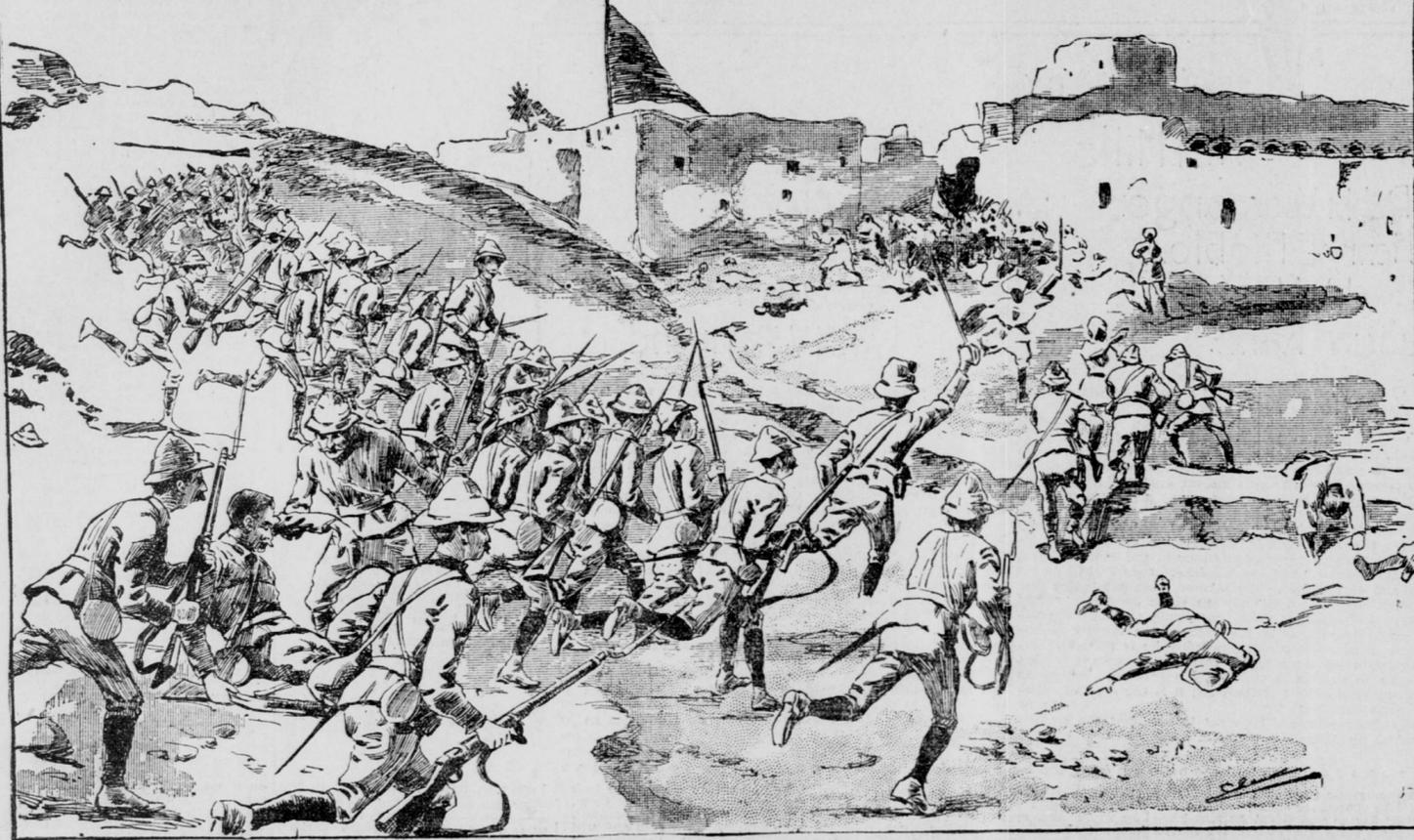


SAN FRANCISCO, SUNDAY, JANUARY 30, 1898.

## The Race to Capture the Soudan.



"WE RUSHED UP THE HILL AND INTO THE FORT."

THE French have suddenly evinced a desire for conquest in the Soudan, and, if report be correct, have advanced across the African continent, regardless of the treaty rights of other powers, until they are pretty close to Khartoum itself. If they occupy Khartoum, the trouble will begin, for Great Britain is not likely to submit tamely to the capture by a foreign power of this most important strategic post.

Khartoum is the key of the Soudan, the nation holding it controls the Nile, along which all the traffic from the immensely rich regions of the Equatorial Soudan must pass. Millions of money and thousands of lives have been lavished on this oasis of the desert. Egypt, to whom the territory nominally belongs, has proved herself, even with the aid of Great Britain, unable to hold the land against the forces of fanaticism controlled by the Mahdi, and since the annihilation of Hicks Pasha's army in 1883, the whole district has been abandoned to all the horrors of barbaric Mohammedan rule.

To-day, just as there is some prospect of the Egyptian expeditionary force, now on the Nile, breaking down the already weakened power of the Mahdi, the French appear on the scene to complicate matters. No one can foresee the outcome of this international embroilment, but it is probable that the difficulty will be settled in the diplomatic courts of Europe, rather than on the burning sands of Egypt. Two great nations, such as France and England, are not likely to fight over the Soudan, and even if they did, the scene of war would promptly be shifted nearer home. Great Britain would meet France, not by sending troops to the East, but by preventing the French from doing so. The first Napoleon's designs upon the British possessions in India were frustrated by the vigor with which Nelson's fleet swept the Mediterranean, his expedition to Egypt was converted into a disastrous failure, and the battle of the Nile left the great general helplessly stranded on a foreign shore. The same plan of campaign would certainly be adopted by Great Britain to-day.

Meanwhile the little French expeditionary force in the Soudan is likely to have enough of desert campaigning before it has finished. One experience of this kind is sufficient to satisfy even the most ardent military enthusiast. The difficulties attendant upon moving large bodies of men in this arid climate are almost insuperable, the water question constantly presents itself in new and trying phases and the problem of transport has never been satisfactorily solved.

It fell to my lot, by one of those accidents which occur now and again in every man's life, to play a humble part in one of these African campaigns. The expedition was not long, nor was it particularly bloodthirsty, and consequently the world, by this time, has forgotten all about it.

I happened to be in Australia in the early part of 1885, when the news of Khartoum's fall and the tragic death of "Chinese" Gordon sent a thrill through the civilized world. One of the best and brightest of British soldiers was gone, and his loss was distinctly traceable to the fatal policy of procrastination characteristic of Gladstone's administration. Gordon might have been saved had the Nile expedition, then almost within reach of Khartoum, started on its long and perilous journey but a week or two earlier. As it was, Sir C. Wilson with a small force

reached Khartoum by steamer but two days after the fall of the town, only to find that the place was in the hands of the Mahdists and that nothing could be done to remedy the fatal error made by the English Government.

It is no wonder that the British people were indignant; a wave of warlike enthusiasm passed over the land, and no cry was heard but that of revenge for the untimely death of "Chinese" Gordon. The manner of his life, its austere virtue and strange military ploy, had always placed Gordon on a different plane from other soldiers of the crown. The manner of his death, after holding to the last with unflinching courage a famine-stricken and beleaguered town, raised him almost to the heights of martyrdom.

At least that was the popular feeling of the day, and it is no wonder that the sentiment spread to the colonies beyond sea. Australia caught the contagion pretty badly, and the Government of the colony of New South Wales, to show in a practical manner its loyalty to the crown, volunteered to dispatch at its own expense a contingent to aid the British forces in wiping out the disgrace of Gordon's death.

There was a good deal of humor in the proposal, for New South Wales, though owing a large and wealth-producing territory, had but little over a million inhabitants. Great Britain, with her huge Indian army to draw upon, had obviously no need for aid from such a Lilliputian source. Still, for some unaccountable reason, the suggestion struck the fancy of the English Cabinet. Perhaps it was to give the world an object lesson as to the solidity of the British Empire; perhaps merely to gratify the vanity of a valuable colony. But whatever the cause, the British Government accepted the offer.

No one was more surprised than the Colonials. Such a thing had never been heard of before. It had become quite fashionable, whenever the English nation was engaged in a little war, for the colonies to offer a portion of their diminutive armies for service at the front. The thing did no harm and helped to advertise the colony, to keep the world aware of its existence.

There was hurrying and scurrying and unbounded patriotic enthusiasm when the news reached Sydney. The worst Russian scare which had ever afflicted the colony was nothing to it. New South Wales was pledged to dispatch within a fortnight a fully equipped regiment of five hundred infantry and two hundred and fifty field artillery, guns and all. To the credit of the colony, the promise was faithfully fulfilled.

There was no difficulty about the artillery. A permanent force of some five hundred men is always maintained to garrison the harbor defense batteries which make Sydney one of the best protected ports in the world. All that was necessary was to call for volunteers, and the whole force at once signified its willingness to go.

With the infantry it was different. There was no standing army to draw from, only a couple of thousand partially paid volunteers, or militia men. And when it came to leaving their homes and families for the desert wilds of the Soudan these men were not especially anxious to go. Some three hundred or so volunteered, but of course a new regiment had to be formed, and material was drawn from all quarters.

There was no trouble in obtaining recruits, civilians of all classes were only too willing to join. Bank clerks and civil servants, old soldiers and sailors, policemen and wharf laborers, men of every occupation and charac-

ter, all flocked to the recruiting office, and, providing they could pass the medical examination, were enrolled. Some of these men had never had a rifle in their hands before, did not even know the rudiments of the goose step, but the old stagers pulled them through, and in ten days they were sent forth, clad in the traditional red jacket of the British army, to fight the mother country's battles in Egypt.

But despite its heterogeneous character the regiment soon proved its capacity. Three weeks on board the troopship, with constant drilling and strictest discipline, brought it into a compact and serviceable form, and when we landed at Suakim the British officers, knowing nothing of the haphazard origin of the contingent, were surprised at the character of the troops.

Australia was able to turn out, so was Tommy Atkins, who was soon on the friendliest possible terms with his brother from across the sea. For one thing the Australian youth had a proficiency in swearing which was the envy of the Britishers, and when the English regiments returned home they took many new and forcible cuss words with them, which, even at the present day, impart a strangely Australian flavor to many an imperial bugle call.

Suakim, when the Australians landed, was one of the busiest ports. The shores of the little lagoon were fairly encircled with great ocean steamers. Men-of-war were dotted here and there, their guns commanding the far-away ranges behind the camp where the rebels clustered; a magnificent P. and O. liner, with wide, open ports and clean, well ventilated decks, proved the care and attention which awaited the sick and wounded. The town, which is on an island and can be reached only by a well-guarded causeway, fairly hummed with military life. Everywhere there was the orderly bustle of a well-regulated camp, and stranger of all there was the British navy, with his vast bulk of beef-flesh.

The navy, who, except when drunk, is generally a man of peace, seemed strangely out of place amid such warlike surroundings. But he was there strictly on business. He was to build a railway after the soldiers had pacified the hostile tribes with rifles and machine guns. And at the time we all fondly believed that our mission was to take that railway right across 200 miles of desert until it struck the great river at Berber. Thus, though it was too late to save Gordon, we were to solve the Central African problem and insure the pacification of the Upper Nile region.

The railway would have been made right enough, though at what cost of man and money I know not, had not the British Government, with characteristic vacillation, withdrawn from the enterprise before it was well begun. All the material for the railway, even to the depots and name boards, was on the spot; dozens of steamers freighted with rails and construction material were in the harbor, waiting to discharge, and had the line gone through the map of Africa might have been colored in a very different way. At any rate, Central Africa would have been opened to European trade and the fanatical followers of the Mahdi would have found sudden reason to mend their ways.

The flat, sandy shore of Suakim Bay was one vast camp. The soldiers were not quartered in the town; the place was much too small, but were camped on the plain, protected only by a slight trench and a thin line of sentries from the attacks of the hostile Sudanese. And Fuzzy-Wuzzy, as Kipling has christened him, is a terribly treacherous enemy, especially on a dark night. His tricks are endless, he can sneak through a line of the most vigilant sentries, and at one time his nightly visits used to cause great alarm in the British camp.

The soldiers slept in large tents of the Indian pattern, each holding forty or fifty men. And at night-time, when all were quietly sleeping, Fuzzy-Wuzzy,

having in some miraculous manner passed the line of sentries, would sneak into a tent. The light would go out, there would be a shriek, and before the suddenly awakened soldiers could seize their arms and grope their way out of the tent the assailant would be gone. And all that would be left to indicate the visit would be a dead soldier, a spear through his heart, stricken down in the midst of his comrades.

This practice was so greatly feared that when we moved out of Suakim and started railway-making in the heart of the enemy's camp, the troops were actually forbidden to sleep in the tents at night. In the daytime they were used as a shelter from the sun, but at night no man was safe within a tangle of cordage and canvas.

The Australian contingent saw the tail end of one of the biggest engagements which have occurred near Suakim, but fortunately for themselves, they arrived just two days too late for the heavy fighting. The affair at Tokrik, when the Sudanese made a determined attack on MacNeill's zereba, very nearly ended in a disaster. Osman Digna, who commanded the Mahdi's troops in this region, suddenly concentrated a large force on the British squares, but though one of the Indian regiments gave way for a time, the attack was eventually repulsed.

The loss, however, was very heavy, a large portion of the transport was cut to pieces by the enemy, and when we marched over the spot a week later, we had good reason to know that a battle had been fought there. If there is one smell in this earth which is worse than another it is that of a defunct camel. And when you take not only one but hundreds and hundreds of the much deceased beasts, and scatter them along the track, you will realize the awful atmosphere we marched through. Worse still, it was not an uncommon thing to come across a human arm or leg sticking bolt upright out of the sand. Some poor fellow was hastily buried here, with but a thin layer of soil above his corpse, a covering too light to secure rest for his remains. Another time, in some out of the way nullah or dry creek bed, we would step over corpses which had never been buried at all, and which would remain until they became as the bones which whiten the plain all around.

These things were not pleasant to look upon, but at the moment, so absorbed were we in our own occupations, we missed the horror of it all. We were marching through burning sand, the sun like a ball of fire overhead, to attack Osman Digna in his stronghold at Tamail, to teach him that these violent assaults upon the British forces could not be made with impunity.

General Graham, who was then in command, had determined to do the thing thoroughly, so he took out nearly all the troops at Suakim, British, Australian and Indian. Some ten thousand strong we marched in a huge hollow square, or rather oblong formation, but, if safe, it was weary work. We had to carry supplies of every kind, including water, with us, for the country would yield nothing, and the center of the square was a seething mass of unruly transport animals. Camels, horses and mules, ambulance wagons and water carts, camp followers of every nationality, were crowded together, and our rate of progress was necessarily the rate of progress of the transport.

We marched four deep, with fixed bayonets, on each side of the square, and every now and then would come the order to halt and face front. It might be a threatened rush by the enemy, who were constantly hovering in the surrounding bush, or it might be only some unfortunate camel which had dropped its load. As these mysterious dropped death for either man or beast to fall behind the guarding fringe of rifles, the whole force had to halt until the mischief could be repaired.

Thus it took us all day to reach Tamail, a distance of fifteen or sixteen miles, and after all there was no battle. Osman Digna, wisely enough, construed discretion as the better part of valor and fled before our force could get at him. A few of his bravest warriors, however, remained hidden behind the hills at the back of the little town, and as we approached Remington bullets, fired from some invisible spot, came dropping from the skies among us.

It was annoying, because we could see nothing to fire back at, and we were most anxious to prove our skill in rifle practice. But perhaps the man most annoyed stood right in front of me. One of these mysterious dropping bullets punctured a nice, clean hole through his right shoulder. I remember watching the red stain on his kharkee tunic where the bullet came out, and wondering what caused it. It was not until I saw the stain spreading all over his back that I realized the man was wounded, and then I think he realized the fact himself, for he went off to the rear and provided the ambulance corps with a little occupation.

After this we burned some huts and filled up some wells, and the battle was over. I am sure we were all very glad, for we had not the slightest desire to be shot, nor did we wish to face a rush of the fanatical Hadendawas, who are among the finest fighting men in the world and whose charge, as experience has often proved, can only be stopped by overpowering rifle fire.

J. F. ROSE-SOLEY.

## PURE AND SWEET

and free from every blemish is the skin, scalp and hair of infants cleansed, purified and beautified by

## Cuticura SOAP

The most effective skin purifying and beautifying soap in the world, as well as purest and sweetest for toilet, bath and nursery. For distressing facial eruptions, pimples, blackheads, red, rough, oily skin, irritations of the scalp, with dry, thin and falling hair, red, rough hands with shapeless nails, and simple rashes and blemishes of infancy it is incomparable. Guaranteed absolutely pure by analytical chemists of the highest standing, whose certificates of analysis accompany each tablet.



Sold throughout the world. POTTER DRUG AND CHEM. CORP., Sole Props., Boston. British depot: F. NEWBURY & SONS, 1 King Edward st., London. Send for our Treatment of Baby's Skin, a book of 64 pages, fully illustrated, containing all that every intelligent mother should know about the Skin, Scalp and Hair, post free.

**MOTHERS!** To know that a warm bath with CUTICURA SOAP, and a single anointing with CUTICURA, the great skin cure, will afford instant relief in the most distressing of itching, burning and scaly infantile rashes and irritations of the skin and scalp, and not to use them is to fail in your duty. This treatment means comfort and rest for parent as well as grateful relief and refreshing sleep for child, and is pure, sweet, safe, speedy and economical.