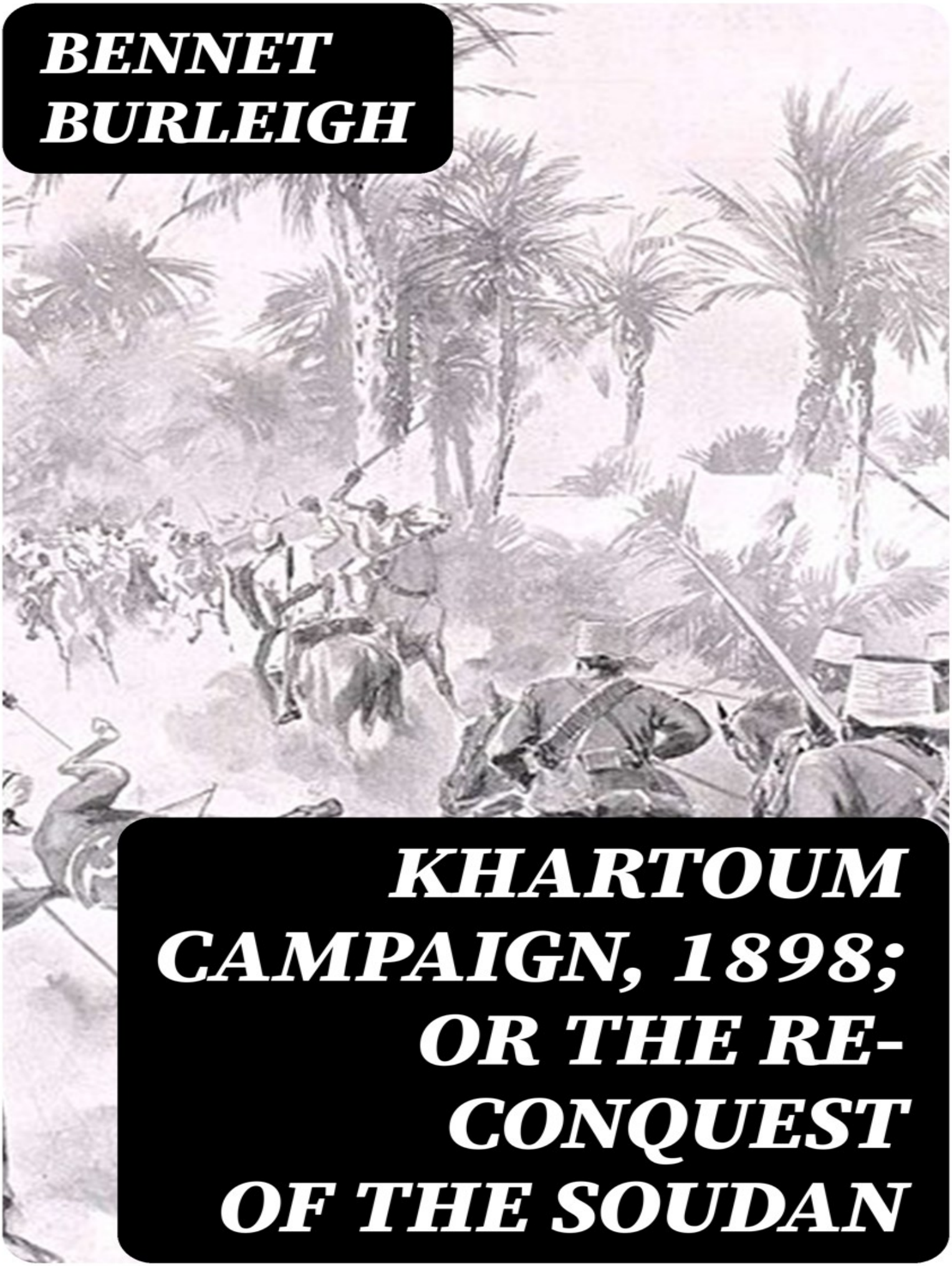

BENNET BURLEIGH

KHARTOUM CAMPAIGN, 1898; OR THE RE-CONQUEST OF THE SOUDAN

Bennet Burleigh

Khartoum Campaign, 1898; or the Re-Conquest of the Soudan

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Brigadier-General H. A. Macdonald, C.B., D.S.O.

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Bennet Burleigh.

By the overthrow of Mahdism, the great region of Central Africa has been opened to civilisation. From the date of the splendid victory of Omdurman, 2nd September 1898, may be reckoned the creation of a vast Soudan empire. At so early a stage, it is idle to speculate whether the country will be held as a British possession, or as a province of Egypt. "The land of the blacks," and their truculent Arab despoilers, has the intrinsic qualities that secure distinction. Given peace, it may be expected that the mixed negroid races of the Upper Nile will prove themselves as orderly and industrious as they are conspicuously brave. Whoever rules them wisely, will have the control of the best native tribes of

the Dark Continent, the raw material of a mighty state. This, too, is foreshadowed; the dominant power in Central Northern Africa, if no farther afield, will have its capital in Khartoum, "Ethiopia will soon stretch out her hands unto God."

The recent events which have so altered the condition of affairs upon the Upper Nile, deserve more than ephemeral record. A campaign so full of inspiriting incident, a victory which has brought presage of a great and prosperous Soudan, merits re-telling. Through half a score of battles or more, from the beginning to the death of Mahdism, I have followed British and Egyptian troops into action against the dervishes. I knew General Hicks, and had the luck to miss accompanying his ill-fated expedition. In the present volume, "Khartoum Campaign," the narrative of the reconquest is completed, the history being carried to the occupation of Fashoda and Sobat, including the withdrawal of Major Marchand's French mission. I have made use of my telegrams and letters to the *Daily Telegraph*, London, and the full notes I made from day to day during the campaign. Besides, I have quoted in certain cases from official sources, and given extracts from verbal and written communications made to me by distinguished officers engaged in the operations.

For use of maps, sketches, and photographs, I am indebted to the proprietors of the *Daily Telegraph*, to Mr Ross of *Black and White*, Surgeon-General William Taylor, Colonel Frank Rhodes, Lieutenant E. D. Loch, Grenadier Guards, Mr Francis Gregson, Mr Munro of Dingwall, N.B., and others.

BENNET BURLEIGH.
London, *December 1898*.

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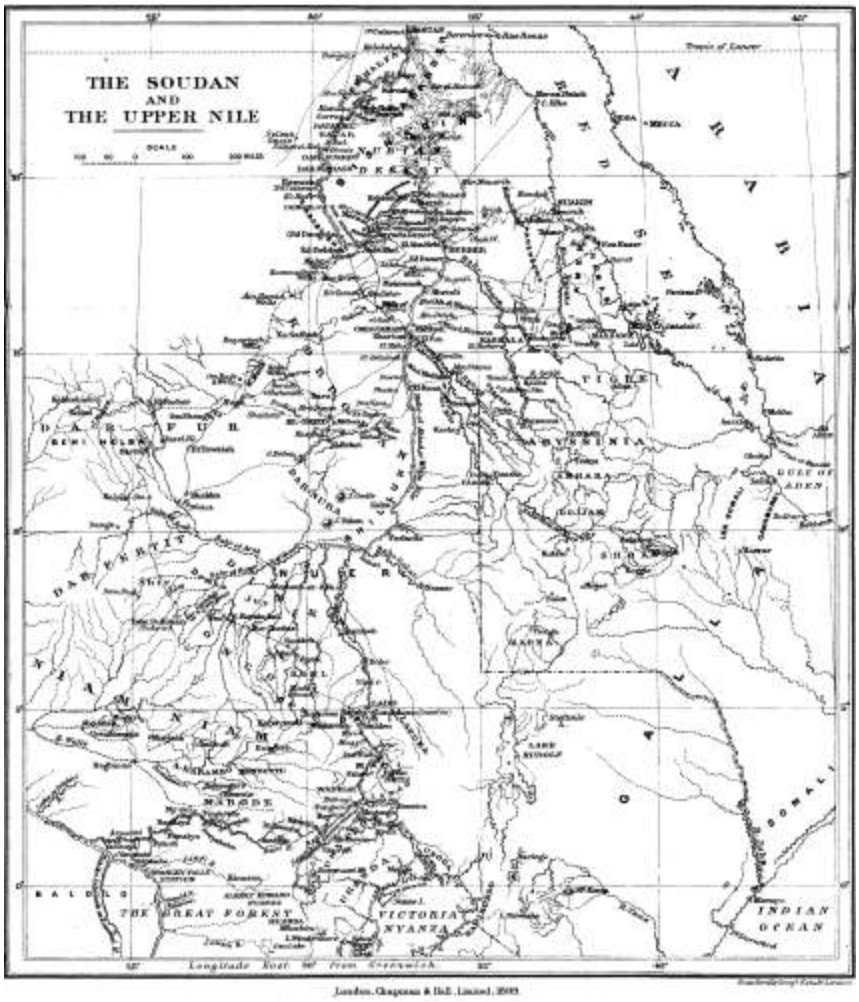

THE SOUDAN AND THE UPPER NILE.

CHAPTER I.

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Introductory.—Review of Field.

It is an easier and kindlier duty to set forth facts than to proclaim opinions and pronounce judgments. Before Tel-el-Kebir was fought in September 1882 and the Egyptian army beaten and disbanded, the insurrection headed by the Mahdi or False Prophet had begun. In the disrupted condition of affairs which succeeded Arabi Pasha's defeat by British arms the dervish movement made further rapid

progress. To Sir Evelyn Wood, V.C., at the close of 1882, was assigned the task, as Sirdar or Commander-in-Chief of the Khedivial troops, of forming a real native army. It was that distinguished soldier, aided by an exceptionally able staff, who first took in hand the re-organisation and proper training of the fellaheen recruits. By dint of drill, discipline and stiffening with British commissioned and non-commissioned officers he soon made passable soldiers of the "Gippies." The new army was at first restricted to eight battalions of Egyptian infantry, one regiment of cavalry, and four batteries of artillery. Although there were Soudanese amongst Arabi's troops, they were mostly gunners. It was not until May 1884 that the first "black" regiment was raised. Yet it had been notorious that the Soudanese were the only Khedivial soldiers who made anything of a stubborn stand against us in the 1882 campaign. The blacks who came down with the Salahieh garrison on the 9th of August 1882, and joined in the surprise attack upon General Graham's brigade then in camp at Kassassin, were not easily driven off. The large body of Egyptian infantry and cavalry, although supported by several Krupp batteries which, issuing from the Tel-el-Kebir lines, assailed us in front, were readily checked and pushed back. It was our right rear that the "blacks" and others forming the Salahieh column menaced, and it required some tough fighting before Sir Baker-Russell with his cavalry and horse artillery was able to drive them off. In truth, the "blacks" held on long after the main body of Arabi's force had abandoned their intention of driving the British into the Suez Canal or the sea.

The first Soudanese battalion was recruited and mustered-in at Suakim. It got the next numeral in regimental order, and so became known as the "Ninth." Many of the blacks who enlisted in the Ninth—Dinkas, Shilluks, Gallas, and what not—were deserters from the Mahdi's banner, or dervishes who had been taken prisoners at El Teb and Tamai. It has never yet been deemed advisable to enrol any of the Arab tribesmen in the Khedivial regular army. Hadendowa, Kababish, Jaalin, Baggara, and many other clans, lack no physical qualifications for a military career. Their desperate courage in support of a cause they have at heart is an inspiration of self-immolation. But they are as uncertain and difficult to regulate by ordinary methods of discipline as the American Red Indian, and so are only fitted for irregular service. In March 1885 General Sir Francis Grenfell succeeded to the Sirdarship. With tact and energy he carried still further forward the excellent work of his predecessor. Four additional Soudanese battalions were created during his term, and the army was strengthened and better equipped for its duties in many other respects. Sir Francis had the satisfaction of leading his untried soldiers against the dervishes, and winning brilliant victories and, in at least one instance, over superior numbers. He it was, who, at Toski in August 1889, routed an invading army of dervishes, whereat was killed their famous leader Wad en Nejumi. That battle put an end to the dream of the Mahdists to overrun and conquer Egypt and the world. The Khalifa thereafter found his safest policy, unless attacked, was to let the regular Egyptian forces severely alone.

It was shown that, when well handled, the fellaheen and the blacks could defeat the dervishes. Lord Kitchener of Khartoum became Sirdar in the spring of 1892. His career in the land of the Nile may be briefly summarised: first as a Lieutenant, then successively as Captain, Major, Colonel and General, that Royal Engineer Officer from 1882 has been actively employed either in Egypt proper or the Soudan. He has, during that interval, been entrusted with many perilous and delicate missions and independent commands. Whatever was given him to do was carried through with zeal and resolution. In his time also little by little the Khedivial forces have been increased. A sixth Soudanese battalion was raised in 1896, and in that and the following year four additional fellaheen battalions were added to the army. When the Khartoum campaign began, the total muster-roll of the regular troops was eighteen battalions of infantry, ten squadrons of cavalry, a camel corps of eight companies, five batteries of artillery, together with the customary quota of engineers, medical staff, transport, and other departmental troops. There was a railway construction battalion numbering at least 2000 men, but they were non-combatants. As the whole armed strength of Egypt was, for the occasion, practically called into the field, the peace of the Delta had to be secured by other means. A small armed body called the Coast Guard and the ordinary police, apart from the meagre British garrison, were responsible for public tranquillity. The re-organisation and increase of the Coast Guard, which was decided on, into an army of 8000 men, was a brilliant idea, and one of the recent master-strokes of Lord Cromer and the Sirdar. It is ostensibly a quasi-civil

force, and it was formed and equipped without the worry of international queries and interference. The Coast Guard is mainly composed of picked men, including old soldiers and reservists. Their duties carry them into the interior as well as along the sea-coast, for, partly on account of the salt tax, there are revenue defaulters along the borders of the Nile as well as by the Mediterranean and Red Sea. They are dressed like soldiers and are armed with Remingtons.

Mohammed Achmed, who called himself the Mahdi, or the last of the prophets, whose mission was to convert the world to Islamism, was a native of Dongola. He was born near El Ordeh, or New Dongola, in 1848, and was the son of a carpenter. In person, he was above the medium height, robust, and with a rather handsome Arab cast of features. During 1884 I saw his brother and two of his nephews in a village south of El Ordeh. All of them were tall stalwart men, light of complexion for Dongolese, courteous and hospitable to strangers. Mohammed Achmed, from his youth, evinced a taste for religious studies coupled with the ascetic extravagances of a too emotional nature. From Khartoum to Fashoda he acquired a great reputation for sanctity. Religious devotees gathered around him and followed him to his retreat upon the island of Abba. There he, in May 1881, first announced his claims as the true Mahdi. His barefaced assertions of special divine command and guidance found credulous believers. With the wisdom of the serpent he had added to his influence and security as a prophet by marrying daughters of Baggara sheiks, *i.e.* chiefs. Mohammed Achmed was a vigorous and captivating preacher, learned in all the literature of the Koran, ever

ready with apt and telling quotations. His early teaching was decidedly socialistic, including a command for the overthrow of the then existing civil state. His principles have been summed up officially as "an insistence upon universal law and religion—his own—with community of goods, and death to all who refused adherence to his tenets." Unfortunately, "opportunity" played into his hands. The misrule of the Pashas, the burden of over-taxation coupled with the legal suppression of the slave trade, and the demoralisation of the Egyptian forces enabled Mohammed Achmed to rebel successfully. Troops sent against him were defeated and annihilated. Towns capitulated to his arms and within a period of two years the inhabitants of the Soudan were hailing him as the true Mahdi, their invincible deliverer. With the capture of Khartoum, on the morning of the 26th of January 1885, and the abandonment of the Soudan and its population—the Egyptian frontier being fixed by British Government order at Wady Halfa—the over-lordship of that immense region from the Second Cataract to the Equatorial Lakes was yielded to the so-called Mahdi Mohammed Achmed did not long enjoy his conquests. Success killed him as it has done many a lesser man. For a season he gave himself up to a life of indolence and the grossest lust. On the 22nd of June 1885, less than six months after Gordon's head had been struck off and brought to him, the Mahdi suddenly died. It is said by some that his death was due to smallpox, by others that one of his women captives poisoned him in revenge for the murder of her relatives. His demise was kept secret for a time by his successor Abdullah, the chief Khalifa, and the other dervish leaders. It

was given out that the Mahdi's spirit had been called to Heaven for a space but would soon return to lead his hosts to fresh triumphs and further fat spoils. A tomb was erected over the place where his body lay, and the legend of his mission was taken over by Abdullah, who also in due season had visions and communicated reputed divine ordinances to the dervishes. Abdullah, who was ignorant, illiterate and cruel, far beyond his dead master—"the cruellest man on earth," Slatin Pasha dubbed him,—by his exactions and treacheries soon overreached himself. Events were hastening to the overthrow of Mahdism. Sheiks and tribes fell away from the Khalifa and returned to the fold of orthodox Mohammedanism. By 1889, as an aggressive force seeking to enlarge its boundaries, Mahdism was spent. Thereafter, stage by stage, its power dwindled, although Omdurman, the dervish capital, remained the headquarters of the strongest native military power that North Africa has ever known.

Lord Cromer has been blamed for many things he did, and much that he left undone, during the earlier days of Mahdism. A fuller knowledge of the whole circumstances justifies my saying that, as custodian of *British interests*, he acted throughout with singular prudence and great forbearance. It was not with his wish or approval that several of the untoward expeditions against the dervishes were undertaken. It is permissible to regret that, from a variety of causes, the British Government engaged in more than one ill-considered and irresolute campaign for the destruction of Mahdism. Much treasure and countless thousands of lives were foolishly squandered and all without

the least compensating advantage. The barren results of the Soudan campaigns directed from the War Office in Pall Mall form too painful a subject for discussion. It is only fair to say, that the military officials' hands may have been much hampered from Downing Street.

Headquarters, Wady Halfa.

As I have stated elsewhere, it was not until 1896 that the serious reconquest of the Soudan was begun. Before then there had been, as Mr Gladstone after all appropriately termed them, "military operations," but not a state of war. He might have called them "blood-spilling enterprises," for they were only that and no more. The re-occupation of the province of Dongola in 1896, freed the Nile up to Merawi, and gave the disaffected Kababish, Jaalin and riverain tribesmen a chance of reverting to their allegiance to the Khedive. It also enabled the Sirdar to pass his gunboats farther up the river. Another gain issuing from the forward movement was that his right was secured from serious attack. Then followed the building of the wonderful Wady Halfa direct desert railway towards Abu Hamid, Berber, and Dakhala at the mouth of the Atbara. It was the 1897

campaign which put all these places into the Sirdar's hands. During that year's high Nile, he passed his gunboats over the long stretch of cataracts betwixt Merawi and Abu Hamid, and ran them up the river where they co-operated with the land forces, regulars and friendlies. Nay more, the steamers were set to do a double duty: convey stores to the advanced posts and assail and harass the dervishes, pushing as far south as Shendy and Shabluka, the Sixth Cataract. By prodigies of labour and enterprise the railroad was speedily constructed to Abu Hamid, then on to Berber, and thence to Dakhala. The whole situation became greatly simplified the moment the line reached Abu Hamid. From the first, the question of dealing a death-blow to Mahdism with British-led troops had turned upon the solution of the transport problem. The through rail and river connection once established from Cairo *viâ* Wady Halfa to Abu Hamid put an end forever to all serious difficulty of providing adequate supplies for the troops. From Abu Hamid the Nile is navigable far south for many months during the year. Then again, the occupation of Abu Hamid unlocked the Korosko desert caravan route and drew more wary and recanting dervishes away from the Khalifa. Following the capture of Abu Hamid, Berber was promptly taken for Egypt by the friendlies, and the Suakim-Berber trade route, which had been closed for many years, was re-opened.

The end was slowly drawing near, for the Sirdar was closing the lines and mustering his forces for a final blow. Railroad construction went forward apace. At the rate of from one to two miles a day track was laid so as to get the line up to Dakhala. Meanwhile, workshops were being

erected at suitable points, and three additional screw gunboats, built in England, were re-fitted for launching. The flotilla was becoming formidable; it comprised 13 vessels, stern-wheelers and screw-steamers, all armed with cannon and machine guns and protected by bullet-proof shields.

Believing there was a chance to wreck the railroad and capture outposts and stores, Mahmoud, a nephew and favourite general of the Khalifa's, led a powerful dervish army from Shendy north to raid the country to and beyond Berber. In spite of the gunboats, after disposing of the recalcitrant Jaalins, Mahmoud crossed the Nile at Metemmeh to the opposite bank. Accompanied by the veteran rebel, Osman Digna, he quitted Aliab, marching to the north-east with 10,000 infantry, riflemen and spearmen, ten small rifled brass guns and 4000 cavalry. It was his intention to cross the Atbara about 30 miles up from the Nile, and fall upon the flank and rear of the Sirdar's detached and outlying troops, killing them in detail. He reckoned too confidently and without full knowledge. Using the steamers and the railways the Sirdar quickly concentrated his whole force, bringing men rapidly up from Wady Halfa and the province of Dongola. The entrenched Egyptian camp at the junction of the Atbara with the Nile was strengthened, and General Gatacre's brigade of British troops was moved on to Kunur, where Macdonald's and Maxwell's brigades also repaired. Mahmoud had ultimately to be attacked in his own chosen fortified camp. His army was destroyed and he himself was taken prisoner. So closed the unexpected Atbara campaign in March last. Thereafter, as the Khalifa showed no intention of inviting fresh disaster

by sending down another army to attack, the Sirdar despatched his troops into summer rest-camps. Dry and shady spots were selected by the banks of the Nile between Berber and Dakhala. One or another of the numberless deserted mud villages was usually chosen for headquarters and offices. With these for a nucleus, the battalion or brigade encampment was pitched in front and the quarters were fenced about with cut mimosa thorn-bush, forming a zereba. All along the Upper Nile, wherever there is a strip of cultivable land, or where water can be easily lifted from the river or wells for irrigation, there the natives had villages of mud and straw huts. In many places, for miles following miles, these hamlets fringe the river's banks, sheltered amidst groves of mimosa and palms. The fiendish cruelty and wanton destructiveness of the dervishes, who, not satiated with slaughtering the villagers—men, women and children—further glutted their fury by firing the homesteads and cutting down the date palms, resulted in depopulating the country. Ignorant and fanatical in their religious frenzy to convert mankind to their new-found creed, the Mahdists held that the surest way to rid the world forthwith of all unbelievers lay in making earth too intolerable to be lived in.

These native dwellings, when cleaned, were not uncomfortable abodes. As the flat roofs were thickly covered with mats and grass whilst, except the doorway, the openings in the mud-walls were small, they were even in the glare of noontide heat, pleasantly cool and shady. The troops found that straw huts or tukals afforded far better protection than the tents from the sun and from dust-

storms. So it came about that, copying the example set by the fellaheen and black soldiers, "Tommy Atkins" also built himself shelters, and "lean-to's" of reeds, palm leaves and straw. Drills and field exercises were relaxed, and the troops had time to rig up alfresco stages and theatres and to enjoy variety entertainments provided by comrades with talent for minstrelsy and the histrionic arts. Meanwhile the preparations for the final campaign against Mahdism were not slackened. Vast quantities of supplies and material of war were stored at Dakhala. Outposts were pushed forward and Shendy was occupied, whilst Metemmeh was held by friendly Jaalin tribesmen, who had suffered much at the Khalifa's hands. The Bayuda desert route also had been cleared of dervishes by these and by neighbouring tribesmen. On the direct track from Korti to Omdurman, outlying wells and oases were in possession of the Kababish and their allies who had broken away from Abdullah's tyranny. The whirligig of time had transformed the equality preachings, and "unity in the faith" of Mahdism into the unbridled supremacy of the Baggara and especially the Taaisha branch of that sept over all the people of the Soudan. They alone were licensed to rob, ravish and murder with impunity. It was the natural sequence of lawless society. Once the foe they leagued to plunder and kill had been disposed of, they turned and rent each other. Abdullah being a Taaisha, he, as a prop to his own pretensions, set them in authority over all the races of the Soudan. One by one, however, Arab clansmen and blacks repented and deserted Mahdism.

The time was ripe for ending the mad mutiny against government and civilisation. July is the period of high Nile in the upper reaches, and the Sirdar planned that his army should be ready to move forward by then. At that date all was in readiness. The Egyptian army which was to take the field consisted of one division of four brigades, each of four battalions with artillery, cavalry and camelry. Besides these there were two brigades of British infantry—Gatacre's division—a regiment of British cavalry, the 21st Lancers, and two and a half English batteries, with many Maxims. It was known that Abdullah had called into Omdurman all his best men and meant giving battle.

CHAPTER II.

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Days of Waiting and Preparation.

"Everything comes to him who waits," but the weariness of it is sometimes terrible. Oftentimes waiting is vain, without accompaniment of hard work. The Sirdar made deliberate choice to carve out a career in Egypt. He did so in the dark days when the outlook was the reverse of promising, in nearly every aspect, to a man of action. Abdication of our task of reconstruction was in the air, the withdrawal of the British army of occupation a much-talked-of calamity. Through every phase of the situation, Kitchener stuck to his guns, keeping to himself his plans for the reconquest of the Soudan. He wrought and watched while he waited, selecting and surrounding himself with able officers, and exacting from each diligence and obedience in the discharge of their duties. The Dongola campaign and the

fortuitous one of the Atbara against Mahmoud greatly strengthened his position. There might be further delay, but his triumphal entry into Omdurman and the downfall of the Khalifa were certain. The Sirdar had but to ask, to receive all the material and men he wished for. He adhered to his early decision to employ only as many British troops as were actually necessary to stiffen the Khedivial army, and no more.

After the battle and victory of the Atbara in the spring, the British troops, or Gatacre's brigade, marched back from Omdabiya by easy stages to the Nile. The wounded and sick were conveyed into the base hospital at Dakhala, whence they were afterwards sent down to Ginenetta or, as it then was, Rail-head. From that point they were, as each case required, forwarded by train and steamboat to Wady Halfa and Cairo. It was at Darmali, 12 miles or more north of Dakhala, that the British soldiers went into summer-quarters. On the 14th of April the brigade mustered 3818 strong, made up as follows:—833 Camerons, 826 Seaforths, 969 Lincolns, and 665 Warwicks. Two companies of Warwicks had been left in the Dongola province when the advance was made. Besides the muster of battalions enumerated, the brigade included a Maxim battery, detachments of the Army Service Corps, and other details. The "Tommies" settled down in camp, living under peace conditions, for with the rout of Mahmoud's men, the nearest dervish force worth considering was as far off as Shabluka Cataract. Everybody was bidden to make himself as snug as possible. Outlying houses and walls were thrown down to secure a free circulation of air. As for sunlight, that was shut

out wherever practicable. The first home drafts to make up for losses arrived at Darmali on the 23rd of April. About 130 men then joined. It was thought desirable to maintain the British battalions at their full strength, and some of them mustered nearly one thousand strong. As the percentage of sick was continuous, and the rate increased as the campaign progressed, the actual roll of men "fit for duty" grew less as we neared Omdurman. Of course, "youths," and all the "weedy ones," were in the first instance rejected by the army doctors, and were never permitted to go to the front. Men over 25 years of age were preferred, and it so happened that both the Grenadier Guards and the Northumberland Fusiliers had a high average of relatively old soldiers, and consequently few sick. From the end of April until the end of May, dull hot days in the Soudan, leave was granted to officers to run down to Alexandria and have a "blow" at San Stefano, by the sea-side. There were quite a number of deaths in the brigade shortly after the men got into camp, the customary reaction having set in on account of the exposure and strain precedent to the victory of the Atbara. To reduce the numbers quartered at Darmali, the Lincolns and Warwicks, on the 19th of April, were marched a mile farther north along the Nile, to Es Selim, where they formed a separate encampment, the Camerons and Seaforths remaining at the first-named place. The average daily number of sick in the brigade at that period was 100 to 150. On one occasion there were 190 men reported unfit for duty. Most of the cases were not of a serious nature, and the patients speedily recovered and returned to their places in the ranks. There was no lack of stores and even dainties at

the camps, for supplies were carried up by caravan, escorted by Jaalin friendlies, from Berber and elsewhere. Much of the sickness in the army was probably due to the men recklessly drinking unboiled and unfiltered Nile water. At that season the river had sunk into its narrowest bed, and there were backwashes and sluggish channels full of light-green tinted water. More filters were procured, and extra care was taken with all the water used for domestic purposes.

In May there were route marches twice a week, the brigade going off at 5.30 a.m. and returning about 7.30 a.m., all in the cool of the morning or such bearable temperature as there was in the 24 hours' daily round in that month. During these exercises the troops had plenty of firing practice, being taught to blaze away at bushes, and occasionally at targets representing dervishes. In that way the remainder of the million of tip-filed Lee-Metford bullets were disposed of, for it had been arranged that there was to be a new cartridge case for the Omdurman campaign. The latest pattern "man-stopper" was a bullet fashioned with a hollow or crater at the point, the nickel casing being perforated.

So the days droned past for the British soldiers, with little to do beyond essaying the impossible of trying to keep cool. It was often otherwise with the Egyptians, for they had to assist in getting the railroad through to Dakhala from Ginenetta, in forwarding boats and stores, and later on in establishing wood stations and cutting fuel for the steamers. The first of the tropical summer rain showers fell at Darmali on the 27th of May. On the 18th of June Major-General

Gatacre went off on a shooting excursion up the Atbara, taking with him a party of ten officers and a few orderlies. They found relatively little big game but plenty of gazelle and birds. The bodies of the slain in Mahmoud's zereba at Omdabiya still lay where they fell, unburied, but dried up and mummified by the sun. Natives had stripped the place and carried off everything left behind by us. A number of dervishes were seen lurking about, part of the defeated army of the enemy, who were afraid to return to Omdurman, anticipating that the Khalifa would have them killed. Indeed, it appeared that numbers of the runaways had settled down at New Hilgi, and were attempting to cultivate. As for the four or five thousand dervish cavalry that Mahmoud had with him, they also never returned to Omdurman. Quite probably they made their way back to their original homes in small bands, rightly believing that Mahdism was doomed. Assured of pardon and good treatment at our hands, fourteen of the Mahdists and a number of women came in with General Gatacre's people. No attempt was made by the dervishes in the neighbourhood to "snipe" the party. They returned to Darmali on the 27th of June. With the sun gone north came the rising of the Nile and fresh breezes. The gunboats kept diligently patrolling the river, watching for any signs of movement on the part of the Khalifa and his forces. The enemy were reported to be gathering in large numbers at Omdurman for the coming conflict. As Shendy was held by a small force of Egyptians, and Metemmeh nominally by the Jaalin for us, frequent visits were made to those posts. Later on, other shooting parties went up to Omdabiya and found that there was an increase in the

numbers of natives about, and that flocks and herds were to be seen grazing in the vicinity. The tribesmen showed that they had abandoned the Khalifa by tearing the dervish patches off their clothing. All being quiet, and peace assured in the Dongola province, the two detached companies of the Warwickshire left Korti and joined their comrades in Es Selim camp.

July was a very busy month. The river flotilla and transport service had all to be thoroughly organised for the impending advance. Gunboats received the final touches and completed their armament. The steamers, barges and giassas, native sailing craft, underwent thorough repair. More and still more munitions of war and provisions were sent forward and stored at Dakhala. That post grew into a formidable camp. The three new twin-screw gunboats built on the Thames, besides other ship-work reconstruction, were put together near Abadia, a village above the Fifth Cataract and north of Berber. The railroad had been hastily laid and completed to Abadia after the battle of Atbara. Thither the sections of the barges and steamers needed for the campaign had been sent by rail from Wady Halfa. Before that date, engineering and other workshops had been erected at Abadia, which, because of its favourable position, was chosen for a permanent camp and industrial centre. Base-hospitals, too, were built there, in order that the wounded and sick might travel as far as possible by water. Astonishing as had been the rapidity with which the Wady Halfa Abu Hamid portion of the desert railroad was laid, smarter work still was done carrying the line through to the Atbara. The utmost energy was put forth, after the defeat of

Mahmoud, by the Director of Railways, Major Girouard, R.E., to get the track completed to Dakhala, the junction of the Atbara with the Nile. Not only the railroad battalion, which was nearly 3000 strong, but every available Khedivial soldier, laboured in some way or other at the task. They put their hearts and thews to the toil, for it was recognised that its completion not only solved the transport problem, but was a swift and sure means of return to Egypt. The railroad battalion worked wonders in grading and laying. Fellaheen and negro, they showed a vim and intelligence in track-making that Europeans could not surpass. Native lads, some in their early teens, clothed with little beyond a sense of their own importance and "army ammunition boots," many sizes too big for their feet, adjusted the fish-plates and put on the screw nuts. Then, for those who bore the heavy burden of rails and sleepers and carried material for the road bed, there were licensed fools, mummers, and droll mimics, who by their antics revived the lagging spirits of the gangs. There is an unsuspected capacity for mimicry in what are called savage men. I have seen Red Indians give excellent pantomimic entertainments, and aborigines in other lands exhibit high mumming talent. In the railroad battalion there was an eccentric negro who was a very king of jesters. From the Sirdar and the Khalifa downwards—for he was an ex-dervish and had played pranks in Omdurman—none escaped a parodying portrayal of their mannerisms. He imitated the tones of their voice and twisted and contorted his face and body to resemble the originals. Nothing was sacred from that mimic any more than from a sapper. He showed us Osman Digna's little ways, and gave

ghastly imitations of trials, mutilations and executions by hanging in the Mahdist camps. And these things were for relaxation, though maybe they served as a reminder of the dervishes' brutal rule. There were vexations and jokes of another sort for Major Girouard and those held tightly responsible for the rapid construction and regular running of the material trains, as indeed all trains were. When the line had been laid beyond Abu Dis, for a time known as Rail-head, the camp and quarters were moved on to the next station. Abu Dis sank in dignity and population until only a corporal and two men were left to guard the place and work the sidings. The desert railway being a single track, frequent sidings are indispensable for the better running of trains. All the control for working the system was vested in the Wady Halfa officials. One night there came to them over the wires an alarmist message to send no more trains to Abu Dis. It was the corporal who urgently rang up his chiefs. What could it mean? Had they deserted, or, more likely, were the dervishes raiding the district? A demand was made from Wady Halfa for the corporal to explain what had happened. His answer was naive, if not satisfactory: "The wild beasts have come down from the hills, and we really cannot accept any trains from any direction." "What do you mean?" was again queried back. So the corporal and his two men responded: "Sir, there are wild beasts all around the hut and tent; what can we do? We dare not stir out." "Light fires, you magnoons," (fools), was the final rejoinder, and the train service went forward as usual. It appeared that the hyenas and wolves, wont to snap up a living around the men's camp, bereft of their pickings were in a state of howling

starvation, and had turned up and made an appeal, by no means mute, to the station guard, which the latter failed to understand or appreciate. In a remarkably short space of time the hyenas and pariah dogs had adopted the habit of scavengering around all the camps and snifting along the track, after the trains, for stray scraps.

Darmali (British Brigade Summer Quarters).

I returned to Cairo early in July, where, having paid into the Financial Military Secretary's hands the £50 security required of war correspondents, intended to cover cost of railway fares south of Wady Halfa, and for any forage drawn from the stores, I received the official permit to proceed to the front. All the restrictions as to the number of correspondents allowed up, which were imposed during the Atbara campaign, were singularly enough removed, and the "very open door" policy substituted. In consequence, there was a large number, over sixteen in all, of so-called representatives of the press at the front. As an old correspondent aptly observed, some of them represented anything but journals or journalism, the name of a newspaper being used merely as a cover for notoriety and

medal hunting. Having secured my warrant to join the Sirdar's army, I started from Cairo for Assouan and Wady Halfa. The headquarters at that date were still in Wady Halfa. On the 21st of July the first detachments of the reinforcements that were to make up the British force to a division, which Major-General Gatacre was to command, left Cairo for the south. Thereafter, nearly day by day up to the 9th of August inclusive, troops were sent forward. These consisted of artillery, cavalry, the 21st Lancers, baggage animals, Royal Engineers, Army Service Corps, Medical Corps, and the four battalions of infantry which were to form the second British brigade. The brigade in question comprised 1st Battalion of the Grenadier Guards, the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, and the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade, together with a battery of Maxims manned by a detachment of the Royal Irish Fusiliers. Brigadier-General the Honourable N. G. Lyttelton, C.B., commanded the second brigade, whilst Major-General Gatacre's former command, the 1st British Brigade, was taken over by Brigadier-General J. Wauchope. The first brigade was made up of the Lincolns, Warwicks, Seaforths, and Camerons, with six Maxims. To prepare for eventualities, and clench the special training he had bestowed upon his men, Major-General Gatacre issued a printed slip of notes, or hints, to his men. I give the salient points of that production:—

"1. As the strength of a European force lies in the occupation of and in movement over open ground, which gives it advantage of fire, so the strength of a dervish force lies in fighting in depressions of the ground, or in a jungle