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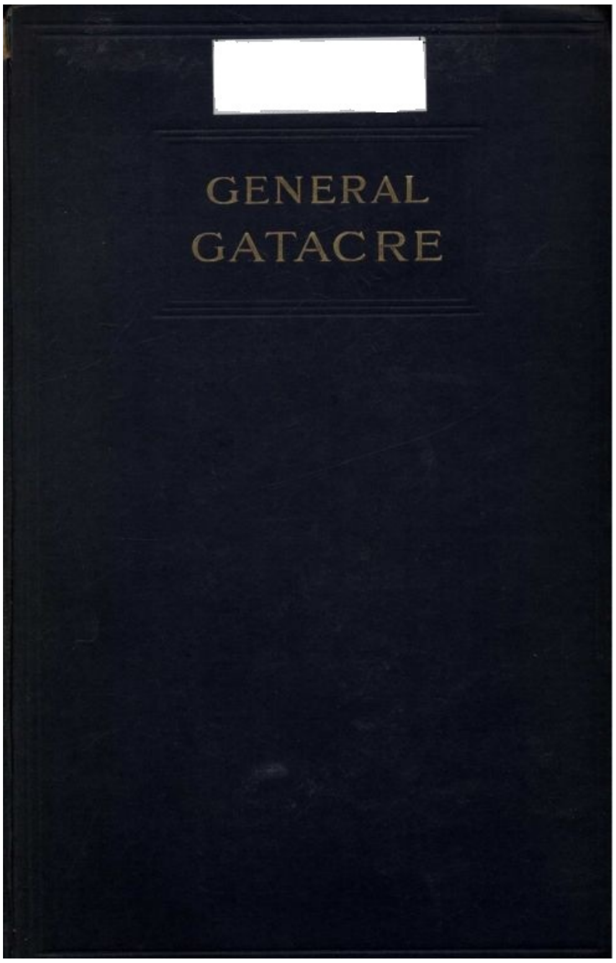

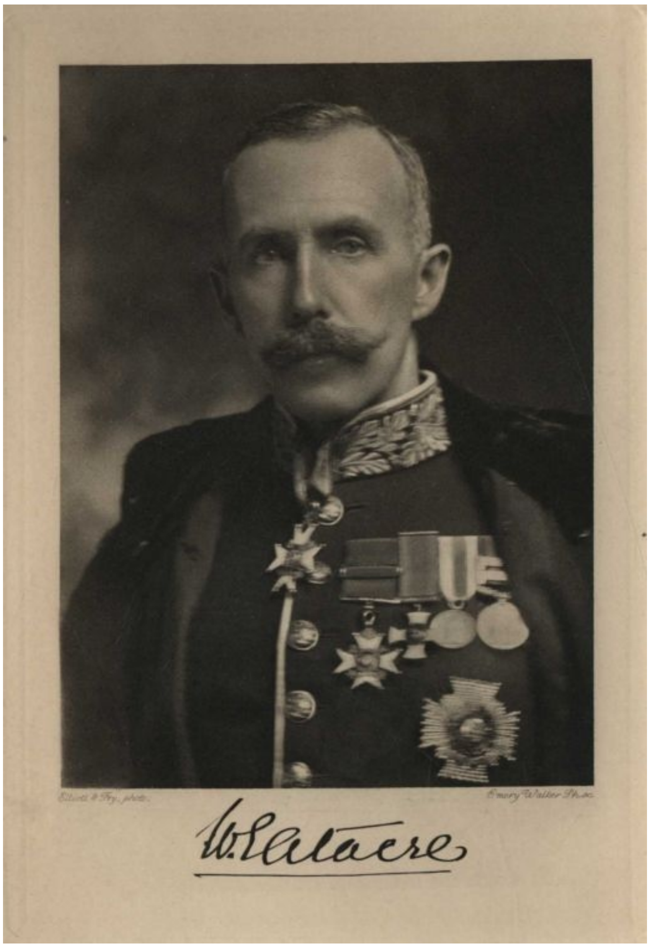
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W. Gatacre

Major-General Sir William Gatacre, K.C.B., D.S.O.

GENERAL GATACRE

THE STORY OF THE LIFE AND SERVICES OF
SIR WILLIAM FORBES GATACRE, K.C.B., D.S.O.
1843-1906

BY BEATRIX GATACRE

WITH PORTRAITS, MAPS, AND ILLUSTRATIONS

What I aspired to be
And was not, comforts me.
R. B.

LONDON JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W. 1910

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO
TWO FRIENDS
WITHOUT WHOSE SYMPATHY AND ASSISTANCE
IT WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN WRITTEN

{vii}
Assured of worthiness, we do not dread
Competitors; we rather give them hail
And greeting in the lists where we may fail:
Must, if we bear an aim beyond the head!
My betters are my masters; purely fed
By their sustainment I likewise shall scale
Some rocky steps between the mount and vale;
Meanwhile the mark I have, and I will wed.
So that I draw the breath of finer air,
Station is naught, nor footways laurel-strewn,
Nor rivals tightly belted for the race.
God-speed to them! My place is here or there;
My pride is that among them I have place:
And thus I keep the instrument in tune.

GEORGE MEREDITH.

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PREFACE

The main object in laying this book before the public is to provide an authentic narrative of Sir William Gatacre's work in South Africa. At the time of his recall no despatch giving the reason for this step was published, but a letter dealing with this matter has since appeared as an Appendix in the *Official History* of the war; it is with reluctance that I have been persuaded to reprint this letter at the end of this volume. It seemed, however, that Sir William's previous career was such a large factor in determining any opinion regarding his later work that some account of the man and his surroundings from the beginning would not be without interest.

In preparing the first half of this story I have been entirely dependent on the recollections of others, and have studiously avoided any attempt to eke out the material with an imaginary amplification; in the latter half my own {x} personal knowledge of himself and his affairs has enabled me to seek my information from numerous sources, and to draw the portrait in richer colours on a more suggestive background.

I wish to acknowledge in full the loyal assistance afforded me by my husband's friends. In every case I have received the most cordial response and co-operation. I am sincerely grateful both to those who have asked me to refrain from naming them and to those who have given me the support of their names. Through the courtesy of these officers and others, I am able to say that every word has been read by one who has personal knowledge of the incidents recorded. In this way I trust that this narrative will have acquired an unimpeachable accuracy.

I am also deeply indebted to the *Official History of the War in South Africa*. Indeed, before the publication of this authoritative statement my task would have been impossible.

To the facts therein recorded I have added extracts from officers' reports, and from Sir William's own letters, and also the words of certain important telegrams which I had found amongst his papers, and for the reproduction of which official permission has been graciously accorded.

{xi} I beg the indulgence of the reader for faults of literary inexperience, and trust that he will recognise my honest endeavour to handle the facts fairly and dispassionately.

BEATRIX GATACRE.

April 8, 1910.

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{1}

GENERAL GATACRE

1843-1906

CHAPTER I

1843-1862

GATACRE

According to a venerable Shropshire antiquarian, that county "has ever been inhabited by a race of men characteristic for uniformity of principle and energy of action."[1] Mr. Eyton goes on to tell of various places mentioned in the Domesday Book, and among these of the Manor of Claverley, which included a very large tract of country, and is described as an "ancient demesne of the Crown." The Manor of Claverley was broken up into various townships, to three of which he accords special notice, "in regard that the King's Tenants thereof were of a rank superior to that of the average class of Freeholders in Royal Manors. These Townships were Broughton, Beobridge, and Gatacre."[2]

[1] *Antiquities of Shropshire*, by R. W. Eyton, 1854, preface.

[2] *Ibid.*, vol. iii. p. 77.

{2}

Ancestors

There is a well-authenticated tradition that the family established at Gatacre at the time of the Conquest held their lands by tenure of military service, under a grant from Edward the Confessor. Eyton speaks of them as "a family of knightly rank, which, having early feoffment in Gatacre, took its name from the place. The period of such feoffment it is vain to conjecture, as being beyond all record of such matters."[3]

[3] Eyton's *Antiquities of Shropshire*, vol. iii. p. 86.

In the reign of Henry II., Sir William de Gatacre had a suit with one Walter, about half a hide of land in Great Lye: this was subject to a Wager of Battle, and apparently Gatacre proved himself the better man, for Great Lye is even now held by his descendant. This same William appears in another record as one of the four "Visors," who in July 1194 had to report to the Courts of Westminster on the validity of the "essoign of Cecilia de Cantreyn, a litigant. Gatacre's associates in this duty—to which knights only were usually appointed—were Henry Christian, Philip Fitz Holegod, and William de Rudge, all his neighbours and of equal rank with himself."[4]

[4] *Ibid.*

He was succeeded by Sir Robert, his son; who sat on a Jury of Grand Assizes in April 1200, to try a question of right in relation to lands at Nordley Regis, at the "Iter of the King's Justices."[5]

[5] *Ibid.*

{3} The tenure of the estates was in great jeopardy in the life of Thomas de Gatacre; for it is told how a certain Philip de Lutley, the King's Escheator, did "seize the estates of Gatacre, Sutton, and Great Lye into the King's hand, on the ground that Thomas de Gatacre had entered upon these estates without doing homage and fealty to the Crown, and without paying his relief, so that he had occupied the same unjustly for twenty-two years and more."[6] At this unfortunate moment Thomas died, leaving Alice, his widow, to fight for herself and their son Thomas. She appealed to the King (Edward III.) in Chancery, in the Michaelmas Term 1368. There was a trial by twenty-four jurors, being knights and others in the visnage of Sutton not being kin to Alice. She herself appeared in person at Westminster, and won her cause, for a "King's writ of the same year commits to the same Alice, widow of Thomas de Gatacre, custody of the Manor of Gatacre and the hamlet of Sutton with their appurtenances."

The grandson of the younger Thomas was called John; he flourished in the reigns of Henry IV., Henry V., and Henry VI., and was High Sheriff of Shropshire in 1409. In a contemporary stained-glass window now in the hall at Gatacre there is a portrait of the same John, who is described as "Groom of the body to Henry VIth." He was succeeded by his son John, who was Member of Parliament for Bridgnorth in the twelfth year of Edward IV.

The ancient house

{4} The house at Gatacre stands in the parish of Claverley, and is about two miles distant from this village. Inside the church—a red sandstone building full of interest to the archæologist—are many monuments, of which the most ancient are two incised marble slabs inlaid in the eastern wall; these are about six feet high. On one is shown a man in armour, elaborate and perfect in all its detail, commemorating William Gatacre, who died in 1577, and his wife and eleven children; and on the other his successor Francis, 1599, is depicted in civilian dress with his wife at his side.

Close by is a very fine alabaster tomb on which lie three full-length recumbent figures, being the effigies of Robert Brooke of Madeley Court, who is described as "Recorder of London, Speaker of P'lyament, and Chiefe Justice of Com'on Pleace," and his two wives, one of whom was a daughter of Gatacre.[7]

Thomas, brother to Francis named above, was destined by his parents for the law; but he "diverted his mind from the most profitable to the most necessary study, from law to divinity," and, much to the grief of his parents, who were of the old persuasion, embraced the Reformed Faith, and became Rector of St. Edmond's, Lombard Street. He died in 1593; but his son and grandson followed the same profession. The former, Thomas (1574-1654), was a friend of Archbishop {5} Ussher, and a member of the Westminster Assembly of Divines. He took part in preparing the annotations to the English Bible, and published a work on Marcus Aurelius; in 1648 he subscribed the Remonstrance against the trial of Charles I. His son, Charles, was Chaplain to Lucius Gary, Viscount Falkland, and was also the author of many books.[8] This younger branch of the family settled at Mildenhall, in Suffolk, and has always spelt the name Gataker. Though there has never failed a male heir to the senior line, this is the only cadet branch that has survived.

The house inhabited by this ancient family was a unique survival of very early times.[9] Where we should now use iron girders our ancestors used oak-trees; they erected them upside-down, so that the roots made arches on which to lay the roof. Large stones were hewn to fill in the walls, and in this particular building the outer surface of the stones was incrusted with a transparent green glaze, very similar to what is now seen on rough pottery. This curious specimen of domestic architecture survived in a habitable condition till the early part of the eighteenth century, when it was wantonly destroyed, and replaced by a brick mansion of the dark and uninteresting type of the early Georges. Portions of the glazed stones are still preserved in the house amongst many other relics of more obvious value.

{6} Colonel Edward Gatacre and his only son, born in 1806 (who figures as the Squire in this narrative), were specimens of the best type of country gentleman of their day. The former was twentieth in direct descent from Sir William de Gatacre of the twelfth century, and was grandfather to Sir William, the hero of this story. The pedigree shows that through the centuries the family had maintained their status as gentle-folk, and had allied themselves with other families of the same standing in the neighbouring counties. Both were men of remarkable activity and considerable cultivation. With the advent of railways came the facility for travel, of which the younger man was quick to avail himself. He visited London every year, and among other men of renown knew Sir Francis Grant, P.R.A., and persuaded him to come and paint the portrait of his father that still hangs at Gatacre—a beautiful picture. He also went abroad, and made a pilgrimage to Rome in the old days when people travelled in their own carriages, making a long stay at many places of interest in Switzerland and Italy.

Forbes

At the age of eighty-one the Colonel died, sincerely mourned throughout the county; and thus in 1849 the young Squire came into his inheritance. About ten years earlier he had married Jessie, second daughter of William Forbes of Callendar, in the county of Stirling. Mr. Forbes, who sprang from a cadet branch of the family of that name, started his career in a shipping office; by his enterprise and {7} inventions he built up a considerable fortune, with which he bought the Callendar estate. His elder son, William Forbes, who succeeded him, represented Stirlingshire in Parliament for many years; and his younger son became Colonel John Forbes of the Coldstream Guards. Their sister Jessie must always have been a beautiful woman, rather Scottish, perhaps, in the vigorous outline of her face, with a depth about her blue eyes and a symmetry of feature that reappeared in her third son; a look of "all-comprehensive tenderness" is the dominant note of the portrait. Indeed, we are told that while Mrs. Gatacre was a very able woman, she had a singular gentleness of manner.

The family already numbered two sons and a daughter when in 1843 Mrs. Gatacre went on a visit to her widowed mother, who was then living at Herbertshire Castle, near Stirling: and so it came about that when a little boy was born on December 3, he was given the names of his uncle and godfather, William Forbes.

Perhaps it is to his Scottish descent that we may trace some of the qualities that became most marked when the child, grown to perfect manhood, had evolved that balance of innumerable strains that go to make the individual—had, as it were, tuned the manifold strings of his lineage to a chord of his own finding. Did he draw his habit of concentration on the matter in hand, his painstaking attention to detail, from the inventor-engineer of Aberdeen? Did he draw his {8} fervent notions of duty and his stern disregard of personal considerations from the blood of the Covenanters that ran in his veins? My own father was heard to say that this son-in-law of his was born out of due time, that his right place would have been at the head of Cromwell's Ironsides.

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[6] See Eyton's *Antiquities*, vol. iii. pp. 90, 91,

[7] See *Shropshire*, by A. C. Hare, p. 319.

[8] See quotation by A. C. Hare, from Thomas Fuller, 1662.

[9] See *The Severn Valley*, by John Randall, 1882, and *Archæologia*, iii. 112, quoted by him.

In course of time another son, Stephen, completed the family. The children were a great source of pride and pleasure to their parents, and had the benefit of all that loving early training could do for them. In this wholesome atmosphere of parental affection and brotherly competition the four boys grew up straight and strong. They vied with one another in childish feats and manly sports, but in all these Willie was the keenest and the most daring.

Even in these latter days the house at Gatacre seems difficult of access, for the nearest railway station (unless you cross the Severn in a ferry) is at Bridgnorth, six miles away; but sixty years ago there was no railway nearer than Wolverhampton, a good ten miles' drive. The eldest son well remembers his father driving his coach-and-four to and fro. The Squire was a famous whip, and maintained this practice far into the sixties. But as the boys grew older they thought nothing of doing this journey on foot at any hour of the day or night; perhaps it was the remoteness of the country in which they were nurtured that had endowed this family for generations back with powers of physical endurance and enterprise beyond the common.

{9}

At school

The elder brothers Edward and John[10] were sent to Mr. Hopkirk's school at Eltham, in Kent; and both were still there when Willie joined them a year or two later. Some of Willie's letters from school are still to be seen; and if handwriting is any sign of character, he must have been an exemplary boy at his lessons, for his letters are so exquisitely written that were it not for the dates duly recorded one could scarcely believe them to be the work of a high-spirited boy of thirteen. Writing to his mother in March 1857, he says: "Did you see in the papers that peace had been made with Persia?"

[10] Now Major-General Sir John Gatacre, K.C.B.

The interest in Persia had been aroused by the approaching departure of his brother John to India, where he was to join a regiment that was at that moment fighting in Persia. Though loth to part from one who was said to be his father's favourite son, the Squire had thought the offer of a commission in the East India Company's army too good an opening to refuse. In May 1857 he accompanied the boy, who was then only sixteen and a half, as far as Marseilles, and did not see him again for nearly twelve years.

At Gatacre there was a famous kennel of setters, and also some good retrievers. A puppy of the latter breed was given to Willie for his own, and he broke and trained it so skilfully, when only fifteen, that the dog was sold for fifteen guineas, and eventually became celebrated in the canine world.

{10}

In the holidays

There are many excellent fox-holding coverts in that part of the country; the Albrighton Hounds still draw them regularly. Such visits were great events to the boys; and we can well believe that Willie would always be out, mounted on whatever he could get, big or small, old or young. One day he was riding a mare who was known to be twenty-two years old, and had all her life been used for harness work; but nothing stopped Willie. When a fox was found close to the house, away he went, and it is still told how Rushlight led the field for miles. Willie seems to have shared more intimately than any of his brothers the Squire's love for horses. He had a vivid recollection of journeys to Birmingham with his father, when he visited the big stables there to search for horses, either for himself or a friend; the elder man taught his son what points to look for and what to avoid. Willie thus acquired a certain confident genius for judging a horse, and all his life took a pleasure in exercising this quality; like his father before him, he was never afraid to buy horses at their request for friends who had more confidence in his judgment than in their own.

One summer holiday the boy found for himself a new recreation. In a letter to Stephen, dated from Gatacre, July 20, 1860, we find the following passage:

{11}

> "Did you know that there was an Alderney bull come? I have begun to work him every day, but he does not like it, and he fights with me a great deal. But I find a good stick the best remedy; sometimes I have to bate him a good deal."

The brothers and sister clearly recall seeing Willie ride this animal day after day in the park.

It is evident that Number Three must often have been a source of anxiety to his parents. One evening in February he gave his mother a most horrible fright. The boys had arranged to go out after wood-pigeons in the spinneys round the house; as there was snow on the ground they slipped a night-shirt over their clothes to make themselves less visible. The three guns posted themselves in three coverts some distance apart, and then lay in wait for the birds as they came in to roost. Willie, who was then sixteen or seventeen, was in a lucky corner: he shot so many that he was at a loss how to bring the birds in. Slipping off his white covering, he made a bag of it and gathered up his spoils. By the time he reached the house he presented such an alarming appearance that his mother naturally imagined him the victim of some terrible accident. With great pride the boy counted out forty-two birds.

In 1856 the Squire was pricked for High Sheriff. There is an ancient custom by which all the sons of Gatacre are enrolled as Freemen of the Borough of Bridgnorth; and on June 25, 1860, William Forbes was duly sworn and inscribed on the rolls.

{12} In the same year, on August 1, he was admitted to the Royal Military College; he was then only sixteen and a half, and measured five feet seven and a quarter inches in height. Ultimately he reached five feet eleven inches in his socks.

Except in the riding-school he does not seem to have made much mark at Sandhurst, but when he left in December 1861 he had earned the college "Recommendation," and on February 18 following was gazetted an ensign in the 77th Foot, now the 2nd Battalion (Duke of Cambridge's Own) Middlesex Regiment.

{13}

CHAPTER II

1862-1880

TO INDIA AND BACK

1862

The 77th Regiment was raised in 1787, and for twenty years served in India, taking part in the fierce campaigns against Tippoo Sahib in 1790-91, in the storming of Seringapatam in 1799, and in many minor operations. On their colours are also recorded the suggestive names, Albuhera, Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz, Vittoria, Pyrenees, Nivelle, Nive, Peninsula. In the Crimea they had charged at the Alma and at Inkerman; they had shivered in the trenches before Sebastopol, and had taken part in the final assault of the Redan. There were many officers and men still with the colours in 1862 who had three clasps to their medals, and also wore the French medal, and in the ranks there was an exceptional number of Gallant Conduct medals.

Without doubt the fine record of the regiment and the fact that all the senior officers had been proved in actual warfare, as their medals so brilliantly testified, had a stimulating effect on the juniors.

{14} Unfortunately the 77th sailed for Sydney, New South Wales, just before the news of the Indian Mutiny reached England; and being detained there, they did not reach India till June 1858, too late to take a share in any but the minor operations incident to the disturbed state of the country.

As subaltern

The regiment was at Hazaribagh, in Bengal, when Ensign William Gatacre joined on June 5, 1862, but was shortly afterwards moved to Allahabad. It was while Gatacre was doing duty with a detachment in the Fort that Major Henry Kent (now Colonel-in-Chief of the Middlesex Regiment) first saw the new subaltern; he describes him as good-looking, thin, smart, and gentlemanly, adding that he took an immediate fancy to him.

It is to General Kent, who still speaks of Gatacre with great affection, that I am indebted for the following story.

Sir Robert Napier, who at that time was Military Member of Council, was passing through Allahabad on tour that winter, and took a walk round the Fort one evening. Seeing a smart young officer with the famous 77th on his cap, he accosted him.

"Ah," he said, "I see you belong to the 77th, which Lord Gough commanded at the battle of Barrosa."

"Yes, sir."

"And you captured a French Eagle there?"

"Yes, sir, we did."

{15} "Well," said Napier, "what have you done with the French Eagle? Have you got it out here?"

"Not at present, sir," came the audacious reply: "we are putting up a memorial in St. Paul's Cathedral to all our poor fellows who fell in the Crimea, and we have sent the Eagle home to have a model taken of it."

Now all this was an imaginary story invented to ease the situation, for Napier was wrong in his facts. It was the 87th that Lord Gough had commanded, and the 87th who had captured the French Standard; but Gatacre's intuitive sense of discipline, even at nineteen, led him to try any way of escape before putting his senior in the wrong.

Major-General Sir Harcourt Bengough, who was a few years senior to Gatacre in the regiment, writes thus:

"The impression I retain of him as a young soldier is that of a strong will and a quick determination to succeed, combined with a very kindly disposition and a great charm of manner."

Another officer tells us that in the hottest weather Gatacre was always cool, smiling, and good-tempered. He was noticeably abstemious and frugal, and very careful of his appearance. At one time he used to clean his own boots because he was too hard up to pay for this service. When he related this in after-life he added, with the pride of efficiency, "And they did shine!"

{16} An officer's wife who knew Gatacre in these early days, and saw him at intervals throughout his career, tells us that there hung about him when he first joined a certain countrified simplicity of mind and manner, as opposed to the conventionality of a town-bred man. Though he enjoyed society, social distractions got little hold on his self-contained nature, and it was rarely that any of his friendships developed into intimacy. He had, however, a ready sympathy, was easily interested in whatever went on around him, and, being very unselfish, was always prepared to do any one a service.

1865

Young Gatacre's letters to his mother from Allahabad disclose a reasoned industry inspired by ambition. The reiteration of the recurring features of his life, cholera, rain, and work, is suggestive of the monotony of existence in the summer months. But his experiences and his surroundings differ in nothing from that of every other subaltern in the Plains. That he worked with assiduity at acquiring the language is shown by his having been placed first out of twenty-two in the Higher Standard, after only two years' study. When the 77th moved to Bareilly, Gatacre was made secretary to the Mutton and Poultry Club, and kept a quailery, which was a venture of his own. The following letter shows the real interest that he took in his charges:

July 31, 1865.

{17} "When the musketry instructor comes down from leave on September 30, I shall try for fifteen days' leave. I cannot get more, as the course begins on October 15, with all its hard work. It is raining very hard here, and I am sitting in the verandah watching all my ducks and geese enjoying themselves. I have both my horses in the field round the house: one of them has a peculiarly unpleasant temper with strangers. The other day the doctor was breakfasting with us; when he went away and had got a short distance, he saw this animal coming at him open-mouthed, but he turned and ran for my room, and both the doctor and horse came into the room together. He does not run at me, as he knows me so well, but I never trust him much; they are very uncertain in India."

On leave

In November 1866 the 77th was sent to Peshawur, and in the following May young Gatacre took six months' leave to Kashmir. But he did not confine himself to shooting in the Happy Valley; he was filled with an adventurous curiosity to see the temples and wild scenery of the mountains beyond. He felt that his pleasure in the trip would lie in his freedom to go where he chose, and when he chose, and as fast as he chose. He knew that his mobility would outstrip that of any companion, and so decided to go alone. In this decision, in which we see the first indication of originality, Gatacre showed a fearlessness, a confidence in his own resources, and a willingness to sever communications with all external support that are remarkable in a lad of
{18} only twenty-three. These characteristics never faded; they may be traced throughout the record of his life whenever occasion arose for his individuality to take action. What other man would have attempted to explore the forests of Abyssinia unaccompanied at the age of sixty-one! His fearlessness and his confidence were with him to the end, and to the end he preserved a mobility that preferred to be unhampered.

1867

Young Gatacre's first objective was Leh. He left Srinagar on May 2, and halting at Manasbal Lake one night, reached Kangan. Here he learnt that the road over the Zoji-La between Sonamarg and Dras was still blocked with snow, and so made up his mind to halt for a time. His diary during this fortnight's halt shows that he was more interested in what he saw than in what he shot. This is the feature of his trip; he writes much more of the temples that he has sketched than of the game that he has killed. One day when he had run across some friends he writes: "Saw a gerau deer that Troop had killed; would like to get one to make a sketch of." He subsequently collected many of his sketches in a book; and these early water-colours are quite surprising in their freshness and finish. They are not pictures, but most painstaking studies of what he saw—picturesque men and women, animals, temples, idols, and occasionally the detail of some designs from the temples. He records with the greatest interest the flowers and birds that he sees, and speaks of its physical features if the country he was passing {19} through was of special interest. It is clear that he had at some time studied the elements of geology, for he writes of the Zoji-La: "Rocks very barren, and look very old—no sharp points."

Goes after bear

After ten days he moved one march up the road to Reval, and spent ten days there shooting, whenever the rain and the snow allowed. On May 16 he writes:

> "Fine morning at last; put everything in the sun to dry. Went out shooting after breakfast, and had a good day; killed a black bear about 200 yards from camp. Had a shot at an ibex; saw nine, but did not hit one. Slept under a tree for about an hour; on my way back killed a brown bear with a beautiful silvery skin, and hit a barrasingh buck in the chest; tracked him a long way, found some blood. Night was coming on and it began to rain, so had to give up the search or should probably have got him—a magnificent beast, horns about a foot high, just beginning to grow. In jumping across the stream I fell in and got wet through; water very strong, was carried down like an arrow; caught hold of a stone and came ashore, took off my things and stood in the sun to dry: sketch reserved."

There is a pleasant vein of boyish humour in some of the entries.

> "Went after a huge black bear that we saw on the hill-side, but could not find him. Climbed one of the stiffest and most slippery hills that I ever was on after the aforesaid bear, and found his cave. Thought him a fool for selecting such a spot; going up there once was bad {20} enough, but to have such an ascent to one's residence was absurd. Found some one of the name of Thorpe had arrived at the camping-ground, asked him to dinner, but he refused as he was so tired; could not understand his reason—the very one why I should have accepted, as he could have gone to bed directly afterwards, my dinner being ready and his not.

It was not till May 23 that he got really started, and even then the road was still deep in snow, or the melting snow was flooding over the road in many places. Under date May 25 we read:

> "Passed some dead men in the pass; they were men going to Yarkand (eight men and a woman) several days ago, when they were overtaken with snow and smothered, all their bedding, clothes, etc., lying about."

Next day, writing from Dras, he notices the great change that has come over the country; and here he spent three days, partly because his servant had fever, and partly because he finds so much to sketch that he cannot tear himself away. The same motive kept him at Lama Guru, of which he gives an excellent description. He reached Leh on June 9, having accomplished the 250 miles from Reval in seventeen days, or deducting four halts, thirteen days; which works out at an average of over nineteen miles every marching day.

At Hemis

The following day he started off for Hemis, where there was a great gathering for the visit {21} of the Burra Lama: this involved a stony and arduous march of twenty-four miles, but he was up early next morning and was very much interested in what was going on.

June 11, 1867.

> "Went all over the Monastery and gained a little information—not much, as the monks keep no records, only from year to year. The place is about 1,300 years old, well built of stone with a whitening on it, on the side of a rock. There are several halls of worship (Gompas) hung round with splendid silk flags and banners, all Chinese silk. There are a few idols, but very small ones, magnificently woven pictures of gods on silk being the chief things. About 10 o'clock the tamasha began, monks dressed in the most magnificent silk garments and quaint tall hats and masks dancing; the costumes were varied about every quarter of an hour and every one equally grand as the former. They each held in their hands a drum like a warming-pan and either a bell or a rattle. They danced a sort of war-dance in a circle, occasionally singing and drumming. Under the verandah of the Quadrangle were seated about thirty monks dressed in red and yellow silk gowns, with fan-shaped hats on their heads; some with drums, some with cymbals, and some with long trumpets, silver and copper, formed the band; they played from music and it went very well with the wild dance. One dance was performed with bears, another was supposed to be a wild man's dance: about ten monks—dressed in hideous masks, yellow embroidered silk jackets, on the shoulders of which tigers' heads were embroidered, and round whose waists were strings of bells, from which were suspended strips of tiger skins— {22} danced in a circle, beating drums and ringing bells. The figure of a man bound hand and foot was placed in the centre. After they had danced round the figure some time, one of them cut off his head with a sword. One of the side walls of the Quadrangle, about 30 ft. high and 12 ft. broad, was covered with a single cloth or flag on which was most beautifully woven the figure of one of their gods and other subjects—worth about 5,000 or 6,000 rupees. This was at first covered with long silk streamers, which were removed; and when the large banner had been duly worshipped and admired, it was rolled up and replaced by another equally splendid, but not so large, by a third and by a fourth. Each dress could not have cost less than £80 or £100—I never saw anything so magnificent; the whole Quadrangle was hung round with silk streamers too. Round the Quadrangle, the prayer-books—viz. rollers of wood with the prayers written on them—are placed, one turn of which is equal to saying a prayer. All the villagers have them at their doors; at one corner of the Quadrangle there is a room in which there is a huge prayer roller. They are called Marni-prayer."

Gatacre was determined to make the most of his opportunities, and insisted on seeing the Burra Lama, whom he thus describes:

> "He is a short, stout, middle-aged man, clothed in fine scarlet cloth, sitting on a throne on which incense was burning; he is never seen by any one except on the occasion of the festival, when he comes and sits on a platform in the Quadrangle for about half an hour. I could not wait till evening to see him, so as a special favour was allowed to see the mortal whom no vulgar European eye had seen before. {23} He received me graciously, and asked me to be seated and how I was; asked me if I had anything to give him. I had brought nothing from Ladak with me, but had some matches with me, which I gave him. He comes from Lhassa; it is three months' journey from here, and he comes once in every five or six years. It was great luck my seeing this festival, as occurring so early in the year it is seldom or never seen."

The Salt Lakes

On his return to Leh, Gatacre was horrified at getting letters telling him to hurry back to Peshawur, as cholera had broken out. But he was too cunning to take this very literally, and at once got his friend the Wazeer to lend him ponies to ride to the Salt Lakes; he adds most sapiently: "If I don't see them now, probably never shall."

It was, however, a very long way (ninety-eight miles) to the Salt Lakes at Rupshu; he did this journey in two days, and on the second day writes:

> "The distance I came to-day was fifty-eight miles; I was nearly dead with fever, and sun and cold, and walking, and riding in a wooden saddle all day."

He spent one day in his tent with fever on the snow-covered plain, but was better next morning and able to get about, and on the following day he started on the return journey, which he accomplished in two marches as before.

{24} After four days spent at Leh with some friends who had turned up, he marched back by the same route, covering 265 miles from Leh to Kangan in twelve days, one of which was a halt at Lama Yuru, where he "slept nearly all day."

Off again

Writing from Baltal on July 1, he comments on the change that has taken place in the Zoji-La in his absence:

> "The Pir is a very different-looking place from what it was when I came through it before. Then it was a wilderness of snow, ice, and rocks; now it is the most beautiful pass, hills covered with grass and flowers and shrubs and trees that were before buried in the snow. The snow rivers are very full and furious; nearly lost a pony in one of them; drove him through it and carried saddles, etc., over the snow some way higher up; the pony was rolled over and over and with difficulty came to land. Now that the snow has disappeared, one sees what a quantity there must have been in the pass when I went through, at least 70 or 80 ft. in some places. The Pir is covered with sweet peas and flowers of all colours and shapes, excessively pretty.
>
> "The hills wear a quite different aspect to what they did when I came up. The snow has melted except on a few of the highest peaks, and the grass has grown, likewise the shrubs. The barley and all the corn is in the ear; it was hardly sown when I came, just a month ago. There are waterfalls from nearly every rock, which looks very pretty and the water is such as 'only teetotallers desire or deserve.' The wild roses, white, red, and yellow, are covered with blossoms, and their smell is delicious."

But before he reached Srinagar the orders for his return were cancelled, and we find him shooting in his old haunts round Kangan.

{25} It is clear that he was enjoying himself thoroughly, that he felt no impatience to return to civilisation, and that he considered his march to Leh and back very much worth doing, for at the end of July he started on another extended tour. It is about 120 miles from Kangan to Skardo, about 200 thence to Leh, and about 250 from Leh to Srinagar, so that he added another 570 miles to his score in the fifty days between July 28 and September 15. Leaving the Sind River by the tributary valley to the north called Wangat, he crossed into the valley of Tylel by a little-known route "said to have been a track made by a gang of horse dealers who came from Tylel into Kashmir years ago." There were two very steep hills, of which the coolies only managed to accomplish the first.

Turning north-east, he made his way across the plains of Deosai, but there was a difficult pass to negotiate before he descended into the valley of the Indus. On August 7 he writes:

> "Got up early and started for Skardo. Got to the top of the ridge in about an hour, all snow and ice, great trouble to get the ponies over the glacier, as it was a nearly perpendicular sheet of ice—they slid down most of the way. From the bottom of the glacier there is a descent of about eight miles down the valley, which opens out into the plain of Skardo. Skardo consists of a number of villages scattered over a stony plain covered with apricot-trees which yield great quantities of fruit. The plain is surrounded with high rocky hills, no grass or trees on them. {26} The Wazeer is an old man with long grey beard, uncle to the present Wazeer Labjar of Ladak, who was formerly Wazeer here. His name is Myraram, he came to see me on my arrival, bringing a large basket of apricots as a present."

A snow pass

The last sentence is a sample of many entries, for wherever he went he made friends with the headmen of the village, and he seems nowhere to have been in difficulties about supplies. As it is unlikely that the Hindustani of the plains of India would be understood in Thibet, he must either have mastered working fragments of the dialect, or he must have talked Persian with the more educated natives. Later on he says: "Met some Tartars who had been to Simla, and had a long talk with them." And in another place: "Had a long talk with a Sepoy who was in one of the four regiments sent by the Maharajah to assist in the capture of Delhi, and saw General Nicholson fall."

Three officers of the 11th Hussars came in to Skardo the day after Gatacre's arrival, and fired him with the desire to see Shigar, a town a few miles higher up the Indus, where they had seen the original game of polo.

After five days' halt at Skardo, Gatacre started on his return journey, via Leh. Both Skardo and Leh are on the Indus: he did not, however, follow the course of this river, but chose to make his way up the valley of the Shyok. This necessitated a passage over the Indus at the junction of the two streams on the second day's march, which he thus describes:

> {27} "Started at daybreak, and reached this at 6 o'clock. Crossed the river at Kiris on twelve mussocks fastened together by eight bamboos or thin sticks—the luggage in the centre, I on one side, Collassie on the other, and two steerers at one end, who steered with long sticks. When they got into the middle of the stream they began their tarnasha, namely, turning the raft round and round like a top by digging their sticks deeply into the water."

Two days later he crossed the Shyok in the same manner, and found the stream "very fast and furious," although it was half a mile across. It is difficult to picture these watercourses, which, with the manners and appearance of mountain-torrents, have the volume and grandeur of mighty rivers. After following the Shyok for about fifty miles, he left it at Paxfain, and turned southwards along the side-stream which leads up to the Chorbat-La, a pass 16,696 ft. above the sea. Writing that evening, he says:

> "Marched at break of day and walked on steadily till the sun went down—a very long march; the first four or five hours were occupied in getting to the top of the pass—a terrible climb—after that it is all down-hill. The Pir was covered with snow, with an immense glacier reaching right across it for about 200 yards."

The next day he struck into the valley of the Indus once more, and reached Leh in six marches on August 26. On the
{28} way "a very civil Sepoy turned up," who was also on his way to Ladak. While in his company Gatacre found that he met with unusual politeness and attention, which was accounted for later when "the Sepoy turned out to be the new Thanadar of these parts."

On September 1 he started back on the direct route to Srinagar, which must have seemed quite familiar to him on this, his third journey. On the Zoji-La he notes that "all the grass that was so beautifully green is now withered up." At Sonamarg he found it "very cold," and writes of his blankets being frozen hard in the morning, and quite white. On September 15 he reached Srinagar, having marched the 285 miles from Leh in sixteen days, making an average of eighteen miles a day. He seems to have done most of his travelling on foot, though it is clear that he sometimes had ponies for his baggage, and that he sometimes rode them. When he was making long marches he had great sympathy for his beasts, and often notices that the ponies were very tired. The rate at which he travelled would, of course, be nothing exceptional on made roads, but it must be remembered that in no case was there any road at all, as we understand the word, and that he habitually moved by double marches.

He found several friends at Srinagar whom he had come across in his travels, and enjoyed an easy fortnight with them there before rejoining at Peshawur.

On sick leave

{29} This season had proved itself a very trying and unhealthy one for the 77th; the regiment had been attacked with cholera and Peshawur fever, and had lost five officers and forty-nine men. Colonel Kent tells us that on his return Gatacre had a sharp attack of fever, and that he and another subaltern had been so very ill when they were sent off home that it was feared they would never again be able to serve in India.

Even after his arrival in England Gatacre had severe recurrences of fever, but home nursing triumphed; and before long he was posted to a depot battalion then commanded by Colonel Browne of the 77th, and stationed at Pembroke Dock. Writing on August 13, 1909, Colonel Browne says:

> "Gatacre's relations with his brother officers were always very smooth, and I cannot recall to mind his ever exchanging an angry word with any one of them, but as a rule he did not encourage intimacy.
>
> "Whatever Gatacre was asked or had to do he did well and thoroughly. Whilst he joined heartily in whatever socially was going on, he never in the days I speak of put himself prominently forward; but there was something about him which I at least recognised as showing a dormant power which only awaited opportunity to exert itself, and this view of him has been fully borne out by his later career."

When Colonel Kent brought the battalion home in March 1870, Lieutenant Gatacre was on the quay to greet his regiment on its arrival at Portsmouth.

{30} The Clarence Barracks in which the regiment was first quartered were at that time old and dilapidated, and have since vanished. In those days every officer who took part in a route-march had to send in a report to the General Officer Commanding. The opening sentence of one of Gatacre's reports amused his wing-commander so much that it survives: "Starting from the Clarence Barracks, long since condemned as unfit for habitation by the Royal Marines, etc."

1870

The events of 1870 on the continent were of course followed with breathless interest by all intelligent Englishmen, and many soldiers must have longed to go and see the ground on which these sanguinary contests had been fought out. This desire was anticipated by the War Office, and special regulations were issued forbidding such an attempt. But to Gatacre the call was irresistible. Having taken first leave that autumn in order to see something of his brother John before his return to India, he slipped away via Harwich and Antwerp to Brussels, which he reached on November 6. He seems afterwards to have followed the route taken by the First German Army under Steinmetz in early August—in fact, Saarbrucken was the scene of the first encounter. Gravelotte had been fought on August 18, but doubtless to a soldier's eye the ground occupied by the combatants could still be identified. Metz had capitulated on October 27, so that the state of a city in which 150,000 men
{31} had been blockaded for three months was exhibited in all its horrors.

Continental battlefields

Writing from Luxembourg on Sunday, November 6, 1870, he says:

> "I started again at 6.30 this morning, and got here, without stopping, at 1 o'clock; nothing but soldiers, horses, and baggage, besides sick men by the hundreds, hospitals filled. I never saw such a sight. To-night I am going to Treves, and then on to Metz, via Saarlouis and Saarbruck, as the road via Vionville is not open on account of the French holding it. I will write from Metz and let you know my movements. I mean to attach myself to the English Ambulance, if possible, for a while, if I can see anything more by doing so."

And again on November 13, from Brussels:

> "From Luxembourg I went on to Treves, Saarbruck, Metz, and then round by Ottange, through Belgium to Brussels again. I went to Gravelotte and several battlefields, and picked up heaps of things, most of which I have got with me; but as nothing is allowed to go over the French frontier, there was a difficulty about passing. I met a man named Caldecott in the service, and he and I travelled together all the way; we drove across the frontier with our things, and so got them through. Metz is in a terrible state; nothing to eat or drink, or place to sleep. I could not write, as all postal communication is stopped, and most of the country round Metz a desert.
>
> "I shall come by the coach Thursday night, so if you could send the cart to Shipley to fetch my things, I will just walk over."

1871-3

{32} Writing on the day following his return, his sister gives Stephen a rchauffé of the traveller's tales:

> "Metz is not injured in the least, but is full of soldiers, and that is why there was no place to sleep in there. When Willie left, the shops were open and provisions coming in. Willie travelled with another Englishman in a waggon with a poor starved horse, and was going about in this way for four or five days. The cold intense; deep snow. He saw 25,000 prisoners going into Germany, packed in trucks, forty officers and men in a truck like cattle, and snow among them. He slept in a hospital three nights, 1,700 men in it.
>
> "I do not think, from what he says, that travelling is over safe—that is, on the French side. The sentries are very sharp; an Englishman who was foolishly travelling by himself, and at night, and could speak no language well, was shot a month ago.
>
> "Willie is glad he went; he met an old gentleman who knew grandpapa at Saarbruck."

It is much to be regretted that the daily impressions of this tour were not recorded with the accuracy of the Kashmir trip, but 1867 seems to have been the only year in which he kept a journal. We hear nothing of how he contrived to get anything to eat, or to get about at all, in a region stripped of supplies by the armies that had passed through; but the interesting fact remains that he did visit this ground, and reappeared at home on Thursday, November 17.

Colonel Henry Kent was very popular in the 77th regiment, which he had first joined in 1845. He held the command {33} for twelve years, and had brought the battalion into a very high state of efficiency when he resigned in 1880. It is notified in General Orders of that year that for the third time in succession the 77th was the best shooting regiment, and that Private H. Morgan, of this corps, was the best shot in the army.

Staff College

In February 1873 Captain Gatacre was admitted to the Staff College. He had worked hard to prepare himself for the entrance examination, had taken private lessons to rub up his mathematics, and had been abroad to polish his French; for not only had he to secure a vacancy in open competition, but he had to dispute the place with another officer in the same corps.

It is clear that even in these early days Gatacre had acquired the art of making himself valued among his fellows. Colonel Kent was dining with the Rifle Brigade at Aldershot one evening when he had the gratification of hearing the laments of some of his contemporaries at the Staff College at the prospect of losing Gatacre. But the Colonel, highly delighted at the success and popularity of his young friend, reassured them, saying:

"Never mind, I have another quite as good to send in his place. I am sending Bengough next term."

"Ah, yes," they said, "but we shall never have another like Gatacre; we shall miss him dreadfully. Why, what can the 77th be made of!"

{34} "Gatacres and Bengoughs," was the proud reply. General Kent affirms, moreover, that His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught was present on this occasion.

1873-4

During these two years Captain Leir[1] was Master of the Staff College Drag-hounds. He speaks of Gatacre, who acted as his Whip, as "the best who ever turned them for me"; and tells us that he was quite the most accomplished horseman of his day—that he used to ride all sorts of horses, made and unmade, that he had wonderful patience and nerve, and was always in the front.

Captain Leir writes that the only fuss he ever had with his colleague was over a hound, called Bellman, who had been given to him by the late Lord Cork when master of the Queen's Buckhounds. Bellman was a great favourite, being very companionable, which is unusual with fox-hounds. Gatacre begged leave to take him home and summer him in Shropshire, but having got him there the Squire took such a fancy to Bellman that his return was delayed till the following January. On another occasion, however, the Master had every reason to be grateful to his friend, as he tells us in the following story.

Indefatigable

For drag-hounds the scent is laid by a man who runs with aniseed half an hour before the hounds start; but as it is imperative that he should thoroughly know his line, he must walk it first, carefully selecting a track which avoids risk of damage to growing crops and affords {35} suitable fences for the field. On one occasion when Captain Leir's runner (or fox as he was familiarly termed) was *hors de combat* from a fall, he sent for a noted runner from Reading to take his place. But when the Master had shown this man half the course, he suddenly threw up the job, and after that no bribe would induce him to go a yard farther. The meet was advertised for the following day, but there was no fox, and Leir, vexed and despairing, now turned to his Whip, who was noted for his resource in all difficulties.

At 6 a.m. the next morning Gatacre started to walk the line by the aid of a map, drove back, did his morning's work on the heath with his class, and ran the line again in the afternoon. The runs varied from four to six miles, according to the season and the condition of hounds and horses, with a ten minutes' check in the middle. The fox on this occasion, however, was a long-winded one; he ran a bit farther than his instructions warranted, in order to enjoy the sight of half the field struggling on the banks of a big brook.

At the final examination in December 1874 Gatacre passed out of the Staff College with special honours in military drawing and surveying, and was at once offered the post of Professor in these subjects at the Royal Military College; he took up this appointment early in 1875.

In the following year, being then thirty-two, he was married to a charming and beautiful girl of Irish descent. Early {36} in the year 1878 their eldest son, William Edward, who is now a Captain in the Yorkshire Light Infantry, was born at Yorktown.

1875-9

A few months later Gatacre was to know the first great grief of his life in the loss of his mother. Willie had always proved intensely lovable, and had also his own graceful and attentive ways of returning the love which he received from his parents. There was, moreover, a strong vein of sentiment in him which led him throughout his life to cling to souvenirs and relics of the past.

As professor

It is evidence of the strength and the simplicity of Gatacre's character that his charm of manner was felt equally by men older and younger than himself. "Manners impress as they indicate real power. And you cannot rightly train one to an air and manner except by making him the kind of man of whom that manner is the natural expression. Nature ever puts a premium on reality."

The cadets in his class were fascinated by this singular and brilliant personality, and loved him with a "schoolboy heat." One of them tells how he seemed more one of themselves than the other professors; another remembers how he treated them as gentlemen, instead of regarding them as schoolboys; another that he was full of sympathy when anything needed explanation; another that if he found out and fell upon some little meanness with the weight of his own {37} uprightness, he would gave the culprit from official correction thus win him as a disciple; another, writing at the time of his death, speaks of Gatacre's influence for good throughout his career. Another, who has afforded me very real assistance in this narrative, tells us that he felt such a genuine hero-worship for Captain Gatacre that he applied for the 77th Regiment in order to serve under him. This cadet not only passed well, but, being a protégé of General William Napier, who was then Governor of the College, might have got himself gazetted into any regiment that he liked to name.

After serving four years as a military instructor, Gatacre was appointed temporarily to the post of Deputy Assistant Quarter-Master-General on the Headquarters Staff at Aldershot. This was his first experience of staff work. The following winter a new field-service equipment was engaging much attention; this was, of course, worked out in the office in which Gatacre was employed. He writes with some satisfaction of the "mess-tin invented by me" being approved and adopted.

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[1] Now Major-General Leir-Carleton.

{38}

CHAPTER III

1880-1883

RANGOON

1880

At the expiration of his term of office at Aldershot, in May 1880, Captain Gatacre took short leave home, and then rejoined the 77th at Dover. The regiment had been already warned for India in the next trooping season, but the news of our misfortune at Maiwand hastened their departure, and in August 1880 they were hurriedly embarked at only a fortnight's notice. To Gatacre the hope of seeing active service must have more than compensated for a disappointment he had expressed at not getting another staff billet. This hope, however, vanished on their arrival at Bombay, where the regiment learnt that the defeat of Ayub Khan outside Khandahar on September 2 had brought the campaign to a conclusion. The battalion was landed at Bombay on September 10, and made its way by road to Madras.

On the staff

{39} It is evident that Gatacre's reputation as a zealous and efficient officer had preceded him, for within one month of his arrival in India he was seconded for service on the staff of the Hyderabad Subsidiary Force, which had its headquarters at Secunderabad. All keen soldiers are pleased to be in India, for there is more chance of active service there than at home, and it was in the hope of getting this opportunity that Gatacre lived and worked. In the meantime his selection for staff work, although the post was only "temporary," was sufficiently complimentary to satisfy all his aspirations. His qualities and temperament had greater scope to expand in such a post than in the more rigid routine of a regiment; his previous experience of India added discernment to his enthusiasm in dealing with all the manifold interests with which he came in contact.

But there was a cloud on the horizon which rapidly grew until the whole sky was for the moment overcast. Early in the New Year his little son, born at Aldershot and aged only fifteen months, fell sick with cholera, and died on January 18. Both parents felt the blow terribly: the mother took fright for the elder boy, and decided to carry him off home. Several touching relics, in the way of a lock of hair, etc., that Gatacre, in spite of his many changes of residence, never afterwards cared to destroy, show how deeply he was moved by this loss. He had a spontaneous fondness for children {40} that led him all his life to accost them; and his attentions to them invariably met with that quick response which is in itself a sign of grace in the recipient.

A manhood fused with female grace,
  In such a sort, a child would twine
  A trustful hand, unasked, in thine,
And find his comfort in thy face.

He looked forward with pleasure to getting a change when he should be relieved in June by the officer whose post he was holding, and soon had the satisfaction of accepting an offer from General the Honourable Arthur Hardinge, Commander-in-Chief of the Bombay Army, to take the place of his Military Secretary, who was for the moment employed elsewhere.

1881

This appointment was even more congenial than the last: for to be on the personal staff of the Commander-in-Chief of a province meant accompanying him on all his tours of inspection. Like the former, this appointment was an eight months' business, for staff officers in India get sixty days' short leave every year, and eight months' long leave occasionally; for the latter period it was usual to appoint some officer to carry on, and it was Gatacre's good fortune throughout his career to be constantly selected for such temporary tenure of office. In this way he gained an acquaintance with all the provinces of India, and with all arms, British and Native, such as rarely falls to the lot of one man. When he left India, seventeen years later, there was hardly a station in all the four provinces which he had not visited.

Military Secretary

{41} In the course of the winter, 1881-2, General Hardinge paid an official visit to Sir Robert Phayre, at Mhow. One of his daughters well remembers Major Gatacre on this occasion. His handsome bronzed face, his slight athletic figure, and keen but kindly blue eyes arrested the attention; and then on further acquaintance, his indefinable charm of manner, his courtly way of devoting himself to his companion for the moment, his curious mixture of modesty and power left an impression which later years exaggerated as his name became identified with all the soldierly qualities and achievements which built up his fame.

Every moment of these inspection tours was full of interest for Gatacre; who, being a good son, writes fully and simply about everything to the Squire at home.

CAMP HAMURGHURI,

December 18, 1881.

"We are having a very pleasant march from Nusserabad to Neemuch; good shooting all the way—duck, snipe, and deer; also some capital pig-sticking. The wild boars here are very difficult to get out of the jungle and grass, but when one does get them out across the open ground they run like greyhounds. I have two ponies a little under fourteen hands, both fast, and I have sometimes galloped a mile and a half before I could catch one; this was allowing him about a quarter of a mile start, otherwise if pressed they turn into the jungle. When you get up to them on the open ground, they turn round and run back a pace or two, and then come straight at you, rising on their {42} hind legs to cut your horse if they get the chance, but this of course they can't do if you use your spear properly. I have got some capital tushes. The best run we have had as yet was at a place called Roopauli, two marches back; two boars broke covert together and went away over capital ground to another place two miles off. The Commander-in-Chief and I took one and had a capital run after him. I had the luck to get the first spear. I was pleased, because I was riding a horse of the Chief's that could never be got up to a pig before. To-morrow we are coming to a place celebrated for cheetul, a kind of spotted deer, antlers like a stag and skin like a fallow deer. I am in hopes of getting one or two. This is a beautiful country to march through, very long grass and jungle all round; nearly all the hills are of white marble; and spotted marbles of sorts, and an enormous number of old forts and temples beautifully ornamented with carvings in marble and stone. Some of them are extraordinarily beautiful in form and design of carving, far superior to anything we see now—and these are thousands, not hundreds, of years old."

1882

It is difficult to say when Gatacre "found" himself—to use an expression that Mr. Rudyard Kipling has for ever endowed with psychological meaning; but there can be no doubt that the shifting scenes in which he played his part from the time he landed in India, in August 1880, till he commanded his regiment in June 1884, must have widened his outlook on life, must have quickened his sense of the {43} opportunities before him, and have enabled him to gauge his own powers. India encourages individuality to a very high degree; men live in small groups in stations that are hundreds of miles apart; in any one place there is (in a sense) only one man of any one grade, so that the labourers do not jostle one another, but each has enough elbow-room to play freely with his tools.

To Burma

At the conclusion of his time with General Hardinge in February 1882, Gatacre was sent to act as Assistant Quarter-Master-General to the Burmese Division, with headquarters at Rangoon, then under the command of General H. Prendergast. The British connection with this picturesque river-port dates from 1824, when Sir Archibald Campbell captured it after a feeble resistance. In the following year, owing to continued outrages on British subjects and the refusal of the King of Ava to enter into any treaty obligations with us, a British force advanced up the Irrawaddy to Prome, and stayed there throughout the rainy season. In October the Burmese Army made an organised attempt to recover the place; but the British forces repulsed the attack, and followed up the enemy to within four days' march of their capital at Ava. At this point the Burmese sued for peace: their apologies were accepted, and the country was evacuated, except for the sea-board provinces of Arakan and Tenasserim. The Province of Pegu was restored to the Burmese and remained in their hands till 1852, when fresh outrages and insolence on the part of another Burmese sovereign again gave rise to hostilities. At the conclusion of {44} peace Pegu was formally annexed by Proclamation, while Lord Dalhousie was Viceroy, under the name of Lower Burma, and Rangoon was made the seat of government.

Upper Burma was at that time in a deplorable condition; the excesses of the ruler, who was called Pagan-min, are described as recalling the worst years of the later Roman Empire. With a change of dynasty in the person of Mindon-min, matters improved somewhat. The new ruler realised the value of European enterprise and capital; he allowed strangers of all nations to settle in the country, and protected travellers and explorers. A few years later a commercial treaty was negotiated with Great Britain, a Resident was received, and for his protection he was allowed a small guard and an armoured boat on the river. To commemorate his flourishing reign Mindon founded a new capital at Mandalay, and in 1874 had himself crowned there to fulfil a prophecy.

King Theebaw

On his death, in September 1878, a terrible tragedy was enacted. Mindon, being an Oriental, had many wives and many sons; these latter he had dispersed as rulers of provinces with very good effect. When the old king lay dying, one of his wives devised a scheme by which to secure the succession to Prince Theebaw, for the reason that he was her son-in-law by his marriage with Supya-lat, her daughter. With the most fiendish designs Theebaw and the queen, in the king's name, summoned all the princes to {45} Mandalay. They arrived each with his Oriental retinue of women of all ages. The royal ladies were lodged in the prison, which had been cleared for their reception; the princes were received into the palace. "Under instructions from the King," a massacre was perpetrated on the nights of February 15, 16, and 17, 1879. The queens and princesses and even royal children were done to death by the "ruffians released for the purpose from the jail which was now the scene of their cruelties, and their bodies were flung into a hole already dug in the jail."[1] The princes were compelled to pass through a certain doorway in the palace, where each one was in turn cut down; it is even said that the queen-mother and Supya-lat with their own hands did the deed. "Eight cartloads of the bodies of the Princes of the Blood were conveyed out of the city by the western or 'Funeral Gate,' and thrown into the river according to custom."

[1] *Parliamentary Papers* (Burma), 1886. Quotations from the *Mandalay Confidential Diary*, by Mr. R. B. Shaw, Resident, of February 19, 1879, and later dates.

It was calculated that some eighty souls thus perished. Even the people were horrified. Our Resident, Mr. Shaw, could do no more than express with vigour the light in which his Government would regard these atrocities; but King Theebaw was inaccessible to argument, and reasserted his right to take "such measures to prevent disturbance as might {46} be desirable," stating that such acts were in accordance with the custom of the State, and that he would go his own way without regard to "censure or blame."[2]

[2] *Parliamentary Papers* (Burma), 1886.

1883

Owing to further gross outrages, the Resident was driven to fulfil his threat of breaking off friendly relations with such a ruler; the British flag was hauled down in August 1879, and the Residency evacuated.

There were now no governors to keep order in the provinces: dacoits sprang up, traders were robbed and killed, the people were oppressed, and the land neglected. English merchants, however, continued to carry on their business at their own risk; their boats plied up and down the broad stream, and it was in their hospitable company that Gatacre spent Christmas 1882 at Mandalay.

RANGOON, *January* 11, 1883.

"MY DEAR FATHER,

"I send you a line to tell you my doings up-country at Christmas time. I was sorry to leave Alice just then, but the opportunity of seeing Mandalay for nothing was a great temptation.

"We went, a party of six, including myself, most of them merchants. We had a steamer to ourselves, and the head of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company, a Mr. Swan, who took us, did everything in first-rate style. The River Irrawaddy is a very difficult one to navigate at this dry season of the year, owing to the constantly shifting sands. We did not get aground, luckily, but we passed several steamers fast on the sands; they sometimes remain there six months till the river fills and floats them off. The steamers only drew 4 ft. 6 in. of water.

{47} "We took four and a half days altogether to go up to Mandalay, but I did not join them till the steamer reached Prome, so I had only three days on board going up. The country, as far as we could see from the banks, consists of large rich plains, covered with grass and scrub jungle; very little cultivation, owing to the poverty of the people, but if capital was forthcoming the soil would grow anything. Where the crops were sown the yield was very large. There are low ranges of hills on the right bank, and a highish range, called the Shan Mountains, on the left bank.

"We were told there was but little game inland; we saw plenty of wild-fowl, geese, etc. The poverty of the people is chiefly owing to the King having started lotteries, which bring him in 10,000 Rs., about £800, a day. The people have gone gambling mad, and barter everything they have for tickets—property, children, everything. The King ruins the country by his recklessness in squandering money; he presses the people to such an extent that an up-country Burman will hardly take the trouble to make money.

"Mandalay is nothing but a collection of mud huts and a few masonry buildings, laid out in a beautiful style, all the houses in rows, with large streets running between each at right angles. It was laid out by Italians. None of the roads are made, so the bullock-carts passing along them in the rains have cut them up to a frightful extent; and in the rains they are impassable except quite at the edges, and then only to pedestrians. Mandalay was only built twenty-five years ago; formerly the capital was Ameerapoora, about six miles off, but {48} was changed to Mandalay by order of the King. Ameerapoora is a beautiful site—large trees, grass, and water everywhere. Some of the carved pagodas are very beautiful, but going very much to decay. The custom is, in Burma, that when a man builds a house or pagoda he only can repair it, or his relations; the consequence is that in course of time the building is forgotten and goes to pieces.

"We saw the war-boats on the river; they are long dug-out canoes, a beautiful shape somewhat like this,[3] generally with a figure-head of a peacock (their sacred bird). The canoes are gilt all over, and manned with eighty to one hundred men; each has a short paddle, and is armed with a 'dah,' the Burmese knife, a 2 ft. 6 in. blade, with handle of 8 in. or 12 in. The canoes go like lightning, driven by the rowers, who shout all the time. The Burmese are great boatmen, and their races on the water are well worth seeing. They bet tremendously high on them.

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[3] See drawing in letter. [Transcriber's note: this letter was missing from the source book.]

"The second largest bell in the world is at Mendoon, near Mandalay; this we went to see. It is 14 ft. high, and of a most enormous thickness—about 1 ft. 6 in. I should say. It was originally suspended on three enormous teak trees laid on masonry supports, but these have given way, and now it rests in the ground. There is also near the bell the commencement of a very large pagoda. Some one (I forget who) made up his mind to build the largest pagoda in the world, so started upon one. He got together an extraordinary amount of brick-work, but an earthquake unfortunately stopped the work by splitting it up in several places. It is about 100 yards square and high, so you can imagine the size of it. It is built with large red bricks, 2 ft. long by 1 ft. wide by 4 in. thick. {49}

"We stopped in Mandalay two and a half days. I rode about all over the place, and found the people very civil, though they are very suspicious of Englishmen.

"We came down in one and a half days to Prome, where I caught the night train down, as I had to be back on New Year's Day, my leave being up. The trip was a most enjoyable one."

Second-in-command

The temporary staff billet having run out at the end of 1882, Gatacre went home on three months' leave early in the following year, and when he returned in May took up the post of second-in-command of his regiment, which in those days meant taking command of one wing of the battalion. This brought no change of residence, as the 77th were then quartered in Rangoon.

He joined heartily in everything that was going on, and had, moreover, interests of his own which lay beyond the field of duty. The spring and autumn race-meetings were a great event. Though he does not seem to have owned any racing ponies, he was always in request as a jockey. Every morning he would hack down to the racecourse, and being a light weight was often asked to give a gallop to the ponies that were in training. In a letter of June 1883 he says: "I rode in five races, and won two, the hurdle race and an open race—the best race of the meeting—which pleased me."

{50} There was a steeplechase pony named Free Lance that he rode to victory many times. The owner of Free Lance appeared as Mr. Darwood, a gentleman of Rangoon, of mixed nationality; but I am inclined to think that Free Lance was in reality the property of King Theebaw, for the General told me that at one time he had half shares with King Theebaw in a racing pony, which he rode, and there is no other period to which this incident could be attached. I have now in my possession a gold scarf-pin that King Theebaw sent as a recognition of Gatacre's services in the matter of this pony. Although this secret was kept so close that none of the regimental officers got wind of it, it is not considered improbable.[4] It was well known that Gatacre had friends amongst the leading men of Rangoon, and it is entirely in accordance with his character that he should have been personally acquainted with his native neighbours. Indeed it is not altogether impossible that he was engaged in some sort of secret intelligence duties for Government, for he told me that at one time he used to disguise himself and go and talk in the Native Bazaar, and it is certain that he acquired the Burmese language, and could even write it to some extent.

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[4] As King Theebaw was at that time an independent friendly sovereign, there is nothing contrary to any regulations in Gatacre's association with him in this matter.

Iolanthe

{51} In the summer of 1882 the regimental officers and others in the station got up a performance of *Patience*, in which Gatacre figured as one of the Dragoon Chorus. In the following year *Iolanthe* was produced. Gatacre was anxious that the audience should include persons of all nationalities; and in order that those who could not understand the English words should have some key to the action, he made a précis of the play, and, having written it in Hindustani characters, had it lithographed, and distributed with the programmes. A copy of this curious document, which covers three sides of foolscap, and is signed in full, is still to be seen in the scrap-book of the officer who joined the 77th Regiment for love of his tutor at Sandhurst.

At the end of September Gatacre heard of the birth of his third son, John Kirwan, now in the 11th Bengal Lancers.

In December 1883 the regiment left Rangoon for Secunderabad.

{52}

CHAPTER IV

1884-1885

SECUNDERABAD

1884

I have read in a recent biography of Alexander Hamilton that "the power of his intellect was hardly suspected under the ambush of his extraordinary charm."[1] This was equally true of Gatacre. Moreover, the high standard of his physical endowments was in itself a mask to his mental abilities; in reality, his physical force was but the evidence and the result of his intellectual energy.

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[1] Alexander Hamilton, by F. S. Oliver, p. 149.

Camp of exercise

He turned the whole of his power on to the work in hand; even when partly disabled, he would not allow himself to be cheated of the pleasure and opportunity that his work afforded. Of course the opportunity that his soul yearned for was active service; he was daily discovering his own value, and longed to prove himself in the fierce furnace of war.

{53} The year 1884 opened with the nearest approach to these conditions that can be contrived without an enemy. A camp of exercise on a very large scale was held near Bangalore, at which 10,000 troops were assembled. Sir Charles Keyes commanded the First Division, in which the 77th were included, and General H. Prendergast had command of the

Second Division, with Colonel W. F. Gatacre as Assistant-Quarter-Master-General.

In spite of the misfortune recorded in Gatacre's own letter given below, he more than satisfied his General, who writes on June 11, 1909:

> "I found him a remarkably clever, zealous, and efficient officer. During the operations his horse fell, and injured his ankle so that he could neither ride nor walk, but that did not prevent him from thinking out and arranging all our plans; though disabled and in great pain, he would write till two in the morning, and all went well with the Division, which he accompanied carried on a stretcher, owing to his devotion."

Below is Gatacre's own account of it all:

HEADQUARTERS 2ND DIVISION, CAMP KRISTNARAJAHPUR,

January 27, 1884.

"MY DEAR FATHER,

"I send you a short letter by this mail, but will write at length by next one, and tell you all about the manoeuvres. They are over now and have been most successful. I have enjoyed them thoroughly, though I have been most unfortunate. I told you one of my horses or charger ponies died of anthrax a few days before leaving Burma (I had just sold the brute for 600 rupees); and the other charger, which I {54} had had for two years, and who was a first-rate animal, died of colic the day after I arrived here. Fortunately for me a friend of mine was kicked off his horse a few days after coming here, and hurt a good deal, so he asked me to ride him, which I have done all through the fortnight's work. Though a very fine horse, he, like many walers, was very nervous and shy, and the last day of the manoeuvring he got nervous in jumping a nullah, and instead of jumping it he jumped into it, and rolled over me, giving me a regular flattening out; he has damaged my ankle and both my knees slightly, and I think it will be at least a month before I can do anything at all, though I am perfectly well in every way. The doctor says that the small bones of the foot are crushed, but that in a month I shall be all right. It was very annoying, just at the finish, wasn't it? Sir Frederick Roberts came to see me, and said he was very sorry about it; so did General Hardinge, the C.-in-C. in Bombay; he came and had a long talk in my tent, and told me all about John and his regiment. He thinks a great deal of John, and says his regiment is one of his best. Your luminous match-box has furnished lights for all these big people; it is always on my table; I shall scratch their names on the back of it. I wanted to see Sir Frederick Roberts about the command of the regiment; so I asked to see him in the usual way, and he sent word to say he would be glad to see me; so I got a litter and went across. He was most kind, said he knew all about it, that he would give his support, and that I need have no doubts on the matter. He asked me if I would like a staff appointment; I said I would, but that I wanted to command the regiment.

{55} "At present the camp has all broken up; my regiment goes to-morrow, and I go with it. I have not seen my own regiment since I came here scarcely; as they were in the 1st Division and I was A.Q.M.G. of the 2nd Division."

In command

On June 24, 1884, Gatacre realised his immediate desire, and succeeded to the command of the 2nd Battalion Middlesex Regiment, as the old 77th had been renamed.

Although nothing occurred during his period of command to distinguish him from many another equally efficient officer, still a recapitulation of the qualities which remain in the minds of those who served under him will give us some idea of what he then was. I am mainly indebted for the material for the following sketch of Gatacre as a Commanding Officer to the kindness of Colonel N. W. Barnardiston, M.V.O., who writes in July 1909:

> "I was adjutant at the time, and never before or since have I served under a better or more efficient battalion commander, nor have I come across one during my experience on the staff."

Gatacre was forty years old when he succeeded Colonel Colquhoun; he had served very little with the regiment, but the time spent on the staff had added to his professional value. While his acute perceptions and easy receptiveness had ripened his judgment on many points, his simplicity of character and natural integrity remained unimpaired. He had {56} downright notions about right and wrong, but was influenced more by the spirit than by the letter of the bond: he was very just, but never hard, always showing a lofty sympathy for those in trouble of any sort, and a tender consideration for their feelings. There was about him a curious balance of moral austerity and physical tenderheartedness; these apparently contradictory qualities both came into fuller play when in the field. He taught the regiment to work with the disinterested spirit that animated himself; to work for the work's sake: he insisted on every duty being done correctly and conscientiously and strictly according to regulations. He never shrank from the disagreeable duty of rebuke, where the interests of the service were at stake; but at the same time he never unduly worried his subordinates, or interfered with their province, and in no way passed the frontier of his own department. If he wanted more work, he looked beyond and not below his own sphere of influence.

Even at this time Gatacre's willingness to accept responsibility and to undertake troublesome and unexpected tasks was remarkable. Where some men might raise objections and fear obstructions when asked, or even ordered, to get something done that was new or out of the common, he would welcome the call on his resources, and do his utmost, by enlisting the goodwill and co-operation of those about him, to carry the business through. Later on, one of his colleagues {57} in Poona looked upon his trick of saying, "No difficulty about that," as evidence of a very valuable quality; and in the Office in Bombay there was a joke that the word "impossible" was not allowed.

It was a sign of the lack of vanity in his composition that Gatacre took so long to find out that there was anything exceptional about himself, but it is now admitted on all sides that his capacity for work was far in excess of the average. According to Mr. G. W. Steevens in 1898, "his body was all steel wire." He was certainly lean and light; at sixty he discovered to his great satisfaction that his weight was the same, ten stone two, as it had been as a subaltern in Peshawur. In appearance also he changed very little, looking always about ten years younger than his age. His back was short in proportion to the length of his limbs, which gave the impression of a shorter man than he measured, but at the same time this was the secret of his graceful seat on a horse, and of his extraordinary walking powers. Like the good horses that he loved to bestride, Gatacre was fast and free, and had the staying powers of the thorough-bred animal; it was inevitable that such a one should be sometimes difficult to "follow," and that other men should occasionally feel that he called upon them for exertions that were beyond their powers.

His whole heart was in his profession; and with the material that was now under his hand he developed an aptitude {58} for the practical training of both officers and men. Acting on ideas suggested by the recent camp at Bangalore, he initiated small field-days at Secunderabad, in which one major with one half-battalion was pitted against another with the remainder. This was before the days of staff-rides and annual camps of exercise, and was so much of a novelty that his adjutant writes that many of his officers "learnt more of the art of organising manoeuvres, drawing up schemes, and issuing orders than it was then possible to do at the Staff College." Moreover, to accompany Gatacre on a field-day was a lesson in horsemanship. He had two capital Arab ponies, and would often lend the spare one to his adjutant or galloper.

No obstacle stopped him, though sometimes these clever little animals were expected to move over the most impossible-looking country—craggy hills, big rocks and boulders, and the steep sides of deep nullahs. If really pounded, he would slip off and lead or drive his pony, until at the earliest moment he would be on its back again.

1885

His gift for administration was further exercised in perfecting the regulations for the rapid turn-out of the Movable Column which had its base at Secunderabad: every little detail was most carefully thought out on the lines of a far larger mobilisation, and every man knew exactly where he had to go, and what he had to do, whenever he should hear the "Alarm."

{59} If he was impatient of laziness or shirking, he was, on the other hand, generous in his appreciation of honest work. He made it a practice to help good men to get forward. There were at that time in India a large number of extra-regimental appointments open to non-commissioned officers. The natural training-ground for such aspirants was in the orderly room, but few commanding officers cared to part with a man who had just become really competent in his particular job and valuable to themselves; with the result that the more promising and ambitious young fellows were unwilling to serve. But during Gatacre's reign the plan was reversed: if a good man, no matter what his duties were, or how difficult he would be to replace, applied for a suitable and desirable position outside the regiment, Gatacre would heartily support the application. Very soon there were plenty of keen young soldiers eager to qualify for billets which were the sure road to advancement. When as a General Officer he had the opportunity of pushing forward promising young officers, he acted on the same principle; he was always ready to train, but never hesitated to let others reap the harvest that he had sown.

Thus in a hundred ways the Colonel built up a reputation for kindness, efficiency, originality, and power: and we are not surprised to read that "his period of command was a very happy one for the 77th."

In April 1885 the far-reaching consequences of the Russian scare made themselves felt at Secunderabad, where the following telegram was received:

> "Warn for service the 2nd Middlesex Regiment and 24th Madras Native Infantry. Detail hereafter."

{60} The excitement was intense. No officer was allowed to leave his bungalow for a walk without saying in which direction he was going. To Gatacre the idea of leading his regiment into action must have presented visions of endless opportunities, and those who knew him must always regret that he had no chance to display as a regimental officer that personal valour and forwardness under fire for which, as a General Officer, he has been subjected to so much criticism.

This state of expectant commotion lasted for six weeks, and then all hopes were quenched, for on May 26 official intimation reached the Commanding Officer that:

> "War with Russia having been averted, the regiment need no longer hold itself in readiness for active service."

This was the second time that he had had to bury his disappointment, and again a third time was it to happen.

D.Q.M.G.

It was clear to all that before long there would be another Burmese War. The grievances of Europeans against King Theebaw had gone on accumulating: diplomatic efforts had entirely failed to secure attention or redress, the patience of the Foreign Office was at an end, and the Government of India was directed to prepare an expeditionary force to march on Mandalay, and thereby to teach King {61} Theebaw that he could not afford to flout the British Government. This mission was entrusted to General Prendergast. Gatacre volunteered to come down and help his former Chief in the embarkation of the troops at Madras for Rangoon. Having proved his value as a staff officer, and having heard of his previous journey to Mandalay, Prendergast was most anxious to take Gatacre with him; but all the posts had been filled, and to the General's "grievous disappointment and much to the disadvantage of the Government," the application to take him as Military Secretary or Special Transport Officer was refused, and Gatacre had to be content with the thanks of the Government of India for his services in the embarkation of troops which he was not permitted to accompany.[2]

[2] *Proceedings of Government*, No. 6502, November 17, 1885.

Secunderabad

In a later chapter we shall follow the fortunes of the Expedition, but for the moment all thought of Burma was swept out of Gatacre's mind by the prospect of serving on the Headquarters Staff of the army. On November 24, 1885, the following telegrams were exchanged:

> "If agreeable to you, Sir Frederick proposes to recommend you to Government as Deputy Quarter-Master-General; you will have to join at once if Government approve."

To which this reply was sent:

> "I gratefully accept His Excellency's offer; am ready to go anywhere."

On December 11 the following Farewell Order was issued:

> {62} "Lieutenant-Colonel Gatacre wishes the Battalion farewell.
>
> "He thanks the officers, non-commissioned officers, and men for the way in which they have zealously and loyally carried out his orders during the short eighteen months he has had the honour of commanding them, and will always take the deepest interest in their welfare.
>
> "He especially thanks his regimental staff, viz. Lieutenant and Adjutant N. W. Barnardiston, and Captain and Quarter-Master Hunt, for their good service as Adjutant and Quarter-Master respectively, and Lieutenant Savile and Lieutenant Burton, who have on many

> occasions officiated in their capacities.
>
> "He wishes the 2nd Battalion Middlesex Regiment many happy New Years, and success wherever they go."

{63}

CHAPTER V

1885-1889

BLACK MOUNTAIN EXPEDITION

Sir Frederick Roberts succeeded Sir Donald Stewart as Commander-in-Chief in India in 1885. After short leave home the new Chief returned just in time to preside over a great concentration of troops near Delhi in December of that year. It was the biggest thing of the sort that had yet been attempted; the manoeuvres occupied about three weeks, and concluded on January 8, 1886, with a Grand Review in which about 35,000 men took part. It would have been a splendid sight, had it not been spoilt by a deluge of rain. The Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, was on parade, and it was afterwards suggested that it was the firing of his salute that had brought down the rain. Anyhow, just as his flag was run up, the storm burst and the rain pitilessly poured down on the columns of men as they carried out the unaltered programme of the day. The march-past occupied six hours. According to an eye-witness, the "trot-past of cavalry and artillery in spite of {64} everything was magnificent, and could have been performed by no other troops.... The Viceroy sat on his horse through the rain with exemplary patience, and we only hope that he will be none the worse."

General Chapman[1] had just taken up the post of Quarter-Master-General, and first saw his Deputy at this camp. Gatacre seems from the outset to have made a good impression on his Chief, who describes him in a letter from Delhi as "a man of active intelligence, quick and ready to do anything, a good rider, and a popular man."

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[1] Now General Sir Edward Chapman, K.C.B.

At Headquarters

It is the province of the Deputy to take charge of the office in which he is working—that is, to acquaint himself with all that is going on in the department and to know all the staff and the clerks personally. On his arrival at Headquarters Gatacre rapidly gathered up all the threads of his new work, and made himself more and more valuable to his Chief; while from his own point of view he used to say that it was at this time that he learnt how to put a finish to his work in the office, and to appreciate the scope and importance to the army at large of the individual work done at Headquarters. As is often the case after a campaign, there was much important reorganisation worked out during the next few years; new schemes of training, housing and surveying, were initiated and carried out. From the inside of the Quarter-Master-General's office Gatacre could in a short time get a comprehension of many points of army administration such as a lifetime in the field would fail to give. {65}

1886

During the winter months the Commander-in-Chief goes on tour, accompanied by a few staff officers: sometimes the Quarter-Master-General would go himself and leave Gatacre in charge, sometimes it was the other way round. One year when the Q.M.G. was making an extended tour, Mrs. Chapman was much pleased at getting a visit from Colonel Gatacre every morning as he went down to office. In response to her appreciation of these attentions he averred that he looked upon her as part of the office, and must see that all was well.

The two men were associated in this department for more than three years, and by the time that General Chapman had to resign (owing to bad health) a fast friendship had sprung up between them, one from which "the all-assuming months and years" have taken no part. On hearing of his friend's death in 1906 General Chapman wrote:

> "A more loyally devoted assistant I could not have found, active, untiring, and self-sacrificing; the public service and the interests of others were always before him. His gallantry and forwardness on service were acknowledged by all, but it was late in life that he so distinguished himself. I recall chiefly the straight-forwardness and honesty of his help and advice, and remember his never-failing and cheery support whenever we had a difficulty to face."

{66} Owing to the illness of the Quarter-Master-General, Gatacre accompanied the Commander-in-Chief on two long tours in the spring of 1886. On the first he saw many places of great historical interest, such as Cawnpore, Futtehghur, Lucknow; and in the second he was taken to Peshawur and Lundi Kotal, where many interesting problems of frontier defence were discussed on the ground. For two months in 1886 he officiated as Quarter-Master-General, pending the arrival of Sir William Lockhart, who was to act for General Chapman while away on long leave.

1887

Christmas was spent at Calcutta, and early in 1887 Gatacre was again on the move. During this year he was twice entrusted with an independent mission; in March he accompanied the Chief on his official visit to Peshawur, Kohat, Rawulpindi, and Quetta, and was afterwards sent to survey and report upon the proposed line for a military road from Loralai in Beluchistan to Dera Ghazi Khan on the Indus. His abstract of daily work shows that he was out all day exploring and surveying. His report shows that he thoroughly investigated all questions relating to the water supply and the area of the camping-grounds on the road, and deals with many questions as to the safety and comfort of the working parties and their guards. Although the country to be explored covered 183 miles, he worked with such celerity that the work was completed in thirteen days.

On tour

Writing from Bannu a week or two later he finds time to send a comprehensive account of his doings:

> {67} "I think I wrote you last from Loralai, beyond Quetta to the east: well, from there I explored a new road which is to run through Mekhtar, Kingri, Rukni, to Dera Ghazi Khan on the Indus. It has been approved, and is to be carried out at once; as in the event of troops moving up towards Kandahar, it would be the route along which all our regiments and stores from the Punjab would move. The country is a wild one at present, savage, with no cultivation or inhabitants, except a few robbers: but the lie of the road is good, and the gradients are easy. Of course a made road will draw the large Kafilas of camels with merchandise from one end to the other, and as the roads will be under our protection the native merchants will gladly use it, and this will gradually people the various halting-places, and so settle the country by degrees. There was much game along the route; markhor, a large goat with splendid horns; gud, a large sheep with very large curly horns, wolves and small game, hares, partridges, wood-pigeons, etc. I had very little time for shooting, but shot one markhor and much small game here and there as I came across it; but as I had a lot of surveying to do all day, I had no time to make excursions after game alone, though I should much have liked to have had a turn with Stephen in some of the hills through which I passed. You would have been delighted with the country in some places, something like Scotland with fewer trees and more sun, but comparatively cool for India. The only disagreeable thing about it is the general want of water and the number of poisonous snakes. Water is found only in certain

{68} streams and in single springs, and is very valuable. Of course, any good road which is required has to follow the line of water, but the rivers commence to flow at any point in the river-bed, and after becoming a rushing torrent, disappear as suddenly as they arose, into the ground and are seen no more; where they go to no one knows, but you may seek in vain further down the bed of the river and not find water. In some cases the water reappears in the stream ten miles lower down, and disappears again as before. The snakes are everywhere, and it was a few days before I left Khur that a young engineer named Hackman was bitten. I saw his death in yesterday's paper. I killed several cobras while marching, I am glad to say."

In November of the same year he was sent on a similar mission to Sikkim. It was discovered that a private treaty had been signed by which the Rajah had declared that Sikkim was subject only to China and Tibet, thus repudiating the British suzerainty. By way of preparation for an expedition to settle this question Gatacre was sent up to report upon the road over the Jelap-La along which troops would move on to Lingtu, the capital of Sikkim. Though it was at that time held by a hostile force of Tibetans, he approached near enough to sketch the fort at Lingtu. His report and his sketches were afterwards incorporated with other matter in a blue-book dealing with the affairs of Sikkim. Sir Thomas Graham asserts that the information set down was of great value to him when in the following spring he led a force into Lingtu and brought the incident to a satisfactory conclusion.

At Simla

{69} In a letter to his father from Simla of September 1887 Gatacre relates the following story:

> "Did I tell you I was nearly polished off by a madman with a revolver? He shot two men he came across, then got on to a rock and defied the crowd, but I got a stick and went for him, to prevent his doing more mischief. He warned me not to come near him, but I spoke to him in his own language, and never took my eyes off him, and when he was going to have a shot at me he suddenly changed his mind and blew a hole in his breast about three or four inches in diameter. The fact was he was not quite sure whether he had a spare round for himself, and these fanatical fellows always destroy themselves after doing as much mischief as they are able; when he shot himself I was just within reach of him, but too late to knock the pistol out of his hands."

This incident attracted a good deal of attention at the time, as the murderer was the personal servant of a resident member of the United Service Club. He had begun by shooting at another servant, and inflicted a mortal wound; the next shot struck the chowkidar, or caretaker, in the arm. Gatacre then appeared on the scene and played the part he describes.

There is another story told of him that belongs to this same year.

On September 27 Lady Dufferin gave a ball at Government House; all the world was there and Gatacre among {70} them. As was his invariable habit, he stayed to the end, and early in the morning told a friend that he was just starting for a ride to Umballa, but would be back in office the next day. To accomplish this design he had arranged for ponies to be in readiness at the various stages along the Old Road from Simla to Umballa, which is a distance of ninety-seven miles, descending about 6,000 ft. from the mountains to the plains. As far as Kalka they were hired ponies, from there to Umballa he had borrowed mounts from a friend, using nine ponies each way. Leaving Simla at 5.15 a.m., he reached Umballa at 2.30 that afternoon. At 4 o'clock he started back and dismounted at Simla again at 3.5 a.m. That is to say, after dancing till daybreak, he covered little short of two hundred miles in twenty-two hours, and turned up again at 10 o'clock ready and fit for his office work as usual.

It is unnecessary to seek for any pretext for such exertion; the fun of the rapid ride, the desire to excel, were quite sufficient stimulus for him. He told the newspapers at the time that he wanted to show what office men could do.

But before very long he was to have an opportunity of putting these powers to more practical uses. In September 1888 Gatacre and two of his colleagues on the Headquarter Staff were given posts on the Hazara Field Force, then concentrating near Abbottabad.

Hazara border

{71} After the Mutiny the Hazara and Peshawur borders became "a rallying-point for mutinous Sepoys and traitors in arms who had to flee from British justice." There was in particular a sect known as the Sittana Fanatics, who continued to stir up coalitions against our power, as they had previously done against our Sikh predecessors in the Punjab. An expedition under Sir Sydney Cotton in 1858 advanced into the mountains, drove the Hindustani fanatics from Sittana, destroyed their forts, razed their dwellings to the ground, and extorted an undertaking from the neighbouring tribes that the rebels should not be allowed a passage through their territory.

1888

Although the centre of disturbance was thus forced back at the point of the sword to Malka, it was not long before numerous raids on unarmed traders, and other outrages, brought the peace of the frontier again into question. Our allies were either unable or unwilling to carry out their pledges, and in 1863 Sir Neville Chamberlain led a force through the Ambeyla Defile. This expedition differed from the others in that all the contiguous tribes were in a state of disaffection, and on this account there was more fighting than in the previous punitive expeditions. The story of the repeated capture and loss of the Eagle's Nest and Crag Picquet still makes brave reading, and afforded moreover most satisfactory proof of the loyalty of our reorganised Native Army. It was noted with satisfaction in 1888 that very few of the Hindustani fanatics were to be found in the ranks of the enemy, showing that the lesson of 1863 was more lasting in its effect than the others had been. The policy of the {72} Government had never altered; in every case the tribe was informed—

> "That the British Government did not covet their possessions, nor those of other neighbouring tribes, with whom it desired to be at peace; but that it expected tribes would restrain individual members from committing unprovoked outrages on British subjects, and afford redress when they are committed; that when a whole tribe, instead of affording redress, seeks to screen the individual offenders, the British Government has no alternative but to hold the whole tribe responsible."[2]

[2] *A Record of the Expeditions against the North-West Frontier Tribes*, by Paget and Mason (1884), p. 41.

The enforcing of this principle has led to the numerous little wars that have afforded the opportunities for distinction to all ranks of which the personnel of an army is so quick to avail itself. Each expedition has usually been of a few weeks' duration only; sometimes there was very little actual fighting; sometimes there was very little political gain; but always there has been a story of hardship and valour.

The Hazara Field Force of 1888 was mobilised for the punishment of certain tribes inhabiting the slopes of the Black Mountain, a region lying on the left bank of the Indus, north of Abbottabad. It was some years since we had had a reckoning with Hassanzais and Akazais in particular, and they had been showing increased insolence in their attitude and daring in their raids.

{73}

Battye killed

A sufficient occasion was all that was needed to bring about open hostility, and this was afforded by the tribesmen themselves on June 18, 1888. On that day Colonel Battye and Captain Urmston conducted a route-march with some three score Goorkhas from the frontier post at Oghi; they had gone perhaps a little nearer to the frontier than was quite expedient, but it was afterwards shown that they had never actually left British territory. When about ten miles from Oghi, they were fired at from two points simultaneously. Colonel Battye ordered the Goorkhas to rush a ridge just ahead on which they could make a stand. The ridge was secured, but, unfortunately, the two British officers turned back to help a wounded man, and, while they were thus separated from the troops, both were cut down with swords. The Subadar (native officer) at once took command, though one arm had been disabled by a blow from a stone, and a bullet had gone through his thigh, and his head was streaming with blood. He collected the party, and marched back to the spot where the two officers had fallen. Keeping up a spirited fire to drive back the tribesmen, he succeeded in recovering both bodies, and brought the whole party back into camp at 8.30 that night. This man, Subadar Kishnbir Nagar Koti, had already gained the Order of Merit three times in the Kabul Campaign.[3]

[3] See *Civil and Military Gazette*, June 1888.

{74} As the Headman of the tribe refused to hand over the offenders, the Government was driven to avenge this outrage by sending an armed force into the country of the Hassenzais and Akazais, who were held responsible.

Hazara Field Force

This force, which numbered about 8,000 men, was organised in four columns, each formed of one British and two native regiments. A peculiar feature of this force was that no regiment was allowed to send more than six hundred men, which was a device to ensure the selection of a picked body of men. The late Sir John McQueen, who was then commanding the Punjab Frontier Force, was given command of the expedition, and Colonel W. F. Gatacre was appointed his Chief Staff Officer. This was naturally a moment of the liveliest satisfaction and anticipation for him. At last he found himself on active service; at last he was to face the ordeal for which he had been training for twenty-six years.

Three of the columns marched out of Oghi on October 2, twenty-four hours' grace having been allowed beyond the time named in the ultimatum sent to the Maliks of the tribes. No. 4 Column, under Brigadier-General Galbraith,[4] had assembled at Derband on the River Indus, and was known throughout the campaign as the River Column; its function was to prevent any trans-Indus tribes moving eastwards across the river to join their neighbours, and it was hoped that the area of hostilities could thus be confined to those spurs of the Black Mountain where lay the heart of the disaffection.

[4] The late Sir William Galbraith, K.C.B.]

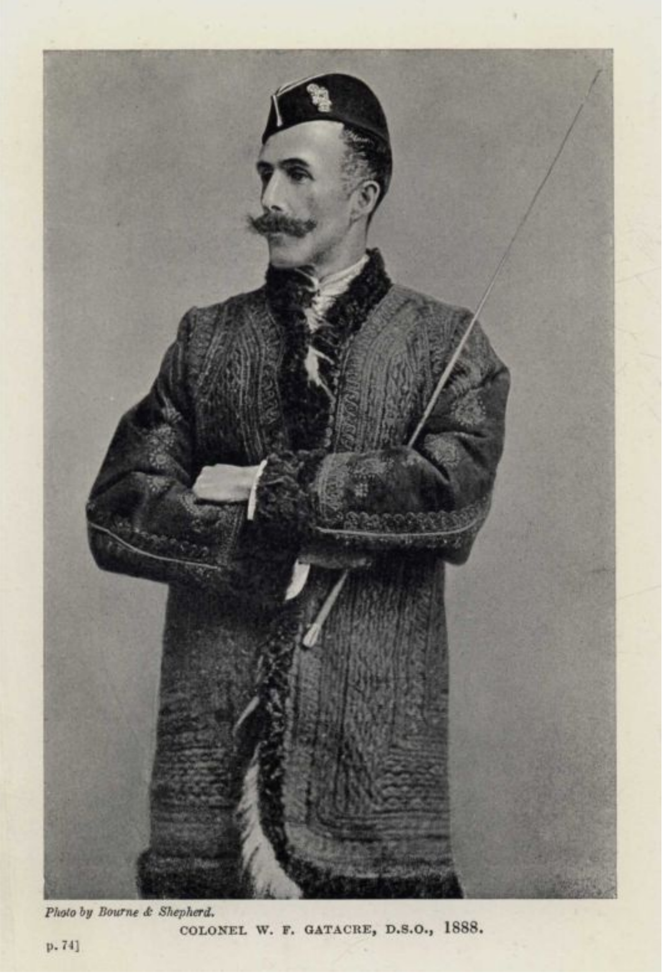
Photo by Bourne & Shepherd.
COLONEL W. F. GATACRE, D.S.O., 1888.
p. 74]

COLONEL W. F. GATACRE, D.S.O., 1888.

{75} The main mass of the Black Mountain lies in a curve of the River Indus between Thakot and Arab. To the north and west its slopes are cut into ridges which descend precipitously into the deep gorge of the river; to the east the eye rests on a bewildering succession of pine-clad mountain ranges, till, stretching over the vale of Kashmir, it reaches the line of eternal snows.

The three mountain columns met with little opposition as they made their way up the spurs overlooking the Agror Valley. The Headquarter Camp was established at Khaim Gali, near the summit of the range, and from that point General McQueen directed the movements against the various villages. After about a fortnight General Channer, commanding

No. 1 Column, was able to open up communication with General Galbraith in the valley below, at Kunhar. The latter at the outset had met with some slight opposition at Kotkai, resulting in the loss of two officers and five men, but had since made considerable progress up the river, and had moreover come to an understanding with the tribes in his immediate neighbourhood. The mountainous nature of the country made it extremely difficult to secure unity of action in the two regions. It became imperative that General McQueen should know what General Galbraith had done and had promised. To effect this purpose Gatacre offered to make his way down on foot to Kunhar, where the River Column had its headquarters.

Visits Galbraith

{76} By this time he was fairly well acquainted with the lie of the country, for he had been out daily with the columns, and, according to his colleague, Major Elles,[5] "had worked harder than any man in the force." He must have known that the direct descent from the ridge on which the Headquarter Camp at Khaim Gali was situated was a series of precipices. Taking the figures given on a map compiled for the expedition of 1891, the elevation of Khaim Gali is 8,680 ft., while the camp at Kunhar in the Indus valley is 1,560 ft., which means a clear descent of 7,120 ft. in a horizontal distance of less than five miles, though the distance actually marched worked out at fourteen miles. Major Elles accompanied Colonel Gatacre, and they took an escort of fifty Khybari Rifles. The party left camp at 6 a.m., and reached Kunhar at noon. Although it was then October, the sun had great power in the middle of the day; the narrow valleys down which they crept were very stuffy, and as they approached the end of the journey the air became very close and oppressive. Major Elles confesses that he felt the sun very much, was tired out, and "could not have attempted the climb back again that day. But nothing," he says, "seemed to tire Gatacre, who was the hardest man I ever met. He neither drank nor smoked, and ate very little."

After settling the business that was the motif of the journey, and partaking of the hospitality of the River Column {77} headquarter mess, Gatacre announced his intention of starting back at 2 o'clock. The men who acted as escort were dismayed at the Colonel Sahib's startling decision; indeed, only half of them were capable of setting off at once, but these insisted on being allowed to do so. Half-way up the mountain they were dead-beat; and as a small party able to take their place had been accidentally met with, the services of the newcomers were impressed, and Gatacre proceeded. It is a question for mountaineers whether the descent or the ascent was the more trying to a man's muscular system, and a question for Anglo-Indians whether the sun is hotter in the forenoon or the afternoon; anyhow, it must have been fairly fierce at 2 p.m. in the deep gorge of the Indus, and to have reached Khaim Gali again the same evening was an achievement worthy of mention in despatches. We are told that the first part of the ascent was very precipitous for about 2,500 ft., and impracticable even for mule carriage; the next 1,500 ft. was nothing but a succession of steps. Farther on, the line lay across terraced cultivation, which involved climbing up the walls supporting the fields, and walking across the soft plough which they enclosed, while throughout the march there were "passages which were impossible for anything but a goat."

At 11 p.m. that same night Gatacre marched into the Headquarter Camp at Khaim Gali, the only man who had completed the double journey. The two marches had occupied six hours and nine hours respectively, and two hours only had been spent in the triple business of negotiation, refreshment, and repose. {78}

This feat did not pass unnoticed at the time. The editor of the *Broad Arrow* of October 20, 1888, says:

> "The story is suggestive of physical endurance and courage, and may be read with profit by fireside warriors and cynical philosophers upon the decline of the British officer."

Active service

Such an exchange of views between a confidential messenger from Headquarters and the officer commanding a column operating independently must always have great military value to the commander of an expedition, and it is evident that the consultation in this case was not without result, for in despatches we read that the first phase of the operations reached its conclusion on October 20. The Akazais and Hassanzais made complete submission, and by the end of the month had paid their fines in full. The object of the second phase was the coercion on similar lines of the Parari Saiads and Tikariwals. In the same way this involved much marching and counter-marching over the same "exigeant" class of country. Although there was scarcely any fighting, doubtless all those who took part in these operations learned many of the supplementary lessons of war which no manoeuvres can ever teach. A British officer in a Goorkha regiment tells us how he learned one of these lessons from Gatacre himself.

{79} The Brigade had just reached its camping-ground: there had been a very arduous and hot march, finishing with a stiff climb up-hill. The Goorkha officer had flung himself on the ground, feeling dead-beat, when Gatacre rode up, and began making inquiry as to the water supply of the camp.

"Who is the Quarter-Master of this regiment?" he asked.

"I am, sir," said the officer, struggling to his feet.

"What has been done to secure the water supply from contamination?"

"Nothing, sir."

"I must have a guard put over it at once. Where is the spring?"

The spring was a thousand feet below. The commanding officer of the regiment, coming upon the scene, protested that his officer had only just come up.

"Never mind," said Gatacre. "It is of the utmost importance. I order you as Quarter-Master to go down and see that a sufficient guard is put round the spring, and that the animals are kept at a proper distance."

Much against his inclination the officer set about carrying out this injunction. On his arrival at the spring he saw the urgency of the order he was sent down to execute, and confessed the justice of the call upon his further exertions. Soldiers, bheesties, and animals were crowding round the pool, which, fed by a small spring, was the only water supply {80} for the Brigade. He quickly restored order, made arrangements for the watering of the different units, and, by thus securing the purity of the head-water, eliminated the chance of fever to thousands of men.

1888-9

On October 28 General Channer occupied Thakot without resistance; on November 7 a deputation from the Parari Saiads came in and made full submission, as the Tikariwals had done already. On November 12 the Hazara Field Force began to disperse, having been under arms for six weeks. The casualties to the whole force amounted to twenty-seven men killed, fifty-nine wounded, and eight who had died of disease, showing that, from a military point of view, it was essentially a minor campaign. Moreover, politically, the results were inconclusive, but to Gatacre it was the field on which he had won his spurs: "the loyal support and valuable aid" that he had afforded his Chief were now for ever recorded; his initiative, energy, and physical powers had been proved in the field; his possession of military ability and soldierly qualities in a marked degree was now established.

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[5] Now Lieut.-General Sir Edmond Elles, G.C.I.E., K.C.B.

It is difficult to understand why he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order, which had been newly created as a recognition of the services of junior officers in the field, while his rank as substantive colonel in the army fully qualified him for a Companionship of the Bath; but so it was. Seven years had yet to run before the latter decoration was awarded, after the Chitral Campaign.

{81}

Safe home

Colonel Gatacre and Major Elles did not return direct to Headquarters on the disbanding of the force, but made an extended march down the Indus, and reached Calcutta early in December. When writing his Christmas greeting to his father, Gatacre says:

> "We are all returned safely from the Black Mountain, and I must say I for one thoroughly enjoyed myself; it was rough going, of course, but the climate was good, and there was plenty of outdoor exercise—such a pleasant change after the office life."

After another summer spent at Simla, Gatacre was sent in October 1889 to act for Sir George Wolseley, who was then commanding the Mandalay Brigade. Throughout the three and a half years that he had served with the Headquarter Staff, much of the work in the Quarter-Master-General's office had had reference to the welfare of the troops which since November 1885 had been operating in Upper Burma. Gatacre had taken moreover a personal interest in the success and well-being of the Army of Occupation, for his brother John had been serving there in command of his regiment, the 23rd Bombay Infantry.

The events which had occurred since Gatacre first visited Mandalay in 1883 will be dealt with in the next chapter.

{82}

CHAPTER VI

1889-1890

MANDALAY

It was with difficulty that the British Government had lived so long at peace with Theebaw, King of Burma. In 1883 he sent a mission to Europe, ostensibly to study western civilisation, but it was recognised that in reality he was making advances to the French Government, who were of course our neighbours on the east, in Siam. There was also friction over the demarcation of the Manipur frontier on the west, but the actual ground for the outbreak of hostilities arose over a commercial question. An English trading company found that King Theebaw had sold over again to the French the rights over some forest lands for which the company had paid seven years' tolls in advance. The High Court of Mandalay upheld their sovereign's proceedings, so that the corporation were driven to appeal to the British Government to vindicate their claims. King Theebaw, however, flatly refused to discuss the matter with the Chief Commissioner of {83} Lower Burma. The British Government welcomed the occasion to send an ultimatum to King Theebaw "which aimed at a settlement of all the main matters in dispute between the two Governments,"[1] and simultaneously instructed Sir Harry Prendergast to prepare a force to march on Mandalay.

[1] *Parliamentary Papers* (Burma), 1886.

A defiant answer having been returned by the King, orders for the advance were issued. A fleet of transports was escorted by a few vessels from the Royal Navy up the Irrawaddy. On November 14, 1885, at a point about twenty-eight miles beyond our frontier post at Thayetmyo, the forts at Minhla barred the passage of the river. Our naval guns then opened fire with good effect, and when the troops landed there was no resistance.

Theebaw surrenders

The advance continued, and ten days later a similar engagement took place about seven miles from Ava. After the naval guns had silenced the enemy's artillery, the Hampshire Regiment was landed, and drove the defenders from their entrenchments. At 4 p.m. on November 24 a royal state barge appeared bearing a flag of truce, and a message that the King "was well disposed in mind and heart."[2] To this a reply was sent that nothing less than the unconditional surrender of the King and his capital would satisfy the British Government, and that the response must be received within twelve hours.

[2] Despatch dated January 13, 1886.

The picturesqueness of the scene was so irresistible that even the official despatch breaks into description of the {84} "far-famed city of Ava, with its mouldering monasteries and decaying walls. On the banks are batteries bristling with guns, and parapets alive with scarlet-clad soldiers," etc., etc.

King Theebaw's reply was received by the time specified, and when translated was found to express a frame of mind that was acceptable to the invaders. The subsequent advance from Ava was therefore unopposed, and on November 28 British troops made their way peacefully through the streets of Mandalay. In the afternoon of the next day the King and his Queens and a suitable retinue were conveyed on board a steamer and transported to Rangoon, *en route* to India. As a compliment to their former estate, the escort was detailed from the Royal Navy. It is said that Supya-lat offered violent resistance to this deportation, saying that she would prefer death or any fate at the hands of the Englishmen to life as a state prisoner with her husband. But she had to conform.

By Proclamation on January 1, 1886, Upper Burma was declared a part of the British Empire, and the Chief Commissioner, Sir Charles Bernard, transferred his headquarters from Rangoon to Mandalay.

Dacoity

Sir Harry Prendergast had completed his task in the occupation of the capital, but the subjugation of the vast province of Upper Burma, covering about 100,000 square miles, was a very different matter. The collapse of the Civil Government and the disbanding of the native {85} army led to a state of anarchy. Pretenders sprang up who were exploited by enterprising ex-officers, and became leaders of the various bands of dacoits that infested the land. These armed bands were a terror to the people, for they lived on the country and robbed and looted freely but it was not till we had won the confidence of the peaceable peasants that they would venture to give us information as to the whereabouts of their enemies. The fact that there was no cohesion or community of interest between these marauders made them the more troublesome to suppress, as each one had to be dealt with separately. The pacification of the country was entrusted to Sir George White with a force of three infantry brigades. But as there was no national party in arms against him, so there was no organised resistance; the enemy were not soldiers, but a lawless rabble led by brigands.

In his report of this work in a country which he describes as "one vast military obstacle," he says:

> "The actual resistance offered to our troops was not very trying to disciplined well-armed soldiers, but small bodies of these soldiers have often had to stand up against bands whose numbers were estimated in thousands. Between April 1 and July 31 over one hundred affairs took place, and few days elapsed without the occurrence of fighting in some part of the newly acquired province."[3]

[3] See *Despatch*, July 17, 1886.

{86} After a time it was found possible partially to replace the soldiers by specially recruited armed military police, who were thickly distributed in all the disturbed districts; and gradually the more peaceable inhabitants realised that every time a military raid was organised there would be a smaller number of thieves and robbers left in the land.

When the bulk of Sir George White's expeditionary force was withdrawn, Brigadier-General George Wolseley, who had been commanding the Mandalay Brigade, assumed the command of the permanent garrison. It was as his substitute that Gatacre held the post from October 1889 to October 1890, with a few weeks' interval in the spring. Gatacre had been nearly four years in the same office on the Headquarter Staff, and his letters show that after the departure of General Chapman in April 1889 he was anxiously watching for some new opening for himself. The change to an independent command was very welcome, and not less so was the change from the social life of Headquarters to the wild simplicity of Upper Burma. The military direction of such a vast and unsettled province would provide scope for administration and opportunity for personal exertion—would, in short, afford all the arduous duties in which Gatacre found his delight.

Fort Dufferin

{87} The ancient citadel of Mandalay is now called Fort Dufferin. It consists of a vast quadrilateral enclosure, in the centre of which stands the palace, surrounded by gardens and a high teak-wood stockade. The walls are 10 ft. thick and 29 ft. high; each side of the square is a mile and a quarter in length; at regular intervals there are gates leading to bridges over a moat that is more than 200 ft. wide. Along the walls are numerous picturesque watch-houses with little seven-roofed pagodas over each gate. These buildings provided quarters and offices for both the civil and military departments.

Sir Charles Crosthwaite, who was Chief Commissioner of Burma when Gatacre took up the command, writes:

> "I lived in one of the pagoda erections over a gate in the Mandalay wall, and there was a long flight of steps leading up to my rooms. I can see Sir William now flying up the steps and rushing down them, after he had seen me, and vaulting on to his horse. He was indefatigable."[4]

[4] August 18, 1909.

The reception rooms in the palace itself were fitted up as a club for the officers of the garrison. Some men were playing whist there one evening in November 1889, when Gatacre came in, and going up to one of the players asked him if he knew anything about transport. The officer, busy with his cards, replied "Not a damn!" which elicited the unexpected response:

"Will you be my transport officer?"

When the hand was finished the subaltern turned round, and for the first time perceived who was speaking to him.

"I am afraid you are chaffing me, sir."

{88} "Not at all. The last two transport officers I have had knew everything—one could not teach them anything. Are you willing to learn?"

That officer did his best to learn, and remained Gatacre's transport officer till his regiment left the station. He remembers especially his General's friendly manner, tells us how the dignity and power of his personality enabled him to dispense with the formalities of his position, and to do things which in other men might have resulted in undue familiarity. There was an arrangement by which the other staff officer carried on the work in the office, while the transport officer accompanied the General on all his tours. It is to this officer that we are indebted for the following story.

Maymyo

About forty miles from Mandalay there is a little hill-station called Maymyo, at an elevation of 3,500 ft. It is now full of red-brick buildings, and is the headquarters of the Lieutenant-General commanding the Burma Division, and there is a railway up from Mandalay which runs on to Lashio. But in 1889 Maymyo was but a collection of huts and tents, and the road that led thither was not only execrable to travel on, but infested with robbers. However, it served as a sanatorium, and the sick folk from Mandalay had to brave the dangers of the road. The transport officer had been spending a month at Maymyo with his wife, and, having met with exceptional difficulties in making his journey down, was very much alive to its discomforts. Only two days before another party had been attacked, their native driver killed, and their kit dacoited. {89}

When they met next morning the General told the officer to lay a dak to Maymyo, as he intended going there next day. The thought of doing that journey again so soon was most distasteful, but the officer only asked:

"What time do we start?"

"There is no 'we' in it. You don't go. I am going alone."

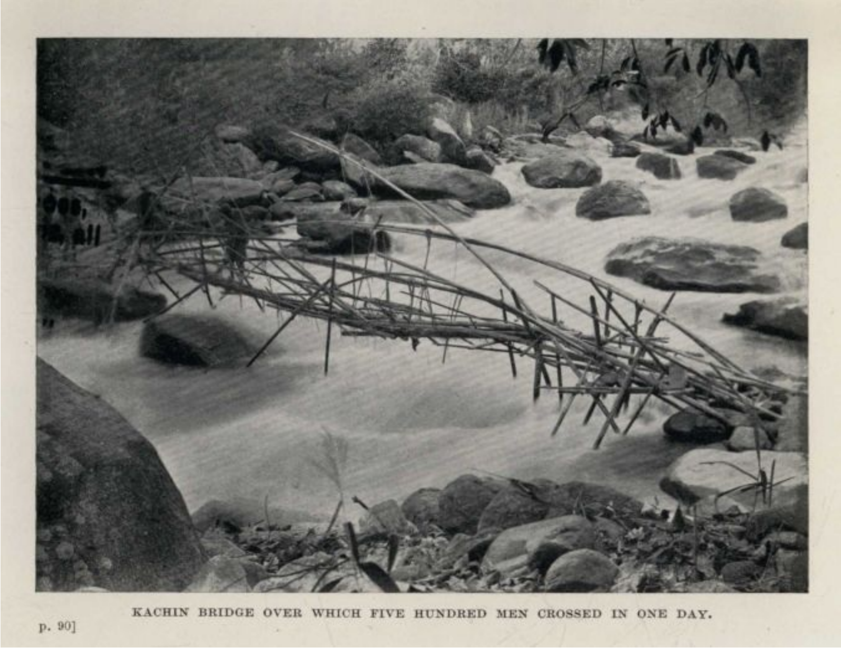
"That's ridiculous!" followed on, with such simplicity and directness that both broke into laughter.

The idea was ridiculous, but it was carried out. The subaltern's pride of office was wounded by his being thus set on one side, but when he realised that it was done out of consideration to himself, and that no one else was taken, he could not but be satisfied. Risk and exertion were like magnets to draw Gatacre; he went alone, dispensing even with an orderly. The fastest and most active ponies were always sent out for the General's use, and it would have been difficult to find man and beast to keep up with him when on such an excursion. He must have made a very early start, for he rode forty miles up into the mountains, inspected the detachment of the Madras Native Infantry quartered there, and returned in time to dine with the Chief Commissioner. There he met Sir Frederick Fryer, to whom he related his day's {90} work. It afterwards transpired that two of the ponies were broken down by the journey, but even for such a mishap the General found a cheerful use. When rallied by one of his commanding officers on this point, he replied:

"Hard on the ponies! Not at all. Why, my dear fellow, it is really a good thing, for the useless ones get weeded out."

In 1886 Sir George White wrote that it would be a "long time before dacoity died of inanition."[5] But British methods, worked with British perseverance, had triumphed over Burmese institutions. In 1889 Sir Charles Crosthwaite could write that "disorder and lawlessness had been put down, and the power of the Government firmly established and fully acknowledged."[6] It was, however, reserved for Gatacre to equip a little expedition which was to penetrate into the Kachin Hills, where a leader known as Kan Hlaing was harassing the country. The General sent the following telegram to Calcutta on November 25, 1889:

"Chief Commissioner has applied for services of troops to operate from Bhamo against Lwe Saing Tonhon Kachins, in Meteilaing, to effect capture or surrender of Kan Hlaing and reduction of Tonhon, the chief town. After effecting this, to march southwards in Binhong and attack pretender Sairyawuiniz. A column to co-operate from Ruby Mines district, marching on Momeit. Bhamo Column to consist of {91} 75 rifles Hants, two guns No. 2 Bombay, 100 rifles 17th Bengal Infantry, and 250 rifles Mogoung Levy. Momeit Column to consist of 50 rifles Hants, 150 Bengal Native Infantry from Mandalay. Have complied with his wishes, made all necessary arrangements. Column will start from Bhamo Dec. 1. The Momeit Column will reach Momeit about Dec. 10. Solicits Army's approval."


KACHIN BRIDGE OVER WHICH FIVE HUNDRED MEN CROSSED IN ONE DAY.

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Kachin Bridge over which five hundred men crossed in one day

The Bhamo Column was under Major Blundell's command, and the Momeit Column under Major Greenway. Lwe Saing was captured on December 23, and Tonhon on the 24th, after sharp fighting. Early in January the force crossed the Shweli River, which was a fierce mountain torrent, so strong that the rafts were swept away, and a man drowned. The passage over the various rocky streams was a great difficulty; in one place a swinging bridge was rigged up with transport ropes and timber; on another occasion the whole column of five to six hundred men with their stores were passed over the Kachin Bridge shown in the picture. A report arrived that the rebel Prince Sawanai and the dacoit leader, Kan Hlaing, were strongly stockaded at Manton, three marches farther on, and that he had a following of 2,000 men. The two columns met as arranged, and captured the village, though it was fiercely defended. Before the force left Manton, Brigadier-General Gatacre and Colonel Strover, the Commissioner, joined the column.

The following letters give the General's own impressions of the country.

{92}

1890

IN THE DEFILE JUST BELOW BHAMO,

February 8, 1890.

"We expect a first-class trip, and should be away about six weeks. We take a month's provisions with us, and a fortnight's follow us. There is a great charm to me in going into quite an unknown country, full of wild beasts and savages; there is nearly every animal under the sun said to be in these jungles, and the place has every appearance of it: tracks of all sorts along the river-banks. But we shall soon see for ourselves. I fancy the scenery will be grand, and we shall probably get many beautiful orchids."

BERNARDMYO, *March* 20, 1890.

"I have only a moment for a line to say I've 'come out alive' at this end of the country, which is fortunate. It is one of the roughest journeys I have ever done, and we have been wet through for days, with no change possible; great mountains, with only goat tracks to move by, had to be climbed two or three times in the day, which made going most tedious. By marching from 5 a.m. to 6 and sometimes 7 p.m. we could only do thirty miles a day; this was for a ten days' movement, so you may imagine the country is rough. It's a magnificent land, however—wild elephants, lots of tigers, and beasts of every description everywhere, and the inhabitants perfect savages, but clever beyond measure at agriculture in their valleys, and on the hill-sides at weaving, knitting, basket-work, etc., of all kinds. I went to find the column I sent out some three months ago, and found it about 150 miles off; they had had a good deal of fighting, and lost a matter of

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[5] *Despatch*, August 18, 1886.

[6] *Report of Administration*, August 1887 to August 1889.

{93} thirty men, which was unfortunate, but it might have been more. I have ordered them all back, except 100 men to hold a post at Mantone, for if the rains commence I should never get them back at all, owing to the impossibility of the roads. I never saw such a desperate country for roads, as they call them; a goat would be puzzled with some of them.

"I hope the Squire and all of you are well. How I should like to see you all, and have a dinner at Gatacre! I have not had any real good food for about two months, but, though rough, we enjoy what we do get."

A rough journey

Though the leader Kan Hlaing succeeded in effecting his escape, the expedition had good effect, for his following was dispersed and his prestige broken. To all those who had taken part in this "rough journey" it brought another clasp to their medal.

On March 27 Brigadier-General Wolseley reached Mandalay on his return from leave, and took over the command next day. But before two months were out, he was wanted to officiate elsewhere, and Gatacre was sent back to Mandalay. He had been very sorry to "give up charge," and was proportionately pleased to resume the command. In his letters he speaks of having initiated many experiments which interested him very much. Writing to his sister in July 1890, he says:

"I have commenced a Government farm here on a large scale, about eight hundred acres at present, but will run up to four or five {94} thousand acres. I have started elephant ploughs, as the ground is so hard owing to want of rain that the ordinary bullock plough is not strong enough, and if we do not plough now the season will be too far gone to enable us to get a crop off the ground this year. The elephant plough has to be specially made, or the brute will pull it to pieces; sometimes they get frightened, and then it is best to clear out, for though the plough weighs half a ton, it is nothing to a frightened elephant, who goes straight home with it through everything. I hope to send you a report on the working of the farm just now; the Squire would like to read it. I wish I had that big plough here that we used to have at Coton; it would be just the thing for this land. I forget how many horses it took, but I should put a couple of elephants in."

Down with fever

During these summer months he suffered repeatedly from fever.

THE PALACE, MANDALAY,

July 22, 1890.

"I have got influenza, which is a great nuisance, as it keeps me from my work, and the doctor warns me solemnly not to go in draughts and to keep out of the sun; but as my present abode is merely a large gilt shed, about thirty yards square, with looking-glass panels open to the four winds of heaven, it is rather difficult to follow his advice. Fortunately the open air always agreed with me, and I feel better to-day, so I hope I may soon be all right again. The rain keeps off, and I am afraid we shall have a famine if we do not get heavy rain soon, for the rice will fail. I wish I could hear somewhat of my future; it is a nuisance being left in doubt as to what I am going to do.

{95} "I wish I had the services of Payne for a bit in the palace gardens; I would make them so pretty. We have rocks, grass, water, everything that one could wish to work upon, but have no artistic people who understand gardening. I am working at it, and getting seeds, and hope to make it a pretty place by-and-by."

MYINGYAN, IRRAWADDY,

August 30, 1890.

"When I last wrote I was in full steam down the Irrawaddy with the Chief Commissioner, but I got a bad go of fever, and the doctor put me ashore, as he thought I would have a better chance. I was rather bad, but the cool breeze on the bank has made a wonderful change, and has quite pulled me round. I've had no fever since I came, and am beginning to feel all right again. Of course, I haven't much walk in me, but that soon comes back with food—that's of course the difficulty in a place like this, but I've managed to get hold of a few chickens and cook them with my servant. Some of them have turned out a success, others smell of kerosine oil, but they all have to be eaten, so it doesn't much matter. I mean to go back to Mandalay in three or four days, and shall be glad to get on my horse again, for it doesn't suit me to be on my back. I have lots to do, and have a man to write from dictation, which saves me writing out long official letters, but still I'm anxious about many things which are being carried out at Mandalay. This place is just opposite Pakoko, where John commanded for a long time, and is very pretty, especially now the river is in full flood, miles across (five or six at least)."

{96} S.S. "GEORGE,"
ON THE IRRAWADDY ABOVE MANDALAY,

September 22, 1890.

"I'm off on my travels again, you see. We started this morning on inspection duty at Bhamo and Shwebo. We should arrive at the former place on 26th. We stay there two days, and then come down to Shwebo on right bank of river; the trip will do me good, I think, and will give me some relaxation while on board. I'm better, but not up to much yet.

"I heard from the C.-in-C. Bombay, Sir George Greaves, to the effect that he was applying for my services as A.G. of Bombay Army. If I get this it will be nice, and I should see a good deal of John. It's a long time since I've seen him now.

"The quail here have been abundant, and the snipe are coming in, but no bags have been made yet. I only speak from hearsay, as I have been unable to go out myself, as you will understand.

"I wish you could all run up the river with me on this steamer; you would enjoy the voyage—such beautiful scenery, and such a river."

A new post

In October the "rightful owner" returned to the command at Mandalay, and Gatacre handed over finally. He brought away many specimens of Burmese art and handicraft. His own artistic faculties enabled him to appreciate all that was quaint or interesting in every locality that he visited. In later life he took great pleasure in showing his friends the objects of value or beauty that he had collected, and {97} evidently looked back on these years of strenuous service with real delight.

From Mandalay he brought away a teak-wood drum that had belonged to King Theebaw. It is cut out of a solid trunk, and stands about three feet from the ground, weighs about a ton, and is covered with the most exquisite carving. He took special pleasure in this piece of furniture, and in a beautiful silver plate from the Shan States.

In November 1890 Gatacre relinquished his substantive post at Headquarters, on his appointment as Adjutant-General to the Bombay Army, with the temporary and local rank of Brigadier-General.

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CHAPTER VII

1890-1894

POONA

Brigadier-General Gatacre took over the duties of Adjutant-General to the Bombay Army on November 25, 1890, under Sir George Greaves as Commander-in-Chief.

His deputy in the office was surprised to find that Gatacre was not so regular in his attendance as might have been expected, and noticed other signs that suggested that he was unhappy and had something on his mind. His colleague was quite right. Gatacre was indeed passing through a severe and prolonged trial, one about which he could take no one into his confidence. To his highly strung nature, in which the loftiest integrity was allied to the tenderest human feelings, a blow such as had fallen upon him must have wrung every fibre, and there is no doubt that he writhed under it.

In adversity

It was about this time that the General was bitten in the hand by a jackal that was said to be mad. His nerves being already unduly strained, the poison (or the thought of it) got such a {99} hold on him that the howling of the jackals kept him awake at night, and a terror even possessed him of their coming in through the open windows. So real was this obsession that he ordered iron railings to be fixed outside, and by thus convincing himself of the impossibility of such a thing, he gradually conquered the fantasies of his sick brain, triumphed over his sleeplessness, and reaped the benefit to his general health.

What was really preying on his mind was not generally known till his friends read of the dissolution of his marriage. Gatacre was the petitioner, and there was no defence. This news gave rise to a strong feeling of sympathy with a man whose probity was unquestioned, and whose attractive appearance and genial manners had already made him a favourite in Poona. There was in Gatacre a depth of faithful affection which nothing could kill; the generosity and kindliness of his judgment forbad his harbouring any thought of blame, and he clung with unaltered loyalty to memories of the past.

Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.

It is from this time that we find him working with an *acharnement*, with a restless and passionate self-obliteration that became an unconquerable habit. Ambition stepped in to revive his interest in his profession, and the service of his neighbour provided occupation for his leisure hours.

{100} 1890-4

Poona is not only the Headquarters of the Bombay Army, but for a good part of the year it is the residence of the Governor of the Bombay Presidency. In the hot weather both civil and military officials retire to the country life of Mahabuleshwar, and in the cold weather spend a few weeks in Bombay City. Thus all the year round there was a succession of official and social engagements; every one had rather more to do than there was time for in office hours, and every one wanted to put in an appearance at such social functions as appealed to his particular tastes. Gatacre not only took part in all these events, but was the prime mover and organiser of everything that went on—no committee of management, no horse-show, gymkhana, or display was complete without his name. Amongst other details the programmes engaged his particular attention. He had a special chalk which, when used on prepared paper, could be reproduced as a lithograph by a very simple process. He rapidly gained great facility in the use of this medium, and there is now quite a remarkable series of exquisite drawings that were thus reproduced. A lively sense of humour animates some of these efforts, more especially those that did duty as hunt-cards. The card was the size of foolscap paper; each season had a new drawing, but all were variations of the study of foxes, while words were put into their mouths expressing the sentiments of the quarry towards Doctor Bull's hounds.

{101} A.G.

The position of Adjutant-General is one of great influence, and this influence Gatacre invariably used to promote the cause of uprightness and true benevolence. There was no red-tape about him; he was always accessible to all ranks, and instantly ready to deal with any emergency.

On one occasion the friends of a young officer wanted to get him out of the way of temptation—the Adjutant-General detailed him to some outlying station. On the other hand, a young cavalry officer from Mhow, who was engaged to a lady in Poona, found himself unexpectedly detained at Headquarters by the A.G. If an officer and his family on their arrival were unable to find quarters, the A.G. would take the whole party in, regardless of any previous acquaintance. In the club one day Gatacre noticed the name of a young officer on the Headquarter Staff posted up as having failed to pay his club account. He sent for the officer and paid his bill, choosing to come himself to the rescue rather than that a young fellow in an honourable post should suffer disgrace. Thus many an unrecorded kindness, many a deed of silent sacrifice, showed the natural generosity of his heart, showed his freedom from any taint of bitterness. Instinctively and deliberately he endeavoured to obliterate his own sorrow by adding to the happiness of others, and in this way surrounded himself with an atmosphere of esteem and gratitude which reacted powerfully for his own benefit. The {102} officer who succeeded him as Adjutant-General had worked in his office for some time, and he now writes that the thought of him revives the "deep impression of what a dear, good fellow he was, and how hospitable and kind."

1891

Gatacre's efforts at hospitality once gave rise to much amusement on the one part and dismay on the other. He usually kept but a small staff of servants, and dined at the club of Western India; but when there was some special gaiety going on, he would fill his house with guests from the outlying stations, and instruct his bearer to engage a good cook and other servants for the necessary period. At the Poona Race Week one year Gatacre's friends were complimenting him on the excellence of his arrangements, and stories were related as to the enormities of which native cooks are sometimes guilty in the preparation of the Sahib's food, and of their troublesome ways in general. One lady was particularly eloquent on the annoyance of having had to part with her khansama only a few days before in order that he might go and nurse his wife, who was dying. Some one suggested a tour of inspection round Gatacre's house, which he had held up as a model establishment. When the party reached the cook-house, I leave you to imagine the lady's surprise and amusement at finding her own truant cook installed for the nonce in her host's kitchen!

His easy camaraderie of manner was so remarkable that a friend once asked Gatacre whether he had ever found {103} that people took advantage of it, and treated him with undue familiarity, to which he replied that he had never known them try. He defended himself with a dry and subtle humour. Assuming an impenetrable blandness of manner, he would on occasion utter sarcasms so veiled that some men could scarcely tell whether he was in earnest or not. He was never angry, but he had a command of quiet language that made his remarks as stinging as they were humorous. The man on the pillory would feel the sting, and the onlooker would see the humour.

When another friend asked him why he was taking so much trouble over a matter that appeared outside the sphere of his interests, and scarcely worthy of the attention that he was lavishing on it, his reply seemed weighted with reproof as he said: "I don't think I ever knew what the meaning of the word trouble was."

Goes on tour

In the province of Bombay the inspections take place in the cold weather between November and March; a spell of hot weather then precedes the break of the monsoon early in June. The rains last till September, and are followed by another spell of hot weather, till the air cools down again to quite a pleasant temperature in November. The first inspection tour arranged for the end of 1891 included a visit to the regiments quartered at Kamptee in the Central Provinces. Kamptee was the Headquarters of the Nagpur District, to the command of which Brigadier-General John Gatacre, C.B., had been recently gazetted. To those {104} who have heard of "inspection fever" (and even the best officers are not always immune), it will be obvious that the station must have been in rather a commotion at the idea of a visit from the Commander-in-chief only four days after the arrival of a new General Officer Commanding. But the new General was well known and trusted in Kamptee, for he had already been in the station for three years while in command of his regiment.

A railway accident

Between 6 and 7 a.m. on November 5 the General was on the platform of Nagpur Station awaiting the arrival of the train, when a telegraphic message came in, saying that there had been a serious railway accident to the Chief's train about nine miles away. A message was sent back for medical assistance, and as soon as possible a break-down gang was got together, but it was nearly 11 o'clock before the relief train reached the spot. General John tells us that the sight that greeted him was more shocking than any battlefield. Eight men of the North Lancashire Regiment were killed outright, twenty-four were severely injured; a European guard, both drivers and both firemen were killed; five native passengers were also killed and eight wounded. Beyond this total of eighteen deaths, four soldiers died within the next few days in hospital. The framework of the carriages, the iron rails, and the men's rifles—everything was amazingly crumpled up and distorted.

The permanent way at this spot runs along a thirty-foot embankment. The whole train was derailed, both engines {105} with their tenders, a horse-box, and five or six coaches had rolled to the bottom of the slope; the next carriage, in which Sir George Greaves had been travelling, was suspended half-way down the bank at an angle of 45°, the body having been completely wrenched away from the platform; and the last coach, which had been occupied by the staff officers—Gatacre, Hogg, and Leach—was hanging in the most precarious position over the edge.

It turned out that the train was unusually long and heavy that day, as it was bringing some fifty men of the North Lancashire Regiment back from Chi-Kulda, a civil hill-station in the Berars, where a few sickly men had been sent as an experiment. When the railway officials at Budnari Junction found that the three coaches set aside for the use of the Headquarter Staff had also to be attached, they feared that the engine would not be powerful enough to pull the train up a certain incline, and gave directions that a spare engine (which was meant only for local shunting work) should be put on in front. This supplementary engine was the cause of the misfortune, for the tyres of its wheels, having been mended, gave way under the unusual strain of a long journey. The front engine left the metals, and, rolling over, pulled the whole train along with it.

The great majority of the fatal cases were of course in the first two coaches, in which the soldiers were unfortunately travelling. Some (of the poor fellows suffered fearfully from scalding, over and above terrible fractures and {106} injuries; some were so inextricably wedged in amongst the wreckage that it was not till the relief train came up with jacks and crowbars that anything could be done to relieve their excruciating sufferings. None of the staff officers were hurt, but Colonel Hogg had a narrow escape, for the end compartment, in which he had been shaving a few minutes earlier, was completely staved in by impact with the Chief's coach in front.

In the official report forwarded by Sir George Greaves we read:

> "I desire to record with pleasure that the officers of the Headquarter Staff were conspicuous in their efforts to release the injured from the wreck of the train, especially Brigadier-General Gatacre, A.G., Lieutenant-Colonel Leach, Military Secretary, and Captain Peyton, A.D.C., all of whom, at considerable personal risk, worked in under the overturned engines and carriages to get at the wounded."

There were also miraculous escapes. A gymnastic sergeant was travelling in the first coach with two small dogs on his knees. Owing apparently to his trained activity, he was able to leap through the window, and thus escaped without injury from a compartment where all his companions were killed.

As soon as possible the wounded were sent on into Kamptee under the charge of their companions, and it was three o'clock before the train got back again to pick up the staff officers.

{107}

"Such good sons"

On his arrival in Kamptee a telegram was handed to Gatacre, informing him of his father's death. This was not unexpected, but for both brothers it must have added a more profound and personal sadness to the horrors with which the day had begun; and as next day they listened to the Service read over the poor young fellows who had been so suddenly struck down, their hearts must have been at Gatacre, where the same words would soon be read over the old man of eighty-six whom they had so sincerely loved and reverenced. Only a few days earlier they had sent a telegram of farewell in their joint names; and in due course had the satisfaction of hearing that it had arrived just in time to please the dying man, who murmured in response, "I thank God for such good sons."

On April 1, 1893, Lieutenant-General Sir John Hudson took over command of the Bombay Army; only two months later he was killed by a fall from his horse. The Commander-in-Chief was taking his usual ride with Colonel Leach, his Military Secretary, before breakfast on the morning of June 9, when his horse stumbled heavily, throwing Sir John forward on his head. Six weeks earlier Sir James Dormer, Commander-in-Chief in Madras, had met with his death while out tiger-shooting, so that this further catastrophe came with added force to the sister Presidency.

Gatacre had written home a few days before, saying how genial and kindly he found his new chief, with whom he {108} was already on intimate terms. It was always a great satisfaction to him to think that the horse which had made the blunder was not one of his choosing, for Sir John had already sought his advice in the matter of getting himself provided with chargers. As chief staff officer it fell to him to make all the arrangements for the imposing ceremony that took place at 8.30 a.m. on the day following the tragedy. Lord Harris, the Governor, came down from Panchguni for the occasion. By special instructions he placed a wreath on the coffin in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, and numberless similar tributes showed the respectful sympathy of the whole army. The Guard of Honour was furnished by the 2nd Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers; all the troops in garrison, both in Poona and Kirkee, accompanied by massed bands, took part in the solemn procession. It is said that five thousand men attended the funeral, and that the whole was so admirably thought out and arranged in the short space of time that no confusion or difficulty arose at any point.

Hands over

In due course Sir Charles Nairne, R.A., became Commander-in-Chief of the Bombay Army. He was the last of the race, for during his tenure of the office its name was changed, and he handed over as Lieutenant-General Commanding the Bombay Army Corps. The office of Adjutant-General was also renamed, but that was not until after Gatacre had been succeeded by General Reginald Curteis. Sir Charles was the third Chief under whom Gatacre had served in this capacity in less than three years. But as {109} these changes made no difference to Gatacre's loyal service, so there seems to have been no difference in the high esteem in which his seniors held him. When he relinquished his post, some eighteen months later, the same cordial regard had grown up which he always contrived to win from all those with whom he was associated either officially or socially. When I came to live in the command, about two years later, there was no household from whom I received a more genuine welcome than from Sir Charles and Lady Nairne and their personal staff.

Early in 1894 the Adjutant-General was appointed to the command of the military district that had its headquarters at Bombay.

{110}

CHAPTER VIII

1894-1895

BOMBAY

Colara

Although the climate of Bombay, which is situated on the nineteenth parallel, did not offer the attractions of Poona, and although the appointment brought no promotion in army rank, still Gatacre welcomed the change of work, and the accession of dignity and opportunity afforded by an independent command. On January 30, 1894, his selection for the command of the Bombay District was gazetted, and shortly afterwards he moved into the bungalow in the Marine Lines, which then formed the official residence. Of this quaint building he was the last tenant, for three years later this relic of Old Bombay and its naval neighbour disappeared under the consuming flame of the Plague Commission.

This house and the adjacent one which sheltered the Admiral were historic erections, being survivals of the days when the Englishman first pitched his moving tent in these regions. For the original canvas covering of the tent, "jaffray-work," or plaited palm-leaves, had been substituted, which had to be renewed each year just before the monsoon broke; {111} this roof was supported on wooden columns that were the successors of the original tent-poles, and made a quaint feature in all the rooms. The canvas walls of the tent had been replaced by Venetian shutters; the doors were made of cotton stuff stretched on a frame, which left a large space above and below the eye-line. The deep verandah, on which greenhouse creepers sprawled luxuriantly, covered a space wide enough to allow of dining and sleeping out-of-doors.

The weather is warm all the year round, and becomes exceedingly damp and oppressive in the spring and autumn, while in the summer the monsoon winds bring a rainfall of nearly 300 inches in three months. White uniform is worn throughout the year, even on full-dress occasions. At the extreme point of the island, in the breeziest and healthiest situation, there are barracks for one British regiment, and hard by is the beautiful chapel raised as a memorial to those who fell in the Afghan Campaign of 1849. It was an exceedingly pretty sight to see a regiment of men all clad in spotless white file into their places on a Sunday morning. The rifle regiments wear their black buttons and ornaments, and one would say that nothing could be smarter, until the reliefs bring another corps, who with their gold buttons and belts produce a more brilliant effect.

{112} According to the military classification, Bombay is a Second-class District, held by a Brigadier-General, who is not really a General Officer, but a full colonel with temporary rank. A First-class District is held by a Major-General, whose importance is further marked by the presence of an A.D.C. There is, however, so much ceremonial work peculiar to Bombay that the General often wished that he had been granted the services of such a young officer, as a way of saving his regular staff.

Transports

Gatacre held this command for more than three years—from January 1894 to July 1897—but for eight months in the summer of the second year, 1895, he was on active service in Chitral, and for the same period in 1896 he was officiating at Quetta. Owing to the difference in climate he thus served for five drill seasons in succession. Although these two short episodes will be dealt with separately, the fact that he did duty through the cold weather for three seasons in Bombay seems to justify also a study of the conditions peculiar to that command.

So far as the passenger traffic is concerned, Bombay is the port of India. It is the quickest route to all the provinces, even as far east as Calcutta. All the transports between England and India call at Bombay, and the vast majority of troops are there embarked and disembarked. In consideration of the work entailed in arranging the transport service, an extra Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General was allowed on the staff; practically this department of the staff office was the {113} shipping agency for all the reliefs throughout India. Not only had the transhipping and railway arrangements to be made for every regiment on its arrival and departure, and for drafts of men from every branch of the service, but privilege passages had to be allotted to the innumerable officers and their families who, when going home on leave, hoped to avail themselves of the chance of a vacancy on a transport. The rule in allotting these passages was that the junior officer should take precedence, Government having apparently in mind that their scale of pay gave them the first title to consideration. At the same time, senior officers were often needed to take command of a ship full of details, and sometimes had to be searched for, Army nursing sisters, too, had special claims.

All these conflicting interests gave rise to almost as many private letters as there were official applications. Ladies and children would come and live in Bombay in the hope of securing a vacancy at the eleventh hour—a device which was often successful. There were numberless hard cases and jealousies over these passages, and many funny stories were told. It was whispered that if an applicant called in person on the General, her chances would be in direct proportion to her personal attractions. The amount of baggage allowed was also a source of infinite vexation. Once a nursing sister, who had recently married an army surgeon, asked to be allowed to send her effects under her maiden name, as the scale {114} of baggage allowed in her professional capacity was slightly higher than that considered sufficient for a captain's wife.

During the loading and unloading of these transports an officer of the General's staff had to be continuously on duty to attend to any matter that might arise, and to check the freight, live and dead. This was a tedious and very irksome duty, and, considering the amount of work going on in the office during the winter months, the time thus spent could be ill spared. The General made a practice of calling in person on all transports immediately before their departure, at whatever hour it might be, and soon after their arrival. If a homeward-bound vessel was starting on a midnight tide, he would dine in his picturesque white mess-dress, and thus be ready to go and pay his official visit of farewell. The house was a long way from the Bunder, so that this duty involved a drive of more than a mile, and a run across the harbour in the Government launch, which was always at his disposal. In that intensely Oriental setting the thrill of living (as it were) in the exchange, and seeing the great ships that go down to the sea carrying their load of joyful anticipations, was irresistibly moving. Gatacre was thus on terms of personal friendship with all the captains, and used to ask them to his own house. As a Christmas recognition of such attentions, the captain of the *Victoria* sent up a specially selected sirloin of English beef one year on the morning of December 25. All who have tasted Indian beef will know that this was a rare delicacy.

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The Navy

But transports were not the only vessels in Bombay Harbour. There were ships from the Royal Navy, ships from the foreign navies, and Peninsular and Oriental weekly mails, outward and homeward bound.

Between the navy and the army there was a strict etiquette regarding the exchange of visits. Writing from Bombay on November 3, 1909, General Swann tells us that—

"The procedure in the matter of ceremonial calling was for a staff officer to go on board within twenty-four hours of a ship's arrival and arrange for the exchange of visits between the captain and the general; the first visit was made by whichever was the junior of the two, and both visits were supposed to be over within the twenty-four hours."

Such official visiting had also to be attended to with great punctuality in the case of foreign warships, and on these occasions a bottle of champagne would be produced at any hour, and the health of the respective sovereigns ceremoniously toasted. The General particularly exerted himself to entertain these foreign guests. When a Russian vessel was in the harbour he asked the captain and three or four officers to breakfast at his house, inviting some ladies who could talk French to come and entertain them. On another occasion, when an Italian vessel lay at anchor, the General writes:

{116} "I got up in the middle of the night last night to take the Duke of Savoy and his staff out hunting to-day. He thoroughly enjoyed himself, galloped to his heart's content, made himself very sore at the knees, and came home perfectly happy. I got back just in time to dress for parade service, but could not get time for breakfast. Went to church, and got back to luncheon at 2.30."

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The hunting days in Bombay were Thursday and Sunday mornings; horses were sent on overnight. The meet was at daybreak at a place reached after about forty minutes in a train that left the station at 4.30 a.m. Hounds moved off as soon as the light allowed. It was a sporting country, for there were plenty of jackals, and the ground varied from soft ricefields, enclosed by Irish banks, to hard rock and heavy sand in which prickly-pear hedges were disagreeably abundant. The hunt usually returned to the Jackal Club Camp in time for the 8.30 train, and all the men got back in time to be at their offices by 10 o'clock. Every one in Bombay has an office of some sort, for no one would live there unless forced thereto by the necessity of fulfilling their vocation.

Another feature of the Bombay command was the constant semi-official attendances at the railway station and elsewhere. Whenever His Excellency the Governor, or His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief, or His Excellency the Admiral Commanding the East Indian Squadron passed through the station, the General Officer Commanding was there to receive him, or to see him off as the occasion demanded.

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Guests

It was also his pleasure to meet any friends, official or private, who might be arriving or departing by the mail. There was hardly a week when his launch was not in attendance on the mail-boats. These usually arrived at daybreak, but for Gatacre no hour was too early. One morning the mail was to bring a general officer who was on his way to take over a command up-country. His son, already appointed as A.D.C., had come down to Bombay to meet his father, and had called at the Staff Office on the previous day. The General offered to take him on board in his launch, as he was himself going to fetch his guest home to breakfast, and named the hour. But when the General stepped into the launch next morning the A.D.C. was nowhere visible on the Bunder. Afterwards the young man turned up, and his father said with a carelessnesss of speech which Gatacre was quick to detect: "May I introduce you to my son?" To which Gatacre replied: "You may bring him up to me if you like."

It was one of the paradoxes of Gatacre's character that he was sometimes as punctilious about fine shades of etiquette as he was on other occasions kindly when such subtleties interfered with his mood or his purpose.

All through the cold weather the General's house was full. There were the friends going by the mail to whom an invitation would be of the greatest convenience; there were the friends arriving by the mail who must stay one night to {118} clear their baggage before starting up-country; there were the friends who had entertained him when inspecting at their station, and whose daughters would enjoy the gaiety of the city. He was very fond of ladies, and minutely thoughtful for every detail which might contribute to their comfort or pleasure while in his house.

Over and above all these calls on his time there was still the soldiering. The district covered a considerable area, extending northward as far as Cutch-Bhuj in Kathywarj and including many inland stations such as Ahmedabad, Baroda, Surat, and Khandalla. There was also a detachment of the Marine Battalion in the Persian Gulf. All the arrangements had been made for an official visit to Bushire in the spring of 1896, and it was with great reluctance that the General gave up this trip when he found himself under orders for Quetta.

It was the soldiering that he loved, and it was for this love of the soldiering that he deliberately overworked himself. No personal considerations had any weight. Having no one at home to watch over him, he became recklessly irregular at his meals, and would sit up to all hours of the night writing—endlessly writing. What kept him going were the trips up-country to inspect the outlying regiments and detachments; for in the train he would make up his arrears of sleep, and the rules of politeness secured his punctual attendance at meal-time. The uncertainty of his hours was a matter of some {119} comment at the office, where no doubt it gave rise to considerable inconvenience, and probably not less troublesome was his habit of utterly disregarding the usual luncheon interval. The General was playfully conscious of all these misdemeanours, for on bidding good-bye to his chief staff officer on his departure for Quetta, he said:

Office hours

"Now you will be all right—with a brand-new General whom you can educate to attend the office regularly at eleven, and go home to tiffin at two."

This officer, however, bore him no grudge for his vagaries, and now writes with great affection of his old Chief.

POONA, *September* 17, 1909.

"As his staff officer there were two points he used to impress on me—'No difficulty' and 'No finality.' Difficulties, like hills, were useful for the exercise they give in surmounting them. There is no difficulty that cannot be overcome somehow. No finality is the watch-word of progress. What may seem best to-day can be improved upon to-morrow, but that is no reason for deferring action indefinitely: 'The best is the enemy of the good.' Act on what seems good at the moment, and trust to time and opportunity to find something better to act on later. But act, and act promptly. This, I think, sums up the principles he tried to instil into me, and his example illustrates his teaching.

"I never served under a chief who thought more quickly, decided more readily, or acted more promptly."

{120} During the last week of November 1894 the Viceroy, Lord Elgin, arranged to hold a Durbar at Lahore. There was to be a great gathering of the native princes of the Punjab, and a concentration of British, Native, and Imperial Service troops. The Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief both had large camps, to which they invited guests from all parts of India. Having received the offer of a tent and the hospitality of his camp from Sir George White, Gatacre selected the two best-looking chargers in his stable and repaired to Lahore in the highest spirits.

In a letter written a little later, however, he confesses that it was not the attractions of the Durbar that took him so

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far out of his command at such a busy time of the year, but the expectation of seeing some one again whom he had recently met as she passed through Bombay. For the guests a Durbar week is a holiday; the General was a free man—he had only to look on and enjoy himself. There were many official functions where every one was gloriously apparelled, but he looked as splendid as any in that brilliant company; and there were many social festivities which afforded opportunity for daily intercourse. It was during the picturesque pageants of the Lahore Week that I came under the spell of the General's charm. To know him was to love him, as many another has since said to me. During that week we learnt to know one another, and at the end of it he {121} wrote a frank manly letter to my father, Lord Davey, begging him to sanction the idea of our marriage. I regret that the kindly reply to his honest exposition of the whole matter has not been preserved; its purport being in accordance with our hopes, the engagement was made known, and I had the gratification of hearing my General's praises on all sides.

In some letters of December 1894 he intentionally writes about himself, and supplies us with the incentives which inspired him.

> "I am always thinking of how I can get on, not for the sake of the money it brings, but for soldiering itself."

And again:

Soldiering first

> "I hope you will not mind my love of soldiering and work; it has such a fascination for me, I am inclined to put it first always. But my love for you will stand out first, and your love for me will enable me to carry out my work at personal inconvenience to ourselves, won't it? You see I am cunningly trying to get you to overlook my endeavours to think of soldiering as the first thing, but, dear, you will always be in my heart all the time."

Perhaps it was by contrast with the slackness natural to the soft climate of Bombay that Gatacre's indomitable spirit attracted so much attention. Colonel James Arnott writes:

> "Working, as I did, in the Civil Department, I had no official association with your husband, and it was only when he commanded the {122} Bombay District that I got to know him at all well. I was much impressed by his keen interest in his profession, his strong *esprit de corps*, his enthusiasm for work, and the activity and strength which enabled him to carry it on in a way to stimulate others. I have a clear recollection of his active figure and his first-rate horsemanship, riding, as he often used to do, bare-backed, an indication of character and of those qualities so necessary in a soldier.
>
> "General Gatacre took his share in everything of public interest in Bombay, but I shall only refer to the very successful Assault-at-Arms which he organised—the first and best thing of the kind that I saw in my long residence in Bombay."[1]

[1] September 13, 1909.

The first tournament

This tournament was a great event. The large grass-covered enclosure known as the Oval was borrowed from the Municipality for the purpose of a Grand Naval and Military Display and Assault-at-Arms. This space, flanked on one side by the Town Hall, and on the other open to the sea, offered every facility for such an undertaking. Admiral Kennedy, who was in residence for Christmas, willingly co-operated; his handy men rendered most valuable assistance, the naval element lending a distinction of which only a Bombay Assault-at-Arms could boast. An attractive programme was made out and entries were invited from all the stations in India.

It was of course necessary to get subscriptions and guarantees; but the General was already personally acquainted {123} with all the leading men in Bombay, and had no difficulty in getting what he wanted. The Governor and the resident native princes gave their support and patronage, and many wealthy merchants, realising the great local expenditure that such a tamasha must involve, contributed generously. In the friendly relations established with the citizens of Bombay over the multifarious business of this tournament lay the secret of the facility with which Gatacre two years later won them to accept his views about segregation.

Every detail of the entertainment had the General's personal attention; his fertile brain organised and perfected the whole and every part, his hands painted the scenery of the Soudan Village, his horse carried the officer's daughter who, in the gay uniform of the Royal Horse Artillery, opened the proceedings by presenting His Excellency the Governor with a programme in a silver case. The incessant labour entailed by this vast undertaking, and the strain necessary to honour all its calls upon him while carrying on simultaneously the routine of his official life, can be best expressed in his own words.

Writing on the Thursday before the tournament, which was to open on Monday, December 17, he says:

> "Before I met you I thought there was only one thing in the world, and that was soldiering; now I think there are two, but the soldiering is at present the only one I have got. I have been busy to-day, and in a fever about the whole thing. I have been calling on the {124} Italian ship, drinking 'The King and Italy,' again very bad when one has fever, I should say; but no matter, the champagne was very good. The levee is just over, the whole world pouring before Lord Harris, and now I am going to paint till about 3 a.m. to-morrow. I have half a town to do, and no one seems able to originate anything."

On the 18th, after the first day's performance, he writes:

> "What will you say to me, not writing to you yesterday? But if you only knew the sort of day I have had! First I was busy in the office, could not move from my chair till 4 o'clock p.m.; then I had to dress and meet H.E. the C.-in-C. at the station at 4.45, then to meet the Admiral at the Apollo Bunder a mile away at 5 o'clock—all official receptions; then to go to the Tournament to see all was right, finish painting scenery, entertain the Governor's party at dinner, go to the Tournament, watch it till 1 a.m., then drink 'the King and Italy' with the Italian officers, who remained till the last. Finally, at 2 a.m., commence to count with an enormous staff of clerks 10,000 tickets, to see if the money was right. You see, I am responsible, and I like to be sure what we are doing. Well, dearest, the thing was a tremendous success. We sold 10,000 Rs. worth of tickets last night, shall sell probably 11,000 Rs. to-night, and so on.

Tent-pegging

> "Everything went well. The light was not as good as I should wish, but it was fair. We had no accident in the ring, but got a horse killed afterwards, his leg being broken by a kick.... Well, I finished these beastly tickets at 4 a.m., and at 7 had to go tent-pegging for an hour, and since then have never sat down, so you see {125} why I did not write. Now it is 5.30 p.m., and I am so tired—or at least my eyes are; and I shall not have a chance to rest till 5 a.m. to-morrow; it will take us all that time to check the takings."

On the 21st, when it was all over except for the prize-giving and the congratulations, he writes:

> "I have fever this morning; have not had any sleep for days, and had to run in the Open Competition for Officers' Tent-pegging, which I won easily, taking both pegs and then touching two more turned on edge. I was rather pleased, as no one else touched one sideways at all, and all were about twenty years younger than I! My team ran fourth for the Duke of Savoy's Cup; my men could not ride well enough; I got both mine.
>
> "To-day is the final ceremony. You have never seen such an extraordinary multitude; tens of thousands of children, who pay one anna each, crowding round the place endeavouring to get an entrance. I do wish you were here to see the unusual activity reigning in the town and the excitement we have caused."

It was the novelty of the thing that gave importance to this tournament; the idea has since been carried out in many stations with marked success. It is interesting to note that such a gathering has also an indirect value; it promotes camaraderie between different branches of the service, and shows how much pleasure may be provided to both competitors and on-lookers by what was essentially "soldiering" in its inception.

{126} In *The Times of India* we read:

> "At the close of the Commander-in-Chief's speech three ringing cheers were given for His Excellency and a similar number for Brigadier-General Gatacre. The Commander-in-Chief having then left the arena, the troops left the ground with bands playing, the men-of-war's men as a special and well-deserved honour being escorted to the Apollo Bunder by a regimental band, and followed by a large crowd of civilians. Several of the troops in camp on the Oval visited the flagship H.M.S. *Bonaventure*, and the turret-ship *Magdala* yesterday morning, while others were taken for a cruise in the harbour, a number of the up-country native troops being taken on a visit to inspect the local cotton mills.
>
> "The work of demolishing the enclosure and removing the plant has already begun, and to-day the majority of the troops will be *en route* for their up-country stations, many of them taking back prizes and other mementoes of the well-organised, well-managed, and finest military display and gathering of its kind ever held in the East."

As soon as it was all over Gatacre took ten days' leave to Calcutta, where he was welcomed with surprise and pleasure by his friends of the other side.

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CHAPTER IX

1895

CHITRAL

The annual inspections in the Bombay District for the season 1894-5 had all been carried out, confidential reports were rapidly being filled in, and got ready to forward to Headquarters, the arrangements for the sailing of the last transport were all settled, and all work was beginning to slacken in Bombay with the approach of the hot weather. Gatacre was making a push to conclude the season's work with a view to taking eight months' leave to England. In theory this long leave can be secured once in every five-year command; but Gatacre had now completed two such appointments without availing himself of this privilege, having been content with the sixty days' leave allowed each year.

But whatever might be the special reasons which drew him homewards in 1895, a better thing still was in prospect for him: in whole-hearted joy he writes on March 15:

> {128} "I am so pleased: have got a telegram from Sir George White saying, 'Have nominated you to command Third Brigade in Division to be mobilised for possible service Chitral.' This is a first-class business, for though it will prevent my coming home so soon, still it is a step onwards, and that is what we want, isn't it, dear? I am so pleased at getting this chance, and will do my best for your sake and my own."

The Third Brigade

The Chitral Relief Force was under the command of Sir Robert Low; the expedition was organised to effect the relief of Surgeon-Major Robertson, I.C.S., and some half-dozen officers who were shut up with a small garrison in the fort at Chitral. We are not concerned here with the internal events which had culminated in the siege of the fort by a hostile faction; suffice it to say that the Government of India regarded the matter as very urgent, and were sending a strong division of both British and Native troops to their assistance.

Sir Robert Low's force was to approach from the south over the Malakand Pass, and to make its way up the valley of the Chitral River. This was a route which had not hitherto been used by the Indian Government, and covered about 185 miles. Communications with Chitral had previously been maintained from the north-east, via Gilgit. During the winter months this latter route was closed, as the road lay over snow-covered passes; the distance was about 160 miles from {129} Gilgit, and this was the recognised access and the base of supplies for the little garrison. And so it came about that, in response to messages from Major Robertson, Colonel Kelly was endeavouring to reach him from Gilgit, undismayed by almost impassable winter snows, at the same time that the Indian Relief Force was advancing with similar intention from Peshawur.

In a letter from Mian Mir, March 24, 1895, Gatacre writes:

> "I leave to-morrow to take command of my Brigade at Hoti Mardan, about twenty-five miles north-east of Peshawur, and we shall march from there on April 1, right away for Chitral; but without doubt we shall have some rough work and some fighting. Umra Khan knows he will have no mercy after destroying Captain Ross's detachment, and will do his best to raise the whole border against us.
>
> "I have four first-class regiments—the Seaforth Highlanders, the Buffs, the 25th Punjab Infantry, the Second 4th Ghoorkas, and we are all sound and prepared to go anywhere, so I hope we shall all come well out of it.

* * * * *

> "I think myself we shall have to drop our tents, small as they are, and march without them. Our difficulty will be crossing deep rivers; we shall have no boats, and must trust to making rafts of skins and floating the men across; but it is always a shaky business when there are bullets flying about."

{130} On March 30, in drenching rain, the first troops marched out of Hoti Mardan; on April 2 they met the enemy, who were lying in wait for them on the slopes of the Malakand Pass. But in this and the subsequent engagements on the banks of the Swat and the Panjkora Rivers, the Third Brigade took no part, being held in reserve. A stirring account of the fighting is given by Colonel Younghusband in his *Story of the Guides*.

A bridge of rafts was thrown across the Panjkora River; the Guides Cavalry and Infantry were passed over on the afternoon of April 15, with orders to reconnoitre certain villages early the next morning. But in the night a flood arose, huge trees crashed down on the swollen stream, completely wrecking the bridge. Two miles below this point, the Sappers were rigging up a suspension bridge; and in the meantime an attempt was made to float the men across on rafts supported by mussocks, or inflated goat-skins, and navigated by native boatmen.

A rescue

Gatacre, whose brigade was still in the rear, had pushed forward to see what was going on, and stood by the river's edge watching this "shaky business." Suddenly a raft on which four men were seated got out of control, broke away from the guiding rope, and was immediately caught by the current, and swirled down the turbulent stream. In an instant Gatacre jumped on his pony, and dashed at full gallop over the rocky ground in the wild hope of reaching the spot where the bridge was being made in time to warn the Sappers, and attempt a rescue. The bend of the river gave him time; with equal promptitude Major Aylmer got into a {131} sling-cradle, and was lowered in mid-stream just as the raft came in sight. Two men only were still on it, one of whom saw his chance and grasped the extended hand. As the river had narrowed from 200 yards to ninety feet, the raft was travelling at a tremendous pace. There was a moment of thrilling strain on the ropes; the cradle was submerged by the sudden pull; but all held on heroically, and Aylmer had the satisfaction of bringing Private Hall safely to land. The other man, together with the two comrades who had been thrown off in the wild descent, were hopelessly lost.[1]

Early on April 17, the bridge being completed, the advance was resumed. It was here that the Third Brigade got its chance. An officer writes:

> "I can well recall our intense joy when we found ourselves going over the Panjkora Bridge in front of the Second Brigade, which had been leading since we left the Malakand. With feverish haste we packed our mules, having moved our camp the night before, so as to be as close as possible to the bridge."

By 10.45 the Third Brigade, accompanied by the Guides Cavalry and the 11th Bengal Lancers, were all across, and orders were received for a general advance on Miankalai, which was being held against us. Sir Robert Low's despatch runs:

> {132} "I pushed on to Ghobani with the Third Brigade, arriving there soon after noon. The enemy had then collected on a bluff in two villages west of Mamugai. The battery came into action about 12.30 p.m., and the enemy soon fell back under cover. The Seaforth Highlanders and 4th Goorkhas moved up to the south side of the valley, and then advanced against the enemy in a westerly direction, driving them back from spur to spur, and eventually arrived at the bluff mentioned about 4 p.m., which they occupied for the night.
>
> "The enemy on this occasion did not show the bold front of previous days, but retired as the infantry advanced; and though the guns were sent forward about 1,000 yards to hasten their retreat, the loss of the enemy was not great. Throughout the action the troops were well handled by Brigadier-General Gatacre, D.S.O.
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> * * * * *
>
> "The same afternoon Brigadier-General Gatacre with the Buffs, the 4th Goorkhas, half of No. 4 Company Bengal Sappers and Miners, No. 2 Derajat Mountain Battery, and the Maxim guns of the Devonshire Regiment pushed on to Barwa, *en route* for Dir and Chitral, with twenty days' supplies.
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> * * * * *
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> "On the afternoon of April 20 Brigadier-General Gatacre sent a message back to me that Major Deane, chief political officer, had received news that the garrison of Chitral was reduced to great straits, and that the mines of the enemy had reached to within ten yards of the fort, and he suggested that he should advance rapidly with a small body of five hundred men.
>
> "To this I consented, as being the only way of passing quickly through the intricate country we were now traversing, and the only chance of rescuing the garrison."[2]

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The Flying Column

The excitement and joyful anticipation amongst those who were to compose the Flying Column were intense. One of them writes:

> "We had intended pushing on over the Lowari Pass without baggage animals, the paths being unfit for even mules without much tedious and lengthy preparation. Every officer and man was to have carried ten days' supplies on his back, and I had already broken up the General's mess stores into suitable 40-lb. loads for hillmen to carry for us. In order to do this I only got to bed at our Janbatai camp at 1 a.m. and had to be up at 3 a.m.; so you can imagine it was impressed on my mind.
>
> "The dear General was, I fancy, awake all night, partly on account of the painful abscess that had been lanced that evening; but in spite of this he marched with us all next day, standing in his stirrups, because of the pain of sitting; and indefatigably urged on our bridging and road-making parties. After our arrival at Dir, having marched twenty miles and made the road and bridged the streams *en route*, the General would not rest or dine till the last of the transport mules had been piloted with lamps over a very difficult and rocky part of the path, just outside Dir. I fancy we dined at about 9.30 p.m.; but this was no unusual thing, for the General always insisted on seeing to the comfort of his brigade before his own, and I hardly ever managed to induce him to sit down to dinner till some time between 9 and 10 p.m."

But much to the chagrin of the five hundred they were a flying column for twenty-four hours only, for on the 22nd

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[1] See Sir Robert Low's *Despatch*, April 18, 1895, par. 18.

[2] See Sir Robert Low's *Despatch*, April 19, 1895.

{134} news was received that the siege, which had lasted forty-six days, had been raised. It was afterwards ascertained that Colonel Kelly had reached the fort at 2 p.m. on the 20th, and that Sher Afzul and his supporters had fled the previous day. The General says nothing of his personal disappointment in the letters of this date, but when he was in the fort a month later, he writes:

> "I wish they had let me loose as I wished, when we reached the Swat River. I should have been in Chitral before Kelly, though he had only half the distance to go that I had. But G.O.C. wanted to move with a united force. Of course we all hold different views regarding the best way of doing these things, but had I had the doing of it, I would have moved by separate lines, one brigade in advance; one would have got on quicker, and more effectively. But this is only between you and me."

GOORKHAS CROSSING THE LOWARI PASS.

p. 134]

Goorkhas crossing the Lowari Pass

The campaign now entered into the second phase; the fighting was over, but not so the work. The Government decided that the Third Brigade should proceed to Chitral. Having already reached Dir, they had covered nearly two-thirds of the distance according to the map, but the most difficult part of the journey was ahead of them. The Lowari Pass, 10,450 ft. high, was covered with deep snow, and the valleys leading up to it on both sides were known to present almost insurmountable obstacles to the passage of a large body of men and animals.

The following extract from *Trans-frontier Wars* (vol. i. p. 544) gives a good idea of the physical features of the country to be traversed.

> {135} "Throughout its entire length from Dir to Ashreth, the road was a mere goat-track, offering extraordinary difficulties to the passage of troops, and requiring extensive improvements before laden animals could follow it.
>
> "The route to Gujar, at the foot of the pass, lay for eleven miles up the Dir Valley beside the tumbling snow-fed torrent that streams from the south side of the pass. The track was in general extremely difficult, frequently losing itself among the boulders that choked the bed of the stream, and rising steeply to traverse the face of a rocky bluff, only to fall again with equal abruptness on the other side. This portion of the road had to be realigned and reconstructed throughout, the river had to be bridged in three or four places, and stone staircase ramps had to be built in the water at more than one point, to enable laden animals to pass where the stream washed the foot of a precipitous cliff. From Gujar, 8,450 ft., to the summit of the pass, a distance of three miles, the track lay over frozen and often treacherous snow, at first at a fairly easy gradient, but growing steeper and more slippery as the pass was approached. Beyond the crest a great snow cornice, 15 ft. in height, overhung the head of the glen, down which the track descended for about 1,000 yards at a gradient of one in three or four, over vast drifts of avalanche snow, in which great rocks and the uprooted trunks of gigantic trees lay deeply embedded. From the foot of this descent the route lay down a steep and rocky gorge, now following the tangled bed of the torrent, now winding through fine forests of pine and cedar, or traversing open grassy glades clogged with the drainage of melting snows."

The advance

{136} In such a struggle with the forces of nature Gatacre was at his best. No difficulty dismayed him; his own passionate belief in the power of goodwill and hard work to overcome every obstacle inspired the whole force. The men learnt to work hard because he expected it of them and seemed always present to appreciate their efforts. They learnt to endure every hardship because he endured physical discomforts as great as theirs. Some few men were attacked with frost-bite, and the General was amongst the number; it caught him across the knuckles, and put him to great inconvenience. They saw him daily riding up and down the road, ministering to their comfort and their safety; and they realised that as a master he was one whom all good workmen delight to serve, because he made himself their servant.

An officer who is now a Brevet-Colonel and has since served in Egypt, in East Africa, and in Natal, writes thus:

> "I have seen a good deal of active service, but nowhere have I met any officer, either of high or low rank, who more completely gave himself up to ensure the comfort of the troops under his command than the dear General. Nothing escaped his eagle eye: at one moment we were arranging that some picket should protect itself better against the wind and rain; at the next the General was showing how a shelter should be run up over the tent of some sick officer, to protect him from the heat of the or describing how better troughs could be for watering horses or mules.
>
> {137} "As to road-making, the General was unsurpassed. From the very commencement of the expedition he realised that good communications must be ensured; and made our brigade work as I have never seen any troops work, except Egyptian troops on the railway in the Soudan. Morning, noon, and night did every available man slave away at bettering the wild mountain paths which were our only link with our supplies and civilisation. The country supplied absolutely nothing but a little hill grass obtainable in some districts, which meant that every grain of food had to be laboriously carried up."

It is evident that the care of 3,000 men in such a country was no light work; and Gatacre, who never took his work lightly even at home, certainly did not spare himself on service. His own letters give such a good idea of the routine of camp life, and of the spirit of genuine pleasure in it all that was so characteristic of him, that they shall tell their own tale.

"We are marching all day over the most impossible ground. Our food comes up at about 10 o'clock at night. Last night, owing to the badness of the track, it never came in at all, and this morning I hear it is still four miles off, the other side of the pass: this means another eight hours! Talk about roads, you never saw such a country! You approach a range of hills 10,000 ft. high, you have to cut a road for the animals before you attempt to bring them up, and this means time. Every now and then they have to stop and clear away these creatures {138} who stalk us and shoot from behind rocks. We have been very fortunate in losing no men, though we have knocked over a good many of them."

* * * * *

"Yesterday we were soaked with rain twice, had difficulty about wood for cooking, all green and soaked with wet; but everybody got in by 10 p.m. except about fifty mules and a company of Goorkhas who were stopped by the road falling away and some mules falling through about 300 yards down the khud. This of course stopped the remainder there for the night, but we got them some food, and they had to bivouac the night there without fire or blankets. We got them on this morning.

"Is it not marvellous? Out of my whole force of four regiments, a battery, and a company of Sappers, I have no sick men; they march all day, making roads, constantly get wet through, often have to sleep at great elevations. We were 8,700 ft. the night before last, without blankets, and yet they are all quite fit: no sick officer or man. Of course we take all the care we can of them.

"Yesterday after passing over the pass we found on the hills along which the road ran all English flowers—narcissus, iris, lilies (they plant them on their graves), may, hawthorn, hyacinths, tulips, in great profusion. The country is magnificent, soil very rich, would grow anything; we must take the country and improve it. It is another Kashmir."

* * * * *

"We had a thunderstorm with lightning last night, a grand sight. I was coming back from Ashreth after nightfall, and stopped several times to watch the lightning light the snow peaks—quite beautiful!

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ON THE ROAD TO CHITRAL.

On the road to Chitral.

{139} "I had a hard day the day before yesterday. My orderly officer and I had to go from Dir to Janbatai and back, about fifty-six miles over a difficult road; we started at 5 a.m. and did not get back till 1 a.m. yesterday. For we were delayed on the road so long inspecting that night overtook us, and we had to walk along a most impossible track leading our ponies; we literally had to feel our way with our feet. We all got falls over rocks and stones, but beyond breaking our skin and clothes we were none the worse. The river was running under us nearly all the way about 300 ft. straight down, so you may imagine we had to be careful. I lost my helmet, but fortunately it rolled down the track instead of over the khudside."

* * * * *

"Though I get up at daybreak and go to bed at 11 p.m. daily, I assure you that I never have a moment; it seems strange, but if you saw the country you would understand it. I have a long line of troops scattered over some forty miles of country connected by a single road along which only one man and one animal can pass at a time; sixteen bridges which may be washed away at any moment, causing many hours' delay in replacement; a snow pass, in the centre exactly, over which every ounce of food has to come; a terrific road along river-beds at one moment, running nearly up to the sky the next; 4,000 mules and donkeys working in stages from place to place, with supplies, guards, escorts, regiments, all of which have to be carefully watched to see that they have food and that nothing goes wrong. All this takes time, for it is a country one cannot gallop in, hardly go off a walk, but we are improving the roads and cutting new ones."

* * * * *

{140} "Then the snow pass stops us; we have to carry all our loads and supplies over the pass by hand. This makes us slow, but it is very sure; now the snow is melting and avalanches falling in every direction. Such an interesting country, and so beautiful! I have never seen such scenery, such mountains, trees, and rivers—simply magnificent! The spot I am now encamped in is about 2,000 ft. below the top of the pass, covered with gigantic cedars and pine-trees, eight and nine feet in diameter; I have never seen such trees. It is impossible to imagine anything more beautiful. There are high snow mountains all around us, a snow torrent from the avalanches rushing some hundreds of feet below us, carrying trees, rocks, etc., along with it; one can hardly hear oneself speak. Below in the valley one finds every English flower almost, chiefly in blossom, white peonies, honeysuckle—all sorts.

"Well, we are getting on all right. I have been halted here for seven days owing to want of supplies; one of our bridges broke and stopped them. But we are moving on to-day; this refers to the troops only—of course I move up and down the line every day.

"One of my officers was shot at yesterday, but up to date I have been unable to discover the man. I always have a duffedar (Native Cavalry N.C.O.) with a carbine behind me whenever I ride, and two Goorkhas whenever I walk; but I am out all day and most of the night, and I wonder they have not had a shot at me yet, for it is a wild country, full of trees, stones, and jungle.

"Yesterday I caught thirty drivers stealing stores from their loads. There has been a great deal of this all along the road, causing us {141} much loss; so I had them all thrashed. There was much howling, but I do not think there will be any more thieving; we have to be summary here."

The fort

On May 15 the Third Brigade marched into Chitral. Sir Robert Low and the Headquarter Staff followed a few days later; their arrival was made the occasion for a political durbar, and a grand review of all the troops, including the garrison of the fort, and Colonel Kelly's triumphant little band. Sir Robert Low made a speech in which he complimented all ranks on the good work that each contingent had performed, and more particularly thanked the Third Brigade and their Brigadier for their share in the success of his expedition.

At the first opportunity Gatacre himself read the Funeral Service over the grave where Captain Baird, who fell in the sortie of March 3, had been hastily buried during the siege. He gave orders for the erection of a wooden cross, and had photographs taken of this and the country round, which he sent with a sympathetic letter to the young officer's mother. On his arrival in England in the autumn he regarded it as one of his first duties to fulfil his promise to call on Mrs. Baird, a widow lamenting her only son.

On the approach of the hot weather, the troops were withdrawn from the fort, and disposed in suitable camps along {142} the road, pending the decision of Government on the question of occupation. The long line of communications was divided into sections, the most advanced, from Dir northwards to Chitral, being held by the Third Brigade, the section from Dir southwards to Janbatai by the Second, and the Swat Valley by the First. Road-making and mending was still the principal occupation, for the General was never satisfied with his roads; and all through the summer months the men were kept, happy, and well by improving the roadway which is still used by the column of troops which every two years relieves the garrison of Chitral.

It was probably at this time that the following incident took place. The General one day passed a supply convoy on the road, in charge of a transport officer with whose appearance he was dissatisfied, though he said nothing at the time. Next day he sent for the senior officer, and after a short talk with him told him to smarten up his subaltern.

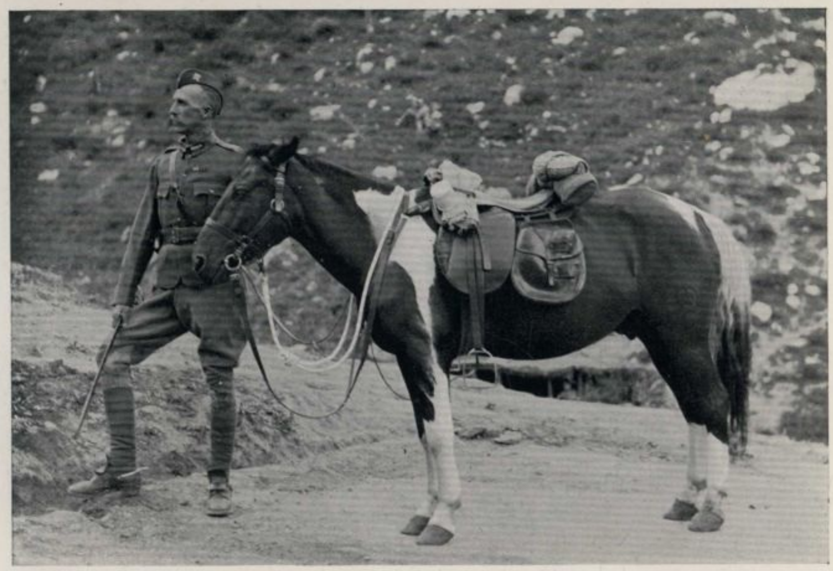
"Certainly, sir, certainly," said the officer, and a look of pride and relief stole over his face that he had himself escaped unfriendly criticism. The General, reading the man's expression, added, "And smarten yourself up, too."

The officer who supplies this tale concludes: "I can see and hear the General's chuckle after administering this little pill."

Snipers

Colonel Ronald Brooke,[3] who proved himself an orderly officer after his General's own heart, tells us how the Ashreth Valley became infested by a band of hillmen who cut up {143} stragglers from the convoys, and finally one night attacked a band of Chitrali traders (under the impression that they were our transport followers) who had incautiously spent the night at the foot of the pass. Twelve out of thirteen were killed; one only escaped, badly wounded, to carry the news to the nearest military post. The story goes on:

"The General and I at once hurried to the spot, which looked just like a shambles, and he immediately ordered a beat on a huge scale. Troops silently surrounded the Ashreth Valley from every side; and on August 12, instead of a grouse drive, we indulged in the far more exciting experience of a Kafristan robber drive. A band of fifteen were flushed on the hillside, of whom five were captured, the others escaping, never to return to so dangerous a spot. Of the five prisoners, three were sentenced to death, and the other two were set free on account of their youth."



GENERAL GATACRE AND HIS FAVOURITE PONY.

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General Gatacre and his favourite pony.

Having thus cleared his own valley of snipers, Gatacre longed to do the same on the Dir-Janbatai section, where the troops on escort-duty had been constantly fired on, several soldiers having been mortally wounded. At last he secured from the Major-General Commanding permission to take over this dangerous section as well as his own. A picked lot of Pathan Sepoys were sent down under an excellent native non-commissioned officer, with instructions to patrol the {144} hillsides far above the position that snipers might take up, just when convoys were on the move, and thus literally to stalk the stalkers. This idea was crowned with success. In a few days' time the Pathans spotted a party of three hillmen lying up for the convoy. With extraordinary skill they succeeded in capturing two of the party; the third man escaped, although so severely wounded that he was tracked by his blood-marks for nine miles. The two prisoners turned out to be Afghans who had come over the frontier bent on doing as much harm as possible. Both were hanged, and thenceforward there was no more sniping on that section.

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[3] Brevet-Lieutenant-Colonel R. G. Brooke, D.S.O.

The General's interest in the scenery and flowers was very genuine. During the three months that the troops were scattered in various camps in these beautiful valleys, he found time to make a large collection of flowers and ferns, and himself attended to the drying and packing of the specimens. When these were eventually handed over to the Forest Department at Calcutta, the botanists found one fern which was pronounced a new variety, and named it after the General in the records of the Department.

In due course orders arrived for the withdrawal of the Relief Force. Early in September Gatacre conducted his Brigade over the frontier, and bade them farewell amidst the heartiest expressions of affection and goodwill on the part of all ranks, British and Native.

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CHAPTER X

1896

QUETTA

On November 10, 1895, a few familiar words were read once more in a village church in Sussex, the old-world troth was given and plighted, and the face of the earth was changed thereby for the two persons most concerned.

The General had been unable to take more than ninety days' privilege leave, and therefore had to be back in Bombay early in January. The drill season was already far advanced, the programme for the inspection of the various regiments in the outlying stations included in the Bombay Command was already laid out, and trips to Baroda, Ahmedabad, Surat, and Cutch-Bhuj followed one another in close succession.

These trips, which made a welcome respite from the heavy office-work and town-life at Headquarters, sometimes included a day's sport and recreation.

On Friday, February 21, the General, his staff officer, and the writer disembarked from the S.S. *Kola* at Mandvi, in {146} the Gulf of Cutch. This coast is so shallow that the steamers have to lie a long way out, and the process of disembarkation includes transfer from the mail-boat to a steam-launch, thence to a rowing-boat, which runs aground alongside some bullock-drawn waggons. Across the highest timbers of these carts nets are stretched, on which the passengers seat themselves, while the final stage is a chair borne by four natives who are waist-deep in water as they cross the pools in the interminable stretch of sea and sand. A forty-mile drive in a carriage provided by the Rao Saheb of Cutch brought us to the capital where the 17th Bombay Infantry were then quartered. The Resident, whose guests we were, the Commandant of the regiment, four other officers, the doctor, and four ladies made up the whole British contingent.

The inspection went off without memorable incident. The real interest of the trip lay in the native races and the pig-sticking camp, which the Rao Saheb had arranged to fill in the blank days while waiting for the weekly mail-boat.

The Rao Saheb was a man of about thirty, who, together with his younger brother, Karloba, had taken kindly to English ways; they played lawn-tennis on even terms with the officers and their wives, and when on horseback their costume was entirely English except for the brilliant puggri. The camp and all its accessories were furnished by the hospitality of the Rao Saheb; he was our companion throughout the day, dinner alone excepted, and nothing was omitted for the comfort of his guests.

Pig-sticking

{147} We reached Wanoti Camp early in the morning, and the seven men who were carrying spears were soon on horseback. The country was flat and sandy, and bare except where patches of low scrub provided excellent cover. A few beaters were sent forward to drive out the game, and before long you could see some very solid-looking bodies, very low on the ground, moving amongst the bushes at a surprising pace: these were a "sounder" of pigs. The Rao Saheb selected one, the General another, and, being mounted on a capital white pony, I was close at his heels. This boar, which was scored to the General's spear, turned out to be the biggest of the seven which was the total for the day. But he was no sooner dispatched than we were off after another. Again the same spear was the first to touch him; then we lost sight of him as he crashed through a thick hedge. When we emerged through the nearest gap we found that the Resident had picked up his line, but while taking a thrust at him the pig jinked and tripped up the horse, so that both he and his rider rolled in the sand, while the pig went off with the eight-foot spear stuck in his body like a pin in a pin-cushion. If we had not been close at hand the savage creature would have turned and rent the fallen man, who, though unhurt, would have been defenceless.

In the afternoon the beaters started on the other side of the camp, and a most thrilling incident occurred. After a chase of about two miles our pig disappeared over the edge of a forty-foot precipice, which was the cliff-like side of a dry {148} nullah; we had to look for a chine, and after a scrambling descent found him again, rather winded, hiding in a ditch about five feet deep and six to eight feet wide. The General had broken his spear in a previous conflict, and was therefore unarmed. There were two officers only with us, one of whom cried out, "If you do not know how to tackle him yourself, give your spear to the General, and let him try."

He took the proffered spear, and, handing over his pony, stepped down into the nullah, just opposite the boar, and with the lance under his elbow stood facing the fierce creature for some four or five minutes, till the latter suddenly rose up and plunged forward; but the spear was in readiness, the charge was stayed, and the animal fell back, run right through the throat.

While at Bhuj the following telegram reached the General:

> "From Military Secretary, Chief, Calcutta: Chief proposes to select you to officiate in command Quetta District during absence of General Galbraith proceeding on leave to England. Please wire if agreeable to you."

It was followed two days later by another, from Sir Charles Nairne, Commander-in-Chief Bombay Army:

> "I congratulate you both on going to Quetta. You will have a wide enough field there."

Throughout the month of March the General was kept busy with the preparation and execution of some extensive {149} manoeuvres which took place on the hills near Khandalla. There was also a Horse Show in Bombay to attend to; this was on a bigger scale than had hitherto been attempted. The General rode in several classes, and won the first prize for Arab chargers, and also for the best turn-out in the driving classes. The cheers that greeted him as he appeared in the prize-winners' parade were significant of the public appreciation of the energy that, as chairman of the committee, he had thrown into the undertaking.

Leaves Bombay

On the evening of April 7, as the General Officer Commanding sailed in the transport *Warren Hastings* for Karachi, *en route* for Quetta, the nine-gun salute boomed out its farewell greeting in the summer night.

This First-class District, with its headquarters on the lofty plateau known as Quetta, about 6,000 ft. high, was a command wholly congenial to Gatacre's temperament. The office-work was very light; there was a garrison of two battalions of British infantry, one regiment of Native cavalry, and two of Native infantry, besides a complement of artillery, equipped both with oxen and mules, a splendid transport train, and other details. The outposts are on the actual frontier of the British Empire; their very distance and inaccessibility exercised a great attraction for him, so that the official visit to each station became a picnic pleasure-party in a very literal sense. Nothing was wanting, not even battle, murder, and sudden death, to create that sense of danger and adventure that casts its fascinating shadow over this wild frontier land.

{150} As the season in which marching could be accomplished in comfort was already advanced, and the days were fast growing hot and long, it was decided to start very soon after our arrival on a tour of inspection to Fort Sandeman, Lorelai, and other outlying posts. Fort Sandeman lies to the north-east of Quetta, and is in the Lower Zhob Valley; it is 180 miles from Khanai station on the Quetta Railway. A squadron of the 5th Sind Horse, under Captain Sherard, furnished the escort. No supplies could be reckoned on by the way, so that transport had to be drawn to carry six weeks' food for five mounted officers, their servants and horses, and also for the hundred Sowars and their horses, and for the transport animals themselves. This made quite a long line of horses, camels, and mules on the march, and one of the duties of our daily routine was a walk down the transport lines at sunset.

There is not space here to do justice to this delightful ride. We covered between six and seven hundred miles in the six weeks we were out. The early starts while the moon shone brilliantly, the long leisurely days in camp, the evening scramble over the nearest hills, and the nights passed under the clear stars, with no sound but the steady tramp of the sentries; the puzzling alternation of sandy desert and rocky rift, dry nullahs and roaring torrents,—all make up memories of strange and delightful doings never to be spoilt, even by the counter recollections of sun and dust.

{151} In the autumn of the same year Fort Sandeman was the scene of a shocking tragedy. A Sepoy of the 40th Pathans ran amok while on sentry duty one evening outside the officers' mess. According to his deposition later, he had been waiting to get all the five officers into line as they wandered round the billiard-table, so that he might strike them all with one bullet. But the finesse of his idea was defeated by his own impatience; he fired his shot when only three men were covered. Two young officers were so seriously wounded that they fell immediately, and died a few hours later. With great presence of mind and courage, and undismayed by a severe wound in the arm, Mr. Maclachlan gave chase to the murderer, and by raising the alarm and calling out the guard contributed to his capture, though unfortunately this was not effected till the tehsildar and two native clerks had been shot dead.

It was the custom to make the last afternoon of an inspection visit the occasion for a social gathering; sports and trials of skill would be arranged, the native regiments would perform feats of horsemanship, and organize a display of national dancing and wrestling. One peculiarly striking effect was worked out by an officer in the 15th Bengal Lancers at Lorelai. Thirty-two Sowars in their white undress uniform, mounted on white or grey horses, cantered past doing sword-practice, their curved blades flashing in the sun; but the ghostly effect of these white horsemen was enhanced when they {152} were followed by another group mounted entirely on chestnuts, doing lance-practice, the red and white pennons and scarlet cummerbunds adding to the colour scheme.

Lorelai also contributed its note of tragedy, for very shortly after our departure from Beluchistan, Colonel Gaisford (soldier and civilian) was treacherously assassinated in the very dak-bungalow in which we had resided.

The object of a short tour planned for September was formally to take over a strip of land known as the Toba Plateau, which had been recently ceded to the Government of India under an arrangement effected by a Frontier Delimitation Commission. As this was a desolate land with few inhabitants, the General planned to combine this political object with military training in the way of practice in field-firing. He arranged that detachments of the 1st Bombay Grenadiers and of the 26th Beluchis should take part in the manoeuvres, and that the 25th Bombay Rifles should meet him at the camping-ground. It was the first time a white man had been seen in the country. The march abounded with picturesque and amusing incidents. For instance, there was the day when the camel transport lost their way. Their pace being a little slower than that of the mules, and the country that day with its low round sandhills being peculiarly puzzling, they lost touch with the tail of the column. A transport duffedar was sent back to look for the string of camels, but came not again; a corporal was sent on a mule to look for the duffedar, and he came not again. It was now getting {153} late, and darkness would soon fall, so the General himself started on a pony to look for the corporal. It was six o'clock before the camels, who were carrying our tents, mess kit, and clothing, reached the camp, from a point exactly opposite to the direction whence they were expected.

Field-firing

When the rendezvous on Toba Plateau was reached, after about three days' march from Chaman, we settled down for a week, and field-firing in the miniature valleys took place daily. The day before the proposed attack newspapers are spread out with the help of stones in the positions where tribesmen defending their homes would be likely to erect sangars and make a stand. The attacking column, being supplied with ball cartridges, shoot at these targets till they disappear, and then advance till a bend of the valley discloses another imaginary concentration of the enemy. This device presents a very realistic counterfeit of hill warfare.

It seems to me now that all our time at Quetta was spent in such mimic fighting. The wild and desolate country, in which the cantonments lay like an oasis, lent itself admirably to military training; the garrison, complete in all its units, provided the necessary troops of all arms, so that a succession of field-officers were sent up for tactical examination, the practical side of which meant a series of field-days. The General's A.D.C., when called upon for reminiscences, sends the following anecdote:

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> "His good temper and quiet way of rebuking people was, I have always thought, remarkable. I remember a field-day when an officer had got a company in a very badly chosen spot. The General, in his usual innocent sort of way, went up to him to gather, as it were, information. He always did that: he looked as if he was dying to learn, while really he was leading on the man to talk and show what he knew, or else to convict him out of his own mouth. The Major had no good reason for his dispositions, and when cornered began to quote the drill-book. The General quietly said: 'It's not very good form to throw the drill-book at your General.'"

On a similar occasion, at an outpost parade, the captain in charge of the picquet was unaccountably nervous, and had great difficulty in explaining the "idea." With two words the General put him out of his pain and signalised his incompetence: "You're shot," he said. "Who is next in command?"

On the Sind-Pishin Railway, as the branch line is called that runs from Ruk Junction on the Indus through Quetta and on to Chaman, there is only one train in each direction in the twenty-four hours. The railroad runs for miles over the wildest and most desolate tracts. It is 150 miles from Quetta to Sibi, and Sibi is 100 miles north of Jacobabad. The roadside stations consist merely of a few planks as platform, a hut for the station-master, who is commonly an Eurasian, and a standpipe; sometimes there is a second hut, in which a bunnia does business in food-stuffs and other simple trading.

A massacre

Sunari Station, lying about 100 miles east of Quetta, must have been a place of slightly {155} more importance, for when the Marris fell upon it they found fifteen persons to murder. Unfortunately for him, a European youth, named Canning, a sub-inspector of the line, and son of the station-master at Sibi, happened to be there that fatal morning. As the daily train approached the station between 9 and 10 a.m., the engine-driver was puzzled at not receiving the customary greeting on the signals, but decided to crawl on carefully into the station. It was only too clear that a wholesale slaughter with swords had been perpetrated; the place was strewn with dead bodies, terribly slashed about, and the bunnia's shop had been set on fire. The terrified driver and guard found the station-master with his arm cut off, but still breathing, and carefully laid him on the train, but even this sole survivor of this unparalleled outrage died before the next station was reached. In the meantime the pointsman had fled on foot to the next station, and telegraphed the startling news from there to Quetta.

Very shortly after the arrival of the news the telegraph wires were found to be cut; to imaginative minds a rising of the whole powerful tribe of Marris was imminent. The railroad, which ran for miles through the Marris' country, might be destroyed, the telegraph lines were already severed, all communication with India would thus be cut off, and Quetta isolated might have added another picturesque story to the romantic series of frontier annals.

{156} Very naturally a panic took place at the adjoining railway-stations, some of the station-masters actually constructing amateur wire entanglements with the telegraph stores. A new staff was established at Sunari with a strong guard, and detachments of the 25th Bombay Rifles were posted all along the line. The Political Department offered the very handsome reward of 2,500 rupees for the capture of the three ringleaders, and Gatacre, who had been on short leave at Simla, hurried back to take a hand in the search.

Early in the morning of October 23 the following letter was sent back to Quetta:

> "To-day I am going out with some of the Pathans to look over the ground where we hear some of these men have been, possibly are now. I do not think we shall get back to-night, as the ground is said to be very bad, but we have taken our blankets and some food. I should much like to catch these Ghazis; it would be highly satisfactory. The Marris promise Gaisford much, but I think they are humbugging him."

The party left Dalujal Station at 5.30 a.m. The troops were drawn from the 24th Beluchistan Regiment. At nightfall they bivouacked near Dirgi Springs; and next morning, with a view to scouring the hills, the party was divided into four groups. Besides the General there were two British officers, two Native officers, and forty-four Pathans. One British officer was allotted to each party, and a subadar took charge of the fourth; the rendezvous was to be a well-marked peak {157} in the range in front of them. The General, with five Sepoys and a Marri whom he had impressed as guide, took a middle line and made straight for the summit, instructing the other parties to take a wider sweep. He had regarded this peak as a likely place, because he had heard that there was a musjid or small shrine built there, to which the murderers might have resorted for purification after contact with the Feringhi.

As the handful of men crept up the rocky slope a sangar came into view, which was suggestive. The leading Pathan signalled with his hand that all should go silently, and crouch; a few more yards were covered in this way, and then the sangar was rushed. The Sepoys flung themselves upon the two men who were found sleeping behind the rocks with such splendid dash that they all rolled together as the enemy made frantic efforts to get at their knives. But no one was hurt, and in an instant the prisoners were securely bound with the puggris of their captors.

The other search-parties now appeared on the scene, and very soon discovered the third Ghazi, who, being also asleep in fancied security, had no chance to get away. Three others, who had been sent away to draw water, were now seen approaching, but they turned and fled. The nature of the ground made it impossible to follow them on their own mountains with any chance of success.

At noon the little force started back. On this return journey the General shifted his position from leading to bringing {158} up the rear; for he anticipated that a stampede might be made on the part of the prisoners with the intention of knocking him down the khud, while in the scuffle and panic they would hope to effect their escape. This reasoned caution in protecting his life against obvious and purposeless dangers was as habitual and spontaneous with the General as was his forwardness in disregarding the risks when occasion demanded. He was punctilious in protecting himself against sunstroke, and wore a pad down his spine as well as the universal topee, and by such personal heedfulness safeguarded his life and general health.

However, on this particular occasion his precaution nearly proved disastrous. As the string of men crept down the mountain-side a jemadar noticed that one of the Sepoys had failed to uncock his rifle, and gave the necessary order. A shot rang out. The General's helmet was blown off his head, and was picked up blackened with the smoke of the charge. He is said to have smiled, as he rescued the Sepoy from the jemadar's wrath and secured the empty cartridge as a memento.

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BELUCHI MURDERERS.

Beluchi murderers.

When the party reached Sunari Station, after a march of seventeen miles, the General discovered that there was no political officer there to whom he could hand over the prisoners, so that there was no choice but to march another six miles to Dalujal. Here the murderers were taken over by the Civil Department. {159} The irons with which they were immediately loaded seemed fantastically medieval in their weight and simplicity. But on the other hand, nothing could have been more fantastic than the proceedings of the Englishman who had effected their capture. This was the view taken by Sir George White, the Commander-in-Chief, though he little guessed when he wrote how very nearly his words had come true.

> "I congratulate you on the way in which you managed and executed the capture. I am also very glad to know we have General Officers commanding first-class districts who take to the hills for amusement, but I must also say that I don't think the job was quite one for the G.O.C. to conduct personally. If they had managed to get a bullet into you it would have made the affair one of very sinister importance. However, from that point of view, 'all is well that ends well.'"

A death sentence

A few days later the headmen of the Marri tribe handed over the other three men implicated, and at Sibi, on November 2, the three Ghazis, Fakir Kala Khan, Jalamb, and Rahim Ali, atoned for their misdeeds. The sentence was death by hanging followed by public cremation.[1]

[1] Compare *Beluchistan Gazette*, October 29, November 5, 1896, and *Civil and Military Gazette*, November 12, 1896.

On the return of the troops to Quetta great excitement prevailed when, through the presence of a strong guard at the station, it became known that the promised treasure was on the same train. Of course this was divided amongst the {160} Sepoys only; all those who went to the mountain had a share, with extra money to those who actually took a hand in the fray. It was evening when the train came in, so that it was not till we reached the house that I noticed the blackened helmet, and saw the rent cut by the bullet. When called upon for an explanation, the emotion of that moment took possession of him again: it was the only time that I heard his voice break.

Throughout that summer Mr. Curry and the railway engineers had been busy over the new railroad that was to connect Sibi and Quetta via the Bolan Pass. This line is shorter than the Hurnai route by fifty miles, but it had hitherto presented insuperable difficulties to the engineer. Two previous attempts had been made; but the floods rise so high in the gorges and had twice so completely wrecked the permanent way, that this route had been discarded by Sir James Browne, who preferred to tackle the Chupper Rift with his magnificent suspension bridge. But owing to the unreliability of the shifting sands at Mud Gorge it was imperative for military purposes to have an alternative line. The new Bolan-Mushkaf railroad was completed in November 1896. To give the General an opportunity of seeing this triumph of construction, Mr. Curry decided to initiate the new service on the day of our departure from Quetta. The eight months' acting appointment reached its conclusion on November 30, 1896, and the first mail train left Quetta for Sibi on that day at 10 a.m., carrying Gatacre back to resume his substantive appointment at Bombay.

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CHAPTER XI

1897

THE PLAGUE

In the Report issued by the Bombay Plague Committee of 1897 it is shown that 27,597 persons died of that disease between August 8, 1896, and June 30, 1897; while the total mortality from all causes for the same period was 45,886. This is more than one-twentieth of the normal average population given as 850,000.[1]

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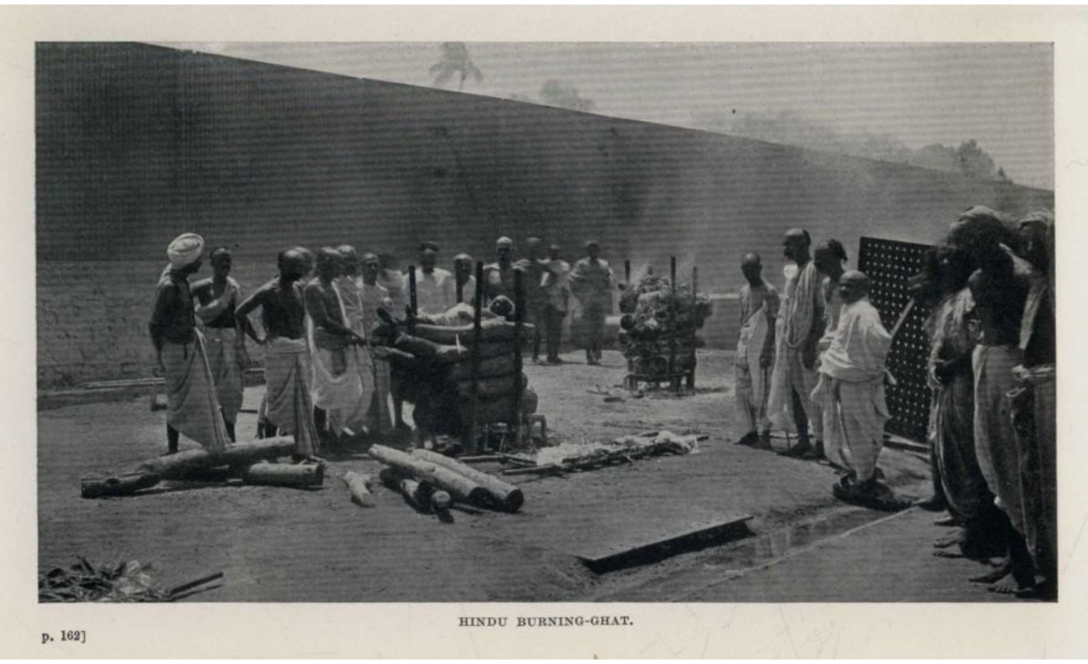
[1] See Chart 3, issued with the *Report on the Bubonic Plague*, by Brigadier-General W. F. Gatacre, C.B., D.S.O., 1897.

When the disease first declared itself, the Press and its volunteer correspondents showed extraordinary ingenuity in denying its existence, in attempting to discount the seriousness of the situation and inventing euphemisms by which to describe the "glandular fever." But the authorities responsible for the health of the city appreciated the gravity of the prospect. The Municipality appointed a special sub-committee to investigate the causes of the epidemic and to carry out measures for its suppression; and Mr. Haffkine, the bacteriologist, was requisitioned from Calcutta to identify the {162} bacillus. By the end of October the accommodation available in the Municipal Hospital for infectious diseases was lamentably inadequate. Customs officers in foreign ports took alarm and imposed quarantine on all vessels from Bombay Port. Natives of all classes were terror-stricken, and many families fled up-country. Thousands daily streamed over the two causeways that connect the Island of Bombay with the mainland; vast crowds assembled at the Bunders and the railway-stations in their haste to get away by sea and rail. Before January was out, half the inhabitants had escaped, for it has been shown that the population fell from 797,000 on December 8 to 437,000 on February 8. At the same time the mortality reached alarming figures, showing 4,559 in December and 6,189 in January in excess of the normal death-rate duly corrected. Although January is the coolest and pleasantest month of the year, it proved the most disastrous; the outbreak reached its climax on the 15th and 16th, on which days 344 and 345 fatal attacks were recorded.

The fires that burn inside the high walls that bound the Charni Road sent up a thicker smoke and a more suggestive stench than ever before. The price of wood for funeral pyres went up; in some cases Hindus consented to bury their dead, because they could not afford to buy the necessary timber. On January 18, 1897, an article appeared in *The Times* {163} *of India* seriously discussing the supply of vultures then inhabiting the Towers of Silence. The writer concludes with the quaint phrase: "There are now nearly 400, the number being ample, even with the high death-rate now existing in the Parsee Community."



Hindu burning-ghat

The General Officer Commanding was fully alive to the dangerous and insanitary condition of some of the older parts of the town. For the greater security of his household he took an airy house on Malabar Hill, instead of inhabiting the official residence in the Marine Lines. He further arranged for the Marine Battalion, which forms the permanent garrison of Bombay, to leave their antiquated huts in the same road and go out under canvas. Two English ladies living in the Marine Lines caught the plague, but fortunately both recovered.

A white man dies

The European colony were profoundly distressed on hearing of the death of Surgeon-Major Robert Manser on January 6, 1897. He was First Physician of the Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy Hospital, and Professor at the Grant Medical College. It was said at first that pneumonia was the cause; but when Nurse Joyce, who had been attending him, died on the following day, suspicions were aroused, and the bacteriological examination established the connection between plague and pneumonia.

Early in February, under a pseudonym, the General published two carefully reasoned and suggestive articles in *The* {164} *Times of India*. In the first he pointed put that the existence of the plague and the consequent exodus of the population afforded an excellent opportunity of carrying out extensive improvements in the housing and sanitation of the worst parts of the city, and in acquiring official control over the disposal of the dead. In the second he called attention to the inadequacy of the hospital accommodation to meet even the present demand, and boldly handles the question of finance, saying:

> "What is a lakh or ten lakhs of rupees where the prosperity of Bombay is concerned? The question is not one for Bombay to haggle over. The plague has become a thing of Imperial importance, Her Majesty takes a deep interest in it, and the necessary funds must be found. But the Government of India will want to see some exhaustive efforts on our part; they will expect an amount of thoroughness in combating the disease which up to the present we have not shown."

After this appeal the writer goes on to suggest that a hospital should be established in Government House, Parel, a large mansion which had been the Governor's residence in the time of Sir James Fergusson, and had since been discarded in favour of a more breezy site on Malabar Point.

Official thanks

The municipality took the hint and voted funds. Lord Sandhurst responded readily and offered his "country seat" for the purposes of a Special Plague Hospital, and the General came forward officially, and promised to see to the equipment of the wards, and to provide doctors, {165} orderlies, attendants, etc., from the troops under his command. His call for volunteers met with the same ready response; for nurses he applied to the various Roman Catholic Convents in the neighbourhood; and expended a special donation from Lady Sandhurst in making the Sisters' quarters as comfortable as possible, and in fitting up a little

Oratory for them. In ten days 150 beds were ready, and by the erection of matting huts in the large compound accommodation could be quickly provided for several hundred more.

The following paragraphs, taken from a letter from the Government of Bombay to the Government of India, dated February 23, 1897, foreshadow the policy which was adopted a few days later:

> "3. To General Gatacre the thanks of His Excellency the Governor in Council are in a special degree due, both for the offer of assistance and for the energy he has thrown into the undertaking. He has spared himself no trouble, and the result will be an unquestionable benefit to the city.
>
> "5. I may add that His Excellency the Governor in Council anticipates great indirect benefit from a measure which brings the Military in touch with the Civil authorities in organising measures for preventing the spread of the plague, for it is not improbable that the Civil authorities may before long be driven to seek considerable assistance at the hands of the Military."[2]

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[2] Government Orders: General Department No. 1481/934 P. Bombay Castle, March 16, 1897.

{166} It was evident that the Governor regarded the situation as one which called for combined effort and extraordinary measures. He also realised that if such an undertaking as stamping out the plague before the monsoon broke was to have any chance of success, there must be central control and central responsibility. He wanted a man endowed equally with the administrative capacity to conceive a comprehensive plan of action, and the executive sagacity to carry it out with success.

The Gatacre Committee

Lord Sandhurst, having decided to execute what amounted to a "coup" in its startling supersession of all the traditions of the civil, municipal, and military services, sent for Gatacre as the strongest man whose services he could command, asked him to name his own committee, and to frame in his own words the instructions under which he was to act, and the powers with which he was to be invested. There can be no doubt that the Governor himself contributed enormously to the good results achieved by the Plague Committee by the splendid freedom from control which he allowed its Chairman, and the manner in which he put every department of Government—civil and municipal—at his disposal, and then let him work out his own system unhampered by any question of custom or finance.

Gatacre realised to the full that he was making himself personally responsible for the success of the undertaking. In a confidential letter he writes:

{167}

> "The Government of Bombay has given me its thanks, and I have been appointed chairman of the committee to stamp out the plague. Lord Sandhurst sent for me, and asked me whom I would like to assist me, and I took Snow, Municipal Commissioner—he is the head of an enormous department and controls the municipality, which thus falls under me—James, an executive engineer of the municipality, an energetic man with an enormous staff of engineers and workmen—Dr. Dimmock, who is a sound man and has energy. I have made Cahusac secretary. I have been told that money is no object, but that I am to stamp out the plague. They have passed an Act directing all to carry out *any order* I like to issue, so if I fail it will be my own fault; but I do not intend to fail. We shall have much opposition, as this gives me powers over all except the Governor and his Councillors.
>
> * * * * *
>
> "I wish they had handed me over this business in December, when I first came down; it would never have got out of Bombay. It has now become a most serious question, and has extended to the whole of India."

We have to thank Dr. Dimmock[3] for an account of the first meeting of the Committee.

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[3] Lieut.-Colonel H. P. Dimmock, M.D., I.M.S.

> "We began at once to decide on sites for plague hospitals. One question that was asked was, What sort of disease was plague? In those days one knew very little about it, for the bacillus had not been discovered. I tried to explain as much as was known, and finished my remarks with words to the effect that whatever the special infection might be, it seemed to be deadly and certainly contagious, and that we need none of us expect 'to come out alive.' 'Well,' said the General, with a smile, 'we can't think about that; we've only got to stop it, so let's get to work.' {168}
>
> "One must consider that at the time plague was such an appalling and mysterious disease that even the doctors feared for their lives each day, though it was their business to face it. How much more awful the invisible foe must have seemed to a layman, and still more to one who had to lead the attack on it as he did most cheerfully and energetically without experience of the ways of infectious diseases!"

The first step was to surround the city with a cordon to put a stop to the spread of the infection up-country. This could be the more easily and effectually carried out because Bombay City is built on an island. A police guard was posted on the Sion and the Mahim Causeways, where the road is carried over the water by long bridges, and at a ford available at low water; a foot-track along the main water-supply was boarded up; and the two railway-stations and all the Bunders were watched by inspection parties.

Special hospitals

Within the city the principle was laid down that all persons suffering from the plague must be brought into hospital. This involved two departments of labour; the first was to provide hospital accommodation, the second to enforce the handing over of the patients.

{169} To meet one of the manifold objections put forward by the population to the use of hospitals, a system was started by which each community should have its own building or camp. This disposed of many insuperable difficulties as to the attendance on the sick, the preparation of food, etc.; and so much did this concession to their peculiar prejudices please the more enlightened communities, that their leaders came in person to the General and offered to run hospitals for their respective brotherhoods at their own expense. Such offers were willingly accepted, but control over these locations was rigidly maintained in the hands of the Committee. Indeed, so rapid was this demand for special accommodation for each sect, that—

> "A scheme of hospital organisation was designed, a special equipment of staff, stores, furniture, and appliances being drawn on a ready basis, suitable to any pressing demands.... So that on an order being issued by the Committee for the institution of a hospital of any proportion, the District Medical Officer had merely to follow the orders laid down for a hospital of the size indicated.... Copies of the plan and equipment of a one-section hospital (twenty beds) was accordingly issued to the various executive departments of the Committee, and to all contractors, with directions to regulate the constructions of buildings and the supply of stores, medicines, and furniture

accordingly."[4]

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[4] *Report*, p. 22.

Within one month of its creation the Committee were running forty-three hospitals, of which fifteen were Government and twenty-eight were special private institutions such as have been described. In every detail of the {170} internal management of these private institutions the will of the Dictator prevailed. He was always a welcome visitor; he took the keenest interest in the symptoms as they developed in any exceptional cases, and he made sure that those peculiarly Christian principles should be upheld which decree that there should be no distinction of caste in any one "jamat," no difference made between high and low, rich and poor, and that all the sick should receive equal attention.

But it was one thing to provide model buildings and the best of attendance, and another to persuade the relatives of the sick to bring in the patients. At the same time the segregation of the sick was the basis of the whole policy, and it was to secure this end that the house-to-house visitation was instituted.

While the mere idea of such a thing inflamed the minds of the writers in the Native Press, in practice the people soon found out that every consideration was shown. An appeal was made to the native gentlemen who were Justices of the Peace to attend at such visitations, and this had an excellent effect. White men did not enter the houses unless opposition was made; in the street a small body of troops was employed as a show of authority, but these were mostly drawn from the Native regiments. In no case was violence needed; the only pressure used was the personal presence of the General, the force of his will and character, the persuasion of his words uttered in their own tongue; the people grew {171} to have faith in his promises, to appreciate his devotion to their interests, and to respect his methods.

Drives the brake

The Fire Brigade brake was commandeered to carry the search-parties. The rendezvous was at daybreak; every one had to be punctual, for the General waited for no one. The Committee was accompanied by officials with special knowledge of the quarter to be visited, and there were always a few lady-doctors present.

Supplies were taken in tiffin-baskets, but, says Dr. Dimmock, "the General's spare diet was a subject of wondering comment; some bread and dried fruit and a bottle of soda water was his usual breakfast, and his untiring energy on such diet was marvellous."

The General himself drove the brake, and one or other of the Plague Committee staff would sit on the box in order to give him an opportunity of discussing urgent matters.

On one occasion in April such a search-party was organised for an essentially Mahommedan quarter, where some opposition might be expected. The locality was occupied by Memons, Sunni Mahommedans, and opulent merchants hailing from Cutch. The usual military precautions were taken, and house-to-house visitation was in full swing. In a five-storied building in Kambekar Street occupied by rich Memons a plague case was discovered on the third floor. The patient was a Memon boy aged twenty, belonging to the rich family of Noorani, who were also the "Patels of the {172} Moholla," *i.e.* leaders of the neighbourhood. The usual certificate was made out, in the name of the patient, Haji Ayub Haji Abdul Rahim Noorani, by the sub-divisional medical officer, and the family were informed that the young man would be removed to the hospital. To this they objected, and already a sullen crowd had assembled outside. In Mahommedan quarters the crowd is essentially male, with an admixture of children; the women, being "Purdah Nashins," do not show themselves.

On being informed of the trouble, the General, who was a little farther up the street, immediately repaired to the spot, speaking conciliatory words to the crowd as he made his way to the third floor and entered the room. Here he selected the oldest member of the family and "very courteously" discussed with him the necessity for the removal of the youth to hospital. In the meantime the new hand ambulance (which was a litter on a pair of bicycle wheels, worked out on an idea of the General's) reached the door; but the sight of it upset the parents so much that they withdrew their reluctant consent to Haji's removal. Recollecting that he was dealing with a wealthy family, the General suggested that they should send for one of their own carriages. Impervious to any notions of infection, but highly conscious of their local standing, the family readily consented to this compromise. Having won his point, the General made his way down to the {173} street, where the crowd was now very dense: he whispered to a native inspector, slipping a few rupees into his hand. In a few minutes there was a vast scramble for sweets which were flying in every direction; under cover of this bombardment the patient was successfully carried off in an English brougham drawn by richly caparisoned white horses.[5]

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[5] Recollections furnished by Mr. Louis Godniho, Deputy Officer; see also *Advocate of India*, April 3, 1897.

The Seedee king

On another occasion the quarter known as Kazipura was selected for the morning's search work. Kazipura is inhabited by all classes of Mahommedans, including the African Negroes or Seedees. On the arrival of the brake the party broke up and entered various dwellings. One party, consisting of two members of the Committee and Dr. Sorab Hormusjee (to whom I am indebted for this story, and who held the appointment of Lady Assistant to the Health Officer), came across a Seedee boy aged eighteen years, whom they declared to be suffering from the plague. The mother denied this, saying her son was only tired, having been dancing all night, and, supported by some male relatives, angrily asserted that she would not allow his removal.

p. 172]
HOUSE-TO-HOUSE VISITATION.

House-to=house visitation.

Within a few minutes the streets and alleys were swarming with Seedees armed with sticks, and a serious riot seemed inevitable. But fortunately the Chairman was on the spot; he instructed Mr. Vincent, the Police Commissioner, to send for the Seedee King Makanda. The arrival of the Great Man and his Queen Sophie had a magic effect; a few words {174} of explanation from the Chairman, a few words from the King to the sick man's mother, won the day for the cause of law and order.

The third story that I have selected is told by Miss Remy, a nursing sister of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. As her contribution describes the horrible dens that were daily visited I give her recollections in her own words:

> "When plague broke out in Bombay I gave up my post for a time (as Matron of a Maternity Hospital attached to a College School) and was selected by the Plague Committee to organise and take charge of the Grant Road Hospital till such time as the Roman Catholic Sisters of the Order of Jesus and Mary were able to take up the work as they had promised. From this hospital—the Police Hospital, where I afterwards worked—I was taken out on several occasions by the Plague Committee in their house-to-house visitation. The people have strong prejudices against natives of another caste, and especially Europeans, approaching too near their places, so that in examining the houses it was necessary to respect the feelings of the owners in this regard. The rooms are usually 10 ft. by 10 ft.; the floor sometimes is of clay beaten down till it is firm and smooth and covered with a layer of liquid cow-dung, which quickly dries, forming a clean and neat surface; this is renewed at short intervals of a week or so. The internal arrangements are very simple; the cooking-place, usually surrounded by shining brass and copper pots, occupies a corner of the room, a low charpoy or cot in another, bundles of firewood, cow- {175} dung cakes used as fuel, are stocked in odd recesses with a collection of dried fish and grain. General Gatacre, always courteous and tactful, was most careful in observing their prejudices. He always asked me to go in first and report if any of the occupants were suffering from plague or other causes, and also as to the condition of their room. The General would follow closely, and as the door opened to admit me he would look into the room. If it was particularly clean and cared-for, he invariably rewarded the occupants with a rupee or so as encouragement. He was quick to see things, patient with details, and possessed of a tact and eloquence which smoothed over many difficulties that came in the way of our work. He was particularly fond of little children, and I have often seen him pat their heads and slip some coppers into their hands as we went along visiting the different tenements. One incident I remember very well. On leaving the neighbourhood of Ripon Road, after visiting a long row of *chawls*, we were followed by a crowd of children, about fifty or more. Suddenly on turning a corner we came upon a sweet shop. The General went up to the stall and, to the utter amazement and indignation of the owner, seized several trays of the sweets and scattered them on the pavement, when there was a general scramble and loud hurrahs. Before the man could remonstrate Sir William took a handful of loose silver from his pocket and placed it on the counter. This more than compensated the man for the sweets, and he smiled and salaamed."

During this systematic visitation hovels were discovered where white men had never before penetrated; scores of houses were boarded up and labelled "U.H.H.," which stood for "Unfit for human habitation."

{176} In *The Times of India* of March 31, 1897, we have a graphic but, alas! lengthy account of the visit of the Committee to a Mahommedan quarter to sanction buildings selected for use as hospitals. We read: "When the General's brake was sighted they lustily cheered him." On this occasion a feast and a vote of thanks was part of the programme.

> "Tea and coffee were provided by the members of the party. When all were seated, Khan Bahadur Cassum Mitha rose and said in Hindustani:
>
> "'General Gatacre,—We have been much honoured by your visit to this place to-day. Since you have assumed the command of affairs relating to this dire pestilence, we have learnt to assure ourselves of our safety. We are convinced that you honour our religious feelings, and we believe that what you do is for our own good. You have perhaps no idea of the esteem and respect you command among us. You have won over our hearts by your noble demeanour, and on the altar of your popularity we are ready to sacrifice everything.... In you, General, we find a saviour, and we thank Lord Sandhurst for sending you among us. You may count on our assistance at any and every moment. Our lives and our money will be always at your command.'"[6]

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[6] See *Bombay Gazette*, March 31, 1897.

Opposition

As if in protest against the compliance of the great majority to the wishes of Government, one sect of Mahommedans, the Sunnis, showed themselves very refractory. After much {177} elaborate letter-writing the Headmen sent a Mr. Raikes to lay before the Plague Committee the objections to their proceedings. At the conference that was arranged the delegate was heckled into expressing himself clearly: "'It really comes to this,' he said; 'they ask you to minimise as far as you possibly can the great objections they have to the removal of the sick by not doing it at all.'"[7] To which the Chairman seems to have rapped out: "That is absolute nonsense!"—to the great amusement of his supporters. But though his words were pointed, his conduct was deliberate, and his patience faultless, for in a leading article we read:

[7] See *Advocate of India*, March 31, 1897.

> "The correspondence between General Gatacre and the representatives of the Sunni Mahommedans will satisfy every one that the community has been treated with extraordinary patience. The Chairman of the Committee has given two long interviews to the Sunni leaders, who have had professional assistance in placing their views before him. He has listened patiently and respectfully to every argument and objection that has been put before him; they have gone to the Governor with a letter which put their case at its strongest; and once again they have gone back to General Gatacre, who once more, in replying to their solicitors, treats them with a kindness and a consideration which sheer stubbornness seldom meets with in this world."[8]

[8] See *Times of India*, April 7, 1897.

{178} The show of troops was slightly increased when the recalcitrant quarter was visited, but this precaution had due effect, and no violence took place.

After about six weeks of unsparing toil and incredible devotion, it was becoming clear that the labours of all those concerned were not in vain: the returns were showing a steady and unmistakable decline. But this had not been accomplished without very great persistence on every side. The General writes:

> "I hope I shall hold out all right, but the strain is pretty severe; some of my Committee are feeling it, but have not broken down yet. We are working from fourteen to eighteen hours in the day, which does not give me much time for writing."

That he won the loyal support of all his colleagues is clear from the following letter:

> "... The General is keeping very well; the amount of work he gets through is tremendous. There is one thing about him that has struck me very much, and that is the extraordinary personal influence he quite unconsciously exerts over the men working under him. A Surgeon-Colonel H—— has been sent down from Chitral for plague duty here, and he dislikes the whole thing. He had congenial work up there, a lovely climate, snow and frost, a nice house with a lovely garden; and he has come down to work in the slums of Bombay at the hottest time of the year, with no friends in the place, and a most enervating climate. He says that if any one else but General Gatacre was {179} at the head of affairs, he would resign to-morrow. Major B—— is the same. His staff appointment will be up in October; he has eight months' leave due to him, and would have taken it if there had been any other General here. But he knows how busy General Gatacre is with the plague, and feels that it would be hard on him to get a new A.A.G. just now. And Major B—— is a hard-headed man, with, one would think, little sentiment about him. But I could give you many instances. Captain C—— of the Bombay Infantry, who is working as a secretary in the office, is only staying because General Gatacre is the Chief.... The General had a great dinner last month for all the medical men in Bombay, and as they refrained from discussing the plague, or their methods of treating it, it went off very well. Last week we had another dinner of twenty-four, to which all the Russian, German, and Austrian scientists and all the foreign consuls were invited; it was a decidedly interesting evening."

On April 30 the General writes:

> "... We are still struggling with the plague, and though it is milder in Bombay it is still dreadfully severe in the provinces all around. We have now been put on to take up the provinces, and it is like paying the labourers of an enormous town when our pay-day comes on.... The work and worry here is unceasing, and I really don't know when we shall be out of the wood."

And again a fortnight later:

> {180} "The climate, though good for Bombay, is beastly, and there is still much sickness about. We lost a nurse, Miss Horne, ten days ago, of plague. In Bombay the mortality has come down to nearly normal, but in Cutch-Mandvi it is still very bad; at the latter place, with a population of 10,000 actually present, they have lost 2,000 in the last fortnight! I am just beginning to write the Report; it will take about two months, I think. We trust the disease will not break out again during the rains, but people know so little about it that it is impossible to say."

Writing on May 21, 1897, he says:

> "... Our work has not lightened much here yet, although the disease is under control. You see the same organisation must exist to prevent the plague breaking out again as up to date has existed for controlling it. There is much plague in the districts, and people are trying to get back to Bombay. Many come in with the disease on them, but we catch them all at the stations and Bunders, and put them in hospital. Now we are stopping every one coming in and detaining them eight days, to make sure they have not got the disease."

In India that year the Queen's birthday was to be celebrated on June 22. Lord Sandhurst invited the General to his official dinner on the occasion, and urged him to come to Poona for a few days' change; but the latter declined the kind invitation, being fearful lest disturbances should occur in Bombay owing to the general holiday.

A murderous assault

{181} That very night, at Poona, as the guests were returning after the dinner, a horrible outrage was perpetrated. In the darkness armed men climbed on to the back of two open carriages and shot the officers riding in them. Mr. Ayerst, who with his wife was in the first carriage attacked, died on the spot, being shot through the head. It was afterwards shown that there was no ill-feeling against this young officer, and that he was the victim of a mistake. In the carriage immediately following, Mr. Rand, a political officer who had been acting as Chairman of the Poona Plague Committee, was driving alone; he was shot through the lungs, and though at one time there seemed some hope of his recovery, he succumbed about ten days later.

It was well known that Gatacre had been receiving threatening letters[9]; violent language of this sort had even appeared in the papers. It was therefore natural that a very strong wave of sympathy and resentment at such an outrage should have been felt in Bombay, where the measures likely to provoke such personal retribution had necessarily been more drastic.

[9] See *Advocate of India*, April 13, 1897.

The General writes on June 25:

> "... Our dinner was a success, but the affair at Poona has rather upset people; it appears that the people there have been determined to have the blood of the Plague Committee, and accordingly arranged to assassinate them. Rand I fear must die; Ayerst, who was shot by
> {182} mistake, was killed at once; L——, who was on the Committee as segregation officer, was wanted, but the assassin mistook Ayerst for him. I trust the man will be discovered; we know who the instigator is, but it will be difficult to prove it. I wish I was on the job. I went to Poona yesterday, and saw the place, and had a long talk with Brewin, head detective; he seems fairly confident he will trace the murderers and bring the crime home to the suspected instigators."

Farewell

Though telegrams conveying the welcome news had reached him a fortnight earlier, it was not till the end of June that Bombay learnt that its General Officer Commanding had been appointed to the command of a Brigade at Aldershot, and would shortly be leaving the scene of his labours. The city had now been pronounced free from plague, hospitals were being closed on all sides, and employés of all ranks were daily dismissed. The Gatacre Committee had succeeded in stamping out the plague, and a chorus of gratitude arose towards the man to whose courage and determination the success of the attempt was mainly attributed. Every community wished to present him with a token of its recognition, while all combined to entertain him "on a very grand scale."[10] Leave was obtained from the Government of India to accept five testimonials, which, being cased in the silver cylinders familiar to the Anglo-Indian, are as beautiful as their contents are unique. Two of these offerings were a
{183} source of special pride and pleasure to their recipient. The casket presented by "The Citizens of Bombay" contains a scroll of parchment on which sixty signatures testify that all the representative men in the city, Christian, Mussulman, and Hindu, all merged their differences in their unanimous appreciation of the brilliant qualities and self-sacrificing devotion of the Chairman of the Bombay Plague Committee. A silver box presented by the seven officers who had so loyally served on the Committee throughout those four arduous months was also specially prized. But I am very sure that he would wish me not to omit a record of the offering of the Plague Staff, native clerks, engineers, and workmen of all classes; or of the touching farewell accorded him by the Sisters of the Cross at the Bandora Convent.

[10] See *Bombay Gazette*, July 6, 1897, and *Times of India*, July 22, 1807.

On July 2, one week before he sailed for home, he writes:

> "I am looking forward to getting back to life again; I have been buried in a plague-pit for the last few months."

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CHAPTER XII

1897-1898

FROM ALDERSHOT TO BERBER

1897

When Gatacre reached Aldershot on Sunday, August 11, 1897, he found that his Brigade was already engaged in manoeuvres. The training was so arranged that year that though a continuous scheme was carried on from day to day, the troops returned each evening to their barracks. His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught, who commanded the Aldershot District, sent a kind message of welcome to the new Brigadier, saying that he would not expect to see him out for the first few days, but hoped that he would soon be able to take up the command of his troops in the field.

Route-marching

As the field-days all took place within easy reach of Aldershot, many ladies used at first to ride out on their bicycles to see what was going on. This practice was, however, suddenly dropped after we learnt that two of our friends had been taken prisoners one day. They were detained, and entertained, at the Headquarter Camp during the day's operations, and were not liberated until the troops
{185} were on the march homewards. It was thought that ladies thus prowling round until they got in touch with their husbands' corps would quite innocently carry information that would materially affect the execution of the military scheme.

It was a great pleasure to Gatacre to find himself in England again. His sociable and friendly instincts all came into play. I remember his getting hold of a list of the cadets at Sandhurst, and seeking out the sons of his friends, and asking them over to such events as would interest them. He set about getting horses, and looked forward to a hunting season at home. The Brigade route-marching was positively an enjoyment to him; he took so much interest in his new regiments that he would get up early on the route-marching days and be on the barrack square to see the first battalion march out, and sit there on his horse until the last man of the last battalion had passed him. Then cantering on, he would work his way up to the head of the column and see the first and the last company march in. He found the most genuine and unaffected pleasure in every phase of his work. The conditions under which it was carried out were much easier and less exacting than they had been in India. Indeed, the light work that goes on after October 1 was so much of a holiday to him that all thought of long leave was postponed till later in the season.

At Christmas he took ten days' leave, which we spent at my father's house in Sussex. The distance being only
{186} twenty-four miles, and the weather being open, we did the journey on horseback, and had a few days' hunting with Lord Leconfield's hounds during our visit. On Monday, January 3, we rode back, and, arriving late, had just sat down to luncheon when the A.D.C. suddenly turned up, bringing a telegram in his hand.

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"This seemed so important, sir," he said, "that I thought I ought to bring it myself."

The telegram was from the War Office in London to the Aldershot Divisional Office, and ran:

> "Please send General Gatacre and Major Snow, Brigade-Major, here as soon as possible; may be wanted for foreign service."

There had been a paragraph in the morning papers announcing the movement of troops from Cairo up the Nile, and this news supplied us with the true interpretation. The General got away by the next train, and in the afternoon sent back this telegram:

> "Arrive 9.15; sail Wednesday next."

Having returned so recently from India, the General had all that he wanted in the way of field-service uniform and camp kit. Though twenty-four hours seemed a short time in which to make preparations for such a momentous journey, still he got away more comfortably than the other men who had received the same short summons. On Tuesday morning {187} he cleared up work in the office, and handed over his Brigade; he left Aldershot in the evening, and started from Charing Cross at 8.30 a.m. on Wednesday, January 5, 1898, for Egypt, via Marseilles.

There is no need to tell over again the long story of the gradual loss of the Soudan to Egypt, with the encroachment of the Dervish Empire, nor of the fall of Khartoum with the death of General Gordon ("my brother dreamer in an iron race") on January 26, 1885, nor of the patient preparation that had been going on in the thirteen years that had passed. This book is concerned only with the final act of the drama, the defeat of the forces of the Khalifa Abdullahi, and the recovery of the capital.

In 1898 Sir Herbert Kitchener was Sirdar of the Egyptian Army. He had organised his force for the purpose it was to fulfil, and had gradually crept onwards up the Nile, until, on September 3, 1897, he reached and occupied Berber. At that point he was, as it were, within striking distance of Khartoum. This view seems also to have been held by the enemy, for in December the Intelligence Department heard of warlike preparations on his part. This report precipitated the massing of the forces on our side. The Sirdar knew that he could call for the assistance of British troops when the real struggle was to take place, and he made his call in December.

Orders were immediately issued for the concentration of three battalions at Wady Halfa. The 1st Lincolnshire and {188} the 1st Cameron Highlanders were already at Cairo, the 1st Warwickshire were moved from Alexandria, while the 1st Seaforth Highlanders at Malta were warned and shipped to Cairo in a very short space of time. This regiment was also pushed forward, as soon as others had been brought from Crete and Gibraltar and Burma, to maintain the usual garrison in Lower Egypt. The command of this service Brigade was given to Major-General W. F. Gatacre, C.B., D.S.O. Major d'Oyly Snow accompanied him as Brigade-Major, and Captain R. G. Brooke as A.D.C.

The General proceeded by train to Assouan, and by boat to Wady Halfa, which he reached on Thursday, January 25. It was here that he first met the Sirdar. But the troops had already passed on in front to Railhead, which was then the other side of Abu Hamed. From Wady Halfa the new Desert Railway, which was still under construction, leaves the Nile and strikes out to the south-east across the open country towards Abu Hamed, a journey of about 250 miles.

Writing from Camp Guheish, about seventeen miles south of Abu Hamed, on February 2, the General says:

> "We arrived here last night about eight o'clock, after a long journey across the desert from Halfa. Such a desert—not a thing to be seen but sand and a few low black rocks jutting out of the plain. A few straw-coloured birds, like stonechats, and a wagtail I saw at one {189} place; goodness knows what they live on. At one o'clock we were within one mile of Abu Hamed, and were steaming steadily along, when, in ploughing through a sand-drift, we went off the line, and had to turn to and clear the line with the few shovels on the train and our hands. Fortunately we were only a mile from Abu Hamed, so I sent on a messenger, and in fifty minutes a relief train came up, and, with the help of jacks, the engine was got on to the line again in four hours. It was fortunate we did not run off the line in the middle of the Desert, or we should have been delayed at least a day, and would have been put to inconvenience for food, though of course we had some. Well, I found Snow waiting for us, and we detrained our horses safely, and then, after going on another mile, we came to our camp, placed between the Nile and the railway—a howling desert, with a tremendous wind blowing night and day. The dust fills everything, but the climate up to date is magnificent, and I hope will continue so for a long time; quite cold at night and in the morning, sufficient to make me put on my great-coat, and at night, though of course I sleep in my clothes, I am glad of all the blankets I can put on.... The Maxim guns I left at Halfa temporarily, as we haven't got sufficient food for the mules yet, but as soon as the train is running through we shall have them up."

A fortnight later the railway had grown longer, and as Railhead advanced, so the British Brigade moved southwards and finally camped at Abu Dis.

Gatacre used the three weeks that the troops were encamped by the railway to get in touch with his Brigade—to {190} feel and to improve their marching powers. His methods excited some comment at the time, but afterwards, when there was a real call for exceptional exertions, it was frankly admitted that the previous training had been of great value. "It is impossible to deny that, while discipline and health were successfully maintained, the general efficiency was greatly increased."[1]

[1] *The River War*, by Winston Spencer Churchill, vol. i. p. 366.

There were, however, two directions in which efficiency was seriously hampered—boots and bullets. The General writes on February 2:

> "The present-shaped bullet .303 Lee-Metford rifle has little stopping power. Well, we have only this class of ammunition, so I am altering the shape of the bullet to that of the Dum-Dum bullet, which has a rounded point. I do this by filing the point off. Before I left Cairo I provided four hundred files and small gauges to test the length of the altered bullet, and daily here we have 2,800 men engaged on this work. I borrowed fifty railway rails and mounted them flat side uppermost, to form anvils on which to file. We have a portion of men unpacking, and another portion packing, so that the same men are always at the same work. The men are getting very sharp at it; it would make a capital picture. This is a terrible place for boots, and many of the men whose boots were not new at starting have mere apologies for boots on their feet. Fortunately, we have time to rectify this, and I have taken the necessary steps."

And again a week later:

> {191} "The men are working very well; we have no drink, and therefore no crime or sickness. I am getting on well with altering our ammunition. We have 3,000,000 rounds to alter, but are making good progress, altering about 80,000 rounds per day."

In the same letter we read:

> "There are crocodiles in the river here, but not many. A fisherman caught one about three feet long, a most vicious little brute, who snaps at everyone and everything; he is tied by the middle with a piece of string, and swims about in a bath; he will probably be eaten when his master gets hungry. Three days ago a gazelle was trapped and sent in to us by a native. He was uninjured, and a beautiful little brute, with large eyes like Lorna's. We all decided to keep him as a pet, and he got quite tame in a few hours. But alas! we got hungry, and some one suggested that he might escape—so we ate him. Perhaps it was the wisest course."

In a letter dated Abu Dis, February 24, we get the first word of the forced march that was ordered on the following day:

> "I am so frightfully busy that I cannot find time for anything, so I think I may as well sit down and write to you for relaxation. Yesterday we had a seventy-mile ride to a place called Bastinab and back, looking out for future camping-grounds, for I have got a hint to be ready to move on at once, as Mahmoud at Metemma has crossed over to the east side of the Nile, and threatens to attack Atbara and {192} Berber.... We may have to move and stack our camp baggage, etc., by the side of the line in the desert, and march on in light order, the same sort of thing as in Chitral—a most exciting business this would be, wouldn't it?
>
> "My Maxim Battery came in to-day; I am quite pleased to get it. The men are looking splendid, and we have only thirty or so sick out of a total strength of nearly 3,000. I have now got my camel transport, something like 800 animals; this makes me more independent, and if I am required to move I can do so."

Between February 22 and 25 a series of telegrams had been flying between the Sirdar at Berber and the Brigadier at Abu Dis. All the details of the march which would be necessary to bring the British troops forward were proposed on the one side and sanctioned on the other, so that when on Friday, February 25, the following telegram was received at midday, orders were immediately issued and the start was made that evening.

> "News has come in that enemy in ten rubs advancing. You can therefore move Brigade as arranged.—SIRDAR."

(A rub means any number between 500 and 1,500 men.)

To which this message was sent in reply:

> "I shall arrive at Atbara Camp nine or ten o'clock on Wednesday second with Maxims and 2,000 men; guns and cavalry will arrive on first.—GATACRE."

{193} I have found a rough draft of the official report of the forced march made by the British Brigade on Berber in accordance with the order received, and have decided to print this narrative almost as it stands.

> "The 1st Lincolnshire and detachment 1st Royal Warwickshire Regiment, with the six guns Maxim Battery, Royal Engineer detachment, Army Hospital Corps, and Army Service Corps, moved to Railhead, sixteen miles, by an empty ballast train, thence by route march seven and a half miles to camp at El Sherreik, which they reached at daylight on the morning of Saturday, February 26, all well. Remainder of Warwicks moved at midnight, arriving at Sherreik 7.30 a.m. The 1st Cameron Highlanders bivouacked by the side of the railway, and on the arrival of a train at 5 a.m. were railed to Railhead. They reached camp at 9.30 a.m. all well.
>
> "At El Sherreik the Brigade halted for the day, and at 10 p.m. started on their march for Diveryah. Tea was made at Nedi, and the troops left again, after resting, at 2.30 a.m. on Sunday. Bastinab was reached shortly after daybreak. Captain Bainbridge, Egyptian Army, supplied firewood, and fires were lit, it being very cold. Here sixty pairs of fantasses were taken, as no water was available *en route*. The road onward proved rocky and sandy in places, and was very heavy going for tired men, but Diveryah was reached at 3 p.m. The stony nature of the country completely wore out many of the boots. The last three miles were very trying, as the sun was hot; there was no shade, and the men felt the weight of their equipment. The bivouac was laid in a small nullah, running at right angles to the Nile, and the {194} men made themselves very comfortable. Finding that a great number of men had worn through the soles of their boots, I arranged with Captain Strickland, Egyptian Army, to convey about 400 men, under the command of Major Napier, Cameron Highlanders, by an Egyptian steamer to Berber. They left Diveryah on Monday morning, February 28, and reached Berber the same day, where they were refitted from the boot store of the Egyptian Army, and rejoined the Brigade on arrival.
>
> "At 2.30 a.m. on Monday, February 28, the Brigade moved from its bivouac *en route* to Um Hosheyo by the desert track, which, almost immediately after leaving the bivouac, lay through brushwood and broken ground. Owing to touch being lost by the rear battalion, a delay of three-quarters of an hour ensued, when the march was resumed over a rough and stony piece of country. After about five miles the track improved, and at 6.15 a.m. the first man of the Brigade marched into Um Hosheyo. Continuing its march the advanced guard reached a grove of Dom palms at Wady Hamar at 8.30 a.m., where a halt was made till 4.30 p.m. to enable the troops to cook and sleep. At 4.30 p.m. the troops again moved forward over a good level track, and continued marching until 10.45 p.m., at which hour Genenetti was reached. Total distance from El Sherreik to Genenetti forty-five miles. Here we dropped another 122 men whose boots had completely gone.
>
> "At 3 a.m. on Tuesday, March 1, the Brigade paraded and moved off along a fairly good track, heavy in places, for Aboudyeh, twelve miles. After a trying hot march the Brigade reached a point two miles north of Aboudyeh at 9 a.m., where they rested till 4.30 p.m. Three {195} men were reported missing, but it was subsequently ascertained that they had proceeded with other men who had worn out their boots from Genenetti, under command of Major Snow, Brigade-Major, with spare ammunition and commissariat supplies. At 4.30 p.m. the troops left Aboudyeh for El Hassa, thirteen miles, a very hot evening, over (at first) a good hard plain, crossed here and there by heavy sandy khors; there was little wind, and the column marched till 11 p.m. through dense clouds of dust. After marching about two miles the Brigade halted to give the men water at Aboudyeh, where a certain number of wells containing brackish water were found. The inhabitants turned out and provided *dilus* (buckets) and ropes, willingly giving the men water. Company after company filed past, each man getting half a canteen full of water. After this halt no more water was obtainable, as the route lay inland, and the men had to rely on their water-bottles.
>
> "At 11 p.m. on Tuesday the Brigade filed on to the El Hassa camping-ground, about three miles north of Berber, and bivouacked by the side of the Nile. Two miles before reaching El Hassa, the General Officer Commanding received a letter by camel messenger from His Excellency the Sirdar, directing that the column should halt for twenty-four hours, and pass through Berber at 5.30 a.m. on the morning

of March 3. The Brigade, therefore, remained halted till 3.30 a.m. on the morning of Thursday the 3rd, when it marched for Berber.

> {196} "On arriving at the north end of the town of Berber, the column was reinforced by the 400 men who had been refitted with boots from the Egyptian Army stores. The Sirdar met the column at about 5.30 a.m. on the outskirts of the town, and was heartily cheered by the troops as they passed him. The bands of the Soudanese battalions played in the three regiments, and the men met with a great reception from all ranks of the battalions in garrison, who turned out to a man, and afterwards provided tea and cigarettes for the men, and breakfasts for the officers, at the camping-ground. The officers likewise received much hospitality at the hands of the Sirdar and the various messes in garrison. At 4.30 p.m. the troops moved on again to Camp Dabeika, eleven miles from Berber, along an excellent desert track, about a mile from, and parallel to, the Nile. The Brigade arrived with no sick man. The conduct of the troops during the whole march was excellent; there were no cases of difficulty between them and the natives of the country, and there was no crime, which may be considered as highly satisfactory and showing the state of discipline in which the commanding officers hold their regiments."

The General marched the greater part of the way on foot, and made use of his spare horses to mount footsore men. When questioned on this point, he gave the following reply in a letter:

> "With regard to my doing our long march on foot, it was nothing to me; troops necessarily march slowly, and it is pleasanter and less fatiguing (not to speak of its being a better example) for me to walk all the way. I always had my horse with me, and I constantly had to get on to go to the head of the column, or the tail, to see if all was going right, and this made a nice change."

{197} The distance from Railhead to El Hassa, just short of Berber, was sixty-five to seventy miles, and this journey was accomplished between 10 p.m. on Saturday and 11 p.m. on Tuesday—seventy-three hours. Another fifteen miles on Thursday completed the march to Dabeika.

This concentration had its effect on the enemy, who gave up any idea of attacking the Sirdar on the Nile, and the camp was unmolested for the next three weeks. Some critics have on this account made out that Gatacre overtaxed his troops in bringing them along at an unnecessary pace in such a climate; but surely the measure of the necessity for rapidity lies in the danger which this junction averted rather than in the security which it brought about. Moreover, it was the Sirdar on the spot who decided and gave orders: the General carried them out. At the time he wrote of it as a race between himself and Mahmoud.

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CHAPTER XIII

1898

ATBARA AND OMDURMAN

Combined force

All through the winter every movement on the part of the Dervish leaders was carefully watched by the gun-boats on the Nile and the Egyptian cavalry on its banks. The Intelligence Department had a system of espionage by which the feeling inside Omdurman was made known to them. The Sirdar knew that the Khalifa was unwilling to turn out his main army, but that a large force was preparing to move out of Metemma under the combined command of the Emir Mahmoud and the cavalry leader Osman Digna. Before long the Sirdar knew that this force had crossed to Shendy on the right bank of the Nile on February 28, and that on March 13 they had reached Aliab, which is only twenty miles south of Dakila, the Egyptian outpost. But their subsequent designs were not known. It was doubtful whether their scheme was to attack the Sirdar at Dakila, a fort which had recently been built on the right bank of the Nile, where the large tributary stream of the Atbara flows in from {199} the south-east, or to make a dash on Berber and sever the railway communication lower down. Eventually the Dervish leader found himself unable to carry out either of these schemes, the fortress appearing too formidable after the arrival of the British contingent, and Berber proving too remote. He decided therefore to threaten both points, and took up a strong position on the banks of the Atbara, about thirty miles above Dakila, which he fortified and entrenched elaborately, and waited for his foes to take the initiative.

The force with which the Sirdar could meet the enemy was composed of the British Brigade, which had now been completed to four battalions by the arrival of the Seaforth Highlanders, and three Brigades of the Egyptian Army, commanded respectively by Colonel Maxwell, Colonel Macdonald, and Colonel Lewis. There were also eight squadrons of cavalry, and two Maxim guns under Colonel Broadwood, six companies of the Camel Corps under Major Tudway, and some artillery, both heavy and light, under Colonel Long. The total ran up to nearly 14,000 men of all arms. This force was concentrated at Kenur on the Nile, and all the officers seem genuinely to have held the opinion that contact with the enemy might occur at any moment. But as it turned out, it was not till seventeen days after the Sirdar's force started on their march to meet the enemy that the two armies met.

{200} On Sunday, March 20, the whole force marched across the angle of the desert to Da Hudi, a camp on the Atbara River about twelve miles south-east of Kenur. They started as if only for a reconnaissance in force, for we read: "We are taking only one day's supplies and what we stand up in, one blanket being carried for us on camels." The hospital staff and transport was cut down to such narrow dimensions that it was hardly adequate for the work when the big fight really took place. Through all the next seventeen days the force lived on tinned beef and biscuits, in daily anticipation of closing with the enemy. But what was privation, discomfort, and hardship to every man in the force was vexation of spirit also to Gatacre. Writing on March 30, he says:

> "We may move to-morrow against Mahmoud, who is still in his entrenched jungle position at Hilgi on the east bank of the Atbara, eighteen miles south of this. I have been urging the Sirdar to move forward and attack him, as we have been inactive for some days, while Mahmoud is merely sitting and waiting for us. The inaction has a bad effect, both on our men and on the enemy."

And again on April 3:

> "We are leaving the camp to-morrow, and going on to one three and a half to four miles south of Abadar. I was in great hopes that the Sirdar would attack Mahmoud at once. I thought I had persuaded him, but he wired my recommendation to Lord Cromer, and gave his {201} own opinion and that of General Hunter, which were for waiting. To-day he got a wire from Lord Cromer, deciding not to attack—a great pity, I think. At present the situation is as under: Mahmoud is in a zariba about ten miles from here, with about 20,000 men, very much crushed up for space, exceedingly hard up for food, and so placed that they cannot, in the event of a reverse, get away at all as an organised force. There never was such a chance, and we are missing it."

Continuing his letter on the following day, he says:

> "Yesterday, after writing so far, I got a bad go of colic, or malaria, or something, which made me feel very bad; but I am better to-day, and hope to be all right to-morrow. I hear that another telegram has come from Lord Cromer, saying, on consideration he leaves the matter to the Sirdar, so I presume he will now attack as soon as possible. I hope so. We have moved to-day to Abadar, and are encamped in a shady belt of trees, near the river, but it is getting very hot."

A forward policy

During this time there had been frequent reconnaissances in the direction of the enemy's camp by the cavalry and Camel Corps and artillery. Three small actions had been fought; and with the help of the information thus obtained, and from the tales of deserters, the position, size, and strength of Mahmoud's camp were known with considerable accuracy.

It was the responsibility which Gatacre had incurred by advocating an early attack on this fortified position, against {202} the advice of others better acquainted with Soudan warfare, that coloured all his dispositions when the day arrived. He did not, however, let his natural forwardness of character deceive him as to the resistance to be overcome. The author of *The River War* has already made this point, although he did not know the true interpretation of the situation.

> "It is impossible not to sympathise with General Gatacre's obvious determination that, whatever happened to the other parts of the assault, the British Brigade should burst into the enclosure at all costs.[1]

[1] *The River War*, vol. i. p. 457.

This feeling of exaggerated personal responsibility led the General to take up his position at the head of his Brigade. In his letter written four days later he anticipates the criticism that would be levelled against him on this account, and shows that he had weighed the point, and had deliberately forsaken the traditional place. Scientific soldiers may criticise his action, but, according to Mr. Churchill, there was to a civilian a certain grim splendour in the spectacle.[2]

[2] *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 468.

In the General's last letter before the fight we find the following words:

> "My men are ready. I have taught them all I know. We shall do our best, and I think my regiments will do all I expect of them; God bless you."

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The assault

The battle of the Atbara was fought on Good Friday, April 8, 1898. It was a brilliant victory, and resulted in the capture of Mahmoud and the total defeat of his army. The enemy's losses were estimated at 40 Emirs and 3,000 Dervishes killed. On our side the losses were 24 killed and 101 wounded in the British Brigade, and 56 killed and 371 wounded in the Egyptian Army. It is interesting to note that the casualties in the two Egyptian Brigades, which took part in the assault on the zariba simultaneously with the British regiments, amount to 381, which gives a higher ratio per Brigade than the figure for the British troops, which is 125. So that it is scarcely possible to maintain that the formation adopted in Gatacre's brigade was peculiarly destructive.

The General's own letter of April 14 from Darmali furnishes a very graphic account of the engagement and the return march:

> "They all did very well, but I had to get a bit forward to watch that all went well. Between you and me, a General Officer should not get up into the firing line of his Brigade without good reason; this I know, but I had good reasons for going there. When your whole Brigade only covers a space of 200 yards by 200 yards, it is immaterial where you are, so far as the penetration of bullets is concerned, but what is important is that the G.O.C. should be where he can watch any important point.... Well, our men started the ball, and we pushed straight on over the stockade. It was pretty hot when we were pulling away the zariba fence; the ground was flying up as if it was {204} being harrowed all round me, with the fire of the riflemen, and I lost a terrible bunch of men at that spot. Of course I saw the sooner we got to the stockade the sooner we should stop the rifle fire, so we rushed it, and as soon as we were in we soon killed all the riflemen and the spearmen there, but we had a real good fight. The general operations of the day, however, were as follows: On evening of the 7th (Thursday) the British Brigade and three Egyptian Brigades moved out from Abadar at 6 p.m., my Brigade leading; we moved in square about three miles, sat down in the Desert, had some food and water, and slept in square till 1 o'clock a.m. Of course we took no blankets or anything with us, merely one day's food, ammunition, and water. At one o'clock we moved on in square, the other brigades following; it was moonlight, and a curious sight to see these three enormous hollow squares moving solemnly on with not a note or a whisper even—no smoking. We went on till just before dawn, then halted and deployed into line; a fine line it was—the Camerons, Seaforths, and Lincolnshires, with the Warwicks in column on the left flank at right angles.
>
> "We then advanced a bit, till we could see the Dem (zariba), pulled up, and commenced firing with our artillery, in hopes of drawing Mahmoud out to fight, and secondly of pounding his army well before we assaulted the position. Our cavalry was on my left, watching the left flank; the Dervishes made several attempts to get their cavalry out, but failed. Well, after hammering away for an hour, the order for assault was given, and away we went, the, Camerons covering the front of the assaulting column, and firing as they went; directly we got on to the crest of the hill men began to tumble about, and I gave the order to rush the zariba and stockade.

{205}

The return march

> "We lost some very good officers and men killed, but that must always be; we lost fewer than I expected. Captain Findlay, Camerons, a nice fellow, was killed getting over the zariba. Captain Urquhart, of the Camerons, too, was killed. He had just come back from the Staff College on purpose to take part in the expedition. Gore was quite a boy. I was with Captain Findlay most of the march to the zariba, as his was the company of direction, and as we were marching principally by the stars, I had to be there or thereabouts. After they were dead I cut off a bit of hair from Findlay and Urquhart to send home; Gore had had his hair cut so short that none was procurable. We buried them all in one grave, immediately after the fight. A curious sight: the Pipers and Buglers of a Soudanese battalion played the Dead March in Saul, then the Pipers of the Camerons and Seaforths played a Lament, then we filled in the grave. We had amongst the four Brigades about 600 killed and wounded, and we had, immediately we had buried the dead and dressed the wounded, to carry all these men back about eight miles across the desert. We told off eight men to each stretcher, and moved slowly homewards, leaving at 6 p.m. The fight was over about 8.45 a.m. I think, but it took us all day to dress the wounded and build sheds for them (of bushes). The sun, of course, is very hot, and we had all to sit in the desert, as the bush and the river-bank was so full of dead and dying Dervishes as to make it inadvisable for our men to

lie there.

*　　*　　*　　*　　*

> "Now I suppose we shall be here for three months, to refit and prepare for the next go-in at Khartoum, which will require careful doing."

{206} The Sirdar was naturally very much gratified at the decisive nature of his victory, and was overwhelmed with telegrams of congratulation. The following quotation from an article in *Blackwood's Magazine* of December 1902 tells us how the Sirdar expressed himself to his colleague:

> "Kitchener was dictating his dispatch to the Queen when there passed in front of us a pony led by a syce, and laden with spoils selected from that field of plenty with the praiseworthy discrimination of an art connoisseur. Kitchener hailed the man, and selecting the finest coat of mail and the most beautifully finished spear, bade me take them to General Gatacre with his warmest thanks for the splendid gallantry and good judgment with which he had led his fine Brigade. I seem now to see the pleasant light that shone in that brave soldier's eyes as I gave him the message word for word. What a splendid fellow, and how willingly any of us would have given our right hands to save him from the fate that befell him—at the hands of his own chiefs—in South Africa."[3]

[3] *Ex* article, "Campaigning with Kitchener," December 1902, p. 738.

In the official dispatch the Sirdar wrote:

> "The high state of efficiency to which the British Brigade was brought is, I consider, in a large measure due to the untiring energy and devotion to duty of Major-General Gatacre and the loyal support rendered him by the commanding officers of his battalions, all of whom he has brought to favourable notice. During the engagement on the 8th inst. General Gatacre showed a fine example of gallant {207} leading. The cordiality and good feeling existing between the British and Egyptian troops, who have fought shoulder to shoulder, is to a great extent due to the hearty co-operation of General Gatacre, and I cannot speak too highly of the services rendered by him and the troops under his command in the recent operations."[4]

[4] *The Times*, Wednesday, May 25, 1898.

All through May, June, and July the time hung heavily for the British Brigade. They were quartered in the villages of Darmali and El Sillem, the General's headquarters being at the former. The temperature ran up to 106° and 108° in the shade, but he makes light of the heat and says, "One does not feel it as one does in India."

One little incident of these weary days has survived, and is recorded by an officer in his recollections.

> "When the General was inspecting the Ordnance workshops at our camp on the Nile, a non-commissioned officer was brought to his notice as having done very good work. Gatacre complimented him highly, and said:
>
> "'Now, what can I do for you? I'll tell you what, you shall carry my flag when we advance to Omdurman.'
>
> "I believe the man's face was a picture, and he did not see it at all in the same light."[5]

[5] *With the 72nd Highlanders in the Sudan Campaign*, by Colonel Granville Egerton.

{208} For, as all the Brigade knew, the General's flag had been carried at the battle of the Atbara by Staff-Sergeant Wyeth, who had been shot through the knee and had subsequently died of his wound, so that the non-commissioned officer had good cause to look on it as an undesirable honour.

This matter of carrying a flag into action has also aroused comment, but it is recorded that the Sirdar was always accompanied by the red Egyptian Flag, and it is probable that, in flying a little Union Jack behind him, the General had merely adopted this practice to flatter the nationality of his troops.

At the end of May he made a trip in a gunboat to Shendy and Metemma, which he much enjoyed. In June he took a fortnight's leave to Alexandria and Cairo. It was while staying there that he received official intimation of his having been advanced to Major-General's rank, for hitherto his name had appeared in the Army List as a Colonel with the temporary and local rank of Major-General. According to regulations, a medical examination was necessary before this promotion could be confirmed. The idea that there could be any question about his health amused Gatacre greatly, and he offered, as a test, to run a hundred yards' race with the Principal Medical Officer. The challenge was politely declined, and an appointment made for the formal examination.

Promotion

{209} In August Gatacre had the great satisfaction of finding himself in command of a Division in the field. A second Brigade of British troops was being sent up, and Colonel Wauchope[6] and Colonel Lyttelton[7] arrived from England to take over the First and Second Brigades respectively. But however gratifying this promotion might be, it lifted him farther from the soldiers and the fighting, and it is owing to this circumstance that his name was so little mentioned in the story of the fight before Omdurman. This elevation, however, made no difference to his work or his activity. On August 17 he writes from Dakila:

[6] The late Major-General Andrew Wauchope, C.B.

[7] General the Hon. Sir Neville Lyttelton, G.C.B.

> "We are very busy now with embarkations and detrainments of troops arriving from the north; we are up nearly every night, as trains arrive at most unearthly hours; this of course is unavoidable. My first Brigade has gone on, and the embarkation of the second

commences at daybreak to-morrow morning.... We move by steamers towing barges to Wad Bishara, about 145 miles, and thence by route march."

Wad Bishara is just below the Sixth Cataract, and lies on the western bank about fifty-five miles north of Omdurman.

The defeat of the Dervish army at the battle of Omdurman took place on Sunday, September 2, 1898. The story was told with much detail in the newspapers at the time, and has since been elaborately set out in *The River War*, but, notwithstanding the existence of many records, this book would not be complete without some account of such an important event. Though far from being a comprehensive narrative, the General's letter is interesting in itself:

"*September* 7, 1898.

{210} "On the morning of September 1 we marched twelve miles through jungle, finding everywhere traces of the flight of the Dervish outposts—dead animals, men, etc., who had been killed by them, probably people attempting to desert.

"We arrived at Kerreri about 12 noon, and found a village on the river with much open ground to our front and south-west, with a conical hill standing up in the plain about two miles to the south. We settled down to eat in the village, and in about an hour our cavalry sent in to say that the Khalifa's army was on the march from Omdurman towards us in three bodies, a centre and two wings. As soon as we had had our food, we set to work to get our troops into position in a kind of semicircle round the village, and strengthened ourselves with a zariba and trench, where zariba thorns were unprocurable; this we finished by dark, and then sat down to eat and sleep. The night passed quietly. The Khalifa missed a chance of doing us much damage by not attacking at night, but luckily he did not disturb us.

"At 3.30 a.m. we stood to our arms, ready for an attack at dawn. It was a beautiful moonlight night, and I had been up most of the time, watching my line and inspecting the patrols, etc. About six in the morning of the 2nd we got intelligence that the Khalifa's army was coming on, and presently they began to pour across the open ground about two miles off, yelling like demons, apparently an endless stream of men and horses. I have never seen anything like it—banners flying all along the line, guns firing, etc. For an hour they kept pouring along in thousands, and suddenly the centre of the mass turned, and came straight for us. I made all my men lie down, so that {211} nothing could be seen of us except our zariba fence. As soon as they got within range, about 2,300 yds., we opened fire with all our guns, rifles, and Maxims, and a hail of lead fell on the army; but they were impervious to any influences of this kind, and kept pressing on and on till we literally mowed them down by hundreds. After about three-quarters of an hour, the ground was strewn with dead and dying, and then, as our fire did not slacken, they began to turn and go, but only at a walk, no running about it.

The great fight

"Then we advanced, and after we had moved on about one mile the centre of the Dervish force returned to the charge and fell upon a Soudanese Brigade, to whose assistance I sent a British Brigade (General Wauchope's); this stayed the Dervish attack, which was driven back and followed up. The whole force advanced and poured a heavy fire into the retreating Dervishes, who slowly withdrew, fighting. We had now been at work fighting and moving from 3.30 a.m. under a heavy sun without water, and had still four miles to march over a very sandy country, so we started in fighting formation, keeping ourselves ready at any moment to face west again. Well, they finally drew off to the hills, and we moved slowly on-towards the water, which one Brigade reached at 2 p.m. and the other at 3.30 p.m.; halted there till 4.30 p.m., and then marched on again into Omdurman, about three and a half miles; this we did not reach till dark, as we had to go carefully. There were still a lot of Dervishes in the town, and our gun-boats were shelling them, up the river and in the town. We had to bivouac out in the desert, as we could not find a suitable place. We could get no water that night, as the river was too far to send to, and it was not safe to allow small parties to go out.

{212} "Next morning we marched down to the river and bivouacked on the water's edge, and there we are now.

"The total dead counted were 10,324 as near as could be; the wounded it would be impossible to count, as they all crowded away on to the river-bank and into the town, but there were thousands of them, possibly another 10,000 or more, some with the most fearful wounds. I went out the next afternoon and also the day following with water for the wounded. I sent out many mules laden entirely with water, and we relieved many of these unfortunates, but no doubt many died from want of water.

"Now the whole thing is over, except an excursion to Fashoda, which the Sirdar is arranging; I think he goes up to-morrow with 100 men of the Northumberland Fusiliers in a steamer.

"We had a nice day at Khartoum; we (800 men from various battalions), two or three bands, nearly all the officers, and an equal number of Egyptians steamed up on gun-boats to Khartoum, landed opposite Gordon's Palace, hoisted the Union Jack and Egyptian flag simultaneously, saluted them, and then held a Memorial Service for Gordon. All our clergymen were present; the Sirdar made me stand on his right hand, thus paying a compliment to the British troops. Afterwards we wandered about and hunted among the ruins to find traces of Gordon."

Friendly words

There is no doubt that the General enhanced his reputation enormously in this campaign. Not only was his work done in the sight of Europe, but it was done under the eyes of a very {213} exacting master. *The World* wrote at the time: "Perhaps the highest compliment that can be paid him is that he has satisfied the Sirdar." Another paper said: "General Gatacre is a keen soldier—a workman 's'il y en a.' His idea of practising troops in the field during a campaign was an inspiration. The conventional idea has been that in the field the only alternatives were fighting and taking it easy. Result when campaigning in a bad climate, laziness in camp, rum, fever, and loss of condition generally."

In a letter of congratulation from a Civil Service friend in India, we find the following generous appreciation:

"You yourself are becoming more famous every day, to the great delight of your friends and well-wishers; and I was proud to see that at the Atbara you gave them a touch of the same bravery and indifference to danger that you delighted us with at the old club at Simla, when you rushed across the open and disarmed that Pathan servant who, after murdering the cook's mate, was firing 'promiscuous,' while we all huddled in the next block. Do you remember?"

One of his former Chiefs on the Bombay side wrote:

You ought to have been a K.C.B. long ago, but you are all right now, and nothing can keep you back."

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CHAPTER XIV

1898-1899

COLCHESTER

Festivities

On November 15, 1898, the Honours Gazette for the recent campaign was published, and Gatacre found himself a Knight Commander of the Bath. Having also been awarded the Second Class of the Imperial Order of the Medjidieh by His Highness the Khedive, he was now in possession of two stars as well as two additional war medals. He had the honour of receiving his knighthood at the hands of Her Majesty Queen Victoria at Windsor on December 10, 1898. Not long afterwards he received an invitation to stay at Windsor Castle, and had the honour of dining with Her Majesty.

1899

In the following February it was notified that Her Majesty the Queen had been graciously pleased to nominate Sir William as one of the officers to receive a Reward for Distinguished and Meritorious Service.

The whole nation was delighted with the success of its representatives in Egypt, and as all hearts had been wrung {215} by the tragedy of 1885, so now all rejoiced with the victors of 1898. A unanimous vote of thanks was passed in both Houses of Parliament. A large copy of these gratifying words printed on vellum and bound in red and green covers respectively was presented to each of the senior officers named therein. These were forwarded through Lord Kitchener, who added a few words endorsing the appreciation of Sir William's good work.

The Lord Mayor of London gave a dinner at the Guildhall in the Sirdar's honour. The Lord Provost of Edinburgh invited Lord Dufferin and Lord Kitchener to accept the Freedom of that ancient city. Edinburgh had reason to feel a special interest in the campaign, for one of the brigadiers was a Midlothian man and there had been two Highland regiments in his command. Lord Dufferin was especially pleased to see Gatacre again, for as Viceroy of India he remembered him well while serving on the Headquarters Staff.

There were also two gala days when the General was the central figure; for his native county of Shropshire was very proud of her son. On December 15 Sir William was enrolled a Freeman of the City of Shrewsbury with much acclamation and many kindly speeches. The county town of Bridgnorth also entertained him handsomely, and reminded him that he had signed their roll in the year 1860. Sir William was not a pretentious speaker, but when called upon for a speech on such occasions his ideas were simple and his words fluent and appropriate.

{216} The appointment he had held at Aldershot having been cancelled on his departure for Egypt, the General found himself unemployed for a time after his return, but at the end of October he was informally invited to say whether the Poona First-class District in India or the command of the Eastern District with Headquarters at Colchester would be the more agreeable to him. It was without hesitation that he chose the latter. From August 1880, when he left Dover with his regiment, to August 1897, when he had returned to take over his brigade at Aldershot, he had served continuously in India, while (with a short interval of five months) he had been working in the tropics for a further ten months. He had now nearly completed thirty-seven years' service, of which twenty-three had been spent in India. There was therefore to him a most attractive novelty about serving at home, and the independent provincial command that was offered to him would, he knew, in many ways prove most congenial. He took over the command from General Burnett on December 8, 1898, and went into residence at Colchester the next day.

The Eastern District at that time included the nine counties which lie between Norfolk and London, and between Nottingham and the sea. The General Officer Commanding was directly responsible to the War Office for the troops of all arms, regular, militia, and volunteers, within this area. During the training season the work was very heavy and {217} necessitated a great deal of touring. His previous experience in Bombay had given the General a special interest in coast defence, and it was therefore with pleasure that he again found himself in command of a long sea-board.

In the last year of his command, 1903, the Army Reorganisation scheme slightly changed his official position, but this was purely technical, and only affected his last six months there.

In Sussex

Occasionally Sir William was called upon to take part in the training outside his own district. Early in the year 1899 he was detailed to conduct one side of a staff-ride that took place in Sussex. An imaginary Blue Force was supposed to be concentrated at Eastbourne, while the Defence held the heights to the north of Ashdown Forest. The wild and picturesque district over which the operations were conducted added immensely to Gatacre's pleasure in the trip; he wrote with enthusiasm of the miles of heather-land, and had in the end the further satisfaction of finding that, as the Blue Invader, he had defeated his Red Opponent by a night-march on Dorking.

Among other events of the London season Sir William was present at the Royal Academy Dinner. Invitations to all sorts of public functions and city dinners followed throughout the summer. As the journey from Colchester only occupies one hour, it was possible for him to enjoy all such London diversions without in any way neglecting his professional duties.

Further evidence of his enhanced reputation was afforded by his selection to command a Division on Salisbury Plain {218} in the forthcoming manoeuvres. Two Divisions were organised, under the general direction of Sir Charles Mansfield Clarke. One had its headquarters at Perham Down and was commanded by Sir Leslie Rundle, the other by Gatacre with headquarters on the Downs above Bulford. This latter Division consisted of two brigades under Colonel Ian Hamilton and Colonel Clements; the staff remained in camp throughout the ten weeks' training, but the troops (which included units from the militia and volunteers as well as the regular army) took part in the training for two or three weeks only. This was the first occasion on which khaki uniform was worn in England; a certain battalion having recently returned from abroad, came into camp as it was, before refitting with home clothing. The camp lasted from June 25 to September 3; at the end Sir William wrote that his stay had been most instructive, and that Sir Charles Mansfield Clarke had expressed himself as much pleased with all that had been done.

Throughout this summer the situation in South Africa, so far as it could be known through the daily papers, was giving rise to great anxiety, and the probability of an outbreak of hostilities before very long became more and more apparent. Early in October Gatacre was warned that in the event of an Army Corps proceeding to South Africa he had been selected for the post of Lieutenant-General commanding the Third Division. Sir George White had only a week {219} before started to take command of the forces in Natal, and had borrowed Gatacre's A.D.C.; and at the same time the 6th Company Army Service Corps had been sent off from Colchester to the Cape.

Before the middle of the month Sir William's appointment and the details of his command were gazetted, and he received orders to sail on the Union-Castle Line mail steamer *Moor* on Saturday, October 21, from Southampton. His departure from Colchester was fixed for Friday the 20th. Although it was scarcely ten months since he had been resident in the district, the General had, as usual, become very popular with all classes. The Mayor and Corporation insisted on being given an opportunity of expressing their congratulations and good wishes.

"The Council," they said, "felt that they were parting not only with a distinguished officer and an ornament to Her Majesty's service, but with a brother citizen."

Off to the Cape

Crowds of friends were assembled on the platform that Friday afternoon, every officer of the garrison was there in uniform, and there were many persons who had come in by train to cry "God-speed," for not a few had husbands, sons, and brothers already at the front. Many people at that time thought that the war would be a very short affair after the arrival of the reinforcements, and it was in this spirit that a lady in her farewell greeting said: "Good-bye, General—good luck to you; but I fear it will all be over before {220} you get out." To which the General replied so gravely that she felt reproved: "Make no mistake. We have a long tough job before us."

In the evening papers that same day the news of the battle of Talana Hill was published. This was the first conflict of the three years' war, and very naturally the account of it added fervour to the public interest in the official departures. Two troopships were leaving Southampton that Saturday as well as the Union-Castle liner which was to carry Sir Redvers Buller and his three divisional commanders. The public knew by what train the officers would travel, and both at Waterloo and at Southampton the popular enthusiasm was expressed with extraordinary vehemence.

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CHAPTER XV

1899

CAPE COLONY

It was with great reluctance that Sir Redvers Buller had been persuaded to give any forecast to the War Office in London of the disposition of troops he intended to make on reaching Capetown. But whatever these may have been, he found on his arrival that the situation had so materially changed that he had to rearrange his plans to suit the emergency.

The Boers were bringing so much pressure to bear on Ladysmith, where Sir George White had established his headquarters, and on Kimberley, that he decided to send the First Division under Lord Methuen to the relief of the latter place, and to employ in Natal the Second Division and the two brigades of which the Third Division had been originally composed. It seemed at the same time so important to reassure the loyal colonists in Eastern Cape Colony that he sent Gatacre there with one battalion of infantry and a promise of speedy reinforcements.

{222} Writing on board ship between Capetown and East London, on November 16, Sir William says:

> "I am ordered to go to East London, and take command of the district up to Bethulie Bridge. Now, what does this mean? Why, that with the Royal Irish Rifles, which has never been on service before, together with half-battalion Berkshire Regiment, and a few Volunteers, I become responsible for the railway line and adjacent country up to the Orange River, about 200 miles long—but the last 100 miles are much disaffected. I have no definite orders, except that I am to hold Queenstown if possible, but East London at any rate, and am to raise as many Volunteers as possible."

When the General reached East London he found that it could be left under the care of a local Volunteer Corps, and so he proceeded by train to Queenstown the same day. Here he found the half-battalion named above, a small detachment of Royal Garrison Artillery, and half a company of Royal Engineers. Besides these regular troops there were 229 men of the Frontier Mounted Rifles, and 285 of the Queenstown Rifle Volunteers.

Sir Redvers Buller, who was the General Commanding-in-Chief, chose Natal for his headquarters. Sir F. Forestier-Walker was in command of the Lines of Communication, with headquarters at Capetown. Sometimes Sir Redvers sent his {223} messages direct to Gatacre, and sometimes they came through Capetown. There was no friction and no contradiction, but it may well have been that this duplication of important telegrams created an atmosphere of unrest and added poignancy to Gatacre's feeling of helplessness.

On November 18 a telegram was received from Sir Redvers Buller, pointing out that "the great thing in this sort of warfare is to be pretty certain that one position is safe before you advance to another, and that we are not yet strong enough to play tricks."[1]

Conflicting messages

Three days, later, however, the General Commanding-in-Chief strikes a different note:

> "I calculate it will be at least five days and probably a week before I have a second battalion to send you, or a battery of field artillery, but I am anxious to get into a position to protect the Indwe mines better than we do. Do you think it would be safe for you to advance your force or part of it to Stormberg, and hold that instead of Queenstown? I am told it is a good position for a force the size of yours. Of course you will have no support."[2]

To this Sir William replied that he had not sufficient men as yet to advance on Stormberg, but as soon as more troops arrived he intended to occupy that junction and clear the country round it.

{224} At the time this message was sent the Boers had not yet crossed the Orange River in strength, but by November 5 they had occupied Aliwal North and Stormberg, and were advancing on Dordrecht. The first is an important town on the Orange River, near which there are good bridges, both for the road and the railway; the second is a railway junction fifty-five miles north-west of Queenstown, and Dordrecht is a small town only thirty-five miles from Queenstown to the north-east.

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[1] See *Official History of the War in South Africa*, 1899-1902, vol. i. pp. 286, 287.

[2] From contemporary copy of telegram in W. F. G.'s own handwriting.

INVASION OF CAPE COLONY: THE BOERS MARCHING SOUTH OVER THE ORANGE RIVER AT ALIWAL NORTH.
p. 224

Invasion of Cape Colony: the Boers marching south over the Orange River at Aliwal North.

On hearing of the occupation of Dordrecht, Sir Redvers grew anxious lest his former suggestion should be taken too seriously, and telegraphed to Sir F. Forestier-Walker:

"Caution Gatacre to be careful. I think he is hardly strong enough to advance beyond Putters Kraal before Methuen's return."[3]

[3] See *Official History*, vol. i. p. 288.

And on the following day he added instructions to reinforce Gatacre by one, or if possible two battalions, and "any mounted men that can be spared."[4]

[4] *Ibid.*

Writing on November 24, Sir William says:

"I have not yet got any more troops, but am hoping for some directly. Fancy what a predicament for a General Officer to be in—no troops, no transport, no horses for his Mounted Infantry; but I trust all are coming. The only unfortunate thing is that our people in front, police, civilian officers, etc., are obliged to fall back for want of support. I have been over a good deal of country the last few days, round {225} our outposts, and am delighted with it. It is fine and open, and the farmers are a nice set of people. The sun is hot, but nothing like India: one can ride in it all day without inconvenience, and it hardly ever gives you sunstroke."

An anxious time

And again on the 28th:

"I have had a terribly anxious time the last two days, the Boers wrecking everything in my front, and no troops to drive them out. I am thankful to say that I hear to-day that a regiment, the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers, is arriving here to-morrow, ... and so I shall be able to make some kind of show—but I am still badly off for everything. I am still praying for artillery, hospitals, etc. The whole country is seething with rebellion, and to put it down we require a lot of men."

Immediately after the arrival of this reinforcement, Gatacre advanced his Headquarters to Putters Kraal, twenty-five miles up the railway, and placed outposts at Sterkstroom, Bushman's Hoek, and Penhoek. The cross railway line running from Stormberg westwards through Rosmead to Naauwpoort was soon afterwards destroyed by the enemy, thus putting a stop to any combined action between Sir William and Sir John French, who was defending a parallel railway which runs up from Port Elizabeth through Naauwpoort and Colesberg to Bloemfontein.

On November 30 Sir William writes:

{226} "I fear this is a grumbling letter, but I am in a miserable state of inefficiency. I have only two regiments (one joined yesterday). We have waggons but no harness, and only half the mules to draw them—and are within a few miles of the enemy. I have orders to raise Mounted Volunteers, but have no saddlery, no equipment, no clothing to supply them with: it would be laughable if it were not lamentable and serious....

"The worst point about the whole thing is that I can hear nothing of any more troops coming to me, that the Boers are eating up the country in our front, and forcing the farmers to join them, because I cannot move: and consequently they are getting stronger every day. I assure you that I am perfectly sick at such a display of inefficiency, unpreparedness, and apathy.

"Yesterday I made a dash out to Molteno, some sixteen miles ahead of my present position, and seized some 7,000 bags of food, meal, etc., and brought it in on some trains which I took out."

On Saturday, December 2, Sir William sent the following message to Sir Redvers Buller:

> "Military situation here requires dealing with extreme carefulness. Boers have occupied Dordrecht, and enemy is advancing in a southerly direction, evidently pointing for Queenstown. I have two British regiments only, and I am thirty-three miles to the north of Queenstown. I am holding Bushman's Hoek range, to endeavour to prevent descent into Queenstown district, which would mean general state of rebellion of Dutch. Force will be strengthened at Queenstown by next British regiment, which should arrive at Queenstown December 5, but Queenstown is indefensible position. Are there any orders, especially as regards my movements?"[5]

[5] See *Official History*, vol. i. p. 288.

{227} To which this reply was returned:

> "We have to make the best of the situation, and if the enemy is advancing by Dordrecht, the importance of Bushman's Hoek is diminished. You have a force which altogether is considerably stronger than the enemy can now bring against you. Cannot you close with him, or else occupy a defensible position which will obstruct his advance? You have an absolutely free hand to do what you think best."[6]

[6] See *Official History*, vol. i. p. 288.

Night attack suggested

On the following day the message given below reached Gatacre through Sir F. Forestier-Walker:

> "General Buller inquires whether you can safely leave your present position and advance to Henning's Station, or somewhere near where you can get a safe position, and also institute a policy of worry. He thinks if you could occupy Henning's Station Boers would fall back on Burghersdorp, or if you could get near enough to Burghersdorp to make night attack, it would be the thing to stop anxiety (*sic*). He adds Hildyard with a battalion and half sent a column of seven thousand Boers under Joubert himself flying. The above was probably wired before Buller read notification of the enemy's occupation of Dordrecht. He wired last night as follows: tell Gatacre he will have to take care of himself till 5th Division arrives. A telegram just received says he has given you a free hand."[7]

[7] From copy of telegram in A.D.C.'s handwriting.

Burghersdorp is about twenty-three miles north of Stormberg, and Henning is a station about ten miles west of {228} Stormberg on the cross line. This telegram, therefore, sketched a far more arduous and hazardous enterprise than that which Gatacre afterwards attempted.

Within the next few days the Third Division was strengthened by the arrival of the 74th and 77th Batteries Royal Field Artillery, the First Battalion Royal Scots, the 33rd Company Army Service Corps, and the 16th Field Hospital. All these units were only just arrived from England, so that, although the additional battalion of infantry was very valuable, Gatacre was unable to employ the men on the raid that he had been planning for some time past. They would serve, however, to protect the camp, and would thus set the other two battalions free for use as a striking force. Even these had only been two and three weeks in the country respectively, and the General had had no opportunity of getting them into the hard condition and fighting form that was reached by his Brigade on the Nile.

On December 8 he writes:

> "I am frightfully busy and worried. The whole of this country is seething with rebels, and as they are all mounted, and I have only a few mounted infantry on half-fed ponies, it is very difficult to cope with them.
>
> "I have now three regiments of infantry, but have a long railway line to guard, and every culvert has a couple of armed men in it. Fancy what an anxiety this is—their safety, their food, their overworked condition. If I had my Division I could really strike somewhere....
>
> {229} "I am hoping to move on a bit to-morrow or next day to recover some of the country given up prior to my arrival, as I think occupation of a position in advance of this may tend to awe the Dutch behind me."

In the *Official History* we read that—

> "The General Officer Commanding considered that, in the existing strategic situation, any further prolongation of the defensive attitude he had hitherto been obliged to maintain would be injurious. He determined, therefore, to take advantage of the free hand left to him by Sir Redvers Buller, and to follow the further suggestion that he should close with the enemy."[8]

[8] See *Official History*, vol. i. p. 289.

The first week in December was spent in reconnoitring the Stormberg position so far as wandering parties of Boers would permit. The general himself prepared a sketch of the hills surrounding it and the roads leading thereto, which he carried with him on the march. The only map available was on too small a scale (twelve and a half miles to the inch) to be useful for tactical purposes, but all possible information was extracted from every man acquainted with the locality. Their accounts of the features and the distances were often inexact, and did not always agree, but eventually five local men, belonging to the Cape Mounted Police, under Sergeant Morgan of the same corps, were selected as guides.

The General's scheme was to attack the Boer laager on the Stormberg Nek; by a night march of nine miles from {230} Molteno he hoped to reach a position from which the enemy's camp could be assaulted at daybreak.

The concentration was made at Molteno, on the afternoon of December 9, the troops being brought from Putters Kraal by train, about sixteen miles, and some from Bushman's Hoet, which was half the distance. The force consisted of the two field batteries, with an escort of Mounted Infantry and two Infantry Battalions. It should have been further augmented by the detachment from Penhoek of 235 Cape Mounted Rifles, but, owing to the miscarriage of a telegram, these men failed to appear.

Another circumstance that modified the original plan was a report that was brought in at the last minute that the enemy had fortified and entrenched the pass between the Kissieberg and Rooi Kop, over which runs the main road and the railway to the junction. The informant affirmed that the Boer main laager was placed on the heights of the Kissieberg, which could be easily ascended from the western side, where there were no artificial defences. The General was assured by all those who should have known that to reach this hill on its western flank would only add two miles to the projected march, and that they could lead him to a favourable spot for such an attempt.

The start

A council was held in the station-master's room at Molteno, and all the commanding officers were consulted as to their men's condition and fitness for the expedition. Although the {231} train service had been most carefully timed, a delay of two hours had somehow crept in; the railway was but a single line and the siding accommodation very limited. However, no one foresaw any difficulty, and so the start was made at nine o'clock that evening by moonlight. Indeed, so eager were the men that they set out at an unusually brisk pace.

In the General's official report we read:

> "The force marched, with the usual halts, for about eight miles by moonlight, and halted near Roberts's farm at 12.30. The chief guide now reported that we were within one and a half miles of the enemy's position, and, after a rest of about three-quarters of an hour, we marched off again in the dark."[9]

It was soon after this halt that the General realised that the guides had not brought him along the road that he had indicated, but, as he wrote, to turn back in consequence of this discovery did not commend itself to him. So the men tramped on, and at 4.20 a.m. found themselves under a face of the Kissieberg. A single shot from a Boer picket precipitated the attack, and before long the enemy had located the British column.

> "Three companies of the Royal Irish Rifles formed to the left, and occupied a kopje; the remainder of this battalion and the Northumberland Fusiliers advanced up a steep hill against the enemy's position."[10]

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> "There was no good position for the British guns, except the ridge 2,000 yards to the west of the Kissieberg. But the infantry's need of immediate support was too pressing to allow time for that ridge's occupation. Lieutenant-Colonel Jeffreys, by direction of General Gatacre, caused the 77th Battery to come into action near the kopje, the 74th unlimbering in the open veldt to the westward. The Mounted Infantry continued to escort the batteries....

A fatal mischance

> "The Boers from the main laager had now manned the hill, but the British artillery was bursting shells on the threatened crest, and a Boer gun, which had come into action, was for a time silenced.
>
> "The attack had lasted half an hour, and progress up the hill was being slowly made by the British infantry, when five companies of the Northumberlands, on the right of the line, were ordered to retire by their commanding officer. He considered that his battalion must leave the hill. The three foremost companies, who were nearly on the summit, did not hear this order, and, under the command of Captain Wilmott, remained with the Irish Rifles, clinging on as they were. The fire of the enemy appeared to be slackening, and for the moment the groups of British officers were convinced that, if they were supported, they could gain the crest. But the withdrawal of a portion of the attacking line had made further success impossible. Nor was that all. Seeing the five companies of the Northumberland Fusiliers falling back to the west, the batteries conceived that all the assailants were retreating, and exerted themselves to the utmost to cover the movement by their fire. The sun was now rising behind the western face of the Kissieberg, so that {233} all the upper part presented to the British guns a black target, on which neither friend nor foe could be distinguished. Thus a fatal mischance came about. A shell fused for explosion just short of the Boer defensive line burst over the foremost group of the Irish Rifles, and struck down Lieutenant-Colonel Eager, Major H. J. Seton, the second-in-command, Major Welman, Captain Bell, and three men. A conference had a few moments before been held between Colonel Eager and Captain Wilmott, as to the steps which should be taken to protect the men from the shells of their own gunners. The former officer had stated that as the situation of the infantry was evidently unknown to the batteries, and was masking their fire, it was necessary to fall back. Captain Wilmott, on the other hand, urged that if the men were once ordered to withdraw, it would be very difficult to get them up the hill again. Colonel Eager replied that there was no help for it. Therefore a general retirement now began."[11]

An officer of the Royal Irish Rifles writes in his official report:

> "At this time I did not think there was more than a piquet in front, and a rush at the end of the kopje would have taken that part of the position and the Boer gun. Colonel Eager, Major Seton, Major Welman, and Captain Bell were knocked over at this point by one of our shells, otherwise I think they would have taken this portion of the Boer position. From subsequent conversation with one Voss, Secretary to Swanepoel, Commandant Smithfield Laager there is no doubt that many of the Boers were leaving the position."

{234} It seems, therefore, clear that the day was almost won, for had our shells fallen a little farther forward, so that the infantry could have held on a quarter of an hour longer, they would doubtless have found the defences evacuated. If our victorious troops had been able to eat the enemy's breakfast, we should have heard nothing of the fatigues of the night march, nor of the missing telegram.

But, unfortunately, the morning ended differently. We will close the account with a quotation from a letter written by one of the aides-de-camp:

> "The General, as soon as he realised the state of things, arranged for the retirement, quite cool under the hottest fire, encouraging

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[9] See *Despatches* published March 17, 1900.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] See *Official History*, vol. i. pp. 297-8.

> the men and moving over the position in every direction, not recklessly, but with a fine courage, which did us all good to watch. The retirement was carried out in wonderful order, and, weary though the men were, they hastened to join their units, and marched home in fair order.... Throughout the retirement he was the last man of the column, beating up tired stragglers, and bringing in abandoned transport."

In all the accounts something is said about a secondary force of Boers that came on to the scene soon after the general retirement had begun, but according to the following extract from another officer's report, they refrained from doing us as much damage as might have been effected by a more experienced enemy.

{235} "Just as we were moving off about 400 Boers appeared on the high plateau on our right flank from the Steynsburg direction, but were at once checked by the fire of our guns, and gave the infantry no further trouble."

The advanced troops got back to Molteno at 11 a.m., and all were in by 12.30. The casualties were officially returned as eight officers wounded (one died of wounds) and thirteen missing; in other ranks there were 25 killed, 102 wounded, and 548 missing. The whole force employed amounted to 3,035 of all ranks.

The main facts of this account are taken from the *History of the War in South Africa* recently published. So little is said in the General's despatch of the part played by the infantry that this omission is a subject of comment in Lord Roberts's covering letter of February 1900.[12] It may therefore be concluded that the Field-Marshal (who was commanding the forces in Ireland at the time that the engagement was fought) was at the time of writing ignorant of many incidents that have since been brought to light.

[12] See *Despatches* published March 17, 1900.

With an ace

In Sir William's letter three days later he speaks of the action as "a most lamentable failure, and yet within an ace of being the success I anticipated," and goes on:

"The fault was mine, as I was responsible of course. I went rather against my better judgment in not resting the night at Molteno, {236} but I was tempted by the shortness of the distance and the certainty of success. It was so near being a brilliant success."

Both in the articles published at the time, and in the *Official History* referred to above, the circumstances in which Sir William was placed are held to have made some demonstration imperative.

"Sir William Gatacre's decision to advance on Stormberg was fully justified by the strategical situation. General Buller's telegram, although it left him a free hand as to time and opportunity, had suggested that operation. The plan, though bold, was sound in its design, and would have succeeded had not exceptional misfortune attended its execution."[13]

[13] See *Official History*, vol. i. pp. 301, 302.

On the following day, Monday, the battle of Magersfontein was fought on the north-west, and on Friday of the same week Sir Redvers Buller delivered his unsuccessful attack on Colenso. Owing to the proximity of dates, the attempt to retake Stormberg is associated in the public mind with the other engagements of that week; but in the numbers employed, in the losses suffered, and in political importance it shrinks into insignificance compared with them. At Magersfontein, on December 11, 14,964 troops of all ranks were engaged, the total killed and wounded was returned as {237} 885, with 63 missing; at Colenso, out of 19,378 men, the losses were 899, with 240 missing; while at Stormberg, out of 3,035 engaged, 135 were killed and wounded, and 571 taken prisoners.[14] From a political point of view, though no ground was gained, still none was lost, and Sir William was actually able, the day after, to establish his headquarters at Sterkstroom, which was five miles farther up the railway than he had been at Putters Kraal.

[14] See *Official History*, vol. i. app. vi. pp. 468, 469, 470.

From the General Commanding-in-Chief Sir William received the following telegram:

"Your telegram respecting your action and dispositions, I think you were quite right to try the night attack and hope better luck next time. I don't think you will find them attack you when in position, but it would be better to retire than run the risk of being surrounded; as to this you must judge for yourself, but military considerations should be held paramount.—BULLER."[15]

[15] See original text. From Frere Camp, 2.17 p.m.; reached Sterkstroom 4.4 p.m., December 11, 1899.

Writing on December 18, Sir William says:

"I have now three regiments—the Derbyshire, Royal Scots, and Royal Irish Rifles. I have been obliged to send the Northumberland Fusiliers to East London to look after the base, as Sir Redvers Buller wished this done. My Howitzer Battery he has been obliged to send to Natal to assist Clery.

{238} "I have up here (Sterkstroom) a large camp with supplies, stores, etc., and have been ordered by Buller to entrench and endeavour with my mounted troops to harry the district round me, but I have so few trained troops, and these Boers are so mobile (all mounted) that it is a very difficult matter to catch them.

* * * * *

> "You must not expect to see much movement from my force: I have no strength—cannot leave my line of communications, which are long. All the districts behind me are ready to rise, and I cannot separate my regiments. I have received orders to entrench my camp, and this I am about to do. This will, of course, free my mounted men a bit, as the post, with provisions, will be safe for them to come back to. As I am writing I hear of a threatened rising in Alice and Seymour, two districts south-west of Stutterheim, right away behind me, which makes it difficult for me to retain my communications with the coast. These may be exaggerated reports, but I have had so many warnings that one cannot afford to disregard them. You may rest assured we shall fight to the end anyhow, and my thoughts will be with you."

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CHAPTER XVI

1900

ORANGE FREE STATE

The anxiety felt by the commanders of the three detached forces in South Africa was shared by the nation at home. The telegrams sent to England by Sir Redvers Buller showed that the state of affairs in Natal after the battle of Colenso was very critical, and that only prompt and ample reinforcements would be of any avail. Troops of all arms were despatched to Capetown as fast as ships could be got ready to carry them, and Field-Marshal Lord Roberts was appointed Commander-in-Chief, with Lord Kitchener as his chief staff officer.

The Field-Marshal reached Capetown on January 10. Four weeks were necessary for the organisation of his new army, which amounted to 35,000 men when concentrated at Modder River on February 8. A week later General French at the head of a Cavalry Division rode into Kimberley, and on the same day the Sixth Division got in touch with General {240} Cronje, and commenced the series of operations which led to his surrender with all his army. There were yet, however, two serious engagements to be fought, at Poplar Grove and Driefontein, before the Commander-in-Chief entered Bloemfontein on Thursday, March 15, 1900. By that time this advance in force into the enemy's country had had its effect in the east and south. The pressure in Natal was relaxed, and on March 1 Sir Redvers Buller rode into Ladysmith and greeted Sir George White and his gallant garrison. In the meantime Gatacre and Clements had been holding on to the railways, impatient to move forward as soon as it was safe to do so. Both these columns, which had been marking time in the face of the enemy, had had occasional conflicts, but these were, for the most part, outpost affairs, or the result of reconnaissance.

Writing from Sterkstroom on February 24, Sir William says:

> "Yesterday we had a fight just north of Molteno, and unfortunately lost about seventy men, but we gained the information we required. Montmorency is missing, and I fear he has been wounded or shot. His party got too far ahead of us, and it was with difficulty I extricated them. I was very nearly shot twice, once by a rifleman (Boer), once by a shell—very near. I have had marvellous luck on more than one occasion. The men all behaved very well. I do not think that people realise quite the extent of the country I am covering. From Karn Nek to Bird's River is thirty-five miles, and I have three and a half regiments only to do it with. I think I told you that Brabant, a {241} Colonial, had been given a command under me of mounted troops. He has a very mixed lot, and their procedure is sketchy, but Lord Roberts wishes him to have a free hand. He is to start to-day towards Dordrecht, and I have told him what I want him to do, *i.e.* to cut in between Dordrecht and Jamestown, which I think should have the effect of making them fall back from Stormberg, in which case I could occupy it, but, as you see, I cannot occupy it without evacuating some place behind me."

Across the river

On March 5 the Third Division reoccupied Stormberg; on the 6th they reached Burghersdorp; on the 9th the scouts chased the Boers to the bridge over the Orange River at Bethulie, and entrenched themselves on the southern bank. The little band arrived just in time to see the railway bridge blown up, but their advance saved the roadway. Lieutenant Popham, of the Derbyshire Regiment, promptly cut the electric wire that would have fused the dynamite, and at night Sir William, accompanied by Lieutenant Grant, R.E., crept along the parapet, and dropped the parcels of explosives into the river. The scouts of the Third Division were rather proud of having saved this bridge, as at Norvals Pont both were destroyed. The next day the column occupied Bethulie in the enemy's country, and on the 15th took possession of the railway junction at Springfontein. Colonel Clements had also crossed the Orange River, and made his way on to the junction shortly after the Third Division had captured the place.

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> "The deliberation of Gatacre's movements surprised his younger officers, who did not know that the Divisional General had received orders from the Commander-in-Chief not to commit himself seriously until reinforcements had reached him, and, if possible, to repair the railway which connects Stormberg with Naauwpoort Junction."[1]

[1] See *Official History*, vol. ii. p. 247.

Colonel Clements had received orders in the same strain:

> "Do not attempt to force passage of river until you hear from me, or are certain that the enemy have considerably loosened their hold over the heights on the north bank. This they are sure to do when we reach Bloemfontein, and it is better that the repair of the bridge be delayed a few days than that lives be lost unnecessarily."[2]

[2] *Ibid.*, vol. ii. p. 256.

On March 16 General Pole-Carew was sent down the line from Bloemfontein to meet Gatacre and Clements.

> "He found at Edenburg that he had just missed Grobler's contingent proceeding north-east. This was only the first of two parties escaping from Colesberg, the second being under Lemmer, while Du Plessis and Olivier were leading a third party in the same direction from Bethulie and Aliwal North. When the three parties united in the neighbourhood of Ladybrand, they formed the imposing total of 5,500 Boers, 1,000 Kaffirs, 10,000 oxen and 800 waggons, covering a total extent of twenty-four miles on the march.

{243} > "As soon as Pole-Carew heard of Grobler's movements on the 16th, he urged upon the Commander-in-Chief the advisability of sending out a strong force east of Bloemfontein, to intercept the Boer commandoes as they came up from the south, and of bringing Brabant from Aliwal North and Gatacre from Springfontein to close in upon their rear."[3]

[3] See *Times History*, vol. iv. p. 7.

A pacific policy

The Field-Marshal was not, however, ready to undertake such an extensive movement; his force had only reached its goal the day before, and neither his men nor his horses would have been equal to such a chase. Moreover the situation presented itself to him in quite a different light. The ready submission of the Boer farmers in the vicinity of the main army led him to exaggerate the effect on the nation at large of the capture of General Cronje and his four thousand fighting men. He was led to believe by reports from various outlying districts that there was no fight left in the Boers, and in his desire to win them without unnecessary blood-shed he decided to try a policy of pacification.

On his arrival at Bloemfontein Lord Roberts issued a Proclamation by which, in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, he offered pardon and protection to all such burghers as would lay down their arms and swear an oath of allegiance.[4] A week later he telegraphed to the War Office:

[4] For words of Proclamation see *Official History*, vol. ii. p. 260.

{244} > "So many burghers have expressed their desire to surrender under the terms of the last proclamation that I have sent small columns in various directions to register the names and to take over arms."[5]

[5] See *Times History*, vol. iv. p. 8.

In pursuance of this policy the Field-Marshal on March 19 telegraphed the following order to Sir William Gatacre, whose headquarters were at Springfontein:

> "Could you manage to take a small force, say two battalions, one battery, and some mounted infantry, as far as Smithfield? It is very desirable British troops should be seen all over the country and opportunity given to burghers to surrender and deliver up their arms under the conditions of the Proclamation of March 15."[6]

[6] See *Official History*, vol. ii. p. 301.

Gatacre's command at this time had increased to four battalions of infantry, with such mounted infantry as he had been able to raise from their ranks, and this Brigade was now employed as line-of-communication troops. Two battalions were needed at Bethulie Bridge, where the men's assistance was required in passing stores, etc., over the road-bridge until the railway should be repaired; from the other two he had to supply guards for 115 miles of railway from Bethulie to Bloemfontein. The Colonial section of his force was acting more or less independently under General Brabant, who had established his headquarters at Aliwal North.

{245} To the telegram given above Gatacre replied that he could not spare more than one battalion (the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles), a field battery, a company of the mounted infantry of the Royal Scots and a section of that of the Royal Irish Rifles. His suggested reduction was approved, and the column started on its fifty-mile march to Smithfield on the 20th.

On the 21st Sir William rode about twenty miles west of the railway to Philipolis, where he took over the keys from the Landrost without opposition, returning the same evening to Springfontein.

In order to understand Sir William's part in the affairs of the next ten days, it will be necessary to follow in detail the messages that passed daily between the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief and the Divisional General.

Troops sent to Wepener

On Monday, March 26, instructions were received directing that two squadrons of Brabant's Mounted Colonials from Aliwal North, together with the mounted infantry company of the Royal Scots already at Smithfield, should push on to Wepener, which lies fifty miles to the north-east of Smithfield.

On Tuesday, the 27th, the 1st Derbyshire Regiment and the 11th Brigade Division of the Royal Field Artillery were called up to complete a Division at headquarters, thus reducing Gatacre's small force by about 1,000 men.

On the same day Sir William telegraphed to Headquarters reporting a rumoured concentration of the enemy at
{246} Modder Poort, expressing his anxiety for the detachment that was marching on Wepener, and suggesting that he should reinforce the column. In reply he was informed that the Field-Marshal did not anticipate danger at Wepener, but that he concurred in the strengthening of the party there.

On March 28 the following telegram was received from Headquarters:

> "If you have enough troops at your disposal, I should wish you to occupy Dewetsdorp will make road from here to Maseru safe preventing enemy's forces from using telegraph lines to the south let me know what you can do to this ends."[7]

[7] From *True Copy*, furnished by D.A.A.G. in 1900.

Now there are two versions of this telegram. The above is the version as it was received by General Gatacre at 9.40 a.m. on March 28. Between the words "*Dewetsdorp*" and "will" he mentally supplied the word "*I*" to fill in the sense. When, however, this important telegram was quoted by Lord Roberts in a despatch to the War Office (dated April 16, 1900), the following verbal variations occur. We find "*I should like*" for "*I should wish*"; the words "*it would*" take the

{247} place of "*will*"; "*and prevent enemy*" stands for "*preventing enemy's forces*"; and the last word "*ends*" appears in the singular, thus bringing it into the body of the message.[8] These differences will seem trifling to the reader, but the meaning of this telegram has since been questioned. Gatacre read it as an order to send a detachment to Dewetsdorp similar to the one already ordered to Wepener, and the writer of the *Official History* so reads it, even in the secondary form.[9]

[8] See *Official History*, vol. ii. app. vii. p. 614.

[9] See marginal note, *Official History*, vol. ii. p. 302.

Detachments

Dewetsdorp lies on the main road that runs from Bloemfontein south-east through Wepener into Basutoland; the distance from the capital to Dewetsdorp is forty miles, and it is twenty-five miles on to Wepener. A detachment sent there was therefore in far less danger than the post at Wepener, and was a source of strength to the latter. It was also known to Gatacre that General French was operating with a mounted force at Thaba'Nchu, so that he naturally concluded that the road Bloemfontein—Thaba'Nchu—Ladybrand, or Maseru, was strongly held. As he himself said in evidence before the Royal Commission, he "never sent them [the troops] there as an outpost, nor expected them to act as such, but merely to hold a post on an interior road."[10]

[10] See *Report South African War Commission*, vol. iii. p. 276.

On the same day, March 28, Gatacre sent this reply to the disputed telegram:

> "Following moves are in progress, in view to covering whole country east of railway.
>
> "Three squadrons Brabant's Horse moving Rouxville to Wepener; two will reach Wepener Sunday next (April 1), the third on Tuesday.
>
> "One squadron Brabant's is moving to Bushman's Kop half-way between Rouxville and Wepener.
>
> {248} "One company Royal Scots Mounted Infantry reaches Wepener Sunday.
>
> "Two companies 2nd Royal Irish, Rifles reach Dewetsdorp Sunday.
>
> "One company Royal Irish Rifles and one section Mounted Infantry Royal Irish Rifles reach Helvetia to-morrow.
>
> "Three companies Royal Irish Rifles at Smithfield with squadron Brabant's Horse."[11]

[11] See Official History, vol. ii. p. 303.

As Gatacre received no reply to the above message he assumed that his dispositions were approved. In furtherance of Lord Roberts's wishes he slightly strengthened the post at Dewetsdorp next day by sending there some mounted infantry of the Northumberland Fusiliers. These changes were also telegraphed to Headquarters.

Although such detachment duty naturally fell to the Third Division as line-of-communication troops, still it would seem that the Headquarters Staff, in calling upon Gatacre to furnish these remote garrisons, had overlooked the fact that his *Division* had never numbered more than four infantry battalions, and had not at any time ever possessed any cavalry. By thus scattering the few men at Gatacre's disposal, the Commander-in-Chief reduced the numbers available for guarding the hundred miles of railway.

> "The railway was necessarily the first care; if that was seriously broken, the army at Bloemfontein, if it did not actually starve, must be injuriously affected."[12]

[12] *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 306

{249} That this question of the adequate protection of the railway line became a week later a great anxiety to Lord Roberts we know from his urgent telegram of April 5, in which he tells Gatacre to satisfy himself that the guards are properly placed, sufficiently entrenched, and on the alert.

Great distances

There were at Headquarters in March 1900 three brigades of Cavalry, and three divisions of Infantry, with their complement of Horse and Field Artillery, which with other units made up a fighting force of 34,000 men. As has been said, Dewetsdorp and Wepener were both nearer to Bloemfontein than to Springfontein, the headquarters of the Third Division. From this place Gatacre had to arrange for the supplies for posts which were eighty and ninety miles away, and that this could not be done without difficulty we see in his letter to me, dated March 31, 1900:

> "After reaching this we have been occupied in covering the whole country from Wepener to Philipolis, and all the country between them and the Orange River, with patrols and small parties, and it is such a business getting supplies to all these scattered detachments. We find we can make them somewhat self-supporting by making the farmers supply sheep, and they can get the farmers' wives to bake bread on payment. The roads generally speaking are good, not metalled, of course, but hard clay, which in dry weather are perfect to move upon; in wet weather they become slippery."

[Illustration: Map of India and Burma]
(Transcriber's note: map omitted from
this etext because too large to scan)

The same day the following telegram reached Gatacre from Bloemfontein:

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> "(With) Reference (to) telegram from Brabant to your Assistant Adjutant-General Springfontein repeated to Intelligence here, what reinforcement do you propose to send him? Boers are active on that side and have strong force between Ladybrand and Thabanchu. Brabant should be reinforced and supported."[13]

[13] From *True Copy*, furnished by D.A.A.G., 1900.

In response to this Gatacre ordered up troops from the Colonial Corps at Aliwal North, and pushed forward the support at Bushman's Kop.

On that same Saturday, March 31, he was directed to arrange for a battalion of infantry and a battery to be at Leeuwberg Kopje, eight miles from Bloemfontein, at daybreak of April 1. Three companies of the Northumberland Fusiliers and five companies of the Royal Scots were accordingly sent. When replying to this order he adds that he has no infantry left, and only one battalion from which to find guards for the railway line.

A third message from Headquarters reached Gatacre at 10.47 that night (the 31st), which informed him of the engagement near the Waterworks, told him to exercise special caution on the railway, and to draw in all outlying forces, adding that "it would appear that Dewetsdorp is too far advanced for security."[14]

[14] *Ibid.*

In response, Gatacre immediately sent off various telegrams by which he hoped to get in touch with his detachments, and also started off a despatch-rider; but the distance was eighty miles, as has been said.

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At Dewetsdorp

It will be remembered that the troops from Smithfield and Helvetia that were assembling at Dewetsdorp were due to reach their destination on Sunday, April 1. On his arrival the Officer Commanding the three companies Royal Irish Fusiliers—

> "was greeted with information from local sources that a Boer commando was expected soon to appear before the village, and, selecting ground which commanded the place, he began to strengthen his position, which he covered by outposts. In the evening a patrol to the north of Dewetsdorp was fired upon. He informed the Headquarters Third Division of this by telegram, and also of the rumoured approach of the commando, which, however, was not credited by the Intelligence Officer who accompanied his detachment."[15]

[15] See *Official History*, vol. ii. p. 306.

At midnight Gatacre's telegram arrived directing him "that he should immediately move his troops to Reddersburg," and closing with the words "matter urgent." At 3.30 a.m. next morning (April 2) the despatch-rider appeared with the same instructions.

In the meantime the engagement known as Sannah's Post had taken place on Saturday, March 31, only thirty miles away. As this unfortunate affair directly affected the Proclamation detachments, I hope it will not seem out of place if I give a brief sketch of what had been taking place a little farther north.

{252} The main water-supply for the city of Bloemfontein was drawn from a point on the Modder River, where it is crossed by the high road running due east to Thaba'Nchu. This point, which is about twenty-one miles from the capital, is known as Sannah's Post. On March 15 the "somewhat inadequate force of 300 mounted infantry" was sent out to hold the Waterworks, and two days later a mounted column, 1,500 strong, under General French, was pushed on to Thaba'Nchu, twenty-one miles farther east. From this force Colonel Pilcher was detached, and through his operations definite news of the enemy's whereabouts was obtained and duly forwarded to Bloemfontein. General French was soon after called back to Headquarters, and left Colonel Broadwood in command of the column. It is clear that—

> "Broadwood, with his 1,500 men, had never been intended to fight battles where he was, forty miles from any supporting force, but only to publish Lord Roberts's proclamations, and to collect arms from any Boers that might surrender."[16]

[16] See *Times History*, vol. iv. p. 33.

So that when he discovered that General Olivier was behind him with 5,000 men, he had no choice but to retire on the Waterworks.

After the death of Joubert the control of the Boer forces fell into the hands of younger men, the most conspicuous {253} amongst whom was Christian de Wet. Having conceived a plan for capturing the Waterworks guard, he placed his forces astride of the road, and hid them in the bed of a stream about five miles west of the Modder River. When the day arrived for the execution of his plan, he found that the mounted column was also delivered into his hand.

Sannah's Post

A messenger got through who carried news of Broadwood's plight between Olivier and De Wet to Lord Roberts, and he sent out an infantry division under General Colvile. But the two forces failed to work together, and the enemy triumphed. This was on Saturday, March 31.

> "The material result of De Wet's achievements at Sannah's Post was the acquisition of seven guns, much ammunition, many horses and waggons, and a large number of prisoners. By occupying the Waterworks, which did not again pass into Lord Roberts's hands until April 23, he inflicted great injury on the health of the troops in Bloemfontein. The moral effect of his success was enormous. It confirmed the resolution of those of the Free State burghers who still remained in arms; it encouraged the waverers; it afforded De Wet the occasion for putting strong pressure upon the considerable numbers of his fellow countrymen who, declaring themselves tired of the war, had given in their rifles to the British troops, and had been allowed to return to their farms as peaceful non-combatants; and it gave those who followed him good heart for his next stroke."[17]

[17] See *Official History*, vol. ii. pp. 298, 299.

{254} On the Sunday following Gatacre was summoned to Headquarters, and had interviews with the Commander-in-Chief, of which he has left the following memorandum:

> "On Sunday, April 1, I proceeded to Bloemfontein by order to see Lord Roberts, arriving late at night. Early next morning (April 2) I saw the Field-Marshal, and he told me he was placing me in command of the Orange Free State territory held by us, and was giving me ten other battalions, which were to be used as under, *i.e.* six Militia battalions to be distributed along the railway south of Bloemfontein, and in the country east and west of it; the four battalions were, with the four I had already (the 2nd wing of the Berkshire was to be called up from Cape Colony), to make up a Division with which I was to proceed at once to Dewetsdorp and operate along the Basuto border through Ladybrand, Clocolan, Ficksburg country, to clear Lord Roberts's right flank, to enable him to advance northwards. He directed me to draw up for his approval a scheme of distribution for the six Militia battalions through the country. This I did, and submitted it on the spot. The Field-Marshal was anxious to know by what date I considered I could concentrate my troops at Reddersburg, ready to move, after relief by the Militia battalions. I replied that, on the assumption that I received the Militia battalions on the 6th, I could move on April 17 (reliefs had to be effected, transport collected, supplies, etc., etc.). This date was considered satisfactory by Lord Roberts. The same evening (April 2) about 9.30 p.m. Lord Roberts again explained to me carefully what he wished, that he was anxious for me to move {255} as soon as possible, and that I was to proceed to Springfontein immediately, and commence preparations. This I did, morning of April 3, by first train."

It would appear that nothing was said during the Monday spent at Bloemfontein about the detachment that was moving that very day from Dewetsdorp through Reddersburg back to the railway at Bethanie. No anxiety seems to have been felt at Headquarters as to what De Wet would do next.

A relief column

At about 7 o'clock on Tuesday evening, April 3, information was brought into Edenburg that the Dewetsdorp detachment was surrounded at Mostert's Hoek, a ridge three or four miles east of Reddersburg. This disquieting news was telegraphed to Lord Roberts, who sent an urgent message to Gatacre directing him to prepare to move on Reddersburg, and asking what troops he had available. The reply stated that there were forty scouts and about twenty-five mounted infantry at Springfontein, a Brigade Division Field Artillery at Bethanie, and about two companies mounted infantry at or near Edenburg. A return message informed Gatacre that the Field-Marshal was sending five companies of the Cameron Highlanders by train to Bethanie, and told the General that he was on no account to go without them.

The order to turn out reached the regiment just before midnight; they had three miles to march to the station, and were entrained at 3.30 a.m.

{256} That same morning, April 4, at about 6 o'clock, the scouts and some mounted infantry started from Bethanie to reconnoitre towards Reddersburg, which was about twelve miles distant, and an hour later they sent in a message that they could hear the firing.

When the five companies of the Camerons and the mounted infantry from Edenburg had joined him at Bethanie, Gatacre started at the head of the column. At 9.30 a.m. another message was sent back by the Officer Commanding the scouts to say that firing had ceased for half an hour. Gatacre pushed on till he reached a ridge west of the village, but he was still five or six miles from the scene of the fight when he learnt through a loyal colonial that two hours earlier the British had surrendered to a force of Boers between two and three thousand strong.

Too late

It was then 11 o'clock, and the relief column was at least five miles from the scene of the misfortune.

The General called a halt, and eventually decided that his troops, being mainly infantry, could do nothing in the way of pursuit of a mounted enemy. After resting for an hour or so, Gatacre came to the conclusion that the safer course would be to retire on the railway, for it must be remembered that he had received the most precise orders "not to move against the Boers until he had satisfied himself that their strength and position warranted his doing so with success."[18]

[18] See *Official History*, vol. ii. p. 311.

{257} About four miles had been accomplished on the return journey, when a messenger arrived from the Chief Staff Officer ordering the column to return and occupy Reddersburg. Accordingly the men retraced their steps and settled down for the night as best they could; but at midnight a telegram reached the General containing very urgent counter-orders:

> "The C.-in-C. directs that you retire to Bethanie during this night so as to reach Bethanie to-morrow morning, as our information leads us to believe that the enemy are moving down in the Reddersburg direction and you are not strong enough to oppose a large force."[19]

[19] From original text.

The column started off again at 2 a.m. April 5.[20]

[20] The movements of the Relief Column are taken from *The 79th News*, special issue entitled "South African War Record," p. 17. The hours differ slightly from those given in the *Official History*.

We are not concerned here with the fatigues of the march from Dewetsdorp, nor with the particular stress which led to capitulation. It is enough to know that although a messenger had succeeded in getting through the enemy's lines, and although the casualties numbered only ten killed and thirty-five wounded out of 591 men of the regular army, some one betrayed his comrades' honour, and the whole party was captured.[21] If this column had been able to hold on an {258} hour or so longer, there would have been no Reddersburg incident. In the same way, if more prompt and more energetic measures had been taken from Headquarters to rescue the column from the perilous situation created by the defeat at

Sannah's Post, the little force could easily have been brought into Bloemfontein with the help of cavalry. As a matter of fact there were on April 2 three cavalry brigades camped at Springfield, Rustfontein, and Bloemspruit respectively, all of which lie just outside the capital to the south and east.

[21] NOTE.—The Officer Commanding was exonerated from all blame in this matter.

In the meantime, what had become of the other detachments? At Wepener, four days later, a force of 1,898 men, composed almost entirely of Colonial Corps, under the command of Colonel Dalgety of the Cape Mounted Rifles, was attacked by De Wet and blockaded for fourteen days; but so skilfully, under the guidance of Major Ronald Maxwell, R.E., did the men entrench themselves, that the total casualties at the end of the siege were only 169.

The other columns, at Smithfield, Helvetia, and Rouxville, were only saved by the skilful handling of Major Allen of the Royal Irish Rifles, who collected them all and withdrew on Aliwal North, and by the heroic spirit of the men themselves. The detachment from Helvetia marched seventy-three miles in fifty-two hours, and that from Smithfield forty-five miles in thirty-six hours. General Brabant sent out some empty waggons to meet the exhausted infantry, but, though almost barefoot and reeling with fatigue, they refused to accept the lift, saying that if they did so the good name of the regiment would suffer.

{259} The story of all these detachments must be looked at as a whole, as a policy. It was the defeat at Sannah's Post which, coming "like a bolt from the blue," changed the whole situation; "the dispositions of the troops, designed to restore peace, were (now) not merely inadequate, they were wholly inappropriate."[22] It is difficult to see how the position of the Dewetsdorp detachment differs from that of the others, all of which were but the execution of the policy sketched in the telegram from the Field-Marshal to the War Office of March 21, given on page 243.

[22] See *Official History*, vol. ii. p. 305.

On April 9 Sir Herbert Chermside arrived at Springfontein to take over the command of the Third Division, and the next day the following letter reached Sir William Gatacre:

"*From Chief of the Staff, S.A.F.F.*

"SIR,

"I am directed by the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief in South Africa to inform you that his lordship has decided, though with much regret, to relieve you of your present command. You will therefore be good enough to make over the command of the 3rd Division to Major-General Sir Herbert Chermside, G.C.M.G., C.B., and proceed to England at an early date.

"I have the honour to be, Sir,
"Your obedient servant,
"B. DUFF, *Colonel, for Major-General,*
"*Chief of the Staff, S.A.F. Force.*"

{260} When the camp woke up on the morning of the 11th their ex-commander was gone. The following letter reflects the spirit in which his staff officers looked at the matter.

"REDDERSBURG, *April* 12, 1900.

"It is with a heavy heart indeed that I write this. Why, oh why did they treat our General so hardly, so unfairly? We know nothing except the bare facts. All are sorry and grieved, and many question the fairness, the justice of the action taken. No one worked harder than he did. I may say it would have been impossible to do so. He never spared himself. Luck, cursed luck, has been all against him. I heard two days ago from England that they believed that he had attacked at Stormberg with two battalions when he had eight at his command,—such a gross mistake! Now the luck having turned, as it appeared, the unfortunate Royal Irish Rifles get caught again, although no possible blame could be attached to him by reasonable men. I worked out the orders and telegrams he had given and received myself, and I know what was done. They seem to have attributed the blame of it to him—most unfairly. He was so good about it and so plucky, blaming no one and taking the blow so courageously,—man could not be braver under any circumstances. All the interest of the campaign has gone for me, and —— feels for him as much as I do.

"We shall never have a chief whom we can serve more loyally, who was always considerate and even-tempered, and spared himself so little. His faults, if I may use the expression, are his virtues, devotion and loyalty and energy—to use all in the service of his country. It has been a great blow to us all.

"Believe me, we feel it as the loss of a personal and dear friend."

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CHAPTER XVII

1900-1903

BACK TO COLCHESTER

Since the Book of Job was written steadfastness in adversity has ever been considered as a virtue of high order. Indeed, what need is there in a Christian country to insist that want of success in the affairs of this world is not incompatible with an unsullied conscience and a stainless shield?

From Capetown Gatacre sent a telegram begging Lord Roberts to give some reason for his action, and in reply received a letter which (while declining to discuss the main issue) closes with the following sentence:

"This action, which Lord Roberts has felt it his duty to take, casts no slur whatever upon your honour, your personal courage, your energy and zeal, which are beyond all question."[1]

[1] For the reasons given by Lord Roberts to the War Office, see the dispatch printed at the end of this volume, p. 286; reprinted from the *Official History*, vol. ii. p. 614.

This was the spirit that welcomed Sir William on his arrival in England; for he came straight home and calmly awaited the verdict of the War Office in London.

{262} The first to pour balm on her servant's wounded spirit was Her Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria. Gatacre reached London on May 12, and on the 24th, in the *Birthday Gazette*, his name appeared as a recipient of the Gold Medal of a new Order, the Kaiser-i-Hind, which the Queen had just created for the recognition of Public Service in India. This first distribution of the decoration had regard more especially to services rendered in dealing with the plague and the famine of 1897 and the following years.

Only five days after Gatacre's arrival the relief of Mafeking, after 217 days' siege, was celebrated in London with much popular rejoicing. This uproarious joy jarred mercilessly on Sir William's mood, but the whole country exulted, and there was no way of escape. The daily papers too were full of South African news, so that even this source of idle distraction carried its sting. And so it happened that when an old friend came to call on the morning of May 24, and to inquire after the General's health (which to most men seemed to provide an obvious explanation of his return), he had the pleasure of informing us of the new decoration.

On the following day Gatacre received instructions to resume command of the Eastern District.

A welcome home

{263} British hearts, ever loyal to brave men in distress, did not stop to quibble over professional responsibilities; they remembered the years of devoted service, they knew of his personal gallantry, and they trusted time to prove their faith. Colchester struck the first note: the townspeople turned out in their thousands to cheer one whom they knew and loved. During the drive from the station to the camp the crowd massed in the streets was so great and so vociferous that the wave of feeling was overwhelming, and it was with a sense of relief that we reached our destination.

In the following June the Prince and Princess of Wales (as we then spoke of Their present Majesties) honoured Norwich with a visit to open the new buildings of the Jenny Lind Hospital. The whole population of the royal borough was in the streets that lovely summer day, and made their loyalty known in the usual way; but they did not forget to keep a sharp lookout for the man who had come from the war, for the man who had so lately fought in their battles; and as the cheers died away after the royal carriage had passed out of sight, they were renewed with deafening insistence as each voice strained to make its message of love and esteem reach the ears of one who with his own eyes had seen the enemy. For I believe that in those days of popular excitement over the occupation of Pretoria, Gatacre was, to the man in the street, the personification of a successful war that had just reached its conclusion.

{264} This burst of feeling, howsoever prompted, was very touching, but what did more to encourage Sir William than any other single event was the gracious and cordial greeting accorded to him by His Royal Highness when, as in duty bound, the General had the honour of receiving him at Norwich Station. Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales also sent for me in the course of the afternoon and was pleased to use very kindly and appreciative words about my husband's services to his country, and her sympathy with his immediate trouble.

When in the round of annual inspections the General visited the Cadet Corps of Bedford Grammar School, he had further evidence of his personal popularity in the attentions showered upon him by all the boys in the school, who insisted on dispensing with the usual mode of traction and harnessing themselves to his carriage. It was the same thing at Clacton, when the Lord Mayor of London opened the Essex Agricultural Show. Sir William had been detained in his office, and only reached the show-ground just before the luncheon assembly broke up; the speaker within the tent was at a loss to account for an untimely uproar. It was the crowd outside who had recognised "General Gatacre," and, as he entered, those inside the tent took up the strain.

However gratifying such popular outbursts may be in their spontaneity, it is the reasoned judgment of his peers that a man ultimately values. The following telegram was received by the senior officer in the station on the day after our return to Colchester.

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> "The members of the Aldershot Conservative Club are delighted to read of the deservedly enthusiastic welcome accorded to General Gatacre yesterday, and wish to convey through you to the General their hearty greetings upon his safe return from the seat of war. We do not forget his services to the Empire, and we loyally reciprocate Colchester's sentiment."

Sympathy

It was in the summer of 1900 that the call arose for more troops for South Africa, which brought several new county Yeomanry Corps and the Volunteer Service Companies into existence; it was Sir William's business to promote the formation of all such corps within the nine counties that made up the Eastern District, and to contribute in every way to their efficiency. This brought him into personal contact with the leading men of all parts of his command, for it will be remembered how much public spirit was shown in the revival of interest in the Auxiliary Forces that marked the years 1900 and 1901. I should like here to record how helpful were the loyalty, the confidence, and I may say the sympathy (if that word can stand for an unexpressed sentiment where silence alone befitted the dignity of the personnel on both sides) that he received on all sides; and how the cordial relations established between the General and the county society of his district encouraged him to tread patiently and hopefully the path he had traced for himself. In many cases the official visit to some great man's house to inspect the corps encamped in his park led to shooting visits in the following autumn—a delightful testimony to the undiminished power of his personal charm.

{266} On the other hand, those in daily converse with Sir William, both in his office and outside, were not blind to the sustained effort on his part that was necessary to carry him through those trying days of eclipse. One under whom he had served in India wrote, with the insight of true affection, for the guidance and inspiration of another:

> "I feel that it is very difficult for Gatacre to face all that he has to bear; but I feel certain that through it all he has exhibited soldierly qualities of a high order, that must be appreciated; but his return home will be very difficult for him to accept, and I fear he will have no opportunity of justifying himself. You must, you know, be in very good heart, and feel very brave for his coming."

It was very difficult for Gatacre to bear, and he never forgot

> The hopes by weakness foiled, or evil fate,
> The slander, the dumb heart-break, and the pain.

It was incontrovertibly the fiercest trial to which he could have been subjected.

Those who have only known suffering when it comes shrouded in the simple majesty of death can have no measure of the additional bitterness of blows dealt by the hand of man, nor the torture endured by a righteous man when his honour is affected.

{267} Gatacre had known what it was to suffer in his private life, but then his profession had come to his assistance, and by flinging himself with all his natural vigour into its arms for shelter and comfort he had triumphed over his pain. In this case he had been given a second chance, he had been allowed to be happy again. The laurels that he had reaped doubled their value in his eyes in that there was another to share them. But his profession at all times had a far larger share of his heart than anything that contributed to his pleasure. That was the way he was made; his profession was identified with his duty, and for him there was nothing so enjoyable as those duties which taxed his endurance and his energy. His soldiering was all in all to him; it was his record; all he had to show; the building that he had built with the bricks that had been served out to him. In his own estimation he was nothing if not a soldier.

Now, recalled, rejected, the worldly hope on which he had set his heart had turned to ashes in his hand: the ambition which had been his saving grace in the days of tribulation was lost to him now. Was this the guerdon for all the years of loving toil? Was this "the reward of it all"?

Who shall say whence a man draws his reserves of strength? It seemed to some of us that in his own dauntless character Gatacre found unquenchable inspiration: his independence of the opinion of men, his own intimate knowledge of the facts of the case, his untarnished record of loyal service, and his own "triumphant endurance and conquering {268} moral energy"—these were things of which no one could deprive him.

> I will be patient and proud, and soberly acquiesce.

Hopes

With a supreme effort of steadfastness and a resolute courage he forced his faith in disinterested work to come to his rescue, but henceforth he was working not to deaden the pain of outraged sensibilities, not for his own advancement, but for the work's own sake—to forward the cause of the army in South Africa, for the simple service of the country. Nothing but his accumulated powers of silent endurance, his proud indifference to his own feelings, aided by the response that his speechless loyalty won from his daily companions, could have sustained him through those three and a half long years while he silently and quietly did his duty. Borrowing the words of another we may say that "his military experience had intensified his natural horror of schism and lukewarm co-operation, and magnanimity was a stronger force than any personal consideration."

Now I contend that in achieving this triumph of discipline Gatacre reached a loftier level in the sight of God and man than any to which high appointments could have raised him; and I believe that his example and his memory in this respect alone will outlive the story of many battlefields, and that he will thus have transformed a story of momentary defeat into an everlasting victory.

{269} This attitude implied a rare simplicity and a profound knowledge of the world. He preferred to accept misconstruction and misrepresentation rather than betray the lofty promptings of his own soul; and he was at the same time perfectly conscious that any attempt (even though successful in the main) to set himself right in the eyes of the world would alienate his friends and make enemies. These words are something more than a speculative analysis of what might have been his frame of mind; for the latter argument was the ground of his refusal to accept any of the several offers he received from writers who asked his sanction for the preparation of articles throwing light on the events in which he had taken part.

As the General recovered his balance and settled down to the routine of his work, his natural buoyancy returned, and he once more took a pleasure in all that went on around him. Hopes that things might work out all right in the end arose to cheer him, and there was much to foster such an idea.

When the South African War Commission was initiated, he hoped that this would give him a chance to explain matters, imagined that it would be a confidential court of inquiry, a sort of hearing in camera, where, without insubordination or disloyalty, he would be encouraged to speak. In May 1903 he was summoned to give evidence. On their arrival all the witnesses are taken aside by one of the Commissioners and formally cautioned not to say anything that might be used against them. To Gatacre these words carried a personal meaning, though the phraseology {270} completely puzzled him. He failed to see how anything that was true could be so used, and could find no purpose in the warning. The Commissioners, however, confined their attention to questions of efficiency and other generalities, and no interest was shown in his personal affairs. And thus this hope of salvation vanished. One touch of character showed itself: he tells the Commissioners how he raised companies of mounted infantry from the battalions in his command, and goes on to say that as soon as the men had learnt to ride and to perform their special duties, he was ordered to send them forward to Army Headquarters, so that his own force was constantly denuded of mounted troops. In the proof submitted for correction his reply to an obvious question appeared as "I never complained." He struck out the past tense, and it stands as his motto: "I never complain."[2]

Departure

Another circumstance in the last year of his command revived his hopes of re-employment. This was a visit by the Commander-in-Chief to Colchester and other places in the Eastern District. Everything had gone very well, the Commander-in-Chief had expressed himself highly satisfied with all that he had seen, and on the last day, at a garden party at Chelmsford, the Chief Staff Officer handed on the encouraging message that Lord Roberts had been much pleased with his visit, and that he had remarked a higher {271} tone amongst officers and men at Colchester than at any other camp. This was, of course, said in private conversation, but it was taken as "inspired."

In August of the same year, 1903, when preparations were being made for extensive manoeuvres to be held on Salisbury Plain, Gatacre was appointed as Umpire-in-Chief of the Blue Army. This was a good omen, for it seemed incredible that a post of such importance in the training of the troops engaged should be given to an officer who was likely soon to be struck off the active list, who was, so to speak, already cast.

That he had a genuine belief that his services might yet be utilised by the State in some capacity is shown by his decision to go on half pay. In the summer of 1903 he called on the Secretary of State for the Colonies and asked him to consider his name for any suitable post in that Department. I believe that he would have taken the Governorship of any island, regardless of its size or climate, just for the love of the service of the State—just for the pleasure of using powers that he knew himself still to possess unimpaired.

The term of the command ran out on December 8, 1903. That he should vacate the post without immediate prospect of re-employment was in itself a bitterness to him, and chilled the expectations that had contributed to the harmony of his days.

His memory hung about Colchester for many years. It was not merely that his portrait hung in the Soldiers' Institute

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[2] *South African War Commission*, vol. iii. p. 277.

{272} that he had opened, nor that he had won many extra comforts for both officers and men in the new barracks that were built under his direction. It was more than this; it was the weight of his name, the tradition of love and esteem that the name revived. When the men were decorating their rooms for Christmas 1906 they made a banner which carried these words: "To the memory of Major-General Sir William Forbes Gatacre—one of the best." This spontaneous tribute was set up nearly a year after his death, and four years after he had left Colchester, a time long enough for the reliefs to have removed all the battalions that had known him there; but there was scarcely a regiment in the service that had not known him somewhere in his thirteen years' service as General Officer.

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CHAPTER XVIII

1904-1906

ABYSSINIA

Although Gatacre undoubtedly indulged hopes of further employment, he had not much confidence in such expectations. While prepared to move onwards should his desires be fulfilled, he was simultaneously safeguarding his retreat.

During the manoeuvres he had made inquiries about the working of the Remount Department in the counties, and had discovered that there was a post open to him which would provide both congenial occupation and reasonable remuneration, namely £500 a year in addition to pension.

He bought a little house in the Cotswold Hills, and for the first few weeks enjoyed the leisure, as he had always enjoyed the leisure of his sixty days' leave.

Although the post he coveted was vacant, and although similar posts were being worked by retired officers of his rank, unaccountable difficulties arose in securing it. In the hope of wearing down these obstacles, whatever might be their origin, Gatacre got permission to hold the post for eight months, but the pay attached was withheld, the {274} arrangement being that he was to draw allowances only, on the scale fixed by Government for all such duty, which is calculated to cover actual travelling expenses. The work consisted mainly of overhauling and replenishing the list of registered horses, over an area of twenty-two counties. These included Wales and Cornwall to the west, while on the east a line drawn from Cheshire to Hampshire inclusive of these two counties would form a rough boundary. He very soon got profoundly interested in his task.

He invented a new system of tabulating all sorts of information useful to the Department. He found that to complete what was properly a year's work in eight months involved working under more pressure than could justly be expected, more especially as his services were voluntary; but the old incentive of reaching his own self-imposed standard would not let him leave his work unfinished. The facts he had collected were useless, his labour would be in vain, unless he could record them in a form that would be handy for reference. His reports were to be the *vade mecum* of the Remount and Yeomanry Officer in each county; there was one little volume for each county, and a General Directory for use at Headquarters. Permission was obtained from Sir Evelyn Wood, commanding the Second Army Corps, to employ an army clerk and two typewriting clerks (women) in an office in Salisbury, and there Gatacre worked for six weeks in July and {275} August 1904. In order to complete his task in the allotted time, he had to stick so closely to his desk that he grudged the loss of working hours which would be the consequence of a Sunday at home. But it occurred to him that as the nights were short and cool he could save the time that would be wasted in the train by doing the journey by night on his bicycle. The distance was sixty-four miles; the first time it worked very well and he met with no mishap, but on the return journey he punctured at 2 a.m., and as it was too dark to do his own repairs, he had to complete the last twenty-four miles on foot.

On the road

A fortnight later he was on the road again, but decided to come by day. He telegraphed to me that he was leaving Salisbury at noon on Saturday. Having remonstrated with him about making this journey in one stretch, as he had done previously, I wired that I would meet him at Malmesbury at 5 p.m., reckoning that he could not complete his forty-eight miles in less than five hours, and that my presence would ensure a break in the long spin. He arrived five minutes before time, but we did not start off again till six. On another occasion he started at daybreak, and we met at nine o'clock for breakfast at Malmesbury. His age was then sixty; the story is told in order to show not only that he still possessed staying powers above the average, but that he still found the highest delight in using such powers.

In September he was informed that the Remount Department had no longer any use for his services. Across the {276} letter to this effect I find written in his own hand "Disappointing, very!" Once more it seemed to him that his devotion and exertion counted for naught; he had done good work, but he had mysteriously failed to make it of any account.

1905

There was, however, an interpretation of the situation which, though hidden from his eyes, can be read between the lines of the file of correspondence. He could see and could gauge the usefulness of his services and ideas, but his humble-mindedness hid from him the fact that it was his own value that stood in his way. His highly trained administrative faculties immediately grasped all the bearings and possibilities of the problem before him, and he could not resist the desire to improve upon existing methods. This was not what the Department wanted. Although willing to admit the intrinsic merits of his scheme, the authorities were not prepared to put in force such a comprehensive measure of reorganisation; so that while they could honestly say that his "work would serve as a model," they had no option but to discontinue using a tool that was too powerful, too keen, for their purpose. His military rank and his administrative ability made it impossible to employ him in the subordinate position that he coveted.

Retired

Yet another blow was hanging over him. On March 22,1905, he went to London to attend the Memorial Service to His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge in Westminster Abbey. At such a gathering he naturally found many friends (more especially as the Duke had been {277} Colonel-in-Chief of the Middlesex Regiment), and, according to one who was amongst the number, it was a pleasure to see how many distinguished men came to greet him, civilians as well as soldiers, and among them men of political standing who knew him more by reputation than in person. This was the last flicker of his public life, for when he returned to the country that evening the intimation of his immediate retirement lay among his correspondence. By contrast to his mood when a few hours earlier he had stood honoured among his peers, this letter seemed a stinging blow, and I can confidently say that he did not expect it. There were still eight months to run before he reached the age of sixty-two, at which point he would (in the event of his not having been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-General) have had to "retire" under the regulations.

The one thing that we had vaguely dreaded had come to pass. The thing was unthinkable, but it was true—the words in his friend's letter had become prophecy: he was to "have no opportunity of justifying himself," no chance of obliterating the slur that had been cast on his name. His career was at an end, and it had closed a dishonoured career, when to have held one more appointment, however insignificant, would have implied recognition of the facts of the case and compensation for the hasty judgment.

It was some time in the summer of 1905 that the late Sir Lepel Griffin invited Gatacre to sit on the board of the {278} Kordofan Trading Company. We welcomed the new interest. I thought that the pretext for regular visits to London was a desirable thing; I liked to think of his moving amongst busy men, and having something to occupy his mind. There was no idea of making a fortune; we had very little spare capital, and he only invested the small amount necessary to qualify as a Director.

From the first he foresaw the opportunity that might arise of visiting the territory specified in the concession. The prospect attracted him wildly. As the season approached when such a proposition could be seriously entertained, his spirits rose, and he revelled in the idea of starting off for the desert; he took the keenest pleasure in preparing every contrivance for his comfort that his experience of camp-life could suggest; he set about getting books and pamphlets in which he could learn the history of the trade in rubber and the chemical processes of its manufacture.

A telegram which reached us on November 10, asking whether he could be ready to start by the Peninsular and Oriental night mail of the 17th, lifted him into the highest spirits: from that moment he talked of nothing but tents, rifles, and such-like necessities, and thought of nothing but the valuable report that he would prepare for his co-Directors.

To those who have been inclined to blame me for letting him go, I would reply that it still appears to me that any {279} attempt to stop him would have been dictated by selfish motives. He was offered a delightful trip, one that would afford him all those arduous pleasures that his soul loved. Why should I stand in his way? I did desire greatly to accompany him, but in such a short space it would have been impossible to wind up his affairs and so set me free to go.

Up the Nile

The rubber forests that were the objective of the trip lay in Abyssinia, east and south of Addis Abeba. The party consisted of the General, in command; an experienced Syrian trader named Idlibi, who had acted as his interpreter during the Egyptian Campaign of 1898; one or two men of a similar class, and a suitable number of servants and porters. Amongst Sir William's three personal servants, one was a Mahommedan bearer from India, with whom he could talk freely in Hindustani, and who could therefore act as interpreter to the Arab servants. The route selected involved a trip in steamers of about 500 miles up the White Nile to Taufikia, and then, turning eastward, a further 250 miles up the tributary river Sobat, which in its upper reaches is called the Baro, to Gambela, from which it is 300 miles by a good caravan track to Addis Abeba.

At Fashoda, which is now officially called Kodok, the party came across an English missionary boat. Gatacre went on board and had tea with the five missionaries a few days before Christmas.

It was hoped that there would have been enough water in the river to float the shallow craft right on to Gambela, {280} but first one boat and then the two smaller craft ran aground. It was therefore necessary to open communications from Keg, where the last barge stranded, to Gambela by road, a distance of about thirty-eight miles. Leaving Idlibi in charge of the caravan, Sir William accomplished this march on foot in three days, accompanied by his servants and a few porters.

1906

Gambela is an important trading centre, and was the first objective of the journey. Politically it is known as an Enclave—that is, a tract of country leased by the King of Abyssinia to the Soudan Government. It thus becomes a frontier post of the Soudan, and has a small Soudanese garrison, which in January 1906 was under the command of the Memour Mehined Riad Effendi.

The Memour was exceedingly hospitable to Sir William, receiving him as a guest in his house, and doing everything in his power to facilitate his journey. Gatacre's letters speak most gratefully of the kindness he received at this officer's hands. At Gambela he discovered the Company's agent, and arranged with him to procure three hundred coolies, who should march to Keg, and then carry the merchandise from the boats along the track by which Sir William himself had just travelled.

His death in the desert

Having completed his business, Gatacre started back to join Idlibi, and report progress. On this return journey he was unfortunate in his camping-grounds. Tents being superfluous in such {281} a climate, the party just bivouacked where they halted when the sudden darkness of the tropics fell upon them. In a small notebook of daily jottings, which at his leisure Gatacre worked up into a more formal journal, I find the following entry on January 11, 1906: "Camped in a swamp—horrible water." He reached Keg next day, and was pleased to find that Idlibi had disembarked all the stuff and divided it into suitable loads for the men to carry. A few days later, being impatient at the non-arrival of the coolies, Gatacre decided again to make his way to Gambela, but was attacked with fever on the road, and died at a place known as Iddeni.

His body was conveyed in a canoe to Gambela, where Mehined Riad Effendi saw to its burial in the Abyssinian Christian Cemetery, with due formality.

On Idlibi's arrival with the merchandise a court of inquiry was held, at which the Memour presided. The depositions of all the servants were formally taken, and a translation of their words was forwarded through the British Consul at Addis Abeba to the Foreign Office in London. It appears therein that there was another Englishman moving to and fro during that week, and that he passed the General on the Tuesday previous to his death, which took place on Thursday, January 18, 1906. I mention this to show that the locality was not unknown to civilisation, and that Gatacre was not the only one to brave the climate.

{282} It is clear that darkness overtook him on the 11th while on swampy ground, so that he was compelled to pass the night exposed to dangerous miasmas. I am convinced that had it not been for this misfortune, or some similar accidental misadventure, he would have returned with the rest of the mission on June 10 as young and high-spirited as he was on his departure.

* * * * *

Lofty designs must close in like effects:
    Loftily lying,
Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects,
    Living and dying.

* * * * *

The key-note to Gatacre's character may be said to be willingness—an eager and fearless willingness to follow the right, the best, an unconditional spending of himself in carrying out the lofty conceptions of duty and service with which he was gifted. Everything he undertook, everything he accomplished, was done with an eager gallantry and a joyful zeal. The effect of these qualities was enhanced by a proud indifference to the cost to himself.

His soldierly heedlessness in risking his life had its moral counterpart in his willingness to accept to the full all responsibility for his actions. How should one who feared not the Hand of God—"the arrow that flieth by day, nor the pestilence that walketh in darkness"—how should such a one fear the judgment of man?

It is to the remarkable association of an exalted sense of duty with exceptional physical powers that Gatacre owes {283} much of his distinction. His standard of efficiency and discipline was as far above the average as were his powers of bodily endurance. His lowliness of mind, however, hid from him the true measure of his endowments, and led him to try to inspire all men with his own lofty ideals. During his long services as staff officer he was always ready to show to his Chief the enthusiastic co-operation that he expected from those who were serving under him. Though some officers may have smarted under his sarcasms, though they may have thought that he overtaxed his troops, it is admitted on all sides that his exactions were prompted solely by the interests of the service, and that his life was the expression of the precepts that he instilled. In the final act of his military career Gatacre proved that he was ready to do as he would be done by—to submit himself without question to the word of authority. Many a time had he been face to face with death; when something more precious than life itself was demanded he laid aside his reputation without a murmur.

The broken arcs

* * * * *

Therefore to whom do I turn but to Thee, the ineffable Name?
  Builder and Maker, Thou, of houses not made with hands!
What, have fear of change from Thee who art ever the same?
  Doubt that Thy power can fill the heart that Thy power expands?
There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as before;
  The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound;
What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more;
  On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven a perfect round.

* * * * *

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Finis

In a sense Gatacre was but the fulfilment of an everlasting type. It is this quality in him, this spark of the eternal Quixotic, of the eternal Heroic, of the eternal Tragic, that redeems his life from the commonplace, that has made him an example to some of his own generation, and may yet make him an example to some that are to come. Death has put an end to controversy. His fair fame remains; he is crowned with the halo of the departed, and his name is written on the long roll of true knights, *sans peur et sans reproche*.

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In Memoriam

On Saturday, May 26, 1906, an alabaster tablet bearing the inscription given below was dedicated by the Rev. H. Hensley Henson, Canon of Westminster, in Claverley Church, Shropshire.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

SIR WILLIAM FORBES GATACRE

MAJOR-GENERAL
KNIGHT COMMANDER OF THE BATH
A MEMBER OF THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDER
HOLDING THE KAISER-I-HIND GOLD MEDAL
AND OF THE ORDER OF THE MEDJIDIEH
AND KNIGHT OF GRACE OF THE ORDER OF SAINT JOHN
OF JERUSALEM

THIRD SON OF
EDWARD LLOYD GATACRE ESQ
OF GATACRE IN THIS PARISH
BORN AT HERBERTSHIRE CASTLE 3 DECEMBER 1843
DIED NEAR GAMBELLA ABYSSINIA 18 JANUARY 1906

HE SERVED WITH DISTINCTION IN THE HAZARA CAMPAIGN 1888 IN THE TON-HON EXPEDITION 1889-90 IN THE CHITRAL RELIEF FORCE 1895 HE COMMANDED THE BRITISH DIVISION IN THE ADVANCE ON KHARTOUM 1898 AND THE THIRD DIVISION OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN FIELD FORCE 1899-1900 NOT LESS MEMORABLE WAS HIS SERVICE AS PRESIDENT OF THE BOMBAY PLAGUE COMMITTEE 1897

STRENUOUS IN ACTION AND GIFTED WITH AN EXALTED SENSE OF EFFICIENCY AND DISCIPLINE HE TROD HIS PATH IN LIFE WITH AN UNSWERVING DEVOTION TO DUTY HIS SIMPLICITY OF CHARACTER HIS GREAT COURAGE AND POWERS OF ENDURANCE HIS MANLY TENDERNESS OF HEART WON HIM THE ADMIRATION AND AFFECTION OF ALL WHO KNEW HIM

"WHOM GOD LOVETH HE CHASTENETH"

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REASONS FOR THE REMOVAL OF LIEUT.-GENERAL GATACRE[1]

[1] See *Official History*, vol. ii. p. 614.

In a memorandum to the Secretary of State for War, dated April 16, 1900, Lord Roberts set forth his reasons for the step he had taken in removing Lieut.-General Sir William Gatacre from the command of the 3rd Division.

With reference to the defeat at Stormberg, Lord Roberts explained the view he had taken as follows:

"In my opinion, Lieut.-General Gatacre on this occasion showed a want of care, judgment, and even of ordinary military precautions, which rendered it impossible for me, in justice to those who might be called on to serve under him, to employ him in any position where serious fighting might be looked for. I was, however, most anxious to avoid, if it were possible, the infliction on him of the slur which necessarily attaches itself to a General who is removed from his command while on active service. I, therefore, refused to supersede him at the time when I assumed the chief command in South Africa, believing that I might safely employ him on the lines of communication or in any position not actually in the front.

{287} "On March 28 I telegraphed to Lieut.-General Gatacre as follows:

"'No. C. 696. If you have enough troops at your disposal I should like you to occupy Dewetsdorp. It would make the road to Maseru safe, and prevent the enemy from using the telegraph line to the south. *Let me know what you can do to this end.*'

"To the question italicised above, Lieut.-General Gatacre gave me no reply. In answer to my telegram he sent a list of movements then in progress in the southern part of the Orange Free State, east of the railway, which included a movement of two companies Royal Irish Rifles towards Dewetsdorp, where they were due to arrive on Sunday (April 1).

"On March 30 he wired that two companies mounted infantry and three companies Royal Irish Rifles were moving on Dewetsdorp.

"On March 31 I wired to Lieut.-General Gatacre that I considered Dewetsdorp too far advanced for security, and on April 1 he informed me that he had sent a despatch rider to Dewetsdorp with orders for the troops there to fall back on Reddersburg.

"The result of these movements was that in falling back these companies were surrounded east of Reddersburg and, being without food or water, were eventually compelled to surrender. For this result I must hold Lieut.-General Gatacre responsible. Dewetsdorp is some forty-five miles by road east of the railway on which the mass of the troops were {288} stationed, and is therefore a position in which a small force is much isolated and might be in great danger if attacked. It appears, however, that Lieut.-General Gatacre ordered two companies mounted infantry and three companies Royal Irish Rifles to Dewetsdorp on his own responsibility, and failed to give me the information I asked for as to what he could do with the troops at his disposal as regards holding the place, which, if supplied, would have enabled me to judge of its adequacy or otherwise, and therefore whether Dewetsdorp should or should not be occupied. The small force he actually sent was entirely incapable of holding its own so far from sufficient force, and being partly composed of infantry was unable to move rapidly when a retirement became necessary. I consider that in thus isolating a small detachment, Lieut.-General Gatacre has shown a grave want of judgment which must necessarily shake the confidence of those under his orders and have a bad effect on the *moral* of his troops. I am therefore unable to retain him in command of his division and have given orders for his relief and return to England.

"ROBERTS, Field-Marshal"

"BLOEMFONTEIN,
"*April* 16, 1900."

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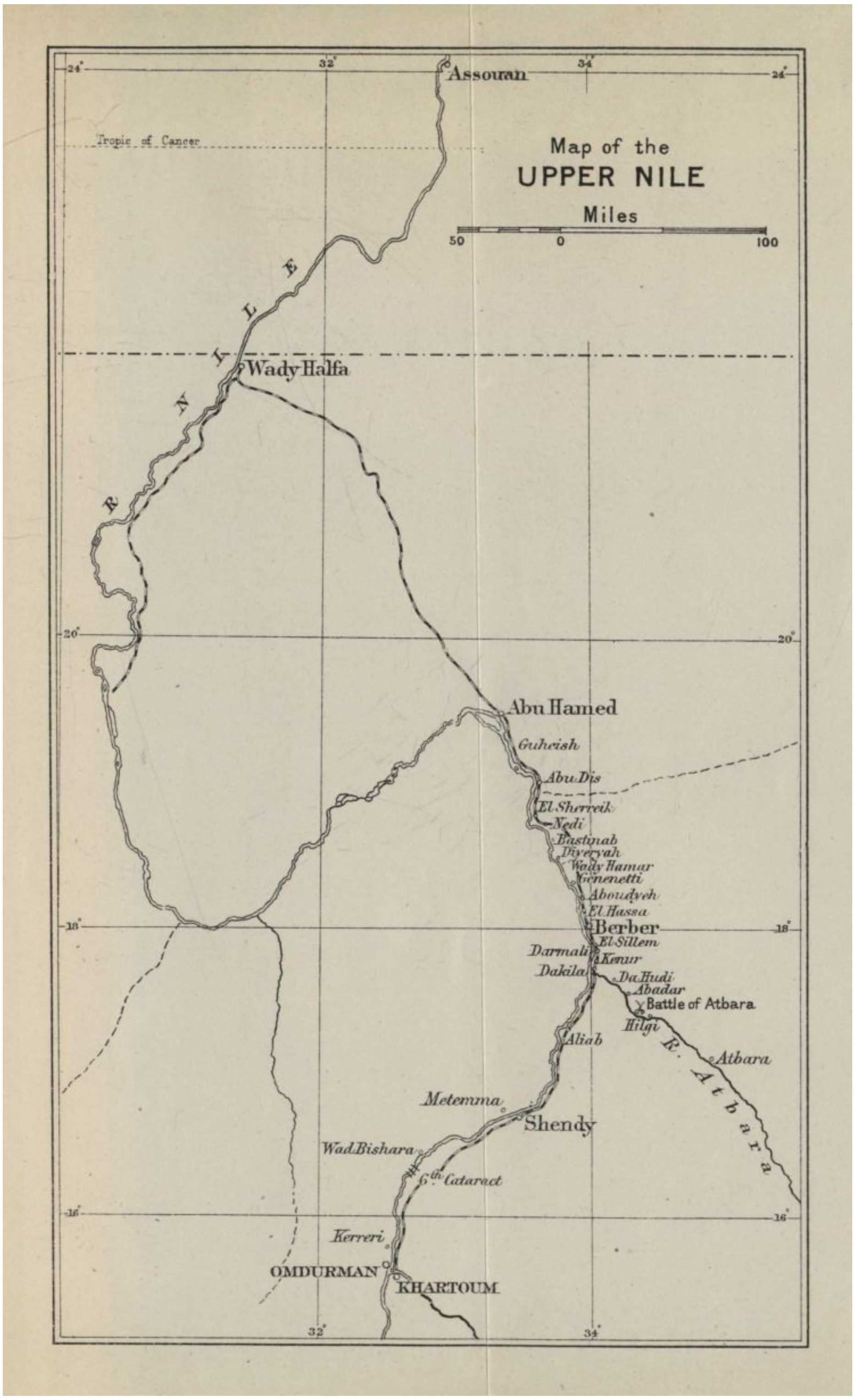
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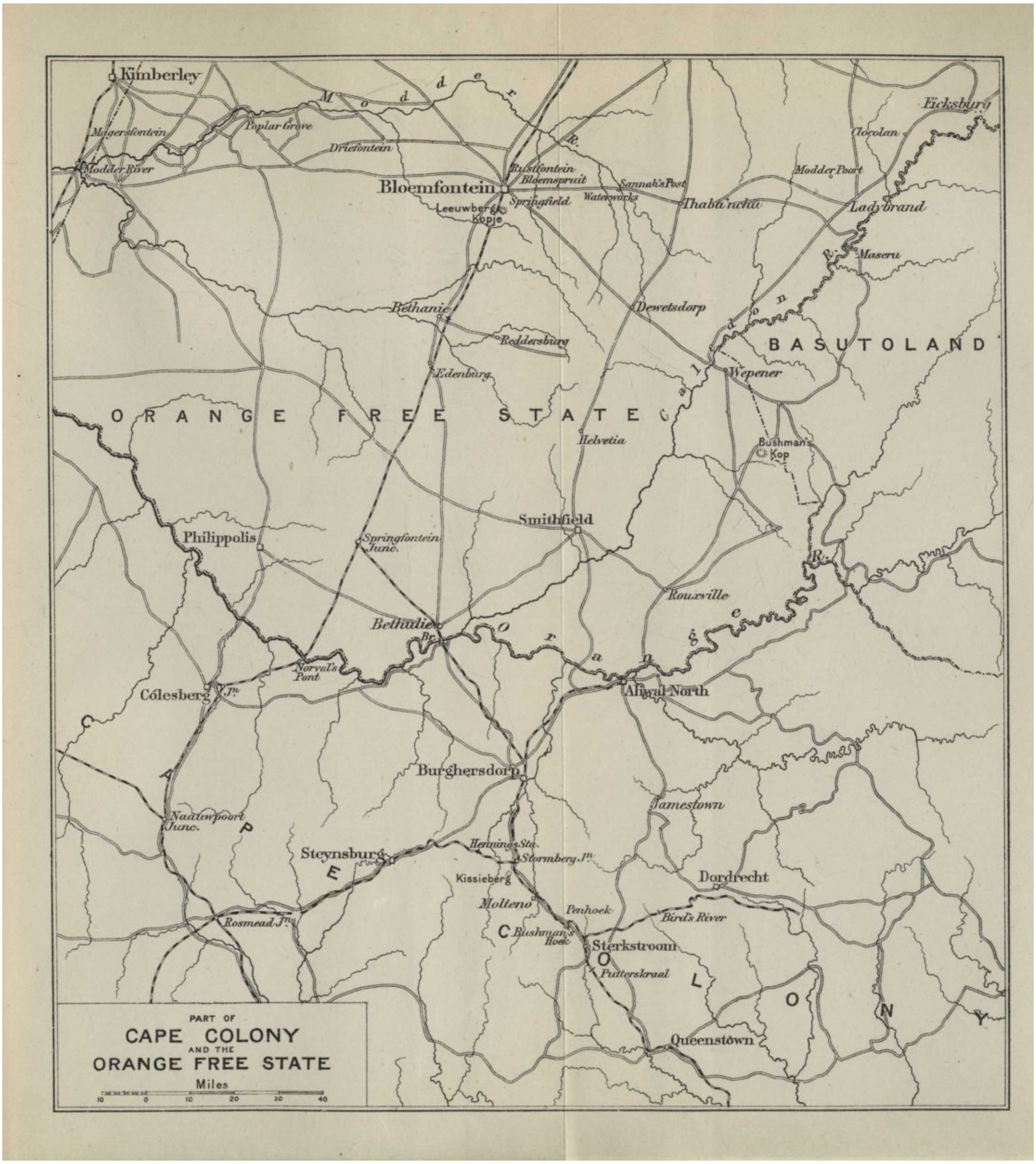
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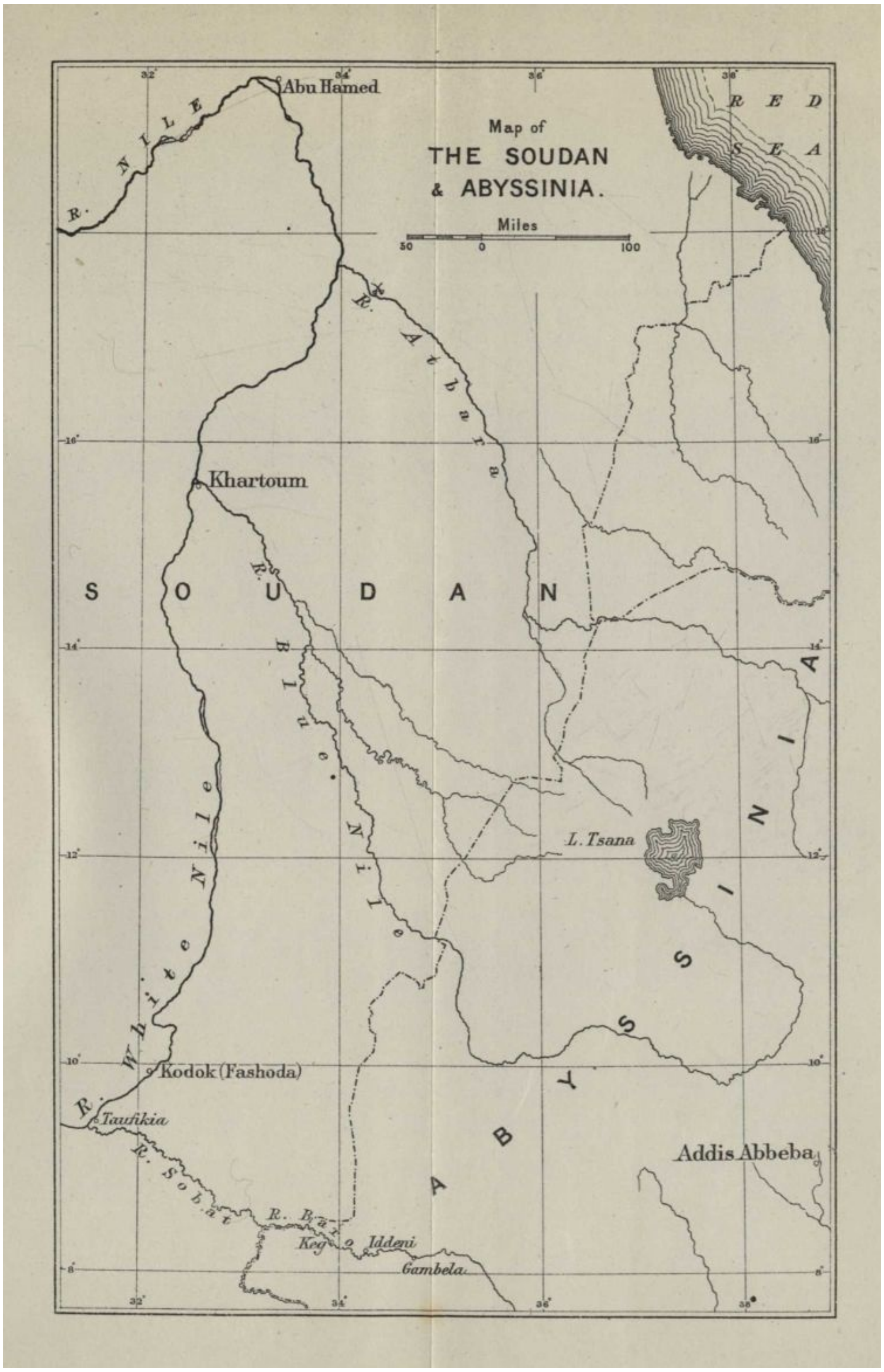
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