

ally satisfactory until questions arose concerning the western boundary of Darfur, and the overlordship of certain frontier districts. There are good grounds for the belief that the delay in arriving at a settlement of these questions reacted very unfavourably upon the Sultan's attitude and caused him to lend a willing ear to enemy propagandists and anti-Government intrigues, the effect of which it was difficult to counteract owing to the Sultan's refusal to allow a European to visit his capital or to enter Darfur.

Modern Darfur has a population of probably under 1,000,000. The internal politics of the Sultanate were complex and variable, but can be briefly described as follows:—The "slave" army of the Sultan, some 10,000 in number, and armed for the most part with firearms, was the supporter of the *status quo*, and formed the real basis of the Sultan's authority. Ali Dinar's domestic policy had proved detrimental to the interests of the Arabs, who were, generally speaking, passively disloyal to him, or, as in the case of the Rizeigat tribesmen of S.W. Darfur, openly hostile to his domination. The sedentary inhabitants of Central Darfur, including the natives of the district eventually traversed by the expeditionary force, chiefly desired to be left undisturbed, but were disposed to welcome the advent of a more lenient and enlightened administration. At the same time any diminution of Government prestige redounded to the credit of the Sultan, and the smallest victory over our troops would have been sufficient to bring large numbers of natives—instigated by fanaticism and the prospect of loot—to his standards.

On receipt of the news of war between Great Britain and Turkey, Ali Dinar assumed publicly, for the first time, a defiant attitude, which was followed, in April 1915, by a formal renunciation of his allegiance to the Sudan Government and a declaration of his adhesion to the cause of our enemies, with whom he was already in close communication *via* the Senussi. In December 1915 the situation became so threatening that a small force of Camel Corps was hastily despatched to Nahud to protect this important trade centre and as a warning to the Sultan against the execution of his threats of an offensive against the loyal Rizeigat tribe. This move of troops on our side of the frontier was answered by the prompt reinforcement of the Sultan's detachments at Jebel el Hilla, and it became evident that preparations by the Sultan for an invasion of Sudan territory were being pushed forward and that active hostilities could no longer be avoided.

I accordingly ordered the concentration at Nahud of a force of all arms under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel P. V. Kelly, 3rd Hussars (attached Egyptian Army), composed of the following units:—

- 2 companies Mounted Infantry.
- 2 batteries (six 12½ pounder Mountain Guns and two maxims) Artillery.
- 1 Maxim battery and (Mule) section.
- 5 companies Camel Corps.
- 6 companies Sudanese Infantry (XIIIth and XIVth battalions).
- 2 companies Arab Infantry (Arab Battalion).
- 3 companies Egyptian Infantry (IVth Battalion),

with the necessary medical and departmental units and details. A total of about 2,000 of all ranks.

Letters from the Sultan and other information from Darfur, received whilst this concentration was being carried out, brought further confirmation of the enemy's designs, and, after personally visiting Nahud early in March 1916, I instructed Colonel Kelly to cross the frontier and to occupy the well-centres at Jebel el Hella and Um Shanga. These two places commanded the first permanent water supplies to the west of Nahud and on the road to El Fasher, and their occupation by our troops not only afforded a means of securing our natives living between Nahud and the border from molestation, but was also an essential preliminary to any further operations in Darfur territory.

On the 16th March the independent mounted troops (Mounted Infantry scouts, "A" battery, maxim battery, five companies Camel Corps) left Nahud, and, advancing *via* Wad Banda, crossed the Darfur boundary and occupied Um Shanga, where an enemy observation post was dispersed on the morning of the 20th idem. It had been intended to push on to Jebel el Hella the same afternoon, but this proved impossible owing to the scarcity of water and inadequate watering facilities at Um Shanga. Colonel Kelly was accordingly faced with the alternative of returning at once to Nahud or of carrying out the further advance with such portion of his force as it was possible to water during the 21st, on the evening of which day the main body from Nahud was due to arrive, with only two days' water supply in hand at Wad Banda. In view of the grave objections involved by the adoption of the former alternative, Colonel Kelly decided to accept the risks attendant on an advance with a reduced force to Jebel el Hella, and sent instructions to the main body to remain at Wad Banda. Accordingly a flying column, composed of Mounted Infantry scouts, 2 guns, 8 maxims, and 240 Camel Corps, left Um Shanga at dawn on the 22nd. Its progress was but slightly opposed by enemy scouts until within four miles of Jebel el Hella, when an enveloping movement by some 800 Fur horsemen was prevented by our fire. Some two miles further on a considerable enemy concentration was located by the guns and maxims in a wooded valley to the left of our square, whence the enemy were subsequently seen to debouch and scatter in all directions. The column reached the wells at Jebel el Hella at 2.15 p.m. without further opposition, and a reconnoitring party was despatched thence to Lugud Wells, two miles distant. These latter wells were occupied in strength on the 26th, by which time the rest of the Field Force had arrived from Nahud, and was distributed according to the capacities of the various local water supplies at Um Shanga and Jebel el Hella. In the course of these operations the enemy are reported to have lost twenty killed and wounded: our casualties were insignificant.

The occupation of Jebel el Hella in a great measure restored our prestige in the Western Sudan and diminished the immediate menace of raids upon our tribesmen. It was, however, clear that the dispersal of Ali Dinar's main army would prove the sole effective guarantee to the security of the Western Sudan, and that we should therefore be in a position to undertake further and more extensive mili-