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***"TOLD  
THROUGH  
THE  
AGES"***

# **THE STORY OF LORD KITCHENER**



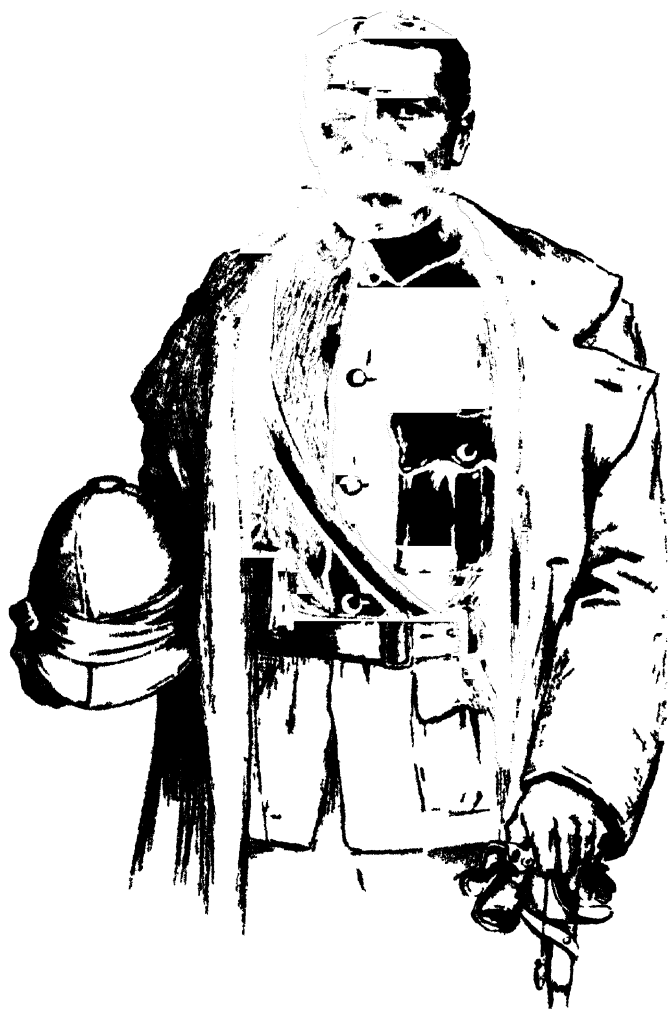
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# THE STORY OF LORD KITCHENER

BY

HAROLD F. B. WHEELER

F. R. Hist. S.

AUTHOR OF

"THE STORY OF NAPOLEON" "THE STORY OF WELLINGTON"

"THE STORY OF NELSON" "THE STORY OF LORD ROBERTS"

"THE FRENCH REVOLUTION" ETC. ETC.

*"The Field-Marshal with the eyes of steel disappears like a figure in story. His coffin is a warship and the sea which is Britain's heritage is his tomb.*

*"The fogs of the North amid which he sank throw over his death a cloud of apotheosis.*

*"One imagines his tall figure rising above the waves to watch the battles of the armies which he created to crush Germany."—Echo de Paris.*

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TO  
JAMES EDWARD WHEELER  
A TRIBUTE OF AFFECTION  
*Vivere est militare*

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# The Story of Lord Kitchener

## CHAPTER I

### A Field-Marshal in Knickerbockers

*"Discipline, discipline, discipline—that is the one thing needful."*

KITCHENER

**T**HE 24th of June is a red-letter day to the sons and daughters of Great Britain, though often enough it passes unsung and unnoticed. It is big with birthdays and events of vast significance. On that date in 1497 John Cabot, peering through the mist from the deck of the stout little *Matthew*, sighted a bleak and uninviting coast which outlined either Newfoundland or Labrador; a little over a century and a half later John Churchill, the future hero of Blenheim and Duke of Marlborough, entered the world exactly seven years after John Hampden, who "durst of his own charge support the liberty and property of the kingdom," had left it; and in 1850 Horatio Herbert Kitchener was born. Appropriately enough, it is the festival of St John the Baptist, whose symbol is a sword. It is good that from many a church-tower the flag of Old England flutters to the breeze on the 24th of June in commemoration of the Forerunner; it is perhaps characteristic that we should forget the others, though they have played their individual parts in

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furthering the progress of the ages. Modern thought knows no profane history.

Many thousands of miles separate Ireland from India, yet three of the most eminent British soldiers of modern times are intimately associated with the little island that constitutes the western frontier of the United Kingdom and the vast Empire within an Empire which occupies 1,767,000 square miles of Southern Asia. These personal links are Wellington, Roberts, and Kitchener. Like Wellington, Earl Kitchener was by birth an Irishman, while Roberts came of Irish stock and was born in Cawnpore. Arthur Wellesley won his spurs in the Land of the Great Mogul during the campaign of Seringapatam and the war with the Mahrattas. Roberts served there for forty years, eventually becoming Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, a post subsequently filled by the last of the trio.

East Anglia has also a claim on Kitchener. Although he was born at Gunsborough House, near Listowel, his family had been connected with Suffolk since the days of William III, one Thomas Kitchener having settled in that county so far back as 1698. You can still decipher the inscription on his weather-beaten tombstone in the quiet churchyard of Lakenheath: "Here lyeth ye body of Thomas Kitchener, who came from Binsted, in Hampshire, in the year 1698, an agent to ye Honble. Sir Nicholas Stuart, Bart., and dep. this life April ye 5th, 1781, aged 65 years."

Thomas, his grandson and namesake, married Martha Robinson, of Eriswell Hall, near Lakenheath, and it was the eldest of their children who became the parent of Henry Horatio, the soldier father of a soldier son who was made Secretary of State for War at the breaking out of

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the mightiest conflict of all time in the summer of 1914. The first wife of Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Horatio Kitchener, and the mother of the subject of this biography, was Frances, daughter of the Rev. John Chevallier, D.D., of Aspall Hall, Suffolk, a beautiful old house in a gorgeous setting of fine trees. Her family, like that of Roberts's mother, was of Huguenot origin. Consequently French and British blood ran in the veins of both Field-M Marshals. These parallels in biography, accentuated still further by the fact that Roberts's paternal grandfather was a clergyman and that the fathers of both had served in India, are particularly interesting because of the intimate association of 'Bobs' with 'K. of K.,' to use the nick-names beloved of Tommy Atkins, and of their respective services to India and South Africa.

Earl Kitchener's genius for organization and administration may have been due, in part, to hereditary influence. His grandfather was a tea merchant in London, and became a freeman of the Clothworkers' Company in 1791, an honour bespeaking prosperity, but it is probable that he owed more to his father, who proved himself to be a thoroughly capable man of affairs, given to experimenting, and not afraid to try new methods if they were likely to be improvements on old ones. Indeed, Colonel Kitchener's talent for business determined the place of his second son's birth. During the terrible famine of 1846-48, one of several which threatened to depopulate Ireland during the nineteenth century, he paid a visit to the Emerald Isle. Thousands died of hunger and fever, and thousands more emigrated to sunnier and more prosperous countries across the Atlantic. Many landlords became bankrupt, and it was to assist them that the Encumbered Estates Act of 1848 was passed, under the provisions of

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which an official Court of Sales was set up in Dublin. This gave Colonel Kitchener a golden opportunity, and he seized it. While in the capital he happened to hear that certain land aggregating about 2000 acres in the counties of Limerick and Kerry was for disposal. He secured it for some £8000, well satisfied with his bargain. The first home of the family after the estate had been handed over was Gunsborough House, an unpretentious shooting lodge standing square and white some three miles from Listowel. Here Horatio Herbert Kitchener was born, and on the 22nd of the following September was taken to Aghavallin Church to be baptized by the Rev. Robert Sandes, rector of the parish of Ballylongford.

"Yes," said Earl Kitchener's nurse a few years ago, "I know that he is a great man; and they tell me that he has no heart, and that everybody is afraid of him; but they are wrong. He is really one of the most tender-hearted men in the world; and whenever he comes to see me he is 'my boy,' just as he was in the old days in Ireland when he used to run to me in all his troubles and fling his arms around me and hug me. Ah, there is nobody left who knows the real 'Master Herbert' as I know him."

Wellington's mother was wont to call him 'the fool of the family.' This goes to prove that the closest kinship does not necessarily confer the gift of accurately gauging character or mental qualifications. As lads neither Arthur Wellesley nor Kitchener was brilliant, which should give encouragement to those whose intellectual fruits do not ripen early. Lady Mornington said that her son wanted "more energy," a remark which might well have been applied to 'Master Herbert,' unless the following story is apocryphal. Like Napoleon at Brienne, he seems to have been fond of building castles in the air, a hobby

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certainly not in keeping with Colonel Kitchener's scheme of education, although it must be admitted that in after life both boys proved their ability to give solid foundations to the fantastic structures of their dreams. After having passed the governess rung of the scholastic ladder, young Herbert was sent to a private school. Apparently he did not make much headway, for just previous to an examination his father told the boy that if he failed he should suffer the indignity of being sent to a school kept by a lady. Kitchener failed, was degraded, and informed that if he did not improve he would be apprenticed to a hatter. No one would be so foolish as to believe that his father literally meant what he said. It was stern parental medicine to which a drop of humour had been added, perhaps because the locality was in Ireland, where wit is traditional and entirely in keeping with the most solemn occasion. The admonition had the desired effect. 'Master Herbert' applied himself to his books, developed a talent for mathematics which was to stand him in good stead, and soon proved that he had a good deal more in him than he had received credit for.

By this time the family had removed to a larger and more imposing residence known as Crotta House, five and a half miles from Tralee. Kitchener showed no marked partiality for outdoor sports other than swimming. He and his brothers frequently drove to Bannastrand for a morning dip in the Atlantic. We have it on the authority of one who knew them very well at the time that none of the boys played foolish pranks or ran into danger unnecessarily. Young Kitchener grew rapidly, overtaking his strength to some extent in the process, which may have had something to do with his lack of interest in athletics. He preferred listening to talking, reasoning to argument,

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books to strenuous pleasures. His immense capacity for detail dates from that period. He learnt to appreciate the full value of 'Thorough,' the family motto.

His father had many interests in addition to the ordinary pursuits of a country gentleman. He regarded time as wealth, and seldom wasted it. He paid special attention to the development of his estate, particularly of that part of it devoted to agriculture, and went in for horse and cattle breeding on a fairly large scale. The Colonel became such an acknowledged expert that he found no difficulty in securing gentlemen pupils to learn farming. Certain portions of the land he reclaimed, making the barren become fruitful, and introducing a system of drainage which amply repaid the money and energy expended on it. He also established a factory for the making of bricks, tiles, and drain-pipes. One can readily understand that his father's enterprise, business instincts, and powers of organization were not lost on the contemplative young man as he wandered about the place.

There is a famous picture representing the Iron Duke's initial encounter with the French. It shows the youthful Arthur Wellesley in conversation with the Marquis of Pignerol at his academy at Angers, where he was initiated into some of the mysteries of the science of war. Kitchener was thirteen years of age when he came into contact with the French for the first time, but while Pignerol's pupil lived to become the dread enemy of the nation which submitted to the iron rule of Napoleon, the lad who was sent to school at Grand Clos, Villeneuve, in French Switzerland, was destined to come to their aid on two occasions and to have but one dispute with them, now happily almost forgotten. The establishment was conducted by the Rev. J. Bennett, an English clergyman. Situated

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at the eastern end of the beautiful Lake of Geneva, the surroundings of the place must have appealed strongly to Herbert Kitchener. They teemed with romantic and historic associations. Close by stood the grim castle of Chillon, the scene of many grim tragedies and of Byron's great poem; fourteen miles away was Lausanne, the home of Gibbon, who wrote much of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* there, and where Rousseau, 'the Foe of Kings,' confessed that he "formed no ideas that were worth recollecting"; and at no great distance was Ferney, for ever famous from its association with Voltaire, whose cutting satire and ruthless disregard of established spiritual authority helped to blaze a trail for the coming of the French Revolution.

Kitchener remained at Villeneuve until 1867, when his father sent him to London to be coached for the entrance examination of the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich. He entered that institution on the last day of January 1868.

It was during a vacation taken in 1870 for the purpose of visiting his father, who was then living at Dinan, in the north of France, that the young cadet gained practical insight into the actualities of a soldier's life. Appropriately enough in the light of subsequent events, Kitchener volunteered to play a part, however humble, in the ill-considered war against Prussia, which was officially declared by the French Government on the 19th of July. Already the Garde Mobile had been called out, and it was in the 6th Battalion of the Reserves of the Mobile Guard of the Côtes du Nord that he enlisted. The streets of Paris resounded to the cry of "*À Berlin!*" Exactly two months later the Germans completed the investment of the city on the Seine.



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Chanzy, who was put in command of the Second Army of the Loire, of which Kitchener's battalion formed a part, after the reoccupation of Orleans by the Germans at the beginning of December, struggled manfully to come to the relief of beleaguered Paris. His ill-organized troops fought well, and often enough with grim determination, but were gradually forced farther back. Thanks mainly to the interference of Gambetta in ordering General Camo to retire behind Beaugency instead of holding a position in front of that town, the hard-fought battle of Villorceau on the 8th of December availed Chanzy nothing, and he was obliged to fall back in the direction of Vendôme, and afterward on Le Mans. Here he remained until the 11th of January, 1871, when Prince Frederick, taking advantage of the night after a day's stiff fighting, made a strong attack, and the weary and dispirited French army broke and fled. Chanzy was compelled to retreat to Laval, on the Mayenne. The German guns were then bombarding Paris.

During his period of service Kitchener made an ascent in a balloon with two French officers, at that time a sufficiently daring adventure for a youth of his age. Of one thing we may be reasonably certain, and that is that when he was invalided home from Laval through severe illness he returned with a stock of experience which bore fruit in many later campaigns in which he played a more prominent part.

Linen trousers and blouses may be excellent for summer manœuvres and add picturesqueness to the passing show, but in the open field in autumn and winter they proved poor protection from the cold and the rain and the piercing winds. The folly of entering upon such an undertaking in a state of unpreparedness was evident at almost every

## A Field-Marshal in Knickerbockers

turn. Kitchener was never guilty of such consummate folly, and we have every reason to believe that our French ally in the Great War has taken to heart the terrible but perhaps necessary lessons of the Franco-German campaign of 1870.

"Why did you go off and join the French Army?" the Duke of Cambridge asked the returned volunteer who had donned the *képi*.

"Please, sir," came the straightforward answer, "I understood that I should not be wanted for some time, and I could not be idle. I thought I might learn something."

The reply revealed characteristic qualities which were the source of his power in later years.

## The Story of Lord Kitchener

Judah, then but little known. After recovering from a severe attack of fever, he joined the expedition, and it is evident from the first Report<sup>1</sup> in which Kitchener's name appears that Conder thought very highly of his assistant. We first hear of him on the 4th December, 1874, when he succeeded, at Tell Jezer, in securing some photographs "under peculiarly unfavourable circumstances." A visit was then paid to a site in Jerusalem known as the Muristan, where Kitchener was left for a short time to recuperate. He rejoined on the 18th March, 1875, in time to take part in the survey of the Dead Sea Desert and to be initiated into the vagaries of Oriental weather.

At Wady Seiyal "we were caught in the most tremendous gale which we have yet experienced in tents," writes Lieutenant Conder<sup>2</sup>; "and our next march of nineteen miles in a perfect hurricane of bitter wind, with showers of sleet and hail, necessitated by the fact that all our barley and other stores were consumed, was the hardest bit of experience we have yet encountered. Our dogs and two muleteers were unable to face the storm, and took refuge in caves. Old Sheikh Hamzeh [the famous guide, of whom Dr Tristram, Mr Palmer, and others have written] fell off his pony twice, and had to be tied on. The brave beasts struggled for eleven hours, and crossed more than one torrent of cold water up nearly to the girths, but by eight at night they were in a warm stable, and we had found refuge in Hebron in the house of a German Karaite Jew, whose hospitality was as great as his subsequent charge was high."

Sometimes the nature of the ground was so difficult that

<sup>1</sup> *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*, January 1875, p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, July 1875, pp. 127-128.

## Exploring the Holy Land

it took four hours to advance five miles, and the only human beings encountered were Bedouin, who looked forward to the time when the Christians would make the desert blossom as the rose and showed an inordinate partiality for tobacco. Kitchener was fully occupied with photographing the remains of old fortresses, vaults, caves, and suchlike, and in assisting in the general work of the survey. For instance, five days were spent in securing particulars and records of the ruins of the great English fortress of King Richard I at Ascalon. Here the knowledge of swimming which Kitchener had gained near his old Irish home was turned to the best use, for Conder got carried away by the current when bathing, and was rescued from certain death by his assistant. "He was," says one of his colleagues, "as good company as a man could wish to have, full of life and good spirits. . . . We none of us thought much about our toilets, and he least of all. Why, after a few months' travelling about in Palestine he looked more like a tramp than an officer of her Majesty's Army. His clothes wouldn't have fetched a threepenny-bit at any 'old clo' shop' in Whitechapel." When the work for the year came to an end 1200 square miles had been surveyed by the party, and about the same number of miles remained to be dealt with.

In a letter which Kitchener sent home from Mount Carmel, in the middle of July 1875, he unconsciously revealed an interesting little sidelight on his own character. The party had been attacked by Moslems, cholera was rampant, the south was in arms, and it was exceedingly unlikely that the expedition would be able to proceed for two or three months. "The non-commissioned officers," he says,<sup>1</sup> "though ready to go through any amount of work

<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Statement*, October 1875, p. 195.

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or danger, are much discouraged at the prospect of an indefinite delay without employment, *which, in my opinion, is more trying in this climate than work.* Under these circumstances Lieutenant Conder and myself both consider it our duty to recommend the Committee to break up the expedition for a time, and recall the non-commissioned officers, empowering Lieutenant Conder and myself to remain as long as the legal proceedings require our presence." The portion which I have taken the liberty to italicize is excellent proof of Kitchener's firm belief in the virtue of work. As a result of Kitchener's suggestion the three N.C.O.'s were sent home.

The attack, of which the legal proceedings was the sequel, took place at Safed late in the afternoon of the 10th July, 1875, when the lieutenants and their thirteen men were busy erecting their tents outside the town. Moslems, like most of the rest of the world, are of an inquisitive nature, and a number strolled across the waste piece of ground where the camp had been pitched, apparently with the idea of taking stock of the strangers and their belongings. The behaviour of the spectators, however, seemed somewhat strange. Not content with having a good look at what was going on, they began to finger everything and to make decidedly uncomplimentary remarks. Conder happened to be resting in his tent at the moment, but when he heard his head servant having a conversation with a sheikh, whose language was exceedingly forceful, he went out to see the cause of the altercation. The sheikh's reply to a polite request that he should go away and mind his own business was a fusillade of stones and curses. The man then gave his attention to the lieutenant, whom he tried to strangle. In this he was so unsuccessful that in a couple of seconds he had

## Exploring the Holy Land

made the acquaintance of Conder's fist, and lay sprawling on the ground.

As soon as he had recovered from his astonishment the assailant again attacked the lieutenant, who felled him a second time, and augmented any bruises he may have received by a split lip. Before getting up the sheikh stealthily drew a knife, but by great good fortune the head servant happened to see the manœuvre, otherwise he would doubtless have succeeded in murdering Conder. The servant managed to wrench the weapon away, and two of the British party promptly bound him, with the intention of handing him over to the Government officials. "Where are my young men?" yelled the Moslem. "Where are my young men?" The cry was not in vain, for in a very short time two hundred or more had come up.

Obviously the only thing to do was to release the fanatic and hope that he and his band would disperse. To hold him as a hostage until help came was excellent in theory, but hopelessly impracticable in the face of the motley multitude which had now gathered. No sooner was the sheikh at liberty than he urged his followers to kill the Christians. A volley of stones was the answer to this appeal. Although they were hopelessly outnumbered, the five white men of the party, all of whom were unarmed, now had great difficulty in restraining their native servants from attacking the assailants. Conder tried to cow the infuriated mob by threatening them with future punishment, and, being a man without fear, boldly dared them to stone him. At this moment the Moslems were reinforced by individuals armed with all manner of weapons, including clubs, a long gun, a battle-axe, a scimitar, and a carbine. Let Conder continue the story :

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“Lieutenant Kitchener and I were immediately surrounded. Three came to me and asked me with curses what I was doing. An old man thrust his battle-axe violently into my side, but I did not like to strike him, though I had now a hunting-crop in my hand. I told them they were mad and would be severely punished if they struck an Englishman. About this time other members of the party saw a gun levelled at me five yards off, but fortunately the man's hand was caught before he fired. A man now came into the crowd which surrounded me and dealt me a blow on the head with a large club with great violence, causing two wounds on the side of my head, covering my face with blood. A second blow, directed with full force at the top of my head, must inevitably have brained me had I not put my head down to his chest. My servants gave me up for dead. The blow fell on my neck, which ever since has been so stiff and swollen that it is impossible to turn it round. The rest of the party saw me fall. As soon as I got up I dealt this man a blow in the face with the handle of my whip which staggered him, but my whip flew out of my hand and left me entirely unarmed. I must inevitably have been murdered but for the cool and prompt assistance of Lieutenant Kitchener, who managed to get to me and engaged one of the clubmen, covering my retreat.

“A blow descending on the top of his head he parried with a cane, which was broken by the force of the blow. A second wounded his arm. His escape is unaccountable. Having retired a few paces from the thick of the fray, I saw that the Moslems were gradually surrounding us, stealing behind trees and through vineyards, and I well understood that in such a case, unless the soldiers arrived at once, we must all die. Many of the servants had indeed already



Kitchener choosing his Cavalry Officers

G. J. Gillingham

(See p 42)





## Exploring the Holy Land

given up hope, though no one fled. I gave the order to leave the tents and fly round the hill.

“Lieutenant Kitchener was the last to obey this order, being engaged in front. He retreated to his tent, and whilst running he was fired at, and heard the bullet whistle by his head. He was also followed for some short distance by a man with a huge scimitar, who subsequently wounded with it more than one of our people.

“Gaining the cover of some trees, we stopped on a bare hill-side to consult, and ventured back to the brow to reconnoitre. At this moment the soldiers arrived with an officer, and the English Consular Agent, Herr Marcus Cigal. I am informed that all the offensive weapons were immediately concealed, the stoning and blasphemous language ceased at once, and not an individual of the crowd remained.”

The ringleaders were sent to prison, and a fine of £340 was levied on Safed, but a claim of £200 for compensation was not allowed.

After a bout of fever Conder and Kitchener returned to London for the winter months. There the two officers applied themselves to work on the great map, to which they were able to make an addition of no fewer than 1600 square miles. Kitchener also began to write the letterpress to accompany a volume of twelve of the fifty photographs which he had taken, some of sites never previously depicted by the camera. In the light of subsequent events it is particularly interesting to know that in 1876 Conder gave it as his opinion<sup>1</sup> that “the change in Palestine [from Bible times] is one of *degree only* and not of kind. The curse of the country is bad government and

<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Statement*, July 1876, p. 132. The italics are in the original.

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oppression. Justice and security of person and property once established, Palestine would become once more a land of corn, vines and olives, rivalling in fertility and in wealth its ancient condition, as deduced from careful study of such notices as remain to us in the Bible and in the later Jewish writings."

Early in 1877 Lieutenant Kitchener assumed command of the expedition, which consisted, in addition to himself, of three non-commissioned officers of the Royal Engineers appointed from the Ordnance Survey, Conder remaining in England to prepare the memoirs to accompany the sheets of the map. The reception of the party at Safed showed that the punishment of the principal participants in the murderous attack on the previous party had had a very salutary effect, the Governor, Kadi, and others going out to meet them. "Nothing," says the Lieutenant, "could be more civil and obliging than everybody was," and even Ali Agha Alan, the ringleader of the affray, took an opportunity to apologize.

In the second week of July Kitchener finished the survey of the north of Palestine, during the course of which he had covered 1000 miles of country, visited and described 476 ruins, and collected considerably over 2000 more names than were recorded on the best map then extant. He settled for a few weeks in the neighbourhood of Mount Lebanon, where he was engaged in copying out his rough notes and making duplicates of the map-work, working twelve hours a day, Sundays included. On his journey down the coast toward Jerusalem, the leader had a slight sunstroke, which is not surprising, as sometimes the thermometer registered 114° in the shade. In London the General Committee of the Fund took the opportunity "of expressing their high sense of Lieutenant Kitchener's

## Exploring the Holy Land

ability and zeal. He has conducted the work for six months without any accidents during a period of suspicion and excitement. His reports . . . are careful and intelligent, and his monthly accounts show due regard to economy. He has hitherto managed to conduct the Survey for a monthly sum less than that which the Committee gave him as a maximum."<sup>1</sup> Thus early we see that capacity for detail and firm belief in business-like methods which were to stand him in such excellent stead in his Egyptian campaigns and the South African War.

The survey of the whole of Western Palestine, which was then inhabited by Arabs, who spent most of their time fighting, was completed by the end of September, bringing six years' work to a successful conclusion. Near El Burg the Lieutenant and his party were mistaken for Bedouin, and some fellahin opened fire on them from behind stone walls. Their marksmanship was so poor that none of the balls did worse damage than to hit the earth beneath the horses' feet, which gave Kitchener sufficient time to make them understand that the new-comers were not foes but friends. At another place some boys attacked one of the non-commissioned officers with stones, which brought forth speedy retribution in a way the young Palestine hooligans could best appreciate. Kitchener had them publicly flogged. In the streets of Nablus he was personally subjected to the same indignity as his assistant had been, but as the officials were by no means friendly Kitchener probably thought it wiser not to take the law into his own hands on this particular occasion.

On his way back to England the leader of the survey party took the opportunity to visit Sofia and the heights

<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Statement*, October 1877, p. 193.

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of Kamerleh. The journey was particularly interesting to the young officer because Turkey was then at war with Russia, and it made such a deep impression on him that he subsequently related his experiences in the pages of *Blackwood's Magazine*.<sup>1</sup> It is very evident that he had no delusions about the Bulgarians. "They seem to be a most despicable race," he writes. "Morally they appear to be at the lowest ebb; and if some of those who agitated about the Bulgarian atrocities really saw and talked to the people, they would, I feel sure, modify their opinions."<sup>2</sup> He formed the belief that the Checkmagee lines were practically impregnable, met Mehemet Ali Pasha at Constantinople, and after a trying journey in a springless cart and sleeping in an unsatisfactory bed on the floor, "with a very limited amount of straw," paid a visit to Baker Pasha, "the only general who has looked after the interior economy and sanitary arrangements of his men." The weather was so bitterly cold that Kitchener's companion was frost-bitten on the ear, but thanks to the Lieutenant's prompt measures a remedy was applied in time.

The article is a careful analysis of the strength and weakness of the Turkish lines, and its writer remarks that "it was a sad pity" that the Turks "had neglected to occupy a high hill-top on the extreme left front; this would have rendered the turning of the left almost an

<sup>1</sup> Vol. cxxiii, pp. 194-200 (February 1898).

<sup>2</sup> The atrocities took place in 1876, and drew from Mr Gladstone a powerful pamphlet entitled *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, while Lord Stratford de Redcliffe advocated the interference of the Powers in *The Times*. Mr Baring's (later Lord Cromer) report asserted that "the way in which the rising was suppressed was inhuman in the last degree—fifty innocent persons suffering for every guilty one." He assessed the number of Mohammedans murdered at about two hundred.

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impossibility. The Russians saw the advantage of this position and occupied it at once; their guns almost enfiladed the Turkish lines from this point." He notes that the eight batteries and redoubts were well constructed and that gun-pits armed with Krupp field guns were placed in advantageous sites.

Kitchener made his return journey to Constantinople alone on horseback through driving snow and sleet, and greatly admired the pluck of 5000 Turkish infantry and cavalry whom he met on the road. "The soldiers were rather straggling," he says, "but every one had his face in the right direction. They were all plodding steadily on through the snow, full of pluck, and only anxious to come up with the enemy. These Turkish soldiers are perfect heroes, enduring any hardships without a murmur. Always ready to fight, never conquered except by overpowering numbers, their motto might well be, 'While we have life we will fight.'"

In January 1878 Kitchener returned to England, and after a short leave joined Conder in the work of preparing the results of their exploration for publication. He had also the honour of reading a paper on the task he had accomplished in Galilee before the Geographical Section of the British Association. After the lecturer had finished addressing the learned folk who had gathered to hear him, Major Wilson, C.B., F.R.S., pointed out that from private information he had received from consuls in Palestine, "the tact and energy displayed by Lieutenant Kitchener in protecting the Christian population had greatly tended to the preservation of peace in that country."

On the 10th of the following September Kitchener handed over to the Fund the completed maps and memoirs for which he was responsible, and the following resolution

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was passed: "That the Committee desire to express their grateful thanks to Lieutenant Kitchener for the way in which he brought the Survey of Western Palestine to a successful termination, and congratulate him on his appointment to the very important work of a similar nature which has been entrusted to him by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs." <sup>1</sup>

It is not always that conscientious work receives such early recognition, but it must not be overlooked that Kitchener had added two particularly desirable assets to his stock-in-trade as a Royal Engineer during his travels in the Holy Land. He had learned Arabic and studied the customs and characteristics of the Near East. This knowledge was to prove of enormous importance to him in the near future.

<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Statement*, October 1878, p. 155.

## CHAPTER III

### Peaceful Cyprus and Stormy Egypt

*"The commander who does not respect his men is unable to lead them."*—KITCHENER

**N**EARLY seven hundred years after Richard I had captured Cyprus on his way to Palestine, the island in the eastern corner of the Mediterranean became, to all intents and purposes, an appanage of the British Crown. Previous to the blighting influence of the Turks, who took it in 1570, it had been dominated by Phœnicians, Greeks, Assyrians, Egyptians, Persians, Macedonians, Romans, and Venetians. It came into British hands in 1878, after the Russo-Turkish War, and before the resulting Berlin Congress had begun its deliberations in the Radziwill Palace, with Bismarck as "honest broker."

The only important article of the Cyprus Convention, which was regarded as a great triumph for Lord Beaconsfield, runs as follows: "If Batoum, Ardahan, Kars,<sup>1</sup> or any of them, shall be retained by Russia, and if any attempt shall be made at any future time by Russia to take possession of any further territories of H.I.M. the Sultan in Asia, as fixed by the definite treaty of peace, England engages to join H.I.M. the Sultan in defending them by force of arms. In return, H.I.M. the Sultan promises to England to introduce necessary reforms, to

<sup>1</sup> On the Armenian frontier.



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be agreed upon later by the two Powers, into the government and for the protection of the Christian and other subjects of the Porte in these territories ; and, in order to enable England to make necessary provision for executing her engagement, H.I.M. the Sultan further consents to assign the island of Cyprus to be occupied and administered by England."

The annual surplus of the revenue of the island over expenditure was to be paid to the Sultan, but this was merely a nominal arrangement. It was "retained as part payment of the loss sustained by England and France in paying the deficiency on the guaranteed Turkish loan of 1855." As Cyprus is only a little over 200 miles from the entrance to the Suez Canal, it was regarded as likely to become an important coaling station. The British occupation of Egypt in 1882 nullified the idea, particularly as there are no good natural harbours. In 1878 the population was some 180,000, of whom about two-thirds were Greek Orthodox Christians and the remainder Mohammedans. When Turkey allied herself with Germany in the Great War the Convention and other agreements were annulled by an Order in Council dated the 5th November 1914, and the island was definitely annexed.

Sir Garnet Wolseley was appointed Lord High Commissioner of Cyprus and Commander-in-Chief of a garrison which, in the first enthusiasm of the moment, was to consist of 7000 Indian troops and three English battalions, but nothing approaching this figure was reached. On the 19th September Kitchener left England to make his survey. He soon discerned that the resources of the island were capable of great development, provided enterprise and capital were brought to bear on the problem. He saw the necessity for good roads and irrigation, and

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found that while the Turks were better workers than the Greeks, they were also more independent. The English rule, however, soon proved very popular. Kitchener was by no means impressed by the appearance of the women of either race, and noted, not without a touch of cynicism and humour, that "the Turkish women veil their faces, which is an advantage." The maps of the War Office he found "innumerable and very bad."

He was particularly anxious that the military arrangements of the island should receive attention. "We know what splendid fighting material there is in the Turkish soldier," he writes.<sup>1</sup> "We also know their wants—good officers, discipline, and commissariat. By raising and maintaining a Turkish regiment in Cyprus, we could find out by experience the reforms necessary. It would become the training school for officers, who would be capable of carrying out the same reforms in Asia Minor; and in case of war, we should have men able to raise troops amongst the many warlike tribes of Syria and Asia Minor, who would follow an English leader to the death. By thus employing Cyprus we should make its possession politically of the vastest importance, and we should really possess the key of the East."

In addition to his map-making, Kitchener was charged with organizing a system of land registration, a very necessary procedure seeing that "the different allotments are marked, or supposed to be marked, out by stones; but as these stones have generally disappeared, the holdings are only known approximately."<sup>2</sup> Formerly

<sup>1</sup> *Blackwood's Magazine*, vol. cxxvi, p. 157 (August 1879).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153. An interesting and reliable account of Cyprus as it was just previous to British rule will be found in *Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. xxxviii, pp. 325-347.

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little care had been taken with the phraseology of title-deeds, and the officials had usually been obliging in the matter of annexations, provided always that the person chiefly concerned had a weighty purse and knew how to open it. We have it on the authority of Sir Samuel Baker that when it was known that the British were about to occupy the island, no fewer than 40,000 irregular title-deeds were awaiting the signature of the Turkish official. The satisfactory way in which Kitchener performed this part of his work received the warm approval of Lord Derby, Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Mr Edward Vizetelly, formerly editor of *The Cyprus Times*, says that "one saw little of Kitchener at the club or anywhere else where Englishmen mostly congregated, although he sometimes turned up at the gymkhana meetings to contribute his share to their success. Kitchener was always a hard worker, a gentleman with a long head who thought much but said little. It is of course easy enough to prophesy when you know, but honestly, to my mind, he looked a man who would go far if he only had his chance."

The survey was interrupted for a time by Kitchener's appointment as a Military Vice-Consul in Asia Minor under Sir Charles Wilson, who had been made British Military Consul-General in Anatolia in February 1879. The headquarters were at Sivas, but the province was so unwieldy that he divided it into four consulates. Kitchener was made Military Vice-Consul at Kastamuni. The Lieutenant returned to Cyprus in 1881, and in the following year was working with his usual assiduity when stirring news arrived from Egypt.

Ismail Pasha, the successor of his uncle as Viceroy of Egypt in 1868, had assumed the title of Khedive three

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years later, thereby becoming virtually an independent sovereign. He had introduced many and far-reaching innovations in the Land of the Pharaohs, made expeditions against Abyssinia, annexed various districts in the Sudan, and endeavoured, with the assistance of Sir Samuel Baker and General Charles Gordon, to suppress the slave trade there. Eventually the loans which he had been compelled to raise placed him in considerable financial difficulties.

In twelve years Ismail had spent no less than £180,000,000, mainly in imitating the ways of Western Europe by building roads, railways, and harbours—and being swindled. The urgent necessity for a supply of ready money caused him in 1875 to dispose of 176,602 shares in the Suez Canal to the British Government for £3,976,582,<sup>1</sup> after they had been offered to, and refused by, the Anglo-Egyptian Bank and the Société Générale of France. It is only just to add, however, that France was already deeply involved in de Lesseps' vast undertaking. The investment has certainly not proved to the disadvantage of the Empire from the defensive point of view which obtained at the time of the purchase; it obviously gave us a direct interest in Egypt, although there was apparently no intention to interfere in the internal affairs of the country, and in normal times it swells the national income of Great Britain by something approaching £700,000 per annum.

When Lord Beaconsfield's deal was announced in the United Kingdom a considerable body of the public criticized it adversely. Lord Hartington<sup>2</sup> went so far as to say

<sup>1</sup> The value of the shares in the Suez Canal was assessed on the 31st March, 1915, at £29,993,000.

<sup>2</sup> Afterward eighth Duke of Devonshire.

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that "It is hardly necessary to disclaim any such notions as those which have been imputed to us—a wish to establish a protectorate over Egypt, an interested reversal of our policy on the whole Eastern Question, or an intention to take part in a general scramble for what does not belong to us. We wanted, and we have obtained, additional national security for that which is to us a necessity—free and uninterrupted passage from Egypt to India. We felt it to be essential that the great highway over which we have now three-fourths of the traffic should not be exclusively in the hands of the foreign shareholders of a foreign country. An opportunity was offered us of acquiring a right in it, and that opportunity was used. There was no deep-laid scheme in the matter. We had not a week to consider it from the first moment we heard that the sale was intended, and our first idea was not so much to buy the property for ourselves as to prevent it changing hands at all." All of which tends to prove that either statesmen do not always say what they know, or are not able to pierce the future with that far-seeing certainty that some folk are apt to assume.

It is necessary that the reader should have this slight sketch of men and matters connected with Egypt in order to understand subsequent happenings. The transaction naturally gave Great Britain considerably added interest in the affairs of this portion of the dominions of the Sultan of Turkey. Four Englishmen overhauled the Khedive's finances and discovered that the debts of the country amounted to £75,000,000 sterling. Later on Mr Goschen was sent as a delegate of the English bondholders, and, together with M. Joubert, who represented French interests, put forth proposals which it was believed would help Egypt to 'put her house in order.' The

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Khedive listened to the voice of the charmers, pretended to acquiesce in their suggestions, and then allowed nothing of a satisfactory nature to be accomplished.

A further Commission of Inquiry got to work, when Ismail suddenly announced that in future he would rule with the assistance of a Ministry. Nubar Pasha was to be the head, and Mr Rivers Wilson, the chairman of the Commission, Minister of Finance. The Khedive's dismissal of this Ministry led to further complications and the interference of various European Governments, with the result that Ismail was deposed by the Sultan in June 1879.

His eldest son, Tewfik, whom he cordially disliked, now assumed the title of Khedive, and the system of Dual Control, whereby Great Britain and France held a watching brief over affairs of State without actually directing them, was inaugurated. Major Evelyn Baring represented the former Power as Controller-General, and M. de Blignières the latter.

Considerable native feeling had been aroused over the reckless extravagance of the late ruler, the introduction of the foreign element in affairs of State and of Turkish officers in the Army, and the evident intention of the newly appointed Commission of Liquidation, on which sat nominees of Great Britain, France, Austria, Germany, and Italy, to do little or nothing to pay arrears due to the soldiers. There was considerable talk of 'Egypt for the Egyptians,' and a National Party came into being. Its active leader was Arabi Pasha, who, after having entered the army as a conscript and serving in the transport department in the Abyssinian campaign of 1875, had been given command of a regiment by Ismail, for whom he had performed sundry services.

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Military demonstrations during 1881 led to a change of Ministry, and in January 1882 Arabi was given the post of Under-Secretary for War. In the following February he was promoted a step further and made Minister of War, with Mahmud Sami, an energetic supporter of the Nationalist movement, as Prime Minister. The growing power of the military dictator then led Great Britain and France to take action, and the dismissal of Arabi and some of his followers, to be followed by a year's banishment, was suggested. Tewfik pretended to carry this out, but before long the Pasha was reinstated and began to take measures for the arming of the forts at Alexandria, off which British and French men-of-war had appeared. There was a riot and a massacre in the city in June, and among the foreigners who were there was Kitchener. He had obtained a short leave of absence, and knowing something of the disturbed state of affairs in Egypt had made his way thither, apparently to watch the progress of affairs. It was evident to him that hostilities might break out at any moment. Unfortunately, so the story goes, he had already obtained an extension of furlough and now required another. Wiring to the effect that if he received no answer he would consider that the reply was in the affirmative, he stayed on. When a telegram summoning him back arrived it was too late, for the boat had gone.

Kitchener was taken on board H.M.S. *Invincible*, an ironclad of 8320 tons armed with ten 9-inch twelve-ton guns, four 64-pounder guns, and a number of 20-pounder and machine guns. When the bombardment by the British ships began on the 11th July he therefore had an excellent opportunity of watching the action. Eleven shells fired by the rebels struck the ship, six of which

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penetrated the hull.<sup>1</sup> The rush of wind created by one of them was so great that it felled the Lieutenant to the deck, and, passing on, killed an unfortunate seaman who happened to cross its path.

"As to the bombardment," writes one who knows him, "Lord K. loves to tell a story which chaffs good-humouredly one of his hosts of that day. He calls it 'the last shot.' At about six o'clock in the evening the white flag was fluttering from every one of the Egyptian forts, and the signal went up from the Admiral's yacht for the general cease fire. It so chanced that on board the *Invincible* one big gun remained loaded and laid. At that time it was not possible to unload these guns without considerable danger, and K.'s friend therefore asked permission to discharge the piece. The necessary signals were exchanged, the permission granted, and as a natural consequence every glass in the fleet was riveted on the point of objective. It was a beautiful shot, says Lord K. It fell straight and true in the very centre of the works against which it was directed. And when the cloud of rubble, dust, and debris had subsided an old Arab woman tottered out of an outhouse to the scene of wreck and drove in some fowls!"

Unbridled licence reigned in Alexandria. Looting and burning, murder and sudden death became the order of the day and of the night. The Khedive was compelled to seek the safe haven of a British vessel, for to have remained in the city would have been to court assassination. It was not until Admiral Sir Beauchamp Seymour, with a body of armed men from the ships, had restored something approaching order that Tewfik

<sup>1</sup> *The Egyptian Campaigns, 1882 to 1885*, by Charles Royle (new and revised edition, 1900), p. 79.



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consented to return to his palace under a guard of 700 marines.

Arabi was still at large and daily gathering recruits for his army of malcontents. If the authority of the Khedive was to be re-established it had necessarily to be done without delay. Troops arrived from Gibraltar and Malta, but those who could be spared from these important garrisons were necessarily few. When it was finally decided to send an Expeditionary Force to Egypt some 22,000 troops were placed at the command of Sir Garnet Wolseley, and on the 30th July, 1882, the first batch of men sailed from England.

"British officers and soldiers were badly wanted at the seat of war; an officer who could speak Arabic was indispensable," writes Winston Churchill.<sup>1</sup> Kitchener, who had now finished his survey of Cyprus, was given the rank of Major in the Egyptian Army, but practically nothing is known of the part he played in the ensuing campaign, although it is obvious that what he did he did well, otherwise he would not have been given the post which afterward fell to him. So far as Wolseley's undertaking is concerned, it must suffice to say that, notwithstanding the many difficulties with which he had to contend, he carried Arabi's strongly fortified position at Tel-el-Kebir on the 18th of September, less than a month from the date of his arrival at Alexandria. The total British losses in killed and wounded were 459, while the bodies of 2000 Egyptians were left on the field. The garrison of Cairo, probably 10,000 strong, surrendered, and very shortly the rebellion was completely crushed. The campaign was one of the quickest in modern history. It was followed by the disbanding of the old Egyptian Army, with the

<sup>1</sup> *The River War*, by Winston S. Churchill (Nelson edn.), p. 123.

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exception of some 80,000 or 40,000 men who remained in the outlying provinces, including the Sudan.<sup>1</sup>

Arabi subsequently pleaded "Guilty" to the charge of rebellion, and was banished to Ceylon. There he remained in exile until 1901, when he was released and granted a pension of £600 a year.

In the winter of 1882 Sir Evelyn Wood was entrusted with the difficult task of organizing and training a new native Egyptian Army of 6000 men, to which twenty-six British officers and a number of drill sergeants were attached. Lord Dufferin added the significant proviso that this figure was fixed "irrespective of events in the Sudan." Sir Evelyn had already a formidable list of military accomplishments to his credit, and if the position of Sirdar (Commander-in-Chief) did not appear at the moment to offer the excitement of other phases of his previous career, he certainly bent himself to the task with extraordinary energy and tact. He had served in the Crimea as a sailor, in the Indian Mutiny as a soldier, and afterward in the Ashanti and Gaika campaigns, while he had only recently returned from South Africa, where he had assumed the command of the British force on the death of Colley at Majuba. Here was a soldier after Kitchener's own heart, a veritable military giant in prowess if not in stature, a man amongst men. Kitchener was appointed second in command of the cavalry, and on the 4th January, 1888, was promoted to the rank of Captain in the British Army, while he continued to hold that of Major in the Egyptian force. His post proved to be no sinecure.

<sup>1</sup> *Mahdism and the Egyptian Sudan*, by Major F. R. Wingate, D.S.O., R.A. (London, 1891), pp. 50, 550. Students will find this book of special value.

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"I had the good fortune to be one of the three present at the birth—as I suppose it may be named—of the new cavalry, to the command of which Taylor had just been appointed," Mr John Macdonald tells us.<sup>1</sup> "Taylor had invited me the night before to accompany him and his friend and witness the operation which they were both to supervise. A tall, slim, thin-faced, slightly stooping figure in long boots, 'cut-away' dark morning coat, and Egyptian fez somewhat tilted over his eyes—such, as I remember him, was the young soldier who was destined to fulfil Gordon's task of 'smashing the Madhi.' 'He's quiet,' Taylor whispered to me, as we were getting ready for the start; 'that's his way.' And again, with the characteristic jerk of the head which all will remember who knew Taylor, 'He's clever.' And so in the raw, greyish, early morning of the 8th of January, 1883, the three of us drove in our dingy rattle-trap over the white, dusty road Nilewards to meet the fellah cavaliers. . . .

"At the barracks we found some forty men waiting. I remember Kitchener's gaze at the awkward, slipshod group as he took his position in the centre of a circular space round which the riders were to show their paces. 'We begin with the officers,' said Taylor, turning to me; 'we shall train them first, then put them to drill the troopers. We have no troopers just yet, though we have 440 horses ready for them.' And now began the selection of the fellah officers. They were to be tested in horsemanship. The first batch of them were ordered to mount. Round they went, Indian file, Kitchener, like a circus master, standing in the centre. Had he flourished a long whip, he might have passed for a show-master at rehearsal.

<sup>1</sup> *Nineteenth Century*, October 1898. Lieut.-Col. A. M. Taylor, of the 19th Hussars, was commander of the cavalry.

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Neither audible nor visible sign did he give of any feeling aroused in him by a performance mostly disappointing and sometimes ridiculous. His hands buried in his trouser pockets, he quietly watched the emergence of the least unfit. It was amusing to observe the difference in demeanour between the two men at some critical stage such as a bareback trot; while Kitchener looked on unmoved, Taylor's broad shoulders shook with a suppressed laugh. 'A good English troop-horse would shake the teeth out of them,' Taylor remarked in one of his asides. In half an hour or so the first native officers of the new fellah cavalry were chosen. It was then that Kitchener made his longest speech: 'We'll have to drive it into those fellows,' he muttered, as if thinking aloud."

It was not long before the young officer proved himself entirely worthy of the confidence placed in him. One of the first persons to recognize his abilities was Sir Evelyn Baring, who had an enviable reputation for seeking out talent and acknowledging it when discovered. Kitchener's name came to be mentioned with growing frequency in official communications, which drew from the future Lord Cromer the remark: "This Kitchener seems to have a finger in every pie. I must see him and find out what he is like." After the interview he told a friend: "That man's got a lot in him. He should prove one of our best assets in Egypt."

"The Egyptian is a coward to the backbone, and he will never be anything else. Centuries of oppression and injustice have broken his spirit," it was said. "Not so," answered Kitchener. "Give him a chance. The same blood courses in his veins as runs in those of the wild Arabs of the desert. Discipline, discipline, discipline—that is the one thing needful."

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Toward the end of 1883 Kitchener again had a spell of surveying. He formed one of the members of a geological expedition to the Sinai peninsula and the district south of the Dead Sea, promoted by the Palestine Exploration Fund and under the able leadership of Professor Edward Hull, LL.D., F.R.S. The party left Suez on the 10th November, and two days later moved their camp to Wady Sudur, where Professor Palmer,<sup>1</sup> Captain Gill, and Lieutenant Charrington, R.N., had been murdered the previous August during the Arabi revolt. Kitchener tells us that he got over "as much ground as a camel would allow. They are bad beasts for surveying. I used to keep mine at a good trot for a bit until he got cross, which he showed by roaring, and then suddenly shutting up all four legs and coming with a thud to the ground, at the same moment springing up again and darting off in an opposite direction. Continued correction caused him to collapse again, and then roll, which was decidedly uncomfortable. I don't think I have ever done such hard work as I had up that Wady Arabah from 'Akabah to the Dead Sea."<sup>2</sup>

Every day the Major took levels, made notes, copied inscriptions, and studied the native tribes. At 'Akabah Kitchener found the Admiralty Survey of the bay at fault, and the south end of the Dead Sea proved to be "terribly so." He was the first man to execute a reconnaissance survey of the Wady Arabah. Arabs steadfastly refused to allow the party to ascend Mount Hor, where the reputed tomb of Aaron is situated, unless they accompanied them—at a price. Eventually terms were arranged, and the building which is supposed to cover the patriarch's dust

<sup>1</sup> Professor of Arabic at Cambridge University.

<sup>2</sup> *Quarterly Statement*, April 1884, p. 136. The letter is dated Abbassiyeh, 13th January, 1884.

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was entered. Kitchener also took some useful observations from the summit. The wonderful tombs and ruins of far-famed Petra were next visited, and the explorers then made their way to the Dead Sea. Here Kitchener received a letter from Sir Evelyn Baring giving some particulars of the disaster to Hicks Pasha's army near El Obeid. At Tell abu Hareirah, near the Beersheba of the Bible, he left the party on the last day of the year to proceed to Gaza, while he struck out for Ismailia, about 200 miles distant. The unsettled state of affairs made it imperative that he should return to military duty without a moment's unnecessary delay.

Four Arabs were his only companions. One of them had been employed by Sir Charles Warren in the task of tracking poor Palmer's murderers, and was energetic and useful, while the others were characterized by Kitchener as lazy and greedy. He passed as Abdullah Bey, the name associated with the great Sheikh Abdullah, and was taken as an Egyptian official returning from Jerusalem. Sand-dunes, occasionally relieved by tamarisks and bushes, stony plains where the only vegetation was desert shrub, wind which blew flying fragments that stung the faces of the five travellers, and bitterly cold nights made the journey as unpleasant as it was monotonous. "I do not think," says Kitchener, "I have ever seen so desolate and dreary a country: nothing but ridge after ridge of sand-dunes for an immense distance." The greatest difficulty encountered was lack of water, and, as the Major frankly confesses, he and his servants arrived at Ismailia "at our last gasp."

## CHAPTER IV

### Gordon and the Mahdi

*"We are a wonderful people ; it was never our Government that made us a grand nation ; our Government has been ever the drag upon our wheels. It is, of course, on the cards that Khartoum is taken under the nose of the expeditionary force, which will be just too late."*—GORDON

**T**HERE was at this time one Mohammed Ahmed, who posed as the Messiah of the Mohammedans and threatened with his ever-increasing band of followers to overrun the Sudan. He was one of the many Mahdis whom the faithful from time to time had believed would lead them to the conquest of the world. In the East an appeal to religious fanaticism is the surest way to secure adherents for revolutionary purposes, and as fighting for Islam is a passport to heaven, once some kind of organization has been evolved the movement is apt to become of a very formidable nature. It was the Mahdi who had defeated Hicks Pasha, which event was made much of by Mohammed Ahmed and all those who believed in him. There was no knowing where the rebellion would end, or to what victories the Messiah might lead the frenzied dervishes.

Kitchener thoroughly appreciated the peril of the situation, and his surmise that the disturbance would spread proved correct. Early in 1884 Osman Digna, the Mahdi's lieutenant, destroyed an Egyptian force under General Baker at El Teb. Very soon Khartoum, the capital of

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the Sudan, and a few other garrisons alone remained to resist the onslaughts of the Mahdi's followers. It is interesting to note that Baker thought very highly of Kitchener. He afterward said of him that he was "the man whom I have always placed my hopes upon . . . one of the few *very superior* British officers, with a cool and good head and a hard constitution, combined with untiring energy."<sup>1</sup>

It had now been decided to abandon the Sudan, but it was first of all necessary to bring away the garrisons and the Egyptian population. The difficult task of carrying out the evacuation was entrusted to Gordon, whose knowledge of 'the Country of the Blacks'—for that is a literal translation of the word 'Sudan'—was second to none. He left England in the middle of January 1884, and almost as soon as he arrived the Khedive appointed him Governor-General of the province. On the 18th February he was in the town which will always be associated with the tragedy of his martyrdom.

Gordon asked for many things, including troops, made many suggestions—all were refused. Kitchener, who was now attached to the Intelligence Department, partly because he had abundantly proved that he was a man of resource and initiative, and partly because he had a knowledge of Arabic, rose to the occasion in his usual energetic and businesslike way. He did his utmost to discover everything possible that would contribute to the relief of the brave officer who was now hemmed in by the Mahdists. For instance, we find him interrogating a man named Ibrahim Wad-Beel, who informed him that all was quiet at Khartoum, and that when Gordon received a messenger from Wolseley he fired a salute and held a parade of troops. A little while later he gathered from another individual

<sup>1</sup> See *post*, p. 58.



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“that the Mahdi came with a strong force to Omdurman and asked General Gordon to surrender. General Gordon replied that he would hold Khartoum for years.”<sup>1</sup>

Some of the tribesmen with whom he and his colleague, Lieutenant Rundle, talked as they made their way about from place to place were so impressed by the wisdom of the arguments put forth that they remained quiet and took no part in the Mahdi's Holy War. Others acted as their allies, and brought whatever scraps of news they thought would interest them. The British officers also raised a force of 1500 Foggara, Ashiabab, and Ababdeh Arabs to form a chain of desert outposts. With a few natives Kitchener sought out Mustafa Pasha Yawer, Mudir of Dongola, in August 1884, and by means of good red gold and an intimate knowledge of Arab wants and wishes gained his allegiance. Nor was the support thus given merely moral, for the Mudir defeated a band of the Mahdi's men at Korti early in the following September.

“It was at Debbeh, ninety miles south of Dongola, in 1884,” writes the late Mr Bennet Burleigh, for so many years the trusted war correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph*, “that I first learned to know him [Kitchener] well. He was then living with the Mudir Mustapha Yawer's irregulars. Wearing the dress of an Arab, he was scarcely distinguishable from a native. He had gone in advance of the British forces on a delicate and dangerous mission, for which he had volunteered. I had wandered, unauthorized, to Debbeh, attended by one servant, in search of news and adventure, and easily found both. On the upward trip I passed a risky night in the Mahdi's ancestral home with his uncle and nephews, and had ridden among

<sup>1</sup> Kitchener to Wolseley, Dongola, 3rd November, 1884. See Royle, p. 326.

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bands of fierce Kabbabish. To my astonishment and delight I found one Englishman within the mud walls of Debbeh—Captain Kitchener, R.E., for such he then was. He gave me a hearty welcome, and added to my debt of gratitude by producing two bottles of claret, his whole store, which we most loyally drank at dinner. For weeks he had not heard the English tongue spoken, and he naturally was glad to see a countryman able to tell him something of what was happening outside the Soudan.”

Kitchener's life at Debbeh was hazardous, as Wilson's account of his short stay in the place makes abundantly evident. He met the Major there on the 15th October, and has left on record an account of the incident : <sup>1</sup>

“ After paying Kitchener's abode a visit, I went round the works, and to see the men. The garrison consisted entirely of Turks, the jail-birds of Alexandria and the Levant, the very same men whom Lord Dufferin would not allow to remain in Egypt in 1882 ; and who, having been drafted off to the Sudan, had found their way to Berber and Dongola, where they had been formed into a corps by the Mudir. Whilst the Mudir was up the river they committed all sorts of atrocities, completely gutted the houses of friend and foe, and seized any women they could find. Each man has now three or four women, who are treated as slaves. No wonder that these wretched people hate the name of Turks, and the latter are the people whom we have come to help, and whom we are to treat as friends. Kitchener and the commandant went round the fort with me, and the latter pointed out the direction from which the Mahdi's people advanced.<sup>2</sup> The ditch was still

<sup>1</sup> *The Life of Major-General Sir Charles William Wilson*, by Colonel Sir Charles M. Watson (London, 1909), pp. 282-283.

<sup>2</sup> The attack had taken place in the previous July.

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full of Mahdi caps, and the belts of the men who had been killed, of whom there seems to have been a good number, as they attacked by night with much determination. Some of them got right up to the guns, but the fire of the Remingtons soon told, and they have received a lesson which they have been in no hurry to repeat."

The Major was "in perils oft," and some of the scenes that he witnessed were revolting to the last degree. It is related that on one occasion he witnessed the execution by flogging of a supposed spy. The unhappy wretch was first whipped until nearly every vestige of flesh had been lashed off his back, and then bound face downward on the scorching sand, the pitiless sun pouring down on his frightful wounds until death gave him a merciful release. Kitchener ran the risk of a similar death—and went on quietly with his work.

It was from Korti that Sir Herbert Stewart started with the desert column of some 1100 men for the relief of Khartoum. Wolseley knew that the position of Gordon was daily growing more serious, otherwise he would not have divided his forces. His own explanation is given in a letter which he wrote from Korti to the Secretary of State for War as follows: <sup>1</sup>

"I had always thought it possible that upon arrival here I might find it necessary to operate beyond this point in two columns—one continuing up the river in our English-built boats, while the other pushed rapidly across the desert to Metammeh, and it was with the view of securing to myself the power of moving across this desert that I proposed the formation of a Camel Brigade.

"Any march across this desert with a small column, as an isolated operation, would be hazardous, and for the

<sup>1</sup> Royle, pp. 331-332.

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purpose of my mission a most useless undertaking. Such a column would most probably be able to fight its way into Khartoum ; possibly it might fight its way out again ; but it could never bring away General Gordon and his garrison in safety. Undertaken, however, under present circumstances, the march of a small force across this desert presents a very different aspect. The so-called Mahdi and his supporters are well aware that they have to deal not only with it, but also with the English army, which they know is advancing up the Nile on Khartoum by Abu Hamed and Berber. Upon arrival here I had to decide whether I should keep all my force together and follow the Nile Valley to Khartoum, or divide it into two columns—one following the river, while the other was pushed rapidly across to Metammeh.

“ If I were not restricted by time, the first course would be by far the most satisfactory, the safest, and would ensure the best results ; but I know that General Gordon is pressed by want of food, and the hot season is not far off, when military operations in this country are trying to the health of European soldiers. I therefore decided upon the last-mentioned course.”

Kitchener, now Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General on the Intelligence Staff, marched part of the way with the relief force, riding ahead with the cavalry scouts, which he commanded, and the indispensable Arab guides. The long columns of companies, so arranged that they could form into three squares almost immediately in order to resist possible attack, with their 2000 odd camels ambling along with that peculiar gait which is as characteristic as their hump, started off on their long march across the Bayuda Desert on the 30th December. The nature of the country varied very considerably, stones

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giving place to sand and sand to grass and scrub to trees as Gordon's Forlorn Hope toiled on, almost without incident other than the capture of a prisoner or two, who sometimes provided useful information in response to Kitchener's searching questions.

Arrived at Gakdul, about ninety-five miles from Korti, early on the morning of the 2nd January, 1885, Sir Herbert Stewart started on the return journey for reinforcements in the evening. This was according to previous arrangements. About 400 men were left to hold the wells and to build three forts. "Occasionally during the day," writes Count Gleichen,<sup>1</sup> "an officer or sentry on outpost would spot a native, miles off in the plain, and signal it down to the commanding officer. The Intelligence Department, still happily represented by Major Kitchener, with some Hussars, would promptly saddle any beasts that came to hand, and scoot out after him. Several times the reconnaissance party captured and scattered a caravan, bringing dates and stores for the Mahdi, and we soon had quite a respectable number of prisoners." Fortunately the little garrison was not disturbed, and the men were hard at work on the 12th when Stewart returned, followed on the next day by Colonel Fred Burnaby. The total strength of the British force was now 1800 men.

On the 14th Kitchener was recalled, "much to his disgust," according to Sir Charles Wilson, and it was while he was proceeding back to the place from whence the expedition had started that Stewart met 10,000 of the enemy at Abu Klea. The Arabs were led by the Ameers of Metammeh and Berber, and fought with consummate bravery, hurling themselves against the British square in

<sup>1</sup> *With the Camel Corps up the Nile*, by Count Gleichen (London, 1888), pp 95-96.



The Battle of Abu Klea  
W B Wilson R I  
Photo B P C London



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such a solid mass that they penetrated it, although not one of those who did so lived to tell the tale. After a desperate struggle, in which brave Fred Burnaby was killed, Stewart's life was saved by the prompt action of Wilson, and Lord Charles Beresford escaped only because he was knocked down by the enemy and fell under the Gardner gun which he and one of the Naval Brigade were endeavouring to bring into action, the opposing forces were compelled to retire. The enemy lost 1200 in killed and wounded, while the British casualties numbered seventy-five officers and men killed and eighty-five wounded.

In the fight on the 19th at Gubat, near the mud-built town of Metammeh, Stewart was mortally wounded and Wilson took command, but the dervishes were again hurled back, and the British reached the Nile, where four of Gordon's steamers awaited them. Metammeh, which was held by the Mahdists, was not attacked. Wilson read the dispatches from Khartoum with feverish avidity. A message dated the 14th December, 1884, showed the besieged General's awful plight: "I have done all in my power to hold out, but I own I consider the position extremely critical, almost desperate, and I say this without any feeling of bitterness with respect to her Majesty's Government, but merely as a matter of fact." Gordon had told the commander of one of his steamers that if English troops did not reach Khartoum by the 24th January it would be too late. It was on that day that Wilson, Stuart-Wortley, and Beresford set out on a last desperate dash to rescue the soldier-saint.

Meanwhile Kitchener had returned to Korti, where he again met the Mudir of Dongola. Shortly afterward an affray took place between the Bashi-Bazouks and some



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Arabs, in which Mr Charles Lewis Shaw, a Canadian journalist, and a friend of his named McBurney were involved, with the result that some of them were marched off to the guard-tent.

Shaw and McBurney were awaiting the turn of events, "when a tall man, tied apparently hand and foot, was thrown amongst us," Mr Shaw relates.<sup>1</sup> "I thought he looked a different brand of Arab than I had been accustomed to. He was; he was Kitchener. He was after the conspiracy.

"I didn't know much Arabic in those days, but we could hear the Dongolese—they were all Dongolese—talk and talk in excited tones the whole night, the bound man occasionally saying a few words.

"When we paraded before the large open-faced orderly tent next morning, we were almost paralysed to see Lord Wolseley himself seated at the little table with Kitchener beside him, both in full staff uniform. . . . A tall, fine-looking Arab . . . was being examined through the interpreter. He didn't seem impressed by the glittering uniforms or the presence of the Commander-in-Chief, or embarrassed by their questions. Once or twice an expression of surprise flitted over his face, but his eyes were always fixed on Kitchener, who would now and again stoop and whisper something in Lord Wolseley's ear. Once he raised his voice. The prisoner heard its intonation and recognized him. With a fierce bound the long, lithe Arab made a spring and was over the table, and had seized Kitchener by the throat. There was a short, swift struggle. Wolseley's eye glistened, and he half drew his sword. Kitchener, athletic as he was, was being overpowered, and the Arab was throttling him to death. There was a

<sup>1</sup> *Canadian Magazine*, March 1899.

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rush of the guard—and within ten minutes a cordon of sentries surrounded the Mudir of Dongola's tent. Within three days he was a prisoner in his palace at Dongola, guarded by half a battalion of British soldiers. The conspiracy was broken.

"How widespread it was, only half a dozen white men knew at the time, but that it embraced the Courts of the Khedive, the Mudir, and the Mahdi leaked out in after years. To it the treachery of the Egyptian garrison at Khartoum<sup>1</sup> and the death of Gordon was due, and the preservation of the Desert Column can be placed to its discovery."

Omdurman, Gordon's position on the west bank of the White Nile, and almost facing Khartoum, fell on or about the 18th January, 1885. Kitchener was to exact full revenge for this thirteen years later. On the 26th January Gordon paid the price of a Government's neglect forty-eight hours before Sir Charles Wilson reached the ill-fated town.

In Gordon's *Journals*<sup>2</sup> somewhat frequent mention is made of Kitchener, and not always in a kindly manner. He writes on the 21st September, 1884, that a note has been received from that officer addressed to Colonel Stewart, who had left Khartoum for Dongola on the *Abbas* on the 9th September and had been foully murdered. "Can I do

<sup>1</sup> "Hassan Bey Balmasawy, who commanded at the Mesalamieh Gate, certainly did not make a proper defence, and failed to warn General Gordon of the danger the town was in. He afterward appears to have taken a commission under the Mahdi, and to have gone to Kordofan with the Emir Abu-Anga."—Kitchener's Report.

<sup>2</sup> *The Journals of Major-General C. G. Gordon, C.B., at Khartoum*, printed from the original MSS., with Introduction and Notes by A. Egmont Hake. London, 1885.

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anything for you or General Gordon?" he asks. "I should be awfully glad if you will let me know. The relief expedition is evidently coming up this way, but whether they will go by Berber or attempt the direct road from here I do not know. The Mahdi is in a bad way; he has abandoned Parfur and has no reinforcements to send to Kartoum and Sennaar, which are asked for."<sup>1</sup> This communication called forth a bitter comment from Gordon: "... it perfectly exasperates one. Kitchener asks Stewart 'what he can do for him'—nothing of what has gone on with respect to the Soudan since Graham's expedition. Of course men are not *obliged* to write at all."

On the 29th of August Kitchener had sent Gordon a message from Mr Egerton saying that Wolseley was coming out to command, and indicating the general movement of troops, but a cipher telegram which was enclosed could not be read by the recipient because Stewart had taken the code-book away with him.<sup>2</sup> This reached Gordon on the 21st September, and in his *Journal* three days later he remarks: "Look at this: I send down a spy, A. Kitchener & Co. send him back with answer. If Kitchener & Co. thought, they would know that A, being seen passing to and fro, must incur suspicion; however, A happily gets through *with risk* (not having, by the way, had one penny from K. & Co.); then all communication stops till I send down B. What is K. doing at Debbeh? that he could not write a better letter than to tell me the names of the generals and regiments—a matter of the most supreme indifference to Kartoum."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Journals of Major-General C. G. Gordon, C. B., at Khartoum*, printed from the original MSS., with Introduction and Notes by A. Egmont Hake (London, 1885), p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

*Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

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Gordon also indulges in an imaginary conversation between Kitchener and Chermiside, in which the former is made to say, "I shall write nothing more to *him* [Gordon] except the purest official documents. It is very clear his liver is out of order, to go and attack officers of his own corps like *that*. It is atrocious!"<sup>1</sup> There are other references in a similar strain, and on the 2nd November he confides to his *Journal* that it is "now forty-six days ago" since he received his last message from Kitchener. On the 5th "my old friend Kitchener sent up the post; he wrapped the letters in some old newspapers (he gave me no news in his letter), the old newspapers were thrown out in the garden: there a clerk who knew some English found them blowing about, and gave them to the apothecary of the hospital, who knows English. The doctor found him reading them, saw date 15th *September*, and secured them for me; they are like gold, as you may imagine, since we have had no news since 24th February, 1884! These papers gave us far more information than any of your letters. Did K. send them by accident or on purpose?"<sup>2</sup> He unjustly accuses the Major of not telling him the route the expedition would take, an "inexplicable" omission entirely due to Kitchener's lack of knowledge. On the 26th November there is a decided change in his opinion of the subject of his former sarcastic remarks: "I had a letter saying Government had given Kitchener *carte blanche* to pay the Mahdi up to £20,000 for me; but adds the 'writer does not think I would accept such a proposition'; in which he is quite right; neither would the Mahdi.

"I like Baker's description of Kitchener,"<sup>3</sup> he goes on. Then follows a paragraph cut from the General's letter,

<sup>1</sup> *Journals*, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

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already quoted.<sup>1</sup> "Whoever comes up here," he avows, "had better appoint Major Kitchener Governor-General, for it is certain, after what has passed, *I am impossible*. (What a comfort!)" Gordon adds that Kitchener "would be the best man," but thinks that the wisest course to pursue is "to give the country over to the Sultan with two millions and the ports."<sup>2</sup> Apparently the last letter received by Gordon from Kitchener was dated Debbah, 14th October 1884, in which the latter told him that Colonel J. D. Stewart and the others on board the steamer that had set out from Khartoum had fallen into the hands of Suleiman Wady Goun, Sheikh of the Minassir, that Wolseley was at Wady Halfa, "and it is expected this expedition will definitely start from Dongola on or about the 1st November." The message ends expressing the hope that Gordon has received some of Kitchener's previous letters; "I have received none from you in reply."

Sir Henry W. Gordon, K.C.B., makes it abundantly clear that his brother's comments on Kitchener's presumed lack of attention are not just. "I am persuaded," he writes in a foreword to the *Journals*,<sup>3</sup> "that he did all in his power to get messengers into Kartoum, in the same way as General Gordon fancied he got them out; and yet how few succeeded in reaching their destination. . . . It is due to Major Kitchener to say that from the time he went to Dongola he certainly kept us acquainted with the position of affairs at Kartoum in a manner most reliable, and deserving of much credit."

Khartoum fell on Monday, the 26th January, 1885. Father Ohrwalder's narrative of some of the ghastly atrocities committed by the Mahdi's forces makes terrible

<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Journals*, p. 254.

<sup>3</sup> Pp. xlii-xliii.

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reading, but at the same time his story is extremely valuable because it shows the type of men against whom Kitchener had to wage relentless warfare in the near future :

“ Nicola Leontides, the Greek Consul, who, on account of his amiable character, was much respected in Khartoum, had his hands cut off first, and was then beheaded. Martin Hansel, the Austrian Consul, who was the oldest member of the European colony, was alive until 2 P.M., when some Arabs from Buri, led by his chief *kavass*, who was on bad terms with him, entered the courtyard of the house, and, on Hansel being summoned to come down, he was at once beheaded. At the same time Mulatte Skander, a carpenter who lived with him, was killed in the same way. His body, together with that of his dog and parrot, was then taken out, alcohol poured over them, and set fire to. After a time, when the body had become like a red-hot coal, it was thrown into the river.

“ Human blood and ruthless cruelty alone seemed to satisfy the dervishes. The Austrian tailor, Klein, on making the sign of the Cross, had his throat cut from ear to ear with a knife which was used to slaughter animals, and his life-blood was poured out before the eyes of his horror-stricken wife and children. Not satisfied with the death of the father, they seized his son, a youth of eighteen, and, burying their lances in his body, they stretched him out at his mother's feet, a corpse! They then took counsel as to how they should kill the next son, a lad of fifteen. But by this time the mother, a daughter of Cattarina Nobili, of Venice, was worked up into a state of mad despair. Seizing her son of five years old with her right hand, while she held her suckling babe to her breast with her left, she fought against these murderers like

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a tigress being robbed of her young, and they could not wrest her children from her ; but they seized her daughter, a girl of eighteen, who became the wife of an Arab.

“The son-in-law of Dr Georges Bey (who had been killed in the Hicks expedition) was roused from sleep by the noise of the Arabs breaking in. He rose from his bed, and, making the sign of the Cross, rushed to the window, where he shouted *Aman!* (‘Security of life’); but a bullet struck him in the forehead, and he fell dead at the feet of his young wife. The dervishes forced their way into the house, broke in the door of the room where the dead man lay stretched out on the bed, killed another Greek, and clove open the head of the little son, a boy of twelve years of age, with an axe.” The unfortunate mother saved another little son of six months old by saying he was a girl. The mother herself was spared to become the wife of Abderrahman Wad en Nejumi.

The official account of the fall of Khartoum published by the War Office was written by Kitchener. It is too lengthy to quote *in extenso*, but one or two of the more important points may be briefly mentioned. He calls attention to the fact that when Gordon sent four of his steamers to meet the Relief Expedition and one with Colonel Stewart, he “had so weakened himself” that it was impossible to keep open communication with the fort of Omdurman because he could not check the Arabs on the White Nile. After doing what he could to allay the hunger of the poor inhabitants, Gordon gave permission for those who wished to do so to leave the town and join the Mahdi, and at the same time he wrote to that worthy requesting hospitality for them. At the beginning of January the population had been reduced by about 20,000, only some 14,000 preferring to remain with the

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**General.** With the fall of Omdurman the enemy secured the command of the river. In Kitchener's opinion the sortie made from Khartoum on the 18th January does not appear to have obtained "any great or permanent advantage" for the besieged garrison, and he held that the town "fell from sudden assault when the garrison were too exhausted by privations to make proper resistance. Having entered the town, the rebels rushed through the streets, shooting and murdering every one they met, thus increasing the panic and destroying any opposition."

The Mahdi's troops ran amok for "some six hours, and about 4000 persons, at least, were killed. The black troops were spared, except those who resisted at the Boori and elsewhere; large numbers of the townspeople and slaves were killed and wounded. The Bashi-Bazouks and white regulars, numbering 3827, and the Shaigia irregulars, numbering 2380, were mostly all killed in cold blood, after they had surrendered and been disarmed. Consul Hansel was killed in his own house. Consul Nicola, a doctor, and Ibrahim Bey Fauzi, who was Gordon's secretary, were taken prisoners; the latter was wounded."

Looting followed the massacre. The inhabitants were told to evacuate the town, and as they passed out they were searched, the women being taken to Omdurman to become slaves to the rebel chiefs. The men were kept under guard for three days, and after having been stripped, were released.

Kitchener satisfactorily disposes of the idea that had Gordon wished his life would have been spared. The presence of Gordon as a prisoner in the enemy's camp, he avers, "would have been a source of great danger to the Mahdi, for the black troops from Kordofan and Khartoum all loved and venerated Gordon, and many other influential



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men knew him to be a wonderfully good man. The want of discipline in the Mahdi's camp made it dangerous for him to keep as a prisoner a man whom all the black troops liked better than himself, and in favour of whom, on a revulsion of feeling, a successful revolt might take place in his own camp. Moreover, if Gordon was dead, he calculated the English would retire and leave him in peace." The failure of the Mahdists to find the Government Treasury led a large number of the Bagara Arabs to abandon the Mahdi, and ere long they were fighting against their former leader.

Kitchener brings the document to a conclusion by paying a tribute to the dead warrior. Although brief, it shows how highly he esteemed his worth. "The memorable siege of Khartoum," he writes, "lasted 317 days, and it is not too much to say that such a noble resistance was due to the indomitable resolution and resource of one Englishman.

"Never was a garrison so nearly rescued, never was a commander so sincerely lamented."

*Too late ! The soldier hero sleeps,  
No more disturbed by Mahdi's frantic rage  
And yet again poor Chlo weeps,  
Then turns once more another blackened page.*

## CHAPTER V

### In Command at Suakin

*"The Mahdi must advance or disappear, and I deprecate leaving him this fresh lease of life and power."*—KITCHENER

**N**OTWITHSTANDING the protest of able men on the spot, including the Commander-in-Chief, General Redvers Buller, Sir Charles Wilson, Kitchener, and Sir Evelyn Baring, who made certain reservations, the Government decided to abandon the Sudan. Their reasons for doing so were based on the possibility of a Russo-British war over the question of Afghanistan, and what Mr Gladstone called "the moral basis of the projected military operations." The latter wrote to the Queen that it was "the entanglement of the British forces in Soudanese operations, which would most powerfully tempt Russia to adopt aggressive measures." In a memorandum which he prepared for the Cabinet on the 9th April, 1885, he dealt with the other matter in a way which showed that he was by no means in accord with those who, because of their first-hand knowledge, were presumably better able to appreciate the problem. "I have from the first regarded the rising of the Soudanese against Egypt as a justifiable and honourable revolt. The Cabinet have, I think, never taken an opposite view." Mr Gladstone's biographer<sup>1</sup> frankly admits

<sup>1</sup> *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, by John Morley (London, 1908 edition), vol. ii, pp. 314, 634.

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that Queen Victoria "was rather vehement against withdrawal."

"The struggle with the Mahdi, or rather, perhaps, with Mahdism, must come sooner or later," Wolseley told the Gladstone Cabinet in a dispatch dated the 16th April, 1885, and he spoke truth, as subsequent events proved. "We can accept it now, and have done with it once and for all, or we can allow all the military reputation we have gained at the cost of so much toil and hard fighting, all the bloodshed and all the expenditure of the past campaign, to go for nothing, and try and stave the final struggle off for a few years. These years will be years of trouble and disturbance for Egypt, of burden and strain to our military resources, and the contest that will come in the end will be no less than that which is in front of us now. This is all we shall gain by a defensive policy."

When Lord Salisbury came into power in the following June Wolseley told him much the same thing, and suggested an advance on Khartoum in the autumn. He was told that the Government "were not prepared to reverse the orders given by their predecessors" so far as the Sudan was concerned. Indeed the province of Dongola and the whole of the Sudan down to the town of Dongola had already been evacuated. The rear-guard at Debbah alone remained.<sup>1</sup> By April 1886 all the British troops were withdrawn to Wady Halfa.

The opinion of the Army was voiced by a staff officer in Egypt, who communicated the following to *The Times*:<sup>2</sup>

"I wonder whether the English nation—taken as a nation—has any conscience at all. I do not think so. As far as I can see, our evacuation of Dongola province

<sup>1</sup> See Royle, chapter li.

<sup>2</sup> *Times*, 9th July, 1885.

## In Command at Suakin

has not caused the slightest stir of any sort or kind at home. People have treated it with absolute indifference—12,700 wretched refugees have cleared out of the place, every one of whom is ruined, and the mass of whom will starve; for if you take these people away from their little patch of river frontage, with its sakeeyah and its cow, they have no means of livelihood whatever. Now, when we went up to Dongola last autumn, the whole province was, as things go in this country, well to do and prosperous. The result of our occupation has been to ruin it completely. The whole place is desolate, and the town is absolutely deserted. There is not a native in it, except such few as may be employed by our rear-guard. We have turned all the inhabitants, who were fairly thriving before, into wanderers and beggars, and many of them, no doubt, will die of hunger; and nobody at home, so far as I can judge, gives all this a thought. I do not believe that any nation ever committed a more cold-blooded, cowardly, wicked act of selfishness than we have done in our evacuation of Dongola. However, it is done now. . . .”

Kitchener had rendered every possible service to the Relief Expedition, with the failure of which he had, of course, nothing to do. When all was over, and the severed head of the soldier who had been the best-beloved man in England was somewhere or other in the Mahdi's camp, the Major resigned his commission in the Egyptian Army and returned home.

“We were on board a steamship bound for Port Said and England,” writes a fellow-traveller who afterward became an intimate friend of Kitchener. “It was a piping hot day, and all of us lay panting in deck-chairs, supporting existence with iced drinks and fans. A tall

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figure arrested my attention, whose close study of the little volume in his hand not even a burning afternoon off Jeddah could perturb. Clothed in the undress uniform of an officer of Engineers, the man at one moment would pace the deck, at another fling himself into his chair, reading, reading always. He had come on board at Aden, and at the moment I did not know it was Herbert Kitchener. But when presently he went below, I ventured to pick up the book he had left in his deck-chair. It was a volume of Arabic fables in the original, and above its title I read 'H. H. Kitchener.' "

Mr Hermann Klein gives us a delightful little reminiscence of Kitchener's brief stay in London which shows the officer in strange guise.

"During the preparation of one of Sir Augustus Harris's dramas,"<sup>1</sup> he notes, "I went to Drury Lane while a rehearsal was in progress, and sat down in the stalls to watch the training of an army of supers in an imaginary fight with some African natives. In due course this was followed by a home-coming and a triumphal march through Trafalgar Square, with the hero at the head of his victorious company. The whole business was splendidly done. Actively assisting the manager in these operations was a gentleman in a frock-coat and tall hat, of undeniable military appearance, who impressed me both by his quiet, masterful manner and the imperturbable patience with which he directed manœuvres to be repeated over and over again until they were satisfactorily executed. After the rehearsal was concluded I went upon the stage. Augustus Harris was talking to his military adviser. He beckoned me to approach. 'Klein, I want to introduce you to my friend, Major Kitchener, who has been

*Human Nature.*

## In Command at Suakin

kind enough to come and help me with this "soldiering" work. What do you think of it? Did you ever see such fighting on the stage before?"

Kitchener was gazetted a Lieutenant-Colonel on the 15th June, 1885, and after a brief visit to Zanzibar as one of the Boundary Commissioners, was appointed Governor-General of the Eastern Sudan and Commandant at Suakin in August 1886. Much had happened in Egypt since he had left it scarcely more than a year before. Major-General Grenfell had succeeded Sir Evelyn Wood as Sirdar, with headquarters at Assouan, while Brigadier-General Butler was at Wady Halfa. The Mahdi had died of small-pox at Omdurman on the 22nd June, 1885, and had been succeeded by the Khalifa Abdullah, the commander-in-chief of one of the three sections of the Mahdi's army. One of his first acts was to perpetuate the memory of his old chief by erecting a mosque above his remains. At Ginniss the British under General Stephenson and the new Egyptian Army under the Sirdar had severely punished the Khalifa's troops, led by Mohammed el Khair, on the 31st December, 1885, the enemy losing 800 men in killed and wounded. In the Eastern Sudan Osman Digna had done his best to capture Suakin, but in August 1886 had been recalled to Omdurman. The friendly tribes had also taken courage, and not a few Mahdists forsook the cause. What they failed to understand was that as the Sudan had been abandoned "the attitude of the Government was purely defensive,"<sup>1</sup> and no troops could be sent to help them to rid the country of a power which they now realized had become a tyranny.

On this coral islet off the west coast of the Red Sea, where devout Mohammedan pilgrims embark for Jeddah,

<sup>1</sup> Wingate, p. 300.

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Kitchener stamped the mark of his vigorous personality, waking it up and making it of consequence from the point of view of defence. "This post," says Mr Winston Churchill,<sup>1</sup> "always one of responsibility and danger, did not satisfy Kitchener, whose ambition was now taking definite form. Eager for more responsibility and more danger, he harried and raided the surrounding tribes; he restricted and almost destroyed the slender trade which was again springing up, and in consequence of his measures the neighbourhood of Suakin was soon in even greater ferment than usual. This culminated at the end of 1887 in the reappearance and advance of Osman Digna. The movements of the dervishes were, however, uncertain. The defences of the town had been greatly strengthened and improved by the skill and activity of its new Governor."

Wingate makes no mention whatever of what one might suppose to be an almost sinister influence on the part of Kitchener. Indeed he says that following the retirement of the loyal Arabs to Trinkitat on the approach of the Ameer Mussa Fiki's forces from Tokar early in November 1886 "a season of greater tranquillity than there had been for years now set in." He goes on to say that by the end of the year the Tokar leader had "considerably increased his following" and the Ameer el Khadr "was unceasing in his efforts to stir up hostility against the Government,"<sup>2</sup> but there is no suggestion of any action on the part of Kitchener which stirred up "even greater ferment than usual." Royle notes that £2000 "was paid to the friendlies by way of subsidy, and trade with the interior was opened. In November, Colonel Kitchener . . . reported 'the collapse of Osman Digna's power,' and a

<sup>1</sup> *The River War*, pp. 123-124.

<sup>2</sup> Wingate, p. 303.

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season of greater tranquillity than Souakim had known for years was experienced. In January 1887," he adds, "affairs at Souakim had even further settled down, and many of the hostile tribes expressed a desire to come to terms, but, in June, news arrived that from 2000 to 3000 dervishes, mostly Baggaras, were advancing from Kassala to relieve Tokar, at that time besieged by the friendlies. The arrival of the Baggaras at Tokar tended to revive the fanatical spirit at that place, but had not much influence on the surrounding tribes, who refused to present themselves there when summoned by Osman Digna."<sup>1</sup> What seems to have been the real cause of Osman's reappearance was his receiving news of the withdrawal of two battalions from the Suakin garrison during the autumn because "things looked so peaceful."<sup>2</sup> Kitchener certainly made a raid in May on the post of Halaib, where slave-dealers had been carrying on their nefarious business, captured the Heteima sheikhs, and dispersed the colony, but far from this checking or hindering commerce, we are told that "soon trade found a ready market."<sup>3</sup>

The Ameer<sup>4</sup> seized his opportunity, and despite the open hostility of the Amarar again besieged the town. An attack by the enemy on the Water Forts was repulsed, as were attempts made at night on several occasions in January 1888, when the men-of-war in the harbour gave valuable assistance in preventing them from being carried to a successful issue. Following a defeat of the friendly Amarar, Kitchener determined to strike a blow at Handub, Osman Digna's headquarters, hoping that he might capture the Ameer. He had a motley army at his command, including Amarar, Bashi-Bazouks, Muwalledin,

<sup>1</sup> Royle, p. 461.

<sup>2</sup> Wingate, p. 341.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 461.

<sup>4</sup> Ameer means chief.



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native police, mounted troops, and Sudanese deserters from the enemy. A start was made early in the morning of the 17th January, and the rebels were taken completely by surprise as they were bowed in prayer outside the zariba in front of the village. Without stopping to gather up their arms they fled, chased by the irregulars and friendlies who formed the advance party. The troops, in their commendable anxiety to win a decisive victory, pushed their preliminary success too far. For a time there seemed a likelihood that they would be cut off, owing to the wily tactics of the enemy. By going round a neighbouring hill the apparently routed Arabs reached the zariba, and, securing their weapons and ammunition, boldly engaged the men who only a short time before had taken them at such disadvantage.

Kitchener, pushing forward with the cavalry, ordered them to dismount. Their fire was so well directed and sustained that the enemy was forced to withdraw into the village. Rallying the Sudanese, the Colonel sought to push forward, but found it necessary before doing so to cover the escape of a number of dervishes from Osman Digna's camp who wished to throw in their lot with him.<sup>1</sup> No sooner had he effected this than a bullet hit him in the face and embedded itself in one of the muscles of the neck. He fell off his horse, but fortunately Captain Hickman, his second in command, was able to rally the men and extricate them from a now untenable position. The total casualties in killed, wounded, and missing were thirty-eight, which is remarkably few considering the nature of the action, and it is supposed that the dervishes lost 800.

Despite the efforts of the surgeons, the shot which had brought Kitchener down could not be located. Six

<sup>1</sup> Wingate, pp. 353-355.

## In Command at Suakin

months later, during a violent fit of coughing, the bullet left its hiding-place and the wound healed.

Sir Evelyn Baring afterward outlined the policy to be pursued in the Eastern Sudan as "in standing purely on the defensive against any hostile movement or combination of the Arab tribes, in avoiding any course of action which might involve the ultimate necessity of offensive action, and in encouraging legitimate trade by every means in our power."<sup>1</sup>

Kitchener, who had obtained permission from Cairo to make the attack, was told that in future neither British officers nor Egyptian regulars were to take part in similar operations.<sup>2</sup> After the battle of Handub he went to Cairo for a few weeks, returning early in March. He was gazetted Colonel on the 11th April, and on going home to England on sick leave a little later was made an Aide-de-camp to the Queen.

<sup>1</sup> To Consul Cameron, 14th March, 1888. Quoted by Winston Churchill, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> Royle, p. 462.

## CHAPTER VI

### Sirdar of the Egyptian Army

*"In war, as in policy, lost opportunities do not return."*

NAPOLÉON

**K**ITCHENER returned to Egypt as Adjutant-General of the Egyptian Army in time to take part in the operations about to be undertaken by Sir Francis Grenfell, now Sirdar, against Osman Digna. The forces of the Ameer had been devoting a great deal of attention to Suakin, necessitating additional troops being sent to the garrison and the dispatch of another ship to assist in the work of patrolling the Red Sea. A personal inspection of the enemy, who were laying siege to the town and had dug trenches south-west of the water forts Gemaizeh and Shaata, convinced the Commander-in-Chief that Suakin must be relieved without delay if it were not to become a second Khartoum. By December 1888 he had augmented the forces in the place to 4750 troops, made up of 750 British regulars, 2000 of the new Egyptian Army, and a similar number of Sudanese. Grenfell's orders were to clear Suakin of the enemy; he was not to make a general offensive movement against the Ameer.

The Egyptian cavalry was under the command of Kitchener. On making his first reconnaissance on the 9th he was compelled to retire before a much larger force than he had at his disposal. This early set-back, while it delayed the campaign, was not without compensation,

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for further drafts of both cavalry and infantry were sent from Cairo, bringing the total up to over 5000 men. At the same time Osman Digna's satellites managed to keep a fairly strong hand on the friendlies. They, while anxious to see the overthrow of his power, for the most part feared to show open hostility.

The plan of attack was carefully thought out, and on the 20th December the battle of Gemaizeh took place. In order to deceive the enemy a naval demonstration was made a few miles from Suakin, at a place called Mersa Kuwai, which was visible from Osman Digna's headquarters at Handub. As Osman Digna sent no reinforcements, it must be presumed that this feint had the desired effect of making him uncertain as to where Grenfell would strike his main blow. At the same time a heavy artillery bombardment of the dervish position, both from the forts and H.M.S. *Racer*, was kept up. Kitchener, in command of three Sudanese battalions which formed the 1st Brigade, together with the 2nd Brigade under Lieut.-Colonel Holled-Smith, advanced toward the trenches. There the troops opened a sustained and heavy fire on the enemy, determinedly rushed across the intervening space with fixed bayonets, and captured the position at a heavy cost to those who had held it.

Meanwhile other troops had advanced to the redoubt on the south flank, which was now shelled by the Horse Artillery battery, while the mounted infantry successfully attacked on the north flank. The various movements were so admirably carried out that within an hour and a half of the British advance Osman Digna's infantry were hastening in disorder toward Handub, and his mounted men were being closely followed by the 20th Hussars in the direction of Hasheen. Over 500 dervishes—a little

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less than a third of those who took part—were slain, including four Ameeris, the casualties to Grenfell's men numbering only half a dozen killed and forty-six wounded.

When "Cease firing" was sounded those troops who were not pursuing the Mahdists at once set to work to entrench themselves in zaribas on the position formerly held by the besiegers. In due course block-houses and additional forts and redoubts were built.<sup>1</sup> After the Sirdar's departure in the first week of 1889 the garrison was reduced to 2000 men, but the Sudanese had won golden opinions from Sir Francis Grenfell. They "behaved not only with gallantry, but with steadiness," he wrote in his dispatch; "they advanced for three hundred yards under fire without firing a shot, and even when the trenches were reached, they did not utterly lose their formation."

Wad en Nejumi, who had planned the destruction of Hicks Pasha's army, and was one of the Mahdi's generals who had besieged Khartoum, was gradually moving down the Nile. On the 3rd August he was met at Toski, about 125 miles from Assouan, by Grenfell in a long and trying battle which lasted seven hours. With a squadron of the 20th Hussars, three squadrons of Egyptian cavalry, and a camel corps, Kitchener was told to make a reconnaissance with the object of checking the advance of the enemy until the arrival of a British brigade anxiously expected from Assouan. This operation was necessitated by the nature of the country, which happened to be particularly suitable for Grenfell's tactics, whereas it favoured the enemy at no great distance beyond. The importance of fighting on suitable ground will be evident to every reader. When the dervishes became aware of the oncoming force

<sup>1</sup> Wingate, pp. 365-369.

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they immediately surged forward, eventually appearing in such large numbers that Kitchener's men twice had to vacate the positions they had taken up. They were then withdrawn to a hill which commanded the enemy's line of advance. This in turn had to be abandoned for the foot of a hill about two miles from Toski. Here the Egyptians were joined by reinforcements, which Wad en Nejumi now attempted to evade by advancing to the north, which it had been the object of the Sirdar's manœuvres to prevent.

He was foiled in his intention by Kitchener, who made a wide detour and headed the enemy off. The Ameer's great hope had been to avoid a fight, but as that had been frustrated, he seized some hills to the west of the Colonel's position and prepared for battle. Further battalions and guns had now reached Grenfell. The first charge of the dervishes resulted in their being forced to retire with considerable loss, and was followed up by the capture of one of the hills they had occupied by the 9th Sudanese and the 2nd Egyptian Battalions. A general advance was then made by Grenfell, and a second hill was carried after a particularly stiff fight. It says much for the determination and bravery of the enemy that they made no fewer than three desperate charges to regain it. Notwithstanding the energy which their fanaticism engendered, it was evident that Wad en Nejumi had lost the day. Yet another hill was stormed, but he managed to take up a second position with those who had eluded the magnificent charge of Kitchener's cavalry, which succeeded the capture of all the heights. Following a severe pounding by the artillery, the whole line pushed forward and completed the enemy's discomfiture. Nejumi was mortally wounded, 1200 of his followers, including several Ameers,

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were killed, some 4000 fighting men and camp-followers were taken prisoners, and nearly 150 standards and a vast supply of weapons and accoutrements fell into the hands of the victors, who lost but 25 killed and 140 wounded.

The faithfulness of the Ameer's bodyguard of forty men was worthy of a better cause. They placed him on a camel, but while endeavouring to escape the party was sighted by some of the cavalry, who opened fire. The camel dropped, and most of the attendants, but when the horse-men came up to demand the surrender of the others the 'dead' jumped to their feet and charged. Those who were not killed engaged in a second encounter, with the result that only one escaped. All the remainder lay dead on the boulder-strewn plain.<sup>1</sup>

The invasion of Egypt was indefinitely postponed, for the reconnaissance had developed into a battle which had shattered Wad en Nejumi's army, killed its commander, and inflicted a staggering blow to the cause that the dervishes represented. Moreover, it inspired confidence in the Egyptian Army, which in turn owed much to Kitchener. The Colonel's immediate rewards were a C.B., a clasp, and mention in dispatches.

Three years afterward, on the 9th April, 1892, to be exact, Kitchener succeeded Grenfell as Commander-in-Chief. The appointment was made largely on the recommendation of Sir Evelyn Baring, despite the claims of Colonel Wodehouse. Since the battle of Toski he had put in excellent work as Adjutant-General, and had also entirely reorganized the Egyptian police.

The condition of the native army at this time is well summed up by Mr (now Sir) Henry Norman.<sup>2</sup> "A month

<sup>1</sup> Wingate, pp. 421-433.

<sup>2</sup> *Contemporary Review*, No. 316, April 1892, p. 492.



**A Dervish Charge**  
Charles M. Sheldon





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ago, at Halfa," he writes, "I watched a whole Egyptian battalion doing the new bayonet exercise without the words of command, in a way which (although their commanding officer apologized for its shortcomings on the ground that it was new to them) would have passed muster with any troops in the world; I walked through their quarters, smart and clean and comfortable, and tasted their first-rate food in the kitchen; I saw them swaggering about the villages, and obviously, as Lord Wolseley would have them do, 'despising the virtues of civil life'; I heard of time-expired men coming back daily to re-enlist; I rode behind them for hours in the desert on field-days, through the choking sand, and under the blazing sun; and I talked long with the officers who had led them at Toski and at Tokar. At the latter place the dervishes had planted their flags within fifteen yards of them, and could be heard shouting to each other to keep still, as the ammunition of the infidels would soon be exhausted, and then they could all be killed. And these same Egyptian troops had been so steady, and so well in hand under such nerve-shaking circumstances, that their commander, to reserve their fire, got them to bring their rifles at command from the 'ready' to the 'present' and back again to the 'ready' without pulling trigger."

The same informant, however, admits that this pleasing picture has another side. "Where he has won in fight, it has been because he could not help winning—because his British officers would not let him lose." He regards the Sudanese regiments as the backbone of the Egyptian Army. "These jet-black creatures," he adds, "resembling amiable gorillas in face, of all heights and only one thickness, narrow-hipped, thin-chested, with no backs to their heads and no calves to their legs, are liked and trusted by

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their officers to a remarkable extent. . . . The dervish is their oppressor and natural enemy, and they only desire the opportunity to 'get at him' at as close quarters as possible. They are children in their love of decoration, and their whims and their devotion to their officers. They are savages in their dislike of discipline and their passionate impatience of restraint on the battle-field. For this reason—to keep them back—they have more English officers to a battalion than Egyptian troops. They detest drill and blank cartridges. They are enthusiastic over every rumour of approaching fight. I was told a delightful story of one recent action in which they took a prominent part. The enemy was under cover not far off; but the firing-line of blacks were blazing away at him as fast as they could open and close their rifles. In vain their officers tried to stop them. The waste of ammunition threatened to become extremely serious, and their commanding officer, a Scotsman who has seen many fights with them, losing his temper, rode up and down behind the line, cursing them with every abusive epithet in a fairly adequate vocabulary of Arabic invective. But entirely without effect. At last one of them happened to turn, and discovered the beloved Bey in evidently a very excited state of mind. He at once arose, ran back to him, and, patting him reassuringly on the boot, he said, 'Don't be frightened, Bey. It's all right. We're here—we'll take care of you!' The Scotch Bey, however, was equal to the occasion. He rode out through the line, and walked his horse up and down in front of the rifles. 'Now,' he said, 'if you must fire, fire at me!' After this it is not surprising to read in dispatches that this officer has twice recently had his horse shot under him."

In concluding this portion of his informative article, the

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writer says that "the Egyptian Army is a pyramid resting on its apex, and that apex is its British officers. They have created it, and they alone can keep it. If their authority and personality were removed, or even weakened, it would be practically worthless in six months." This will help us, perhaps, to an appreciation of the task which Kitchener had taken in hand, and with the beginning of which he had had so much to do. He was naturally anxious to begin the reconquest of the Sudan, but for a time the Home Government refused to listen to any suggestion of the kind.

"Late one night"—the story is told by Mr Frank Scudamore, the war correspondent—"Kitchener's A.D.C., Major Watson, was playing billiards at the Turf Club when a telegram was brought to him. He read it, then darted round to the Sirdar's house. All was darkness, for the Sirdar had gone to bed. By dint of throwing gravel at the bedroom window, Watson awakened his chief, who came down in no very good humour at being called up. But when he read the telegram Kitchener for once lost his iron self-control, and, joining hands with his A.D.C., broke into a wild dance round the house. The dispatch authorized Kitchener to move on Akasheh, and his chance had come at last.

"When the reconquest of the Sudan was finally decided upon," Mr Scudamore continues, "the Government thought of giving the supreme command of the expedition to Sir Redvers Buller, and asked him to estimate the cost. Sir Redvers replied that he thought it could be done for £8,500,000. Then the Government asked the Sirdar to tender, and he said he would do the whole thing, lock, stock, and barrel, for £500,000.<sup>1</sup> And he did."

<sup>1</sup> The figures are incorrect. See *post*, p. 98.

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The same well-known writer relates another story of this period. It also deals with the question of finance, but in an entirely different way. It reveals a trait in the character of the subject of this biography of which few people, knowing only the stern disciplinarian, could have been aware.

"Well, sergeant," he said to a non-commissioned officer who had been invalided home, "I hope you will soon come back fit and well; and—er—here is something that may be useful to you at home." He placed in the man's hand a cheque for twenty-five pounds.

On another occasion he sent for one of the survivors of the unfortunate expedition led by Hicks Pasha. "What made you run away?" he asked. "Why should we do otherwise?" replied the dusky warrior. "If we fight and win we get neither thanks nor praise. We are treated like dogs. Our pay is kept from us. We are ill-treated continually and by everybody. Better we die, and——" "Yes?" queried the Sirdar, as the man hesitated, doubtless thinking that perhaps he was saying too much. "And," continued the survivor, "our officers with us."

In this and other ways Kitchener found out grievances both real and fancied. He punished officers who abused their men; he punished men who refused to carry out the orders of their officers. Thus slowly and surely he did his part in perfecting the human machine for active service in a long and trying campaign. That the time would come when the Egyptian Army would be called upon to settle the constantly recurring problem of the dervishes he had no doubt. So firm was this belief in the mind of Sir Samuel W. Baker that he sent Kitchener some memoranda on military routes toward Berber. "My opinion," he averred, "is very strong upon the necessity of quietly

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preparing for the event beforehand, so that when the moment shall arrive, the success may be accomplished without loss of time. In all our recent expeditions one notes a general absence of military science. You will have the opportunity of preparing for a blow, and delivering it with undoubted result, which will bring honour upon the force you command and to yourself."

The Sirdar believed in his troops, and he believed also in himself. It was in the early days of 1894 that Abbas, who had succeeded Tewfik as Khedive, made a tour of inspection from Cairo to the southern limit of his dominions. At Wady Halfa he reviewed the garrison and took the opportunity of expressing his dissatisfaction with the troops. Kitchener promptly resigned. When the young ruler begged him to continue to discharge his duties he refused. The matter was taken up by the Home Government, with the result that a General Order printed in Arabic, English, and French was issued by the Khedive stating that he was satisfied with the efficiency of the Army and had confidence in its officers. This closed the affair, except that a K.C.M.G. was conferred on Kitchener, who went on as though no untoward incident had happened. Two years later the ruler had every reason to know that the belief expressed in the General Order was not misplaced.

## CHAPTER VII

### On the Road to Dongola

*"The reconquest of the Sudan has been the triumph of hard work, perseverance, and economy, exercised through long years of patient waiting. Never, perhaps, has hard work so amply deserved success, assuredly, success so unequivocal and brilliant has never crowned hard work!"*—VISCOUNT MILNER

KITCHENER'S motto was 'Thorough,' and it was that of the entire military machine which he controlled. If there was one particular branch that displayed keener efficiency than any of the others it was the Intelligence Department, for which Colonel Francis Wingate was responsible. The officials attached to it penetrated into all manner of places, even into the Khalifa's palace at Omdurman. Disguised as women, as traders, or as warriors, they went about collecting information here, there, and everywhere.<sup>1</sup> Nothing came amiss to them—they were entirely worthy of the name borne by the Department they so ably represented. The Sirdar had played the game of spy often enough to appreciate its perils and its practical worth, but he was not exacting, for the sufficient reason that there was no need to be.

Kitchener knew perfectly well that sooner or later the problem of the Khalifa would have to be solved by the sword. Those of another school of opinion were anxious that the question should be postponed until it became more urgent. They held that the salvation of Egypt lay

<sup>1</sup> *The River War*, p. 126.

## On the Road to Dongola

in making its lands more productive by the construction of dams, reservoirs, and barrages. Beyond doubt a system of irrigation was absolutely essential to the prosperity of the country, but the foundation of prosperity is peace, and the Sirdar recognized the fact that while Mahdism was rampant Egypt could never remain undisturbed for any length of time.

The two points of view are admirably illustrated by Mr Winston Churchill. "At regular intervals," he tells us, "Sir Herbert Kitchener and Sir William Garstin would successively visit the British Agency (it would be treason to call it 'Government House'), the one to urge the case for a war, the other to plead for a reservoir. The reservoir had won. Only a few weeks before the advance to Dongola was ordered Garstin met Kitchener returning from the Agency. The engineer inquired the result of the General's interview. 'I'm beaten,' said Kitchener abruptly; 'you've got your dam'—and Garstin went on his way rejoicing."<sup>1</sup>

The crisis for which Sir Herbert Kitchener had been preparing was precipitated by the difficulties of Italy with the Abyssinians in Erythræa, and the rumour that King Menelek's forces were likely to join hands with the dervishes for a united attack on Kassala. The defeat of General Baratieri at the battle of Adowa on the 1st March, 1896, led the Italian Ambassador in London to make a request that a demonstration beyond Wady Halfa might be made to distract the attention of the common foe. The Nile above that town had been abandoned since 1884. To use the words of Viscount Milner: "The demonstration originally proposed was quite insignificant: it was

<sup>1</sup> *The River War*, p. 129. In this connexion see also *Modern Egypt*, by the Earl of Cromer (London, 1908), vol. ii, p. 82.



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immediately transformed into a project for the reoccupation of Dongola, which in turn inevitably involved the re-conquest of Khartoum.”<sup>1</sup> Addressing the House of Commons on the 17th March, Mr G. N. Curzon,<sup>2</sup> Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, stated that “the Government, acting in conjunction with the Government of Egypt and their advisers, and in order to avoid danger to Italy, to Egypt, and to England, and in the interests of Europe, have ordered an advance to Akasheh.”<sup>3</sup> Such an operation, as the Earl of Cromer avows, was trifling with the question. “It was essential to discard absolutely the vacillation of the past in dealing with Soudan matters. The idea of limiting the operations to a demonstration was speedily abandoned.”<sup>4</sup>

The Egyptian Army numbered 18,000 men. Some of the battalions had British colonels and majors, while others were entirely officered by natives. They were stationed at Cairo, Suakin, and Wady Halfa. On the 12th March Kitchener received instructions to begin the advance. As commander “a better choice could not have been made,” says the British Representative. “Young, energetic, ardently and exclusively devoted to his profession, and, as the honourable scars on his face testified, experienced in Soudanese warfare, Sir Herbert Kitchener possessed all the qualities necessary to bring the campaign to a successful issue. Like many another military commander, the bonds which united him and his subordinates were those of stern discipline on the one side, and, on the other, the respect due to superior talent

<sup>1</sup> *England in Egypt*, by Viscount Milner (London, 1904), p. 395.

<sup>2</sup> Created first Baron Curzon of Kedleston, 1898; Earl, 1911.

<sup>3</sup> Some ninety miles from Wady Halfa.

<sup>4</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii, pp. 84-85.

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and the confidence felt in the resourcefulness of a strong and masterful spirit, rather than the affectionate obedience yielded to the behests of a genial chief. When the campaign was over, there were not wanting critics who whispered that Sir Herbert Kitchener's success had been due as much to good luck as to good management. If, it was said, a number of events had happened, which, as a matter of fact, did not happen, the result might have been different. The same may be said of any military commander and of any campaign. Fortune is proverbially fickle in war. . . . The fact, however, is that Sir Herbert Kitchener's main merit was that he left as little as possible to chance. A first-rate military administrator, every detail of the machine with which he had to work received adequate attention. Before any decisive movement was made, each portion of the machine was adapted, so far as human foresight could provide, to perform its allotted task.

"Sir Herbert Kitchener also possessed another quality which is rare among soldiers, and which was of special value under the circumstances then existing. He did not think that extravagance was the necessary handmaid of efficiency. On the contrary, he was a rigid economist, and, whilst making adequate provision for all essential and necessary expenditure, suppressed with a firm hand any tendency toward waste and extravagance."<sup>1</sup>

In less than three weeks 8000 troops, the greater proportion belonging to the Egyptian Army and the North Staffordshire Regiment, were at Wady Halfa. The Sirdar, his chief staff officer, Colonel H. M. L. Rundle, and Colonel A. Hunter, who was to command at Sarras and south of that point, arrived on the 28th. Between

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii, pp. 87-88.

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seventy and eighty British officers were under them. For the purpose of guarding Suakin some 2500 Indian troops reached there on the 30th May. The first move forward was to Akasheh, about one-third of the distance to Dongola, and some fifty miles south of Sarras, to which outpost a railway already existed from Wady Halfa. The advance party of Colonel Hunter's force had no difficulty in occupying Akasheh, and the work of building a fort and forming an entrenched camp was at once undertaken. Thither three battalions of Egyptian infantry, a camel corps, several squadrons of cavalry, and a battery of artillery under Major H. A. Macdonald followed.<sup>1</sup> At almost regular intervals between Wady Halfa and Akasheh troops were stationed to guard the line of communication, while the friendlies did excellent work as patrols.

To secure adequate supplies and the means of transporting them, Kitchener determined to put the existing railway in working order and continue it as near to Dongola as was practicable. The lines had been laid down in the Nile expedition of 1885. It was to be an engineers' war as well as a soldiers' war. Where the iron road was not yet in evidence camels carried the guns if the surface was of sand, but for stony and mountainous districts mules had to be taken. Stern-wheel steamers, some of which were converted into miniature gunboats by being armed, acted as tugs for smaller vessels in which troops and stores were conveyed to Wady Halfa, where the concentration was taking place. The railway ran from Cairo to Belianah, a distance of a little under 350 miles. From thence to Assouan the Nile served. A tiny strip of rail eight miles in length connected that place

<sup>1</sup> Later General Sir Hector Macdonald.

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with Shellal, above the First Cataract, where the river was again brought into service until Wady Halfa was reached. There another section was open as far as Sarras, thirty-three miles off. Very soon sleepers and rails were being put down south of that point at the rate of from 500 yards to a mile a day under the superintendence of Nicour Bey and Lieutenant Girouard, R.E., for while the old route remained, the dervishes had seen fit to destroy everything else. The telegraph was seldom behind when troops were moved from one place to another.<sup>1</sup>

"Everybody here in Halfa," writes Dr (now Sir) A. Conan Doyle on the 13th April, "seems full of zeal and of confidence. The Sirdar, as tall and strong as a young oak, carries himself in a fashion that reacts upon every man in the force. Such impressions are of enormous importance with Orientals. 'Their tails are up until they tickle the backs of their heads,' said an Egyptian officer, describing the spirit of his men, and that is the impression which is conveyed by their smiling faces and alert bearing. And as to work, I should think there are no men to beat them. Never again can I believe in Eastern apathy. Give them a definite task, and they will put Westerners to shame. To see a fatigue-party empty a steamer of its doora bags is a sight to remember. Day by day my confidence in the Egyptian soldier increases, and I believe that he will wipe away some ugly memories by his conduct in the coming campaign.

"One of the difficulties which the headquarters staff has to encounter," adds the novelist turned war correspondent, "is a curious one. From all the broad British Empire men come flying toward the war, as moths to a candle, begging and imploring for employment. From

<sup>1</sup> Royle, p. 506.

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the uttermost ends of the earth they come posting; neither letter nor telegram will stop them, and nothing short of a corporal's guard can put a check to their determination to force themselves upon the army, in which it is most difficult to find places for them. A number of Anglo-Indians were on their way, I believe, within a few hours of the news reaching them, and have now been detained at Cairo or Assouan. At Korosko we met one of these gallant adventurers, a gentle-mannered, languid, delicately featured man of a noble Scottish family, who was panting for a command of Egyptian horse. Alas! there came a short, stern telegram from the Sirdar, and our brave Scot flitted away into the darkness, too down-hearted to bid us farewell. I learn to-day, however, that his perseverance has had its reward, and that a place has at last been found for him.”<sup>1</sup>

Although there were one or two brushes with the enemy, the initial engagement of importance took place at Firket on the 7th June, by which time the Sirdar's quarters and the greater part of the Egyptian Army had been moved to Akasheh, sixteen miles north of that place. Once again the Intelligence Department had been at work, and Kitchener knew a great deal more about the composition of the force he was about to attack than was good for the enemy's cause. ‘Forewarned is forearmed’; he was both. At the same time it is only right to add that spies were by no means absent in the Sirdar's own camp. Kitchener, however, knew and practised the value of silence. He kept his plan to himself until it was about to be put into operation, thereby proving the truth of another old saw to the effect that ‘Prevention is better than cure.’ The forces opposed to him numbered 3000,

<sup>1</sup> *The Westminster Budget*, 8th May, 1896, p. 14.

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under the command of the Ameer Hamuda, the bravest of the Khalifa's lieutenants, with whom were nearly sixty other Ameers. To shatter this army would be a victory indeed. There seemed every likelihood of his doing it, for he could bring over 9000 troops into the field.

On the night of the 6th the Sirdar started two columns by different routes, the idea being to surround the camp and compel it to surrender. The main force, consisting of three infantry brigades, with two field batteries and two Maxim guns, was commanded by Colonel Hunter, and made its way along the Nile; the cavalry, camel corps, 12th Sudanese Battalion, and a battery of Horse Artillery and two Maxim guns, under Major Burn-Murdoch, crossed the desert. The arrangement was carried out with the precision of an express train running on scheduled time. At five o'clock the following morning the dervishes were attacked, but although taken unawares they put up a stiff fight and did not begin to retreat until the cold steel of the bayonets made them flee in every direction. They were pursued by the cavalry and severely handled, their losses being placed by various authorities at as low as 800 and as high as 2000. Probably about 1000 would be nearer the truth,<sup>1</sup> for many got away owing to the failure of the desert column to cut them off.

The dead body of Hamuda was recognized by Slatin Pasha, who had escaped from Omdurman after a long imprisonment and was now attached to the Intelligence Department. Forty other Ameers were also slain, including the most able of them. Only twenty Egyptian and Sudanese troops were killed and eighty wounded. In

<sup>1</sup> See *The Egyptian Sudan, its Loss and Recovery*, by Henry S. L. Alford and W. Dennistoun Sword (London, 1898), p. 91, and Royle, p. 512.

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addition hundreds of prisoners were taken, one of whom averred that the guns of their assailants "poured out their fire like water." Captives and refugees were alike sent to Wady Halfa. On the 8th the dervish depot of Suada was captured and occupied, and eight large boats and many camels fell to Captain Bryan Mahon. The place was at once fortified. Before the end of the month it was announced that seventy-three miles of railway were available, that the line was completed to Akasheh, and would soon be beyond the scene of the recent battle.

For three months it seemed as though the stars in their courses fought against Kitchener. Cholera broke out amongst the troops, the weather was so vile that sections of the railway were washed away, the camps were flooded, and the lateness in the rise of the Nile impeded the progress of the gunboats. During a march across the desert the 1st Brigade of 3000 men, which had been ordered from Suada to Delligo, encountered such terrible heat and sand-storms that no fewer than 1700 of the troops, after putting up a valiant fight against adverse conditions, were obliged to fall out, while a number died. A leading authority describes this disastrous march as having been "undertaken without any adequate motive."<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding these many difficulties, Kosheh, six miles south of Firket, marked the rail-head at the beginning of August. Officers and men alike toiled ceaselessly. "How's this?" exclaimed Kitchener on one occasion. "Work suspended! You must go on; that line has to be finished as soon as mortal man can finish it." "Sorry, sir, I can't," answered the lieutenant thus interrogated. "The Government hasn't sent us on the sleepers." "I've no use for a man who says 'can't,'" came the abrupt

<sup>1</sup> Royle, p. 514.

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reply. "You had better go back to Cairo." A week later the Sirdar wired the officer to return.

Toward the end of August the weather improved. The Nile was slowly rising, enabling steamers to pass the rapids of the Second Cataract, and, what was of even greater importance, a steel gunboat, in sections, was brought up by the railway, put together by the engineers, and launched on the 20th. On her trial she burst the low-pressure cylinder boiler and was thereby rendered useless for a time. At the moment Kitchener's temper was not of the best, but it speedily subsided to normal. A new boiler was obtained, and Lord Edward Cecil, the Sirdar's aide-de-camp, was watching it being put in position. "Well," he said to a friend who was standing near, "if anything goes wrong again I shall ride straight out into the desert with two days' rations and try to find the Khalifa. I take it that in the circumstances he will be pleasanter company than the General."

The method of getting the gunboats through the Big Gate of the Second Cataract, which is formed by two giant rocks, between which the water rushes at a great rate and falls in a steep descent of ten feet in seventy yards, is thus described by an eye-witness: "Five immense cables were attached to the boat, two on each side and one in front, and at each cable 400 men pulled with all their might. At intervals of a quarter of an hour they were relieved by others, one regiment being allotted to each cable. In spite of all this power it took an hour and a half to haul each boat through the 'Gate,' which gives an idea of the force of the current."<sup>1</sup> Seven vessels were hauled up against the current in this way, without assistance from their own power, for the all-sufficient

<sup>1</sup> Alford and Sword, p. 106.



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reason that the fires had to be drawn owing to the angle which the boats assumed.

Toward the middle of September nearly 15,000 men were ready to advance, and on the 19th this great concourse of troops marched along the sands, the gunboats slowly making their way up the river. "It is a very solemn and weird sight," says Lieut.-Colonel Haggard, "this starting of troops in the dark, before proceeding into action. In spite of all attempts at silence, a sort of continued murmur seems to rise with the cold night air; vague forms are seen moving along, which prove perhaps to be the camels; a dull tramping is heard—it is a regiment moving off; a rattling and clanging of chains next attracts your attention—the guns are passing. And no one says a word, no matches are struck, no pipes are lighted; orders are given in a low tone, and passed on quietly from company to company. The dust rises and heavily fills the air, while through that dust is somehow felt to be moving a grim restless force of men, going on to death or to glory, controlled solely by the love of honour and the iron hand of discipline. . . . The sensation felt upon these occasions was a grim and peculiar sense of subdued excitement—a sensation which completely dies away after the first shots are fired or the first blows struck, but a sensation well worth having lived to have experienced, for it is like nothing else in existence."<sup>1</sup>

Kitchener was prepared to attack the enemy's mud-walled fort at Kerma, but found that it had been abandoned for Hafir, on the western side of the river. There one of Gordon's steamers and a number of boats laden with grain were moored to the bank, at no great

<sup>1</sup> *Under Crescent and Star*, by Lieut.-Colonel A. Haggard, D.S.O. (London, 1895), pp. 368-369.

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distance from the trenches which had been thrown up. Further relics of the ill-fated General were also in evidence in the form of five guns of small calibre, secured at Khartoum when that place fell. No attempt was made by Kitchener to cross the river, so the engagement became practically a contest between the artillery on either side and the little flotilla of gunboats, the *Tamaai*, the *Abu Klea*, and the *Metammeh*, under Commander the Hon. S. C. J. Colville, R.N. The fight is thus chronicled by a contemporary newspaper whose artist was present:<sup>1</sup>

“The Emir Wad el Bishara, commanding the dervish force there, had posted two guns, the one at the Sakieh (a machine erected for raising water) and the other in a dense grove of palms on the river-bank, and had dug a double line of rifle-pits connecting the positions of these guns, besides which he had constructed a battery, with five guns, and a big entrenchment on the south side of his camp.

“There was a small island,<sup>2</sup> just opposite to the enemy’s line of defences, reducing the width of the channel there to about 600 yards; advantage of this was taken by placing on the island four batteries of Egyptian field artillery, with Maxim guns manned by some men of the Connaught Rangers; while three gunboats moved up the river, supported by the Horse Artillery. A sharp engagement took place under these conditions, the enemy’s batteries discharging quantities of both shot and shell, besides the showers of bullets from the rifle-pits which assailed the boats; yet only thirteen men on the Anglo-Egyptian side were wounded, and one killed. The dervishes, fighting under cover, did not lose many, though

<sup>1</sup> *Illustrated London News*, vol. cix, No. 2997, p. 289.

<sup>2</sup> Artaghasi.

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Wad el Bishara was wounded by the bursting of a shell in his tent, and two of his servants were killed. He was carried out, and decided to evacuate the position. The enemy withdrew, taking their guns with them, but their steamboat was sunk. Next morning, all the enemy having retired, Kitchener's army crossed the Nile."

In the light of more recent history it is interesting to note that the commander of the *Abu Klea* was Lieutenant David Beatty, whose name will always be associated with the battle of Heligoland Bight and the fights off the Dogger Bank and the Danish coast.<sup>1</sup> When Colville was wounded this young officer took over the command of the flotilla and played his part with marked ability and bravery. It is good to know that the dervish gunboat was sunk. When Kitchener had got the upper hand his miniature fleet steamed toward Dongola, while the fight continued intermittently until dawn on the following morning, when the enemy decamped. Their sailing-boats and cargoes were captured, together with a great deal of ammunition, which external evidence proved to have belonged to Hicks Pasha's luckless force.

The Ameer had vacated the position in order to fight Kitchener's forces at Dongola, where he believed the crossing of the Nile would be made. This information was given to the Sirdar, who forthwith issued orders that the army was to cross at Hafir. Here the *gyassas* came in useful. They were emptied of their cargoes and turned into transports. It took from six-thirty in the morning until sunset to get men, munitions, and animals from one side of the river to the other, but by that time the

<sup>1</sup> See *Stirring Deeds of Britain's Sea-dogs in the Great War*, by Harold F. B. Wheeler (London, 1916).

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gunboats had returned to Hafir, after having bombarded Dongola and captured some more boats.

The crossing took place on the 20th September, and on the two following days the troops marched in the direction of the dervish hosts. They came upon them lined up on a ridge of hills outside the town on the 28rd. The gunboats lost no time in heavily shelling the position, and made it so untenable that the enemy began to retreat in disorder before the infantry could be got into action. The cavalry charged and pursued the foe, but the resistance offered was comparatively feeble, and 900 of the dervishes surrendered. The forts and batteries of Dongola were destroyed by the gunboats. When the last great lump of mud crumbled and disappeared in a cloud of dust it was a sign that the Nile valley had been restored to the rule of the Khedive.

Colville and a party from the boats were the first to reach the town, and as no resistance was offered the Egyptian flag was flying from the Mudir's residence before the troops entered. The enthusiastic reception accorded the conquerors by the inhabitants testified to the fact that they were by no means enraptured with the treatment accorded them by their former rulers.

It was a wonderful achievement, and no one was louder in his praise of the man who had carried through the project than Sir Evelyn Baring. At the same time he realized that though a commander has the genius of Napoleon his prowess is worth nothing without reliable officers and men willing and able to carry out his orders, however difficult of accomplishment they may be. In twelve short words the Earl of Cromer has written a glowing testimonial to the black and white heroes who took part in the Dongola expedition: "The whole force,

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from general to private, deserved success, and they succeeded.”<sup>1</sup>

In a rare and delightful little volume<sup>2</sup> by the Special War Correspondent of *The Allahabad Press*, who, of course, had every opportunity of studying his subject at first hand on many occasions, the writer remarks that “The Sirdar is the Soudan,” and this is the reason for it :

“South of Assouan there is absolutely no civilian Government : steamboats and sailing craft, railway and telegraph, are under the sole control of the Sirdar. The steamboats are under the orders of his subordinate officers ; the railway is worked and repaired by his ‘railway battalion’ ; the telegraph and post offices are manned by privates of the Royal Engineers. Even those merchants who have no regular contract with the military authorities to supply the army, and who are enterprising enough to penetrate to the Soudan on private commercial ventures, must needs apply for leave to the Sirdar before passing Assouan. Unless they obtain the sanction of the Sirdar neither they nor any other civilian can enter into his kingdom of the Soudan. The civilian population being therefore so limited, and there being few women even in Halfa, I think the question of the administration of civil justice does not arise at all. But, anyhow, there is a large and fully occupied military prison at Wady Halfa.

“The Sirdar has his own postage stamps and his own telegraph stamps. Money there is little need for ; life in the Soudan is so simple, and is cut and dried like everything military. Your expenses are either deducted from your pay, or, in the case of transactions with the few civilian merchants in the Soudan, settlement is made by a cheque

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> *With the Sirdar to Omdurman*.

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on Cairo. Otherwise, I have no doubt that the Sirdar would have his own coinage. You will see from this how every department of the Soudan State comes completely under the Sirdar's control: his will is law. And this is so not only in public but also in private life. No officer, until he is very senior, is allowed to marry. He signs a promissory document to that effect before he enters the Egyptian Army."

With the fall of the province of Dongola the Khalifa concentrated most of his forces at Omdurman, and largely confined his energies to putting it in a state of defence. The Egyptian Army occupied Debbah, Korti, and Merawi. The administration of the country, with its population of over 56,000, was placed in the hands of Major-General Hunter, and the railway was continued to Kerma. Kitchener was rewarded by being made a K.C.B., the Khedive conferred upon him the Medjidie of the First Class, and he was promoted to the rank of Major-General. Before leaving for Cairo he expressed his regret that there had not been "a better fight" to conclude the campaign of 1896, and in his capital the Khalifa informed his faithful adherents that the angel of the Lord and the spirit of the Mahdi had warned him in a vision "that the souls of the accursed Egyptians and of the miserable English shall leave their bodies between Dongola and Omdurman, at some spot which their bones shall whiten. Thus shall the infidels be conquered."

The spirit of the Mahdi, being evil, led Abdullah astray, as the next chapter will show.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Bridging the Nubian Desert

*" Victory is the beautiful, bright-coloured flower. Transport is the stem without which it could never have blossomed."*—WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

ON the 5th February, 1897, when the matter of voting £798,802 for the Dongola Expedition was occupying the attention of the House of Commons, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, Chancellor of the Exchequer, took occasion to make the following remarks. He declared that since the campaign was undertaken "the British Government had never concealed, either from Parliament or the country, that, in their view, there should be a further advance in the same direction; that Egypt could never be held to be permanently secured so long as a hostile Power was in occupation of the Nile valley up to Khartoum; and that England, having compelled the Egyptian Government to abandon the Sudan, had incurred toward its inhabitants responsibilities for the fulfilment of which the moment had arrived now that the baleful rule of the Khalifa was crumbling to decay."

Sir Herbert Kitchener's plan of campaign was to lay down a railway from Wady Halfa across the Nubian Desert to Abu Hamed. The capture of Berber would enable him to continue the line to that town, and thence to the Atbara. It was a bold project, entirely worthy of the Sirdar who

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had already proved the usefulness of the iron road as an aid to warfare, but there were plenty of military and arm-chair critics who condemned the plan as fantastic. Some recommended Suakin as a suitable base from which to strike at Berber, others held that it would be better to march from Dongola to Korti, and thence cross the Bayuda Desert and secure Metammeh.

Even Sir Evelyn Baring, Kitchener's staunch supporter, confesses that "The interval which elapsed between the occupation of Abu Hamed <sup>1</sup> and the final advance on Khartoum was a period of much anxiety. Sir Herbert Kitchener's force depended entirely upon the desert railway for its supplies. I was rather haunted with the idea that some European adventurer, of the type familiar in India a century and more ago, might turn up at Khartoum and advise the dervishes to make frequent raids across the Nile below Abu Hamed, with a view to cutting the communication of the Anglo-Egyptian force with Wadi Halfa. This was unquestionably the right military operation to have undertaken; neither, I think, would it have been very difficult of accomplishment. Fortunately, however, the dervishes were themselves devoid of all military qualities, with the exception of undaunted courage, and did not invite any European assistance. They therefore failed to take advantage of the opportunity presented to them. To myself, it was a great relief when the period of suspense was over. I do not think that the somewhat perilous position in which Sir Herbert Kitchener's army was unquestionably placed for some time was at all realized by the public in general." <sup>2</sup>

Cynical commentators on the march of civilization have

<sup>1</sup> On the 7th August. See *post*, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii, pp. 94-95, note.



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asserted, not altogether without truth, that the bottle usually follows the Bible of the missionary, and the machine gun brings up the rear. The Sudan Military Railway was at once an instrument of construction and destruction. It was a novel form of cavalry charging through the desert to wrest victory from the adherents of the Khalifa and to give peace to a population scattered about a vast district of 950,000 square miles.

Wady Halfa, as the northern terminus of the Dongola railway, was already provided with some of the thousand and one appliances with which the engineer performs his magic. Girouard ordered more, from locomotives to lamps, lathes, rails, sleepers, carriages, trucks, fish-plates, bolts, and so on. "Such was the comprehensive accuracy of the estimate," says Winston Churchill anent Girouard's labours, "that the working parties were never delayed by the want even of a piece of brass wire."<sup>1</sup>

The idea that a desert is necessarily as flat as the proverbial pancake is certainly not true of the Nubian Desert. At one point it is 1600 feet above Wady Halfa. Another difficulty was the water supply. The farther the railway proceeded the less likelihood there appeared to be of water. For a time this was not of great consequence, because the locomotive could carry sufficient for the outward and return journey, but as the rail-head drew farther and farther away from the terminus the problem loomed larger. Eventually each train had to take with it travelling tanks. Men working on the construction of the line—there were 2500 of them—were also dependent on the iron road for their liquid refreshment, and the arrival or non-arrival of the tank train was consequently an event of importance. Two wells were eventually sunk and provided a plentiful

<sup>1</sup> *The River War*, p. 212.

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supply of water; half a dozen more were dug and provided a plentiful supply of—sand.

The workshops at Wady Halfa never shut. Girouard seemed to be calculating and inspecting twenty-four hours a day, and Kitchener liked to see things for himself, which meant that the Sirdar was never long absent from the constantly shifting rail-head. The difficulties of transport are well illustrated by Mr Winston Churchill, who follows the progress of a box of biscuits from Cairo to Berber in December 1897. "The route," he says, "was as follows: From Cairo to Nagh Hamadi (840 miles) by rail; from Nagh Hamadi to Assouan (205 miles) by boat; from Assouan to Shellal (6 miles) by rail; from Shellal to Halfa (226 miles) by boat; from Halfa to Dakhesh (rail-head)—248 miles—by military railway; from Dakhesh to Shereik (45 miles) by boat; from Shereik by camel (18 miles) round a cataract to Bashtinab; from Bashtinab by boat (25 miles) to Omsheyo; from Omsheyo round another impracticable reach (11 miles) by camel to Geneinetti, and thence (22 miles) to Berber by boat. The road taken by this box of biscuits was followed by every ton of supplies required by 10,000 men in the field. . . . In the face of every difficulty a regular supply was maintained. The construction of the railway was not delayed, nor the food of the troops reduced."<sup>1</sup>

Ten bridges, sixty culverts, and a large number of embankments had to be built, necessitating the transport of many tons of building material. The economical tendencies of the Sirdar were well illustrated after the taking of Abu Hamed.<sup>2</sup> The battered ramparts of the place were collected and incorporated in the permanent way of the Sudan Military Railway. The stations were

<sup>1</sup> *The River War*, pp. 223-224.

<sup>2</sup> See *post*, p. 104.

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numbered, and at No. 6, situated at mid-distance between Halfa and Abu Hamed, forges were erected and various machines put in for repairing purposes. Here engines and drivers were changed, and a turntable provided.

In his own inimitable way Mr G. W. Steevens, the special correspondent of *The Daily Mail* during the campaign, records his first journey on Kitchener's iron horse. The train ran beautifully, stopped frequently, and travelled slowly. "The scenery, it must be owned, was monotonous, and yet not without haunting beauty. Mile on mile, hour on hour, we glided through sheer desert. Yellow sand to right and left—now stretching away endlessly, now a valley between small broken hills. Sometimes the hills sloped away from us, then they closed in again. Now they were diaphanous blue on the horizon, now soft purple as we ran under their flanks. But always they were steeped through and through with sun—hazy, immobile, silent. . . .

"Straight, firm, and purposeful ran the rails. Now they split into a double line: here was another train waiting—a string of empty trucks—and also a tent, a little hut made of sleeper baulks, a tank, points, and a board with the inscription 'No. 5.' This was a station—a wayside station. But No. 6 is a Swindon of the desert. Every train stops there half an hour or more to fill up with water, for there is a great trifoliate well there. Also the train changes drivers. And here, a hundred miles into the heart of the Nubian Desert, two years ago a sanctuary of inviolate silence, where no blade of green ever sprang, where, possibly, no foot trod since the birth of the world, here is a little colony of British engine-drivers. They have a little rest-house shanty of board and galvanized iron; there

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are pictures from the illustrated papers on the walls, and a pup at the door. There they swelter and smoke and spit and look out at the winking rails and the red-hot sand, and wait till their turn comes to take the train. They don't love the life—who would?—but they stick to it like Britons, and take the trains out and home. They, too, are not the meanest of the conquerors of the Sudan.

“Toward dusk mimosa bushes, dotted park-wise over the sand, began to rise up on both sides of us, then palms; soon we were in a thickish scrub. The air cooled and moistened from death to life: we were back again on the Nile, at Abu Hamed. Thereafter we slept peacefully again, and awoke in the midst of a large camp of white tents. They unhooked the saloon, but the train crawled on, disgorging rails and sleepers, till it came to a place where a swarm of fellahin were shovelling up sand round the last metals. The naked embankment ran straight and purposeful as ever, so far as you could see. Small in the distance was a white man with a spirit-level.”<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile the Jaalin tribe at Metammeh had revolted against the Khalifa's rule. A force under the Amcer Mahmoud was sent from Omdurman, but despite the plucky fight which the Jaalins put up while their ammunition lasted, the town was entered and a horrible massacre ensued. Men, women, and children were slaughtered indiscriminately, and 2000 prisoners were either beheaded or had a hand or foot cut off. The fate of their chief was worthy of the worst days of the Spanish Inquisition. He was taken to the Khalifa's capital, bricked in, and allowed to die. Metammeh was razed to the ground. Those who

<sup>1</sup> *With Kitchener to Khartum*, by G. W. Steevens (London, 1909), pp. 12-13.

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escaped joined the friendlies of the Bayuda Desert, and subsequently captured Gakdul Wells.

On the 29th July Major-General Hunter, with the 8rd, 9th, 10th, and 11th Battalions of Sudanese infantry, a battery of Field Artillery, and a small detachment of cavalry, started from Merawi on a long march of 182 miles for the purpose of attacking the 1500 dervishes concentrated at Abu Hamed. After hard fighting on the 7th August, during which the Egyptian casualties numbered eighty-seven in killed and wounded and the defenders lost very severely, the enemy took to their heels. Amongst those who were captured during the hand-to-hand fighting that took place was Mohammed Ezzam and many members of the Baggara tribe. This victory enabled the railway to be pushed forward, and a month later 187 miles had been completed ; it reached Abu Hamed itself on the last day of October.

During August Berber, the largest town in the Sudan since the destruction of Khartoum, was evacuated by the dervishes and entered by friendlies, while men and the necessary impedimenta of war began to pour into Abu Hamed. It was not long before Hunter and the gunboat flotilla were also at Berber, and an advanced post was established at Ed Damer, after a hostile band had been compelled to disperse and four boats laden with grain captured. Kitchener came along, expressed himself as well satisfied, and returned to Abu Hamed. In due course his headquarters were removed to Berber, where he stayed at the house of the leading merchant, the former Governor's house having fallen into ruins.

The desert did not blossom as the rose, though the means of its doing so was already there in the shape of the locomotive. Osman Digna, jealous of the reputation

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of Mahmoud, the Khalifa's cousin, who was now near Metammeh with 10,000 men, retreated across the Atbara, thus relieving the Eastern Sudan of his unwelcome presence and enabling trade to be carried on between Suakin and Berber. Had the two enemy forces seen fit to co-operate at this juncture the result might have been serious for Kitchener. They did not, and the Khalifa appeared to be much too concerned about the safety of Omdurman to risk offensive operations.

In order to ascertain the exact state of affairs at Metammeh, three gunboats under Commander Keppel were sent from Berber on the 14th October to reconnoitre. Several mud forts stationed along the river-bank did not appear to be particularly formidable defences when those on board the *Zafir*, the *Fateh*, and the *Naser* first caught sight of them. Keeping comparatively close to the opposite, or east, bank, the flotilla at first concentrated its fire on the two northern forts. On steaming by, Keppel found to his intense astonishment that no guns had been mounted to the southward, consequently after they had been passed they were powerless to do harm. So far so good, but there were other things to be reckoned with besides the forts. Cavalry appeared, to be speedily dealt with by the Maxim guns mounted on the steamers, though men hidden behind scrub on the shore nearest to them tried to pick off men on the decks. Taken at a disadvantage for a moment, the sailors did not lose their heads either literally or metaphorically. They swung the guns in the direction of the mimosa bushes and rained death into them. On their return journey the flotilla secured half a dozen boats laden with grain, and, disappearing out of sight, laid up for the night. There was another surprise for the dervishes on the morrow, for Keppel returned and

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bombarded the stronghold for four hours. As a result of the two engagements several hundred of the enemy were killed, while only one man on the steamers was mortally wounded.

On Christmas Day 1897 the Italians transferred Kassala, on the Red Sea coast, to the Egyptians. The Sirdar carried out the arrangements, including the taking over of 700 Italian irregulars, members of friendly tribes, who became the Arab Battalion. Colonel Parsons, the 16th Egyptian Battalion, and some artillery now took up their quarters there. Kitchener did not make a prolonged stay at Kassala, and was not present at the ceremony which took place when the Italian flag gave way to the crescent and three stars. He was hastening to Wady Halfa, anxious to ascertain the truth of many rumours which had reached him regarding the Khalifa's movements. Mahmoud and Osman Digna had apparently overcome their petty jealousy, and were concentrated at Metammeh with 20,000 men, while 40,000 dusky warriors held Omdurman. The ubiquitous Intelligence Department informed him that there was every likelihood of an immediate advance by Mahmoud and Osman Digna on Berber. He betrayed no undue anxiety. His answer was to wire to Baring for a British brigade.

## CHAPTER IX

### The Battle of the Atbara

*"The news of victory must be in London to-night."*—COLONEL MURRAY, of the Seaforth's

**I**N the second week of February 1898 Mahmoud began to make serious preparations for an advance. The news brought by the Intelligence Department was confirmed and augmented by the officers of the gunboats, who patrolled the river with the vigilance of policemen trying to track a thief. Nothing seemed to escape their attention. For instance, on one occasion a wounded deserter from the dervishes was discovered by them on one of the banks as he held up a long, thin arm in token of surrender and as a plea for help. The poor fellow had been crawling about for six agonizing weeks, living on nuts and edible roots. When he was rescued he was in such a condition of collapse that he could not raise a mug of water to his parched lips.

Kitchener was at Berber perfecting his arrangements for the coming clash. His force was augmented by the arrival of the British brigade, consisting of the 1st Battalions of the Warwicks, the Lincolnshires, and the Cameron Highlanders, under the command of Major-General W. F. Gatacre, already known to fame in connexion with the Chitral Expedition. 'Hushed old Egypt' deserved the poet's description no longer. The shriek of locomotive whistles, the dull, metallic accompaniment of



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the plate-layer's hammer, and the clatter of machine guns had awakened it from slumber. Construction and destruction went hand in hand. Gatacre and his men were at Darmali, some ten miles south of Berber, on the 12th March, and had only been there a few hours when news came that Mahmoud, after having been engaged for a fortnight in getting his troops across the Nile, had marched along the east bank and reached Aliab. Four days later practically the whole of Kitchener's army, which now included the Scaforths, had arrived at Kenur, within easy distance of Fort Atbara, at the junction of the Nile and the Atbara. With 13,000 men the Sirdar was now ready to intercept the enemy.<sup>1</sup> Striking across the desert, Mahmoud reached Nakheila, some thirty-five miles from the mouth of the Atbara, on the 20th, on which day Kitchener halted his army at Ras-el-Hudi, about twenty miles to the north of the former place. Then began hard work for the cavalry scouts, who were constantly in touch with the enemy and had several brushes with them. At Abadar Colonel Broadwood and the advanced troops discovered a body of dervishes, who were routed after they had driven in the outposts.

On the 23rd an attempt was made to entice the enemy from his position, and in the ensuing action the Egyptian cavalry were at first compelled to fall back ; the infantry, however, gave such a good account of themselves that their opponents did not continue the fight. A few days later the forts at Shendy, which guarded the enemy's line of communication with Omdurman, were attacked by the Sirdar's gunboats and the 15th Egyptian Battalion with complete success. Many prisoners were taken, and a vast quantity of stores was secured. The forts were left a heap

<sup>1</sup> Royle, pp. 535-536.

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of ruins. A final reconnaissance of Mahmoud's strong and heavily entrenched position near Nakheila was made on the 5th April. The day did not start well for Broadwood and his cavalry, who were supported by Maxims and a battery of Horse Artillery. The Baggara horsemen made a bold attempt to surround them and to capture the guns. Fortunately the cavalry fell back in excellent order, covered by the murderous fire of the Maxims, and a final charge scattered the enemy. The main body played no part in this action, though they were held in reserve for service if necessary.

The idea that Kitchener was one of those wonderful persons, so beloved of the novelist and the hero-worshipper, who instinctively sum up a situation and act without referring to anybody is a delusion. At Nakheila, for instance, he discussed the situation with Gatacre and Hunter, and on the 1st April telegraphed details to Baring in order to ascertain his opinion. Gatacre was for attacking the Ameer; Hunter counselled waiting, in the hope that Mahmoud would attack, and thus give the Sirdar's force the advantage in the matter of ground. Kitchener himself did not doubt of the success of an offensive movement by his troops, "though it would probably entail considerable loss."

Baring answered at some length, after having consulted Sir Francis Grenfell, now in command at Cairo, and counselled patience. Before receiving this Kitchener had wired that he and his colleagues had come to the conclusion that an attack was advisable, and that in all probability it would take place on the 6th. Then Baring's communication arrived, and the Sirdar's answer to it was that the proposed attack was postponed. The latter was acknowledged by a message stating that the case was

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materially altered by Hunter's changed opinion, that the decision was left to Kitchener, and that whatever he did would be fully supported by the British Agent. Mr Arthur Balfour, temporarily in charge of the Foreign Office, also wired that "the Sirdar may count on the support of her Majesty's Government whichever course he decides on adopting." The matter was left to his "absolute discretion."<sup>1</sup>

This discretion Kitchener duly exercised, and on the 6th he and his troops reached Umdabbia, only seven and a half miles from Mahmoud's well-defended position.

A start was made on the evening of the following day, and when Mutrus was reached the troops were given an opportunity to rest. At 1 A.M. on Good Friday, the 8th April, they were again on the march. After three hours' tramp in the cool of the early morning, each brigade marching in battalion squares, grim, silent, and leisurely, for the distance to be traversed was not great, the native guides saw little flickers of flame on the horizon. There was no mistaking them for anything but the camp-fires of the dervishes as they rose and fell with the wind—which also scattered the desert sand and stung the faces of the expectant British, Egyptians, and Sudanese. When it was fully light a position was occupied about 600 yards from the thorn zariba, palisades, rifle-pits, earthworks, shelter-huts, and trenches which defended the forces under Mahmoud and Osman Digna on the north bank of the Atbara. Here the river-bed was dry save for a few pools of more or less stagnant water. Kitchener knew what to expect, for his patrols had sketched the place and his cavalry had reconnoitred it, as we have already noted.

<sup>1</sup> See *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii, pp. 98-102.

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It looked formidable enough to those who saw it for the first time.

The battle began with a bombardment by two dozen guns, which were trained on the zariba, while the Maxims effectually held the Baggara horsemen in check and the rocket battery under the command of Lieutenant David Beatty set many of the thatched huts ablaze. This cross fire was kept up for an hour and a half, and was the Sirdar's salute to a foe who had never lacked daring and now showed that they knew something of the art of erecting defences. With Gatacre and Colonel Money leading the British brigade, with the extended Camerons in front and columns of Warwicks, Seaforths, and Lincolns behind, General Hector Macdonald's brigade, Maxwell's brigade, and the 15th Sudanese and the 8th Egyptian Battalions extending to the right, the whole line advanced. Lewis's brigade was to the left rear of the Warwicks, while the cavalry and Horse Artillery were also stationed to the left, but at some distance away. Bugles, bagpipes, and the instruments of the native regiments made strange music as the army pressed forward, anxious only to reach the river-bank over the bodies of their foes. It was death or glory now, and plenty of bayonet work before either, they hoped.

At intervals the men halted and poured the contents of their rifles into the zariba. This was not answered at once, for the enemy were sparing of their fire, but when the distance had narrowed to some 200 yards the dervishes showed that they possessed a plentiful supply of ammunition. Brave fellows of the Sirdar's army began to drop, sometimes singly and sometimes in pathetic little groups. Another 100 yards was covered, once more each man sought a target where the maximum of destruction could

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be wrought, and then the bugles sounded the final 'Advance.' It says much for the intrepidity of Gatacre that he was the first to reach the stockade. The Cameron Highlanders, and the leading native battalions, under Macdonald and Maxwell, tore across the gap in their effort to win the race, and all three won, for it was a dead heat. Scotsmen, Sudanese, and Egyptians tugged at the great thorn bushes as though they were pulling cabbages, while others blazed away to afford them some measure of protection. It was a trying time, but not a man faltered.

Soon there were sufficient gaps to allow of entry. Camerons, Seaforths, Lincolns, and Warwicks dashed in, to be brought face to face with trenches lined with the devotees of Mahdism. Here a fierce fight ensued, and several British officers were mortally wounded. "Go on, my company, and give it them," gasped Captain Findlay as he fell. "Never mind me, lads, go on," Major Urquhart muttered with his dying breath. Piper Stewart went on playing *The March of the Cameron Men* until he succumbed to five bullets. The enemy seemed to have almost every species of weapon available, from spears to elephant guns, and they also had several brass cannon. There is no doubting their bravery. They fought with great intrepidity, urged on by an almost insane fervour of religious fanaticism. The Khalifa was well served by his devotees that day. The opposing troops had literally to hack their way with the bayonet over the trenches and across the enclosure. Yet they pushed on remorselessly, and those of the enemy who could do so were at length compelled to evacuate the shambles. Some took to flight, others calmly walked away, fearing neither shot nor steel, since death in battle was a passport to heaven. One band of fugitives, anxious only to wipe out the stain

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of defeat, recrossed the desert to Aliab, on the Nile. Here they were met by gunboats on their ceaseless patrol, with the result that 200 fell before the withering fire of their enemies, and 70 surrendered.

At the battle of the Atbara 8000 dervishes were killed, 2000 wounded, and 2000 made prisoners. Beyond question many escaped and did not report themselves afterward.<sup>1</sup> They had had enough of Mahdism and fighting against machine guns and bayonets. Of the Anglo-Egyptian Army 81 were killed, 487 were wounded, and several died subsequently. As he was riding through the *dem* the Sirdar narrowly escaped annihilation. Many unexploded shells were lying about, and the scorched rank grass was on fire. Shortly after he had gone several of the shells went off at the spot on which he had reined his horse to speak to Lord Edward Cecil.

Osman Digna made good his escape to Omdurman, but Mahmoud was captured. "Why have you come into my country to burn and kill?" questioned Kitchener when the prisoner was brought before him. "I have to obey my orders, and so have you," came the reply. It was a soldier's answer to a soldier's question. Mahmoud evidently did not entertain a high opinion of Osman Digna. "He was not in the fight; he went away with the cavalry," he vouchsafed, adding: "All the rest of my Ameers stayed with me. I saw your troops at five in the morning, and mounted my horse and rode round the camp to see that

<sup>1</sup> There is much discrepancy in the figures given by authorities. For instance, Royle says that the total of the Ameer's force could not have exceeded 14,000, of whom probably 8000 continued in flight to Adarama, "losing many men on the way" (p. 458). Churchill assesses the dervish army at 12,000, and adds that "scarcely 4000 reached Gedaref in safety" (p. 297). Lord Cromer gives the force as "about 12,000 men" (vol. ii, p. 97).

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my people were in their places. Then I returned to my quarters and waited. I am not a woman to run away." As he had received a bayonet wound in the leg it would have been difficult for him to do so. He was found hiding in a hole, doubtless in the hope that he might be able to escape when the Anglo-Egyptian Army had passed on, and not from fear. Such a man was worthy of a better cause. One feels instinctively that he would have rendered Kitchener excellent service as a 'friendly' had he been other than a rebel.

The Sirdar never had a finer reception than when he appeared with his staff after the battle of the Atbara. "What your battalion has done was one of the finest feats performed for many years; you ought to be proud of such a regiment," he said to Colonel Money, of the Camerons. The native troops, at whom idle critics had scoffed and in whom Kitchener had believed, were not forgotten. The sergeant-major of each dusky regiment that crossed Mahmoud's zariba on Good Friday 1898 was promoted to the rank of subaltern. He had "driven it into those fellows" as he said he would do when the new Egyptian Army had come into being. "Discipline—the one thing needful," had won.

The late Mr G. W. Steevens,<sup>1</sup> who was present, has left a glowing account of the superb behaviour of Kitchener's dusky soldiers. "If the zariba had been as high and thick as the Bank of England," he says, "the blacks and their brigaded Egyptians would have slicked through it and picked out the thorns after the 'Cease fire.' . . . They attacked fast, but they attacked steadily, and kept their formation to the last moment there was anything to form against. The battle of the Atbara has definitely placed

<sup>1</sup> *With Kitchener to Khartum*, p. 66.

## The Battle of the Atbara

the blacks—yes, and the once contemned Egyptians—in the ranks of the very best troops in the world.” There were many handshakes and many salutes after the last white puff of shrapnel had burst above the zariba and the blood had been casually wiped off the bayonets with tufts of grass. “‘*Dushman quaiiss kitur,*’ ran round from grin to grin; ‘very good fight, very good fight.’”

Kitchener returned to Berber, to which place the Sudanese troops had the satisfaction of escorting over 2000 dervish prisoners. The Sirdar fittingly made his triumphal entry at the head of Macdonald’s brigade. Arrived at a square in the centre of the town, the tall figure dismounted and took his place on a raised and canopied platform, surrounded by his staff. Battalion after battalion marched past and saluted; the long line of captives was seemingly endless. Mahmoud was there, erect and defiant, glancing neither to the right nor to the left. Stoic he was, and Stoic he remained. The native population showed their appreciation by rivalling the din of Babel. They wanted to show their satisfaction with the victory and their detestation of the Khalifa, whose representative seemed to mind not at all. He walked like an animated idol carved in stone.



## CHAPTER X

### The Khartoum Campaign

*"He has written a new page of British history and has blotted out an old one."*—EARL ROSEBERY

THE battle of the Atbara had shattered an army. So far, therefore, it was decisive, but it was not final. To be sure, the idea was entertained by certain optimistic folk that the Khalifa might lay down his arms and surrender, for the Sirdar's fighting machine had proved its worth and its invincibility. Kitchener thought otherwise and prepared for the final advance. Omdurman, the heart and centre of the dervish crusade, remained inviolate. Not a shot had pierced its mud walls. The tomb of the Mahdi, the sign and symbol of the revolution, still cast its evil shadow in the city. Abdullah continued to dream, and had publicly stated that his predecessor was sending a great invisible host to battle with the 'Turks' when the Anglo-Egyptian Army showed itself on the Kereri Plain. More important than any or all of these abstract things was the concrete fact that behind the defences of the capital were over 60,000 armed men. These figures were more important to Kitchener than the suppositions of all the prophets of submission.

The Sirdar betrayed no signs of haste, yet was miserly of time. He polished, oiled, and augmented 'the machine.' He ordered more men, more munitions, more gunboats,

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Railway wagons groaned and creaked with the weight of additions to his flotilla, which came in sections : boilers, crank shafts, pistons, steam-pipes, plates, the thousand and one articles beloved of the marine engineer. When these things were sorted out and pieced together the result was formidable. Out of the apparent chaos there emerged the *Sultan*, the *Melik*, and the *Sheikh*. They were smaller but of more consequence for fighting purposes than the other units of the Nile fleet, carrying two Nordenfeldts, one 12-pounder, a howitzer, and four Maxim guns. When launched at Abadieh, at the moment the terminus of the S.M.R. and the Portsmouth of the Sudan, they brought the total of the Sirdar's navy to ten, to which must be added five steam transports and scores of sailing-vessels and barges. Batteries, rifles, stores, medical supplies, forage, ammunition, the whole paraphernalia of war came along the shining rails which were the veritable life-lines of Kitchener and his host. When all was ready for the final advance, the last trapping and equipment received and pressed into service, the statistics of the expedition were formidable enough : 25,800 troops, of whom 8200 were British ; 64 military guns ; 60 naval guns ; over 7000 horses, mules, camels, and donkeys ; and the usual motley gathering of camp-followers. Until the Sirdar gave the word to concentrate the battalions were in garrison at Atbara, Berber, and Abadieh.

The Rev. Owen Spencer Watkins, the Acting Wesleyan Chaplain who accompanied the expedition, furnishes us with an interesting description of the important stronghold of Atbara.<sup>1</sup> "In the afternoon," he writes, "I took the opportunity of exploring Atbara Fort, which had

<sup>1</sup> *With Kitchener's Army*, by Owen Spencer Watkins (London, 1900), pp. 45-46.

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already played an important part in the reconquest of the Soudan, and which was destined to be the railway terminus and base of further operations in the fall of the year. The place is a monument to the industry of the Egyptian troops and the ingenuity of their English officers. To find such a stronghold in the wilderness so recently regained from the dervishes was to me a revelation of the energy with which the Sirdar had been pushing his way south during the past years. Viewed from the desert the place was unobtrusive and apparently insignificant—merely a mud wall and a few trees, above which showed the clustering yardarms of some native sailing-boats. But when examined it proved to be a military position of great strength. Its mud walls were over six feet high, and of thickness to defy any bullet, or even any artillery that the enemy were likely to possess; outside the wall was a wide trench some seven or eight feet deep, and beyond this again a zariba of mimosa thorn. Inside the walls were gun platforms on which were mounted Maxims, at the two gates guardhouses, and outside a couple of blockhouses of considerable strength. Situated as it was at the juncture of the Nile and the Atbara, having water on two sides, and on the third the formidable defences I have already described, it seemed well-nigh impregnable. For a mile round the fort the dense bush of mimosa thorn and dhom-palm had been cleared, and no enemy could approach unseen, for in the centre was a great four-legged erection of a crow's-nest, from which a constant look-out was kept. Truly, after my survey I was quite prepared to believe an enthusiastic officer of the Egyptian Army, who declared that with two battalions he could hold his own inside those walls against the whole Soudan."

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In August, four months after the Good Friday battle, the army concentrated at Wad Hamed. They came on foot, in steamers, and on camel-back. By the end of the month a further advance had been made to El Hajir, and from thence to Wady Abid, Sayal, Suruab, and Egeiga, the last-mentioned place only half a dozen miles north of the Khalifa's capital. The men had not been rushed; neither had they been blessed by good weather. Now and again they caught sight of enemy scouts, who invariably turned tail when confronted by the Sirdar's cavalry. Only on the 1st September, when the Anglo-Egyptian forces were within striking distance, did the dervishes show signs of fight. They swarmed from the city, 40,000 or more, making a very formidable array. Then they stopped; the manœuvre was at an end. Friendlies, numbering perhaps 2500 men, under the command of Major Stuart-Wortley, rendered excellent service by occupying various villages on the east bank. The flotilla, after silencing the forts of Halfiyeh, ran the gauntlet of those at Khartoum and Omdurman, and safely landed the 87th Howitzer Battery, which had been towed in barges. The guns fired a few rounds, made some ugly gaps in the yellow dome of the Mahdi's tomb, and lapsed into silence. The last phase of the Sudan Campaign had begun. Had the Khalifa attacked when night came he might have annihilated the Anglo-Egyptian Army, as his predecessor had annihilated Gordon. He failed to do so, and thereby sealed his own doom.

Abdullah had already been warned what to expect in a letter which Kitchener had thought well to send to him at the dictates of common humanity. It ran as follows:

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*"To ABDULLA, son of MOHAMMED EL-TAAISHI,  
Head of the Sudan*

"Bear in mind that your evil deeds throughout the Sudan, particularly your murdering a great number of Mohammedans without cause or excuse, besides oppression and tyranny, necessitated the advance of my troops for the destruction of your throne in order to save the country from your devilish doings and iniquity. Inasmuch as there are many in your keeping for whose blood you are held responsible, innocent, old, and infirm women, and children and others, abhorring you and your government, who are guilty of nothing, and because we have no desire that they should suffer the least harm, we ask you to have them removed from the *dem* to a place where the shells of guns and bullets of rifles shall not reach them. If you do not do so the shells and bullets cannot recognize them and will consequently kill them. and afterwards you will be responsible before God for their blood. Stand firm, you and your helpers, only in the field of battle to meet the punishment prepared for you by the praised God. But if you and your Ameer incline to surrender to prevent blood being shed, we shall receive your envoy with due welcome, and be sure that we shall treat you with justice and peace.

*"KITCHENER,  
Sirdar of the Troops in the Sudan"*

On the 2nd September, 1898, thirteen years after his death. Gordon was avenged. The gunboats and the howitzers on the east bank of the river opened fire, as they had done on the previous day. Kitchener's position, which somewhat resembled a horseshoe in

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shape, rested on the Nile, and included the village of El Genuia. The British front was defended by a zariba, that of the Sudanese and Egyptians by a trench, while the flanks were held by gunboats. To the right was the Kereri Ridge, near which the Egyptian cavalry was posted with the Horse Artillery and the Camel Corps; on the left was Surgham Hill, secured by the 21st Lancers. Between the two elevations stretched desert scrub.

At six o'clock the hosts of the Khalifa were seen approaching, not in a confused mass, as one is apt to imagine when thinking of the attacks of semi-savages, but in orderly array. They made a brave show, with the green, black, white, red, and blue banners of Ameers and sheikhs borne proudly aloft, and as they came nearer the waiting troops heard them chanting in one long, monotonous drone: "There is but one God, and Mohammed is His prophet." All unknowing, the Khalifa was doing exactly what the Sirdar wished him to do, for it is an easier task to stand on the defensive in the open than it is to take the offensive when the enemy is behind walls.

The guns of the Field Artillery on the left crashed out and shells ploughed through the enemy's ranks. Still they came on, then suddenly wheeled to their right and rushed toward the British, the strongest point of the line, who opened fire with Lee-Metfords and Maxims. At the same time another body of men clambered up Surgham Hill and sought to attack the zariba with long-range fire, a manœuvre which did not prove entirely successful, thanks to the gunboats in the rear. Again and again the dervishes attempted to rush the lines. At each attempt they were foiled and their numbers grew less.

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Spearmen and riflemen were mown down, yet there were always others to take their places. They came up in masses, in those solid formations with which the Germans again made us acquainted in the Great War.

Meanwhile the battle was developing in the direction of the Kereri Ridge, which Osman Sheikh-ed-Din, the Khalifa's son, was attacking with 15,000 men, both cavalry and infantry. Kitchener saw this and sent word to Broadwood, in command of nine squadrons of cavalry, the Camel Corps, and the Horse Artillery, to withdraw within the lines held by the infantry. The Colonel answered that he would prefer to retire to the north, and as no objection was raised by the Commander-in-Chief he began to do so. In attempting to carry out the operation the men who were crossing the dip between the two heights which form the ridge were enfiladed. Broadwood put up a brave fight, but the dervishes pressed so rapidly that the Colonel was compelled to order the Camel Corps to retreat to the zariba, an operation necessarily attended by severe risk. The cavalry were drawn up across the river end of the dip, the Horse Artillery stationed on the northern ridge. No sooner had the withdrawal begun than the enemy attempted to cut off the helpless corps. Broadwood got ready to charge, though he could scarcely hope to stop the onslaught of the dense mass. Yet he must cover the Camel Corps at all costs. Anxious eyes watched the slow progress of the ambling animals and their riders, others watched the relentless advance of the dervishes. Suddenly a great roar came from the direction of the river and reverberated among the low-lying hills. Two gunboats had steamed up and opened a galling fire that effectually held up the dervishes and enabled the

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refugees to reach the zariba. Osman, smarting at the sting of 450 casualties sustained by his men, prepared to give his undivided attention to the Egyptian mounted troops. Broadwood, temporarily relieved of pressure by the naval forces, began to retreat northward, and in doing so undoubtedly assisted the Sirdar by keeping his pursuers from the main field of action for a time. In the chase he was compelled to abandon a couple of guns, which got stuck in a morass and could not be pulled out. Led by Major Mahon, the Egyptian cavalry boldly charged the oncoming horsemen and flung them back. For a second time the gunboats came to the rescue. Having successfully concluded their first operation, they again opened fire. The practice of the seamen was so excellent that Osman's force was driven off, and Broadwood not only returned to the main body, but actually succeeded in getting back his guns.

The main attack of the dervishes having failed, the 21st Lancers were ordered to reconnoitre Surgham Hill. It was found unoccupied, with the exception of skirmishers who had taken shelter behind the rocks and were intent on picking off the cavalry whenever opportunity presented. On the great yellow plain below masses of men were to be seen moving in the direction of the Khalifa's capital. Kitchener was therefore brought into communication by heliograph with Colonel Rowland Hill-Martin. "Advance and clear the left flank," the Sirdar flashed back, "and use every effort to prevent the enemy re-entering Omdurman." Patrols were sent out, and one detachment reported that about 1000 dervishes were concealed in a *khor*<sup>1</sup> less than a mile off. It would be necessary to defeat this force before those in retreat could be reached, but the

<sup>1</sup> Ravine.



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cavalry was not informed that immediately the scouts had disappeared this force had been augmented by 1700 men.

Mr Winston Churchill, who had ridden hard for three days in order to share in the battle, and who took part in the charge, gives us the following vivid picture of what happened : <sup>1</sup>

“The heads of the squadrons wheeled slowly to the left, and the Lancers, breaking into a trot, began to cross the dervish front in column of troops. Thereupon and with one accord the blue-clad men dropped on their knees, and there burst out a loud, crackling fire of musketry. It was hardly possible to miss such a target at such a range. Horses and men fell at once. The only course was plain and welcome to all. The Colonel, nearer than his regiment, already saw what lay behind the skirmishers. He ordered ‘Right wheel into line’ to be sounded. The trumpet jerked out a shrill note, heard faintly above the trampling of the horses and the noise of the rifles. On the instant all the sixteen troops swung round and locked up into a long galloping line, and the 21st Lancers were committed to their first charge in war.

“Two hundred and fifty yards away the dark blue men were firing madly in a thin film of light-blue smoke. Their bullets struck the hard gravel into the air, and the troopers, to shield their faces from the stinging dust, bowed their helmets forward, like the Cuirassiers at Waterloo. The pace was fast and the distance short. Yet before it was half covered the whole aspect of the affair changed. A deep crease in the ground—a dry watercourse, a *khôr*—appeared where all had seemed smooth, level plain; and

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Mr Winston Churchill for permission to reprint this narrative from *The River War*, pp. 351-353.



Omdurman : Charge of the 21st Lancers  
Stanley Berkeley



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from it there sprang, with the suddenness of a pantomime effect and a high-pitched yell, a dense white mass of men nearly as long as our front and about twelve deep. A score of horsemen and a dozen bright flags rose as if by magic from the earth. Eager warriors sprang forward to anticipate the shock. The rest stood firm to meet it.

"The Lancers acknowledged the apparition only by an increase of pace. . . . The riflemen, firing bravely to the last, were swept head over heels into the *chor*, and jumping down with them, at full gallop and in the closest order, the British squadrons struck the fierce brigade with one loud, furious shout. The collision was prodigious. Nearly thirty Lancers, men and horses, and at least two hundred Arabs were overthrown. . . . As a rider tears through a bullfinch, the officers forced their way through the press, and as an iron rake might be drawn through a heap of shingle, so the regiment followed. They shattered the dervish array, and, their pace reduced to a walk, scrambled out of the *chor* on the further side, leaving a score of troopers behind them, and dragging on with the charge more than a thousand Arabs.

"Then, and not till then, the killing began, and thereafter each man saw the world along his lance, under his guard, or through the back-sight of his pistol, and each had his own strange tale to tell. . . . Within two minutes of the collision every living man was clear of the dervish mass. All who had fallen were cut at with swords till they stopped quivering, but no artistic mutilations were attempted. . . . In 120 seconds five officers, 65 men, and 119 horses out of fewer than 400 had been killed or wounded."

The cavalry now dismounted and poured a steady and

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accurate fire on the dervishes in the *khôr*. This forced the enemy to give up the struggle and retreat toward Surgham Hill. Captain Kenna and Lieutenant De Montmorency performed gallant acts which won for them the Victoria Cross during this fast and furious fight. One of the first to fall in the charge was Lieutenant R. S. Grenfell, a nephew of the former Sirdar. Both officers went back to search for the young lieutenant. They found his dead body, and as De Montmorency was putting it on his horse the animal bolted. Kenna, helped by Corporal Swarbrick, immediately gave chase, while the other held the dervishes at bay with his revolver. On recovering the horse De Montmorency made good his escape. The Captain also performed another notable deed. Major Wyndham had his horse shot under him in the *khôr*. Kenna galloped back, put him on his own beast, and got him away in safety.

A great deal of criticism has been levelled at Kitchener in connexion with this brilliant charge of the Lancers. The question is well summed up by Judge Royle.<sup>1</sup> "Most military men," he says, "appear to consider that for cavalry to charge unbroken infantry of unknown quantity, over unknown ground, was, to put it mildly, a mistake. Its result, so far as the enemy was concerned, was practically nil. By the loss which the cavalry sustained in horses alone they were put out of action, instead of being reserved for the moment when they were required for the purpose of pursuing the fugitives." In the view of Steevens<sup>2</sup> the charge was "a gross blunder" and contributed to the escape of the Khalifa.

As part of the general movement to reach Omdurman before those of the Khalifa's hordes who had vacated the

<sup>1</sup> P. 567.

<sup>2</sup> P. 130.

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field could do so, the Sirdar's army was now advancing by échelon of brigades from the left in the direction of Surgham. The movement was made in this order : 2nd British, 1st British, 2nd, 3rd, and 1st Egyptian, with the 4th Egyptian in reserve to cover the rear of the transport column, and the native cavalry and Camel Corps also in the rear. Apparently it was not until this force was on the move that it was ascertained that the Khalifa himself had men to the number of 20,000 hidden behind the hill.

A change was then made in the disposition of the troops, two companies of the 18th Battalion attached to Maxwell's brigade meanwhile swarming up Surgham, which they stormed and occupied. While the alteration was taking place a large gap was left between Macdonald's men and the remainder of the army. The isolation of the Scottish brigadier was Abdullah's chance, and he seized it. A charge of mounted men came first, and was received with superb coolness by the blacks, who never faltered. They kept up a sustained fire, though their Martini rifles had no magazines. The Khalifa's infantry followed, and, failing to pierce the line, fell in scores. Further hope of annihilating Macdonald's brigade by this section of the dervish army was removed by the support which was now given by Lewis and Wauchope, although of course the brunt of the attack had been borne by Macdonald.

What was Kitchener doing at this crisis ? is a question that may well be asked. Churchill saw him and has left a cameo for future generations to admire. "In the centre," he writes, "under the red Egyptian flag, careless of the bullets which that conspicuous emblem drew, and which inflicted some loss among those around him, rode

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the Sirdar, stern and sullen, equally unmoved by fear or enthusiasm.”<sup>1</sup>

The fight had already turned against the enemy when Osman and Ali-Wad-Helu brought up reinforcements. The Highlanders, the Warwicks, and the Lincolns were rushed up to prevent any enveloping movement on the part of the dervishes. The emergency had not been foreseen, but prompt measures were taken to deal with it. Macdonald arranged and rearranged his Sudanese and Egyptians with amazing dexterity, bringing up his battalions and batteries where the attack was fiercest, but never depleting his ranks sufficiently to be taken by surprise. His men fought until their supply of cartridges was almost exhausted, and the attack was finally repulsed by the Lincolns. For the last time several hundred of the dauntless horsemen rushed at the left of Macdonald's sweating soldiery, and were annihilated.

At half-past eleven the Empire of the Mahdi ceased to be. The dervishes were routed. Kitchener thought they had been given “a good dusting.” Of this there was no doubt, for nearly 11,000 gallant foemen were lying on the desert sand. Conqueror and vanquished had fought as strong men always fight—without thought of their own skins. Civilization and barbarism had clashed, and civilization, as represented by brave troops, modern guns, and organization, had conquered. “Of the 4000 dervish black troops who surrendered,” says Sir Francis Wingate in an official report, “1222 were wounded; there were wounded in almost every house in Omdurman, and, in view of the fact that almost every able-bodied man in the town had been forced to take part in the battle, it is fair to conclude that the number of wounded (16,000) as

<sup>1</sup> *The River War*, p. 365.

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telegraphed was not over-estimated." The casualties in the Anglo-Egyptian Army reached 48 killed and 382 wounded.<sup>1</sup>

At 2.30 in the afternoon Maxwell's brigade and the 82nd Field Battery, accompanied by Kitchener and his staff, marched toward Omdurman. The Khalifa's black flag of tyranny had been captured and was carried immediately behind the Sirdar. It was seen from the city, but the soldiers who surrounded it were not those who had accompanied the symbol of evil five hours before. A dozen or more sheikhs came out to meet the victors, followed by the principal Ameer, who asked for pardon and did not seem at all certain of Kitchener's promise that if the people who possessed weapons laid them down they would escape death. He returned to Omdurman, and when he came back he brought many of the Khalifa's former subjects with him.

<sup>1</sup> It may be of interest to readers to know that General C. V. F. Townshend, who commanded the British Expeditionary Force operating against Baghdad in 1915-16, and was compelled to surrender at Kut-el-Amara after a most gallant defence of that place for 143 days, won his Distinguished Service Order at Omdurman.



## CHAPTER XI

### In the Khalifa's Capital

*"The development and elevation of the character of a people depend mainly on the growth of self-control and the power to dominate natural impulses, as well as on the practice of unobtrusive self-reliance and perseverance, combined with reasoned determination."*

KITCHENER

"WE reached Omdurman," says Mr F. Scudamore, who was one of the Sirdar's party, "and made our way to the Mahdi's tomb, which stood in a wide, enclosed space in the heart of what was called the Iron Mosque, but which really was but a shelter roofed with corrugated iron, built round the four sides of a great square courtyard. At one corner of this court was the Khalifa's house, and as we rode into the open square a shell burst among us. Exclamations of delight broke from Kitchener and his staff, for it was thought that Abdullah was at home, and was bidding us welcome from his windows. But another and yet other shells followed, until they began to rain in our midst with a wholly unpleasant persistency.

"Then of a sudden Sir Archibald Hunter made a discovery. 'These are our own shells, sir,' he said. It was true. A battery of our guns from the other side of the town was shelling the Khalifa's stronghold, not knowing we were inside. 'Gentlemen,' said Kitchener, 'I am afraid we can't stop it, so we had better move away. It would be a pity to be knocked on the head after the

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battle's over.' He turned his horse as he spoke and we all followed him."

Unfortunately Abdullah had escaped. "When the day had gone hopelessly against him," relates Mr Charles Neufeld, who had been a captive of the Khalifa for eleven years and was released by the Sirdar, "and he had been persuaded to enter the town, he ordered the drums and ombeyehs to be sounded, and endeavoured to make a final stand at the large praying enclosure. But few obeyed the summons, and of those that came some slunk away, and others jeered at the disconsolate and discredited prophet. Finally he sent his secretary to collect his household, but the secretary did not return. Stopping two fugitives, he sent them to ascertain the whereabouts of the enemy, and they came upon the Sirdar and his staff not 1200 yards away. Abdulla, warned in time, contrived to slip away, whilst the Sirdar changed his direction and made the complete circuit of Omdurman." Street-fighting broke out during the night, but by the following morning all was quiet and the army pitched camp four miles from the city.

A deeply impressive religious service took place outside the ruins of Gordon's palace at Khartoum on Sunday, the 4th September. It was characterized by extreme simplicity, as the dead General's life and faith had been. A captured city is not made docile in a moment, and it was therefore impossible for all the victors of Omdurman to take part, but representatives of every corps in the avenging army were conveyed across the flooded river. On the one side lay the ruined city of the dead; on the opposite bank the squalid city of the living. No more eloquent sermon, despite the fact that it was unuttered, was ever preached in minster or meeting-house. In the building behind that clump of green in the distance

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Gordon had fought his last fight, cane in hand. Had it been possible to make a psychological analysis of the thoughts of the officers and men now slowly making their way up the Nile, who could have doubted of the result? They were centred, as their eyes were centred, on the ruined palace beneath the shade of the palms—surely the most becoming of trees. Appropriate, too, the giant acacia in front and the roofless house.

The troops clattered off the craft, lined up, faced the sorry spectacle of the palace and waited. The Sirdar, his staff and four chaplains stood in the centre, like an archbishop surrounded by his clergy. As Kitchener gave the sign something red and blue and white shot up against the sky. It was the Union Jack flying above Gordon's old home. Then the Egyptian flag went up. The sword had yielded to the sword. A gunboat saluted with twenty-one guns, the troops saluted with hands to helmets, the band saluted with brass. The National Anthem and the Khedival Hymn were played. Then muffled drums and the Dead March in *Saul* and the march from Handel's *Scipione*. A Psalm was read, prayers were said, a portion of the gorgeous rhetoric of the Burial Service was recited. "It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. . . . O death, where is thy sting? . . . Therefore . . . be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

It was left to the Sudanese to play Gordon's favourite hymn, *Abide with Me*. To them it may have been a mere thing of crochets and quavers, well-nigh meaningless other than as music, and not altogether comprehensible as that. But the white troops and the Man who had accomplished the Task knew what it meant.



**In Memory of Gordon**  
Lance Calkin and W T Maud



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When all was over Kitchener did a great deal of hand-shaking. The steel in him seemed to bend. "He was softened, gentle, almost affectionate to all," wrote a staff officer who was there; "and those—there were many—who had often misjudged and misunderstood him must have at last realized that down in that often forbidding and always stern and self-reliant nature there was a soft spot, and a human sympathy, of which they had not believed him capable."

Subsequently various charges of inhumanity toward the enemy were levelled at Kitchener. These he thought well to contradict in a dispatch to Sir Evelyn Baring.<sup>1</sup> He emphatically denied that he ordered, "or gave it to be understood, that the dervish wounded were to be massacred. That the troops under my command, whether British, Egyptian, or Sudanese, wantonly killed wounded or unarmed dervishes when no longer in a position to do us injury. That Omdurman was looted for three days after its occupation. That, when we were rapidly advancing upon the town, fire was opened by the gunboats on mixed masses of fugitives in the streets. I would add that my action regarding the tomb of Mohamed Ahmed, the so-called Mahdi, was taken after due deliberation, and prompted solely by political considerations."<sup>2</sup>

Steevens mentions that as the army was crossing a *chor* close to the walls of Omdurman "four dervishes popped out, seemingly from dead walls beyond. They came towards us and probably wished to surrender, but the blacks fired, and they dived into their dead walls again."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Omdurman, 1st February, 1899. *Parliamentary Papers—Egypt, 1899.*

<sup>2</sup> See *post*, p. 139.

<sup>3</sup> P. 134.

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This does not necessarily signify that the dervishes were shot, but even if they paid the death penalty it is only just to add that the Egyptians and Sudanese had every excuse for their action. They remembered how Major Urquhart, of the Cameron Highlanders, had been shot at the battle of the Atbara by a man who had concealed himself with the killed, and the dervish love of ambush was calculated to make the most highly disciplined troops nervy. Captain Adolf von Tiedemann, of the Royal Prussian General Staff, who was in the immediate vicinity of the Sirdar practically the whole day, says that "such evident calumnies" as those dealt with in the above dispatch "would never be given credence to for a moment in the mind of any intelligent man possessed of common sense." He notes that when Kitchener entered the city "crowds of unarmed dervishes rushed towards him, and it would have been easy enough for his escort to have cut them down. Lord Kitchener received them with kindness, and, as every one on his staff can testify, he did all in his power to put a stop to the street-fighting which broke out here and there in the town. Putting aside all regard for his personal safety, he, as I saw several times, rode into narrow streets and courtyards, with uplifted hand, calling out to the inhabitants gathered there, *Amân !* ('Peace !')."

The Captain then proceeds to deal with other important charges. As the German code of military ethics is vastly different from our own, and certainly does not err on the side of humanity, what he says is of considerable importance. "As regards the killing of the wounded on the battlefield, that was a necessary measure which was as regrettable as it was indispensable. After the first attack of the dervishes had been repulsed, and when the Anglo-Egyptian army was moving off by brigades to its left

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towards Omdurman, I myself left the staff and rode over a great part of the battlefield, but I registered a mental vow never to do so again. A wounded and apparently defenceless dervish lying on the ground is much more dangerous than his fellow with a whole skin and arms in his hand rushing against one. One knows perfectly what to expect from the latter, while the apparent helplessness of the former makes one forget the necessary caution and also the fact that a bullet fired by a wounded man makes quite as big a hole as one fired by an unhurt person.

“During my ride over the battlefield I several times saw dervishes who had been lying on the ground suddenly rise and fire off their rifles into the ranks of the troops marching near them or who had already passed by them, and for these latter it was simply demanded, as a measure of self-preservation, that they should secure themselves against such attacks by a chain of scouts pushed to the front. It is not only the moral right, but the duty, of the soldier to make use of his arms against an enemy from whom it is to be expected that he will use his weapons to inflict loss on the troops to which he (the soldier) belongs, and the behaviour of the wounded dervishes was such as to justify this belief. It is quite possible that here and there some wounded enemies may have been shot who had no hostile intentions, and who were only intent on saving their lives, but it is difficult to realize the peaceable intentions of such. To make out a few such isolated instances and accusations of useless cruelty against a whole army appears to me absurd.

“Besides, one heard of a large number of cases in which not only British, but also black soldiers received and treated their wounded enemies with great kindness, although at times they had but a poor reward for it. I



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myself saw a man of the 82nd Field Battery giving a wounded dervish a drink out of his water-bottle, holding up his head the while with his hand, and then leaving a piece of bread, which he took out of his own haversack, on the ground beside him."

Further evidence is afforded by Chaplain Owen Spencer Watkins. "Many of the mangled heaps of humanity we passed were still living," he tells us, "and as we marched by they glared at us with cruel, treacherous eyes full of hate. Some of our number were moved by pity to give them of the precious water in their bottles, and were repaid for their kindness by the wounded men trying to take their lives with the new strength thus gained. The 'no surrender' spirit of the dervishes was simply remarkable. I saw men, too mangled, you would think, to move, slowly and painfully raising themselves on their elbows, and with their last strength firing one shot at the hated Englishman." <sup>1</sup>

The undoubted success of the Khartoum Campaign was partly due to the fact that Kitchener did not receive his instructions from the War Office, but from Baring. Without in any way seeking to belittle the Sirdar's military capacity, Lord Cromer has shown—as this necessarily brief study has also endeavoured to prove—that the principal problems of the expedition were those of supply and transport. "The main quality required to meet these difficulties," says Lord Cromer, "was a good head for business. By one of those fortunate accidents which have been frequent in the history of Anglo-Saxon enterprise, a man was found equal to the occasion. Lord Kitchener of Khartoum won his well-deserved peerage because he was an excellent man of business; he looked carefully after

<sup>1</sup> *With Kitchener's Army*, pp. 180-181.

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every important detail and enforced economy." The writer also indulges in a few candid remarks on the War Office, with which venerable institution he came into contact in the matter of stores. "In order to reform it, men rather than measures were required. I should add that there is reason to believe that since the South African War the administration of the War Office has been greatly improved. It is, however, impossible to speak positively on this point until its efficiency has undergone the crucial test of war."<sup>1</sup>

The only comment one can make on this is that the War Office is an exceptionally dull scholar. It learns its lessons after a campaign, and usually manages to forget them before the advent of the next resort to arms. So far from the Khartoum Campaign interfering with his administrative work, Baring found that it added but little to his ordinary labours.

Five days after his triumphal entry into Omdurman, Sir Herbert Kitchener was informed that Fashoda, on the White Nile, had been occupied by a force of white men and black soldiers. The news came from the captain of one of Gordon's old steamers that had been captured by the Mahdists and had now returned from a foraging expedition. Particulars were scanty, the chief item being that the strange force at Fashoda had killed or wounded some forty men on the vessel and her consort. The latter was at Reng awaiting instructions from the Khalifa. It never received them!

Kitchener set out to investigate, taking with him five steamers, two battalions of Sudanese, two companies of Camerons, a battery of artillery, and four Maxim guns. He found a miniature army of 128 men, mostly black,

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii, pp. 107-109.

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under the command of Major Marchand, above whose tent the French flag was flying. The Sirdar's tact and Lord Salisbury's firmness alone saved the nations which are now such firm allies from declaring hostilities against each other. The amazing exploits of the eight Frenchmen who formed Marchand's expedition—all the others were Senegalese—appealed to Kitchener, who appreciated the fact that bravery is not a characteristic wholly British. Of this he had had ample evidence in the campaign which had so recently closed. Admiration, however, did not blind him to the fact that serious complications were likely to arise over the pretensions of the Major that Fashoda was French territory. He disregarded the tricolour, hoisted the Egyptian flag, and opened the conversation by congratulating Major Marchand on what he had accomplished. "No," was the answer, as the officer swept his hand in the direction of the Senegalese, "it is not I, but these soldiers who have done it." The Sirdar afterward confessed that he then knew that he had to deal with a gentleman.

"It is impossible," he writes to Baring, "not to entertain the highest admiration of the courage, devotion, and indomitable spirit displayed by M. Marchand's expedition, but our general impression was one of astonishment that an attempt should have been made to carry out a project of such magnitude and danger by the dispatch of so small and ill-equipped a force, which—as their commander remarked to me—was neither in a position to resist a second dervish attack nor to retire; indeed, had our destruction of the Khalifa's power at Omdurman been delayed for a fortnight, in all probability he and his companions would have been massacred.

"The claims of M. Marchand to have occupied the

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Bahr-el-Ghazal and Fashoda provinces with the force at his disposal would be ludicrous, did not the sufferings and privations his expedition endured during their two years' arduous journey render the futility of their efforts pathetic."

It was during Kitchener's absence that the Mahdi's body was removed from the sarcophagus that contained it and the tomb destroyed. The remains were cremated in the furnace of one of the steamers and the ashes thrown into the Nile. These things were done by the Sirdar's instructions. Although at the time a great deal of sentimental rubbish was written about this alleged desecration, Kitchener's fear that unless all traces of the Mahdi were removed the place would become a kind of second Mecca was surely sufficient justification.

It was not until the 24th November, 1899, that the Khalifa was at last run to earth. He perished in the battle of Om Debrikat. Osman Digna, his lieutenant, was captured in January 1900, by which time the Sirdar had surrendered his duties to Sir Francis Wingate.

Kitchener had avenged Gordon. He had achieved what he had set out to do. It was his way. In October 1898 he became Baron Kitchener of Khartoum, G.C.B. He received the thanks of both Lords and Commons at Westminster, and in the following year Parliament made him a grant of £30,000. The Premier, Lord Salisbury, undoubtedly voiced the sentiments of the Empire when he said of the victorious soldier that "He will remain a striking figure, not only adorned by the valour and patriotism which all successful generals can show, but with the most extraordinary combination of calculation, of strategy, of statesmanship which it ever fell to any

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general in these circumstances to display. . . . He took exactly the time necessary for his work ; he made precisely the preparations which that work required ; he expended upon it the time, the resource, and the military strength precisely which it demanded, and his victory came out with absolute accuracy, like the answer to a scientific calculation."

In November 1898 Kitchener was entertained at the Mansion House and presented with a sword of honour and the freedom of the city of London, a time-honoured form of acknowledgment of great services rendered to the State. In returning thanks the Sirdar gave some interesting particulars of the ways and means of the late expedition :

" You may take it that during the two and a half years' campaign extra military credits to the amount of two and a half millions have been expended. In this sum I have included the recent grant for the extension of the railway from Atbara to Khartoum, the work on which is already in hand. Well, against this large expenditure we have some assets to show ; we have, or shall have, 760 miles of railways, properly equipped with engines, rolling stock, and a track with bridges in good order. . . . For this running concern I do not think that £3000 a mile will be considered too high a value. This represents two and a quarter millions out of the money granted, and for the other quarter of a million we have 2000 miles of telegraph line, six new gunboats, besides barges, sailing-craft, and—the Sudan."

Lord Kitchener's stay in England was short, but he made excellent use of his time. He was bent particularly on raising £100,000 for the purpose of building and endowing a college at Khartoum as a memorial to Gordon. There could be no more worthy way of perpetuating the name and fame

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of the great Christian General than this. He rightly felt that Great Britain had a duty to discharge to the rising generation of the Sudan ; that although she had purged the country of Mahdism and given of her blood and treasure, there remained much to be built up. John Bull, proud of his universities and schools, must put his hands in his pockets and bring them out laden with good yellow gold as a thank-offering for what his soldier lads had accomplished. It would show that Britain's mission was pacific and benevolent.

As the Sirdar himself avowed : " A responsible task is henceforth laid upon us, and those who have conquered are called upon to civilize. In fact, the work interrupted since the death of Gordon must now be resumed. . . . The area of the Sudan comprises a population of upwards of three million persons, of whom it may be said that they are wholly uneducated. The dangers arising from that fact are too obvious, and have been too painfully felt during many years past, for me to dwell upon them. In the course of time, no doubt, an education of some sort, and administered by some hands, will be set on foot. But if Khartoum could be made forthwith the centre of an education supported by British funds and organized from Britain there would be secured to this country indisputably the first place in Africa as a civilizing power, and an effect would be created which would be felt for good throughout the central regions of that continent. I accordingly propose that at Khartoum there should be founded and maintained with British money a college bearing the name of the Gordon Memorial College, to be a pledge that the memory of Gordon is still alive among us, and that his aspirations are at length to be realized.

"Certain questions will naturally arise as to whom exactly

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we should educate, and as to the nature of the education to be given. Our system would need to be gradually built up. We should begin by teaching the sons of the leading men, the heads of villages, and the heads of districts. They belong to a race very capable of learning, and ready to learn. The teaching, in its early stages, would be devoted to purely elementary subjects, such as reading, writing, geography, and the English language. Later, and after these preliminary stages had been passed, a more advanced course would be instituted, including a training in technical subjects specially adapted to the requirements of those who inhabit the valley of the Upper Nile. The principal teachers in the college would be British, and the supervision of the arrangements would be vested in the Governor-General of the Sudan. I need not add that there would be no interference with the religion of the people."

The appeal was made "in the name of Gordon and in the cause of that civilization which is the life of the Empire of Britain."

Strange to say, Kitchener seems to have entertained grave doubts as to the likelihood of his obtaining the money. Indeed, there is a suggestion in the following conversation that he did not quite understand the nature of his own countrymen. Having lived for so long a time far removed from the busy haunts of the commerce-loving Englishman, the opportunity of studying his subject at first hand had been denied him to a very appreciable extent. This lack of knowledge of the national temperament may possibly account for the state of semi-ignorance regarding the British Expeditionary Force in which the people of the United Kingdom were kept in the days of the Great War. One can appreciate Kitchener's reasons for

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suppressing information during the South African Campaign, when Britain had scarcely a friend in the world other than her own kith and kin, and when practically the whole of Continental Europe was only too ready to assist the Boers, but these conditions did not obtain in the Conflict of the Nations. This failing is not unique in Lord Kitchener, but the biographer who would draw a correct portrait must necessarily include imperfections. Cromwell was incomplete without his warts.

The conversation took place at a country house at which Mr Smalley, who records it in his *Anglo-American Memories*, was a fellow-guest of the Sirdar. The proposed college was the topic under discussion.

"He wanted £100,000 and he doubted whether he would get it. In vain his friends urged him to make his appeal. 'No,' said Lord Kitchener, 'nothing less than £100,000 will be any use. It is a large sum. I should not like to fail, and if they gave me only part of the amount, to have to return it.'

"He was told that his name would be enough. It was the psychological moment. Delay would only injure his chances. Lord Glenesk offered Lord Kitchener £1000 across the dinner-table, and other sums were offered there and then, and the support of two powerful newspapers was promised. Still he hesitated and still he repeated, 'I should not like to fail.' At last one of the company said: 'Well, Lord Kitchener, if you had doubted about your campaigns as you do about this you would never have got to Khartoum.'

"His face hardened, and his reply was characteristic of the man: 'Perhaps not; but then I could depend on myself, and now I have to depend on the British public.'"

The appeal was made and no less than £120,000 was



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willingly subscribed by John Bull. Lord Kitchener attended a meeting at the Mansion House and afterward went to the Royal Exchange. Some of the managers and members of the Committee of 'the House' conducted him to the Mexican Railway market, where he was immediately recognized. Staid and sober financiers shouted themselves hoarse and demanded a speech. He jumped on to a stool, smiled blandly, said he wanted a lot of money and expected to get it, and there and then collected £1000, with more to follow. On the 5th January, 1899, shortly after his return to Egypt as Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief of the Sudan, he laid the foundation-stone of the College. Some idea of the immense size of the territory he was called upon to rule may be gathered from the fact that its area is 1,006,000 square miles. The railway continued to make such satisfactory progress that in due course it reached Khartoum, the Atbara being spanned by a bridge which Kitchener opened on the 26th August, 1899. The first through train from Cairo to the new city of Khartoum, with the designing of which he had much to do, ran on the 10th January, 1900. The residence of the Governor-General stands where Gordon's palace once was. "From the dark red arcades of the Gordon College," says Mr Douglas Sladen, "which has kindled a zeal for education through all the Sudan, for miles northward along the lofty banks of the Blue Nile, rise stately Government buildings, avenues of cool dark *lebbeks*, soaring clumps of palms, and the bungalows of the British rulers of the land set in exquisite tropical gardens."

## CHAPTER XII

### Briton and Boer in South Africa

*"The issue in South Africa, stripped of all details and technicalities, was simply this : Whether a country in its nature indivisible, and by virtue of its physical, racial, and social conditions inevitably destined to come under a single government, should be wholly within the Empire, or wholly without it. Two conflicting political systems could not permanently coexist, separated by purely artificial boundaries, on the South African veld. Either the modern progressive Empire or the old-world racial oligarchy had to go."*—LORD MILNER

THE history of South Africa is no mean study. It is an amazing jungle whose dense undergrowth has not yet been entirely cleared by the foresters of fact. Briton and Boer have met as foes and as friends ; many of the native races have sided with both and fought with both. It has been a great battle-ground for racial supremacy—black *versus* black, black *versus* white, white *versus* white. Kopje and veld, drift and river have run red in the process. Conflicting ideals have fought to a finish. To understand something of the labyrinthine causes of the campaign of 1899–1902, with which Kitchener had so much to do, one must go far back. To detail them would be to write the record of South Africa. Told in the briefest and broadest outline, this is the story :

Three decades before the Dutch East India Company decided to send out an expedition to occupy Table Bay Commodore Humphrey Fitzherbert had annexed it on the 3rd July, 1620, in the name of his Majesty King James

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the First of England. Unfortunately neither the Government nor the Company appreciated the British sea-dog's attempt at empire-making, and nothing further was done. In our day he would have been feasted and knighted and compelled to make speeches. When it was known that the Dutch Expedition had arrived in April 1652, England asked no questions and issued no challenge. It was regarded as unimportant. Holland's interest in the Dark Continent was frankly commercial, the sole idea of the Company being to establish a victualling station for their ships at the Cape of Good Hope—the "Stormy Cape" of Bartholomew Diaz, and "the most stately thing and fairest cape we saw in the whole circumference of the world" of Francis Drake.

The pioneers erected a fort, laid the foundations of the "Town at the Cape," and in due course set about the difficult task of colonization. It was not until some of them started farming and became free burghers, as they were called, that slaves were introduced, and with them a great deal of trouble that was to come to a head in after years. Scourgings and brandings, floggings and sudden death were all too frequently the lot of the unfortunate blacks. Government was in the hands of a Council of Policy appointed by the Company. This was necessarily an autocratic body, for the latter alone had the right to supply foreign vessels and trade with the natives. The farmers were compelled to deal with the corporation at fixed prices, but in their transactions the officials usually managed to make a profit for themselves as well as for their employers. It was not until 1659 that the settlers were represented on the Council by a solitary member, who was nominated by the burghers and chosen from a selection of four by the Council.

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The first Huguenots to put in an appearance—and their coming had a marked influence on succeeding generations—were forty-five shipwrecked mariners who landed in 1660. These were followed by nearly 200 other Frenchmen and Frenchwomen in 1688, after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. They got on well with the Boers,<sup>1</sup> intermarried and discussed Calvinism with their neighbours. As the Dutch population then numbered only about 1000, the infusion of Huguenot blood was more marked than it would otherwise have been.

Although trouble with the Hottentots was frequent, the settlers gradually got the upper hand, so much so that eventually the appointment of a chief was left with the Dutch commander. The colony and population began to grow, explorations north of the peninsula were undertaken, and wagons creaked on their way to “fresh woods and pastures new,” often enough because of the tyrannical rule of the officials. “The Dutch East India Company,” says Watermeyer, the principal historian of the period, “cared nought for the progress of the colony provided only that they had a refreshment station for their richly laden fleets, and that the English, French, Danes, and Portuguese had not. Whatever tended to infringe in the slightest degree on their darling monopoly was visited with the severest penalties, whether the culprit chanced to be high in rank or low.”

Although Jacobus Coetsee in 1761 was the first man to cross the Gariep, whence the troublesome original inhabitants known as Bushmen had been driven, that waterway was renamed the Orange River in 1779 by a Scotsman named Gordon, who was in the employ of the Company and sought to honour the Stadtholder in this manner. In

<sup>1</sup> ‘Boer’ literally means ‘a farmer.’

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the latter year the Boers, after repeated trouble with the Bushmen, fought the First Kaffir War,<sup>1</sup> and we find commandos taking the field and defeating the enemy. A second outbreak occurred in 1798, but as the Government gave the farmers no support, they were obliged to withdraw, losing in stock as the Council forfeited the confidence of the commandos. Many of the settlers so bitterly resented the corruption which had become rife among the officials that two deputations had already been sent to Holland in an effort to get their grievances redressed. Finally, in 1795, the inhabitants of Swellendam and of Graaf Reinet, the most northerly town of the colony, taking their cue from the revolutionists of France, broke out into open rebellion and entirely dissociated themselves from the Company and all its works. Swellendam even went so far as to announce that it was a Free Republic, and a National Assembly was elected.

France had declared war against Great Britain and Holland two years before, and William of Orange, now a refugee in England, had transferred Cape Colony to England. When a small expeditionary force, under General Craig, was landed there in June 1795, the Commissioner refused to recognize the Stadtholder's mandate as valid, and he and the few armed men available held out until British reinforcements arrived in the following September. Various reforms were introduced which helped to make the new dispensation popular and to secure the submission of the outlying districts of Stellenbosch and Swellendam, although Graaf Reinet held out for a time.

<sup>1</sup> 'Kaffir' is the Arabic word for 'infidel,' and is used to designate tribes of the warlike Bantu race, including the Basutos, Pondos, Matabele, Zulus, Mashonas, and Bechuanas. They are akin to the Sudanese.

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It certainly cannot be said that the British Government was fortunate or wise in its choice of Lord Macartney as the first Governor of Cape Colony. He arrived in May 1796, after a long and tedious voyage of nearly six months, and showed by his harsh measures that he was by no means the type of man who ought to have been sent out. He was despotic, and despotism had already led to unhappy results ; he insisted on the burghers swearing a new oath of allegiance, notwithstanding that they had already sworn one ; and he visited with severe penalties all those who showed democratic tendencies—and there were very few who did not cherish them, even though they did not necessarily publish their hopes abroad. At the end of his short and extravagant administration in 1798 Macartney thought it well to make a voluntary affidavit to the effect that the only emoluments he had received in addition to his salary of £10,000 a year were merely “ some small articles of fruit, venison, or such trifles, which it was out of my power to refuse or elude, and which I am sure could not possibly exceed the value of from one to two hundred rix-dollars.”

“ The economic condition of the people,” says Professor H. E. Egerton, one of our greatest authorities on Colonial history,<sup>1</sup> “ was improved by the English occupation ; and the ‘ free trade ’ promised to the colonists, though very different from free trade as we now understand it, was certainly an improvement upon the rigid monopoly of the Dutch East India Company. The main difficulty in the way of the British authorities was the same in Cape Colony as in America. An intensely aristocratic social system found itself confronted with a community which, whatever

<sup>1</sup> *The Cambridge Modern History* (Cambridge, 1906), vol. ix, pp. 749-750.

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had been its political condition, was intensely democratic. Englishmen of the type of the governing classes of the eighteenth century found it difficult to associate with the tradesmen and farmers of Cape Colony, although feminine tact might sometimes bridge the chasm."

The Third Kaffir War, which broke out in 1799, was no more successful than the attempt to solve the problem of the Bantu natives by means of conciliation, which they regarded as weakness. Corruption marked the administration of Sir George Young, Macartney's successor, who was recalled in April 1801. British rule came to an end for a time by reason of the short-lived Peace of Amiens, and in 1803 the colony was restored to the Batavian Republic, as Holland had now become. When war again broke out with France another British expedition was sent to the Cape, and in January 1806 the Dutch authorities, following the loss of the battle of Blaauwberg, capitulated to Sir David Baird. Governors Caledon and Cradock both showed themselves well disposed toward the colonists. The administration of justice was improved, a postal service was instituted, a water supply established, the conditions of the Hottentots were vastly improved, and a Fourth Kaffir War, which drove the Xosas across the Great Fish River to the eastward, was successfully waged during the period which intervened between 1806 and the confirmation of the conquest by the London Convention of August 1814. A sum of £6,000,000 was then paid to Holland by Great Britain by way of compensation for Demerara, Berbice, Essequibo, and Cape Colony.

One particularly unhappy occurrence which took place while Cradock was at the Cape must be mentioned. The statements of certain missionaries regarding the alleged behaviour of certain Boers toward the Hottentots resulted

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in the inauguration of what was known as 'the Black Circuit.' This was a special court which visited three towns for the purpose of holding trials of the persons implicated. Some of the charges were obviously trumped up, and it was proved that the Hottentots had committed robbery, incendiarism, and murder. Only seven colonists were actually guilty of offences against the blacks, although thirty charges were preferred. The Black Circuit had consequently a malign influence on the Boers. It was felt that the Government had been a little too eager to take up the inquiry against the whites, particularly as complaints of native wrongdoings had on various occasions been neglected. This embittered not a few colonists, and planted seeds of discontent the growth of which was fostered by the execution of five farmers who took up arms with a number of others as a protest against the death of a Boer who was killed in resisting arrest by Hottentot police. The five farmers were sentenced by a Dutch judge and hanged at Slachter's Nek on the 9th March, 1816.

The twelve years' administration of Lord Charles Somerset began in 1814. It was reactionary and oppressive, so much so that Brougham threatened to move for the Governor's impeachment if he were not recalled. In 1826, therefore, Somerset was ordered to return to England to explain his conduct, and the report of the commission of inquiry led to the appointment of an Executive Council of seven members to assist the Governor. At the same time it must be admitted that Somerset's idea of inducing several thousand British to emigrate to South Africa was a far-sighted stroke of policy. They found homes in the unoccupied eastern portion of the colony. He also introduced the wool industry by importing sheep, and lent his



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assistance to improving the breed of horses. During his administration the Fifth Kaffir War (1818-19) was waged, and the Keiskamma River became the boundary of the colony, the territory between the Great Fish River and the Keiskamma being regarded as neutral, although it was in actual fact British.

A further cause of discontent was the abolition of the slave trade in 1884. There were then nearly 40,000 slaves in the colony, officially valued at £3,041,290, while the sum assigned to their owners by way of compensation was only £1,247,401. It was manifestly unfair that the sum allotted was also to cover the cost of carrying out the Act, and a gross imposition that each individual claim, duly stamped to the value of thirty shillings, had to be proved before Commissioners sitting in London. When a claim was recognized it was paid in three and a half per cent. stock through Metropolitan bankers, who required commission. There is small cause for wonder that a great many people were ruined. While it is obviously impossible to defend slave-trading in the twentieth century, it must be remembered that it was part and parcel of the social system of the Boers. If the measure had not been carried out in a manner which added insult to injury, the grievances of the farmers would scarcely have taken such deep root in their minds. Incidentally it may be remarked that as the importation of slaves had been forbidden in 1806, the custom would necessarily have died out in due course. The missionaries, who were much to the front in this movement, and proved themselves excellent visionaries but poor realists, had usually sided with the natives against the Dutch in any dispute that occurred. According to them it was the presence of the white people which made the moral character of the Kaffirs

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as dark as their skins ; to the colonists these turbulent folk never appeared to be happy unless they were plundering and murdering. Indeed, the Sixth Kaffir War flamed up in the last month of 1834 almost immediately after the Rev. Dr John Philip, the zealous champion of the natives, had visited the Xosas chiefs on a mission of conciliation. The struggle, attended as it was by the destruction of hundreds of homesteads and many thousands of cattle, lasted until May 1835, and ended in the victory of the commandos. Again the boundary of the colony was shifted, this time to the Great Kei River, the territory between it and the previous line of demarcation being annexed as the Province of Queen Adelaide.

The authorities at home refused to recognize the terms of settlement, upheld the action of the Kaffirs and handed them back practically the whole of the conquered territory. Many of the Dutch regarded this action as tantamount to a surrender, and felt that under the British Government there was no security. To the weak and foolish policy of the Foreign Office, as represented by Lord Glenelg, rather than to the emancipation of the slaves, the primary cause of that central fact in South African history known as the Great Trek must be attributed. The movement was spread over a considerable period—namely, from 1833 to 1840. Some 10,000 Boers, chiefly from the midland and eastern parts of the colony, left their homes and moved northward. Amongst them was a certain small boy named Stephanus Paulus Johannes Kruger. Some crossed the Orange River, others crossed the Vaal to the Zoutpansberg, and a third party crossed the Drakensberg into the Tugela valley. Their abiding-places afterward became the Orange Free State, the Transvaal, and Natal respectively. They fought with the Matabele and defeated

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them ; they fought with the Zulus and suffered disaster. The latter massacred some of the British who were already residing at Port Natal and some of the Boers who had followed them. It was not until the arrival of Andries Pretorius that the tide began to turn. Under his leadership the natives suffered defeat on the 16th December, 1838—Dingan's Day, as it has ever since been called, after the bloodthirsty Zulu king.

The Republic of Natal was proclaimed by the emigrants in 1840, but according to the British idea these Dutchmen were still the Queen's subjects, and following the intervention of the Cape Government when the Boers attacked the Pondos, the Union Jack was run up at Port Natal (now Durban) three years later. Many of the Boers repacked their wagons and set out for the Orange Free State. This was in turn annexed by the British in 1848, following the Seventh Kaffir War, and renamed the Orange River Sovereignty. Whereupon some of those who had journeyed to it in their search for independence and an abiding land creaked and whipped their way to the Transvaal. Here they found their desired haven. The Eighth Kaffir War broke out in the last month of 1850, and was fanned by a rebellion on the part of some of the Hottentots. It ended in the deportation of the Xosas from the Amatola Mountains, which district afterward became Grikwaland East. By the Sand River Convention of 1852 Great Britain recognized the freedom of the Transvaal, henceforth to be known as the South African Republic, and to become a veritable hornets' nest to the country which now dispossessed herself of her rebellious children. The treaty particularly stated that there should be no slavery, and that neither conquests of nor alliances with the natives north of the Vaal River should be made. In March 1854

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Great Britain also abandoned the Orange Free State, although many of the inhabitants did not desire the change. History shows that the weakness of statesmen usually makes difficulties for their successors, and the rule was to be abundantly proved in South Africa.

Affairs did not shape well in the new republic. There was considerable political discord, disputes with the natives were frequent, the 'Dopper Church' broke away from the State-recognized Dutch Reformed Church, the Government practically collapsed and became bankrupt. Of freedom there was very little; of unity none at all. As to the promise that there should be no slavery, children were obtained from native slave-owners and became unpaid 'apprentices.' When a war was on with the coloured races boys and girls were made prisoners and afterward distributed amongst Boer families, not for humanitarian reasons, but because they were useful as workers.

Livingstone, who had his station at Kolobeng destroyed by the Transvaal authorities, writing of the Boers as they were in 1857, says that "It is difficult for a person in a civilized country to conceive that any body of men possessing the common attributes of humanity . . . should with one accord set out, after loading their own wives and children with caresses, and proceed to shoot down in cold blood men and women, of a different colour, it is true, but possessed of domestic feelings and affections equal to their own. I saw and conversed with children in the houses of Boers who had by their own and their masters' account been captured, and in several instances I traced the parents of these unfortunates, though the plan approved by the long-headed among the burghers is to take children so young that they soon forget their parents and their

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native language also. It was long before I could give credit to the tales of bloodshed told by native witnesses, and had I received no other testimony but theirs I should probably have continued sceptical to this day as to the truth of the accounts; but when I found the Boers themselves, some bewailing and denouncing, others glorying in the bloody scenes in which they had been themselves the actors, I was compelled to admit the validity of the testimony and try to account for the cruel anomaly. They are all traditionally religious, tracing their descent from some of the best men (Huguenots and Dutch) the world ever saw. Hence they claim to themselves the title of 'Christians,' and all the coloured races are 'black property' or 'creatures.' They being the chosen people of God, the heathen are given to them for an inheritance, and they are the rod of Divine vengeance on the heathen as were the Jews of old."

Whatever truth there may have been in this statement—and the evidence of Livingstone is not to be lightly put aside—things had considerably improved twenty years later, for when the Transvaal became British territory "not a single individual was found in any servitude which resembled slavery."<sup>1</sup>

In 1875 the Transvaalers opened hostilities against the Bapedi tribe, whose chief had absolutely refused to pay hut-tax. A commando of some 2500 white men, including a number of English volunteers, took part in the Sekukuni War, as it was called. It ended in the triumph of the natives, a mutiny in the Boer camp, and a general retreat homeward. "The investigation into the causes of the

<sup>1</sup> *A History of South Africa from the Earliest Days of Union*, by William Charles Scully (London, 1915), p. 216. This little volume will be found of value to the student.

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'retreat,' " says Theal, " showed an utter absence of discipline, as well as a want of organization in every department. The commissariat was a failure, for many of the men were half starved. A large proportion mustered without guns or ammunition, and there was no source from which they could be supplied. In short, it was clearly shown that though a body of men brought together in this way might be capable of inflicting enormous loss upon an enemy armed with assegais, in a campaign lasting only a few days, or a few weeks at most, they became an unruly rabble in front of a foe armed with guns, and when the campaign seemed likely to be protracted over months." <sup>1</sup>

Things were far from satisfactory at Pretoria, the capital of the South African Republic. When the Volksraad voted a war-tax the farmers refused to pay, the country was insolvent, the Zulus under Cetewayo threatened to invade it, and President Burgers had lost the support of the people. Thither Sir Theophilus Shepstone was sent as a special British Commissioner. Even Lord Morley admits that Shepstone " found the Boer Government, which was loosely organized even at its best, now completely paralysed, without money, without internal authority, without defensive power against external foes. In alarm at the possible result of such a situation on the peace of the European domain in South Africa, he proclaimed the sovereignty of the Queen, and set up an administration. This he was empowered by secret instructions to do, if he should think fit." <sup>2</sup> The Volksraad voted against annexation, but offered no suggestion as to how the many difficulties of the country

<sup>1</sup> *South African History and Geography*, by G. M. Theal, vol. ii, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Gladstone*, vol. ii, p. 198.

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were to be overcome, and no open opposition was offered. The Executive Council formally protested, yet no revolution was more quietly accomplished. Out of a possible 8000 votes 3000 signed a petition in favour of annexation. Kruger accepted an official position under the British Government, and only resigned when he was refused an increase of salary.<sup>1</sup>

The disputes between the Transvaal Boers and the Zulus led to the sending of an ultimatum to Cetewayo in December 1878. While the British camp at Isandhlwana was annihilated by 20,000 of the enemy on the 22nd January, 1879, a small detachment at Rorke's Drift fought with amazing courage on the same day and compelled the Zulus to retreat. On the 4th of the following July<sup>2</sup> Lord Chelmsford, ably assisted by Colonels Redvers Buller and Drury-Lowe, fought the decisive battle of Ulundi, and 'the Black Napoleon' was captured. Zululand was annexed eight years later. The menace to the Transvaal being removed, there was a loud outcry in the colony itself and by the Liberal Opposition at home against the annexation; an agitation which, so far as the latter was concerned, when it got into power, the Ministers failed to justify. "The new Government," says Lord Morley, "at once placed themselves exactly in the position of the old one."<sup>3</sup> Some of the promises made at the time of annexation were certainly not fulfilled. Indeed, Sir Bartle Frere, the High Commissioner, after meeting the Boers at Erasmus Farm in April 1879, summed up the situation in a single sentence.

<sup>1</sup> *The Transvaal from Within*, by J. P. Fitzpatrick (London, 1899), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Not the 5th, as stated in *The Cambridge Modern History*, vol. xii, p. 636.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Gladstone*, vol. ii, p. 201.

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“It was clear to me,” he wrote to his wife, “that it was not the annexation, so much as the neglect to fulfil the promises and the expectations held out by Shepstone when he took over the Government, that has stirred up the great mass of the Boers and given a handle to agitators.”

The people of the Transvaal decided to settle their differences with Great Britain by a resort to arms. On Dingan's Day 1880 they proclaimed the Republic anew. On the 28th January, 1881, an insignificant force of about 1000 men under Sir George Colley met with a reverse at Laing's Nek, the pass over the Drakensberg into Natal; at Ingogo Colley was again repulsed on the 7th of the following month, and suffered final defeat at Majuba Hill on the 27th. Gladstone now recognized the independence of the Boers, subject to the suzerainty of the Crown. In 1884 they asked for, and obtained, still further concessions. The word ‘suzerainty’ was deleted, but it is fairly obvious that if it was not inserted in the letter it was certainly meant in the spirit, as Article 4 of the Convention of London, signed on the 27th February, clearly proves. It runs as follows: “The South African Republic will conclude no treaty or agreement with any State or Nation other than the Orange Free State, nor with any native tribe to the eastward or westward of the Republic, until the same has been approved by Her Majesty the Queen. Such approval shall be considered to have been granted if Her Majesty's Government shall not, within six months after receiving a copy of such treaty (which shall be delivered to them immediately upon its completion), have notified that the conclusion of such treaty is in conflict with the interests of Great Britain or of any of Her Majesty's possessions in South Africa.” The omission of the one word ‘suzerainty’ was due to Lord Derby, then



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Secretary of State, who struck it out "because it was not capable of legal definition," as he afterward explained to the House of Lords. One wonders what would have happened to the Empire if the term had been struck out of every document containing it! Incidentally, why use it if it has no meaning?

Although the boundaries of the Transvaal were clearly defined in the terms of the new arrangement, Bechuanaland was raided by the Boers, the republics of Goshen and Stellaland were set up, Mafeking, its chief town, was attacked, and the territory was proclaimed by President Kruger to be a protectorate of the South African Republic. Thither an expedition under Sir Charles Warren was dispatched, and Bechuanaland was created a Crown Colony, to the entire satisfaction of the native chiefs. Zululand, the power of which had been broken by Britain because it menaced the Transvaal, was also invaded by the Boers, with the evident object of getting to the sea, although ostensibly to assist Dinizulu, Cetewayo's son, against his enemies. For their services 3000 square miles of territory were ceded to the Boers and became the New Republic. Shortly after its independence had been recognized by Great Britain it was incorporated in the Transvaal. The remaining portion of Zululand became British territory in 1887, the year following the annexation of the New Republic by Kruger.

Gold had already been discovered in the Transvaal, but when a particularly rich vein was found on the Witwatersrand, south of Pretoria, in 1884, the news brought an enormous number of Europeans to the district. These Uitlanders, as they were called, eventually formed a majority of the population, the British numbering more than all the other 'foreigners' combined. They owned

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more than half the land and paid nine-tenths of the taxation, but by the Franchise Law of 1890 were not allowed to have a vote until they had lived ten years in the Transvaal, although in 1881 one year's residence had been deemed sufficient. By making the tax on goods coming *via* the Portuguese port of Delagoa Bay less than on those sent from Cape Colony, the President sought to divert trade from the great British possession in the south. Kruger was quite content to make money out of the mines, provided those who did the work and paid the taxes were satisfied to do so without having a voice in the spending of the money that rolled into the Boer exchequer. It is all very well to say that the miners received good wages and the mining companies excellent dividends, but both helped to swell the prosperity of the country to an extent hitherto undreamed of.

Bribery and corruption, monopolies and mismanagement characterized the Boer Government, and Kruger's oppression of the Uitlanders brought matters to such a pass that rebellion threatened to break out at any moment. At this juncture Dr Jameson, the Administrator of Mashonaland, crossed from Rhodesia into the Transvaal with a few hundred men in the last week of December 1895, but he was promptly compelled to surrender with his force. The rebellion was still-born. Kruger had already voiced his aspirations at Bloemfontein eight years before, when he spoke of a United South Africa under one flag. Jameson's abortive raid played into his hands, and obtained for him the sympathy of the greater part of Europe, and more especially a telegram of congratulation from the German Emperor, which, in the light of the Great War, makes particularly interesting reading. "I express to you my sincere congratulations,"

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wired Wilhelm, "that without appealing to the help of friendly Powers you and your people have succeeded in repelling with your own forces the armed bands which had broken into your country, and in maintaining the independence of your country against foreign aggression." Rhodes, Prime Minister of Cape Colony and the greatest Empire-builder of modern times, resigned; certain prominent Uitlanders at Johannesburg were condemned to death, a sentence afterward remitted to heavy fines and imprisonments; Jameson and his officers were handed over to be dealt with by their own Government.

Britain's suzerainty was not only disputed but denied, and on the 9th March, 1897, a secret offensive and defensive alliance was entered into by the South African Republic and the Orange Free State. Huge quantities of rifles, artillery, and ammunition were quietly smuggled into both countries, disguised as peaceful merchandise, the cost being borne by the despised but extremely useful Uitlanders. Fortifications were erected at Pretoria and Johannesburg, with the building of which Colonel Schiel, a German artillery officer, had much to do. British 'foreigners' to the number of over 20,000 sent a petition to the home authorities through Sir Alfred Milner, High Commissioner and Governor of the Cape, praying for protection. Mr Joseph Chamberlain, Colonial Secretary, took up the matter with characteristic energy, and Milner went to interview Kruger. The High Commissioner asked that five years' residence should entitle Uitlanders to a vote. The President would concede nothing. Reinforcements, all too small for the purpose of war, but deemed sufficient to protect Natal in case of necessity, were sent from England and India in September 1899. This was the excuse for the ultimatum

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which was handed to the British representative at Pretoria on the 9th of the following month. Forty-eight hours' grace was allowed. The troops were not withdrawn as Kruger demanded. On the 12th the Boers flung down the gauntlet by invading Natal and occupying Laing's Nek. The war for South African supremacy had begun.

The rough-and-ready method of creating the Boer army was graphically described by a correspondent of *The Times* at Pretoria. "The leading principle," he wrote, "is that every male old enough to carry a gun must come out to fight when called upon, and that every article in the country, to whomsoever it may belong, if only it can be made to subserve some warlike purpose, can be requisitioned, or 'commandeered,' to use the Boer phrase, at a moment's notice. Horses are simply annexed from their stables or taken out of the shafts in the streets; the saddlers' and the provision merchants' stores are gutted. Their horses, luggage and all are packed like sardines into the trains and sent off to the front, where, on arriving, they somehow sort themselves out again. Never was there quite so wonderful an army in its way; old farmers, boys from school, members of the Raad, clerks in the Government offices, shopkeepers, lawyers, and what not are all swept into the net of the 'commando.' What sort of a fighting force this conglomeration will make yet remains to be seen."

A motley collection of citizen soldiers, no doubt, but a nation in arms that was to tax the vast resources of the world's greatest Empire.

Sufficient has been said to make it abundantly clear that one of the contributing causes of the South African War was the fundamental difference between the temperaments and ideals of the nations involved. The British in

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South Africa were energetic and enterprising, the Boers stolid and conservative. Kruger and his Boers were excellent Old Testament Christians, to use an apparently contradictory term. They most emphatically upheld the literal inspiration and interpretation of the Scriptures, texts from which were employed by them on any and every occasion.

Poultney Bigelow, the American publicist, who knew Kruger, once termed him a "grand old democratic tyrant." Certainly the President of the South African Republic was a typical representative of his generation of the descendants of the Dutch settlers and French Huguenots who had found a home in Cape Colony in the middle of the seventeenth century. Family life was still patriarchal. When a son married it was the custom for his father to give him a share of the paternal estates. Of course a certain number of the Boers had drifted to the towns and become prominent in politics, law, letters, and other pursuits of civilization, but many thousands still lived on the vast plains of Cape Colony, the Orange Free State, Natal, and the Transvaal. This gave them that intimate knowledge of the country which was to stand them in such excellent stead in the trying days which followed the delivery of the fatal ultimatum. They proved skilful tacticians and rapidly developed into hardy campaigners, conducting their warfare "in the old-time manner, hunting for battalions, stalking for squadrons, and ensnaring like birds some of the most experienced soldiers in the world," as an anonymous contemporary writer well puts it. Botha and Smuts, who were later to render splendid service to the Empire in her hour of greater peril, received their training in the South African War, as did the disloyal De Wet, who again raised the standard of revolt against Britain in 1914.

## CHAPTER XIII

### Chief of the Staff to Lord Roberts

*"In addition to military knowledge and experience, there must be good judgment, sound common sense, tenacity of purpose, quickness of perception, promptitude of decision, and, above all, an infinite capacity for taking pains."*—EARL ROBERTS

**W**ITH that perversity which is characteristic of her conduct of military affairs, Great Britain made three cardinal mistakes at the beginning of the war. She under-estimated the number of men required for active service in the field and to guard the long lines of communications ; she failed to recognize the character of the coming operations ; and she minimized the strength, determination, and prowess of her adversary. There was no definite plan of campaign and no properly organized Transport Department, and there was a lack of mounted infantry, of mobile heavy artillery, of stores, and of suitable maps. "In Germany," commented a caustic critic of that empire, "had the army failed as the British Army has failed, had the War Minister <sup>1</sup> organized defeat and been caught unprepared, that Minister would have been execrated as a traitor and imprisoned in a fortress for the rest of his natural life." The few stalwarts who had lifted up their voices in the House of Commons on behalf of Army reform had met the usual fate of reformers, and

<sup>1</sup> The fifth Marquess of Lansdowne. He entered the Coalition Cabinet of 1915 as a Minister without portfolio.

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the nation was now reaping the whirlwind. The general nature of the ground and the hide-and-seek guerrilla tactics of the Boers, who avoided concentration as much as possible, and consequently fought more actions than battles, were all to the disadvantage of an army which was ill-informed and unprepared.

The war began before General Buller, the first Commander-in-Chief, embarked at Southampton. Considering the chaotic condition of affairs already noted, it is not surprising that during the first few months Britain had many set-backs. Providentially the Boers did not use their advantages to the full. Had they taken this "tide in the affairs of men" at the flood and invaded Cape Colony with a sufficient display of armed force, many Dutchmen would have thrown in their lot with their brother Boers. Instead, little devil Doubt bade them be cautious. They therefore squandered much of their strength in besieging the three strongholds—weakholds would be the more correct term, for they were ill-chosen—where half the British force was isolated. Mafeking and Kimberley, in Cape Colony, and Ladysmith, in Natal, were closely invested by large Boer forces, whereas they could have been 'contained' by considerably fewer men without the British being any the wiser. There were British successes at Belmont, Enslin, and Modder River, followed by reverses at Stormberg, Magersfontein, and Colenso. Generals Gatacre, Methuen, and Buller failed to stem the tide.

Realizing that Buller had quite sufficient to engage his attention in Natal, the Government appointed Lord Roberts to the supreme command of the campaign on the 18th December, 1899. Kitchener happened to be at Khartoum, busy enough with the work embraced in his

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comprehensive offices of Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief of the Sudan, when he received a cablegram asking him if he would accept the appointment of Chief of the Staff. His reply was both characteristic and emphatic, and it showed his implicit confidence in the military prowess of the little great man who had seen so much service in India and was the idol of the British nation. His answer read: "Delighted to serve in any capacity under Lord Roberts." Such keen enthusiasm and promise of cordial co-operation in the direction of the war augured well for the future. Notwithstanding an awful 'black week' which immediately preceded the official announcement of these appointments, the nation took on added courage. 'Bobs' and 'K. of K.' would see the matter through. Such was the expressed opinion of the British public. The familiarity of nicknames and abbreviations is not accorded to many folk by prosaic John Bull. That they had been granted to Roberts and Kitchener was proof positive of the esteem in which they were held. The difference in the designations is significant. 'Bobs' was a term of affection, 'K. of K.' of respect. Kitchener was not the type of man to inspire the lovable regard in which the hero of Kandahar was held. This was partly due to the reserved nature of one who had never been known to wear his heart on his sleeve and seldom to betray emotion. Roberts was sixty-seven years of age; Kitchener was forty-nine. It was felt that the combination of experience and driving force thus brought to bear on the issue would be excellent. The choice received the unqualified support not only of the nation but of the Empire.

Kitchener started on his journey down the Nile. One wonders whether a certain remark that he had made some



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years before to a distinguished officer occurred to him. "Tell Roberts," he had said, "I want a billet under him, and if there is nothing else open I'll black his boots" Shortly after Omdurman Kitchener met the officer again, and the latter ventured to remind him of his former ambition. "I remember it," replied the liberator of the Sudan, "and it still stands. You can take it to him again!"

He embarked in the cruiser *Isis* at Alexandria on the 22nd December, transhipped to H.M.S. *Dido* at Malta, and reached Gibraltar in time to pick up the *Dunnottar Castle*, in which Roberts had left Southampton on the 23rd. Neither the Commander-in-Chief nor his Chief of the Staff devoted much time to recreation during the remainder of the voyage. The greater part of each day was spent in working out plans for the forthcoming campaign. They arrived at Cape Town on the 10th January, 1900.

A great many stories are told of Kitchener at this period, some of them doubtless apocryphal. A few, however, seem to bear the hall-mark of authenticity. They fit in with what we know of the man and his methods. "I understand," a friend remarked to the Chief of the Staff, "that you intend to reorganize the transport." "Reorganize?" was the frigid answer. "I am going to organize it." It is even said that one day Major-General F. W. Kitchener humorously remarked that he had been called to headquarters to get a wiggling from his younger brother. On another occasion the same officer had to rebuke two Colonials, who were rather inclined to resent it. "Perhaps you do not know who I am?" said the General. "No; who are you?" asked one of them. "General Kitchener; and I shall expect you to report

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yourselves at my tent in the morning," came the reply. "Why," answered the Canadian, "we have had old Kitchener's picture on the wood-shed at home ever since he whacked the niggers at Omdurman, and you are as much like him as I am!" General F. W. Kitchener, in telling the story, admitted that "the wood-shed saved him."

"I've seen men go into Kitchener's quarters swaggering and laughing," says Mr A. G. Hales, the war correspondent, "and come out looking like plucked birds. I've asked more than one what happened. 'Well,' came the answer, 'one look is enough for me. It makes your blood run cold. A man might disobey Lord Roberts, but Kitchener!' When Kitchener came into touch with these men their jaws fell. Why, he told some of them one day he wondered they didn't bring ladies' maids to curl their hair for them."

It is asserted that the Chief of the Staff received a telegram from a peer of the realm who had a son serving in the Yeomanry. "Please allow son return at once urgent family reasons." Within a few hours the nobleman in question received the reply: "Son cannot return at all urgent military reasons."

Kitchener always thoroughly appreciated the truth of Napoleon's utterance that "Every hour of time is a chance of misfortune for future life." A bridge was necessary at a special point. There was a certain amount of danger to the engineers in the quick mode of construction that was employed. "How much longer would it take to do the work by a safer method?" asked the General. "Not more than an hour, sir," was the reply. "Very well, do not change the plans. You will continue the work as it is begun."

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On another occasion he came across several young officers standing in front of an hotel. "Well, gentlemen," asked the General, "what are you doing here?" One of the officers, who had not met Kitchener before and did not happen to recognize him from the photographs that were extant, replied in what he considered to be true military style: "Haw! Just come up from Moddah Rivah." "Well," answered Kitchener, "you'll get a train back to Modder River at four o'clock."

Yet this abrupt man with a tongue as sharp as a two-edged sword was a diplomatist who knew how to use the velvet glove as well as the mailed fist. He had only been in South Africa a few weeks when he issued an order in the name of the Commander-in-Chief impressing upon all officers in charge of columns or detached commands the grave importance of doing all in their power by good and conciliatory treatment to secure the co-operation of the people of the country in all matters affecting the interests of the troops.

When he heard of the death of Mr G. W. Steevens, the most brilliant of the younger school of war correspondents, he said to an interviewer: "I am anxious to tell you how very sorry I was to learn of the death of Mr Steevens. He was with me in the Sudan, and of course I saw a great deal of him and knew him well. He was such a clever and able man. I wish all correspondents were like him. I suppose they will try to follow in his footsteps. I am sure I hope they will. He was a model correspondent, the best I have ever known, and I should like you to say how greatly grieved I am at his death." For such an individual that is a long speech. He is one of Carlyle's silent men. Had the Sage of Chelsea been living now he would doubtless have penned a panegyric on Lord Kitchener.

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"Lord Kitchener," remarked a General who served with him, "is very much misjudged at home in England, where people believe that he is a sort of ogre who devotes his time to chasing officers round South Africa. This is a most erroneous idea. I have worked under him now for many months, and the more one sees of Lord Kitchener the greater becomes one's liking and respect for him. No officer who does his duty can wish for a kinder or better friend than 'K.,' but there is trouble in store for the one who neglects it; the Chief will stand no nonsense. When once he has lost faith in an officer he has no further use for him, and he is soon sent home on some excuse or other."

Roberts first gave the matter of the distribution of troops his special attention, while his Chief of the Staff occupied himself with the transport, a matter always dear to his heart, and, as we have seen in connexion with the Sudan Campaign, one of superlative importance. More men were on their way to South Africa, and their places in the scheme of operations had to be arranged before the two Generals could leave for Modder River Camp, whence the great opening movement of the second phase of the war was to begin. When hostilities broke out some 20,000 British soldiers were available in South Africa; by the second week of February 1900 over 100,000 khaki-clad troops had arrived from different parts of the Empire. Probably about 80,000 Boers were in the field. Kitchener worked much and slept little. He thought and lived transport; transport by truck and track, by oxen, mule, and locomotive.

We may be reasonably certain that the plan of sending a special train from Cape Town, with fifty armed men to protect it, was the subtle plan of the Chief of the Staff to

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focus public attention while he and Roberts left by an ordinary passenger train. This was on the 6th February. They arrived at Modder River Camp three days later. Here some 33,500 men and 120 guns were concentrated, ready to attack the intrepid Cronje and relieve Kimberley. Four infantry divisions, under Lieutenant-Generals Lord Methuen, Tucker, Kelly-Kenny, and Colville, a cavalry division under French, together with some mounted infantry and corps troops, composed the army. Demonstrations had already been made to divert the attention of the entrenched enemy, but no general movement had taken place since the disastrous battle of Magersfontein. "I confess that when I had made a careful survey of the Boer position," said Roberts, "I came to the conclusion that Lord Methuen had been given an almost impossible task."

In the record of the war prepared in the Historical Section of the Great General Staff of the German Army the character of the man who in after years was to become an object of special detestation to the Kaiser's subjects is thus summed up : <sup>1</sup> "He was at this time one of the most remarkable officers in the British Army. His personality was extremely soldier-like ; he was very independent and reserved, and disliked asking the advice of others. Nevertheless, he has a deep appreciation for everything really great and lofty, but, although deliberate as a rule, he can, on occasion, become impulsive, and allow himself to be carried away by his temperament. . . . The army was in high spirits on learning that these two men [Roberts and Kitchener] were placed at its head ; the knowledge that

<sup>1</sup> *The War in South Africa*, authorized translation by Colonel W. H. H. Waters, R.A., C.V.O. (London, 1904), vol. i, pp. 126-127. In later references this work will be cited as *German Official History*.

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the conduct of the future operations had been confided to their proved and skilful hands strengthened to a most remarkable extent the drooping self-confidence of officers and men."

Roberts's main object was to carry the war into the enemy's country, so that the Boers would be compelled to recall their forces before Ladysmith and Kimberley and in Cape Colony to defend it. The immediate military necessity was to raise the siege of the Diamond City, then in imminent danger of surrender owing to the alarm of the inhabitants. The cavalry under French was ordered to ride round the left flank of Cronje's army and relieve Kimberley. At the same time the infantry, with the exception of Methuen's division, which was to watch the enemy and remain on the defensive, was to push forward, cut the farmer-general's communications with Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State, and envelop him. On the 10th February Kitchener informed French that Kimberley was to be relieved "at all costs."<sup>1</sup> Early the following morning the cavalry and the 7th Division began to advance to Ramdam, the point of concentration. In the afternoon two figures destined to play important parts on a still greater stage could be seen silhouetted against the afterglow as they reconnoitred near Riet River. They were General French and Major Douglas Haig, both of whom in turn afterward became Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in France.

At 2 A.M. on the 12th three columns of cavalry and

<sup>1</sup> *History of the War in South Africa, 1899-1902*, compiled by direction of his Majesty's Government by Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice, K.C.B., with a staff of officers (London, 1907), vol. ii, p. 11. In subsequent references this work will be referred to as *Official History*.

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the Horse Artillery batteries started in the direction of Waterval Drift, which French hoped to seize for the passage of the Riet. It was found to be defended by De Wet. The British, however, secured Waterval Hill, and while Broadwood held it the main force pushed on to De Kiel's Drift, a few miles distant. Here it was afterward joined by the remainder of the cavalry and the 7th Division, De Wet having fallen back to the south-east. In the evening Kitchener rode over from Ramdam, which had now become headquarters, to see how matters were progressing, and found to his dismay that the transport train was in difficulties at the drift owing to the steep banks, that the cavalry supply column had failed to put in an appearance, and that patrols sent in advance had reported the absence of drinking-water. Delay was inevitable, for the wagons blocked the ford, and Kitchener therefore telegraphed to that effect to the Commander-in-Chief, whose reply was that French must not wait but push ahead, and if possible seize a drift over the Modder and cross it, the infantry remaining at De Kiel's Drift to cover the passage of the transport. At the same time he ordered the 6th Division and Hannay's brigade of mounted infantry to Waterval Drift and the 9th Division to Ramdam. It was not until 10.30 A.M. on the 18th that the cavalry was ready to start. They rode off cheerily enough, but the long miles which separated them from their destination were not ordinary miles. The sun was so fierce that it set on fire the scorched stubble of the veld ; now and again a flash of flame, followed by a sharp report, indicated the presence of Boer skirmishers ; and when a well was found the time at their disposal was so short that although the troops were able to quench their thirst their poor beasts could not be watered. Forty horses either dropped dead or were left to perish. The dust

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kicked up by the advancing host was suffocating, the heat well-nigh unbearable, the everlasting plain intolerable. And at the back of each man's mind was the deep-rooted and agonizing question, Would there be rest at the drift or the enemy in force ?

With the appearance of green bushes fringing the river came the answer to the problem. The Boers were there ! A solitary battery was alone in a state to support the charge of the 12th Lancers across the Klip Drift ; their comrades of the 9th attacked the Rondeval Drift, uncovered by artillery fire. The resistance was half-hearted, and the opposite bank was gained with three casualties. Forty miles remained to be traversed. Had Cronje concentrated and attacked French the result might have been disastrous to the British, but fortunately he did not, although a force under Froneman was athwart the line of advance, leaving the possibility of an attempt to envelop the British flank.<sup>1</sup> To support the cavalry, and also to hold the position, Kitchener hastened forward with the 6th Division under General Kelly-Kenny, covering twenty-seven miles in twenty-three hours, despite rainstorms that soaked the troops at night and scorching rays that burnt them by day. Not a few fell out, and somehow or other managed to stumble forward to the Modder after they had made a partial recovery.

Relieved by the 6th Division, French started off at 9.30 A.M. on the 15th. North of Klip Drift it was found that the enemy under Froneman were holding a position on two ridges which were joined by a neck, completely blocking the road. Supported by the fire of the Horse Artillery batteries and two 12-pounder naval guns, the cavalry charged, pierced the centre of Froneman's line

<sup>1</sup> *Official History*, vol. ii, p. 31.



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by breaking through the nek, and sent the enemy flying helter-skelter in the direction of Magersfontein. The audacity of the manœuvre was so marked that some of the British commander's own officers were amazed. "The enterprise," writes one of them, "appeared to us at first as quite hopeless ; we believed that only a few of us would come out of it alive, and, had we made a similar attack at Aldershot, we should certainly have all been put out of action, and have been looked upon as idiots. When we had galloped about a quarter of a mile we received a very hot frontal and flanking fire, and I looked along the ranks expecting to see men falling in masses, but I saw no one come down, although the rifle-fire was crackling all around us. The feeling was wonderfully exciting, just as in a good run to hounds." The casualties numbered sixteen only.

"It was the most brilliant stroke of the whole war," says the official historian, "alike in the prompt decision with which it was ordered and in the consequences which followed from it. The infantry, nevertheless, deserve their share of the credit. Without the extreme exertions of the 6th Division on the 14th, carried on up to 1 A.M. on the 15th, French could not have left Klip Drift when he did, and had the Boers been given more time to prepare their defence and receive reinforcements his attack would probably have been impossible. Nor must the effect of the quick recognition of the nature of the situation by Lord Kitchener and his eager pressing forward of the weary infantry to relieve the cavalry be left out of account as one of the decisive factors in the achievement."<sup>1</sup>

In the afternoon the Diamond City came into view. Alexandersfontein had already been abandoned by

<sup>1</sup> *Official History*, vol. ii, p. 36.

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Ferreira, the commandant entrusted with the investment of Kimberley, and was now held by a British garrison. At six o'clock French reported by flashlight to Kitchener that he had captured the enemy's laager at Oliphantsfontein and entered the city. French had faithfully carried out the order to relieve it "at all costs."

## CHAPTER XIV

### The Battle of Paardeberg

*"God has given into our hands a great heritage, for which we have been called upon to pay a heavy price in the blood of our dearest and our best."*—EARL ROBERTS

**M**EANWHILE the infantry had been busy. Part of the 7th Division had occupied Jacobsdal on the day French had relieved Kimberley, the 6th Division at Klip Drift had been in action with the enemy, and the 9th Division had crossed the Riet at Waterval Drift. Unfortunately much the same kind of block as had attended the passage of De Kiel's Drift<sup>1</sup> occurred at Waterval, and it was found necessary to leave a small force of about 400 infantry and horsemen to escort the convoy while the 9th Division pushed on. With the exception of a few wagons the convoy had crossed by daybreak of the 15th, when De Wet's commando suddenly approached and opened fire. Roberts was communicated with by field cable, and the Commander-in-Chief hurried back a few companies of mounted infantry, the 1st King's Own Scottish Borderers, and a battery of Field Artillery, which had set out for his headquarters at Wegdraai, to reinforce the escort. When they came up it was found that further troops would be necessary if the convoy was to be saved, for De Wet had also been strengthened. Roberts thereupon ordered it to be destroyed. As this

<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, p. 174.

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was found to be impracticable, there being insufficient time for the operation, no fewer than 176 wagons were abandoned to the enemy. A small convoy from Enslin also fell into the hands of the enemy on the same day.

"I attacked the convoy on the flank," says De Wet. "The three or four hundred troops who were guarding it offered a stout resistance, although they were without any guns. After fighting for two hours the English received a reinforcement of cavalry, with four Armstrong guns, and redoubled their efforts to drive us from the positions we had taken up under cover of the mule wagons. As I knew that it would be a serious blow to Lord Roberts to lose the provisions he was expecting, I was firmly resolved to capture them, unless the force of numbers rendered the task quite impossible. I accordingly resisted the enemy's attack with all the power I could. The battle raged until it became dark; and I think we were justified with what we had achieved. We had captured sixteen hundred oxen and forty prisoners; whilst General Fourie, whom I had ordered to attack the camp on the south, had taken several prisoners and a few water-carts. We remained that night in our positions. The small number of burghers I had at my disposal made it impossible for me to surround the English camp. To our great surprise, the following morning, we saw that the English had gone."<sup>1</sup>

Piet Cronje, slow to recognize the web that was being woven about him, had now made up his mind to abandon his entrenchments at Magersfontein and move up the right bank of the Modder. His decision was just too late. From Klip Drift, Kitchener telegraphed to Roberts that

<sup>1</sup> *Three Years' War*, by Christiaan Rudolf de Wet (London edition, 1903), pp. 47-48.

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Cronje's army was passing "across our front, whether to hold us or moving on is not known."<sup>1</sup> Mounted infantry and a field battery under Major-General C. E. Knox set off in the direction taken by the Boers as soon as it was sufficiently light on the morning of the 16th, tracked them, and followed them through the day. Though the British were inferior in numbers, they were steadfast and resolutely refused to be shaken off. They dogged the Boers with relentless tenacity, and drove the rear-guard from a ridge it had held on the southern knolls of Drieputs Kopjes. The enemy fell back to a second position, which was attacked at Kitchener's suggestion, but it was found impossible to dislodge them. The presence of Knox's infantry, however, prevented the Boers from using the near-by drift. Yet fortune favoured Cronje, for under cover of darkness he managed to elude the vigilance of the British outposts, and no fewer than 200 wagons, attended by an escort, reached Paardeberg Drift, crossed the river, and escaped, the main body, after a short halt, lumbering on toward Vendutie Drift. Hastening back to Klip Drift, Kitchener wrote a dispatch to Roberts summing up the situation as it stood at 4 P.M. :

"I have returned from Knox's brigade, which has been already held back by Boers, who fight an excellent rear-guard action. He has turned them out of three successive positions. I would propose that Knox's brigade should bivouac about Paardeberg, to which point I had hoped the mounted infantry and artillery would have gone early, only unfortunately they stopped short of it. Hannay with mounted infantry to continue pursuit and keep touch with enemy, who are reported to be inclining to the north and not to have crossed the river. The rest of

<sup>1</sup> *Official History*, vol. ii, p. 79.

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the 6th Division to join Knox's brigade about 1 A.M. to-morrow, and Colville's division to follow evening of to-morrow, if they get in here at dawn. The enemy are very numerous and fight well and cleverly ; I fear we have not done much damage to convoy, but we have hustled them all day. Telegraphic communication with French has been interrupted by convoy crossing the line. Break has now been found, and will be repaired very shortly. I will then try to get French to co-operate with us. If we only had time, I feel sure that we should make short work of convoy, but, with the troops we have, it is a very difficult operation. I am sending Chester Master<sup>1</sup> to Kimberley to-night to ask French if he could meet me at Koodoos Drift. The supply question is becoming acute. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

The Commander-in-Chief acted promptly, for, as he had already wired to Kelly-Kenny, "Every hour of pursuit now is worth days afterwards." Colville's division, with the exception of the Highland Brigade, which was sent with two regiments of mounted infantry to Klip Kraal Drift, was hastened forward to Klip Drift, and arrived there at 4.30 A.M. on the 17th. After a few hours' rest the Chief of the Staff ordered them to push on to Paardeberg. French, who had made an unsuccessful attempt on the 16th to capture the big gun known as Long Tom which had given so much annoyance to the inhabitants of Kimberley, was lying down for a much-needed rest when Captain Chester Master came in hot-foot with Kitchener's urgent message to prevent Cronje's retreat at Koodoos Drift, near which ran the main road to Bloemfontein. This measure has received the enthusiastic recognition

<sup>1</sup> Captain Chester Master, of Rimington's Guides.

<sup>2</sup> *Official History*, vol. ii, pp. 90-91.

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of the Historical Section of the German General Staff, whose comment is that "If Lord Kitchener at Klip Drift had not informed General French of the state of affairs, the cavalry division could not have taken part in the pursuit of Cronje, who would then, probably, have succeeded in escaping."<sup>1</sup>

The great cavalry leader and about 1500 men—all the remainder were dead beat—with a dozen guns were off at 4.30 on the following morning. They were met by a column under Broadwood, sighted by Ferreira's commando and fired upon by them, and captured a signalling station a few miles from Vendutie Drift. Shortly afterward scouts returned with the important information that the Boers were about to cross Vendutie Drift and that Koodoos Drift was to all intents and purposes already held by them. The Horse Artillery batteries were rushed forward, and almost before the enemy knew that the British had come up shrapnel was bursting about them as they urged their heavy-laden wagons across the ford. The unexpected had happened with a vengeance, for French was the last man whom Cronje had expected to contest the passage. An attempt by the latter to seize a commanding kopje was foiled by the prowess of the cavalry, who secured it first and held it with grim determination. The Boers made several ineffective attempts to compel French to evacuate his commanding position; the little force successfully held the passage in their grip. Hour after hour went by with the unwieldy convoy unable to move, and without French being able to get into communication with the British troops, whom he knew could not be far off.

That same morning Knox's column also resumed its

<sup>1</sup> *German Official History*, vol. i, p. 159.

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march, and after coming up with various units of Kelly-Kenny's 6th Division, reached a position near Paardeberg Drift, where the Boer rearguard was posted. Kitchener attached himself to Hannay's brigade and arrived there about 10 A.M., followed later by Macdonald's and Smith-Dorrien's brigades, forming the 9th Division. "Thus, by the early morning of the 18th February," says Sir Frederick Maurice, "Lord Kitchener had placed two divisions, as well as a brigade of mounted infantry, within striking distance of the laager which Cronje had formed, when he was assailed by the shells of French's horse battery. Great as had been the exertions of the cavalry which headed off the Boers at Vendutie Drift, the efforts of the other arms were no whit inferior, for Hannay's, Kelly-Kenny's, and Colvile's men had made forced marches by day and night across the veld under conditions of heat and fatigue, hunger and thirst, uncertainty of their position, and expectation of an attack from any quarter, such as only those who have taken part in similar operations in Africa can appreciate. Nor must it be forgotten that the mounted infantry and a large party of Kelly-Kenny's division were warmly engaged on the 16th with the enemy's rear-guard. The dogged determination which sustained the infantry during their marches on the south of the Modder was a fitting complement to French's movement, when, hastening from Kimberley with a small brigade of cavalry and two batteries of Horse Artillery, he brought Cronje to a halt at Vendutie Drift. Each arm worthily supported the other, and thus enabled Lord Roberts successfully to carry out his plans." <sup>1</sup> According to the German official report it was not until daybreak of the 18th that Kitchener knew that he

<sup>1</sup> *Official History*, vol. ii, pp. 103-104.



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had overtaken Cronje. He made the discovery when reconnoitring.<sup>1</sup>

One at least of Cronje's commandants had surmised that the bombardment of the Boer position at Magersfontein which had been carried out by Methuen was undertaken with the fixed idea of creating the impression that the British were able to attack the enemy when they wished, and consequently compelling them to remain there. De Wet talked the matter over with the stubborn old General. "The enemy," he told him, "will not attack us here. He will flank us." Cronje refused to entertain the suggestion until it was too late. When De Wet ascertained that the British were on the move, he sent a dispatch rider with the information. "Are you afraid of things like that?" Cronje asked the messenger. "Just you go and shoot them down, and catch them when they run."<sup>2</sup> It was not until the Boers who had been scattered by French in the vicinity of Klip Drift came up and told him at noon on the 15th of what had happened that he decided to make a move. Ferreira frankly advised Cronje to abandon the women, children, and baggage and make an effort to break through, but this he steadfastly refused to do.

Cronje's laager was situated on the right or northern bank of the Modder at Vendutie Drift, his position extending between Paardeberg Drift and Wolveskraal Drift. During the night of the 17th-18th the Boers worked feverishly at digging themselves in, using for the purpose any likely instrument that they could lay their hands on, for in their hasty abandonment of Magersfontein they had been compelled to leave much of their equipment

<sup>1</sup> *German Official History*, vol. i, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> *Three Years' War*, pp. 38, 46.

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behind. Daybreak of the 18th revealed that their arduous labour had not been in vain, for there were trenches on the right bank extending for about a mile and a half above Vendutie Drift, where the guns were placed, and for about half that distance on the opposite bank. The neighbouring dongas were strongly held, and every available bush concealed men. In the banks of the river cunningly devised pits connected by passages had been excavated for the non-combatants. Cronje's works were formidable enough and his position good for defensive purposes, particularly as the attack would have to be made across flat country which offered practically no cover until the bush of the river valley was reached.

Probably no battle has been so adversely criticized as that of Paardeberg, fought on Sunday, the 18th February, 1900. Roberts was not present owing to illness, and Kitchener assumed command. He was without an adequate staff, and to this defect the British official record<sup>1</sup> of the campaign attributes in no slight degree his lack of success. "Such staff as he had," we are told, "was not in itself an organized body accustomed to carry out with self-restraint and in unison his design. . . . Young staff officers did what was right in their own eyes, to the shattering of combinations of the nature of which they were not aware. It was possibly also unfortunate that the character of the campaign in Egypt had not brought home to Lord Kitchener himself the evil effects of such intrusive action. All this tended to break up the battle into a series of isolated, disconnected actions in which the design is lost in the detail. The interest of unity and the gradual working out of a definite scheme is wanting throughout. . . . It was as far as Lord Kitchener

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii, p. 112.

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was concerned a gallant attempt to substitute his own vigorous personality for the missing agency of command."

The German official account adversely criticizes Kitchener for the bayonet charge of the Boer position, and mentions that though Colville thought it might succeed with heavy loss, he held it was not necessary to storm the Boer position, but to surround it. It supports Kitchener's determination to carry the attack through, but somewhat qualifies the statement by a significant footnote, which is not altogether in consonance with the passage quoted above from Maurice's standard work regarding the failings of the staff. "The Chief of the Staff," we are told, "wished to command in person all units down to and including battalions, and he issued his orders direct to the latter, ignoring the regulation channels of communication and the divisional commanders. The consequence was that a strong feeling of resentment took possession of the divisional generals; they retired completely into the background, and on this particular day were even more passive than usual. Their leadership was destitute of all agreeable responsibility and initiative; and this was particularly noticeable in the attitude of the commander of the cavalry division, who was otherwise so alert."<sup>1</sup> If this remark be true, one is apt to wonder why it is relegated to the limbo of small type at the bottom of a page. Germans are certainly not given to sugar-coated pills in their criticism of the military commanders of other nations. Lack of careful preparation, inadequate reconnoitring, and isolated attacks by individual brigades and battalions are also mentioned as contributing to Kitchener's lack of success.<sup>2</sup> Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's

<sup>1</sup> *German Official History*, vol. i, p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter xxi.

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summing up of the case certainly seems reasonable : " It is not given to the greatest men to have every soldierly gift equally developed, and it may be said without offence that Lord Kitchener's cool judgment upon the actual field of battle has not yet been proved as conclusively as his long-headed power of organization and his iron determination." <sup>1</sup>

It has been asserted that Kitchener ought not to have attacked Cronje ; that had he been content to surround him, the Boer general must have surrendered. This view altogether overlooks the obvious fact that Cronje would have strengthened his already strong position, and probably have held out until the arrival of reinforcements. It was the imminent likelihood of his receiving support from other commandos, some of which did succeed in reaching him, which determined Kitchener to give battle. The German historians consider that he was " thoroughly justified " in doing so, but regard the execution as " less happy." Our own specialists support the former contention, and add that had he merely invested the enemy's position and shelled him there would not have been sufficient time " to entrench the enveloping line so securely as to prevent a resolute and still partially mobile enemy from dashing through it in the night and joining hands with the reinforcements on the way to his assistance, while time would have been given to an enterprising commander to organize these into a formidable relieving force."

Kitchener opened the battle in the firm belief that Cronje had concentrated his men in the laager, whereas most of the Boers were concealed in the shrub-covered

<sup>1</sup> *The Great Boer War*, by Arthur Conan Doyle (Nelson edition), p. 250.

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dongas and river-banks. This idea was shared by Macdonald, the commander of the Highland Brigade. The manœuvres of the Chief of the Staff were based on this assumption, for which purpose part of the 6th Division was to make a frontal attack on the laager from the south, whilst other troops attacked it from both up-stream and down-stream. From a spur of Signal Hill <sup>1</sup> two batteries began to shell the laager, and having once found the range, they made excellent practice, setting wagons on fire and exploding some of the enemy's ammunition. At 8 A.M. Kitchener sent the following telegram from the cable cart: "We have stopped the enemy's convoy on the river here. General Kelly-Kenny's division is holding them to the south, enemy lining bank of Modder, convoy stationary in our immediate front. General Colville's division has arrived and they are putting one brigade and one battery on the north side of the river, and one brigade and one howitzer battery on the south side, and will march eastward, up-stream. The mounted infantry have gone round, and hold the river on our right flank. I have been in heliographic communication with General French, who is opposite to us, in rear of the enemy's position; he is now moving down on opposite bank on our right flank. The enemy is thus completely surrounded and I think it must be a case of complete surrender. Will keep you informed as events occur." <sup>2</sup>

Knox's brigade and the Yorkshire Regiment on the south bank were now approaching their unseen enemy, their front extending for some two miles. When they were within appreciable distance of the Boers one line

<sup>1</sup> There is a curious error in Map 8 of the *German Official History*, where the positions of Gun Hill and Signal Hill are transposed.

<sup>2</sup> *Official History*, vol. ii, p. 123.

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of men lay on their stomachs and fired while another advanced, "Playing Red Indians," as one gallant Tommy told his comrade. A small party of the Yorkshires made a bold attempt to cross the Modder, with disastrous results, for many of them were shot down. Their colleagues of the West Riding and Oxfordshire were more fortunate, and drove the Boers from the trenches on the near bank. The Oxfordshire Light Infantry had also worked up to within a few hundred yards of the river. "There was a continual flight of bullets about us," writes a member of this battalion. "I dreamed of a battle the night before, but I never thought it could be as terrible as this. We were mad with thirst, and our officers flopped down like ninepins." To the left of Knox's brigade many of the heroes of Magersfontein were confronted by such a withering fire that they could proceed no farther, but some companies of the Black Watch and the Seaforths dashed down the bank of the swiftly flowing river, joined hands, faced a withering hail of shot as they crossed, and advanced toward the Boers in the big donga. Here they were supported by the 7th Mounted Infantry and others of their own regiments who had made the venture from another point of vantage lower down. Casualties were numerous, but the splendid fellows held their own until darkness brought them welcome relief. Smith-Dorrien's 19th Brigade also crossed, and while some of the 2nd Shropshire Light Infantry, under Lieut.-Colonel J. Spens, the 1st Gordon Highlanders, and the Royal Canadian Regiment started off to support the Highland Brigade, their movements were carried out separately and without the knowledge of the Highlanders. Meanwhile Boer reinforcements under Commandant Steyn had approached from the left bank, and seized a position near

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Stinkfontein. Thanks to the prompt action of the 81st Battery in the vicinity of Vanderberg Drift, where Hannay was stationed, they were compelled to abandon their guns and fall back. Although mounted infantry occupied Stinkfontein, the guns were not captured by the British, and were afterward recovered by De Wet.

Shortly after one o'clock Kitchener determined to rush the Boer position with fixed bayonets. Unfortunately only a half battalion of the Cornwall Light Infantry was available, yet they managed to cross the Modder and join the Canadians. Cornishmen and Canadians, joined by some of the Highlanders, dashed forward, Colonel Aldworth leading. There was no cover between them and the donga to shield them from shrapnel and rifle-bullet, and as they tore on many a brave man fell. Aldworth managed to say six words in the brief interval between the time he was shot and the moment of death. They were full of encouragement and made his men furious to revenge his loss. "Come on, Dukes!" he gasped. "Come on, Cornwalls!" But the fire that confronted them was so withering that those who remained were compelled to give up the charge and to fling themselves on the ground. Bullets had conquered bayonets, and the attack on the big donga could not be pressed home.

"This gallant but unsuccessful assault," we are told,<sup>1</sup> "is typical of the numerous attacks made during the 18th. "They were not organized by superior authority. They were not prepared by artillery fire. They were never in sufficient strength, and they were not supported by simultaneous flanking attacks. Hence Spens's flanking attack, made separately, became merely a frontal attack. The value of long-range covering fire appears to have

<sup>1</sup> *Official History*, vol. ii, p. 140.

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been ignored. Except in this instance they were usually delivered without combination between the senior officers of the units actually engaged. Had the general officer commanding the 19th Brigade received notice from Headquarters, which, in spite of the temporary failure of the heliograph, could have been brought by hand when Aldworth crossed the river, he could have arranged for a united effort of all the troops scattered on the west of the laager."

At three o'clock or thereabouts Colonel O. C. Hannay, who had seen Kitchener personally twelve hours before, and had then been given verbal instructions to cross the Modder and assault the laager from the east when the attack from the west had developed, received the following order from the Chief of the Staff: "The time has now come for a final effort. All troops have been warned that the laager must be rushed at all costs. Try and carry Stephenson's brigade on with you. But if you cannot go the mounted infantry should do it. Gallop up if necessary and fire into the laager." Why this communication was not sent to Brigadier-General T. E. Stephenson, the senior officer of the eastern attack, is one of the many mysteries of a battle which defies adequate elucidation, even by the staff of officers who compiled the history to which we have so often referred.<sup>1</sup> "These instructions," they tell us, "must have represented what was passing through Lord Kitchener's mind, not any orders actually issued. Kelly-Kenny knew nothing of his brigades (the 13th and 18th) having been so warned. No directions to aid the assault had been given to the 18th Brigade. Of Colville's division, the only available men, three companies of the Cornwall Light Infantry, had not even begun to

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii, pp. 131-132.



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cross the river at Paardeberg Drift." Before proceeding to carry out what he regarded as urgent orders, Hannay sent to Colonel H. de B. de Lisle to attack with the mounted infantry—the message was duly delivered on the following morning—dispatched a galloper to instruct the 4th Mounted Infantry to cross to the right bank, and then set out on his last desperate adventure. A gallant little band of between fifty and sixty men took part in the charge; two returned. The remainder were killed, wounded, or taken prisoners. Nevertheless the sacrifice was not altogether in vain, for the firing line advanced as the Boers concentrated on the annihilation of the oncoming heroes. A second attempt was made on the laager, in which companies of the Welsh and the Essex Regiments took part. This also failed, and the men were compelled to dig themselves in.

The appearance of De Wet with 600 burghers and a couple of guns while the attack on Cronje's laager was developing was an added misfortune to a day which had been singularly unkind to the British arms. Dividing his forces, De Wet captured Kitchener's Kopje, south of the Modder, held by a small force of Kitchener's Horse, while Philip Botha surprised a detachment of the same corps at Osfontein Farm and took the majority of the men prisoners. Some of the 2nd East Kent Regiment, five companies of the Gloucesters, and a few of the 8th Mounted Infantry were detailed to deal with the new-comers, but De Wet stolidly maintained his position.

At the close of the day Kitchener wired the news of his lack of success to the Commander-in-Chief: "We did not succeed in getting into the enemy's convoy, though we drove the Boers back a considerable distance along the river-bed. The troops are maintaining their position,

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and I hope to-morrow we shall be able to do something more definite. Late this afternoon the Boers developed an attack on our right, which is still going on, but is kept under control by our artillery. Our casualties have, I fear, been severe. . . .”

No fewer than 1270 officers and men were returned as killed, wounded, or missing as the result of this fierce Sunday battle in the wastes of South Africa. It was certainly neither a British victory nor a disaster. for “Cronje’s mobility was destroyed, his oxen and horses killed or scattered, the spirit of his burghers crushed. The Boer commandos imprisoned in the bed of the Modder were, in fact, doomed.”<sup>1</sup>

The remainder of the story of Paardeberg concerns Roberts rather than Kitchener.<sup>2</sup> When the Commander-in-Chief heard that things were not going so well as had been anticipated, he at once ordered the 7th Division forward, and was himself on the scene of action at 10 A.M. on the 19th. Covered by a heavy bombardment, the British trenches stealthily approached nearer and nearer to the main Boer position, and on the 27th—appropriately enough the anniversary of Majuba—Cronje made an unconditional surrender.

<sup>1</sup> *Official History*, vol. ii, p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> See the author’s companion work, *The Story of Lord Roberts*, pp. 165-171.

## CHAPTER XV

### Guerrilla Warfare in South Africa

*"It is impossible for a people that has fought as the Boers have done to lose their self-respect ; and it is just as impossible for Englishmen to regard them with contempt."*—KITCHENER

GIROUARD, whom we last met sweating in the Sudan and helping to conquer the dervishes by the locomotive, was now Director of Railways in South Africa. The work was extraordinarily comprehensive. It not only involved the relaying of tracks and the reconstruction of bridges damaged or destroyed by the enemy, but often enough the putting down of temporary iron roads when it was necessary to divert traffic owing to serious breaks on the main route. Roberts's immediate objective was Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State, and he hoped to have the service of the railway which enters the country at Norval's Pont at his disposal. From thence the line runs *via* Bloemfontein to Viljoen's Drift, on the Vaal River, where it joins up with the Transvaal system. In order to be ready for this change in the line of communications, and to make the many arrangements that would be necessary, Kitchener was sent to Naauwpoort to assist Girouard "in pushing the railway across the Orange River as soon as the enemy vacate the country in the south," as Roberts wrote in his orders. "The Norval's Pont bridge," the dispatch continued, "is reported to be so strongly fortified,

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and the ground immediately north of the river in that direction to be so difficult, that the Bethulie bridge would appear to be the one we could secure the more easily. This would require assistance from General Gatacre's troops, and you are authorized to call upon him for such assistance as he may be able to afford. As Brabant pushes forward, and the enemy's numbers decrease, Gatacre will doubtless be able to occupy Stormberg."

One of Kitchener's first movements was to send three flying columns to clear the country of rebels in the neighbourhood of Prieska, in the north-west of Cape Colony. The result was eminently satisfactory, yet when a column under Major-General R. A. P. Clements occupied the hills above Norval's Pont bridge on the 7th-8th March, 1900, it was found that the three centre spans had been destroyed by De Wet, who had safely crossed the Orange River and left the ruin as a memento. A temporary structure of pontoons and casks was put together by the Royal Engineers, enabling Clements to enter the Free State a week later. On the 13th of the same month, after Roberts and Kitchener had paid a flying visit to Kimberley, Bloemfontein surrendered without the waste of a single shell, and on the 19th a train left the late capital for Cape Town, a distance of 750 miles. The Orange Free State was formally annexed on the 24th May. Kitchener was in the neighbourhood of De Aar, in the north-west of Cape Colony, for a considerable time, so that he might deal with any insurrectionary movements and provide for the safety of the all-important lines of communication. "That Lord Roberts should have parted with his principal adviser at such a time during the very height of the operations," remarks a German historian, "shows what

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importance he attributed to the state of affairs in the rear of the army.”<sup>1</sup>

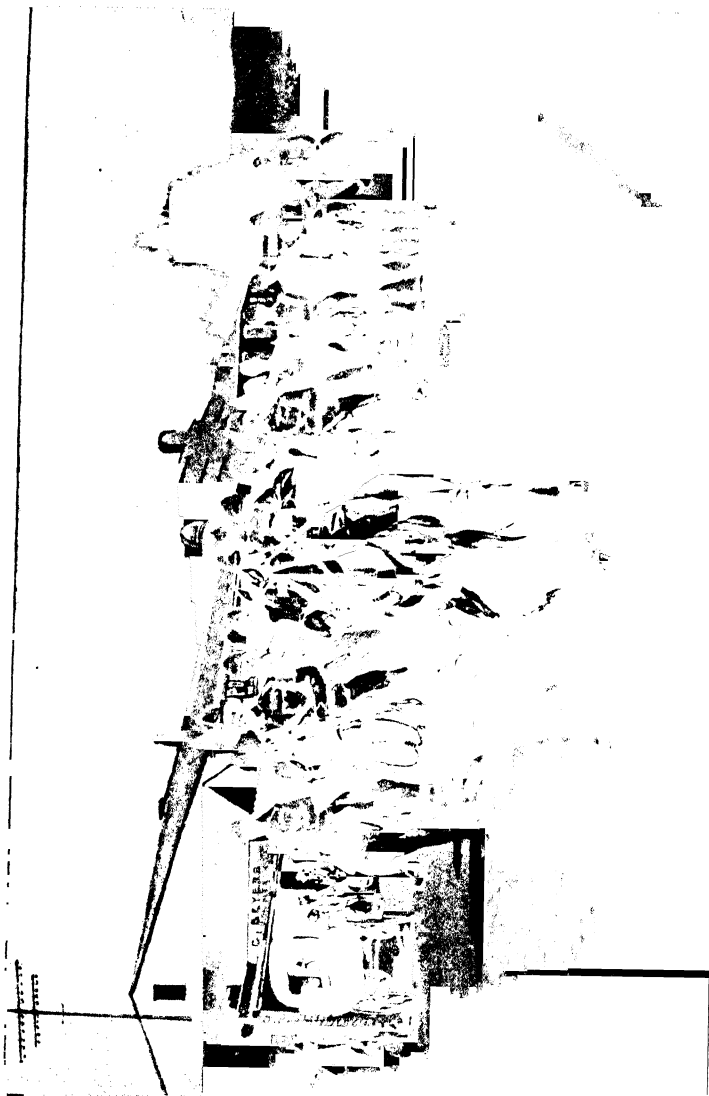
On the 3rd May the Commander-in-Chief left Bloemfontein, crossed the Vet and Zand Rivers, and entered Kroonstad. Here he stayed ten days to enable the single line of railway to be repaired. From thence he started off on his dash on Johannesburg, which fell to him on the 30th of the same month. The Union Jack was hoisted at Pretoria, thirty miles away, on the 5th June, 1900, and a little less than three months later the territory of the South African Republic became part of her Majesty's dominions and over 111,000 square miles were added to the British Empire.

Early in June Kitchener had an exceedingly narrow escape. He was asleep in a siding of Kopjes Station when the Boers made a sudden attack, from which he and the men working on the line were rescued by the timely arrival of some mounted infantry with two guns.

In August the Chief of the Staff commanded an abortive chase of the wily De Wet and President Steyn in the Western Transvaal. The famous guerrilla effectively eluded the pursuit of Kitchener, Methuen, Smith-Dorrien, Broadwood, and Ian Hamilton even when apparently surrounded.

As the war proceeded the commandant repeated this kind of performance again and again. He was never captured. The fox always succeeded in being just a little ahead of the hounds. He marched round columns, dashed his way through them, put up running fights, split up his band into smaller bodies, concentrated them again, and was always ready to grasp any opportunity that presented itself of attacking weak detachments. His

<sup>1</sup> *German Official History*, vol. ii, p. 23.





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adroit tactics won for him the admiration of the British Army, and it is on record that on a certain occasion Roberts sat and listened while one of his staff regaled a select audience with this little ditty :

*Of all the Boers we have come across yet,  
None can compare with this Christian De Wet ;  
For him we seem unable to get—  
(Though Hildyard and Broadwood,  
And our Sudanese Lord should)—  
Long as the world goes round !*

Kitchener succeeded, however, in making De Wet turn back to the Orange Free State, and in relieving the plucky little garrison of Australians, Rhodesians, and Cape Mounted Police at Brakfontein, on the Elands River.

Roberts was now able to advance against the main army. In conjunction with Buller, who had worked up from Natal, he dispersed the Boers at Bergendal, where the ridge held by the enemy was assaulted by Kitchener's express orders and carried with complete success. Finally Komati Poort was reached by Pole-Carew and Henry, and the Boers before them retired into Portuguese territory. During the pursuit some of the artillery got stuck in the mud. Kitchener came galloping up, jumped off his horse, and promptly lent his aid. It took three hours of downright hard work to release the guns, and throughout that time no one laboured more strenuously than the Chief of the Staff.

On the 29th November, 1900, Roberts gave up the command in South Africa " into the able hands of General Lord Kitchener of Khartoum," to quote his own words in a Special Army Order issued on that day. At the time all kinds of vague rumours regarding disagreement with



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his Chief of the Staff were rife in England, but no sooner had the new Commander-in-Chief of the British Army landed in the Isle of Wight than he gave the lie direct to all such contemptible gossip. "It was with great regret," he told the inhabitants of Cowes, "that I left South Africa; indeed, I do not think I should have given up my command had I not the most implicit confidence in my successor, Lord Kitchener. The task which has devolved on that distinguished officer is surrounded with difficulties, partly owing to the marvellous mobility of the enemy, but mainly on account of the vast extent and absolute barrenness of the country in which the operations are being carried on." At Southampton he referred to Kitchener as his "right-hand man through the campaign. I am specially indebted to him for his wise counsel. No one could have laboured more strenuously and in a more self-effacing manner than Lord Kitchener. He never had any idea of self-aggrandizement. He has worked as few men could work. I feel sure he will bring the war to a speedy termination."

The end of the war was by no means so near a settlement as most people thought and Lord Roberts suggested. The day of big actions was over, that was all. For another eighteen months the Boers proved to be most stubborn and elusive enemies, fighting in scattered bands, appearing and disappearing with the perversity of the will-o'-the-wisp, striking blows in unexpected quarters, surprising convoys and columns, and sometimes inflicting severe loss.

On the 20th December, 1900, Kitchener issued a proclamation notifying burghers "that if after this date they voluntarily surrender, they will be allowed to live with their families in Government laagers until such time as

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the guerrilla warfare now being carried on will admit of their returning safely to their homes. All stock and property brought in at the time of the surrender of such burghers will be respected and paid for if requisitioned." While this had some good effect, the majority of the Boers regarded what was undoubtedly a generous offer as a sign of weakness. Certain burghers who were in favour of peace and convinced that further resistance was futile formed committees for the purpose of aiding the propaganda, but the various commandants in the field were as adamant and took good care that their followers were not 'contaminated.'

Two months later Kitchener discussed peace terms with Commandant-General Louis Botha at Middelburg.<sup>1</sup> After communicating with the home authorities, the terms were subsequently outlined by Kitchener in the following letter,<sup>2</sup> which reveals him in the rôle of statesman :

"With reference to our conversation at Middelburg on the 28th February, I have the honour to inform you that, in the event of a general and complete cessation of hostilities, and the surrender of all rifles, ammunition, cannon, and other munitions of war in the hands of the burghers, or in Government depots, or elsewhere, His Majesty's Government is prepared to adopt the following measures :

"His Majesty's Government will at once grant an amnesty in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony for all *bona-fide* acts of war committed during the recent hostilities. British subjects belonging to Natal and Cape Colony, while they will not be compelled to return to those Colonies, will, if they do so, be liable to be dealt with by the laws of those colonies specially passed to

<sup>1</sup> *Official History*, vol. iv, pp. 326-328.

<sup>2</sup> Dated Pretoria, 7th March, 1901. *Ibid.*, vol. iv, pp. 524-526.

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meet the circumstances arising out of the present war. As you are doubtless aware the special law in the Cape Colony has greatly mitigated the ordinary penalties for High Treason in the present case.

"All prisoners of war now in St Helena, Ceylon, or elsewhere, being burghers or Colonists, will, on the completion of the surrender, be brought back to their country as quickly as arrangements can be made for their transport.

"At the earliest practicable date military administration will cease, and will be replaced by civil administration in the form of Crown Colony Government. There will, therefore, be, in the first instance, in each of the new Colonies, a Governor and an Executive Council, composed of the principal officials, with a Legislative Council consisting of a certain number of official members, to whom a nominated unofficial element will be added. But it is the desire of His Majesty's Government, as soon as circumstances permit, to introduce a representative element, and ultimately to concede to the new Colonies the privilege of self-government. Moreover, on the cessation of hostilities a High Court will be established in each of the new Colonies to administer the laws of the land and this Court will be independent of the Executive.

"Church property, public trusts, and orphan funds will be respected.

"Both the English and Dutch languages will be used and taught in Public Schools when the parents of the children desire it, and allowed in Courts of Law.

"As regards the debts of the late Republican Governments, His Majesty's Government cannot undertake any liability. It is however prepared, as an act of grace, to set aside a sum not exceeding one million pounds sterling to repay inhabitants of the Transvaal and Orange River

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Colony for goods requisitioned from them by the late Republican Governments, or subsequent to annexation, by Commandants in the field being in a position to enforce such requisitions. But such claims will have to be established to the satisfaction of a Judge or Judicial Commission, appointed by the Government to investigate and assess them, and if exceeding in the aggregate one million pounds they will be liable to reduction *pro rata*.

"I also beg to inform Your Honour that the new Government will take into immediate consideration the possibility of assisting by loan the occupants of farms, who will take the oath of allegiance, to repair any injuries sustained by destruction of buildings or loss of stock during the war, and that no special war tax will be imposed upon farms to defray the expense of the war.

"When burghers require the protection of firearms, such will be allowed to them by licence, and on due registration, provided they take the oath of allegiance. Licences will also be issued for sporting rifles, guns, etc., but military firearms will only be allowed for purposes of protection.

"As regards the extension of the franchise to Kaffirs in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony, it is not the intention of His Majesty's Government to give such franchise before representative government is granted to those Colonies, and if then given it will be so limited as to secure the just predominance of the white race. The legal position of coloured persons will, however, be similar to that which they hold in the Cape Colony."

In a letter which Botha addressed to his brother burghers he counselled them to fight on. "Let us," he wrote, "as Daniel in the lions' den, place our trust in God alone, for in His time and in His way He will certainly give us deliverance."

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Huge concentration camps were formed in which many thousands of women and children were gathered, a step which Kitchener confessed to be unpleasant and repugnant, but forced upon him by Botha's policy of compelling unwilling and peaceful inhabitants to join his commandos. Everything was done to make the refugees as comfortable as was possible in the circumstances.<sup>1</sup> In May 1902 over 116,000 men, women, and children were in refugee camps in the four colonies.

It was found necessary to send out further troops to support Kitchener in his policy of 'wearing them down.' Scores of mobile columns scoured the veld. No fewer than 195,400 Britons, including those guarding the lines of communication and 50,000 employed in Cape Colony, played a game of military hide-and-seek with from 30,000 to 50,000 Boers and malcontents. On the railways and across various stretches of country little stone forts and corrugated-iron structures made with an inner and an outer wall filled with shingle were erected. Eventually these buildings numbered over 8000, each surrounded by a trench and entanglements, and connected with its neighbour on either side by telephone, a wire fence, and a broad trench. In some parts rough redoubts were also built. They kept sentry over some 3700 miles.<sup>2</sup> "Not only do they protect our communications and render inter-communication difficult between the different portions of the Boer forces," said Kitchener, "but they serve as barriers against which our mobile columns are able to drive bands of the enemy and force them to surrender."

<sup>1</sup> See *Report on Concentration Camps by a Committee of Ladies appointed by the Secretary of State for War* (Cd. 893) and *Papers relating to the Refugee Camps* (Cd. 853).

<sup>2</sup> *Official History*, vol. iv, p. 570.

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Armoured trains with searchlights, machine guns, and a mounted Q.F. gun were stationed at convenient points ready to lend their aid when occasion demanded and to patrol the line.

Different districts were selected for the purpose of sweeping out or cornering the enemy by means of 'drives,' a plan of operations in which, of course, the block-houses played an important part. It did not invariably prove successful, because no means of warfare is perfect, but it certainly did much to tire the commandos.

In the south-east of the Orange River Colony, which was a particularly difficult stretch of country to bring to submission, Kitchener was eventually obliged to give up the plan of moving columns making wide sweeps, and definitely allotted a restricted zone to which each was to confine its attentions. Even then the enemy gave their pursuers a good deal of trouble, and despite the incessant vigil of columns working from the different centres it took a considerable time before the results proved the wisdom of the Commander-in-Chief's abandonment of his general policy.

Some idea of how these operations were carried out may be gathered from Sir Ian Hamilton's great drive across the Western Transvaal in April and May 1902, just previous to the cessation of hostilities. In that particular stretch of territory no block-houses existed, and the contour of the country did not lend itself to the manœuvre because it was without the natural barriers of mountains and unfordable rivers. The net was the angle of Bechuanaland lying between Vryburg and the western boundary of the Transvaal. With four columns Hamilton drove the Boers toward the railway line, and in order to delude the enemy at night the gaps between the columns

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were filled in by setting fire to the veld, thus giving the impression that there were no openings for the enemy to break through. The positions occupied by the troops were also carefully chosen and entrenchments thrown up. When the British drag-net was sufficiently near to the railway the searchlights of the armoured trains swept the horizon and revealed any burghers who happened to be about, the troops always remaining in the shadow of the reverse slopes of any rising in the ground. In three days over 860 Boers had been captured. Spies and natives spread all kinds of false reports regarding Ian Hamilton's movements, and instead of following the plans of other commanders who had traversed that part, he worked out his own scheme of operations and succeeded better than any of them.

Many drives of a similar character were undertaken, unfortunately not always with the same appreciable result, for, as we are assured by Captain Maurice Harold Grant,<sup>1</sup> "Only by a trusted and trustful commander with a corps of troops of supreme excellence could such a scheme be carried out. Sir I. Hamilton had under him men who were able and willing to make no halt by day and take no rest by night, for each long day's march, often nearly foodless and waterless, was intended only to bring them to the place of vigil or of fighting. Their labours were almost incredible. Long and deep trenches, impervious wire entanglements, fortified laagers of wagons, redoubts to hold from seventy to twenty men—not only bullet-proof, but proof against artillery—sprang up each night under the hands of men who had already performed the extremity of toil since dawn, and were to do the same on the morrow, and for days after. During the day every man was a scout; at night not one but had to become a

<sup>1</sup> *Official History*, vol. iv, pp. 509-510.

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sentry, with eyes, ears, and rifle alert. Such efforts would cause more casualties among inferior troops than among their adversaries. For a like reward they have seldom been equalled by soldiers in the field, and indeed there have been few who could have sustained them."

Another great drive was undertaken by French in the Eastern Transvaal, each of the seven columns under his command starting from different points, but keeping in touch with each other. As the 15,000 troops with their sixty-three guns advanced, so the Boers were pushed before them. There were occasional skirmishes and rearguard actions, of course, and Botha made a night attack on Smith-Dorrien's men at Bothwell, but of big stand-up fights there was none. The country was laid waste as a necessary part of the plan. When the drive ended over 1800 of the enemy had been killed, wounded, taken prisoners, or had surrendered, over 270,000 head of stock secured, a vast number of carts and wagons either burned or captured, and eleven guns had fallen into the hands of the British. These results had been obtained notwithstanding the abominable wet weather and the privations that the great drag-net had been compelled to endure. The operation began on the 27th January, 1901, and ended in the middle of the following April. Yet Botha and nearly 8000 men escaped.

At the end of July, when the rebels in Cape Colony and the Boers who had invaded it were giving cause for serious thought, and further invasion by hostile bands was regarded as imminent, Kitchener paid a personal visit to French at Middelburg. The famous cavalry leader was now in command of the mobile columns in the colony, and despite the fact that he had virtually surrounded Scheepers on the Camdeboo Mountains, the enemy had



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managed to find a loophole and get through it. Probably as a result of the interview a new method was tried. French wished to push the commandos across the Orange River, and by marching his eight columns southward, leaving sufficiently wide gaps between, he thought that perhaps the enemy would break through them in the desired direction. This system met with only partial success, and when peace overtures were made a few of the enemy were still to be found in Cape Colony.

Many brave deeds are recorded of the sixty odd columns which traversed the vast territory used as a theatre of operations during the last phase of the war. In heat and cold, rain and shine, in foggy and clear weather the regulars and volunteers of the British Army, Imperialist in very truth, scoured kopje and veld, mountain and plain in search of the enemy. One splendid story must suffice, though a thousand could be told. It concerns the garrisons of two remote relics of the Zulu War known as Forts Italia and Prospect, the time September 1901, when Botha thought of reaching Natal through Zululand. A handful of men, eighty in all, under Captain C. A. Rowley, held the outpost of the former, while 800 mounted infantry held the fort under Major A. J. Chapman. For their attack on Italia the Boers brought up 1500 strong—four times the number of the outpost on the mountain, in the trenches, and in the fort. The advanced party of eighty troops was first attacked and overpowered. Twenty were on the ground, and brave Lieutenant H. R. Kane, of the 1st South Lancashire Regiment, died after gasping: "No surrender." The remainder fought until they could fight no longer, and were taken prisoners of war. The enemy then attacked the main position, but were driven back. There was a lull, followed by a terrific storm of shot, which

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continued in almost unbroken fury for many hours. The men at the two guns loaded and fired with a rapidity seldom equalled and never excelled. Their officer and four men fell beside the pieces. Their comrades of the rifle used over 70,000 rounds against the force which invested them, and nearly 400 Boers fell dead or wounded. From 2 A.M. until 7.30 P.M. men of the 5th Division of Mounted Infantry kept the Union Jack flying at the post which guarded the British frontier, and when it was found that their assailants, sick and weary of their lack of progress, had raised the siege and were retiring, one officer and twenty-one men lay dead, and five officers and fifty-four men were wounded. Need we wonder that the men of Italia received the hearty congratulations of the Commander-in-Chief ?

Fifteen miles away the little garrison of Fort Prospect were playing their part. They also fought round the clock. Over 500 burghers surged against them, and were flung back as a rising beach repels the sea. Heroes all, the eighty men who had held the post thought nothing of their own bravery when compared with that of a few Zululand Native Police, who dashed through the enemy and lent their aid to the Dorsets until Grobelaar turned his back on them and disappeared.

The compiler of the official record of this phase of a long and weary war, which cost British tax-payers over £190,000,000 for their army in excess of the estimated peace expenditure, has frankly admitted that to describe all the operations during the period of Kitchener's command is "beyond the power of man." Fortunately there is no necessity for us to attempt the impossible in the present volume. It must suffice to say that in March 1902 about 40,000 Boers were prisoners, and on the

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12th April several of their leaders had an interview with Kitchener at Pretoria for the purpose of discussing terms of peace. A little over a month later the elected representatives of the commandos met at Vereeniging. The suggestion that the commandos should vote for thirty delegates for each Republic came from the Commander-in-Chief. He rightly refused to grant an armistice, and excluded from voting foreigners serving with the Boer generals and any commandos in Cape Colony. Yet he did not deal harshly with the men who had fought against him with so much spirit, even though they had sometimes abused the acknowledged rules of civilized warfare. At each place where the ballot-box was erected there was a local truce. The men were asked if they were willing to surrender independence, and at the same time selected their representatives. Although the opinions expressed at the ensuing conference were by no means unanimous, a commission of five met Lord Kitchener and Milner at Pretoria on the 19th May, 1902, with definite powers to negotiate. At some stages of the subsequent proceedings a further resort to the rifle seemed not unlikely to ensue. The difficulties raised were finally overcome, however, and on the 31st of May, 1902, the South African War was brought to an end by the signature of the Treaty of Vereeniging.

Within twenty-four hours the Commander-in-Chief had received the thanks of King Edward VII, and a few days later the following cable came to hand from the Right Hon. St John Brodrick, Secretary of State for War : " His Majesty's Government offer you their most sincere congratulations on the energy, skill, and patience with which you have conducted this prolonged campaign, and would wish you to communicate to the troops under your

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command their profound sense of the spirit and endurance with which they have met every call made upon them, of their bravery in action, of the excellent discipline preserved and of the humanity shown by them throughout this trying period."

Before Kitchener left South Africa he attended a farewell banquet at Johannesburg, and at Cape Town was presented with a sword of honour. Speaking at the latter place, he said that he had been primarily responsible for the proclamation of martial law in the colony, and it had been a relief to him when he found that the inhabitants did not denounce the measure. "Without it," he added, "the farmers of the colony would have been either actually or politically dead. The farmers had been fed with lies, not always told them in Dutch, until they thought the British people were a nation of monsters. Martial law had then stepped in and prevented people from taking a fatal step. It had also been effective in preventing munitions of war from reaching the enemy. Now that peace had come, he asked them all to put aside racial feelings, and also to put aside 'leagues' and 'bonds,' and to strive for the welfare of their common colony. Briton and Boer had had a good fight, and they were now shaking hands after it. It was a happy augury for the future that the people of Cape Colony had not dealt in a vindictive spirit with the question of the rebels." Finally, he expressed the hope "that all the colonists would soon become again a happy and united family as Providence meant them to be."

While the Army in South Africa had a tender affection for 'Bobs,' it had the deepest respect for 'K.' Roberts never regarded it as a sign of weakness to wear his heart on his sleeve; Kitchener apparently did, though he was

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by no means lacking in the finer qualities of humanity. Moreover, he thoroughly appreciated generous instincts in others, as his final Order to the officers and men in South Africa proved :

“ The General Officer Commanding in Chief wishes to express his best thanks to all general officers, officers, non-commissioned officers, and men for the excellent service they have rendered since he first took the command eighteen months ago. The period in question offered few opportunities for those decisive engagements which keep up the spirit of an army, and add brilliance and interest to its operations. On the other hand, officers and men have been called upon for increasing and ever-increasing exertions, in the face of great hardships and other difficulties, against dangerous and elusive antagonists.

“ The conduct of the troops under these trying circumstances has been beyond all praise. Never has there been the smallest sign of slackness or impatience. It seems to Lord Kitchener that the qualities of endurance and resolution they have displayed are much more valuable to a commander than any dashing or short-lived effort whereby some hard-fought actions may be won in a campaign of ordinary duration.

“ The Commander-in-Chief also has special pleasure in congratulating the Army on the kindly and humane spirit by which all ranks have been animated during this long struggle. Fortunately for the future of South Africa, the truth in this matter is known to our late enemy as well as to ourselves ; and no misrepresentations from outside can prevail in the long run against the actual fact, that no war has ever yet been waged in which the combatants and non-combatants on either side have shown so much consideration and kindness to one another.

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"This message would be incomplete if reference were not made to the soldierly qualities displayed throughout the campaign by our quondam enemies, and to the admirable spirit displayed by them in carrying out the surrender of their arms. Many Boer leaders who at an earlier date recognized the futility of carrying on the devastating conflict beyond a certain point have already for some time served with us in the field, and the help which they rendered us will not be forgotten. Many, also, of those who continued to struggle to the end have expressed the hope that on some future occasion they may have an opportunity of serving side by side with His Majesty's forces, from whom Lord Kitchener can assure them they will receive a very hearty welcome."

The links of the Empire had been tested and found true. Bushmen from Australia, lumbermen from Canada, colonists of New Zealand, the Cape, Natal, and Namaqualand had come forward to prove that Britain was something more than a name and a sentiment. They were the advance-guard of the great Imperial Army which hastened in the dark days of August 1914 from every stretch of territory which shows red on the maps.

The beginning of the World War was taken full advantage of by some of the malcontents of South Africa to raise the standard of revolt, and once again Beyers, De Wet, Kemp, and Maritz entered the field against Britain, and also against General Louis Botha, Premier of South Africa, who led the King's forces. Beyers, in attempting to escape pursuit, was drowned in the Vaal River; De Wet was captured; Kemp and Maritz surrendered. With loyal South Africans Botha, our brilliant antagonist of but a few short years before, conquered for the common Empire

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vast German territories in Africa. The 'opportunity' mentioned in Kitchener's Order had come.

If the Boer War made enemies it also made a multitude of friends.

When Lord Kitchener reached London in July 1902 he was met at Paddington Station by the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Connaught, the Duke of Cambridge, Lord Roberts, and other distinguished persons. With characteristic brevity he expressed his thanks to the Mayor, Sir John Aird, for the address which the great contractor handed to him, and at once turned his thoughts to an entirely different matter. "How is the Assouan dam getting on?" he asked. "Very well," replied Sir John; "in fact, we hope to finish the work this year." "That is capital!" was the General's enthusiastic comment.

He received a tremendous reception from the crowds which had gathered to catch a glimpse of the man who had restored peace to the Empire, and his drive from the terminus to St James's Palace was anything but a quiet one. After dining with the Prince of Wales he proceeded to Buckingham Palace, where the King personally decorated him with the new and exclusive Order of Merit, now the most coveted of all distinctions.

## CHAPTER XVI

### Commander-in-Chief in India

*"My sole aim . . . has been to place the administration of the Army in India on a business footing."*—KITCHENER

**K**ITCHENER richly deserved the Parliamentary grant of £50,000 that was made to him on his return to England. He was promoted to the full rank of General, and became Viscount Kitchener of Khartoum, of the Vaal in the Colony of the Transvaal, and of Aspoll in the county of Suffolk, with special remainder to his brothers and their children. He and Lord Roberts were fellow-guests of the Corporation of the City of London at the historic Guildhall, he was the immediate successor of the Iron Duke as an honorary burgess of Ipswich, he received the freedom of Sheffield, and he visited many centres of industrial activity. His speeches were not floods of oratory. He plucked no flowers from the garland of rhetoric to fling them at his listeners' feet. He dealt with practical matters as a practical man—in a word, as a Royal Engineer indicating certain constructive plans. For instance, at Stockton-on-Tees he asked employers of labour to find their countrymen who were returning from South Africa "good, permanent, wage-earning positions." Before Lord Roberts began his great mission in the cause of National Service<sup>1</sup> Kitchener had emphasized the necessity.

<sup>1</sup> See the author's *The Story of Lord Roberts*, pp. 227-240.



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Addressing Yeomanry at Welshpool in September 1902, he remarked :

“ You Yeomanry have had some experience of what it means to be more or less untrained in war, and how greatly a man, whatever his spirit and pluck may be, is handicapped by want of training in a fight. You, therefore, well realize with me how essential it is that the young men of the country should join the military forces and become trained by those who have reaped experience during this war, so that they may in their turn be ready, if the necessity should arise, to take their place as trained men in the ranks. You must not forget that we shall not always have, nor do we wish to have, a war that lasts long enough to train our men during the campaign. It is, therefore, I think, of vital importance that every one, whether in this country or in that Greater Britain beyond the seas, should realize that it is the bounden duty and high privilege of every British able-bodied man to defend and maintain that great Empire the citizenship of which we have inherited, and the honour and glory of which the men of the Empire are determined shall, as far as lies in their power, be handed on untarnished to those that follow us.”

Kitchener had only been home a few months when he was appointed to the exceedingly important post of Commander-in-Chief in India, a position which Lord Roberts had also held. Had Lord Rosebery been Premier it is morally certain that the pacificator of turbulent South Africa would have remained at home. He criticized the appointment, and boldly confessed that he “ would not have shrunk from recommending him for the position of Secretary of State for War.” Unfortunately the wish of the far-seeing statesman could not be translated into fact.

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Had Kitchener been sent to Pall Mall then, the burden of the giant task which fell to him in 1914 would have been considerably lightened.

Various people who happened to be at Victoria Station, London, on the 17th October, 1902, remarked on the strange physical resemblance which a gentleman sitting in a reserved compartment bore to Lord Kitchener, but as the name on the label was 'Mr Cook' only a few appreciated the *ruse de guerre*, and cheered and waved their hats.

Kitchener remained in Paris for a few days before proceeding to Egypt, where in the city of Gordon's martyrdom he was to open the new Memorial College. The Fashoda incident had long since been forgotten, but another of earlier date was remembered by the *Temps*, which ventured this delightful witticism: "Since yesterday there has been in France one ex-French soldier the more; his name is Kitchener, and he resides at the British Embassy."

At the opening ceremony of the noble institution at Khartoum which he had suggested and done so much to further the General delivered what was for him a long speech. There is no need to quote the whole of it, but there are certain portions which indicated the marvellous strides already made in the desert city since the downfall of hideous and barbaric Mahdism:

"We now see the Sudan people of all classes anxiously desirous of education for their children, also that the steps which we have taken for their future in this respect meet entirely with their approval, and that they encourage us by every means to push forward the scheme. In the Sudan primary schools we find excellent material to work on. During the short time that they have been established, I am informed that they have become already fully equal

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in efficiency to the primary schools of Egypt ; therefore, we cannot fail now to recognize that there is no lack of room for developing education in the Sudan, nor of youths eager to learn and capable of learning. I am delighted to see those who are here to-day. They are an excellent type, and clearly show the fruitful field there is here for work which, if developed, will surely result in making this country a prosperous centre of civilization instead of what we all remember it to have been formerly.

“ But, though great steps have been made, we must still look forward for the actual realization of the original scheme. This memorial to General Gordon has not been called a college without due consideration. It was hoped, and fully foreseen, that it would in the future become the head and centre of secondary and more advanced scientific training and education of the youths of the Sudan in literary and technical knowledge. Here they will be brought up and taught so as to be able to go out into the world equipped to fill many posts for which they are already required in this country. I, for one, am quite willing and happy to wait patiently for that result, which is, undoubtedly, the future of the institution. . . .

“ Glancing ahead, we confidently hope to see the institution supporting 300 students, with a proper staff of English masters, with whom they will be so closely associated during their four or six years of residence that their native views of life will be greatly modified and gradually moulded to a morally higher and more efficient standard, while their intellect and knowledge will be so developed and increased as to open to them careers either in the Army, in civil life, or in technical work, thus raising them to the level of others who have long enjoyed the benefits of civilization and progress.”

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The new Commander-in-Chief arrived at Bombay on the 28th November. It was not long before he formed the opinion that extensive reorganization was eminently necessary, including certain changes in the disposition of the forces. While he had no cause to think that there was likelihood of immediate danger, an exhaustive study of the situation showed that the Indian Army was not sufficiently prepared for possible hostilities. Many of the troops were garrisoned at places which had been considered advantageous at the time immediately succeeding the terrible Indian Mutiny, and for reasons of accommodation or climate had not been changed since.

Some of them he left ; others he shifted. "The forces on my plan," he said, "are distributed throughout India pretty much as before ; only now there is method and intelligible order in their grouping." He secured more adequate pay and allowances, established a higher scale for pensions, built munition factories, and applied modern business methods to the administration. The new service rifle was introduced, the artillery was provided with quick-firing guns, and he even disbanded regiments which had earned for themselves an unenviable record. Like Roberts before him, Kitchener paid special attention to field-training, and from time to time qualified inspecting officers examined each battalion.

He stationed divisions at various points along the main railway routes, placed two divisions at the two great highways from Hindustan to Afghanistan and Central Asia, and three frontier brigades between the Khaiber and the Bolan Pishin road. The shimmering steel rails became lines of communication in very truth, as they had done in the vast tracts of the Sudan and South Africa. He trained each division as a whole, making it a complete

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unit, redistributed the all-important ammunition columns so that they were immediately available for service instead of being scattered in a more or less haphazard way, and divided the forces into a Northern and a Southern Army.

Kitchener likewise saw the necessity for a thoroughly trained and highly educated General Staff. "We must follow a system of training for war suited to the vastly changed conditions of the present day, and steadfastly eliminate all obsolete traditions," he averred in his Memorandum on the subject. "In all ranks, from the private soldier to the General Officer, each step up the ladder requires a corresponding increase in knowledge, in self-reliance, in the power of initiative, in the habit of readily accepting responsibility, and in the faculty of command, qualities which can be attained only by unremitting study combined with constant practice.

"It is recognized that it is the duty of a commanding officer to educate and train his men in all branches of soldiering, but hitherto it has not been so generally understood that this holds equally true as regards the education and training of the officers serving under him. The plea that teaching is a difficult art, which it is given to few to acquire, is one which cannot be accepted. The whole secret of preparing for war is a matter of training and instruction, and commanding or other officers who profess or show their incapacity as instructors, and their inability to train and educate those under them for all the situations of modern war, must be deemed unfit for the positions they hold.

"The system at present in force in India, whereby officers are sent to garrison classes to prepare for their promotion examinations, is particularly faulty. Knowledge thus crammed up in the course of a few weeks, only to be

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forgotten as soon as the examination is passed, is in no sense education. In future the military education of officers must be imparted within their regiments; it must commence from the day they join and continue until they leave the service."

The Memorandum is typical of Kitchener. It reveals his passion for efficiency, his belief in work, his disbelief in 'feather-bed jobs,' his hatred of the pernicious system of raising officers by hot-house methods. He believed in red tape—with reservations. "The true combination of discipline with a proper exercise of individual intelligence and initiative," he concluded, "cannot fail to give the army in which these qualities have been inculcated a decided superiority over one in which they have been neglected."

Kitchener's biggest problem was not the modernizing of the service, but the limitation of his powers by tradition. He found that the Military Member of Council was the adviser of the Government on military matters, and that the Commander-in-Chief was virtually his subordinate. The office of the former was a survival of the days when the Presidencies of Bengal, Bombay, and Madras each had its own army. Kitchener contended that as Commander-in-Chief he ought to advise the executive on purely military questions. He regarded the duality of control as an element of weakness rather than of strength.

The situation was summed up by Lord Kitchener in an interview which he accorded Dr W. H. Fitchett. "I gave one set of instructions to a general upon a certain subject," he remarked, "and the Military Member of the Council gave another set of instructions to the same general on the same subject. What was that unhappy

<sup>1</sup> Dr W. H. Fitchett, in *The Daily Mail*, 10th January, 1906.

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officer to do—except perhaps do nothing? Then I am responsible for the efficiency of the Army in India, but I had no opportunity of explaining my own plans to the supreme authority, the Indian Government. They had to be filtered through the lips of another military officer.

“There is no question as to the right of the Government of India to decide finally all questions of policy. The civil power, of course, is supreme. All I contend for is that it must be adequately informed as to the plans which I, as the responsible expert it employs, think necessary for the efficiency of the Army. There has been much talk of a design on my part to set up a ‘military autocracy.’ Nothing could be more untrue. The civil Government in the last resort is, and must be, supreme. But I must work under conditions which enable me to discharge the trust put in my hands by the civil Government; and one of these conditions is that I must be allowed to put adequately and personally my own plans before the Government to which I am responsible.

“There are,” Lord Kitchener continued, “only three principles for which I contend, and they belong to the very alphabet of common-sense. The first is unity of authority: a divided command in military affairs is fatal. Next, the Army in India must be organized on an intelligible plan, and with some regard to its instant and effective use as an instrument of war. . . . My third principle is that having a definite and comprehensive plan I should have the right of stating it myself to the Government to which I am responsible.”

“One of the chief faults of the Indian system,” Kitchener stated in one of his minutes on the subject, “is the enormous delay and endless discussion which it involves.

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It is impossible to formulate or carry out any consistent military policy. No needed reform can be initiated, no useful measure can be adopted, without being subject to vexatious and, for the most part, unnecessary criticism—not merely as regards the financial effect of the proposal, but as to its desirability or necessity from the purely military point of view. The fault lies simply in the system, which has created two offices which have been trained to unfortunate jealousy and antagonism and which, therefore, duplicate work, and in the duplication destroy progress and defeat the true ends of military efficiency. The system is one of dual control and divided responsibility. It is a system of 'want of trust,' such as that which has recently been condemned and abolished in the Army at home."

Lord Curzon was Viceroy at the time. He contended that if Lord Kitchener's proposed reform were carried out the Commander-in-Chief would virtually become dictator in all military matters. Eventually a compromise was arranged, and like most compromises it did not prove a success. The Military Member of Council was to give place to a Member for Military Supply, and a new Army Department under the Commander-in-Chief was to take over the work of the old Military Department, with the exception of supply, for which a second department was constituted. While the Viceroy had the right to consult the Member for Military Supply on military matters, the new member was not entitled to insist upon being consulted. Lord Curzon nominated a distinguished general then holding high command in India, and formerly of the Military Department, an officer, as Sir Richard Holmes points out, "precisely of the type calculated to bring about what would, in effect, be a continuation of the old



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system.”<sup>1</sup> The Viceroy, who had introduced many reforms during his energetic administration, including the partition of Bengal, which was afterward reversed, resigned, although the Ordinary Members of his Council supported his policy. The controversy concerned methods rather than men, a clash of schools of thought rather than of two strong personalities.

In 1909 the Supply Department was abolished at the suggestion of Lord Morley, then Secretary of State for India. This strengthening of Kitchener's position was the subject of a long debate in the House of Lords, Lord Curzon leading the attack. He complained that “The Government were now going to concentrate in the hands of one man in India, not merely the executive control of the Army, its patronage, its equipment, its inspection, its preparation for war, but also the business of finance and administration, which was ordinarily discharged by the War Office. Such a burden was too much for any shoulders, however capable or however broad. There was no one in history except Napoleon who could bear such a weight, and although in India we had been very fortunate in having Commanders-in-Chief of great position and character, still we could not always expect to turn out men of Napoleonic type.” In his opinion his system was one of “dangerous centralization.”

Earl Roberts agreed with Lord Curzon's criticism, while the Earl of Cromer said that the change appeared to him to be for purely financial reasons. “All this talk about military autocracy,” Lord Morley replied, “was quite wide of the mark. Lord Minto<sup>2</sup> had expressed the view

<sup>1</sup> *Edward VII: His Life and Times*, edited by Sir Richard Holmes, p. 562.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Curzon's successor.

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that the transfer of wider powers to the Commander-in-Chief would materially detract from his independence of action, and it was pointed out that the post of Secretary of the Army Department would now always be held by a distinguished general officer on the same footing as the Secretary to the Government in every other department and with free access to the Viceroy. He was not going to say that the new duties were a light burden, but Lord Kitchener had carried out to a greater extent than had ever been the case before, and very wisely and prudently, the very obvious principle of delegation. It was a complete delusion to suppose that the Commander-in-Chief could not carry out the duties which now devolved upon him. The measure of responsibility was not the measure of his work, as all depended upon the arrangement and organization of business, and in devolution and decentralization." Lord Morley also mentioned that if the Commander-in-Chief took the field in time of war "there would be left behind the Adjutant-General and most of his division, and also the staff of the Quartermaster-General. The Viceroy would not therefore be completely isolated, and there would be no break in the continuity of information."

Before Lord Curzon left for England, India was visited by the present King and Queen, then Prince and Princess of Wales. On his return the Prince made a speech on his tour at the London Guildhall, when he took occasion to remark on the efficiency of the troops under Kitchener's command.

"During the month of December," he observed, "in the neighbourhood of Rawal Pindi, I had the pleasure of staying with Lord Kitchener in his camp of manoeuvres, and witnessed operations on an extended scale between

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two armies, numbering in all over 55,000 men, terminating in a review and march past of the largest force ever brought together in India in time of peace. I was struck with the general fitness and splendid appearance of the British troops, with the physique and power of endurance of the native army, and the dash of its cavalry, while throughout the Army I found an earnest desire for increased efficiency and for readiness to take the field. I was especially glad to have the opportunity of being associated with our magnificent Army in India under such practical conditions. I am proud to say that during my tour I was able to inspect 148,000 troops."

Kitchener's habit of visiting military stations without notice is common knowledge. When some manœuvres were to be carried out at Attock some one thought it would be well if the troops were warned beforehand, so that no hitch might occur when the orders to move came to hand. The comment of the Commander-in-Chief was brief but to the point. "Why give them notice?" he said in his abrupt way. "Why warn staff officers? Would they receive warning in war? The Army of India should be ready to move anywhere at a few hours' notice. Let the conditions of actual warfare be imitated as closely as possible." On his various tours of inspection he travelled no fewer than 65,000 miles. No untoward incidents marked his long and frequent journeys, although he met with a bad accident at Simla. He was riding through a small tunnel in the hill-side when his horse flung him heavily against the side. When his injuries were attended to, it was found that one of his legs had sustained a compound fracture.

In August 1909 Lord Kitchener's task in the great Empire beyond the seas was finished, and when introducing

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the Indian Budget in the House of Commons the Under-Secretary for India took the opportunity of paying a neatly turned compliment to the retiring Commander-in-Chief. "He is," said the Master of Elibank, "a distinguished soldier and high administrative genius, whose efforts have been directed toward obtaining the best possible instrument for defensive purposes at the least possible cost to the Indian taxpayer. In leaving India Lord Kitchener will carry with him the recognition of his Majesty's Government and the good wishes of those who have served with him and under him. There is not a single unit in the Indian Army which Lord Kitchener has not personally visited."

At a farewell dinner given in his honour by the members of the United Service Club at Simla the Viceroy remarked that India was losing an illustrious Commander-in-Chief and a far-seeing, sagacious statesman, and that he would miss his loyal support. The guest of the evening, after alluding to the fact that the Tibet, Zakka Khel, and Mohmand affairs were the only expeditions during his term of office, paid a tribute to his predecessors, who had left him a legacy of a splendid foundation to build upon. He praised the loyalty, exertions, and self-sacrifice of the British and Indian troops, and concluded by saying: "I am deeply sorry to leave the army, which is second to none in loyalty to its sovereign, and in discipline, efficiency, and devotion to its profession."

For his services in India Kitchener was promoted to the rank of Field-Marshal, the highest rung on the ladder of military fame.

The subject of this biography was reputed to be as great a believer in destiny as was Napoleon, and it has been stated that he once told the following story of a certain

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happening in India with evident relish. While it may be apocryphal, internal evidence leads one to suppose that it is the type of anecdote that would have appealed to him because it accentuates a deep-seated trait in his character. He was never unwilling to take risks, but only after he had prepared, so far as was humanly possible, against the likelihood of failure.

A certain sergeant of a company of British infantry stationed in a district of Burma infested by dacoits was never weary of airing his views on predestination. It was his favourite topic of conversation, and he would indulge his pet theory on the slightest provocation. One night, when he was about to take a walk outside the lines, he was discovered by a colleague slipping a revolver into his pocket. The individual who happened to see this performance was one of the sergeant's most bitter opponents of his belief in 'fate,' and incidentally had often been bored by his expositions.

"Why are you taking that revolver with you?" he asked.

"To shoot with," was the fairly obvious reply.

"But if your time has come to die, you're always telling us that nothing will save you," objected the other, "so what's the good of taking the revolver with you?"

"Oh," answered the sergeant, "but look how awkward it would be if I met a dacoit whose last day had come, according to destiny, and I had nothing with which to shoot him!"

Only a few months previous to the outbreak of the World War a fine equestrian statue of Lord Kitchener was unveiled at Calcutta. "One of his final visits," says Mr March, the sculptor, "coincided with the Agadir crisis, when we thought that war with Germany was

## Commander-in-Chief in India

coming at last. At previous sittings he had talked a great deal ; but that day he sat down, took no interest in what I was doing, and from time to time made jottings in his notebook." Appropriately enough the statue is close to the bronze figure of Roberts. One little feature of the unveiling ceremony alone concerns us. It was the reading of a letter from General Sir Beauchamp Duff, who had been the great soldier's right-hand man during the time when 'Hercules at the Himalayas' was carrying out his many reforms, and was then occupying the proud position of military head of the Indian Army. The writer confessed that Kitchener's work was so great that probably it would not be appreciated to the full extent it deserved in his lifetime.

That was well said, for a man who reaps the entire harvest of his fame and leaves nothing for posterity to gather and garner is apt to figure less in history than he whose labours continue to bear fruit in later generations.

## CHAPTER XVII

### Egypt's Strong Man

*"Those who have conquered are called upon to civilize."*

KITCHENER

**K**ITCHENER did not take the shortest route home, but the longest. He visited China, Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. In Japan he represented the King and the British Army at the grand manœuvres which were held during his visit, and showed the utmost interest in the wonderful little soldiers who had already proved their prowess in warfare against a great European Power. At the request of their respective Governments, he went very thoroughly into the problem of providing military ways and means for the defence of the Commonwealth and New Zealand against possible foreign aggression.

That Australia was thoroughly alive to the necessity of safeguarding her territory was proved by the fact that she had already offered a Dreadnought to the Imperial Government, passed a Naval Loan Bill for the building of four cruisers, six small gunboats, and three submarines for service in her own territorial seas, and a Defence Act which gave Kitchener a good foundation to work upon. There was a school of opinion which held that the more or less rough-and-ready guerrilla tactics of the Boers would suffice to repel any invasion project that might be tried by a covetous Power, but Kitchener soon disillusioned those

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who held this theory. Excellent fighting material and the greatest zeal were already at hand, as he candidly admitted, and these were obviously "indispensable adjuncts to the creation of an army," but he also pointed out that they were "not in these days of themselves enough to enable a force to take the field against thoroughly trained regular troops with any chance of success."

He divided the continent, with its 3,000,000 square miles, into areas, each under the command of a special Area Officer, while a commander to be known as Brigade Major when on active service was made responsible for ten areas. In his report Lord Kitchener recommended that the peace strength of the army should be 80,000 men between the ages of nineteen and twenty-four, a figure to be raised when on a war footing to 107,000 by the addition of lads of eighteen and of men in their twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth years. The establishment of a military college to educate officers for permanent service was also recommended, and this was afterward established at Duntroon, near Canberra, the Federal capital. In Australia and New Zealand lads begin their compulsory training at twelve years of age, and continue until they reach the age of twenty-five, unless they are forbidden to bear arms "by the doctrine of their religion," in which case they are given non-combatant duties. Thinly populated districts are also exempted from the Act. For the first two years the boys are junior cadets, and are instructed in physical exercises and elementary drill to the number of ninety hours per annum. From fourteen to eighteen four whole-day drills, twelve half-day drills, and fourteen night drills are required of them annually as senior cadets. At eighteen they are enrolled in the Militia, and up to the age of twenty-five are required to put in sixteen half-day or night drills and



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eight consecutive days in camp every twelve months. They are paid at the rate of three shillings a day and upward. For the technical branches of the service, including the Navy, twenty-five days have to be devoted every year, the age on entry being eighteen. Kitchener insisted that the organization should be thorough and designed for war purposes. It was to be no mere make-believe or playing at soldiers. "The force must be an integral portion of the national life," he wrote. "The citizen should be brought up from boyhood to look forward to the day when he will be enrolled as fit to defend his country; and he should be accustomed to practise those habits of self-denial, of devotion to, and emulation in, the execution of his duty, of reticence and prompt obedience to lawful authority, which are essential to the formation of patriotic and efficient citizen soldiers." Kitchener estimated that the cost of his plan would amount to £1,884,000. The military budget of 1913-1914, however, was £2,500,000, the peace establishment was 105,000 men, and the estimated war strength 150,000.<sup>1</sup> The scheme, somewhat augmented, is still on trial, and has not been an unqualified success. At the close of the first year of compulsory training it was found that 84 per cent of the boys had failed to perform the requisite number of drills.

The wife of Admiral Sir Richard Poore, who entertained Kitchener at Admiralty House, Sydney, tells a delightful little anecdote of the occasion. "Knowing his tastes," she writes, "we had a very small party to meet him, but

<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of 1915 the Commonwealth Statistician stated that the number of men between the ages of eighteen and sixty available in Australia under the Defence Act was 1,414,200. Twenty per cent is allowed as the proportion that might be omitted as unfit.

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among our guests was as pretty and intelligent a girl as one could find in a long day's journey, and she had come 800 miles to meet the hero of Khartoum and Paardeberg ! But at dinner he remarked with annihilating emphasis that he had heard so much of the beauty of Australian girls, and so far he had not seen a single decent-looking one." "They say he hates women," Queen Victoria once remarked after Lord Kitchener had visited her at Balmoral, "but I can only say he was very nice to me."

During his brief visit to New Zealand the chief of the Arawa tribe of Maori was so much impressed by the stories of the great soldier that he offered him a sword given to one of the chief's ancestors by Captain Cook. Kitchener, while he deeply appreciated the significance of the proffered gift, gratefully declined it.

Dr G. H. Putnam, the distinguished American publisher and man of letters, crossed the Atlantic with Kitchener, and in his entertaining *Memories* details a chat he had with him. He found the Field-Marshal reticent when sitting at the captain's table, but he "gave me one evening the benefit of a talk all to myself on the essential importance and value of war for the development and maintenance of character and manliness in the individual and in 'the community.' He could conceive of no power or factor that could replace war as an influence to preserve man from degeneracy. He did not lose sight of the miseries and the suffering resulting from war, but he believed that the loss to mankind would be far greater from the 'rotteness' of a long peace. Speaking from recent experience, he pointed out that the princes and 'gentle' classes of India, who considered war as the only possible occupation (with the exception of hunting) for gentlemen, found their chief grievance against British

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rule in the fact that it prevented fighting throughout the peninsula. Kitchener agreed with the Indian princes in the belief that they and their noble subjects were decaying in character under the enforced idleness of the *pax Britannica*, and he sympathized keenly with their princely grievance.

"I suggested to the General that during the periods in which Europe had accepted most thoroughly the domination of the soldier class and the influence of the military ideal, as for instance during the Thirty Years War, there had been no satisfactory development of nobility. He admitted this objection as pertinent, but contended that war could be carried on with methods and with standards that would preserve it as an instrument of civilization. I asked whether it would be a good thing for India if the British force, once every ten years or so, should establish a 'ring fence' within which the princes might, for the purpose of keeping themselves in condition, carry on a little fighting with their own followers, a kind of twentieth-century tournament. 'I could hardly take the responsibility, Major,' he replied, 'of formally recommending such a plan, but I am convinced that it would have many advantages.'"

Kitchener arrived in the Homeland in April 1910, preparatory to taking up the post of Commander-in-Chief and High Commissioner in the Mediterranean in succession to the Duke of Connaught, whom Mr Asquith once truthfully termed "one of the necessary men." As the Duke had resigned because in his opinion the duties attached to this high-sounding position were not sufficiently onerous or necessary for him to retain it, the reason for wishing to send Kitchener to Malta, the headquarters of the command, is obscure. Perhaps a benevolent Government

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was of opinion that after the strenuous labours of Egypt, South Africa, and India, Lord Kitchener would welcome a respite, though a good deal of travelling would be entailed in inspection. If this were so, the Cabinet showed a lamentable inability to appreciate the Field-Marshal's most pronounced characteristic. Hard work was as essential to him as is water to a fish. He was sixty years of age, when the lamp of life is not supposed to shine so brightly as at forty, but despite an unusually feverish existence, Kitchener had always kept the wick well trimmed. It was neither clogged nor charred. The sinecure had no charm for him, and so he never took up the command. Instead, he was given a seat on the Committee of Imperial Defence. A visit to Egypt before the year was out showed the direction in which his thoughts were turned. The Near East still beckoned. He visited Khartoum and its neighbour Omdurman, and he went to Uganda, where he bought land, an item of news that was not lost sight of by those interested in the rubber industry, for the quality of the product is good there. At Nairobi, the capital of the province of Ukamba, British East Africa, and a centre of the Uganda Railway, the Field-Marshal visited the Government agricultural farms. Here he was rather astonished at being shown a plot of growing corn called Kitchener wheat, which he was assured was not affected by rust, a species of fungi that farmers dread. Kitchener was naturally very interested, and asked for further particulars. "It transpired," he afterward told a number of Suffolk agriculturists, "that this wheat had been obtained from South Africa, some 2000 miles away, and was a product of blending by my Boer friends of the wheat I had sent them with their own wheat, to which, without my knowledge, they had given my

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name." The wheat which he had presented to his former enemies had been samples grown in Tibet, and discovered during the British expedition to the Land of the Lamas. Dr Chevallier, Kitchener's grandfather, it should be mentioned, introduced the barley, which is known by his name.

That the distinguished traveller had no intention of burying himself in the wilds became evident when he purchased Broome Hall, near Canterbury. Here his fine collection of beautiful old china was housed. Of his passion for 'blue and white' a capital story is told. He was once inspecting some specimens belonging to another devotee when a particularly fragile vase broke into several pieces. For once the Field-Marshal betrayed emotion. The connoisseur passed over the incident as of little consequence. "Come again next week and break another," he said. Some time later Kitchener had occasion to call again, and caught sight of the unfortunate vase pieced together, and bearing a little silver band on which was engraved: "This is the most treasured of my collection; it was broken in the hands of Lord Kitchener."

The death of Sir Eldon Gorst in July 1911 left vacant the post of British Agent and Consul-General in Egypt. Who would succeed him? At once the name of Kitchener came uppermost in the public mind, and when it was known that the Field-Marshal had accepted the appointment most people felt that only common justice had been done to his high abilities. His knowledge of the country and its people, his work as one of the makers of the modern Egyptian Army and as Sirdar were surely sufficient guarantee of a wise administration. Yet there were critics who felt that it was unwise to entrust a civil position to a man of the sword. Some folk are as frightened of soldiers

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as children are supposed to be of policemen. They conjured up visions of a military despotism. Not King Charles's head but Cromwell's body cast its shadow. Sir Edward Grey, speaking in the House of Commons, defended the appointment by virtually admitting that the Field-Marshal was the only man who was capable of taking up the reins of office at that juncture.

"It is a civil appointment," he declared. "I am confident that the qualities possessed by Lord Kitchener, his special knowledge and experience in Egyptian affairs, and his impartiality and capacity make the appointment one which will command general confidence. He has shown great capacity, not only as a soldier. The appointment in Egypt is an exceedingly difficult one to fill, as everybody knows. It requires special knowledge, special experience, and special qualities. I do not know of any one who possesses that special knowledge and experience and those qualities in so high a degree as Lord Kitchener."

The Field-Marshal left England in September. At that time he had added to his many titles that of President of the 1st North London Boy Scouts, and the detachment was drawn up in front of his train at Liverpool Street. The lads had recently spent a week in camp in Broome Park, and Kitchener immediately recognized some of them. Those who think of him as stern and unbending should recollect that one who held the highest rank in the British Army was not above taking a good-natured interest in these youngsters. On this occasion he gave a farewell message.

"It is very good of you," he said, "to come and say good-bye to me. All of you work hard while I am away and keep the Scout law. I shall expect to see you down at Broome when I come back, and I hope we shall have

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some more sport with the rabbits. I am very glad to see you. Good-bye!"

The wisdom of the Government's choice was made manifest as soon as Kitchener arrived in Egypt. On the 1st October, 1911, war broke out between Italy and Turkey. Egypt was a suzerain state of the Ottoman Empire. The army therefore entertained the highest hopes of seeing active service, but these hopes became nothing more. The Land of the Pharaohs was kept strictly neutral, and no Turkish soldiers were allowed to use it as a back door to Tripoli. We may be sure that Italy did not forget these things when she was making up her mind as to whose side she should support in the Great War.

The situation in 1911 required delicate handling, but Kitchener steered the ship of State so skilfully that no complications ensued. His wise administration did much to conciliate the Nationalist party, which had threatened to get out of hand. He improved the hard lot of the fellaheen, encouraged the growing of cotton, set on foot plans for draining the northern delta and various irrigation schemes. The country began to make material progress. He ordered the construction of new roads and the repairing of old ones, started savings banks, built a number of forts along the Suez Canal, ordered plans to be drawn for a proposed barrage across the White Nile, and showed by his continued interest in the work of the Gordon Memorial College that he was the foe of ignorance and a firm believer in the beneficent influence of education.

Lord Kitchener was sometimes referred to as a martinet, a word which has altered its original meaning, and in military matters usually denotes a small-minded and cross-grained individual. As such it was entirely wrong when

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applied to 'K. of K.,' who was planned on too big a scale. He was a rigid disciplinarian, and insisted that orders are given to be carried out; but he was also imaginative, and on occasion could make two plus two equal five. He never instructed a man or a regiment to carry out the impossible or to do something he would not attempt himself.

"I am afraid I cannot keep order in my district," an Egyptian official once complained to him. "Can't you?" replied the British Agent. "Then I will come and do it."

Kitchener was held in high regard by the people. Translated literally, an Arabic saying of the time ran: "The hens in Egypt have laid bigger eggs since Kitchener Pasha came to rule over us." Sir Rudolph Slatin Pasha, Inspector-General of the Sudan, once stated that Kitchener's popularity in Egypt "might be gathered from the crowded state of the Agency in Cairo, where people of all classes came to beg his advice and assistance in all kinds of matters, very often trivial private affairs. They came because they knew Lord Kitchener made a point of receiving everybody; he talked to them in Arabic and showed a genuine desire to help them."

On a certain occasion an old sheikh consulted the British Agent, and after he had left Kitchener's presence he gave a brief but expressive account of what had passed. "He put his hands on my shoulders, and said to me, 'Am I not your father? Will a father forget his children!'" Thus he poured oil on troubled waters, and though some of the natives proved irreconcilable, the majority held him in great respect. The "big, brainy, brawny man" of Mr Keir Hardie, who was not notorious for scattering compliments, "to whom all littleness and meanness were



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foreign," again proved that he was that very desirable individual, the right man in the right place.

The German Naval Law Amendment Act of 1912 made it necessary for the concentration of a large number of British battleships in the North Sea, which thus became the main theatre of possible hostilities. Four battleships were withdrawn from the Mediterranean for the purpose of augmenting those in home waters. Representations regarding this policy were made to the Government by Lord Kitchener and the naval and military Commanders-in-Chief in the south of Europe. The Mediterranean is the great artery of the British Empire, and the weakening of our forces there proportionately strengthened the naval resources of Austria and Italy, the latter country then being in the Triple Alliance. There even seemed a possibility of the defence of the main trade route to India and Australia being left to France. The outcome was the laying down of additional men-of-war to meet the undoubted requirements of the service.

A conspiracy to assassinate the Khedive, Kitchener, and Mohammed Said Pasha,<sup>1</sup> was brought to light in the summer of 1912. Detectives disguised as peasants obtained information of the plot and promptly arrested three young men, one of whom was a journalist connected with *El Lewa*,<sup>2</sup> the Nationalist newspaper. Another of the prisoners was recognized by Captain Fitzgerald, Lord Kitchener's aide-de-camp, as an individual who had frequently been seen when the Field-Marshal was about. After a trial in public the chief instigator of the conspiracy was sentenced to fifteen years' hard labour, and the others to fifteen years' imprisonment. A little later

<sup>1</sup> Egyptian Premier.

<sup>2</sup> *The Standard*.

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*El Lewa*, which had been founded in 1898 by the Nationalist agitator Mustapha Kamel Pasha, was suppressed by the Government. At its offices documents were found which clearly proved that a dangerous secret society existed. It should be added, however, that the Nationalist Party, far from making progress, was losing many of its adherents.

At the time of the discovery of the plot Lord Kitchener was about to pay a visit to England. The day and hour of his departure from Cairo were known, but when the Minister of Education and other officials arrived to bid him farewell the train had gone. He left at the beginning of July, and did not start on his return journey until the following September. One of the reasons for his visit to the Homeland was his desire to consult a specialist regarding his injured limb. The Field-Marshal was of opinion that it could be broken again and reset. Unfortunately this was found to be impossible owing to the time which had elapsed since the accident in India. Conditions had set in which made such an operation unlikely of success.

It was duly noted in the Press that special precautions by detectives and police were taken at Dover when Lord Kitchener embarked. At Paris he engaged rooms at a small hotel and paid a visit to the Khedive, who was staying in the Gay City for a time. Proceeding to Venice, where Mr Asquith was enjoying a brief holiday, he had a conversation with the Premier before boarding the steamer which was to take him to Egypt. The final stage of the journey was made on the *Schleswig*, then running on the new North German Lloyd service between Venice and Alexandria. At that time Germany was a menace but not an open enemy.

Kitchener visited the Sudan, toured through Lower Egypt, and went quietly on with his work of rejuvenating

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the Land of the Pharaohs. He was back again in the Homeland in the autumn of 1918, when he had the honour of being a guest of the King at Balmoral for a few days. One little incident, trivial enough in one sense but important in another, took place in December. The Field-Marshal made his first flight in an aeroplane. Piloted by the well-known French aviator M. Olivier, he flew for a quarter of an hour above the suburbs of Cairo. When he returned to the Heliopolis aerodrome 'El Lord,' as the Egyptians called the British Agent, remarked to one of his friends standing near that flying was "a lovely game." Kitchener's next furlough, during which he was made an Earl, was to prove his last. Three years later, when it was known that Kitchener was dead, Sir Reginald Wingate, Sirdar of the Egyptian Army, sent the following dispatch:

"On behalf of the British officers and officials of the Sudan, the officers and men of the Egyptian Army whom he led to victory, and the inhabitants of the Sudan whom he released from dervish tyranny and misgovernment, his successor in this country and comrade-in-arms offers heartfelt sympathy to Lord Kitchener's family in what is a personal and national bereavement."

The Sphinx at Gizeh awaits his companion in vain.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### Raising Kitchener's Army

*"Do your duty bravely. Fear God. Honour the King."*

KITCHENER

WRITING in *Blackwood's Magazine* less than two years before the greatest clash of arms known in history, "A Staff Officer" ventured to suggest that if ever Kitchener were placed in authority at the War Office it would be a fine thing for that venerable institution, but decidedly unpleasant for those who were employed there. As Sirdar, Commander-in-Chief in India, and British Agent and Consul-General in Egypt, the Field-Marshal had proved to be a man who refused to bow before the great god Tradition. Had he not referred to the dual system in India as "paper-logged with more or less unnecessary verbiage"? The inefficiency, supposed or real, of the War Office was a mine with rich veins to the fun-makers.

"During many an evening in camp or bivouac," says this observer, "Kitchener often talked long, openly, and convincingly upon reforms needed in the War Office and the Army. Of his opinions on these points it is too soon to speak, for he may yet have occasion to put them into practice. So I shall only say that they are calculated to produce a very considerable fluttering in Pall Mall dovecots and among the old women of both sexes when Big Ben chimes out K.'s hour of office and responsibility."

## The Story of Lord Kitchener

The hour struck on the 5th August, 1914, when Lord Kitchener was appointed, "for the time being," Secretary of State for War. It was perhaps in keeping with the 'wait and see' policy that had obtained in Great Britain for several years that at the moment of the Empire's greatest peril Mr Asquith should be endeavouring to shoulder the onerous responsibilities of Premier and War Minister. It was with a sigh of genuine relief that the people read on the morning of the 6th that the following statement had been issued from 10 Downing Street on the previous night :

"In consequence of the pressure of other duties the Prime Minister has been compelled to give up the office of Secretary of State for War. The King has approved of the appointment of Lord Kitchener as his successor. Lord Kitchener undertakes the duties of the office for the time being in view of the emergency created by the war, and his post in Egypt will be kept open."

With whole-heartedness the nation acclaimed the victor of Omdurman to be the right man in the right place. The poor, overworked spectre of Cromwell failed to flutter his tattered shroud before even the most nervous, and the time-honoured shibboleth of a civilian Minister for military matters rose to no one's lips. Unfortunately the appointment was made many months too late. Instead of grappling with the problem in peace conditions and getting the machine into running order before the great strain which was to come, Kitchener had to accept the War Office as it was and prepare during war for the greatest task that any man has been called upon to undertake. This, it must be confessed, was a grave disability, and added to it was the further drawback that for many

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years he had been away from England, excepting only for a few brief furloughs.

On Monday, the 3rd August, 1914, the Field-Marshal had already started on his return journey to Egypt. He had reached Dover preparatory to crossing the Channel by the one-o'clock boat. In this he was ahead of his party, which included the Sirdar and Lord Edward Cecil, who had entered their saloon carriage when they were recalled by special messenger. Kitchener himself was summoned back by telegram. Immediately on his arrival in London he visited Lord Haldane, who was acting as Mr Asquith's understudy at the War Office. We may be reasonably certain that Kitchener started work at once, even though he had no strictly official duties to fulfil. In the afternoon Sir Edward Grey made a speech in the House of Commons which showed that negotiations with Germany were hopeless. It was the knell of an era. The announcement of the appointment was held back because of the necessity for making arrangements for the conduct of Egyptian affairs between the Foreign Office and the authorities at Cairo.

For these reasons the Premier nominally held the position of Secretary of State for War until the morning of the 6th. On that day, when asking for half a million additional men for the Army, Mr Asquith told the House that it would not be just to the country for him to continue to hold that post. "I am very glad to say," he remarked, "that a very distinguished soldier and administrator in the person of Lord Kitchener, with the great public spirit and patriotism that every one would expect from him, at my request stepped into the breach." At this point loud cheers came from every quarter of the Chamber. "Lord Kitchener," the speaker went on, "as every one

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knows, is not a politician. His association with the Government as a member of the Cabinet for this purpose must not be taken as in any way identifying him with any set of political opinions. He has at a great public emergency responded to a great public call, and I am certain he will have with him in the discharge of one of the most arduous tasks that has ever fallen upon a Minister the complete confidence of all parties and all opinions."

At the beginning of 1914 the Regular Army consisted of 444,431 officers and men, of whom 156,110 were on Home and Colonial establishments, and 78,476 on the Indian establishment. In addition there was the Army Reserve of 146,756, and the Special Reserve of 68,089. The Territorial Force numbered 251,706, or over 50,000 short of its peace establishment of 315,438, and there was also a National Reserve of 217,680 time-expired men. These figures make a formidable total, yet when war clouded the August sky only 136,000 Regulars were in the British Isles, including non-combatants. From these men and the Reserves was provided the Expeditionary Force which did such yeoman service in helping to prevent the Kaiser from entering Paris according to his time-table. Within a week "the spear-head of the British Army," as Lord Haldane called it, was ready to be transported across the Narrow Sea. The Expeditionary Force, commanded by Sir John French, the brilliant leader of cavalry in the South African War, with its impedimenta of munitions, motor-cars, horses, carts, wagons, artillery, and so on, left the shores of Old England and arrived safely in France without a single casualty, without a slip, and without a word being said in the newspapers until the soldiers were disembarked on Continental soil. It was a notable triumph shared by the Army, the Navy, and the

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railways; and the last-mentioned richly merited Lord Kitchener's praise. Embarkation began on the night of the 7th August. By the 17th between 150,000 and 160,000 British troops were on the other side of the Channel.

The most exacting of critics would find it difficult to find flaws in the efficiency of an organization which had produced such a result. While it would be manifestly unfair to suggest that the perfect working of the machine was entirely due to Lord Kitchener, it is only just to say that the Expeditionary Force was not fully equipped when he entered office. For instance, within twelve days of the order to mobilize the Remount Department had secured 36,000 horses for the Expeditionary Force, 80,000 for the Territorials, and 18,000 for the Reserves. A few months later, when things were in full swing at the Western Front, 450 miles of telephone wire, 570 telephones, 534,000 sandbags, 38,000 bars of soap, 100,000 pairs of boots, 10,000 lb. of dubbing, 150,000 pairs of socks, and many other articles were issued in a single month. The Quartermaster-General and the Director of Contracts purchased articles of clothing such as trousers, greatcoats, shirts, puttees, and so on by the million.

Each of the men of the Expeditionary Force bore in his Active Service Pay Book a little memento of Lord Kitchener's kindly interest in his welfare. It was a personal letter from the Field-Marshal himself. Possibly in years to come these documents may be of more intrinsic value than the time-fuses of German shells and other relics of the War of the Nations. The simple message, couched in such homely language that it could not fail to be understood by the most unlettered Tommy, ran as follows :



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“ You are ordered abroad as a soldier of the King to help our French comrades against the invasion of a common Enemy. You have to perform a task which will need your courage, your energy, your patience. Remember that the honour of the British Army depends on your individual conduct. It will be your duty not only to set an example of discipline and perfect steadiness under fire, but also to maintain the most friendly relations with those whom you are helping in this struggle. The operations in which you are engaged will, for the most part, take place in a friendly country, and you can do your own country no better service than in showing yourself in France and Belgium in the true character of a British soldier.

“ Be invariably courteous, considerate, and kind. Never do anything likely to injure or destroy property, and always look upon looting as a disgraceful act. You are sure to meet with a welcome and to be trusted ; your conduct must justify that welcome and that trust. Your duty cannot be done unless your health is sound. So keep constantly on your guard against any excesses. In this new experience you may find temptations both in wine and women. You must entirely resist both temptations, and, while treating all women with perfect courtesy, you should avoid any intimacy.

“ Do your duty bravely.

“ Fear God.

“ Honour the King.

“ KITCHENER,  
“ *Field-Marshal* ”

Lord Kitchener was convinced that the conflict would last a considerable period, and that the number of troops

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required to humiliate our enemies would be enormous. His first appeal was for 100,000 men, between the ages of eighteen and thirty, for the formation of a second Army, the terms of service being a period of three years or until the conclusion of hostilities. To raise them he invited the active co-operation of the Lords-Lieutenant of counties and Territorial Associations. Territorials could offer themselves for foreign service, but subsequently the Field-Marshal made it abundantly clear that he fully recognized that many men had responsibilities which precluded them from leaving England. "He does not desire that those who cannot, on account of their affairs, volunteer for foreign service, should by any means be induced to do so, or on account of such inability should leave the Territorial Forces. County associations and officers commanding units should arrange that, in Territorial districts, certain units should be designated for home service and receive all those who cannot volunteer for foreign service into their ranks, whilst those who have not such important ties at home should be passed from units remaining for home defence into units of the Territorial Force who have elected to volunteer for foreign service." So ran the instructions.

A great advertising campaign was started. "Your King and Country Need You" stared from a thousand hoardings in populous towns and depleted villages. "An addition of 100,000 men to His Majesty's Regular Army is immediately necessary in the present grave National Emergency. Lord Kitchener is confident——" so ran the announcement, set in bold type, in scores of newspapers, from the stately pages of *The Times* to the columns of the most obscure representative of the provincial Press. The last four words, "Lord Kitchener is

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confident——” solve the problem of the Why and Wherefore of the famous soldier and administrator for whom the great god Precedent had been set at naught in his shrine at Whitehall. They were entirely characteristic of the Secretary of State for War, and they inspired the man in the street to enlist. There was trust on both sides, and trust is the greatest asset a country can have.

Before August had given place to September Kitchener announced that he had been “much gratified” by the response to his pioneer appeals. The first 100,000 were divided into six divisions, the Scottish, Irish, Northern, Western, Eastern, and Light Infantry. He lost no time in asking for another 100,000 men, extending the age-limit to 35, ex-soldiers to 45, and certain selected ex-non-commissioned officers up to 50. The minimum height was 5 feet 3 inches, and the chest measurement 34 inches, which were altered shortly afterward to 5 feet 6 inches (infantry) and 35½ inches respectively. When the third appeal was made the age was increased to 38, and the minimum height lowered to 5 feet 4 inches, except for units for which a special standard was required. The height was again reduced to 5 feet 3 inches on the 5th November, as was the chest measurement to 34½ inches a little later. Recruits came in at the rate of about 80,000 a week. Long queues of young men waited outside the Central Recruiting Office at Great Scotland Yard, and so great was the pressure that a marquee had to be erected on the Horse Guards Parade to relieve it. Liverpool had the honour of forming the first complete battalion of Kitchener’s Army. It is now known as the 11th Battalion King’s Liverpool Regiment, and the Field-Marshal was its Honorary Colonel. Kitchener also held the same rank in the Irish Guards. He succeeded Lord Roberts in the latter

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position in December 1914, and when the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion paraded to receive him he told the men that he was proud to command a regiment which had upheld the most glorious traditions of its race in the war, and which was destined, he believed, to leave an imperishable name.

On the 10th September Mr Asquith asked Parliament for another half-million men, and stated that the number of recruits who had enlisted into the Regular Army since the declaration of war, exclusive of those who had joined the Territorials, was 439,000 up to the evening of the previous day. County Associations were authorized to form a home service unit for each unit of the Territorial Force which had been accepted for Imperial service.

By an Army Order dated the 30th December, 1914, the organization into divisions and army corps was developed by the creation of half a dozen Armies, to be numbered 1 to 6, and to consist as a general rule of three army corps. These, taking them in order, were to be commanded by Generals Sir Douglas Haig,<sup>1</sup> Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, Sir Archibald Hunter, Sir Ian Hamilton, Sir Leslie Rundle, and Sir Bruce Hamilton. Another step in the raising of men was taken in the following February, when the Army Estimates for 1915-16 were introduced. The number allowed for the Home and Colonial establishments, exclusive of India, was no fewer than 8,000,000.

In May 1915 Kitchener called for another 800,000 men, and again important alterations were made regarding the standard of physique required. The age-limit was put up to 40, the minimum height reduced to 5 feet 2 inches, and the chest measurement to 38½ inches. Before the end of the year 4,000,000 men had been sanctioned by

<sup>1</sup> Afterward successor to Lord French as Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force.

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Parliament to be raised in the United Kingdom alone. In May 1916 the Military Service Bill imposed compulsory service upon all fit men between the ages of eighteen and forty-one. This measure, said Lord Kitchener, "makes directly, and unmistakably, for equality of sacrifice in the national cause. . . . The conviction universally felt that we have engaged in a just war, and the patriotism of our people under the voluntary system, have given us a far larger army than we could ever have contemplated. This Bill will enable us to maintain its numbers in a manner and degree not hitherto possible, and thus take our fair and full share in the great conflict on the issue of which our nation, as a nation, and the future of our race depend."

It is often said that in periods of peril Great Britain invariably produces a man who will deal with the exigencies of the situation in an entirely satisfactory manner. History shows that there is a good deal of truth in the assertion, although it seems likely that the day of the 'heaven-born general' is over. Chatham, in a moment of enthusiasm, referred to Clive as such, but that was long before the introduction of machine guns, shrapnel, high-explosive shells, *minenwerfers*, armour-plate fortresses, aircraft, poisonous gas, liquid fire, and a militant German Empire. If 'the little Corporal' were to return to earth he would have to revise many of his own maxims and go back to school at Brienne. Forts in the days of the Napoleonic campaigns were puny affairs when compared with those of Liège, yet despite a magnificent resistance Brialmont's structures were soon shattered by the modern artillery hammers of Thor. Napoleon never had the extended and heavily entrenched battle-fronts of latter-day warfare, the long-drawn-out months when the use of cavalry was impossible, the advantages of reconnaissance

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by aircraft, and the disadvantages of bombardment by the same arm. Kitchener would have been the first to flatly contradict any one who was foolish enough to refer to him in terms that were applied—not altogether without reason—to the hero of Plassey. That he had a genius for organization is obvious. It stands out on almost every page of this record, and much more could be told if it were necessary to further emphasize the point. The Berlin cartoonist may depict him counting and recounting kilted recruits as they run round one of his legs so that by self-deception Gulliver Kitchener reaches a total of a million men; *Kladderadatch* may show him as a supercilious individual with a heavy moustache, a negligible forehead, and the inevitable briar pipe—he smoked cigars; but the Prussian higher command, usually no respecter of persons, had more than a sneaking regard for the late British Secretary of State for War. German generals worship blood and iron, and Kitchener was both; they despise humane qualities, and Kitchener possessed them. The combination was beyond them, it was a mystery which they feared, for the Teuton is neither a psychologist nor a successful dealer in abstractions, Doctor of Philosophy though he may be.

It is too early by perhaps half a century to hazard an opinion of the place that Lord Kitchener is likely to occupy in the record of the World War. That he will be accorded a conspicuous niche in the Valhalla of British History is certain. He deserved well of the Empire on which the sun never sets long before the Kaiser unsheathed his sword and drenched it in the blood of the innocents. Whether his fame will be added to or detracted from is a secret for later writers to reveal. His story is still in the telling. Criticism has not been silent regarding the

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part played by him in the opening phases of Armageddon, and while much that seems relevant at the moment may disappear when facts of which we are not cognizant are revealed, it must be remembered that Napoleon, Nelson, Wellington, Cromwell, and all other great commanders are famous not because they never made mistakes but because they succeeded in spite of them. To expect to find in Kitchener a man who never erred is to anticipate the impossible and to deprive him of excellent company. We shall have occasion to refer to a few of these adverse opinions, and perhaps to agree with some of them in the light of available information, but as the whole of the evidence is not before us it is obvious that no final verdict can be given. Historians of the future will command material not yet available which will allow of justice being done in many doubtful indictments. At present we may, at all events, claim for Kitchener that nothing can take from him the credit of the conquest of the Sudan, the final victories of the South African War, and his truly wonderful work as a creator not of a single army but of armies numbering millions of men. We detract nothing from the patriotism of the nation by frankly admitting that Kitchener's name had much to do with the gathering of Great and Greater Britain's mighty host.

That Kitchener neither minimized the strength of the Central Powers nor the possibility of the war extending over several years is evident in his speeches in the House of Lords, although it may be that at first he somewhat under-estimated the reserves of the enemy. Exactly why he called up comparatively few men at a time and on several occasions altered the physical standard required of recruits are problems which future historians may be able to solve. At present no explanation can be given.

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Although Great Britain only undertook to send 160,000 men to the Continent, the war had not been raging for more than a few weeks before it became abundantly evident that if we were to render sufficient aid to our Allies that force would have to be multiplied many times. With the exception of a tiny strip of territory, the whole of Belgium and of Northern France, with their industries, their coal-fields, and their railways, was in the grip of the Huns. As a guarantor of Belgian neutrality, in which pact traitorous Germany had also been a partner, we had no right to expect our Allies to 'do their bit' and ours as well, even though the whole pressure of the mighty British Navy were exercised—a condition which was not in effect for many months. There was, of course, the difficulty of training and equipping the men. Germany had been a standing menace to the peace of the world for several years, and a wise Government would have been forewarned and forearmed, but political considerations had stood in the way of efficient preparation. In November 1908 Lord Roberts moved in the House of Lords that the defence of the United Kingdom necessitated immediate attention, and in May 1913, after he had led a futile crusade on behalf of universal training, the last Commander-in-Chief of the British Army boldly came forward and said that Germany was preparing for war with Great Britain and that "we ought to be getting ready."<sup>1</sup> The warnings went for nothing, but the nation now remembers them. However lax the Government may have been in the past, Lord Kitchener's concern was with the present and the future. How far his words

<sup>1</sup> I have dealt at length with this noble soldier's crusade in chapter xx of *The Story of Lord Roberts*, a companion volume to the present work.



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weighed in the Cabinet, or what his counsel was, we have no means of knowing. All we are certain of is that appeal after appeal was made for men and more or less adequately responded to ; that the patriots who joined the colours contained a far greater proportion of skilled men than the War Office could afford to spare from factories and works that supplied or were capable of supplying munitions of war ; that married men preponderated over the single, despite Kitchener's preference for the latter ; that as campaign after campaign started, either as a result of Germany's intrigues or of our slow, if more honest, diplomacy, the Cabinet still clung to what was known as Voluntaryism, although often enough the greatest pressure was brought to bear on recruits by their employers and the recruiting sergeants ; that the task of raising men for the Army was taken out of the hands of the Secretary of State for War and placed in those of Lord Derby, with results by no means entirely satisfactory ; and that after nearly two years of war Compulsion was eventually forced on the Government by the stern facts of the military situation, backed up by a strong body of public opinion.

That Lord Kitchener was to some extent responsible for the official secrecy regarding the conduct of the war seems probable. At first the general belief that ' K. of K. ' did not deem it politic to give much information as to the position of affairs at the front was regarded as sufficient excuse for its non-appearance. There came a time, however, when many people were lulled into a false sense of security, although they were met by the paradox of ' No news is good news ' and the most urgent appeals for more men. The British Army disappeared from the newspapers for days at a time. The bi-weekly report from Sir John French started well but ended badly ; it was

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issued with bewildering irregularity. Before the coming of the Coalition Ministry this lack of information was voiced in Parliament by several members of the Commons and of the Peers. Several of these subsequently joined what came to be termed the Cabinet of All the Talents; but their mouths were then sealed. They became "as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth." "Any Government which tries to ride this country in blinkers," said Mr Austen Chamberlain before he became an oligarchist, "will never get the best out of its mount." Drawing on his own experience as a Press censor during the South African War, Lord Derby gave it as his opinion that "it would be perfectly proper to allow accredited correspondents of the leading newspapers to be attached to the Headquarters. A more honourable lot of men cannot be found. The other day an account of the battle of Neuve Chapelle by an anonymous correspondent appeared in the newspapers, and I venture to say that that report has brought in more recruits than any speech which any Minister of the Crown has made."<sup>1</sup> To the weather expert the articles of 'Eye-witness' were doubtless of interest. Even the semi-official *Westminster Gazette* was at last compelled to issue a dignified protest: "The position as regards information is worse now than it was at the beginning of the war, and that after endless promises of fuller statements."<sup>2</sup> Speaking of England in 1855, Cavour said that "disasters and defeats, instead of shaking her confidence, had never failed to encourage her to make new efforts and new sacrifices." It was usually found that when things were bad recruiting was good. Exactly why German wireless news, often enough false,

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Oldham, 22nd April, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> 24th May, 1916.

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was allowed to be published must remain a mystery. The French certainly did not find that military necessity prevented them from issuing frequent official and semi-official *communiqués*. In a somewhat cryptic passage Kitchener volunteered the information that General Joffre "is the man responsible in this and every other matter connected with the operations of the Army in the field."<sup>1</sup> This, however, was said in November 1914, and did not necessarily apply in 1916.

It appears evident from a passage in Sir John French's dispatch dated the 2nd February, 1915, dealing with the fight round La Bassée, that the Commander-in-Chief was by no means in accord with the policy of semi-secrecy obtaining in Government circles. "I regard it as most unfortunate," he wrote, "that circumstances have prevented any account of many splendid instances of courage and endurance, in the face of almost unparalleled hardships and fatigue in war, coming regularly to the knowledge of the public." Sir Ian Hamilton's dispatch of the 20th May, 1915, which dealt with events up to the 4th of that month, and included a vivid description of the magnificent bravery of the troops at Gallipoli Landing, was not published until the 7th of the following July, while Sir Charles Dobell's dispatch of the 1st March, 1916, detailing the Cameroon Campaign from the 27th September, 1914, until the conquest of the colony, was only issued as a supplement to *The London Gazette* of the 31st May, 1916.

Perhaps the most amazing confession of all regarding the censorship was made by Lord Chancellor Buckmaster on the 8rd November, 1915. "I am not," he confessed, "revealing any Cabinet secret when I say that since I have been a member of the Cabinet I have not received

<sup>1</sup> Speech in the House of Lords, 26th November, 1914.

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information in regard to any of the past events of the war beyond the information that has been made public in the Press. It is not true to say that the Government are suppressing things. Officially I know nothing beyond what has appeared in the newspapers."

Kitchener seems to have assumed the rôle of Atlas, either voluntarily or at the request of the Cabinet. At the beginning of the war we find him finishing one day's work and starting another by receiving at midnight several Ministers and military officers and remaining in conclave with them until 2 A.M., visiting the Premier at 9 A.M., hurrying from Downing Street to confer with Mr Winston Churchill and Lord Haldane, attending a long sitting of the Cabinet, and still finding time to discharge his obligations to the War Office. Like Napoleon, he "multiplied himself by his activity." Visits to hospitals, inspections at Shorncliffe, Aldershot, Manchester, and elsewhere, attendance at funerals, visits to the Western and Italian fronts, to Gallipoli, to Greece, to Paris on several occasions, speech-making in Parliament and elsewhere, the reorganization of the London Anti-Aircraft Corps, and the oversight of an enormous correspondence and of half a dozen campaigns were crowded into Kitchener's twenty-two months of office as Secretary of State for War.

The list is not complete. Extraneous duties fell to his lot. The policy of the Government regarding alien enemies in the United Kingdom was the cause of a great deal of dissatisfaction on the part of the public. The sinking of the *Lusitania* intensified this irritation, and a demand for concentrated control was made in the House of Commons. Mr M'Kenna, who was then Home Secretary, defended his department by asserting that "From the very first the responsibility of determining whether aliens

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should be interned or not had rested with Lord Kitchener, and down to October the sole responsibility for the release of interned prisoners rested also with the War Office. But it was obvious that representations might be made as to the harmlessness of individuals, and that police inquiries into their characters would be necessary before they could be set free. So much use was made of the police in consequence that it was found convenient to leave the last word for a time with the Home Secretary, but on 11th November Lord Kitchener decided that he must resume the responsibility for the release of prisoners, as he had the sole responsibility of their internment.”<sup>1</sup>

If the evidence of Colonel Repington, the able military correspondent of *The Times*, is to be believed—and so far as the present writer is aware it has not been contradicted—“For fourteen months the General Staff at Army Headquarters in London was relegated to obscurity. It was entirely overshadowed by Lord Kitchener. Last month a most gratifying resurrection of the General Staff took place. . . . Thus we have at last restored the orthodox machinery for conducting war. . . .”<sup>2</sup> This appeared on the day following Mr Asquith’s announcement of the formation of a War Committee of the Cabinet, and on the 24th November the Premier told the House of Commons that “Various steps have been taken by additions to *personnel* and redistribution of functions to increase the effectiveness and to make more constant use of the advice of the General Staff. It is not desirable to give detailed particulars.” Referring to the same matter a week or two later, when dealing with the co-operation of the Allied Staffs, Colonel Repington noted that “On our side we

<sup>1</sup> 3rd March, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 12th November, 1915.

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possessed in our General and War Staffs the machinery necessary for advising the Government upon all matters relating to strategy and operations by sea and land, but it was not until October 1915 . . . that these Staffs were restored to their legitimate functions. . . .”<sup>1</sup> Sir Edward Carson, in dealing with the causes which led to his resignation from the Coalition Cabinet, stated that when hostilities began “Whatever military staff they had at the War Office—and I am told some of them were very experienced Generals—all went off to carry on the war on the Continent, and so the staff was depleted.” While this explains a great deal, it does not take away from the fact that over a year later, when the conflict had become far more complicated, it was found possible to reinstate the General Staff. Lieutenant-General Sir William Robertson, K.C.V.O., K.C.B., D.S.O., who had risen from the ranks to Chief of the General Staff of the Expeditionary Force, was recalled from France in December 1915 to take up the duties of chief of this very important department.

In a war of such colossal magnitude, with operations extending from Europe to China, there was plenty of scope for things to go agley. Each and all of the Central Powers and the Allies blundered. Antwerp's forlorn hope, though a tiny affair compared to the tragedy of Gallipoli, was the beginning of a series of unfortunate miscalculations. Mr Winston Churchill has assured us that the project of sending a relieving army to the citadel on the Scheldt “originated with Lord Kitchener and the French Government.”<sup>2</sup> On the afternoon of the 2nd October, 1914, when plans were far advanced but not sufficiently

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 9th December, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> Speech in the House of Commons, 15th November, 1915.

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developed to make a definite promise of help possible, the Belgian Government had telegraphed that it had been decided 'practically to abandon the defence.' At midnight several British Ministers sat in conference at Lord Kitchener's house in Carlton Gardens. "It seemed," according to the then First Lord of the Admiralty, "that at the moment when aid was available everything was going to be thrown away for the sake of three or four days' continued resistance." Churchill then suggested that he should go to Antwerp "to see in what way the defence could be prolonged until either a relieving force could arrive, or the impossibility of sending a relieving force could be established." By the time the representative of the Cabinet arrived, most of the outer defences of the city had been shattered. It was arranged that King Albert should know within three days if it would be practicable to send a relieving force. If it were found impossible British troops would be sent to various points to ensure the retirement of the Belgian Field Army. Meanwhile naval brigades and naval guns were to help in the defence of Antwerp. Some 8000 men duly arrived and put up a gallant fight, but "other and more powerful considerations," to quote Sir John French, prevented the larger operation for the relief of the city from being carried out. The same authority says that "It is too early now to judge what effect the delaying, even for five or six days, of at least 60,000 Germans before Antwerp may have had upon the fortunes of the general battle to the southward. It was certainly powerful and helpful."<sup>1</sup> In his opinion the valuable assistance which the Belgian Army gave on the canal and the Yser River was the

<sup>1</sup> I have dealt with the defence of Antwerp at greater length in *Stirring Deeds of Britain's Sea-dogs* (London, 1916), chapter xiii.

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outcome of the intervention of the Naval Division. On the other hand, the garrison troops in the western part of Antwerp were unable to rejoin the main army, and it is believed that 30,000 of them were killed, captured, or compelled to enter Dutch territory. The retreat of the Belgian Army was covered by the 3rd Cavalry Division and the 7th Division under Sir Henry Rawlinson, which were diverted for the purpose during the battle of Ypres-Armentières, when France could ill afford to spare them. According to a neutral war correspondent, Churchill distinctly told the Burgomaster of Antwerp: "You needn't worry. We're going to save the city."<sup>1</sup> It is fairly evident that the fall of the Liverpool of Belgium was in no way due to remissness on the part of Lord Kitchener.

The Dardanelles Expedition was the biggest offensive campaign undertaken by Great Britain and France in the early stages of the war. As the former furnished most men and most ships, it was mainly a British enterprise. In his enthusiastic Dundee speech of the 5th June, 1915, Mr Winston Churchill, after dealing with the losses of ships and of sailors, remarked that "military operations will also be costly, but those who suppose that Lord Kitchener has embarked upon them without narrowly and carefully considering their requirements in relation to all other needs and in relation to the paramount need of our Army in France and Flanders—such people are mistaken, and not only mistaken, they are presumptuous."

Subsequent events proved that Mr Churchill was also deserving of these epithets. "The army of Sir Ian Hamilton, the fleet of Admiral de Robeck," he went on, "are separated only by a few miles from a victory such

<sup>1</sup> *Fighting in Flanders*, by E. Alexander Powell (London, 1914), p. 176.



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as this war has not yet seen. . . . I am speaking of victory in the sense of a brilliant and formidable fact, shaping the destinies of nations and shortening the duration of the war. Beyond those few miles of ridge and scrub on which our soldiers, our French comrades, our gallant Australians, and our New Zealand fellow-subjects are now battling, lie the downfall of a hostile Empire, the destruction of an enemy's fleet and army, the fall of a world-famous capital, and probably the accession of powerful allies. The struggle will be heavy, the risks numerous, the losses cruel ; but victory when it comes will make amends for all. There never was a great subsidiary operation of war in which a more complete harmony of strategic, political, and economic advantages has combined, or which stood in truer relation to the main decision which is in the central theatre. Through the Narrows of the Dardanelles and across the ridges of the Gallipoli Peninsula lie some of the shortest paths to a triumphant peace. That is all I say upon that subject this afternoon ; but later on, perhaps, when the concluding chapters in this famous story have been written, I may be allowed to return again to the subject."

The concluding chapters in this famous story have been written, and they prove once more that short cuts are often the longest way round. The initial mistake was in sending ships to fight land battles, and this form of warfare was afterward referred to in Parliament<sup>1</sup> by the same speaker as "a legitimate war gamble with stakes which we could afford to lose, for a prize of inestimable value, a prize which, in the opinion of the highest experts, there was a fair and reasonable chance of our winning, a prize which at that time could be won by no other means." In the

<sup>1</sup> 15th November, 1915.

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course of the same speech Mr Winston Churchill averred that he "asked Lord Kitchener directly whether it was understood he assumed the responsibility for the military operations, by which I meant and said I meant the measuring of the forces required to achieve success, and after he had replied in the affirmative I transferred the Naval Division on the 12th March to military command." The bombardment of the Dardanelles began at daybreak on the 3rd November, 1914; the Battle of the Landing took place on the 25th of the following April, over five months later. Yet, in the course of the speech already cited Mr Churchill acknowledged that "the essence of an attack upon the Gallipoli Peninsula was speed and vigour." Mr Asquith, when dealing with the matter a few days before,<sup>1</sup> stated that "the operation conceived was a purely naval operation. We could not afford at that time—Lord Kitchener said and we all agreed—any substantial military support; and it was therefore decided to make the attempt with the Navy and with the Navy alone." When a joint operation was decided on the *modus operandi* was left to the judgment of the commanders on the spot. The expedition, superb for the fighting of the men who took part in it, is a sorry story from every other point of view, and far from solving the whole situation in the Balkans, Bulgaria sided with Germany and Greece refrained from joining the Allies. On the morning of the 9th January, 1916, the last man of the gallant host that had stormed the heights to no purpose bade farewell to the rocky, blood-soaked neck of land that stood between the remnants of a British army and the capital of the Ottoman Empire.

The mistake, as we have said, was in bombarding the outer forts with the Fleet long before the troops had arrived.

<sup>1</sup> Speech in the House of Commons, 2nd November, 1915.

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It 'gave the game away,' to use an expressive colloquial phrase, and the Turks and their German officers were not slow to take advantage of the warning. Had the campaign started as a joint operation the Union Jack might now be waving above the domes and minarets of Constantinople. Kitchener said he was not ready, and cannot be blamed for naval errors.

The most serious criticism of Lord Kitchener's administration was made with regard to the shortage of munitions. This matter was brought to a head by an interview with Sir John French that appeared in a number of French and English newspapers during March 1915, in which he particularly emphasized the need for material. "It is a rough war, this," he remarked, "but the problem it sets is a comparatively simple one—munitions, more munitions, always more munitions. That is the essential question, the governing condition of all progress, of every leap forward." The vigorous offensive at Neuve Chapelle, when the British losses totalled 12,811 in killed, wounded, and missing, had accentuated the need of high-explosive shells, for all the wire entanglements were not cut away before the advance of the infantry, although the curtain of shrapnel fire proved extremely valuable. In his dispatch the Commander-in-Chief said that the main cause of the long duration of present-day battles was the power of defence conferred by modern weapons, and they could only be shortened and the loss of life reduced "if attacks can be supported by the most efficient and powerful force of artillery available; but an almost unlimited supply of ammunition is necessary and a most liberal discretionary power as to its use must be given to the Artillery Commanders."<sup>1</sup> The difficulty of securing

<sup>1</sup> *Naval and Military Despatches*, Part II, p. 185.

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an adequate supply of material had been broached by Lord Kitchener in Parliament so long back as the second month of the war,<sup>1</sup> and on the 15th March, 1915, three days after the afore-mentioned battle, he averred that the same problem was causing him "very serious anxiety," and that "We have, unfortunately, found that the output is not only not equal to our necessities, but does not fulfil our expectations."

On the 20th April Mr Asquith stated at a meeting at Newcastle that he had seen "a statement the other day that the operations of war, not only of our Army but of our Allies, were being crippled, or at any rate hampered, by our failure to provide the necessary ammunition. There is not a word of truth in that statement, which is the more mischievous because, if it were believed, it is calculated to dishearten our troops, to discourage our Allies, and to stimulate the hopes and activities of our enemies." On the following day Mr Lloyd George informed Parliament, with the authority of the Secretary of State for War, that "In the fortnight's battle around Neuve Chapelle almost as much ammunition was spent by our artillery as during the whole of the Boer War," that between 2500 and 3000 firms were making munitions, and that "The production of high explosives has been placed on a footing which relieves us of all anxiety and enables us also largely to supply our Allies." Less than a week later Lord Derby asked Kitchener whether he wanted more munitions. "His answer was a tactful one," said Lord Derby, "and he did not put himself in opposition to anybody. What he told me was this—and I have his authority for quoting it—that the demand for munitions of war is absolutely unlimited, and it is not confined to

<sup>1</sup> 17th September, 1914.

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shells, but is for small ammunition, and the more he gets the more men he will be able to put into the field. Reading between the lines, you will see that optimism as regards the output of munitions of war is not as justifiable as some people would have us believe.”<sup>1</sup> Referring to the paragraph in Mr Asquith’s speech quoted above, Lord Derby remarked that it was “absolutely and perfectly opposed to the facts.” The lack of munitions was accentuated by the result of the British attack on the 9th May in the districts of Fromelles and Richebourg. “We found the enemy much more strongly posted than we expected,” wrote the Military Correspondent of *The Times*, who was then in Northern France. “We had not sufficient high explosive to level his parapets to the ground after the French practice, and when our infantry gallantly stormed the trenches, as they did in both attacks, they found a garrison undismayed, many entanglements still intact, and Maxims on all sides ready to pour in streams of bullets. . . . The want of an unlimited supply of high explosive was a fatal bar to our success.”<sup>2</sup> Speaking in the House of Lords on the 18th of the same month with reference to this comment, Lord Kitchener told his hearers that he was “confident that, in the very near future, we shall be in a satisfactory position with regard to the supply of these shells to the Army at the front.”

The issue was further complicated in the following July. Lord Haldane then said that a committee which included Lord Kitchener, Mr Lloyd George, Mr Churchill, Mr M’Kenna, and other Cabinet Ministers had their attention called in October 1914 “to the urgent necessity to increase the supply of munitions,” that orders were placed with

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Manchester, 27th April, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 14th May, 1915.

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the great munition manufacturers, which they undertook, "and which if they had been carried out would have placed this country in a position of tremendous advantage, and we should have had a very large surplus. . . . But there arose difficulties between labour and capital which confounded all the calculations of the munition manufacturers, and that is the source of the trouble to-day." <sup>1</sup> This version of what took place was afterward referred to by Mr Lloyd George as "incomplete and in some material respects inaccurate." The Prime Minister was asked to give a day for the discussion of the causes which led to the shortage. This was refused. The case must therefore remain *sub judice*, for the evidence is at present a bundle of contradictions. An important outcome of the controversy was the appointment of Mr Lloyd George to the new post of Minister of Munitions in the Coalition Government of June 1915. Just previous to this, on his Majesty's fiftieth birthday, the King had honoured Lord Kitchener and also the Order by bestowing on him the Knighthood of the Garter. The confidence placed in him by the Head of the State had already been shown in a particularly charming and characteristic way, by the granting of York House, St James's Palace, as his London residence.

<sup>1</sup> In an address to the members of the National Liberal Club upon "The Duty of the Nation in this Crisis," delivered the 5th July, 1915.

## CHAPTER XIX

### The Last Post

*"We have to stick it out and do our very best until the release comes."*—KITCHENER

EARLY in July 1915 Kitchener and Mr Asquith, with Lord Crewe and Mr Balfour, attended a conference of Allied Ministers at Calais. At the conclusion of the meeting the Secretary of State for War and the Premier left for the British General Headquarters, where they were the guests of Sir John French for nearly three days. This was the first time that the Field-Marshal had seen the Army which he had raised in the field, and he made abundant use of the brief period he could spare from his exacting duties at Whitehall. The most extraordinary enthusiasm was shown by the troops, for Tommy Atkins, regular or volunteer, was his sincere and whole-hearted admirer. With Mr Asquith he made an extended tour of the northern half of the territory occupied by the British, including the ruined town of Ypres. "As our two visitors, with a small staff of officers,"<sup>1</sup> says an eye-witness with General Headquarters, "picked their way along the rubbish-strewn street amidst the ruined houses, the sun came out and lit up the scene of desolation in all its horror. . . . Leaving Ypres and its

<sup>1</sup> Colonels Hankey and Fitzgerald, the latter of whom was a member of Lord Kitchener's party on H.M.S. *Hampshire* and was drowned.

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Cloth Hall, still grand in its desolation and a monument of German Kultur, the party was able to watch some of our guns which were actually engaged in repelling the German counter-attack being made that afternoon to the north of the town. Some more troops were then seen working at entrenchments. A move was then made north into the Belgian area, when his Majesty the King of the Belgians met the party, which was conducted round some of the Belgian defences. After a short halt at one or two points, and the inspection of a battalion, a return was made to General Headquarters.

"On Thursday," continues the narrator, "Lord Kitchener alone made an extended tour round the southern half of the Army, Mr Asquith being occupied at General Headquarters and in visiting one of the Army Headquarters. Lord Kitchener's itinerary was a long one, and did not allow of much time for inspections. His first visit was to the Indian Cavalry, which was formed up in mass to receive him. This large body of mounted troops formed a very fine picture with the curved sabres and lances of the sowars flashing in the sun. Then followed a long run through miles of roads lined on each side with infantry, who presented arms and cheered lustily as he passed slowly between their ranks in an open car. In this way, with occasional halts to meet corps, divisional and brigade commanders, the whole morning was passed. The troops all looked very cheerful and well, and evidently pleased. Luckily most of the route was over *pavé* roads, so that there was not much dust.

"After reaching the southern boundary of the British sphere Lord Kitchener continued his journey to the Headquarters of one of the French armies, where he was most cordially received by the Army Commander. He was



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shown round some of the French defences, by which he was much interested and impressed."

The two distinguished visitors returned to London on the 8th. A few hours later the welcome news came to hand that a territory of 820,000 square miles had passed from the rule of Potsdam. At 2 A.M. on the morning of the 9th General Botha accepted Governor Seitz's surrender of all the German forces in South-West Africa, thus bringing a skilfully conducted campaign to an end. This is how Lord Kitchener greeted his former enemy: "I am anxious to express to you on behalf of the Army our sincere admiration of the masterly conduct by you of the campaign in German South-West Africa and to offer you and your force our cordial congratulations on your brilliant victory. We shall warmly welcome you and the South Africans who can come over to join us." The philosophy of British Empire-making is summed up in this simple, straightforward, and whole-hearted message.

An award which must have deeply affected its recipient came to Kitchener during the course of this eventful month. It was belated, and therefore probably appreciated the more. Kitchener had long since passed the time when distinctions held much attraction for him, but this was a tribute to early work, and a man never forgets his youth. The Council of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society granted the Livingstone Gold Medal to him in recognition of his work on the survey of Palestine and as director of the survey of Cyprus, and of his signal services to the State.

In the following August Kitchener spent two days with the French Army at the Western Front, and then inspected the British Expeditionary Force. In addition to having long interviews with M. Millerand and General Joffre,

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he passed along the entire front of the French Army from left to right, and was thus able to realize the plan on which the trenches were constructed, and to study the defensive positions, artillery, and general organization.<sup>1</sup>

Much had been happening in the Balkan States. There military men and politicians had anxiously been watching the giant struggle in Gallipoli. Indeed, one of the objects of the expedition was to secure the goodwill, and possibly the armed assistance, of Greece, Bulgaria, and Rumania. Serbia was already with the Allies; she had been fighting Austria since July 1914. On the 7th July, 1915, the Serbian Minister in London had suggested that assistance might be sent to his country, but the military authorities decided that troops could not be spared. Ten days later Bulgaria, the Central Powers, and Turkey signed a secret treaty by which certain parts of Serbia and Greece were to be given to Bulgaria for her participation in the war. The seeming indecision of Ferdinand, who was both timid and crafty—a not unusual combination—had evidently been a ruse to gain time and to watch the turn of events. The Russian retreat in Galicia, and the failure of Britain and France to pierce the Dardanelles, weighed heavily in the scales against the Allies. The conquests of Germany, however temporary they might be, was the evidence of things seen and not merely promised.

On the 21st September, when the Germans were preparing to hack their way through Serbia as they had already done in grief-stricken Belgium, M. Eleutherios Venizelos, the Greek Premier, invited France and Great Britain to send 150,000 troops to Salonika. Although the official order for Bulgaria to mobilize was dated the 23rd September, the marshalling of troops had begun

<sup>1</sup> Official Note, Paris, 18th August, 1915.

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previous to the sending of the telegram from Athens. King Constantine signed his mobilization decree on the same day. The proposals of M. Venizelos were accepted on the 24th, and Great Britain and France set about their preparations. Rumania was already in arms, but her sword remained in the scabbard. Bulgaria informed Great Britain that she had "no aggressive intentions whatever."<sup>1</sup> On the 27th Serbia told the British Government that she was anxious to forestall the new friend of the Teutonic League in taking the offensive. Diplomacy, travelling a slow and tortuous road, was against this, and the optimists who still hoped that Bulgaria would be won to the side of the Allies gained a temporary triumph. Sir Edward Grey announced that "as long as the Bulgarian attitude is unaggressive, there should be no disturbance of friendly relations. If, on the other hand, the Bulgarian mobilization were to result in Bulgaria assuming an aggressive attitude on the side of our enemies, we are prepared to give to our friends in the Balkans all the support in our power in the manner that would be most welcome to them, in concert with our Allies, without reserve and without qualification." The Foreign Secretary afterward explained that these words were meant in a political and not in a military sense. Yet it was fairly obvious that Serbia had done with politics and was in urgent need of the practical help that men, munitions, and guns could alone render at this crisis in her affairs. In dealing with the causes that led to his resignation from the Cabinet, Sir Edward Carson stated that when he was a party to the policy outlined by Sir Edward Grey in his speech mentioned above, he "believed that

<sup>1</sup> Sir Edward Grey in the House of Commons, 28th September, 1915.

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our military advisers never would have allowed us to make that declaration unless we had actual preparations and plans which were ready when the moment came to enable us to strike and assist our gallant little Ally in the field of battle."

On the 2nd October M. Venizelos agreed to the landing of the Allied troops under "a merely formal protest," to quote Mr Asquith's words. Forty-eight hours later the Greek Premier told the Chambers that Greece must abide by her treaty with Serbia to go to her assistance in the event of Bulgarian aggression. To this the King would not agree, and M. Venizelos was obliged to resign. The following day saw the beginning of the fierce Austro-German attack on Serbia from the north, and on the 7th French and British troops began disembarking at Salonika, which Greece had taken and occupied in November 1912, during the first Balkan War, and retained at the conclusion of hostilities, when she entered into an agreement allowing Serbia the full use of the port.<sup>1</sup>

The British General Staff did not support an expedition to Salonika, and on the 11th, when Bulgaria began to attack Serbia, the War Council decided that it was too late to help the gallant little country which had already borne so much of the heat and burden of the day. Four days later Britain declared war against the perjured State, and on the anniversary of Trafalgar Dedeagatch was treated to a forcible reminder of the power of the British Navy.

On the 29th October the thick-set figure of Joffre was noticed in London, and doubtless as a sequel Mr Asquith told the House on the 2nd November, when referring to the attacks of Germany, Austria, and Bulgaria, that we

<sup>1</sup> See *Serbia: her People, History, and Aspirations*, by Woislav M. Petrovitch (London, 1915), chapters xi. and xii.

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could not "allow Serbia to become the prey of this sinister and nefarious combination."

Heroics, however, availed nothing. A little handful of sailors under Admiral Troubridge at Belgrade did wonderful work with armed launches against the Austrian monitors and helped to keep the enemy at bay with their naval guns, but neither British nor Serbian could hope to stand the terrific bombardment by heavy artillery that heralded the fall of Belgrade, which was entered on the 8th October. The peasant soldiery in the north, who had repelled the invaders again and again, would have been superhuman had they been able to resist the sledgehammer blows of the mighty converging columns of their foes. They fought with superb courage, but they fought in vain. Serbia was overrun, and the stricken host slowly retreated over their own inhospitable, snow-covered mountains from the country for which they had sacrificed their all.

Tragedy, unmaking kingdoms, creates kings. Belgium in her agony gave birth to a crowned hero; Serbia at her crucifixion found in her aged and almost sightless ruler an apotheosis of herself. Mark and learn what Peter said: "I believe in the liberty of Serbia as I believe in God. It was the dream of my youth. It was for that I fought throughout manhood. It has become the faith of the twilight of my life. I live only to see Serbia free. I pray that God may let me live until the day of redemption of my people. On that day I am ready to die, if the Lord wills. I have struggled a great deal in my life, and am tired, bruised, and broken from it; but I will see—I shall see—this triumph. I shall not die before the victory of my country."

The eastern frontier was left to the care of the Allies.

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Two French divisions, totalling perhaps 20,000 men, and the British 10th Division, numbering some 13,000 men, under Lieut.-General Sir Bryan Mahon, arrived at Salonika from Gallipoli. The task of the former was to protect the railway between Krivolak and Veles and to ensure communication with the Serbian Army; that of the latter to maintain the position from Salonika to Krivolak and to support the French right.<sup>1</sup> General Sarrail pushed forward in the hope that he might join hands with the Serbians somewhere in the region of Uskub, on the Vardar, and force back the enemy. The difficulties of the task were enormous, for there was only a single railway track to Doiran, and from thence pack-animals, motors, and wagons had to be used to transport material. Aided by the British, Sarrail secured the commanding height of Kara Hodjali, and held it with spirit against the Bulgarians. A determined attempt was made to reach the Serbians, but all too soon the offensive gave place to the defensive and retirement, and beyond the fact that the operations of the Allies secured the retreat of the Uskub detachment the agony and bloody sweat of these brave men went for nothing. On the 6th December and following days the British, after holding their position to ensure the withdrawal of the French left, found themselves hopelessly outnumbered by the attacking Bulgarian forces, and began to retreat in the direction of Salonika, fighting rearguard actions at some cost to themselves but at greater cost to the enemy. When the full account of the wonderful stand made by the 10th (Irish) Division on the 11th between Lake Doiran and the Vardar comes to be written it will be found that the units of the Dublin Fusiliers, the

<sup>1</sup> Sir Charles Monro's dispatch, Headquarters, First Army, France, 6th March, 1916.

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Munster Fusiliers, and the Connaught Rangers deserved well of the division, their regiments, and their Allies. Their losses were estimated at 1500, and those of the Bulgars at 8000 dead and wounded. The Allies crossed into Greek territory and took up a strong position which covered the main routes to their base and enabled the troops that were being landed there to secure their ground. Before the end of the year five British and three French divisions were at Salonika, which was put in a thorough state of defence, with Sarraill in command. The Greek generals withdrew their troops farther to the east, and according to Sir Charles Monro "showed a disposition to meet our demands in a reasonable and friendly spirit."

Toward the end of the first week of November the United Kingdom was agog with rumours regarding Lord Kitchener. Newspapers announced that it was understood he had resigned. This was officially denied, but was followed by the statement of one prominent London evening journal that "the public may take it for granted that Lord Kitchener will not return to the War Office." Political scribes suggested that he was on the verge of taking up important military duties in the Near East. The Press Bureau circulated the information that his absence was temporary, that he was "on public duty," and that Mr Asquith was carrying on the work at the War Office. The Prime Minister's partiality for that particular post was again remarked upon, and it was audibly whispered that Mr Asquith at Whitehall portended change, as it had done before. *The Globe* repeated the statement that Kitchener had resigned despite the official denial, and was suspended.

At the historic Guildhall banquet Mr Asquith shed a glimmer of light on the subject. "Lord Kitchener," he said, "went in the first instance to Paris, where he engaged

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in friendly and, I believe, fruitful consultation with the Prime Minister and the War Minister of France in the new Government which has recently been formed in that Allied country. From Paris Lord Kitchener proceeded to—What shall I say? I know that I shall be told that, after the fashion of this perverse and misguided Government, I am concealing the truth and hoodwinking the nation—Lord Kitchener proceeded on his mission. He has gone—only, as we all hope and trust, for a very short time—but he has gone to survey at close quarters and in intimate confidence with our representatives and those of our Allies the whole situation in the Eastern theatre of the war. He takes with him the complete confidence of his colleagues and, I believe, of his countrymen. He takes with him the authority of a great soldier and a great administrator; and added to this the special faculties of insight and judgment which he derives from an unrivalled knowledge and experience of the Near East.”

After leaving Paris Kitchener proceeded to Mudros to discuss the question of the evacuation of Gallipoli with General Sir Charles Monro and the various commanders. In the middle of the previous month he had wired to Sir Ian Hamilton with reference to such a possibility, which was “unthinkable” to the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces. Hamilton was recalled on the 16th. Monro was appointed as his successor, and pending his arrival Lieut.-General Sir William Birdwood, who had won high praise from officers and men alike, took temporary charge of the operations. On reaching Gallipoli Monro came to the conclusion that an early evacuation was eminently desirable, and reported to that effect. The General was expected to give “a fresh, unbiased opinion” on the question, and he had done so, but the



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Cabinet was still unwilling to abandon a campaign on which so much blood and treasure had been expended. At the same time it was apparently no more inclined to send more men than it had been in the previous August, when Hamilton had cabled to Kitchener for large reinforcements to enable him to bring the undertaking to "a quick, victorious decision." Hamilton's divisions were then 45,000 under establishment, and certain battalions had been so reduced that they were withdrawn from the fighting line. To assist him in his attack on the 21st August he sent for 5000 Yeomanry from Egypt.

It is believed that Lord Kitchener was not favourably disposed to withdrawal, but what he saw certainly changed this opinion, presuming that he held it. He made a thorough inspection of the fighting area of Cape Helles, Anzac, and Suvla Bay, evidence of which is furnished by a snapshot of him as he stood leaning with his left elbow on the sandbags at the top of one of the parapets, a small shrub alone screening his head.

Captain C. E. W. Bean, the official Press representative with the Australian forces, furnishes an interesting little account of Kitchener at Anzac. "Very few even of the senior officers," he writes, "had any previous knowledge of the visit, but the moment he stepped ashore the men 'tumbled' to it and a remarkable scene occurred. How the knowledge could spread so far I do not know, but by the time Lord Kitchener had reached the end of the pier the men were tumbling like rabbits out of every dug-out on the hillside, jumping over obstacles and making straight for the beach.

"Australians do not cheer readily, but as Lord Kitchener, accompanied by Generals Birdwood and Maxwell and others, passed the crowd along the beach the men

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spontaneously called for cheers and gave them again and again. It was purely a soldiers' welcome.

"Lord Kitchener many times turned to the men. 'His Majesty the King has asked me to tell you how splendidly he thinks you have done,' he said. 'You have done excellently well. Better,' he added, 'even than I thought you would.'

"Without any pause Lord Kitchener went straight up the steepest road in the Anzac area direct from the beach to the highest point in the old Anzac area, and in less than ten minutes one could see the tall figure stalking by the side of the little figure which all Anzac knows so well,<sup>1</sup> right at the top of the steep ascent. Most persons arrive at that summit breathless, but Lord Kitchener went straight up without a halt. He went through the front firing trench on the neck where the Light Horse had charged. The troops could scarcely be restrained from cheering him, although the Turks in places were within twenty yards, and the Anzac Staff had some moments of considerable anxiety at certain awkward corners all too visible to the Turkish snipers."

What he saw and heard had an important sequel. There was to be no continuance of winter operations. Kitchener gave the word for evacuation, but unfortunately it could not be carried out without elaborate preparation. Nature fought with the Turks during the last days of the French and British occupation of the peninsula. A hurricane that lasted half a week, filling that treacherous coast and its long, stretching trenches with wind and rain, snow and frost, exacted a toll of thousands; some dead, many ill. On the 20th December, 1915, Anzac and Suvla were evacuated, "an achievement without parallel in

<sup>1</sup> General Birdwood.

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the annals of war," as Monro very rightly termed it. The Turks had not the faintest notion that anything untoward had happened, and continued to bombard and fusillade empty positions. By the 9th of January, 1916, the last Briton and the last Frenchman had left that land of melancholy, which a thousand and one fights and a multitude of brave deeds had failed to redeem. Those who remained lay stiff and cold, shrouded in imperishable glory. They numbered over 25,000 officers and men.

On the 20th November, 1915, Kitchener arrived at Athens for the purpose of having an audience of King Constantine and paying a visit to M. Skouloudis, the Premier. His party included Sir Henry MacMahon, High Commissioner for Egypt, General Sir John Maxwell, commanding the British forces in Egypt, General Howe, and Colonel Fitzgerald, his military secretary. After motoring to the British Legation, Kitchener proceeded to the palace, where he stayed for over an hour, and in the afternoon had a long interview with the Premier. We do not know what took place, but the Athens representative of *The Times* telegraphed that he had learnt "that these conversations have had the good result of warranting more favourable views with regard to the prospect of a settlement of the question of the treatment of Allied troops who may cross over from Serbian into Greek territory." In an interview which the King afterward accorded to a special correspondent of the same newspaper his Majesty expressed his gratitude for the missions of Lord Kitchener and M. Denys Cochin. "With these two gentlemen the King has fully discussed the situation, and he trusts that many clouds may be dispersed by their visit."

At Rome on the 26th November Kitchener exchanged views with Signor Salandra, the Italian Premier, and

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various military authorities, and in the afternoon left for the Italian General Headquarters at the front, where he was received by King Victor Emmanuel. His stay was short, for he arrived in Milan on the 28th, and spent a couple of hours sight-seeing. He then left for Turin and Paris. In the French capital he lunched with the President, and attended an important War Council at which M. Poincaré, M. Briand, and Generals Joffre, Gallieni, and Jilinsky<sup>1</sup> were present. Early in the following month Kitchener took part in a long conference of French and British Ministers and some of their military and naval advisers at Calais. The meeting occupied three and a half hours.

Another campaign that went awry was the Mesopotamian expedition. Its programme, as outlined by the Premier, was "to secure the neutrality of the Arabs, to safeguard our interests in the Persian Gulf, to protect the oil-fields, and generally to maintain the authority of our flag in the East." Offensive operations under the direction of the Indian Government had begun on the 7th November, 1914, when the Turkish fort of Fao, at the entrance to the Shatt-al-Arab,<sup>2</sup> was bombarded by a British gunboat and the village occupied by British and Indian troops. Following the arrival of the remainder of the contingent an engagement with troops from Basra took place on the swampy plain and in the date-groves of Sahil on the 17th. Although the British losses were somewhat heavy the enemy was routed. The battle had such an excellent effect that Basra, the potential terminus of the Imperial Ottoman Bagdad Railway on which Germany has set such great store, a port of considerable importance, and the centre of Turkish influence, was

<sup>1</sup> Aide-de-camp to the Tsar.

<sup>2</sup> The river formed by the union of the Tigris and Euphrates.

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evacuated by the Turks. It was occupied by the British on the 28rd and a Military Governor appointed. After a series of stubborn fights Kurna, at the junction of the Euphrates and the Tigris and nearly fifty miles above Basra, surrendered unconditionally on the 9th of the following month. Here and at Mezera, on the opposite bank of the latter river, strong entrenched camps were formed. With the arrival of reinforcements from India Lieut.-General Sir John Nixon took command, and Bagdad, the old capital of the Caliphate, became the object of the expedition. It is unnecessary to detail the particulars that are known of the advance of the forces between the end of the year and the middle of June 1915. It must suffice to say that after the brilliant action at Shaiba on the 12th-14th April, which was a blow aimed at Basra by the Turks, the enemy beat a speedy retreat ; that Amara fell on the 3rd June and the safety of the oil-pipe line which was of so much importance was secured ; that following the battle known as Kut-el-Amara the town of that name was entered on the 29th September. "I do not think," said Mr Asquith, "that in the whole course of the war there has been a series of operations more carefully contrived, more brilliantly conducted, and with a better prospect of success."

In a telegram sent by General Townshend, who was in charge of the operations at Kut, to the General Staff on the 3rd October from Azizieh, where he had halted in his pursuit of the enemy, "he expressed the opinion," writes the Commander-in-Chief of the expedition, "that if the Government desired to occupy Baghdad, two divisions, or one closely supported by another, exclusive of communication troops, were necessary." Shortly afterward Townshend was informed that another division would be

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sent, and he was reinforced by Nixon with a brigade of infantry, two regiments of cavalry, a horse battery, and the addition of H.M.S. *Firefly* to his naval flotilla. When it was decided to send two divisions from France, Major-General Kemball, of the General Staff, paid visits by aeroplane to Kut on the 19th October and the 5th November to discuss Townshend's plans for the advance on Bagdad, and on his return "gave no inkling that General Townshend was in doubt as to the adequacy of the force that would be under his command." Referring to his telegram of the 3rd October, the gallant defender of the then besieged town wired on the 7th April, 1916: "I consider this pointed out risk sufficiently and was all, in my opinion, that a subordinate commander could do. It would be contrary to discipline to protest in the full sense and meaning of the word." In the same communication he frankly admitted that he told Nixon previous to the battle of Kut that he hoped to rout the Turks completely, and, if he saw the chance, to "take the risk of pushing on into Bagdad on the heels of the rout: but," he added, "I halted at Azizieh on finding that the Turks had rallied at Ctesiphon in formidable numbers. The knowledge I had gained of the reinforcements the Turks had sent to Mesopotamia and the experience of the Kut battle made it clear to me that, compared with those at Kurna, I had very different troops to deal with, and that it was essential for me to be cautious, and that in order to take Bagdad at least an Army Corps would be required. This I have mentioned to show my readiness to accept every responsibility for my actions, and that in the first instance I myself had contemplated getting into Bagdad."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Papers relating to Major-General C. V. F. Townshend's Appreciation of the Position after the Battle of Kut-el-Amara* (Cd. 8253).

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Much remains to be revealed regarding Townshend's subsequent operations. We know that he advanced toward Ctesiphon, where the Turks had taken up a strong and heavily entrenched position astride the Tigris covering the approach to Bagdad, which is some eighteen miles to the north-west. On the 22nd November Townshend attacked the centre and north-east flank of the position on the left bank of the Tigris, secured over 1800 prisoners and eight guns, captured the front position and penetrated the second line, and finally had to abandon the pieces and fall back to the first position owing to heavy losses. On the following night the enemy received reinforcements, yet despite a heavy attack which they made on the British line they were repulsed. Further assistance came to the Turks on the 25th, and as Townshend was nine miles from his shipping and source of supplies at Lajj, he withdrew to that place under cover of night, and later to Azizieh. While continuing his retirement in the direction of Kut the enemy attacked him at Umm-el-Tubal on the 1st December, but by means of a brilliant counter-attack made by the cavalry brigade Townshend was able to extricate himself and to reach Kut-el-Amara on the 3rd.<sup>1</sup> Referring in his dispatch to the troops who took part in these operations, Sir John Nixon says: "They proved themselves to be soldiers of the finest quality." Of Townshend he writes: "I have a very high opinion indeed of this officer's capabilities as a commander of troops in the field. He was tried very highly, not only at the battle of Ctesiphon, but more especially during the retirement that ensued. Untiring, resourceful, and

<sup>1</sup> Sir John Nixon's dispatch of 17th January, 1916. Nixon retired on account of ill-health in January 1916 and was succeeded by General Lake.

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even more cheerful as the outlook grew darker he possesses, in my opinion, very special qualifications as a commander. He is imperturbable under the heaviest fire and his judgment is undisturbed."

Forty-eight hours later the siege of Kut-el-Amara began ; it ended on the 29th April, 1916, after a superb defence of 148 days, " conducted with a gallantry and fortitude that will be for ever memorable." There were times when it was feared that the tragedy of Khartoum might be repeated in the squalid town in the Chaldean desert, but the Turks showed no such ferocity. The surrender of Townshend and his 9000 officers and men when they were on the verge of starvation is no reflection on their heroism, and the fate of the many unsuccessful attempts made to succour them is no disgrace to the relieving forces, which on more than one occasion were within a few miles of the besieged garrison. Stores and millstones to grind corn were delivered by aeroplane, facts which compare favourably with the romance of Sinbad the Sailor, so inseparably associated with Bagdad. Townshend capitulated to the Tigris rather than to the Turks.

Was Lord Kitchener involved in the order that sent Townshend to advance against Bagdad, despite the presence of four Turkish divisions at Ctesiphon ? The Secretary of State for India told the House that " All the military authorities, the General Officer Commanding in Mesopotamia, the military authorities in India, and the military authorities at home, concurred in the orders for the advance toward Bagdad with the troops which were then at the disposal of the General Officer in command." <sup>1</sup> If there was ever a case of " all the King's men " being

<sup>1</sup> Speech by Mr Chamberlain in the House of Commons, 22nd March, 1916.



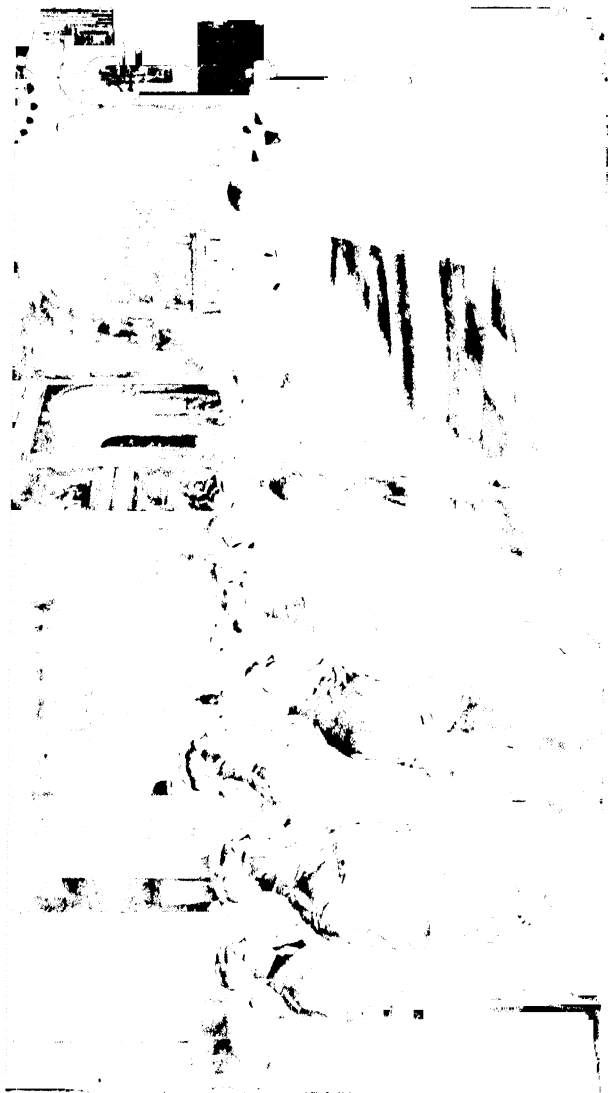
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involved this was one. *All* the authorities obviously included Lord Kitchener, but it is difficult to understand how it came about that a Field-Marshal who had dealt personally with campaigns in countries of long distances and many difficulties favoured so rash an enterprise. In the middle of February 1916 the conduct of operations in Mesopotamia was transferred from the India Office to the War Office, which subsequently supervised all branches of the operations in conjunction with the Government of India and its military department.<sup>1</sup>

In one of his final speeches in the House of Lords the Secretary of State for War paid a glowing tribute to Townshend and his troops, "whose dogged determination and splendid courage have earned for them so honourable a record." He attributed the failure to relieve the beleaguered force to "the adverse elements alone."

On the last day of May 1916, after considerable time had been spent in the Commons in criticizing the administration of the Secretary of State for War, it was announced that Lord Kitchener would be glad to see any members at the War Office on the following Friday, the 2nd June, and to answer questions. The meeting was private, but an official statement was issued that Lord Kitchener reviewed certain aspects of the war, replied to recent criticisms of Army administration, and also answered a number of questions put to him. All unknowing, it was his farewell of Parliament. No one looking at the tall, masterful soldier, with the broad jaw of the fighter and the healthy complexion of a vigorous man, could have guessed that within a few brief hours he would have passed from the life militant to the life triumphant.

<sup>1</sup> Lord Islington in the House of Lords, 30th March, 1916.



‘ The Last Post ’ in St Paul’s Cathedral  
S. Legg



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Destiny was kind in the three days that remained to him. He was at work in London on the following Saturday morning ; and he was fond of work. In the afternoon he motored to Broome Hall, and spent the remaining hours of the day with his pictures and his china ; and he was fond of his hobbies. He was up early next morning, wandering about the broad acres of his domain, and when his old friends Lieutenant-Colonel Fitzgerald and Major Humphrey Leggett joined him he still went on walking ; for he was fond of his friends and of his estate. In the afternoon he returned to London, and caught a train to the north of Scotland, where he was to set out on an important mission to Russia ; and he was fond of travel.

A stiff gale was blowing when H.M.S. *Hampshire*, with Kitchener and his staff on board, put out to sea on Monday night, the date 5th June, 1916, the time 7 P.M. or thereabouts. An hour later good folk on the western shore of Pomona, one of the Orkneys, saw a warship on fire and what appeared to be four boats put off from her. Later a dozen men on a raft were flung up on the rocky shore by the boiling surf, but Kitchener was not one of them. "We have to stick it out and do our very best until the release comes," he had written to Lord Desborough in a time of sorrow. "I only wish I could do more, or, rather, that what I do was better work." The release had come.

"Of those who left the ship and have survived," said Leading Seaman Rogerson, a survivor from the *Hampshire*, "I was the one who saw Lord Kitchener last. He went down with the ship. He did not leave her."

When the news came through, and the men and women of the Empire read Admiral Sir John Jellicoe's brief particulars of the tragedy, they were staggered by the suddenness of it. The term may savour of melodrama,

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but it is adequate. Soldiers betrayed emotion and were not ashamed ; politicians, priests, and kings spoke of his great qualities and splendid achievements ; critics forgot what he had failed to do and thought only of the tasks he had so magnificently accomplished. If he made mistakes he made them honestly ; and a great man who sometimes fails has greater affinity with ordinary humanity than he whose life-story is told as though he never erred.

A Field-Marshal drowned at sea ! Yes, and what more fitting sepulchre for Britain's greatest ? In this catastrophe it was fated that the sister services should be united, for silently as he had lived and toiled the great soldier disappeared for ever with some 700 gallant seamen. The deadly mine which so suddenly destroyed the great ship and its precious freight had brought peace to a devoted and tireless servant of his country who all his days neither slumbered nor slept. More it could not do. The great achievements of Lord Kitchener remain a heritage to his countrymen, who will cherish them in pride and thankfulness and record them for the inspiration of those who shall come after.

A solemn service attended by the King and Queen and eminent representatives of the fighting forces, the Houses of Parliament and the nation was held at St Paul's Cathedral on the 18th June, 1916. There were no mortal remains to be deposited under the vast dome, where sleep the mighty Nelson, the iron Wellington, and so many of Lord Kitchener's peers. But surely the indomitable spirit was present in that place when, with bowed heads, the great congregation gave ear to the bugles as they sounded the solemn notes of the "Last Post," the soldier's farewell.

*Render thanks to the Giver,  
England, for, thy son.*





