

THE FIGHT WITH THE DERVISHES.

Two raids were made by Arabs recently into Egyptian territory in the vicinity of Wady Halfa, but both were repulsed by the Egyptian troops, who inflicted some loss on the raiders. The pursuit of the Dervish raiders by the Camel Corps from Wady Halfa has led to a serious encounter. The Camel Corps overtook the Dervishes at the Ambigol Wells, and a desperate hand-to-hand struggle took place, in which the enemy fought with great tenacity. They appear to have been ultimately worsted, and retreated southward, but the loss of the Egyptians was heavy, amounting to between forty and fifty, amongst whom were Captain Pyne, adjutant of the corps, and an Egyptian Major. A detachment of cavalry, under Lieutenant D'Aguilar, arrived at Ambigol after the action.

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On the extraordinary improvement in fighting qualities shown by the Egyptian troops the *London Times* says:—Decidedly the most gratifying feature in the accounts of these engagements which have reached us is the proof which they contain of the remarkable progress in soldierly qualities made by the fellaheen forces under the guidance and instruction of their British officers. Never has a more extraordinary transformation been effected in any body of men than that which Sir Evelyn Wood, Sir Francis Grenfell, and Colonel Kitchener have accomplished with the aid of their English subordinates in the army of the Khedive. The black troops in his service, it is true, were always splendid fighting men. Even the discouragements of being ill-fed, ill-paid, ill-disciplined, ill-armed, and ill-led could not daunt their hereditary valour in the face of the foe, and it is not improbable that a portion of the contingent which has been engaged at Wady Halfa was composed of these grand warriors. But the fellaheen themselves, who used to run like sheep when they had been driven into action, have developed into steady and reliable soldiers under the intelligent care of their British chiefs. They seem to belong to a different race from the miserable wretches who behaved so disgracefully at El Teb. The raw material out of which Sir Evelyn Wood and his successors evolved the Egyptian army of to-day was enough to have struck despair into the heart of any leader. It has been moulded into an admirably drilled and disciplined force, perfectly well in hand in the field, and ready, as it has shown at Toski and at Tokar, to follow its officers into action with abundant confidence and courage. It is pretty certain that sooner or later, the Egyptian army will be called upon to take part in serious operations to the south. Mr. Milner has warned us in his admirable book that there can be no permanent repose for Egypt whilst the Soudan and the Nile are in the hands of fanatical and warlike savages. It would be unwise to attribute too much importance to the fit of effervescence which has led to the late advance on Wady Halfa; but that outbreak undoubtedly possesses a certain significance as a symptom of the chronic danger which perpetually threatens Egypt, and which a gradual re-occupation of part of the Soudan can alone remove in an effectual and permanent way.

HOW THE DERVISHES FIGHT.

It is easier to turn a hungry tiger aside from his prey than a thorough excited Dervish from his swoop on an enemy. His half-brother in fanaticism and creed, the Indian or Afghan Ghazi, is terrible, but the African and Arab Dervish is superlatively awful, with an incurable delirium for his opponent's gore. Howling and whirling Dervishes, such as travellers are "specially conducted to see when visiting the East" are a comparatively harmless sort of lunatics compared with those types of the African bigots who, "converted" to Mahdism, burn to run amuck with the rest of unbelieving humanity. Once fairly bitten with the tarantula of Moslem sectarian zeal the proselyte is consumed with the belief that the delights of the seventh or any number of heavens awaits him if he can only engage in sturdy, steady butchery with "infidels," of his own or any race. It is a matter of indifference to him if, in the operation, whilst he sheathes his sword in his and his Prophet's enemy, the latter is doing the same

to him. Quick and happy translation he holds as his sure reward.

The stiff fight the other day between the Egyptian troops south of Wady Halfa and the Mahdists recalls to me many a bygone incident and fierce struggle between British and Egyptian troops and forces largely composed of Dervishes. Ambigol Cataract, where the skirmish took place, is about sixty miles south of Wady Halfa. There is an Egyptian outpost at Gemai, where the great Second Cataract proper begins, and another at Sarrass. The one station is fifteen miles and the other thirty-three miles further up stream, and the railroad line and ironclad train still runs through to both posts. No doubt when the Dervish raiders, numbering 400 strong, were repulsed from the forts they fell back from the river towards the easier going tracks inland, along which they must have sped on their camels. The Egyptian cavalry—which, under careful English training, has learned to trust their weapons and their own physical strength in a contest with the Bedouinese—probably not numbering more than two squadrons, overtook the raiders at the pleasant aforesaid camp of Ambigol. There, no doubt, under the palm-trees' grateful shade, hard by the rush and roar of the mighty river, Egyptian troops at once opened fire upon them. Although the whole of the enemy were unlikely to have been Dervishes—for these gentry never run away, but, when necessary, walk sedately out of the fight, merely to assume a fresh coign of vantage—a sharp engagement seems to have ensued. The Mahdists, nothing loath, swarmed, mounted and foot, up the rocky hills, which their pursuers had, with sound tactical judgment, crowned, and whence they had opened fire.

I think it was at the battle of El Teb I first made the acquaintance of the Mahdist Dervishes. The Fuzzy-Wuzzy Hadendowah tribesmen are the bravest of the brave, but the Dervish is heroism run crazy. These so-called "holy beggars," self-sworn to devote themselves to the Prophet's cause, came at General Graham's square of marines, Highlandmen, and stout linesmen as if we had been children to be frightened by a cry. Clad in their patchwork rags, with shaved bare heads, many armed with no better weapons than sticks, they charged full in front of the fire-walled square. Down they went by scores and hundreds, but others quickly took up the running towards us. I saw them that day—more than one of them, pierced through and through with Martini-Henry bullet-wounds, come fiercely on, reeling like drunken men, their teeth gleaming and eyes aflame with hatred. Happy were they if they could but cross weapons with our bayonets. When exhausted nature failed them, their last act was generally to hurl the weapon they carried, stick, lance, or sword, towards our ranks, and shout an Arab imprecation against us, "Nosrani!" (Nazaruno!) An old grey-haired sheik actually charged the square, reading the Koran aloud, which he held in his hands. Later on, when Sir Herbert (then Colonel) Stewart charged the worsted Arab footmen with his two regiments of cavalry, their mounted Dervishes faced his whole force and boldly charged them in return. Again, at Tamai, when the Arabs broke into General Davis's square, where I was, and having temporarily captured our six machine-guns, on which they danced in fiendish glee, the Dervishes were in the forefront of the attack. A big marine, who had bayoneted one of them, found his rifle caught and clutched by the fanatic savage, who strove to reach his foe-man with his sword. It was at the moment we were being driven back, and whilst the marine tugged and swore to get his weapon free, the reeling Dervish essayed with his parting strength to slay or wound our Tommy Atkins. In the desperate battle of Abu-Klea similar scenes occurred. I state it as a fact, of which I took personal note at the time, that during the *mêlée* in which Colonel Burnaby fell, a Dervish, who had struck that officer and was promptly bayoneted through the back, twisted about whilst the steel was protruding, and tried to thrust his lance into the soldier. Even the crippled and wounded Dervishes on the field of battle lay in wait to stab the chance-passing enemy. Asked to "Surrender," and put down their swords and spears, the invariable answer of the sorely-stricken Dervish was, "Christian (or infidel) dogs, never!" When I saw them last in the Soudan, a few years ago, there was no abatement in their blood-thirsty ferocity, nor show of hesitation, whether they numbered few or many, of a longing to get to close quarters with their enemy.—"*Daily Telegraph*" *Military Correspondent*.