
DARFUR, 1916

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SUDAN NOTES AND RECORDS

Vol. XXII.

Part I.

1939

DARFUR, 1916

By J. A. Gillan, C.M.G.

I.

PROLOGUE.

THE Darfur campaign of 1916, an infinitesimal sideshow in the Great War,—out of which indeed it arose,—attracted little outside attention at the time. Its topical interest in the Sudan is long since past ; while as a chapter of history its main outlines are adequately described in Sir Harold MacMichael's "Anglo-Egyptian Sudan." Nevertheless before the last active British participant (in a minor capacity) is removed from access to archives to the realms of anecdote, it may be worth while to place on record a short narrative account of the events which led to the reinclusion of Darfur within the administrative boundaries of the Sudan.

To achieve the requisite balance in such an account between the utilisation of archival record and personal reminiscence is not easy. Too much of the first may be dry and dull. The second may be written off by the superior as irrelevant, garrulous and egotistical. If in the latter respect I offend against the high scientific standard of "Sudan Notes and Records" I ask forgiveness.

To disarm criticism I am prepared to plead guilty to devoting an amount of space disproportionate to its relative importance to the last section, "The End of Ali Dinar." But it has never been written up before and the chief actor is unlikely, even in retirement, to drop his veil of modesty. And whatever moral may be drawn from the episode it was great fun for those who took part in it—and got away

with it. Here at least the informal narrative can be the only appropriate style to describe what was "irregular warfare" in more ways than one.

II.

HISTORICAL.

For the purpose of this narrative only a short historical summary is necessary.

In the 14th and 15th centuries Arabs had already found their way into Darfur and by superior intelligence, assisted by intermarriage and a matrilinear system of succession, their progeny gradually began to acquire positions of importance. By the end of the 16th century one Suleiman "Solong" (=Arab in the Fur language) had founded an Islamic dynasty¹ which lasted, with short intermissions of non-recognition, until 1916.

Suleiman's capital was at Tura in the northern heights of Jebel Marra, but with the stabilisation and increase of the Sultanate during the 17th century the capital was moved to Tina in the eastern foothills. Already Fur conquests were extending eastwards, and by the end of the 18th century (about which time the capital was moved to El Fasher) the Fur had not only conquered most of Kordofan but their armies had even penetrated to the Nile.

The Turco-Egyptian conquest of Kordofan in 1822 reduced the Fur sultanate to the approximate eastern boundaries of today, but there it was left without serious interference until 1874 when Zubeir Pasha, after a fight with Government troops encroaching on his southern preserves, was pardoned and himself volunteered to annex Darfur in the Government's name. In this he was successful; the Fur army was defeated at Menawashi where Sultan Ibrahim Hussein was killed, and El Fasher was occupied. But meanwhile Ismail Pasha, the Governor-General, had been hurrying in from the east to prevent

(1) MacMichael. Note on the Burial Place of the Fur Sultans at Tura S.N.R.
Vol. IX No. 2.

all the spoils of war falling to Zubeir. The latter went off in indignation to Cairo to appeal, and Darfur was administered, at least in theory, as a province of the Sudan. Harun Seif el Din, a grandson of Sultan Mohammed Fadl, who had been elected to what remained of the sultanate, held out in J. Marra till 1880 when he was defeated and killed by Slatin who was then Governor of Dara, and Abdullahi Dud-banga became Sultan in name over a small remnant of loyalists. Slatin, now Governor-General of Darfur, had then to face the steadily increasing tide of Mahdist revolt and after a long resistance was compelled to surrender in December 1883.

To summarise the history of Darfur during the Mahdia I cannot do better than quote Sir Harold MacMichael.² "Chaos had followed and the last of a series of shortlived Sultans died at the hands of the Emir Zogal in 1884. On the Mahdi's death Zogal was recalled by the Khalifa and left Yusef, a son of Sultan Ibrahim, in charge. Yusef showed signs of independence and Osman Gano, the ruler of Kordofan, was sent to repress him. Yusef fled to Jebel Marra but was killed in 1888. His brother, Abu Kheirat, then declared himself Sultan and joined the revolt of Abu Gemmeiza. Soon afterwards his followers rebelled against him and put him to death. Ali Dinar, a grandson of the great Sultan Mohammed Fadl (d.1839) succeeded. He kept aloof from the dervishes, but when, on Osman Gano's death, the Emir Mahmud came to power, Ali Dinar was induced to surrender and accompanied the Emir in his terrible march of 1897 through Kordofan. He went, however, no further than Omdurman, and before the arrival of the British troops he had gone with another of the Khalifa's emirs to attack the Mek of Tegali in eastern Kordofan. When the news of the Khalifa's defeat reached him he set out for El Fasher, collecting many adherents as he went, regardless of the fact that after the battle of the Atbara the Sirdar had sent another member of the royal house of the Fur, one Ibrahim Ali, to take over Darfur. Ali Dinar outpaced and outwitted his dilatory rival, captured El Fasher from the dervishes, defeated Ibrahim and seized the throne of

(2) *The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, p. 60.

his fathers. The newly established government of the Sudan were content to let well alone on condition of his paying a nominal tribute year by year, and he was recognized officially in 1900."

For the next fifteen years Darfur maintained its virtual independence. The Sultan's relations with the Sudan Government were cold and frequently tinged with suspicion, but generally correct. In Darfur proper and among the surrounding sedentaries, Arab and black, he quickly consolidated his position save for the stubborn resistance of that doughty warrior and Government supporter,³ *feki* Senin of Kebkebia, whom he finally defeated and slew in 1909. Thence onward, whether from love or fear, his rule was undisputed.

On his borders, however, the intentions of his nominal suzerain were not Ali Dinar's only preoccupation. On the south-east the Rizeigat, though politically included in his domains, were ever a thorn in his flesh ; their attitude was alternately one of active and passive resistance to his sovereignty, and in the former they gave as much as they got on more than one occasion. The other *baggara* tribes adjusted their loyalties to the opportunities of the moment. On the west he was troubled both by the semi-independent buffer states of Masalit, Sula and Tama (to which both he and the Sultan of Wadai claimed sovereign rights) and by the steady advance of the French. Ali Dinar conquered Dar Tama and Dar Sula eventually surrendered to the French, but Dar Masalit maintained its precarious independence until the end, in virtue of which it still holds its special "charter."

Toleration of this complete *de facto* independence on the part of a tributary state, justifiable and inevitable as it was during the early years of the reoccupation, could obviously not have been continued indefinitely. The Sultan's arbitrary methods and the continued existence of slavery in his domains could not for ever be exempt from external criticism. The repercussions of Fur-Rizeigat strife on the Kordofan border might at any moment have necessitated entry into the arena. At some time the advance of the French from the West

(3) MacMichael. *The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* p. 127.

must have led to the need for coming to an agreement on the interpretation of the Anglo-French Declaration of 1899⁴ in regard to the debatable lands. And this in turn would have led to the necessity of introducing some form of control over the Sultan, or despite him, for the observance both of the terms of such agreement and of *bon voisinage* in day to day affairs.

It is interesting to speculate on the methods by which such control might have been imposed and on the consequences which might have followed in the normal course of events. Direct administration meant heavy financial commitments on an unbalanced budget; nor was it likely to be achieved by diplomatic negotiations. There are references existent to the possibility of the recognition of some form of native state under the political guidance of a Resident. And the name of the Emir Abdel Hamid was canvassed as a possible candidate for the Sultanate should Ali Dinar prove recalcitrant. No record appears to exist of the means by which it was proposed that his abdication should in such case be secured.

In the event, the echos of a European war, even before the days of wireless, were to reverberate in the ears of this African potentate in such a way as to cause him to force the Sudan Government to take summary action, and so to shape the destiny of his land in a manner conditioned by such action and by the circumstances of the period at which it was taken. A military campaign was unlikely to herald the birth of a new form of treaty state. Lack of staff and money must have precluded the establishment of the full bureaucratic machinery of the pre-war era. The resultant compromise was to be an experiment on new lines of administrative policy whose influence was to extend far beyond Darfur.

III.

DAYS OF WAITING.

I shall look at the events leading directly up to the occupation of Darfur primarily from the angle of Inspector, Nahud, supplemented

(4) Hertslet. *The Map of Africa by Treaty*, Vol. II. No. 244.

by facts which were, needless to say, not always at the time clear to, or fully appreciated by, the local official. ("Why can't these people in Khartoum make up their minds what they want to do ? !").

For all the faults of his regime Ali Dinar had on the whole been a fairly good neighbour. Official correspondence was of course conducted between him and Khartoum, where Darfur affairs mostly centred in the hands of Slatin Pasha. Locally however we used to keep up an informal and fairly friendly interchange of letters on border affairs, and many minor questions of thefts, debts and such-like were settled to mutual satisfaction.

Shortly after Turkey entered the war one sensed that the atmosphere was changing. Correspondence ceased, and it was afterwards learned that as early as February 1915 Enver Pasha had made a direct appeal to Ali Dinar to throw in his lot with Germany's Turkish and Senussi allies. A further letter from Nuri Bey in August 1915 provided additional proof of direct enemy complicity. The Gellaba of course got busy early with self-seeking intrigue and rumour. The British were evacuating the Sudan having been defeated by Germany in Europe ; Ali Dinar, "the great Moslem Sultan of the West," had only to move and the Sudan would fall on easy prey to his hosts—*etcetera ad nauseam*. The French were meanwhile advancing from the west but their position was somewhat precarious and they were being actively resisted by Bakhit Abu Risha, Sultan of Dar Sula, who now subordinated his border feud with Ali Dinar in the face of foreign aggression.

At the same time Sultan Ali had his own internal troubles and he had to move warily. His rule, as we have seen, may not have been loved but it was unquestioned by the Fur and other black tribes ; but most of his Arabs, now scenting trouble, were sitting on the fence.

The Rizeigat were on the point of open revolt and it wanted all the firmness and diplomacy of that great and astute Nazir, Musa Madibbo, to keep his tribe in hand until he should learn of the Sudan Government's intentions. Musa's pathetic appeal to the Government

to send "even one shawish" to show that he was on their side was answered in September by a loan of 300 Remington rifles with 30,000 rounds of ammunition, but he was cautioned (and faithfully obeyed the advice) not to move without orders.

The position of the Sudan Government was obviously one of great difficulty. Public security must be safeguarded, and while there was as yet no real alarm the people near the frontier were getting nervous. It was essential at all costs to prevent Ali Dinar taking the offensive. Further there were our obligations not only to Musa Madibbo but to our French allies in the west whose position might be considerably relieved by a counterstroke on our part. On the other hand the hazards of undertaking a campaign in Darfur in the conditions obtaining during the Great War could not be underestimated. Formidable enough were the difficulties in any case of transporting a force over 400 miles of more or less waterless country from railhead at El Obeid to El Fasher. (Remember that in 1915 mechanical transport was practically non-existent in the Sudan). Added to these were various even more formidable wartime factors. A reverse, even a slight one, might have incalculable consequences in the Sudan. Reinforcements in men and material were practically unobtainable. Personnel, military and civil, with a knowledge of the country was already becoming depleted. And the financial situation was not such that the addition of a large, poor and backward province to the administrative burdens of the Sudan could be viewed with relish. Everything pointed to a policy of preparation but no commitment, and this was in fact the policy adopted during the autumn of 1915.

Locally of course there was plenty to do for Bence-Pembroke⁵ and myself. Western Kordofan took a good deal of covering by two men even in those less feverish days. Darfur intelligence and preliminary preparations for a possible campaign kept us busy to say the least of it—but it was interesting, and it seemed, or we pretended it was, something a little nearer war-service. (Anyone of military

(5) R. A. Bence-Pembroke, Sudan Political Service, later Governor of Darfur

age who was tied to a colonial or equivalent administrative post through the Great War will know what that means). Cypher telegrams were, I think, the worst bane of our life, and with only a camel mail to Nahud nearly everything had to be done by wire. I remember a grim fortnight when "W" had been condemned as unsafe and a promised "F.O." had not found a "safe hand" for transit. Most of the day and a good deal of the night we spent wrestling with the intricacies of "Playfair" while gum garden petitions and camel theft cases mounted up unheard. Rumours of course were rife and they had to be sifted and intelligence reports had to be compiled. Khartoum tried to help by sending the latest and best thing in spies who was to come up as a pedlar and be known to no one except Pembroke and myself. His advent was heralded by the chief merchant coming to the Office one morning with the announcement—"The Intelligence Agent has arrived; where is he going to live?"

Water supply was likely to present one of the greatest difficulties in a campaign, and in order to augment resources as much as possible all suitable surplus *tebeldis* along the road between Nahud and the frontier were bought or hired, and filled. To this day a large clump of *tebeldis* at Wad Banda is known as "*dan Kelly*." Incidentally what impressed the local inhabitants later on far more than the first arrival of aeroplanes was their first sight of the syphoning of water from *tebeldis*. Here was a "*mekanet el Hakuma*" of some practical value!

MacMichael⁽⁶⁾ was sent up to Nahud in October as Political Officer designate in case of hostilities to study the situation and acquire local knowledge. And in passing I cannot forbear to pay a disciple's tribute to the extraordinary comprehensiveness and accuracy, as proved by future events, of the personality lists, maps, etc., which he compiled from informants of every sort (mostly ignorant and many lying) during this period. By December the betting was on a "show" and troops began to arrive. The transfrontier watering

(6) Now Sir H.A. MacMichael, K.C.M.G., D.S.O., High Commissioner for Palestine and Transjordania.

places assumed conversational disguises as Scarborough, Blackpool, etc. In January Kelly,⁷ O.C. designate, arrived and made a preliminary reconnaissance between Nahud and the frontier.

January, 1916 was in fact the decisive month. As transpired later it was then that a long rumoured consignment of arms reached Ali Dinar from the Senussi under charge of the Fezzani, Gheis Abu Koraym.⁸ How far this was the deciding factor in Ali Dinar's mind must be a matter of conjecture but it may be significant that it was then that he committed his first open act of defiance. Some little time before, a polite but firm letter had been sent to him reminding him that his tribute was overdue and advising him to send it promptly. His answer was not without its humour. I was sitting in the office one morning in January when a terrified envoy crawled in on his hands and knees, reached up to the table and placed thereon two spears and two throwing sticks inscribed with appropriate texts from the Koran relative to the doleful doom of the *kafir*. One further attempt was made to point out that while a joke might be a joke this was going too far. The reply to this, received in February, was the famous letter of defiance addressed to "The Governor of Hell in Kordofan and the Inspector of Flames at Nahud." It was clear that further negotiation was useless and that the sooner action could be taken the better. Mobilisation was completed by the end of February, and on March 8th, Sir Reginald Wingate, the Sirdar and Governor-General, arrived at Nahud to inspect and wish good luck to the Western Frontier Force.

IV.

THE FASHER CAMPAIGN.

The force mobilized at Nahud under Kelly's command was composed of between 2,000 and 3,000 of all ranks (excluding transport).

(7) Now Brigadier-General P. J. V. Kelly, C.M.G., D.S.O., late 3rd Hussars and Egyptian Army.

(8) If local rumour was correct the Senussi's faith in his potential ally's cause was not unqualified. The story was that he also sent a magic stone, with a message to the effect that if it floated the omen was good; if it sank the fates were against the Sultan. The stone was dropped in a burma and knocked the bottom out.

consisting of the following units of the Egyptian Army :—

- 2 Companies Mounted Infantry.
- 2 batteries Artillery (6 mountain guns and 2 maxims.)
- 1 mule maxim battery.
- 5 companies Camel Corps.

XIIIth Sudanese Bn.

- 2 companies XIVth Sudanese Bn.
- 2 companies Arab Bn. (now Eastern Arab Corps).
- 3 companies 4th Egyptian Bn.

Medical and departmental details.

The original scheme was for a mounted column to occupy Um Shanga, the first well centre across the border, and thence to push on to Jebel el Hilla thereby securing two adequate watering places for the concentration of the force. Further operations would be dependent on events, but the probability appeared to be that the advance on El Fasher would be postponed until the rains when a non-mechanised force could operate more easily in desert country.

The mounted column left Nahud on March 16th and entered Um Shanga on the morning of the 20th practically unopposed and to the obvious joy of the villagers. The main difficulties of the campaign —*i.e.*, water rather than enemy—were however very quickly apparent. The famous Um Shanga wells were indeed existent but were so silted up that it was obvious that the mounted column could not be watered and get on to Jebel el Hilla before the scheduled arrival of the thirsty main column. As the only alternative to the loss of prestige which would accompany even a temporary withdrawal, a risk had to be taken. The main body was held up at Wad Banda; as many of the mounted column as possible were watered on the 20th and 21st, and turned into a flying column about 300 strong which left for Jebel el Hilla at dawn of the 22nd. Jebel el Hilla was found, as was expected, to be occupied in some force, but a strength of 4 to 1 was insufficient in the face of disciplined modern fire, and the occupation



THE SIRDAR AND STAFF AT NAHUD, 10TH MARCH, 1916.

Left to Right: MIR. BESHIR BEY KAMBAL.
BIMB. MOHAMMED SHAHIN.
J. A. GILLAN (Inspector, Nahud).
LIEUT.-COL. F. F. CARROLL.
IBRAHIM BEY DIMITRI.
MAJOR F. W. L. EDWARDS.
GENERAL SIR F. R. WINGATE.
MAJOR G. S. SYMES.



KELLY AND LITTLE AT WAD BANDA, 18TH MARCH, 1916.



KENNEDY'S FORDS AT UM SHANGA, 22ND MARCH, 1916.



WARREN, HUDDLESTON, MACLAINE,
 THURBURN.
 MACMICHAEL, TAPLEY, CUMMINS,
 "THE MESS," JEBEL EL HILLA,
 APRIL, 1916.

was completed with insignificant losses on the Government side. By the 26th the whole force was encamped, according to water capacities, between Um Shanga, Jebel el Hilla and Lugud.

A lighter side to the incessant labours of watering at Um Shanga was provided on the night of the 21st by the sudden arrival out of the blue of Kennedy⁹ and Claxton¹⁰ in two "old Ford" tourers, the first cars ever to penetrate beyond Nahud. Inspired by a desire to see for himself what the possibilities were for mechanical transport Kennedy had set out and arrived within a mile or two of Jebel el Hilla before he discovered from a chance passer-by that (owing to the water difficulties described above) the army was not yet there. Discreetly he turned and came round to Um Shanga. It is interesting to speculate whether, had he progressed further, the walls of Jebel el Hilla would have fallen at the unaccustomed sound of this modern Joshua's motor horn.

Pending a decision as to major developments it was obviously desirable to extend our hold along the well line to Abiad beyond which was the long waterless stretch to El Fasher, in order both to increase our own water supply and to deny these sources to enemy forces. During the first fortnight of April therefore Burush, Um Kedada and Abiad were successively occupied with slight opposition, and it became apparent that Ali Dinar had decided not to risk (and in any case would now be unable to conduct) any major dry-season operation east of El Fasher.

The question now had to be decided as to whether, in the light of existing conditions, the further advance was to be made now or postponed till the rains as originally visualised. The position may be summarised in the words of Sir Reginald Wingate's despatch:— "The sole advantage to be gained by delay consisted in the greater certainty of success that might be afforded by the employment of a considerably larger force than was permitted by the existing (dry

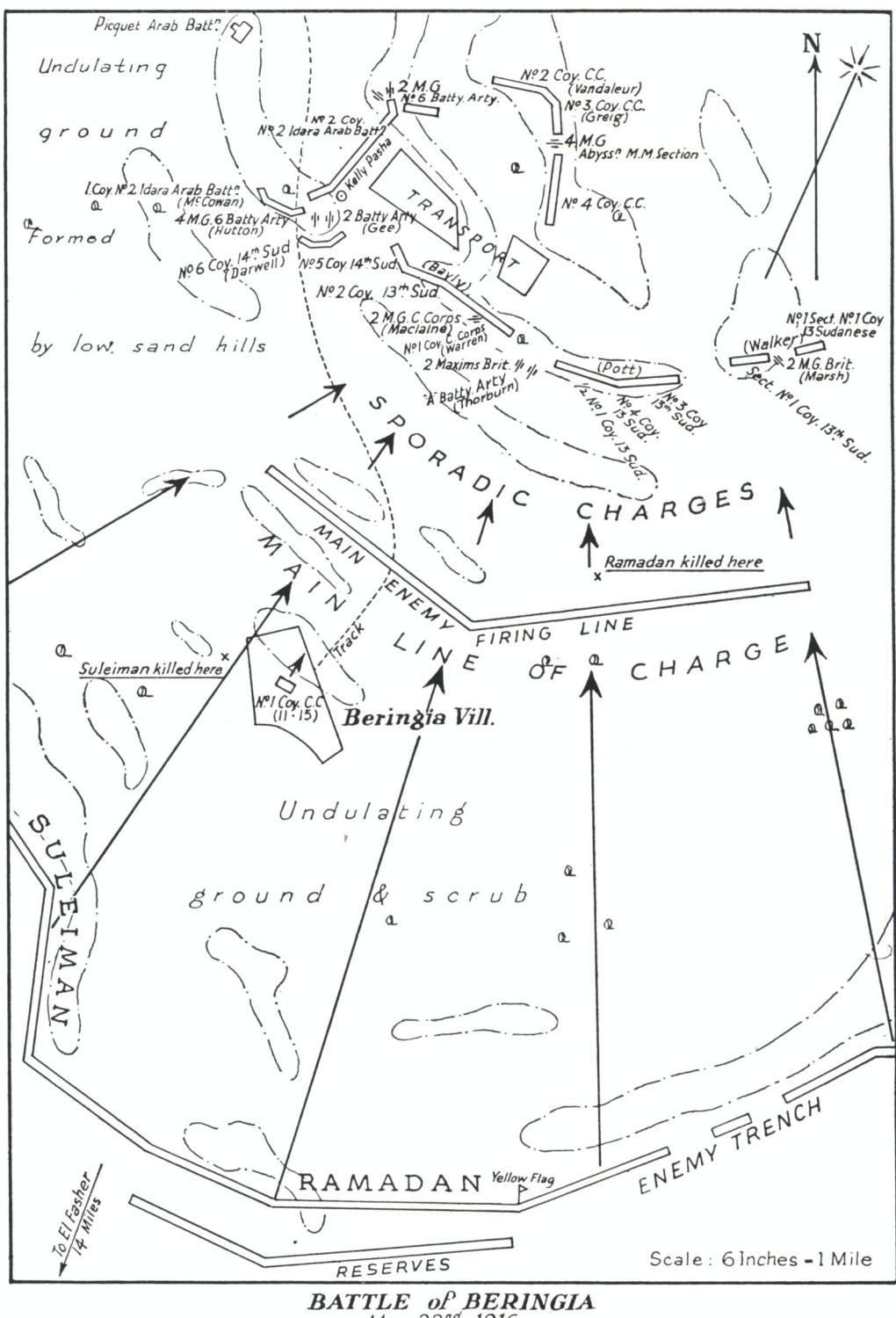
(9) The late Lt.-Col. M. R. Kennedy, C.M.G., D.S.O., Director of Works.

(10) (Temp. Capt.) H. Claxton, late P.W.D.

weather) conditions of water supply and transport. The question briefly, was whether under these existing conditions, which enabled us to pin the enemy down to his chosen place of concentration, we could bring up a sufficient force of all arms (and supply it from railhead 400 miles distant) to defeat the Sultan's army and to occupy his capital, without risk of a reverse or an inconclusive battle, which might entail a rapid and disastrous retreat. After full consideration, and with the entire concurrence of Colonel Kelly, I decided that an advance on El Fasher during the full moon in May offered a reasonable prospect of the rapid attainment of our aims, and fully justified the risks inseparable from the enterprise. My opinion was further strengthened by the knowledge, which was communicated to me shortly afterwards, that the French military authorities in Wadai would be prepared to co-operate to the full extent of the limited means immediately at their disposal, an undertaking which was very amply discharged by the French occupation of Dar Sula, which was effected soon after the entry of our troops into El Fasher."

El Fasher is 80 miles from Abiad by the direct (and then waterless) road. The longer road by Mellit was chosen in order to make use of watering facilities at that place, only 40 miles from El Fasher. Even so the 68 waterless miles from Abiad to Mellit presented no small difficulties for the transport of a large mixed force which included horses, infantry and (now) a British maxim detachment of the Warwickshire Regiment. The force was divided into a slow-moving and a mobile column which left Abiad respectively on May 15th and 16th, united en route on the 17th, and on the 18th entered Mellit which had been evacuated the evening before.

It should be mentioned here that for the final advance a detachment of Royal Flying Corps had been lent by the Egyptian Expeditionary Force and were now working in contact with Kelly's force. Considering the machines employed (B E 2 C's, already almost time-expired) and the conditions in which they had to fly they put up some astonishing performances. Proclamations had already been dropped over El Fasher. One machine (Capt. E. J. Bannatyne, R.F.C.) put in eight



hours flying (they were not supposed to fly after 10 a.m. owing to "Sudan atmospherics") on the day before the occupation of Mellit in the course of which its propellor was hit by a bullet; and I shall refer later to Lt. Slessor's¹¹ pursuit of the Sultan after the evacuation of El Fasher.

And now comes the "big battle," and I must confess that my description is derived only from records (some of which have suffered from the ravages of subsequent clerical reorganisations) and from hearsay. My own duties at this time were unfortunately only "Lines of Communication" and I did not get to El Fasher until June.

The force resumed its advance towards El Fasher on May 21st and was in touch with enemy cavalry throughout the day. On the morning of the 22nd a running fight was kept up through broken country with little view from daybreak until 10.30, when a large number of the enemy was seen at about 2,000 yards and had to be dislodged by artillery fire. It was now clear that the main enemy concentration was near at hand and the force advanced another half mile to obtain a better position and entrenched itself about half a mile north of the village of Beringia. To make what follows clearer to the reader—though it was unknown then to the staff—it should be explained that the Fur battle plan was somewhat optimistically based on the hope of ambushing the Government troops on the line of march. To this end some 2,000 yards of trench had been prepared (and was occupied) in a crescent formation, cleverly concealed on the reverse side of the sand dunes 500 to 1,000 yards west and south of Beringia village.¹²

For this reason our scouts were unable to get any clear information as to enemy numbers and Huddleston¹³ with No. 1 Coy. Camel Corps

(11) Now Group Captain J. C. Slessor, D.S.O., M.C., R.A.F.

(12) NOTE. The official sketches divide the battle into three phases. The composite sketch accompanying this article is intended to illustrate the general course of the engagement from 11.15 until just before the enemy retreat. No. 1 Coy. C.C. is shown twice—at 11.15 and on its return to the main body. The latter is shown as disposed to meet the brunt of the enemy attack, approximately at 11.30.

(13) Now Major-General H. J. Huddleston, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., M.C., late Dorsetshire Regiment, Egyptian Army and Sudan Defence Force.

was sent forward to reconnoitre. Coming under heavy fire at 11.15 in Beringia village he was forced to retire; this had the fortunate effect of drawing the enemy from his prepared position, and the whole Fur army charged for our square. To such a challenge against disciplined troops armed with modern weapons and already "dug in" there could be only one end, but there was no doubt about the gallantry of the Fur *jehadis*. On they came against a withering fire of guns, maxims and rifles, and though not a man reached the square several fell within 10 yards of it. The enemy cavalry, largely Arab, contributed little to the fight, contenting themselves with circling round in the middle distance and letting off such rifles as they possessed at an innocuous elevation. By noon the attack had begun to waver, the advance was sounded and the remnants of the Fur army scattered in every direction. Out of a force of some 3,600 they had lost 500 killed and a number of wounded which could never be estimated with any accuracy. Our casualties were 3 officers wounded; other ranks, 5 killed or died of wounds and 18 wounded.

The force advanced another 5 miles in the afternoon and camped for the night about 9 miles short of El Fasher. The square was attacked at dawn on the 23rd by a mixed force some 800 strong, but the attack was driven off without much difficulty; the advance was resumed, and El Fasher was entered without opposition at 10 a.m.

Meanwhile Ali Dinar, having seen the shattering effect of the Beringia battle on the flower of his army, and having failed to collect more than the above small force to fight even a delaying action, had decided on flight. One can well picture the scenes of confusion during the night—the hurrying and shouting; stragglers and wounded still coming in; others being driven off none too willingly to fight again at dawn; the faithful collecting what chattels they could to support themselves and their master in the wilderness; the wiser or more craven (according to viewpoint) watching for an opportunity to slip away unobserved. Early in the morning the Sultan left El Fasher for the fastnesses of the Jebel Marra foothills with a motley crowd of some 1,500 personal attendants, doggedly loyal *jehadis* and hangers-on;

swelled further almost as it left the town by a few diehards fleeing from the abortive dawn attack on the square. The confusion of the flight was worse confounded when Slessor descended from the sky a little way south of El Fasher and bombed the disordered mob. It was credibly reported that a bomb only just missed the Sultan as he was dismounting from his camel to get on a donkey. But the routed remnant of the Fur army at least scored one trick in the disastrous game—though probably without even the satisfaction of knowing it. A Remington bullet hit Slessor in the leg, and he was fortunate in being able to get back safely over the 80 odd miles to Abiad after being six hours in the air.

Much remained to be done before it could be said that Darfur was effectively occupied, but in less than 24 hours Ali Dinar's army, as a major menace to the security of the Sudan, had ceased to exist.

V.

SETTLING DOWN.

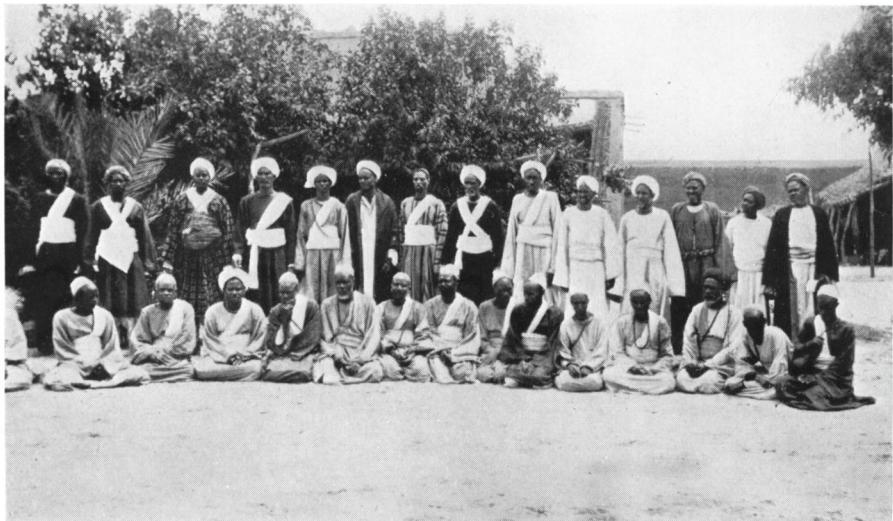
The royal palace and its precincts presented at the occupation an extraordinary contrast in barbaric splendour and equally barbaric squalor. The few hours elapsing between Ali Dinar's flight and the entry of the army were not wasted by the riff-raff who broke in and picked up anything that came handy. Fortunately however there was no arson, and the major buildings still stand as a monument to the aesthetic side of the Sultan's complex character—as anyone who has seen El Fasher will agree. But cheek by jowl with the show places was a conglomeration of complete confusion. Here was a charming little garden with shady trees and a fish pond ; round the corner were middens and every conceivable collection of filthy refuse. The centre of all was the solid but finely proportioned two-storeyed official palace from which a cloistered passage-way with spacious ante-chambers led to the chief *harim* quarters, an enormous building (still standing) with a thatched roof so smooth that it looked as if it had been finished off with a razor blade. But from the palace roof you looked down on a squalid mass of miserable *tukls* and *rakubas* huddled

together without order or plan, out of which emerged here and there the super-tukl or brick house of some *ras-mia* or court favourite. Near at hand was the anti-aircraft tower, a Heath Robinsonian structure enabling the Sultan's Remingtons and " *khash-khangs* " to reach 20 feet nearer the sky. Kelly and Little¹⁴ took up their abode in the official palace, while the *harim* building became MacMichael's joint house and office where I joined him three weeks later.

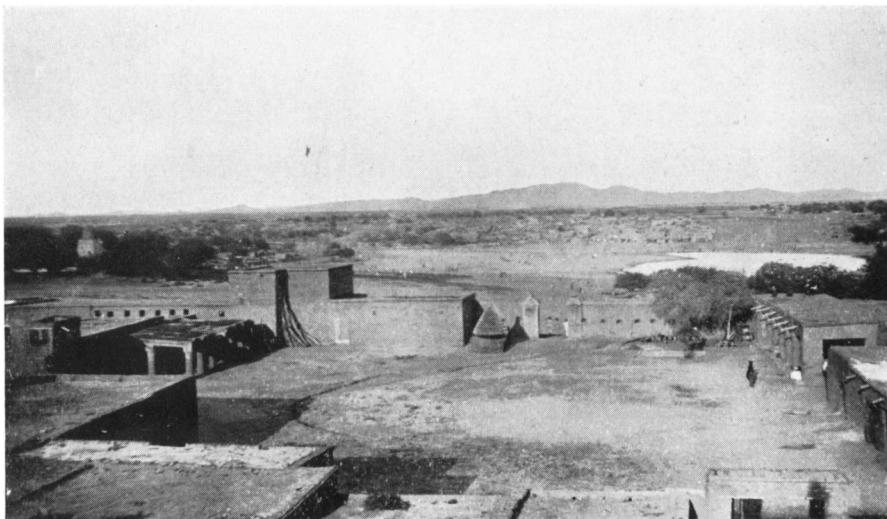
Making all allowance for factors of fear of the new conqueror and time service, there can be no doubt that the vast majority of the population of El Fasher and its neighbourhood heartily welcomed the arrival of the Government and were prepared to "cooperate"—while of course out to get anything they could from the new dispensation. The real die-hard element, such as it was, had fled with the Sultan, and the majority of the leaders of the north and centre flocked in to receive the *aman*. The mass of the people had everything to gain from the breaking of a tyrannous regime, but this did not necessarily apply to the bigger men who, under a direct administration opposed to bribery and extortion, might well lose these perquisites of office. Remembrance of the fact that such office was not infrequently the precursor to imprisonment or the gallows was unlikely to last long.

Direct rule on the Sudan pre-war model was in fact impossible with the staff then available, and both war conditions and financial stringency made any large scale reinforcements impossible; but this was by no means the primary consideration in MacMichael's mind in laying down the new policy. With the full support of the Central Government (whether of conviction or necessity) he (most certainly of conviction) made it clear from the start that local rule and justice were to issue through the natural leaders of the people; that these leaders would receive support as long as they ruled with reasonable equity and efficiency, and that they were worthy of and would receive their hire. Today this all seems very trite and obvious—hardly worthy perhaps of mention. But it was not so in 1916 when, except for a few heretical and unrecognised tendencies in Northern and Western

(14) C.S.O. now Lt.-Col. C. H. Little, D.S.O., late Somerset L.I. and Egyptian Army.



GROUP OF NOTABLES AT EL FASHER, JUNE, 1916.



EL FASHER, SUMMER, 1916, LOOKING EAST FROM PALACE ROOF



HARIM QUARTERS, EL FASHER PALACE, SUMMER, 1916.



HARIM QUARTERS, INTERIOR.

Kordofan, direct administration was the order of the day. The circumstances of the hour with the happy conjunction of the man led to Darfur providing the first major experiment in devolution in the Sudan which was destined to serve as a model on which a post-war school of thought could build up a new system of administration. It is to this policy that I chiefly attribute the extraordinary measure of loyalty which Ali Dinar's late leaders gave and have continued to give to the Government. Some have fallen by the way, and there have been setbacks inevitable to the institution of an alien regime, but taking it by and large the loyal service of the "Darfur barons" supplies an outstanding tribute to the devolutionary principle and to MacMichael's foresight. The experiment of course proceeded on rough and ready lines in its early days. The legalisation of taxation presented no difficulty but the same did not apply to the devolutionary machinery of its assessment and collection. There was no legislation on the statute book to give sanction to devolved judicial powers but fortunately this was not allowed to stand in the way; and useful experience was gained, and on the whole effective justice was administered, under a system of *sultas* scribbled on scraps of paper and thumbed by the Political Officer or his assistant. Lack of funds coupled with traditional practice led to acquiescence in the system of "eating of fines" held in such abhorrence by a later school of eastern devolutionary thought. Doubtless in principle the latter was right but the system was inevitable during a period of transition; it worked, and its abuses are often exaggerated by the purist.

There was plenty of work during these summer months of 1916 for the civil authority which consisted of MacMichael and myself, aided by Atterbury,¹⁵ as Commandant of Police and a skeleton clerical cadre of imported and local clerks. Grain was scarce and the army had to be fed. Police had to be organised on a nucleus supplied by Kordofan and the old Slavery Department. Tribal records and assessments had to be made, for which MacMichael's previously compiled "Who's Who" formed an amazingly accurate

(15) F. Atterbury, Repression of Slave Trade Department.

foundation. The Sultan's herds were scattered all over Darfur in charge of tribes and individuals to whom they were now granted on receipt of I.O.U.s. Arms and other royal possessions were still coming in—one day a dozen rifles, the next a load of ivory. I remember one day being told that the royal *dira* (chain mail) had arrived. It was produced on the verandah which served as an office and turned out to be the spring-mattress of an iron double bed, the framework of which stood as a derelict (and obsolete) reminder that our house had been the royal *harim*.

Ali Dinar's clerical staff were a surprisingly efficient body and adapted themselves wonderfully well to the requirements of their new masters. There was of course no filing system but *feki* Senussi could usually ferret out from some chest a record which was neatly written and well kept up to date. Among these was an exercise book containing lists of the Sultan's recognised offspring, one wife to a page, headed "by our lady so-and-so," with her progeny tabulated in columns of serial order, name and sex. The sons came to about 120; I forgot the number of daughters.

Another native assistant of these days worthy of mention was Mohammed El Fagir, ex-Nazir of the Kordofan Messeria. His insatiable love of intrigue had led to his expulsion from his tribe and a period of detention in Omdurman; and it was again to get him into trouble when at a later date he might, with greater restraint, have consolidated his position as *nazir* of a large group of heterogeneous elements in southern Darfur. But of his essential loyalty there could be no doubt and he proved a most valuable collaborator in explaining the aims and methods of the Government to the sheikhs and people of Darfur in these early days.

The rains of 1916 were good, and after recent years of bad rains and unrest the people were glad to devote themselves to what looked like being a good harvest. In the north and centre peace reigned and the administration was settling down as rapidly as circumstances allowed. But the south was still in a ferment. Ali Dinar was at large beyond Jebel Marra with a force which, though of no great

military strength, was a focus for malcontents. In the south-west Musa Madibbo was firmly holding his Rizeigat under control in the name of the Government. Elsewhere in the south chaos reigned, and in particular the Beni Helba horsemen under Omar Gamil—ex-cavalry leader, now brigand in chief—were looting and kidnapping far and wide. The local Fur were sitting on the fence, and an uncomfortable one at that. Clearly the north had to be consolidated first; the troops had to be rested, and operations in the south were impossible during the rains. But the situation could not be maintained indefinitely without loss to Government prestige, and early in October Kelly and MacMichael left for Khartoum to discuss plans for the winter campaign.

VI.

THE END OF ALI DINAR.

To show the flag in the south and to give heart to the well disposed during the period of waiting, Huddleston had been sent early in October with a Company of dismounted Camel Corps to sit in the neighbourhood of Kas. He found Zakaria, the Sultan's eldest son, with 400 *jehadis* and about 1000 Fur levies, encamped at Dibbis, ejected him without much opposition and ensconced himself there.

From the nature of his reports and from an acquaintance of some years I had an instinct that Huddleston would not sit quiet very long and that something more interesting than the daily round at El Fasher might soon happen. For the moment I was tied in MacMichael's absence, but in the middle of October Sarsfield-Hall¹⁶ arrived to augment the political staff. I was therefore free to represent with a clear conscience to McCowan,¹⁷ who was commanding in Kelly's absence, that the presence of a political officer with Huddleston's detachment was not only desirable (at least to the political officer) but was now feasible. Meanwhile Huddleston's proposals for

(16) E. G. Sarsfield-Hall, C.M.G., Sudan Political Service, later Governor of Khartoum.

(17) Now Lt.-Col. W. H. McCowan, C.B.E., D.S.O., late Cameron Highlanders and Egyptian Army.

immediate action had not been received with approbation in high quarters but it was decided, in case his hand should be forced, to send some reinforcements. On October 25th I left with Wright¹⁸ and a Company of XIIIth. Sudanese for Dibbis. Shortly before our arrival there my premonition was confirmed by the receipt of a note from Huddleston saying that he had decided to push on next day and that if we wanted to be in at the death we had better hurry up.

An unauthorised military venture is a ticklish affair. It can probably only be justified by its success, and Huddleston was under no delusion as to the risks he was running. I have little doubt that from their point of view Headquarters were correct in standing for the hundred per cent safety of a full-dress winter campaign. It was not just a matter, as cynics wise after the event have sometimes inferred, of ensuring another bar to the Darfur medal and a bunch of decorations. Such considerations were certainly not going to weigh with those responsible for burdening a creaking Sudan budget with the additional expense of such a campaign.

From Huddleston's point of vantage however the arguments were entirely different. He was sitting on the edge of a region of chaos, rampant with looting and disorder with which he was powerless to interfere. As long as we remained in El Fasher we could afford within reason to bide our time. Once we showed the flag in the south we assumed certain responsibilities the denial of which was bound to affect our prestige adversely. It was no use telling primitive Arabs and Fur that the army was coming in the winter and that all would then be put right. If Huddleston felt strong enough to press on I believe he was bound to do so. He had weighed up the military factors and decided that he was strong enough and the event proved him right. As a subordinate political officer I agreed with his appreciation of the situation at the time and I have seen no reason to alter my opinion. Incidentally in view of the nature of the country and of the opposition I have little doubt that the final act would have been

(18) The late Captain H. S. Wright, Manchester Regiment and Egyptian Army.

much the same. In such broken country the "army" would never have brought the enemy to bay in a pitched battle, and unless Ali Dinar had surrendered (which is unlikely) the end would have been achieved by some small flying column—3 or 4 months later and after the expenditure of thousands of pounds.

Ali Dinar was at this time camped at Kulme, some 57 miles west of Dibbis, with anything up to 2,000 or 3,000 followers of whom perhaps 500 might be classified as "regulars." But it was clear from the account given by Melik Mustafa Galgham—who brought in a very evasively worded offer of "negotiations" and firmly refused to return—that a large number of these had little stomach for a fight. Sickness and hardships were increasing and confidence had suffered a further blow on the receipt of an adverse report from the oracle of the Deriba lake in Jebel Marra.¹⁹

Leaving a small post at Dibbis Huddleston marched out on November 1st with about 200 men of the Camel Corps and XIIIth. Sudanese (Wright), a few gunners under Thurburn,²⁰ a small detachment of mule-mounted Arab battalion scouts and myself with Mohammed El Fagir and his Arab "friendlies." We spent the night of the 2nd at a deserted camp of Zakaria's at Gudamo and started for Kulme early next morning. Through very thick country we mounted a high and narrow pass about 5 miles short of Kulme. Here, it transpired later, Ali Dinar had meant to oppose us and had he done so it is unlikely that we should have got through without some casualties. Luckily we had got up earlier than the enemy and it was not until we were into more open country that we met any opposition. It was not serious and we reached Kulme without loss to find it just deserted. Pots were still boiling on the fires and there were all the signs of a hurried evacuation.

Deserters, refugees and arms quickly began to pour in and by night we had a refugee camp of nearly 2,000. It was clear that Ali Dinar's force as a military offensive menace had ceased to exist.

(19) Jebel Marra and the Deriba Lakes, S.N.R. Vol. I. No. 4.

(20) Now Col. J. O. Thurburn, M.C., R.A.

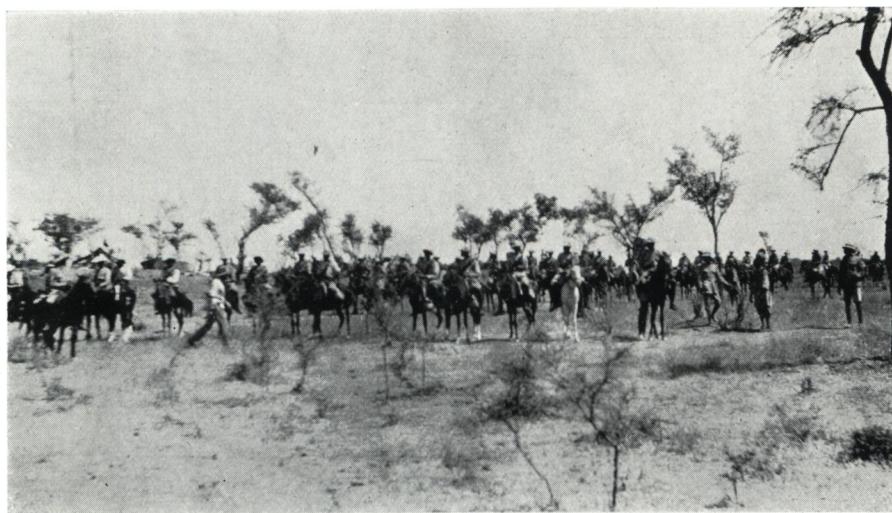
But where had he gone? Doubtless the majority didn't know. As certainly a minority, still doubtful as to which side to back, wouldn't say. (I have never met anything to touch the stupidity *cum* obstinacy of the lowland Fur, anyhow as they were 20 years ago). The harrassed political officer was nonplussed and could only report to his Officer Commanding on the 5th that Ali Dinar had gone to Burbur which might be anything between 10 and 20 miles away, and thence had vanished into thin air.

Meanwhile Huddleston had come to the conclusion that we should never catch Ali Dinar and his remnants on foot. He wanted 100 mounted men and he had only about 20 Arab Battalion scouts on mules and 10 personal Camel Corps escort on ponies. By the evening of the 4th I had scrounged some 70 of the weirdest hired and commandeered ponies that ever composed a military force. On the morning of the 5th "Huddleston's Horse" paraded 100 strong. It was not perhaps an imposing squadron, and some of the XIIIth. Sudanese looked as uncomfortable as their horses, but it functioned. Officers were allowed half a camel apiece and if our few stores gave out before Ali Dinar gave in we were to live on the country. On the afternoon of the 5th we equitated unsteadily to Burbur—16 miles as it turned out.

During dinner at Burbur two somewhat bewildered yokels were brought in. They turned out to be spies of Ali Dinar who had bumped into us by mistake and now thought it wiser to change sides. The Sultan was apparently no better informed of our movements than we were of his. From them information was obtained that he and most of his remaining followers were at Giuba (Juba on map) which we reckoned to be about 12 miles distant. This was better than we had reason—or perhaps right—to expect and Huddleston decided to waste no time. Orders were given to march at midnight and we set out in the dark over a most unpleasantly rocky, precipitous and thorny hill track. Seeing it by daylight on return later it was a mystery how the gun camels had ever tackled it by night. We lay down for a couple of hours in a bitterly cold khor bed and judged



ARAB "FRIENDLIES" LEAVING DIBBIS, 1ST NOVEMBER, 1916.



"HUDDLESTON'S HORSE" AT KULME, NOVEMBER, 1916.



CAPTURED RIFLES, IVORY, ETC., AT KULME, NOVEMBER, 1916.



SULTAN ALI DINAR, KILLED AT GIUBA, 6TH NOVEMBER, 1916.

that we should be at our destination at dawn. This proved to be optimistic partly due to bad going and partly to the vagueness of our Fur guides, and it was close on 7 before some wisps of smoke in a valley warned us that we were almost on top of the quarry. The camp itself was invisible among the trees ; not a sound of alarm could be heard, and there appeared to be no sentries on watch. The machine guns were quickly dismounted and a spray of bullets round the camp fires was the first announcement of our arrival. By the time we got down the slope and across a steep khor the camp was empty and small parties could be seen bolting on horseback or foot in various directions. Collecting a few men (our "cavalry" were not all very clever at negotiating the khor and the friendlies were more interested in the camp loot than in battle) Huddleston dashed after what looked the best dressed party just disappearing round a hill. A few shots were exchanged from ridge to ridge, and after about the third rise we came on a thick built form, with a strong and dignified face marred only by cruel, sensuous lips, with a bullet hole drilled through the centre of his forehead. It was Ali Dinar. Beside him lay his son Mohammed Fadl wounded in the leg, (whom I was just in time to save from further damage at the butt end of an enthusiastic soldier's rifle) while two other sons, Hussein and Seif el Din, and Hassan Sabil, the court chamberlain, stood by stoically awaiting what fate might bring.

The next couple of hours was spent in a rousing St. Patrick's day hunt over hill and dale, with *baladi* saddles slipping and the XIIIth. Sudanese as often over their ponies' ears as on their backs. It produced few tangible results in the way of captures and no casualties beyond bruises, but for a few minutes it might have been otherwise. As transpired later Zakaria and Hamza, the Sultan's eldest sons, were on their way that morning from the cattle camp to visit their father. We nearly ran into them and the hunt was soon on their trail. The guns and some of the less accomplished or fortunate horsemen had by this time given up the unequal contest and had decided to take a rest. Meanwhile Zakaria and party had led us in

a hairpin course to the edge of an escarpment where the trail was lost. From the crest we thought we saw them below us and fire was opened, when to our discomfort (and hasty retreat to cover) we were answered by our own machine guns. Luckily the range was a long one and no harm was done on either side. (This part of the action does not appear in the records.) Subsequently Zakaria told the story of how they dodged us by cutting in between us under the escarpment and lay in shelter laughing while we fired at each other over them.

There followed a period of waiting at Giuba, my chief remembrances of which are a plague of earwigs and hundreds upon hundreds of bad eggs industriously collected by our new constituents. (I asked the local Fur if they ever ate eggs. "Oh, sometimes" was the reply, "when the hen refuses to hatch them.") There was no point in chasing the remnants of the enemy as long as, according to rumour, there was a reasonable chance of their surrender. But the country was still disturbed. It was alleged that messengers from both sides had been murdered on the road, though more probably they had merely shirked the errand. It was not for over a fortnight, on November 23rd, that Zakaria, Hamza and practically all the leading men up till then unaccounted for came in to surrender. The "winter campaign" was over, and it was possible to gazette Darfur as a civil "province," in fact as well as in name, from January 1st 1917.

There is no doubt we were lucky. The end, I think, must have been the same, but in that tangled country it might well have taken weeks instead of days and some losses to achieve it. But Huddleston's judgment of the situation proved to be right. Having made his decision he wasted no time in carrying it into action and fortune favoured its execution. The total bill was one friendly accidentally killed plus little more than the field allowance of 200 men.

Is it too puerile to conclude this informal (not to say indiscreet) chapter by quoting the final chorus of Dupuis²¹ and Middleton's²²

(21) C. G. Dupuis, C.B.E., Sudan Political Service, later Governor of Darfur.

(22) The late Major Walter Middleton, O.B.E., King's Shropshire Light Infantry, Egyptian Army and Sudan Political Service.

popular parody of the day ?

'Twas a long way to go to Fasher ;
'Twas a long way to go.
'Twas a long way to go to Fasher
But I've earned my D.S.O.
Goodbye Kelly Pasha ; goodbye elastic square.
I'd a long way rather stay in Fasher, but I'm wanted elsewhere.

VII.

EPILOGUE.

Darfur, as befits a child born as a long afterthought to a large family, has always had an identity very much her own. Dongola, the first born, may become a part of the Northern Province ; the Bahr el Ghazal may be submerged in Equatoria ; but Darfur remains Darfur, and woe to the man who tries to tamper with her integrity. The forms and procedure of her courts may irk the tidy minded administrator or lawyer. ("But," says the local champion, "were these courts not functioning as the heirs of a long tradition before your artificial eastern products had emerged from a sea of direct administration ?") The Masalit Sultanate may not so nearly approximate to a treaty state as its Resident sometimes affirms. The sanctity of Fasher race week and the immutable round of horseshows ; the blue shirts and the double terais ; the squire D.Cs. and the tribal barons ; the Darfur dinner and the Darfur polo team on leave—all these may sometimes bring a smile to the lips of the cynical riverain District Commissioner or the Khartoum departmentalist who has not served in the paradise of the west. But as long as these little idiosyncracies are based on, and continue to be evidence of, pride of achievement and not mere traditional conservatism they may be pardoned, and indeed welcomed, in this drab age of uniformity from which even the Sudan is not immune.

The latest Sudan province is young, but she is a sturdy, healthy child of whom her strangely mated parents and their fortuitous obstetricians may well be proud. Long may she flourish !