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The Avenging of Gordon, by Ernest Nathaniel Bennett

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Obvious typographical errors and punctuation errors have been corrected after careful comparison with other occurrences within the text and consultation of external sources.

More detail can be found at [the end of the book](#).

THE DOWNFALL OF
THE DERVISHES



E. N. BENNETT

THE DOWNFALL OF THE DERVISHES



*Lord Kitchener of Khartoum.
From a Photograph by Bassano.*

Art Photogravure Co. Ltd.

THE DOWNFALL OF THE DERVISHES

OR

THE AVENGING OF GORDON

BEING A PERSONAL NARRATIVE OF THE
FINAL SOUDAN CAMPAIGN OF 1898

BY

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SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT FOR "THE WESTMINSTER GAZETTE"

WITH A PORTRAIT, MAP AND PLANS

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1899

TO
MY FRIEND
H. R. H.
I DEDICATE THIS LITTLE BOOK

PREFACE

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In the following pages I have aimed at furnishing some account of the interesting experiences which fell to our lot during the recent campaign in the Sudan.

My best thanks are due to several friends for the assistance they have rendered me, and I feel especially grateful to H.H. Prince Christian Victor of Schleswig-Holstein and Major Stuart-Wortley, C.M.G., for their very kind help in supplying me with much additional and interesting information about the work of the Gunboats and the Friendly Tribes.

I must also acknowledge the courteous permission accorded me by the Editor of the *Westminster Gazette* to use in the compilation of this book some of the letters which I had previously contributed to the columns of his newspaper.

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ERNEST N. BENNETT.

HERTFORD COLLEGE, OXFORD,
1st November 1898.

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CHAPTER I

FROM CAIRO TO THE ATBARA

Towards the end of last July I heard to my great joy, from the editor of the *Westminster Gazette*, that a permit had been granted me to act as his special correspondent during the forthcoming campaign in the Sudan. Sinister rumours had been afloat for a long time to the effect that the utmost difficulty would be experienced in securing such permission, and several officials at the Foreign Office had warned applicants that even in the event of a formal pass beyond Wady Halfa being accorded, there would be no certainty that correspondents would be allowed to proceed actually to the front. The baselessness of these apprehensions was amply shown by subsequent events. War correspondents in the recent campaign had little to complain of on the score of any curtailment of their liberty of movement, though the Sirdar's subsequent refusal to take any pressmen to Fashoda may have provoked some unreasonable criticism. [2]

A day or two after the receipt of the Sirdar's permit I happened to meet at dinner an old college acquaintance, Mr. Henry Cross, who had rowed five in the 'Varsity boat of 1888. When I told him of my intended visit to the Sudan, he was all eagerness to join me; but as he was utterly inexperienced in the sort of travel that would fall to our lot before Khartum was reached, I did my best to dissuade him from making any rash resolves of the sort on the spur of the moment. The daily round of a war correspondent's life amid a charming environment of scenery and climate is simply delightful, when to the joys of an open-air existence and abundant exercise there is added the pleasant excitement which springs from a risk of danger. Such delights as these I had experienced during the Cretan troubles in the spring of 1897, but from what one knew personally of tropical travel, and what one gathered from various accounts of the Sudan, one realised that the forthcoming campaign would be in the Lancer's words, already become historical, "no bloomin' picnic." Accordingly I laid before Cross graphic and horrible pictures of sandstorms and sunstroke and the other unpleasantnesses which one might expect to meet amid the torrid plains of the Sudan. Would that my advice had been acted upon and his bright young life preserved! As it was, my friend secured a permit through the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, and rapidly made his preparations for departure. Our last meeting before we left Charing Cross was at Bletchley Junction, and over some railway tea and a couple of buns we made our final arrangements. [3]

The great difficulty which I had to surmount before leaving England arose from a gigantic heap of examination papers which went far towards filling up my college rooms. The limits of time imposed by the authorities who preside over the destinies of University and other examinations appear sometimes to the fevered imagination of the anxious *employé* to be strongly flavoured with the ancient Egyptian spirit of "bricks without straw." Under time pressure of this kind one's ethical system becomes quite distorted. How heartily one gets to hate the good little boys and girls who write four or five pages of cram! With what satisfaction one surveys the work of the stripling whose indifference or ignorance has curtailed the product of his mental training within the more reasonable limits of a few lines, to be marked after a single synoptic glance! However, with the aid of several hirelings, whose unskilled labour sufficed to execute the merely clerical portion of my task, I contrived to break the back of this obstacle to my happiness. The penultimate batch was finished at the Charing Cross Hotel, the final lot completed just before our train steamed into Folkestone. [4]

I shook off the dust of these papers from my garments, and stepped upon the steamer's deck a free agent. Away with lectures and pupils and essays, the solemnity of the Senior Common Room, and the good-humoured toleration of the smart undergraduate! Farewell for many a week to dear Oxford—with its scouts and "bedders"—porters and proctors—bursars and battels! Just as I was leaving the walls of the college a copy reached me from a continental professor of his *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, to which I had furnished a slight contribution some months ago. "Pray accept this trifle," I said to a sorrowful friend, "for your own edification during the 'Long'; I am now going to another region rich in apocryphal acts, to wit, those of the war correspondent." [5]

There is no need to dwell upon the trite journey to Alexandria. Such a subject may well be left to the pen of the tourist, who, under the capable management of Dr. Lunn, enjoys at the same time economic and religious satisfaction, and travels at reduced fares to further the reunion of Christendom. The Messageries steamer which conveyed us from Marseilles carried, as is generally the case, scarcely any passengers, except a conglomerate mass of human beings at the foc'sle, and very little freight. Nevertheless, thanks to the enormous subsidy furnished by the French Government, these half-empty steamers invariably afford good accommodation and excellent food. On board our boat were Major Mitford and Lieutenant Winston Churchill. The latter gentleman was going out to be attached to the 21st Lancers, and in the intervals of campaigning conversation and graphic accounts of his recent experiences on the Indian frontier, he supplied us with luminous information as to the principles and practice of Tory Democracy. Another fellow-passenger with whom I was privileged to enjoy a good deal of pleasant conversation was an Egyptian Bey of high official rank. As we neared Alexandria, he told me a great many interesting facts about the bombardment of 1882. He was present during the engagement, and ridiculed the ground which was alleged at the time for the action of our ironclads. Sir Beauchamp Seymour had been ordered from home to "prevent the construction of [6]

fresh fortifications at all costs," and when a number of Arabi's levies were seen to be shovelling some spadefuls of sand upon the wretched mounds which stretched towards Ras-el-tin, the concentrated fire of our warships opened upon the whole line of so-called "fortifications." The Egyptian artillerymen did their best, although some of their heaviest guns were not fired from ignorance of their mechanism; nor was the assistance rendered them by a host of men, women, and even children, of much practical utility. My friend told me he saw one of these amateur gunners endeavouring to load a breech-loading Krupp by shoving a shell wrong way about down the mouth of the gun! The shell, of course, stuck fast, and its base projected from the muzzle.

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We reached Alexandria by August 2nd, on which day was fought, exactly one hundred years before, the Battle of the Nile. The words which were used to describe this achievement, "It was not a victory, it was a conquest," might, exactly one month afterwards, have been well used of another British triumph before the walls of Omdurman! But whereas the Mahdist enemy has vanished never to reappear, our ancient adversaries, the French, are still in Egypt with all their traditional eagerness to thwart and injure us—an eagerness which seems to be increased, if possible, by their realisation of the fact that their power in Egypt is gradually waning. I learnt from an authority of the highest standing that in a list of official appointments made from day to day there is a marked decrease in the number of French names, and of course a corresponding increase in English ones. It is certain, too, that the vast majority of educated Egyptians are coming to realise clearly the injury which is inflicted on their country by the obstinacy and perversity of the French, whose policy is one of sheer obstruction to any measure of progress suggested by the British advisers of the Khedive, however reasonable its conditions and beneficial its results. The present scheme of new irrigation works at Philae, which will bring thousands of fresh acres under cultivation and increase the revenue enormously, has, needless to say, received the most violent opposition from the French. How long are we going to tolerate this absurd political farce? When will a British Government have the courage to inform the world that we officially recognise what is already a *fait accompli*, and intend to remain in sole and permanent possession of a country for which we have done so much?

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Several amusing stories are told in Cairo of the animosities which often exist between Englishmen and Frenchmen as individuals. Some time ago, a naval lieutenant in uniform entered the Bar Splendid, near the Esbekiyeh Gardens, and called for some refreshment. Three Frenchmen entered simultaneously, and as the lieutenant raised the glass to his lips his arm was joggled so roughly that half the liquor was spilt. He turned to the three Frenchmen, but as they did not look at him he concluded that the occurrence was a mere accident due to his neighbours' clumsiness, but unnoticed by them. He therefore raised his half-filled glass once more, and this time actually saw one of the Frenchmen deliberately jog his arm. Justly furious at this uncalled for insult, the Englishman, who was an excellent "bruiser," laid about him with such vigour and dexterity that in a twinkling two of his assailants were sprawling on the sanded floor of the restaurant. He turned to the third. "No, you're too small," said he, and forthwith seizing the diminutive Gaul by the back of his collar, he slid him under one of the tables, and, leaving the trio in their undignified positions, he walked quietly out of the café and reported the occurrence to his superior officer. Next day, three Frenchmen, whose features were somewhat discoloured and bedraggled, rang the bell at the lieutenant's quarters with a view to "demand satisfaction." But on the doorstep stood the lieutenant's servant, a huge bluejacket, who informed the visitors that a British officer could not cross swords with persons of their inferior social standing. As the Frenchmen were persistent and noisy, the sailor exclaimed, "Well, it was my master's day yesterday, but, strike me blue, it's mine to-day!" and with that he cleared for action by rolling up his sleeves. The sight, however, of his brawny arms, coupled with a vivid recollection of *le box* as practised by the British, appeared to impress the three would-be duellists, and they speedily withdrew.

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We stayed for several days at Shepheard's, where the semi-comatose servants gradually awoke from the lethargy which overtakes them out of the season, and did their best to make us comfortable. The general torpor which seizes upon Cairo during the hot summer months was broken during our stay by the incessant despatch of troops to the front. Every afternoon detachments of infantry and cavalry marched briskly through the streets towards the station with drums and fifes, and "Auld Lang Syne" was played as the train steamed away. It was curious to notice how infinitesimal was the interest which seemed to be aroused in the passers-by. The Egyptian natives scarcely took the trouble to glance at the columns as they marched past in full war kit and brown kharki uniforms. A little knot of Europeans, whose smallness served to emphasise the emptiness of the hotel, would step out upon the verandah—where, by the way, the temperature was nearly 100° in the shade—and follow with their eyes the passing battalions; but otherwise no interest whatever seemed to be aroused by their departure. The fact is, that it never occurs to Egyptians of the lower classes that they have any share or lot in what is perpetrated by the powers that be. They are, as Aristotle expressed it, "slaves by nature," and centuries may roll by before any other political sentiment is instilled into this most conservative of nations than that of fear and acquiescence. At the same time, this lack of interest is certainly not prevalent to the same extent amongst the educated and enlightened sections of Egyptian society. Whatever may be the divergency of opinion *à propos* of various questions of internal reform, or larger problems as to the ultimate government of the country—whatever be the diverse opinions on topics such as these amongst the educated natives—there is a practically unanimous approval of two enterprises now in hand—the new *Barrage* of the Nile, and the recovery of the Sudan.

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The social life of the upper classes in Egypt is gradually yielding to European influences. Much has been accomplished in this direction during the space of a single generation. Egyptian gentlemen, whose fathers wore the turban and loose native dress, now get their tweed suits and

patent leather boots from English firms. The position of women too is steadily improving as education advances, and home life, to the dismay of the "Old Egyptian" party, is being slowly but steadily revolutionised in the direction of greater freedom and independence for the ladies. Some time ago I received a most kind invitation from an Egyptian Pasha to dine with him. I dressed and drove off to his house, thinking, of course, that I should merely share a *tête-à-tête* meal with His Excellency. What was my surprise to meet in a kind of drawing-room the Pasha's wife and three charming daughters, who all spoke English, French, German, and Arabic with fluency! An excellent dinner was served, towards the end of which a strange compound made its appearance in a large tureen. I was on the point of declining this delicacy, when it flashed upon me that the mess of pottage must be meant for plum-pudding, and had been prepared expressly in my honour. It was even so. As I ladled some of the pudding into a soup plate I expressed my keen satisfaction at the appearance of this British dish; and I think that my enthusiastic remarks led the family to believe that the staple article of diet in English households was plum-pudding, served at all meals all the year round. After dinner we returned to the drawing-room, where the Misses Pasha played admirably a variety of selections from Grieg and Brahms, and finally, "God Save the Queen," at the close of a very pleasant evening, which gave me a vivid impression of the advancement which is being gradually effected in the home life of the more enlightened Egyptians, though, of course, the liberty enjoyed by my kind hostess and her accomplished daughters is as yet the exception rather than the rule.

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Our few days in Cairo were fully taken up with preparations for the campaign. One consequence of the inrush of officers and correspondents was a dearth of horses. The neighbourhood had been ransacked for animals, and if the demand continued it seemed as though Ammianus' prediction, slightly altered, would become true of Cairo, "*Creditur jam equos defuturos esse.*" The price of riding horses advanced by leaps and bounds, and as the Government had been offering from £20 to £25 for them, I thought myself lucky when I learnt from my friend, Mr. A. V. Houghton, that he had kindly secured me a passable steed for £17, 10s. Beasts outworn, with irregular gait and hair in scanty tufts, were being purchased by despairing voyagers in default of better horseflesh.

Then came the choice of servants, and many of the individuals who offered themselves were quaint enough. Before the final selection, batches were paraded before me from time to time, some of whom were alleged to be bilingual, nay, even trilingual; but in most cases a little *viva voce* examination revealed the fact that their English consisted of little else than half a dozen "swear words"; others again were persons with a "past," and so unsuitable for the future. In Egypt one can rarely put any trust in written "characters," for such documents, either forged or secured from former servants, can be purchased in the bazaars at so much a dozen, the price, of course, varying according to the social status of the master whose signature they are alleged to bear. All that a disreputable Arab in search of employment has to do is to ask the shopman for a testimonial to the zeal and honesty of "Ali" or "Mahmoud," according as his name is one or the other. After one's choice had fallen upon a comparatively blameless Ethiopian from Dongola as cook, and a Cairene Egyptian as *sāis*, the rejected candidates were dispersed by the jubilant pair amid a babel of imprecations heaped upon each others' relatives dead and alive. Finally, the grateful cook came to me in the evening, and amid the laughter of my friends, solemnly presented me with a worked cholera belt, which, he declared, his swarthy daughter had expressly knitted for my comfort in the Sudan. With many blushes I accepted this useful present.

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Our stores were purchased from Messrs. Walker of Cairo, a veritable firm of Egyptian Whiteleys, from whom one can buy anything, from condensed milk to a trotting camel. It is on occasions like this that a bachelor, unaccustomed to anything like a quantitative analysis of the food he consumes from day to day, deplores the absence of feminine assistance. He knows *what* he wants but not *how much* of it. Acting under the prejudiced advice of a chocolate-coloured shopman, we laid in large quantities of things comparatively useless, and neglected the weightier matters. For example, our rice gave out after three weeks, while we had enough pepper to last us a lifetime.

We were altogether very busy in Cairo, and had little time for any side issues. This was a pity, as my companion wished to visit the pyramids, the mosques, and so on, while I personally wanted to see something of the magical practices which still prevail to a considerable extent in Cairo.

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Egyptian magic was, of course, famous in antiquity. The author of Exodus speaks of it, and, at a later date, Celsus, the able opponent of Christianity, declared, strangely enough, that Christ worked all His miracles by means of magic which He had learnt in Egypt! I have heard on excellent authority that necromancy is still practised in Cairo, and if our departure could have been delayed I should have done my best, with the aid of some Egyptian friends, to be present at one of these *séances* for the evocation of the dead. Another species of magic consists of gazing into ink in order to see pictures prophetic of the future. This practice is, after all, simply a form of the katoptromancy or crystal-gazing which was used for divination in the remotest antiquity, and still yields results full of psychological, if no longer of supernatural, interest. Scripture appears to contain several references to the curious phenomena which frequently exist in connection with crystal-gazing. The Hebrew divination by Urim and Thummim, and by cups, of which we read, was almost certainly based on this ancient practice; and at a still later period St. Paul compares our imperfect conceptions of what lies beyond things temporal to the perplexing images which can be "seen through a mirror in a riddle" (δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι). Mr. Lane's delightful book, *The Modern Egyptians*, contains an account of the ink-gazing which is still carried on by young boys.

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I should like to add to these remarks on Egyptian magic a most curious account which I had

first-hand from an official who was high in the favour of the late Khedive, Tewfik Pacha. During the critical weeks which immediately preceded the bombardment of Alexandria, my informant was suddenly summoned to an immediate audience with His Highness. Several matters of vital importance were discussed between the Khedive and his Minister, and the latter went home pledged to the utmost secrecy with respect to what he had learnt. Soon after entering his house, his wife mentioned to him that during the course of the afternoon she had heard from another lady of a wonderful medium, whom she had asked to call that evening. After a short time the medium in question, an extremely old woman of the very poorest class, arrived, and the Minister laughingly promised his wife to test the genuineness of the visitor's gifts. When admitted to his presence the old creature almost immediately fell down in a kind of fit, and to his amazement he heard proceeding from her lips in strange tones, quite unlike her normal voice, the very words spoken to himself two hours before by the Khedive under pledge of the most stringent secrecy!

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Shortly before leaving Cairo my cook Ali appeared before me with a huge two-handed Dervish sword, which he had purchased out of his own money for twenty piastres. The creature had already the day before begged me to buy him a rifle for defensive purposes, as I was quite unable to eradicate from his mind the belief that his kitchen utensils and himself might at any moment during the next six weeks be exposed to an attack from a frenzied rush of Dervishes. I could not see my way to gratify his wishes in this respect. To have a cook bending over the fire with a belt full of cartridges, or walking round one's tent with a loaded rifle—these were indeed added terrors to the perils of a Sudan campaign. He was, however, permitted to wear the gigantic sword, as I thought it might come in handy for cutting wood or opening tins of meat.

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We were not sorry to get out of Cairo. The moist heat which prevailed in the town clogged all the pores of the skin and was extremely trying. Just before we left, a detachment of the Grenadier Guards entrained for the front. These fine fellows were marched from Abbasseeyeh to the station—no great distance—in the hottest part of the day, between twelve o'clock and two. When they reached the station the perspiration was streaming from their faces, and they were kept at "attention" to prevent them from drinking water in this condition. But the heat had already begun to tell in several cases; three men fell prostrate, and quite a number were attacked by violent sickness. The drainage, too, of the city was in a deplorable condition. The old native system had been recently abolished, and during the period of transition sanitation was in a state of chaos. Which things are an allegory! In consequence probably of the escape of sewage into water-pipes, enteric fever and diphtheria were far from infrequent, and quite recently two young officers of the 21st Lancers had succumbed to these fatal diseases.

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When we arrived at the railway station in the evening *en route* for the South, we found our servants already there. But how transformed! Ali and the *sâis* had exchanged their native cotton garments for brand new suits of yellow kharki, purchased at my expense. From some association of ideas in connection with the forthcoming campaign, they were "got up" in a pseudo-military fashion, with brass buttons and shoulder straps. As Ali the cook stood before us in his ill-fitting garments, with an enormous crusading sword in one hand and a kitchen colander and soup ladle in the other,—a kind of walking allegory of Peace and War,—we laughed so much that we could scarcely ask for our tickets. At the last moment a native rushed into the station closely pursued by his wife. The man was evidently bent on securing a seat in the train, but his better half disapproved of this, and as he was getting into the carriage she suddenly struck a violent blow at his hand luggage. It was a most effective stroke. The bundle he carried exploded like a shell, and its contents lay scattered in hopeless confusion over the platform. Long before the baffled husband could collect the *disjecta membra* of his travelling kit, the train steamed off into the darkness, and he was left to settle matters with his triumphant wife.

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We rapidly left Cairo behind us, and with it the joys and comforts of civilisation. It was a positive relief to feel that we had now commenced in real earnest to travel the twelve hundred miles which separated us from our final goal far away in the Sudan. Still, at the time of our departure from Cairo, no certainty was felt that there would be any fighting at all. Rumours were persistently current that the Khalifa and his forces had retreated from Omdurman. It would, as somebody said, be simply a case of *cherchez la femme*. If the women and children became panic-stricken and retired, it was certain that the Dervishes would lose heart and make a poor show of resistance. Take, for instance, the case of Berber. Here a vigorous defence might reasonably have been expected, but it was afterwards found that an exodus of the women brought about the total evacuation of the town, which our advancing forces thus occupied without any fighting whatever. Still it was too early to speculate on the amount of opposition our troops were likely to encounter. Whether there would be one or more sharp struggles before we found ourselves face to face with the ramparts of Omdurman; whether even then those ramparts would be held by Dervishes driven to bay and fighting with their old desperate courage, or we should bivouac in a deserted city—all these things, we felt, lay verily on the knees of the gods!

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Our first taste of discomfort was provided by the night journey to Luxor. Soon after leaving Cairo the motion of the train raises an almost continuous cloud of dust, which penetrates into the carriages, scheme one never so wisely. One may put the glass windows up or merely raise the wooden venetians according as one prefers the alternative of being almost asphyxiated by too little air or stifled by too much dust. Even with the windows up the dust insinuates itself into the compartment somehow; and if one can sleep through the night one finds next morning a thick layer of dust over everything, and reflects with astonishment and dismay on the condition of one's lungs and internal economy in general. The train was not a "troop train" in the special sense, but it contained a good many officers. It is worth noticing, by the way, that Egyptian officers, even of high military rank, travel second class with British sergeant-majors and warrant

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officers. As no horse boxes would be available for the conveyance of our animals for two days, we were compelled to stay a couple of nights at the Luxor Hotel. The dreariness of this hotel out of the season was still more marked than at Shephard's. Outside, all blistered by the heat, hung the quaint notice, as a warning to that species of knicker-bockered tourist who shoots gulls from the Clacton cliffs, "*Il est défendu de chasser dans le jardin.*" The servants shuffled listlessly about, the long corridors were covered with dust, and forlorn notices about church services which were no longer served, and trained nurses who had vanished, were almost the only outward and visible signs of the past season, with its crowded *table d'hôte*, the vulgar chatter of American globe-trotters, and the irritating atmosphere of valetudinarianism. [25]

At the hotel we met two hard-worked transport officers, Captain Hall and Lieutenant Delavoy, busied night and day with the incessant despatch of stores and ammunition to the front. People are often apt to forget to what an extent the success of a campaign is due to the honest work of the Army Service Corps and transport officials. Upon these departmental troops fell the onerous labour of forwarding for many weeks all the stores required for the feeding of some twenty-three thousand men and several thousand animals.

Our recent campaigns in the Sudan have been unique in military history from the fact that the army's line of communication with its base was ultimately over twelve hundred miles in length. Every ounce of food, with the exception of a little fresh meat occasionally obtained along the line of march, had to be conveyed from Cairo by river, rail, or camel. The best thanks of the public are due to the indefatigable labours of the transport officers and men, many of whom were not brought by their work within the area which will be covered by the forthcoming medal. [26]

As we sat at dinner in the cool of the evening under the palms and tamarisks, somebody chanced to look under the table and saw a number of large yellowish tarantulas waltzing about our feet. A panic ensued, and the meeting rose as one man and got upon chairs, until these repulsive insects were driven away by the waiters. The incident forcibly recalled the famous congress of ladies which was convened to demonstrate the Superiority of Woman over Man, and was broken up by a small box of mice opened by a son of Belial in the audience. These horrid spiders, whose bite is very painful, and, in the case of young children, occasionally fatal, seemed to be ubiquitous at Luxor; nor did they even respect the sanctity of our bedrooms. Medical psychologists tell of a case in which a gentleman suffering from hallucinations declared that he saw "pink pachyderms" in his bath, but was unable to secure a specimen owing to the rapidity of the creature's movements. But I had much rather see a pink pachyderm—which may after all be merely subjective—inside my tub than a brace of tortoiseshell tarantulas, whose objectivity is undoubted, racing round and round the bath and cutting off one's retreat. [27]

We took the opportunity afforded us by our enforced wait at Luxor to visit the temples. No tickets were demanded, no touts clamoured at one's heels and interfered with one's reflections. We rode to Karnak in the moonlight, and after dismounting we were suddenly mobbed by scores of dogs, who came rushing upon us from the Bedawin houses near the ruins. The animals became so menacing and approached so close that I was compelled to use my revolver. The pariah doggie in Egypt does not seem to be quite like his Constantinople cousin, who is probably descended partly from the jackals who accompanied the Turkish armies from their Asiatic settlements. The puppies of these pariah dogs are, by the way, the dearest little creatures in the world, with rough woolly coats like tiny bears.

There is absolutely nothing in the world to compare with the temple of Karnak in point of magnificence and grandeur. When one gazes on the colossal pillars, the huge pylons, and the rows and rows of sculptured sphinxes, it would be alike difficult and painful to believe that all this mighty effort, this outcome of the blood and sweat of thousands, could after all be based on a mere delusion and groundless enthusiasm. On the contrary, one may wonder whether the full force of the religious motive which raised these giant structures has not been to some extent lost in later ages. At anyrate, it seems certain that in the West our religious consciousness has never been marked by that intense appreciation of God's omnipotence which underlay the creation of such stupendous monuments. On the contrary, there seems to be a tendency in modern Christianity to anthropomorphise the Deity into the official Head of a scheme of charity organisation, to which the belief in a future life, so powerful a factor in the ancient religion of Egypt, is attached as a subsequent phase of subsidiary importance. As the race grows less and less disposed to endure physical pain and discomfort, we clamour more and more for tangible and material blessings, and refuse to be comforted by any contemplation of the problematic joys of another world. There is something to be said for this point of view, and much evil has undoubtedly been done by the reckless bestowal on suffering humanity of "cheques to be cashed on the other side of Jordan." Still, if this process continues, it is difficult to realise how, in the conduct of future generations, any place can be found for a religious and supernatural, as distinct from a merely ethical, obligation. [28]

The railway journey from Luxor to Shellal, a village on the river bank just above the first cataract, where the railway terminates, ought to have taken about eight hours, but it took over sixteen. All the trains have third-class carriages or rather trucks, and an excellent object lesson in Oriental procrastination was afforded at the moment when the train started. All night long crowds of natives had been sleeping on the ground just outside the station with all their curious goods and chattels—beds and bundles and babies—around them. Scarcely one of them made the slightest effort to get on board the train until the whistle went, and then a terrific scramble took place. "Gyppies" of all sizes, sexes, and ages rushed wildly down the line, trying to hurl their baggage into the carriages and then climb up after it. This went on for some three hundred yards, and despite the increasing speed of the train most of these procrastinating creatures [29]

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contrived to find some sort of place on it. If they failed, they simply went to sleep again till the day following, when they tried again.

The traffic on this line was enormous, and the rolling stock available could scarcely bear the unusual strain put upon it. We were repeatedly stopped on the way by a variety of accidents. First of all a carriage got off the rails; then an axle became red hot from lack of grease, and set fire to the woodwork; and finally a train in front of us left the metals, and a long interval elapsed while two lengths of rail were taken up and straightened. The line has, from motives of false economy, been laid in a miserably inefficient manner, and an official casually informed me that trains ran off the rails about three times a week. One of the most difficult things to deal with was the transport of horses and mules. Sometimes one saw a loose box filled with sixteen mules all kicking together, and on the steamers accidents continually happened amongst the crowded horses. [31]

As we ran past Assouan down to the water's edge at Shellal, the graceful temple of Philae in midstream was flooded with an orange glow from the setting sun. Along the bank a forest of slender masts and lateen sails stood out against the sky. Across the river the strange rocks, bared of all earth and vegetation and polished smooth by the flying sand, have assumed the oddest shapes, and look for all the world like the primeval work of some Titanic infant at play.

The sight of a luggage van at a terminus was enough to drive any inexperienced voyager to utter despair. When we arrived at Shellal the moon had not yet risen, and the feeble light of a few lanterns was all we had wherewith to disentangle our separate lots of luggage and stores from the general *mélange*. The chaos of luggage was fearful. Under the weight of two of our store cases an officer's sword had been bent almost into the prophetic pruning hook, and a band-box belonging to our one lady passenger had, with all that it contained, been squashed absolutely flat. Everybody had to see after his own possessions or he was lost. Later on, as the boat steamed off from Shellal, an officer who had entrusted the embarkation of his horse to his *sâis* was horrified to see the man calmly sitting on the bank smoking a cigarette with the horse beside him. [32]

During our stay at Shellal we slept in the garden of a shabby one-storeyed house, dignified with the title of the "Spiro Hotel." This was run by one of those ubiquitous Greeks who invariably turn up in the East where there is any chance of making money. All along the line of advance to Omdurman we were accompanied by Greeks, who trafficked in bread, fresh meat, and the like. Like the Irishman and the Jew, the Greek seems to flourish the more the further he is removed from his native country.

By this time our horses had caused us such signal inconvenience, and it was becoming so difficult amid the congested traffic to find room for them, that Cross and I determined to do without our mounts. Accordingly, we sold one to an officer at a slight profit, and sent the other back to Cairo. If British officers could march on foot to Khartum from the point where rail and river failed us, why shouldn't we? If one is taking part in a campaign where there is a probability of a reverse, a sound horse may be useful; but one felt on the present occasion that, if any running away was to be done, it would not fall to our lot. [33]

At Shellal a brother of Ali's, called Mahmoud, suddenly turned up from some quarter or other, and we annexed him at a moderate rate of pay. His was the most unskilled labour I have ever witnessed. He generally drove the tent pegs into the ground sloping inwards, and with the notches inside instead of out! When he loaded a camel, he would place a Gladstone bag on one side and a heavy box of stores on the other, and then looked quite surprised when the camel rose and the whole structure fell with a crash to the ground. At times like these his imbecile features would be illumined with a fearful smile, and if we rebuked his folly and menaced him with punishment, his grin became broader and broader. When on one occasion I smote him with a thorn stick, his mirth became so uproarious that we abandoned all hope of his reformation, and merely gave Ali orders that in future his brother's activities were to be strictly confined to the hewing of wood and drawing of water. [34]

A large base hospital, with two hundred beds, had been established at Assouan, and throughout the line of advance strenuous efforts were being made to cope with any demands upon the medical service. It is generally admitted that at the Atbara fight the medical arrangements were not as complete as they might have been, and considerable confusion is said to have been produced by the inadequacy of the accommodation for the wounded. This time, however, Surgeon-General Taylor had arrived on the scene, and throughout the campaign there was no cause for complaint. In addition to base hospitals at Assouan, Atbara, Rojan Island, and elsewhere, each brigade had no less than five field hospitals attached to it. The National Aid Society proffered its assistance, undertaking to send its own transport; but the Sirdar refused the offer, with the idea probably that an army in the field ought to supply its own medical requirements. Some of the officials of the Society were, I heard, incensed at this refusal; for they alleged, with some reason, that during a campaign nobody "goes sick" unless he is practically too ill to move about, and that the voluntary assistance rendered by the Society may be of the greatest service to a large number of devoted men who, despite their sufferings, are too keen and patriotic to enrol themselves on the sick-list—the only means of securing treatment from the Army Medical Corps. Just before we embarked, a batch of invalided men passed northwards on their way to Cyprus, where the climate is comparatively cool in August. Sunstroke was beginning to claim its victims; a sergeant and a private of the Northumberland Fusiliers had already succumbed to the heat, which, amid the rocks of Philæ, was driving the quicksilver up to 110° in the shade. The Nile was still rising perceptibly day by day, and in one spot I saw hundreds of tons of Government stores—reserve supplies for ten thousand men—which would have to be moved, as the waters gave promise of reaching an abnormal height this year. Scores of natives found [35]

employment about the landing-stage as porters, and were perpetually fighting over the division of the luggage and the *bakshish*. I noticed four of these men, during a frantic struggle on the river bank, collapse into the water, where they still continued their combat of words and blows, even when occasionally submerged—

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Quamquam sunt sub aqua sub aqua maledicere tentant.

We journeyed towards Wady Halfa in the old stern-wheeler *Ibis*, which was crowded with officers of the Lancashire Fusiliers, and as it towed a large barge on either side full of the rank and file of the 2nd Battalion, we made slow progress. There is but little incident to chronicle on a Nile voyage, and it is difficult to understand why, even in winter, people select the Nile as the river *par excellence* for steamboat tours. The eye falls continually upon bleak hills and dreary sand plains on either bank, relieved only by occasional patches of *dhurra* and date palms, while the monotony which hangs like a pall over everything Egyptian—landscape, architecture, sculpture—becomes in time most oppressive and wearisome. The fact is, that were it not for the social pleasures one may, or may not, derive from several weeks' sojourn on one of Cook's steamers, nobody except a few souls really interested in the antiquities of Upper Egypt would undertake this voyage.

The Tommy Atkins were packed like sardines on the barges, but seemed to be in excellent spirits throughout the voyage. They continually talked about the coming battle, and were as keen as possible to get a sight of the Dervishes. All this arose, of course, from sheer love of adventure and fighting, for the campaign could scarcely be regarded as undertaken in defence of "our hearth and home," and was only indirectly waged for the sake of our country. As we advanced up the river the soldiers grew more musical day by day. Local lyrics from the North alternated with Moody and Sankey hymns, and occasionally some very fair attempts at harmony helped to beguile the tedium and discomfort of the voyage. In one respect the result of the "territorial system" in our British regiments is not altogether good. Numerous little *coteries* exist amongst the men enlisted from the same families and districts, and the result is that the bonds of discipline between non-commissioned officers and privates tend to become relaxed. I noticed, for instance, to my surprise, that some of the sergeants were sitting down on the deck playing cards with the men—a species of *camaraderie* which is certainly not desirable.

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A few hours before we reached Assouan the ruins of Kumombo had come in sight. This town, the ancient Ombi, was once, if we may trust an unknown imitator of Juvenal, the scene of a strange and horrible fight between the residents and some malevolent visitors from Denderah, a hundred miles farther down the river. The cause of the encounter has quite a modern flavour about it—each town imagined it had secured the sole and exclusive means of Salvation—

Inde furor vulgo quod numina vicinorum
Odit uterque locus, cum solos credat habendos
Esse deos quos ipse colit.

The pious citizens of Ombi worshipped the crocodile. At Tentyra this ugly beast appeared on the dinner-table, and was devoured with all the added relish which would arise from cooking and eating the deity of a hostile sect. The Tentyrites, in fact, specialised in crocodiles. Plunging into the river they climbed upon the saurians' backs—so Pliny tells us,—and when the crocodile opened his jaws they neatly placed a cudgel across his back teeth, and so steered their captive to the shore. After landing they stood round in a circle and swore roundly at the crocodile, and this scolding so alarmed the timid monster that it "threw up" all the bodies it had eaten, which thus secured a respectable funeral.

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Our four days' journey by river from Wady Halfa was only twice broken, once by an hour's halt at Korosko to send off telegrams and take on board some chickens and fresh limes. The other halt was a sad one. A young private of the Fusiliers, after a brief illness, died of internal hæmorrhage, caused, possibly, by lifting heavy luggage. There were, of course, no hospital arrangements on board the crowded barges, but his comrades placed the sick man in as cool a spot as could be found, and tended him as well as they could. But the case was hopeless, and on 11th August the poor fellow died. The steamer drew up beside the bank, and a section of the dead man's company speedily dug a grave in the dry sand. The colonel read the burial service, and after a little heap of stones had been piled above the grave, soon to be obliterated by the drifting sand of the desert, we steamed on our way southwards. Amid the excitement of battle and sudden death, one looks with something akin to indifference as men are struck down by shell-splinter and bullet—it is all part of the day's work, and all must take their chance. But amid quieter surroundings the feelings have freer play, and we all felt, I think, that there was a peculiar element of sadness about this young soldier's death. As the end approached he lay half conscious in a corner of the deck, unmindful of all that passed around him—the swirl and rush of the torrent, and the ceaseless chatter of his comrades.

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His eyes

Were with his heart, and that was far away—

away, perhaps, in the far-off Lancashire village where his boyhood was spent and his friends awaited his return.

On 12th August universal dismay was caused on board by the news that our supply of ice had given out. The Arab *restaurateur* was promptly kicked for his gross negligence, but this did little good. The weather was stifling hot, and unless we wished to drink lukewarm soda water some means had to be devised. The best thing to do if one cannot secure ice in the Sudan is to put one's bottles into a canvas bucket, full of water. The sides are slightly porous and the consequent evaporation brings down the temperature of the contents. Otherwise, merely placing the bottles

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in straw cases, and then immersing them up to the neck in water, serves to keep the drink fairly cool. The *restaurateur*, who charged us no less than eight shillings a day for food, really deserved the kicking which he received, for ever since the commencement of the voyage he had consistently dropped one course a day from the dinner, so that if the journey had been prolonged much further, our dinner promised to become a negative quantity.

We were not sorry to leave the *Ibis* at Wady Halfa, and the Tommies must have been delighted to get, even for an hour or so, an opportunity of stretching their limbs. The train, consisting of a number of horse boxes and open trucks, stood waiting for us, and after a brief delay we steamed off for our thirty-six hours' run across the open desert to the Atbara. Cross, Major Stuart-Wortley, and I found ourselves ensconced in a covered cattle-truck, half full of baggage; but we got our beds out, and speedily made ourselves as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. In the middle of the truck stood a big "zia," and we managed to have this filled with decent water before we left—a sensible precaution, as only two wells exist along these three hundred and fifty miles of desert railway; and when three men have to cook and "wash up" and cool their drinks, not to mention a succession of personal ablutions, the possession of a big "zia" full of good water is a great alleviation of the cattle-truck's discomforts. [42]

In the old days of vacillation and weakness, which ended in the surrender of the Sudan, and thus spread untold miseries over thousands and thousands of square miles, the selection of Wady Halfa as the frontier of Egypt was made in defiance of the best expert opinion on the subject. But if the advice of, at anyrate, one of the experts consulted by the Conservative Government of the day had reached England a little earlier, it seems very probable that El Debbeh, the obvious and natural frontier post under the circumstances of the time, would have been chosen instead of a spot two hundred and fifty miles farther north. The advice in question was, I believe, given to Lord Salisbury on a Monday; but as the fate of the Government was already sealed, and it was known that the Thursday following would see the Ministry out of office, there was no time to effect the proposed change, and Wady Halfa was thus left as the temporary frontier town of the Khedive's loyal provinces, and an enormous tract of country, which would have been protected by a garrison at El Debbeh, was left to Dervish control and devastation. [43]

As we neared the end of our journey the train again skirted the Nile, and whenever we halted crowds of natives grouped themselves along the line, either to sell eggs and dates or simply to stare. The railway is still a source of never-ending wonderment. The simple unmechanical minds of these Arabs seem to regard an engine as a being endowed with life and will-power; and quite recently a village sheikh near Berber protested to a railway official against the cruelty of forcing a small engine to draw a long line of heavily laden trucks. All these people are really ex-Dervishes, and I noticed a fair number of the genuine "fuzzy-wuzzies" amongst them. One of their sheikhs came up and informed us that when we got to Omdurman the Khalifa would fight like *Sheitan* (the devil). These natives appeared to vastly enjoy the blessings of peace. How vividly impressed they must have been by the constant succession of trains passing across the desert, laden with fighting men and countless tons of stores, visible evidences of the power and wealth of the conquering *Inglizi!* [44]

As we approached Abu Hamed, the scene of the sharp, brief fight last year, we noticed some object roll along the side of the line; and when the train pulled up we learnt that a non-commissioned officer had fallen off one of the carriages. In a few minutes the missing Fusilier picked us up, walking along quite coolly without having sustained a scratch. On a subsequent journey another poor fellow was not so lucky, for he fell off in the same way, and was instantly cut to pieces by the wheels.

The sun was setting as we neared Berber, and in the distance across the river the outlines of "Slatin's Hill" stood sharply out against the sky. This was the spot where the fugitive took shelter at a critical moment when pursuit seemed close upon his heels and capture imminent. On our own side of the stream the train ran slowly through the scattered suburbs of Berber, and one realised how, as on every occasion during the Khalifa's attempts to oppose our advance, the Dervishes had blundered, by selecting Abu Hamed for the fight instead of Berber. At the latter place there were fully five miles of detached mud-huts extending inland from the river. Not a particle of cover would have been available for an attacking force, and the expulsion of a resolute body of Dervishes from the shelter of these mud walls would have cost us dear. [45]

When the train finally crawled into the vast area covered by the Atbara camp, it was quite dark, and, amid the confusion, Cross and I, with two officers, thought it best to sleep as we were on the ground beside the railway. However, as bad luck would have it, a heavy shower of rain descended upon our devoted selves just as we had fallen off to sleep, and the downpour was followed by a strong wind from the river, which covered our quaternion with a thick layer of sand and dust. A more unpleasant night it would be difficult to imagine, as, beside the dust and wet, it was extremely difficult to breathe amid the clouds of sand. At last I could stand the discomfort no longer, and, jumping up, I seized my bed and bolted for an enclosure hard by. Here my onset was suddenly barred by the bayonet of a sentry, who brought his rifle down to the "charge"; but a little explanation secured a passage for myself and my half-soaked bed, and I found an empty tent, to which my three companions came running like rabbits. [46]

We enjoyed a few hours' sleep before dawn, and then reported ourselves to Colonel Wingate and General Rundle, the commandant. We learnt from the former that the 21st Lancers and some gunners had crossed the river that day with the intention of making their way by land to the proposed camp just north of Shabluka. As these were the last troops who would ascend the left bank of the river, it was imperative that the two camels which we had purchased for our stores should proceed at once by the same route; and as this route promised to be an interesting one,

Cross and I determined to accompany our beasts of burden on foot in the absence of our horses. Accordingly we secured an order for the transport across the river of ourselves, our servants, camels, and stores in the old paddle-boat *El Tahra*. This ancient tub had a rather peculiar history. She had fifteen years ago formed one of the Government flotilla on the upper Nile. When the evacuation of the Sudan took place an Egyptian battery fired half a dozen shells into her and sank her at Rafia to prevent the Dervishes from making use of her. The *El Tahra*, however, was destined for something better than this inglorious fate, and she was raised, patched up, and throughout the recent campaign performed much useful service. Amongst her more notable achievements was the embarkation of the officers and crew of the ill-fated *Zaphir* after they were left stranded on the bank without an ounce of baggage. The scars inflicted by her former masters were quite visible, as the big holes torn by the shells had been neatly covered with iron plating.

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Orientalers are wonderfully good at renovating old vessels. A few years ago I crossed from Galata to Scutari in a vessel which twenty years ago had been condemned as unseaworthy by our Board of Trade. She was then bought for a mere song by a Turkish company, which began to patch her up. In the middle of this process the venerable craft broke her back and fell in two; but the Orientalers were not discouraged. They set to work again and put the fragments together, and the result of their zeal and patience has now been steaming to and fro between Europe and Asia amongst the choppy waters of the Sea of Marmora for several years.

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The prospect of speedily leaving the Atbara camp behind us was a pleasant one. The place was absolutely detestable; no one had a good word for it. The air was full of flying clouds of dust raised by an interminable succession of blasts from the river. Often before one could get a cup of coffee to one's lips it was coated with a layer of dust. In order to keep the eyes from being inflamed one was driven to wear huge goggles or a gossamer veil over the face.

In addition to the moral training which is alleged to result from all forms of worry and vexation, our discomforts during the campaign frequently possessed an exegetical value. One realised more forcibly than hitherto the meaning of some of the "Plagues of Egypt." Nile boils are only too well known amongst the hapless officials who dwell along the banks of the river. Again, as the ancient narrative speaks of the dust as the vehicle of malignant forms of insect life, so now bacilli are spread broadcast by this means. When we woke up in the morning and shook an inch of dust from our blankets, we were lucky not to find in addition that our mouths and throats were ulcerated; and men suffering from enteric fever and other internal inflammations found their recovery retarded, and often, I am afraid, prevented, by the penetrating dust which they were compelled to swallow and breathe, however fast tents were tied up or windows fastened.

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Another abomination was the plague of flies. At meals one made a sweep to get rid of these beasties and then a rush to convey the food to one's lips; but even in this brief space a couple of flies often found time to get their beaks into the morsel and so perished miserably. Tobacco was useless against these Sudanese flies; they seemed to enjoy the fumes. The only way to circumvent them was to sacrifice a little jam on a bit of bread and put it aside to attract the vermin. In a twinkling bread and jam had become invisible. Nothing was to be seen but a thick bunch of greedy flies jostling each other like people at an "early door."

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On 16th August, owing to a series of those vexatious delays which are inseparable from Eastern travel, we did not get our two camels to the water's edge until nearly six o'clock, and even then the perverse beasts absolutely refused to get into the barge which was to convey them to the other side. At length we tied their legs together, and then dragged and shoved them over the plank by main force. How utterly one loathes a camel sometimes! Its disposition is morose and malignant even from its birth; it is full of original sin, and any affection lavished upon it is quite wasted. In a word, the camel is a hopelessly depraved beast—

Monstrum nulla virtute redemptum.

The other day I came across a magazine article by a writer who claimed to know all about camels, and he spoke sympathetically of the "soft, purring sound" which issued from the animal's lips. What an amazing euphemism for the horrid guttural snorts with which the peevish brute protests against any attempt to control its movements or put a load upon its back. There is no chivalry in the camel's breast. It will bite a pound of flesh out of you as you lie asleep, or if you are riding will suddenly turn round as you are admiring the scenery and nibble your legs.

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At length the obstinate creatures were ferried over the river, but before they were loaded and ready to start it was already dark. On the bank I met Howard for the first time since his Balliol days, and he most kindly offered to lend me his second horse if I cared to ride after the Lancers; but as Cross had no horse I decided to stay with him.

As Cross, Howard, and myself stood there in the brief twilight, how little we dreamt that I alone of the trio should live to return from the campaign! No thought of coming disaster overshadowed us as we laughed and chatted together. It is not always so. I have personally known three cases in which brave men, accustomed to the perils of battle, suddenly experienced a vivid presentiment that they would be struck down in the approaching fight, and in each case a bullet found its mark in their bodies.

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Howard rode off, and then Cross and I set out to overtake the column already encamped thirteen miles away. The general lie of the ground I knew. If we followed the telegraph lines we should reach the village of Abu Selim, and thence a sharp turn to the left would bring us to the Lancers' camp beside the Nile. Starting as we did at seven, we hoped to reach our goal by midnight, and then a few hours' sleep would have intervened before a fresh move forward at four next morning. But the scheme fell through. None of the servants knew the way in the dark; there was no moon, and the starlight was not strong enough to show the telegraph posts. We struggled

on in the uneven scrub, pushing through mimosa thorns and falling over logs of palm wood, while our servants struck matches to look for the hoof-marks of the cavalry. After two hours of this wearisome work we had advanced less than three miles, and we saw that the enterprise was hopeless. We sat down on a stump and reviewed the situation. Neither of us had been overfed that day. Cross had had some cocoa at dawn, a cup of bovril at midday, and tea and bread at four o'clock. My own diet had been the same as his, minus the afternoon meal. I have a great belief, personally, in the hygienic value of temporary starvation, but as we sat there in the dark, Cross paid scant attention to my eulogies upon the utility of emptiness, and very wisely voted for our immediate return to the starting-place. I did not like to give up our scheme, but there was not much in the way of alternative, so after a noisy palaver with our servants, reinforced by three suspicious-looking Arabs, who emerged from the bush, we finally sent one camel and two servants along the bank, and after another two hours' floundering through the scrub, found ourselves again opposite the junction of the Atbara and Nile. We felt that the stores would probably pick up the column sooner or later, but as for ourselves, it would be foolish to be wandering about the west bank, nearer the Dervish country, without military escort. Woe betide any stragglers who chanced to fall into the hands of the Dervishes at present! The best thing to do would be to empty five chambers of one's revolver and keep the sixth for one's self! [53]

One of the suspicious-looking Arabs walked back with us and showed us a dear little hut made of wattled branches, which would shelter us for the night. Our guide turned out to be a native who had suffered at the hands of the cruel Mahmoud just before that scoundrel was defeated and captured at the battle of the Atbara in the spring. He bared his arm and showed us a hideous wound, now healed over, where a Dervish spear had cut through his flesh from shoulder to elbow. The poor man had lost his wife and child—slain, both of them, by the savage Baggaras. This incident, one among thousands of the same kind, may give one some idea of the cruel sufferings to which whole tribes were abandoned by our cowardly evacuation of the Sudan. We had put our hand to the plough, and then drew back. [54]

We had a good square meal, washed down by a bottle of claret, the solitary survivor of four. Its three companions had fallen from the camel's back, and lay shattered on the ground, with their life-juice ebbing fast. That night I dreamt that I was shooting rabbits amongst bracken in Essex, and suddenly awoke, to find myself covered with a quantity of vegetable matter. Everyone has experienced the curious feeling of hopeless bewilderment which occasionally comes over a man when he wakes in the dark amid fresh surroundings, and wonders where on earth and what on earth he is; whether he is in this world or the next. I found ultimately that the camel had literally eaten us out of house and home, for it had ambled up in the night and devoured the wattled branches of our hut to such an extent that the sides and roof suddenly collapsed upon our sleeping forms. [55]

CHAPTER II

FROM THE ATBARA TO WAD HAMED

Early on the morning of the 17th our old friend the *El Tahra* came in sight, and we hailed her and crossed again to the Atbara. Next day, with the rest of the correspondents still remaining in the camp, we embarked on board a native *ghyassa* which was towed up the river by the gunboat *Tamai*. We were thoroughly crowded and uncomfortable on this miserable barge, and even when we stepped on to the lower deck of the gunboat the dirt and confusion was indescribable. The first night I attempted in the dark to get a little exercise in this way, but I fell over a live goat into the middle of a dead sheep newly slaughtered, and resolved to do without any further exercise until I landed. [56]

The Arab servants were quite happy amid these horrid surroundings, and according to their wont would sit about in groups telling stories till the small hours of the morning. One of their tales, I learnt, concerned a mummy which arose and talked to the Bedawin who unearthed it. In view of certain evidence which has lately been forthcoming, it is just possible that some substratum of truth may have underlaid this weird story. The evidence to which I allude is contained in the following account, which is alleged to be authentic. [57]

A short time ago an Englishman who was travelling in Mexico happened to discover a mummied body of which the extremities were missing. He carried off his find to the home of a Mexican friend whose guest he was, and after dinner showed the mummy to the master and mistress of the house. The case with its contents was placed on the billiard table, and the trio sat on a couch some distance off, when suddenly a voice seemed to issue from the box. The Englishman turned to his host to compliment him on his supposed ventriloquism, when he saw that both the Mexican and his wife were deadly pale, and the lady in a fainting condition. He rushed to the case on the table and declares that as he stooped over it he heard articulate speech issue from the mummied form inside! The voice, however, was only momentary, and after a time his host informed him that already before he entered the room the sound had been heard by his wife and himself proceeding from the box. [58]

This mummy is now, I hear, in England, and one authority who has been consulted suggests that the employment of the Röntgen rays might perhaps reveal in the mummy's interior some mechanical device employed by the ancients to produce the semblance of the human voice. That some contrivance of this kind was known in antiquity seems almost certain. Priestcraft sometimes caused the statues of gods to talk, as, for example, the famous statue of Memnon amongst the

ruins of Thebes. In the case before us some vibration may have started this venerable clockwork into renewed activity, just as nowadays the pressure of infantile fingers causes the mechanical doll to squeak and gibber, or cry "Papa," "Mamma."

At length Colonel Wingate took pity on our abject position in the *ghyassa*, and we were permitted to leave the society of "Gypsy" officers and native servants, and have our meals on the upper deck. [59]

The gunboat conveyed the Staff of the Intelligence Department, including Slatin Pasha. The long years of hardship endured at Omdurman have left few traces on Slatin; he is always in excellent spirits, and a most kind and unselfish travelling companion. He told me that he was utterly weary of the Sudan, and would, like many others, be heartily glad to see the last of campaigning in these torrid regions. He told me, too, many interesting things about Omdurman and the prisoners still in the Dervishes' power; and how the Austrian mission-sister had been compelled to marry a Greek by the Khalifa on the quaint ground that it was indecorous for an unmarried lady to reside at Omdurman without adequate protection.

The Nile becomes much more interesting above the Atbara, and the banks in places are clothed with dense vegetation. We stopped several times to take in wood for the engine, and at one of our halting-places, Zeibad, during a ramble on shore, I found the bushes full of little doves (*turtur Senegalensis*), and a flock of wild geese got up, offering a fine shot had one carried a gun. A few hundred yards away I noticed a line of huge Marabout storks. The plumage of these birds is very striking, and I have heard it suggested that when on one occasion during the Atbara campaign a correspondent rode back to camp in hot haste with the report that he had been chased by Dervishes, he had really fallen in with a line of Marabout storks, and mistaken their mottled plumage for Arab "gibbehs." Farther along the bank we skirted a huge marsh—a perfect paradise for a sportsman: teal, duck, and snipe rose in vast coveys; on a tall bush a large fishing eagle was perched, which paid scant attention to the steamer; while at the foot two small crocodiles or very large water-lizards lay basking in the sunshine. On every side a multitude of cranes, secretary birds, and the sacred ibis stalked solemnly about in dignified silence. The whole formed a charming picture of animal life undisturbed by the presence of man—every creature working out its own perfection in "delight and liberty." [60]

The voyage was full of interest. By day we wrote up our diaries, took photographs of interesting bits of river scenery, or occasionally got a shot at a wild duck or goose, which formed a welcome addition to our larder. About half-way to Shabluka we sighted the curious pyramids of Meroe, thirteen or fourteen in number. These seem to be often irregular in shape, and are not nearly so large as the pyramids of Ghizeh or Sakhara. They stand all solitary in a waste of sand and rock, strange enigmatic relics of a vanished race. The region of Meroe once formed a kingdom in itself, which succeeded the Ethiopian kingdom of Napata, lower down the river. The dynasties of the Meroitic kings attained considerable power, and were able to retain their independence when the rest of Egypt became subject to foreign control. Meroe was formerly a flourishing centre for caravan and river-borne trade, but this seems to have disappeared by the Christian era, for in Nero's time it is described as a desolate wilderness, and this fact seems to render untenable the belief that the Queen Candace mentioned in the Acts was the sovereign of Meroe. From the time of Justinian to the 14th century Meroe was absorbed in the kingdom of Dongola, whose inhabitants professed the Jacobite form of Christianity. Quite recently I heard that an altar had been found somewhere in the Meroe region with an inscription to Isa (Jesus), who still lives in the tradition of the country as a great Sheikh. Now that the Sudan has been opened up, and travellers need not fear a compulsory experience of the Khalifa's hospitality at Omdurman, one of the first steps which English archæologists ought to undertake is the investigation of the countless ruins, tombs, inscriptions, and so forth, which exist south of Wady Halfa. No one, for instance, has yet deciphered the script which is met with amongst the ruins in the Wady Ben Naga. Lepsius explored these ruins in 1844, and published some of the curious inscriptions in his *Denkmäler*; but until a bilingual inscription is discovered which will, like the Rosetta Stone, furnish a clue to this mysterious writing, Egyptologists will continue to sigh over its inscrutable characters. Professor Sayce had asked me to bring back some "squeezes" and photographs from the Meroitic inscriptions; but, alas, on the return journey the squeeze paper and photographic apparatus were lost by the capsizing of some *ghyassas*, and so I could do nothing in the cause of palæography. [61]

A short distance past the pyramids we caught up a curious procession wending its way along the bank. A famous Gaalin sheikh, Hamara Wad Abu Sin, was journeying southwards to join the Anglo-Egyptian forces. This important ally led the way on foot, followed by a retainer armed with a Remington. Then came a baggage camel carrying the personal luggage of the chieftain, and the rear was brought up by two men and two boys. When the gunboat got opposite the old sheikh, he at once jumped into the river and swam to us, followed by one of the small boys, who kept his master's bundle of clothes out of the water. Wad Abu Sin is head of the Shukryeh tribe, and is noted throughout the Sudan for his personal bravery. His father was *mudir* of Khartum under Gordon, and he himself was a prisoner in that town until he managed to escape through Abyssinia. It was touching to see the old man's joy at meeting Slatin, his fellow-sufferer under the cruel tyranny of the Khalifa. [62]

At Magyrich, on the western bank, we found the Lancers encamped in a beautiful palm grove, and Cross and I were especially glad to see our camel with the two servants, who had evidently managed to pick up the column. Some distance lower down than Magyrich we had already passed two little groups of Lancers. One batch of twelve stood on the bank, and asked us to take them on board, as their horses had broken down; the other party consisted of only two men, [63]

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whose comrade had just died of sunstroke, and been buried by the survivors under a mimosa bush.

At 5 a.m. a man swam to the boat from the shore, who turned out to be a deserter from Omdurman. He stated that when he left two of the Dervish boats were on the point of starting to the South, in order, perhaps, to fetch grain, and that the Khalifa was at present with his army, at the outermost of the Omdurman lines of defence, about three miles to the north of the town. This seemed to confirm the general belief, which was afterwards verified, that the decisive battle would not be fought in front of the Kerreri ridge, some ten miles north of the capital, but in front of Omdurman itself. [65]

The sight of Metemmeh was full of interest. On the opposite bank lay the ingeniously constructed forts of Shendy, with solid mud walls, thirty-five feet thick. Miles back beyond Metemmeh, in the desert, lay Abu Klea, and between the two the hamlets of Abu Kru and Gubat. The fighting which we were destined to experience before Omdurman was as nothing compared with the desperate struggles in 1885, when the gallant column of British troops fought its way through overwhelming numbers from Abu Klea to the Nile. Englishmen may well be proud of this splendid feat of arms, unexampled as it is in the history of the Sudan campaigns. Major Stuart-Wortley, who was present at the series of fights from Abu Klea to the Nile, pointed out to me the mud-hut to which Sir Herbert Stewart had been carried. How pitiful to think that the lives of this gallant leader and many another brave man were sacrificed in vain! Instead of helping to save the beleaguered city and rescue Gordon, the dearly-won victory of Abu Klea only seemed to hasten the destruction of Khartum. The Mahdist forces were so incensed by the sight of their wounded comrades brought back after the battle, that they demanded to be led at once to the assault, and captured the town almost without resistance. [66]

We heard, by the way, at Nasri that all the graves of the gallant men who fell in the fighting from Abu Klea to Metemmeh had been desecrated by the Dervishes, and that the white bones lay scattered over the desert. One exception, however, had been made. The resting-place of Sir Herbert Stewart had not been molested.

The above news was, I believe, embodied in several telegrams, but was struck out by the Press Censor, as it was thought likely to cause pain to many in England whose relatives had fallen in the Abu Klea campaign. Afterwards, too, some doubts were thrown upon the truth of the report; but even if the story was well founded, it matters little. Of our valiant dead we may surely say, in the immortal words of the Athenian statesman, "They received each one for himself the noblest of all sepulchres. I speak not of that in which their remains are laid, but of that in which their glory survives.... For the whole earth is a sepulchre of famous men: not only are they commemorated by columns and inscriptions, but there dwells also an unwritten memorial of them, graven not on stone, but in the hearts of men." [67]

The evening before we reached Nasri Island we were suddenly overtaken by a terrific sandstorm. Two vast columns of sand rose straight up from the desert and swept rapidly towards us. The sky was black with clouds, birds ceased to sing, and the grasshoppers chirruped no more, as all living creatures, from ourselves downward, prepared for the coming terror. The *Tamai* at once tied up to the bank, and we waited for the hurricane. Suddenly it came rushing upon us. Everyone clutched books, camp-chairs, cameras, plates, bottles—whatever lay within reach—and sat tight, while the gunboat heeled over beneath the shock. The storm was shortlived; streams of sunshine broke afresh through the clouds, and birds and insects came forth from their hiding-places, and rejoiced that the tyranny was overpast. We speedily collected our scattered properties and went on our way. Yet all night long the lightning flashed incessantly, showing up every bush and rock on the river bank as clearly as at noonday. [68]

Nasri Island had been converted into a vast depôt for stores. All the people who were obliged to remain at this station throughout the campaign seemed very depressed. There was nothing whatever to do out of work hours except to prowl along the river bank, on the chance of slaying a goose or catching a fish. One of the officers came on board, and, in answer to our query as to his welfare, said he felt "a bit cheap," as in addition to being soaked to the skin as he lay in bed, he had been stung by two scorpions during the night. As the *Tamai's* condensers had gone wrong, and the engineer seemed to have lost his head altogether, we tied up to the bank until 2 a.m., and four more hours brought us to Wad Hamed, where the Sirdar's forces were to be finally concentrated before the march upon Omdurman.

We thoroughly enjoyed the week's sojourn at Wad Hamed, as the camp seemed healthy, and along the Nile there were many charming bits of scenery. In fact, in some places where the enormous breadth of the river was broken up into narrower channels, one might almost imagine oneself on the Thames. The banks were clothed with the bright green foliage of the nebek and mimosa bushes, which afforded shelter to innumerable birds. The thorns of the nebek are worse even than those of the mimosa; they curl inwards, and are very strong. Nevertheless, the camel rejoices exceedingly when it can seize a mouthful of this prickly tree, and the yellow berries are not to be despised by human beings when they are really hungry. There is, however, one feature which is sadly lacking even in the nicest bits of Nile scenery; there are no flowers. [69]

After we had pitched our tents amongst some mimosa scrub, during which process our barefooted servants leapt about like cats on hot bricks, we were informed that the Sirdar would receive the correspondents in his tent. Bennett-Burleigh had arrived in the meantime, having stolen away from the Lancers' camp and the other correspondents, and ridden forty miles that day—a fine performance, if not strictly in accord with military discipline. We thereupon collected our little cohort of fifteen, and went off to meet the General. I did not enjoy the interview, which [70]

was as barren of results as it was humiliating. The only parallel to it which I can think of is that of a row of curates before a brusque and autocratic bishop. During the brief commonplaces which passed between us, the general impression conveyed to me was the immeasurable condescension of our chief in even deigning to address the representatives of a Press which has never failed to extol even to the verge of exaggeration the achievements of the Anglo-Egyptian Army and its leader! How deep the gulf which appeared to separate the Egyptian commander-in-chief from the civilian correspondent! In short, I should advise anybody who cannot put his pride in his pocket to avoid the rôle of amateur war correspondent in Egypt. The professionals are, I suppose, to some extent inoculated by this time, and cling to the delusion that correspondents during a campaign are treated like officers.

At the same time, I am bound to confess that if I were a commanding officer I should not be favourably impressed with the *genus* "correspondent" as a whole. There is sometimes a blatant self-conceit and vulgar swagger about a war correspondent which is very irritating, while in other cases intolerance of discipline and incessant attempts to override military regulations for mere private ends have gone far to justify Lord Wolseley's *dictum* that correspondents are "the curse of modern warfare." Of course there are delightful exceptions to this sort of thing to be met with in a war correspondent's camp. Some of the men who engage in this most delightful occupation are good fellows in every sense of the phrase,—brave, generous, and clever,—and it is a privilege to enjoy the companionship of men like Steevens, Scudamore, Villiers, and others whom I could name. [71]

Altogether, the little *kosmos* of our camp was full of interest, as the types of war correspondent one meets with vary considerably. There is the rough man who glories in his roughness, scorns luxury, and doesn't wash. An excellent fellow in his way, he yet renders himself more unhappy than he need be by his unstinted devotion to discomfort. To imitate an ancient Eremite by never changing one's shirt when you can purchase one for 2s. 11¾d., and to sleep on the ground when you have got plenty of money to buy a valise bed, may have certain charms when the weather is fair and you haven't got fever; but when rain is falling upon you, as it knows how to fall in the tropics, or you would give half your income for a little shade from the midday sun, which has got you by the back of the neck and made you limp and listless—it is then that the swashbuckler and old campaigner theory breaks down. [72]

In signal contrast with the above type, one finds the war correspondent who makes himself as comfortable as possible. His editor does not grudge the supply, nor he the expenditure, of large sums of money. He puts on a clean shirt every day, and has his boots polished in the heart of the desert. He wears beautiful cummerbunds, and is all glorious within; his underclothing is of wrought silk. When less fortunate mortals drink muddy water this Sybarite calls for a whisky and Rosbach, and finishes off a dinner of five courses with a glass of excellent liqueur. But, after all, why shouldn't a man make his camp life as pleasant as possible as long as his comforts don't interfere with other people's? Indeed, so far from this being the case, the "comfortable" correspondent—as far as my experience goes—is often a really kind and generous fellow, who never grudges a friend a share in his good things; and as to his picturesque costume and careful toilette, a man preserves his self-respect all the better when he is clean and nicely dressed. The hospitality, too, which, when camels and servants abound, can be generously dispensed to agreeable and communicative officers, is a most valuable factor in the success of a war correspondent's career; its quality is like that of mercy—it blesses him that gives as well as him that takes. [73]

Another type meets us in the veterans, the self-constituted *doyens* of the pressmen, who claim to regulate the camp and lay down the law generally. Some old persons of this sort, on the strength of their own antiquity and their experience of half a dozen campaigns, are loud in their denunciation of all "interlopers," as they are pleased to call all gentlemen who pay their own expenses and do literary work in connection with the campaign.

Again, all campaigners must know the type of correspondent, who, ignorant of any language except his own, and speaking that imperfectly, ill-treats his servants when they fail to understand his orders. Such persons as this are either too stupid or too lazy to master even a few common words of the vernacular, yet they imagine that for £2, 10s. a month they can secure an accomplished linguist as a servant! "Untwist that knot; not that knot, that other knot! Great Scot! You," etc. etc. The poor Arab boy stands perplexed and fearful—he cannot understand this bewildering utterance, and becomes helpless or makes a bad shot and begins to open a tin of marmalade or lay the table. Then "thud, thud," as a heavy stick falls on the servant's bare flesh, or the wretched boy emerges from the tent, his face streaming with blood from a cowardly blow by his master's fist. I have known an Arab servant to be followed for yards and beaten most cruelly with a heavy stick, because, owing to a breakdown of the telegraph, he was unable to forward a message sent by his master. The boy was absolutely blameless in the matter, but his master would not listen to a word of explanation, and the sound of the brutal strokes he showered upon the servant were audible far away. The foul abuse bellowed at servants frequently made our camp a disgrace to the zeriba. Everybody in the East swears at his servants, but still—whether the proposition be ethically sound or not—there is a gentlemanly way of swearing—brief and incisive, and not intended to reach the ears of others than the delinquent. [74] [75]

Moreover, if one treats one's Arab servants with kindness and firmness withal, they generally do their best, and often become quite devoted to their master. When after the battle Mr. Villiers was lost for some time, and fears were entertained about him, his servant was full of genuine distress and anxiety. If, on the other hand, no tie exists between master and servant except fear of the *kurbash* and the loss of the paltry wages, what can one expect in the way of zeal and

devotion?

The yells and screams of fury which commenced at daybreak, and often made night hideous in the correspondents' camp, were never heard amongst the officers, who surely had infinitely more to put up with in the way of discomfort than we had. In short, disgust was often the prevailing sentiment with which one could contemplate our own camp, and it was a delightful relief to get away for a quiet, pleasant chat with one's officer friends.

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There are other types also. The "new hand," some peaceful-looking journalist who has never fired a shot in his life, even at a bunny, stands before the door of his tent clad in all the trappings with which Messrs. Silver adorn the noumenal war correspondent of their imagination. Every strap in the brand new kit is in its place, and the poor man is so festooned with cameras and field-glasses and revolvers and haversacks that respiration must be difficult, as he bumps along on his gee-gee in an enormous helmet. He cannot ride, to walk he is ashamed. Yet, if the "new hand's" enthusiasm for a war correspondent's career is not disillusioned by the stern realities of a Sudan campaign, he will appear in our next "little war" as an old hand, and will be all the happier for having left behind him the outfit dear to the war correspondent of comic opera, and donned a less intricate but more effective costume.

Once more, there is the non-journalistic amateur, who, in order to go through the campaign, has secured a permit to act as a correspondent for some newspaper. As I was myself a humble member of this class, I will refrain from criticising its merits and defects, though later on a brief tribute may well be paid to the memory of two of its members, who, alas, did not return—Cross and Howard.

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Now, concerning war correspondents enough has been said. Let no one be offended by fair criticism and good-natured banter—

Quicquid agunt homines, votum, timor, ira, voluptas,
Gaudia, discursus, nostri est farrago libelli.

At the same time it seems likely that the day of the highly paid war correspondent, with *carte blanche* to spend as much as he likes, is almost over. Scores of capable men with a 'Varsity education would be delighted to do war correspondent's work for a tithe of what is paid to some of these gentlemen; and as agencies like Reuter supply excellent telegrams, there is no crying need for additional "wires." At least one of our leading newspapers was quite uncertain for a long time as to whether it would send a special correspondent to the Sudan or not, and an editor remarked to me that the copy sent was often scarcely worth the outlay. "We don't want to read," said he, "how our correspondent was bitten by mosquitoes, or left his pyjamas behind him."

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As my friend Professor Poulton of Oxford had kindly bestowed upon me a small net and a "killing bottle," I resolved to collect some butterflies and insects for the University Museum, and made frequent excursions outside Wad Hamed camp for the purpose. But ill-luck pursued my untrained efforts at practical entomology. The only thing the bottle came within measurable distance of killing was myself, for it got broken almost at the start, and my cook, thinking the strong-smelling concoction at the bottom was some form of curry powder or seasoning, had carefully annexed the *débris* of the bottle, and was proceeding to use it for culinary purposes, when I seized the stuff and hurled it into the river.

The butterfly net also fell upon evil days, for the donkey which carried it began to roll one evening before its load was removed, and the apparatus was utterly smashed. The stick and brasswork I reluctantly left on the field, but the green gauze served to protect one's eyes and complexion when sandstorms swept through the air.

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In consequence of these disasters my entomology had to be carried out with ruder implements—to wit, a bath towel and a thick stick. If a butterfly settled on the ground I stalked it carefully, and then fell upon it with the towel; but I often rose from the earth with no butterfly, and nothing in my hands except half a dozen mimosa thorns. Incensed at failure, one struck at the gaudy insects as they fluttered past, and sometimes succeeded in braining a few; but as I gathered up the scattered remains I trembled to think of the Professor's sarcasms upon the condition of my Sudanese specimens. The natives used to gaze upon my pursuit of butterflies with looks of amusement and surprise. What could the Englishman want with these worthless insects? Were they his totems or fetiches? did he collect them for gastronomic purposes, or as material for magical rites? I sometimes offered some trifling *bakshish* for butterflies, but the Arabs could never be brought to realise that I wanted variety and quality as well as quantity. On one occasion a struggling mass of fifteen or twenty common white butterflies in a matchbox—all exactly the same—was triumphantly brought me by a small boy. I liberated the unhappy prisoners, and rewarded the boy with one penny and a severe lecture.^[1]

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As to the other insects in my collection, many of these were so appallingly ugly and malignant in appearance that one had to pull oneself together to attempt their capture. A soda-water bottle had been filled with whisky amid the protests of Cross, who thought this a waste of good liquor, and when some grisly insect with a striped body, projecting eyes, and aggressive antennæ appeared inside the tent, something like this conversation used to take place:—

E. N. B.—"Do you mind catching that harmless lepidopt, Cross, while I hold the bottle?"

H. C.—"I think, somehow, that you're better at catching those beasts than I am; give me the bottle."

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As I had decreed death as the penalty for any creeping thing which invaded our tent, the noisome creature was, as a rule, gingerly secured and forced into the spirit, where it speedily

died of *delirium tremens*. Nothing is more unpleasant in tropical countries than to have a winged insect of great size and energy enter one's tent in the dark. *Omne ignotum pro terribili*: suddenly the Unknown makes its presence felt by rising up from the ground with a loud buzz; it necessarily strikes against the tent pole or the canvas, and immediately collapses with a thud on the bedclothes or one's face; and then, after a brief interval for recovery, it recommences its clumsy gambols and aerial flights.

Our stock of literature in the Wad Hamed camp was of amazing variety. We established by usage a sort of Desert Circulating Library, and novels, old magazines, and even newspapers of venerable antiquity were eagerly sought for and exchanged. My own parcel of books on board the *Tamai* consisted of Whyte Melville's *Holmby House*, *The Juggler and the Soul*, by Helen Mathers, and a penny edition of *Quentin Durward*. I was surprised on one occasion to find a Scotchman engaged in reading Horace's *Satires* in a new translation by Mr. Coutts. He knew nothing of the original Latin, but had purchased the volume, and was wading through the archaic material with apparent relish. Possibly the jokes of antiquity may have succeeded in striking that chord in a Scottish temperament which is so often unresponsive to contemporary humour! Whenever one got a periodical of any sort, such as *The Wide World*, one did not toy with it in a dilettante fashion. Every line of it was read from cover to cover, and even the advertisements of life assurance offices were perused with some degree of interest amid this comparative dearth of intellectual pabulum.

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One evening, in an interval of leisure before dinner, I strolled along the Nile to see if I could add a little fresh fish to our *ménu*. I had with me one of the excellent rods made for a few shillings by Slater of Newark-on-Trent, which pack up into very small compass, and can easily be carried in a hold-all or Gladstone bag. The river was much too muddy for fly fishing, and one of my officer friends remarked that the fish would have to jump a foot out of the water before they saw the fly. Nevertheless I tried a few casts with a Zulu and a nondescript chub-fly, and after a couple of rises managed to land a curious fish of the carp (?) tribe with long barbules, which is called by the Arabs "Abu Shenab" (Father of Moustaches). There is another very common fish in the Nile of the bream species. It is shaped like a pair of bellows, and has about the same flavour when cooked.

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It is always worth while to try a cast or two on unknown waters in the course of one's travels. This spring I was fortunate enough to get some excellent sport from a few hours' fly fishing in the Waters of Merom and the Jordan. The latter river simply teems with fish of seventeen different species, some of which, including the "Father of Moustaches," are found elsewhere only in the Nile—a fact which seems to indicate a connection between the two streams at some remote period.

Sir Francis Grenfell told me that a friend of his had landed some huge fish at the junction of the Nile and Atbara, and during our stay there a native caught a fish weighing nearly a hundred pounds, which was served up, I believe, at the Guards' mess. When the Nile gets lower, some splendid sport might be enjoyed with these monstrous fish. In fact, when one fishes in a stream like the Atbara, there is a delightful uncertainty about the nature of the prospective catch. One never knows what is coming up. That keen sportsman, the late Sir Samuel Baker, fished in this stream with a live bait 2 lbs. in weight, and landed fish up to 180 lbs.! On one occasion he tells how something seized the bait, and would not budge an inch. The dead weight on the line was tremendous, and Sir Samuel says it felt "as if the devil himself had got hold of the hook." At last, after placing his feet against a rock and pulling, something moved upwards in the water which looked for all the world like a cart wheel. Finally, up came a huge water-tortoise, which gave one plunge, and broke away with the hook and several yards of line.

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By day the vast area occupied by the two British brigades, and various battalions of Sudanese and Egyptians, was full of ceaseless work, accompanied by a perfect babel of sounds, as fatigue parties hurried in various directions, and long strings of native labourers carried loads or hauled at ropes, with their monotonous sing-song recitation of Koran fragments. The Gregorian chant, which secures the exclusive devotion of some Churchmen, is doubtless an approximation to the music of the primitive Church, but solely because that Church happened to find its earliest home in the East, where no other type of music has ever been known or appreciated. But there is no more reason why an Englishman should feel bound to sing ugly Gregorians than that he should chant the psalms in loose cotton garments without his boots. In either case the "local colour" is quite un-Western.

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In this, as in all other Sudan campaigns, some difficulty was experienced by the officers in keeping the soldiers from becoming almost amphibious creatures. If he had his own way, Tommy Atkins would have spent the greater part of his time in floundering about the muddy river. The spirit of sport, so deeply ingrained in the Englishman, found few outlets during the campaign; but now and then, in order to witness a good swimming race, Mr. Atkins would gladly cast a large lump of his rations—bread or biscuit upon the waters. Arab urchins swim admirably, with that quick hand-over-hand stroke which primitive tribes always employ; and they judge their distances so accurately that they rarely miss a crust, even where the stream is running at the rate of many miles an hour.

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But the troops were, as a matter of fact, always far too busy to get much time for relaxation, in or out of the water. It is astonishing that the authorities should have found it necessary to assign such an enormous amount of work to the officers and men during the concentration at Wad Hamed. On some days the British troops had no less than twelve hours' fatigue work! Take, for example, the casual record of one day's round of work, got through by a certain battalion in the heat of a Sudan August. The troops were on parade from 4.30 to 8. They then returned to the

camp, and, without being allowed any breakfast, were set to cut grass. Ten minutes were then allotted for the morning meal. The next item was wood-cutting, and the digging of trenches for camp purposes. This fatigue continued till the midday dinner, and from two o'clock to dark the men were practised in loading camels. Next morning reveille sounded at four, and then, although the battalion was on the point of leaving the camp, they were actually ordered, before their departure, to cut a number of tree-stumps out of the ground! I do not mention these facts with any intent to dispute their utility or expediency. The British soldier does, under normal conditions during peace, infinitely less work than falls to the lot of his continental brethren. When the Russian soldier has finished his parades he is set to build walls and make roads, while Atkins is disporting himself in the cricket or football field. So it is perhaps not undesirable that our men should learn the meaning of really hard work occasionally. But it was pleasant to see how cheerfully the Tommies bore it, at anyrate outwardly; for I never heard a word of grumbling or "grousing," as they phrase it. Moreover, from a hygienic point of view, their round of heavy fatigues most certainly agreed with them. Wonderfully little sickness prevailed in the ranks, in spite of the fierce heat and the indifferent water, though the wear and tear removed every ounce of superfluous flesh, and reduced our men to the condition of those "lean and wiry dogs" which Plato regarded as a model in the selection of his Republican warriors. [87]

The Sudanese, on the other hand, grumbled a good deal. Their conception of military discipline and obedience are somewhat rudimentary, and manual labour is distasteful to them. The discontent which was caused in their ranks by what they deemed excessive fatigue work culminated finally in a number of desertions. In Wad Hamed alone there were, I believe, no less than twenty cases of desertion, and three at least of the scoundrels were recaptured and shot. The deserters were doubtless making off southwards to join the Khalifa, for the life of a Baggara Dervish in prosperous times—a mere round of eating, sleeping, and fighting—would form an ideal existence in the eyes of an animal like the average Sudanese soldier. [88]

On the other hand, a constant stream of fugitives began to reach the camp from the south; in Wad Hamed there were some thirteen hundred deserters from the Khalifa's dominions. Many of them came down the river, a motley herd of women and children, with a sprinkling of men all packed together in native barges. What these poor creatures lived on I do not know, but I strolled amongst some hundreds of them one evening, and they all seemed in excellent spirits and quite convinced that this time, at anyrate, they had put their money on the right horse. The presence of these uninvited guests caused considerable embarrassment to the Army Service Corps, but the authorities did the best they could for them, and in a big camp there are always a good many pickings which the refugees and vultures might share between them, though our feathered visitors had rather a pull over the other bipeds, as they rose betimes, and, according to the ancient adage, the early bird got the "bully" beef. This beef, by the way, was always to be picked up. It was issued to the men, for greater convenience of transport, in 3-lb. tins, which were trisected with a hammer and chisel for three rations. But, as the men soon got tired of the meat, and it speedily, after being opened, became uneatable from the heat, vast quantities of it were thrown away; and I noticed that the line of railway was often marked for hundreds of yards with tins of "bully" beef more or less full, which were speedily pounced upon by Arabs; if any village chanced to be close at hand. [89]

Occasionally the soldiers got rations of fresh meat, and, what was almost more welcome, fresh bread, with now and then the additional luxury—oh, blissful moment!—of a little marmalade. Once a week, too, a tot of rum was served out, and happy was the orderly whose task it was to convey the rum rations to his superiors; for the officers rarely drank the fiery spirit, and when it was given back it was not wasted. This small weekly allowance was the only strong drink which Tommy Atkins imbibed throughout the campaign. The deadly effects of alcoholic excess in a climate like that of the Sudan are, of course, well known, and in a previous campaign the danger of allowing the men the use of intoxicants had been so unpleasantly demonstrated in the case of a certain British battalion, that the Sirdar very wisely established a system of "total prohibition" amongst the rank and file. Some rascally Greeks brought casks of whiskey and beer to the Atbara, but the authorities soon discovered their little game. Most of the alcohol was sent back to Cairo, and of the remainder, some was put under the military seal and the rest simply emptied into the sand! [90]

At Wad Hamed officers and correspondents alike enjoyed a life of comparative comfort and refinement, which was necessarily impossible in our subsequent camps during the final week of the campaign. On ordinary days we woke about five o'clock, when Ali brought us a mug of cocoa and a biscuit. The biscuit supplied to the Egyptian troops was of a dark brown colour, and hard as a brick. On leaving Wad Hamed, Ali went by mistake to the wrong canteen, and brought us a bag of "Gypsy" biscuit, on which Cross and I subsisted for several days, and were thankful at the end that we had only lost one tooth each in that period. The British biscuit was much nicer, comparatively white, and quite free from "weevils"; for I used to shake my biscuits to see if I could extract one of these insects, which I much wished to see. No weevil ever emerged, and I am under the impression that this insect, which figures so prominently in tales about pirates and "sea dogs," must be a semi-fabulous creature, to be placed under the same category as the basilisk and the Barometz lamb. [91]

After dressing we generally strolled about the camp on the banks of the river for an hour or so, and then we were quite ready for breakfast, which ordinarily meant porridge, sardines, bread or biscuit, marmalade, and tea. As at this time of the day one could generally secure a little hot water or the remaining contents of the teapot, I used to devote some time to shaving. This operation was quite an ordeal in the Sudan. Lather manufactured from muddy Nile water spread [92]

a layer of fine sand over one's face, which speedily blunted the best steel, and towards the end of the campaign I might as well have used a piece of hoop iron as try to make my razors work with cold water. With warm water the torture was somewhat less acute.

Perhaps it is worth while mentioning in connection with our biscuit supply that any traveller or explorer who cannot secure flour as he proceeds, can easily make certain of having a continual supply of decent bread by the following means. Let him order a quantity of thick, flat cakes to be made of ordinary bread dough. When these are thoroughly baked they must be gradually dried either by artificial heat or by the sun, if its rays are strong enough, until every particle of moisture is dried up. Bread thus desiccated will last for months, and when it is wanted a lump is sprinkled with a little water, and one finds nice spongy bread for breakfast instead of the hard and monotonous biscuit. Mrs. Theodore Bent first taught me this bread-lore, and when I explored Sokotra in company with herself and her husband, we took several sacks of these flat cakes, and were in consequence never without nice fresh bread. [93]

In the interval between breakfast and midday we got through a good deal of work in the way of letter-writing or telegraphing. If one had nothing to do oneself there was always a certain psychological interest attaching to the study of one's fellow-correspondents and their mysterious movements. One of them, after a successful prowling for news, would appear walking towards his tent with an air of *nonchalance* intended to conceal his eagerness to find telegraph forms. He would dive within the canvas, and then dispatch a servant with a telegram, which five hours afterwards would be received in London, and next morning would be read by thousands of eager eyes; for surely no Sudan campaign has ever possessed a quarter of the interest which, for some reason or other, the present one has aroused in the British public. Of course all telegrams had to be brought to Colonel Wingate and receive his official *visé* and approval before being put upon the wires. The utmost precautions were taken throughout the campaign against any bad faith on the part of the operatives. All the clerks employed in this service were bound over in sureties of £240 not to divulge the contents of any telegram. This was found necessary, inasmuch as during the last campaign several important telegrams—so I was informed—between the Sirdar and Sir Francis Grenfell were revealed to others than the lawful recipients. [94]

After a light lunch about 12.30, everybody, soldier and civilian alike, lolled about in shirt-sleeves or went to sleep well under cover of his canvas. Outside the sun blazed down in fury on the desert, till the rocks became too hot to be touched, and the rarefied air quivered over the yellow sand. To walk twenty yards in the open without a helmet might mean death, and even inside one's tent the heat which penetrated a double roof of thick green canvas was so intense that a wet towel was very welcome as a protection for the head. Whenever the surrounding temperature exceeds that of the surface of one's body there is always a risk of sunstroke, and it is amazing that during the heat which has prevailed in England during August and September few people took the trouble to protect their heads by any additional covering beyond a straw hat. In fact, Surgeon-Major Parkes states that he had come across many more cases of sunstroke in England than in Africa, where he had spent many years amid the vicissitudes of travel and exploration. Furthermore, a "spinal pad" is almost of as much importance as a good helmet against sunstroke, yet in the Sudan the use of the spinal pad supplied by the Government was rather the exception than the rule, and men walked about in the tropical sun with a helmet on their heads while their back was protected only by a flannel shirt. Sunstroke acts in different ways. I have seen the quartermaster of a P. and O. in the Red Sea suddenly drop as if he had been shot; but, in most cases, the initial stages—loss of appetite, nausea, and headache—give one full warning, and if the patient can at once get under some shade and secure medical assistance, the "touch of the sun," which has upset him for the time being, passes away without leaving any effects behind it except a general lassitude for some time. [95]

About four o'clock the hottest part was over, but the danger of sunstroke was, if anything, greater, because the oblique rays of the sun fell upon one's neck, unless, indeed, as was the case with the rank and file, a "curtain" was attached to the helmet. Nearly everybody drank tea about this time. There is a kind of notion abroad that this beverage serves to cool one, but the general effect produced in the Sudan seemed quite the reverse. Any perspiration left in one's sebaceous follicles after the genial warmth of the Sudan had kept us in a sort of natural Turkish bath for six hours, was elicited by the warm tea, and one realised how easy under such conditions it would be to lose every particle of one's existing body in even less than the seven years indicated by medical statistics, and thus, on good Bishop Butler's showing, secure, together with revaccination, a frequently recurring proof of one's immortality. [96]

After tea we were amply compensated for the discomforts of the day by the delights of a tropical evening. The air was deliciously cool, and the soft tints of sunset coloured all the landscape. Everyone recovered his temper, and such pleasures and duties of social life as survived in the desert occupied our attention from this hour till bedtime. Men dropped in to see each other all over the camp, and there was a general atmosphere of "Have a drink, old chap." The amount of fluid one can consume in these tropical regions is amazing. Nobody, of course, who has any common sense thinks of drinking much alcohol in the heat of the day. Lime juice and soda is often taken at lunch, while some claret or sauterne, or a whisky and Rosbach, are common beverages in the evening. It is often very difficult indeed—especially when one is on the march—to keep such luxuries cool, but the ingenious "sparklets," which were brought out to the Sudan in thousands, will always, if fairly good water can be got, provide one with a decent drink, as the sudden liberation of the compressed gas cools the water as well as aerates it. [97]

It is worth while being really thirsty and hungry to understand the pleasures of drink and food. Our English meals follow each other with such regularity and diversity that one seldom realises [98]

what it means to crave for food and drink as a primary instinct. But oh! the joy of a deep draught of cool water after long hours of abstention in the desert, or, what is almost as bad, a long course of brackish water—saline water, which quenches one's thirst for the moment only to increase it by the after-taste. Once when I was travelling with Mr. Bent, I remember how I was walking in a stony ravine after six days of nothing but brackish water; suddenly, to my delighted vision, a little brook of limpid water appeared running down to the sea. One threw oneself flat upon the bank and drank, and drank, and drank! Hunger is much more easily endured than thirst, and Æschylus did well to class amongst the most joyful of human experiences the sight of running water to a thirsty traveller—

[99]

ὄδοιπόρω διψῶντι πηγαῖον ῥέος.

At the same time, indiscriminate drinking is a tiresome habit, which can be shaken off with a little practice and determination. The inexperienced traveller in the East always carries a huge water-bottle, from which he is continually drinking copious draughts; but after a few months he learns to drink at meal times, and not to encumber himself with his water-bottle on every occasion when he is away from the tent. Education and self-control go largely hand in hand. Officers stand hunger and thirst much better than the rank and file, who, in the Sudan, exercised very little self-control in the matter of drink. Whenever they could get it, the soldiers were perpetually dipping their tin mugs in the large "zias" or "fantasias" provided for their use.

Just before the evening shadows cooled the air too much and made a chill possible, we spread our india-rubber baths on the ground and enjoyed the refreshment of a good "tub." The Nile water was so saturated with mud that when one stood in one's bath upon a thick precipitate of sand the sensation recalled the seaside paddling of one's childhood.

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The tropical twilight was all too brief, and darkness fell suddenly like a pall upon the landscape. Then out came candlesticks and lanterns, and the one substantial meal of the day made its appearance. The quality of our *cuisine* varied considerably. At a stationary camp like Wad Hamed we sometimes purchased fresh meat from an enterprising Greek called Loisa, but this was always very lean and tough, and these fleshspots of Egypt had few charms for us. The Arabs devour any sort of meat, whatever be the condition of the beast which supplies it. Two days after the battle of Omdurman, Ali appeared before the tent with a wretched kid in the last stage of a rapid decline. He knew I disapproved of loot, and declared that he had purchased the animal, and intended to fry the liver for me for to-morrow's breakfast. As the poor kid was far too ill and weak even to stand on its legs, I declined the suggested dainty. There were quite enough bacilli prowling around in Omdurman without incurring the risk of trichinosis. In less than an hour I saw our quaternion of servants with several guests enjoying a ghoulish banquet off the remains of the invalid animal.

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Sometimes we had splendid dinners of tinned curry, preserved pine-apple, and other delicacies; and except on the evening of the battle, nobody, as far as I know, ever went without his dinner if he was well enough to eat it. Occasionally, if there was a downpour of rain or other cause which rendered cooking difficult, we sank to this sort of level—

Potage à la Khalifa.

(Ingredients—a morsel of emaciated goat with some onions; simmer as long as possible. Sufficient for two. Seasonable, when one is very hungry.)

Bully Beef au naturel.

Jam.

Biscuit à discrétion.

Whisky. Sparklets. Lime juice. Nile water.

On the 26th of August we were told to hold ourselves in readiness to embark on the *Metemmeh* next morning. The Gypsy troops and Sudanese had already gone, and a general exodus of the British battalions was taking place. On the evening before our departure I strolled once more along the river. Scarcely a sound broke the silence; the busy scene of the day's restless activity was still. The rows and rows of tents and mountainous heaps of baggage had vanished like magic; little remained to show that for more than a week some twenty-two thousand men had lived and moved within this vast area. Here and there various relics of the encampment lay scattered about,—soda-water bottles, empty tins, old newspapers, the framework of blanket tents, and so on,—but the only permanent structure which marked, and perhaps still marks, the site of the abandoned camp was a wattled hut which Howard's servant built for him, as his master had arrived at Wad Hamed without a tent of any kind. An army of vultures had spread over all the space within the zeriba, and seemed to be having a good time amongst old sardine tins and fragments of offal and similar dainties.

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The glow of a tropical sunset was falling on the Nile; yet, beautiful as it was, the scene lost something from the dead level of the surrounding prospect. For an ideally beautiful effect of the kind one needs mountains as well as water. Who, for example, that has ever seen it, can forget the play of moonbeam and starlight on the lake—

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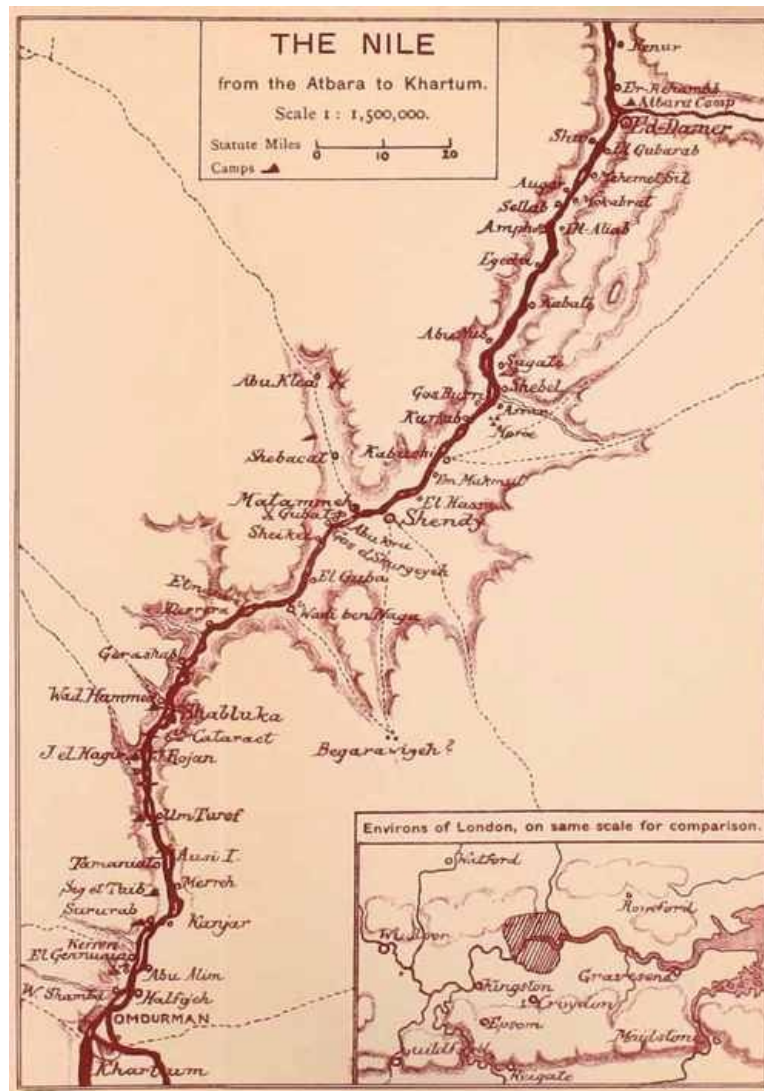
When the blue waves roll nightly on deep Galilee?

It was strange to think that within a week the campaign would be ended, Gordon avenged, and the Crescent flag flying over the ramparts of Omdurman—the final goal of all this vast congeries of men and stores, guns and ammunition. As the postal connection with the outside world was now to cease until the capture of Omdurman, many letters had been sent off on the previous day,

and for several of the writers the message which sped home was a final one. Later on, when the battle had been fought, a man whom I knew showed me a letter which he was sending off to his widowed mother to tell her that he had come safe through the fight and was on the point of returning home. This note reached its destination a day after the receipt of a telegram announcing his death from fever! Surely it would be difficult to meet with a sadder and more pathetic instance of the vicissitudes and uncertainty of human life!

FOOTNOTE:

- [1] A brief list of the entomological specimens brought back from the campaign is given on p. 253.



R. V. Darbishire 1898.

{ Click on map for larger image. }

THE NILE
from the Atbara to Khartum.
Scale 1 : 1,500,000.

CHAPTER III

THE WEEK BEFORE THE BATTLE

We said good-bye to Wad Hamed on 26th August. Cross and I had, with several others, selected to go by river rather than by land, as this would afford us an opportunity of seeing the cataract of Shabluka, which had become a household word in the army because of the possibility of Dervish resistance at this point. The rest of the correspondents accompanied the two British brigades toward Beled Hagir, our next camping site, just south of the cataract, and opposite Rojan Island.

As we were leaving Wad Hamed about forty Gaalins arrived on the bank, and were embarked

on the *Metemmeh*. These friendlies were wonderfully spick and span, with nice clean clothes. Some of them were equipped with large Dervish swords, while others had only sticks, which they carried with a jaunty air at the "shoulder," in anticipation, no doubt, of the Remington rifles which would be issued to them before the fight. They were accompanied to the bank by a fine old sheikh in flowing snow-white robes, and their farewells to the venerable chieftain were very impressive. In the Sudan people are not content with a single handshake. When one group is saying good-bye to another the interchange of courtesies and caresses is interminable. One man falls on the other's neck, without actually touching his face or shoulder,—rather after the manner of a stage kiss,—and then handshaking goes on *ad libitum* all round, the same two people often clasping and unclasping their hands half a dozen times or more, according to the degree of intimacy.

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The Shabluka cataract, through which the flooded Nile rushes with amazing violence, lies in a gorge which has evidently in remote ages been torn through the limestone ridge by the river. A width of a thousand yards is here suddenly compressed into a hundred yards, and in the face of the terrific current which is thus produced, our gunboat could barely forge ahead at the rate of one and a half miles an hour. It is an open secret that the new gunboats built for the Nile service by Thorneycrofts are regarded as failures by naval experts. One of them, the *Sheikh*, can only make two miles an hour against the ordinary Nile current in August.

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Even in the moonlight one could realise the amount of damage which might have been inflicted by an effective occupation of Shabluka, upon a force advancing up the river. When we passed the forts, constructed, after the manner of Dervish engineers, on a level with the water, we found them deserted, and their guns had been removed. But if the enemy, who were posted here up to last May, had maintained their position, we should have been compelled to halt and drive them out of it from the land side, for none of our slow gunboats could have forced the gorge had it been lined with artillery.

We arrived at Rojan Island before daybreak on the 28th, and were aroused out of sleep in the dark by the pleasing intelligence that an order had arrived from the Sirdar that we were to be turned out of the gunboat, bag and baggage, as the vessel was wanted for other purposes. Floundering about in the semi-darkness we got our luggage together as well as we could, and in less than twenty minutes found ourselves sitting on the river bank with our few goods and chattels round us. It would not have taken the gunboat five minutes to land us at Hagir on the opposite bank; in fact, after marooning us on the island, it actually touched at the camp on its return down the Nile. This was one of several instances in which, during the campaign, correspondents were treated with an utter disregard of consideration or even ordinary courtesy. It often seemed as if the Sirdar or his subordinates went out of their way to cause all the inconvenience they could to the representatives of the press. Certainly if this conduct was merely due to oversight or thoughtlessness, it was bad enough; if it was intentional, it was based upon a petty and ungenerous abuse of authority. On the present occasion we were left for seven mortal hours on this treeless island, although the *El Tahra* was lying off Hagir, and could easily have been sent across the river for us. When at last the old ferry-boat came blundering across, the official in charge, who seemed, from his manner, to have caught the Sirdar's mental attitude towards correspondents, brusquely refused to take us over to Hagir, because no one had given him orders to do so. Consequently the *El Tahra* left us and recrossed to the camp with her precious commander, although one of our number was suffering severely from the sun, and lay prostrate on the ground. As all our baggage was on the other side of the river, having been sent on by camels, we had absolutely nothing to protect us from the heat as it grew fiercer and fiercer every moment, so we simply sat on the ground and grilled in the sun. The misery of such an experience is very real indeed when the thermometer stands at 115° in the shade! As one lies amid a dreary waste of sand and rock,

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sub curru nimium propinqui
Solis in terra domibus negata,

with the pitiless rays of noontide beating down upon one's head, visions of iced cups and other delights rise like a mental mirage and mock one's misery! The thoughts stray far away in fantasy from the unlovely landscape, and rest upon an English tennis lawn, beside the cool Cherwell or under the cedars of the Wadham Gardens—the pleasant game, the refreshment of shade and drink which follows it!

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As there was absolutely nothing else to do on the island—and it is always a good thing to engage in some more or less arduous work when one is inclined to take a pessimistic view of one's surroundings—I scrambled up to the top of Gebel Rojan, a rocky hill about three hundred feet high. From this Pisgah height one could trace far away to the south the faint outlines of the hills of Omdurman, our Promised Land! Below, on the desert plain, three Egyptian battalions were marching forward, their right flank guarded by squadrons of cavalry. The rifle barrels and steel scabbards glistened brightly in the rising sunlight, and the columns themselves looked like sinuous lines of ants threading their way through the scrub.

We were all very bad-tempered when the *El Tahra* returned once more; but this time, mercifully, the steamer was no longer in the hands of the punctilious sapper, with his combination of red tape and rudeness. The new commander ventured upon the independent exercise of his own common sense, and most kindly conveyed us across the river without further ado. Whether he was subsequently reprimanded by the authorities for this act of ordinary politeness I do not know.

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By the time we had landed from the steamer, and the servants had discovered the whereabouts

of our camels and luggage, it was nearly two o'clock, and the camp had practically broken up. The native battalions had left early in the morning, as I had seen from the summit of Gebel Rojan, and had been followed by General Gatacre's division. The Sirdar and his staff, the Intelligence Department, the correspondents, and the baggage were to leave at four o'clock; so there was barely time to get a scratch meal before we saw to the loading of our camels, and again set out on our forward march towards Omdurman. Both Cross and I had intended to walk, but Steevens and Maud most kindly put a couple of their extra horses at our disposal. The animal I rode was a polo pony from Cairo, in excellent condition and full of "go." It hated to be alone for a moment, and if in the scrub it found itself separated from the rest of the column, either in the rear or on the flank, and the rein was at all loose, it would suddenly, without any warning, make a clean bolt to rejoin its companions; and when a borrowed horse tears at full gallop through mimosa bushes and over the rough sandy soil intersected with *nullahs*, one is precious glad to be able to return it to its owner in the evening without a couple of broken knees or worse. [112]

The air was delightfully cool, with a pleasant breeze from the river, and this evening ride from Hagir will remain in one's memory as one of the pleasant experiences of the campaign. The comparative novelty of our surroundings, and the certainty that now at length we were within measurable distance of the enemy, filled one with elation and banished all the petty worries of the morning. As long as one enjoyed good health, nothing could be more delightful than the simple pleasures of our open-air existence, with all its hard work and good-fellowship. But when fever or dysentery gets hold upon a man, all the glamour of the campaign fades away, and one is forced to realise all the sordid discomforts of the march. During the recent advance upon Omdurman many a case of unobtrusive heroism occurred, in which men, officers and privates alike, refused to avail themselves of the field hospitals, which would have taken them for the time being from their battalion, and preferred to march along with the rest, though their heads were racked with pain and their strength at vanishing point from fever. If a campaigner could secure from a fairy godmother or other supra-mundane agency one supreme blessing, he ought most certainly to ask for health. Yet there is one danger to which the healthy man is exposed. He finds it difficult, sometimes, to sympathise with others less fortunate than himself. To many who enjoy vigorous health there is something positively irritating in a sick man. It is a painful trait in some characters, and is a survival possibly of that terrible instinct which leads almost every species of lower animal to finish off those of their number who become sick or maimed. I have known a man who experienced this peculiar irritation in the presence of comrades who were ill, behave in the most unselfish and generous way to the same men when they were in sound health; and while he had to force himself, as it were, to show sympathy with an ailing man, he would fetch water in his helmet for a wounded donkey, and feel ready to weep at the sight of a dying horse. [113]

As we rode along the edge of the Nile, well ahead of the crowd of camels and the Lancer escort of the Sirdar, in order to avoid the blinding clouds of dust which they raised, we noticed at intervals along the line of march bands of Sudanese women. These faithful creatures had managed by some means or other to accompany their husbands to the front. Although unrecognised officially, and in consequence not accorded any means of transport, they had contrived to cross the Nile as stowaways, hidden under forage or flour sacks; and they were now trudging slowly along with large bundles on their heads, and in some cases a brace of babies slung over their shoulders. When they arrived at the camp they cooked their husband's food, mended his clothes, and introduced a general flavour of domesticity into the rough camp life. The husbands seemed to be very kind to their wives and children, and the Sudanese portion of the camp was dotted with little family groups, each of them formed under a tree and surrounded by a miniature zeriba. In fact, domestic life has such charms in the eyes of the Sudanese warriors, that they become quite depressed and morose if their women-folk are left behind. The recent revolt in Uganda is alleged by some to have been largely caused by the refusal of Major Macdonald to allow the wives of the soldiers to accompany them on the advance northwards—a refusal which, if it actually occurred, would most certainly run counter to the military traditions of the Sudan. [114]

During the earlier part of the day's march Mr. Scudamore's "drink camel," *i.e.* the animal which carried his stores of alcohol and soda water, occasionally came to a sudden halt and toyed with the branches of a nebek or mimosa thorn. At such times his master showed great kindness and forbearance; he did not urge on the hesitating beast with gibes and blows, but calling several of us round him, quietly dismounted and relieved the camel's load by "drinks all round." How touching an example of humanity towards poor dumb animals! Let the traveller and explorer, then, always remember that when the whisky mule halts, it is a kindness to lighten his burden; if after some hours he jibs and refuses to proceed, fate has clearly marked out that spot for the site of the camp! The whisky mule must not be left behind! [115]

On the occasion of one of these halts I was astonished to see a diminutive boy in very ragged clothes walking along with two half-plucked pigeons in his hand and a large bag over his shoulder. After mounting I rode beside him and found that he was a Greek. His father and mother kept a small café in Cairo, and the boy, who was only fourteen and very small for his age, had actually traversed some twelve hundred miles by land and water in order to sell cigarettes to the army. This adventurous urchin, Anastasios by name, became a great pet with the Tommies, who bought his cigarettes and supplied him with enough fragments of bully beef and biscuit to keep him going throughout the campaign. As I spoke some Greek, I saw a good deal of the boy subsequently, and succeeded in getting him allowed a passage from Omdurman on board the *Metemmeh*; but at Atbara Camp some of the officials rather needlessly refused to give him a place amongst the baggage in the open trucks, and when I last saw the imp he was being led away by a zaptieh, or native policeman, after a desperate attempt to override authority and hide himself and the remainder of his cigarette boxes under a heap of luggage. [116]

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During our advance by land from Hagir, Mr. Frederick Villiers' bicycle was much in evidence. It is astonishing to what a number of uses this versatile machine may be put in peace and war alike. An Oxford professor, whose metaphysical researches are combined with military enthusiasm and the study of minor tactics, has given to the world a treatise in which is demonstrated with logical acumen the value of the bicycle as a weapon or rather implement of defence against a charge of cavalry. The academical tactician suggests, I believe, that when the enemy's horse are galloping down upon you their charge may be broken and rendered futile by the terrifying aspect of a line of cyclists holding their machines in the air and rapidly spinning the wheels round! No war-horse, it is maintained, could face this fearsome spectacle, and utter discomfort would overtake the charging squadrons! What a pity our 'Varsity cyclist corps were not posted in front of the zeriba at Omdurman to obviate the necessity of bullets when the Baggara horse came thundering down upon us!

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But the bicycle can be put to more regular uses in a campaign. A correspondent, for example, who went through the whole of the Greco-Turkish War was mounted on his machine, and published a book, which, under the title of Ὁ Πόλεμος ἀπὸ Ποδηλάτου ("The War from a Bicycle"), had a great sale in Athens. Still, despite their badness, roads do exist between Larissa, Velesino, Domoko, etc., whereas in the sandy, stony deserts of the Sudan the road is a very open one indeed, and ill adapted for wheeled traffic. In consequence of this, Mr. Villiers' bicycle, which was of a dull green tint, was usually to be found in the charge of his servant, who had acquired considerable skill in controlling the movements of his master's donkey with one hand and his master's machine with the other. Certainly this lugubrious-looking bicycle bore the battle and the breeze wonderfully well, and the maker ought to secure a splendid advertisement out of it; for tyres which can pass unpunctured through the terrors of the mimosa scrub, and refrain from bursting under the rays of a Sudan sun in August, may fairly be recommended for "strong roadster" work in the country lanes of England.

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It was almost dark when we reached the camp, which has been called by everyone, as far as I know, "Um Teref," though this is incorrect, for "Um Teref" is the name of the village on the opposite bank of the river. Though it was difficult in the twilight to see far ahead of our column, there was no possibility of mistaking the whereabouts of the camp, for the wild music of the Sudanese bands was already in full swing. The first thing these black troops do when they get into camp is to strike up some of their unearthly tunes, and in the absence of more normal appliances they have been known to fashion old tin biscuit boxes into a species of wind instrument. Just as I got within the zeriba, a squad of these blacks were giving hot chase to a curious animal, which had been put up in the bush. The hunted creature ran between my horse's legs; it had a fine brush, with mottled fur, and looked like a wolverine or some beast of that kind.

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The area required for some twenty-two thousand men, with hundreds of camels, horses, and mules, was enormous, and we rode hopelessly about in the gathering gloom, trying to find the space allotted to correspondents. After a couple of hours' search we at length succeeded in finding our camels and getting our tents pitched, and then we did full justice to whatever sort of dinner the ingenuity of our cooks could contrive for their hungry masters. The camp was an extremely pretty one, and in places the vegetation by the river banks was quite luxuriant. Bushes of all kinds, especially the "Dead Sea apple," were dotted about; and as these prevented one from seeing more than a hundred yards around, it was difficult to realise the vast size of the camp. A zeriba had, of course, been formed, and just behind it thousands of troops lay all night under arms, ready to repulse any Dervish attempt to surprise the camp by a sudden rush.

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Next morning a rumour got about that during the darkness a Dervish had crept up to the zeriba and thrown his spear over with a shout of defiance, and the veritable spear was produced by a sentry of the Lancashire Fusiliers as a proof of the story's genuineness. The story was substantially true, for whilst the troops were engaged in forming the zeriba a Baggara cavalry scout, who, for some reason or other, found himself within the enclosure, suddenly dashed at a gallop out of the bush, knocking over several astonished Fusiliers, and hurling his spear at them as he disappeared in the darkness.

Scorpions proved most troublesome in all our camps, but they were especially numerous at Um Teref. In some places they simply swarmed, and both officers and men, and, still more, native servants, suffered from their painful stings. Those, like myself, who slept on a raised bed—*e.g.* the "Salisbury" bed, made by Silvers—were not so much exposed to risk as the possessors of the "Wolseley Valise"—a mattress which lies on the ground, and forms a most inviting hiding-place for creeping things innumerable. The pain experienced by a European from a scorpion's sting is very acute while it lasts, but passes off in a few hours. The natives were continually stung, and one of the correspondents had attained a great reputation from the skill with which he scarified the affected portions of native bodies, prior to the application of Scrubb's Ammonia. One poor fellow—a private in the Lancashire Fusiliers—was stung by a scorpion in three places along his spine, and speedily died in a state of coma.

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Another insect pest was a huge yellow spider of loathsome aspect and malignant disposition, called by the natives "Abu Shebek" (Father of Spiders). This creature was frequently captured and conveyed to some regimental mess, where it was forced to engage in single combat with a scorpion. These adversaries were, as a rule, pretty evenly matched, and the "Warwickshire Pet," a monstrous spider, appeared to be invincible until it was matched against the "Cameron Slogger," a redoubtable scorpion, who vanquished his opponent after a desperate struggle amid loud cheers from the victorious mess.

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In the ordinary course of events we should have moved on from Um Teref at daybreak on the 29th, but owing to a succession of storms on the Nile the full complement of gunboats and

ghyassas laden with stores and baggage had not yet arrived, and so the order to march was countermanded, and we remained in the zeriba for another night. The extra day, however, was not as pleasant as it might have been amongst the shady trees, for the violent wind which was retarding the progress of the gunboats swept incessant clouds of dust over the camp all the morning. Later in the day, however, the wind sank, and I enjoyed a delightful ramble along the river beyond the zeriba. Here I found, amongst other treasures, an enormous brick-red beetle, which clung to a tree with such pertinacity that I had to cut away a piece of the branch and boil it and the beetle together before the latter would abandon his hold and be duly pickled in the whisky. [124]

Early in the morning some squadrons of Egyptian cavalry and the Camel Corps had left the camp to make a reconnaissance, but none of the correspondents were permitted to accompany this force. They did not, however, lose much, for the cavalry brought back scarcely any information, beyond the news that fresh tracks had been seen of Dervish horsemen retreating southwards towards Omdurman.

On the morning of the 30th we were up by 4 a.m., and the camels were loaded by lantern-light. Nobody was sorry to rise, for, acting under orders, we had all struck our tents the night before to save time in the morning, and, as bad luck would have it, a storm of rain and lightning burst over the camp about midnight. There are few things more disagreeable than to have rain pouring down upon one as one sleeps, or tries to sleep, in the open. When the first heavy drops begin to fall everybody knows what is to follow, and various execrations are heard all around in the darkness, as the suddenly awakened sleepers put some garments on, hide others under the pillow, and do their best with a mackintosh to turn off the rain and keep it from collecting in pools under their backs. The Arab servants are always in the lowest depths of depression when it rains. Their thin cotton garments soon get soaked through, but I felt somewhat reluctant to lend them any of my wraps, as on a previous occasion, during a tropical downpour, I told two Somali servants that they might cover themselves with my waterproof, and during the night they each rolled in a different direction, and split my splendid red-lined mackintosh into two portions. These two Somali boys, by the way, whenever a heavy shower overtook us in the daytime, always did their very best to keep their heads dry. They would dash off and thrust their shaven pates under a rock or inside an old packing-case, and seemed to be comparatively indifferent about the rest of their black bodies, which lay exposed to the weather. [125]

When we left the camp *en masse* at five, the rain gradually ceased, and the sun rose in splendour across the Nile. The spectacle before us was magnificent. Column after column of infantry—black, chocolate, and white—advanced in perfect order, and squadrons of cavalry scouted on the flanks and far ahead, searching out every patch of scrub which might conceal a force of Dervishes. The Sirdar and his staff advanced in front, and the numerous halts and consultations which were made showed how carefully and cautiously the army was advancing. The troops were actually marching in battle order, ready at any moment to close into square formation if the enemy appeared; and one realised, as never before during the campaign, that we were really in a state of war. Our Lancer scouts had at length come into touch with the enemy, and had even fired a volley at one of several parties of Dervish horse who were sullenly retreating through the bush towards Kerreri. [126]

We were already well within twenty-five miles of Omdurman. Along the line of march we came across several large Dervish villages, abandoned by their inhabitants within the last day or two. In the hurry of flight angaribs (native beds), calabashes, and even a little food had been left behind. In some spots the fires which had cooked the last meal of these unfortunate villagers were still smouldering, and, either from accident or design, several of the huts had been destroyed by fire. The ground was strewn with fragments of earthenware cooking-pots, which the poor creatures had carefully broken up before they fled away to the dubious protection of the Omdurman walls. Close beside one of the deserted huts a tiny donkey stood and gazed upon us—the sole surviving occupant of the village. One of the servants, with a keen eye for loot, immediately annexed the little donkey; but I refused to take it, as I thought it would be happier amid its native surroundings, where it could eke out a precarious living amongst the herbage on the river bank. As I rode past several of the huts I noticed inside some strips of leather rudely embroidered with cowries, which had been used to suspend a gourd of water. The workmanship was so rough that I did not think this loot worth taking, though several Lancers thought differently, for I afterwards saw similar trophies hung over their saddles. [127]

Towards the middle of this day's march a rather amusing incident occurred. A small party of Lancers scouting in one of the deserted villages suddenly came across an Arab clad in a fine *gibbeh*, with a long spear in his hand. Here, at last, was a living Dervish within five yards! He made no effort to escape, and was at once surrounded and taken prisoner. On his being searched, five Maria Theresa dollars were discovered in the folds of his clothing, and the triumphant Lancers returned to the Sirdar and his staff with the proud consciousness of having captured the first real Dervish prisoner of the campaign. After a modest rehearsal of their achievement, they begged that in memory of the event the *gibbeh*, dollars, and spear of the captive might be handed over to themselves. No objection being raised, the prisoner, who, throughout the affair, had looked not at all alarmed, but only rather bored, was again led off to be interrogated by the Intelligence Department, when the exultant Lancers learned that the captive was one of Colonel Wingate's best spies, and after doing some excellent work in front had been quietly waiting to rejoin our forces! The five dollars had to be unearthed from the depths of the Lancers' pockets, and the imitation Dervish again strutted proudly about with his coat of many colours and his broad-bladed spear. [128]

The army advanced over the uneven ground in excellent order. The long lines, now lost in the hollows, now broken for the moment by impenetrable masses of thorn bush, kept their formation marvellously well; and often, as they appeared over the crest of a sandy ridge, the line was as perfect as on a field day at Aldershot. As regards actual pace, the Sudanese blacks can easily outmarch the Tommies, and would invariably have been well in the van if the *échelon* formation had not been carefully preserved.

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The day's march on the 30th was not more than some eight or nine miles. We halted for the night beside the river at a spot exactly opposite a village called Merreh on the other bank. At some little distance inland, on our right front, a hill rose up called Seg-et-taib, and, for convenience, the camp has been generally named after the hill. Trees and bushes grew abundantly within our zeriba, and along the margin of the Nile large clumps of bright green grass were greedily devoured by the ponies, which, like all Oriental riding-horses, lashed out viciously at each other whenever their tethering ropes allowed it, and sometimes fought and tore each other with their teeth like tigers. The river banks at Seg-et-taib were rather difficult of access, as strips of marshy land ran in every direction parallel to the stream. Everyone who reached the water on foot was covered with black slimy mud up to his knees; and as we rode through the bog our horses sank up to their flanks in the soft ooze, but managed somehow to flounder through it without rolling over with their riders. A pleasant spot beneath some trees was assigned for our camp, but when we reached it we found a bevy of Sudanese ladies already in possession. A little *bakshish*, however, solved the difficulty, and the fair ones withdrew, after cleverly tying up pots and pans and babies within the folds of their voluminous garments.

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At Seg-et-taib my companion Cross, who had been far from well for some days past, and suffered especially from sleeplessness, became so ill that I went off in search of his friend, Surgeon-General Taylor, who throughout Cross' illness was invariably most kind and thoughtful. This officer at once came to see the patient, and ordered him to be placed on one of the hospital barges which were being sent up the river to accompany the advance of the army. This was a great relief to my mind, as our surroundings were most uncomfortable for a sick man. We had left behind a good deal of baggage at Wad Hamed, and all our tent except the outer fly, which afforded us only a feeble shelter from sun or rain. On the hospital barges, of course, the invalided men could get proper attention and diet—things practically impossible in our rough camp life; and although I felt rather solitary in the absence of my tent companion, I had every hope that the illness which had attacked him would be speedily checked under medical treatment.

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During the latter portion of the advance upon Khartum, internal disorders of various kinds were extremely common. Some of the medical staff ascribed these derangements to the use of tinned meat; but after all, the evidence of experts in England seems to show conclusively that the virulent poison called "ptomaine" is so rare, that the chance of injury from tinned meats is practically infinitesimal. Others maintained, with greater probability, that the drinking water was at fault. The native servants, to save themselves trouble or a slight wetting, invariably filled their buckets from the water close to the bank. Anyone who is acquainted with Oriental habits can realise the peril of drinking such water as this, fouled as it was by hundreds of horses, mules, and camels, and taken from a river which is treated as a vast sewer by all the inhabitants along its banks.

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The water question was, indeed, a big one throughout the campaign. Some filtered the muddy water as it was, but the process was a very tedious one, for the Birkfeld filter became choked with mud after about a pint of water had passed through it, and then all its internal arrangements had to be cleaned. The native servants were so stupid at any work of this sort, that one generally had to do one's filtering for oneself; and the exercise was so vigorous that, by the time one had filtered a pint, one was thirsty enough to drink a quart. Another method was to precipitate the mud to some extent by a few grains of alum; but there are hygienic reasons against the employment of this astringent in drinking water. The safest plan is to let the mud settle, and then boil the water. Yet, even if the water is boiled, one is never secure from bacteria, for fresh germs may enter it as it cools. Moreover, it is impossible to boil *all* the water required for camp purposes; and if a servant "washes up" the plates and cups in unboiled water, or one plunges one's head into it, there can be no absolute guarantee against the intrusion of an evil bacillus into one's system. The only hope is that one's internal zeriba, so to speak, is well guarded by a valiant line of those good bacilli whose chief delight—so bacteriologists tell us—is to gather round the malignant invader and do him to death. Water taken from the middle of the stream was said to be perfectly wholesome, but even here the mud held in solution acted as an irritant. There was another little thing, too, which rather set one against any Nile water at the Atbara camp, to wit, the fact that almost every day a corpse or two of the Dervishes killed at the fight—when the Atbara was nearly empty—were caught up by the flooded stream, and carried down visibly into the Nile. Still, these bodies were almost mummified from the heat; so perhaps there was not much danger, after all, to be feared from their presence in our water supply.

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We again advanced with the utmost caution from Seg-et-taib. The cavalry searched the scrub, and two gunboats steamed slowly up the river in support. A party of the Lancers had climbed the hill of Seg-et-taib, and from this point the Khalifa's forces were at length seen by British eyes. A vast camp had been pitched about a mile and a half from the river, in order, probably, to avoid the shells of the gunboats. It stretched along the Wady Shamba, some three miles in front of Omdurman. The alignment of the white tents was perfectly visible with a good glass, and groups of Baggara horsemen were dotted about the plain in front of the Dervish infantry. No incident worth recording occurred during this day's advance along the plain, except, perhaps, a rather gruesome find in one of several deserted villages through which we passed. On the ground lay

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the corpse of one of our native spies; the body was shockingly mutilated and partially charred, so the poor wretch would seem to have been cruelly tortured before death. Some six or seven miles ahead of us rose the bleak ridge of Kerreri like a vast barrier across the line of our advance. Here it was that the Khalifa had doubtless intended to await our onslaught, but either his heart failed him at the last moment or the rapidity of our advance upset his plans. Yet, in refusing to take his stand on the hills of Kerreri, the Khalifa was acting in opposition to the sentiment of his followers, who trusted in a prophecy of the Mahdi, to the effect that one day Kerreri should be the scene of a great victory over the infidel invaders. "It was called," writes Mr. Bennett-Burleigh, "'the death-place of all infidels'; and thither at least once a year repaired the Khalifa and his following, to look over the coming battleground, and render thanks in anticipation for the wholesale slaughter of the unbelievers, and the triumph of the true Moslems."

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À propos of Kerreri, it may be worth noticing how misleading were the accounts of this prospective battlefield which had appeared in some newspapers, and how incorrect the maps were. One account stated that along the *wady* to the north of Kerreri white quartz stones lay so thickly on the ground that at night-time the place appears to be covered with snow. This description was simply absurd. There were red quartz pebbles, but one came across very few white ones. Again, the maps led one to suppose that the whole of the aforesaid *wady* was densely overgrown with mimosa, whereas I did not see a bush of any kind whatever as we crossed the gentle declivity leading up to the ridge.

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We had now arrived at the last camp which we occupied before leaving Kerreri. Sururab was the least pleasant of all our halting-places, and we pitched our tents on a bare piece of stony ground utterly devoid of vegetation.

Suddenly, after lunch, as we sat under the shade and chatted, there came borne to our ears the dull booming of artillery. The gunboats which had accompanied us had advanced beyond Sururab, and were hard at work shelling the Kerreri ridge, which was occupied by a Dervish outpost. The sound of the guns was faint, and as the vessels were some eight miles ahead of us, and the intervening ground was uneven, we could not, alas, see the effect of their fire, though we afterwards learnt all about it.

The space which was allotted to the correspondents at Sururab was so confined that one could scarcely walk five yards without stumbling across a camel or tripping over a tent-rope, and the donkeys brayed so loudly that sleep was difficult. It was intensely annoying to hear one ass lead off with a full-voiced bray, which died away in spasmodic gasps. Almost immediately a brother donkey would lift up his voice and utter a similar succession of notes, and then groups of donkeys would join in the music, and a species of antiphonal braying between the *decani* and *cantoris* donkeys ranged on either side of one's tent would continue till one became absolutely savage, and wished, like Balaam, that one had a sword in one's hand. If an ass is permitted to get well on with its braying, you cannot stop it; when in full voice it takes not the slightest notice of a good-sized stone. I sometimes heard one of my correspondent colleagues call his servant in the darkness, and say, "Hassan, take that moke away—right away into the desert—or I'll kill it." The servant would seize the offender and lead it, still braying, several hundred yards away. But just as he got back again, the banished animal, dismayed to find itself alone, would send forth an anxious bray of diabolical energy, which reached the long ears of its companions, and made matters worse than before.

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At Sururab, as before, precautions were taken against night attack. The order went round that lights were to be extinguished and tents struck. Everyone lay down to rest as he was, in his clothes, and officers slept with their swords and revolvers buckled on. Most of us, I think, expected that the enemy, if they refrained from attack, would at anyrate harass us by "sniping" into our camp during the darkness. Nothing would have been easier, for, with the exception of a few native spies, every soul in the army was within the zeriba, and there was a quantity of scrub just along the river north of the camp which would have afforded excellent cover for Dervish sharpshooters. Against "sniping," little, as a rule, can be done. No form of retaliation is possible if the "snipers" are well concealed; one simply has to sit still and take one's chance. Of course in our own case, camped as we were in an absolutely flat plain, not commanded by any rising ground, the risks from sniping were not considerable. In the frontier wars of India, on the contrary, an appalling number of casualties frequently result from the desultory fire of the hillmen securely posted amongst the rocky heights above the camp.

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As it happened, our evening at Sururab was scarcely troubled at all by Dervish bullets. A few rifle shots came from the scrub, and a bullet whistled overhead as I was chatting with Villiers—the first one of the campaign! I heard two revolver shots during the night, but these were accidental, and came from inside the camp. One of the bullets unfortunately penetrated the thigh of a Warwickshire private, but he ultimately recovered.

No one, I think, who experienced the subsequent wretchedness of the night at Sururab is likely to forget it. There was a threatening look about the clouds as the sun went down, but we struck our tents and lay down to sleep hoping for the best. About ten o'clock, however, we were awakened by heavy drops of rain splashing on our faces, and then down came the torrent! I had, most fortunately, left my tent loose upon the ground, so, after putting on my mackintosh, I dragged a portion of the waterproof tent over me. The exclamations of many of my colleagues around me showed that they were not so comfortably bedded. Some had not brought waterproofs with them; others had packed their tents over night. There is an undeniable satisfaction during a heavy shower in feeling that one is on the right side of a window pane, and witnessing the hurried passage along a street of dripping pedestrians; and as I heard the rain beating down upon the tent canvas drawn over my bed, I experienced the same sort of selfish complacency.

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Clothed as I was in a kharki suit and boots, and covered over with a blanket, a mackintosh, and the waterproof canvas, I felt as if I was being boiled alive; but still I was safe from any moisture *ab extra*. Nemesis, however, was close upon me in my splendid isolation. I made a slight movement of my hand under the rug, and instantly felt a sharp prick in the palm. At the same moment, on the inside of the canvas within six inches of my face, appeared a large scorpion. I had evidently disturbed the beast, which stung me and then ran up the canvas. I felt perfectly horrified for a moment. The idea that the scorpion might run over my face was sickening. Fancy the effects of a scorpion's sting in the eye! With a sudden sweep of my arm I dashed the whole tent covering, scorpion and all, off the bed. Anything in the rain line was better than scorpions as bed-fellows. All this time the pain in my hand increased. I tied a piece of string tightly round the wrist and sucked the wound hard, and then waited for the agony which I fully expected. Fortunately, however, the pain in an hour's time or so gradually wore off, and I think the scorpion must have stung me through the blanket, and so failed to penetrate the hardened skin of one's palm to an appreciable depth. We were now nearly all in the same plight. Everybody in the camp, with few exceptions, was soaked through that night. One general officer told me that, as he found himself lying in a large pool of water which had collected under his back, he got up and spent the night sitting in a camp-chair, without getting a wink of sleep,—a cheerful experience, forsooth! It is amazing that our men escaped fever after experiences such as these. During the Emin Relief Expedition, it was noted that every wetting, whether from wading a stream or a downpour of rain, invariably resulted in fever to man and beast alike.

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Despite the soaking rain, I dropped off to sleep, but was awaked about one o'clock by a commotion on my left. Mr. Villiers had also been stung in the neck by a scorpion, and was in great pain. He told me the sting felt like a red-hot knife plunged into his flesh, and the whole of his left side became temporarily paralysed. His faithful servant rubbed some ammonia into the wound, and after somebody had given him nearly a bottle of raw whisky, he managed to get to sleep.

Reveille sounded at 4 a.m., and we all rejoiced to see the dawn. The rain still fell in sheets, but notwithstanding the inclement weather, Mr. Scudamore was sitting and calmly shaving himself before a looking-glass, with a piece of waterproof over his shoulders. The dripping servants emerged from their nooks and crannies in the lowest depths of depression, and the camels snorted with increased petulance as they floundered through the mud to be loaded. The camel hates wet almost as much as his masters. I have often been amused at their cat-like unwillingness to put their feet into quite shallow water. This is due, I believe, to the fact that the animal's feet, if wetted, have a tendency to crack in the sun and become very painful.

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How servants contrive to light fires with slush all round and rain pouring down in torrents I cannot imagine, but Ali brought me a cup of hot cocoa and some biscuit—a delicious meal when one is draped in soaking garments.

Villiers awoke from the heavy sleep into which the raw spirit had driven him, and he and I set out to march with the troops, who were now streaming from the zeriba. He still suffered from a semi-paralysis of the left side; but despite this and a general weakness caused by the virus, he kept up on foot with the infantry battalions.

September 1st, drizzling rain and thick mud! The familiar collocation, helped out by an occasional covey of sand-grouse in lieu of partridges, brought one's thoughts back to the joys of English stubble and turnip-field left four thousand miles behind us! As the sun rose higher in the sky the rain gradually ceased, and as we dried our spirits rose. The bushes along the line of our march were full of many beautiful birds with vivid plumage, and a valuable collection might probably have been put together if anyone had had a light gun and time to use it. Every now and then, too, a hare would dart up from its "form" and race across our front, pursued by two small regimental doggies. These hares, like many other species of animal in the Sudan, have assumed the colour of their sandy environment most marvellously. It is almost impossible to see them sitting. They have ears of extraordinary length, and are altogether odd-looking creatures. They did not run as well as their British cousins, and occasionally one was caught by a dog or clubbed by a Sudanese soldier. I never tasted the flesh, but an officer told me he found it very good eating.

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Long before we reached Kerreri we saw the figures of several Lancer scouts silhouetted against the sky-line along the summit of the ridge. Our cavalry had, as usual, pushed on ahead through the scrub and climbed the hills. Some of them rode up the lesser slopes towards the east and west, while others, leaving their chargers below, clambered up the steep crags in the middle. As Lieutenant Montmorency and another officer reached the top a Dervish suddenly fired a "right and left" at them from a huge elephant gun; but fortunately he missed with both barrels, and then bolted. With the exception of this man, who seemed to be a sort of "caretaker" in the empty camp, there was not a Dervish to be seen. The shell fire of the gunboats had rendered the ridge untenable. In every direction lay the *débris* of a deserted camp. Some of the fires were still smoking, and here and there were dotted the small wattled shelters which the Sudanese Arabs rejoice to make. In one place a feeble sort of entrenchment had been commenced, but speedily abandoned.

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By this time the dampness of the early morning had been succeeded by blazing sunshine. The march was the longest and most tedious one of the campaign, and scarcely a sound we heard except the muffled tramp, tramp, of thousands of men traversing the sand. Suddenly, as we were crossing a dried-up water-course in the Wady Suetne, a little to the north of Kerreri, the roar of a heavy gun reached our ears from the south—then another, and another! A general murmur of satisfaction ran along the ranks. The tired men brightened up, and stepped out with renewed

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vigour, while the Sudanese almost broke into a run from excitement. Major Elmslie's Lyddite battery had got into position, and was shelling the city from the other side of the river. As I was a free agent, I ran as hard as I could up the rough slopes, and reached the crest of the ridge. Little could be seen from the lower slopes, but from the summit a splendid spectacle presented itself. The terrible fifty-pounder shells had found the range, and were playing havoc with the walls and public buildings of Omdurman. Nothing can resist Lyddite. Thick walls were pierced like brown paper, and the stones hurled high in the air amid clouds of dust and flame. A shell had torn a vast hole through the lofty dome-like structure which covered the Mahdi's sepulchre, the gilded top of which had been carried clean away. The effect of the shells upon the wretched people who chanced to be near to the Mahdi's tomb at the time of the bombardment was truly awful, as I saw with my own eyes two days afterwards.

Below on the vast plain, which, broken only by the mass of Gebel Surgham, stretched from Kerreri to the outskirts of Omdurman our cavalry were manœuvring with the Baggara horse "very prettily," as one of the generals remarked. Our regiment of Lancers, three hundred and twenty all told, would ride pluckily towards the dense masses of the enemy, and then withdraw as lines of riflemen advanced to meet them, or large bodies of mounted Baggaras attempted to cut off their retreat. The Khalifa's entire army, incensed by the bombardment and by the galling fire which our dismounted troopers took every opportunity of pouring into them, were now moving forward to attack and annihilate the infidels. [147]

With Wauchope's Brigade in front, the infantry and artillery crossed the ridge sloping down to the river. On the left was the village of Kerreri, guarded by an ancient redoubt, and here we imagined would be the site for the camp. But orders were given to continue the march, so we trudged more than a mile farther, to the deserted hamlet of El Genuaia. Without further ado, mimosa branches were cut and a zeriba was formed on a small scale round the village. The heliograph from the top of Gebel Surgham was flashing incessantly, and keeping the Sirdar well informed of the whereabouts and progress of the enemy's advance. The Lancers too came trotting in, having done their best to delay the onset of the Dervishes. "We expect," said Colonel Wingate to me, "to be attacked in half an hour." Meanwhile fatigue parties dragged the bushes on the southern face of our zeriba much farther away in the direction of Omdurman, and the result was a vast zeriba extending along the Nile from El Genuaia to a small village called—so I gathered from the maps—Geren Nebi. The length of the rough semi-circle must have been over nine hundred yards. Nearer Geren Nebi it enclosed a number of mud-huts, which were ultimately used for hospital purposes; and between this part of the zeriba and our original site, there was a gentle declivity terminating in a small inlet of the Nile, with thick black mud along its margin. A little beyond this inlet, towards the south, the plain shelved down to the river, and within the hollow thus formed the majority of the baggage animals and native servants were posted. The cover thus afforded must have been excellent, for I do not think that a single baggage animal was killed throughout the fight. On the extreme left of our line lay a gap between the end of the zeriba and the river, left purposely, I presume, in order to admit the cavalry. Not to go into more detail than needful about the position of our troops—the line began on the left side with the 32nd Field Battery R.A., and an Egyptian battery of twelve-pounder Maxim-Nordenfeldts. Next in order came the two British Brigades with two Maxim batteries, and the remaining two-thirds of the zeriba was held by the various native battalions. Towards the northern side of the zeriba an Egyptian battery was posted on a little mound of sand. The British infantry were protected solely by the zeriba, but in front of the native battalions under Colonels Lewis, Maxwell, and Macdonald ran a shallow trench. Colonel Collinson's brigade was posted as a reserve inside the zeriba some distance to the rear of Macdonald's division. [148]

Ammunition boxes lay in rows behind each company, bayonets had been fixed, and everyone looked eagerly over the plain for a glimpse of the advancing Dervishes. For some reason or other, which has never been adequately explained, the Dervishes did not advance to the attack that afternoon. The Khalifa's army, after marching forward a couple of miles, came to a sudden halt, and subsequently withdrew to its camp for the night. None of the Emirs in the enemy's lines, with the exception of the wily Osman Digna, had had any previous experience of British methods of warfare. Still, some at least of the Dervish leaders must have passed a night of anxiety, full of gloomy anticipations of coming disaster. The brave Wad-Ed-Nejumi, just before the battle of Toski, addressed the followers whom he had led across the terrible Bayuda desert, and warned them in simple, soldierly words that each one must be prepared on the morrow to meet his Maker. Thoughts such as this were surely, one would think, enough to keep the Khalifa and his generals awake that night with the awful sense of responsibility! Not that the Moslem fighting man, whether of high or low degree, has any fear of death itself. From what I have seen of him in action, I should imagine that the contingency of death never enters into his head as a factor of the fight which need be regarded. Absolutely convinced as he is of a future existence in which bravery and devotion will be rewarded, the Dervish faces the muzzles of Maxim guns with a sword in his hand. It is civilisation which sets Death upon his throne of terror. The greater the sum of life's enjoyments the greater the dread of losing them, and as the nervous organism of mankind becomes relaxed and softened by the æsthetic and sentimental influences of social progress, physical pain is accentuated in reality, and dreaded all the more in anticipation. The ordinary belief in a future life amongst Christian peoples is, for the most part, so nebulous and indefinite that it fails altogether as a mainspring of action amid the risks of battle. Thus, unless other sentimental or utilitarian considerations can step in to fill the gap, *e.g.* patriotism, or the preservation of hearth and home, the Christian is invariably at a disadvantage in contending with his Moslem enemy. Look at the spectacle presented by the Ottoman Empire, in which millions of Christians have been dominated for centuries by a small but valiant minority of Osmanlis. [149]

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When it was known that the Khalifa's army had postponed the attack, a general feeling of disappointment pervaded the whole zeriba. The men, both white and black, had been as keen as possible; we had all been waiting for the enemy, and he hadn't come! We were robbed of our show, and it was positively annoying to hear, instead of the warlike commands which had prefaced the afternoon, the pacific order for fatigue parties to leave the zeriba and cut wood for cooking purposes! What awful bathos! From Khalifa to kitchen utensils, from battle and murder to bully beef and biscuit!

Few of the twenty-three thousand men who passed that night within the zeriba are likely to forget it. We felt certain of a battle on the morrow, for all doubts as to whether the Khalifa would stand and fight, or flee away into the uttermost parts of the Sudan, were now set at rest. The two armies actually lay encamped within five miles of each other on an almost dead level! The whole of our force, from the Sirdar downwards, was fully conscious of its strength and its ability to resist the Dervish assault in the morning. But what if the Khalifa resolved after all to attack our zeriba under the cover of night? When one remembers the thinness of our extended line, our miserably inadequate defences, the stealthiness and rapidity of the Dervish infantry, the impossibility of accurate fire in the darkness, the preponderating numbers of the enemy and their splendid valour,—when one thinks of these and other things which may not be discussed *coram populo*, one cannot be sufficiently thankful that the Khalifa refrained from attacking us on that memorable night! Had such an assault taken place, I feel *absolutely certain* that of the brave fellows who in the morning advanced unflinchingly against the most terrific fire of the century's warfare, a vast number would have broken through the zeriba in the darkness. The result would have been terrible beyond words! The cut and thrust of the Dervish sword and spear, with the cross fire of our own men, might have ended in a fulfilment of the Mahdi's prophecy, instead of a decisive and almost bloodless victory for the British arms!

With the exception of sentries, who were doubled, the troops were allowed to sleep, though their rest was broken by several alarms during the night. Two friendly Arabs had been sent out beyond Geren Nebi with orders, in the event of a Dervish onset, to raise the peculiar trilling cry which one hears in a higher key from Sudanese women. Suddenly the trilling sound was distinctly heard, the men were instantly roused, and our spies came racing in at full speed, and jumped clean over the zeriba! They pretended that the Khalifa's army was close upon their heels, but no Dervishes appeared. In all probability these worthless creatures had been alarmed by some "sniping" shots from the river bank, or else thought it would be more agreeable inside than outside the zeriba, and so resolved to get back and spend a comfortable night. The alarm over, our men lay down once more; and now a note of comedy was added to the anxiety, for in the dark a camel, with its forelegs tied together, suddenly ran *amok* through the camp, leaping with clumsy bounds over the officers' *angaribs*, and causing much confusion and laughter.

During the earlier part of the evening an order had been passed round that all lights were to be extinguished in five minutes; but, as usual, a number of people were selfish enough to disobey orders, and incur the risk of Dervish sniping, rather than get into bed by starlight. As a matter of fact, a number of shots were fired into the camp from the Surgham ridge, and some desultory sniping from the bushes beyond Geren Nebi sent occasional bullets whistling over the sleeping camp.

Before I fell asleep, I was astonished to see Cross walking up from the bank. He seemed much better, and said that he had been terribly worried all day by the thought that, after all, he might not be present at the battle. The floating hospital in which he lay was moored at an island opposite the zeriba, and it seemed doubtful at one time whether the barge would be moved over to our side. "If it hadn't," said Cross, "I had made up my mind to swim across the river to you."

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE OF OMDURMAN

On 2nd September we rose from our broken slumbers in the dull grey light of daybreak, and by the time the first sunlight had flushed the surface of the Nile everybody was hard at work over his breakfast. When one knows that within an hour or two the normal routine of regular meals may be rudely interrupted by the exigencies of a whole day's fighting, it behoves one to eat at least as substantial a breakfast, if it can be got, as one does in London before catching a morning express to Edinburgh. Certainly it is impossible to imagine a more agreeable prelude to a battle than that which we experienced in our zeriba. There was plenty of time for a really comfortable meal, without being interrupted by an unpleasantly early visit from the Dervishes.

As Cross and I strolled up towards that part of the line held by the British, I stopped for a few minutes at the huts which had been converted into temporary shelters for the wounded. Everything was in its place, and the *angaribs* and stretchers ready for prospective employment. Having just emerged from the floating hospital, Cross was naturally very weak, and one of the medical staff, having noticed this, gave him a dose of *sal volatile*. Every British soldier carried on him a little packet of medical requisites for "first aid to the wounded." The packet was a marvel of condensed utility—lint, bandages, medicated silk, and other things, all compressed into a tiny parcel about three inches square.

By the time I reached the British portion of the zeriba the men were all in their places, with reserve companies in position a little to the rear. Every officer had seen to the working of his

revolver, and all the Tommies had opened the breech of their Lee-Metfords and tested the magazine action—a very necessary precaution amongst the sand and dust of Egypt. The two batteries on the extreme left were drawn up, with the grim muzzles of the fifteen-pounders and the Maxim-Nordenfeldts pointing towards Gebel Surgham. Case upon case of shells lay ready to hand, and a number of these missiles were spread out on the sand close beside the gun-carriages.

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Long before the advancing Dervishes came within range and sight of our infantry, the Egyptian cavalry, some two thousand strong, had left the northern side of the zeriba, and with the Camel Corps had come in touch with a large body of the enemy under the Sheikh Ed-Din. The Dervishes, certainly not less than fifteen thousand in number, immediately advanced against the Khedival cavalry, expecting, no doubt, an easy victory over the Egyptians: how often in the past had the fellahin horsemen fled in utter rout before them! But now the despised Egyptians retreated in excellent order, dismounting and firing volleys as steadily as on the parade ground at Cairo. The Camel Corps were blundering slowly along, scarcely able to keep ahead of the native spearmen, and were threatened every moment with annihilation. In fact, throughout the day's fighting, no troops were exposed to more serious risk than the cumbrous Camel Corps. The cavalry acted splendidly, halting repeatedly under a hot fire until the camel men came up. Captain Ricardo of the 17th Lancers, who was attached to the Egyptian cavalry, told me that he never wished to command better troops than the "Gyppies" showed themselves to be under these trying circumstances. Nevertheless, many saddles were emptied by Dervish bullets, two field-guns had to be temporarily abandoned, and it would have fared very ill with this gallant corps if they had been compelled to rely solely on their own efforts. As it was, the Egyptian battery posted on a knoll at the north-west corner of the zeriba had got the range of the Kerreri ridge accurately, and as the triumphant Dervishes appeared amongst the rocks in full pursuit of the retreating cavalry, round after round of twelve-pounder shells burst amongst them. At the same moment the Melik and Sultan had trained their quick-firing guns upon the Dervishes, and did splendid execution amongst the crowded ranks. Under this combined fire the enemy wavered, but not for long. They tried to dodge the projectiles and advance more cautiously under cover of various rocky gullies amongst the broken ground. It was like a terrible game of hide-and-seek. The white gibbeks, hidden for some minutes behind the hill, suddenly reappeared by fresh exits from the ridge; but shells met them at every turn, and finally the fanatics, balked of their prey, sullenly withdrew beyond the hills altogether with most of their wounded, leaving some twelve hundred of their number dead or dying on the field.

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Inside the zeriba we were all alert and ready. Breakfast was over, and we simply waited for the enemy. I looked down into the hollow beside the river where the baggage camels, camp followers, and servants were stowed away in safety, and saw Ali grasping his enormous sword. The faithful creature came up and informed me that he intended to devote his attention exclusively to the defence of my person during the coming fight. I gently restrained the vaulting ambition of my cook, and pointed out to him the value of less ostentatious heroism—the protection, for example, of the camels from bullets, and the groceries from theft. Having shaken off this enthusiast, I walked along the zeriba to a point some way below the Lincolns. A large number of the Tommies had never been under fire before, *e.g.* the Guards and the Lancashire Fusiliers, and there was a curious look of suppressed excitement in some of the faces, as they stared over the desert to catch a glimpse of the enemy they were at last destined to behold, after many long marches by day and false alarms by night. Now and then I caught in a man's eye the curious gleam which comes from the joy of shedding blood—that mysterious impulse which, despite all the veneer of civilisation, still holds its own in a man's nature, whether he is killing rats with a terrier, rejoicing in a prize fight, playing a salmon, or potting Dervishes. It was a fine day, and we had come out to kill something. Call it what you like, the experience is a big factor in the joy of living: one speaks *φωναῖα συνετοῖσι*. Lower down the line the Sudanese showed their white teeth as they grinned with delight at the prospect of slaughter.

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Suddenly the Lancers came trotting over the ridge between Gebel Surgham and the Nile, while several officers galloped across the plain and reported to the Sirdar that the Khalifa's forces were now rapidly advancing. The signallers from Gebel Surgham had come in by this time, and the cavalry, after a temporary halt beyond Geren Nebi, entered the zeriba by the gap beyond the batteries, and there waited ready for future emergencies.

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"When they do show themselves," said an artillery officer, "we'll give them beans," and "beans" they certainly got! Even as he spoke, a long white streak far away in the distance suddenly spread itself over the yellow sand; the longed-for moment had arrived! "Here they come!" was on everybody's lips, and a rustle of excitement ran down the ranks.

True enough, on either side of Gebel Surgham, and then on towards the western slopes of Kerreri, line upon line of Dervish infantry and cavalry appeared. Gigantic banners fluttered aloft, borne on lofty flagstaves. The rising sun glinted on sword blades and spearheads innumerable, and as the mighty host drew nearer, black heads and arms became visible amongst the white of the massed *gibbeks*. And now, too, a dense volume of sound came rolling over the desert as the fanatical Arabs raised continuous shouts of defiance, mingled with chants to Allah and the Prophet—their final battle-cry before the inevitable death awaiting them—the veritable requiem song of Mahdism! In the clear morning air the pageant was truly magnificent, a splendid panorama of some forty thousand barbarians moving forward all undismayed to do battle with the largest army which Great Britain has placed in the field for forty years. So marvellous a picture—once seen, never to be seen again—must surely have impressed itself indelibly upon the memory of all who witnessed it!

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Our men stood unmoved within the zeriba. Suddenly a cloud of white smoke massed itself along

the enemy's front, and one realised that the Dervishes had opened fire on us. The Khalifa's forces possessed eighteen thousand Martinis and a still larger number of Remingtons, captured from the ill-fated army of Hicks Pasha and the various garrisons of the Sudan. But as none of the Dervishes understood the sighting of their rifles, and many of them had actually knocked off the back-sights as a useless encumbrance, their opening volleys at over two thousand yards, being fired point blank, were useless. They simply wasted ammunition; for most of the bullets of course struck the sand hundreds of yards in front of us, and comparatively few got as far as the zeriba. No response came from our silent ranks for another five minutes. Then at 6.20 a roar came from the batteries on the left, and a shell shrieked through the air and burst about twenty yards in front of the formidable line advancing against the southern face of the zeriba. Almost simultaneously the other batteries opened fire on the dense masses of the enemy advancing round the western slopes of Surgham, and still farther away towards the ridge of Kerreri.

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The battle had now commenced in dire earnest. As the enemy rapidly advanced, bullets of all sizes and shapes soon began to whistle over the zeriba from the Martinis, Remingtons, and nondescript weapons of the enemy. A battery, too, which they had placed on the western slope of Surgham, fired at the portion of our line held by the Camerons and Seaforths. More than forty rounds were fired from these Dervish field guns, but the shells did little, if any, damage, as, although the fuses were beautifully timed and the projectiles burst at an excellent height above the ground, the range was too long, and they all fell short. Moreover, after the fight some fragments of these shells were picked up and found to be made of very thin brass casing; so that the damage they could have inflicted, even had they reached our lines, must have been inconsiderable. As it was, they burst like maroons at the Crystal Palace, with a loud report and little else.

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Our own artillery had very soon found the range accurately. The British fifteen-pounders and the short Maxim-Nordenfeldts of the Egyptian gunners were admirably worked, and the precision of the shell fire was marvellous. Scores of shrapnel burst just over the advancing line, and other shells struck the ground under their feet, tearing huge gaps in the ranks and throwing up clouds of earth and stones. The division of the enemy nearest to the zeriba was advancing over the ridge between Surgham and the river, and with a good field glass I could see the fearful havoc played by the fire of our guns. Beneath the descending shower of bullets from a well-placed shrapnel, a little crowd of men would fall torn and bleeding upon the sand, and sometimes a shell splinter would crash into a horse and hurl the animal with its rider to the ground. Despite this awful fire, the brave Dervishes came steadily on down the slope, though the line of their march was thickly strewn with dead and wounded. At length, to complete their discomfiture, the enemy in this part of the field came within long range of the rifles of the Guards, the Warwicks, and other battalions lining the more southern face of the zeriba. As withering volleys were poured into them, in addition to the incessant shell fire, the remnants of this brave division seemed to realise the hopelessness of a direct advance, and swerved to their left without any disorder to join their comrades who had advanced round Surgham from the west.

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The main attack upon our position had now fully developed, and it was at this juncture that the Egyptian cavalry and the Camel Corps regained the shelter of their comrades' trenches after their lucky escape from Sheikh Ed-Din's spearmen. Thousands upon thousands of Dervish infantry and cavalry advanced all along the line in a rough semicircle, with frenzied shouts and a continuous but irregular fire upon the western face of the zeriba. Towards the left centre the Khalifa's black ensign stood out above the white *gibbehs* and red sashes of his bodyguard—that heroic and devoted band who rallied to the last round their leader's flag, and died to a man in its defence!

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The din of battle was terrific. The roar of the artillery, the shriek of shells, the crisp volleys of the Lee-Metfords, and the unceasing rat-tat-tat of the deadly Maxims were so deafening that it was only occasionally in brief intervals that one realised that bullets by hundreds were flying around us.

Other proofs, however, of this were soon in evidence. In every direction the medical service men were to be seen carrying the dead and wounded on stretchers to the rear. As I walked across the zeriba with the Rifle Brigade, who were ordered to reinforce the line facing west, three men were hit by Dervish bullets, and immediately afterwards I saw a corporal of the Camerons shot clean through the head. As I said above, comparatively few bullets were heard, but every now and then a man fell to the ground. Colonel Money's horse was shot under him; he secured another mount, and in a few minutes his second horse rolled over, pierced by another Dervish bullet. Shortly afterwards, as I was watching the Maxim fire, a Highlander suddenly fell over two yards to my left. He was, I think, shot through the upper part of the arm; but what amused me was the self-conscious, shamefaced look which came over his face when the stretcher arrived. He looked sheepishly round to see if anybody noticed it, and was evidently quite ashamed of being carried off!

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It was interesting to hear various occasional remarks which were made as flying bullets whistled overhead or made a splash in the loose sand of the zeriba. After a little experience in being under fire the ear gets to appreciate the relative distances of these invisible messengers, but the tendency at first is to imagine that the passing bullet is much nearer to one than it really is. I remember hearing a young soldier remark as a bullet whizzed over us, "By Jove, that nearly got me on the head!" whereas the missile was yards up in the air. It is, indeed, always satisfactory under such circumstances to note the whizz of bullets through the air; for, of course, if you hear the missile, it can't do you any harm. Some of the Dervish bullets played the oddest tricks. My friend, Captain Maclachlan of the Camerons, suddenly felt his side drenched with

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water, and, looking down, found that his water-bottle had been pierced from side to side. I found that this little anecdote had already reached England when I arrived, and had, moreover, been duly improved upon; for an old lady in the train spoke in sympathetic tones of the providential escape of the poor invalid officer who had been saved from a bullet as he lay in bed by the *hot water bottle* applied to his side! Another bullet passed through an ammunition pouch, cutting eight cartridges in half just between the lead and the cordite without exploding a single one. In another case, a Dervish bullet bored a hole through the helmet of the man in front, tore the shoulder-strap from the man behind, then wounded a sergeant in the leg, and finally dropped harmlessly on the toes of a private in the rear.

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Between the two Highland battalions was posted a battery of Maxims under Captain Smeaton, whom I had seen in Crete a year and a half ago. Just behind the Maxims a detachment of Engineers did excellent work in organising the ammunition supply. One is always glad to hear the conduct of this fine corps appreciated, for frequently the sappers, from the nature of their work, are not sufficiently noticed in the literature of our "little wars." They did much excellent work at the Atbara, with scarcely a word of subsequent recognition from the Press; and here in the Omdurman zeriba they were posted in the middle of the fighting line, and took their chance as well as anyone else.

The Maxims poured forth an unceasing stream of bullets. A belt of cartridges was fixed, and instantly began to glide through the breech mechanism; then ta-ta-ta-ta-ta—the belt was empty and thrown aside to make way for another. It was not difficult to see how the gun was doing its terrible work, for if the aim became unduly depressed, a screen of dust and sand was thrown up in front of the enemy's line, and the only thing needed was a trifling elevation of the barrel.

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There is a sort of fascination about a Maxim in full swing. Water is placed round the barrel in a metal casing, in order to keep the steel from becoming red hot. As it is, in three minutes after the water is poured in it boils furiously, and steam rushes out of the valves. Still, as long as the barrel is in contact with water of any kind, all goes well. In the midst of the Dervish attack the water suddenly gave out in Captain Smeaton's battery, and the machinery would speedily have ceased work from overheating but for the ready help of the men who stood by, and immediately emptied their water-bottles into the empty tubing. The Maxims, thus refreshed, continued their work, and up to 8.30 a.m. no less than ninety thousand rounds of ammunition had been fired from these weapons alone.

About seven o'clock a marvellous attempt to break our lines was made by the enemy. The Dervish leader in the centre—perhaps Yakub, the Khalifa's brother—actually dispatched a body of about one hundred and fifty cavalry against the British position. That any sane man could be guilty of such criminal folly is almost incredible. The devoted band galloped towards the zeriba over the open desert in the very teeth of Maxims and Lee-Metford volleys! Needless to say, not one of these brave fellows got within five hundred yards of our lines. The Maxims and rifles rained bullets upon them, the murderous sheet of lead mowed them down, and they simply vanished from sight. One heroic leader struggled on in front of his comrades, until he too, with his beautiful Arab charger, went down like the rest, and lay there, a silent witness to the magnificent valour of the Khalifa's followers. Not one man in twenty returned from this wild charge, which, for the utter recklessness of its bravery, must be almost unexampled in military history.

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The interchange of shots continued until about 8.30, by which time the Dervish forces had been practically annihilated, with the exception of two or three large masses, which had retreated in excellent order behind the hills on the south-west and north-west. In fact, during the last half-hour of this portion of the engagement, the actual rifle fire of the Dervishes had been confined almost exclusively to a small body of sharpshooters, who had ensconced themselves in a sandy hollow some nine hundred yards away on our left centre. These riflemen, being sheltered from the hail of bullets which whizzed over their heads, continued to make very fair practice on our ranks for some time. At last a shell from Major Williams' battery pitched right into the middle of their retreat. What exactly happened I do not know, but, at anyrate, we were troubled by no more bullets from *that* quarter. Throughout the fighting up to this point I never saw a Dervish *run*; whenever he retreated he simply walked off the field. I noticed many of the wounded struggle to their feet, attempt to walk away, and then fall to rise no more as merciless volleys again struck them to the ground.

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As the Sirdar appeared to think that all danger from Dervish attack was now past and over, the entire army received orders to leave the zeriba and march in *échelon* straight on Omdurman. Meanwhile, however, the Lancers had advanced over the ridge towards the river, with orders to harass the enemy and head them off from Omdurman as far as possible. The troopers trotted off in excellent spirits, glad to get a chance of some fighting after their forced inaction under cover during the assault upon the zeriba.

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And now occurred the most graphic and sensational bit of fighting in the whole battle. A continuous stream of Dervishes was traversing the plain between Gebel Surgham and the suburbs of Omdurman. But before the Lancers had advanced far upon the flank of these fugitives they noticed what appeared to be a body of some two hundred spearmen, who were partly under cover of a low ridge of sand. These Dervishes soon showed that they had rifles as well as spears, for a hot fire was opened upon the cavalry. A charge was at once ordered, and the line of Lancers galloped down upon the enemy. Before they had reached the hollow, however, they saw beyond the riflemen a considerable body of Dervishes, whose presence, thanks to a further inequality in the ground, had not been revealed till that moment. I have heard it said that, previous to falling foul of these partly concealed Dervishes, the Lancers had advanced without any scouts being

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thrown forward who might have easily discovered how the land lay. Again, even when the white mass of men, some fifteen deep, suddenly rose up before the eyes of the cavalry, there would have been absolutely no shadow of discredit in retiring; for cavalry are not ordinarily required to charge unbroken infantry, nor was this course rendered necessary by the Sirdar's orders. There can be little doubt that if our men, immediately on sighting the large compact body in the rear of the riflemen, had withdrawn, dismounted, and poured volleys from their carbines into the massed ranks of the enemy, they would have inflicted far greater damage upon the Dervishes, with scarcely any appreciable loss to themselves. This course was not taken. So far from halting and retreating, our gallant Lancers quickened their chargers' pace, and hurled themselves boldly against the double rampart of fighting men. Colonel Martin led the way, riding well ahead of his regiment, and, without attempting to use his weapons, forced a passage through the dense masses in front of him. He did not, I believe, receive a scratch during this perilous exploit, though it was almost a miracle that he escaped with his life. A friend of mine who took part in this famous charge told me that as the cavalry galloped forward they were met by a perfect hail of bullets from the riflemen in front, which ought to have emptied many a saddle, but for the most part flew harmlessly overhead. As is usually the case in desperate fighting, none of the men who came safely through the charge appeared to know much about its details. My informant told me that he noticed an officer—probably Lieutenant Grenfell—standing a little on one side and fighting with a ring of Dervishes, three of whom suddenly turned upon himself. As they advanced he realised that he had better make some use of his weapons, so whipped out his revolver and shot the foremost Dervish. After this his horse struggled onward past the rest of the assailants. Until he had shot this man, he had quite forgotten to draw either sword or revolver!

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The outer line of the enemy was soon broken up by the impact of the cavalry, and the riflemen tumbled head over heels amongst the horses' feet. But much greater resistance came from the two thousand Dervishes at the back. The confusion was terrible. Lances are not of much use in a crowd, and if our troopers had used their sabres they would have suffered less from the heavy sword blades which were hacking their bodies and hamstringing their horses. If any man was unhorsed he was as good as dead. The furious Arabs leapt upon him and slashed at his face till his features disappeared and his flesh hung in strips. Lieutenant Clerk's charger stumbled and fell forward as it breasted the edge of the *nullah*, but most fortunately its master kept his seat, and managed to get through the *mêlée* unhurt. This officer was on September 2nd far too ill and weak for any sort of military duty, but he pluckily kept to his regiment till the day's arduous work was over, and was then obliged to go into hospital worse than before. The fighting through the brief period of this charge—a few minutes all told from beginning to end—was wild and fierce. The Lancers never flinched in the face of an enemy six times as numerous as themselves, and, doing what they could with the clumsy lances, forced a path for their squadrons through the crowd in front. On the other hand, the Dervishes rejoiced, no doubt, to get to close quarters with the hated infidels after all the futile attempts and cruel losses of the morning. Their eyes gleamed with fury as they crowded round the hated Englishmen, and showered spear thrusts and sword cuts upon man and beast alike. The cross-handled Dervish sword is terribly heavy, and the long straight blades of several which I picked up had been freshly ground for subsequent employment upon the person of Tommy Atkins. The large Dervish spear, too, when properly handled, is a most formidable weapon, and if a thrust is driven well home into the body, the wound from the broad iron head is so wide and deep that a man has little chance of recovery.

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My readers have all read in the newspapers of some of the many acts of heroism and narrow escapes which were crowded into the space of a few minutes. They have heard how gallantly men like Lieutenant Montmorency and Private Peddar, who had fought their way unhurt through the Dervishes' line, turned back to save their wounded and dismounted comrades—how Major Wyndham, when his horse fell dead beneath him, managed with the help of his friends to push his way through the press and escape the death which overtook almost every other Lancer who was unhorsed.

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The enemy's line was completely broken up by the cavalry, and about seventy of the Dervishes were killed or wounded. But when the Lancers formed up some three hundred yards on the other side of the hollow, it was evident from even a cursory glance that the gallant charge had cost them dear. Lieutenant Grenfell with twenty troopers were missing, and of the fifty wounded men many were streaming with blood and scarcely able to keep their saddles. No less than one hundred and nineteen horses out of three hundred and twenty were killed or hopelessly wounded, and in some cases the faithful creatures, who had carried their masters safely through the fight, just managed to rejoin the ranks and then fell dead.

After the charge Colonel Martin ordered his men to dismount and fire volleys at the enemy, who still held their ground. The magazine fire of the carbines speedily dispersed the Dervishes, and the victorious Lancers returned to the scene of their charge and recovered the dead. All the bodies had been horribly mutilated; the faces were quite unrecognisable, and the flesh of the neck and shoulders was scored and lacerated in every direction with sword cuts and spear thrusts.

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Indignation against the Dervishes for such mutilations may easily be exaggerated. Sickening as it is to gaze upon a comrade's features hacked out of all human semblance, one cannot forget that the men who did the deed had seen thousands of their brethren slain by our awful fire without a possibility of retaliation. It is worth remembering, too, that the mutilation of the human body is not the exclusive monopoly of barbaric peoples; anyone who has seen the effects of shell fire—bodies ripped open, jaws torn off, and kindred horrors—may find it difficult to differentiate very markedly between the accursed usages inseparable from every system of warfare—civilised

and barbarous alike.

While the Lancers had met and engaged the enemy beyond Gebel Surgham, the whole of the infantry, artillery, and baggage-train had left the zeriba and advanced in *échelon* upon Omdurman. The British battalions led the way on the left; on the right marched the Egyptians and Sudanese—Maxwell's brigade in front, Lewis's next, and Macdonald's bringing up the rear. I joined Lewis's men, and as the line of our advance led us over the ground covered by a portion of the attack, we speedily found ourselves amongst dead and dying Dervishes. The first of these I came across was the brave leader who had led the charge of the Baggara cavalry. He and his horse were quite dead—both of them riddled with bullets. His spear lay beside him, and was seized by a Sudanese soldier as a present for his *bimbashi*. As we marched towards Gebel Surgham, and further out upon the plain, the efficacy of our shell and rifle fire became more apparent every yard we advanced. In every direction rows and clusters of white *gibbeks* and black bodies lay scattered over the sand. [181]

Here and there, too, horses were stretched motionless, or else tossed restlessly to and fro, unable to rise. I cannot account for the fact, but the sight of a wounded horse is much more painful to myself, and, I know, to many other men, than the sight of a wounded man. As one walks over a battlefield one gazes with indifference or vague curiosity on mangled heaps of human bodies, but where one sees a horse cruelly torn by a shell splinter, raising and drooping its head upon the sand, with terror and anguish in its beautiful eyes—such a sight as this must fill the heart of any lover of animals with pain and pity. [182]

Our native battalions were soon busily engaged in killing the wounded. The Sudanese undertook this task with evident relish, and never spared a single Dervish along their path. On our left front, at the foot of the Surgham slope, where the opening shell fire of the batteries on the left had covered the hillside with dead and wounded, a large number of servants and camp followers were also busy. These harpies, intent solely on loot, had armed themselves with various weapons. Some carried clubs or spears, others had managed to secure old rifles. They advanced with great caution, and I saw them fire repeatedly into bodies which were already quite dead, before they dared to rush in and strip the corpse of its arms and clothing. These cowardly wretches ought most certainly to have been prevented from carrying on this irresponsible shooting. They fired anyhow, without looking to see who was in front, and their bullets continually ricocheted against the rocks. One of these bullets passed quite close to the front of our brigade as we advanced, and I heard that an officer was wounded by another. [183]

The barbarous usage of killing the wounded has become traditional in Sudanese warfare, and in some cases it must be looked upon as a painful necessity. The wounded Dervishes—as I saw with my own eyes, and on one occasion nearly felt with my own body—sometimes raised themselves and fired one last round at our advancing line. On one occasion a wounded Baggara suddenly rose up from a little heap of bodies and stabbed no less than seven Egyptian cavalry troopers before he was finally dispatched. Still, when all has been said in defence of this practice, it is certain that in many cases wounded Dervishes, unarmed and helpless, were butchered from sheer wantonness and lust of bloodshed. The whole formed a hideous picture, not easy to forget. [184]

Some of the wounded turned wearily over, and paid no attention to our advance. For many of them, indeed, the bitterness of death was already past. They lay in the scorching heat, with shattered bodies and shattered hopes, awaiting the final thrust of the merciless bayonet. Many of them were doubtless good as well as brave men. They had trusted in Allah that he would deliver them, but their prayer had been in vain. There are few experiences in this world more cruel than the sudden extinction of religious hope, and the dying thoughts of some of these Dervishes must have been exceeding bitter. [184]

As I tramped along with Lewis's brigade towards Omdurman, we were suddenly aware that something had gone wrong on the right flank and rear of the column. The "ispt," "ispt" of bullets was heard in every direction, and men began to fall. Turning round, I soon saw what had happened. The enemy had actually renewed the fight, and an orderly attack was being made on Macdonald's brigade by the large Dervish force under Sheikh Ed-Din, which had retreated under the fire of the gunboats at the beginning of the engagement, and held itself in readiness behind the Kerreri ridge for this flank attack. At the same time several other bodies of Dervishes appeared to the west of Surgham, and also from behind the low hills straight in front. [185]

The brunt of this fresh attack fell upon the rear brigade. Colonel Macdonald did not lose a moment. His blacks were at once formed into two lines, meeting at an obtuse angle, and a steady fire was opened on the enemy, who advanced with marvellous rapidity. Towards the left centre, the black standard of the Khalifa rose again to view, and behind this, and on either flank, line after line of infantry swept once more over the undulating desert.

This was the only portion of the fight in which any part of our position was seriously threatened, and during this second battle—for it practically amounted to this—the Sudanese and Egyptian infantry had most of the fighting to themselves. Right well they fought—one native brigade against some twenty-five thousand Dervishes. Any wavering or panic on the part of these battalions would have been fatal, for during the really critical period of the fight they were quite isolated. Lewis's brigade—their nearest support—was at least nine hundred yards away, and most of the British columns were actually out of sight, advancing along the river a mile and a half in front. The men of the brigade, which comprised the 9th, 10th, and 11th Sudanese and the 2nd Egyptians, were armed with Martinis; and the smoke of the black powder they used interfered to some extent with the accuracy of their fire, which always tends, in the case of native troops, to become rather wild as the excitement of battle grows upon them. Thus it happened that the [186]

enemy managed to get to much closer quarters with us than previously. Their foremost ranks sometimes seemed to advance within one hundred and fifty yards of the Sudanese, and when a perfect flood of Sheikh Ed-Din's infantry was let loose from the Kerreri slopes upon Macdonald's rear, some of the Dervishes, despite the withering rifle fire, actually ran up and used their spears against our men, until they were bayoneted or shot down at the very muzzles of the rifles. Another brilliant attempt was made by the Khalifa's cavalry to break the Sudanese lines, and some of the horsemen got within a few yards of the line before they were shot down in detail. One determined standard-bearer, with nothing in his hands except his flagstaff, struggled on heroically to within a dozen yards of the blacks before he fell, riddled with bullets.

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Efforts had, of course, been made all along the line to lend assistance to Macdonald in his one-handed struggle. The gunboats had joined with his own three batteries in shelling the dense masses under Sheikh Ed-Din, while on the left other batteries had galloped up, and now from the northern slopes of Surgham poured round after round of shell upon the indomitable enemy. Three battalions, too, of the 1st British Brigade had come up at the double, and the Lincolns had been dispatched to aid in the final dispersion of Ed-Din's Dervishes amongst the rugged slopes of Kerreri.

Still, valuable as this help was in completing the rout of the Dervishes, and driving them off finally beyond the hills to the west, there is no doubt that the repulse of the enemy was already a *fait accompli* long before the British battalions had wheeled to the right and traversed the long distance—at least one and a half miles—between their position near the river and the rear of our advance on the right. Colonel Macdonald had proved once more his sterling qualities as a leader. The Sudanese had shown that they could stand absolutely steady under a prolonged fire as well as rush impetuously to an attack. The "Gyppies," who in the old days of El Teb and Hicks Pasha's disaster threw away their rifles and were butchered as they fled or knelt to beg for mercy—these very Fellahin soldiers, now disciplined and taught the value of self-respect by British officers, fired regular volleys and stood firm as a rock against the stream of Dervishes which threatened every moment to engulf them.

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I noticed, by the way, one very smart bit of fighting during the movement in support of Macdonald. The brigade under Colonel Maxwell advanced almost directly upon Gebel Surgham, and a number of Sudanese were ordered to clear the hill of Dervishes. Up went the blacks like monkeys. The whole eastern slope of Surgham was dotted with little white puffs of smoke as the lithe creatures leapt from boulder to boulder and drove the enemy before them. At the top of the hill the surviving Dervishes, under the Emir Osman Azrak, made a desperate stand, but were killed to a man.

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It was not till nearly midday that "Cease fire" again sounded, and the victorious march to Omdurman was resumed. Scattered bands of Dervishes were to be seen in the distance, making westward to the shelter of the hills. Upon the rear of these fugitives the Egyptian cavalry was let loose; and as they galloped away to the right, and cut up the stragglers, they felt, no doubt, that they were getting some sort of compensation for their bad luck in the early morning. Captain Smeaton lent me his field glasses, which were more powerful than my own, and far away in front, on a ridge of rock, safe from cavalry and rifle bullets, I saw a little band of Dervishes—some sixty in all—painfully making their way to the west. With the fine binoculars in my hand I could even see the faces of the poor wretches, the majority of whom seemed to be wounded. Some limped along unaided over the rough hillside, others were supported by their comrades. How many hundreds, nay, thousands, of these wounded Dervishes ultimately succumbed to the fearful injuries inflicted by the "man-stopping" bullet, no one, I suppose, will ever know accurately; but one may be tolerably sure that behind the hills many a poor creature lay down to die.

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In handing Captain Smeaton's glasses back, I noticed that one of the mules harnessed to the Maxims had just been struck by a bullet, which passed clean through the animal's neck. The wounded mule, by name Tommy, was evidently quite a pet amongst the gunners, and though it looked rather anxious and depressed, it dragged the Maxim with unabated vigour.

In places, as we marched along, the ground was strewn thickly with bodies, as the fire had struck the enemy down in little heaps. In one spot I saw a ring of nine men and three horses, all evidently slain by the explosion of a single shell. One Dervish, as I passed, raised his face to mine with a ghastly smile, as if deprecating our vengeance, and throwing his *gibbeh* on one side, displayed an awful wound. A shell splinter had struck the miserable man full in front, and literally ripped his body open from side to side. Another man lay face downward upon the sand, breathing bubbles through a pool of gore, and actually drowning in his own blood! As a rule, however, the features of the dead were not distorted. They lay as if asleep, with a peaceful look upon their faces, and many of them were handsome men of magnificent build.

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The sun by this time was terribly hot, and, after the excitement of the fight, the fatigue of the day's work, and the absence of sleep on the previous night began to tell upon the men. Several halts were made, and at last a string of camels laden with *fantasias* (metal water tanks) made their appearance. The men crowded round, and filled their bottles to the brim. The water was quite warm, but the troops drank it with avidity. I filled my bottle, and then, plunging the whole thing into a bucket, waited till evaporation should cool the contents. Meanwhile I crawled under a Maxim carriage. The scanty shade was perfectly delicious, and I should have gone to sleep but for the mules, which became restless, and kicked out occasionally with their hoofs in unpleasant proximity to my head.

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After half an hour's halt the onward march was resumed, and we saw the troops in front about two hundred yards away actually marching through a mirage of water, rocks, and bushes! Cross

tried to photograph the curious scene, but the result did not prove a success. Why does one never get a decent photograph of a mirage in the desert? Men still fell out of the ranks from sheer exhaustion. One would see a soldier totter on for some yards, trying to pull himself together, and then suddenly step to one side and sink down on the sand, saying, "It's no good; I can't go on." On two occasions when this happened, the exhausted man had drained the entire contents of his bottle, which had been full an hour ago, and not a drop of water was to be got from any of the soldiers near! I mention this to show the utter lack of self-control in the matter of drink which prevailed amongst the "Tommies." My own bottle was the only one within reach that contained any water at all, and of course I did what everyone else would have done, and divided what remained between the two men, who seemed to be actually dying of thirst. They then got up and managed to struggle on to Omdurman, their rifles being carried for them by some of their comrades. A private of the Warwicks suddenly dropped down dead from heat apoplexy, and was buried on the spot. The comparatively mild sufferings of our own men turned one's thoughts to the crowded heaps of wounded wretches left behind us in the desert to the added tortures of that thirst which invariably accompanies gunshot wounds. How many thousands, too, of women and children would soon be weeping with all the wild lamentation of the East over the brave men who lay in the sleep of death far away upon the plain! Sorrow is the same all the world over—that dread factor in human life—and the terrific carnage of the day's fighting had taken away the bread-winner and protector from thousands of poor homes in the Sudan, and doomed many a household to starvation.

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The battle was now to all intents and purposes over, and already vast flocks of vultures were wheeling round and round over the expanse of desert. Another halt was made on the edge of a *chor* on the outskirts of Omdurman. The water of this inlet was thick and yellow, and in the shallower parts dead animals—horses, mules, and donkeys—lay about in various stages of decay. Nevertheless, the thirsty troops rushed down the bank and drank greedily of the foul water. The want of self-control and common sense at this *chor* may quite well be partly responsible for the large number of typhoid cases which subsequently occurred. As I thought that ten minutes more of dry throat and parched lips were better than the chance of enteric fever, I walked down to the Nile. Here I found Captain Ricardo, Lord Tullibardine, and one or two others sitting under the scanty shade of a mud-hut, where I joined them after some tremendous draughts of running water, drunk out of a calabash which I had cut from the neck of a dead Dervish. Lord Tullibardine kindly gave me some brandy to flavour the water, and Captain Ricardo recounted the good deeds of the "Gypsy" cavalry. Then we all lay at full length and indulged in a little siesta.

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The bugles soon sounded the "advance," and the final order came that the army was to occupy Omdurman forthwith. The weary troops advanced once more, and we all waded through the muddy *chor*. The water reached to our knees, and was very refreshing after the long tramp over the hot sand. Alongside one of the battalions rode the Presbyterian chaplain, mounted—oh tell it not in the Kirk, neither publish it amongst the Elders—upon a looted pony! It was, I think, a colt which I had seen earlier in the day standing unhurt amongst a heap of dead Dervishes, and calmly nibbling some scanty blades of desert grass.

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As we marched on through the apparently interminable suburbs of the city, the regimental drums and fifes and the Highlanders' bagpipes struck up some lively tunes. The effect of music at such a time was simply marvellous: it put fresh heart and vigour into all of us. The Sudanese, with broad grins on their shiny black faces, played the various marching tunes of the British regiments, and were loudly cheered by their white comrades. All along the broad street which runs through Omdurman to the central square we were greeted by bands of women, who stood in clusters at the doors, and welcomed us with curious trilling cries of joy.

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The Khalifa had escaped from the southern end of the town about an hour before our foremost troops arrived, and had been followed by a panic-stricken mob of men, women, and children, with camels and donkeys. In spite, however, of this exodus, the advance battalions, with the Sirdar and his staff, had met with some resistance from Dervishes still concealed in the houses along the main street. Here and there bullets were fired from windows and roofs across the line of our advance, and troops had to be detailed to clear out these dangerous assailants. Fortunately, a little light still came from the setting sun, and the Sudanese were soon able to rid themselves of their antagonists. Bullets had been repeatedly fired at the Sirdar and his staff as they advanced, and a little further on destruction nearly overtook them from the shells of our own field guns. The Sirdar had ordered the 32nd battery to shell the Khalifa's palace, and nevertheless saw fit to advance with his staff into the zone of fire. Suddenly four shells burst in rapid succession above their heads, close to the Mahdi's tomb and the great square. Everyone hurried away to shelter, but Howard had already dismounted and reached an upper room in the Khalifa's palace. Another shell screamed over the houses, and as it burst a fragment struck Howard on the back of the head, and killed him instantly—a tragic and untimely death, when the perils of the day seemed over and rest nigh at hand! Thus perished a man who was, I believe, absolutely fearless in the presence of danger. He was my junior at Oxford, but I remember that as an undergraduate at Balliol he was known for that reckless daring and courage which in after years led him to seek for adventure in Cuba, Matabeleland, and finally the Sudan. During the campaign in South Africa Howard displayed signal ability as adjutant of his corps; in fact, the splendid courage and unceasing energy which marked his whole career gave every promise of ultimately securing for him a still higher fame and distinction. As it was, his young life was cut short in the very midst of his restless activity, and he died as he had lived, eager to do his best, and utterly fearless of everything except failure.

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"The untented Kosmos his abode
He passed, a wilful stranger—
His mistress still the open road
And the bright eyes of Danger!"

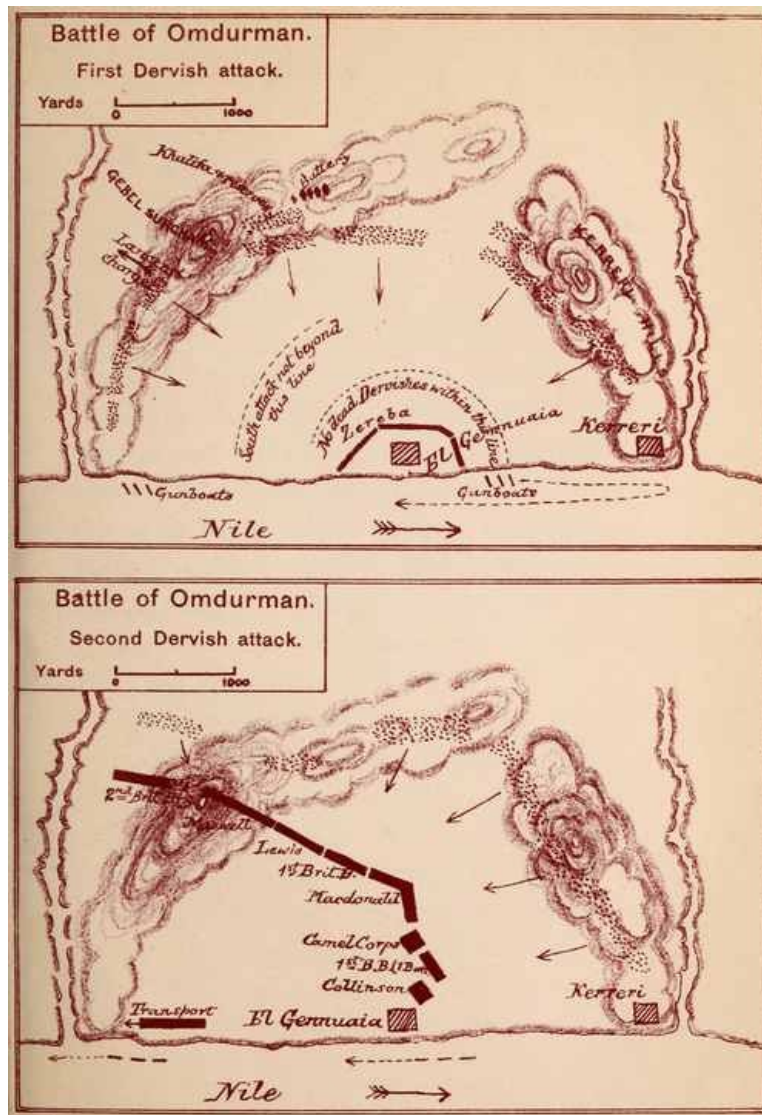
Our little band of fifteen had received, indeed, more than its fair share of casualties in the day's fighting. In addition to Howard's death, Colonel Rhodes had been shot through the shoulder, and another correspondent had been slightly wounded in the face with a spent bullet.

The street fighting was over, darkness had fallen upon the city, and the weary troops at length bivouacked for the night. In addition to the wear and tear of the actual fighting, they had marched at least fifteen miles, for the most part in the full heat of the sun. Many of the men simply lay down as they were, and at once fell fast asleep. After the army an apparently endless succession of baggage animals filed wearily through the town. I gave up all hope of finding camels and servants amid the general confusion, and betook myself to the Camerons. The other correspondents went on, and, failing to discover their baggage, had to sleep on the ground without food or blankets. I fared much better. Inside my pocket was a small tin of potted meat, and, as Captain Maclachlan had some biscuits, we intended to devour these before going to sleep with our helmets for pillows. But a joyful surprise was in store for us. By a great piece of good luck, some of the regimental baggage camels happened to pass by, and these were speedily annexed, with splendid results. My kind host invited me to dinner, and what a meal we had! On a central packing-case, which served as a *buffet*, stood several tins of "Suffolk pie" and ox tongue, and for every man a biscuit or two. How delightful it was to eat these tinned dainties—the only meat-food which had passed our lips that day! Then came the crowning mercy. Maclachlan unearthed a bottle of champagne from some mysterious source, and we shared the generous wine between us. Our tumblers were the lower halves of whisky bottles, cut round by string soaked in turpentine and then set alight. We drank many toasts—the Sirdar, the Army, Friends in England now Abed, etc. Our fatigues were all forgotten, and we felt so amiable that I really think that if the Khalifa had been within reach we should have sent him an invitation to join us, and bring Osman Digna with him. This dinner-party in the open street of Omdurman was one of the pleasantest I have ever attended—*olim meminisse juvabit!*

At length we wrapped ourselves in blankets for the night, and lay down upon the sand. All around was heard the heavy, regular breathing of strong men, utterly tired out by the excitement and labours of the eventful day. With the exception of occasional shots from Sudanese looters or Dervish "snipers" across the river, perfect stillness reigned over the thousands of men who lay in the large open spaces of the city. Not a sound broke the silence—the camp was asleep, and

"All that mighty heart was lying still!"

The moon had risen, and far away on the horizon gleamed the Southern Cross, like that celestial symbol which inspired the Roman Conqueror in his bivouac centuries ago, and helped to shape the destinies of Christendom. *Per hoc vince*—good men of our victory's true worth, and presage of our future work in these unhappy regions! The day's carnage had indeed been cruel; blood had been poured out like water; but there is a mysterious law in the working of Providence which forbids the continued existence of systems which have ceased to subserve the cause of progress. Mahdism has proved the most shameful and terrible instrument of bloodshed and oppression which the modern world has ever witnessed. It has reduced whole provinces to utter desolation, so that tracts once smiling and fertile are now but solitary wastes, the habitation of wild beasts. Thousands upon thousands of homesteads have been laid in ruins, and the innocent villagers outraged and tortured and murdered. As I entered the Mahdi's tomb on the following morning, I saw a band of natives casting stones with loud curses upon the spot where his body lay; and scores of unhappy creatures who on the night of the battle were liberated, after long years of imprisonment, lifted up their hands, and with streaming eyes thanked God for the destruction of their oppressor's rule. Mahdism has vanished, never to return, and once more the arms of Great Britain have advanced the cause of civilisation and "made for righteousness" in the history of the century.



R. V. Darbishire 1898.

{Click on map for larger image.}

Battle of Omdurman.
First Dervish attack.

Battle of Omdurman.
Second Dervish attack.

CHAPTER V

GUNBOATS AND GAALIN

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No account of the recent campaign could be in any way complete if it did not include some mention of the valuable assistance rendered to the Sirdar and the Anglo-Egyptian forces by the gunboats and the Friendlies. I have thought it better to keep this portion of the narrative distinct from the rest, and to mould the present chapter more or less into the form of a diary.

The Sirdar's fleet at the end of the campaign consisted of the following gunboats:—*Sultan*, *Sheikh*, *Melik*, *Fatteh*, *Nasr*, *Hafir*, *Tamai*, *Metemmeh*, and *Abu Klea*. In addition to these were the old unarmed *El Tahra* and, up to 25th August, the gunboat *Zaphir*.

The navigation of the Nile was full of difficulty. The river charts were bad or non-existent, and no *reis*, or native captain, could really be trusted to keep his boat in the deep channels with any certainty. Still, it must be remembered that the bed of the Nile is continually changing its position, and what are deep holes one year may be turned by next year's flood into shallow pools. On the whole, it is astonishing that the river service was not frequently overtaken by disaster. The engines on a boat like the *Tamai* were always on the verge of dissolution, the current was terrific, and all the vessels—gunboats, barges, and *ghyassas*—were loaded down to the water's edge. The barges, on which the troops were packed together with barely room to turn themselves, were especially liable to accident, as they were exceedingly top-heavy and loosely constructed. I remember seeing a gunboat gently collide with one of these barges as it lay, fortunately without any crew, off the bank at Wad Hamed. The whole structure collapsed at once; the top platform fell off, and in less than two minutes the remains of the barge and all its cargo that would float were drifting rapidly down the Nile.

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One gunboat alone, the *Zaphir*, was overtaken by serious disaster. It happened as follows: On 23rd August the *Zaphir* left the Atbara at 4 p.m. The officers on board consisted of General Rundle, Prince Christian Victor, Lieutenant Micklem, R.E., Major Dodd, R.A.M.C., and, in command of the vessel, Commander Keppel, R.N. In the *ghyassas*, which were lashed to the gunboat, were packed "details" of various native battalions. All went well for two nights, although on the 23rd the *Zaphir* tied up to the bank in the midst of a violent storm of wind which suddenly swept over the river from the desert. At 4.45 p.m. on the 25th of August the officers were sitting on the upper deck taking tea, when Mr. Poole, the engineer, suddenly asked Commander Keppel to come below at once. Prince Christian meanwhile walked forward, and noticed that the ship lay very low in the water, so much so, in fact, that the rapid current was washing over the bows. As he walked back to General Rundle, Commander Keppel rushed up from the lower deck and informed the assembled officers that water had found its way into the hold, and the gunboat might go down any moment; meanwhile, he had ordered the engineer to make for the shore at full speed. On the receipt of this startling information the officers walked to the side of the vessel, and as they did so, the *Zaphir*, which was floundering in a clumsy fashion towards the bank, suddenly gave a heavy lurch to starboard, and seemed on the point of "turning turtle." A general exodus of natives followed; servants, sailors, and "Gypsy" soldiers sprang out of the nooks and crannies in which they hide themselves on board, and, leaping into the stream, swam easily to the shore. At the same instant General Rundle, Major Dodd, and Lieutenant Micklem jumped from the deck on to the *ghyassas* at the side. The *Zaphir*, however, righted herself again, but as the fires had been put out by the inrush of water, she drifted slightly and began to settle down. An attempt to get a rope from the ship to the shore failed. Prince Christian then jumped upon a *ghyassa*, and lastly, just as the gunboat sank within thirty yards of the bank, Commander Keppel followed his example. Most fortunately, someone had the presence of mind to cut the *ghyassas* adrift, otherwise they would certainly have been dragged down with the vessel as she foundered. On the return journey from Omdurman I noticed that part of the funnel was still out of the water, and a twelve-pounder gun projected from the stern battery a couple of feet above the stream. The whole party bivouacked on shore that night in rather a destitute condition. Nobody seemed to know how the leak was caused, but from the time the inrush of water was noticed, at 5.40, only eleven minutes elapsed before the vessel sank. A few stores had been saved, and off these the shipwrecked officers made a meal. Everyone by good luck had managed to land in his helmet, but otherwise the clothing of the party was rather nondescript. Prince Christian, for example, had nothing left except a pair of trousers and a canvas shirt. Next morning the natives dived about the wreck and fished out some odds and ends of clothing and baggage. At midday on the 26th, Major Drage, D.S.O., happened to pass up the river in the *El Tahra*, and conveyed the *Zaphir's* crew to Rojan Island, where Commander Keppel transferred his flag to the *Sultan*, accompanied by Prince Christian and Major Dodd.

On the day before the loss of the *Zaphir*, the "Irregulars" or "Friendlies" had assembled at Wad Hamed. This motley corps was composed of detachments from the following tribes:—Gaalin, Ababdeh, Shukriyeh, Batahin, Bishariyeh, Mersalamieh, Gimiab, and a few Hassaniyeh. All these tribes have for thirteen years been bitterly hostile to the English and Egyptians, but, thanks to the impolitic conduct of the Khalifa and the cruel devastation practised by his generals, many of his adherents amongst these Arab tribes have been alienated from the Mahdi's successor, and now look forward to an era of peace and security under a settled government. By far the most useful and important section of these Friendlies was furnished by the Gaalin, a brave and warlike tribe, who fought gallantly against the British at Abu Klea, Abu Kru, and Gubat in January 1885. In July 1897 Khalifa's army under the brutal Mahmoud—who was captured at the Atbara, and is now imprisoned at Wady Halfa—suddenly, on their march northwards, attacked the Gaalin, and butchered a large number of them at Metemmeh. Ever since this treacherous massacre a deadly feud had existed between this tribe and the Khalifa's government.

As a fighting force the Irregulars, numbering about two thousand five hundred, presented a rather quaint appearance. They were armed with every imaginable weapon. Some had rifles, others were equipped with old flint and steel muskets, elephant guns, ancient muzzle-loading pistols, spears, swords, and daggers. Their methods of locomotion were almost as varied as their accoutrements. Some were mounted on horses, some marched on foot, others ambled along on camels, mules, and donkeys. About twelve hundred Remingtons were supplied at Wad Hamed for distribution amongst the tribes in proportion to their numbers, and it was a proud day for many of these picturesque ruffians when they secured one of these rifles. The possession of guns always seems to exercise a peculiar fascination over semi-barbarous peoples. A friend and myself once bestowed three ancient Snider carbines, rubbed bright with Monkey Brand Soap, upon a small Arabian potentate, who was delighted with the present and had the rifles carried after him by three almost naked courtiers wherever he went. We took good care not to give the monarch any cartridges, but his attendants did not seem to mind the absence of ammunition. What they liked was to swagger about with the Sniders, and use them as a sort of glorified walking-stick with the muzzle stuck into the ground.

For the command of this extraordinary army the Sirdar had selected Major Stuart-Wortley, whose military ability and almost unique experience of Sudan campaigns marked him out as the proper man for the work of impressing some order and discipline upon the rough and turbulent material of the Friendly Contingents. Lieutenant Wood also accompanied the force as staff officer.

The Gaalin and the other Friendlies crossed over from Wad Hamed, and were ordered to proceed along the river parallel to the advance of the Anglo-Egyptian forces on the opposite bank. The various tribal contingents marched separately under their own sheikhs, and presented

a most picturesque appearance across the river as their white-clad columns moved in and out of the green bushes. They first came into touch with the enemy on 29th August, when the village of Gaali was found to be occupied by a small detachment of Jehadieh infantry and Dervish cavalry. These were speedily routed by the Friendlies, who attacked the small force before them in fine style, and captured ten prisoners.

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On 31st August three gunboats—the *Sultan*, *Melik*, and *Fatteh*—were ordered to advance up the river from Seg-et-taib and shell the advance post held by the Dervishes on the Kerreri ridge. Before midday the gunboats took up a position opposite Kerreri village, and proceeded to enfilade the Dervish camp on the hill. Some splendid practice was made, and great confusion was produced by the twelve-pounder shells as they burst in rapid succession amongst the enemy, who could be seen rushing about, collecting their property and striking their tents. The camp was soon rendered untenable by our fire, and as the Dervishes fled over the plain towards Omdurman, they were followed by shells from the gunboats, which knocked over about a dozen cavalry.

On 1st September some excellent work was done by an effective co-operation between the gunboats and the Friendlies. At 5.30 a.m. the *Sultan*, *Sheikh*, *Melik*, *Fatteh*, and *Nasr* steamed up the right bank of the river and met Major Stuart-Wortley. It was arranged that the gunboats should steam on ahead and shell the villages and forts from the river, while the Friendlies advanced along the bank. At 9.30 the vessels engaged and utterly destroyed a fort to the south of Halfayah. The villages of Hejra el Sharg and Halfayah were next shelled, and as a body of Dervish cavalry emerged into the open ground, some forty or fifty of them were knocked over by shrapnel.

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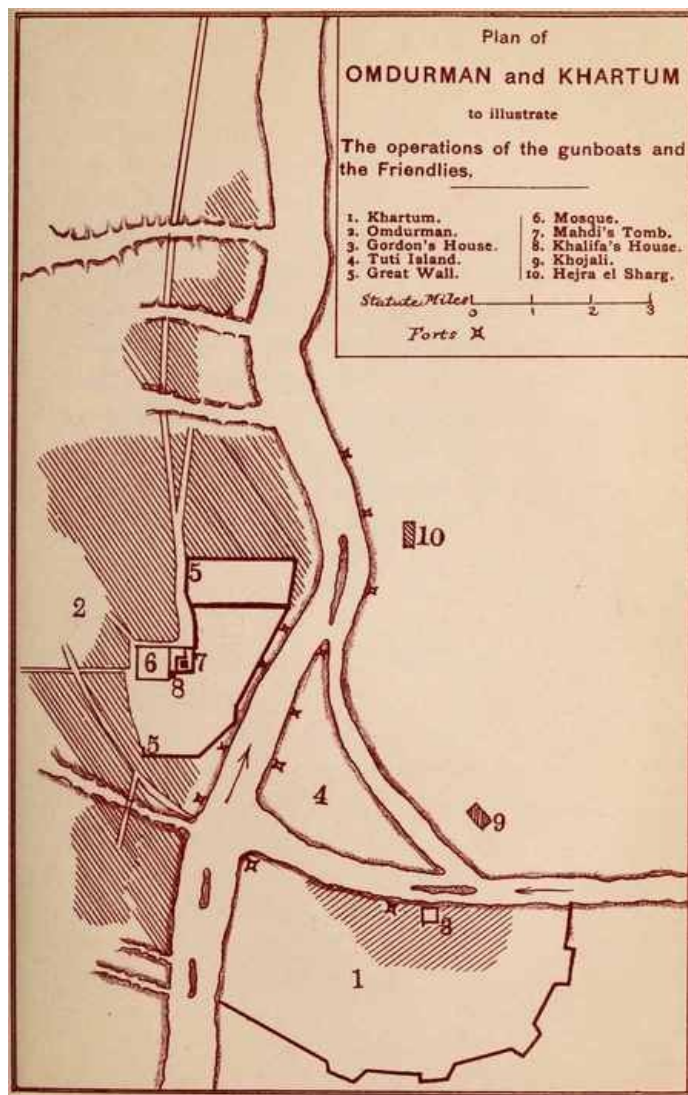
On land, meanwhile, the Irregulars had not been idle. Notwithstanding the shells of the gunboats, several of the villages south of Halfayah were found to be held in considerable force by the enemy. Major Stuart-Wortley drew up his men for the attack, but an unexpected hitch occurred, as the Mersalamieh and Gimiab contingents posted in front did not seem at all disposed to advance against the Dervishes, who were waiting for them behind the shelter of numerous mud-houses. Instead of rushing to the attack, they suddenly halted and danced a "fantasia" instead! Major Stuart-Wortley did not waste time over these faint-hearted warriors, but brought up his trusty Gaalin, who, supported by the other tribes, gallantly attacked house after house, and routed the enemy, killing a large number, including Isa Zachnieh, a cousin of the Khalifa, and losing themselves over sixty killed and wounded.

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The Gaalin made very little use of their rifles in the desperate fighting which practically cleared the right bank of the Dervishes. They loaded their guns and fired them into the air, calling upon Allah to direct the course of the bullets! Then throwing their Remingtons on one side, they gripped their broad-bladed spears, and used them so effectively that after the fight the Dervish casualties stood at three hundred and fifty killed, wounded none! At one moment Major Stuart-Wortley and Lieutenant Wood were in great danger. A troop of Baggara horsemen suddenly charged down upon the spot where they were standing, and the Ababdeh Arabs who were with the two officers, instead of waiting for the cavalry, simply turned tail and fled. Immediately after this fighting round Halfayah, two hundred and fifty Shukriyeh Friendlies were dispatched up the Blue Nile in pursuit of the Dervishes who had fled.

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By 11.30 on the 1st, the fighting on the right bank was to all intents and purposes over. Five hundred Gaalin and one hundred and seventy-five British infantry, made up of details from the Guards, Rifle Brigade, Highlanders, etc., were embarked on the five gunboats. The original plan had been to land Stuart-Wortley's levies on Tuti Island, but this was abandoned owing to the close proximity of the Omdurman forts—a fact not disclosed on the Intelligence maps—and the presence on the island of a large force of Dervishes.



R. V. Darbishire 1898.

{Click on map for larger image.}

Plan of
 OMDURMAN and KHARTUM
 to illustrate

The operations of the gunboats and the Friendlies.

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Khartum. | 6. Mosque. |
| 2. Omdurman. | 7. Mahdi's Tomb. |
| 3. Gordon's House. | 8. Khalifa's House. |
| 4. Tuti Island. | 9. Khojali. |
| 5. Great Wall. | 10. Hejra el Sharg. |

Meanwhile Major Elmslie's battery of howitzers had taken up a position on the bank opposite the centre of Omdurman, and at 1.30 opened fire on the Mahdi's tomb, at a range of three thousand one hundred and fifty yards. The two first shells missed their mark, but played havoc with the neighbouring buildings; the third wrecked the apex of the dome, and carried away the gilded ornaments which surmounted it. Later on three other shells crashed into the structure, tearing enormous holes in the stonework, and utterly destroying the whole of the interior. Subsequently the howitzers abandoned their artillery practice on tombs and their violation of the dead, and engaged in the more satisfactory demolition of the Omdurman ramparts. Vast breaches were torn in the big wall which ran along the river, and many of the principal buildings were utterly destroyed. [215]

At 2 p.m. the gunboats, with the *Sultan* leading, advanced farther up the stream in order to shell the forts of Omdurman. As they steamed slowly up past the city, the boats were met by a heavy shell fire, and occasional volleys from Dervish riflemen. The enemy's shells burst all round the boats, but they only succeeded in scoring two hits the whole day, one of which splintered some woodwork on a barge, while the other struck an iron mantlet at an angle and glanced harmlessly off into the water. At such short range the Dervish gunners ought most certainly to have made better practice, but the fact is, that the aim of our quick-firing guns was so marvellously accurate that it was almost impossible for the enemy to work their artillery. Thanks very largely to the skill of two Royal Marine sergeants, our fire silenced one battery after another. In some cases actually two shells out of three penetrated the embrasures of the forts, dismounting the guns inside, and doing terrible execution amongst the Dervish gunners. [216]

While the twelve-pounder guns were demolishing the forts, the Maxims were turned with deadly effect on the Dervishes who were running about the banks. As two more forts in Khartum

—one at the juncture of the Blue and White Nile, the other close to Gordon's palace—continued to fire upon us, the gunboats steamed past the ruined city, and speedily converted these last defences of the enemy into mere heaps of rubbish. At 5 p.m. the Friendlies were disembarked on the right bank, where they remained with the howitzer battery and the British detachment under Captain Ferguson of the Northumberland Fusiliers. The five gunboats then returned and took up a position off El Genuaia opposite to the zeriba.

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During the battle on the morning of 2nd September, the gunboats were posted at both ends of the zeriba, and made themselves extremely useful. As was mentioned above, the fire of these boats lying off Kerreri village practically saved the Camel Corps from annihilation. Throughout the rest of the fight, too, a galling shell fire was kept up on the Dervish forces advancing from the north-west and, more especially, from the south, over the sandy ridge between Surgham and the Nile.

Meanwhile the howitzer battery had again opened fire at daybreak, and continued its work of destruction amongst the buildings of Omdurman. The effect of the Lyddite shells was so terrible that the Khalifa seems to have abandoned his plan of falling back behind the walls of his capital. This was a most fortunate thing, so far as we were concerned, for if, after the fearful slaughter of his troops in the first half of the engagement, the Khalifa had retreated with ten or fifteen thousand men inside the tortuous streets and crowded houses of Omdurman, we should have had the utmost difficulty in driving the enemy out, and could not, in all probability, have occupied Omdurman on the evening of the 2nd. House-to-house fighting is always a costly and dangerous business, and had it taken place, the prophetic estimate popularly attributed to the Sirdar of "one thousand casualties before Khartum is ours," might well have been realised in fact. As it was, the Dervishes prepared to take their chance in the open desert, rather than await our onset under a continual fire of fifty-pounder shells which burst amid sheets of flame and clouds of dust, and sent huge fragments for hundreds of yards, wrecking every obstacle in their path.

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When the battle was over, the gunboats steamed up side by side with the general advance, and were met at Omdurman by a hot rifle fire from Dervishes concealed in the houses along the margin of the river. The streets leading to the southern exit of the town were by this time crowded with a mass of fugitives. In addition to mounted Baggaras and Dervish infantry, a mob of inhabitants—men, women, and children, dragging after them camels, horses, and donkeys laden with goods and chattels—all this confused stream of human beings and animals was pressing madly forward in panic-stricken flight. Orders were given to fire upon the fugitives, and as the artillerymen on the gunboats, from their raised position, could see well over the walls, a deadly fire was opened upon the crowded thoroughfares. One street especially, which led down to the river, was swept by a frightful hail of Maxim bullets, which mowed the poor wretches down in scores.

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After taking part in the battle and the subsequent destruction of fugitives, the gunboats proceeded, on the night of the 2nd, about one hundred miles farther up the river, and returned to Omdurman on 5th September with the report that they had seen no more Dervishes.

During the fighting off Omdurman on the 1st, two of the Khalifa's gunboats were destroyed. There was a pathetic interest attached to old vessels like the *Bordein* and *Ismailia*, as they had formed a part of Gordon's little fleet in the old days of thirteen years ago! The *Bordein* had been despatched northwards by Gordon, but, like the *Abbas*, had been wrecked. She struck on a rock in the Shabluka Cataract, on 30th January 1885, and foundered, but was subsequently raised by the Dervishes. When our gunners came within sight of the vessel, voices were raised to save the old boat for Gordon's sake. "Don't let us fire on the poor old *Bordein*!" But there is little room for sentiment or loving-kindness amid the exigencies of warfare, and under our fire the *Bordein* was headed for the shore, and sank as she reached it.

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A still worse fate overtook the *Ismailia*. In some way or other she fouled one of the mines laid down by the Khalifa's engineers in midstream; the mine exploded, and the *Ismailia*, literally hoist by its own petard, was blown out of the water. Two other mines had also been laid in the channel, near the right bank opposite Omdurman. The ropes connecting these with the shore were afterwards found inside the ruined forts, but all our attempts to explode them were futile. The Dervish steamer which was subsequently captured by the Sirdar on his way to Fashoda was, I believe, the solitary survivor of Gordon's ill-starred flotilla. The *Talawahiyah* had been sunk off Rojan Island, on 29th January 1885, and was never recovered. The *Abbas*, which set out from Khartum with Colonel Stewart and Mr. Power on board,—the one last desperate attempt to reopen communications with the North,—was wrecked at Hebbeh, between Abu Hamed and Kirbekan, and now lies there, keel uppermost.

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CHAPTER VI

AFTER THE BATTLE

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On the morning of 3rd September our troops moved out of Omdurman and encamped on the banks of the river some two miles to the north. The moment I had finished breakfast I made for the Mahdi's tomb. The interior was an absolute wreck. Vast quantities of stones and mortar, torn away by the Lyddite shells, were heaped upon the floor, and of the superstructure over the Mahdi's grave only the wooden framework remained. Some pieces of tawdry drapery which had covered the tomb lay on the ground, and these I brought away. Outside the tomb, a

little to the right, I came across a truly awful spectacle. One of the terrible Lyddite shells had burst amongst some unfortunate Arabs near the Khalifa's palace. Eight men lay dead in a ghastly ring, some of them torn by horrid mutilations; but the curious point about some of the bodies was that they were not lying flat, but were sitting on the ground with fearfully contorted limbs and features. Could this be due to the deadly fumes of the picric acid contained in the Lyddite? The stonework of the tomb and the surrounding buildings was often stained yellow by this chemical. Outside in the open street fragments of Koran manuscripts were lying about in every direction.

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I then set out to find Cross and the other correspondents. It was said that they were with the Staff, in strange and unwonted proximity to the Sirdar's tent. However, as nobody seemed to know where the Staff was, I wandered about for hours seeking my colleagues in vain.

As I passed along the river a barge drew up alongside to land the bodies of the British soldiers who had been killed. From some misunderstanding a wounded man slid out of the boat amongst the corpses, and began to walk up the bank, but was promptly sent back with the reprimand—"D—n you, what do you mean by coming ashore with this lot? You aren't dead!" Even amid such gruesome surroundings it was quite funny to see the disappointed look of the man as he returned to the barge to take his place under a separate category.

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At last I came by accident upon Cross. The poor fellow was again in a state of prostration, and was lying under the blanket-tent of Captain Luther, R.A.M.C., in the camp of the Lancashire Fusiliers. The officers of this battalion had been most kind to Cross, and as the day was terribly hot he remained under the shelter of their tents until the evening, when he rejoined me in our own camp. He told me that on the previous night he had, like the rest of the correspondents, failed to get any food, and had slept on the sand without a blanket, though Steevens, with his usual kindness, had lent him an overcoat when the night air became chilly.

At length, after wandering up and down for miles in the blazing heat, I discovered the whereabouts of our camp out in the desert to the south-west of the town. All my colleagues were here except Villiers. Nobody seemed to know what had become of him, and as the hours passed and he failed to turn up we began to get alarmed. His servant had pitched Villiers' umbrella tent, and beside it stood the bicycle, which was disfigured by an honourable scar, for the top of the valve was gone, and Hassan declared that it had been carried away by a Dervish bullet. I mounted the famous machine, intending to go for a ride to the execution ground, where several fine gibbets were standing, but as the back wheel was "buckled" I soon dismounted—with the proud consciousness, however, of being the first cyclist in Omdurman!

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The streets of the town were perfectly loathsome. In every direction lay the decaying bodies of dead animals, and the stench was terrible. Moslems, from a curious intermixture of humanity and cruelty, never give a dying animal a *coup de grâce*, and they seldom take the trouble to bury the carcass. Moreover, in some parts of the town one could scarcely walk fifty yards without coming across the bodies of men, and occasionally, I am sorry to say, those of women and little children. At least five hundred dead people lay scattered about the streets, some destroyed by Lyddite shells, but the majority pierced with bullets. I saw some of these corpses lying in the shallow water near the bank of the river, and as it seemed to be nobody's business to bury them, it is not surprising that our Guardsmen and other soldiers contracted the germs of enteric fever at Omdurman!

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Inside the Khalifa's arsenal there were many curious things—spears, bows and arrows, coats of chain mail, machine guns, Krupps, various kinds of ammunition, and other warlike apparatus, ancient and modern. Three carriages of European make were also visible, which were said to have been used by the Khalifa on state occasions, though these vehicles could never have got beyond the main streets, for the simple reason that outside the town no roads exist.

Most of the Dervish ammunition used in the battle seems to have been of home manufacture. All the Martini cartridges I picked up amongst their dead were extremely well made of "solid drawn" brass, and stamped with a K and a Π. I imagine that these letters may stand for Khartum and Pentekachi, the unfortunate Greek who succeeded in manufacturing gunpowder for the Mahdi, and was finally blown to atoms by an explosion of the magazine. On a Martini rifle which I secured from the battlefield, the Enfield stamp is still visible. Some disgraceful facts were revealed at the time when Berber was occupied, and the public documents fell into our hands, for, in addition to various offers of assistance addressed to the Khalifa from people in high positions at Cairo, some invoices were discovered which showed clearly that a certain Manchester firm had supplied the Khalifa with lead for the manufacture of bullets! It is difficult to believe that an Englishman could sink so low as to supply his country's enemy with munitions of war for the sake of filthy lucre!

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A new bullet, by the way, was used in the recent campaign. Its title is sufficiently significant. It is called the "man-stopping bullet," and simply means that an ordinary .303 Lee-Metford bullet is scooped out at the end to the depth of about half an inch. When this missile strikes an object the hollow nose instantly expands like an umbrella, inflicting a tremendous shock, which was frequently not secured when the ordinary solid bullet, with its enormous velocity (two thousand feet a second at the muzzle), passed clean through an enemy's body, but failed to administer a sufficiently crushing blow. At Krugersdorp an ordinary Lee-Metford bullet was driven right through the brain of a Boer; and so far was the tiny puncture from being immediately fatal, that the Dutchman walked to church next Sunday—though it is true that on the Sunday following he went there again in a coffin. Of course this solid bullet, when it chanced to come in contact with a bone, served its purpose well, and shattered the bone to atoms. The first occasion, I believe, on which the Lee-Metford bullet was fired into a human body was at the well-known Featherstone

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riots; and I remember seeing a drawing made by a medical man at the time of the foot of one of the rioters, which had been struck. Not only was the lower part of the leg bone completely smashed, but almost every bone in the foot had been broken more or less by the terrific force of the bullet.

À propos of dum-dum bullets, man-stopping bullets, *et hoc genus omne*, a good deal of false sentiment has been evoked in England and France. The main object of a soldier in battle is to put his opponent out of action, and it is found by experience that the ordinary bullet does not adequately secure this result when employed against barbarous or semi-barbarous enemies. A civilised combatant, when he is struck by a bullet—even if the wound be a comparatively slight one, say through the shoulder—almost invariably sits down on the ground; but the nervous system of the savage is a far less delicate organism, and nothing short of a crushing blow will check his wild onset. Even in the Martini-Henry days scores of Dervishes rushed upon the British troops at Abu Klea and elsewhere, with the blood spurting from seven or eight bullet wounds, and then cut and thrust with deadly effect until loss of blood told, and they fell dead in or about the square. One of the two British officers who lost their lives at the Atbara fight was killed by a large elephant bullet, the hollow base of which had been filled with a fulminate. This was an *explosive* bullet, quite a distinct species from the missile described above. [229]

The fire from our zeriba, which mowed the Dervishes down in rows and heaps, must have been simply appalling. The ordinary metaphors of "rain" and "hail" are scarcely adequate to describe the awful effect of modern rifles and machine guns when their fire is steady and concentrated. It is rather a wall of lead than a rain, which, as it advances, sweeps everything instantly from its track. There must be a limit to human endurance, one would think, even in the excitement of battle, and the time may well come when human art will prove superior to human courage and discipline, and civilised troops will refuse to expose themselves to what may have become practically the certainty of death or wounds, or, at anyrate, of enormous risk. The educational and social forces at work in modern life certainly do not tend to foster the old-fashioned virtue of unquestioning obedience, or the consolations to be derived from religious faith. Yet it is precisely these two things which alone have often enabled a leader to count with confidence upon a response to his call when he summons his followers to almost certain destruction—the surrender of life and all that life holds dear. [230]

On 4th September, at 9.15 a.m., four gunboats conveyed the Sirdar and various detachments of troops, with most of the correspondents, across the Nile to Khartum. We moved alongside the quay in front of the ruins of Gordon's palace, and the troops formed a rough semicircle, with the Sirdar, his Staff, and the two foreign *Attachés* inside. Four chaplains took their stand with their faces to the river, ready to conduct a memorial service. At ten o'clock the Union Jack was run up from one of the flagstuffs which surmounted the ruined façade of the palace, and almost immediately afterwards the Crescent flag of Egypt was unfurled. The gunboat *Melik* fired twenty-one guns, but as no blank ammunition was forthcoming, twenty-one shells were sent screaming up the Nile—a most unique and realistic form of salute! After this hearty cheers were given for Her Gracious Majesty the Queen and His Highness the Khedive. Then came a brief and simple service to the memory of the brave man who, thirteen long years ago, had so often stood on the very terrace which lay in ruins before us, and, hoping against hope, looked northwards over the desert—but in vain—for any sign of help from England! The air of Gordon's favourite hymn was played, and as its cadence fell upon the ears, one's thoughts recalled the words of the exquisite verses— [231]

"I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless,
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.

.
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh abide with me!" [232]

How truly must the spirit of these lines have been felt by Gordon, that noble and sincere Christian, deserted by man, yet doubtless sustained by the abiding presence of his Master in life and death.

During our brief stay at Omdurman every variety of loot was hawked about the camp for sale. Huge shields of hippopotamus hide, spears, swords, old rifles, Mahdist coins, and other trophies of battle or pillage, found ready purchasers. A negro paid me a visit who was clad in chain mail, cut rather after the fashion of a dress coat. There was, indeed, quite a flavour of the Margate sands about the appearance of this Ethiopian, with his striped cotton trousers and his metallic coat, the tails of which, like those of Burnand's hero, "positively swept the ground." These suits of mail were beautifully made of steel rings, and could be purchased for about twenty-five shillings each; but they were very heavy and awkward things to carry about. Everybody brought back a Dervish sword or two, which were often very interesting. Some blades had the famous Ferrara stamp, others were marked by the mail-clad figure which is said to belong to the period of the Crusades, from which, at anyrate, the general pattern of Dervish swords—a straight blade with a plain cross hilt—seems to date. The pretty *gibbehs*, too, were brought home in large numbers; there were nearly eleven thousand of them available for selection on the sandy plain three miles away! The history of the Dervish *gibbeh* is rather a quaint one. The original garment was, of course, the plain white cotton coat of the Arab; but the Mahdi, who was somewhat ascetic—in theory, at anyrate, if not in practice—ordered his followers to sew black patches upon their nice white coats, as tokens of humility. But alas for human frailty, what was intended to curb the spiritual pride of the faithful became a direct incentive to the vainglorious adornment of their persons! The ladies of Omdurman were strongly opposed to the dowdiness of the black patches [233]

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upon their husbands and lovers, and, under the influence of the more æsthetic circles of Dervish society, the white *gibbehs* were gradually tricked out with gaudy squares of blue, red, and purple.

Many of the dead bodies in the field had rosaries round their necks, usually made of box or sandal wood. Nobody paid much attention to these ornaments, but from one point of view they are interesting. Was the use of a row of beads for religious purposes borrowed from the Christians by the Moslems, or *vice versâ*? Another curious relic was an insulator from a Dervish field telegraph, which had been worked between a point near Gebel Surgham and Omdurman during the battle. Many of the dead Emirs wore watches, one of which was marked "Dent, London."

Our soldiers seemed to thoroughly enjoy the rest at Omdurman. They had probably some very quaint ideas of our geographical surroundings and the reason for our presence in the Sudan. On 4th September some companies of Sudanese who had been sent up the river in pursuit of the Khalifa were seen returning in the distance with a long string of Dervish prisoners. There was great excitement amongst the British troops; whole battalions ran wildly over the sand expecting to catch a glimpse of the Dervish leader, and I heard one Tommy Atkins say to his comrade, "Urry up, Bill, come along; they've cotched the bloody Khee-dive!"

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In addition to Dervish prisoners who were captured by the active Sudanese, hundreds came in voluntarily and surrendered themselves. Many were wounded more or less seriously, but of the rest a large number were enrolled as soldiers of the Khedive! What amazing versatility! On one day the Dervish rushes boldly against our shells and bullets, and on the next he joins us as a comrade in arms! Some of the French papers declared ungenerously that the Sirdar had armed these Dervish allies in order to dispatch them against Major Marchand. Such an act would under the circumstances have been legitimate, and had these newly enrolled soldiers of the Khedive been given a free hand, "the evacuation of Fashoda" would have been ancient history by this time! But of course no such intention ever entered the Sirdar's head. The brave Marchand certainly deserved a better fate than to be wiped out by ex-Dervishes.

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The prisoners were released from their fetters on the night of the battle. Amongst them were a number of jet black Abyssinians, survivors of the sanguinary battle of Galabat. I saw Charles Neufeld, and he looked very little the worse for his stay at Omdurman. A great deal of English sympathy has been wasted on this person. The harrowing stories we have read in the papers of the poor captive languishing in hopeless captivity are sheer nonsense. On two separate occasions Neufeld had the chance of escape, for a clever and courageous Arab called Oman had been dispatched by the Intelligence Department to rescue the captive. Neufeld, however, refused to leave Omdurman unless he was accompanied by a black woman, with whom he lived. This was obviously out of the question. So Father Rossignoli was rescued instead, and brought safely to Assouan.

An infinitely more pathetic case was that of the two Austrian Sisters who had been compelled to marry Greeks. One of these, who was childless, returned to Cairo; but the other, who had borne her husband three children, elected—so I heard—to remain for good at Omdurman. The poor woman felt that she could never face her co-religionists at home after her vows of celibacy had been broken. I remember as I walked along the bazaar on the morning after the fight I noticed a European woman in Arab dress standing amongst a crowd of natives. She looked wistfully and sadly at the British as they passed, and I always regret that I did not speak to her.

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Slatin Pasha soon returned from his pursuit of the Khalifa. The Egyptian cavalry had followed the tracks of the fugitive for thirty miles up the river, but as the horses were dead beat and no forage could be landed from the gunboat accompanying the pursuit, owing to a long stretch of marshy ground, the squadrons were compelled to return without the Khalifa. I happened to be strolling past Slatin's tent at the time, and he called me in and told me how terribly disappointed he was at the failure of the pursuit. He was kept very busy all the time we were at Omdurman by continual visits from many old Dervish friends and acquaintances. One day when I was with him a handsome old Arab with a white beard came into the tent, and sinking down without a word, bent his head over Slatin's shoulder and wept. At length he found words to tell us that his only son had been killed in the fighting. "Oh, Hassan," said Slatin, and could get no further—his kind heart was too full of pity; and as he placed his hand on to his old friend's shoulder and tried to soothe his sorrow, I turned away, unable to bear the sight of the father's grief.

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As Cross grew no better, and there was little else to do in Omdurman, I asked Colonel Wingate to allow us a passage on the first gunboat leaving for the North. Accordingly, on the morning of the 6th, Cross, René Bull, and myself embarked on the *Metemmeh*, and steamed away down the river. Nobody was sorry to say good-bye to the repulsive streets of Omdurman.

Two barges packed with the rank and file of the Warwicks were lashed to either side of the *Metemmeh*, which carried on board Colonel Forbes and the officers of the battalion, together with Lieutenant Clerk of the 21st Lancers. We were all in excellent spirits, and fully expected to reach the Atbara in about thirty hours. As steam and current bore us rapidly past the battlefield in the twilight, the vultures circling over the distant plain and the broken zeriba by the river's bank were the only visible signs which remained to tell of our momentous victory.

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We were not destined to reach the Atbara in thirty hours! The sun had set, and the *reis* had been advised to tie up to the banks for the night; but the obstinate fellow denied the necessity of any stoppage for another hour or two, so we went tearing down the stream at a tremendous pace. Dinner was just over—a curious meal, supported almost entirely by voluntary contributions of tinned meats, rice, jams, etc.—when, without a moment's warning, a tremendous shock sent

everything and everybody sprawling over the deck. Loud cries of "We are going over" came from the river, and through the semi-darkness one could see that the troop barge had been wrenched from its lashings by the shock, and was heeling over in a terrible manner. Everybody on board the gunboat shouted "Sit down," "Keep still"; and it was very fine to see how the soldiers immediately obeyed their officers, though for the moment they fully expected to be capsized into the flooded stream. By good luck the detached barge righted itself and remained fixed in midstream, about thirty yards from the gunboat and the other barge.

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Nobody quite knew where we were or what had happened, but as it seemed certain that we were not likely to go much further that night, we all made preparations for going to sleep. The upper deck was quite a small affair, and the space at our disposal was curtailed by the presence of a large table and a number of camp chairs. Over these few square yards of deck we had to dispose the recumbent forms of some twenty-six human beings. The result was a sort of Chinese puzzle. I had always heard that Nature, when she had any close packing to do, employed the beautiful simplicity of the hexagon, and suggested a trial of this system; but the theory, owing, probably, to dissimilarities in our lengths and breadths, would not work at all. We lay in wild disorder, but so tightly wedged together that it was impossible to move about when one had finally secured one's berth in this casual ward! A friend's boots gently reposed upon my pillow all night, while my own feet were thrust against the ribs of a transverse form below.

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When the sun rose next morning we saw that the incompetent *reis* had run us right on to a sandy island which is submerged when the Nile is in full flood. The whole of that day was spent in endeavouring to drag the gunboat and the barges off the sandbank. The *Nasr*, under the command of Lieutenant Hon. H. L. A. Hood, happened to come along, and did her best to help us, but the only hawser available snapped like a thread from the strain put upon it, and the *Nasr* departed. The troops were then ordered to get into the shallows and try to push the barges off. What had been foreseen by several of us happened! The soldiers managed to shove one of the barges into deep water, and then several of them, unable to check their movements, found themselves out of their depths in the strong current. One poor fellow was drowned under our eyes, and two others were just rescued in a state of utter exhaustion by natives with life-belts. The whole thing was a complete muddle, and we all felt angry at the incompetence and obstinacy which had brought about the needless loss of life.

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Another night was spent on this depressing sandbank, and at dinner we became aware that something dreadful had attached itself to the vessel. We looked over the side, and from the space between the gunboat and the left-hand barge emerged the body of an Egyptian cavalry man. The corpse bobbed up and down on the swirling waters in a horribly grotesque fashion. Its spurs had caught the woodwork of the barge for a few moments and delayed its rapid passage down the Nile. I remember we remarked, "Oh, it's only a dead Gypsy," and then went back to our dinner.

Next day we made a desperate effort to get afloat, and finally succeeded. Instead, however, of being the first to reach Atbara Camp, and to secure the earliest train service to Wady Halfa, we had had the mortification of seeing the Seaforth Highlanders pass us the day before.

At Nasri Island I landed to get the tent and other baggage which we had left behind us on leaving Wad Hamed, but was informed that the five *ghyassas* containing officers' luggage—and our own unfortunate belongings amongst it—had capsized two days before. My precious tent, two Gladstone bags, and a case of stores lay fathoms deep in the Nile, and all the consolation I had was to draw up a pathetic claim for compensation from the impecunious Egyptian War Office.

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By the time we arrived at the Atbara, Cross's illness had increased, and his temperature had gone up to 100°. The army surgeon on board the *Metemmeh* advised him to stay in hospital at the Atbara for a few days before proceeding to Cairo, and the officer in charge of the hospital gave the same advice. I had already heard from another medical man that he did not detect any traces of typhoid symptoms in Cross; so one thought that he was merely suffering from the common feverishness which comes from a "touch of the sun," and passes off after a few days. I remained at the Atbara for a night, and then went on with the Warwicks to Wady Halfa, leaving a servant with Cross, who had arranged to follow by the next train in two days' time.

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The remainder of our homeward journey was comparatively uneventful. The bad luck, however, which seemed to follow the Warwicks delayed us for twenty-four hours on our journey to Wady Halfa, for the wretched engines which dragged our cattle pens (first class) and baggage trucks (third class) repeatedly broke down from overheating and lack of grease.

During a short wait at Shellal my servant called my attention to a woman on the bank, who was apparently in great distress, and told me that she was weeping because she had been divorced by her husband. Such cases are often very cruel, for Mohammedan law allows a husband to write his wife a bill of divorcement without pretext of any sort. At the same time, he is bound to maintain her for three months, and her dowry is restored. Many good Moslems deplore the obsolete character of their divorce laws, which have outlived their usefulness. Still, it must not be forgotten that in one respect Moslem wives have for centuries enjoyed a privilege which was not possessed by Englishwomen until a recent date, namely, the absolute control of their own money and property. Female education, too, which is increasing rapidly in the towns, and later on will spread to the country districts, will doubtless serve to improve the status and welfare of native women. Monogamy is already almost universal with the fellahin, and is steadily gaining ground amongst the educated classes. A good deal of false sentiment is often expended by good people in England over the lot of their Mohammedan sisters, but they may rest assured that women all the world over have the amelioration of their condition very largely in their own hands. Further, a very slight acquaintance at first hand with Oriental countries will show one that Moslem home

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life is full of happiness, and that nowhere in the world is greater devotion lavished by parents upon their children.

At Luxor the blessings of civilisation met us again, in the shape of a nice breakfast at the hotel and a big bath. Most of us had slept more or less in our ordinary clothes for several weeks, and everyone, from the Colonel downwards, wallowed joyfully in an unlimited supply of warm water. As we sat at breakfast, someone told me that a camel had died just near the hotel from the bite of an asp. The snake, a little creature some eight inches long, was lying under the sand, according to its wont, with its head just above the ground. The poor camel trod on it, and was bitten in the foot. It speedily died, swollen to nearly double its ordinary size, and the natives lit a fire over its carcass. The Arabs dread the little asp terribly, and its bite is nearly always fatal. A special antitoxin has been prepared by the *Institut Pasteur* from the serum of horses bitten by poisonous snakes. A subcutaneous injection of ten cubic centimetres of this fluid is alleged to be a sure specific against the bite of any known species of venomous land-snake. But this preparation is practically useless in the Sudan, as it loses its efficacy if much exposed to light or to a high degree of heat. Nor has it, so far as I know, ever yet been tried in the case of any human being bitten by a deadly snake. I took some with me last year when exploring in Sokotra with the late Mr. Theodore Bent, but despite the glowing accounts of the efficacy of *dowa Inglizi* and offers of large bakshish, the faith of the natives was never robust enough to allow them to voluntarily submit to a snake bite for experimental purposes.

On the final stage of our railway journey from Luxor to Cairo, Lieutenant Clerk and I shared a carriage between us, and were extremely comfortable. Ali redoubled his efforts in the cooking line, and for our final meal in the train, to which we invited a military chaplain, the Rev. E. H. Pulling, we used up all our remaining tins, and dined off *pâté de foie gras*, a curried blend of prawns and chicken, and stewed apricots—a good instance of what a clever Arab servant can turn out with a spirit-lamp and a couple of tin saucepans in a crowded third-class carriage.

After waiting four days in Cairo, and receiving a telegram from the Atbara which gave me no cause for the least apprehension about Cross's condition, I left Alexandria on the 17th of September for Marseilles. On board I renewed my acquaintance with Major Stuart-Wortley, and amongst the other passengers were Prince Francis of Teck and Prince Christian Victor. Prince Francis had been very ill throughout the latter part of the campaign, but during the fight had risen from his bed, in spite of medical advice, and worked a Maxim gun with good effect.

We left Marseilles by the morning *rapide* on the 21st, and as we were crossing the Channel on the 22nd, Prince Christian handed me the *Morning Post*, and pointed to a paragraph which announced the death of Cross from enteric fever on the 20th.

The news took away for the time being all the joy of one's return. Twice I have been fated to lose my travelling companion by death when the work was finished which we set ourselves to do. Cross was an old Hertford man, who had rowed five in the 'Varsity boat of 1889, and had afterwards been appointed to an assistant mastership at Bedford. He had always been very loyal to his old college, and our successes on the river were largely due to his "coaching." We shall all—seniors and juniors alike—miss him greatly. In spite of constant attacks of illness from exposure to the sun, each of which left him weaker than before, Cross had refused to return from the front, and, as I said above, had actually dragged himself out of hospital in order to be present at the battle. But while his natural vivacity and vigour were to some extent impaired by physical debility, he was always unselfish in the "give and take" of camp life, and bore uncomplainingly the many discomforts which are necessarily experienced by the sick during the advance of an army. Still side by side with his courageous endurance of physical suffering, and the coolness which he showed when under fire for the first time, the central thought which occupied Cross's mind was that of returning to his beloved work at Bedford.

"His was a soul whose master-bias leans
To homefelt pleasures and to gentle scenes—
More brave for this, that he had much to love!"

The Sudan campaign, which, thanks to the Sirdar's wonderful genius for organisation, has been so thoroughly successful, cannot be regarded as in any sense final. Unless our recovery of the Nile banks as far as Omdurman is followed by the possession of the Bahr-el-Ghazal, we may almost be said to have laboured in vain. If we stayed our hand at Khartum, or even Fashoda, the same remark which Lord Salisbury passed on the French possessions in the Sahara, that "the soil was rather light," would apply equally well to our arid conquests in the Sudan. The so-called French occupation of the Bahr-el-Ghazal must not be allowed to count for anything. Their utter failure as colonisers in French Congo, Senegal, and even Algeria, and the selfish tariffs with which they seek to exclude foreign industry from the regions which they reserve for Frenchmen who never come—these things deprive them of any moral claim to further annexations of vast territories in the interior of Africa. Moreover, the Bahr-el-Ghazal was indubitably a province of Egypt before the Mahdi's revolt, and must be restored to the Khedive intact. Under British control this fertile province will be able to develop its splendid resources. Coffee grows wild, timber abounds, and thousands of square miles are ready for the cultivation of corn, two crops of which can be grown in a single year. In ancient days Egypt was the granary of Europe. Rome and Byzantium were dependent almost entirely upon the Alexandrian corn-ships. In fact, one of the most serious accusations which could be brought against a citizen was that he was carrying on intrigues for the stoppage of these vessels. This actual charge was levied against the great Athanasius himself, and the philosopher Sopater, who was accused of delaying the corn supply by magical rites, was promptly decapitated by Constantine "because he was too clever" (ὁ ὑπερβολὴν σοφίᾳς). There is no reason why the Bahr-el-Ghazal, when connected by river and rail

with the sea, should not take its place as one of the great corn-growing countries of the world. Again, an exploration of the Nuba region to the north of the province may lead to the discovery of mineral wealth. At anyrate, during an earlier campaign, a Dervish caravan was captured by the forces under Sir Francis Grenfell, and amongst the merchandise was found a large quantity of gold which had been dug out of the Nuba Hills.

But even when the possession and organisation of the Bahr-el-Ghazal has become an accomplished fact, we find ourselves barred by a belt of territory some two hundred miles across, from Uganda to the north of Lake Tanganyika. Despite the vital importance of securing a road between Uganda and Nyassaland, Lord Salisbury allowed Germany to make the western frontier of its East African possessions conterminous with that of the Congo State, and thus completely bar our advance from north or south. But in this case what was lost by the weakness of one Government may be recovered by the firmness of another; and if this result be happily secured, the territories regained to civilisation by Lord Kitchener's genius will be united to our vast possessions in the South, and Mr. Cecil Rhodes' magnificent idea of a British Empire in Africa, stretching from Cairo to the Cape, will at length be realised in actual fact.

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A BRIEF NOTE ON A FEW ENTOMOLOGICAL SPECIMENS BROUGHT FROM
THE SUDAN,

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22ND SEPTEMBER 1898.

I have handed over my small collection of insects to Professor Poulton, F.R.S., of Oxford, who has had them set, and has kindly supplied me with materials for the following list, which may possibly be of some interest to any reader interested in Entomology.

BUTTERFLIES.

Three specimens of *Limnas Chrysippus*, a Danaine butterfly, found over all the warmer parts of the Old World. Of these three butterflies, one is the brown type form (Wad Hamed); one the Alcippus or Alcippoides variety, with white hind wings (Wad Hamed); one an Alcippoides, with much less white (near Kerreri).

Three specimens of *Belenois mesentina*. Two males (Zeidab and Wad Hamed) are typical. The female (near Pyramids of Meroe) is darker than usual. The specimen in the Hope Collection nearest to it comes from Somaliland.

One *Teracolus*. Very like *T. auxo*. The specimen is a male, small and white, with orange tip to the fore wing (near Pyramids of Meroe).

Three very small species of *Lycænidæ*. Two males and two females (two, Kerreri; two, Rojan Island).

MOTHS.

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Noctuæ.—One *Grammodes stolidus* (Battlefield of Omdurman), exactly like the Hope Specimens from India.

One dubious specimen, probably a species of *Pandesema* (on gunboat near Shabluka).

Bombycidæ.—One small female moth (Luxor), somewhat resembling *Trichiura cratægi*.

Tineina.—Three small pale specimens (two, on gunboats near Metemmeh; one, Wad Hamed).

NEUROPTERA.

Trichoptera.—A few species, very pale in colour (Luxor and Abu Ahmed).

COLEOPTERA.

One Cicindela. A very small and pale species, not represented in the Hope Collection (Wad Hamed).

One Buprestid, namely, *Sternocera irregularis*. A large brown species, with irregular tufts of straw-coloured hair on elytra and thorax (Um Teref).

One Longicorn. A large black shining *Prionus*, not represented in Hope Collection.

Heteromera. Two species, as yet unrepresented with Hope Collection.

Two Lamellicorns, apparently *melolontha*, or very similar.

HEMIPTERA.

One immature form of a large species, pale in colour.

HOMOPTERA.

Fulgoridæ. One small pale species.

ORTHOPTERA.

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Gryllidæ. Two pale species.

Acridiidæ. Two pale species.

HYMENOPTERA.

One winged ant—dark, with sand-coloured patches.

ARACHNIDA—ARANEINA.

Six species of spiders. One of these is a beautiful mimic of an ant.

The above list is necessarily imperfect. It had to be compiled immediately for the publication of this volume, and there has been no time to properly "work out" many of the species. It is interesting to note the pale tint of

so many of these Sudanese insects—a manifest adaptation to environment, for purposes of concealment amid the yellow sand of the desert.

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[Pg 21](#), 'bran new suits' replaced by 'brand new suits'.

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[Pg 76](#), 'bran new kit' replaced by 'brand new kit'.

[Pg 122](#), 'attained a great' replaced by 'attained a great'.

[Pg 147](#), 'artilery crossed' replaced by 'artillery crossed'.

[Pg 228](#), 'Àpropos' replaced by 'A propos'.

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[Pg 3C](#), 'art any painter' replaced by 'art of any painter'.

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