishes attempted an assault, but being again driven off with severe loss the remnant returned to Abu Hamed.

Saleh Bey, the gallant sheikh of the Ababdehs, who had conducted the defence, was unfortunately mortally wounded. After this the Murat garrison was strengthened by some Egyptian infantry. The English officer in charge of the reinforcement found the place in a very unsanitary condition, owing to the fact that the Ababdeh would not bury the dead Dervishes.

Along the Nile Wad Nejumi had made a determined invasion in 1889, and it was on this occasion that the hardest fight of these days took place. It arose almost

unexpectedly from a reconnaissance which the Egyptian forces were making when they encountered Wad Nejumi's advancing forces at Argin. The Dervishes had been making a long desert march in order the better to conceal their whereabouts, and had come down to the river at Argin. The Egyptian force attempted to drive them thirsty into the desert again. The Dervish fights well at all times, but when he is fighting for water as well as for love of fighting he is a rough customer to tackle, and for a long time it was a hand-to-hand ding-dong business. To take one instance—Captain Fenwick in command of half a battalion found himself driven back and back by superior numbers, until at last his rear rank were standing in the river, and it would have gone hard with him had not Colonel (now General) Hunter reinforced him in the nick of time. It was this fight at Argin which broke the spirit of Nejumi's followers, and facilitated their final overthrow at Toski a few days later. A typical instance occurred at this time of the hard luck which always attends the giving of medals. Captains Nason and Fenwick, wounded at Argin, were sent down to the Cairo Hospital, so that on the day on which Toski was fought they were a few miles north of the medal zone. As English troops were present at Toski, the blue and white medal ribbon was given as well as the Khedive's star; but as no English troops were present at Argin, only the Khedive's star was given to the two above-mentioned wounded officers.

After Wad Nejumi's invasion had failed the Dervishes confined themselves to raiding. In this they were occasionally successful. A small party would start

from the Dervish outpost at Akasheh, and taking a plentiful supply of water-skins would drop them out in the desert about twenty-five miles from Halfa; they would then swoop down on some village behind Halfa, murdering man, woman, and child, carry off whatever they could find, and then evade the pursuit of the Halfa garrison by going straight into the desert to the spot where they had dropped their water-skins; having watered their horses they would be off again, while their pursuers, having no water, would be unable to follow. So bold did they get, that on one occasion they descended on the officers playing polo outside Halfa, causing them to relinquish the game and bolt for the Halfa gate. On another occasion, when General Knowles was reviewing the Halfa garrison, the parade was broken up quickly to allow some of the troops to go in pursuit of raiding Dervishes. Only a few months before the Dongola Expedition, the raiders had galloped through Tewfikieh within a mile of Halfa, slashing at the unarmed and inoffensive inhabitants, several of whom were drowned in attempting to save themselves by the river. Again, another time they captured our outpost fort at Khor Moussa three miles south of Halfa, but held it only for a few hours, as it was promptly re-captured by the 13th Battalion under Captain Machell. It was in order to cut off the retreat of the raiders that we established an advance post at Sarras, thirty-three miles south of Halfa. Before we occupied this the Dervishes had been wont to use it as a base for raiding, but when occupied by us it enabled the garrison there to cut off the retreat of the raiders, and it proved an excellent measure. The

Dervishes only raided where it was fairly safe. They never attacked troops, only defenceless villages, and they had as much objection as any one else to finding their line of retreat cut.

The importance which they attached to Sarras was evident from the way in which they fought for it. In fact, next to Argin, it was the stiffest fight of those days. The Dervishes got right into the centre of our infantry line, and hand-to-hand fighting ensued, in which at first the Dervishes slowly bore back the Egyptian troops.

Major Rundle, commanding the artillery in the centre of our position, saw a confused mass of friends and enemies gradually coming on to his guns. If the guns were overwhelmed before the supports came up, the centre of the position would have been lost and a rout probable. He therefore loaded up his guns with case, and delayed as long as possible before firing into friends and foes alike. Fortunately the tide of victory turned, and gradually every Dervish who had penetrated our firing line was killed.

A similar state of things existed at Suakim. The tribes in the neighbourhood, stirred up by Osman Digna, constantly attempted to worry the garrison. In fact, in 1888 they practically besieged the place, but the action of Gemaizeh turned them out of their trenches, and caused a great number of the tribes, notably the powerful Hadendowa, to assume a neutral attitude; a severe blow was dealt to the Dervishes in this district when their base at Tokar was captured in 1893, and after this the district became comparatively safe, nearly all the tribes-

men refusing to respond to the calls of Osman Digna in his attempt to organize raids. That gentleman became notorious for his ability in planning raids in which he took care to look well after his own skin. He had always relays of horses ready, and after a raid would gallop for eighty miles without stopping. Tokar was a great loss to the Dervishes, as it was a fertile spot, which supplied them with plenty of food, and formed a base from which to raid. Here also they fought hard to retain their advantage, and very nearly caught our attacking force unprepared; but the steadiness of the Egyptian troops was all that could be desired, and though some Dervishes got right up to the square they got no further.

It was near Suakim that Osman Digna was nearly captured by Sir Herbert Kitchener, at that time Governor of Suakim. He received news that Osman Digna was comfortably established at Handoub, about fifteen miles distant. He asked for permission from Cairo to attack him. At this time the strictest instructions had been issued that no advance was to be made of even the smallest kind, and so Cairo forbade the use of the Suakim troops on this venture, but recommended that the friendly tribes should be incited to attack, while a few cavalry might be allowed to be in reserve to give the tribesmen confidence. On receipt of this Colonel Kitchener quickly collected a motley crowd of friendly Arabs, and at sunset paraded them to receive ammunition. Captain Hickman, while superintending the distribution of ammunition, noticed that several of the men belonging to the Sudanese regiments of the garrison had brought their arms, and dressed in *gallabeas* had

mixed themselves with the Arab levies. He reported this to Colonel Kitchener, and asked what he should do. "Oh, give them ammunition and say nothing," was the answer. With this scratch lot of scallywags and a few cavalry Colonel Kitchener and Captain Hickman started off at sunrise the next morning, and completely surprised Osman Digna and his men at prayers. Osman Digna as usual leaped on his horse and galloped away. His followers, thinking they were attacked by a large force, fled precipitately, many being shot down. But the friendly Arabs, instead of following up the Dervishes immediately, scattered among the huts looting the Dervish property. The Dervishes finding they were not followed stopped, and soon got over their alarm when they saw that they were in larger numbers than their attackers, and quickly grasped the opportunity afforded to attack the friendlies while scattered in search of loot. Charging back the Dervishes drove the friendlies out, and the only thing that saved disaster was the presence of the men from the Sudanese regiments. Colonel Kitchener and Captain Hickman collected these, and gradually the Arabs rallied on them; Captain Hickman then brought up the cavalry which had been waiting in support. The Dervishes had stopped, hesitating, and the moment for a charge appeared to be nearing when Colonel Kitchener was hit by a bullet. With difficulty he kept his saddle, and the friendlies seeing this ran, leaving the few Sudanese and cavalry to look after themselves. Colonel Kitchener was badly hit, but Captain Hickman kept things together. The cavalry threatened each flank of the Dervishes alternately, and the Sudanese retired steadily firing.

Thus the whole way back to Suakim did the Dervishes threaten to overwhelm them, but always hesitated before the determined front and the watchful cavalry.

Colonel Kitchener's wound was a curious one which puzzled the doctors. The bullet broke his jaw, and then went down his throat without doing further damage, but it fairly puzzled the doctors to find it, as Colonel Kitchener did not know till some time afterwards that he had swallowed it.

This brief and necessarily incomplete sketch of the fighting previous to 1896 will give some idea of the situation when the Government ordered an advance to Dongola. On every line of advance the Dervishes had tested our defence to their cost, and their raiding bases had been captured, with the result that the tribes on our side of the frontier felt secure from raids, and being confident in our power were either friendly or neutral.

CHAPTER II

It was therefore in March 1896 that her Majesty's Government decided to once more attempt the conquest of the Sudan. Doubtless there was considerable discussion over the oft-debated question of the route to be taken, whether by Suakim-Berber or Suakim-Kassala, or by direct advance up the Nile. A discussion of these routes does not come within the compass of this book, which aims simply at giving an account of the campaign as it occurred; wiser heads than mine have discussed before now the relative merits of the three routes.

Whatever the reasons adduced may have been, the fact remains that, whether right or wrong, it was decided as a first measure to reconquer Dongola, and that as the preliminary stages of the advance were not likely to meet with much opposition, the regenerated Egyptian army was to carry out the work as long as possible, and to be re-inforced if necessary by British troops.

A fortunate consequence of the decision to employ the Egyptian army only was that it caused the undertaking to be put in the hands of the man who proved himself to be wonderfully fitted for the task.

Colonel Sir Herbert Kitchener, K.C.M.G., Sirdar of

the Egyptian army, was called upon to forthwith arrange a scheme for, and carry out, the expedition to Dongola.

Let us examine the problem that presented itself to him. The main body of the Dervish garrison of the Dongola province was in Dongola itself, but there was a considerable number, variously estimated at from two thousand to three thousand, at Suarda (see Map I.), with advance posts at Ferket and Akasheh.

Evidently then the first thing was to defeat the force in the neighbourhood of Ferket and Suarda. This meant advancing one hundred miles from Sarras fighting a battle, and maintaining the force on the ground won. How was the force to be supplied on the march to the battle, and more especially after it? Behind them would be one hundred miles of continuous cataract, preventing the supplies being brought by river; to bring them by camel over one hundred miles of bad road through the burning desert, where not an ounce of food could be got, would mean a most stupendous number of camels for even a small force. A baggage camel will carry 300 lbs. twenty miles a day. He eats 10 lbs. of food a day. He occupies ten days in going one hundred miles and back, in which time he eats 100 lbs., so he only brings up 200 lbs. for the force. He must have rest every now and again, and he will die on the least provocation. To take a month's supply one hundred miles for ten thousand men, about fifteen thousand camels are required, and then when a further advance of two hundred miles is made to Dongola and Merowi, what is to be done then?

The Sirdar hit on exactly the right solution. He determined to take every advantage possible of the river, to carry supplies on it wherever it could be done, to supplement it with camel transport where it could not be done, *and to make a railway*. This meant gradual advance. At first, an advance to the furthest limit that alternate boat and camel service would supply. As the railway advanced, push on the boats and camels.

Let us examine the river. From Halfa to Ferket, a distance of about one hundred miles, the river at low Nile is impassable for boats; at high Nile boats can sail up parts of it, but must be pulled up most of the way. From Ferket to Kassinger, at highest Nile, boats can sail the whole way; at low Nile navigation is interrupted (see Map I.) at Suarda and between Kaibar and Hannek.

The Sirdar's plan, therefore, was to advance to Akasheh a small force, and entrench it there to cover the railway construction. This small force could be supplied by camel convoys, which halted every night at an entrenched post, and were convoyed by a guard. When the railway had proceeded as far as safety permitted, he would rapidly bring up his whole force and drive the Dervishes out of Ferket and Suarda. As they were just as much governed by questions of supply, they would then be unable to keep any permanent force north of Hannek, and he could safely continue the construction of his railway to Ferket, while in the meantime camels worked between rail-head and the force. When the railway reached Ferket he would bring up a big reserve of supplies, wait till high Nile, then put

it into boats which could sail right up to Dongola, Merowi, Kassinger, thus supplying the force.

To carry his force across the river, to tow barges on calm days, to scout up the river, to bombard river forts preliminary to a landing, to enfilade fortifications, to make life on the river-bank unbearable for the enemy, to do all these things he would have gunboats drawing two feet of water. When the river rose the gunboats lying at Halfa were to be pulled up the cataracts to Ferket, and three new ones should be taken in sections by rail to Ferket and launched. Thus he would have complete command of the river, and could supply a big force, which, when the time came, he would move swiftly to the destruction of the Dervishes.

It looks a simple plan, but it needed a man who knew the country and the enemy to make it, and a mistake in the scheme would be heavily paid for. Any one who has seen the inhospitable, barren, grilling Batn el Haggar, will understand what a mistake in the supply of a force would mean. It stopped the Romans, Greeks, and Persians. Simple as the plan looks, it was not so simple to execute, but luckily Sir Herbert Kitchener was as capable to execute as he was to plan.

In the previous chapter I have shown how the Egyptian army had for the past ten years been constantly sparring with the Dervishes. This living in a continual state of minor warfare had been a most excellent training for our officers, and there were few details connected with moving troops about the barren country or the tactics of the Dervishes which were not known to Kitchener, Hunter, Rundle, MacDonald,

Maxwell, Lewis, and at least a score more who had spent the previous twelve years on the frontier. So the Sirdar had under him a set of officers fully trained to carry out the scheme he had arranged with the least friction or waste of time and labour.

It was, I think, on the 21st March that the Sirdar ordered Colonel Hunter to advance from Halfa with the force there and occupy Akasheh, which was about sixteen miles north of Ferket. Colonel Hunter lost no time in carrying out these instructions. He met with no opposition, only a few Dervishes being seen. Colonel Hunter entrenched a brigade, some guns, and cavalry at Akasheh, and established posts at Wady Atira and Ambigol, under protection of which the camel convoys halted at night, and continued their march by day, escorted by troops. A telegraph-line was laid by Lieutenant Manifold, R.E., from Halfa to Akasheh, arriving at that place almost as soon as the troops. There were no spare instruments at Halfa, so it was worked with ones that were improvised by Lieutenant Manifold out of old electric bells, etc., until proper instruments from Cairo arrived. It was considered certain that the Dervishes would attack the convoys, and if they had they certainly would have done considerable damage. There was no road for the convoys. They had to clamber in long straggling line up and down steep rocky hills, and it would have been quite possible for the Dervishes to cut up one end or other of the convoys before the escort could interfere. The escort could not be scattered too much or they would be beaten in detail, so that there were some splendid

opportunities for the Dervishes, but they never took them. No doubt they found it hard to get unobserved through our cavalry and camel screen. Daily the cavalry used to scout from Akasheh towards Ferket, and were in constant touch with the Dervish cavalry scouts. A cavalry officer told me he never had such a good time as during this outpost duty. He said it was like going out hunting every day, one never knew what would turn up. One day they would be trying to outride and capture a weaker patrol, the next they would be dodging and watching a stronger one.

Major Broadwood, second in command of the cavalry, collected a lot of useful information scouting by himself. On one occasion he climbed to the top of Ferket hill, and looked down into Ferket, about one mile off, where the whole Dervish force was holding a prayer parade in full dress. Having studied them and made a good guess at their numbers, Major Broadwood retired, and the next Friday rode up the west bank of the river, and from a hill on that side again watched the Dervish church parade, and found they had been slightly reinforced since the previous week. The Alighat Arabs were also utilized to prevent the Dervishes skirting right round Akasheh and cutting in behind. Ambigol Wells in the desert, about six miles from the river, and Moghrat Wells, also about six miles from the river, were the only points where water could be got in the desert. These were fortified and held by detachments. The Alighat Arabs then rode daily along the line Akasheh-Ambigol Wells, Moghrat Wells. They were placed under the supervision of Major Roddy Owen, to whom

they soon became devoted. In order to ensure that they did their daily ride, he made them bring written messages from one post to another, stating the time and place they last left. Roddy Owen was determined if possible to have a fight on his birthday. He said he had had a fight on two previous birthdays, and he meant to again if it could be done. When the day came round the cavalry were out scouting as usual, and a battalion of infantry was in support, so Roddy Owen went ahead with his friendly Arabs, and showing himself at Ferket, tried to draw the Dervishes on to the cavalry and infantry behind. In this he was unsuccessful, so he did not fight that birthday.

Under cover of the dispositions just described, the railway began to be made. As already stated, a railway existed from Halfa to Sarras (thirty-three miles). It had been constructed by order of Ismail in the time of Gordon, and had been carried on a further distance of fifty-five miles to Akasheh in the Nile Expedition of 1884. This last fifty-five miles had been torn up by the Dervishes when we retreated. The sleepers had been burnt, the fish-plates, bolts, etc., made into spears; the rails, being too heavy to carry away, were tossed down the embankment, a few of them badly bent and twisted, but the majority unharmed. The formation level remained practically complete, except in a few places where floods and sandstorms had made small breaches.

Two engines and a few trucks only were running between Halfa and Sarras. The remaining engines which had been used in the 1884 expedition were either

on the scrap-heap as worn out, or had been lying idle, some of their parts being taken to repair the two engines that were running. There were small workshops at Halfa, with native workmen under one or two European superintendents.

It was necessary, therefore, to utilize the railway material on the spot at once, and to supplement it as quickly as possible with the many things that it wanted. Measures were taken to procure engines, trucks, sleepers, rails, machinery for shops, fitters and workmen, foremen, platelayers, and all the various accessories of a railway. The gauge of the existing thirty-three miles was three feet six inches, so this determined the gauge of the railway—in many ways a convenient one, but inconvenient for a military railway, because, since the railway at the Cape is the only other one in the world, I believe, of the same gauge, there is no ready-made supply of locomotives and rolling stock. Everything had to be made to order, shipped to Alexandria, and then taken a thousand miles up river, the greater part of the way by sailing-boats, with three transshipments between Alexandria and Halfa. Naturally this took time. In fact, the new engines only came into use during the last month of the expedition, in September, and then they were very disappointing. The new trucks arrived quicker, but in the meantime all the old engines and rolling stock long since condemned were patched up and made to struggle on to the imminent danger of all concerned. A railway battalion was formed by enlisting under the conscription act several hundred of the fellaheen, who had no more idea how to

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lay a railway than to fly. To superintend them several so-called native platelayers were sent up from Lower Egypt. Naturally they proved, with few exceptions, to be all the useless scoundrels discharged from the Lower Egypt railways; the same with the engine-drivers, they were nearly all native stokers, with the most limited knowledge of how to drive or look after an engine, and with the most reckless disregard of consequences. When one puts an ignorant but reckless native engine-driver on a patched-up, condemned locomotive with no brakes, to drive a train of worn-out trucks along a track laid by men who have never seen a rail and don't understand a straight line, or the necessity for exactitude; and when this track climbs up and down and in and out among switchback gradients and sharp corners, then you get all the elements required to produce the most exciting and exhilarating railway travelling.

To lick this mob into shape, to teach them to lay a proper track and to lay it fast, to make good the accidents caused by the sporting native engine-drivers, to put order and organization into the railway, the Sirdar got five Royal Engineer subalterns, and the one he put in charge of the whole happened to be, with the Sirdar's usual luck, the very man for the post. Lieutenant Girouard, R.E., knew exactly what was wanted, and had the head, the energy, and the pluck to do it. He was here, there, and everywhere, instructing, swearing, shoving things along, gradually getting organization and system to take the place of chaos, and under his able guidance every one became slowly, but noticeably,

more proficient at the work ; but it was real hard work for him and the officers and men under him. As bad luck would have it, the summer of 1896 was the hottest known for years, and the Batn el Haggar desert, through which the operations were being conducted, is quite the hottest part of the Sudan. The thermometer over and over again rose to 116° in the shade, often to 120° , and once or twice to 127° and 129° . In this weather the expeditionary force had to march or sit grilling in tents, or sometimes without shelter ; to pull boats day after day up the cataract ; and to work from sunrise to sunset, and often through the night, making a railway.

While the railway is hammering steadily forward, we will turn to the organization of the transport. As soon as the campaign began, veterinary officers were sent to the camel districts to buy camels. The natives soon heard that camels were wanted ; it was a bad time of year to buy, because camels were in great requisition to carry the crops to the railways, but still sufficient were produced, and all day long veterinary officers were examining and passing camels. They were then marched up to Wady Halfa. The *personnel* of the transport corps was, like the railway battalion, raised by using the conscription act to enlist the required number of fellaheen. Now, strange as it may seem, it is nevertheless a fact, that though the Egyptian often depends entirely upon camels to carry his farm produce to market, and although he uses and works with camels from his babyhood, yet he is absolutely ignorant of how to look after and work a camel so as to get the most

work out of him. I have seen an Egyptian transport man detected by the transport officer carrying all his stable paraphernalia and worldly treasures *inside the panel of the camel saddle, having removed some of the stuffing* to make room for a bottle, a knife, a bit of biscuit, and goodness knows what else, and then he positively could not understand for a long time why it is calculated to give a camel a sore back.

He also is under the impression that a camel will carry any amount, and when he has loaded him until even he thinks the weight is enough, then he does not think he is adding to its weight by putting his fat self on the top of all, thus saving the trouble of walking.

Another objection to the raw, untutored Egyptian peasant as a transport soldier is, that he positively does not know what you are talking about when you tell him he must do as he is told, and that punctuality is necessary. He is quite ready to do as he is told and to be punctual if only you will explain what these things mean. It is something he has not heard of before.

To illustrate his absolute ignorance of discipline I will relate the following true story. When the new camels arrived at Halfa, the Sirdar said he would inspect them. He stood under a tree, and the camels were told to file past him. Just as the leading man got opposite the Sirdar with his camel he stopped, thereby blocking the whole string of camels behind, and proceeded leisurely to light a cigarette, or rather I should say he attempted to do so, but was made to move on by the transport officer in a forcible manner which quite astonished him,

and I don't suppose to this day he can understand why he wasn't allowed to light that cigarette.

I have, I fear, enumerated first all the bad points of the raw Egyptian as a transport man, not because he has no good ones, but in order to show the difficulties the transport officers had to contend with.

In fairness to the Egyptian I must add that, when trained he makes the most excellent transport man. He is capable of being taught and disciplined, and when this is done he follows out his instructions most carefully, and takes the keenest interest in his camel's welfare; also it is unnecessary to teach him to load quickly and to make the load balance. This he knows better than any one, but he has to be shown how to put the load in the most convenient place for the camel. Last, but not least, he has wonderful powers of endurance. Hour after hour he can tramp steadily on, often eating only biscuit; two or three hours' sleep and on he goes again through the hottest day, but you must give him water. Food he can do without, but he wants plenty of water, more than an Englishman.

The Sirdar's knowledge of the men of the country enabled him to select exactly the right ones to hustle and train the mob into a first-class transport corps, although there was no time for quiet instruction. The transport had to come into existence at once, and work at breaking strain, so the officers had to be up and about during the short rests, and on the march teaching and bustling the raw recruits into their work.

Two of the English officers were lent from the police force, so they knew the language and the characteristics

of the men they had to deal with thoroughly. A third officer had won his commission from the ranks fighting on the frontier, and had years of experience. Major Kitchener, brother of the Sirdar, was put in charge of the whole to organize and direct. Nothing is more tiring than marching with a convoy of camels whose pace is only two and a half miles an hour. An hour before sunrise they would be off, between twelve and three a halt would be made, when camels and saddles had to be inspected, and when that was done the only shade to be got was by stretching a blanket from one rock to another; off again at three and right on till ten, eleven, or twelve, report arrival, find what loads are to be taken on the morrow, arrange them for loading, see the men feed the camels,—of course they aren't doing so,—two or three hours for sleep, and off again.

By this means the pile of supplies at Akasheh was daily getting higher. When the railway reached Moghrat Wells, a few trains of supplies were run there; while the camels were taking that away the railway pushed on.

In the meantime things were not quite quiet at Suakim. In the middle of April Osman Digna turned up in his old haunts between Tokar and Suakim. The friendly tribes tried to resist him, and called on the Government for support. Colonel Lloyd reported that there seemed a chance of catching Osman Digna, so was given permission to try. The scheme was that the 10th Battalion at Tokar was to unite with the Suakim force, and then they would surround and defeat Osman Digna.

The Suakim force was preceded by some reconnoitring

cavalry under Captain Fenwick, who had orders not to engage the Dervishes, but if possible to get through to Major Sydney, commanding the 10th Battalion (Sudanese), and so keep up communication till the junction was effected.

Acting under these orders, Captain Fenwick was proceeding through the thick bush, when his patrols came back to say they had stumbled right into the Dervishes. A retirement at the trot was ordered; hardly had the word been given than the Dervishes appeared and began to gain. Captain Fenwick tried to call a halt to face about, but so thick was the bush that his men were scattered, and few heard the order. Captain Fenwick pulled up, jumped off, took a carbine from a fallen trooper, shouted to another who galloped past him to pass the word to rally round him, and then, standing alone, proceeded to fire at the on-coming Dervishes. The trooper who had been told to pass the word to halt and rally managed to do so, and gradually they grouped round Captain Fenwick, coming in by ones and twos from the bush. Captain Fenwick dismounted them all, and firing volleys they fought their way to a small eminence in open ground; on this they lay down. The Dervishes, shouting and yelling to each other to assemble, every moment increased in numbers. Captain Fenwick knew he must husband his ammunition, so only allowed one or two picked shots to fire, while he himself took a carbine, and whenever a Dervish showed himself he fired. When a number of them tried to charge a steady volley rang out. Captain Fenwick did not expect to escape, it only required one

rush of the Dervishes and they would be annihilated ; but fortunately the Dervishes were not Osman Digna's picked fighting men, they were only his scallywags, and the determined front checked them. A few would come on and be bowled over, but no organized rush was made.

Towards dawn some steady volleys rang out not far off. Another body of Dervishes had found the 10th Battalion zeribahed for the night and had attacked them, but the Dervishes round Captain Fenwick, thinking the 10th Battalion were advancing to his relief, drew off, and early in the morning another force hastily sent on by Colonel Lloyd relieved Captain Fenwick, who had fired one hundred and fifty rounds himself, and very few of them wasted. The force followed up the Dervishes, but they would not await an attack, and left the district altogether.

In May the Sirdar, finding the time was approaching when he could advance, ordered the Egyptian troops at Suakim to come to Halfa, their place at Suakim and Tokar being taken by Indian troops.

The Suakim garrison proceeded by steamer to Kosseir, and from there marched across the desert to Keneh, and then up the Nile. A desert march of one hundred and eighty miles in May, with the thermometer at 115° in the shade, is not a pleasant experience, but the troops did first-rate marching. The 1st Battalion, which was the last to cross, had a very bad march, as they found one set of wells quite dry. They were therefore forced to march straight on without water, and do a double march to the next wells. Many of them only just reached

the end, and several would not have reached if they had not been driven on by force.

In the meantime the Dervishes had begun to think that the continued presence of a force at Akasheh and the advance of the railway meant business, and urgent commands were coming from Dongola and Omdurman to drive the unbelievers out of Akasheh and tear up their railway.

The Dervish commander at Ferket knew this was no easy matter, so he asked for reinforcements, but in the meantime, in order to show his zeal, he determined to make a demonstration, which he could describe in his despatches as a brilliant victory.

Accordingly, on the 21st May the whole Dervish force in Ferket, about two thousand infantry and three hundred cavalry, marched out towards Akasheh. At the same time Colonel Burn-Murdoch was conducting a larger cavalry reconnaissance than usual, in fact he had about six hundred Egyptian cavalry with him. About nine miles from Akasheh the Dervish advancing force was sighted. Colonel Burn-Murdoch, finding that the ground was bad for charging the Dervish cavalry, ordered a retirement to more suitable ground in the rear. The retirement was begun at the trot, and immediately a cloud of sand was raised obscuring everything. The Dervish cavalry were closer than had been thought, and galloping hard they managed to get into the tail of the retiring Egyptian squadrons. So thick was the cloud of dust that those in front knew nothing of the Dervishes being amongst the rear squadrons for some time; when it became known, word was passed to halt and turn

about. This was not so easy to do. The trot had become a canter, and the dust prevented the order being passed quickly. Nevertheless they soon managed to pull up, and turning about, put the Dervish cavalry to flight. Our casualties were, I believe, nine killed and wounded only.

Colonel Burn-Murdoch, seeing that the whole of the Dervish infantry was advancing, then dismounted his men and fired volleys. The Dervishes exchanged shots and then marched back to Ferket, and sent a report of a brilliant victory over the infidels to Omdurman.

They next turned their attention to the railway, which had now reached Ambigol Wells, sixty-four miles from Halfa. A raid had been long expected, and rail-head was guarded by a battalion which furnished outposts day and night to protect the railway battalion, who were all innocent of drill or musketry training. About 9 p.m. on the 1st of June the alarm was sounded, and firing was heard from a hill about a mile off the railway camp. The troops stood to arms, but the Dervishes did not mean business, and hadn't the slightest intention of charging. Having fired off their rifles at an impossible range, they mounted their camels and were off. The camel corps from Akasheh got the news by wire and went in pursuit, but the Dervishes had too much of a start, and got back to Ferket, where no doubt they reported that they had entirely destroyed the railway.

CHAPTER III

THE Sirdar now thought that the railway had advanced as far as was safe. For the last fortnight it had been advancing rapidly. The railway battalion could now lay a mile in a day, but though the pace of their work had improved, its quality was not yet what it afterwards became. Two engines had fallen to the bottom of a fifteen-foot bank, another train was so badly wrecked that it blocked the line for two days, thus cutting off the rail-head supply of water, so that all those who did not go back to the break-down had to march to the river. An engine or truck simply off the line was a daily occurrence of no importance whatever so long as it had not turned over. Often after working all day an officer and break-down gang would have to go back at night to put a train on the line, and till that train came in the camp was without water.

Still, in spite of these little *contretemps* no damage was done; the two engines had been raised from the bottom of the fifteen-foot bank and were running again. One or two drivers were driving with one arm in a sling, and Halfa Hospital had a few more patients than usual.

Everything was now ready for an advance on Ferket. The concentration was carried out with the utmost despatch. Although the fight was fought on the 7th June, it was not until the evening of the 4th that the Egyptian troops, located at distances of from sixteen to one hundred miles from Ferket, began to move for a concentration, which was nevertheless complete at Akasheh on the afternoon of the 6th.

The North Staffordshire Regiment had been brought from Cairo to garrison Halfa. The Egyptian army had yet to win the confidence of the public, and it was thought by those in authority in Cairo that in case the Egyptian army was defeated there should be a garrison of British troops at Halfa for them to fall back on. It was hard lines on the English battalion to have to wait at Halfa while the Egyptian army went to Ferket, but such is the fortune of war.

On the 4th June the troops garrisoning the rear-most posts on the river began to move forward, and each post as they passed joined them. The main part of the troops were at Halfa, and all the afternoon of the 4th, and through the following night, the railway was pouring them into Ambigol Wells. Providence looked after them on the railway. There were no brake-blocks to the engines; the ones ordered had not had time to arrive, the ones improvised had worn out, so they ran away down every hill, and generally failed to get up the opposite one till the third attempt; but get up they did, and put all the troops into Ambigol Wells before 1 a.m. on the 5th. As yet practically none of the new stores and rolling stock had had time to arrive,

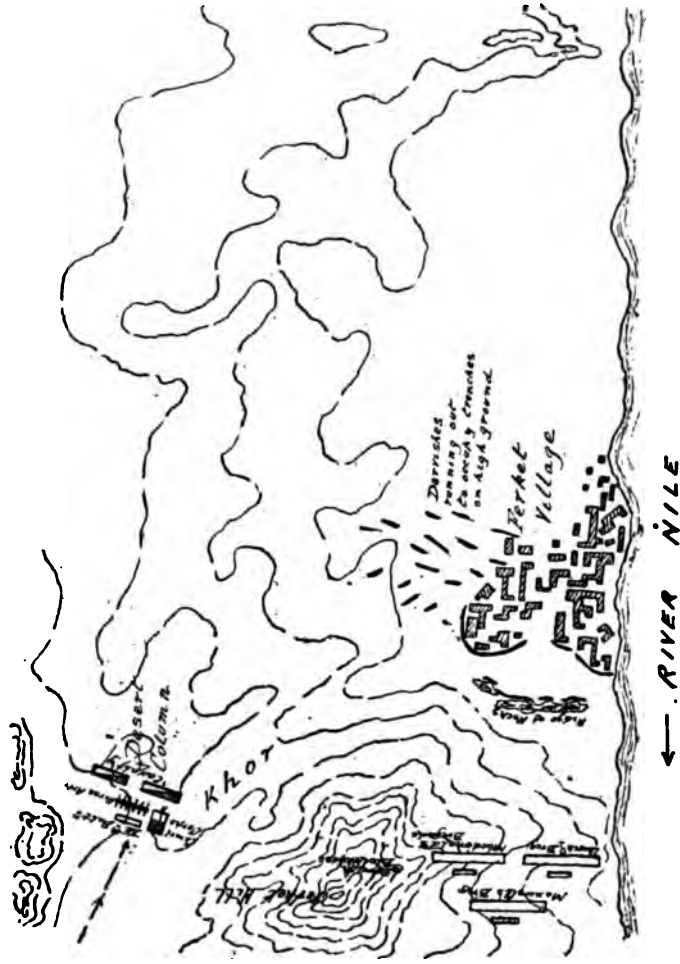
so that it was simply with the old patched-up material that the railway successfully played its part in the concentration.

On the 5th the troops that had arrived at Ambigol Wells marched to the river, and then up to Okmeh, a place about two miles north of Akasheh. The object of this was that Akasheh should appear to have exactly the same garrison as usual. Daily the Dervish scouts reconnoitred the place, but they could not see the troops just arrived at Okmeh without going round Akasheh, which they never did. On the afternoon of the 6th the whole force was concentrated at Akasheh: three brigades of infantry, three field and one horse battery, six squadrons cavalry, and the camel corps, about ten thousand altogether. The Intelligence Department had collected a great deal of information about the Dervish force at Ferket, and estimated them to be about three thousand strong.

The Sirdar decided to take the main part of his force along the river, and to send the cavalry, camel corps, horse battery, and one infantry battalion on transport camels by the desert route, so as to come down on Ferket simultaneously from the desert side and so hem them in.

It required very nice calculation to find out the exact time at which the two columns should start in order to arrive simultaneously. Major Broadwood, from constant scouting, knew both routes perfectly, and I believe I am right in saying that he was responsible for the times of starting, which turned out to be exactly right.

DIAGRAM 1.
Advance on PerAct
(Approx) Scale 1 inch = 375 Miles



I think it was about 5 p.m. in the afternoon of the 6th that the force began to move out of Akasheh, and continued marching steadily till about 11.30 p.m. The ground along the river-bank was execrable, a succession of steep rocky hills and valleys running down to the river. It was a moonlight night, but even so it was difficult going for men and animals from boulder to boulder. Strict silence was kept, and of course there were no lights. At 11.30 p.m. the force halted and lay down for a short sleep, which seemed to have hardly begun before it was interrupted at 1.30 a.m. by the order to advance again. As the first shimmer of dawn began to appear one began to wonder how far off we were, and whether it had been timed right. Soon Ferket hill rose up close at hand, and just as it began to get a little lighter the slope of the spur from Ferket hill was reached. The force formed up, Lewis's Brigade next the river, MacDonal on its left, Maxwell's in support. No sign of the Dervishes had yet been seen, but a small block-house became visible on the slope of Ferket hill. Having formed up, the force moved forward again. Bang! and five Dervishes, one with a smoking rifle, could be seen running up the hill to get into the block-house. This could not be allowed. Five sharpshooters in that block-house would give a lot of annoyance. Half a company was told off to fire but missed. Then a maxim was turned on, and laid them low in succession just before they reached the block-house.

Just as the river force topped the slope of the spur from Ferket hill, bang went a gun away on the left in

the desert. The desert column had arrived absolutely simultaneously. Half-a-mile in front of the river column was Ferket village; the Dervishes, completely surprised, nevertheless streamed out and ran to their posts. MacDonald's Brigade went off to the left to gain touch with the desert column and complete the hemming-in circle, Maxwell's Brigade came up in line with Lewis's to fill the gap left by MacDonald's. The whole line opened fire. Just to the north of Ferket village was a low line of rocks. The Dervishes kept up a brisk fire from these, and clung to them till they were shot and bayoneted by the advancing troops. About forty horsemen suddenly dashed out of the houses and tried to charge, they were mowed down in ten yards. The Dervishes on the east side, finding themselves taken in front by the desert column and in flank by MacDonald and Maxwell, tried to fly back to the houses. To do so they had to cross an open bit of ground. Few survived the independent fire that was opened as they tried to get over the bare space. Down into the houses went the troops, and it was finished.

The cavalry now went off in pursuit of the few that had got away, and continued the pursuit for two days, till they arrived opposite Suarda, men and horses pretty tired. The 12th Battalion followed up on transport camels in support, as it was expected that Suarda, the Dervish frontier headquarters, would have a garrison in it, but there was none; they had all been at Ferket, so the cavalry marched in, and the first phase of the operations was complete. The whole of

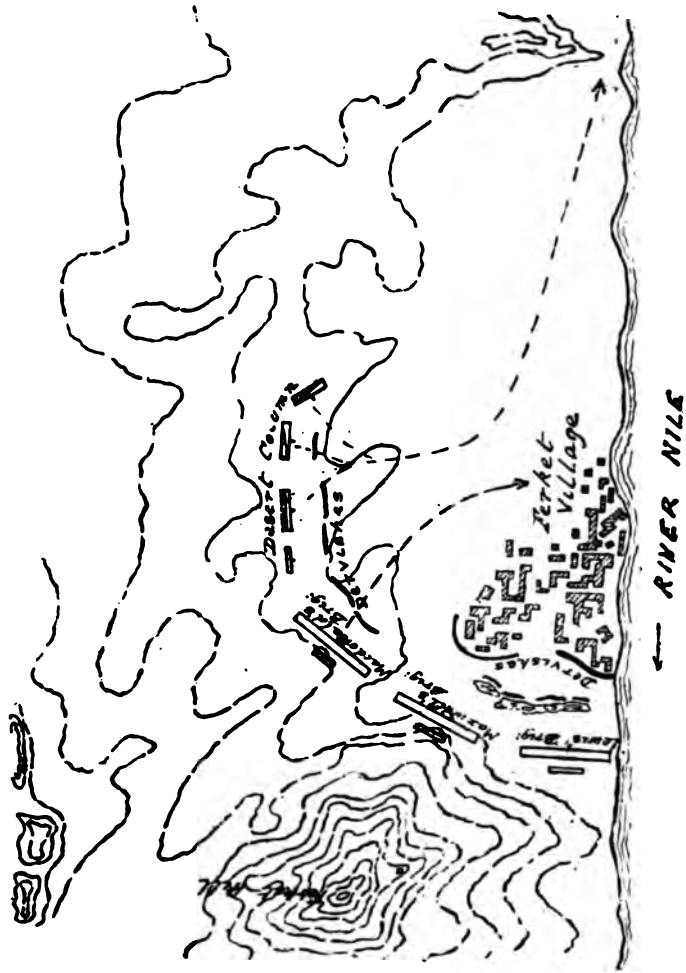
the Dervish advance force was killed or taken prisoner, and there were none between Hannek and Suarda. The surprise had been complete. So quickly and unexpectedly had the concentration at Akasheh been carried out, that the Dervishes had received no intelligence; so accurately were the two columns timed that hardly a Dervish escaped.

Our casualties were about twenty-five killed and seventy-five wounded. Only one British officer, Captain Legge, was wounded. All through the campaign the British officers of the Egyptian army had extraordinary luck in action, which is all the more remarkable considering that they are all mounted.

Among the Dervish slain were many emirs, including Hammuda, their commander. Colonel Slatin Pasha was invaluable for identifying the emirs. It was hoped that Osman Azrak would be found among the killed. This emir had become almost as notorious as Osman Digna. He had resided for some time previously under our protection at Wady Halfa, but one day went over to the Dervishes, and planned and led several raids. But, like Osman Digna, he took very good care of his skin, and fled as soon as the fight began. He took a small box of treasure and swam across the river with it on his head. Several very fine camels were captured, and a great number of donkeys.

Several people thought we should immediately continue to advance to Dongola, but the Sirdar knew better. He knew that he had sprung as far as it was possible to spring, and that the next spring, when the time came to make it, must not be to Dongola only, but right past

DIAGRAM I
Attack on Berket. River & Desert Columns joined
(Approx) Scale 1 inch = 375 Miles



it to Merowi and Kassinger, some three hundred and fifty miles from Ferket. At present the river was low, and no boats could go beyond Suarda. How, then, could he supply the force if he advanced at once? How would he cross the river without boats? His gunboats would have to be left behind, and if he reached the place he could not possibly keep a big force there. The province itself would provide practically nothing.

No; his plan, as I said before, was to bring the railway to Ferket, run up supplies, and make a base there. In another two months the river would be rising, and all his gunboats and barges could be pulled up the cataracts from Halfa, where they were now lying.

It was thought that the Dervishes in Dongola might make an advance to dispute the ground we had won, but they did not move. No doubt they were hindered from advancing by the same obstacle which hindered us. From Suarda to Hannek the river was impassable for boats, the banks were barren and devoid of supplies, so the neutral strip of cataract and desert lay between the forces, making them for the time safe from each other.

Accordingly the railway again began to forge ahead. All the battalions in turn were set to work making the embankment that would bring it into Ferket. The 7th Egyptian Battalion, commanded by Fathi Bey, on the very afternoon of the Ferket fight started back to rail-head, not that they were now necessary as escort, but to increase the number of workers. This battalion did most wonderful marching. On the afternoon of the 5th it left rail-head, and arrived at Akasheh (nineteen miles) on the morning of the 6th, left Akasha the same



DERVISHES CAPTURED AT FERKET.

afternoon, marched to Ferket (sixteen miles), and fought there the morning of the 7th, started back the same afternoon, and reached rail-head again on the morning of the 9th, that is to say, seventy miles and a fight in the course of three days and a half, during which the



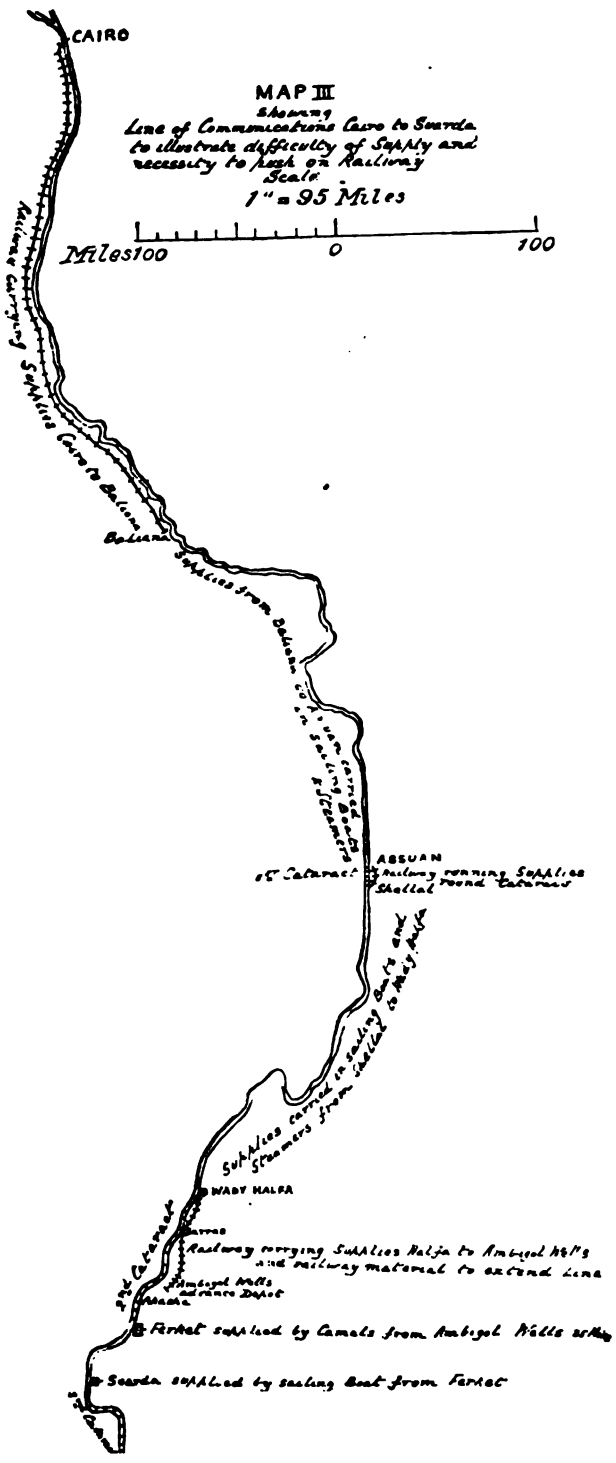
ARTILLERY.

thermometer was playing about between 110° and 120° in the shade.

The main part of the force was encamped at Ferket, while Suarda was held by one brigade. The cavalry, for reasons of supply, were sent back to Sarras, and now began one of those weary spells of waiting and working, of which so many had to be gone through during the next two years, and indeed these times of waiting and

hard toiling on the line of communications are far the most trying part of a campaign. Truly is it said, "The day of battle is the soldier's holiday." As stated before, it was the hottest summer known for years. It is difficult to say whose lot was preferable, that of the man who was not employed on the line of communications, and so had little to do but watch the thermometer as he stewed in a grass hut at Ferket, or on the other hand the lot of the man who was employed on the line of communications forwarding stores, or working in the sun on indifferent food from sunrise to sunset, pulling boats through cataracts, marching with camel convoys, or making a railway.

It will be interesting to examine the line of communications at the time that we had advanced to Ferket. From the base at Cairo stores were forwarded for three hundred and ninety miles by rail to Naghamadi. There an English officer was in charge of a gang of men who took them over the railway, and put them into boats which sailed one hundred and forty-five miles to Assouan. There another English officer was in charge, who had the stores loaded on to a train which took them four miles round the cataract to Shellal, where they were again put into boats. This work was entirely done by convicts. At Shellal some of the boats were lashed alongside stern-wheel steamers, themselves loaded and towed two hundred and forty miles to Halfa, while the remaining boats sailed. From Halfa the railway carried them sixty-eight miles to Ambigol Wells, where they were loaded on camels and carried about thirty-five miles to Ferket. The Suarda Brigade was supplied by boat from Ferket. In



spite of the length of the line of communications, and the frequent transshipments, the supplies reached the front with wonderful regularity. For fresh meat a contract was made with a Greek who practically never failed. The animals were driven up the whole way, so they were pretty muscular when they arrived, but there was no doubt about the meat being fresh, as one saw one's lunch walking about at six in the morning. Small detachments on the line of communications did not fare so well as those who were at the front, where there were a large number of troops and a supply depôt, but nevertheless every one got a good ration.

All through the campaign, in spite of the length of the line of communications, the desolation of the country, which now produced practically nothing, and the number of posts that had to be fed, the supply officers, Lieutenant-Colonel Rogers, Captains Drage and Blunt, and Lieutenant Howard, succeeded in producing a sufficiency of good supplies, while Lieutenant Gorringe, R.E., performed the duties of D.A.A.G.(B) in such a manner that no troops were ever without a ration of some sort, and except on a very few occasions every one got a full ration.

And so the time went on while we waited for two things: (1) the completion of the railway to Ferket, and (2) the rising of the river which would enable the boats to be brought up the cataract and sail on. After the force had been encamped for about a fortnight at Ferket it was found that the dead had not been buried sufficiently to prevent the place becoming unsavoury, so it was decided to move on eight miles to Kosheh, which

now became the advance base from which the force would eventually start for Dongola.

I think it was in the beginning of July, when we were already longing for an advance, that we heard there was cholera in Lower Egypt. At first little attention was paid to the matter. Cholera had often visited Egypt, but had never travelled further south than Assouan. Soon, however, news came that it had reached Assouan and passed it, and next we heard that it was at Halfa. Mr. Vallum, who had long superintended Halfa workshops, succumbed to it, another Englishman sent up by the firm who made the gunboats also died, and the natives were decimated by it. Next it reached Akasheh and finally Kosheh. The force was at once spread out in the desert half-a-mile from the river, and everything was done to prevent intercourse, but of course the camel convoys and the railway brought it in. Rail-head, although in the desert, where one is usually free from infectious diseases, was nevertheless attacked, and to every one's grief Captain Fenwick fell a victim to it. He must have escaped death at the hands of the Dervishes at least a dozen times, and it seemed hard that he should die thus. Another popular officer, Surgeon Captain Trask, died of it the same day. Curiously enough, he spent a night at rail-head with Fenwick and the R.E. officer. The next morning he rode on to Kosheh, and died there at 2.30 in the afternoon, exactly at the same time that Captain Fenwick expired. The next day Lieutenant Polwhele, R.E., died at Halfa, to which place he had been sent a few days earlier from rail-head with enteric fever. This was the officer who

had had charge of rail-head camp, and so mercilessly had he worked himself in order to teach them how to lay the track and to push the railway forward, that he had run down in health and could not resist the fever. As there was only one officer left at rail-head, Lieutenant Girouard, R.E., went up from Halfa, but got sun-stroke at rail-head camp which laid him up for a fortnight, so that it looked as if fortune was trying to stop the railway; but nevertheless it continued to advance a mile a day, although they had to move camp every day as well to try and shake off the cholera. It was about this time that that officer of world-wide popularity, Roddy Owen, was also carried off by cholera at Ambigol Wells. What a place for this popular soldier sportsman to end his days in! But after all it was on active service, and so a fitting end to a romantic career. A marble tombstone marks his grave in the desert on which is written, "Under the Shadow of the Sword is Paradise."

Lieutenant Farmer also succumbed to enteric fever, so that people began to wonder how much more damage the cholera and enteric were going to do. A good number of the soldiers were down with it, and the North Staffordshire Regiment were suffering pretty severely, although they had immediately left Halfa and camped at Gemai. It really seemed quite within the bounds of possibility that twenty-five per cent. of the force might be destroyed.

One gets to know men thoroughly well on active service, and it was depressing to see real friends carried off by disease, so that, what with the heat and either overwork or else lack of work, life at this time was not

very rosy, and every one was longing for an advance which could not come yet.

The Sirdar was, I believe, rather anxious as to what the cholera would do, but he was nevertheless determined not to be hurried into a premature advance.

After a time the cholera reached its maximum, and then the number of cases declined daily. It hung about for some time, but no further anxiety was felt as to its doing any considerable damage.

On the 4th August the railway reached Koshêr, one hundred and eight miles from Halfa, and every one immediately began to ask, "When are we going to advance?" But a great deal still had to be done. The river began to rise, and the time came to begin hauling gunboats, barges, and sailing-boats up the cataract.

This work was placed under the direction of Colonel Hunter. He had done the same work in the '84 Expedition, he knew better than any one how to direct Egyptians, and it was a work that required a man absolutely without nerves. For instance, at the "Great Gate" in the cataract there is a narrow channel about thirty feet wide between rocks which turns and twists, and through it the water rushes like a mill-race. A steamer would come up to it with all steam on, and three ropes were fastened on to bow and sides, on which several hundred men on the banks were pulling. Higher and higher the water mounted at the bows till it threatened to swamp the steamer; of course it was imperative to keep her bows on to the stream. When she turned a corner a different arrangement had to be made, and made at once. A strong pull on the wrong rope and

over she would go. An officer was always standing by with an axe ready to cut any rope on which a pull was being wrongly made, and often a rope was cut in the nick of time. Officers and men wore little else but helmet and boots, so that they could wade and swim through bye channels to get to advantageous points from which to pull. Now and then a man would lose his footing or try to swim a dangerous place. Like a flash he would be gone and sucked under in the eddies.

The banks were steep and rocky. Not a particle of shade to be found during the halts, and the heat refracted off the rocky hills till it seemed like an oven. And so it went on till through a hundred miles of cataract four gunboats, two unarmed steamers, and a quantity of barges and sailing-boats were safely brought to Kosheh.

While this was going on a new gunboat had been brought in sections by rail from Halfa, and was being put together at Kosheh. It was quite the fashion to go down and watch the progress of the work on it. It was attended by ill-luck from the beginning. Two Englishmen were sent up by the firm who made it to superintend its construction. One died of cholera, the other was killed by a heavy weight falling on him, so the Royal Engineers took it over, but it was like putting a Chinese puzzle together without knowing the key. Owing to the death of the Englishman who had been supervising the transport of the various parts, several stores and pieces of the gunboat had got mixed with railway stores, so frantic wires flew between Kosheh and Halfa for such and such a nut, or rod, or plate of steel. On one occasion Halfa declared they had sent off a particular nut,

while Kosheh declared they had not received it. The inference was that it had fallen off in transit on the railway, so cavalry were sent patrolling along the railway to find the nut. It seemed like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay, but strange to say it was found. In spite of difficulties, however, and a storm which nearly destroyed it by blowing the shear legs on to it, the boat began to approach completion, and now at last it seemed as if the time for advance was near. In a few days the river would be high enough for gunboats and nuggars to steam and sail on, the railway would have filled Kosheh with the required amount of supplies. As bad luck would have it, as the time approached for the advance the weather became hotter and hotter, and when the day arrived for the commencement it was positively stifling. A storm was brewing, and the air was heavy and fearfully sultry; but the Sirdar would wait for nothing once he was ready. He had decided that the Suarda Brigade should march along the river to Absarrat, and at the same time the First Brigade from Kosheh should cut across thirty-eight miles of desert from Kosheh to Absarrat and join the Second Brigade there. The Third and Fourth Brigades and other troops would follow as soon as everything was finally ready. Two water depôts were made in the desert by sending out water-tanks on camels and leaving them there. The First Brigade started off from Kosheh about 4.30 in the afternoon in stifling heat. Colonel Hunter in command decided that the best plan was to march as fast as possible and get across quickly. About 9 p.m. a tremendous storm of sand and rain swept over the

country. Nearly every tent and hut in Koshch was flattened and drenched, and the brigade in the desert had a terrible time. The storm had no effect in cooling the atmosphere as more was still brewing, and next day was terribly hot marching for the troops crossing the desert. The men drank the liberal water allowance most improvidently, and soon began to suffer from thirst. Baggage was taken off the camels and the men put on them. The whole column tailed out for miles, and every man struggled on the best pace he could, or lay down to be picked up by the camels or die. Somehow or other nearly the whole lot managed to get to Absarrat. Some made their way back to Kosheh, and a very few expired.

The Second Brigade marching along the river from Suarda had a similar experience. The country they had to cross was very rough, but they had the river, and so they managed to hold out and arrive in good order.

The idea was, that under cover of these two brigades supplies could be pushed on to Absarrat, and in a few days' time the river would be high enough for an advance of the whole force, but "man proposes, God disposes."

CHAPTER IV

ON the evening of the 28th August, just as preparations for advance seemed to be approaching completion, the Sirdar got a telegram to say that twelve miles of railway were washed away by floods between Sarras and Moghrat, also damage done near Ambigol Wells, and that it would take five thousand men three weeks to repair. Three weeks! If the force waited that time the river would have risen and started going down again, and they might be too late to get the steamers and boats up the cataracts beyond. The Sirdar said it must be done in ten days. He rose to the occasion at once. Everybody was bitterly disappointed, but the Sirdar set the example in buckling to to put matters right. He decided to go himself to superintend the work of repair. The floods had done a certain amount of damage between Akasheh and Kosheh, but all day long troops had been repairing it, and about midnight a train reached Kosheh. The engine-driver had been twenty-four hours on duty, but the train and two others standing in the station were immediately loaded with troops and tools, water fantasses, and rations. I went down to see the arrangements. It was pitch dark. Every staff officer thought it was an

occasion requiring zeal, consequently the scene was highly amusing. One staff officer would be trying to put troops into a train while the engineer officer ordered it to shunt. The staff officer would then threaten the native engine-driver with instant death if he did not stop shunting, and the engineer officer threatened him with slow torture if he did not keep on shunting. However, about 1 a.m. the first train started off, the Sirdar himself getting into a truck and going with it. The line between Kosheh and Akasheh, only roughly repaired after the floods, was in a very precarious condition, and the train swayed and jolted along. The engine-driver, who had been over twenty-four hours on duty, fell asleep, and left his engine to the stoker, who promptly burnt the boiler out, and the train came to a standstill, with another one coming along behind it.

When the other train came up the engine left its train and shoved the first train over the crest of the hill which runs down into Akasheh, and then left it to bring its own train up. The first train, left to itself, began to move down the hill which runs for two miles into Akasheh at a sharp gradient, and as the boiler was burnt out, and the steam brake could not be applied, it looked as if the train, with Sirdar, troops and all, would soon be dashing into Akasheh fifty miles an hour. Fortunately the hand-brakes on the engine and the brake-van were just enough to hold it, and the second train again coming up hooked on, and so they both reached Akasheh.

Only two engines now remained to take the troops on, so the greater part of the rations and water

fantasses were left behind to come the next trip. One officer remarked to the Sirdar that he thought he was cutting down the allowance of water very low for troops going into the desert. "Well," said the Sirdar, "it will be a very funny thing if we are going to a place where the line has been washed out by water if we don't find some;" and of course he was right. For the next ten days the troops repairing the line in the desert got their water almost entirely from rain-water pools, daily getting smaller by evaporation, till it became necessary to dig in the channels where the water had run. It was rather yellow water, but very wholesome. After leaving Akasheh the Sirdar's train was not yet free from accidents. It attempted to cross a place at Ambigol Wells which had been broken by flood, and was not yet completely repaired; in fact, the men were still working on it. The engine heeled right over and remained in the middle trembling in the balance, and it took from 10 a.m. till 5 p.m. to jack it up and get it over the place.

The next day the troops arrived at the south end of the break and set to work with a will. The railway battalion and transport and North Staffordshire Regiment were already at work on the north end of the gap. The camel corps, in the absence of most of the transport at the front, were temporarily turned into transport. It has always been a mystery to me how the troops in the desert got supplies at this time, considering the disorganization of the line of communications caused by the catastrophe, but nevertheless the rations continued to arrive regularly, and although it was hand to mouth

there was always something for the hand to put into the mouth. Two engines were working between Akasheh and the south end of the gap, bringing water and supplies, but they were cut off from the shops at Halfa, and were badly in need of a wash-out and repair. All day long without a check the work proceeded, the Sirdar directing, riding from Moghrat to Sarras and back on a camel. Just as the end seemed to be in view, news came of six miles washed away at Akasheh, and one of the two engines remaining on the south side had been caught by the flood and turned on its side. The remaining engine could hardly crawl along for want of cleaning and repair. Its driver had jaundice, but pluckily stuck to his work day and night. Off went the Sirdar to Akasheh to direct the work there. He was almost the first to reach the place, and might have been seen with his coat off, laying out a railway curve for the men to work on. The cavalry, who had been marching up to take their place in the advance, were stopped at Akasheh and turned to the novel work of repairing railway. More battalions marched from Kosheh to Akasheh and soon got to work.

As if enough accidents had not taken place there must needs be another, caused by carelessness, at Moghrat. An Egyptian officer had been sent from a battalion working on the line to fill the water fantasses at a rain-water pool near Moghrat station. He was given a railway truck to put the fantasses in, and was told to push this to Moghrat, but on no account to allow his men to get into the truck and run down the hills. He carried out these instructions till he got within a mile of Moghrat, and there he found himself on the top of a

long hill running down to the station. This was too much temptation. He put all his men into the truck, and seating himself on the buffer in front, away they started down the hill. By the time they reached Moghrat station they were going thirty miles an hour, the officer on the buffer swinging his legs and enjoying himself immensely. Round the corner they swung, and there, two hundred yards in front, was the only remaining engine on the line taking water by bucket from the pool. The officer on the buffer saw at once that his place was no one for a gentleman, and so jumped off, but he did not jump clear, and the truck caught him and completely smashed him. The next second it hit the engine. The effect was like an explosion. Men and fantasses were thrown high in the air, and then fell to the bottom of the high bank. There was no doctor; one or two English officers who were there happened to have a few bandages, with which they did the best they could for the injured till the doctor arrived in the afternoon.

It would be as well if I now explained how it was the railway could be so damaged by rain. In the first place, such tremendous rain had not been seen in these parts for twenty years. Most years it does not rain at all in these regions, and that there had been very little in the last twelve years was shown by the fact that we found the railway bank made in 1884 almost intact. In the second place, the country between Halfa and Kosheh is a sea of precipitous rocky hills, through which run a few broad sandy khors or dry water-courses, consequently there is no other alternative than to lay the railway for a

great deal of the way in these water-channels. To do anything else would mean infinite labour, time, and money, altogether out of the question with a hastily-constructed military railway, and as rain only comes in any quantity once in every twenty years, it was reasonable to expect that we might take the risk. As it was, thanks to the Sirdar's energetic direction and the zealous work of the troops, the whole damage was repaired twelve days after it had occurred—that is to say, repaired after a fashion, just sufficiently well to enable the line to work. After the railway had been completed, on the 4th August, the Railway Battalion had gone back on it improving the line, and had got it into very fair order, when the floods came and undid their work; and so now it was indeed a dangerous track over which the trains brought up the last supplies necessary for the advance, important amongst which was the coal for the **gunboats**. While the railway was being repaired work had progressed apace on the gunboat at Kosheh, so that when the Sirdar returned there she was ready for her trial. This boat was the apple of the Sirdar's eye. He knew better than any one the value of gunboats, and he had daily watched the progress of the work on this one, and he now was all keenness to see her trial. Alas! she had not gone two hundred yards before there was a bang. A cylinder had burst, and all question of her use in the advance was at an end.

The Sirdar was more upset by this than by anything that had happened previously. The cholera, the bad desert march, the flooding of the railway, all these had seemed to affect him but little, but his disappointment

at this last accident for a time got the better of him. He turned and rode into the desert by himself for a couple of hours, and it was not till the evening that he was himself again. There was nothing more now to wait for, and on the 10th September the Sirdar and remaining troops left Kosheh for the advance on Dongola.

CHAPTER V

It was like going on leave when we marched out of Kosheh, after the long hot period of waiting and preparing. The weather was still very hot, but we did not feel the heat so much now that we knew we should soon be in touch with the Dervishes, and turning them out of Dongola.

The time spent in repairing the railway had not been wasted at the front. Supplies had been pushed up, and the telegraph had been laid well on. In fact, the telegraph had been laid across the desert before the infantry crossed, as soon as cavalry had reported it safe. On the 15th September the whole force was concentrated at Fereig, and all the supplies had arrived there by boat. The force was composed as follows :—

Half a battalion North Staffordshire Regiment.

One maxim battery Connaught Rangers.

Six squadrons Egyptian cavalry, under Lieutenant-Colonel Burn-Murdoch.

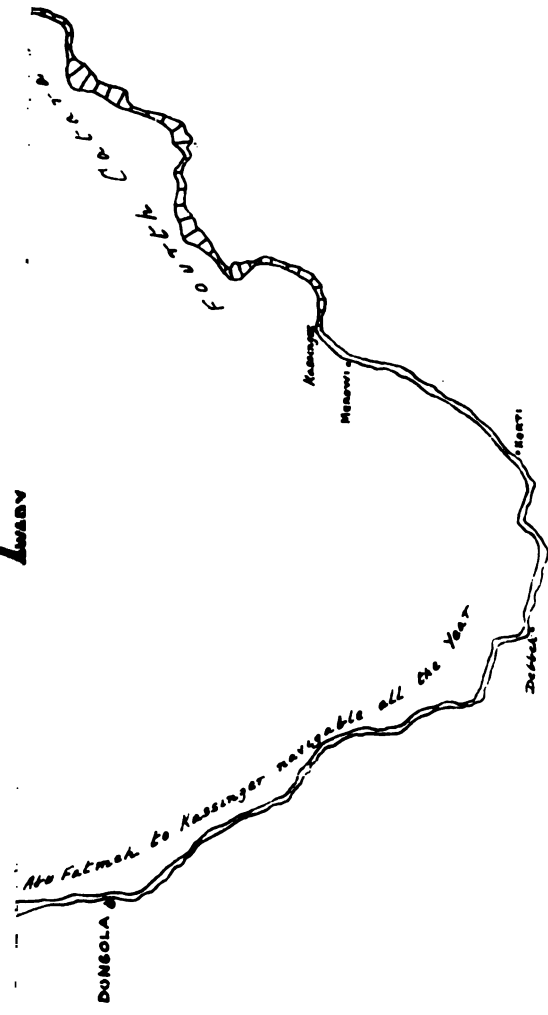
Camel corps, under Major Tudway.

Three mule and one horse battery.

First Brigade, under Major Lewis; Ninth and Tenth Sudanese, and Third and Fourth Egyptian.

Second Brigade, under Major Macdonald; Eleventh, Twelfth, Thirteenth Sudanese.

Lusay



Third Brigade, under Major Maxwell; Second, Seventh, and Eighth Egyptian.

Fourth Brigade, under Major David; First, Fifteenth, and half Fifth Egyptian.

Four gunboats, under Commander Colville, R.N., with Lieutenants Beatty and Robertson, R.N., and Captain Oldfield, R.M.A., commanding boats.

The total strength was about 12,000.

The Sixth Battalion had been left at Kosheh, and half the Fifth was to stay at Fereig.

The Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Battalions were commanded and entirely officered by Egyptian officers. All the others were commanded by English officers, with two other English officers to each Egyptian and three to each Sudanese battalion.

There were also three unarmed steamers.

On the 14th September the cavalry made an extended reconnaissance nearly as far as Abu Fatmeh. They found no Dervish force, but got news which confirmed previous rumours that they had built a fort at Kerma, and intended to fight us there. Kerma is on the east bank, about six miles above the top of the cataract. During this reconnaissance they encountered a few Dervish cavalry, which gave rise to an incident more suitable to ancient warfare. The emir commanding the Dervish scouts, seeing one of our squadrons approaching, galloped out brandishing his spear and sword, and making his horse prance the while he shouted insults at the Egyptians. An Egyptian trooper promptly took up the challenge and charged him, but the Dervish dodged the lance point and missed the Egyptian with his sword. Captain Whitler then put an end to this tournament business by riding out and shooting the emir. On the 15th we had a false alarm, which caused the whole camp to stand

to arms. On the 16th the force marched off, the flotilla steaming and sailing alongside through the cataracts, which in this part are not rapid enough to make boat-hauling necessary, but careful steaming was required. Marching steadily on, the force arrived on the evening of the 18th within seven miles of Kerma, and it was expected that Kerma fort would be attacked next day. As usual, the force lay down to sleep in the ranks, formed up with their backs to the river; no fires were allowed, so that our position should not be known. One gunboat had had the bad luck to get aground on what was practically the last rock in the cataract. It was crushing luck on its commander, Lieutenant Robertson, R.N., who had taken an energetic part in bringing steamers and boats through the cataracts between Halfa and Kosheh, and now the very last rock was to stop him taking part in the gunboat fight which occurred the next day. All night long the gunboats were snorting and puffing, trying to get the unfortunate one off, but without success. About 7.30 p.m. Captain Mahon of the cavalry reported that he had been right up to Kerma fort and found it empty, and the Dervishes had been busy all day crossing to Hafir, and were still doing so.

Before sunrise on the 19th September the force moved off, and about 9.30 came up to Kerma fort, to find it evacuated. It was a thick loop-holed mud wall, with embrasures for guns, and an inner fort. It commanded an excellent field of fire, and would have necessitated some loss to troops capturing it, but the gunboats could have knocked it about a lot. Passing the fort, the force went on till Kerma village was reached, and there halted

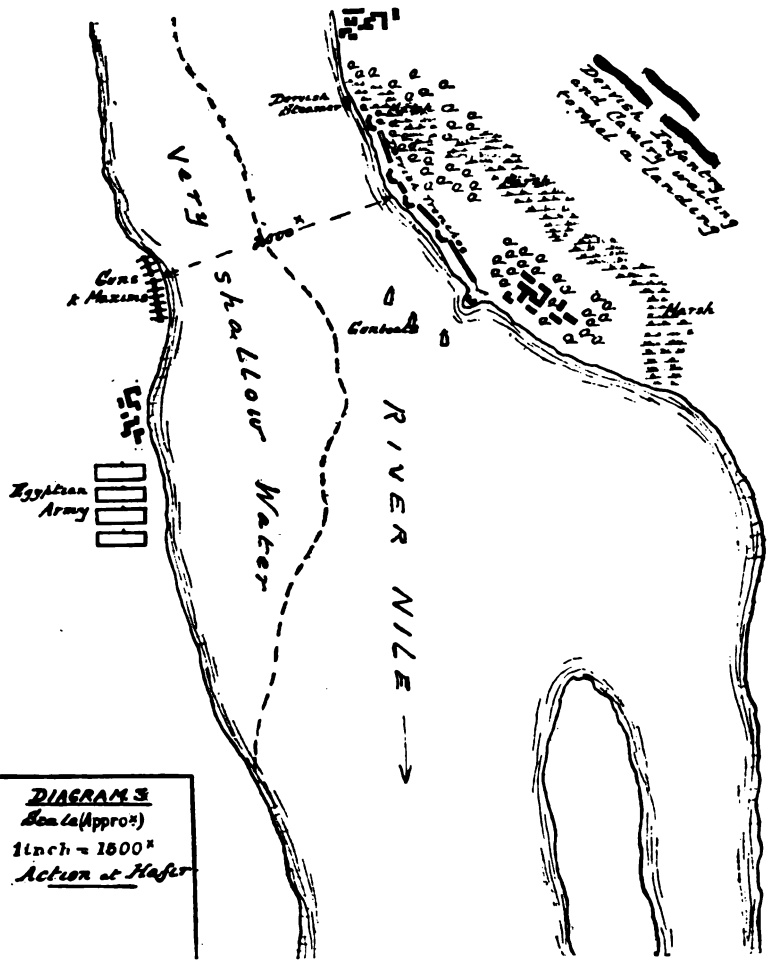


DIAGRAM 3
 Scale (Approx)
 1 inch = 1800 ft
 Action at Hafez

just opposite Hafir. The gunboats were steaming along side, and as they came opposite Hafir puffs of smoke and the report of guns revealed the Dervish position on the other bank. It was an excellent position. The navigable channel of the river at this point is not very wide, and to get through the gunboats would have to pass close by the Dervish position. As soon as the gunboats saw the Dervishes they steamed up and engaged them. The Dervishes were occupying some excellently placed low trenches connecting six earth gun emplacements. Several Dervishes could also be seen firing from the tops of the palm-trees, from which they were soon dislodged by the maxims, and if they were not killed by the bullets, they certainly must have been by their fall to the ground. Behind in the desert could be seen about three thousand Dervish horse and foot, waiting out of range of the gunboats to fall on any force that attempted to cross the river. It looked a very stiff nut to crack. The gunboats were having a pretty warm time. They are provided with steel plates, which protect the greater part of the boat from rifle fire ; but people walking about from one part of the boat to the other are exposed, and of course the boats were not proof against shell fire. They seemed tremendous big targets for the Dervishes to hit, but not more than four or five shells hit them the whole day, and fortunately they did no harm. One shell passed right through the magazine of a gunboat, but did not explode, and did not touch any ammunition. After the bombardment had proceeded about half-an-hour Commander Colville was hit in the wrist ; for the moment he was somewhat overcome, and the native reis in the

conning-tower with him, who did not relish his position at all, thought it an excellent opportunity to turn his boat round and retreat. These boats turn very easily, and before Commander Colville realized what the reis was doing he had whisked the boat round and was going down stream. The Dervishes were so elated at this that they jumped up on to the parapet and brandished their rifles, but speedily took shelter again when the two other gunboats stood in a bit closer and let fly their maxims. Commander Colville soon made the native reis bring up the gunboat again, and so the bombardment proceeded. After another hour, Commander Colville drew off the boats, and steaming back to the force reported that he could not make much impression, and asked that they might be assisted by the artillery from the east bank. All the artillery and the British maxim battery accordingly took up their position opposite Hafir, and commenced to bombard with some effect. The Dervishes replied to them with rifle fire, but their gun fire did not reach. The gunboats again went up and continued bombarding. While this was going on, the officers of the land force were watching the proceedings through their glasses, and arguing as to the right way of taking the position. "My dear sir, what we ought to do now is all to get in boats, scoot across, and wipe 'em out."

"Rot, my good man; we should be as thick as flies on the boats, and they'd pot us all before we get across. What we ought to do is to send half the force up stream and half down, and that would divide that mobile force of theirs, and then we would cross simultaneously,

come round behind them, and unite in mopping them up."

"Not a bit of it, my dear sir; we ought to leave a small force to make a feint at crossing here, and send the whole lot to cross at Argo Island," etc. etc.

But the Sirdar had a plan by which he was going to get the position without losing a man of his land force. The Dervish, like every one else, hates to know that there is a force behind him doing goodness knows what; also he thinks that every one is like himself, and will ill-treat his women-kind if they are captured, consequently if he knows a force is behind him, he will leave any position to see what that force is doing. About 12.30 the Sirdar, having thoroughly pounded their position, ordered the gunboats to run past it and proceed to Dongola. The gunboats had a very hot time passing the position, the Dervishes redoubling their efforts, and subsequent examination showed that hardly a square inch of the gunboats had escaped being hit. However, the shells mostly missed them, and they all got safely by with a loss of twenty-one killed and wounded, and proceeded to Dongola. This manoeuvre at first appeared to have no effect, and the Dervishes still replied briskly to our artillery. We afterwards heard that about half-past one a piece of shell wounded the Dervish commander, Wad Bishara, in the head. This was a most fortunate occurrence, as he was a first-class man, and indeed he had taken up a splendid position, and altogether showed more generalship than any other Dervish commander that we subsequently met. Although wounded, he tried to make his men stick to

the position, but they insisted on going back to Dongola to protect their wives and property from the gunboats; accordingly during the night, unknown to us, they marched away to Dongola, leaving behind several boats containing grain, and a small steamer which had been sunk in shallow water in the bombardment. The next morning one awoke with some curiosity. We knew it had been decided that if the Dervishes still occupied their position we were to cross and turn them out, which would mean stiff fighting. The news soon spread that the place was evacuated, and we got orders to get on to steamers and boats and cross, as Dongola lies on the west bank.

Every one, when they reached the other bank, was much interested in the Dervish position, of which Diagram III. is a sketch. In the trenches could be seen each man's little pile of empty cartridge cases, a handful of dates, and here and there a half-eaten sheep or goat. The trenches were very cunningly made, with neat loopholes, so well made, in fact, that they had been little damaged by the bombardment; on the other hand, the gun emplacements were very inferior, and had been much knocked about. The natives of the village said that few Dervishes had been killed, but confirmed the report of Wad Bishara's wound.

During the whole of the 20th all through the night, and till 1 p.m. on the 21st, the steamers and boats were crossing the troops, transport animals, and supplies. The gunboats returned, and reported that they had found Dongola devoid of any garrison, but they had seen the whole Dervish force marching from Hafir to

garrison Dongola, and reported them to be about five thousand. They had recently been reinforced by seven hundred Sudanese from Omdurman. At 5 p.m. on the 21st the force started to march the thirty-five miles which lay between them and Dongola. Marching was continued till midnight, a halt till 4 a.m., then marched again till 9.30 a.m., halt during the heat of the day, march again from 4 p.m. till midnight; starting again at 4 a.m. on the 23rd we arrived about 8.30 at a place which was believed to be within about six miles of Dongola. It was a perfect position if they chose to attack us. Here a halt was made for the whole day to rest the troops, before what was expected to be a hard fight the next day. Double rations were issued. The Intelligence Department were in communication with spies in Dongola. The gunboats were bombarding the place. The Dervishes replied pluckily to the gunboats. Time and again their little brass guns were knocked over, but they always put them up and managed to keep them going. The land force were rather sore at the gunboats having all the fun, and I think an officer expressed the opinion of all when he said, "Damn those gunboats, why can't they shut up? they will frighten them all away."

Soon after we had bivouacked we were all surprised by the arrival of the gunboat whose cylinder had burst at Kosheh. Colonel Cochrane, commanding line of communications, had managed to get the cylinder of another similar gunboat, also under construction, put into the place of the damaged cylinder, and he now turned up triumphant on the boat. Next day the gun-

boat did good service in bombarding Dongola. The deck nearly gave way when they fired the 12-pounder, but they shored it up with telegraph poles and continued firing.

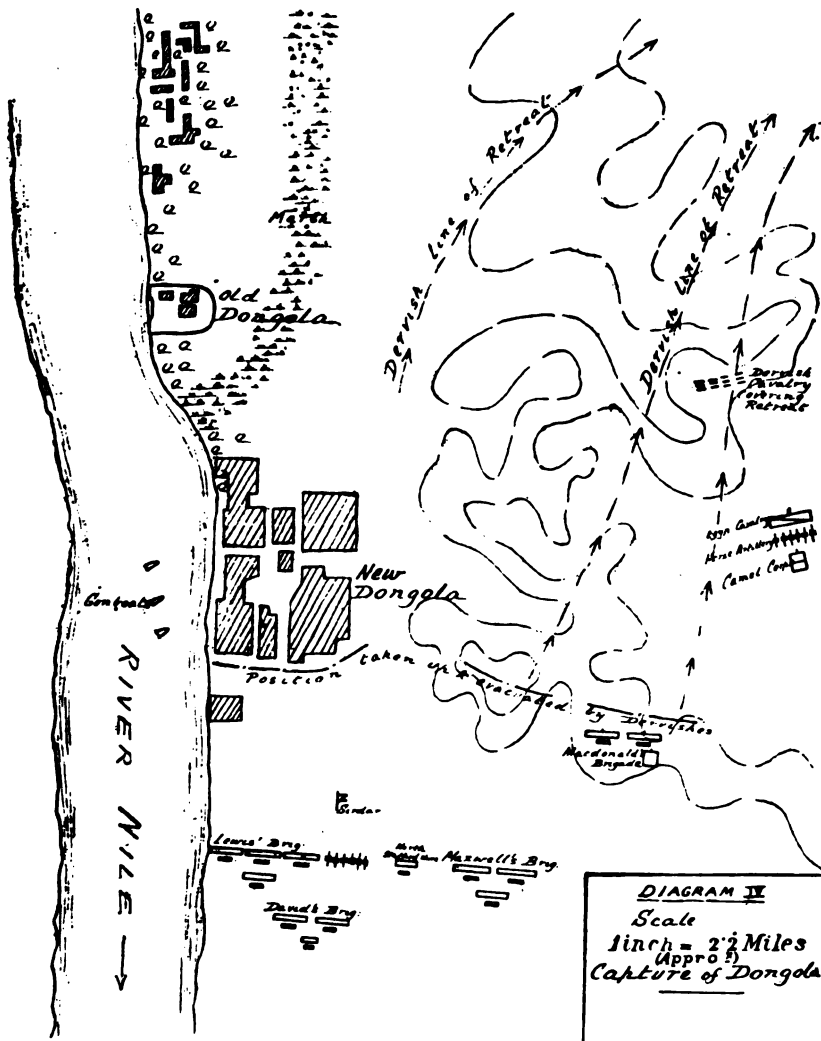
In the afternoon the Sirdar assembled the Brigadiers, and informed them he intended to attack Dongola the



El Ta'ara, GORDON'S STEAMER RE-CAPTURED FROM DERVISHES AT HAFIR.

next day, that the enemy were about five thousand strong, that their riflemen were posted behind the fortifications of the town, and that all their spearmen and cavalry would be on the ridge to the west of the town, from which they intended to hurl themselves on our flank. Lewis's Brigade supported by David's was to attack the town. MacDonald's, supported by Maxwell's, would attack the ridge. The North Staffordshire

and maxims would be in the centre, the cavalry, camel corps, and horse artillery on the right flank. It was in this order that the force moved off at 5 a.m. the following morning. As the ground the whole way to Dongola was perfectly open, we were able to march with a front of two brigades and the Staffords in line, with the cavalry and camel corps on the right, and though many men had seen bigger forces, all agreed that one could not see a finer sight than when, with Dongola in the foreground, this force was marching on a broad front in perfect formation as if at a review to attack the place. The distance to Dongola was much further than had been anticipated. We expected to reach the place at 9 a.m., but at 10 a.m. we had not sighted it. About this time the cavalry scouts reported that they had found the enemy in position as expected, about two thousand on the ridge, remainder in the town, and soon we were all able to see the enemy on a ridge about two thousand yards off. On the plain in front of them was a body of cavalry manœuvring with such precision that we thought at first they must be ours, until a glance to our flank showed that our cavalry was still there. The Intelligence Department had that morning published the fact that the Dervishes had held a council of war the previous night, at which they had determined to fight, and now when they began firing their brass guns, it looked as if we were going to have a run for our money. Our cavalry and camel corps were now told to work round the Dervish flank, while MacDonald's Brigade was ordered to attack the ridge in front. Lewis's Brigade was to



advance on the town, supported by David's, while Maxwell's was to fill the gap between MacDonald and Lewis. No sooner had our cavalry started off than the Dervishes on the ridge disappeared from view. This looked rather like a bolt, but it might be that the Dervishes had retired a few hundred yards from the edge of the ridge, and were ambushed in a hollow. Accordingly MacDonald halted at the foot of a ridge, and sent a staff officer up to see what was on top. He returned to say that the Dervish infantry were not visible, the Dervish cavalry were about five hundred yards off retiring steadily before our cavalry. Just then the horse artillery began to open fire, and MacDonald continued advancing with mounted officers scouting in front, as there were numerous small valleys sufficient to hide a large force. Meanwhile the remainder of the force was advancing on the town preceded by the Sirdar and staff, the cavalry were following up the retreating Dervishes, and the horse artillery, accompanying them, could be heard firing. Some of the Dervish cavalry turned at bay to cover the retreat and charged towards our cavalry. Captain Adams's squadron charged to meet them. Just as Captain Adams was within a few lengths of the leading emir, Adams's horse fell, throwing him to the ground. The emir galloped over him, slashing at him with his sword, but missed him. The Egyptian squadron defeated the Dervish one, and continued the pursuit. It soon became patent to all that we were not going to get a fight. The town was found to be empty. Several of the Sirdar's staff remonstrated with him for riding right ahead of every

one. It was quite possible that one or two fanatics might be lurking behind, who could easily distinguish him by his flag, but he continued to ride in front. It was now about mid-day, and since the prospect of a fight had faded, the long march of seven hours began to be felt. The men had finished their water-bottles



SAKIYEH AT DONGOLA. DERVISH PRISONERS ALONGSIDE.

and were very thirsty, but we had to march on past the town, which seemed as if it was never going to end. We finally halted on the south side of it. To reach the proper river bank, we had to cross an overflow from the Nile, which was about a foot deep with stagnant water. Several of the Staffordshire drank from this while crossing, and consequently suffered severely from enteric fever about a fortnight later. About an hour

after we had reached our bivouac, we were all surprised to see the cavalry returning. I never heard what was the reason for so short a pursuit, doubtless there were excellent ones, but it caused a good deal of surprise at the time. It made no difference, however, to the Dervish losses. They knew it would be impossible to retreat along the river as the gunboats would prevent it, so the whole Dervish force, bolting in a disorganized rabble, had struck into the desert to try and reach Khartum by a desert route which is used by caravans. The wells, however, were not sufficient to supply so many, several did not know the road, so very few ever reached Omdurman. They were afterwards found lying dead in the desert in groups of fifty and a hundred. In many cases, one could see holes dug in the sand with their hands in the vain endeavour to get water. So hurried had been their flight, that mothers with babes in arms had dropped them, and the cavalry and horse artillery came back laden with black and brown babies. They had also made a much more useful capture in the shape of seven hundred Sudanese riflemen, better known as "blacks." These, finding themselves deserted, had surrendered. Four hundred of the best of them were promptly enlisted in the Egyptian army, and sent to Halfa to be trained. The remaining three hundred not being considered physically fit, were sent to work with the railway battalion. Dongola was not exactly the place one would choose to live in. It is barely above water at high Nile, so that we found the whole place saturated and full of every sort of fly. The old fortifications of the town were in very fair order. There were no

valuables, but a good many curiosities, such as shirts of mail, war drums, etc. One officer was lucky enough to get a genuine Crusader's sword with an English crest and Latin motto engraved on it. The gunboats took additional troops on board, and without resistance went right up to Debbeh, Korti, and Merowi, which were quite empty. MacDonald's Brigade soon left Dongola to garrison these places. Merowi is nearly the limit of the navigable stretch of Nile in this part. At Kassinger, eighteen miles from Merowi, begins the Fourth Cataract, which blocks navigation for one hundred and thirty-five miles to Abu Hamed. Between Merowi and Omdurman lies the Bayuda Desert, so at present we were at the end of our tether. Some people at home began to ask why we did not immediately continue to advance. The Sirdar was as keen and determined to advance as any one, but on quite a different plan, which necessitated a good many days of hard work before the next advance began.

Thus the first phase of the campaign was over. It was by far the stiffest bit of work of the whole three years. The exceptional heat and rains, and the cholera, added to the fact that the war machine was being to a great extent freshly organized, and started on its work while money was short; all these considerations made the Dongola Expedition harder work than the subsequent phases of the campaign, when everybody was thoroughly trained, and knew their work, and when the heat, though bad, was not unprecedentedly so.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN an expedition reaches its goal, and the strain of urgency is removed, a reaction sets in. Small indispositions that one does not notice while struggling to reach the goal begin to make themselves felt. One notices that one has run down considerably in health and energy. Six months of hot weather in a tent or hut or without any shelter, with indifferent food, with frequent calls on one for exceptional spurts of hard work, take it out of fellows; so that when the objects of the expedition had been attained, fellows began to speculate on the chance of leave. Although it was confidently expected that an advance to Khartum would ultimately take place, it hardly seemed at this time within the scope of "practical politics;" it was in the dim future, and was something one must take care to be in, but in the meantime why not a little leave instead of stewing in a grass hut at some ruined, steaming, fly-blown place on the Nile, watching the men building mud huts, which certainly would be cooler, but not very enticing to a man who is feeling run down? Another effect of the reaction is that one notices how beastly the food is, how monotonous and dreary the country, how hard it is to

amuse oneself; one longs for the sight of fresh green vegetables, fresh butter, to find that one's things are not smothered in sand, to get out of sight and smell of a camel, to see a real green field; or with the many who are living entirely or almost by themselves on the long line of communications, there is a strong desire to walk into a mess again and hear several fellows chaffing one another, to go to a theatre where one will forget ammunition, equipment, camels, water supply, food arrangements, boats, railways, angareebes, natives, drill, baggage, etc., etc. The Sudan campaigners had to stand this test of discipline and endurance a good deal during the three years' campaign. As I stated before, and as the Sirdar said in his speech to the troops at Cairo, these times of waiting and working in monotonous uncomfortable places are far the greatest tests of discipline and soldierly qualities that troops have to undergo.

Although every one was hoping for leave, it could not be granted. The intelligence from Omdurman was that the Khalifa was very angry at the loss of Dongola, and was planning an attack in force, so all had to remain on the frontier. In a few special cases leave for one month to Cairo was granted. Fortunately the tribes in the Bayuda Desert had come over to our side and were holding all the wells for us, backed up by the camel corps, who had hard work for many months to come patrolling the Bayuda Desert, to watch and inspire confidence in the friendlies.

The next few months, although there appeared to be little of importance going on, were nevertheless the time during which the foundations of a great deal of the after

success of the campaign was being laid. There was not the same urgency and strain, so there was time for instruction, and all departments profited by it. The transport, although still working on the portages, had their education thoroughly completed in care of saddles and camels, loading and unloading baggage quickly, and, in the manner most convenient to the camel, turning out prepared in every detail at the shortest notice and punctual to the moment, and in a hundred and one other dodges, small in themselves, but essential to a perfect transport corps, which means untold advantage to the health and comfort of a force. The transport camps quickly arranged would nevertheless have done credit to a crack cavalry regiment for neatness and comfort of man and beast. The same could hardly be said of their clothes, but here again their practical common-sense was shown. Many had cut holes in the corners of corn-sacks to put their arms through, others had cut holes to put their legs through, and either way it made a most serviceable coat. They patched their clothes with anything they could get, and it was not uncommon to see a man wearing trousers of which the right leg was blue, the left khaki, and the seat a bit of a corn-sack. When the transport requisitioned for clothes they were given the cast-off clothes of the railway battalion. When the railway battalion requisitioned for clothes they were given the cast-off clothes of the transport to patch their garments with, and no man's trousers were condemned unless both knees and the seat were gone.

While the transport was being perfected in their

duties, an even more important improvement was taking place in the railway battalion. The railway was being extended one hundred miles further from Kosheh to the head of the Third Cataract at Kerma, so that Dongola might then be connected by alternate rail and steamer with Cairo, and be independent of camel transport. The railway also was profiting by the fact that there was not so much need now of excessive hurry, and Lieutenant Blakeney, R.E., was teaching them not only to lay a track quickly but in first-rate style. The result was that the rail-head party was soon organized in such a way, that they could with ease and comfort lay two miles of first-rate track in a day. The advantage of this training was incalculable when the big desert line was made later on.

Two more gunboats which had been ordered at the commencement of the campaign were run up by rail in sections and put together. The one which had been so hastily put together was thoroughly overhauled, and all these three boats afterwards proved first-rate.

The "blacks" captured at Dongola were going through recruits' drill and musketry at Halfa under the supervision of Captain Fergusson, so as to form the nucleus of a new Sudanese battalion which was being raised. Two more Egyptian battalions, two more Egyptian squadrons, and one more battery were being recruited and trained in Cairo.

The Sirdar meanwhile had made his plan, and was busy arranging for the next and most important part of the campaign. He argued that the only way for a big force to advance was by the Nile, that to supply that big force

there must be a railway going by the shortest route, no matter how many miles of desert it might have to cross, that the key of the Sudan was Berber, that the key of Berber was Abu Hamed. The key of the Sudan would not require anything like so big a force to take it that the stronghold itself at Omdurman would require, consequently the key might easily be captured, the line of communication to it perfected, and then no matter how big a force was required to capture the stronghold, that force could then with ease be brought up and supplied, and not only that, but when it reached the stronghold it could continue to operate right on to the confines of the Sudan. On the other hand, to try to send a big force at once across the Bayuda Desert to Omdurman was a gambler's throw, and if successful, the uncertain line of communication would necessitate the immediate reduction of the force, so that it could not reap the full fruits of its victory, and would be living from hand to mouth for many months, while the line of communications was being improved.

Arguing thus, he decided entirely on his own responsibility, contrary to the opinion of eminent engineers and of many who knew Egypt and the Sudan well, to make a railway over two hundred and thirty-five miles of absolutely unmapped and waterless desert from Halfa to Abu Hamed, which was garrisoned by the Dervishes. To appreciate the boldness of this scheme, it must be borne in mind, first, that when the Sirdar decided on it, no one knew anything of the desert between Murat Wells and Abu Hamed. Very few Europeans had ever crossed it, and they had made no maps. All the



MAP V

*roughly showing
the small amount of knowledge of topography
of Nubian Desert possessed at the time the
Sirdar decided to make Railway across it*

Miles 0 5 10 15 20 25

information to be got from them was that it was very hilly and bad for a railway. The caravan route from Murat Wells to Abu Hamed was roughly mapped, but no survey of the slightest use to a railway had ever been made, consequently it was not known what difficulties might be encountered. The country between Korosko and Murat Wells was well mapped, and known to be difficult for a railway. Secondly, it must be borne in mind that the only wells in this desert were Murat Wells; none existed between Wady Halfa and Abu Hamed, where the railway was to be made; also it was known that Said Pasha had formerly made determined attempts to find water in this desert, causing wells two hundred to three hundred feet deep to be sunk in several places, but without success. This lack of water would be a great impediment to the railway. If none were found it would mean that engines would have to run two hundred and thirty-four miles out and two hundred and thirty-four back without water, before the line reached the other end. This meant that every engine would have to draw about fourteen trucks, carrying fourteen fifteen-hundred-gallon tanks of water for its own consumption, thus greatly reducing the number of trucks available for railway material, and so retarding the progress of the line. Again, such a distance is a tremendous long run for an engine, and an engine breaking down and blocking a line on which three thousand men are depending for their water is a serious matter. The water supply of the construction party was another consideration. Supposing the line to be easy, three thousand men would be required at rail-head,

if there was heavy work more would be required. Every man must be allowed three gallons a day, so that nine thousand gallons is the minimum that must go by train daily to rail-head ; six more trucks daily carrying nothing but water instead of railway material. If a serious accident happened on the line, if floods came or anything caused it to be blocked for forty-eight hours, the rail-head party would die of thirst.

Fortunately the Sirdar was not to be deterred by any of these considerations, and decided to take all the risks and make the line. He knew that he had the right man to plan and execute it in Lieutenant Girouard, R.E., who had already overcome all difficulties on the Dongola line, and created an excellent railway constructing machine out of what at first seemed most unpromising material.

Engineer officers were therefore sent out to explore the desert and find out the best route for the railway. As Abu Hamed was still held by the Dervishes the line could not be completely reconnoitred, but Lieutenant Cator, R.E. (who died three weeks later), accompanied by the Ababdeh Arabs, rode as close as possible, and from this and several other Engineer officers' reports, it was found that whereas the country between Korosko and Abu Hamed was extremely difficult for a railway, there appeared to be an extraordinarily convenient belt of easy country between Wady Halfa and Abu Hamed. Though the country rose to a good height, it appeared to be a fairly gradual ascent. The descent into Abu Hamed was believed to be difficult but could not be examined, and had to be left to the future. Another

MAP. VI
*showing roughly
 what became known as Nibran Desert from
 Reconnaissance Maps made by Engineer
 Officers. The chain dotted line shows approximate
 route decided on for Rastamay*



Miles 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 Miles

result of the Engineer officers' reports was that wells were sunk in two places in the desert, which seemed to be the only places where water could possibly be found. It was a forlorn hope, nothing was expected of it. No one could hope to find water in a dreary waste, in which not even a bush six inches high grows



CAMEL CORPS.

for a hundred miles. One or two patches of dwarfed thorn bushes were to be found in a few places in the desert, separated by several miles. Nevertheless at both the places which were tried, water in abundance was found at a depth of seventy feet, and at distances of seventy-seven and one hundred and twenty-six miles from Wady Halfa. The importance of this in expediting the construction of the line will be readily understood.

After the success at these two wells, several more were dug in other parts of the desert, but in every case without success.

One of the features of campaigning in the Sudan is camel reconnaissance. As stated before, the camel corps were busy patrolling the Bayuda Desert, Engineer officers were reconnoitring the Nubian Desert, and Staff and other officers are constantly finding themselves doing long camel rides. Since this is the case, it will perhaps not be out of place if I give a description of a long desert camel ride. Let the reader imagine that with myself he has been told off to ride from Halfa to Murat Wells to inspect the fort there, and then to make a detour to see if any rain-water has been caught in the rock basins, which are known to exist in a few places in the desert, and which occasionally furnish water which might be used by raiding Dervishes.

First of all, what time of year is it? This is an important matter. If it is winter it will be bitterly cold sleeping out at night. It will be beautifully fresh and invigorating between sunrise and 10.30 a.m., rather unpleasantly hot but still bearable till 3.30 p.m., and then cool and pleasant till sunset starts one shivering again. If it is summer—well, let us suppose it is summer; then we have got a very unpleasant experience before us, but we must make our preparations. We are each possessed of two camels, a riding one and a baggage one, both bred in the desert and bought from desert Arabs. There are camels and camels. Nothing is more ungainly than the Lower Egypt big lumbering camel; on the other hand, one cannot see a finer sight

than a good desert "hadjin" or riding camel, with a well-turned-out Arab sheikh on its back. Tall, with a fine short-haired white coat, its small head held well up, clean long legs, large well-shaped hump, keeping its head up and not stretched down when it trots; on its back a clear-eyed, copper-coloured, good-looking



CAMEL CORPS.

Arab, dressed in white with red leather boots coming above his knees, round his waist a coloured sash showing off his spare but well-knit figure, on his head a neatly-wound coloured turban, on his left arm in an ornamental leather and crocodile skin case a silver-handled dagger, in his belt a revolver, slung on the side of his saddle a silver-hilted straight sword in a

scabbard of ornamental red leather with silver tip, also a round rhinoceros-hide shield, behind his saddle a rifle. The saddle itself is a cup-shaped "macloufa" with pommel in front and behind. It is covered with red leather, the pommels being ornamented in various ways; it is almost hidden by a long, double, white sheepskin hanging well down on either side over a pair of fine "hoorgs." The whole makes up a picture which cannot be surpassed even by a fine rider on a well-bred horse, especially if one sees it in the desert a hundred miles from anywhere. We are then each possessed of a good riding camel and also of a well-bred baggage camel, almost a "hadjin," but not quite. This will not be enough, because we must load them light as we want to travel fast and keep our baggage with us. We therefore borrow another or get it from the transport. We will take one servant to cook for us and one camel boy, who will ride one baggage camel and lead another, and with the assistance of the Arab guide will feed and look after all the camels when we halt. Now, as to the loads. We must carry three days' water for our two selves and two servants, the guide looks after himself. This means two gallons per man per day: that is, twenty-four gallons for three days. We will therefore fill four or five waterskins according to their size. If we were not going to Murat Wells we would carry it in two fantasses and one waterskin. The fantasses (water tanks) do not leak like a skin, but the Murat water corrodes them, and a drink of Murat water which has been two days in a fantass and one day in a waterskin is about as nasty in colour and taste as one can imagine.



DESERT TRAVELLING, OLD STYLE AND NEW.
Ald el Azim, sheikh of Abal-leh Arab, riding from Murat Wells to meet rail-head in desert, seventy miles from river.



We must next pack up twelve days' food and liquor for ourselves. This will go into two lime-juice boxes about two feet square by six inches deep and into a pair of hoorgs (big leather bags thrown across a camel and hanging one on each side). On one side of the hoorg we put enough food for three days, so as not to unpack the boxes every halt; in the other bag of the hoorg go sauce-pan, frying-pan, kettle, iron teapot, four iron cups, four knives, four forks, four spoons, and, so as to make the weight equal, a bottle of whisky, bottle of claret, bottle of lime juice, and tin of milk. The next thing to be thought of is forage for the camels, 10 lbs. of doura per camel per day. We must carry three days' forage, so that means 150 lbs. of doura. Don't forget firewood, as not a stick shall we find to light our camp fire.

Next we make up two small rolls of bedding each, two blankets and a pillow (sounds luxurious, but it is almost a necessity, it makes so much difference). Inside the bedding rolls are a few clothes. Each roll of bedding is about two feet six inches long and fifteen inches in diameter. They go one each side of our macloufas under the seat against the panel, then put a blanket over the seat of the macloufa, on top of that a "furoa" (sheepskin). On the back pommel sling sword and revolver, so that revolver does not touch the camel or it will gall it, also a full canvas water-bottle and haversack with odds and ends; see that nothing except the sword scabbard touches the camel; anything that does will gall him. Your own camel is now ready, lightly loaded as he should be. The servant's camel will have the hoorgs containing food and cooking pots, while hanging on

each side so as to balance will be a half-full waterskin (full ones would make load too much). The camel boy rides on top of the camel carrying forage, and leads a camel carrying the water and firewood. These last two camels are heavily loaded at present, but they are fresh now, and their loads of water and forage will rapidly diminish. We will start in the afternoon; the preparations and loading up for a long journey cannot be hurried, however one may try. Once one gets into the desert one's Arab guide and the servants will load up and start off in a very short time, but they *will* dawdle over the first start; consequently, if we tried to start in the morning we should not get off till it was getting hot. So we order the start to be made at 3 p.m., and at 4 p.m. everything is ready. The camels were watered at ten o'clock in the morning, and are now loaded ready for us. Directly a camel feels one's weight coming on him he jumps up like an earthquake, so a good dodge for mounting is to catch hold of the back pommel, bend one's knee and put the crook of it on the near front corner of the saddle; supposing the camel jumps up when one has done only that, it does not throw one. With the right hand on the rear pommel and one's knee crooked over the corner of the saddle one is perfectly secure, and can slide into the seat with ease at one's leisure. The novice, on the other hand, puts his right leg right over the saddle, the camel jumps up and throws him backwards.

However, at length we are off. Just before we start we are told to go and see on our way if the Arabs have left water as directed at the place to which a well-

digging party is to be sent for the railway. This means a bit of a detour, so we do not follow the ordinary track. About 5 p.m. it begins to cool. Both our camels and ourselves are fresh, and it is very pleasant to be swinging along in the open desert. Going into the desert one gets the same feeling of independence and freedom from worry which one gets on board ship.



STARTING ON A LONG DESERT RIDE.

For three days, at any rate, no letters or telegrams can reach one. One is alone with nature like the most veritable savage. The camel is undoubtedly the animal for long journeys. The only thing against him is that his pace is not quite fast enough, so one has to ride many hours in order to cover a long distance. Good riding camels, such as I assume we are on, can go seven miles an hour, but they cannot keep it up for

one hundred and fifteen miles, so as that is to be our journey we cannot go more than four to four and a half miles an hour. We ought to do thirty-five miles a day, so we must ride about nine hours daily, and what with short halts and occasionally walking, it means being in the saddle at least ten hours a day. Having left at 4 p.m. we halt at 7 p.m., the camels' customary feeding time. As we are not to be halted long the saddles are not taken off, only the loads. In front of each camel is spread a sack, and on that his feed of doura is placed; if you do not put a sack under it he will not touch it. In a few minutes one's servant has lit a fire, and soon produces a meal consisting of soup, a tin of Indian curry, biscuits and jam. At 8.30 p.m. we are off again. Not very good for the digestion, but that is a detail we don't consider in the Sudan, and we ride till 11 p.m. For this part of the journey we are dependent on the guide; during the day we can find our way about the desert, especially if we have ridden it before, but at night it is very difficult without taking a lot of trouble to constantly watch one's compass, so it is better to follow the guide, who is going by the stars and does it with ease, chatting away meanwhile. The Arabs have names for all the constellations though they group them in a different way. They have a certain amount of practical knowledge of astronomy, and know when to expect certain stars, etc. At 11 p.m. we halt and lay our sheepskin and blankets on the sand, but first make a hole for your hip and dig the sand to make it soft. These two operations make all the difference to one's comfort. This is the best part

of a desert ride. One is pleasantly tired, the air is beautifully fresh and cool after the burning day, not a vestige of a cloud, so all the stars are twinkling overhead through the clear atmosphere like myriads of diamonds set in a lovely blue. Absolute stillness and a sense of boundless space and freedom have a



ARAB DESERT POLICE, SUKIM.

soothing effect and one drops off to sleep. A hand on one's shoulder wakes one to see the Arab bending over one. He knows the value of travelling while it is cool. It seems to be still night, but over in the East there is just a suspicion of dimness about the stars. While the camels are being fed and we are rolling up our bedding the servant makes some cocoa, which is

very refreshing. One doesn't feel inclined to eat, but swallows some biscuit so as to have something to start on. By the time everything is ready it is almost light, and half-an-hour after the start the sun appears and we swear at him as he rises. As I said before, it is the middle of summer, so that very soon after the sun's appearance he makes himself felt. Being still low on the horizon it glances up off the sand, and seems to get under one's helmet; however, it is not yet really hot, so we chat away with one another and with the guide. We are not likely to come on any camel tracks here, but if we did he would tell you when the camels passed, last night or this morning or the day before yesterday, whose camels they were, and the pace they were travelling. The latter is quite easy. One can very soon notice the different patterns made by a camel's feet on the sand when walking, jogging or trotting out, but it always beat me how an Arab could tell the freshness of the tracks within an hour, and the way in which they knew the shape of footmark of half the riding camels in the Sudan.

Presently we come upon some pieces of ostrich eggs, some of them about five inches across. They are varied in colour from mauve to yellow. The Arab tells us how long ago there used to be almost yearly rains in this desert, so that a certain amount of rough grass grew in it, and the ostriches used to breed and feed here, but now there is not a blade of grass and the ostriches have all gone south. As I said before, we are not riding on the ordinary camel track, and we have now got into quite the orthodox desert—simply a vast extent of sand.

Hills are just visible on each side dodging up and down in the mirage, but in front there is nothing hardly to be seen except a few faint hill-tops. The guide is directing his course on one of them. We dip down into a hollow, the hill-top is lost to view, and nothing is on the horizon to steer by, but half-an-hour afterwards we reach the crest of a slope and find that we are marching exactly on the same hill-top; the guide has not swerved an atom. About nine o'clock one begins to want breakfast, but a halt must not be made for another two hours at least. If we were to halt for breakfast we should not be ready to start again till almost eleven, and then it would be too hot, so we munch a biscuit and jog steadily on, while the heat gets steadily worse, the glare of the sand seems to burn the eyes and the shimmering of the mirage tires them; conversation flags, and from now till four o'clock in the afternoon one exists in a miserable state of hot monotony. Soon after eleven it is evident that the camels are feeling the heat, so we must halt. As far as we are concerned the halt is no rest; it would be better to be riding through the heat of the day instead of sitting still grilling in the sun, but we have to consider the camels, and one of the first rules in their care is not to work them between eleven and three, or better still between ten and four.

The novice thinks it would be good to take his macloufa off the camel to make a nice seat, but it is a mistake to sit on it, as it forces the stuffing up so that the wood panel will bear on the camel and gall him. We put our blankets on the sand, and try to while away time till our servant produces a hot, repulsive tinned sausage, and

some tea, biscuit and jam. It is too hot to talk, but we have brought a small strip of canvas, and a few sticks with some rope. It seems too small to be of any use, but it makes all the difference, so we put it up and lie under it. The best thing to do is to read a novel. It is too hot to sleep, but one tries to, taking good care that one's helmet is over one's head. The temperature is anything from 110° to 125° in the shade, if there was such a thing; slowly the time drags on, till at two o'clock we sit up to have some soup and some tinned nastiness. At 2.30 we begin loading up and start again at three. In an hour's time it appears to be a little cooler, and we begin to emerge from our comatose state and become human beings once more. Conversation begins again, and the Arab tells us the names of the various hills we are now coming to; also that, near that distant hill just visible, there are moufflon to be found, though it is difficult to get near them. They are very shy, and live a hundred miles from the river in the heart of the desert, feeding on "gush," a grassy plant which grows here and there in the desert. There are different kinds of "gush," but there is one kind which contains a lot of moisture, and camels, gazelle, and moufflon, when they feed on it, can go without drinking water for three months. The "gush" requires little rain; one shower of rain in the year is enough for it. In the northern part of the Nubian Desert they get a little rain every year, so "gush" grows plentifully in the khors. In the southern and western parts, rain, and consequently also "gush," is much scarcer.

Presently we notice that the Arab is looking keenly at

something ahead. "What is that?" he says, pointing ahead. We can see nothing, but a desert Arab can see as well with his eyes as we can with field-glasses; eager to satisfy his curiosity he makes his camel break into a swift trot. He does this without any effort, and it is impossible to see or describe how he does it. If we want to quicken our pace we have to use the whip and drum with our heels, but he glides off instantly with apparently no effort. He almost disappears from view, and when we come up with him again we find him standing in the midst of a number of broken earthenware water-pitchers. The Arab is as astonished as we are. We are well away from the ordinary camel track, so he has never seen them before, nor has he heard of them. They are quite a different shape to any Egyptian or Arab pot. They are exactly the same shape as Greek pitchers. Just as this occurs to us, the Arab says, "Those do not belong to this country, they are very, very ancient, they belonged to the Greeks."

The Arabs know all about Alexander's conquest of the country, and there are many traces of the Greeks, so perhaps this is another. If so, what do these broken pitchers mean? Was there a well here? Did they belong to a force that got lost in the desert? Ask another.

(In consequence of this discovery some men were sent to dig at this place, but did not find water.)

Again at 7 p.m. we halt for some dinner and to feed the camels. While we are waiting for dinner we hear the splash of water, and looking round see the servant wasting some precious water by washing the

plates! This is a most heinous offence. Water in the desert is more precious than gold and is only used for drinking. The plates can be thoroughly cleaned by rubbing them in the sand. The same method will, unfortunately, not do for cleaning ourselves, and it is very uncomfortable having to spend three hot days and nights without a wash, and it adds considerably to the fatigue. The next day passes in the same way as the first, except that instead of cooling about four o'clock, it appears to be, if possible, hotter. The air is still and oppressive. The setting of the sun makes no difference, and we pour with perspiration. This means that a storm is coming. The camels have known it for some time, and have tried to stop and even turn round. There is nothing visible to betray the coming of the storm, only the oppressive heat and the camels' behaviour, but presently a black cloud can be seen rising rapidly on the horizon, and soon a dense yellow wall is seen to be advancing in the distance. It is no use trying to go on; nothing would persuade the camels to, nor would even the Arab be able to find his way. We rapidly dismount, the camels turn their backs to the coming storm, but before we have half unloaded it is upon us. A positive wall of sand, through which one cannot see six feet, comes surging over the desert and strikes one with a rush, stinging the face and hands. Now for several hours we shall be enveloped in sand. There is no chance of dinner, so we bury our heads under a blanket, and with this protection manage to eat some biscuits without swallowing much sand. Then we lie down to leeward of our saddles, wrap ourselves in blankets and go to

sleep. When we awake the storm is practically over; our eyes, noses, and ears are absolutely full of sand, also our hair and clothes; it is caked all over one's skin, it is everywhere. We have lost some time, so we must shove along to-day. Another day passes in the same way, and when we lie down at night we are beginning to feel pretty weary, but the next day ought to take us into Murat fort.

About ten the next morning one of the camels begins to go lame. An examination of his feet shows he has not cut them on a stone—it seems to be somewhere in the thigh; however, go he must. When the mid-day halt is made, the Arab gets a piece of rope round the lame camel's hind-foot; the camel boy holds his head while the Arab pulls at the hind-leg with all his might. After repeating this performance a few times he rubs it well with "sem," a sort of inferior cooking butter, with which one's servant spoils one's food. The result of this strange treatment is that the camel goes sound. We must keep an eye on the camels now. They have been three days without water, and are making the peculiar gurgling groan they make when they are thirsty. They can smell water a long way off, and if we do not watch them, they are quite likely to get up like a flash all together and stampede for the wells, which are now within about twelve miles. It would be very unpleasant for us, fatigued as we are, to have to walk the last twelve miles and arrive without any baggage. We cut the mid-day halt a bit shorter to-day as we are keen to get to the wells. We are longing for a bath and a rest. We shall be able to buy a sheep and have fresh

meat, also goats' milk, and we can get a native string bedstead to lie on and a good tent. The thought of these luxuries makes us urge the camels on. We are now in the hilly country, riding in a narrow khor, fairly sprinkled with gush, between conical-shaped precipitous hills of black and brown rock. The track twists and turns, until rounding a corner, we come upon a view which rewards us for our long ride. At the end of the rocky gorge, about half-a-mile in front, a high stone wall connects three or four blockhouses on the rugged hills. Walking about below, driving in their flocks, are a number of picturesque Arabs, and in the foreground, coming to meet us at a spanking trot, is the Arab sheikh, accompanied by a few followers. I have already described what a perfect picture he makes, and as he comes up, he pulls up his camel and swings him round without an effort, as he leans over to touch hands. Every bit of the natural savage that is in us rejoices at our surroundings. Here we are in the heart of the desert, one hundred and twenty miles from an Englishman, in the midst of the bold, free, picturesque Arabs, surrounded by desolate yet grand scenery, tinted by the setting sun with the pink and mauve hues peculiar to Egypt. We feel that existence here must be a struggle, and we are exhilarated by the consciousness of our power to contend with the desert.

We rest ourselves and the camels the whole of the next day, luxuriating in baths and the other luxuries I have named, and in the afternoon of the following day we start off on a detour in the desert, to see if there is water at one of the places where it is frequently

found to have been caught in a rock basin. I will not weary the reader with further descriptions, which would only be repetition. After two days we return to Murat, rest another day, and then start back for Halfa, which seems like a metropolis of luxury when we reach it with sun-blistered lips and peeling face after our ten days' trip in the desert.

CHAPTER VII

ON the 4th May, 1897, the railway which was being constructed to connect the Dongola province with Halfa reached its terminus at Kerma, just above the Hannek cataract, two hundred and three miles from Halfa. The completion of this line enabled the construction of the big desert line to forthwith proceed apace. Fifteen miles of it had already been laid, but now the whole of the railway battalion came down off the other line, and work began on the new one in earnest.

In the meantime there was practically nothing to break the monotony of life on the frontier at Merowi, Debbeh, and Korti. On one occasion the Intelligence Department had received news that the Dervishes at Abu Hamed were going to ride to Gebel Kuror in the Nubian Desert, where there was a rock water-basin, and having watered there, they were going to raid the railway. Captain King immediately took his company of camel corps out to Gebel Kuror and emptied the water out of the rock. It was a curious place to find water in. In order to get it they had to climb up a small precipice, fill buckets, and let them down with a rope. But the Dervishes did not carry out their plan,

in fact they probably never intended to. It was, I think, in June that the cavalry made a reconnaissance part of the way to Abu Hamed in order to collect information about the road, cataracts, strength of Dervishes at Abu Hamed, etc. They reached Essalamat without seeing any Dervishes, and then turned to come back. Captain Peyton's squadron was doing rear-guard, and at midday they halted to water the horses. A picket of ten troopers under an Egyptian subaltern remained mounted about three hundred yards in rear, when suddenly round the corner came half-a-dozen Dervish cavalry, who were much surprised to see the Egyptians.

The Dervishes turned round and disappeared round the hill with the Egyptian picket in pursuit. When they also rounded the hill, they found themselves in front of about one hundred Dervish cavalry. They pulled up to turn round, but they probably would not have escaped if Captain Peyton and the remainder of his squadron had not at that moment turned up and charged. The numbers were about equal, so it was hammer-and-tongs. Captain Peyton was surrounded by four or five Dervishes, but they had tackled a man who had won prizes at the military tournament for skill at arms, and he speedily despatched three of his assailants, but a fourth speared him from behind. He managed to keep his saddle, and his trumpeter came to his assistance, but he would probably have been killed if the remaining squadrons had not at that moment come up and put the Dervishes to flight.

This was the only skirmish which occurred during

this period of waiting, though we managed to stir up the friendly Arabs to raid the Dervish cattle, etc.

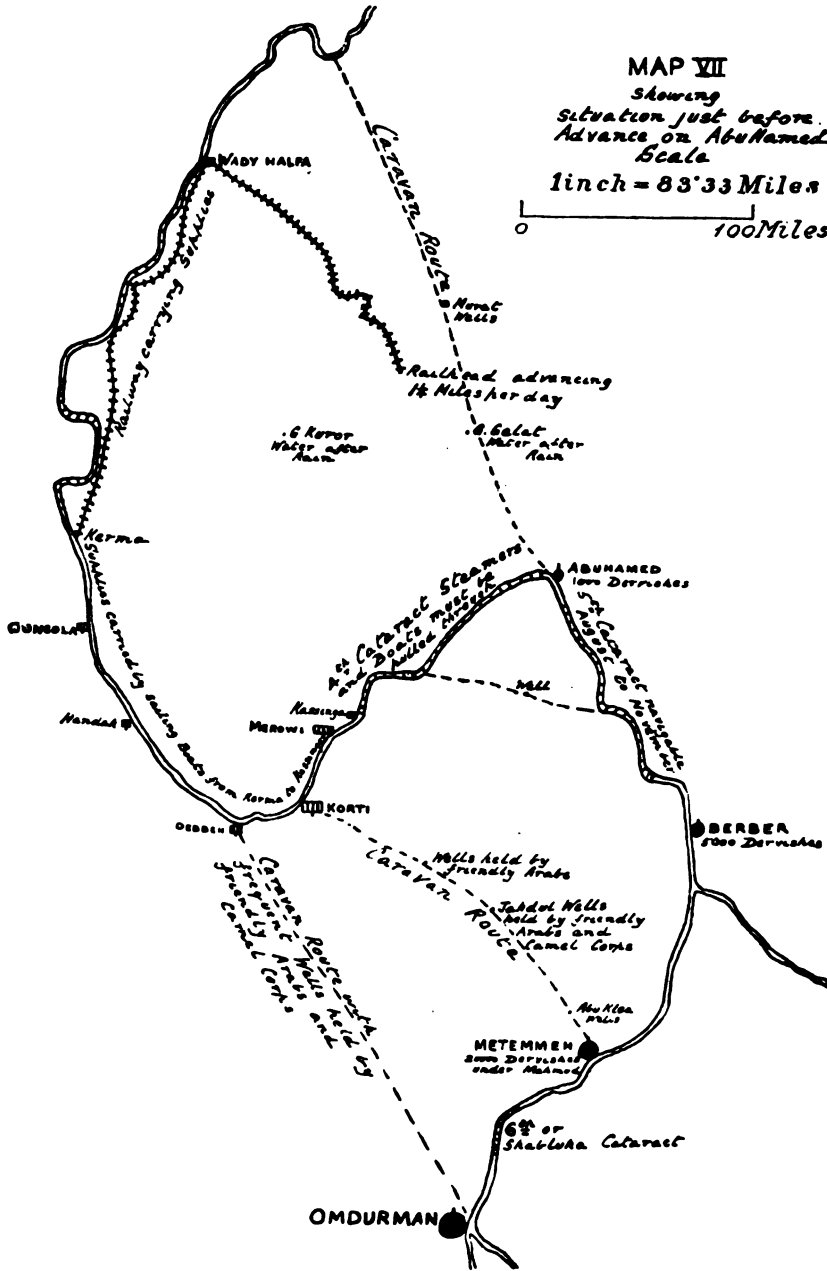
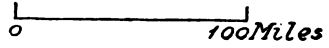
At the end of June or beginning of July, the Intelligence Department got news that the Khalifa had decided to send a big force under his trusty general Mahmud to occupy that strategic point Metemmeh. This was the capital of the Jaalin tribe, and they knew what it meant to have a Dervish army billeted on them. It meant the robbery of all their property and food. They sent a deputation to the Khalifa asking him not to send the army there, and they would be responsible for holding Metemmeh against the "Turks." The Khalifa was very angry with them for making this request, and refused to alter his plan, so the Jaalin decided to throw in their lot with us and resist Mahmud when he arrived. Two sheikhs of the Jaalin came over to Merowi and asked for arms, ammunition, and assistance. It was a ticklish problem. The whole thing might be a cock-and-bull story got up to obtain arms and ammunition, and perhaps entrap a small force at Metemmeh. The Sirdar decided to send them arms and ammunition, but not to go to Metemmeh to help them; if he did so, he would have to take the whole Egyptian army and a British brigade, leaving the Dervish garrisons of Abu Hamed and Berber on his flank and rear, while it would be impossible to run supplies across the Bayuda Desert for so big a force. When the British desert column crossed in 1884 they were only two thousand five hundred strong, and yet there was the greatest difficulty to supply even this small number.

The Sirdar, therefore, ordered six thousand rifles and

MAP VII

Showing
Situation just before
Advance on AbuHamed
Scale

1 inch = 83.33 Miles



a good quantity of ammunition to be sent to them, but Mahmud had heard that the Jaalin had sent to us for help, and before the rifles reached them he had swooped down on Metemmeh.

His first attack was repulsed, but his second was successful, and six thousand Jaalin men, women, and children were massacred in the usual Dervish fashion. Old women were killed, young ones made prisoners. The remnant of the tribe fled to our post at Jakdul Wells in the desert, and from there arrived destitute at Merowi.

At the end of July the desert railway had reached a point one hundred and fifteen miles from Halfa in the middle of the desert. It was now nearer to the Dervish force at Abu Hamed than our most advanced post on the Nile. The last raised Egyptian battalion was stationed at rail-head to protect it, but they had only done about six months' drill, so could hardly be called seasoned troops.

The Ababdeh Arabs, with their head-quarters at Murat Wells forty miles off, continually patrolled across the front of rail-head, about forty miles ahead of it, on the look-out for tracks of any Dervishes that might be bent on raiding.

It seemed rather cool cheek making a railway towards a place which was still in the hands of the enemy, while the construction party of three thousand men depended for their water upon a single line of hastily-constructed railway. Two or three times they had to go on half and quarter rations of water, drawing on the reserve which was always kept. On one occasion, when half

rations of water had twice been issued, there was only one tank left for the next issue when the water train turned up. The Nile was now rapidly rising, and as rail-head would soon be dangerously near Abu Hamed, it became imperative to take that place.

The Ababdeh Arabs under Abd el Azim were ordered to make a reconnaissance to ascertain the strength of the place. This they did in a very ingenious way, and sent in a report that could not have been made better even by an officer from the Staff College. They did not ride direct on Abu Hamed, but on a small village called Abteen, about seven miles below it. As they approached from the desert they opened out into a long line, and riding rapidly forward, they drove in front of them every man they came across, and gradually closing in they surrounded the place and enclosed in it all its inhabitants, so that no one could get away to give the Dervishes warning. They then got hold of the village sheikh, and having threatened him with every threat imaginable, they got the most complete and, as it turned out, the most accurate information of the Dervish strength and dispositions. They then watered their camels, and in order to avoid pursuit, they took all the inhabitants, man, woman, and child, out into the desert with them, so that they could not send news to the Dervishes. About six miles out they released them all, and rode back to Murat Wells.

They reported that there were about four hundred and fifty Dervish riflemen and fifty cavalry in Abu Hamed, also about six hundred of the local inhabitants armed only with spears and clubs, that they could not

keep a bigger force there on account of the difficulty of supply, but that they expected to get news of our advance, and then they would be reinforced from Berber. They intended to fight unless gunboats attacked them, but their position was quite open on the river side, and untenable against gunboat attack. They had made shelter-trenches round the houses which were right down on the river and overlooked by low hills, which came close to them. They had one gun, and their commander was Mohammed Zain, and they expected us to come when the Nile was nearly high between 15th and 20th August.

The Sirdar decided to send a small column under Major-General Hunter to take the place. In order that this column should not find Abu Hamed strengthened by reinforcements from Berber, it was essential that its departure should be kept a secret as long as possible, also that it should start earlier than the Dervishes expected, and march rapidly. The country between Kassinger, our advance post, and Abu Hamed is terribly bad for marching. There is not even a track, and one has to climb up and down steep rocky hills.

In order that the force might move rapidly over this country it must be a small one, and as the Dervish garrison of Abu Hamed was small, there was no necessity to send a large force. The column was therefore about two thousand seven hundred strong, consisting of Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh Sudanese Battalions, and the Third Egyptian, with one mule battery and twenty-five troopers to scout. Colonel MacDonald commanded the infantry, and General Hunter was in command of the

whole. The date of departure and the composition of the force was kept a profound secret to the very last moment; only the Sirdar and Generals Hunter and Rundle knew it, so that it caused general surprise when, on the 31st July, quite ten or fifteen days before any one expected it, the column left Kassinger at short notice. At the same time the camel corps and friendly Arabs made a demonstration towards Metemmeh as if we intended to attack Mahmud.

Four gunboats were also ordered to try and get to Abu Hamed at the same time as the column, though it was practically known to be impossible for them to get through the cataracts in time.

The column which left Kassinger had one hundred and eighteen miles of bad country in front of it to be got over as rapidly as possible, in order to reach Abu Hamed before it was reinforced from Berber.

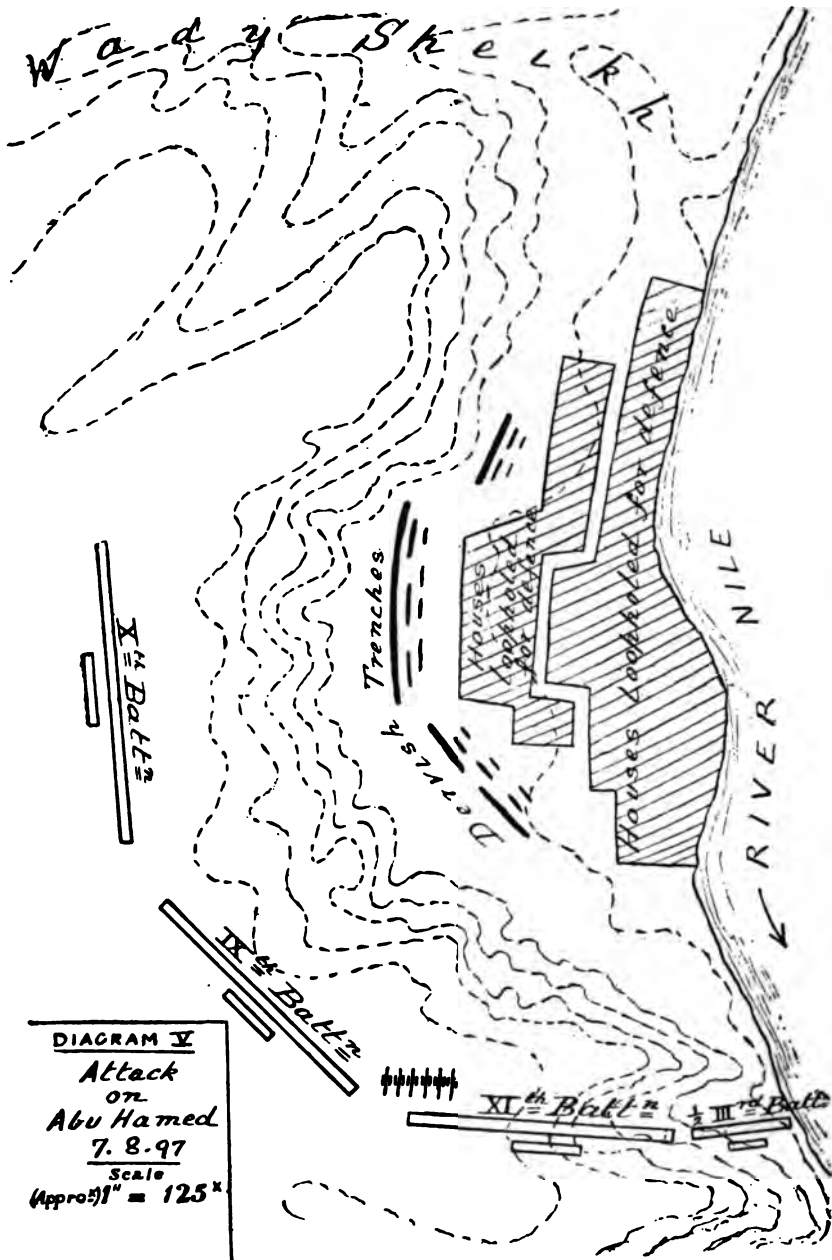
It was the hottest time of the year, so General Hunter did most of the marching by night. Although this is no doubt the best thing to do in hot weather, it has the drawback of depriving men of their sleep, as no one can sleep well in the hot day. The result was, that after two or three days' marching, every one had the greatest difficulty to keep awake even on the march. The ground was execrable and the column had to go in single file, while the transport tailed out for miles; nevertheless, the hundred and eighteen miles was accomplished in seven and a half days, that is, at the rate of fifteen and a half miles a day, which, considering the heat and the country traversed, shows the excellent marching power of the "Black" and the Egyptian.

By 2 a.m. on the 7th August, General Hunter's force was within one and a half miles of Abu Hamed. The transport was zeribahed on the river, and the whole force lay down for a short rest, having just completed sixteen miles.

About 4 a.m. the force moved off, leaving half of the Third Battalion (Egyptian) as escort to the transport in a zeriba on the river.

The Ababdeh Arabs with the General had drawn a map of the place in the sand. (This they can do excellently.)

General Hunter decided to attack both along the river-bank from the east and also from the desert. About 5 a.m. the force was formed up within about a quarter of a mile of Abu Hamed, but from the nature of the ground not a sign of either Dervishes or trenches could be seen; the only thing visible was their tall observation tower made of spars. The general impression was that the place was empty, and Major Kincaid, R.E., rode forward to reconnoitre it. As seen from the map the ground is peculiar. The desert in the neighbourhood has a general and easy slope to the river, but when within two hundred yards of the river bank drops suddenly, so that Abu Hamed lies at the bottom of a sort of crater. Major Kincaid rode to the edge of this crater and looked down into the place. Not a human being could he see. About eighty yards off him were some trenches which appeared empty, so he got out his pocket-book to write a message to the General. He wrote, "There is no enem——" Bang! crash! wh-t! wht! wht! came the bullets past his



ears. A few black heads had popped over the trenches eighty yards off, and fired a volley and missed him!

Major Kincaid turned about to return with his information, but was not in time to stop the General and all the Staff also riding to the edge of the crater. Bang! crash! again this time a larger volley, and at only eighty yards' range, but, incredible to relate, not one of the group of mounted officers was hit. The Staff turned about in double quick time, and the General ordered the battery to bombard the place. The infantry were drawn up only two hundred yards off the trenches, but out of sight. It was expecting a good deal of troops to ask them to stand idle within two hundred yards of the enemy for half-an-hour while the artillery bombarded, so Colonel MacDonald, in order to keep them employed, dressed the line on markers as if at a review.

It was curious to see punctilious drill going on within a stone's throw of the enemy's unseen trenches. The artillery soon found that the nature of the ground prevented them from doing more than hit the tops of the houses, while the Dervishes were lying perfectly quiet, so they changed their position so as to enfilade the trenches (see Diagram V.), and came into action within one hundred yards of them.

Still the Dervishes held their fire, but even now the artillery could not depress their guns enough to hit the majority of trenches, so General Hunter ordered the infantry to assault.

As soon as our troops reached the edge of the crater a roar of musketry broke out from the Dervish trenches,

and a hail of bullets was poured at our men, but fortunately, as before, most of it went high. Colonel MacDonald's intention was to rush the place with the bayonet, but without any word of command, first the Eleventh and then the other battalions broke into rapid independent firing, and no one could advance without getting shot by their own side, so there were our troops on the sky-line with the enemy shooting at them from a trench eighty yards off. In the first few seconds four out of the five mounted officers of the Tenth Battalion were brought to the ground, two killed and two with their horses shot; every man of the colour party was either killed or wounded. It was a most unpleasant position. Colonel MacDonald immediately came out in front swearing at the men and knocking up their rifles. The other officers did the same, and in a few minutes our firing ceased.

At the same time the Dervishes began to bolt from the trenches into the houses behind, and our troops rushed forward to enter the place with them. Then, as an officer said, "It was like crowding into the pit of a theatre on a Saturday night." There were narrow openings between the houses, which soon became crammed with a struggling mass of Dervishes and our troops, and then it was like Donnybrook fair, "wherever you see a head hit it."

The black is a splendid chap at house fighting, and they rapidly worked through the place, though it must be admitted some of their methods are almost as dangerous to friend as to foe. Before entering a house they fire several volleys into it (and as it is mud most of the bullets come out the other side), then they rush

in, and if a Dervish comes for them, they stick their bayonet in and at the same time pull the trigger. Before turning a corner from one street to another they reach their rifle round the corner and pull the trigger on chance, regardless of the fact that there may be some of their own troops coming up the street. Nevertheless they are A1 at clearing an enemy out of a village. In a twinkling they were all over the place, on the roofs, through the windows, and in no time had worked through the place and formed up beyond, firing volleys at the few flying Dervish cavalry, who were the only ones to escape.

The local inhabitants, who had been armed only with spears and clubs, made practically no resistance, and were all taken prisoners and soon released, but the genuine Dervishes refused with few exceptions to surrender, and died fighting. One man, who was an excellent shot, had hidden in a small house on the river, from which he picked off one after another half-a-dozen men who advanced to dislodge him. Colonel MacDonald, hearing about it, ordered a gun to be brought up. The gun fired several rounds through the house, and then one or two men went forward to find the bits of the man as they expected, but crack went his rifle again and another man dropped. The gun now reduced the house to ruins, and this time when they went up there was no shot fired, but not a trace of the man could be found. He had probably slipped into the river. Our casualties were about twenty-five killed and fifty-five wounded, about eighty in all. It was marvellous that the casualty list was not bigger considering the amount of ammunition let off on both sides. It can probably be explained by

the fact that the Dervishes were so overwhelmed by our fire that they could not aim, and what little aim they did take was bad, owing to the well-known difficulty of firing up-hill. Two of the best English officers in the Sudan were, however, killed, Major Sidney and Lieutenant Fitzclarence, both in the Tenth Battalion. This battalion, by the way, had worse luck than any other during the whole campaign, 1896—1899. Out of the five English officers in the battalion when the Dongola Expedition began two were killed, one wounded, one died of cholera, one was invalided home, and another, who filled one of the vacancies, died of enteric. It is true this battalion was in the front line in every engagement during the three years, but the Ninth and Eleventh Battalions, which had almost as much fighting, were very much more lucky.

The Dervish emir Mohammed Zain was found hiding under a bed. When brought up before General Hunter, the following conversation took place :—

General H. Why did you fight? Didn't you know it was useless?

Mohammed Zain. I knew you had only three times as many men as I had, and every one of my men is worth four of yours; you could not fire till you were quite close up, and at that range our rifles were as good as yours, and any way I have killed a lot of your men.

General H. What will Mahmud do now? Will he stay looting and robbing at Metemmeh, or will he come down here to attack me?

Mohammed Zain. He will be down here in five days' time to wipe you out.

CHAPTER VIII

THE position of General Hunter's small force at Abu Hamed was such as to cause a certain amount of anxiety. The victualling of the place by camels over one hundred and eighteen miles of atrocious country was a slow process, and Mahmud with a big force might be down any day to find the place without sufficient supplies to stand a ten days' siege till the arrival of a relieving force, which itself would increase the difficulty of supply.

Gunboats were badly needed both to strengthen the garrison and to reconnoitre up the river to find out the intentions of the Dervishes, but they were still struggling in the cataracts. A quantity of supplies in boats were being pulled through the cataracts by a detachment under Captain Doran, but it was a lengthy process, as the cataracts were very difficult, and Captain Doran had a tough job in front of him. For some time, therefore, no reserve of supplies could be piled up at Abu Hamed, and to add to the difficulty, a disaster occurred to a big camel convoy that was crossing from Korosko to Abu Hamed. It occurred in this way.

About five hundred new camels had been bought in Lower Egypt, and were being brought up the Nile by some freshly recruited transport men. When they reached Korosko, they were ordered to march across the desert to Abu Hamed with supplies for that place. Accordingly they started off in two convoys. The first, consisting of two hundred and fifty camels, was under the command of an Egyptian officer. The remaining two hundred and fifty started a day later under Lieutenant Mackay of the transport. The camels were Lower Egyptian ones, unaccustomed to the desert and to going without water. The men in charge were raw recruits, equally unaccustomed to the desert and a short water allowance; the loads were rather heavy, but as if this was not enough to contend with, an unusual heat-wave came on as soon as they had left Korosko. Occasionally, when there has been no wind for some time, the desert heats up like an oven, and a breathless stifling heat hangs over it. These heat-waves are well known by the Arabs, and they never attempt to travel through them. The camels felt the heat tremendously, and could not be got to travel at the usual rate. Consequently at the end of the third day, instead of reaching Murat Wells, the first convoy under the Egyptian officer was still a long way from that place.

There was no discipline among the raw recruits, the convoy got into disorder, and finally stampeded. One Egyptian subaltern succeeded in collecting a few and taking them to Gebel Raffat, where there was some rain water in the rocks. The Egyptian officer in charge

and a few others reached Murat Wells in an exhausted state.

In the meantime Lieutenant Mackay was having the same difficulty with his convoy of two hundred and fifty. He took four and a half days instead of three to reach Murat, but he kept order in his convoy, and forced the camels on. His own camel was too exhausted to carry him the last sixteen miles, so he had to walk that distance without any water; but he brought all his convoy into Murat Wells, though every man and camel was absolutely dead beat, and could not have gone five miles further.

The Arabs at Murat Wells went in search of the convoy that stampeded, and succeeded in rescuing several, but eleven men and two hundred camels were either lost or found dead from thirst. As soon as men and animals were sufficiently recovered, Lieutenant Mackay took them into Abu Hamed without further mishap.

In the meantime the gunboats under Commander Keppel, R.N., were having a hard time of it in the cataracts. The usual plan was followed of attaching ropes on which several hundred men pulled while the gunboat put on all steam, but at the first bad place the leading gunboat capsized and was wrecked. A side current caught it and swung the bows round so that the rope came across the deck. The men on the rope, in the hope of saving her, pulled all the harder, whereas they ought to have let go.

The result was she capsized in a twinkling; Lieutenant Beatty, R.N., in command of her, although a

good swimmer, was twice sucked under in the eddies, but the second time he saw a loose telegraph pole, and catching hold of that he managed to stay on the surface till he drifted ashore. As the capsized gunboat went dashing down the cataract, some men on the bank said they thought they heard some knocking inside her, so they followed it down until it ran aground, and then ripped open the bottom plates, and out crawled the engineer and stoker alive and well. This mishap did not serve to encourage the other gunboats, but they managed to negotiate the place safely, and went on in the same fashion pulling and steaming through the next hundred miles. One of the reises (native steersmen) had a most dangerous habit of leaving the tiller and falling on his knees to pray just at the critical moments, and Commander Keppel had to instruct him that the right time to pray was before and after the critical moment and not exactly when it occurred.

Had only one hundred Dervishes turned up on the steep hills overlooking the river they could have caused infinite annoyance and delay, but they were probably deterred from this by the fact that we held all the wells in the Bayuda Desert, and the tribes there were friendly to us.

While General Hunter was waiting at Abu Hamed for the gunboats, news reached him that the Dervish Emir Zekki, in command at Berber, was evacuating that place.

Confirmation of this news also reached Merowi, but of course it was only rumour and not to be relied on. However, as soon as the first gunboat reached Abu

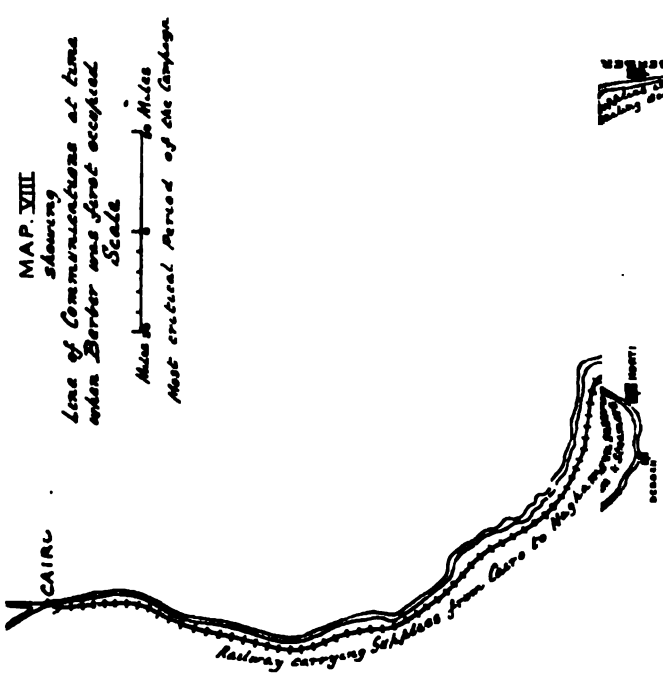
Hamed, General Hunter went on board and proceeded up the river. The Ababdeh Arabs about two hundred strong, under Ahmet Bey Khalifa, rode along the bank mounted on fast camels, so that in the event of meeting a big force of Dervishes they could escape. When the gunboat was going through the cataract near Umhasheya, about thirty miles from Berber, it struck a rock. The nearest pillow and blankets were stuffed into the hole to keep the water out. Immediately the accident occurred three or four fellows rushed to the place with blankets and pillows, but it was observed that each man brought somebody else's bedding and not his own. This mishap caused some delay, and the Ababdeh Arabs got ahead of the gunboat, and approaching Berber cautiously, they were told by the natives that the Dervishes had left. With some trepidation they rode into the place, and found it was evacuated by the Dervishes.

It seemed surprising that the Dervishes should have evacuated so important a place as Berber; but the Khalifa probably thought that our main advance was going to be on Metemmeh, in the same way that the British desert column advanced in 1884, and that we had captured Abu Hamed only to protect our flank and rear.

Arguing thus, he would decide that the big struggle must be at Metemmeh, and he could not allow Mahmud to go to reinforce Berber, or we should take Metemmeh. As he could not reinforce Berber it was no good allowing the five thousand men there to be destroyed. The Atbara was in flood, so gunboats could steam right up



SPIKING PARTIES IN FRONT OF TRAIN.



MAP. XIII

showing

Line of Communications at time
when Barber was first occupied
Scale

10 Miles

Most critical Period of the Campaign

CAIRO

Railway carrying Seaboard from Cairo to Red Sea

PORT
SEA LEVEL

1000 Feet

it, and cut off the escape of the Berber garrison. These were probably the reasons which induced the Khalifa to order the evacuation of Berber, so that the Sirdar's strategy in threatening Metemneh while he advanced to Abu Hamed and Berber was successful.

When General Hunter reported that Berber was evacuated, the Sirdar was confronted with another problem. There was a certain amount of difficulty in supplying Abu Hamed, which would be considerably increased if he advanced one hundred and thirty miles further to Berber. The force sent there would have to be small; if the Dervishes came down to it in numbers our main body would have to march a long way to reinforce the place, and to supply them would be difficult. To appreciate the difficulty, let us examine the line of communications. From Cairo supplies went by rail three hundred and ninety miles to Naghamadi, from thence by boat one hundred and forty-five miles to Assouan, then four miles by rail round the cataract to Shellal, from there two hundred and twenty miles by boat to Halfa, then two hundred and three miles by rail to Kerma (the other desert line was not yet completed), from Kerma one hundred and eighteen miles by boat to Kassinger, and from there slowly and with difficulty were either pulled through the cataracts, or carried by camel to Abu Hamed; from there to Berber, one hundred and thirty miles, boats could sail for the next three months, after which the falling Nile would cause navigation to be broken at two cataracts necessitating two camel portages. From this it is easy to understand the urgency and importance of the desert

railway under construction from Wady Halfa to Abu Hamed. When that was completed, supplies would reach the latter place eighteen days earlier than by the existing route. Fortunately the railway was forging ahead at a tremendous pace. In the month of August forty-five miles were completed, bringing the total amount laid up to one hundred and sixty miles, that is, eighty-five miles from Abu Hamed. There was every reason to expect this pace would be kept up, so no doubt this materially assisted the Sirdar to decide on taking the risk of occupying Berber.

The occupation was at first of a very slender nature. The gunboats took four hundred men up and disembarked them on an island opposite Berber, while the gunboats moored alongside.

MacDonald's Brigade soon followed, and on its arrival the place was properly occupied. Three more battalions left Kassinger for Abu Hamed; each battalion had to pull boats through the cataracts containing two months' supplies for themselves.

As there was a chance of Dervishes raiding down on them while they were busy in the cataracts, the orders for their departure were kept absolutely secret as long as possible, and the battalions had to start on the shortest notice. For instance, the Second Battalion, commanded by Major Pink, got the order to start at 10 a.m. one morning, and at 1 p.m. it had moved off, having broken up a camp in which it had been some months, and drawn supplies and equipment for the expedition in front of it.

Here I must relate an amusing example of the expe-

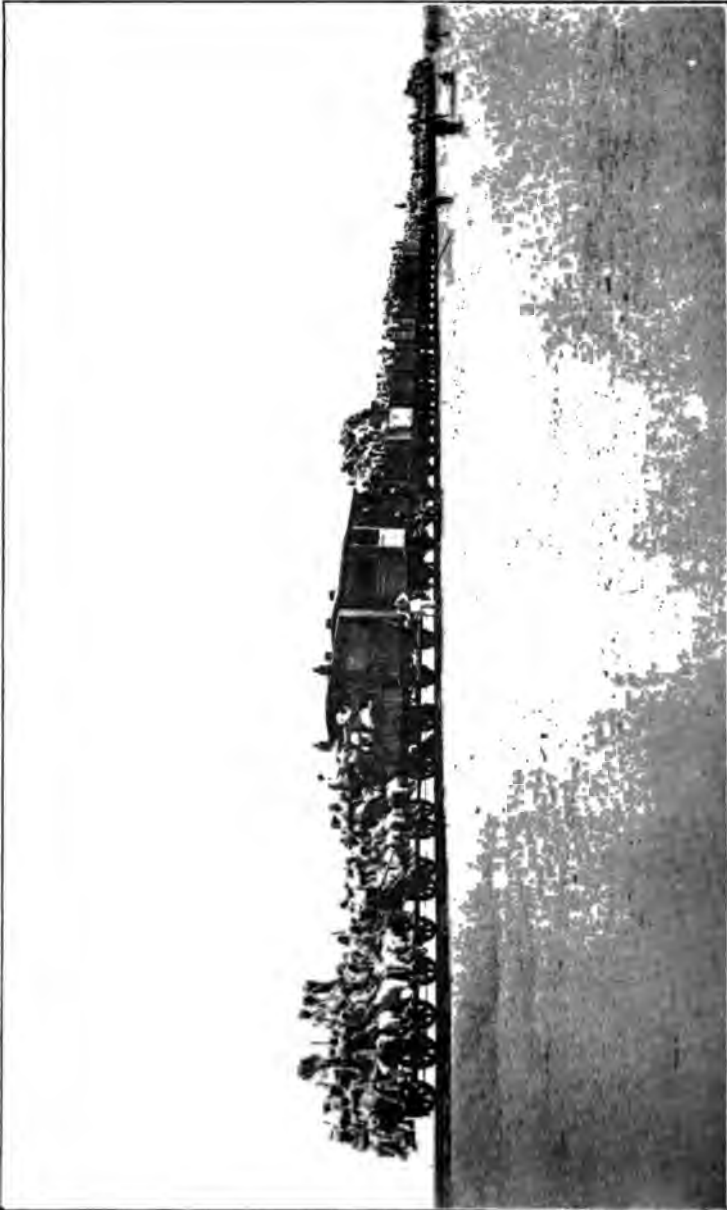


PLATE-LAYING PARTY RETURNING TO CAMP AFTER WORK.

dients that have to be thought of on active service for carrying on work with the means at hand. The Sirdar happened to visit Kassinger about this time, and noticed a number of coils of telegraph-wire which he had thought were already forwarded to the front. The commandant of the station explained that he had been forbidden to send it forward on camels as they were all required for carrying food, and that he had only got donkeys on which to load the wire. He explained that two coils of wire were much too heavy for one donkey, and that one coil of wire could not be fastened so as to stay on, but always fell off though he had tried every means of fastening it on.

“Oh!” said the Sirdar, “I’ll show you how to do it: bring me a donkey and a coil of wire.” The Sirdar then placed the coil of wire on the ground, backed the donkey till his hind-feet were inside the coil, then lifting up the coil passed it up his hind-legs and along his body till it rested on the saddle, and the donkey was inside the coil, having been, so to speak, threaded through it. There was no chance of the coil falling off now, and away the donkey went.

It must have been an anxious time for the Sirdar between the occupation of Berber and the completion of the desert railway to Abu Hamed, but he did not have to wait long. On the 31st October the railway reached that place, so that in less than three months after the capture of Abu Hamed trains were running into it. Between the 15th May and 31st October two hundred miles of railway had been constructed, that is at the rate of one and one-sixth miles a day, during the hottest

time of the year, through a previously unmapped and waterless desert. The quality of the line was also good, and trains carrying two hundred tons of supplies, drawn by engines weighing fifty tons without tender, ran twenty-five to thirty miles an hour with safety.

It would perhaps interest some readers if I described shortly the organization and working of the railway corps while constructing the desert railway.

I have already told how R.E. subalterns had made rough reconnaissance maps on camel-back of the desert. These had enabled the general line of the railway to be decided on, but more detail survey was of course required to supplement this. Accordingly a survey camp was located always six miles in advance of rail-head. In this camp were two R.E. subalterns, one sapper, and eighteen Egyptians, working with theodolite and level, putting in pegs every hundred feet to mark the line, while information as to the height of the railway bank or cutting at each of these pegs was sent back to rail-head daily. The survey party was supplied with water and rations by camel from rail-head. In the event of being attacked they were sufficiently strong to be able to force their way back to rail-head camp, six miles distant, as the Dervishes could not possibly send more than a raiding party of, at the outside, three hundred camelmén.

The next stage was the construction of the embankment. By the greatest fortune and by dint of taking every care to locate the line so as to conform to the ground as far as possible, the embankment required was very slight, for long distances it did not exceed one

foot in height, occasionally it ran up to two feet, but very seldom over that. Thus it was possible for the party engaged in constructing the embankment to live at rail-head camp—a great convenience for reasons of supply. Had it been necessary to locate construction parties in the heart of the desert ahead of the railway, the question of their supply would have been a difficult one.

The embankment party, about fifteen hundred strong, started in the early morning from rail-head camp, taking their day's rations and cooking-pots with them. They always kept one day's work ahead of the rails, throwing up from one and a quarter to one and a half miles of embankment daily, returning to camp at sunset. They therefore had longer hours, further to march, and harder work than any one.

Behind the bankmakers came the plate-laying party laying the rails and sleepers. This party, about one thousand strong, was organized exactly like a machine: each separate piece of work had a particular gang of men always doing that same work, and of such a strength that, while keeping up with gangs doing other work, it did not work faster than them. A train of railway material would arrive at rail-head, with rails on some trucks, sleepers in others, while the proper complement of fish-plates and bolts were in boxes on each rail-truck. Immediately the train arrived a few men jumped into the sleeper trucks and quickly passed them out to gangs told off to carry them to the front of the train, where they were laid on the embankment; other men adjusted them at right angles to the line and

spaced them correctly ; next came gangs carrying rails which they placed on the sleepers, while others adjusted them so as to butt against each other. While some men put on the fish-plates another puts chalk marks on the rail to show where it should be spiked. Then follow the spiking parties, each consisting of five men, one at each end of the sleeper levering it up to the rail, two spiking, one gauging and superintending. Behind the spiking parties are three or four men roughly straightening the line by levering it with bars ; behind them follows up the engine with its train without waiting for the line to be ballasted, so as to have the rails and sleepers as close as possible to the working party. Behind the train they are packing earth under the sleepers and getting the line correctly graded ; and again behind them a few men with bars are straightening it truly, then a big party fills in with earth. Half-a-mile further back a second lot of straighteners, lifters, and fillers-in are improving the work, while behind all come the most skilful platelayers giving the finishing touches.

The whole of the embankment party and the platelaying parties were in one camp at rail-head, under the direction of two, sometimes one, R.E. subalterns ; while for security against attack there was half a battalion of the last-raised Egyptian Battalion under the command of a British captain, who was in military command of the camp.

Every four or five days the camp would be moved forward. Rations and water came daily by rail from Halfa. Every twenty miles there was a station, or

rather just a loop siding to allow trains to pass. Each station had a station-master, two pointsmen, and a telephone clerk (all native), living in a tent.

Wady Halfa was the base, on the proper organization of which the whole progress of the work depended. It was divided into separate departments—workshops, traffic, buildings, stores and maintenance, each under the control of an R.E. subaltern, assisted by native officers, while the workshop department had the advantage of the valuable experience of Mr. Saunderson and Mr. Adams, who had come from big workshops in England.

The building or works department built workshops and stores, engine-pits, etc., sunk wells in the desert, and later on put up what bridges were required.

The workshops put together new engines and trucks, patched up old ones, and repaired the running ones.

The traffic department controlled the passing of trains by telephone, the marshalling and allotment of trucks, the loading of trains, the teaching of natives to become signalmen, pointsmen, station-masters, etc.

The stores and maintenance department requisitioned stores, kept an eye on their passage up the river, stacked and stored them in the right places, and at the same time controlled and watched the platelaying gangs that were always maintaining and improving the line.

A detachment of R.E. non-commissioned officers and men from one of the railway companies were employed in the workshops, driving engines and superintending the various departments, but the bulk of engine-drivers and artisans were of every nationality under the sun.

CHAPTER IX

Now at last Khartum began to be within the sphere of "practical politics," but first we had to strengthen our still precarious hold on Berber. At the end of November the Nile for five miles between Neddi and Bashtinab, and for fifteen miles between Umhasheyo and Geneinetti was impracticable for boats, so the boats were distributed on the intervening spaces of good water, and camels carried supplies round the cataracts. Owing to the length of the river between Abu Hamed and Berber, and the necessity of portages, supplies took several days in getting from one place to the other, and it was not a line of communication suitable for connecting what was to be eventually the advanced base of a big expedition, so the Sirdar decided to at once extend the railway to Berber.

In order to slightly quicken transport, two small steamers were brought up from Merowi and placed one on each stretch of fair water. One of these steamers was the one that was captured from the Dervishes at Hafir and sunk by our gunboats during the bombardment. She had been patched up, and did a tremendous lot of useful work during the remainder of the expedition. It

was considered very doubtful if she had enough steam power to get through the cataracts between Merowi and Abu Hamed. Her boiler was about eighteen years old, and had not had much attention when she was in the hands of the Dervishes. However, Captain Bainbridge was told to try and get her through the cataracts. This officer had had more experience than any one at pulling steamers and boats through cataracts, and was quite an expert at it. He had, however, no easy task in getting this small steamer through, and it was only by screwing the safety-valve down and chancing the boiler bursting that he did it.

On one occasion the boat could make no headway up a narrow rapid channel, and for half-an-hour it remained absolutely stationary with the engines going full speed ahead, during which time it was a toss up whether she got up or was dashed down the cataract. Eventually a possibility was seen of edging into an easier channel, and the boat slowly moved up.

Soon after Berber had been properly occupied, the gunboats under Commander Keppel, R.N., steamed up to bombard Metemmeh. They found the Dervishes quite ready for them. Several forts had been built along the river-bank, and behind in the desert was the Dervish entrenched position. The gunboats bombarded briskly all day, keeping close to the east bank, where the Dervish guns could hardly reach them, while their own fire was just as effective as at shorter range. At night they tied up to an island, and early next morning again ran up to Metemmeh. It was hardly light, so they expected to surprise the forts, but hardly had they fired the first

gun before an answering shell came over their heads. As before they lay within about fifty yards of the east bank, while the forts were on the west. They had just begun to warm to the work, when suddenly from the bushes behind, within fifty yards, there was a rattle of musketry. As an officer said at the time, it was a case of "front seat behind the funnel for me, please;" but a maxim swung round, and very soon made the bushes too hot for their occupants. After bombarding for some time the gunboats ran past and went right on to the beginning of the Shabluka Cataract, then turned, and on their way back again bombarded Metemmeh. The gunboats were hit by the Dervish shell in two or three places, but not in any vital part, though one had to be towed back as her steam-pipe had been cut by a shell.

This was the first of many reconnaissances by the gunboats. One gunboat was always on patrol for a week at a time, making life unbearable for the Dervishes, so that the gunboat fellows had plenty of small skirmishes, and a trip on one of these patrols was eagerly sought after. An Egyptian brigade was now encamped at the junction of the Atbara with the Nile, and set to work to build a fort, inside which were built huts for stores and men, and everything was done to prepare the place for being the advance base of the Khartum Expedition. The gunboats made it their head-quarters, and started from it on their patrols.

Before the Egyptian Brigade had occupied Atbara camp, the Dervishes had made two very impudent raids, the first behind Berber and within four miles of it. They

carried off some cattle and women, and had the good fortune to capture the camel post, which happened to be passing at the time. Captain King's company of the camel corps and the Ababdeh Arabs went in pursuit, and pressed them so closely that the Dervishes had to leave the cattle and women, and also dropped one mail-bag, but kept the remainder and got away. It would have been curious if one could have seen the Khalifa puzzling over the various letters from home to officers at Berber, in which no doubt the Khalifa was not referred to in flattering terms. One of the lost letters was a very long list of stores required by the railway for the Berber extension. It was on its way to the Sirdar, who was at Berber. He was delighted when he heard of the loss of this letter. He said, "Now the Khalifa will see the amount of things *I'm* asked to provide the force with. I wonder what he would say if one of *his* emirs sent in a long requisition like that? he'd probably cut his head off."

Another raid was made by the Dervishes actually on to the village straight opposite Berber. The gunboats took some troops across, and the Dervishes fled. It was to stop these raids that troops were established in forts on both banks of the Nile at the Atbara junction. This measure proved successful, and only one other raid was subsequently made, and then the raiders were mostly captured. In order that the villagers might protect themselves, they were armed with Remingtons. They were naturally very much on the *qui vive*, and inclined to fire at any horsemen on the chance of their being Dervishes; the result was, that the day after the arms

were issued General Hunter and his Staff, while riding from Berber to Atbara, were fired at the whole way.

I should have mentioned before, that in November General Hunter took a small flying column to Adarama, the head-quarters of Osman Digna, in the hopes of catching that gentleman. Adarama is on the Atbara, about forty miles from its mouth, and was Osman Digna's favourite residence. Needless to say, that wily individual was not at home, but his village was burnt and a large quantity of supplies taken. It must have been annoying to Osman Digna to find the tables turned, and a raid being made on his own house.

Communication was now open with Suakim, and Major Sparkes, commanding the Fourth Battalion at that place, rode through to Berber, being the first European to travel this way since 1883. The sheikhs of the tribes living near this highway came to see the Sirdar at Berber, and asked if he would recognize their ancient right to levy toll on caravans. Having received an answer in the affirmative, they declared their loyalty to the Egyptian Government, and never gave any trouble.

Lieutenant Manifold, R.E., having brought the telegraph to Berber, started to connect that place by telegraph with Suakim. Parties were also sent out to improve the water supply at wells along the route.

We must now turn our attention in another direction. It will be remembered that the Italians had agreed not to evacuate Kassala until such time as we were in a position to take it over, provided that we did so within a reasonable time.

Now that we had Berber we were in a position to

occupy Kassala, and the importance of this place immediately becomes evident. Kassala lies at the head of the Atbara, down which a force could easily advance on Berber. It is the centre of a grain district which could support a large Dervish force, consequently were it in the hands of the Dervishes, they could constantly threaten Berber, and no advance could be made to Khartum while it was possible for a Dervish force to come down the Atbara behind us. Had not the Italians therefore held on to Kassala, we should have been obliged to send a force to take the place from the Dervishes.

As it was, however, the Sixteenth Egyptian Battalion and some camel corps took the place over from the Italians. Since the Italian defeat at Adua, their Government had prohibited any military operations, consequently the Dervishes had some posts close to the place. As soon as Colonel Parsons arrived at Kassala, he sent a force of Arab irregulars, raised by the Italians, to turn the Dervishes out of their posts. This they did with great dash, and the Dervishes were driven right out of the district and retired to Gedaref, a place some way further south. A very holy man (whose name I forget), who was the sheikh of this district, but had been living under our protection at Suakim, was brought back to his own place at Kassala, and received with great enthusiasm.

CHAPTER X

THE position was now changed. Whereas at the end of the Dongola Expedition the Sirdar had the advantage of operating on interior lines, and could threaten either Metemmeh or Berber, now the Khalifa was on the inside of the circle, and ought to be able to keep our troops marching and countermarching, by threatening first Merowi and then Berber. In view of the fact that both places were liable to attack, the Sirdar had his army about equally divided, and we have seen how broken was communication between Abu Hamed and Berber, so that troops would take ten days to march from one to the other. Consequently for one half of the army to reinforce the other would require time. The railway could not immediately advance, as the material ordered for the extension did not begin to arrive till January. It was rather a critical position, but the Khalifa did not at first appear to realize his advantage, and it looked as if we were going to have another long weary spell of uneventful waiting.

An amusing incident occurred at Berber which well illustrates the "Black's" character. After the Abu



ENGLISH TROOPS ARRIVING AT HALFA.

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Hamed fight Colonel MacDonald had soundly rated the men who began the independent firing without orders. Well, one night at Berber, Colonel MacDonald, while sleeping as usual in the court-yard round his hut, was woke up by a black soldier properly dressed in drill order without arms. When asked what he wanted, he said, "My battalion is very sorry that you are angry with them for firing without orders at Abu Hamed, but *we* know best what to do, we have been fighting since we were boys, *we* know the Dervishes, and *we* know the best way to turn them out of a place, so just you leave things to us, and we'll pull you through." The "Black" then turned about, and was outside the courtyard before Colonel MacDonald recovered from his surprise and exploded.

In January the railway again began to advance, and every day now decreased the Khalifa's chance of scoring a success. The people at Berber did not believe much in the permanency of our occupation, and the sheikh was caught sending letters to the Khalifa saying, "Now is the time to come and destroy the Turks, they have only a few battalions here, and cannot bring any more; Mahmud's army would take the place easily."

In January news came that the Khalifa was about to utilize in a blundering way the advantage of his position, and it was reported that Mahmud was going to attack Berber and destroy the railway, the insidious effect of which the Khalifa had begun to realize. He had, of course, never seen a railway, but spies explained to him that it was "like a steamer, except that it went on wheels on the land, and could not go in the water,

and every time it came it brought a pile of supplies as high as a mountain."

The Sirdar immediately altered his dispositions, and brought all the Egyptian army except one battalion and the camel corps from Merowi to Berber. At the same time the Fourth Battalion (Egyptian) under Major Sparkes marched from Suakim to Berber, accomplishing the two hundred and seventy miles in the extraordinarily short period of thirteen days, that is, at the rate of twenty-one miles a day. The greatest distance covered in one day was thirty miles. This performance was one more proof of the Egyptian's wonderful strength and endurance, and was the record march in a campaign in which a great many good marches were made. An English brigade from Cairo was also speedily sent up, and camped at the end of the railway. From this point it could march to reinforce the Egyptian army at Berber, or if the Khalifa, after threatening Berber, sent a force to attack Merowi and Korti, then the English brigade could be railed back to Halfa, up the other line to Kerma, from there by steamers to Merowi, and reach that place in six or seven days, that is to say, at least five or six days before the Dervishes could. Had the Khalifa continued (as he ought to have) threatening first one and then the other, we should probably have been obliged to advance and attack them in their fortified position at Metemmeh, thus further lengthening the line of communications, and losing a good many men at Metemmeh.

It was a great treat to see British troops again.

The brigade consisted of the Cameron Highlanders, Seaforth Highlanders, Lincolnshire and Warwickshire Regiments, commanded by General Gatacre, who immediately set himself energetically to work to get the brigade in training.

Just as a prize-fighter requires to go into training for a fight, so does a soldier require to for a campaign ; so General Gatacre adopted the methods of the trainer, plenty of the best food that could be obtained, early rising and lots of marching. He had excellent material to work on, and at the end of a short time the brigade was as hard and fit as they could be. Two companies of the Warwickshire were sent to Merowi, as their arrival there would be reported with great exaggeration in numbers to the Khalifa.

Another result of keeping the British Brigade back at rail-head was, that Mahmud never expected to meet them when he came down. He had heard of their coming up the Nile, but thought they were still some way from Berber.

Now that the force at Berber was increased, it became necessary to increase the amount of camel transport, so Beshir Bey, the sheikh of the Bisharin tribe in the Nubian Desert, was called upon to produce a thousand camels by a certain day.

Beshir Bey was a pretty good scoundrel, and his men are the biggest scoundrels unhung. They lived on the line of wells connecting Berber with Assouan, and previous to this campaign had made a lot of money by running ammunition to the Dervishes—in fact, they were hand-in-glove with them, as correspondence taken

at Berber proved. They now took over the transport work at the portages so as to release the regular transport for work at the front. They looted the goods they were transporting in the most barefaced way, and of course punctuality had no meaning for them, and they were as truculent as possible. Captain Bainbridge, who was in charge of them, had a worrying time of it, and finally he caused quite a sensation by putting Beshir Bey in the guard-room. To appreciate the effect this had on the Arabs, the reader must imagine what he would think if the subaltern in command of the Guard at the Bank of England were to put the Lord Mayor in the guard-room. However, it did Beshir Bey a lot of good, though I don't wish to insinuate that the same treatment would do the Lord Mayor good.

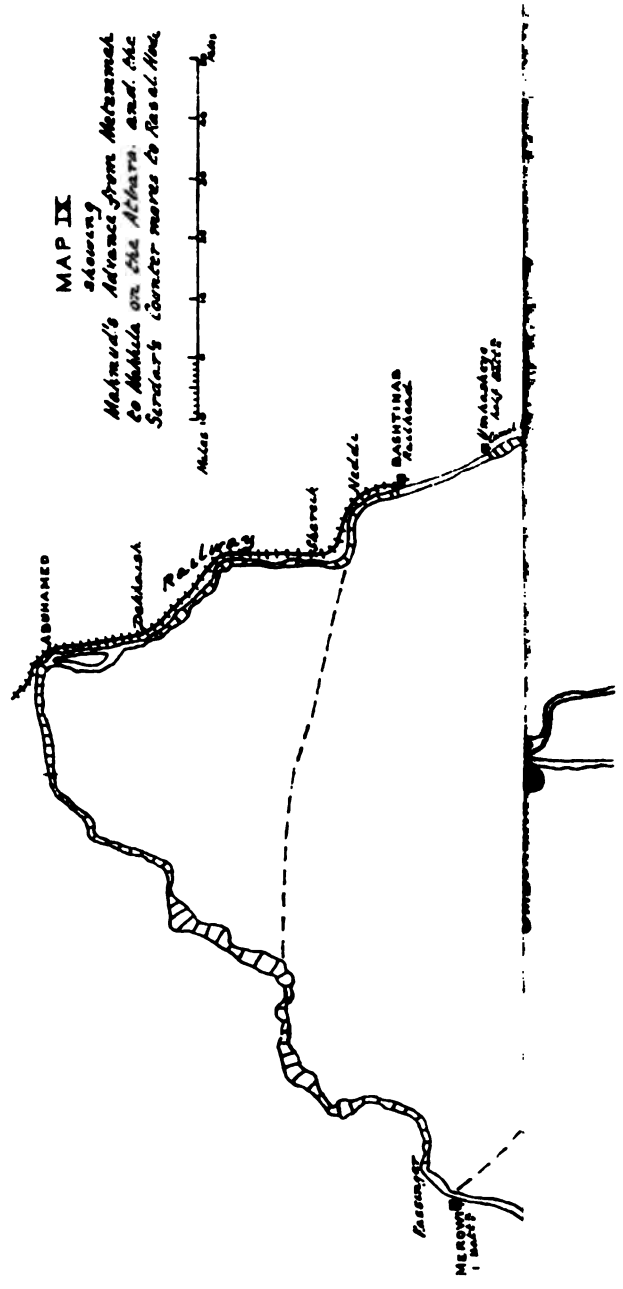
Although rumours of the Dervish intention to advance continued to come in, the time went on without any actual movement, and the railway forged ahead, every day shortening the line of communications, and bringing the various parts of our line more into touch.

The gunboats were busy watching the Dervishes, and one day reported that Mahmud had during the night crossed the whole of his force to Shendi. They next reported that small parties of them were coming down the Nile. The Sirdar had an Egyptian brigade in Atbara fort, and the remainder of the Egyptian army at Berber, and the British Brigade received orders to march as quickly as possible to that place. Rail-head was now fifty-four miles south of Abu Hamed. General Gatacre got the order to march at 1 p.m., just as the

MAP IX

*showing
Mahmed's Advances from Mahmud
to Akhala on the Alfara and the
Sindar's counter moves to Ras al-Hud.*

Miles 0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35



brigade was returning from a long route march. At 8 p.m. they entrained and travelled to rail-head. Early the next morning they started marching. It was now the month of March, and the weather was still cool in the mornings and afternoons, but hot at mid-day. It was thought that the Dervishes would march rapidly down the Nile, so it was necessary for the British Brigade to march hard to reach the force at the Atbara before the Dervishes did. The value of the marching training they had had was now evident; they reached a place four miles north of Berber in four and a half days from the time they left rail-head, fifty-four miles south of Abu Hamed. Consequently they had marched seventy-four miles in four and a half days, that is, at the rate of sixteen and a half miles a day. On arrival at Berber they were much disappointed to hear that the Dervishes had made no further move, and after resting a day they marched fourteen miles further on to a camp half-way between Berber and the Atbara.

For the next few days the Dervishes made no move, and it looked as if they were changing their minds, but about the 10th March the gunboats reported that all Mahmud's force was on the move down the Nile. Lieutenant Beatty's gunboats had a smart skirmish, driving a body of them off an island on which they had landed to get food. Major Sitwell was wounded in this affair; the bullet came from the flank and scored the flesh all along his back, but just missed the backbone by a hair's-breadth. It was supposed that the Dervishes were coming straight down the Nile and

would attack Atbara fort. As this was an excellent position for us to defend, the Sirdar did not show his whole force at the Atbara fort in order to entice them to attack it. He had one Egyptian brigade in the fort, and the whole of the remainder of the force were concentrated at Kenur, four miles north of the Atbara.



SIRDAR'S CAMP, BASEL HUDI ON ATBARA.

From this place they could march to the Atbara, and take the Dervishes in flank as soon as they had given themselves away by crossing it and attacking the fort.

The gunboats continued to send word of the Dervish advance, and were daily engaged with them, but one day they reported that no Dervishes were to be seen anywhere along the bank, and they appeared to have

struck eastwards inland. The cavalry were immediately sent to reconnoitre. They searched the country twenty-five miles south of the Atbara without seeing any Dervishes, but got news that they had left the Nile at Kabati, and were marching across the desert to strike the Atbara, and from there go round our flank to Berber. It was evident that this was what they were doing, so the Sirdar moved his force to Hudi on the Atbara, leaving one battalion in the fort at the mouth of the Atbara, and one in Berber. The advantage of our position now can be seen by a glance at the map. If the Dervishes wanted to go round our flank on to Berber they would have to make a very long desert march without water, impossible for a big force, while we could attack them in flank while they were doing it. At the same time, we blocked their further advance down the Atbara. Small parties of them might ride round on camels to raid Berber or the line of communications behind. To guard against this there was a battalion in Berber, and no boats or convoys were moving between Geneinetti and the Atbara. Everything that was required was now at the Atbara fort, and was sent from there by camel. Geneinetti and also rail-head were too far off for them to raid.

At the same time there was a certain amount of anxiety as long as their whereabouts were unknown. The cavalry were continually on the look-out for them, and one day reported their arrival on the Atbara. It was, of course, supposed they would attack forthwith, and the ground round our bivouac was well cleared. A brigade was always on outpost duty while the cavalry

reconnoitred. Two or three days after their arrival on the Atbara, the cavalry came in contact with a body of their cavalry coming to reconnoitre us. It was just beyond the outposts, who were able to fire at the Dervishes. This, together with the reports sent in, led to the idea that the Dervishes were coming to attack, so the Sirdar formed up the force to receive them, but it soon turned out that the Dervish cavalry were only trying to reconnoitre us, and were not supported by any infantry. This state of affairs went on from day to day, Mahmud sitting at Nakhila while we were at Hudi daily expecting an attack. Our cavalry were very busy keeping touch with the Dervishes and constantly skirmishing with them. It was very difficult country for cavalry to work in as it was thickly covered with bush, so that most unexpected encounters took place. On one occasion the cavalry had completed their morning reconnaissance, all patrols had come in and reported the country quite clear of the enemy for fifteen miles in every direction. Accordingly, they began watering and feeding the horses; the English officers were squatting on the ground together having some lunch, when suddenly their attention was attracted by grunts from the Marquis of Tullibardine, whose mouth was so full of bread that he could not speak, and could only grunt and point with his fork. Looking in the direction in which he was pointing they saw a group of Dervish horsemen dashing down on them. The English officers were in a group by themselves, the remainder of the cavalry on the river one hundred yards off. Every officer sprang for his horse. Captain Baring,

who was nearest to the Dervishes, was so closely pressed that while he was in the act of mounting, and before he had quite thrown his leg over the saddle, he was obliged to shoot the leading Dervish to prevent being cut down. As it was, most of the officers would certainly have been cut down if it had not been that one troop of cavalry was on guard and mounted, and they dashed up to the rescue, and assisted the officers to put the Dervishes to flight.

CHAPTER XI

As the days went by, and the Dervishes still continued inactive, the Sirdar decided on a measure which it was hoped would stir them to attack us. The Dervishes had left a certain amount of property and food that they could not carry in their forts at Shendi under the charge of those who were unable to march with them. The Sirdar directed the Fifteenth Battalion under Major Hickman, which had been left at Atbara fort, to proceed on the gunboats to Shendi, take the place, destroy the forts, and bring back the supplies. This was thoroughly accomplished by Major Hickman, and in due time the news reached the Dervishes, but still they showed no inclination to move, though Osman Digna sent some of his men to try and capture Adarama (his own home) from the friendly Arabs who were holding it for us. These had orders to evacuate the place if attacked, but they twice defeated Osman Digna's men.

The Dervishes were now suffering considerably from hunger. Their arrangements for supply were very sketchy, and they were now living on dom nuts. The nuts that grow on the dom palms have a kernel of hard vegetable ivory. When ground into powder it makes

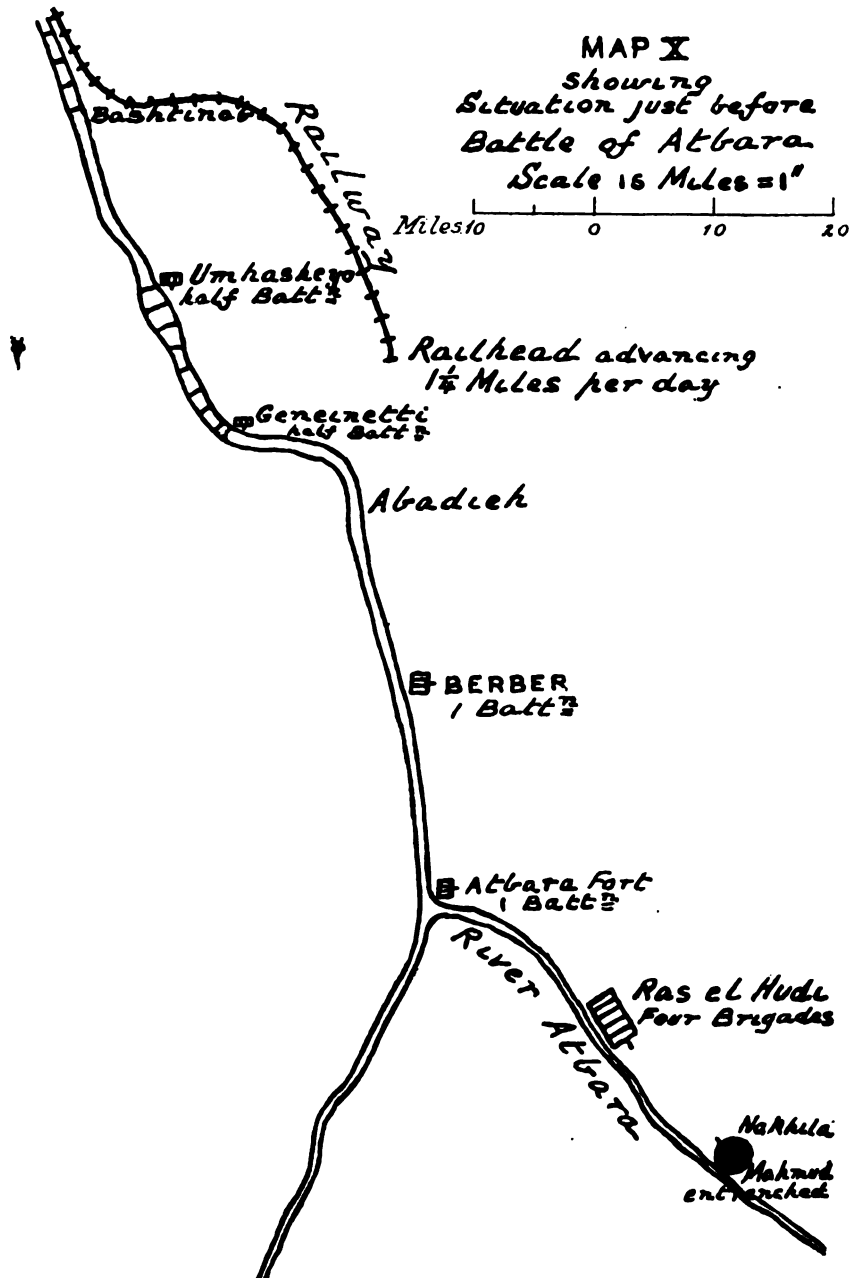
bread of a very sustaining nature. Each man was issued two nuts a day. It was hardly a fighting man's allowance, but still Mahmud was not inclined to assume the offensive, and he continued to improve the entrenchments of his position until every man and animal was provided with cover. He had learnt now that a much bigger force was in front of him than he had expected.

This unexpected delay on the part of the Dervishes was of course very disappointing to our force. The British Brigade was exceedingly uncomfortable. They had left their camp under the impression that they were going to have a fight the next day, and be back in camp in forty-eight hours, consequently they had brought practically no baggage. The Egyptian army, on the other hand, after two years' campaigning, were up to every wrinkle, and knew how to combine the utmost mobility with the utmost comfort possible under the circumstances. Any battalion could start off at a moment's notice with little transport, and yet have everything they wanted, and make a comfortable camp with shelter from the sun in no time. The British Brigade very soon learnt the tricks of the trade, but at present they were having a poor time of it.

It soon became evident that the Dervishes were not likely to make a determined attack, and that if left alone they would continue in their present position for an indefinite time, keeping our force on the *qui vive*, and stopping the numerous preparations which had yet to be made. The railway would soon be dangerously near to them. It was spurting ahead, and while the two forces had been watching one another on the Atbara

the railway had advanced thirty-three miles. On one occasion three miles were laid in one day. It would soon be at Abadieh, and then the new gunboats would be run up and put together. But none of this could be done if Mahmud occupied his threatening position on our flank. Consequently it was evident that the Dervish position would have to be attacked. Here were eighteen thousand Dervishes, who had obligingly marched some distance to put their heads into the lion's mouth; it would never do for this army to return intact to swell the force which we should meet later at Khartum. The Sirdar had given them every inducement to attack him, but as they had declined it was now necessary to adopt the more awkward alternative of attacking them. Accordingly the Sirdar ordered General Hunter to reconnoitre the Dervish position and report on it. General Hunter was escorted by the whole of the cavalry under Lieut.-Colonel Broadwood and a maxim battery. The Dervishes, hearing of their approach, were under the impression that the whole of our force were coming to attack them, consequently they all retired behind their entrenchments, and allowed our cavalry to stand on a commanding ridge within six hundred yards and take stock of them. The Dervishes were adopting their usual tactics of holding their fire for short range. They must have been very disappointed when General Hunter, after noting everything he wanted, turned about and retired. After the cavalry had proceeded about four miles homewards, they came across Bimbashi Butler quietly resting under a tree near the river. This officer had left the Nile at Darmali in

MAP X
Showing
Situation just before
Battle of Atbara
Scale 15 Miles = 1"



order to join the force on the Atbara, and in order to save time he had cut across the desert, but had struck across at a little too great an angle, and so had struck the Atbara a few miles below the Dervish camp, whereas he imagined he was just below our own camp, and intended as soon as he was rested to go on up the Atbara, in which case he would have ridden straight into the Dervishes. The providential meeting with our cavalry saved him from an unpleasant experience. General Hunter reported the Dervish position to be so strong that it was deemed necessary to make another reconnoissance, to discover if possible some weak point in it. Accordingly General Hunter again proceeded with the cavalry and a maxim battery. Again they crowned the ridge overlooking the Dervish position, but this time the Dervish cavalry dashed out from the flanks and galloped round to cut off our cavalry, while the footmen swarmed out like ants. Things looked rather ugly. If every one kept cool and behaved all right, there was no reason why they should not pull through, but a retirement under such circumstances was a difficult thing to carry out well. Lieut.-Colonel Broadwood, however, made excellent dispositions, and the retirement proceeded like a drill. They soon found, however, that some Dervish cavalry were drawn up across their line of retreat, so Captain Perse's squadron was ordered to cut a way through. This was speedily carried out, Captain Perse receiving a bullet in the left fore-arm. In the meantime the maxims were doing excellent service. In fact, there is no doubt that they saved the situation. The Dervish cavalry simply couldn't face them. As

soon as a body of horsemen were seen to be collecting for a charge, the maxims were turned on to them and dispersed them. After a bit the Dervish footmen were shaken off and left behind, and then there was no more anxiety, though the Dervish cavalry followed for eight miles.

In the afternoon of the 7th April the Anglo-Egyptian force left their bivouac. The force consisted of eight squadrons of Egyptian cavalry under Lieut.-Colonel Broadwood, one company camel corps (Captain King), one British brigade of four battalions under Brigadier-General Gatacre, three Egyptian brigades commanded by General Hunter, while the brigadiers were Lieut.-Colonels MacDonald, Maxwell, and Lewis. One English maxim battery, two Egyptian maxim batteries, four Egyptian mule batteries, and a rocket party under Lieutenant Beatty, R.N.,—about fourteen thousand all told.

The nature of the Dervish position was well known from General Hunter's reconnaissances. It was more or less of an oval resting on the river, honeycombed with trenches, and surrounded by a zeriba. It resembled Abu Hamed on a larger scale, in that it lay at the bottom of a kind of crater, of which the radius was about six hundred yards, so that it would be impossible to open fire at a greater range, which was evidently the reason which caused the Dervishes to take up such a position.

The force marched in the desert away from the belt of trees and undergrowth along the river; about 11 p.m. a halt was made in order to give the men a short sleep. At 2 a.m. the march was resumed, and at sunrise

the force topped the low line of hills overlooking the Dervish position six hundred yards off. Hardly a Dervish could be seen. Here and there a black head popped up for a moment only; our force was formed up as shown in the diagram. The British Brigade on the left, two Egyptian brigades on the right, Lieut.-Colonel Lewis's Brigade in support behind the left, as the Dervish cavalry appeared to be inclined to threaten that flank. At 6.30 a.m. the guns began to bombard, the Dervishes all the while remaining quite still and hidden in their trenches. It was very curious standing inactive and unmolested within six hundred yards of the enemy, watching the effect of the artillery fire, just as one would a game of football, waiting in suspense for the order to advance. After an hour and a half the bombardment ceased. The infantry were all ready for an advance. The British Brigade had the Cameron Highlanders in line, the other three regiments in column behind. This formation had been adopted on account of the difficulty that was expected in getting through the zeriba. The Cameron Highlanders were to pull away the bushes and make gaps through which the columns were to rush. The Egyptian Brigades were in their usual attack formation. Colonel MacDonald had three battalions in front line, one in support. Each battalion had four companies in line, two in support. Colonel Maxwell had two battalions in front line, two in support; while each battalion had four companies in front line, two in support. Owing to the conformation of the ridge on which our force was drawn up, the left of the line was a little further from the Dervish position

than the right, so that the British had further to go. About 8.10 the Sirdar ordered the advance, and the whole line stepped off, the artillery pushing to the front and keeping up their fire right up to the trenches. The Dervishes held their fire till we were within three hundred yards. Then a mass of black heads appeared, and there was a roar of musketry. It was a terrific volley, but fortunately it went high as usual. They kept up a very hot fire, but ours was hotter, and in a few seconds the Dervishes dared not show their heads above the trenches, but put their rifles on the parapet and pulled the trigger without aiming. Our advance was steady but rapid. The zeriba was nothing, and the whole line was soon in the trenches, from which the Dervishes got up and bolted like rabbits. Right through about two hundred yards of trenches, pits, entanglements, and small palisades the troops worked their way, till they stood on the river-bank firing at the Dervishes flying to the bush on the other side. When working through the trenches the Eleventh Battalion under Major Jackson found themselves opposite Mahmud's stronghold, guarded by his picked bodyguard. The first company, one hundred strong, which advanced to take it had ninety men hit, but the company behind was close at their heels, and cleared the bodyguard out. Though the fighting through the trenches only took twenty minutes, it was hot work at close quarters. Some of the Dervishes bolted, firing as they went, others lay low in deep pits and fired at point-blank range. Captain Findlay, who was yards in front of his men, was mortally wounded in hand-to-hand fight.

Major Urquhart of the same regiment was killed, but the British showed their usual aptitude for bayonet fighting, and most of their casualties occurred before they reached the zeriba. Once in they were more than a match for the Dervishes.

The Egyptian army advanced with great dash, and worked through the pits and trenches very quickly. All mounted officers were ordered to dismount. General Hunter was the only officer in the firing line who remained mounted, and riding as he was at the head of the division, waving his helmet and shouting encouragement to the men, it was a miracle that he escaped. As soon as the position was taken the cavalry attempted to pursue, but the dense bush was absolutely impracticable for them, and they were obliged to give up, but pursuit was unnecessary. The Dervishes were entirely broken up. They could not go to the Nile, for the gunboats were watching it; they could only go up the Atbara, and then try and strike across the desert to hit the Nile higher up.

The importance of Kassala was now demonstrated, as it prevented the fugitives retiring to that grain district and reforming there, while the Kassala garrison was for a long time busy in hunting them down and capturing them. As a matter of fact, few ever returned to Khartum. Out of seventeen thousand that had been present at the fight, about five thousand were killed, one thousand taken prisoners, four or five thousand more must have perished in flight from wounds and hunger; the remainder scattered. Our casualties were five hundred and seventy killed and wounded, of which

the largest proportion to numbers engaged were British, their killed and wounded totalling up to about one hundred and fifty. A large number of officers of the British Brigade were hit. Major Urquhart, Captain Findlay, and second Lieutenant Gore were killed, and no less than twenty-one other officers wounded. The



EGYPTIAN ARTILLERY.

Egyptian army had five British officers wounded, but of course the percentage of British officers to Egyptian is very small.

It was generally considered that the cause of the British suffering most was due to their ceasing fire at the zeriba; their discipline and coolness was such that their advance was absolutely like a drill. They began

by volley firing, and changed by order to independent. Their shooting was excellent. Not a Dervish could live above ground, but the majority of their casualties occurred at the zeriba, when they ceased fire and the officers came out in front. The cessation of fire and the short interval that intervened before they were hand to hand was the fatal period, especially for the officers. The Egyptian army, on the other hand, though their shooting was not so good, never ceased firing, and kept up a hail of bullets which prevented the Dervishes taking aim, so that, though the enemy likewise poured out a perfect hailstorm of bullets, yet it was mostly misdirected.

The column formation of the British, which had been adopted on account of the difficulty expected at the zeriba, no doubt increased their casualties.

After the firing had ceased some men of the Tenth Battalion Sudanese found Mahmud hiding in the casemate in which he had taken shelter during the engagement. Some men of the Ninth attempted to dispute the possession of the prisoner, for whom the Sirdar offered a reward of £100, and Mahmud would probably have been killed if Captain Franks, R.A., had not come up and ordered him to be taken to the Sirdar. Mahmud was very truculent when confronted with the Sirdar, and when asked why he came to fight against us, he said, "Because I have to obey orders the same as you have to."

General Hunter had offered £100 for Osman Digna, but that cur had bolted at the commencement of the fight as usual. The Battle of Atbara was the first

occasion on which a force of Dervishes superior in numbers had been turned out of a strongly entrenched position at the point of the bayonet. The same thing was done at Gemaizeh, but there the Egyptian army was superior in numbers, and during the present campaign the Sirdar had always contrived to outnumber his enemy; it was satisfactory, therefore, that the Egyptian army obtained this opportunity of showing their ability to cope with superior numbers in close combat—a fact which was doubted by many who did not know them. Of course they were assisted by as fine a British brigade as one could wish to see, but the fact remains that they were still inferior in numbers, and yet behaved exactly as they should have done.

The filth and smell of the Dervish camp was beyond description. They had absolutely no sanitary arrangement, and now that dead and dying men and mangled animals were strewn everywhere, it was altogether a fearful place. The small pools of water in the dry bed of the Atbara were also polluted, so it was deemed advisable that the force should assemble and lie down for rest in the clean desert away from the filth; but it was very trying sitting through the heat of the day in the glaring sun. Now that the fight was over the inevitable reaction set in, and men began to feel the fatigue of the marching and fighting; the hot sun beating down did not help to lessen the discomfort. The march back to the Atbara was a trying experience for the wounded. They had to be carried thirty miles on stretchers, which was the most comfortable way of transporting them under the circumstances. Colonel



SIEDAR INSPECTING GUARD OF HONOUR ON HIS RETURN TO HALFA AFTER BATTLE OF ATBARA.

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Lewis's Egyptian Brigade performed this arduous service, again demonstrating the extraordinary strength and endurance of the Egyptian.

Since the population of Berber had expected a Dervish victory, and one of their sheikhs had been sending information to the enemy, it was deemed advisable that they should see Mahmud captive with their own eyes, otherwise they would probably not believe it. The Sirdar, therefore, ordered Captain Doran to decorate the town of Berber, and prepare it for the triumphal entry of the troops with Mahmud and the other prisoners.

Captain Doran found it somewhat difficult to carry out the order, as flags and bunting are not to be found in the Berber shops. The ladies of Berber, however, came to his rescue, and offered him all sorts of gay-coloured clothing, and in twenty-four hours the place was transformed by having gaudy-coloured female garments festooned across the streets. The natives turned out and lined the streets to see the troops enter, and satisfy themselves as to Mahmud's capture, a fact which pleased the populace, but not some of the sheikhs. These gentlemen, however, came up and offered their congratulations to the Sirdar.

CHAPTER XII

It may possibly be asked by some why the victory at the Atbara was not immediately followed by an advance up the Nile. It was, but not in a manner apparent to the ordinary observer. It was not likely that the Sirdar, having destroyed the force which had held the important strategic point Metemmeh, would allow the Dervishes to re-occupy that place. In fact, as soon as the Dervishes had quitted it, he had ordered the Jaalin to occupy it, and now that it was in our possession the Khalifa no longer possessed the power to threaten both Dongola and Berber. The whole country up to the Shabluka Cataract was now ours, but it was not in the least bit necessary to send any of the army one hundred miles up to Metemmeh, and thereby increase the difficulty of supply. With the Jaalin at Metemmeh and Colonel Wingate's spies, we should get ample notice if the Khalifa was about to send another force to attempt the capture of that place, and with our steamers we could put a force there before he could. As regards an immediate advance on Khartum itself, the Sirdar knew full well that though the force he had destroyed contained some of the Khalifa's best troops, yet three times their

number of his picked troops still remained, who would be in no way demoralized by Mahmud's defeat. An advance now would have to be carried out without the all-important gunboats, and even if successful, without the gunboats it would be impossible to follow up the success by a rapid swoop up both the Niles. The Sirdar knew that the right time to advance on Khartum was at high Nile if the full fruits of victory were to be reaped, and subsequent events proved him right.

It was then the general opinion that a vote of thanks and a handsome testimonial ought to be presented to Mahmud for having provided some excitement and entertainment for a couple of months, which would otherwise have been spent in monotonous waiting.

It was now the middle of April, so that we knew we had only about three and a half months more to wait before the advance, but they would be hot months. The troops returned to their previous quarters, the Egyptian battalions to the Atbara fort, where they resumed the work of building store huts and hospitals, and otherwise preparing it as our future base; the Sudanese brigades returned to Berber, and the British to Darmali, where they proceeded to make themselves as comfortable as possible, and everything was done to keep the troops in health during the ensuing hot weather. A small theatre was rigged up, where smoking concerts were held. A race meeting was got up, also sports, and every week one of the steamers took some men on board and took them for a trip down the Nile. Route marching was carried out in the early morning. In this manner the troops kept in health, and though, of course, the doctors

had their hands pretty full, still when the time came for the brigade to take the field again, they turned out as fit as they could be. At the end of April the railway reached Abadieh, and in a week the place was transformed. What had been a bare waste of sand by the bank of the Nile, with hardly a man in sight, became in a few days a veritable dockyard humming with busy workers. Three new gunboats were brought up in sections by rail and were launched. Temporary workshops sprang up. Three Egyptian battalions came to work at the place, and built themselves huts in a few days. Captain Hobbs, who was in charge of all the sailing-boats, had collected them here for repairs, and boats, sails, and masts were lying all along the shore in every stage of repair, while Captain Hobbs, accompanied by a red-headed Egyptian, whom he called his Director of Stores, walked up and down hastening the progress of the work.

Major Gordon, R.E., and Mr. Bond of the Naval Engineers were superintending the construction of the gunboats. The sections were riveted together, and the boilers and machinery then put in, and the superstructure built up. When completed they looked very formidable, as the upper deck was a considerable height above the water, completely protected by steel plates against rifle-fire, with loopholes for musketry and maxims. They carried two six-pounder quick-firers, one small howitzer, and four maxims. They were also provided with an electric search-light. Unfortunately their powers of steaming did not equal their looks, and though everything possible to improve it was done, they always

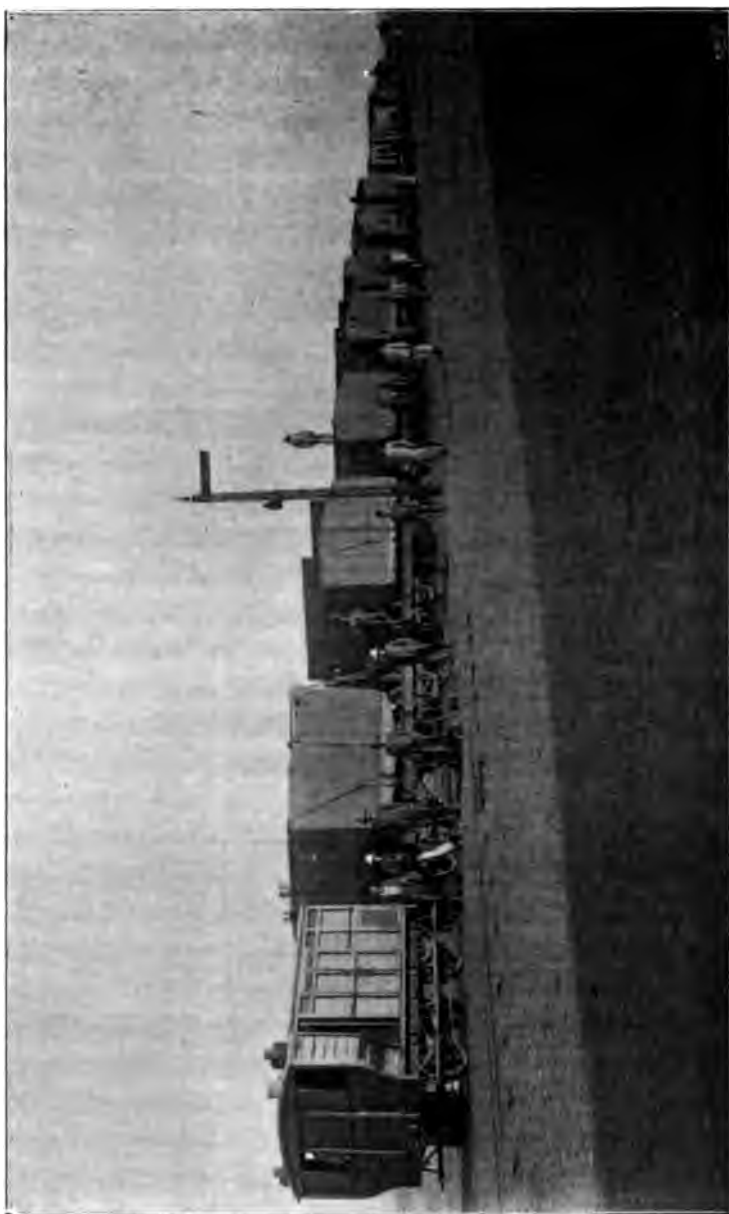
remained much slower than the other gunboats, and were almost useless for the important duty of towing troops. Some wag nicknamed them the "Gordon Greyhounds," though their defective steaming had nothing to do with Major Gordon. At the same time as the gunboats were being built, eight steel double-deck troop barges were brought up in sections by rail and put together in like



HUT IN ATBARA FORT.

manner. In the meanwhile the railway was pushing on, and at the end of June reached Atbara fort, which was to be its terminus till Khartum was taken.

Between March 1896 and June 1898, five hundred and fifty miles of railway had been constructed. The work had proceeded steadily and uninterruptedly in spite of the heat, the difficulty of training natives to the work, and the lack of water in a huge unmapped



THE GUNBOAT IN SECTIONS LOADED ON TO TRAIN TO GO ACROSS TO ABADIEH.



desert, the other end of which was held by the enemy, and in which the construction party lived for six months at the risk of being cut off from water, and so dying of thirst and liable to attacks from the Dervishes. The immense distance of Wady Halfa from the sea must also be taken into consideration, and the number of transshipments necessary to get the railway materials and stores to Wady Halfa. No amount of speed in laying the materials would be of any use if the constant supply of material was not kept up, so that Colonel Maxwell commanding at Halfa, Captain Pedley at Assouan, Major Gordon at Cairo, and the other officers and non-commissioned officers on the line of communications, were all parts of the continuous working railway machine. While for the battalions of the army there were often periods of rest (irksome, no doubt, but still rest), for the officers and men of the railway there was none. It was one long, steady, hard grind for two and a quarter years, through the hottest weather, on indifferent food, through a barren and desolate country. They had, however, the satisfaction of knowing that, with the Sirdar to plan and Lieutenant Girouard to organize and direct, their energy was expended in the most useful and remunerative way.

As soon as the railway reached the Atbara, supplies were poured into that place ; two trains, bringing about three hundred and fifty to four hundred tons between them, arrived daily. It was trying work for the European engine-drivers. Their turns for driving came frequently, and driving an engine in the Sudan in hot weather is terribly trying for a white man, but during the whole

time of railway construction, the engine-drivers stuck to their work in the most admirable way, though some succumbed. With a hot furnace in front of him, a foot-plate so hot that it could hardly be stood on, a hot sun above, every part of the engine too hot to touch, and the glare of the desert in his eyes, the lot



HALEFA WORKSHOPS.

of an engine-driver was not a pleasant one, and it was little wonder if they occasionally lost their tempers with Egyptian station-masters. The Egyptian made a capital station-master when he had learnt his work, but some of his ways are very exasperating to a white man, and it was not an uncommon thing to see the engine-driver leave his engine and chase the station-master into the desert. One engine-driver had a standing feud with

one of the station-masters, and his arrival and departure at this station was always accomplished amid a shower of missiles to and from the engine, until it finished up by the engine-driver firing a revolver at the station-master as he entered and left the station.

About the middle of July, the Fifteenth and First Egyptian Battalions left Atbara and proceeded up both banks of the Nile, cutting wood and stacking it on the banks ready for the use of the steamers. Under cover of the Jaalin at Metemmeh, the telegraph was pushed forward. Sergeant Dennett, R.E., who was in charge of the party, in his zeal to get the telegraph well forward, pushed on beyond Metemmeh, and telegraphed back that he had seen Dervish cavalry. He was still proceeding to work ahead but was ordered to stop.

As the Nile was now fairly high, Captains Bunsbury, Bainbridge, Oldfield, and Borton were ordered to bring the four steamers on the Dongola reach of the river through the cataracts to Abu Hamed and then up to Atbara. One of the four steamers was the ill-fated *Teb*, which had been wrecked last year in the cataract. She had been righted and repaired, and as she had been wrecked two years running her name was changed to *Hafir*, in the hope that her luck would change.

Two out of the three battalions at Merowi and Debbeh were ordered up to the Atbara, bringing with them through the cataracts a number of sailing-boats, so that by the beginning of August the whole flotilla was assembled at the Atbara, consisting of ten gun-boats, five unarmed steamers, eight troop barges, and

a quantity of sailing-boats, probably three or four hundred.

The pile of supplies at the Atbara was now enormous and was daily increasing, but would soon be complete. The Sirdar had decided to have enough supplies at or south of the Atbara to last the force till the end of October.

CHAPTER XIII

WITH the railway complete to the Atbara and supplies piled up there, the flotilla of steamers and sailing-boats also collected at the Atbara, and the Nile nearly high, nothing more was wanted to complete the preparation for an advance on Khartum. The Sirdar had decided that the force in the field must be increased by four battalions of infantry, one regiment of cavalry, one field battery, one battery of the new five-inch Howitzers, two forty-pounders, one company of engineers, and A.S.C. and R.A.M.C. in proportion. To meet this demand the following troops had been collected in Cairo, and were now awaiting orders to proceed to the front:—

Twenty-first Lancers.
Thirty-second Field Battery Royal Artillery.
Thirty-seventh Howitzer Battery Royal Artillery.
Two forty-pounders Royal Artillery.
Second Company Royal Engineers.
First Battalion Grenadier Guards.
Second Battalion Rifle Brigade.
First Battalion Fifth Fusiliers.
Lancashire Fusiliers.
Remount Dépôt.

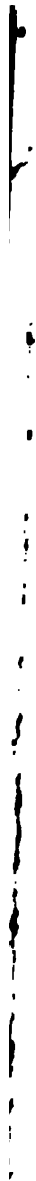
The infantry were to be brigaded together, and called

the Second Brigade, under Colonel Lyttelton. The First Brigade, which had fought at the Atbara, was now commanded by Colonel Wauchope, as Major-General Gatacre had been appointed divisional commander.

It will be interesting to examine the line of communications for the Khartum Expedition, along which these reinforcements had now to be sent. From Cairo by rail to Assouan five hundred and thirty-five miles (thirty-six hours), from Assouan to Halfa two hundred and twenty miles in barges towed by steamers (four days), from Halfa to Atbara by rail three hundred and eighty-five miles (thirty-six hours), that is to say, from Cairo to Atbara seven days, sometimes eight or even nine.

Every one who took part in the campaign was struck with admiration of the Sirdar's genius and perseverance in having thought out and made such a perfect line of communications through such difficult and inhospitable country. Every one looked upon Khartum as already ours. There were probably a few hundred men in the British army capable of carrying out what remained to be done to capture Khartum, but we are fortunate if we possess more than a handful who could have carried out the operations of the last two years, and made preparations for the final coup so successfully and with such little loss of men, money, and time.

It was arranged that the reinforcements in Cairo should leave by half battalions, squadrons, and batteries at a time, each one day behind the other. The first to leave were, I think, half a battalion of the Rifle Brigade, who left Cairo on the 27th July. All the stores and supplies for these troops had preceded them to the front.



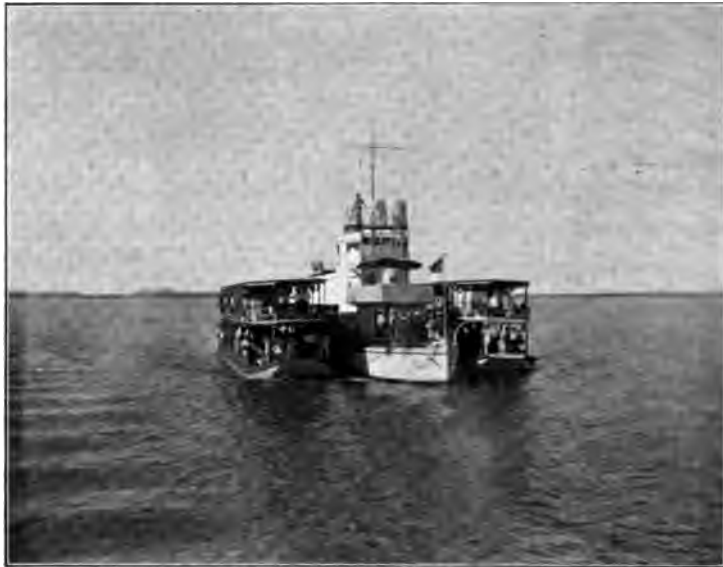
While the reinforcements are steadily travelling up we will return to the front to narrate the events taking place there.

On the 3rd August the First and Second Egyptian Brigades, under Lieutenant-Colonel Maxwell and Lieutenant-Colonel MacDonald, left Berber, and on the 4th embarked at the Atbara on barges, boats, and steamers. There were four steamers, each towing two double-deck troop barges and two sailing-boats. The inability of the new gunboats to tow barges against the high Nile current had made it impossible to spare more steamers for this duty, so that the men were literally packed on board. No one except the Sirdar believed that that number of men could by any means be got into the boats supplied. One officer reported to the Sirdar that he had been ordered to put three hundred and fifty men on to a barge, that he had managed to put on two hundred and eighty but could not see how to put any more on.

“Oh, I think you can,” said the Sirdar; “come back and let me know when you have done it,” and somehow or other it was done, and the two brigades were all stowed away. As one officer remarked, “When they get to the other end it will be like unpacking a new box of biscuits, they’ll have to pull the middle man out with a jerk before any of the others can move.”

As the steamers moved off, with the water almost level with the gunwales of the barges, many prophesied that they would not reach their destination, but they did. The British troops subsequently had exactly double the room that had been allowed to the Egyptian,

but they considered themselves crowded, and with reason. It was, however, the best way of getting to the front rapidly. Under cover of the two Egyptian brigades supplies were now pushed forward in boats, and a depôt was formed on Nasri Island, a few miles below the Shabluka Cataract, and only about sixty miles from



The Melik WITH TROOPS STEAMING UP TO KHARTUM.

Khartum. The Egyptian brigades were disembarked at Wad Habeshi on the west bank, two or three miles below Shabluka Cataract, but the disembarkation was hardly complete before the Nile made a sudden rise which flooded the site of the camp, but was at the same time too shallow to allow of boats coming close to dry land, so the troops had to be re-embarked as quickly as

possible and taken on a short distance to a more suitable site at Wad Hamed. This caused a delay of about thirty-six hours, the meaning of which could not be communicated to Atbara, so that there was considerable anxiety there at the non-return of the steamers. When they did return the Sirdar went off in one of the smaller steamers that were towing supplies.

Lieutenant Gorringe, R.E., who had throughout the campaign acted as D.A.A.G. (B), had his hands full arranging and telling off steamers and boats for troops and supplies, so that the right kind and quantity of stores and supplies should be at the right place at the right time. But everything went without a hitch as usual. The First British Brigade was the next to go up to Wad Habeshi, so that now there was a steady stream of troops from Cairo to Wad Habeshi, one thousand two hundred and fifty-five miles. On the 21st August the last of the reinforcements reached Atbara. The Lancers marched from Atbara to Wad Habeshi, and a very trying march it was for them, as the high Nile had flooded up the khors, necessitating very long detours. This regiment, however, was simply bursting with keenness. They had never been on service before, and they meant business. They didn't mean to return to Cairo without having a thundering good slap at the Dervishes. Every private was as keen as he could be, and prepared to ride any number of hours if he could only get his lance into a Dervish. They had an unusual big average of years of service, and were all as hard as nails, in fact, as some one remarked, "Those men are regular Thrusters." In the meantime, the

camel corps, under Major Tudway, had marched across the Bayuda Desert to Metemmeh and on to Wad Hamed.

In this way a force of about twenty-three thousand men, which on the 27th July had been strung out between Cairo and the Atbara, was on the 23rd August at Wad Hamed and at a camp about ten miles further on, a distance of one thousand two hundred and sixty miles from Cairo. The only mishap had been the wreck of the flagship, with Commander Keppel and General Rundle on board. This gunboat had been so strained by towing heavy barges that the joints of her plates suddenly opened, and before she could reach the bank she sank, but no lives were lost. The Shabluka Cataract, through which the flotilla now had to pass, is a most extraordinary place. The Nile, which at Khartum is about one mile wide, narrows down in running through the Shabluka defile to a width of about two hundred and fifty yards, in some places only one hundred and fifty yards. Steep hills of black rock rise straight up out of the river, and between these the water races and swirls along in and out, turning right-angle corners, so that navigation is extremely difficult. The scenery is grand, as the bold ruggedness of the rocky hills is here and there relieved by a patch of palm trees and vegetation between the cliffs and the river. It was this defile which had prevented the gunboats from running up and shelling Khartum during the previous months. The Dervishes had built very cunning forts on the water's edge, and as the width of the stream would have necessitated the gunboats coming within

one hundred yards of them, they could not have passed them. These forts, however, would become untenable as soon as we crowned the hills overlooking them, and were therefore now evacuated, as the Dervishes had decided to make their stand at Omdurman and not at the Shabluka, as was at one time expected.

A reconnoissance by the cavalry and gunboats having ascertained that the whole of the Shabluka Pass (twenty miles) was clear of the enemy, both on the water's edge and on the hills above, the boats were sent forward with supplies to make a depôt at Gebel Royan, an island near the southern end of the cataract, while the Egyptian army moved forward and camped on the bank opposite. Gebel Royan, being within forty miles of Omdurman, was to be the last depôt, and an hospital was established here. It was at this place that the force was for the first time camped all together. It was composed as follows :—

BRITISH TROOPS.

Twenty-first Lancers, commanded by Colonel Martin.
 Thirty-second Field Battery R.A., commanded by Major Williams.
 Thirty-seventh Howitzer Battery, commanded by Major Elmslie.
 Two forty-pounders, commanded by Lieutenant Weymouth.
 Second Company R.E., commanded by Major Arkwright.
 One Maxim Battery.

INFANTRY DIVISION, COMMANDED BY MAJOR-GENERAL GATACRE.

First Brigade (Colonel Wauchope).

First Battalion Cameron Highlanders (Colonel Money).
 First Battalion Seaforth Highlanders (Colonel Murray).
 First Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment (Lieutenant-Colonel Forbes).
 First Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment (Colonel Verner).

Second Brigade (Colonel Lyttelton.)

First Battalion Grenadier Guards (Colonel Hatton).

Second Battalion Rifle Brigade (Colonel Howard).

First Battalion Fifth Fusiliers (Lieutenant-Colonel Money).

Second Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers (Lieutenant-Colonel Collingwood).

R.A.M.C. in proportion under Surgeon-General Taylor as P.M.O.
A.S.C. and O.S.C. in proportion.

EGYPTIAN TROOPS.

Eight Squadrons of Cavalry under Lieutenant-Colonel Broadwood.

One Horse Artillery Battery and four mule Batteries under
Colonel Long.

Camel Corps under Major Tudway.

INFANTRY DIVISION, COMMANDED BY MAJOR-GENERAL HUNTER.

First Brigade (Lieutenant-Colonel MacDonald).

Ninth Sudanese (Major Walter).

Tenth Sudanese (Major Nason).

Eleventh Sudanese (Major Jackson).

Second Egyptian (Major Pink).

Second Brigade (Lieutenant-Colonel Maxwell).

Twelfth Sudanese (Lieutenant-Colonel Townsend).

Thirteenth Sudanese (Lieutenant-Colonel Smith-Dorien).

Fourteenth Sudanese (Major Shekleton).

Eighth Egyptian (Colussi Bey).

Third Brigade (Lieutenant-Colonel Lewis).

Third Egyptian (Lieutenant-Colonel Sillem).

Fourth Egyptian (Major Sparkes).

Seventh Egyptian (Fathy Bey).

Fifteenth Egyptian (Major Hickman).

Fourth Brigade (Lieutenant-Colonel Collinson).

First Egyptian (Captain Doran).

Sixteenth Egyptian (Major Bunbury).

Seventeenth Egyptian (?)

Eighteenth Egyptian (Captain Matchett).

Ten gunboats under Commander Keppel, R.N.

It was a splendid force, in excellent condition, well fed, equipped and clothed, bursting with keenness, and with absolutely unbounded confidence in the skill and ability of their commander, Sir Herbert Kitchener.

The weather now was not as hot as usual at this time of year, although of course it was very hot. Every night there was a sand-storm, sometimes accompanied by rain and thunder. Practically nothing had been seen so far of the Dervishes. Our cavalry only had seen their scouts retiring before them and lighting up signal fires, which were repeated all the way to Omdurman. When the British division were making a zeriba at their camp opposite Gebel Royan, a single Dervish horseman galloped up, threw his spear into the zeriba, and galloped away.

On the 28th August the Egyptian army left the Gebel Royan camp and marched on ten miles, the British division following in the afternoon. The next day a most violent sand-storm was raging all day, it was impossible to see ten yards ahead. The force remained halted while supplies came up, the steamers going back and towing up the sailing-boats. The cavalry went out and reconnoitred. I must say I do not envy the lot of a cavalry soldier on the march. He is the first to leave the camp and the last to return to it, and then he must see to his horse before he thinks of himself. Apparently he never sleeps or eats.

The next day the force moved off all together. The cavalry spread out in a screen on the front and flank. The infantry marched on a broad front of three brigades, each in the formation selected by its commander. Most

Second Brigade (Colonel Lyttelton.)

First Battalion Grenadier Guards (Colonel Hatton).

Second Battalion Rifle Brigade (Colonel Howard).

First Battalion Fifth Fusiliers (Lieutenant-Colonel Money).

Second Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers (Lieutenant-Colonel Collingwood).

R.A.M.C. in proportion under Surgeon-General Taylor as P.M.O.
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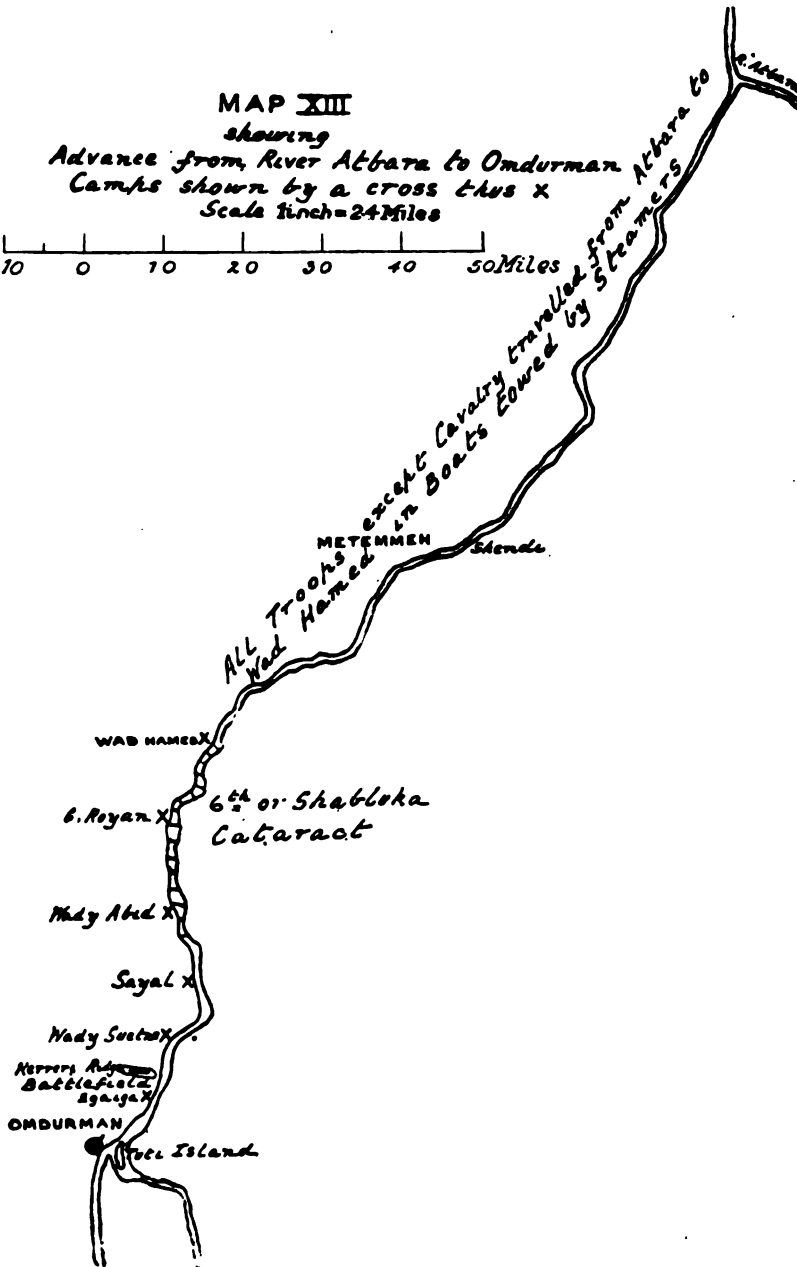
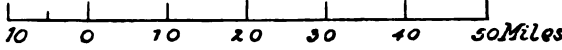
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generally three battalions in front line in half battalion column, and one battalion in support in company column. A British brigade was next the river, with the other British brigade behind them ; on the right of the British two Egyptian brigades, one behind the other, and on their right two more Egyptian brigades. The batteries marched each with its brigade. The transport, under Lieutenant-Colonel Kitchener, its energetic director, marched between the British and the Egyptian forces. As already explained, the discipline of the transport was perfect. They loaded up and assembled from the various parts of the camp in no time, and then marched like a well-drilled regiment. Their loads were put on in the manner most convenient to the camel. The saddles were in first-rate order, and the animals properly fed and looked after, so that very few fell out. In this way the comfort of the force was secured by the arrival of their baggage at the same time as the troops, the importance of which cannot be over-estimated when marching long hours in hot weather. In fact, the whole war machine was now so perfect that everything went like clockwork, and the ordinary discomfort of active service was far less than in the preceding stages of the campaign. The usual hour for starting was 5 a.m., and we kept marching with occasional short halts till 2 p.m., and were generally settled down in camp by 4 p.m. The cavalry always reconnoitred four or five miles ahead, and remained out until the bivouac was finished and the troops were in position.

Practically no tents were carried, so it did not take

MAP XIII

showing
Advance from River Atbara to Omdurman
Camps shown by a cross thus X
Scale 1 inch = 24 Miles



long to settle down. We now bivouacked in a hollow oblong formed of battalions in double company column, and a zeriba was made all round. In this way we had arrived on the 31st August within about eight miles of Kerreri Ridge, that is to say, within about fifteen or sixteen of Omdurman.

We had all along expected to find the Dervishes drawn up on Kerreri Ridge, and while we were settling down in bivouac the cavalry were pushing on to reconnoitre it, supported by gunboats. We soon heard the gunboats firing, and heard later that there were Dervishes at Kerreri, and the Lancers, thirsting for a fight, had succeeded in having a small brush with them, but the Dervish force there was apparently a small one.

CHAPTER XIV

ON the 1st September we moved off with the expectation of having to assault the Kerreri Ridge. There had been a good deal of rain in the night, which, though it gave us a soaking, had the effect of cooling the air, and the first part of the march was quite pleasantly cool, but the heat which comes on a few hours after rain is always by far the most trying. Kerreri Ridge came nearer and nearer without any signs of the enemy, and it soon became apparent that it was unoccupied. Every one was now eager to crown the ridge, as I think most people like myself thought that we should then see Omdurman below us about two miles further on. The men were all keen to see over the other side, and though keeping their formation they regularly raced up the ridge.

It was rather a disappointment to find that we could not yet see Omdurman, though the big white dome of the Mahdi's tomb was just visible about eight miles off. We got a grand view, however, of the Nile, with the gunboats steaming up to bombard Omdurman, while on our right front we could see our cavalry about to work round to the west of the town to reconnoitre it.

Below on the river-bank, about a mile off and on rising ground, could be seen the village of Egaiga, offering us a most excellent position. The Sirdar moved the force down to it, and we began to bivouac and prepare a meal. While we were engaged we heard the gunboats and howitzers opening fire on Omdurman. The howitzer battery was disembarked on Tuti Island after that island and the east bank of the Nile had been cleared of the few Dervishes on them by the friendly Jaalin tribe, under Major Stuart-Wortley, assisted by the gunboats.

It was most satisfactory to hear the first shell burst in Omdurman, after all the months (for some the years) of looking forward to this day.

The gunboats were replied to by several forts constructed on the river-bank, but the shooting of the gunboats was too good for the forts, and one after another their guns were dismounted by our shells passing through the embrasures. The gunboats had their usual luck in not being hit by shell. It only required one to send a gunboat to the bottom, but though the shells hit and damaged their superstructure their hulls and machinery were never hit.

In the meantime the cavalry (the Egyptian squadrons under Lieutenant-Colonel Broadwood, the Lancers under Colonel Martin) had got within a mile of Omdurman, and were rewarded by a splendid sight. The Dervish army issued from the town, and moving with the utmost precision and rapidity in formed and disciplined bodies, were soon formed up in one long line five miles in length. To see this line brandishing their spears, firing

off their rifles, and shouting to Allah was a splendid sight. Having indulged in these antics they all advanced, their cavalry spurring out to follow up our cavalry, who were steadily retiring, having sent in word to the Sirdar that the Dervish army was advancing. The Sirdar gave the troops as much time as possible to have a meal, but there was no time for any cooking before we formed up as shown in Diagram VII., and waited for the Dervishes, who were hidden from view behind some hilly ground about two miles on our left front. It was now about 3 p.m., and excessively hot. It was not the time we should have chosen for a fight, as the force had been marching since 5 a.m., but they had quite enough go left in them.

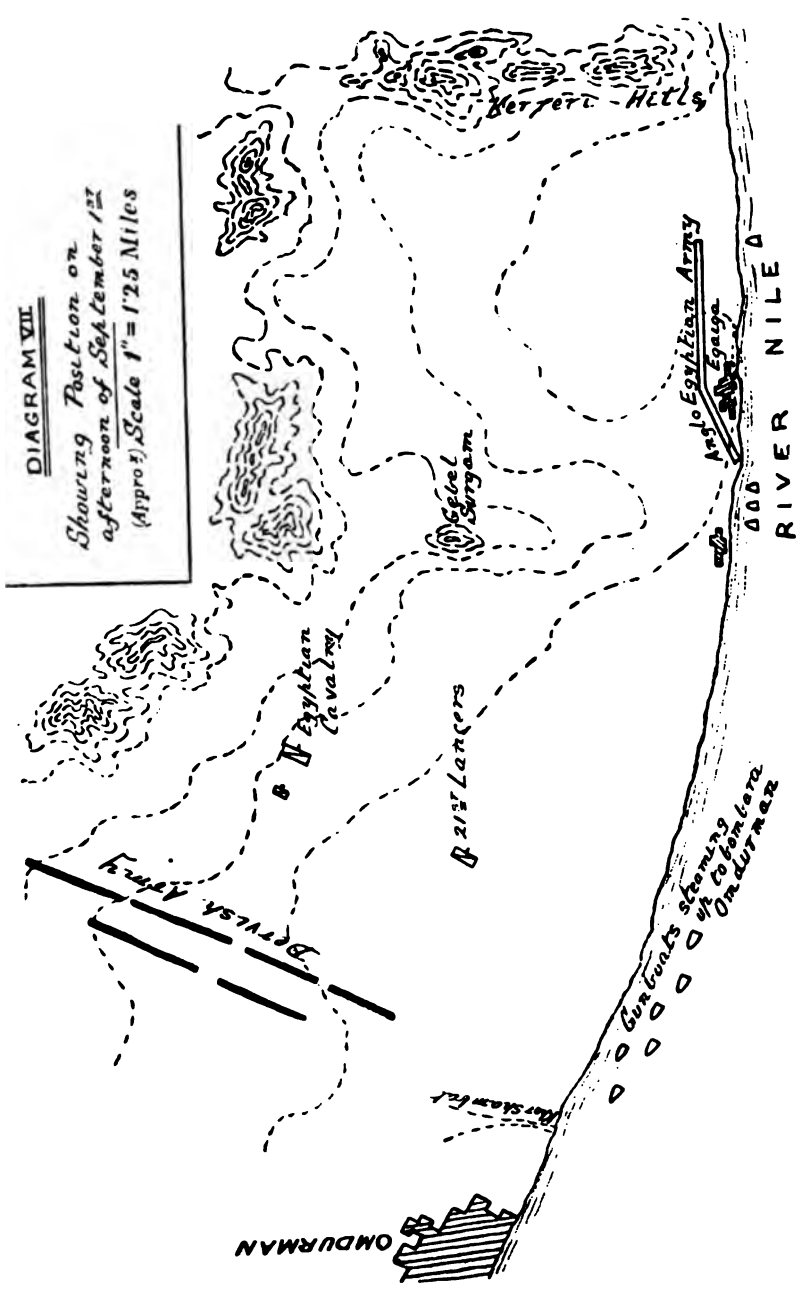
The Dervish force after advancing about a mile had halted, while their cavalry tried to get through ours and observe the dispositions of our infantry. This led to some very pretty sparring, in which our cavalry completely prevented theirs from gaining any information.

About 5 p.m. the Sirdar altered our position and placed us as shown in Diagram VIII., at the same time ordering us either to make a zeriba, or, where the ground was soft, to make a small shelter-trench. We were now allowed to pile arms, lie down in position, and prepare a meal. From now on we remained prepared for attack, the men lying down in the ranks, and only a certain number at a time being allowed to fetch water or leave the ranks. As soon as it was dark the cavalry came inside the infantry, while gunboats enfiladed the front and rear of our position. It was thought that the Dervishes meant to make a night attack, and this

report was confirmed by spies, who said they were now bivouacked in the desert about four miles off, and that they intended to march round us during the night, and attack from the rear. A night attack was the Dervishes' only chance of success. Had they attacked at night with the same determination with which they subsequently attacked in the daytime, it is most probable that they would have reached our lines, and a hand-to-hand fight ensued. Owing to the darkness, we could not have fired with any effect until they were within two hundred yards, and that distance would not have given sufficient time to destroy their overwhelming numbers. I heard this opinion expressed by many men that evening who knew what they were talking about.

The Sirdar employed a ruse to dissuade the Dervishes from a night attack. He sent spies, who were to profess themselves deserters from us, and inform the Khalifa that *we* were going to make a night attack on the Dervishes. We all, of course, lay down that night fully dressed and armed, and officers as well as men took it in turn to keep awake and on the alert. Every one had the utmost confidence that victory would be ours in the course of the next day or two, but as one did one's turn of sentry-go that night one's mind naturally reviewed the momentous issues which were now hanging in the scale. Here we were one thousand three hundred miles from the nearest reinforcement at Cairo, about to assault the stronghold of the fanatical savagery of the Sudan. Our goal was invested with the glamour of romance from being the death-place of a national hero, and a goal to reach which several lives

DIAGRAM VII
 Showing Position on
 afternoon of September 1st
 (Approx), Scale 1" = 1.25 Miles



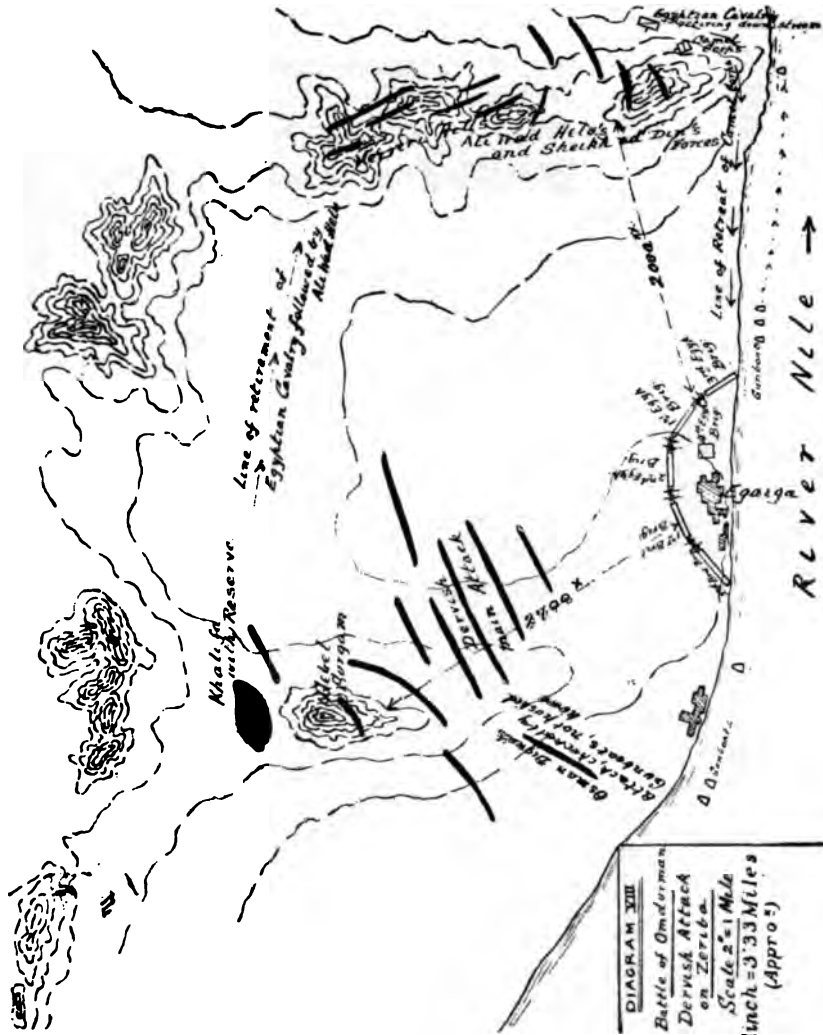
the foot of Gebel Surgam now opened a tremendous fire, heedless of the fact that the range was two thousand seven hundred yards, so that hardly a bullet fell in the zeriba. Our artillery, however, was firing splendidly, and one could see the bursting shells making gaps in their masses. The Dervishes on our left front were apparently waiting for their left to get right round us, when they evidently intended to rush simultaneously upon us. They reckoned, however, without Colonel Broadwood. That officer was giving the Dervish left plenty of employment, and was handling his cavalry and camel corps so as to delay them, draw them off, and prevent them attacking simultaneously. Finding they were suffering from our artillery the Dervishes soon got tired of waiting for their left to get round, and the remainder advanced to attack with a great shouting. It was a splendid sight. A huge amphitheatre, lit up by a blazing sun, in which a mass of fearless men, clad in gay-coloured jibbahs, waving countless flags, and following reckless horsemen, were rushing forward with absolute confidence of victory and absolute contempt of death. On they came, firing as they ran, and their bullets now began to whiz round us. Their attack was being launched mainly on the First British and Second Egyptian Brigades. Our artillery were firing as fast as they could load, and when the enemy had got within nine hundred yards the First British and Second Egyptian Brigades opened fire. The fire discipline of the British throughout the action was a treat to watch; exactly as on parade they changed from volley-firing to independent and back to volley-firing as might be

had reserved their fire so long that they had not had time to kill us before we reached them. The Khalifa therefore had decided to come out in the open, to begin firing at long range, and trust to the bravery, fanaticism, and numbers of his men to overpower us with a rush.

As soon as the Sirdar heard the Dervishes were advancing, he ordered us back to the splendid position we had just vacated. Spare ammunition was placed close behind the troops, three gunboats were drawn up enfilading the front face, three more enfilading the rear face. The others were bombarding Omdurman, thereby detaining about five thousand Dervishes in that place. About 6.15 a.m. we heard the shouts of the advancing horde, and presently they could be seen coming from Gebel Surgam and moving across our front. The Egyptian cavalry, camel corps, and horse artillery could be seen retiring steadily before them, also moving across our front and retiring northwards so as not to mask our fire. The 21st Lancers, who had gone out along the river-bank, were similarly retiring, and now came into the zeriba. The Dervishes moved with extraordinary rapidity, shouting songs to Allah, and soon the head of the long line of flags had reached the Kerreri range of hills. Our artillery now (6.50 a.m.) opened fire. A mass of Dervishes came into view over the rising ground running out from the foot of Gebel Surgam, so that they formed a huge crescent which was rapidly extending and curling round its horns, while an apparently inexhaustible supply of flags and black humanity issuing from behind Gebel Surgam kept the line of the crescent unbroken. The Dervishes at

ordered, coolly and without any hurry. Their shooting too was admirable; they began knocking them over at nine hundred yards, and within three hundred nothing could live. The Egyptian troops were as steady, but they cannot shoot so well. Although the Dervishes were falling in hundreds their advance seemed at first to be unchecked; numbers dropped, but others were rushing on, and coming nearer and nearer, till it almost seemed as if they would reach us; but within three hundred yards of the British and within two hundred of the Egyptian Brigade scarcely a Dervish could live. A few miraculously escaped till within fifty yards or so and then dropped. One or two daring horsemen calmly stood within one hundred yards, imploring their men to come on. The bullets must have been whistling past them in hundreds, but for a few minutes they seemed to have a charmed life. It could not last, however, and they soon bit the ground. The rush was checked, but only temporarily. There was a fold in the ground about four hundred yards from us, and here they took cover and kept up a pretty good fire, and it was at this time that the British sustained the bulk of their casualties. The Sirdar had some close shaves. He and his Staff, being mounted, were rather prominent marks. One staff officer got a bullet through his shoulder-strap, General Rundle's horse was wounded, two gallopers had their horses shot, so it was evident the enemy were firing at the Staff. Now and again the enemy would try to rush forward from their cover, always with the same result.

In the meantime the cavalry and camel corps



main attack on the zeriba. The other ten thousand or so of the Dervish left made a show of attacking the rear force of our position; but by this time the attack on our left front had been beaten back, the attack on our rear was not pushed home with the same vigour in fact, our infantry on that face did not open fire, and the artillery alone were able to force them to take shelter in the hills, whence they occasionally fired a few shells at us with a fair amount of accuracy. The 32nd Field Battery was meanwhile searching the ground on our left front with shrapnel in the most excellent manner, and finally the Dervishes concealed in the folds of the ground there suddenly fled to the shelter of Gebel Surgam, the infantry and maxims doing tremendous execution on them as they ran. At 8.15 a.m. the attack had thus been thoroughly defeated, and the Dervishes having retired were now in two large groups—the larger under the Khalifa out of sight behind Gebel Surgam, the other out of sight in and behind Kerreri Hills, while about ten thousand having followed Colonel Broadwood some miles northwards had turned back to join the Kerreri group. Colonel Broadwood followed on the heels of these ten thousand as soon as they turned southwards.

The moment had now come for us to assume the offensive. The Dervishes had left Omdurman and come into the open, and the Sirdar was determined they should stay there, and not return to Omdurman to make a stubborn house-to-house fight. He therefore determined to march to Omdurman as quickly as possible, and ordered the force to issue from the zeriba and move

appeared to be in difficulties on Kerreri Hills. Colonel Broadwood had achieved his object in preventing about twenty thousand Dervishes attacking simultaneously with the others, but now that he was on the hills the camel corps began to get into difficulties. The camel is fast on the plain, but put him on a rocky hill and he is the most awkward animal alive. The Dervishes instantly perceiving the difficulties of the camel corps, and moving with great rapidity, seemed to have every chance of cutting them off; the horse artillery supporting the camel corps remained in their position so long, that they had to limber up to retire within a few yards of the Dervishes, who with one volley killed seven horses in one team, so that gun had to be abandoned. Lieutenant-Colonel Broadwood was on the point of charging to the assistance of the camel corps. It would have been disastrous to charge twenty thousand Dervishes with eight hundred cavalry, but it looked as if it would have to be done. The Sirdar, however, had seen the state of affairs, and had sent Lieutenant Roberts to order Major Gordon's gunboat to go to their assistance. The gunboat arrived in the nick of time, and was able to pour in a deadly fire on the Dervishes at close range, while the artillery on the south side of the zeriba was also able to hit them. This gave the camel corps a respite, and by excellent management they extricated themselves and retired into the zeriba. About ten thousand of the Dervish left now tried to cut off Colonel Broadwood and his cavalry. He played with them, and kept leading them further and further north, thereby preventing them joining the

main attack on the zeriba. The other ten thousand or so of the Dervish left made a show of attacking the rear force of our position; but by this time the attack on our left front had been beaten back, the attack on our rear was not pushed home with the same vigour, in fact, our infantry on that face did not open fire, and the artillery alone were able to force them to take shelter in the hills, whence they occasionally fired a few shells at us with a fair amount of accuracy. The 32nd Field Battery was meanwhile searching the ground on our left front with shrapnel in the most excellent manner, and finally the Dervishes concealed in the folds of the ground there suddenly fled to the shelter of Gebel Surgam, the infantry and maxims doing tremendous execution on them as they ran. At 8.15 a.m. the attack had thus been thoroughly defeated, and the Dervishes having retired were now in two large groups—the larger under the Khalifa out of sight behind Gebel Surgam, the other out of sight in and behind Kerreri Hills, while about ten thousand having followed Colonel Broadwood some miles northwards had turned back to join the Kerreri group. Colonel Broadwood followed on the heels of these ten thousand as soon as they turned southwards.

The moment had now come for us to assume the offensive. The Dervishes had left Omdurman and come into the open, and the Sirdar was determined they should stay there, and not return to Omdurman to make a stubborn house-to-house fight. He therefore determined to march to Omdurman as quickly as possible, and ordered the force to issue from the zeriba and move

to the south in echelon of brigades from the left. The probable reason of this formation was that we should have in our rear the large unbroken body of Dervishes on the Kerreri Hills, and they might at any moment fall on the rear, in which case the echelon formation would make it easy to repulse them, while at the same time it was suited to repel a flank attack. The large body of Dervishes under the Khalifa, who were hidden behind Gebel Surgam, were supposed by most people, I think, to have fled towards Omdurman, and I do not think their presence there was known, consequently we were about to execute a flank march in close proximity to the enemy, while a large body of them were also in our rear. It was a manœuvre which would require some skill to carry out. MacDonald's Brigade, which was to be the outside one of the echelon, had of course, in order to reach its proper position in the echelon, to march about a mile diagonally into the desert, while of course each brigade except the pivot one had also to swing out some distance, and with a big force of six brigades it would require some little time before the formation of the echelon was complete, and the force could move off; but the Sirdar was determined at all costs to get to Omdurman before the defeated Dervishes could rally there, consequently he allowed very little time for the force to get into echelon, and ordered the British brigades, who were the pivot, to move off while the brigades in rear struggled to make up their distance as best they could. MacDonald's Brigade being the outside one, and having the furthest to go, was thus left quite a mile behind the remainder of the force. The camel

corps kept in rear of MacDonald's Brigade, watching the Dervishes on Kerreri Hills, while Collinson's Brigade marched along the river escorting the transport. The wounded were put into boats and guarded by the gun-boats. The Egyptian cavalry were out of sight on the other side of Kerreri Hills, but were marching up to bring up the rear of the force, and help the camel corps keep an eye on the Dervishes on Kerreri Hills, and give notice of their movements. The 21st Lancers preceded the infantry, reconnoitring the ground towards Omdurman, but the extent of their front did not enable them to discover and give notice of the Khalifa's force behind Gebel Surgam. An incident occurred when the force began to leave the zeriba. A group of war correspondents rode out to see what amount of Dervishes had fallen in the attack. They had not gone far before a wounded Baggara sprang up and came for them with his spear. The correspondents all fired at him, but without effect, and scattered in all directions. Lieutenant Smythe, seeing what was going on, rode up, and interposing himself between the Baggara and the infidel he had selected to slay, fired at the charging Arab. He hit him but failed to stop him, and the Arab thrust his spear through the front of Smythe's coat and into his arm, but before he could make another thrust Smythe blew his brains out. For thus saving the War Correspondent he was awarded the V.C.

To return to the progress of the battle: the Lancers were trotting ahead with scouts in front and on the flank, when suddenly the scouts came upon a khor which only became visible at a distance of a few yards, and

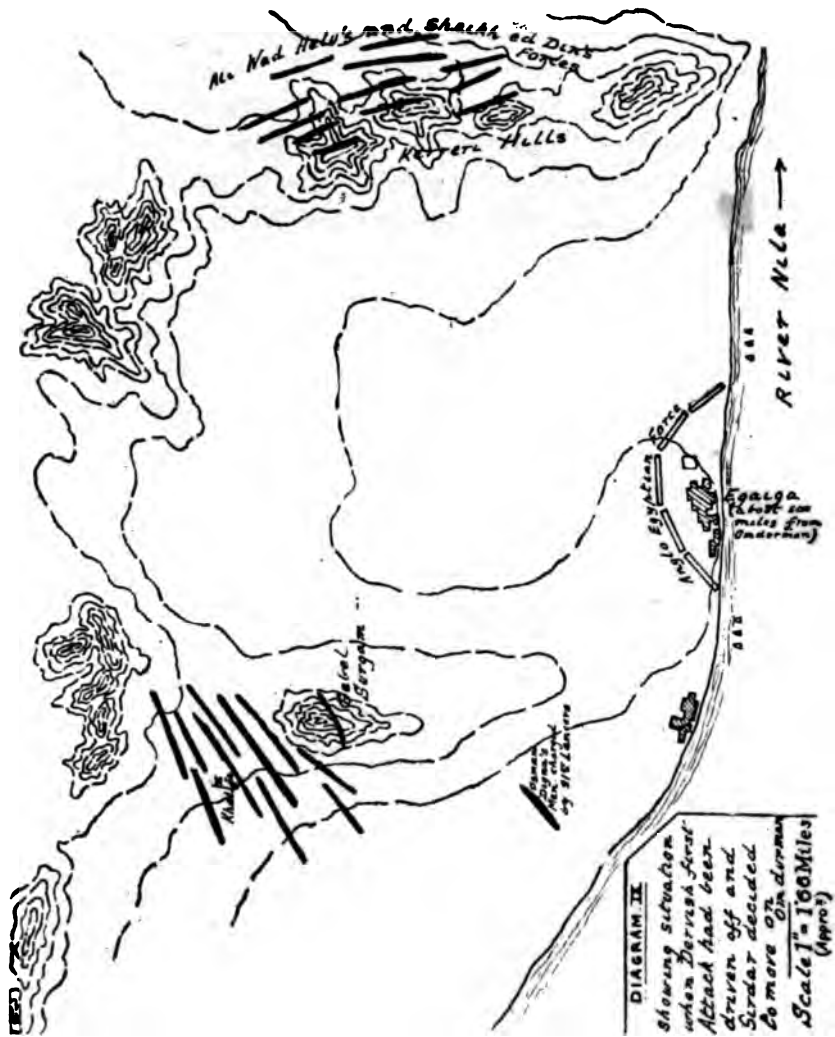


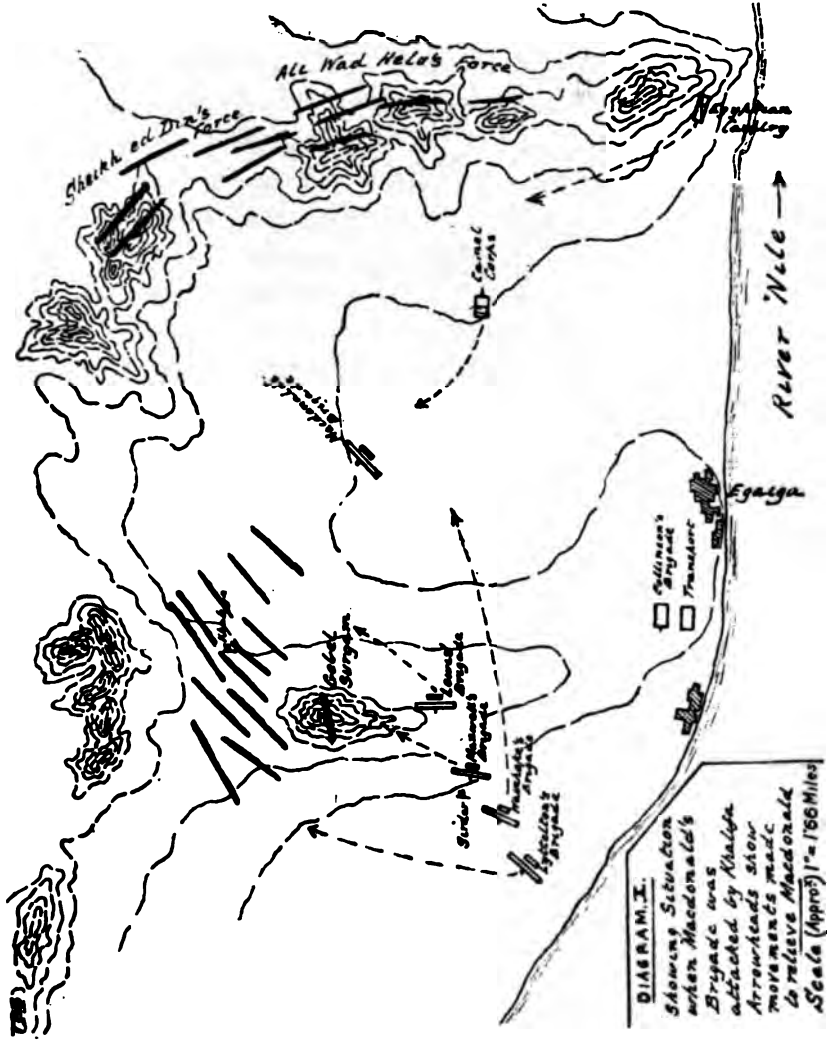
DIAGRAM II
 Showing situation
 when Dardar first
 attack had been
 driven off and
 Sirdar decided
 to more on Dardar
 Scale 1" = 100 Miles
 (Approx)

was filled with Dervishes, who opened fire. Had the Lancers attempted to retire they must all have been shot down. Without a second's hesitation Colonel Martin gave the order to wheel into line and charge. It was an awkward place for cavalry; the descent into the khor was steep, there was a serried array of Dervishes waiting in it, and the bank on the other side was equally steep. It required a good horse to negotiate it, and any one that fell was literally cut to pieces. The Lancers had been longing for a rough-and-tumble, and, by Jove, they had got it with a vengeance. A hail of bullets swept over them as they dashed at the khor, and then it was every man for himself. The mass of Dervishes stopped the impetus of the charge, and each man had to cut his way through at the walk, scramble up the other side, and form up beyond. Lieutenant Grenfell's horse pecked and fell, throwing him into the Dervishes never to rise again. When his body was afterwards recovered a spear was found to have penetrated the back of his watch and stopped the hands at 8.22 a.m. Second Lieutenant Nesham got a bullet through his right fore-arm, a cut on the right shoulder, and as his sword-arm fell powerless to his side they pulled away his sword; another man cut his left fore-arm to the bone so that his reins dropped, another cut his helmet off his head and slashed his right thigh, another had seized his horse's head, but Nesham had shot him just before his arm was disabled, and he now dug his spurs into his horse once more. It made a great plunge and took him clear; as he went they aimed more blows at him, which cut his saddlery in five places and wounded his

horse, but he got away and is now recovering from his wounds. Lieutenant Molyneux and Captain Kenna after charging through returned again into the *mêlée*, and by making gallant rescues earned the V.C. Private Byrne also earned the V.C.; though wounded and disarmed he refused to leave a dismounted officer, and kept his assailants at bay by knocking them over with his horse till help arrived. As he was so engaged he was heard to ejaculate, "—— the —— he's broken my pipe." The loss of the short pipe which he was smoking at the time enraged him far more than his wounds. Out of three hundred and twenty men and horses who went into the charge, sixty men and one hundred and nineteen horses were killed or wounded. After riding through, the Lancers formed up on the other side, and dismounting, opened fire with their carbines, and so finally cleared the Dervishes off the ground and forced them to retire. They thus came successfully out of a contest with about two thousand of the enemy. Several people at home wanted to know how it was the Lancers did not discover the Dervish ambush sooner, but the khor or nullah in which the Dervishes were hidden could not be seen by an observer fifty yards distant, who would imagine an unbroken plain was stretching out in front of him. It was, therefore, a perfect place for an ambush.

After the force had left the zeriba about two miles behind, heavy firing was heard in the rear, and the Sirdar was informed that MacDonal's Brigade, separated by about a mile from the rest of the force (the cause has been already explained), was being attacked by a very

large body of Dervishes coming from behind Gebel Surgam. The position of the force at this moment is shown in Diagram X. The Sirdar immediately ordered a movement which, if successful, would mean the cutting in two of the Dervish force, the surrounding on three sides of one-half, and on two sides of the other half, while the whole lot would be debarred from retreating to Omdurman, and would only have the desert to fly to; but while the movement was being carried out, that is to say, for about half-an-hour or more, it would be necessary for MacDonald's Brigade to sustain the attack of the whole Dervish army attacking in front and rear. The orders given by the Sirdar were that Colonel Wauchope's British Brigade was to immediately hurry to MacDonald's assistance. All other brigades were to march to their right. This would in time cause Lewis's Brigade to catch the attacking Dervishes in flank, Maxwell's Brigade would capture Gebel Surgam, and descending the other side of it come on to the flank and rear of the Khalifa's force, while the Second British Brigade, doubling round on the outside of our line, would be still more in the Dervish rear and absolutely cut off their retreat. The camel corps were helping MacDonald, delaying as long as possible the attack of Ali Wad Helu's men from Kerreri Hills who were threatening MacDonald's rear. The Egyptian cavalry by hovering near these men also delayed their attack. It was evident that at this moment everything depended on MacDonald's Brigade. If they were overpowered Lewis's and Collinson's Brigades would also be caught unsupported and similarly overwhelmed. We will now



therefore follow the fortunes of MacDonald's Brigade from the moment that it left the zeriba.

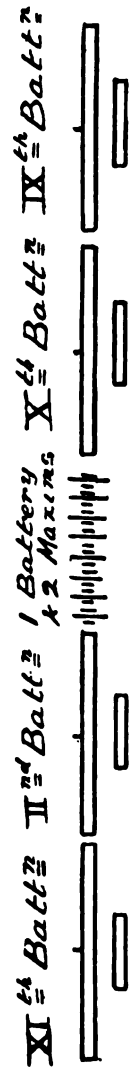
As already explained, this brigade had to march diagonally into the desert to take up its place on the extreme flank of the echelon, and in so doing found itself being left further and further behind. After marching about a mile, this brigade, being more in the desert than the remainder, came into sight of the Khalifa's force behind Gebel Surgam, which was hidden from the remainder, but owing to the distance, and the folds of the ground, the Dervishes appeared at first to be there in small numbers, and it was supposed that they were the rear of the retreating Dervishes. Colonel MacDonald, however, slightly changed the direction of his march to the right, in order to march direct on them, and not expose his flank to them. At the same time, he sent to Colonel Lewis, whose brigade was rapidly getting out of sight, to say what he was doing, and ask him to assist by clearing out the few Dervishes who were on Gebel Surgam, and so take the ones behind it in flank while he was taking them in front. Colonel MacDonald had no option in attacking, as, had he attempted to follow the force to Omdurman, his flank would have passed within a few hundred yards of the Dervishes. Colonel Lewis had just received peremptory orders to hurry up and make up his distance, so not thinking the Dervishes were in large numbers behind Gebel Surgam, he sent back to Colonel MacDonald to say his orders forbade him complying with his request. Colonel MacDonald had, therefore, to fight his way through the Khalifa's force by himself. As the brigade advanced, it

soon became evident that it was the main body of the Dervishes confronting them, and that far from retreating, they were marshalling for an attack, no doubt thinking the brigade was an easy prey. It must also be remembered that Ali Wad Helu's force of about twenty thousand men was in the Kerreri Hills behind, but at this moment they were keeping concealed, and not showing any signs of coming on. When MacDonald's brigade arrived within seven hundred yards of the enemy the Dervishes opened a pretty hot fire. MacDonald halted to deploy, his intention being to advance another two hundred yards. In order to deploy, he ordered the Ninth Battalion (Sudanese), which was leading, to deploy into line, the mule battery and maxims to come up on their left, the Tenth Battalion (Sudanese) to come up on their left, the Second Egyptian again on their left, and the Eleventh Sudanese on the extreme left, each battalion to have four companies in front line, two in support. His intention was, when the deployment was complete, to advance two hundred yards before opening fire; but the guns, when they got the order to come up, thought they were required to come into action, and promptly did so. The Dervish fire meanwhile was getting pretty hot, and they had started to advance, whereupon the Ninth Battalion became very excited, and could with difficulty be restrained from charging forward. Without any orders they opened independent firing. Each battalion as it came up, hearing the firing on its right, thought the order had been given to open independent fire, and did so. The Ninth Battalion were now almost out of hand. If they broke line and rushed forward into the mass of

Dervishes in front the game would be up. Our game was to keep them at bay by our fire until we had killed so many that we could charge the remainder. There were about twenty thousand Dervishes, all the Khalifa's picked troops with the Khalifa himself commanding. Colonel MacDonald, seeing how the brigade was getting out of hand, rode out in front, and riding down in front of the line, knocked up their rifles and shouted to them to cease fire. The battalion officers and non-commissioned officers did the same, and after a few minutes, in which Colonel MacDonald galloped up and down in front of the line, they all ceased fire and ordered arms. Colonel MacDonald kept them standing quite still while he harangued them for a couple of minutes in no measured terms. It was very unpleasant for them standing still in the open under a hot fire without being able to reply to it, but it had the effect of getting them thoroughly in hand, and from that time on they worked like a machine. The Dervishes took advantage of the cessation of fire, and pushed forward to within about four hundred yards, from whence their riflemen poured in a heavy but frightfully ill-aimed fire. Colonel MacDonald now ordered firing to recommence by company volleys. After a few minutes the Dervishes launched their attack. With a great yelling they rose up and rushed forward, headed by about two hundred mounted emirs, galloping as hard as their horses could lay legs to the ground. Colonel MacDonald ordered independent firing to commence. The guns fired case shot, and every rifle and maxim fired as fast as they could load. It was a stirring moment. It must have been a terrific fire for the Dervishes to

DIAGRAM XI

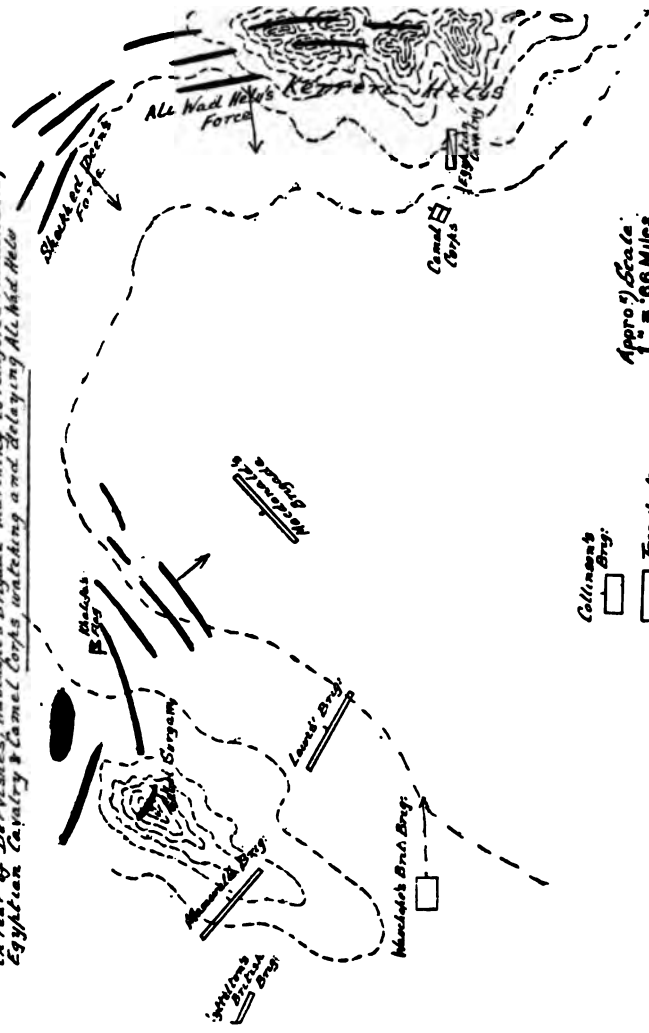
showing
Deployment of Col. Macdonald's Brigade





face. So rapid was our fire, that above the sound of the explosions could be heard the swish of our bullets going through the air just like the swish of water. It literally swept away the line of charging Dervishes. One or two horsemen got within one hundred yards, and it really looked as if they would reach us. The leading emir was hit twice, one could see him reel in his saddle, but he still came on at full gallop, and was just lifting his spear when he fell within forty yards of our line, exactly as if he had been knocked off by the branch of a tree. The Dervishes behind, seeing the slaughter of the ones in front, stopped and lay down about four hundred yards off, whence they kept up a pretty hot fire. At this moment the movements ordered by the Sirdar began to take effect. Lewis's Brigade, although still some way from MacDonald's, could be seen coming up fast, three battalions deployed, one in support, and they soon opened a fire on the flank of the Khalifa's force which was attacking MacDonald's Brigade. Maxwell's Brigade could also be seen clearing the Dervishes off Gebel Surgam, and establishing his maxims there. Two batteries had arrived to reinforce MacDonald, having been sent by General Hunter, and it seemed as if the moment had come for MacDonald to advance against the Dervishes in front of him and roll them back on the Khalifa's black flag (which was a prominent mark). He would thus co-operate with Maxwell's and Lewis's Brigades, who were also converging on the Khalifa's flag. Just as MacDonald, however, was about to give the order to advance, Captain Henry of the camel corps rode up and informed him that at least ten thousand Dervishes were

DIAGRAM XII

Showing
Lewis' Brigade coming into action against Khalifa's flank and so relieving pressure on Macdonald's Brigade which is just about to be attacked in rear by Sidi el Deir Ali's Force. Maxwell's Brigade is about to occupy Sbeita, and descend on Khalifa's flank. Syrett's Brigade is getting in rear of Derwishes, Macdonald's Brigade marching to reinforce Macdonald, Egyptian Cavalry & Camel Corps, waiting and delaying Ali Nad Helo



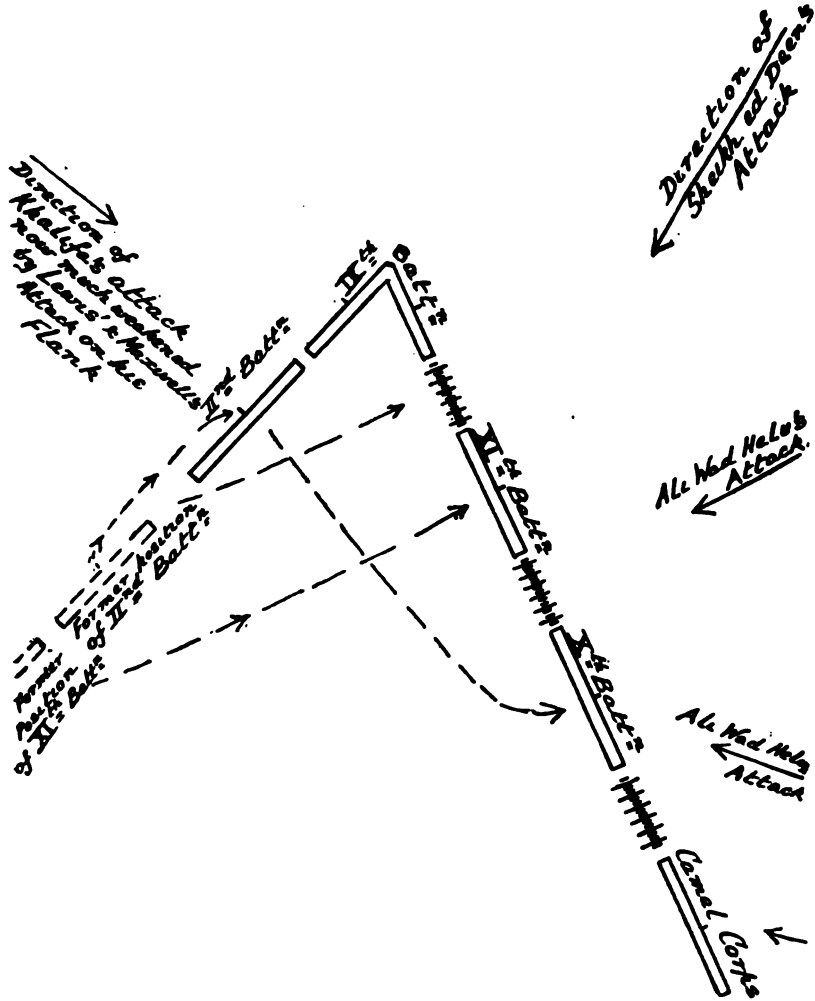
Collinson's Coy. 
 Transport 

Approx. Scale
 1" = 1.66 Miles

coming down from Kerreri Hills to attack him in his right rear. Colonel MacDonald was for a moment disposed to disregard them and go for the ones in front, but at this moment the body of Dervishes referred to came in sight in large numbers, moving rapidly on to the rear of the brigade. There was only just time to make arrangements to meet them. Colonel MacDonald sent his galloper to tell the Eleventh Battalion on the left to come across and form up facing the rear with their backs to the backs of the Ninth Battalion. As it seemed doubtful whether the Eleventh Battalion could get across in time, MacDonald swung back half of the Ninth Battalion, so that this battalion made an arrow-head. They were ordered to open independent firing, while Major Laurie's Battery came into action on the right of the Ninth firing case. This slightly checked the Dervishes, who had begun a heavy fire, and the Eleventh Battalion, after having twenty-seven men hit while marching across, had time to form up with admirable steadiness and order; but when they opened fire the Dervishes were within three hundred yards and still coming on, while the Khalifa's force were still attacking the other face of the brigade, so that it was under a heavy cross-fire, fortunately very ill-directed. Captain Peak's Battery, which had just come up, came into action on the right of the Eleventh, and the camel corps, who had all along been watching and sparring with Ali Wad Helu's force, now dismounted and formed on the right of the brigade. The fire of Colonel Lewis's Brigade was now having a marked effect on the Khalifa's force, so Colonel MacDonald moved the Tenth Battalion from the front

DIAGRAM XIII

Showing
change of front of Macdonald's
Brigade so as to form arrow head
facing front & right rear



face to the rear face of the arrow-head in which the brigade was now formed, while the Second Battalion, moving to the right with the precision of a drill parade, filled the gap made by the removal of the Tenth. The Third battery (Captain De Rougemont's) came into action between the Tenth Battalion and the camel corps, so that now there were one and a half battalions firing at the Khalifa's force, while two and a half battalions, camel corps, and three batteries were firing the other way at Ali Wad Helu's force. The infantry were firing independent firing, the guns firing case. The noise was deafening, and was added to by the bursting of the Dervish shells, which, however, were bursting too close to us to do any damage. MacDonald's trumpeter was shot at his side. The casualties of the brigade gradually rose to one hundred and sixty-eight, while those of the camel corps on its right rose to forty. It was the last effort of the Dervishes, their last chance, and bravely they tried to push home, but the ground was open, and nothing could live in the open against our fire. MacDonald's Brigade had now been heavily engaged for well over an hour, and the ammunition began to get very low. More had been sent for, but had not yet arrived. The Dervish attack, however, was weakening, and Colonel MacDonald saw the moment was approaching when he should advance and charge; but the Dervish line overlapped his right so much that he decided to wait until he was joined by Colonel Wauchope's British Brigade, which was now close by and coming up fast. Since there was nothing more to fear from the Khalifa's force, who were being

rapidly enveloped by Maxwell's and Lewis's Egyptian and Lyttelton's British Brigades, Colonel MacDonald wheeled the Second Battalion and half of the Ninth into line with the remainder of his force. As Colonel MacDonald rode up to the officer commanding the Ninth Battalion to tell him to bring up the left half of his battalion in line with the right half, that officer's horse suddenly whipped round, and let fly a tremendous kick at Colonel MacDonald, catching him fair on the leg just below the knee. It was a wonder that it did not break his leg. As it was, the pain was so great that he nearly fainted. He succeeded, however, in recovering himself almost immediately, and continued directing his brigade. Colonel Wauchope sent the Lincolnshire Regiment to prolong MacDonald's right, and brought the remainder of his brigade up on the left of MacDonald's. Colonel Broadwood had for some time been hovering on the Dervish left with the Egyptian cavalry, waiting for the right moment to charge. As soon as MacDonald saw the Lincolnshire Regiment on his right, he ordered the cease fire (the brigade had only two rounds a man left), and riding out in front, ordered the brigade to advance. The bands struck up, the Sudanese shook their rifles aloft, and though keeping good time and steady pace, they literally danced along; several of them produced whistles which they blew vigorously. They were only waiting for MacDonald to give the signal, and let them loose to rush headlong on the enemy, but he kept them in hand, advancing steadily all in line; it looked as if the next minute would bring us hand to hand with the Dervishes. The whole army was now in

one long irregular line advancing simultaneously, Lyttelton's, Maxwell's, and Lewis's brigades enveloping the Khalifa's force; Wauchope's and MacDonald's, the camel corps and cavalry advancing on and outflanking Ali Wad Helu's force, completely cutting them off both from the Khalifa and Omdurman, so that both the Dervish forces had to fight it out where they were, or fly to the desert. It was a splendid spectacle, but it was too much for the Dervishes. Time after time they had hurled themselves in vain against us, their whole force had failed to overwhelm one brigade, and now they saw our whole army advancing in line exultant with absolute confidence of victory; thousands of their bravest lay dead on the field, their leaders had seen the day was lost, and, after the manner of Dervish leaders, had fled. It was not to be supposed that the rank and file would struggle any longer; sullenly they gave way, then broke and fled, and instantly Colonel Broadwood saw the moment he had been waiting for had come, and charged in with his cavalry, turning their retreat into a rout. Here and there single Dervishes made a brave but futile rush at our line. At 11.50 a.m. the infantry halted, and the battle was won. It had lasted more or less continuously for five hours, and if we include the ground covered by the Egyptian cavalry on our right and the Lancers on our left, it had spread over a tract of country about ten miles long by two miles wide. It was fortunate that Ali Wad Helu's attack on MacDonald's Brigade was not made simultaneously with the Khalifa's attack. As I have explained, about a quarter of an hour elapsed between the two attacks, so that Colonel

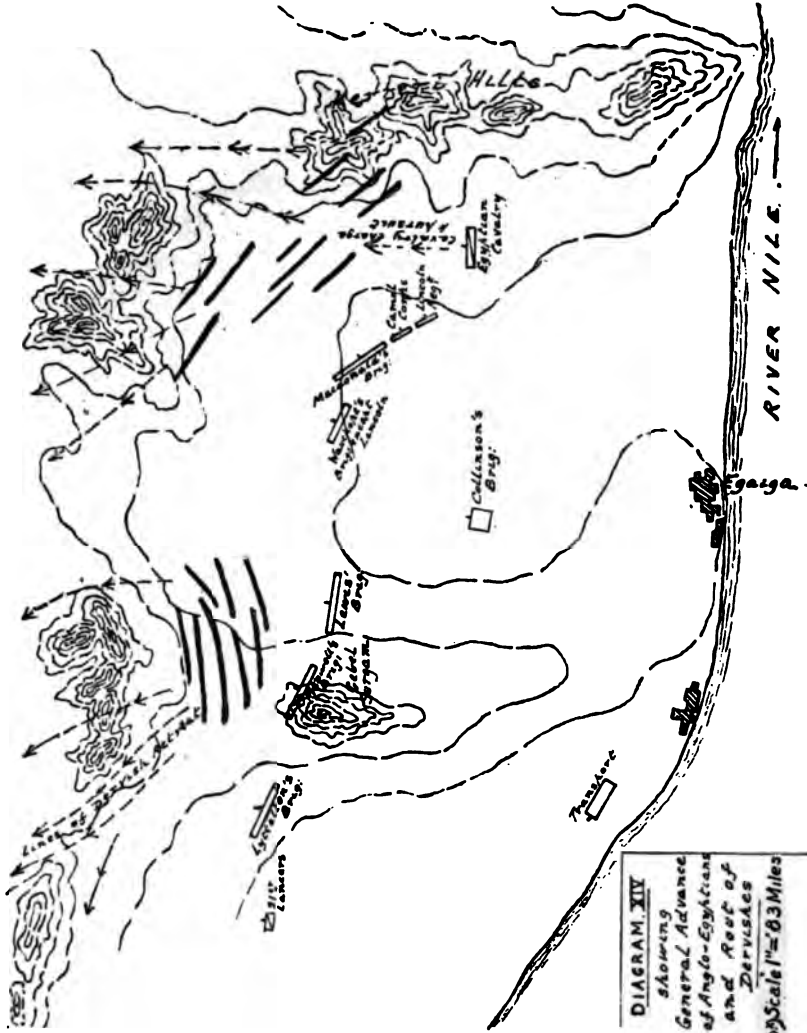


DIAGRAM XIV
 showing
 General Advance
 of Anglo-Egyptian
 and Retreat of
 Derwishes
 (Approx Scale 1"=0.3 Miles)

MacDonald was able to have his whole brigade in line to repel the first attack, and then had time to change front to the right rear to resist the second attack. Had the two attacks been simultaneous, the sheer weight of numbers would probably have overwhelmed the brigade, and then sweeping on, the Dervishes would have found Lewis's and Collinson's Brigades equally detached, and they would not have been defeated until they had come upon the two British and the Second Egyptian Brigades. The bravery of the Dervishes was beyond all praise. The Khalifa's body-guard had died to a man round his black flag, the last man standing by it continuing to fire on our battalions till he fell. The ground for yards round the flag was piled with corpses, and the flag was guarded only by dead men when our men reached it. Major Hickman, commanding the Fifteenth Battalion, pulled it up, and sent it to the Sirdar. Slatin Pasha rode up and inquired from a wounded Dervish near the flag whether the Khalifa was killed. The man replied that the Khalifa had been protected by a hole being dug for him in the ground, and he had only been gone ten minutes, having mounted on a fast camel.

The Sirdar was now anxious to follow up his success by entering Omdurman as soon as possible. There were about five thousand Dervishes in that place, and several fugitives from the battlefield would succeed in entering it, so unless he could get there quick we might yet have some house-to-house fighting. The Sirdar ordered Lewis's and MacDonald's Brigades to stay on the ground and collect our wounded, and send them to the boats as quickly as possible, and then follow on to

Omdurman. The two British Brigades and Maxwell's marched down to the river at Khor Shambat close to Omdurman, so that the men might get a much-needed drink of water, and a short halt after the hard work of the morning. It was now very hot, as it was two o'clock before the troops reached Khor Shambat. The Sirdar said the British Brigades might rest till 3.45, but he only gave Maxwell's Brigade half-an-hour, and at 2.30 p.m. he took them with him to enter Omdurman, telling the British to follow later. He had the Khalifa's black flag flying behind him, and as he approached Omdurman the gunboats opened fire on him, thinking they were firing at the Khalifa, and not dreaming we had reached Omdurman so quickly. The flag was quickly furled, and a galloper sent to stop the gunboats. The Thirty-second Field Battery had come into action about half-an-hour previously on a small eminence outside Omdurman and was shelling it. In spite of all remonstrances the Sirdar insisted on riding ahead of the brigade as they approached Omdurman. The Dervishes were uncertain what to do. They knew the day was lost, but if they were to be massacred they would sooner die fighting. They could hardly comprehend a conqueror having mercy, though the Sirdar had sent a captured Dervish to explain that if they laid down their arms their lives would be spared. They were consequently undecided when the Sirdar arrived. He, however, continued to ride coolly into the town, telling the Dervishes he would spare their lives if they laid down their arms. The question at that particular moment was whether they would spare his

life, not whether he would spare theirs, but by sheer bluff and by coolly riding steadily forward the Sirdar gained his point. The Dervishes knew that their cause was lost, and they knew that it was the Sirdar and not only one of his brigadiers who was promising them their lives, and so they laid down their arms to him, though they would not have relied on the promise of a subordinate officer. In this way the Sirdar obtained possession of the town with practically no house-to-house fighting, and so saved the many lives which such fighting would have cost.

Pressing on they next came to a high walled enclosure, in which some natives said there were two thousand Baggara prepared to fight to the death. The Sirdar requested Colonel Maxwell to assault the place with his brigade; but when an entrance was made it was found to be empty, and they pressed on to the Khalifa's house, from which the sound of his war-horn had been heard summoning his followers to rally, so that it was hoped he would be found there. Colonel Maxwell had succeeded in doubling a company of Sudanese in front of the Sirdar. As they entered a narrow passage close to the Khalifa's houses two Baggara horsemen dashed out of a gate and hurled themselves on the Sudanese. The leading horseman speared a Sudanese with a great spear about fifteen inches broad; it took off the top of the man's head just like the top of an egg. Of course they were shot before they could do any more, and as our men entered the doorway from which they had come they saw a small body of horsemen disappearing down a lane. It is thought by some

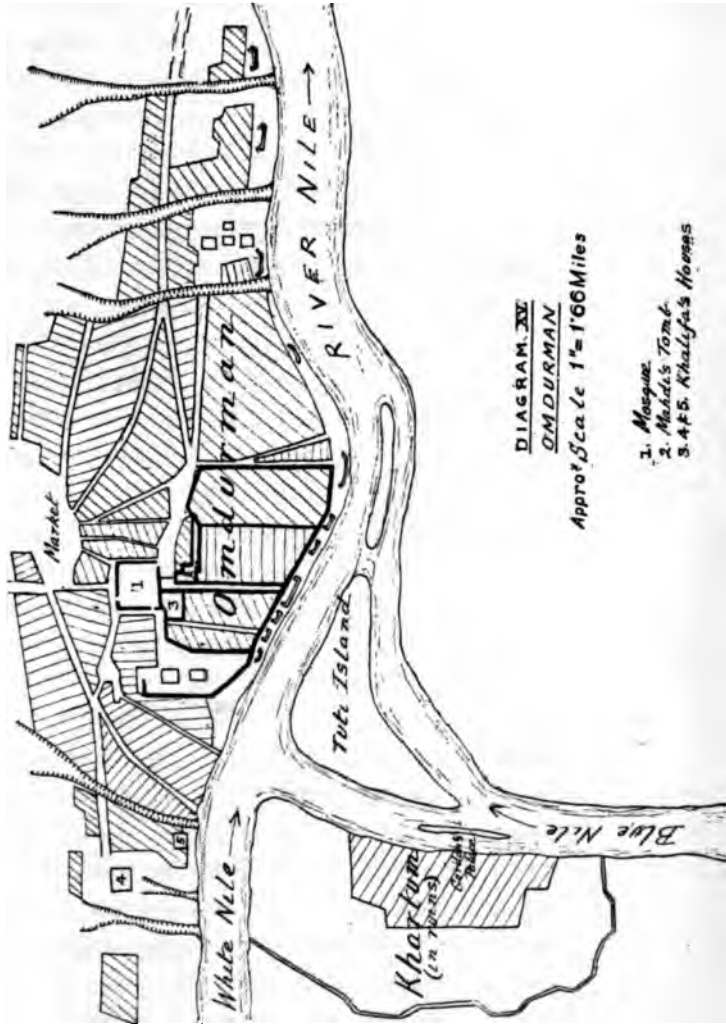
that these were the rear-guard of the Khalifa's escort, and that the two men who had charged had done so in the hope of gaining a little time. It was disappointing for the Sirdar to find when the Khalifa's house was reached that he had made good his escape.

While the Sirdar, General Hunter, and their Staffs were standing in the courtyard, a shell came in and burst right in the courtyard, killing poor Howard, the correspondent of the *Times*, who after riding through the charge with the 21st Lancers in the morning was now killed at the end of the day by one of our own shells. The Thirty-second Field Battery had had no orders to discontinue bombarding, and had no idea that any of our troops had yet entered the town. The courtyard was very soon vacated, and a galloper sent to order the Thirty-second Field Battery to cease fire.

The Sirdar next visited the prison, and released Neufeld, the Austrian trader, who had spent thirteen years as a captive in Omdurman. He was loaded with chains, and dressed as he was in a Dervish jibba and turban, it would have been difficult to distinguish him from a Dervish had it not been for his complexion, which was a good deal paler than that of the English officers surrounding him, as, owing to his imprisonment, he was not in the least bit sunburnt. He had been employed in the Khalifa's arsenal superintending the manufacture of powder, and he said that the Khalifa had visited him only a short time previously, and upbraided him with the badness of the powder, saying that was the only reason of his defeat. He had also announced his intention of killing Neufeld, but at that

moment the Khalifa was told that the Sirdar was entering the town, so he had hurriedly disappeared to look after his own safety. There were several Greeks and some nuns, who had been living in the town unable to escape, and were now rejoiced at the return of their liberty. Neufeld said that none of the inhabitants had dreamt we should win, and the Khalifa had been so confident of success that he had invited all his emirs to dine with him after the battle, and we found the meal in course of preparation when we arrived.

About 5 p.m. the remaining five brigades reached the north end of Omdurman and began to enter. Omdurman is a rabbit-warren of mud hovels, six miles long by about half-a-mile wide. One street (at parts very narrow) runs down the length of this, so that it was a matter of time for so big a force to thread their way through to the centre, where a road led out at right-angles to the place which the Sirdar had selected for bivouac outside the town on the east side. Had the force known where they were marching to the quickest way would have been to march outside the town; but, presumably for reasons of impressing the inhabitants, the orders were to march through the town. The result was that a block very soon occurred. Darkness came on, and camels, guns, and men seemed to be inextricably mixed and blocked. Although most of the brigades had reached the outskirts of Omdurman at 5 p.m., they nearly all took till 11 or 12 at night before they reached their bivouac, and one brigade, unable to reach the spot, bivouacked in an open place in the town. The transport had not a notion where their brigades



were, so very few got their baggage that night. Captain Watson, the Sirdar's A.D.C., had arranged a capital dinner for the Staff, and had all their baggage neatly laid out for them in an open space in the town, but he could not find the Sirdar and his Staff. They, however, succeeded in getting something to eat from the Guards, and then lay down on the bare ground, after sending



CARRIAGE USED BY GORDON. NEUFELD IN BACKGROUND.

men to try and find Watson. General Hunter and his Staff were equally unlucky in getting their baggage. Every one was pretty well dead beat when they reached their bivouacs between 11 and 12 that night. We had stood to arms at 3.30 a.m., and had been on the go ever since, marching and fighting through a long hot day, with very little to eat and drink. But what did fatigue and absence of baggage matter now that Omdurman was taken?

Every man in the force must have felt happier that night than he had ever felt before, and if men, who had only been working for this climax for three or four years, or even three or four months, felt happy, what must have been the feelings of the Sirdar, Generals Hunter and Rundle, and the score of right-hand men of the Sirdar, who had been working and fighting for this goal for fourteen years! All the work was now crowned with a success more ample than the most sanguine could have hoped for. The Dervishes were absolutely pulverized, Omdurman and the whole Nile valley was ours. Gordon was avenged. The casualties on our side were about five hundred, of which about one hundred and fifty were killed. Out of the five hundred casualties about one hundred and fifty were British, the remainder Egyptian, the largest percentage being amongst the 21st Lancers, and next with MacDonald's Brigade, whose casualty list was one hundred and sixty-eight. Of the Dervishes quite fifteen thousand were killed. Officers sent out the next day counted eleven thousand eight hundred dead on the battlefield; to these must be added those killed by the bombardment in Omdurman and in the desert during pursuit. Several thousand more were wounded and taken prisoners. The remainder had fled, or taken up the rôle of peaceful inhabitants. From reports of the Greeks in Omdurman, and from estimation of the numbers seen by the distance they covered when extended, there is not a doubt that one is making no exaggeration, but rather the contrary, by saying that the Dervish army which took the field on the 2d September numbered fifty thousand. Our

force was about fourteen thousand Egyptian and nine thousand British, total twenty-three thousand. The smallness of our loss was due to the facts that the Dervish fire was extraordinarily inaccurate, and that the openness of the ground enabled us to keep the greater part of the enemy at a distance. Had the Dervishes stayed in Omdurman and fought there as pluckily as they fought in the open, or had they made a night attack, the casualty list would have been very different. The Egyptian cavalry continued the pursuit until late at night, but their horses were dead beat. For the last forty-eight hours they had had very little rest. The high Nile had made the country swampy for some distance from the usual river-bank, and as the gunboat carrying their supplies could not get near sound ground or find the cavalry, they were obliged to return.

CHAPTER XV

THE next morning the Sirdar sent the news of the victory down by steamer. It was apparently awaited at home with some anxiety, as for the last two days telegraphic communication had been interrupted. The telegraph line had been placed on poles as far as Wad Hamed, where the force had concentrated. When the concentration was completed there was no more necessity for the telegraph as far as the Sirdar's convenience was concerned, as the force was all together and had all its supplies with it, consequently the Sirdar had not considered it worth while to allow Lieutenant Manifold, R.E. (in charge of telegraphs), to buy an insulated cable such as is ordinarily used for laying along the ground behind a force, so the bare wire which would subsequently be raised on poles was laid on the march. As long as the weather was dry it worked well, but the rain storms that occurred had wetted the ground too much to allow messages to pass over the bare wire.

Going round the town one could see the damage that had been done to Omdurman by the howitzer battery and the gunboats. The embrasures of all the forts were

much knocked about. The top of the dome of the Mahdi's Tomb was knocked off, and there were several large holes in it. There were many Dervishes lying dead in the streets who had been killed by the bombardment. One narrow street was absolutely paved with them. The inhabitants told us, with what truth it is difficult to say, that on one occasion there were one hundred Dervishes praying in the courtyard of the mosque: a lyddite shell burst in their midst, and only two came out unwounded. The Dervish arsenals were found to be stocked with a quantity of the most heterogeneous war material: guns and Remingtons, drums and accoutrements from Hicks Pasha's and Gordon's armies, Italian magazine rifles bought from the Abyssinians, elephant guns, cheap revolvers, shot guns, shirts of mail, some of them dating from the Crusades, others made to copy them, helmets, spears, shields, swords, Sudanese drums of every description. There were many signs of the busy preparation of arms and ammunition that had been going on. In the Emir Yunes' house, which was a small arsenal, could be seen in one corner piles of old rifles, in another various parts of rifles for repairing old ones, and in another a pile of rifles that had been so prepared. In the same way there were powder, caps, bullets, half-made up cartridges and ammunition ready for issue. Here also were to be seen the famous copper drums celebrated throughout the Sudan, also two European carriages, one of which had belonged to Gordon. The other was the identical one in which Said Pasha, a former Khedive of Egypt, had driven all the way from Cairo, drawn over the desert by

camels. There was very little of any value found. The Khalifa, although confident of victory, had nevertheless taken the precaution of sending all his treasure away. It is supposed that it was sent to Gebel Gedir many hundred miles south-west. The filth and smell of the town was terrible. There were no good houses, only mud hovels, in which human beings had crowded together, killing their animals for food inside their hovels or just outside the door, and leaving the parts they did not eat to rot and smell where they lay. Sanitary arrangements were *nil*. The recent rain had made pools in the streets in which dead animals and corpses were lying and rotting. It was curious to observe amidst such barbaric existence the remnants of a former semi-civilization in the crippled but still working workshops, and a crazy telegraph line still in use. The only building of any pretension was the Mahdi's Tomb, which was a well-built stone structure with big white dome rising to a height of about seventy feet. The courtyards outside were enclosed by a high, well-built stone wall. Since so much of the Dervish fanaticism centred in the Mahdi's Tomb, and since they believed that even though dead he was capable of working wonders against the infidels, and since the tomb would probably become a goal for pilgrimages and a rallying point in case of rebellion, it was considered wise that it should be destroyed. Consequently the whole thing was completely rased to the ground. The day after the fight the troops were allowed a much-needed and well-earned rest; Arab irregulars on fast camels were sent in pursuit of the Khalifa; the women

of the town and what other inhabitants had not fled were sent out to bring in the Dervish wounded from the battlefield. Several of them were treated by our doctors, although they were busy with our own wounded. Other Dervishes were taken into their houses in the town and looked after by their women. Charges have been made in the newspapers that wounded men were wantonly killed by the troops. This was not the case, but several of the Dervish wounded were killed by our men in self-defence only, for the wounded Dervishes would sham death when we advanced until our men were right on top of them, and would then jump up and attack them. Needless to say, such men were quickly despatched, and the frequency of the occurrence caused the men to be pretty wary in passing over wounded, and to fire on the slightest sign of a Dervish jumping up. Unfortunately there were a few dastardly camp-followers, who for a short time, when every one was too busy to stop them, looted and, if necessary, killed the fallen Dervishes, but they were soon stopped.

Our own wounded were much more fortunate than wounded men can usually expect to be. Very little time elapsed before their wounds were dressed. Doctors and medical stores were present in abundance. Then there was no carrying the wounded long distances in stretchers, which is so painful for them. As soon as they were sufficiently strong they were taken by steamers to Atbara and Abadieh, where there was ample accommodation for them in roomy, well-roofed, mud-brick hospitals. When convalescent they travelled by alternate rail and steamer to Cairo.

On the 4th September representatives of every regiment and corps paraded at the ruined site of Gordon's Palace at Khartum. A short thanksgiving service was held by the chaplains of all denominations, and then the British and Egyptian flags were simultaneously hoisted. The officers surrounding the Sirdar, who was visibly moved, shook hands with him and offered their heartiest congratulations, and in so doing expressed the feelings of every man of the force.

It was, I think, on the following day that a Dervish steamer hove in sight from the south flying a white flag in token of surrender, and was soon alongside Omdurman. The Dervish commander of the boat was much surprised to find us in possession of the town. The steamer was observed to be absolutely covered with bullet marks from small calibre rifles. The Dervish explained that the Khalifa, having heard of the arrival of white men at Fashoda, had sent him to defeat them. He said he found them entrenched at Fashoda flying a flag which he had never seen before. After a hot engagement of a few hours he had drawn off, and had returned to Omdurman to get sufficient reinforcements to wipe them out, having also told all the Dervishes on the river-bank in that neighbourhood to attack them. There was, of course, much discussion as to who the white men could be, but it was generally agreed that it must be Marchand's party. The Sirdar, having settled all the most pressing business at Omdurman, started for Fashoda with a flotilla of five gunboats, on board of which were one hundred men of the Cameron Highlanders, the Eleventh Sudanese Battalion (Major Jack-

son), half of the Thirteenth Battalion, and Captain Peak's Battery. At Renk, about one hundred miles south of Khartum, they found a small Dervish force, which at once opened fire on the gunboats with their one gun, but they were very soon put to flight or captured, and the flotilla proceeded.

Numerous hippopotami were seen, and on one occasion one of the boats towed by the steamers appeared to be aground, but it was found to have only run foul of a hippopotamus. Two lions and numbers of every kind of deer were seen. The banks were wooded, and flooded for miles on each side. The stream was sluggish, and the gunboats could steam at a good pace against it. It is unnecessary to repeat what is matter of universal knowledge, how Major Marchand's gallant band, after having accomplished an heroic march across Africa, were found entrenched at Fashoda with their ammunition almost exhausted, waiting for the Dervishes to reappear in force to administer the *coup de grâce*; of how the Sirdar established the Eleventh Battalion under Major Jackson and Captain Peak's Battery at Fashoda, and then proceeding as far as possible up the Sobat, left half the Thirteenth Battalion there; and of the subsequent negotiations which ensued, and finished by the French evacuating Fashoda and leaving the whole Nile valley to us. The Shilluk tribe, who inhabited the neighbourhood of Fashoda, received us with great joy. We had several Shilluks serving in the ranks of our Sudanese regiments, and they were very useful in arranging the good understanding. The Sirdar sent a Shilluk sergeant of long service to summon the chiefs to interview him.

The Sirdar was somewhat surprised, and rendered almost suspicious by the fact that, though there were evidently plenty of Shilluks about, not more than seven made their appearance at a time, they would then disappear and seven more would take their place. The Shilluk sergeant hastened to explain that he had found the Shilluks coming in large numbers to greet him in their national costume, which consisted of stark nakedness. He had told them the great white Pasha would be very angry at such disrespect; accordingly they had with difficulty succeeded in raising seven loin-cloths, which the entire tribe were taking it in turn to wear in order to be presented to him. In view of the time this would take, the Sirdar said he would be quite willing to receive them in their national costume.

Another amusing incident arose as follows. It was thought that the Sudanese in our ranks would be perplexed at meeting white men at Fashoda, and be unable to understand the delicate relations between them and us. As it was most necessary to avoid any untoward accident which would precipitate hostilities, it was decided to try to explain the delicate situation to the men. Accordingly, several of the black sergeants were summoned, and it was explained to them that we should find white men at Fashoda, and that though they were our friends, they were not English nor Egyptian officials, and that they disputed our right to Fashoda, etc., etc. The state of the case having been carefully explained to them, they were told to inform the men. This they were overheard to do in the following short and pithy sentence:—"When we reach Fashoda we shall find

white men, but they are not 'Ingleesi,' they are thieves and robbers." After that, the officer who had endeavoured to explain the situation felt it was no good wasting any more breath.

While the Sirdar was proceeding up to Fashoda the whole of the British troops left Omdurman on their



The Boncin, GORDON'S STEAMER CAPTURED AT KHARTUM.

return to Cairo. They went down to the Atbara in sailing-boats, tying up every night to the bank to sleep. Every night a storm of sand and rain came on which required exertions to be made to prevent the boats being wrecked. In the daytime it was difficult to get shelter from the sun in the open boats, so that it was not a very pleasant experience, but it was a very expeditious way

of getting the troops down. Several men travelled down in the *Bordein*, the historic steamer in which Sir Charles Wilson went to Khartum in 1885, to find it in the hands of the Mahdi. The steamer had been used by the Dervishes ever since, and was now the most extraordinary patchwork apology for a steamer you could imagine. Her machinery was in a crazy condition. There was no safety-valve to the boiler or steam gauge, and the only way the engineer could tell how much steam he had was by opening the steam-whistle, and guessing from the strength of the whistle what pressure of steam there was.

By the end of September all the British troops were back in Cairo, that is to say, the Sirdar had only taken eight weeks to mobilize and conduct twenty-three thousand men to Khartum, fight a battle, and send nine thousand of them back to Cairo. In that time five thousand of them had travelled two thousand six hundred and forty miles, four thousand of them had travelled one thousand four hundred and thirty miles, and the remainder from one hundred and eighty to five hundred miles, which will give an idea of the admirable line of communications.

CHAPTER XVI

ALTHOUGH the battle of the 2nd September had overthrown the Dervish power, and the British troops had been able to return, and several officers of the Egyptian army were granted leave, yet there still remained some very hard work to be done in the Eastern Sudan.

It will be remembered that Gedaref, about one hundred and thirty miles south-west of Kassala, and about one hundred and eighty miles east of the White Nile, was garrisoned by a Dervish force about five thousand strong under Ahmed Fedil. This emir had been ordered to join the Khalifa at Omdurman, and after considerable delay had set out to do so, leaving part of his force at Gedaref, but unfortunately had not reached Omdurman in time to be destroyed with the remainder. As soon as he had withdrawn his main body from Gedaref, the Sirdar had ordered the Kassala garrison under Colonel Parsons to occupy that place. I am sure I shall be pardoned by the officer who sent the following account of the operations to his corps journal, if I insert it here ; otherwise I should be obliged to omit these interesting and important operations, without which the story of the campaign would be

incomplete. It was only by a mere chance that I obtained a copy of the *Royal Engineer's Journal*, in which the following account appears :—

Extract from Royal Engineer's Journal.

“The readers of the *Royal Engineer's Journal* may care to hear something of recent events in the Eastern Sudan, where we are having a little campaign all to ourselves, and with no newspaper correspondents to chronicle events. The writer arrived at Kassala at the end of April last, just as detachments from its garrison were returning after a successful visit to the Upper Atbara, where between Fasher and Ossobri they completed the dispersal of the fugitives from Mahmud's army, and brought many of them back as prisoners to Kassala. A period of inaction followed, broken, so far as regards the writer, by a reconnaissance visit to the Atbara in May, which resulted in his being the only Egyptian casualty in a skirmish with Dervishes. Nature, however, aided by the best and kindest of medical treatment, worked wonders, and before the end of June I was as well and strong as ever.

“As the days went on our minds at Kassala were continually exercised as to the part, if any, we were to play in the coming campaign. With but a fortnightly post, and with a long, expensive, and circuitous telegraphic connection *via* Massowah with the outer world, we were very much cut off, and so far as the Nile was concerned we gleaned most of our news out of the English papers. It was very tantalizing to be at once so near and yet so far. When August came it was

obvious that we were not to join in the advance on Khartum, and that our only hope of action lay in the Eastern Sudan. Our eyes turned naturally therefore on Gedaref, where, at a distance of some one hundred and thirty miles south-west of us, was assembled the army of Ahmed Fedil, reputed to number from five thousand to six thousand men. As the greatest amount of fighting men we could withdraw from Kassala for offensive purposes did not exceed one thousand four hundred, it was clear that so long as the bulk of Fedil's army was at Gedaref we would have to remain inactive; our hope, therefore, was that the Khalifa would withdraw some at least of the Gedaref garrison to assist him at Omdurman. Our intelligence patrols brought us word on many occasions that orders had gone to Fedil to come to the Khalifa, but for a long time he preferred the security of Gedaref, and it was not until a few days before the fall of Boga that Fedil marched west to the Blue Nile. On the 5th September we got confirmation of this intelligence, simultaneously with the news of the Sirdar's victory of three days before, and on the 7th we started for the Atbara. The force which left Kassala was composed as follows:—four hundred and fifty men of the Sixteenth Egyptian (Fellaheen) Battalion, which, recently raised, was to have its first experience of active service; four hundred and fifty men of the local Arab Battalion, a corps which had done good work under the Italians, and which had been taken over by the Egyptian Government on the occupation of Kassala; eighty men of the Egyptian Slavery Department camel corps; and three hundred and seventy Arab irregulars,

the command of which latter fell to the writer. One section of field hospital also accompanied the force. The camel corps was composed of blacks, most of whom had served their time in the Sudanese battalions of the Egyptian army. The irregulars were organized in 'bands' by tribes, under the leadership of sheikhs; there was one band of Beni Amirs, two of Shukriahs, and three of Hadendowas. Neither the Arab battalion nor the irregulars could be termed in our sense 'regulars'; they all had had a certain amount of drill and training, but the Arab nature does not adapt itself, as does the Egyptian, to solid drill and European methods. Their value lay in their excellent marching powers, in their dash, and in the smallness of their wants. What little clothing and equipment was required was entirely carried by the man himself, and his daily ration was but one pound of flour.

"Two days' marching brought the force to El Fasher, at which point it was decided to cross the Atbara. The river was there four hundred yards wide, and with a current of three to four miles per hour, and to a force unsupplied with bridging material, proved a formidable obstacle. We took with us barrels from Kassala for rafts, and as much local-made rope as we could lay hands on; but the crossing of the river was solved by the carpenters of the Egyptian Battalion, who most cleverly constructed boats, the framework of which was made of the wood growing by the river, and the covering formed of canvas which was available. Oars were made with bits of board nailed to straight tree branches. In these boats we were able to carry from twenty-five to

thirty men at a trip, and with fewer men a considerable quantity of stores. The Shukriah Arabs made some of their native rafts, on which, towed by swimmers, some of the irregulars crossed, but the bulk of the work fell on our six boats. Our three hundred and fifty camels and our horses and mules were swum across by the Shukriah Arabs, the camels being supported in front by inflated skins. With these primitive means of crossing, it took six days to transfer our force and its supplies for sixteen days to the left bank of the river, and it was not until Saturday, 17th September, that we commenced our march south.

“On the following morning we reached Mogatta, the point on the river bank from which we were to strike for Gedaref, and at once formed a post wherein to leave the heaviest of our baggage, and some of our ammunition and supplies.

“At about 5 p.m. firing was heard at our outposts, and proved to be from a patrol of forty men sent from Gedaref to see if any troops from Kassala had crossed the Atbara. A hundred men sent out from our post quickly dispersed the patrol, killing some and taking five prisoners. The remainder of the patrol hurried straight back to Gedaref, and so put an end to any hopes of our surprising that place.

“The day of 19th September was spent at Mogatta in making final arrangements, and settling what was to be left behind there and what taken forward with the force. As the march to Gedaref was but two days, and as food supplies were known to abound there, but five days' food was carried. One hundred and fifty rounds of

ammunition per man was taken, water for two days—a considerable item—and the smallest possible quantity of baggage. By this means the number of transport camels to accompany the fighting force was reduced to about one hundred and seventy. We started on our march from Mogatta at daylight on the 20th September, and with a rest from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. covered some twenty-two miles by 8 p.m., when we halted for the night. The first ten miles was through a thorn scrub so thick that the whole force had to march in single file. The bush then became less dense, but the grass was so rank and long, and the surface of the ground so broken, that except for short intervals the movement in single file had to be maintained.

“On the morning of the 21st we marched at 5 a.m., and at 7 a.m. our advanced guard fired on some Dervish horsemen who had come out to scout for us. A couple of hours later we neared Wad Akabu, the outlying village of the Gedaref district, and some four and a half hours distant from El Gedaref itself. There had always been an observation post at Wad Akabu, and it was not thought unlikely that we should here encounter resistance. We formed battle array therefore just before the village came in sight, but as we approached closer the villagers came out to tell us that the Dervish post had retired earlier in the day. We moved through the village to a rain-pond south of the village, and there made our midday halt. From the villagers we gleaned information, some of which proved true and some of which proved false.

“All our previous reports had told us that so far

Gedaref was ignorant of the fall of Khartum, but at Wad Akabu we heard that at last the news had reached the Dervishes, but that it had had no effect in altering their determination to fight, and that we would find them drawn up outside Gedaref. Then we heard that Fedil's army had gone to Boga, and that half of it was destroyed there and the rest scattered. This information, as we learnt to our cost later, was entirely false. Fedil never got nearer to Khartum than Rufaa, and his army was at the time entirely intact and on the Blue Nile.

“ At four o'clock in the afternoon we continued our march for a couple of hours, when we bivouacked in square, with our camels inside, and with posts thrown out to the front on all four sides.

“ The term 'Gedaref' applies not only to the village or town which was our immediate objective, but also to a district of considerable extent surrounding the main village of El Gedaref, or, as it is sometimes called, Suk Abu Sinn. This district which we had now entered is composed of undulating country of great fertility. The summer rainfall is considerable, and after its commencement dhura crops are very widely sown, whilst the rain-water collected in the khors and bottoms serves to supply the villages scattered hither and thither throughout the district. In happier days Suk Abu Sinn has been a town of considerable size and great prosperity, and even after the Dervish occupation the local Arab population (Shukriah tribe) remained and continued to annually grow their crops. Gedaref was therefore a great source of grain supply for the Dervishes generally,

and Khartum was indebted to it for a large quantity of its food.

“ The march was resumed at daylight on the 22nd in the following order :—Arab Battalion, Arab irregulars, Sixteenth Battalion, hospital, baggage train, rear guard. After about an hour's marching, Baggara horsemen were seen on the hills in front watching our approach, but they retired as we advanced. At about 8.30 a.m. we approached a ridge of hills some few hundred feet high, and beyond which was known to be, at a distance of about three miles, Suk Abu Sinn. Behind the western end of this ridge and near some convenient water a halt of short duration was made to collect the force before a further advance. When the order to march was given, a quarter of an hour brought us to a hillock from the top of which all things were made plain. Below us about a hundred feet lay a broad-bottomed grass-grown valley running from north-west to south-east, bounded on the north by the ridge to the western edge of which we had just advanced, and on the south-west by a lower ridge, which, running south-east, ultimately died away in the plain after a couple of miles. For convenience I will call this latter the southern ridge, as opposed to the northern ridge already mentioned.

“ From the hillock top the whole Dervish force could be seen one and a half miles away drawn up in the valley bottom and on the lower slopes of the southern ridge ; their riflemen were in lines, whilst behind them were bodies in square formation. We could make out altogether about six separate large groups. The

Dervishes had been waiting for us in the open since the previous evening, and with their banners waving and brandished swords and spears it was easy to see that they meant fighting. Their numbers we afterwards ascertained were one thousand five hundred riflemen and one thousand seven hundred spearmen, a very different quantity to the eight hundred riflemen and two hundred spearmen that we had expected to meet.

“Once the enemy were seen there was no delay on our part; our commander gave the order for the force to move at once to the southern ridge, whence we would at once command the Dervishes, and at the same time insert ourselves between them and their stronghold. The distance, about three-quarters of a mile, was covered at a rapid pace, and necessarily so, because we had only just time to reach a suitable position on the ridge when rifle shots from below showed that the Dervishes were advancing to the attack. Our force formed line to the left to meet the advance, the Arab Battalion on the right, the Egyptian Battalion in the centre, and half the Arab irregulars on the left. The Dervishes moved up the hill in open line formation, firing as they came; our line replied, and advanced forward slowly to meet them. The nature of the ground necessarily divided the Dervish attack into two—one of which opposed the Arab Battalion on our right, the other of which was directed against the Egyptian Battalion and the irregulars. The Arab Battalion pressed forward and drove back those opposed to them, and moving south towards the lower ground with one company, occupied the hillock indicated on

plan, and with another a village in the valley similarly indicated (see Diagram, p. 245).

“ We must now return and pursue the fortunes of our baggage train. This followed our fighting troops, but at a considerably slower pace, and hardly had it started from our original rendezvous when a strong body of Dervishes were seen working on to the northern ridge with the view of following our force on its march. Seeing this, the Egyptian officer in command of half the irregulars took it on himself to remain behind to endeavour to check this advance, an endeavour in which he was but for a very short time successful. The Dervishes in numbers worked round the valley top, and very soon were seen drawn up on the higher and northern portion of the southern ridge prepared to advance not only on the baggage train, but also on the rear of our line, now on the lower slopes of the same ridge. It was an anxious moment, and after consultation the Egyptian Battalion turned about to meet the new foe in rear, whilst the irregulars advanced down the slopes to hold in check the frontal attack.

“ The Dervishes from the hill-top lost no time, and with banners waving advanced down the slope.

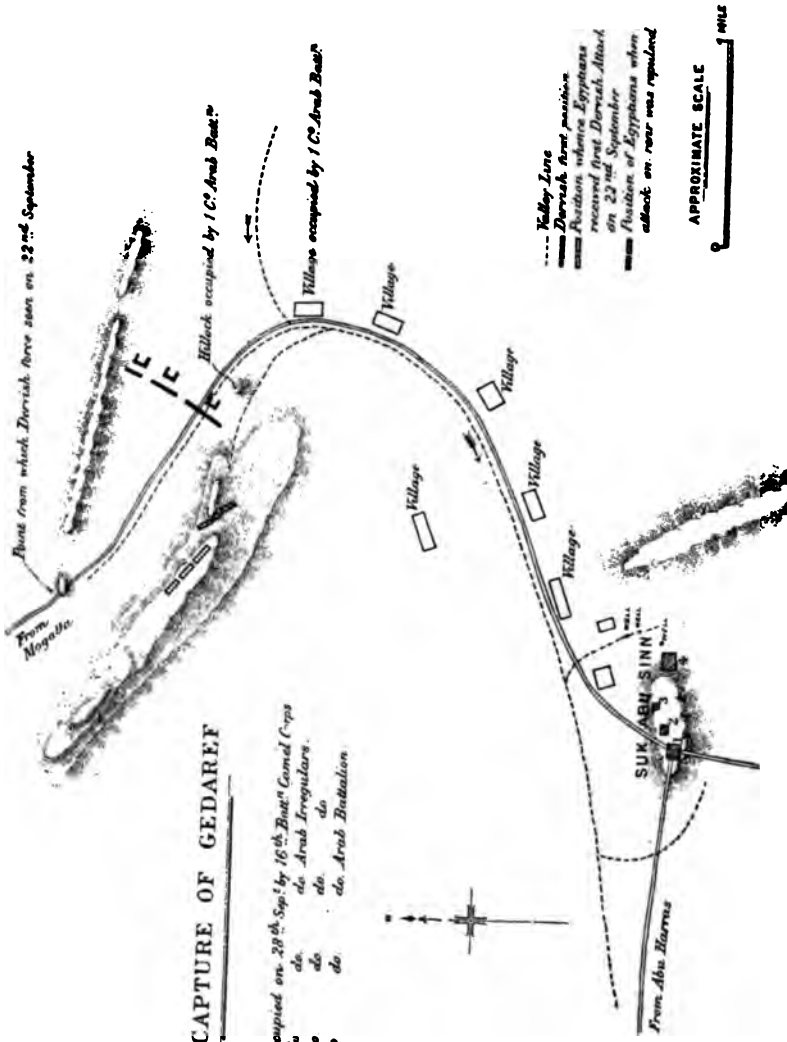
“ The baggage train offered a tempting object of attack with its long line of slowly-moving camels. Our camel corps, dismounted from their camels, worked for its protection, and these steady old soldiers showed they had not forgotten their past army service by the coolness of their fire and their gallantry under difficulties. The Dervishes, however, were not to be denied, and pushing on caused a retirement of the irregulars and

others with the baggage train, and got in among the baggage animals, killing some and dragging off others. The Egyptian Battalion, however, took up a position from which their fire flanked our retiring troops, and at the same time did execution among the advancing Dervishes.

“Meantime the irregulars, who had advanced to check the Dervishes in the valley, found their enemies retiring before them, and seeing the baggage train in difficulties returned to its assistance; in this they were accompanied by the portion of the Arab Battalion which had not advanced to the lower hillock or to the village in the plain. These returning troops were successful in stopping the retirement of the baggage guard just as the steady fire of the Egyptian Battalion was commencing to tell on the Dervishes. This fire, continuous and rapid, effected heavy losses, and at last, in the twinkling of an eye, the Dervishes turned and fled down the southern slopes of the southern ridge. Their course lay along the valley bed in the direction of Suk Abu Sinn, and they were followed and kept on the move by all available men of the Arab Battalion and irregulars. When those in pursuit reached the hollow north-east of the town they halted to collect themselves, and sent civilians up into the houses to see if the place was held or not. The Dervishes had, however, gone, and the troops advanced up on to the parade ground outside the walled enclosure, wherein had lived Achmed Fedil, to find Nur Angur, a Dervish leader of fame, with two hundred and fifty of his men, waiting to surrender. This was a happy termination to a day of varying

THE CAPTURE OF GEDAREF

1. *Zene* occupied on 28th Sep^r by 16th Indⁿ Camel Corps
2. *do* *do* *do* Arab Irregulars
3. *do* *do* *do* *do*
4. *do* *do* *do* Arab Battalion



From Moguda

Hillock occupied by 1st Arab Bde^r

Village occupied by 1st Arab Bde^r

SUK ABU SINN

From Abu Haraz

--- Valley Line
 ——— Dervish front position
 ——— Position whence Egyptians received first Dervish Attack on 22nd September
 ——— Position of Egyptians when attack on river was repulsed

APPROXIMATE SCALE
 1 MILE

fortune, on which our victory was due not to any tactical fault on the part of the Dervishes, but rather to their bad shooting on the one hand and to the fighting qualities of the camel corps and the Fellaheen Battalion on the other. The latter fought in line throughout, and its conduct was a striking tribute to the efficacy of steady drill as a means to discipline.

“ Our victory, although complete, was not gained without serious loss, as our casualty roll of forty killed and sixty wounded showed. It was estimated that the Dervishes left close on five hundred dead on the battlefield. On the second morning after our arrival at Gedaref, Nur Angur gave us the first intimation of the possibility of Ahmed Fedil returning to Gedaref. Fedil had never got nearer than Rufaa to Khartum, and his army was still intact. From Rufaa he retired towards Abu Harras, but the arrival of steamers there from Khartum showed him that his chances of crossing the Nile near that point were small, and he accordingly moved to Gebel Araing, a place two and a half days' march from Gedaref, and there considered his future action. Events showed how valuable was this information given by Nur Angur, and by this act and by his subsequent services in obtaining intelligence he rendered us very material assistance. The Nur, a Dongalau by birth, the husband of seventy wives and the father of a hundred children, is a man of between fifty and sixty years of age. His life has been a varied one, and would be well worth the writing. Years ago he served as a Mudir in the Sudan under Gordon Pasha, and was in the Government service for a long period before the

force of circumstances transformed him into a Dervish. His career under the Mahdi and subsequently under his successor was full of incident. He took a prominent part in the fighting against the desert column in 1884–85, and later on commanded in several of the engagements which took place between the Dervishes and Italians in the Eastern Sudan. A man of considerable education and intelligence, he was able to appreciate better than others how hopeless the Dervish cause was once Khartum had fallen, and it was for this reason that he elected to stay at Gedaref and surrender instead of taking refuge in flight. Directly we heard that the return of Ahmed Fedil was at all possible we began to look about us, and set our house in a state of defence.

“The Beit Zeki, as was called the enclosure where Ahmed Fedil had lived, stands at the highest part of a flat-topped hill, if indeed we can give the name of hill to a rise in the ground not exceeding twenty-five to thirty feet. From the summit the ground falls gently on all sides, and here and there were scattered brick houses and enclosures, the dwellings of the more important Dervishes, but the vast majority of the people dwelt in straw huts or tulkuls, which in great numbers surrounded the Beit Zeki, and whose tops could be seen above the crops of dhura and millet with which the whole area was covered; the corn stood from seven to fourteen feet high, and made it a matter of great difficulty to form any idea of the ‘lie’ of the ground. In the valley bottom east of the Beit Zeki lay the five wells which form the water supply of Suk Abu Sinn,

and to maintain command of which must be an essential portion of any scheme of defence.

“Happily within a few yards of the most southern of the wells was situated the Bait el Mal, or treasury, a square brick enclosure, on to the central yard of which faced the various rooms where the business of the place had been transacted. This enclosure, well adapted for defence, was allotted to the Arab Battalion. The Beit Zeki was occupied by the Egyptian Battalion, the camel corps, and the hospital. The bulk of the irregulars were placed in a brick enclosure north-east of the Beit Zeki, whilst the remainder held a smaller enclosure, which from its position flanked both the Bait el Mal and the main fort of the irregulars.

“These four works covered very effectively the eight hundred yards between the Beit Zeki and the wells, and it was easy to see that time alone was required to make the position as a whole a very strong one. Much, however, had to be done; banquettes from which the soldiers could shoot over the wall tops or through loopholes had to be made, superfluous interior walls had to be removed, whilst, most pressing of all, the field of fire had to be cleared. It was this latter which formed at first the main work not only of the soldiers but also of all the available civilians; the corn was trodden and broken down, the straw tukuls were burnt, and the brick buildings, where desirable, were knocked down. The work of defence was continued on successive days, although we got no additional intelligence as to Ahmed Fedil's movements; but just as we were beginning to think that Nur Angur was the victim of a nervous

delusion the blow came. On the 27th we sent a camel corps patrol out sixteen miles along the western road by which an advance on Ahmed Fedil's part would come, and they returned about 4 p.m. announcing all clear. An hour later, however, an infantry outpost, placed about four miles out, fired on six Baggara horsemen advancing from the west—horsemen who must have been close on the tracks of our returning camel corps. The approach of horsemen from the threatened direction led to the order for a strong camel corps patrol to again reconnoitre on the next day the western road.

“ On the morning of the 28th we had not to wait long for news; before they had gone three miles the camel corps heard the drums and trumpets of advancing horsemen, who were evidently not coming to surrender. In a little time longer, bodies of infantry and a camel baggage train were seen behind the horsemen, and we at once knew that Fedil had returned to claim his own again. There was no indecision about his movements. He halted his baggage train a couple of miles from our position, and at once advanced to the attack. Fedil doubtless expected to find Gedaref very much as he left it, but his riflemen must have been very much surprised by the change. The Dervishes pushed up through the dhura from the west and opened fire against the Beit Zeki from south, west, and north, and at the same time engaged the western and northern faces of the irregulars' fort. A little later the attack developed still further to the east, and a direct frontal attack was launched from the north against the irregulars' outwork (No. 3 on Diagram). The Dervishes developed a

very considerable fire everywhere, and dodging in and out among the dhura and between the tukuls were not very easy to see. Despite the heavy fire with which their advance was met, our enemy pushed on with great pertinacity and dash, and on the north some of them succeeded in occupying tukuls within sixty or seventy yards of the Beit Zeki. The defence, however, was too strong, and after about one and a half hours the Dervishes fell back on all sides. A short pause then followed, during which Fedil rallied his forces, and with the aid of his reserves prepared to launch a second attack. This advance, directed in the main against the western and northern faces of the Beit Zeki, met the same fate as its predecessor, and very soon a few isolated Dervishes in tukuls were all that maintained fire against us. A hundred of the irregulars were sent out and cleared the tukuls, and then Fedil drew off his forces into the valley west of the town. The two brass guns that had been taken on the 22nd and mounted in the Beit Zeki did considerable service during the day, and it was to us no mean satisfaction to thus turn Fedil's weapons against himself. The Bait el Mal, or water fort, was never seriously attacked, as a single shell and a couple of well-aimed volleys served to disperse the few Baggara horsemen that watched our position from the east.

“The Dervishes must have finally retired at about 1 p.m., but it was not for some time that we realized that they had ended their efforts, and we quite expected further fighting later in the day or early next morning. An inspection of the ground surrounding our forts made

on the 29th showed us how severely the Dervishes had been punished, and the estimate of five hundred killed does not err on the side of excess. Several deserters who came in were alike in their reports as to the large number of wounded, and put down the total casualties at more than one '*rub*' (eight hundred to one thousand). The fact that our losses on the 28th were but five killed and thirteen wounded bears eloquent testimony to the advantage which troops fighting behind fortifications have against those who attack them from the open.

“During the 29th and 30th the army of Ahmed Fedil, which, after allowing for its losses, must still have numbered three thousand five hundred men, remained encamped a couple of miles west of us on the lower ground, and we had leisure to note its apparent strength, its train of camels, and its doings generally. The Dervishes spent their days in collecting dhura from adjacent villages and resting after their labours. On the morning of the 30th, being a Friday, they had their usual weekly parade, and in one long line their horsemen and their footmen made quite an imposing array. The chief business transacted at the parade was the decapitation of three men who had been sent from us to Fedil with messages, and we can but suppose that the Dervish general thought this the best way of showing to his troops the contempt which he, at all events, entertained for 'the enemies of God.'

“The Egyptian force in possession of Gedaref was not from its numbers adequate to attack Fedil, or rather not sufficient to do so without undue risk of losing possession of Gedaref. If we had moved out with our

whole force it would have been possible for Fedil to work round and re-occupy the place; after leaving a sufficient guard in the forts our little force would have been too small to undertake the offensive. After all, too, our main object had been obtained, the Egyptian flag waved over Gedaref, and an Egyptian garrison was firmly planted there. It remained, therefore, but to let the process of time or the advent of additional Egyptian troops dispose of Fedil's defeated army. The curious thing was that he should still remain with his ammunition nearly exhausted, and when the leader for whom he was fighting had long ago fled from Khartum. The fanatical spirit, however, dies hard in the Sudan, and in still maintaining allegiance to his master and hostility to the 'Turks,' Fedil was only doing what the Dervishes had always done before. On the Upper Atbara, after the defeat of Mahmud, the routed and half-starved Dervishes (blacks as well as Arabs) resolutely refused to accept offers of pardon, and fought whenever they had the chance; and Fedil was only pursuing the same course under very much easier circumstances.

"On the morning of the 1st October Ahmed Fedil's army was on the move, and wound its way across the plain and over the hills to the village of El Assar, where Fedil halted, and where, with plenty of corn and water available, he was able to make for himself a comfortable resting-place. This village, about three hours south-west of Suk Abu Sinn, was a safer place for Fedil than his previous encampment situated on the road from Abu Harras—the road by which Egyptian reinforcements were certain to arrive; and at El Assar he

was favourably placed for a further retreat to the south.

“ After the fight of the 28th September a good deal of work remained to be done by the garrison of Gedaref—camels had to be sent back to bring ammunition to replenish our much diminished and scanty stock; our defences had to be completed, as well as the work of making the dirty and insanitary surroundings of Gedaref more suitable for prolonged occupation by troops. The Shukriah Arabs from adjacent villages kept coming in in large numbers with their flocks and their herds and all their worldly possessions, and to dispose of this floating and perturbed population was in itself a task.

“ As regards obtaining intelligence as to the doings of Ahmed Fedil, the followers of Nur Angur were given arms, and pushed forward to watch what was going on at Assar. These men, intimately acquainted with the country, and under a leader who was a master in the arts of Dervish warfare, brought daily and often hourly information, with the result of keeping our commander well acquainted with whatever was happening near Fedil's head-quarters. The Sirdar was naturally kept informed by telegram through Kassala of the course of events, whilst letters were sent by camel to El Medinah on the Blue Nile, where a communication from the chief of the Staff had informed us an Egyptian post had been established.

“ News from outside, however, seemed a long time coming; but at last, on the morning of the 11th October, a camel man from Kassala brought a telegram from the Sirdar to say that General Rundle in force was on the

way to Gedaref, and that he would probably be able to march from Abu Harras on or about the 10th October.

“It seems probable that in a very few days after these words are written (October 11), the actors on the Gedaref stage will no longer be exclusively drawn from the garrison of Kassala, and the present seems therefore a fitting point at which to bring this narrative to a close.”

Here the account in the *Royal Engineers' Journal* ends, and I must continue the narrative as best I can, although I did not participate in the operations.

News of Colonel Parsons' position at Gedaref having reached the Sirdar, he sent General Rundle with a force to assist. Messengers had been sent to Ahmed Fedil's force promising them their lives if they surrendered, but that individual had returned to attack Colonel Parsons at Gedaref. General Rundle proceeded up the Blue Nile until he arrived at Abu Harras, from which it was necessary to branch off into the desert to reach Gedaref. There was a long waterless march in front of him. He could not supply his whole force with water, and many of them were down with fever. The whereabouts of Ahmed Fedil were also uncertain. Gunboats patrolled right up the Blue Nile to prevent him crossing, and Colonel Collinson started with the Twelfth Battalion to reinforce Colonel Parsons. If such reinforcement was not sufficient, he was to let General Rundle know, and he would follow with the remainder. Colonel Collinson had a difficult waterless march, and on approaching Gedaref was attacked at night, but easily repulsed the Dervishes and effected a junction with Colonel Parsons. The next

day Colonels Parsons and Collinson rode out to reconnoitre the Dervish position with a view to deciding on the best means of attack. On reaching it they found Ahmed Fedil's force in full retreat, and a large number of them deserted and surrendered to us. Ahmed Fedil now kept constantly on the move raiding villages, and it was difficult to get accurate information of his whereabouts. The only thing to do was to manoeuvre so as to gradually force him on to the Blue Nile, where he could be tracked down.

After several weeks of watching the Blue Nile to prevent Ahmed Fedil crossing it, Colonel Lewis, on the 11th February, received news that Ahmed Fedil with two thousand followers was on the point of crossing at Roseires, about ten miles distant. Although Colonel Lewis only had the Tenth Battalion (Lieut.-Colonel Nason's) with him, whose numbers were reduced by fever and casualties to a little over four hundred, he immediately set out to intercept Ahmed Fedil. On arrival at Roseires, he found the Dervishes in the act of crossing. About one thousand had crossed to the other bank, while one thousand more were on an island in mid-stream. Colonel Lewis's force at once opened fire, but it was soon apparent that the Dervishes meant to continue crossing and get clear away. Our men were therefore directed to try and find the ford by which the Dervishes had crossed to the island. After a few unsuccessful attempts the ford was found, and under a hot fire from the Dervishes the Tenth Battalion waded across to the lower end of the island. It was now seen that the Dervishes were strongly posted on

the crest of the small hill in the centre of the island, separated from our men by about two hundred yards of perfectly open ground without a scrap of cover, while the Dervishes on the left bank of the river had posted themselves so as to pour an enfilading fire across the open piece of ground which our men would have to cross.

The Tenth Battalion quickly formed up, and then without the least hesitation charged in the most gallant style across the open glacis through a perfect hail of bullets from front and flank. Over a hundred out of our four hundred men fell in this short distance, together with Major Fergusson and six Egyptian officers, but the remainder never wavered, and charging straight on they drove them from their position, and pouring a murderous fire into them as they ran they mowed them down in numbers, driving them to the water's edge, where the survivors, about six hundred, threw down their arms and surrendered themselves prisoners. It was fortunate that their resistance ceased, as our men had exhausted their ammunition. Ahmed Fedil, with the Dervishes who had previously crossed to the left bank, made off, and after several days gained the White Nile, in the hope of crossing it and joining the Khalifa. Only Ahmed Fedil and a few personal followers succeeded in doing this; the remainder were intercepted by the patrolling gunboats, and surrendered themselves to the number of about one thousand. The action at Roseires, though a small one, was the stiffest hand-to-hand fight of the whole campaign, as the casualty list shows. Out of four hundred and thirty officers and men one English

officer was wounded, three Egyptian officers killed, five wounded, and one hundred and fifty men killed and wounded. The battalion throughout behaved beautifully. Not for a second did they hesitate, in spite of the superior numbers and the difficulty of crossing an open space swept by frontal and flanking fire. Captain Jennings, R.A.M.C., behaved most gallantly. While our charging troops swept on and closed with the enemy, he remained in the deadly open space still swept by the flanking fire of the Dervishes on the east bank, and with the assistance of the slightly wounded he succeeded in getting all the wounded carried off the fire-swept zone and placed under cover, returning again and again to the open ground to carry out this service, thereby saving many lives. Major Fergusson, who was wounded, had taken part in six previous actions in the campaign, and was the only officer of the battalion who had been with it since the commencement of the Dongola Expedition; of the other four two had been killed, one died, one was invalided.

This action disposed of the last Dervish force in the field in the Eastern Sudan. There now remained only the force under the Khalifa himself.

When the Khalifa fled from Omdurman he was obliged to follow the Nile for one hundred and eighty miles as far as Ed Duem, which is the first place where a line of water-pools makes it possible to strike south-east into the desert. Following this route, he had not halted until he had reached Lake Sherkeleh, about one hundred and twenty miles south-east from Ed Duem. Here he had been joined by the remnant of his forces, and promptly

proceeded to raid the neighbouring tribes in order to collect supplies. The Sirdar established the second Egyptian Battalion at Ed Duem under Lieutenant-Colonel Pink. To this post the Arabs constantly brought news of the Khalifa, complaining of the way in which they were being raided, and asked for assistance; but, native like, thought their request would not be granted unless they minimized the difficulty of the undertaking, consequently they understated the strength of the Khalifa's force, and made out that he had only seven hundred men. These reports having been forwarded to the Sirdar, he decided to send his brother, Colonel Kitchener, to attack the Khalifa. To do this he gave him four hundred and fifty of the Fourteenth Sudanese Battalion under Lieutenant-Colonel Shekleton, four hundred and fifty of the Second Egyptian Battalion under Lieutenant-Colonel Pink, and about fifty Arab cavalry (ex-Dervishes) under Lieutenant-Colonel Mitford and Major Williams, while Lieutenant-Colonel Tudway acted as Staff officer to the column. They had a difficult march in front of them, as they could not rely on getting water for one hundred and twenty miles, that is to say, until they were close to the Khalifa, but the usual arrangements for carrying water and economizing it were made. After a trying march they arrived within a short distance of the position, and heard with dismay that the Khalifa had used up all the water at his camp, and had moved to the place where they had hoped to water. This meant very careful husbanding of the water they still had with them. They soon came upon the deserted encampment of the Khalifa, and here another unpleasant fact was revealed.

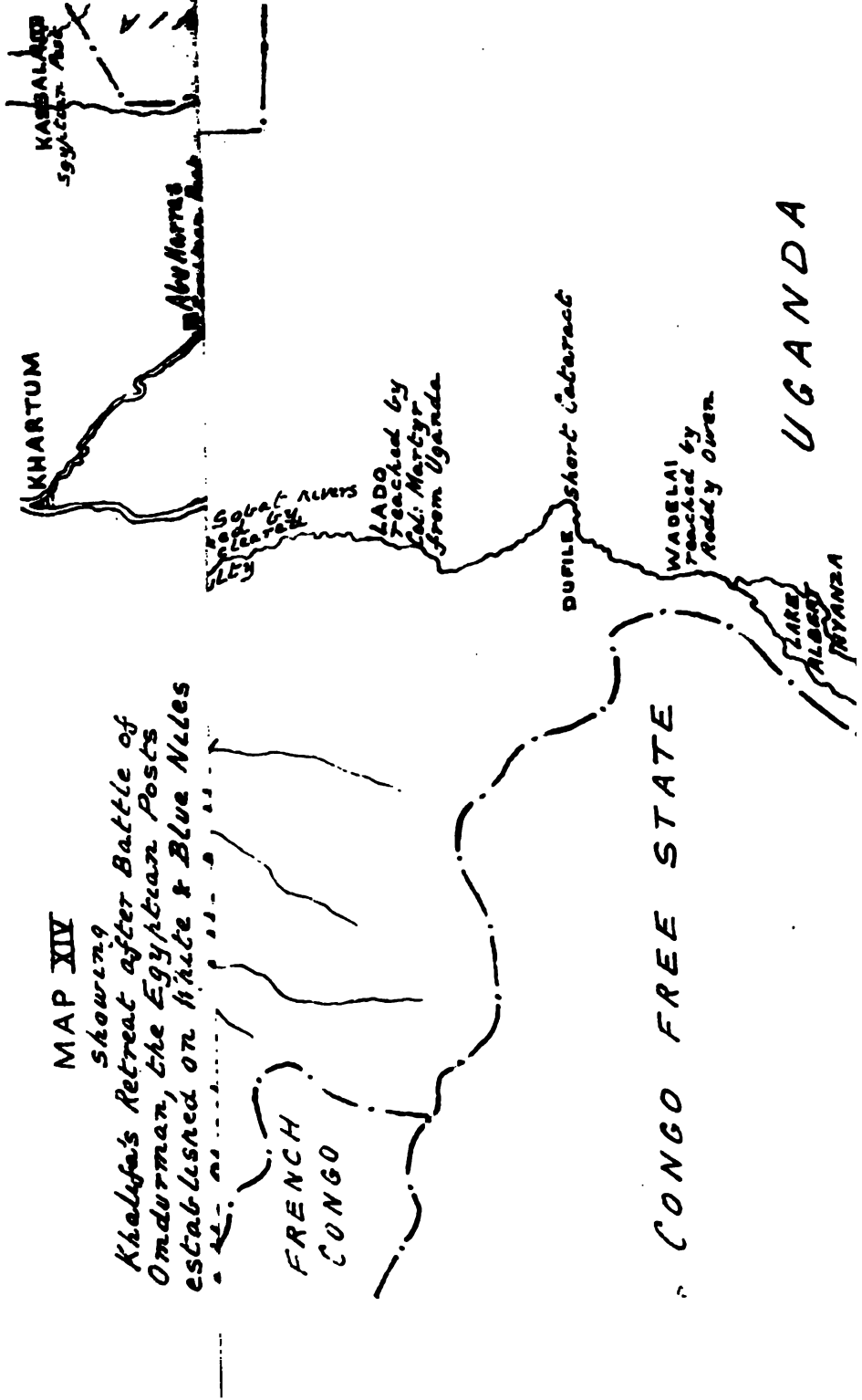
Far from being the encampment of seven hundred men it was the camp of a few thousand, and it became evident to Colonel Kitchener that his force was not big enough. However, he decided to reconnoitre the enemy and obtain accurate information. Accordingly he moved on till within three miles of the Khalifa. Here he formed a zeriba, and sent Lieutenant-Colonel Mitford and Major Williams to reconnoitre with their fifty ex-Dervish cavalry, who turned out first-rate scouts. Mitford and Williams soon found the enemy drawn up for a fight, and estimated that there were no less than four thousand men with rifles and about three thousand spearmen. They returned with this intelligence to Colonel Kitchener, who of course decided it would be madness to engage the enemy. Accordingly he immediately retired. The Khalifa started in pursuit, but halted when he reached Colonel Kitchener's deserted zeriba. His emirs did their best to persuade him to follow up Colonel Kitchener, but he was convinced the Egyptians had a large force concealed, on to which they were trying to draw him, and he refused to follow up, fortunately for Colonel Kitchener. The force, however, had a very trying march back to the river on very short water allowance.

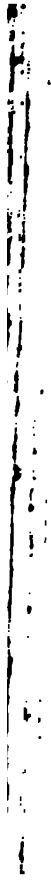
Though the Khalifa thus escaped destruction, it is only a respite. His days are numbered. In the coming autumn, when the rains have fallen and filled up all water-pools in the desert, the Sirdar intends, so we hear, to at any rate drive him beyond the limits of the Sudan, even if he has not the fortune to capture him. At the same time Darfur and Kordofan will be taken over. The only task then remaining will be to cut through the Sudd

from Fashoda to Duffilé, to open communication with the Lakes and Uganda. This will be a difficult, tedious, and dangerous undertaking. Baker, Gessi, and Gordon all nearly lost their lives, and spent months wandering through the dreary Sudd in days when it was not so overgrown as now. But once it is done it will be comparatively easy to keep the channel open, and steamers can then ply from Khartum to the cataract at Duffilé. There a short railway will perhaps turn the cataract, and then on in steamers to the lakes. When the railway reaches Khartum, as it will in the autumn, when Mr. Rhodes's railway reaches Tanganyika, and when the Sudd is cut through, we shall have *steam and telegraphic communication* from Cairo to the Cape. This will suffice for many, many years to come. It will be generations before the time comes when steamer and boat communication from Khartum to the lakes will not suffice to fully develop and work the countries bordering the Nile. Far more urgent and useful lines await the immediate attention of the railway engineer—first from the Red Sea to Kassala, Gedaref, and the Blue Nile, and secondly westwards from Khartum to Darfur. When those lines are completed we shall have steam communication with every part of the Sudan. It is unnecessary to point out the strategic value of the first when we consider the position of our powerful and warlike neighbour Abyssinia. The recent operations against Ahmed Fedil in the neighbourhood of Gedaref demonstrated the difficulty of moving and supplying even a small force in that neighbourhood, and showed up a weak spot in our frontier.

MAP XIV

Showing
Khalifa's Retreat after Battle of
Omdurman, the Egyptian Posts
established on White & Blue Niles





But now I am leaving the domain of accomplished facts and launching into the regions of speculation. It is time that I closed the account of the Sudan campaign. To any one who took part in it, it was, I think, evident that the success and smooth working of the operations were due (1) to the genius and untiring perseverance of our commander, (2) to the speed and thoroughness with which Lieutenant Girouard carried out the laying of the railway, (3) to the fact that all men in responsible positions were men who had spent several years on the frontier, and so had acquired such a thorough knowledge of the country and its people, that they knew exactly how to carry out a campaign, which has given to us the whole of the Nile valley, the Eastern Sudan to the Red Sea and the Abyssinian border, the Bahr el Ghazal, Kordofan and Darfur in the Western Sudan. British dominion from the Cape to Cairo is an accomplished fact; and though the campaigns of Egypt have not been productive of such battles as occurred in the Peninsula, the Crimea, and in India, yet we may find that the future African historian will consider the battles of Tel el Kebir and Khartum as decisive in African history as the battle of Plassy was in the history of India.

THE END.

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