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THE STRUGGLE FOB BOEGTJ.

IT is a mark of the nature of the British empire, and of the conditions under which we hold it, that hardly a month passes, certainly never so much as half a year, but some place which the average well-educated per- son cannot even find on the map leaps into sudden publicity, and is on every newspaper placard and in every one's mouth. Yesterday they were unknown, to-morrow probably they will be forgotten. Fashoda made a somewhat deeper impression ; yet for a week or so last year eyes were fixed on Borgu and Mossi just as keenly as they were later on the Bahr-el-Gha- zal and with good reason, for there was more serious danger of a conflict over the Niger than ever arose over the Nile. Now the strain has been for- gotten : the men out there who were doing the empire's work on its frontiers are no longer actors before a great theatre; but the work goes on all the same, and it is just as well to set on record what was done and is being done.

The Convention signed last July in Paris between Great Britain and France ended sud- denly and summarily a chapter of history which has not yet been written the story of French ag- gressions on territories claimed by us in West Africa, and of our too-long-deferred resistance to those aggressions. The en- croachment proceeded steadily

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from the Berlin Conference in 1884-85. Within ten years from that date the French, working south and south-east from Senegambia and the Upper Niger, had interposed themselves between the pro- tectorate of Sierra Leone and the Niger so completely that there was nothing to be done but fix a frontier by joint com- mission, which left that colony practically resourceless ; and they were pushing with fever- ish activity into the regions north of the Gold Coast. In the meanwhile Dahomey, con- quered in 1890, had become another base, and expeditions from it were moving north- ward. Thus in the acute period of the struggle the French were making their way south- east from their posts of Segu and Bandiagara in the French Sudan, and north and north- west from Carnotville in Up- per Dahomey. By 1896 their forces had joined hands behind the Gold Coast, and were striving to retrench as far as possible the hinterlands of that colony, and of German Togo- land, while at the same time they endeavoured to make themselves masters of the west bank of the Niger and secure a port on its waters accessible direct from the sea. Thus there were two distinct points of friction between English and French : first, the hinter- land of the Gold Coast (Mossi, 2R

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Gurunsi, and the surround- ing countries) ; and secondly, Borgu, which is part of the natural hinterland of Lagos. The French forces working from the French Sudan and from Dahomey were, when matters came to a critical juncture, in touch with each other as well as with their respective bases ; our forces resisting them, almost non-existent at first, were up to the end dis- connected. The object of this paper is to relate what took place during the final phase of the struggle in Borgu, part of the territory held by the Royal Niger Company. The story of the resistance offered in the hinterland of our Crown Colony of the Gold Coast is similar, but quite distinct. It consti- tutes by itself another chapter of history not yet written, but which we hope to write as soon as the facts are available.

In 1894 Commandant Toutee started on a voyage, professedly of private exploration, and ap- plied to the Royal Niger Com- pany for leave to pass through territories under their jurisdic- tion; but as he was taking with him a considerable armed force, this request was refused. Accordingly he set out from Porto Novo on the Dahomey coast, and from Carnotville made his way north - east through the Bariba country, till he struck the Niger opposite Badjibo, a point about midway between Bussa and Jebba. Here he established a camp and forti- fied a position which he called Fort d'Arenberg. From this point it is possible to navigate to the sea, though not safe ; no

vessel is insured beyond Jebba. Above Badjibo the river is practically unnavigable for more than 500 miles. In the meantime a strong expedition, under Commandant Decoeur, had been despatched in July 1894 from Dahomey northward, having for its main objects to secure a treaty with the chief of Gurma, a country lying to the north of Borgu and Togo- land, thus cutting the Germans off from the Niger ; and to obtain treaties with the king of Nikki, which, the French asserted, was the capital of Borgu. Borgu, comprising the riverine inhabitants of the right bank of the Niger from Illo southward to near Jebba, would, it was thought, give them a port on the navigable waters of the Lower Niger.

Now the Royal Niger Com- pany claimed both these coun- tries, Gurma and Borgu. They claimed Gurma in virtue of treaty rights on the ground that it was a province of Gando, with which country they had a treaty. Moreover, Gando is itself a fief of the Sultanate of Sokoto, and by the convention of 1890 the Company had rights over all appanages of Sokoto. They claimed Borgu, first, on the ground that the Say-Barrua line, fixed in 1890, gave to Great Britain all included by a line drawn from Say south to the ninth parallel, up to which the frontiers were delimited from the coast ; and secondly, on the ground that the king of Bussa alleged himself to be sovereign of all Borgu, and with this king they had concluded a treaty in 1890 and paid him a subsidy.

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But as the French asserted that Nikki, not Bussa, was the cap- ital of Borgu, it was thought advisable to despatch Captain Lugard to secure a treaty with that town.

Decoeur's expedition did not make rapid progress. Borgu is a difficult country ; its inhabit- ants, the Baribas, are a warlike, predatory people, whose chief weapon is the poisoned arrow. According to Mockler Ferry- man, they came originally from Northern Africa, and profess not to be pagans, but to wor- ship "Kisra, a Jew." At all events, their country was un- explored, and they had beaten back the wave of Fulah con- quest which, sweeping over all the countries between Lake Tchad and the Niger, had surged across the river into Gurma and Illorin, Borgu's neighbours. Consequently, al- though Decoeur left Dahomey before Captain Lugard sailed from England, the English officer, proceeding by water to Jebba, succeeded in organising a force, and reaching Nikki before the French. Marching by way of Kiama, he entered Nikki, and concluded a treaty there on November 10, 1894, then passed on southward to secure the Company's rights in Okuta and Ilesha. Five days later the French came on the scene. M. Ballot, governor of Dahomey, hearing of the English mission, had sent up two other expeditions. That under M. Alby was the first to arrive; M. Decoeur joined him with a strong force (whereas Captain Lugard had been ac- companied only by twenty-four

men with arms, all recruits), insisted that the king of Nikki should accept the French flag, and wrote home to say that a treaty had been concluded on November 26, making no men- tion of Captain Lugard. Then the various French exploring parties pushed on hastily to the north, to anticipate Dr Griiner and Lieutenant von Karnap, who were on a similar errand on behalf of Germany. Flags of both colours were distributed freely through the country, and as the signing of each treaty was accompanied by a hand- some gratuity, some chiefs did a profitable trade in the busi- ness. The ruler of Sansanne Mango accepted three within a space of six months.

So ended in 1895 the first " race for Borgu," in which European expeditions hunted treaties from negro chiefs. The result was somewhat to dis- credit all such treaties, but to strengthen the Niger Com- pany's claim to Borgu. Wheth- er Nikki or Bussa was the capi- tal of Borgu might be a matter of opinion ; but in each place the Company had a prior claim. The French practically recog- nised this by shifting their ground and attempting to secure the country by what was called "effective occupa- tion," but in reality was open usurpation.

In the end of 1896 two ex- peditions were organised by M. Ballot in Dahomey : one under Lieutenant Bretonnet, whose object was Borgu and the navi- gable Niger; the other, under Captains Baud and Vermeersch, which was directed to interpose

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between the German hinterland and the Niger. Lieutenant Bretonnet left Carnotville on December 28, 1896, with three white officers, 100 Senegalese, and a number of porters. It is noticeable that he did not advance direct to Nikki and claim the benefit of the treaty : on the contrary, he turned west from Paraku and made a cir- cuit to avoid what was theo- retically a friendly town. He established posts at Bori, Bouay, and, after some skirmishing on the road, at Kandi. From Kandi he marched to Illo on the Niger, thence down-stream to Bussa, which he entered by his own account, at the king's invitation on February 5, 1897. Now a great deal had happened since Captain Lugard went out to Borgu in 1894. The Niger Company had com- plained of the act of aggression committed by Captain Toutee in occupying Fort d'Arenberg, and Lord Eosebery had said definitely that the place must be evacuated. France yielded, and Fort d'Arenberg became Fort Goldie. Further, it was notified to France that Bussa was under British protection, and an announcement to that effect was made in the 'Lon- don Gazette' in June 1895 In the face of this, Lieutenant Bretonnet's entry into the town was no less than an act of war, and the Niger Company would have instantly repelled the aggression, but their hands were tied. In the latter part of 1896 it had been found necessary to organise a force to punish the Fulah Emirs of Nupe and I116rin, who, in

addition to repeated breaches of their treaties, had endeav- oured to bring about a general rising against the Company. They had solicited help from the king of Bussa ; yet he had not only refused it, but had informed the Company of the plot. At this time diplomacy was still slowly endeavouring to solve the problem presented by the conflicting treaty claims in Borgu, and the French Gov- ernment represented to the English that if the Niger Com- pany had a considerable force on foot, they would be tempted to strengthen their claims by going in and occupying Nikki. Lord Salisbury's Government accordingly exacted from Sir George Goldie a pledge that he would not undertake any operations north of Jebba, which is the head of the navi- gable Niger. Nikki is well to the north of this point, and Bida and I116rin, the objectives of the expedition, were well to the south of it ; and the pledge was accordingly given. Natur- ally it was taken as binding both sides to abide by the status quo. But just as the brilliant campaign against the Fulahs was practically decided by the victory at Bida on Janu- ary 29, 1897, news came that a French expedition was at Illo, and shortly after a letter from the king of Bussa reached Sir George Goldie, stating that his capital had been occupied, and asking for assistance. In face of the pledge given to Govern- ment, however, nothing could be done by the Company, though they probably never expected that Lord Salisbury

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would continue to negotiate without insisting, as a pre- liminary to all discussion, upon the evacuation of a town over which a previous Government had expressly declared a pro- tectorate. Lieutenant Breton- net remained therefore in pos- session of Bussa, though not in peace. He was hotly attacked by the natives; but his Sene- galese fought, as they always do, admirably, and he not only held his ground but extended his conquest. After consider- able bloodshed he took Wawa, a town south of Bussa, and was met there by envoys from Kiama, where also he hoisted the tricolour. But the country, though nominally occupied, was not subdued up to July : Lieu- tenant Bretonnet was fighting continuously against what were described as "rebellions" in the different towns that had courted his alliance. Kishi, which lies on the direct road between Carnotville and Kiama, was occupied ; but Nikki was still left untouched.

In the meantime the Baud- Vermeersch expedition, which had set out also in the end of 1896, had been even more fortunate than M. Bretonnet. They reached Gurma without difficulty, and had the good fortune to find the king coping with a rebellion. In return for their help, which was effec- tually given, he placed all Gurma under French protec- tion : this success bore fruit in the Franco-German agreement of July 1897, by which Ger- many resigned all her claims to a hinterland reaching to the Niger. Moving westward,

Captain Baud got into touch with Lieutenants Voulet and Chanoine, who were coming from Wagadugu : this junction of French forces despatched from countries so remote as the French Sudan and Dahomey impressed the natives consider- ably, and brought levies of auxiliaries flocking in. Gurma was occupied in force, and the Youlet - Chanoine expedition turned westward again, leaving Captains Baud and Vermeersch to hold their acquisition. But in August the whole Bariba coun- try rose against the French- men. Lieutenant Bretonnet's garrisons had to fall back on his main force ; and reinforce- ments were sent up from Carnotville under Captain Ganier, who, as senior, took command at Paraku, assisted by M. Vermeersch. By Nov- ember they were strong enough to advance upon the heart of the resistance, and after a battle fought somewhat to the south, on November 6 they entered Nikki, this time as victors, and hoisted the flag there on Dec- ember 10, and immediately opened communication with M. Bretonnet at Bussa. In the meanwhile Captain Baud, left in charge of Gurma, had struck across from Fada-N'Gurma to Say, where he met an outpost of M. Destenave's force from the French Sudan. He then proceeded to march upon Illo, whence Lieutenant Bretonnet's original post had been with- drawn. Marching south from this, he was surrounded by the Baribas; but after a severe fight he succeeded in routing them, and the country was

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terrorised into submission. Thus by December 10, 1897, when Commandant Ricour came to take command as Governor of Upper Dahomey, the whole of Borgu as well as Gurma were in reality effec- tively occupied. Setting the question of international moral- ity apart, the French officers had done their work extra- ordinarily well. Their troops took their supplies by force and cost nothing to keep ; and they had very few of them. Three companies of Senegalese, one of Hausas hastily levied in the latter part of 1897, and two of the Dahomey police, made up the whole force at M. Eicour's disposal. In order to hold such a country with such a force, a reign of terror was imperative, and it was instituted. The soldiers were dotted about in the towns and villages in groups of half-a-dozen or less, and a white officer or non- commissioned officer went the rounds in perfect security. The Baribas were thoroughly cowed ; they hated, but they were afraid. It was very different from the method in which we make war against savages, sending large expeditions and paying fair or even at times excessive prices for such goods as the natives choose to supply; but of its own kind it was an excel- lent piece of work.

Yet from the point of view of the British the whole thing sim- ply amounted to this. France had occupied by force Borgu, a country which was British by prior treaty and by the 1890 agreement with France, and part, if not all, of which had

been declared a protectorate. The recognition of the Niger Company's treaties by the For- eign Office had sealed the ac- quisition to the Company under the authority of her Majesty's Government. Now the Com- pany could not declare war upon France, and it appealed to Lord Salisbury to redress such violent usurpation of its rights. Protests lodged by him in Paris produced no practical result. Moreover, the frontier between Dahomey and the hin- terland of Lagos had been de- limited by joint agreement from the coast up to the ninth paral- lel. But from the middle of 1897 the French, entirely dis- regarding this arrangement, had begun to cross our fron- tier, striking to the east from a point considerably south of Carnotville, and arranged a line of communication with Bussa through Saki and Kishi. Lieut. -Colonel M'Callum, Gov- ernor of Lagos, at once re- ported this act of trespass, and was instructed to request the French to withdraw. On Sep- tember 10 a French party un- der Lieutenant Brot attempt- ed to capture Ilesha, but were repulsed, and had to fall back on Saki; and on the 24th of that month, in consequence of Colonel M'Callum's prompt ac- tion, was obliged to evacuate Saki, which was at once occu- pied by men of the Lagos Hausa Force. A few days later Lieutenant Neale, with a detachment of the same body, occupied Igboho, on the line to Kishi. In the meantime three companies of the West India Regiment, under Lieut.-

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Colonel Allen, had been ordered from Sierra Leone to Lagos, and by November 15 two companies were at Saki. But it was thought necessary, since diplomacy proved ineffectual, to make a further show of force in West Africa. In October 1897 Colonel Lugard was recalled from South Africa to organise a force (to be called the West African Fron- tier Force) which should have its headquarters in Nigeria.

The force which it was pro- posed to raise amounted prac- tically to a brigade. It was to consist of two very strong bat- talions of infantry, each con- taining 1200 men, with twenty- nine officers and forty -four non-commissioned officers. To each battalion was affiliated a field - hospital, with three doctors and a nursing staff of six non-commissioned offi- cers from the Army Medical Corps. There was also to be a base hospital at Lokoja, with two doctors and three nurses, selected from the staff at Guy's. The artillery consisted of three batteries, two of seven-pounders, one of twelve-pounders. There was also a transport depart- ment, an accounts department, and one engineer company. A small headquarter staff, con- sisting of the Commissioner and Commandant, his second in command, and an aide-de-camp, made up the whole. The second in command was Colonel Will- cocks, D.S.O., who was tele- graphed for before he had fairly returned from the Tochi Valley campaign on the N.W. frontier of India the eighth on which he had seen service. Each bat- talion was to consist half of

Yorubas, half of Hausas ; and as the Yorubas were the easier to get, recruiting began at Ibadan. On November 27, Lieut. - Colonel Pilcher sailed from London to raise the 1st battalion, taking with him his European staff, which consisted of one captain (commander), two subalterns, and five non- commissioned officers to each of the eight companies of which the battalion was to be composed. The nucleus of this battalion, which had been already recruited by Captains Creighton and Taubman Goldie at Ibadan, was sent to Lokoja, whither Lieut. -Colonel Pilcher proceeded direct by steamer. Lieut. -Colonel Fitzgerald, com- manding the 2nd battalion, ar- rived at Lagos early in February, and proceeded to Ibddan, where he began recruiting Yorubas. Early in March 1898, Colonel Lugard left London to take command of all the forces in or near Borgu, including the detachments of the Lagos Con- stabulary and the West India Regiment, as well as a large part of the Niger Company's troops and the new levies. Touching at Lagos, he went on to Lokoja, where were the headquarters of the 1st bat- talion : the officers were busily engaged in drilling and re- cruiting. He himself proceeded to Jebba, and sent word to Colonel Fitzgerald to march across country from Ibddan to that point, which became now the general headquarters, and everything except the 1st battalion was moved up there.

It was the end of April be- fore the headquarters were es-

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tablished at Jebba, and the situation had in the meantime become exceedingly strained. The Niger Company claimed Borgu; the French had issued a decree declaring that Borgu was now part of Upper Da- homey. The French, as has been seen, held the country; but the British troops, under Colonel M'Callum, had been actively pushing up from the south. On December 4, Lieu- tenant Turner, RE., with twelve non-commissioned offi- cers and sappers of his corps, left England for Lagos, to carry a telegraph wire through the hinterland of Lagos and I116rin to Jebba, in order to put the officers acting in this debate- able land into direct communi- cation with their Government. On December 12, the Hausas, under Major Ewart, occupied Ilesha, from which the French had been repulsed some months earlier ; and on Christmas Day 100 Hausas, with four guns, left Saki to march on Okuta, a town of Borgu. Mr Kohr- weger, a district commissioner of Lagos, who acted through- out this whole affair as politi cal agent, reported on January 15 that Okuta had been occu- pied. In the meanwhile pre- paration was being made for the telegraph wire as far as Saki, and by February 22 the wire was actually brought up to that point, and Governor M'Callum moved with it. His presence at the front was ur- gently necessary, because public feeling in England had been roused to fever pitch. Mr Rohrweger had succeeded in occupying a couple more towns on the line between Okuta and

Kiama, and on February 6 a detachment of Hausas, under a non-commissioned officer, had hoisted the flag in Borea, some thirty -five miles south-east of Nikki. This village became suddenly notable throughout Europe, for on February 19 Mr Chamberlain read to the House of Commons two telegrams, one of which stated that thirty Senegalese had come to Borea, and had ordered the British post there to haul down the union- jack. The demand was re- fused, and the Senegalese camped a little distance off. The other telegram related a similar incident at Wa, on the Gold Coast. In both of these regions parties of troops belong- ing to the rival nations were interspersed like men on a chess- board, and it was plain that the tension on the spot must be very great. It was particularly galling to the Frenchmen, be- cause, while England merely asserted a protectorate over these regions, on the French system whatever was part of a colony was part of France : Borgu was part of Upper Da- homey, and Lieutenant Breton- net and the rest were defending, as they considered, the frontier of their country, just as much as if they had been, for instance, in Algeria.

Neither the Wa incident nor that of Borea had in itself any particular importance ; but the manner in which they were announced, and the spirit in which the announcement was received by the country, were significant. The English con- tinued their advance in Borgu wherever it was possible with- out an actual collision, which

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both sides avoided. Three more companies of the 2nd West India Regiment had been despatched from Sierra Leone to Lagos, and, on Feb- ruary 28, 149 men of that regiment left Saki for Okuta. The British advanced posts were now within a couple of marches of Nikki. In the first week of March Governor M'Callum proceeded in person to Okuta. But the tornado season was now beginning, and he reported home that the diffi- culties occasioned by the rains, combined with the strength of the French line of posts between Kishi and Kiama, made it advisable that any farther advance should be made from the Niger. In the meanwhile the telegraph wire was being rapidly carried to- wards Illorin, which point it reached on April 3 ; and the presence of the British posts, interrupting lines of communi- cation, greatly hampered the French in Borgu. They had devastated the country, which is at no time a rich one, and were in difficulty for supplies. For these they depended largely upon Kishi, a town lying about fifty miles south of Kiama. Kishi was, properly speaking, no part of Borgu, but a Yoruba town, with which a treaty had been concluded in 1894. The Yorubas are a peaceful and industrious people, and consequently Kishi, al- though a small place, was much richer than the rest of the country which the French had to draw on. It was there- fore a serious blow to them

when on April 22 the inhabi- tants of this town rose, drove out the French garrison, and called in some West Indian soldiers from the nearest British post. Politically also it was a grave reverse, as it certainly did not go to bear out the French contention that their troops were in the various towns by the special prayer of their inhabitants.

Such was the position of affairs when Colonel Lugard arrived at Jebba. He had reached Lokoja on April 10, and set out for his headquarters on the 13th. By April 17 the telegraph wire had reached its destination 1 having been car- ried from Lagos in little over three months and he was in touch with the authorities at home. Steps were at once taken to carry on from the new base the work which had been begun by Governor M'Callum. Three hundred of the Niger Company's troops, who had shown their value in the Bida campaign, had been sent up hurriedly into Sokoto "when word came that a French ex- pedition had crossed the Niger from Say. Of this ill-fated mis- sion under M. Cazemajou (after- wards massacred at Zinder) they could find no trace, and were returning by the Niger when they were stopped at Fort Goldie, and ordered to be in readiness to act as a field force. They could be well spared for the purpose, as the new battalions could now sup- ply men to take their places in the Company's various gar- risons. Colonel Willcocks was

1 It has since been carried to Lokoja.

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put in command of the force, and ordered to march rapidly from Fort Goldie towards Kiama, and hoist the English flag "wherever the tricolour was not flying.

Striking to the north-west, Colonel Willcocks occupied the village of Adube, and thence detached a party with orders to march north in the direction of Bussa. An important village named Timanji was found where no flag was flying, and the union - jack was therefore hoisted and a small garrison left there. In the meanwhile angry protests came in from the French officers in command at the different posts. It was thought necessary to strengthen the small party left at Timanji, and a reinforcement was sent up under Lieutenants Glossop and Mangles. On their way they had to pass a village where was a small detachment of Senegalese with two white sergeants. These people or- dered the party to stop ; but being in a minority, were con- tent with heaping insults on the Hausas and their officers. Reliefs were left in Timanji, and Lieutenant Mangles stayed in charge of them ; but Lieutenant Glossop, returning with the rest of the detachment, had again to pass through the French post. This time the Senegalese had numbers in their favour, and they were drawn up across the path with fixed bayonets. The officers on each side had it practically in their power to bring on a European war and this is only one instance of the risks that were run continu- ally for a matter of six months both in Borgu and in the

Mossi country but fortunate- ly discretion prevailed. Lieu- tenant Glossop kept his temper, treated the insults with con- temptuous silence, and made a detour round the Senegalese, who made no further attempt to interfere with him.

After these events, Colonel Willcocks proceeded, in accord- ance with his instructions, to make a tour of the southern border of Borgu, inspecting the detachments of the West India Regiment and the Lagos Hausa Force posted on the northern frontier of Yorubaland. This he did with remarkable rapidity, covering from twenty to thirty miles a-day, though the country is difficult, full of rivers, none of which are bridged, and the climate, always deadly, is at its worst in the season of the rains, which were then beginning. But another incident which threatened to be critical took place at a small village near Kishi called Betekuta. There was no flag here, and though it was scarcely more than a cluster of rambling farmhouses, the union -jack was run up. But a night or two later a detachment of the French came in and hoisted their flag also, under the cover of darkness. Colonel Willcocks immediately sent to Lieutenant Loissu (in command at Kiama) to protest, and demand that it should be hauled down. The French officer then declared that the English were terrorising the country, and that Betekuta had implored his protection. This was of course denied, and Colonel Willcocks sent word to say that if the French flag remained in Betekuta he would

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come and hoist the English one at exactly the same distance, 500 yards, from the French in Kiama, which was a town of importance. Lieutenant Loissu, who had only a handful of men, had no means of stopping the English force of three hundred rifles from doing this ; but he petitioned for six days' post- ponement till he should have time to consult his chief, M. Demoulin, who was at Nikki. This was not at first granted, but was ultimately conceded, in deference to French suscepti- bilities, since the knowledge of the ultimatum had leaked out among the natives, and there was no desire to inflict on them a gratuitous humiliation. But in the interval a hundred Sene- galese were thrown by a rapid movement into Kiama.

The fact was that the French meant to fight. The Niger Company's troops had been despatched in February on a forced march to Argungu, then hurried back to the Niger, and sent to act as a field force before they could have their clothing renewed; and they were, after three months of hard marching in African bush, a very un- kempt, ragged-looking body of men. They were armed with Sniders, and it seems that the French mistook these for the muzzle-loading guns known on the coast as "long Danes." Consequently M. Loissu and his officers, having a well- grounded confidence in their Senegalese as fighting men, were prepared to match a hun- dred of them, armed with re- peating rifles, against what they took to be a mob of raw scallywags fighting with

muzzle - loaders. They would assuredly have found out their mistake, to their great cost, for care had been taken to concen- trate a force at this point, where the crisis must come, sufficient to assure the result in case of collision. Just before the limit of time had expired, an express reached the French officer at Kiama, carrying a copy of a Havas telegram which had been sent overland from Car- notville by relays of galloping horsemen. The telegram stated that a Convention was just about to be signed, and that the imminent collision must be avoided. In view of this tele- gram, Lieutenant Loissu urged that action should be suspended. But the English replied that they had no similar instructions from their Government, though they were in direct telegraphic communication with London, and, consequently, insisted that the union- jack must go up in Kiama, as Lieutenant Loissu absolutely refused to remove the tricolour from Betekuta. The force advanced in fighting order to Kiama, the water- jackets of the Maxims were filled, and there was every ex- pectation of a fight. French sentries were discovered posted in the trees, but no shot was fired, and the union -jack was hoisted 500 yards distant from the tricolour.

That was practically the end. The English settled themselves down in camp at Kiama, and did, as English officers always do, their best to make them- selves happy and to live at peace with their neighbours. It was represented to the French officers that the quar-

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rel was between Governments, not between individuals : a race meeting was got up, with an event for Frenchmen only ; but as it was on Waterloo day, and the event was called "the Waterloo cup " by an undiplo- matic soldier, no Frenchman would enter ! Still, when news of the Convention signed at Paris on 14th July 1898 came in, and it was found that the French had to evacuate every fort in Borgu of which posses- sion had been actually disputed the conventional line of de- marcation fell a little east of Nikki they were very bitter: they said that France had once more been humiliated by Eng- land, and all the other things that French officers in such circumstances are accustomed to say. As a matter of fact, they had done surprisingly well on the bargain, though their positive gains were greater on the Gold Coast frontier than hi Borgu. But, with feelings as they were, the business of ar- ranging for evacuation and oc- cupation was somewhat ticklish. Colonel Ricour, on receiving his instructions, wrote a courteous letter expressing his willingness to go at once, in accordance with the clause of the Conven- tion stipulating immediate evac- uation by either side of territory which now fell to the other ; but asked leave to retain his posts for some time in the three towns of Illo, Bussa, and Ki- ama, where (he said) there were large quantities of military stores. Now, to hold these three important towns was practically to hold the entire country ; but the request was not refused. Colonel Lugard

replied that the French were welcome to leave their men un- til they should have been able to remove their stores, but that he should not refrain from moving British troops through the rest of the country, since it was now British. This was simply a civil way of saying that they would hold the lines of communication between the French base and these posts, and thus that M. Kicour would be beholden to the English for all escorts between him and this portion of his command. Also it was highly probable, seeing the feeling of the natives towards the French, that when the British flag replaced the tricolour all through the coun- try, a rising might take place, directed against the scattered and disconnected remnants of the force which had dealt so severely with the Baribas; or at least, that the small French garrisons, discredited in the eyes of the natives, would owe their safety to British bayonets. At all events, the French troops were immediately withdrawn ; the English, who on receipt of the news marched without loss of a moment to Bussa, arrived in the night and found the French prepared to leave the next morning, and were ex- cellently received by them. On the southern border, a mistake in the map issued in illustration of the Convention led to an in- cident comic rather than serious, which began with the blood- less capture of a French native officer by some of our Hausas, and ended with mutual apolo- gies and courtesies between the English and French command- ing officers.

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Such is the story of how a European war was prevented by the tact of those on the spot, though there was no flinching or hesitation on the part of our officers, who carried out their difficult orders, and forced the crisis which resulted in the Con- vention. Their immediate task that of repelling French ag- gression on the Niger Company's frontier and the hinterland of Lagos ended when the Con- vention was signed. But the work they did stands, and may be the germ of much. In so far as concerned the definite purpose for which it was raised, the West African Frontier Force happily did not need to prove its efficiency in fight ; but it was proved in other ways beyond a possibility of question. For instance, on one occasion it happened that, to meet an emergency, a company of Lieut. - Colonel Fitzgerald's battalion, commanded by Cap- tain Freemantle (of the Cold- stream Guards), was ordered to march immediately from Jebba to Fort Goldie, twenty- six miles distant. The order was given at midnight ; two hours later the men were on the march. Half-a-dozen rivers, affluents of the Niger, had to be crossed, and they were all in flood. It was still night when they reached the first river, swollen beyond all possi- bility of fording it. Lieu- tenant Buxton of the Norfolk Regiment swam it, searched the other bank, and found a canoe in which the men were ferried over. Swimming flood- streams in the dark is not pleasant work when crocodiles

may be swimming there too. Twelve hours after they set out, the company was at Fort Goldie.

The newly raised troops were actually employed on active ser- vice twice in the course of the last year, first, on the expedi- tion sent, under the command of Lieut. - Colonel Pilcher, to reduce Lapai, an important Hausa town not far from the left bank of the Niger; and secondly, in a smaller affair undertaken to punish the mur- derers of a British officer near Illo. But neither of these ex- peditions led to any serious fighting, though the Lapai busi- ness at one time threatened to be as serious as that with Bida and Illorin ; and they were re- garded by the officers and men rather in the light of a pleasant break in the monotony of the year's real work. That has of course consisted in the drilling, organisation, and housing of the force. When the 2nd batta- lion moved and occupied the island of Jebba, they were obliged at first simply to camp in tents. Then the ground had to be cleared ; the men were told off to build their own lines, and likewise grass huts and a grass mess -hut were built for the officers and non-commissioned officers. Not till August was the river high enough to bring up stores by steamer to Jebba ; but the material for houses was landed at Lokoja, and Lieu- tenant M'Clintock with his company of sappers was busily engaged in setting them up. The type adopted consisted of a mason -work foundation, upon which were placed iron pillars

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set in concrete, and on these pillars the wooden houses were put up, for it is found that malaria hangs about low, and it is an advantage to sleep some distance above the ground. When the river rose, the re- maining stores went to Jebba and the engineers with them; though by that time the 2nd battalion and Royal Artillery were so comfortably settled in the grass huts that they hardly desired the change. The sol- diers, who before had been employed in building, now were turned on to the new fatigue duty of carrying timber and other materials from the land- ing - place ; and besides the fatigue duty drill went on un- ceasingly. At half -past five A.M. every day there would be reveille ; officers dressed to an accompaniment of jabbering from the parade-ground as the never-silent negroes assembled ; at six "Fall in" would sound, and from half -past six to eight was parade. Then after break- fast, from nine to ten, came drill for recruits, and till twelve, when the men had their mid-day meal, various fatigue duties. Then came sleep, and again, from four to six, parade, and by the end of that Europeans had had enough of it. Always, too, during the day there would be musketry practice, an uphill business, for the negro is slow in learning how to shoot; but the perseverance of his instruc- tors has got the better of his incapacity, and up to 400 yards volley-firing is done with very

fair results. The men are armed with Lee-Metfords, and the little bush - fighting that was done against Lapai and elsewhere proved the superiority of the hard bullet over that used in the Sniders. The soft bullet is apt to break up when volleys are fired into bush where natives are hiding ; but the Lee-Metf ord projectiles went through the cover so completely that the hidden party always ran before our men could get close. The three batteries of gunners also, under Major Robinson, have arrived at a considerable degree of competence, and, in short, the force has become effective.

It has not been without cost. Europeans working hard under service conditions in any hot climate must always be liable to a heavy mortality, and although the climate in these regions of the Mger is less dis- agreeable than that of many places in India, it has proved deadly. The mortality at Lo- koja, which is near the junc- tion of the Niger and Benue, where the land at the conflu- ence is submerged at high Mger, has been greater than that at Jebba, which lies farther up - stream, with no stagnant water about ; but even at Jebba it has been heavy. Still, the country is a very different one from the coast with its mangrove swamps, which Mr Harold Bindloss has so vividly de- scribed in his book on the Niger Delta. 1 The situation of Lokoja, lying at the confluence

1 In the Niger Country. By Harold Bindloss. Edinburgh and London: 1898.

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of two huge rivers, and backed by mountain - chains, is very beautiful, and the scenery in general recalled South Africa to men who had seen the kloopfs and kopjes. At Jebba the stream is not so broad, and is pent in between high stony cliffs : above the island itself one of many in the river rises the great Jebba rock at the foot of the rapids, a huge crag in mid -stream, wooded at its base, but bare and bald for its upper half. Sport is still only a matter of anticipation, for the officers have been too hard at work to spare the time needed to hunt big game in the dense bush ; but plenty of tracks have been seen, both of elephants and lions, and no doubt in easier times there will be good bags made by men stationed at Jebba. For the moment it is worth while to note two very important ex- periments that were tried to make life less uncomfortable. A soda - water machine was brought out and put under the charge of a non - commissoned officer who had learnt the work in India. All the water was boiled in a huge copper before being aerated, and thus a drink was available in which the microbes could find no harbour- age. Still more interesting was the regimental farm of the 2nd battalion, started under the direction of Captain the Hon. Fitzroy Somerset of the Grena- dier Guards. This has not only

provided vegetables, but has been a means of fattening cattle, sheep, guinea-fowl, and turkeys procured from the natives, so that the Europeans have never wanted for fresh food, and have even been able to supply the gunboats. The black soldiers receive a weekly ration of guinea corn and trade beef ; it is prepared for them by their women. The Yorubas pre- fer yams, but it has hitherto been hard to get these. The recruit- ing has gone on steadily, till both battalions are nearly, if not quite, up to strength. With the 1st battalion, which began with a nucleus of Hausas, the original difficulty was to enlist Yorubas; and, with Fitzger- ald's, which began by enrolling Yorubas, the opposite was the case. Hausas and Yorubas being enemies, it was hard to induce either of them to enlist in a regiment recruited, appar- ently, from another and not a friendly race ; but once one or two companies were organised, things went on more easily. What has been said of the work done at Jebba describes also in rough outline that car- ried out at Lokoja by Lieut. - Colonel Pilcher and his officers with the 1st battalion. In short, the force, which was started in a somewhat experi- mental way a year ago, is now one that can be counted upon, and its officers may be heartily congratulated on the results of their work.

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