THE RIVER WAR
AN HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF
THE RECONQUEST OF THE SOUDAN

BY
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AUTHOR OF 'THE STORY OF THE MALAKAND FIELD FORCE, 1897'

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IN TWO VOLUMES
VOLUME II.

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
NEW YORK AND BOMBAY
1899

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Soudan precautions. Surviving thousands struggled away towards Omdurman and swelled the broad stream of fugitives upon whose flank the 21st Lancers already hung vengefully. Yakub and the defenders of the Black Flag disdained to fly, and perished where they stood, beneath the holy ensign, so that when their conquerors reached the spot the dark folds of the banner waved only over the dead.

While all this was taking place—for events were moving at speed—the 1st British Brigade was still doubling across the rear of Maxwell and Lewis to fill the gap between the latter and MacDonald. As they had wheeled round, the regiments gained on each other according to their proximity to the pivot flank. The brigade assumed a formation which may be described as an échelon of columns of route, with the Lincolns, who were actually the pivot regiment, leading. By the time that the right of Lewis’s brigade was reached and the British had begun to deploy, it was evident that the Khalifa’s attack was broken and that his force was in full retreat. In the near foreground the Arab dead lay thickly. Crowds of fugitives were trooping off in the distance. The Black Flag alone waved defiantly over the corpses of its defenders. In the front of the brigade the fight was over. But those who looked away to the right saw a different spectacle.* What appeared to be an entirely new army was coming down from the Kerreri Hills. While the soldiers looked and wondered, fresh orders arrived. A mounted officer galloped up. There was a report that terrible events were happening in the dust

* Map, 'Omdurman: the Attack on MacDonald,' to face page 156.
and smoke to the northward. The spearmen had closed with MacDonald's brigade; were crumpling his line from the flank; had already broken it. Such were the rumours. The orders were more precise. The nearest regiment—the Lincolnshire—was to hurry to MacDonald's threatened flank to meet the attack. The rest of the brigade was to change front half right, and remain in support. The Lincolnshires, breathless but elated, forthwith started off again at the double. They began to traverse the rear of MacDonald's brigade, dimly conscious of rapid movements by its battalions, and to the sound of tremendous independent firing, which did not, however, prevent them from hearing the venomous hiss of bullets.

Had the Khalifa's attack been simultaneous with that which was now developed, the position of MacDonald's brigade must have been almost hopeless. In the actual event it was one of extreme peril. The attack in his front was weakening every minute, but the far more formidable attack on his right rear grew stronger and nearer in inverse ratio. Both attacks must be met. The moment was critical; the danger near. All depended on MacDonald, and that officer, who by valour and conduct in war had won his way from the rank of a private soldier to the command of a brigade, and will doubtless obtain still higher employment, was equal to the emergency.

To meet the Khalifa's attack he had arranged his force facing south-west, with three battalions in line and the fourth held back in column of companies in rear
of the right flank—an inverted L-shaped formation.* As the attack from the south-west gradually weakened and the attack from the north-west continually increased, he broke off his battalions and batteries from the longer side of the L and transferred them to the shorter. He timed these movements so accurately that each face of his brigade was able to exactly sustain the attacks of the enemy. As soon as the Khalifa’s force began to waver he ordered the XIth Soudanese and a battery on his left to move across the angle in which the brigade was formed, and deploy along the shorter face to meet the impending onslaught of Ali-Wad-Helu. Perceiving this, the IXth Soudanese, who were the regiment in column on the right of the original front, wheeled to the right from column into line without waiting for orders, so that two battalions faced towards the Khalifa and two towards the fresh attack. By this time it was clear that the Khalifa was practically repulsed, and MacDonald ordered the Xth Soudanese and another battery to change front and prolong the line of the IXth and XIth. He then moved the 2nd Egyptians diagonally to their right front, so as to close the gap at the angle between their line and that of the three other battalions. These difficult manoeuvres were carried out under a heavy fire, which in twenty minutes caused over 120 casualties in the four battalions—exclusive of the losses in the artillery batteries—and in the face of the determined attacks of an enemy who outnumbered the troops by seven to one and had only to close with them to be victorious. Amid the roar of the firing and

* Plan, 'Omdurman: MacDonald's Change of Front,' to face page 160.
the dust, smoke, and confusion of the change of front, the General found time to summon the officers of the IXth Soudanese around him, rebuked them for having wheeled into line in anticipation of his order, and requested them to drill more steadily in brigade.

The three Soudanese battalions were now confronted with the whole fury of the Dervish attack from Kerrarri. The bravery of the blacks was no less conspicuous than the wildness of their musketry. They evinced an extraordinary excitement—firing their rifles without any attempt to sight or aim, and only anxious to pull the trigger, re-load, and pull it again. In vain the British officers strove to calm their impulsive soldiers. In vain they called upon them by name, or, taking their rifles from them, adjusted the sights themselves. The independent firing was utterly beyond control. Soon the ammunition began to be exhausted, and the soldiers turned round clamouring for more cartridges, which their officers doled out to them by twos and threes in the hopes of steadying them. It was useless. They fired them all off and clamoured for more. Meanwhile, although suffering fearfully from the close and accurate fire of the three artillery batteries and eight Maxim guns, and to a less extent from the random firing of the Soudanese, the Dervishes drew nearer in thousands, and it seemed certain that there would be an actual collision. The valiant blacks prepared themselves with delight to meet the shock, notwithstanding the overwhelming numbers of the enemy. Scarcely three rounds per man remained throughout the brigade. The batteries opened a rapid fire of case-shot. Still the
Dervishes advanced, and the survivors of their first wave of assault were scarcely a hundred yards away. Behind them both Green flags pressed forward over enormous masses of armed humanity, rolling on as they now believed to victory.

At this moment the Lincoln Regiment began to come up. As they doubled along the rear of the Xth Soudanese, the blacks looked round. In the days when British regiments were known by numbers, each of which had a glorious significance, the Lincolnshire was called the 10th Foot. Officers and men still cherish the famous number, although they are labelled with a shoddy, modern territorial title; and throughout the war they called the Xth Soudanese 'our black battalion'—to the intense delight of those military savages. The Soudanese had for the most part ceased firing, having come to the end of their ammunition, and were waiting with fixed bayonets for the hand-to-hand conflict which now seemed inevitable. Suddenly they saw the English regiment—their own English regiment—coming to their help. All along the line they turned a succession of grinning faces, and emitted wild cries of satisfaction and of welcome. But the English were intent on business. As soon as the leading company—Captain Maxwell's—cleared the right of MacDonald's brigade, they formed line, and opened an independent fire obliquely across the front of the Soudanese. Groups of Dervishes in twos and threes were then within a hundred yards. The great masses were within 300 yards. The independent firing lasted two

12 Captain R. P. Maxwell, Lincolnshire Regiment.
minutes, during which the whole regiment deployed. Its effect was to clear away the leading groups of Arabs. The deployment having been accomplished with the loss of a dozen men, including Colonel Sloggett, who fell shot through the breast while attending to the wounded, section volleys were ordered. With excellent discipline the independent firing was instantly stopped, and the battalion began with machine-like regularity to carry out the principles of modern musketry, for which their training had efficiently prepared them and their rifles were admirably suited. They fired on an average sixty rounds per man, and finally repulsed the attack.

The Dervishes were weak in cavalry, and had scarcely 2,000 horsemen on the field. About 400 of these, mostly the personal retainers of the various Emirs, were formed into an irregular regiment and attached to the flag of Ali-Wad-Helu. Now when these horsemen perceived that there was no more hope of victory, they arranged themselves in a solid mass and charged the left of MacDonald's brigade. The distance was about 500 yards, and, wild as was the firing of the Soudanese, it was evident that they could not possibly succeed. Nevertheless, many carrying no weapon in their hands, and all urging their horses to their utmost speed, they rode unflinchingly to certain death. All were killed and fell as they entered the zone of fire—three, twenty, fifty, two hundred, sixty, thirty, five and one out beyond them all—a brown smear across the sandy plain. A few riderless horses alone broke through the ranks of the infantry.

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The valour of their deed has been discounted by those who have told the tale. 'Mad fanaticism' is the depreciating comment of their conquerors. I hold this to be a cruel injustice. Nor can he be a very brave man who will not credit them with a nobler motive, and believe that they died to clear their honour from the stain of defeat. Why should we regard as madness in the savage what would be sublime in civilised men? For I hope that if evil days should come upon our own country, and the last army which a collapsing Empire could interpose between London and the invader were dissolving in rout and ruin, that there would be some—even in these modern days—who would not care to accustom themselves to a new order of things and tamely survive the disaster.

After the failure of the attack from Kerreeri the whole Anglo-Egyptian army advanced westward, in a line of bayonets and artillery nearly two miles long, and drove the Dervishes before them into the deserts, so that they could by no means rally or re-form. The Egyptian cavalry, who had returned along the river, formed line on the right of the infantry in readiness to pursue. At half-past eleven Sir H. Kitchener shut up his glasses, and, remarking that he thought the enemy had been given 'a good dusting,' gave the order for the brigades to resume their interrupted march on Omdurman—a movement which was possible, now that the forces in the plain were beaten. The Brigadiers thereupon stopped the firing, massed their commands in convenient formations, and turned again towards the south and the city. The Lincolnshire Regiment remained detached as a rearguard.
Meanwhile the great Dervish army, which had advanced at sunrise in hope and courage, fled in utter rout, pursued by the Egyptian cavalry, harried by the 21st Lancers, and leaving more than 9,000 warriors dead and even greater numbers wounded behind them.

Thus ended the battle of Omdurman—the most signal triumph ever gained by the arms of science over barbarians. Within the space of five hours the strongest and best-armed savage army yet arrayed against a modern European Power had been destroyed and dispersed, with hardly any difficulty, comparatively small risk, and insignificant loss to the victors.
THE RIVER WAR

BRITISH DIVISION

British Officers and Others ranking as Officers

Killed (3)

Capt. G. Caldecott, 1st Royal Warwickshire Regiment.
Hon. H. Howard, 21st Lancers: correspondent of the TIMES.

Wounded (11)

Col. F. Rhodes, D.S.O.: correspondent of the TIMES
Lieut.-Col. Sloggett, R.A.M.C.
Capt. Hon. W. L. Bagot, 1st Grenadier Guards
Capt. S. S. S. Clarke, 1st Cameron Highlanders
Lieut. and Adj. A. M. Pirie, 21st Lancers
Lieut. J. C. Brinton, 2nd Life Guards: attached 21st Lancers
Lieut. C. E. Etches, 1st Royal Warwickshire Regiment
Lieut. A. D. Nicholson, 1st Cameron Highlanders
Lieut. Hon. R. F. Molyneux, Royal Horse Guards: attached 21st Lancers
Lieut. C. S. Nesham, 21st Lancers
Mr. C. Williams, correspondent of the DAILY CHRONICLE

Summary of Loss in the Division

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Killed</th>
<th>Wounded</th>
<th>Total number of Casualties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Officers</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st Lancers</td>
<td>1 *</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Grenadier Guards</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Northumberland Fusiliers</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>1st Royal Warwick Regiment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Lincolnshire Regiment</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Lancashire Fusiliers</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>1st Seaforth Highlanders</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Cameron Highlanders</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Rifle Brigade</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detachment Army Serv. Corps.</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Detachment R. Army Med. Corps</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondents</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 'Attached.'
† Including two 'attached.'

* The curious fatality which attends 'attached' officers, and which was much remarked on the Indian Frontier, receives a singular demonstration in the case of those attached to the 21st Lancers.
THE FALL OF THE CITY

EGYPTIAN ARMY

British Officers and N.C. Officer

Wounded (6)

Capt. C. H. de Rougemont, R.A.
Capt. N. M. Smyth, Intelligence Staff
Lieut. H. A. Micklem, R.E.

Lieut. H. C. B. Hopkinson, Camel Corps
Lieut. C. F. S. Vandeleur, D.S.O.
Staff-Sergt. Hooper

Native Ranks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Killed</td>
<td>Wounded</td>
<td>Killed</td>
<td>Wounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavalry</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camel Corps</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Egyptians</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd &quot;</td>
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<td>3rd &quot;</td>
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<td>4th &quot;</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>7th &quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>8th &quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>IXth Soudanese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Xth &quot;</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIth &quot;</td>
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<td>XIIth &quot;</td>
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<td>XIIIth &quot;</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>XIVth &quot;</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>15th Egyptians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>17th &quot;</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>18th &quot;</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>273</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General total: 19 British officers and 463 men.5

5 The proportion of killed to wounded in the Egyptian army is curiously low, and quite at variance with average results. It will be seen that almost half those killed in the army were in the 21st Lancers.
The following approximate statistics of the expenditure of ammunition may be of technical interest:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>British Division (Lee-Metford rifle)</th>
<th>172,000 rounds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian Army (Martini-Henry rifle):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacDonald’s Brigade</td>
<td>160,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxwell’s</td>
<td>75,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis’s</td>
<td>37,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>272,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Artillery (case and shrapnel)        | 3,500 shell |
| Maxim guns, British                 | 37,000      |
| " Egyptian                           | 30,000      |
| **Total**                            | **444,000** |

| Maxim guns, British                 | 37,000      |
| " Egyptian                           | 30,000      |
| **Total**                            | **67,000**  |

The Dervish losses were, from computations made on the field and corrected at a later date, ascertained to be 9,700 killed, and wounded variously estimated from 10,000 to 16,000. There were, besides, 5,000 prisoners.

6. The two British batteries together fired 800 shell. The 4th battery of the Egyptian army fired 913 shell. This is probably a record for a single battery in one day.
admit that, though the world may be much more prosperous, it can scarcely be so merry.

Another sight, besides the captured city, drew curious spectators. On the 5th of September, three days after the fight, I rode with Lord Tullibardine of the Egyptian cavalry, to examine the scene of battle.* Our road lay by the khor whereat the victorious army had watered in the afternoon of the 2nd, and thence across the sandy, rock-strewn plain to the southern slopes of Surgham Hill. And so we came at once on to the ground over which the 21st Lancers had charged. Its peculiar formation was the more apparent at a second view. As we looked from the spot where we had wheeled into line and begun to gallop, it was scarcely possible to believe that an extensive khor ran right across what appeared to be smooth and unobstructed plain. An advance of a hundred yards revealed the trap, and displayed a long ditch with steeply sloping rocky sides, about four feet in depth and perhaps twenty feet wide. In this trench lay a dozen bodies of Dervishes, half-a-dozen dead donkeys, and a litter of goat-skin water-bottles, Dervish saddles, and broken weapons. The level ground beyond was sparsely spotted with corpses. Some had been buried where they fell by their friends in the city, and their places were indicated by little mounds of lighter-coloured earth. Half-a-dozen horses, stripped of saddles and bridles, made a brown jumble in the background. In the centre a red and white lance-pennon, flying from a stick, marked the grave of the fallen Lancers. And that was all. Yet

* Map, 'The Dervish Dead,' to face page 224.
the place may be remarkable. At any rate, a great many officers of all regiments and arms had been to visit it.

We rode on. We climbed the ridge of Surgham Hill, following almost the same route as that of the 'White Flag men' three days previously. At the crest of the ridge the village and the outline of the zeriba came into sight, and it was evident that we had now reached the spot where the Dervish column had come into the artillery fire. All over the ground—on the average three yards apart—were dead men, clad in the white and patched smocks of faithful Dervishes. Three days of burning sun had done their work. The bodies were swollen to almost gigantic proportions. Twice as large as living men, they appeared in every sense monstrous. The more advanced corpses hardly resembled human beings, but rather great bladders such as natives use to float down the Nile on. Frightful gashes scarred their limbs, and great black stains, once crimson, covered their garments. The sight was appalling. The smell redoubled the horror.

We galloped on. A strong, hot wind blew from the west across the great plain and hurried foul and tainted to the river. Keeping to windward of the thickest clusters, we picked our way, and the story of the fight unfolded itself. Here was where the artillery had opened on the swarming masses. Men had fallen in little groups of five or six to each shell. Nearer to the zeriba—about 1,000 yards from it—the musketry had begun to tell, and the dead lay evenly scattered about—one every ten yards. Two hundred yards further the full force of the fire—artillery, Maxims, and
rifles—had burst on them. In places desperate rushes to get on at all costs had been made by devoted, fearless men. In such places the bodies lay so thickly as to hide the ground. Occasionally there were double layers of this hideous covering. Once I saw them lying three deep. In a space not exceeding a hundred yards square more than 400 corpses lay festering.

It is difficult to imagine the postures into which man, once created in the image of his Maker, had been twisted. It is not wise to try, for he who succeeds will ask himself with me: 'Can I ever forget?'

I have tried to gild war, and to solace myself for the loss of dear and gallant friends, with the thought that a soldier's death for a cause that he believes in will count for much, whatever may be beyond this world. When the soldier of a civilised Power is killed in action, his limbs are composed and his body is borne by friendly arms reverently to the grave. The wail of the fifes, the roll of the drums, the triumphant words of the Funeral Service, all divest the act of its squalor; and the spectator sympathises with, perhaps almost envies, the comrade who has found this honourable exit. But there was nothing *dulce et decorum* about the Dervish dead; nothing of the dignity of unconquerable manhood; all was filthy corruption. Yet these were as brave men as ever walked the earth. The conviction was borne in on me that their claim beyond the grave in respect of a valiant death was not less good than that which any of our countrymen could make. The thought may not be original; it may happily be untrue; it seemed certainly most unwelcome.
The incidents of the battle might be traced by the lines and patches of the slain. Here was where Mac-
Donald's brigade, the three artillery batteries, and eight Maxim guns had repulsed the Khalifa's attack. A
great heap of corpses lay round the spot where the Black Flag had been captured. There was where the
brigade had faced about to meet Ali-Wad-Helu and Osman Sheikh-ed-Din. There, again, was where the
Baggara cavalry had made their last splendid charge to certain death. The white-clad bodies of the men were
intermingled with the brown and bay horses, so that this part of the field looked less white-speckled than the
rest. They had ridden straight at the solid line of bayonets and in the teeth of the storm of projectiles.
Every man had galloped at full speed, and when he fell he shot many lengths in front of his horse, rolling over
and over—destroyed, not conquered, by machinery.

At such sights the triumph of victory faded on the mind, and a mournful feeling of disgust grew stronger.
All this was bad to see, but worse remained; after the dead, the wounded. The officer or soldier who
escapes from the field with a wound has a claim on his country. To the private it may mean a pension; to
the officer a gratuity, perhaps a 'mention in despatches,' certainly advancement in his profession. The
scar may even, when the sting has departed, be a source of pride—an excuse to re-tell the story. To
soothe the pain there are anaesthetics; to heal the injury the resources of science are at hand. It was
otherwise with the Dervish wounded.

There may have been wounded Dervishes among
the heaps of slain. The atmosphere forbade approach. There certainly were many scattered about the plain. We approached these cautiously and, pistol in hand, examined their condition. Lord Tullibardine had a large water-bottle. He dismounted, and gave a few drops to each till it was all gone. You must remember that this was three days after the fight, and that the sun had beaten down mercilessly all the time. Some of the wounded were very thirsty. It would have been a grateful sight to see a large bucket of clear, cool water placed before each shaking, feverish figure. That, or a nameless man with a revolver and a big bag of cartridges, would have seemed merciful. The scenes were pathetic. Where there was a shady bush four men had crawled to die. Someone had spread a rag on the thorns to increase the shade. Three of the unfortunate creatures had attained their object; the fourth survived. He was shot through
both legs. The bullet—a Martini-Henry bullet—had lodged in the right knee-cap. The whole limb was stiffened. We gave him a drink. You would not think such joy could come from a small cup of water. Tullibardine examined his injury. Presently he pulled out his knife, and after much probing and cutting extracted the bullet—with the button-hook. I have seen, and shall see perchance again, a man with a famous name worse employed.

Would the reader be further sickened with the horrors of the field? There was a man that had crawled a mile in three days, but was yet two miles from the river. He had one foot; the other remained behind. I wonder if he ever reached the water he had struggled so hard to attain! There was a man with both legs shattered; he had dragged himself along in a sitting posture, making perhaps four hundred yards a day. The extraordinary vitality of these poor wretches only prolonged their torments. So terrible were the sights and smells that the brain failed to realise the suffering and agony they proclaimed. As a man faints and his body refuses to suffer beyond a certain degree under torture, so the mind was unable to appreciate that an arrangement of line and colour lying on the ground was a human being, partly putresced but still alive. Perhaps stern Nature, more merciful than stern civilisation, lent a kindly delirium. But I must record the fact that most of the men I saw were sane and capable of feeling every pang. And meanwhile they all struggled towards the Nile, the great river of their country, without which the invaders could never have
Note: The figures represent the number of skulls counted by Capt. Burges, E.A. February 1899. This total, 7899, must be increased by at least 25% on account of the large number of bodies buried or removed by the Arabs. The total then becomes 9874, which closely approximates to the original estimate.

**BATTLE OF OMDURMAN**

"AFTER THE BATTLE"

**THE DERVISH DEAD.**

Scale: 4250 or 1.5 Inches = 1 Mile

Yards 2000

Mile 1

0

1/2

3000

2000

Open Ground

2510 Killed

Um Metraman

1640 Killed

Kerreri Hills

250'

1404 Killed

Egyptian Cavalry

The Khalifa's Attack

2175 Killed

The Frontal Attack

218 Killed

Charge of 21st Lancers

J. Suyaham 250

Bare Open Plain intersected by Flat Rhors

Kerreri

Village

66 Killed

Sunboat extricating Camel Corps

To Metemna

64 Killed

Gravel Slopes

20 Killed

Old Fort

Groups of scattered houses

Rive Nile

El Egeiga

Mokwat L

Salimi L
come upon them, but which they nevertheless did not reproach. One man had reached it and lay exhausted, but content, on the bank. Another had attained the water and had died at its brim. Let us hope he had his drink first.

All this was three days after the action. Yet on the 9th of September, when a week had passed, there were still a few wounded who had neither died nor crawled away, but continued to suffer. How had they lived? It is not possible that they could have existed so long without food and water. The women and the disarmed population of Omdurman had been busy. Many hundreds not quite helpless had dragged themselves off and died all along the line of retreat. Those who were from the country round Omdurman had succour from their relations and neighbours; but it was bad for the man who had come from far and had no friends. The women would perhaps spare him a few drops of water—enough to help him through the day—but if he were a stranger, they would do no more.

Thus it was that these painful and shocking cases occurred, and it is not easy to see how they could have been prevented. The statement that 'the wounded Dervishes received every delicacy and attention' is so utterly devoid of truth that it transcends the limits of mendacity and passes into the realms of the ridiculous. I was impatient to get back to the camp. There was nothing to be gained by dallying on the field, unless a man were anxious to become quite callous, so that no imaginable misery which could come to human flesh
would ever have moved him again. I may have written in these pages something of vengeance and of the paying of a debt. It may be that vengeance is sweet, and that the gods forbade vengeance to men because they reserved for themselves so delicious and intoxicating a drink. But no one should drain the cup to the bottom. The dregs are often filthy-tasting.

So as the haze deepened into the gloom of the night, and the uncertain outlines of the distant hills faded altogether from the view, we rode back to camp—'home to Omdurman,' and left the field of battle to its silent occupants. There they lie, those valiant warriors of a false faith and fallen domination; their only history preserved by their conquerors; their only monument, their bones—and these the drifting sand of the desert will bury in a few short years. Three days before I had seen them rise—eager, confident, resolved. The roar of their shouting had swelled like the surf on a rocky shore. The flashing of their blades had displayed their numbers, their vitality, their ferocity. They were confident in their strength, in the justice of their cause, in the support of their religion. Now only the heaps of corruption in the plain, and the fugitives dispersed and scattered in the wilderness, remained. The terrible machinery of scientific war had done its work. The Dervish host was scattered and destroyed. Their end, however, only anticipates that of the victors; for Time, which laughs at science, as science laughs at valour, will in due course contemptuously brush both combatants away.

Yet it may happen in some distant age, when a
mighty system of irrigation has changed the desolate plain of Omdurman into a fertile garden, and the mud hovels of the town have given place to the houses, the schools, and the theatres of a great metropolis, that the husbandman, turning up a skull amid the luxuriant crop, will sapiently remark: 'There was aforetime a battle here.' Thus the event will be remembered.