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BATTLES OF THE NINETEENTH... CENTURY



ILLUSTRATED



The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders crossing the Modder River.

BATTLES
OF THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY

VOL. VI.

THE BOER WAR OF 1899—1900

DOWN TO THE OCCUPATION OF PRETORIA

SPECIAL EDITION

WITH COLOURED PLATES AND NUMEROUS OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

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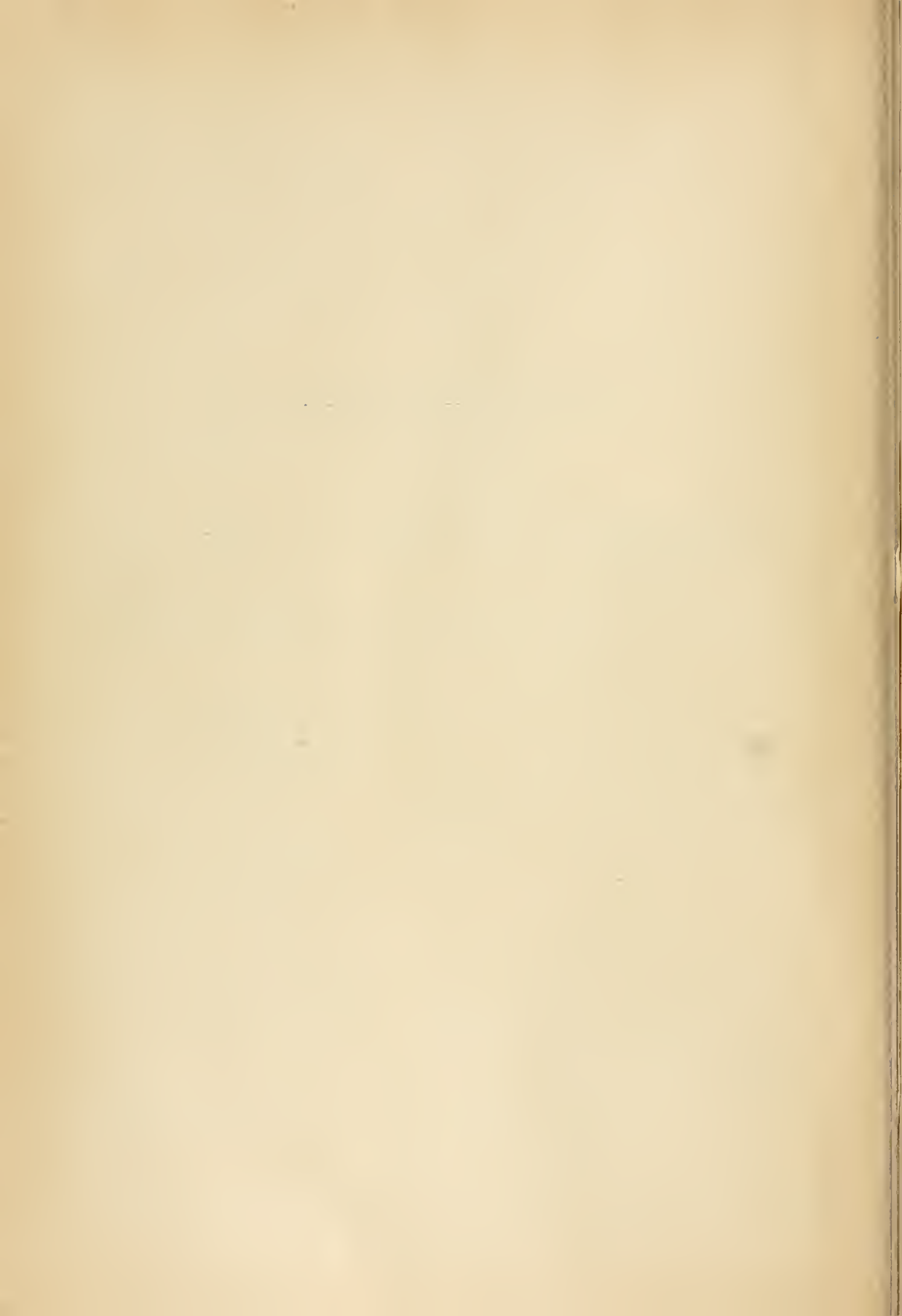
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THE BOER WAR.

CHAPTER I.

THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR.

IT is needless to tell afresh the oft-told story of our troubles in the Transvaal, from the days of the disastrous defeat at Majuba to those of the senseless and luckless Jameson Raid. Nor is it necessary to pass in review the course of the negotiations that preceded the war, the agitation at Johannesburg, the abortive conference between Sir Alfred Milner and President Kruger at Bloemfontein in the spring of 1899, and the negotiations that followed, in which, unhappily, neither Government trusted the other.

The demands made by Great Britain on the Transvaal were supposed by the Boers to be only the prelude to further claims that would destroy whatever independence was left to the Transvaal. The concessions offered by Mr. Kruger were declared by the advocates of the Uitlanders to be mere makeshift evasions, that in their practical application would prove of no real worth. Such a state of things was only too likely to end in war; and the conflict was precipitated by the ultimatum addressed to the British Government by President Kruger on October 9th, calling upon Great Britain to withdraw the reinforcements from the Cape, suspend further war preparations, and refer the questions in debate to arbitration. Forty-eight hours were given for the reply, and war began on the afternoon of October 11th.

Before describing the first operations it will be well to say something of the nature of the theatre of war and of the organisation and positions of the opposing forces.

The boundaries of the Transvaal or South African Republic included when the war began an area of about 120,000 square miles, almost exactly the same extent as the area of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The

Orange Free State had an area of 48,000 square miles. The two republics together had an area equal to about seven-eighths of France. But compared to European countries both were very thinly populated, their white inhabitants, except in the mining districts, being a race of cattle-owning farmers. Neither republic had any coast-line, and, taking them as a single state, their frontiers towards British and Portuguese territory amounted to about 1,700 miles. About 300 miles of this frontier divided the eastern Transvaal from Portuguese territory.



SIR REDVERS BULLER.
(Photo: Gregory, Strand.)

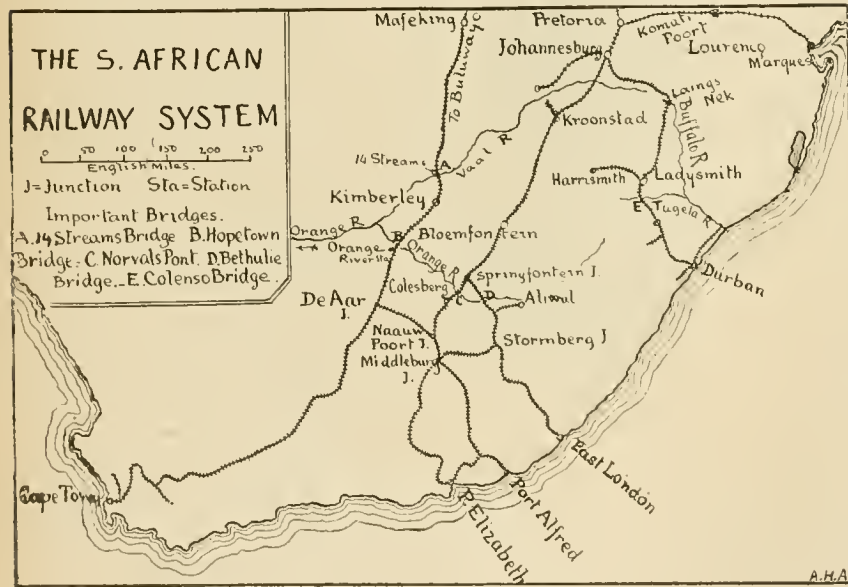
The whole of the Orange Free State and the greater part of the Transvaal belong to the high uplands of the great Central African plateau. Southward through Cape Colony and Natal the land falls in successive terraces to the sea level. Thus, while Johannesburg in the Transvaal is over 5,600 feet above the sea, and the ground at Laing's Nek on the Natal border about 5,400, Glencoe and Dundee in Natal are a little above 4,000; then the Biggarsberg range marks the edge of another terrace at Ladysmith, the level having dropped to 3,200. By the time that, on our way to the coast, we have reached Pietermaritzburg, the capital of Natal, we have gone down another thousand feet, and at Pinetown Station, only twelve miles from the sea, we are at the 1,100 feet level, and there is a sharp drop to the quays of Durban.

On the west, the Boer borders are on the high veldt of the plateau, an upland region, bare as a beaten road in the dry season, but for the most part green with quick-growing grass in the time of the rains, which come in the summer months (corresponding to the winter months of our northern hemisphere). On the north side the

Transvaal plateau is lower, and the character of the country (known as the "bush veldt") has much in common with the forest land of Rhodesia.

Through the Boer lands streams and rivers, often dry in winter, have cut deeply into the plateau. The crossing-places of the larger streams are mostly by fords, approached by steep slopes on both sides, locally known as "drifts." There are few bridges, chiefly on the railways. Most of the roads are mere waggon tracks.

The white settlers originally penetrated into the uplands by two main lines of approach—from Cape Colony over the drifts of the Orange River, and from Natal by the mountain passes of the Drakensberg range, which here forms the bold escarpment of the plateau. Between these two main lines of approach the mountain mass of Basutoland—the Switzerland of South Africa—inhabited by semi-independent tribes, bars for some 150 miles the access to the Boer republics.



The railways, following the original lines of immigration and settlement, lie west and east of the Basutoland mountains, in Cape Colony and in Natal, and the British plan of campaign was determined largely by their position.

The two chief Cape railways are—(1) the line from Cape Town to Kimberley and Buluwayo, which crosses the Orange River just outside the Free State frontier, and runs along the high veldt parallel to the western border of the two republics, through Kimberley, Vryburg, and Mafeking into Rhodesia. At De Aar junction, just south of the Orange River, it sends off a

line eastward to link it with (2) the railway from Port Elizabeth, which enters the Free State by Norvals Pont Bridge on the Orange River, and then goes north through Bloemfontein (the Free State capital) and across the Vaal to Johannesburg and Pretoria. A third line from the port of East London joins the Free State railway at a junction north of Norvals Pont, and has another connection with the Port Elizabeth-Bloemfontein line by a cross line to Middleburg in Cape Colony, where the cross line from De Aar also comes in. Middleburg is thus the chief railway junction south of the Orange River. The line east of the Basutoland mountain mass runs from Durban, the port of Natal, through Pietermaritzburg and the northern coal field of the Colony, traverses the ridge at Laing's Nek by a tunnel, and then runs on to Johannesburg. It sends off a branch at Ladysmith through Van Reenen's Pass in the Drakens-

berg to Harrismith in the Free State. These were the lines running from British territory before the war. There was another railway giving access to the Transvaal from Portuguese territory on the east coast. It started from Lourenço Marques on Delagoa Bay. At Komati Poort it climbed the eastern wall of the plateau by a boldly constructed rackwork line, and then was carried to Pretoria by the Netherlands

railway, so called because it was constructed by Dutch capitalists.

Though the shortest way to Pretoria is from Delagoa Bay, the lowlands through which the line runs up to Komati Poort are peculiarly unhealthy both for men and horses. As a large British army must be based on the sea, an invasion of the Transvaal from Rhodesia by any considerable force was also out of the question. Nor could the main force be assembled at Kimberley and Mafeking to operate from the western frontier, for it would have to depend for supplies on a single line of

railway, which, running along the open veldt within sight of the Boer borders, could not be kept open in the important first stage of the campaign. The advance must, therefore, be along the southern lines of approach, from the Cape Colony and Natal.

The alliance of the Orange Free State with the Transvaal made it necessary to include a march across the Orange River in the plan of operations. An advance on this side would give the main British army three lines of railway for bringing up supplies and reinforcements, and would open a way into the Transvaal on which there were none of the formidable mountain positions that barred the way of a march by Northern Natal. Moreover, by beginning with the invasion of the Free State, the British general would be able to threaten in flank and rear the Boer forces holding the Drakensberg passes and the country about Laing's Nek. Accordingly, as soon as there was any serious prospect of war, it was decided that a complete army corps and a cavalry division should be sent to Cape Colony, and concentrated on the line of railway junctions south of the Orange River, ready to advance on Bloemfontein, Johannesburg, and Pretoria. A division of British troops, with a cavalry brigade, would meanwhile defend Natal from a Boer invasion; for it was anticipated that on the outbreak of war the Transvaal Boers would repeat the plan of 1880-81, and invade Northern Natal by Laing's Nek, while their allies of the Free State advanced on the British left through the Drakensberg passes. Local levies, assisted by detachments of Imperial troops, were to hold Kimberley (the diamond city) and Mafeking, on the western border of the hostile republics, thus compelling the Boers to detach a certain number of men and guns from the force concentrated on their southern frontiers. In Rhodesia, the local troops and a corps of mounted rifles, raised by Special Service officers, were relied upon to deal with Boer raiders, and prevent a possible renewal of the Matabele rising. Such was the original British plan of campaign.

As has been the case in so many recent wars, once the diplomatic tension became severe, the concentration of troops on both sides, in view of a possible conflict, precipitated the actual outbreak of hostilities. Some minor reinforcements had been despatched from England to the Cape at various times during 1899, and in August a number of Special Service

officers had gone to South Africa to organise the local defences. Sir William Butler, an officer who had done good service in many parts of the world, including South Africa, held the Cape command. He had acted as High Commissioner during Sir Alfred Milner's absence at Bloemfontein, and in a despatch to the Cabinet, published in one of the Transvaal Blue Books, he had expressed the opinion that the Uitlander agitation was largely artificial. In his *Life of General Colley*, published early in 1899, he had shown that he was completely out of harmony with what may be called the "Forward Policy" in South Africa. As the clouds darkened, and war seemed likely to be the result, he took the strong step of asking to be relieved from a command in which he would have had to take a prominent part in carrying out a policy of which he could not approve. General Forestier Walker was sent out to take his place at the Cape, and the military authorities at home showed their undiminished confidence in Sir William by at once appointing him to the Devonport command.

Two battalions (the 1st Manchester and the 1st Munster Fusiliers) had been sent out from home to the Cape in August. In September large reinforcements were sent off from England and from India, and steps were taken that pointed to the imminence of a great campaign.

At the Cabinet Council held on Friday, October 6th, it was decided to send 10,000 men to South Africa. More than half of these were drawn from the Indian garrisons, the rest being provided from the Home Stations and the Mediterranean. At the same time Sir George White was ordered to proceed to South Africa with a staff of Special Service officers and provide for the defence of Natal. Sir George had had a brilliant Indian career. He was an Irish officer, but, like many of his countrymen, had served as a regimental officer with a Highland battalion. In the Afghan War he was with Roberts in the famous march to Candahar, and the records of the Victoria Cross tell how at Charasiah Major White, as he then was, charged at the head of the Gordons and stormed a rocky ridge held by a force of the enemy that outnumbered the assailants ten to one, White meeting the Afghan leader in single combat and killing him. At Candahar he led another charge in which several of the Afghan guns were captured. Rapid promotion followed these exploits, and White, after having been commander-in-chief of the Indian army, came home to take a high position on the

headquarters staff at the Horse Guards. It was understood that in the case of war he was to be second in command of the expeditionary force in South Africa, and rumour already spoke of Sir Redvers Buller, another wearer of the Victoria Cross, and a soldier who had seen much African service, as the destined commander-in-chief in the field.

Sir George White left England for Natal on September 16th. It may be of interest to note here the dates on which the various corps ordered to Africa sailed for their destination. There were sent from England :—

1st Northumberland Fusiliers, on Sept. 16th.

9th, 15th, and 31st Companies, Army Service Corps, Sept. 16th.

4th Company, Army Ordnance Corps, Sept. 16th.

Section, Telegraph Battalion, R.E., Sept. 20th.

18th, 62nd, and 75th Batteries, R.F.A., Sept. 28th.

Balloon Section, R.E., and No. 5 Co. A.S.C., Sept. 28th.

An Ammunition Column, Sept. 30th.

From Egypt :—

1st Royal Irish Fusiliers, Sept. 24th.

From Malta :—

1st Border Regiment, Sept. 28th

From India :—

42nd Battery, R.F.A., Sept. 17th.

21st Battery, R.F.A., Sept. 18th.

2nd King's Royal Rifles, Sept. 18th.

9th Field Hospital, Sept. 18th.

53rd Battery, R.F.A., Sept. 19th.

1st Devonshire Regiment, Sept. 21st.

10th Hussars, Sept. 21st, 22nd, and 23rd.

2nd Gordon Highlanders, Sept. 23rd.

1st Gloucester Regiment, Sept. 25th.

9th Lancers, Sept. 25th.

5th Dragoon Guards, Sept. 26th.

An Ammunition Column, Sept. 28th.

These troops, some of which, however, could not arrive till far into October, would raise the strength of the Cape and Natal garrisons to about 20,000 men. But, even with the local armed police and volunteer forces, they would still be outnumbered heavily by the levy *en masse* which the two republics could rapidly put into the field. The Home Government was

therefore engaged in preparing for the mobilisation of a complete army corps, and arranging with the great shipping companies to take over about a hundred large steamers as transports.

But events moved so fast that war had begun before all the reinforcements had arrived, and before the army corps had completed its mobilisation. On September 28th the Orange Free State had declared that in the event of hostilities its burghers would fight on the side of the Transvaal. On October 1st the two republics began to collect their forces. The only trained troops they possessed were a number of batteries of artillery and a few mounted police. But every man was liable to service, and possessed a Mauser rifle, supplied by the State, a bandolier, and a quantity of cartridges, and almost every man had a horse, and was bound to bring with him at least a week's supplies for himself and his mount. The process of mobilising was simple in the extreme. The burghers of each district took the field under the local Field Cornet, who was in peace their magistrate, in war their commander. On receiving a



SIR FORFSTIER WALKER.
(Photo: Russell & Sons, Southsea.)

telegram from the capital he sent word to the nearest farms for the able-bodied men to turn out, and these passed on the message to the farms farther from the centre. In the next few hours the men would come riding in, and meanwhile he would have commandeered or requisitioned horses, waggons, and stores to supply his "commando" or column. Women generally came in the waggons to help with the camp cooking. The commandoes either marched to the post assigned to them, or made their way to a railway station, whence they could reach the laagers by train. In the towns the men were called out and sent to the front by train, with horses and transport locally requisitioned.

A letter from a Dutch resident in Johannesburg gives a striking picture of this mustering in arms of the manhood of a whole nation. Whatever may have been the rights or wrongs of the quarrel, it is evident that the burghers of the republics threw themselves heart and soul into what they regarded as a patriotic struggle for the existence of their country. "On Wednesday," says the writer, "Mauser



STARTING FOR THE CAPE: SIR REDVERS BULLER TAKING LEAVE OF HIS FAMILY.

rifles were distributed over the whole country to the 'burghers' and to those 'Outlanders' who voluntarily enrolled themselves, upon which a general 'commanding' (calling up) followed. There was a tremendous panic in the town, for it is not so very tranquillising to see every other man with a rifle on his shoulder. All large shops were subsequently closed and nailed up with iron and wood. The horses, asses, and mules were taken from the carriages in the street to be used by the troops. On Friday, only from here, six trains with troops left for Volksrust. I do not think that there is another country in the whole world where anything of the kind is possible. In twenty-four hours the burghers armed, called up, and transported! My landlord D. has left all in his house as it was, only asking me to look a bit after his things, and has left also. It was a very interesting sight at the station, and I have admired the Afrikaner wives and girls for their admirable attitude. No weeping or crying, nothing of that. 'Do your duty,' then a kiss, a shake-hands, and the train went off with husbands, brothers, fathers, possibly not to return again. Those left behind flourished still a long time with hats, etc., after the train, above which the four colours of the flag unfolded themselves.

"Touching scenes took place. There was old Ferreira with his five sons, for instance, he himself a Boer of the old 'trekker' type, and his sons, all six feet odd. An old Boer finds his son of fifteen years or thereabouts has stolen away, and has asked for a rifle from the 'veldkornet' to join the troops. The old man in the end approves his son's desire. 'Behave as a man' is his word of leave. Old and young, rich and poor, without demurring, without discouragement, all have flocked together at the first summons, leaving all behind, because the country is in want of them. No glittering of epaulettes or buttons, no music, no bombast or boasting; only calmness and seriousness in those resolute, tawny heads!

"I was with an old German lady, whose heart, so susceptible to love of the native country, grew too big. She could not help going along all the waggons to press the rough fists. 'Will you all come back?' 'Missus,' is the reply, 'we cannot positively promise you this, but we shall nevertheless try.' It is also a very pathetic sight to see how great the love for their native country is with the Boers. Four hundred were called up in Quarter 2 Krugersdorp district, and

670 presented themselves. The commander tried to refuse those 270, but there was no question of that. In Maranburg 150 were summoned, and 800 appeared. Everybody joins. All from the highest to the lowest rank are ready, and full of enthusiasm and reliance in the Lord."

The eastern Orange Free State commandoes were directed to Harrismith, whence the railway conveyed them to Van Reenen's Pass, the principal entrance to Natal. The neighbouring passes of the Drakensberg, Tintwa's, and Botha's were also occupied in force. Other columns from the western and southern districts moved towards the drifts and bridges of the Orange River and towards Kimberley and Vryburg. The bulk of the Transvaal forces began to concentrate at Volksrust, the frontier station just north of Laing's Nek, and at Wakkerstroom, a few miles to the eastward. The commandoes of the southeast mustered at Vryheid, where they could march into Natal by the drifts of the Buffalo River. From the Northern Transvaal a strong force began to move towards Mafeking, and smaller commandoes in the Free State and the Transvaal were told off to observe the Basuto border, the frontier of Rhodesia, and the pass at Komati Poort where the Delagoa Bay railway enters the highlands, as there was a rumour that a British force might be moved through Portuguese territory.

There had been something like a panic among the Outlanders of the Rand. The trains that came down by Laing's Nek were crowded day and night with fugitives. Many of them, including women and children, travelled in open trucks, huddled together, exposed to driving storms of rain, and suffering terribly in the long journey. This panic-flight had been partly prompted by rumours that on the outbreak of war the Boers would bombard Johannesburg with the heavy guns of the fort that looks down upon it, and would blow up the headworks of the mines and the chief buildings. Rumour, too, said that the Boers intended to raid the border without a declaration of war, and call the Dutch of the Colony (who form about three-fifths of the population) to arms. On October 5th there was a report that the enemy had actually seized Laing's Nek, and were marching on Newcastle, and the result was a panic-flight southwards from the border town. If the Boers had been an impious savage Zulus there could not have been more alarm. Mr. Escombe, the ex-Premier of Natal,

was in the town, and he vainly endeavoured to reassure the citizens, declaring that even if the Boers came, he and his family would stay at their home in the place. At the same time there was an ill-considered outcry against General Penn Symons and the British authorities for leaving Charleston, Laing's Nek, and Newcastle undefended. The General had wisely decided that to hold these advanced posts in the narrow wedge of hilly country between the Drakensberg and the gorge of the Buffalo would be to play into the hands of the enemy, and offer an easy victory to their superior forces. He had contented himself with holding Dundee and Glencoe Junction with an advanced brigade, keeping the rest of his forces at the important junction of Lady-smith, where he barred the roads from Laing's Nek on the northward and Van Reenen's Pass to the westward.

On October 7th the Home Government called out 25,000 men of the Reserves, ordered the mobilisation of the First Army Corps and a cavalry division, and issued the official list of staff appointments for the coming expedition. At the same time, Parliament was summoned to meet on the 17th to sanction these measures and grant the necessary supplies.

The mobilisation was, even apart from the need of preparation for the impending war, a very interesting experiment. It was the first time that Great Britain had used the modern machinery of her military system to put in the field so large a force as an army corps plus a cavalry division. The troops that had been sent to South Africa from India might be said to have been already mobilised before the order came, for regiments in India are kept at full war strength, and are in possession of their campaigning kit and equipment. This was why, when the first emergency arose, the Indian garrisons were so largely drawn upon. The troops sent out from England in September belonged to regiments that were first on the list for foreign service, and therefore strong in numbers. But the rest could not be sent out without a considerable stiffening of reservists, for they were battalions, squadrons, and batteries that were largely made up of half-trained recruits, and had sent large drafts of men to strengthen the regiments that were already abroad.

Ten days were given for the reservists to join. In Continental armies the period is a day or two, but this longer term was de-

liberately chosen in England to diminish as much as possible the dislocation of business that must necessarily follow the sudden calling of so many men from workshop and office, farm and factory. The reservists came up splendidly. The few absentees could easily be accounted for. Some were ill, some at sea. Comparatively few were rejected at the medical examination. The men were in good physical condition, and readily fell into their places in the ranks. Most satisfactory, too, was the action of the employers. Almost without exception they announced that they would keep the reservists' situations open for them, only filling them temporarily in their absence, and in most cases they arranged to grant half-pay or some smaller regular assistance to the wives and families of those who needed such help.

The assembly of the reservists and their departure for their regiments were made in many places the occasion of public demonstrations. In more than one town the mayor and corporation accompanied them to the railway station. Military bands played them through the streets amid cheering crowds. Funds were opened to provide for the relatives left at home by the soldiers, and for the widows and orphans of the campaign. Offers of service came from the Volunteers of Canada and Australia, and many of the home Volunteer regiments emulated in this respect their colonial comrades.

The mobilisation was completed on October 17th. The embarkation began on October 20th. General Sir Redvers Buller had sailed from Southampton on the 15th, amid a scene of the wildest enthusiasm. These demonstrations were renewed as transport after transport put to sea from Southampton, the London Docks, Liverpool, or Queenstown, most of the ships going from the first-named port. For more than a fortnight ships started almost daily, and the long procession of great steamers crowded with fighting-men streamed southwards from the Channel towards the Cape. Never in all her history had England sent so mighty an armament so far.

But while the first reinforcements, the vanguard of the new Armada, were still upon the sea, the war had begun. We have seen that the period named in the Boer ultimatum expired on the afternoon of October 11th. That same evening the commandoes of the Transvaal began the war by invading British territory.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST MOVEMENTS OF THE BOERS.

AT the outbreak of the war it was not possible to make anything but a rough estimate of the forces that the two republics had put into the field. All that was certain was that the bulk of the Transvaal commandoes, under the personal command of General Joubert, were concentrated on the borders of Northern Natal, and that the same district was threatened by the Free State forces concentrated about Harrismith and Albertina, with their vanguards in the Drakensberg passes. On the evening of October 11th the Free State troops broke up their camps and began to move into the passes, chiefly at Van Reenen's and Tintwa's. At the same time Joubert's Transvaal levies began to cross the frontier in three columns. The right column, the smallest of the three, marched through Botha's Pass in the Drakensberg. The centre column moved from Volksrust on Charleston, pushing forward its vanguard to seize Laing's Nek. The left column marched from Wakkerstroom towards the Buffalo River, its objective being Mount Prospect and Ingogo. Further to the south, minor forces were on the move from Vryheid towards the drifts of the Buffalo east of Dundee and away due south, towards the part of Zululand that belongs to Natal.

Sir George White had already reached Natal and had his headquarters at Ladysmith when the war began. He had about 9,000 men with him in camp, and he had away to the northward, at Craigsidde camp, between Dundee and Glencoe, and in these two towns, a brigade of infantry, with three batteries and some cavalry and colonial troops, about 4,000 in all, under General Sir William Penn Symons. Symons

had cavalry patrols out towards the country over which the Boers were expected to approach, and he had ordered them to fall back slowly before the enemy's advance without fighting. White's communications with Durban were secured by garrisons of colonial troops at Colenso and Estcourt, where there were important bridges

on the railway, and at Pietermaritzburg, the capital of the colony. Durban was made safe by the presence of part of the Cape Squadron under Rear-Admiral Harris.

As the advance of the invaders of Natal was thus unopposed at the outset, there was no fighting for a few days in this the principal theatre of war. The first fight took place in the night, between October 12th and 13th, on the western border, and it was a success for the Boers. Colonel Baden-Powell held Mafeking with a garrison formed of a detachment of the Munster Fusiliers, and a corps of colonial mounted rifles recruited



SIR WILLIAM PENN SYMONS.

in Bechuanaland and Rhodesia just before the war. In all he had about 1,200 men with him. His second in command was Major Lord Edward Cecil, D.S.O., of the Grenadier Guards, a son of Lord Salisbury. An important element in the defence was supplied by two armoured trains, the larger one armed with a 7-pounder gun and some Maxims; the smaller, known locally as the "Mosquito," armed with a Maxim gun. The next posts on the railway were, the station at Lobatsi, 47 miles to the northward, held by a small party of volunteers, and Kimberley, 223 miles to the southward, where the great heaps of debris from the diamond mines had been converted into improvised fortifications, and armed with field-pieces and machine-guns, and furnished with electric



A. Wolmarans,
P. J. Joubert,

F. W. Reitz (State Secretary),
S. J. P. Kruger (President),

S. M. Burger,

J. H. M. Kock,
P. A. Cronje,

THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN REPUBLIC.

search-lights. Colonel Kekewich was in command, and he had a garrison of about 3,000 men, including the 1st Battalion of the North Lancashire Regiment, some gunners of the Royal Artillery and a detachment of Royal Engineers, and a number of colonial volunteers and armed townsfolk. Still further south there was a small force of volunteers and regulars holding the railway bridge at Orange River station.

It had been reported that Commandant Cronje, one of the best of the Boer generals, the man who had stopped Jameson at Krugersdorp and Dornkop, was moving across the veldt to attack Mafeking. Colonel Baden-Powell was anxious to get rid of as many as possible of the non-combatants. On the 12th a last trainload of refugees started from Mafeking for Kimberley. It conveyed about 300 women and children, and was escorted by the little armoured train, the *Mosquito*, with a crew of fifteen colonial volunteers under Captain Nesbitt, V.C., a young officer of the colonial forces, who had won the coveted cross

"For Valour" in the Mashonaland War of 1896. The refugees reached Kimberley safely, and went on for the south. Nesbitt then hitched on to the armoured train a couple of trucks in which were two field-pieces and a quantity of ammunition for the defence of Mafeking. In the evening he started northwards, a pilot engine running in front of the train, but only about forty yards ahead, too near to be of any real service. The railway is a single line, with, at intervals, a station where there is a siding on which a train can be shunted for another to pass it. At Maribogo siding, forty-five miles from Mafeking, the stationmaster

told Captain Nesbitt that there was a Boer force near the line some miles ahead. But it was very important to get the guns and ammunition on to Mafeking, and, hoping to slip through in the darkness of the night, the young officer ordered the engine drivers to go ahead.

For twelve miles more the train ran steadily northwards along the starlit veldt without any sign of an enemy. Kraaipan station was close ahead, when suddenly the pilot engine ran off the line. Flowerday, the driver, sprang off the footplate and waved a red lamp to warn the other engine, but it was too close for the signal to be of any avail, and although it was going at a low speed, it could not be stopped till it had run on to the pilot engine. Nesbitt and the drivers examined the track, and found that some of the rails had been removed, and thus the train had been brought to a standstill. The rails were lying on the bank, and they were debating about the possibility of repairing damages, when

close by from a watercourse that crossed the line a score of rifles flashed through the darkness and the bullets whistled round them and flattened on the wrecked engines. The officer and the railway men took refuge in the armoured car, and with rifle fire and an occasional spurt from the Maxim gun answered the Boer attack, aiming at the flashes of the rifles that now were flickering here and there in a wide circle on the veldt. For four hours the fight went on, Nesbitt hoping that relief of some kind might appear. One of the railway men and three of the sixteen colonial volunteers who guarded the train were wounded, all slightly, by bullets that came



SIR GEORGE WHITE.

(Photo: Bourne & Shepherd, Calcutta.)

in through the loopholes. But though the Mauser bullets were rattling like hail on the waggon, none of them penetrated its steel armour. At last the sun rose, and then a mile away on a swell of the veldt a battery of artillery was seen to be in position. The Boers opened with shell, and aimed first at the engines, which were soon completely wrecked. They then turned their guns on the armoured car. It was evident that they had information as to the contents of the train, for they took care not to hit the trucks that contained the guns and ammunition, which they hoped to capture intact. The train was not built to resist artillery fire, and seeing that there was no help to be expected, Nesbitt ordered the white flag to be displayed. It was not observed for a couple of minutes, during which the guns continued firing, happily without hurting any of the brave men who guarded the train. During this interval Driver Flowerday had slipped out of the waggon and crept away unobserved along a drain beside the railway bank. It was he who brought the details of the affair to Maribogo, whence the news was sent on to Kimberley and the Cape.

The Boers secured the guns and ammunition, and took their prisoners to Pretoria. It was a small affair, but it produced a very unpleasant impression, coming at the very outset of the war. It was a first score for the enemy. The party that had intercepted the train belonged to Cronje's force, and had been detailed to cut the line south of Mafeking as a prelude to the attack on that place, on which the main body was now directed. It met, as we shall see, with a

very plucky and resourceful resistance at the hands of Colonel Baden-Powell and his little garrison.

Another commando of the Free State forces marched on Kimberley, and pushed a strong column south of the town, which cut the telegraph and tore up the railway, blowing up the bridge over the Modder Spruit. Forty miles north of the town the important railway bridge at Fourteen Streams was also destroyed. On

the southern border of the Free State the burghers occupied and cut the railway north of Norval's Point on the line from the Cape to Bloemfontein. The great bridge at Orange River Station on the line to Kimberley was held by Imperial and Colonial troops, and in order to simplify the defence, the Royal Engineers destroyed the long stone bridge over the river by which the old Kimberley road crosses it.

Other movements on these borders may be left out of account for the present, and we shall tell later on the story of the defence of Kimberley by Kekewich and of

Mafeking by Baden-Powell. Let us now return to the operations of the main Boer armies in the invasion of Natal.

It had been expected that their advance would be very rapid. But in this war they were for the first time moving in large bodies, encumbered not only with long trains of waggons, but also with several batteries of field artillery and many heavy guns of position. The central column was halted at Laing's Nek on the 13th.

It was not till Saturday, October 14th, that the vanguard rode into Newcastle and hoisted



SIR ARCHIBALD HUNTER.

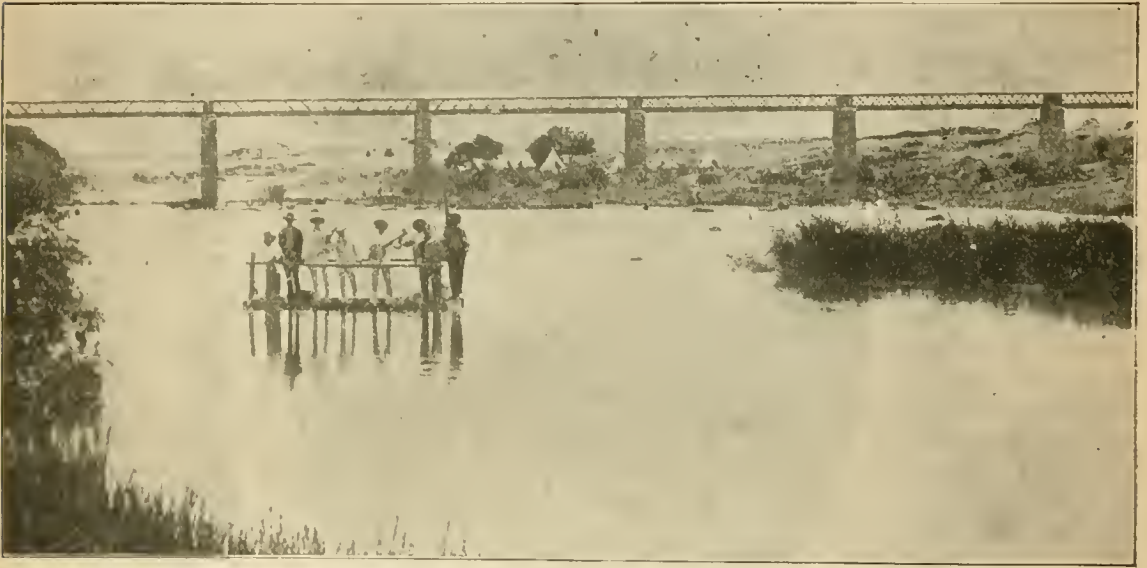
(Photo: Bassano, Old Bond Street, W.)

the "vierkleur," the "four-coloured" flag of the Transvaal, on the Town Hall.

On that day there were false reports in London of a great battle near Ladysmith. They had only the slenderest foundation. In the morning Sir George White moved out to see if he could draw the Free State forces into an action, with a view to disposing of the force that had come through Tintwa's and Van Reenen's Passes before they could be joined by any of the other columns. He had with him in Ladysmith an infantry brigade made up of the 1st Devons, the 1st

force. It was clear that the Boers were still clinging to the rocky defiles of the Drakensberg, and had only pushed small mounted parties into the lower ground. They were, in fact, waiting till the northern advance could be combined with their operations. After this reconnaissance in force, Sir George White returned to his camp at Ladysmith.

The next few days were uneventful. On Sunday, the 15th, General Joubert's vanguard occupied Ingagane, eight miles from Newcastle and twenty-four miles north of Glencoe. During



THE MODDER STRUIT BRIDGE, DESTROYED BY THE BOERS.

Gloucesters, 1st Manchesters, 2nd Gordon Highlanders, and 1st Liverpool Regiment, besides three batteries of Royal Field Artillery, and the 10th Mountain Battery. For cavalry he had the 5th Dragoon Guards, 5th Irish Lancers, 10th Hussars, and a colonial corps, the Natal Carabineers, and the Imperial Light Horse, a body of mounted rifles who were chiefly recruited among the Uitlanders. There were also some infantry and artillery volunteers in the town.

During Thursday his mounted scouts had been falling back before the advancing Free State commandoes. Early on Friday morning Sir George, with General Hunter, moved out with the bulk of his force some ten miles to the west of Ladysmith along the Acton Homes road. But the Boer patrols fell back before his cavalry scouts, exchanging a few harmless shots, and there was no sign of an enemy anywhere in

the next two days the Boers were concentrating about Ingagane, and pushed on an advanced guard to Dannhäuser, about twelve miles from Glencoe. Then the commandoes began to close in, and on Thursday, 10th, there were signs that the long-delayed attack on the British positions was imminent.

Joubert had arranged his plans admirably. The Free State commandoes from the Drakensberg passes were to push forward towards Ladysmith, and without venturing to give battle they were to make demonstrations that would keep Sir George White's force occupied. Meanwhile Joubert's right column, under Commandant Viljoen, was to move between Glencoe and the Drakensberg by the road that runs from Newcastle to near Elandsplaagte and destroy railway and telegraph, thus cutting off communication between Symons at Dundee and Glencoe and White at Ladysmith. Symons'



NEWS FROM MAKEKING!

force was then to be attacked and overwhelmed by the combined forces of Joubert's centre column (Commandant Erasmus) and his left column, composed of the burghers from beyond the Buffalo river, under Commandant Lucas Meyer.

Sir W. Symons had with him at Craigside Camp, near Dundee, an infantry brigade of four fine battalions, the 1st Leicesters, the 1st King's Royal Rifles, the 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers, and the 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers. He had three batteries of the Royal Artillery, for cavalry the 18th Hussars, besides a detachment of mounted infantry, with a Maxim, and some colonial mounted volunteers. In all, he had about 4,000 men and eighteen guns.

On Thursday the Free State commandoes pushed forward a screen of mounted rifles from the passes to the west of Ladysmith. On the road that descends from Tintwa's Pass they opened with artillery on the British cavalry patrols. At other points there was an exchange

of rifle and carbine shots between small parties of the advancing burghers and the retiring British, but there were very few casualties. By evening the enemy's screen of patrols held a line of about twenty miles running south from Beester's station on the Harrismith railway to Blaaubank, and with the right thrown back towards Acton Homes, a farm on the Tintwa's Pass road. Then came news that the wire and railway had been cut by raiders between Ladysmith and Glencoe Junction. But White could still communicate with Symons by a wire that ran further east by Greytown, and which the Boers had not interfered with. That wire was soon to bring stirring news, for on the Friday morning the first battle of the Natal campaign was fought. It was at first known as the battle of Glencoe, but it took place many miles further east beyond Dundee, and ought to be called rather the battle of Dundee or the battle of Talana Hill, from the scene of its most stirring episode.



COLONEL BADEN-POWELL.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST FIGHT IN NATAL.—THE BATTLE OF DUNDEE.

SIR WILLIAM SYMONS was aware that the enemy was closing in upon him from the northward, and the cutting of the direct wire to Ladysmith told him that at least small parties were working round to his left rear. He had been expecting attack for some days. At last it came.

In the evening of Thursday, cyclist scouts had come in from the northward with the news that the enemy was advancing. In the darkness of the night, about 2 a.m., there were rifle shots on the Dannhäuser road, and the mounted patrols fell back on the town, where the volunteers turned out under arms. Before dawn the troops in the camp had fallen in, expecting an attack from the northward. As the sun rose there was a roar of guns and a rush of screaming shells, that fell without bursting in and near the camp. The guns, a battery of six field-pieces, were flashing from the bold ridge of Talana Hill, north-east of the camp, a spur of the Impati mountain. Up this rocky height the Boers of Lucas Meyer's commando had dragged them under cover of darkness, and scouts came spurring in with the news that there were about 4,000 men with the guns.

Symons had three batteries of the Royal Artillery with him, the 21st, 42nd, and 53rd. Two of them were sent up to the high ground near the town, a low ridge jutting from the Biggarsberg, and soon opened fire on the enemy's battery on Takana Hill. It was from the very first an unequal conflict for the Boers. They

could only oppose five or at most six guns to the twelve guns of the Royal Artillery, and, while every British shell reached its mark and burst accurately, the Boers, having defective material to work with, and not being so highly trained as their opponents, were able to keep up only a slower and less accurate fire, and very few of their shells exploded. Indeed, it is said that they were mostly only "plugged shell"—that is, shells fired with a plug in the hole intended for the fuse, so that they were like old-fashioned solid shot and comparatively harmless.

An artillery duel of this kind could not last very long. In twenty minutes the Boer guns were all silenced. And then there was a brief lull before the second phase of the battle began. Three of Symons' infantry regiments—the King's Royal Rifles, the Dublin Fusiliers, and the Royal Irish Rifles—had



GENERAL FRENCH.

(Photo: Chas. Knight, Aldershot.)

moved out from the camp to the east of the town, and were now forming for the attack. The Leicester Regiment was held in reserve. While the two batteries still kept up a long-range shell fire on the ridge held by the Boers, the three battalions moved forward into long rifle range. In front half-companies were extended in a long firing line. Behind them, protected by the inequalities of the ground, the rest of each company moved in closer order to supply the losses of the fighting line. Still further back were other companies in a double line of reserves. They were moving forward as steadily and coolly as if they were engaged

in an attack drill in the Long Valley at Aldershot.

And now as they came in range of the Boer Mausers, there was a flickering outburst of rifle fire from the steep ridge of Talana. At first the attacking line pressed forward in silence. Here and there an officer or a man dropped, and was picked up and borne to the rear by the stretcher parties. At last, when the range was still more than half a mile, the advancing battalions opened fire, the sharp volleys of the Lee-Netfords answering the more irregular firing of the enemy. Fighting under cover along the rocky crest, the Boers must have suffered very little from our fire at this stage of the attack. Soon the slope became steeper, the range shorter, the hostile fire from the crest more deadly. And now the advance was checked for a while, the firing line, reinforced from the supports, halting under whatever cover the inequalities of the ground afforded, and trying by its well-aimed volleys to beat down the fire of the defence.

It was at this stage of the fight that news arrived that another Boer column was approaching from the northward. The Leicester Regiment and a battery of artillery that had so far been waiting in reserve were sent off to watch and check this new advance. Having seen to this, General Symons ordered the two other batteries to advance closer to the Boer position on Talana Hill and support the infantry attack with fire at this nearer range. He himself rode forward with his staff and took up a position about a thousand yards from the Boers, halting near a clump of trees on the lower slope of Talana. Almost immediately he fell from his

horse mortally wounded by a rifle bullet, and in the next few minutes several of the staff were hit.

The battle was now near its end. Reinforced with all their reserves, the long line of Fusiliers and Rifles was sweeping up the steep slope. As they reached the crest, the Dublin Fusiliers first, they were met by a fierce outburst of fire from the Boers. Holding their ground for yet awhile among the rocks, the enemy bravely replied at a range of less than a hundred yards to the

magazine fire of the attack. In those last moments of the fight the losses on both sides were fearfully heavy. But the Boers carry no bayonets, and as the attack at last closed upon them they gave way and ran down the back of the ridge, pursued by the fire of the victors.

Those who watched the fight from Dundee thought that the storming of Talana meant the capture of the Boer artillery. It seemed impossible that the Boers could have withdrawn their guns over the difficult ground behind the ridge, while the shell fire



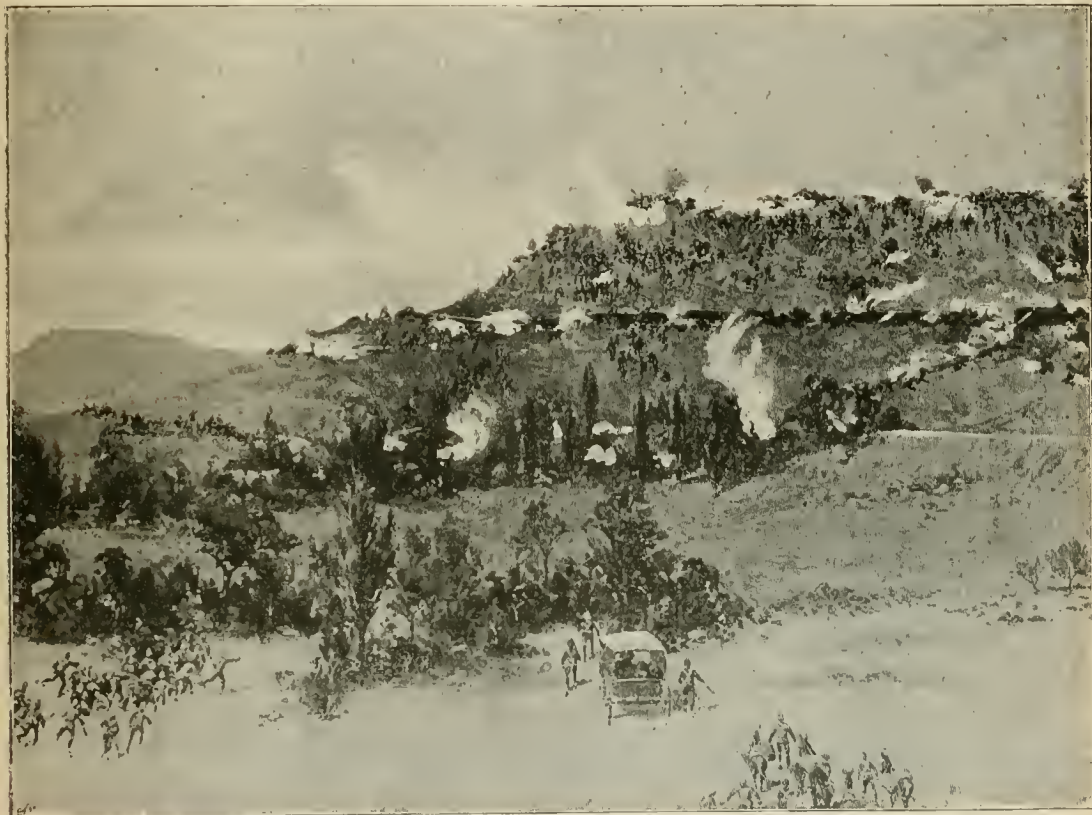
READY FOR THE FRONT: A BOER FATHER AND SON.

of the artillery and the streams of bullets from the three battalions were sweeping the crest. In the first accounts of the action telegraphed to England it was stated that the enemy's guns had all been taken. But this proved to be wrong. The Boers had clung so tenaciously to the position in order to save their artillery, and they had carried off every one of their guns and waggons, probably dragging them by hand power down the rocks to the more sheltered spot where the teams were waiting for them. It was a remarkable exploit.

During the final stage of the attack a mounted

column, made up of the 18th Hussars, with a Maxim gun, and the mounted infantry of the Dublin Fusiliers and the Rifles, had swept round the shoulder of Talana to pursue the defeated enemy. The other Boer force, which had been reported to be crossing Hatting Spruit away to the northward, had fallen back, the artillery sending a few long-ranging shells after it. Later on it was reported that it was Joubert's central column under Commandant Erasmus, and that,

shooters on the hill. There can be no doubt that this very greatly increased his own danger and that of his staff. The General was, as we have seen, mortally wounded. His chief staff officer, Colonel Beckett, a soldier who had shared the dangers and the glory of the desert march in the Gordon expedition, was seriously wounded, his shoulder being shattered by a Mauser bullet. Major Hammersley, the next in rank on the divisional staff, was seriously wounded in the



THE BATTLE OF TALANA HILL.

finding it had arrived too late to take part in the first attack, it had retired across the Spruit.

The success of the day had been dearly purchased. The first list of casualties, to which afterwards some additions had to be made, showed a loss of 10 officers killed and 22 wounded, and 30 men killed and 150 wounded. The staff had suffered heavily. The General had ridden boldly about the field, joining the troops in their advance within rifle range, and a red pennon carried by a lancer who rode with him not only marked his position for gallopers coming with messages, but also unhappily pointed him out clearly to the Boer sharp-

leg. Colonel John Sherston, the Brigade Major, or chief of brigade staff, was shot dead. He was one of the most popular men in the army, a brilliant soldier who had served on the staff of his uncle, Lord Roberts, in the famous march to Candahar. Captain Lock Adams, of the Brigade Staff, was seriously wounded. He had lately been aide-de-camp to the Governor-General of India, and had voluntarily resigned that post when the outlook in Africa became threatening, in the hope of seeing active service. In regimental officers the King's Royal Rifles suffered most severely. The officers wore the black cross-belt with the silver badge of their regiment

over their khaki uniforms, and there can be little doubt that this helped the Boer marksmen to pick them off. Lieutenant-Colonel Gunning, the commander of the battalion, a veteran of South African warfare, was killed at the head of his men. Captain Mark Pechell was killed leading his company up the fire-swept slope. He was an exceptionally tall man, and towered above his companions in the firing line. He was one of three brothers, all of them soldiers. Within a few days another of the three was to fall fighting against the same enemies on the Bechuanaland frontier. Two other of the captains and one of the majors were wounded, and of the lieutenants, three were killed and three wounded. Of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, Captain Connor was mortally wounded and died next day. He was the adjutant of his battalion, the very type of a dashing Irish soldier. He had seen hard fighting on the Indian frontier, and a popular novelist had taken him for the model of one of his soldier heroes. Major Davison, of the same regiment, was wounded. One of the lieutenants was killed, and a captain and three lieutenants wounded. Of the Dublin Fusiliers, Captain Weldon was killed, Lieutenant Genge mortally wounded, and two other captains and a lieutenant wounded. The number of officers hit was out of all proportion to the casualties among the rank and file. These were heaviest in the Rifles; the Irish Fusiliers suffered next. In the artillery there was only one gunner killed by a Boer shell.

Of the Boer losses it was not easy to make an estimate. The first reports said that they were very heavy. But this is doubtful. On the captured position there were about thirty of the enemy lying dead and wounded. In a roughly-improvised field hospital in the rear of the captured ridge there were seventy wounded burghers. Riderless horses and ponies were running about, scared by the firing. The mounted troops under Colonel Moller, consisting of a squadron of the 18th Hussars and four sections of mounted infantry, about 200 men in all, had ridden round the hill, taking with them a Maxim on a galloping carriage. They had charged the retreating Boers, and it was supposed that they were cutting them up badly in the pursuit. Later in the day the sound of firing was heard away to the northward. It was a dull, heavy sound, suggesting that not merely rifles but also artillery were in action. It was a puzzling incident; and later still, when evening came and there was no news from Moller and

his mounted force, no sign of their return, there was some anxiety in the camp. But so strong was the belief that the Boer commando had been fairly caught and beaten, and must be utterly demoralised and turned into a mere rabble of fugitives, that everyone expected to see Moller return in the morning with a long column of captured prisoners. But next day came, and still there were no tidings of the pursuit.

It was only some days later that the mystery of the missing squadron was solved. The news came as a heavy blow to the public at home, and put the action of Talana Hill in a much less brilliant light than the first despatches. It became evident that the Boers had only held on to the hill to gain time to remove their guns, that they had carried off most of their wounded, and that, far from being a routed rabble, they had kept together, under the cover of the rear-guard that had sacrificed itself on the ridge, and had successfully turned on their pursuers. Dashing boldly forward into the hilly country the Hussars and mounted infantry had been cunningly entrapped. The Boers had given way to them at first only to close in on their line of retreat, bring them under fire from all sides, and finally drive them into a valley, where they held out for a while among the walls of a cattle enclosure. Then the guns that had been in action at Talana were brought up and opened fire on them, and the little column displayed the white flag and surrendered. They were well treated. The wounded were cared for in the Boer ambulances. The rest of the prisoners were next day conveyed by train over Laing's Nek to Pretoria. A great crowd gathered at the station to see the prisoners arrive. And it must be said to their honour that the Boers behaved with chivalrous courtesy. There was not a cheer or a mocking word. The crowd looked on in dead silence as the men and officers passed out, and many heads were uncovered. At Pretoria they found Captain Nesbitt and his companions, who had been taken in the armoured train disaster at Kraaipan. Unhappily, these were not the only prisoners in these first difficult weeks of the war, when our forces in Natal were barely holding their own against superior numbers.

The gallant fight that General Symons' brigade had made at Dundee had a good result, in that it taught the Boer burghers that Majuba was not a typical British battle. On the hillside of Talana Hill both sides learned to respect each other; but otherwise the battle had scanty

results, for, as we shall see, the position that had been won at the cost of so much death and suffering, the price of so many gallant lives, had almost immediately to be abandoned.

But before following further the fortunes of the northern detached force, we must see what General White and the other brigade were doing at Ladysmith. On the morrow of Talana Hill they scored another success. "Victory on victory" was the stirring headline under which the first tidings of this second battle was given to exultant readers at home.

The fact was that the whole situation about Dundee and Glencoe Junction was from the first difficult. These advanced positions had been

held on political rather than military grounds. The Natal Government had insisted on the northern part of the colony being defended, urging that its abandonment would produce an unfortunate result, depressing the loyal portion of the population, and encouraging those who were thinking of throwing in their fortunes with the Boer invaders. The Government was even anxious that an attempt should be made to defend Laing's Nek. The military authorities yielded so far that, against their better judgment, they occupied Dundee and Glencoe instead of making a stand with all their available forces at Ladysmith. This error had now to be rectified by a perilous retreat.



THE CAMP OF THE 5TH DEVONS AT LADYSMITH.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BATTLE OF ELANDSLAAGTE.

WE have seen that Sir George White had in his camp at Ladysmith a force made up of five infantry battalions (the 1st Devons, 1st Gloucesters, 1st Manchesters, 2nd Gordon Highlanders, and 1st Liverpool Regiment), three batteries of the Royal Field Artillery, the 10th Mountain Battery, and the Natal Volunteer Artillery (30 guns in all), three imperial cavalry regiments (the 5th Dragoon Guards, 5th Irish Lancers, and 19th Hussars), two fine regiments of colonial mounted rifles (the Natal Carabineers and the Imperial Light Horse), besides minor bodies of colonial volunteers, detachments of regular mounted infantry, and Royal Engineers and departmental corps. Altogether, he had about 9,000 men under his command. He had with him two of the best among the younger generals of our army: General French, who had the reputation of being one of the best of our cavalry leaders, and was to command later on General Buller's cavalry division; and General Sir Archibald Hunter, who had won his rank on the battlefields of the Soudan, where from Toski to Khartoum he had in every fight been foremost in the attack; with the Egyptians and the Soudanese the presence of the "fighting general" had always been taken for a presage of victory.

In Natal, as in England, there was a feeling that it would be an evil day for the Boers when they ventured to try conclusions with such a force under such leaders. When, on October 10th, the screen of Boer scouts pressed forward from the Drakensberg passes, it looked as if an attack was coming from that direction. But the Free State commandoes were either lacking in enterprise or, what is more probable,

they were wisely waiting for the further development of the movement by their allies of the Transvaal from the northward before accepting the grim ordeal of battle. During Friday, the 20th, while Lucas Meyer's commando was losing the battle of Talana Hill on Joubert's left, and Commandant Erasmus was hanging back and arriving too late to be of any use in the centre,

the right Transvaal column under Commandant Viljoen was moving southwards, well to the west of the railway and in the hilly ground between it and the Drakensberg. It is very rough country, but there is a road, or rather waggon trail, that runs through a pass in the Biggarsberg, north of Blackcraig Farm, the road following a gap in the range between its highest summit on the east and a bold spur of the Drakensberg on the west. At this point on the maps of Natal there are two forts marked as if guarding the pass, but they are only police posts,



COLONEL SCOTT-CHISHOLME.

Killed at Elandslaagte

and had no military value. Viljoen's vanguard under Commandant Koek had seized the pass on the morning of Wednesday, the 18th. Once it was over this pass of the Biggarsberg, it had a fork of the trail before it. The road to the left ran down the valley of the little Inkunzi River to Waschbank station on the Ladysmith-Dundee line, near which there was an important iron railway bridge over the Waschbank River. The road to the right ran across the Sunday River to Elandslaagte station, near Ladysmith on the same line, and only sixteen miles from General White's camp. Koek, with the advance guard, which consisted of 1,800 burghers with three guns, took the Elandslaagte road. In the afternoon he came down on the little hamlet and the railway station while a train with supplies for Dundee

was standing at the platform. The driver of the engine put on full steam and got away up the line towards Dundee under a sharp but harmless fusillade. A second train that followed soon after was captured. It was a lucky chance for the Boers, as the train was laden with commissariat supplies and live stock. Two newspaper correspondents were on the train, and they were well treated by the Boers, who amused themselves and their prisoners with a smoking concert in the evening in one of the houses, the pianist sitting at the instrument with his rifle slung at his back. Next day White was inactive. He knew the line was cut to the northward, but he was anxious about the movements of the Free State commandoes on his left. Before committing himself to an advance to the north, he wished to make sure that behind the screen of Boer outposts the enemy was not working towards Colenso, and steps were taken to guard the line in that direction. On Friday General French took out a small force to reconnoitre towards Elandslaagte. The day was dark, with driving rain, and it was difficult to see far, but it was ascertained that the enemy held the station and the hills beyond, though in what force it was impossible to say. A couple of Boer horsemen were taken prisoners while patrolling. When the troops returned to camp, drenched to the skin and depressed by a day of comparative inaction, they heard the news of the victory of Dundee—the first news, that told of none of the circumstances which afterwards so much diminished the sense of victory won. All was animation in the camp; everyone was longing to show that the Ladysmith force could do as well as their comrades at Dundee. They had not long to wait.

Early on the next morning, Saturday, the 21st, General French was sent out again to reconnoitre. It was a fine clear morning, and the work therefore promised better results. Elandslaagte was again the object of the expedition. French had with him the Imperial Light Horse, under Colonel Scott-Chisholme, a

veteran who had lately been in command of the 5th Irish Lancers, with whom he had seen service in India. There were also the six guns of the Natal Volunteers, and on the railway there was first an armoured train as escort, and then an ordinary train conveying half a battalion of the Manchester Regiment. The mounted rifles and the guns moved through the low hills north of the town, with the railway on their left, where the armoured train protected their flank. Soon a shot in front told that an enemy had been seen. It was, however, only a solitary Boer scout who was shot by one of the Imperial Rifles. The advance now led up to a high

plateau, part of the northern face of which was a steep cliff. To this vantage ground French brought up his battery. It commanded a splendid view of the ground beyond. "Below this cliff," writes the *Times* correspondent, who accompanied the General, "stretched a plain for two miles, or perhaps two miles and a half, forming a gentle depression in the centre. In its centre lay the station and settlement of Elandslaagte. In our direct front appeared a group of tin houses, surrounded by trees, while to the left stretched away the goods extension leading to the coalfields. The northern

slopes of the valley stood out marked black with smoke-stacks and pit-mouths. But our attention rested on other matters than tin dwellings and colliery clumps, for the place was alive with Boers. It was evident that our appearance upon the sky-line of the tableland had taken the enemy completely by surprise. Mounted Boers could be seen all over the settlement. As soon as they realised that a force was upon them, they turned their horses' heads towards the hillslopes behind the line and evacuated the settlement at their best pace. They all seemed to be making for a slope which lay at the foot of a kopje taller than the surrounding country, about 5,000 yards from where we stood. As there were many men still in the station, as soon as our advanced guard spread out in the plain below the tableland, General French ordered up the Volunteer Battery. It came into action on the edge of the



COLONEL SCHIEL,

Commander of the Boer Artillery, taken prisoner at Elandslaagte.

tableland against the principal buildings in the railway yard. Two shells were fired, both taking effect."

As the shells exploded, a number of Boers scuttled out of the station buildings and disappeared in the broken ground. But almost immediately, from the top of a hill beyond the station, and nearly 5,000 yards, or close on three miles away, there came a bright flash, then another in rapid succession, and two shells came roaring through the air, struck well in the battery and exploded. Happily, none of the gunners were hurt, but one shell had burst almost under a gun limber, and blew it to pieces, killing two of the horses. Evidently the Boer artillerymen had the range to a nicety. It was afterwards discovered that the guns were under the command of Colonel Schiel, the German officer who had trained the Staats Artillerie. For ten minutes shell after shell dropped neatly on the ground above the cliff; many of them, however, failed to burst. But it was evident that the battery could not hold its own. The Volunteer guns were only seven-pounders, and had not even the range of the enemy's battery. French therefore ordered the guns to retire out of the enemy's reach. While he was watching this withdrawal a shell burst close to him, but though it covered the General and his staff with a shower of mud, no one was hit by the flying fragments of metal. The Boers then fired a few shots at the armoured train, but soon saw that it was out of range, and their guns ceased firing.

General French had brought out in the train a couple of expert telegraphists with a telephone apparatus and an arrangement for tapping the wires. Near the railway-bank the General and his staff dismounted under the escort of the armoured train. One of the operators climbed a telegraph pole and fastened with a clamp a connecting wire from his instrument to the line wire. Then another wire was fastened to a metal peg driven deep in the wet earth, and Ladysmith station was rung up. Soon the answer came, and French was able to talk with one of White's staff-officers miles away. He told him what had happened; said that if the Boers were to be cleared off the line at Elands-laagte, he must have strong reinforcements—above all, some field batteries of the Royal Artillery; and then came the welcome message that the reinforcements asked for would be sent out as quickly as possible by road and rail. As soon as he got this news, French drew back his

whole force to Modderspruit to wait for the coming help.

As soon as the Boers saw the smoke of the retiring trains, a number of horsemen came galloping out along the hills beyond the line, evidently with a view to cutting the line behind the trains and attacking them. But the sight of the Imperial Light Horse trotting forward to meet them showed that the game was up, and they halted and stood watching the retirement.

Meanwhile, in Ladysmith the troops were turning out, eager for battle. Some of the infantry were to be sent by rail, but the guns, the cavalry, and part of the infantry had to proceed by road. It is not quite clear that all the troops subsequently engaged were ordered out at once, and in any case some of them appear to have taken a long time over their journey. Part of the garrison was kept in the lines under General Hunter, for there was always a chance of an attack from the westward by the Orange Free State commandoes. Sir George White rode out with the cavalry, but he refused to take the command out of General French's hands. "This is your show," he said to him; and in his despatch that evening, telling of the brilliant result of the long day's work, he took care to give all the credit to his subordinate, explaining that he had taken no part in directing the day's operations, leaving that to General French, and being himself only present as a spectator. Such chivalrous self-abnegation is rare even among the best of soldiers.

It was eleven a.m. before the first reinforcements reached Modderspruit. These were the 5th Irish Lancers and two batteries of the Royal Field Artillery. The guns had been horsed with double teams, so as to allow them to gallop a considerable part of the way. Then the infantry began to arrive by rail—first the rest of the Manchesters, then the Devons and the Gordons, who were to have before evening an experience something like that of their other battalion at Dargai. Out beyond the railway on the left there was desultory skirmishing in progress, and while the men rested at the rendezvous they could hear now a solitary crack of a rifle, now a little burst of firing. In this direction the Imperial Light Horse were in contact with the mounted Boers who had ridden out to try to cut off the train, and they were skirmishing in the broken ground. Some of the 5th Lancers were sent to support the volunteers. Towards three o'clock the 5th Dragoon Guards arrived. A squadron of this

regiment was sent out to reconnoitre towards the Drakensberg on the left. Suddenly they were fired on. From some point in the broken ground came the "Rap, rap, rap" of a Maxim. But the fire was badly aimed and touched no one. It ceased as suddenly as it had begun; the gun and those who worked it hurrying off to safer ground. They seemed to have belonged to the left or northernmost column of the Free State forces, who took no further part in the day's fighting. On the whole, the men of the Free State seemed very half-hearted compared to their Transvaal cousins in this first phase of the war. Perhaps they felt it was not their quarrel. They had been dragged into it by the alliance made by the Bloemfontein politicians, after having been friends with England since they first existed as a free state.

At three, General French decided to advance and attack the Boer position at Elandslaagte. If anything was to be done before sunset, there was now no time to lose. Even as it was, the long delay would mean a hurrying through the first stages of the battle, which would make the assault of the ridge beyond the station a costly business for lack of sufficient preparation. Colonel Ian Hamilton was the brigadier in command of the three infantry regiments, the Manchesters, the Devons, and the Gordons. As a young lieutenant of the Gordons he had been at Majuba. He was in command there of the party of Highlanders that held the advanced kopje on the northern edge of the summit. He it was who had first reported to General Colley that the Boers were massing in sheltered ground below the slope and preparing to attack. The lesson of the value of good rifle shooting, so terribly impressed on the defenders of Majuba, had been turned to good account by Ian Hamilton. He had been superintendent of the musketry training of the army, first in India, then at home, and now he was to reap some of the results of this long scientific preparation of our infantry for effective fire on the battlefield.

Led by the Manchesters, the brigade moved forward to the high ground in front of the Boer position. The cavalry and mounted rifles guarded the flanks of the advance, forcing back the detached parties of Boers that had followed the retirement early in the day. It was about four o'clock when the Manchesters and Devons deployed along the plateau, with the Gordons in reserve. There was an interval between the leading regiments into which the 21st Field Battery galloped and unlimbered. For the Boer

guns had opened fire as soon as the infantry appeared on the crest, and were dropping their shells unpleasantly close to the long line, though few of them burst. At the first shot from our battery the Boer gunners changed their target, firing only at the guns, and firing with some effect. One of the first shells wounded a gunner officer, Captain Campbell. Another blew up a limber. Others killed and wounded men and horses. But our guns had the range and were doing still more terrible work, for there were six of them against the two, or at most three, which the Boers had in action. And the odds would soon be heavier, for in a cloud of dust, with a jingle and rattle of gear and cracking of whips, six more guns, the 42nd Battery, were galloping up into the line of battle. As the battery wheeled round and unlimbered, the Boer guns ceased firing. The 21st Battery, by its splendid shooting, had silenced them in exactly six minutes.

And now the twelve guns heavily bombarded the Boer position as a preparation for the infantry attack, and a thunderstorm began to rage to the northward. "The scene," says the correspondent we have already quoted, "was a weird one even for a battlefield. A huge bank of thunder-cloud formed a background to the Dutch position—one dense pall of cloud, fringed with the grey of a setting sun. So dark was this background that every puff of bursting shrapnel showed distinctly to the naked eye. Ever and anon a blinding flash would momentarily chase the gloom away, causing the saw-edged limits of the ridge to stand out sharp and clear against the evening sky. The detonation of the guns and crashing of the galloping waggons seemed in harmony with peals of thunder which at times seemed to drown the din of battle." But the light was failing, night being hastened by the gathering thunder-clouds, and after half-an-hour of preparation the word was given to Colonel Ian Hamilton to put his infantry in motion.

While the artillery was still in action, some Boers rode rather ostentatiously down the slope on their left on to the lower ground and fled round the shoulder of the hill. Some of the Lancers and Light Horse rode after them, but were soon checked by fire from the crest. It was an old trick of Boer warfare to draw the horsemen on our side under rifle fire, and there is no doubt the seeming fugitives were soon back at their posts on the hill.

The plan of the infantry attack was what one

sees in every Aldershot field day—a frontal attack to hold the enemy and keep him occupied, a turning movement to get at one of his flanks, bring him under a cross fire, and roll up his line. The Devons deployed for the front attack. The Manchesters, with the Gordons in support at first and afterwards up in line with them, swept round to go for the Boer left. The batteries moved to a shorter range, to support the infantry, who moved forward as steadily as if it were only a mere field day and not the grim reality of war "with bullets in the guns."

The Devons advanced to the attack, with four companies in front as firing line and supports, and the other four moving in single rank in a very open column further back. As they moved down into the open ground before the Boer position the guns on the hill reopened fire, making the advancing battalion their target. Some of the shells went high, others burst in the open spaces between the companies, but altogether very few men were touched. The British artillery came to the help of the infantry by concentrating its fire on the Boer guns. For a few minutes they would be silenced, but then the gunners would man them again and reopen fire. General White in his despatch expressed his admiration of the dogged courage with which the enemy's artillerymen thus tried to keep their guns in action. Many of them were gunners who had learned their business in the German army; but there were also Boers of the Transvaal among them.

After advancing till they were 1,200 yards from the enemy, the Devons began to fire volleys, taking cover at each halt among the ant-hills that covered parts of the valley in clumps, many of them rising nearly to a man's height. But for some of the companies no such cover was available, and they simply laid down in the open. Alternately halting to fire and moving steadily forward, the regiment got at last within about 800 yards of the Boers. Here they were halted, lying down behind whatever cover was available, and keeping up a steady fire against the Boer position on the heights in front. This pause in the advance was made in

order to give the regiments engaged in the flank attack time to work round to their ground on the Boer left. During the latter part of their advance the Devons had been under fire from the rifles of the Boers on the ridge. As they halted at its foot, it seemed to those who watched them from the British artillery position that they were still exposed to a pitiless rain of bullets from the rocky crest in front. But it is very likely that there was a good deal of what tacticians call "dead ground" at this point; that is, ground hidden by the lower curves of the hillside from those in position on its summit, and therefore safe from direct fire.

But part of the Devons' position was certainly under the Boer rifles, and the men had to endure the trying ordeal of waiting quietly for the word to push on while suffering loss from rifles to which their reply from the lower ground must have been comparatively ineffective. To assist them, and prepare the way for the final advance, first one, then the other battery limbered up, galloped forward and unlimbered again, and came into action again at closer range, raining a well-directed fire of bursting shrapnel shells on the long summit of the ridge.

By this time the storm had burst again over the battlefield. The lightning flashed brightly and swiftly, gleam after gleam, under the leaden sky, and the roar of the thunder-peals seemed to drown the cannonade. There was a deluge of blinding rain that seemed to wrap the ridge in a dense haze, and made the aim of gunner and rifleman uncertain. Everyone was drenched to the skin.

And now at last the moment was drawing near for the final dash at the crest. Away to the right the Manchesters and the Gordons were climbing swiftly among the boulders that strewed the shoulder of the ridge. Colonel Chisholme had dismounted a squadron of his Light Horse, and had brought them up to support the flank attack. The Boers had marked the encircling attack, and met it with showers of rifle bullets at one point where the Gordons had to narrow their front to pass between two small kopjes that rose from the hill. Here



COMMANDER ROCK.
Killed at Elandslaagte.



THE BATTLE OF FLANDSLAAGTE: THE CAVALRY CHARGE.

the loss of the advancing attack was heavy, some fifty men falling killed or wounded among the boulders. There was further loss in passing the fences of barbed wire that ran across the ridge.

As the flank attack gained the shoulder of the ridge, the word was given for the Devons to go forward again. General French had galloped to the front, and, dismounting, led the advance on foot. All the companies were now in line, and the men strode up the slope with a swinging pace, and as they gained the upper part of the hillside their fire crossed that of the flank attack, driving the Boers from the level space on top.

At one end of the ridge rose a high-pointed kopje. This was the final citadel of the defence. Its rugged side, a mass of granite boulders, bristled with rifles, and, though the shrapnel of our artillery, passing over the infantry, was bursting fairly among the boulders, the men who still held on to the kopje continued to the last to fire at the attacking regiments. In front of the kopje stood the two Boer guns. They had ceased firing; and as the Devons rushed up to them it was seen that round them, heaped on the ground, were all the gunners who had lately been serving them—all but one, who stood calmly by the wheel of the gun on the right, a blood-stained handkerchief tied round his head showing that he had been wounded. The brave fellow was taken prisoner and sent off to the nearest ambulance.

By this time it was nearly dark. The last kopje was abandoned as the attack closed upon it, a few of its defenders holding up a white flag and surrendering. Here and there along the ridge handfuls of Boers held out among the boulders on the crest. In places a solitary man waited, firing from behind a stone, till the attacking infantry rushed over him. It was at this period, just as the battle ceased, that it was alleged some of the Boers first displayed a white flag and then shot down the men who came forward to accept their surrender. It may be that there was treachery of this base kind. But it is also quite possible that while some of the burghers were anxious to surrender, others close

by were determined to fight to the death, and the men who held the flag and the men who fired were thus different groups acting without concert or knowledge of each other's intentions.

The Boers who had been driven over the ridge fled by the back of the height, where they had their horses waiting for them, and then they rode northwards and westwards to gain the broken hilly ground of the Biggarsberg range. But the Lancers and the 5th Dragoon Guards had been held in readiness for this moment, and they swept round the shoulder of the hill and charged in among the retreating burghers, doing terrible execution with their lances. Some fifty of the enemy were killed, and some prisoners taken. A number of waggons laden with supplies and camp equipment were also captured. But the pursuit could not be pushed far. Night was falling darkly, and the country immediately to the north of the battlefield was a mass of broken hills and narrow valleys, where the ponies of the burghers could soon outstrip the cavalry horses.

The night that followed was a terrible time. The battle had ended in the darkness. Companies and battalions were got together by the officers and men calling to each other. The rolls

were called by lantern light, and the search for the wounded went on hour after hour in the night among the rocks and boulders of the hard-won ridge. It was bitterly cold on the hilltop, everyone was soaked through and chilled to the bones. It was bad enough for the tired men who had come safely through the fight, but it was awful for the unfortunate wounded of both armies. Many of the wounded were not found till the morning. To add to the general mass of suffering, although it had rained so heavily during the day, water was scarce upon the hill. It formed no pools, but ran down between the clefts of the boulders, and all the water-bottles had been emptied during the fight. The ambulance men, the doctors, a corps of Indian bearers carrying doolies, or covered litters, and a crowd of willing volunteers, including some of the correspondents and many of the Boer prisoners, worked wearied but unweariedly



COLONEL DICK CUNYNGNAME.

(Photo: Edwards.)

through the long night, helping to find, bring in, and attend to the wounded—Boer and British being, of course, equally well cared for. Happily, in some of the captured waggons there was a quantity of blankets and mattresses, and these were used to make an additional improvised hospital. The station buildings at Elandslaagte and the little hamlet received many of the wounded men; others were sent back by a train into Ladysmith.

The first roll of the British casualties gave 4 officers killed and 31 wounded, many of these latter dangerously, and 37 men killed and 175 wounded. Considering the strength of the position and the shortness of the artillery preparation before the attack, the wonder is that the loss was not twice as great. The Imperial Light Horse and the Gordons had suffered most severely. Colonel Scott-Chisholme, the commander of the Light Horse, had been shot dead at the head of his men. He had taken off his scarf, and was using it to wave his men on, when he was shot through the head and died instantly. The second in command, Major Wools Sampson, who before the war had been a prominent business man in Johannesburg, was badly wounded. Four of the captains and four lieutenants were also among the wounded, and the loss of the rank and file was heavy.

Of the Gordons, Major Wright was struck down with a bullet through the foot as he led his men up the hill. He roughly bandaged the wound, and then calmly got his pipe and pouch out of his haversack and smoked the pipe of peace as he lay disabled behind the advancing attack. His colleague, Major Denne, who had been with the Gordons in Egypt from Tel-el-Kebir to Kirbekan and Tamai, was killed higher up the fire-swept hillside. Four of the lieutenants were killed. The battalion commander, Colonel Dick Cunynghame, was severely wounded by a Mauser bullet in his right arm. Two of the captains fell wounded and four of the lieutenants, and in several of these cases there was more than one wound, the officers struggling on till a second bullet dropped them. One

of those thus doubly wounded was Lieutenant Hennessy, a militia officer of the Gordons attached for the campaign to the second battalion. Sergeant-Major Robertson was wounded, and also Pipe-Major Charles Dunbar, who fell as he played the pibroch of the Gordons at the head of the charge. Of the rank and file 27 were killed and 84 wounded, and there were only five companies, or less than 500 men, in action. The losses of the other battalion at Dargai seem trifling compared to these terrible figures. Of the staff, Captain Ronald Brooke was wounded. The colonel of the Manchesters, Arthur Curran, had a bullet in

the shoulder, and three of the captains were badly wounded and a lieutenant slightly. The Devons had a captain and three lieutenants wounded. Two officers of the artillery were hit.

Of the Boer losses it is impossible to speak with any certainty. They had probably removed most of their wounded. Sixty-five dead were found on the summit, and it was estimated that 50 more were killed in the pursuit. Of the prisoners taken, more than 50 were wounded. Among them was Colonel Schiel, the artillery commander, and Pretorius, a grandson of the famous

founder of the first Boer republic. Among the stones on the hilltop an old man with a long grey beard was found mortally wounded. Asked his name, he said it was Kock. "You were in command?" was asked, and he replied, "No, that was my son; I am Judge Kock, the father of the commandant." His son was among the dead on the battlefield. Amongst the dead were several other prominent Transvaal officials and members of the Pretoria Volksraad. Some of them were old men, and among the killed and wounded there were also mere boys. It was a national levy *en masse* that we were fighting.

The prisoners said that the troops engaged on the Boer side were chiefly made up of a commando from the Johannesburg district, with a small party of Free State men, and a detachment of the regular artillery. Some of the captured Boer officers expressed surprise

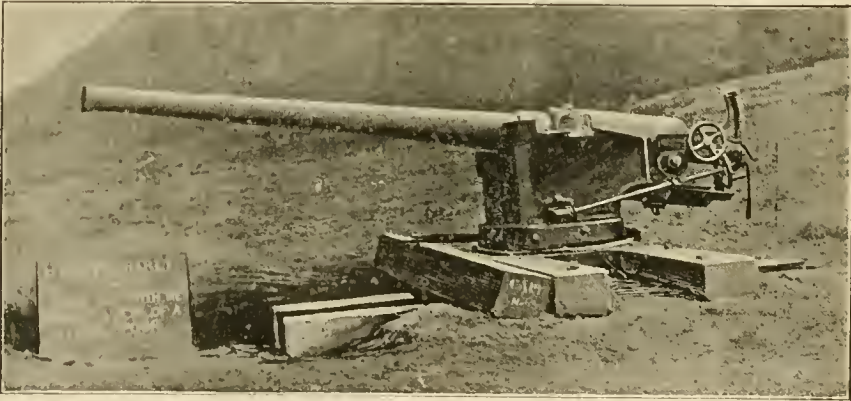


GENERAL PRETORIUS.
Taken prisoner at Elandslaagte.

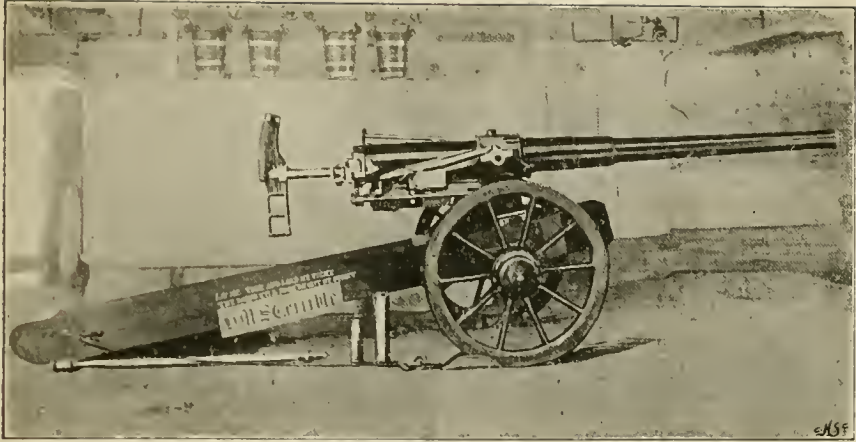
at the steady way in which the Johannesburg commando had fought. "We considered it our worst commando," they said. "So many of them are townsmen unused to work in the open air." The highest estimate of the numbers engaged on the Boer side was 1,800. A curious discovery was made when the captured guns were examined. They had the name of the British South Africa Company on their carriages, and were, in fact, the two guns that Dr. Jameson had taken over the Transvaal border in his unfortunate raid, and which the burghers under Cronje had got possession of at the Dornkop surrender.

Like Talana Hill, Elandsplaagte was a fight that had chiefly moral results. It drove the Boers from the railway at this point, but

another detachment of the same column of invaders of Natal had turned to the left from the pass through the Biggarsberg, come down upon the railway at Waschbank station, twelve miles further north, and seized and destroyed the bridge over the Waschbank River, thus permanently cutting the line. On the very day after the battle of Elandsplaagte, the troops that had been engaged were withdrawn from the conquered heights of Elandsplaagte to Ladysmith, and the hill was occupied before evening by the Boer advance patrols. Before following further the story of the Ladysmith force, we must return to the events that were happening at Dundee on the day after the victory of Talana Hill, the same day on which Elandsplaagte was fought and won.



ONE OF THE I.I.M.S. *TERRIBLE* 4.7-IN. GUNS ON A TEMPORARY PLATFORM.



ONE OF THE H.M.S. *TERRIBLE* 12-POUNDERS ON WHEELS.

CHAPTER V.

THE RETREAT FROM DUNDEE AND THE BATTLE OF RIETFOENTEIN.

AT Dundee, on the Saturday morning after General Symons' victory, there was, as we have said already, growing anxiety about the missing squadron of the 18th Hussars and the mounted infantry who had accompanied them. There was also keen expectation of another fight; for it was certain there was an unbeaten Boer force in the neighbourhood somewhere on the road to Damnhäuser and Newcastle. It was the force that had shown itself late in the day, and withdrawn before the Leicesters and a battery sent out to observe its movements. This column was the command of the Boer leader Erasmus, the vanguard of Joubert's central force—in fact, the head of his main body. In the general Boer movement the check inflicted by Symons on Lucas Meyer at Talana Hill was a minor incident; and though the garrison of Dundee were not yet aware of it, 20,000 men with field artillery and heavy guns of position were closing in upon them.

Colonel (now local Major-General) Yule, who had taken command of the British force at Dundee, had about 3,500 available for the defence of the place and three batteries of field artillery. It is clear that to have held on indefinitely at Dundee under these circumstances would have been to incur the certainty of being locked up in a place impossible to hold against long-ranging artillery of heavy calibre. General

Symons had done right well in staying long enough to strike at and seriously defeat Meyer's isolated force. But his successor in command knew the time for retreat was not far off. It came, however, sooner than was expected, for the defenders of Dundee had not realised on the Saturday morning that the main advance of the Boers had made as much progress as it had, in fact, accomplished.

The early part of the day was fine. Towards noon there was a downpour of rain, and a thunderstorm was echoing away to the westward among the rugged mountain walls of the Drakensberg. A report had come in that the Boers were coming down the north road, and Yule had cleared for action by striking the tents in the camp and moving the baggage to the other side of the town. As the storm ceased and the sky cleared for a while, suddenly a couple of 40-pounder shells came hurtling into the town. They were fired from a pair of guns in position on a spur of the Impati mountain above the old Newcastle road. The range was fully 6,000 yards, or about three and a half miles. The British artillery came into action against the Boer guns and tried to silence them. But our field-pieces could not range so far, and the Boers, who had the range exactly, were dropping shell after shell near the guns, occasionally sending one over the battery and into the town. Luckily, the Boer material was bad, and only

one of the shells burst. This explosion killed Lieutenant Hannah of the Leicester Regiment. It was clear that our guns were overmatched, and could do nothing. But, after it had lasted an hour, the Boer bombardment was stopped by a new storm of rain, blotting out all the view from the artillery position.

The rain continued till evening. After dark the camp was silently abandoned, and the troops marched through Dundee and bivouacked without tents, under the rain, on the high ground about two miles south of the place. Here they were out of range of the Boer battery. The retirement and the bombardment earlier in the day had caused something like a panic in the town. Most of the inhabitants followed the retreating troops, and either, like them, spent the night in the open or found shelter in some farm buildings near the new position of the brigade. The wounded, including General Symons, were left under the protection of the Geneva Red Cross flag in the town, with a small escort.

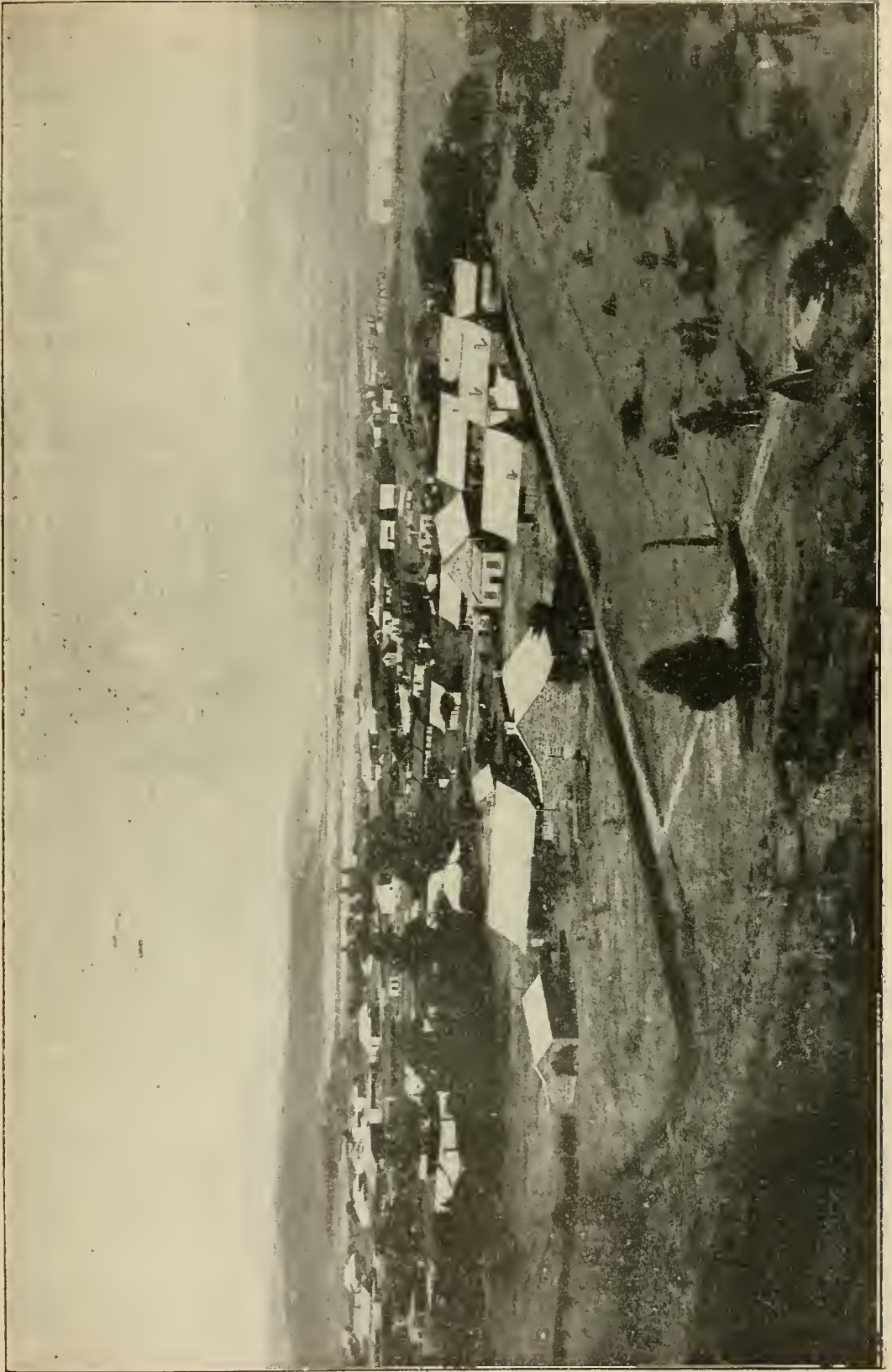
It was expected that by this change of ground the hospital would be saved from the risk of bombardment, and the troops would be in a better position to meet a Boer attack, which it was anticipated would be made early on Sunday. At dawn the troops were under arms, but the hills north of the town were silent and seemed to be deserted. About nine there came news of the Elandslaagte victory. In the camp above Dundee the impression was that this second defeat might explain the inactivity of the Boers. At this stage of the war many thought that a first failure would take all heart out of the burghers and lead them to abandon the struggle on which they had so rashly ventured. An exaggerated idea of the success won by the Ladysmith force, together with this general impression of the state of the enemy's mind, led Yule to leave his purely defensive attitude and take a step that might have had dangerous consequences. He divided his small force, sending a part of it to reoccupy the old camping-ground north of the town and watch the Newcastle road, while the rest were sent off towards Glencoe "to intercept the fugitives from Elandslaagte," to quote a letter written from the camp. As a matter of fact, there were no fugitives from Elandslaagte within miles of Glencoe, and so far from their movements being paralysed by the news of the defeat, the Boers were continuing their advance in stolid, leisurely fashion, their movements being delayed by the work of

detraining and bringing down the road their heavy artillery and marching their enormous convoys of waggons over Laing's Nek.

Yule, moving towards Glencoe, sighted a body of the enemy near the main road to Ladysmith. They were not fugitives, however, but an advancing commando on its way south. He brought one of his batteries into action against them, and at the same time a troop of the 18th Hussars, who were scouting to the front, began skirmishing with some Boer horsemen. But the fire of the British battery found a strange echo from the Impati mountain far away to the north. There, on the same spur from which the Boer 40-pounders had bombarded Dundee the day before, they were again in action. It had been a complete mistake to suppose that they or the commando they were with had been withdrawn. The shells began to drop into the camp, and some of them were sent after the Glencoe column. Again a friendly storm stopped the cannonade, and Yule withdrew all his forces to the old camp.

Plainly, it was no use staying on the Dundee hills, to be practised at by these long-range guns without being able to answer them. The only way to silence them would be to attack and storm the Impati mountain; but was it not likely that the Boers, as they had held on there for two days, were being reinforced from Newcastle, and might not an attack mean simply flinging the brigade to destruction against vastly superior forces? Reports that came in from various points seemed to indicate that this would be the only probable result of an advance. To stay on the hills was impossible. General Yule rightly decided that the time had come for withdrawal. His only safe course was to join hands with White at Ladysmith.

On Sunday night the march began in the dark. To have taken the main road by Glencoe, Meran, and Elandslaagte was out of the question. The Boers were in possession of parts of that route and in force on its flank. The line chosen by Yule was a less direct way of leaving Dundee by the Helpmakaar road, striking off from it at Beith, crossing the Waschbank River well to the east of the railway, and getting into Ladysmith from the north-eastward. The troops moved silently through Dundee, fires being left burning in the old camp to mislead the enemy. The wounded could not be removed. They were left under the Red Cross in the hospital. Yule had to say farewell sadly to General Symons,



GENERAL VIEW OF LADYSMITH,

but the wounded officer, with his accustomed pluck, took a hopeful view of the outlook, both for himself and for the army. As to the latter, the withdrawal from an untenable position that had been taken up for political rather than military reasons must simplify and improve the situation. As for himself, the bullet had been extracted from the wound, and he might yet be well; meanwhile, he had a victory to his credit, and had been specially promoted from the acting to substantial rank of major-general. Possibly neither officer realised that it was a final parting.

The army had also to leave in Dundee about sixty tons of commissariat stores, a valuable booty for the advancing Boers, who, like all irregularly organised armies, found in matters of supply one of their chief difficulties. If the retreat had been sooner foreseen, steps might have been taken to render these supplies useless, but, as we have seen, the opinion of those in command at Dundee had undergone rapid changes during the last two days, and the decision to retreat had only been definitely adopted on Sunday afternoon.

The King's Royal Rifles, under Major Campbell, formed the advanced guard. Colonel Dartnell, of the Natal Police, who knew the country thoroughly and was with the column, had indicated the best line of march to General Yule and provided guides for the night march. With the force marched all its transport, and the column was a very long one and was only able to move slowly on the rain-drenched, muddy roads, which were made still more difficult by numerous gradients. Thus, when morning dawned, the column had only covered eight miles. But it had got safely clear of Dundee, and now the men were allowed to halt and rest, and fires were lighted and coffee made.

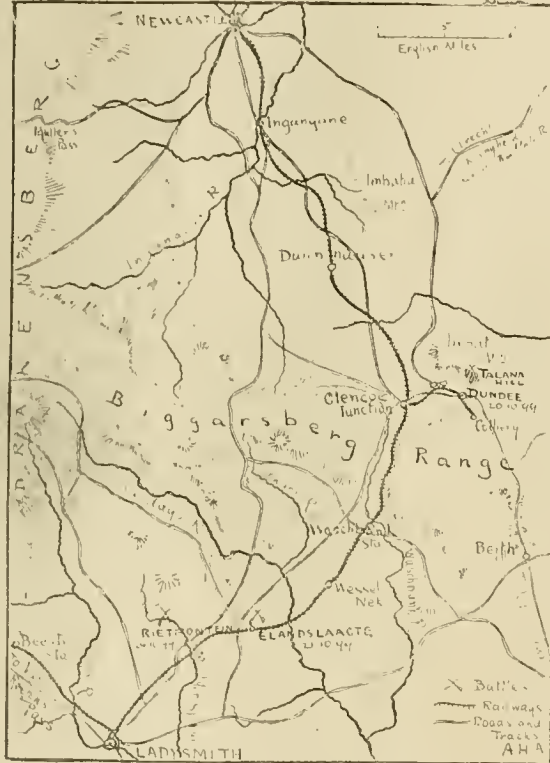
In the afternoon the march was resumed,

although the weather was wretchedly bad and the men had had little rest. General Yule was anxious to reach as soon as possible the Waschbank Pass in the Biggarsberg range. If the enemy should occupy it before him by an ill chance, he knew that a mere handful of men could hold it long enough to make the forcing of the defile a deadly business. A strong body of the enemy might be able to successfully bar the way. After another short halt in the evening a forced march was made on Monday night, and the defile was found to be unoccupied.

Strangely enough, considering that they were supposed to have many friends in the country, the Boer leaders did not discover the withdrawal of Yule's force till late on Monday afternoon. They then rode into the town and took possession. At the time a report was spread that they shot in cold blood thirty citizens of Dundee who belonged to the town guard. This was a body of men armed with rifles, but not uniformed, raised in many of the towns for the preservation of order, and especially to prevent looting by

the natives. General Yule, before leaving, had advised the town guard not to appear in arms when the Boers entered, and, above all, not to make any show of resistance, as this might have unfortunate results. The report of the massacre suggested that they had disregarded his prudent counsel and become involved in an affray with the invaders of Natal. But when the war was nearly six weeks old, a semi-official notice in the press informed the public that, like so many other wild stories that found credence in the early days of the conflict, this tale of cold-blooded murder by the Boers at Dundee had not a word of truth in it.

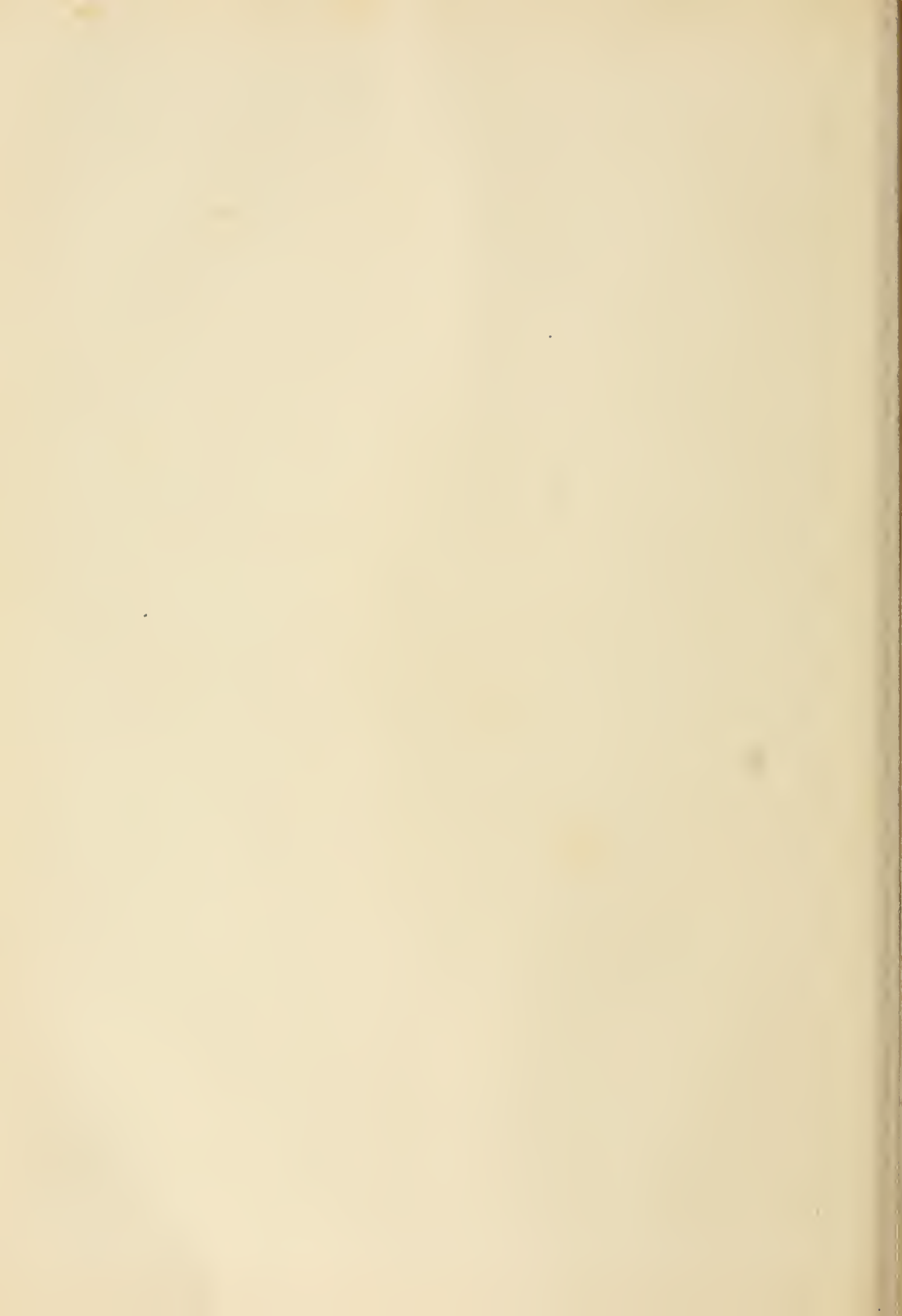
Having seen Yule's column as far as the Biggarsberg Pass, let us glance at the course of



THE BATTLES IN NATAL, OCTOBER, 1899.



RUNNING THE GAUNTLET: A LANCER PATROL UNDER CROSS FIRE.



events at Ladysmith after Elandsplaagte. Facing a double line of invasion from the north and from the west, White had to keep his small force concentrated. After breaking up Kock's command in the battle of the 21st, he had therefore drawn back his force from Elandsplaagte and kept it ready for the next move at Ladysmith. He was in telegraphic communication with Yule up to the day he left Dundee, and his chief anxiety now was to prevent the Boers from cutting in from the westward on his colleague's line of retreat and interposing between the Dundee force and Ladysmith. On Monday night Yule would be through the Waschbank Pass. White could best help him by keeping the Boers occupied to the north-west of Ladysmith, and a reconnaissance in force in that direction would have the result of not only accomplishing this, but also might supply valuable information. On Monday, therefore, General White decided to employ part of his force next day in a reconnaissance against the commandoes that were moving towards the railway between Elandsplaagte and the town. The result was the action known as the battle of Rietfontein.

Sir George White's scouts had reported the movement of the Free State commandoes from the ground near Beesters towards the line of the railway. Their guns could be seen on the summit of Jonono's Kop. On Tuesday morning in the twilight White marched out to drive them from this point of vantage and keep them so fully occupied as to prevent them from interfering with Yule's retreat.

He left Hunter with a small detachment to hold the town. The force that marched out was made up of a brigade of infantry (the Devons, Gloucesters, Liverpools, and 2nd King's Royal Rifles), of cavalry the 5th Royal Irish Lancers and the 10th Hussars, of mounted infantry the Imperial Light Horse and the Natal Rifles, and of artillery eighteen guns supplied by the 10th Mountain Battery and the 42nd and 53rd Batteries, R.F.A. In all there were about 5,000 men.

Mr. Steevens, who was with the force, de-

scribes the march out in his picturesque style. "At four in the dim morning," he says, "guns began to roll and rattle through the mud-greased streets of Ladysmith. By six the whole northern road was jammed tight with bearer company, field hospital, ammunition column, all the stiff, unwieldy, crawling tail of an army. Indians tottered and staggered under green-curtained doolies; Kaffir boys guided spans of four and five and six mules drawing ambulances like bakers' vans; others walked beside waggons curling whips that would dwarf the biggest salmon-rod round the flanks of small-bodied, huge-horned oxen. This tail of the army alone covered three miles of road. At length, emerging in front of them, you found two clanking field batteries and sections of mountain guns jingling on mules. Ahead of these, again, long khaki lines of infantry sat beside the road or pounded it under their even tramp. Then the general himself and his staff; then best part of a regiment of infantry; then a company, the reserve of the advanced guard; then a half-company, the support; then a broken group of men, the advanced party; then, in the very front, the point—a sergeant and half-a-dozen privates

trudging sturdily along the road, the scenting nose of the column. Away out of sight were the horsemen." Such was the order of march, seen from rear to front as the correspondent rode out to catch up with the advanced guard.

The cavalry scouting beyond Modder Spruit were skirmishing with parties of the Boers early in the morning. Reports came in that the enemy were again occupying the Elandsplaagte ridge, and that near to our line of advance and on the left they held Matwana's and Jonono's Kops above the railway and the farm of Rietfontein. At eight o'clock the column had reached Modder Spruit, and there was a halt, some of the men making preparations for cooking or warming up coffee, others smoking and resting on the ground, while the General and his staff reconnoitred the hills. Suddenly from the heights beyond the railway there came the deep boom of a Boer gun. The shell fell away



GENERAL YULE.
(Photo: Yee, Plymouth.)

to the northward, where the cavalry were scouting, and everyone was watching for another shot in the same direction when suddenly there was a loud report from the crest and a well-aimed shell burst among the artillery, dropping close to a gun, killing one of its horses and wounding another. In a moment the two batteries were making for a bit of rising ground beyond the railway that offered a good position for opening fire. The wire fences of the line were cut and levelled in great gaps in half a minute, and the guns rushed up on the other side, swung round, unlimbered, and opened fire. The mountain battery was ready almost as soon as the field-guns, and a heavy bombardment of the Boer artillery position began, while two battalions of infantry rushed forward, deployed in attack formation on each side of the guns, and advanced to get within easy rifle range of the enemy.

The Boer guns were on a ridge between and rather to the front of two bold kopjes. There were only two guns, one of them a field-piece of old pattern using black powder, and sending out a great smoke cloud at every discharge, the other a modern quick-firer using smokeless powder, and therefore presenting no such easy target to our gunners. In a quarter of an hour the Boer guns had either been silenced or had been withdrawn. In any case, they were no longer firing.

Meanwhile, our infantry was in action against the Boer riflemen, who lined the upper slopes of the hills. It was noticed that at various points in the enemy's line there was plenty of white smoke, showing that a good many of the Boers preferred to stick to their old Martinis rather than accept the new-fangled Mauser rifles. The artillery was now able to assist our infantry by shelling the Boer positions. The hillside was covered with long, dry grass, and more than once the shells set it on fire and the grey cloud of smoke hid great patches of the Boer position.

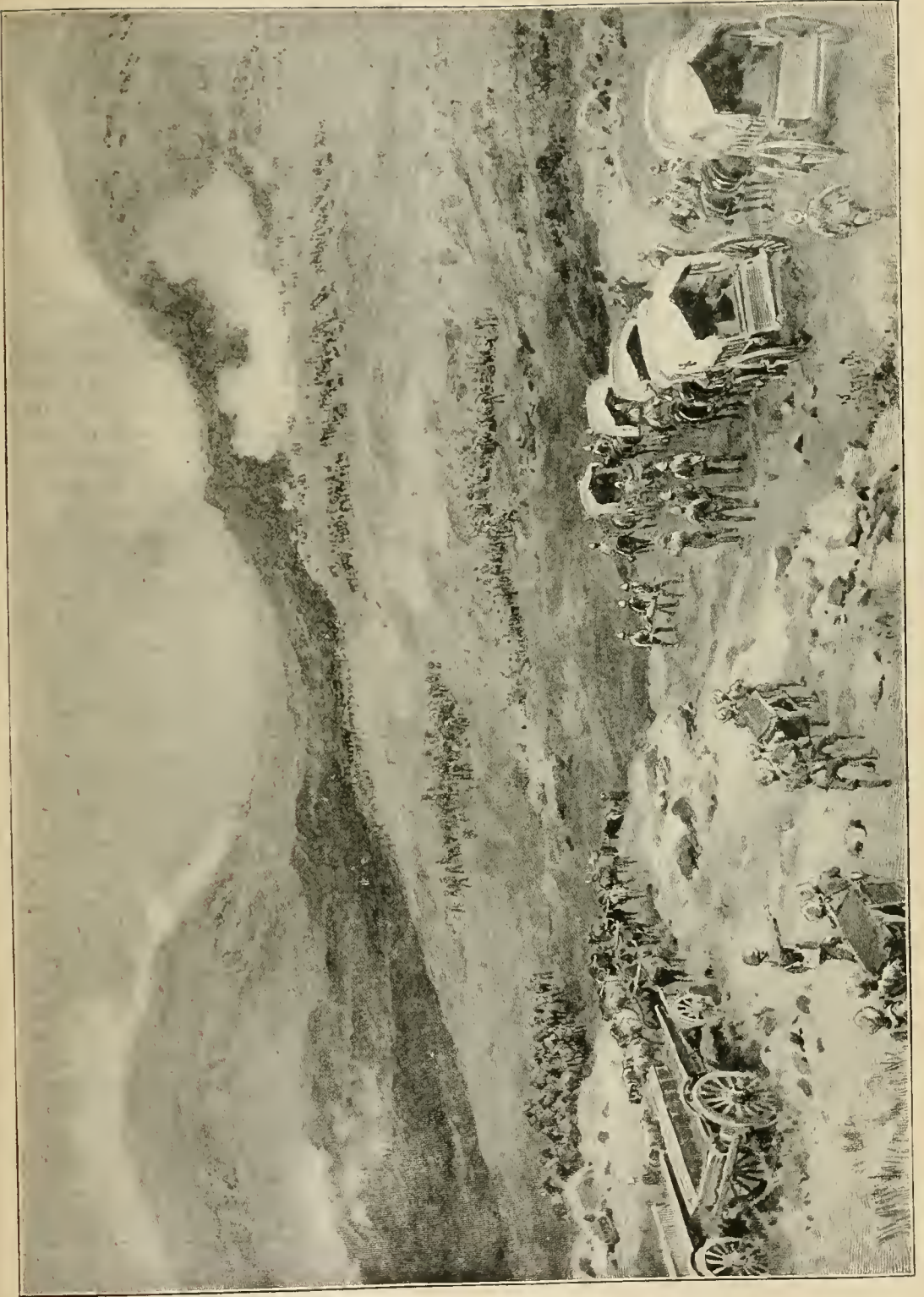
The Gloucester and Liverpool regiments formed the attacking line. The Devons were in reserve. The King's Royal Rifles guarded the left flank, having with them the Imperial Light Horse. The Natal Carabineers, with a Maxim, were away on the left at Modder Spruit to protect that flank. The orders to the infantry were to occupy the first ridge but not to advance beyond it, as the whole action was in the nature of a demonstration to keep the Boers occupied. Towards eleven the Gloucesters and Liverpools gained the top of the first slope. They had met

with no determined resistance, the Boers falling back gradually to the higher ground beyond. In their eagerness the Gloucesters began to descend the slope beyond the ridge as if intending to attack the Boer main position. But they were exposed to a heavy fire, with no cover whatever, on the open slope, and they had to fall back, losing a good many officers and men, including their commander, Colonel Wilsford.

Meanwhile it had become evident that the Boers, while giving way on the right and centre of the British position, were massing for an attack on its left, which if successful would cut the column off from Ladysmith. White therefore sent the Devons up to support the Liverpools on the left, pushed the Imperial Light Horse and the King's Royal Rifles out in the same direction to extend the line and check the enemy's turning movement, and brought the Natal Carabineers from his right to his left rear to form an additional flank guard. The Boers fell back before this display of force, and then for a couple of hours there was a somewhat monotonous fight, knots of Boer sharpshooters firing from various coigns of vantage on the further ridges and their guns taking an occasional shot at the British, while our infantry and artillery replied. At two the fire on both sides had dwindled away, and about that hour it ceased, and the word was given to march back to Ladysmith.

As was natural, both sides claimed a victory. But Sir George White had accomplished what he had intended, and had kept the Boers near Rietfontein from advancing to the eastward, and thus secured the retreat of Yule's column. The fight cost us over a hundred casualties, including twelve killed and 104 wounded, and seven missing.

On Tuesday, the day of the action of Rietfontein, the Dundee column, under General Yule, had got through the Biggarsberg passes and was on the Waschbank River. Fugitives from Dundee, weary and travel-stained, had already reached Ladysmith. The 5th Irish Lancers had been sent out to gain touch with the retreating column and escort it in, and Yule, hearing the guns at Rietfontein, had sent off a strong patrol of the 18th Hussars to learn what was in progress away to his right front. The patrol, a small body of men commanded by a sergeant, missed its way in the hills, and reached Ladysmith only after some skirmishing with the Boers, who tried to cut it off and make the horsemen prisoners. On Wednesday the column moved on to



THE BATTLE OF RIETFONTAIN.

Sunday's River and picked up the Lancers. On the next day—Thursday, October 26th—Yule reached Ladysmith, and Sir George White had the whole of his division concentrated.

A letter from General Joubert, sent in under a flag of truce, had brought sorrowful news from Dundee. General Sir W. Penn Symons had died in the hospital of the mortal wound received on the slope of Talana Hill. The Boer General ordered military honours to be paid at his funeral, and wrote to Sir George White expressing his sincere regret at the death of his gallant adversary.

So far, the result of the first fortnight of the war was that, in spite of our successes at Talana Hill, Elandsplaagte, and Rietfontein, the north of the colony had been overrun by the invaders. But everyone hoped that now Sir George White had gathered his forces in the lines of Ladysmith, the further advance of the Boers would be checked until the arrival of the first rein-

forcements from England would turn the scales in our favour. It was noted with satisfaction that our men had shown that they could meet the Boers on ground chosen by the enemy themselves for a stand, and drive them from the natural fortresses of the Natal highlands. True, we had had to retire on the morrow of our victories, but it was argued that this was but a prudent step in view of the great numbers opposed to us. We were only drawing back to make a better spring forward. We were bringing our strength together, and the sluggish movements of the enemy showed that there was not much chance of his outmanœuvring us. If he attacked our little army at Ladysmith, he would be made to pay severely for his temerity. This was the general impression of the situation that was current when the last week of October (the third of the war) began. A few days more sufficed to show that we had again underestimated the fighting power of our adversaries.



BOER PRISONERS.

(Photo: H. W. Nicholls, Johannesburg.)



"BOERS!" A NATIVE RUNNER WITH DESPATCHES FROM LADYSMITH.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BATTLE OF PEPWORTH HILL, AND THE AFFAIR OF NIKOLSON'S NEK.

ON the morning of October 27th, the day after Yule's brigade reached Ladysmith, the Boer commandoes were reported to have reached Modder Spruit, twelve miles north of the town. The Free Staters were closing in on the west, and the next day the Transvaal men began to work round it to the eastward. Ladysmith lies in the midst of an amphitheatre of hills and kopjes. It is a difficult position to defend, for it would require an enormous force to hold the hills around it, and if they were in the possession of an enemy the situation of a garrison crowded into the small town in the centre of the circle would be perilous in the extreme.

On the afternoon of Sunday, October 29th, the enemy were busy digging entrenchments and placing heavy guns in position on the long flat top of Pepworth Hill to the north of the town, and they were also showing in force on the rugged ridge of Lombard's Kop to the eastward. That evening Sir George White decided to attack the

Boer positions next day, with a view to capturing their heavy artillery, driving back the commandoes into the hills, and preventing the investment of Ladysmith.

Word had come from Durban that heavy guns from the fleet were being landed and would be sent up to the front to strengthen the defence. With these it might be possible to wreck the Boer gun emplacements 8,000 yards (or about $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles) away on Pepworth Hill, and so avert the peril of bombardment. But the guns had not arrived, and the 15-pounders of the Royal Artillery, and the lighter guns of the Natal volunteers, could not range effectively up to the hill. The best course, therefore, seemed to be to attempt what Symons had done at Dundee and attack the Boer position, driving off or capturing their heavy artillery. A careful reconnaissance on Sunday afternoon had shown that the Boers were holding a great semicircle of hills, with their centre at Pepworth. On their right, west of the town, and leaving a considerable gap between

their ground and Pepworth Hill, were the Free State commandoes. On the left, about Farquhar's Farm, were Lucas Meyer's troops who had come down from Dundee on the track of Yule's retreating column. Altogether the Boers covered a line of about twenty miles—not continuously, but having their troops and guns in position on a number of bold ridges and boulder-strewn kopjes, that even without any entrenching work were ready-made natural fortresses.

White's plan of attack was a somewhat elaborate scheme. The troops were to go out in three columns. The centre and right column were each formed of a brigade. Two more battalions and a mountain battery were formed into a small detached force to act on the left. The troops and their commanders were:—

Left Column.—Colonel Carleton: 1st Gloucesters, 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers, 10th Mountain Battery.

Centre Column.—Brigadier-General Ian Hamilton (7th Brigade): 1st Devons, 1st Manchesters, 2nd Gordon Highlanders, 2nd Rifle Brigade, Imperial Light Horse.

Right Column.—Colonel Grimwood (8th Brigade): 1st Leicesters, 1st King's Royal Rifles, 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers, 1st Liverpools.

The centre column was mainly composed of the troops who had fought and won at Elands-laagte; the right column, of the victors of Talana Hill. Three batteries of the Royal Field Artillery were to act in the centre; three more with the Natal Volunteer Battery on the right. Beyond the flank of Grimwood's right column were the cavalry and mounted infantry, six regiments in all, under General French.

The troops moved out in the night, so as to be ready to attack at daybreak. The first to start were the two battalions and the mountain guns on the left. They marched out of the lines at ten o'clock on Sunday evening. The column was accompanied by Major Adye, of the Staff. Carleton's orders were to occupy a hill six miles to the north and a little west of Ladysmith. To reach it the column would pass between the Free Staters and the Boer centre on Pepworth Hill, but having reached and seized it, they would threaten the Boer line of retreat and at the same time be in a position to keep off an advance of the Free State men against the left of our centre attack.

The night march of the little column to seize a hill on the Boer flank had a curious resemblance to Colley's plan at Majuba, and it had

unhappily the same ending. While the column was stumbling along a rocky track in a defile in the hills in almost absolute darkness, some boulders came rolling down the slope on one side. It may have been an accident, but it is far more likely that the Boer scouts had even in the darkness discovered Carleton's movements, that they had silently dogged the advance of the little column on its flank, and when it entered the narrow valley they had rolled the rocks down the slope in order to cause confusion and alarm. Or it may have been that there was also treachery at work. The gun mules of the battery, and a number of other mules carrying the reserve ammunition of the infantry, were led by native drivers, mostly Cape Boys, a mixed gathering of half-breeds and of pure-blooded blacks of various tribes settled as labourers in the Colony. The Cape Boys are not cowards; they did some of the hardest fighting in the storming of kopjes held by the rebels in the second Matabele war; they had already shown discontent at their pay and treatment while serving with the battery, and many of them were very likely in the mood to desert at the first opportunity. Whether it was treachery or mere panic, when the stones came crashing into the column, the Cape Boys bolted, and the mules went off in a wild stampede. Carleton and Adye kept their men together, and though the guns and the reserve ammunition were gone, they pushed on with most of their force. They were soon aware that the Boers were moving in the darkness on their flank and in front. To advance might be to fall into a prepared ambush in the darkness. To fall back would have been the most prudent course, though that was not without its dangers. But it was decided to occupy at once a good position and hold on till daylight; so the column moved up a slope of the hillside till it reached unopposed a flat summit, and there some of the men rested, while others built up low breastworks of loose stones. When the day broke, they were soon attacked on all sides. But before following further the story of the left column, we must see what was happening in the centre and on the right.

Two other columns had moved out before dawn to their allotted positions. Ian Hamilton's brigade faced Pepworth Hill; Grimwood's, with French's cavalry on its right, was pushed out towards Farquhar's Farm. Low kopjes and broken ground afforded a good deal of shelter for both men and guns. The first shot was fired shortly after five a.m. by a heavy Boer gun on the summit



FIELD ARTILLERY COMING INTO ACTION.

of Pepworth. The shell fell in the town. Then almost immediately the enemy seemed to have become aware of the infantry advance. The gun changed its target and fired at the British brigade in the centre. Lighter guns on Pepworth Hill and a battery on a ridge near Farquhar's Farm opened fire. They used smokeless powder, and for some time it proved very difficult to accurately locate the Boer gun positions. Our artillery was brought into action, and after awhile began to pick up the ranges, and there was a perceptible diminution in the Boer fire. It had not been effective at any time, for though the gunners laid their guns fairly well, the shells generally failed to burst properly. At seven o'clock rifle fire was heard far away to the north-west. It was supposed that Carleton's column was at work holding back the Free Staters. The diminution in the Boer artillery fire was encouraging. It was reported, too, that a large body of men had been seen riding away by the western slope of Pepworth Hill, and some thought the Boers were beginning to abandon their main position. We shall see later what the movement really meant.

At eight a.m. stragglers from Carleton's column began to come into the town in twos and threes. They brought news of the stampede of the mules, and the news caused some misgivings. But it was hoped that even without the guns Carleton would be able to do his work. An officer of the 10th Mountain Battery had just arrived from Durban that morning. Hearing that a number of the mules were straying in the neighbourhood of the road to Nikolson's Nek, he went out with a few men, picked up some more stragglers on the way, caught several mules still carrying their loads, and was able to put together at last two guns, with their carriages, and to get together a number of men and a small quantity of ammunition. Thus, in the course of the morning, he had organised a section of two guns, with which he went out again to help in the fight in the centre. The other four guns and most of the material of the battery, with the greater number of the mules, were in the hands of the Boers.

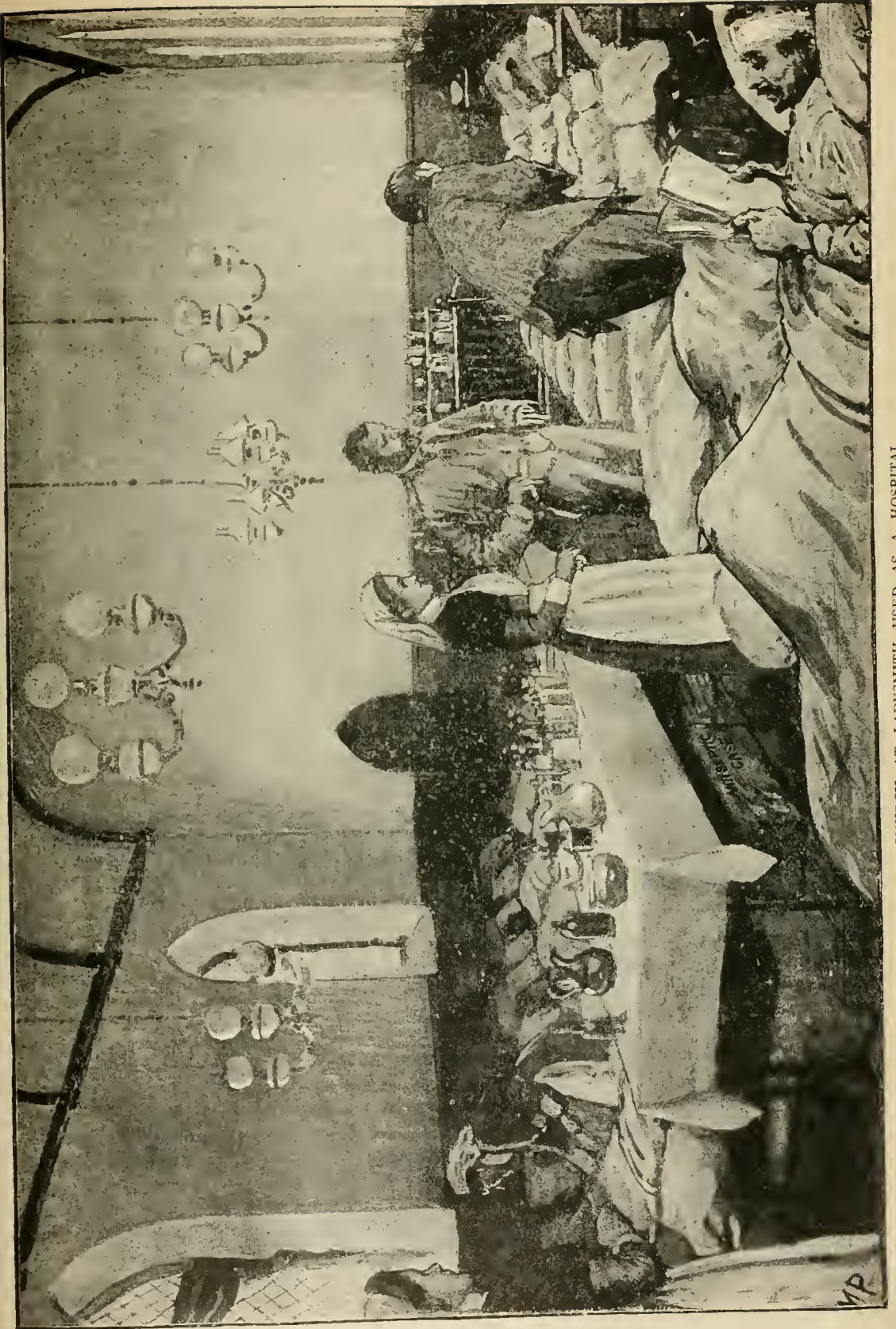
But to return to the battlefield. General White in the centre was arranging with Hamilton for the infantry advance against the Pepworth position, and his batteries were shelling Farquhar's Farm to prepare the way for the attack of his four battalions. The Boers had been steadily falling back, and our men were in good spirits. It looked like the beginning of another victory, won too at no great loss, for till now the losses on our side had been slight. But it was soon to

be seen that the Boer retirement was a tactical move. They were falling back in order to increase the separation between our centre and right, and to draw the latter into ground that would be favourable to their counter-attack. Behind the kopjes near Farquhar's Farm and the great mass of Lombard's Kop, thousands of Boer riflemen were waiting to advance. And now their batteries woke up again into sudden activity. A storm of shells from field-pieces, quick-firers and heavy guns of position rained upon Grimwood's battalions. The crests in front blazed with rifle fire, and through the broken ground right and left of the brigade swarms of riflemen pushed forward from rock to rock, firing as they came.

For awhile French, dismounting many of his men to use their carbines, kept back the right flank attack. White sent Ian Hamilton's battalions one by one to help his hard-pressed right brigade by driving back the Boers who were trying to push in between it and his centre. All our fighting force was being diverted to the right. The attack on Pepworth had been abandoned.

By eight o'clock the Boer counter-attack seemed to be successfully checked. But, on the other hand, our general plan of attack had collapsed. Very little of the centre column was left in front of Pepworth Hill; most of its infantry and all but one of its batteries had gone to the help of Grimwood's hard-pressed brigade. The left column under Carleton was too far away to influence in any way the general course of the fight, and was itself in serious peril. Between eight and nine the fight seemed less hot, but the Boers were gathering for another attack. It was now that serious news reached Sir George White from the small detachment he had left to hold the defences of Ladysmith. They sent him word that the Boer artillery was opening fire on the camp on the north side of the town, and that the enemy were threatening to attack. Reluctantly the order was given to Grimwood and Ian Hamilton to withdraw. The first movement in retreat was the signal for the Boers to come on, opening a heavy fire on the front and flank of the battalions on the British right and shelling them vigorously from all their batteries, which now reopened fire from various points on the long semicircle of hills.

Exposed to this shower of projectiles and dispirited by the retirement, the troops at first came back somewhat hurriedly and irregularly. The 13th and 53rd Batteries of the Royal Field Artillery galloped bravely to the front to protect



A CHURCH AT LADYSMITH USED AS A HOSPITAL.

the retreat, ready if necessary to devote themselves to destruction in order to save the infantry. The 53rd was taken in flank by a Maxim-Nordenfeldt quick-firer, which sent a stream of one-pound shells into it. Two guns swung round to meet this dangerous opponent; the other four held back the Boer pursuit. Then the two batteries retired alternately, one unlimbering to open fire while the other was on the move. One gun had five out of its six horses killed, and seemed on the point of capture, but a brave non-commissioned officer, Bombardier Saunders, galloped back with a team and limber from one of the waggons, and under a shower of bullets brought back the gun. Another gun was overturned while crossing a ditch. Lieutenant Higgins and a party of gunners righted it and brought it in. So the retirement went on, most of the men moving steadily as if on parade and making a dogged fight. But between the ordered lines that still faced the Boers there was trooping back to Ladysmith a mass of waggons and teamsters, stragglers from the ranks and wounded men helped by comrades, and into this crowd the Boer shells plunged, many of them bursting with deadly effect.

From Pepworth Hill the big Creusot gun was again at work, shelling now the town, now the retiring army.

The artillery, bravely as it had fought, had failed to silence the Boer guns, and could not touch the huge cannon that sent its long-ranging shells from the flat summit of Pepworth. But at this critical moment help arrived. Captain Scott, of the *Terrible*, had, with the help of his engineers and artificers, turned his giant cruiser into a floating factory, in which carriages were being prepared with which some of the long-range quick-firers of the fleet could be used on land. While the fight was in progress, two of these guns had reached Ladysmith station. They were long 12-pounders, weighing more than the 15-pounders of the Royal Field Artillery and ranging further. The bluejackets got them smartly out of the railway trucks, and, harnessing themselves to the drag-ropes, ran

them up to a bit of rising ground north-east of the town. Lieutenant Egerton, R.N., was in charge of the guns. He promptly brought them into action against the great gun on Pepworth Hill, and silenced it with a few shots. Then the naval guns were turned on the Boer artillery positions to the north-eastward, and rapidly developed such a marked superiority of fire that they checked, to a great extent, the Boer pursuit. Under the cover of this fire the two brigades and their batteries regained the town. The men tramped back to the lines weary and depressed. The day that had begun so hopefully had ended in defeat.



CAPTAIN PERCY SCOTT, R.N.

(Photo: Gregory, Strand.)

But the worst result of the morning's work was not yet known. There was no news of the left detached column beyond the tidings brought in by stragglers that during the night it had lost its mule battery and reserve ammunition. Some anxiety was felt during the early hours of the afternoon at no further message coming from Colonel Carleton or Major Adye. But it was known that they had 1,200 men with them belonging to two crack regiments, and it was felt that at the worst they would be able to make their way back to camp.

The Irish Fusiliers had a splendid fighting record. The eagle on their badges told how they were one of the two regiments that had taken a French eagle at Waterloo. The Gloucesters were the regiment that had been given the distinction of wearing the badge-plate on its head-dresses, both on the front and the back, to commemorate how at the battle of Alexandria, under Sir Ralph Abercromby, when caught in line by French cavalry, the regiment had beaten the enemy off, the rear rank facing about, and the men fighting back to back amid the rush of the enemy's horsemen. But with all this reliance on the fighting power of men who had inherited such traditions, it is strange that no effort was made to communicate with the isolated column, even if it could not be reinforced. In the afternoon some of those in the town said they heard firing away to the northward. It was the last effort of Carleton's men. In the

evening General Joubert sent in a messenger under a flag of truce to inform Sir George White that the Gloucesters and the Fusiliers, with the gunners of the mountain battery, had been compelled to surrender, and to ask him to send out doctors and an ambulance to assist in succouring their wounded.

Exactly what had happened was not known till long after. At the time all that could be ascertained was that as day broke the column

and a hospital was improvised in a spot sheltered by a low ridge. All the morning, as the boom of guns and the rattle of rifle fire came from the battlefield, there were hopes of relief. But after midday the fight had ceased, and the two regiments, with their supply of cartridges running low, and no reserve of ammunition at hand, felt that they had been abandoned to their fate. If only they had had the mountain guns they might have kept the enemy at bay ;



AN ANSWER TO "LONG TOM": ONE OF THE H.M.S. "TERRIBLE" 4.7 INCH GUNS IN ACTION

had found itself beset in the hills by a continually increasing force of the enemy. The hill top which they held ran down with a broken rocky slope on three sides. On the fourth it dropped in a sheer precipice. On three sides sharpshooters hidden in the rocks sent in a pitiless fire, to which only a doubtful reply could be made, for so well were the Boer marksmen concealed that hardly one of them was to be seen by the beleaguered battalions. As the morning went on the enemy increased in numbers. The Boers who had been seen riding off from Pepworth Hill had gone to reinforce this attack. There were numerous casualties,

but now the Boers were bringing artillery into position to support the steady advance of their riflemen, and the outlook was hopeless.

The white flag of surrender was displayed, apparently on the part of the crest held by the Gloucesters, and the "Cease fire" sounded. For a few minutes it was impossible to get all the men to obey. They continued here and there firing on the advancing Boers, refusing to believe that they were called upon to lay down their arms. It is well to remember this incident in connection with some of the charges against the Boers of displaying the white flag and still firing. Even with disciplined troops we see

how some may wish to fight to the death even when others in the same command have made up their minds that resistance means only useless loss of life.

When the firing at last ceased on both sides, and officers and men realised that one more capitulation had been added to the record of Majuba, there was an outburst of something like despair. Some threw themselves wearily on the ground, others broke their swords and rifles.

success for our arms that had been felt at the tidings of Talana Hill and Elandsplaagte. The net result of the campaign was that our army had been forced back into the lines of Ladysmith, while British infantry, cavalry, and artillery were entrained as prisoners for Pretoria. Ladysmith, now menaced by the Boer artillery with bombardment, was a bad place to defend. Sir George White would have chosen at once to retire across the Tugela and await reinforce-



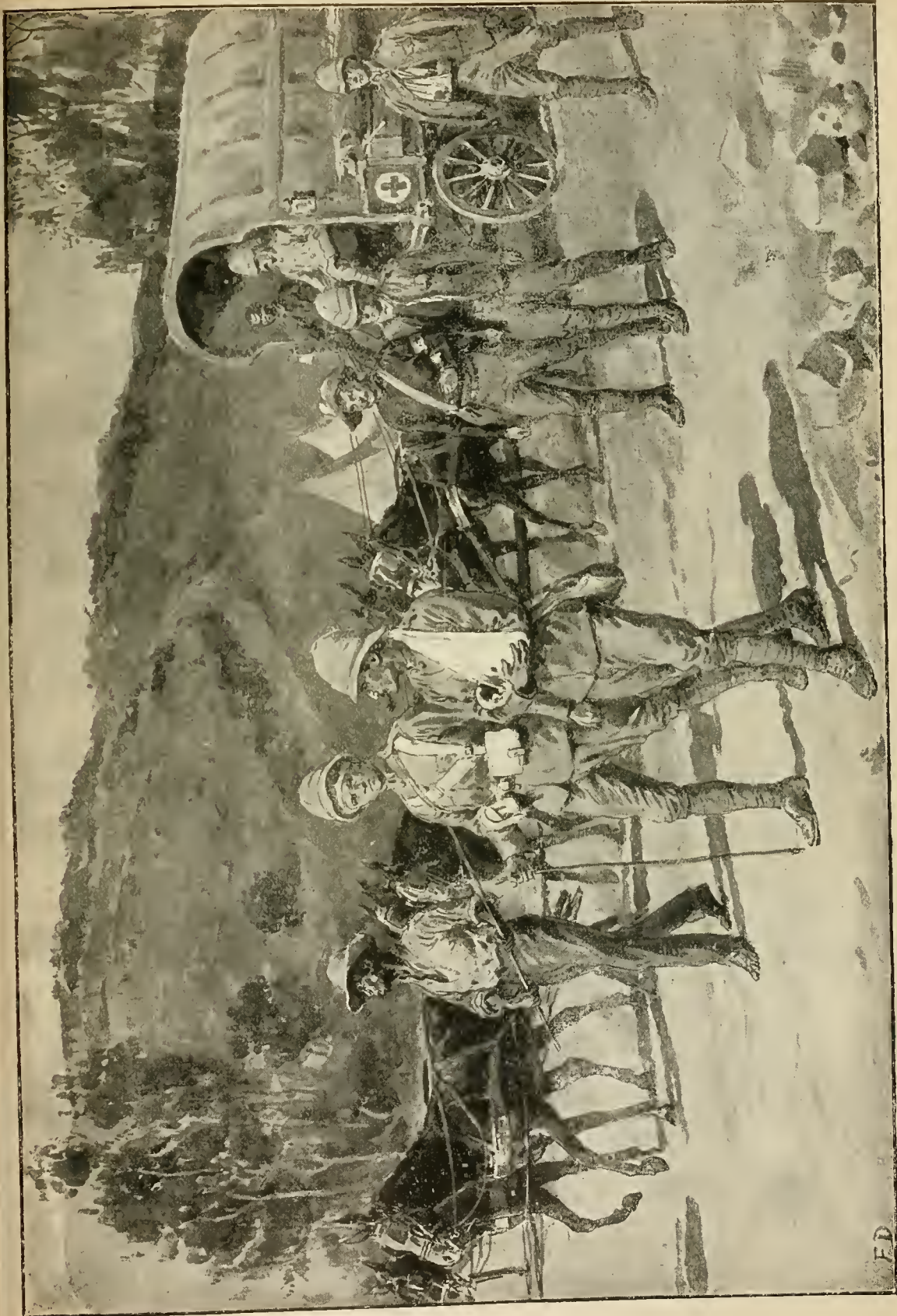
THE HOSPITAL TRAIN LEAVING LADYSMITH.

The victors showed no exultation. They gave their water-bottles to the thirsty soldiers; they helped to assist the many wounded. The courtesy of the Boer commandant, the self-restraint of his men, did something to lessen the bitterness of surrender.

The losses of this disastrous day were heavy. There were nearly 300 killed and wounded, besides the prisoners and guns lost, at Nikolson's Nek. But more serious than any loss was the blow to the prestige of the army in Natal. The surrender of Nikolson's Nek, the retirement of our troops under the pursuing fire of the Boer batteries, swept away at once the impression of

ments, but the Colonial Government begged him to hold his ground at all costs. Help was coming from England, and it was feared that retreat would be followed by a widespread rising of the Dutch colonists at the news that the defenders of Natal were falling back towards the sea-coast. So once again Sir George subordinated military to political considerations; and as so often happens when such a course is taken, the decision had an unfortunate effect on the subsequent course of the campaign.

Of course, no one at the time imagined that the Boer army would be able to cut off Ladysmith from the rest of the Colony, successfully



AN AMBULANCE WAGON RETURNING TO LADYSMITH, OCTOBER 31, 1899.

ED

invest it, and at the same time provide a force strong enough to oppose the advance of a relief column. Thus it was anticipated that Sir George White would in any case not have to remain on the defensive at Ladysmith for any length of time. And, in addition to this, there was the further argument that not only would a retirement across the Tugela have had a bad political effect, but it would also have entailed either the abandonment or destruction of an enormous quantity of stores and equip-

ments which could not have been removed in case of a hurried retreat. These stores had been accumulated at Ladysmith in preparation for the campaign, at a time when it was supposed that no Boer army would venture or be able to penetrate so far into the Colony. Their value was said to amount to something like a quarter of a million sterling. This was an additional argument for remaining in the town, and, added to the political reasons, it settled the question.



COLONEL THORNEYCROFT (OF THORNEYCROFT'S LIGHT HORSE) AND HIS ADJUTANT.



GENERAL VIEW OF VRYBURG.

Photo: E. J. Sargent.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INVESTMENT OF MAFEKING, KIMBERLEY, AND LADYSMITH—SITUATION IN THE THEATRE OF WAR BEFORE THE ARRIVAL OF THE 1ST ARMY CORPS.

WE have seen that in the first days of the war the Boers had moved a considerable force to their western frontiers to attack Mafeking and Kimberley. The Boers of the Transvaal operating on this side of the theatre of war were under the command of Cronje, the victor of Krugersdorp and Dornkop. The Free State commandoes were under Prinsloo, the commandant-general of the Free State forces. Cronje, as the more experienced soldier of the two, had the general direction of the western campaign.

By October 13th, the third day of the war, the railway had been cut north of Mafeking and south of Kimberley, and near Kraaipan station, between the two towns, the scene of the capture of Nesbitt and the armoured train. As regards railway and telegraphic communication, the two towns were therefore isolated from Cape Colony, though they could still send news to Orange River station by despatch riders, who made a long detour into Bechuanaland.

Mafeking is a small place. Its regular population, white and black, before the war was about 500. In the days when it was the railhead station of the Bechuanaland railway, before the line was prolonged to Buluwayo, it was the place where goods for Rhodesia and the north were transferred to the heavy Cape waggons. This business had gone, but it was still a *dépôt* for waggon traffic into the Northern Transvaal

and Bechuanaland, and there were consequently important stores in the little town.

Just to the south of the town runs the Malopo River, crossed by the drift or ford used by the waggons in old days and the new iron bridge on stone piers that carries the Bechuanaland railway across the stream. The place stands on the high veldt, some 4,000 feet above the sea level. The country round is generally flat, covered in places with low bush. About two miles to the westward it gradually rises, and four or five miles out on the north, west, and south there are ridges and kopjes, which, however, are of no great height above the general level.

The commandant of Mafeking was Brevet-Colonel R. S. S. Baden-Powell, who soon became the popular hero of the war with the public at home. Baden-Powell was the youngest of three brothers. The eldest was Sir George Baden-Powell, M.P., who died in 1898, and the second, Major B. F. S. Baden-Powell, of the Scots Guards. The colonel was a little over forty-two years of age when the war began, but he had already made himself a name by his many-sided activity. He was one of the smartest of British cavalry officers, and he had made a speciality of scouting, which he described as the finest sport on earth. He saw his first active service in the bloodless Ashanti campaign of 1895-96. Then he served as chief of the staff to General Sir F. Carrington in the campaign for the suppression of the revolt that broke out in Matabeleland and

Mashonaland in 1896. He had a busy time, for he not only performed staff duties, but sometimes went out alone, or almost alone, on scouting expeditions, and sometimes was in independent command of a column. He had many narrow escapes when he went prowling in the dark in the Matoppo Hills to locate the camps of the Matabele impis. "He who never sleeps" was the name the enemy gave him, and he deserved it, for he was never "a man to be caught napping." But soldiering was only part of his employment. He can use both pen and pencil deftly, and during the war in Matabeleland he was special war correspondent for the *Daily Chronicle* of London, and special artist for the *Graphic*. Out of his letters and sketches, many of them made in some lull of an attack, he produced one of the best histories that we have of the campaign, a book that reveals the plucky, light-hearted spirit of its author. Baden-Powell is a cheerful, resourceful man, and no better commander could have been found for Mafeking. His garrison was made up of specially enlisted volunteers, many of whom had served under him in Rhodesia, and all of whom knew the country well, were at home on the veldt and in the saddle, and were handy with their rifles. As helpers he had a number of special service officers. Amongst them, acting as chief of his staff, was Lord Edward Cecil, the soldier son of Lord Salisbury. Cecil had served with Lord Kitchener in the re-conquest of the Soudan, from Ferket to Omdurman.

News of the approach of Cronje's forces reached Mafeking on Friday, October 13th. The first fighting took place next day. Baden-

Powell's mounted scouts had been watching and retiring before the Boer commando during the Friday afternoon, the enemy moving up along the railway from the south and across the veldt to the northward so as to encircle the town. At dawn on Saturday morning all the garrison stood to their arms expecting an attack. Mounted patrols were pushed out in all directions, and at 5.25 a sharp rifle fire was heard away to the northwards. A patrol under Lord Charles Bentinek was out on that side, and in a few minutes one of his men came galloping in with the news that he was in contact with a Boer commando about 600 strong near the railway line. The report had hardly been made when the sound of the firing ceased.

In the railway station there was an armoured train waiting with steam up. It consisted of a protected engine and three armoured trucks, two of them armed each with a Maxim, the third carrying a small Hotchkiss quick-firer. Captain Ashley Williams, of the

British South African police, was in command. He was ordered to go out and, if possible, engage the enemy.

The train ran out of the town, and soon pulled up near the position held by Lord Charles Bentinek and his men. Here Captain Williams was informed that after firing a few shots, which did no harm, the Boers had retired along the line. There was a cheer as Williams told the engine-driver to push on. "Go ahead," shouted one of Bentinek's troopers. "Those fellows can't shoot for nuts!" Two miles further on the Boers were seen a few hundred yards off on the veldt. The train opened fire with machine-



COLONEL BADEN-POWELL.
(Photo: Maull & Fox, Piccadilly.)

guns and rifles. The Boers took cover, and answered with their Mausers. Then the Boers brought some light quick-firing guns into action from a longer range. The shells fell unpleasantly near the train, but by keeping it on the move and altering the range the enemy's gunners were puzzled. But Baden-Powell, hearing the reports of the guns, became anxious about the train; one well-placed shell might disable it. So he prudently sent out Captain

two men killed and seventeen wounded in this sortie, and a party with a flag of truce was sent out to bring back the wounded.

In the first reports sent home to the newspapers this little affair was represented as a serious engagement, and a great victory for the defenders of Mafeking. It was said that hundreds of Boers had been killed. But as the enemy fought under cover, their losses were probably no greater than our own. They



A SORTIE IN AN ARMoured TRAIN.

Fitzclarence with a squadron of mounted rifles to bring it back.

The squadron galloped out, and soon came into action with the Boers. Then the mounted men and the train alternately retired, the squadron dismounting a number of riflemen while the train ran back a little—the train then bringing its guns into action while the men mounted and rode back to a new position further to the rear. The Boers followed up until they came within rifle range of the defences of Mafeking, while a party on the railway tore it up at several points to prevent the return of the train. The little force lost

certainly were not discouraged in the least degree. They followed up our retirement, and reported the affair as the victorious repulse of a sortie.

Baden-Powell made no attempt to interfere with the enemy's approach on the south side. By Monday, the 16th, the Boers were in position all round Mafeking, and the place was isolated. On that day Cronje, having got some of his guns into position, sent in an officer with a flag of truce to demand the surrender of the garrison. He added that if it were refused he would bombard the town. Colonel Baden-Powell, of course, refused to surrender, and told the

messenger that, in return for Commandant Cronje's courtesy in giving him notice of the bombardment, he wished to inform him that there were a number of mines round the town of which he must beware. Some of these, he said, were designed to act automatically, others could be controlled from headquarters. He also informed the Boer commandant that a number of his countrymen were prisoners in the local gaol, and added that, in order that he might have the opportunity of avoiding injury to the building and its inmates when he opened fire, the gaol would be distinguished by a yellow flag flying from it. The story about the mines was apparently a piece of bluff, for during many weeks not a word about any damage being done by them appeared in the reports from Mafeking, though during that time the Boers pushed close in to the town. The nearest approach to a mine that was ever exploded was a couple of truck-loads of dynamite. The dynamite had been stored in the town for sale to miners, and Colonel Baden-Powell, fearing the possible effect of an accidental explosion during the siege, got rid of it very ingeniously. It was laden with some detonators amongst it on the trucks, and a plucky engine-driver named Byferry ran it out on the veldt. The Boers, taking it for an armoured train, opened upon it with quick-firers, on which Byferry uncoupled his engine and ran back, abandoning the trucks. He was just at a safe distance when the mass of dynamite was blown up by a shell. It is said that some of the Boers who were approaching the train were killed by the explosion. If Baden-Powell had been engaged in laying ground mines he would not have thus disposed of all this dynamite.

The bombardment began on the 16th, and was continued throughout the siege in a desultory way, often only a few shots being fired in the twenty-four hours. The garrison constructed a number of ingenious bomb-proof shelters, and there was very little loss of life. One of the shelters adjoined the Catholic convent, and the hospital was installed in it, the nuns acting as nurses. Later, when the Boers brought a heavy 94-pounder into action at long range, a look out was kept by a sentry equipped with a horn, on which he blew a loud, sharp blast whenever the flash of the gun showed that a shell was coming. This gave the garrison and the townsfolk a few seconds in which to take cover. Baden-Powell sent out by runners cheery messages telling how safe the garrison

felt. Now he reported that a heavy bombardment had resulted in the death of a dog, and again that the only damage done was the smashing of a cooking pot. Early in the siege Cronje sent in a messenger to demand again surrender, "in order to avoid further bloodshed." "When is the bloodshed going to begin?" asked Baden-Powell in reply.

The Boers had cut off the supply of water from the reservoir outside the town, but a fair supply could be obtained from the Malopo River. The enemy's shells seldom burst, but some of them caused fires in the town. They were also engaged in sapping up nearer to the defences, and digging trenches from which they could fire into the streets. In order to check these approaches, a night sortie was made on October 24th by a party under Captain Fitzclarence. Noiselessly approaching the nearest Boer trench, they dashed into it with the bayonet and cleared it from end to end, and then returned to the town while the enemy were firing wildly in the darkness, much of their fire being directed at a red lantern which Lord Edward Cecil had hoisted on a pole on the town common in order to mislead them into the idea that there was another move in preparation on that side. What the Boers lost is not known, but six of Fitzclarence's party were killed and nine wounded. The bodies of the dead were brought in next day under a flag of truce.

On the last day of the month the Boers attempted an assault. A rain of shells was directed upon the town, and under cover of this fire two parties of the besiegers dashed out of the advanced trenches and tried to rush the south-east angle of the defences and an outwork known as the Cannon Kopje. Both attacks were repulsed with heavy loss. The casualties in the garrison were only eight killed and four wounded. After this unsuccessful assault the besiegers made no further attempts, settling down quietly to blockade and starve out the place. They still bombarded it at intervals, and sent gusts of rifle fire from the trenches, which they gradually pushed up to shorter range.

Colonel Baden-Powell kept up the spirits of his garrison by telling them that they were certain to be relieved, and showing his confidence by his own cheery demeanour. By a tacit agreement Sunday was a day of rest for both besiegers and besieged. "There is little question," wrote a correspondent in the beleaguered garrison, "that this day off is a remarkable boon to the inhabitants. Our out-

posts converse in a curious but friendly way with those of the enemy. We ourselves indulge in baths, shaves, clean shirts, polished boots, and other luxuries unknown during weekdays. One is able to go to church if so disposed. There is a celebration of the Holy Communion each Sunday, the rector and the Roman Catholic priest officiating in their respective churches. You may eat breakfast in comfort, and during the morning wander round snap-shooting, happy in the knowledge that no shells or Mauser bullets will interfere in an untimely manner with your comforts. Your lunch need not be gulped down in fear of a 100-pounder hurtling through the dining-room window, and in the afternoon we play cricket matches and the volunteer band discourses music in the market-square. Let no one imagine that because we have intervals of comfort the siege of Mafeking is a picnic."

It was indeed anything but a picnic. Here is a note from the same correspondent's diary a few days later, describing weekday experiences:—"It requires more courage to sit tight under a bombardment than to go out in the open and tackle the enemy in a battle that lasts perhaps two or three hours. Our battle has lasted a month, and we have been under fire every day. We have not been able to eat our meals in peace, and sometimes we have not eaten them at all. We cannot move about in our own town, and every now and then someone is hurt. However, there is no question of surrender in Mafeking to-day. You must move from shelter to shelter; you must dodge down lanes, having always an eye to the direction from which you expect to be fired upon. From our market-place the tents of the enemy are plainly visible to the east, and upon the outskirts of the town you cannot cross the road or leave the house without being subjected to a smart volley of sharpshooters watching all day to get a shot at someone."

Having brought up the story of the gallant defence of Mafeking to the end of October, let us see what was meanwhile happening at other points on the western border. The chief place on the railway between Mafeking and Kimberley is the town of Vryburg, ninety-six miles south of the former, and 127 miles north of the latter point. Though not a large city like Kimberley, it ranks as the capital of Bechuanaland. There is a strong Dutch element in the local population, and the defence was entrusted to a small force of armed police under a British officer.

At first he was led to believe that the inhabitants would assist him in holding the town, and rifles were distributed to some of the citizens. But Mr. Tillard, the local magistrate, telegraphed to the Cape on October 14th that 500 Boers with artillery were approaching, and that defence was impossible. He was informed by telegraph that he must act on the orders of Colonel Kekewich, the commandant at Kimberley. But meanwhile an agitation for surrender had begun among the townfolk. On the 16th the officer in command at Vryburg, finding that he could not trust even the volunteers to whom he had given rifles, reluctantly ordered his handful of police to evacuate the town. As they were falling in to march off he went into his quarters and shot himself dead with his revolver. We must suppose that his mind had broken down under the strain of the last few days, and regret that he had not the strength of will and steadfastness of mind the situation required. Resistance on the spot was probably hopeless with a disaffected population in the town; but there was plenty of work waiting for him if he had got away with his detachment to Kimberley or Kuruman.

The police had not long left the town when the Boers marched in, hoisted the flag of the Transvaal, and, amidst the cheers of the Dutch inhabitants, proclaimed the annexation of Bechuanaland to the Republic. Meanwhile the Free State men, under Prinsloo, were closing in upon Kimberley.

Mr. Rhodes had hurried up to Kimberley on the first day of the war. He announced his intention of staying in the "Diamond City" till the danger was over, and said that he felt "as safe there as if he was in Piccadilly." The garrison was made up of half a battalion (four companies) of the Loyal North Lancashire, under the commander of the regiment, Colonel Kekewich (who also acted as commandant of the place), and some volunteers, artillery, infantry, and mounted rifles, with a few officers and men of the Royal Garrison Artillery and Royal Engineers. In all there were about three or four thousand men. A number of the citizens were also armed with rifles and enrolled as a town guard for police duties in Kimberley, where, besides the whites, there was a large native population engaged in work at the diamond mines.

On Saturday, October 14th—the same day that the fighting began at Mafeking—a Boer laager was seen about eight miles south-east of

the town. Further away to the eastward clouds of dust were rising, indicating the movement of a large column with horses and waggons. Scouts pushed out to the southward brought back word that the enemy was moving towards the Modder River bridge on the railway. The armoured train ran out with a detachment of the North Lancashires, and found the Boers near the line at Spytfontein station, where the railway runs through a range of hills and kopjes

one of the piers. Small bodies of Free State burghers also seized Belmont and other points on the railway between the Modder and the Orange River, and a train despatched from De Aar Junction to bring back railway employes from the stations on the Free State border was unable to proceed beyond the bridge at Orange River station. On the same day the Boers cut the lines of pipes that convey drinking water into Kimberley, from the waterworks outside



FIRING FROM AN ARMOURD TRAIN.

that became famous as the scene of desperate fighting at a later stage of the war. Fire was opened upon the enemy with rifles and Maxims. They brought up some light artillery, but the Boer gunners made bad practice, and failed to disable the train, which drove the enemy from the line, inflicting a good deal of loss on them without incurring a single casualty on the British side. The train ran back into Kimberley, and the Lancashires were heartily cheered as they marched back to their quarters.

But, meanwhile, another Boer commando had reached the Modder, the railway line and telegraph were cut, and two spans of the bridge were destroyed by exploding a mine at the top of

the town, but the garrison had still a supply, though of inferior quality, in the great dams and reservoirs of the De Beers mines.

During the next few days the Boers were establishing themselves in strong positions round the town. Beyond a few shots exchanged between outposts and patrols, there was no fighting. On the 17th Colonel Kekewich issued orders for the fuller organisation of the defence. For the better preservation of internal order the town was divided into four sub-districts. The garrison and the population were put upon regular rations in order to economise the food supplies. The members of the fire brigade were forbidden to take part in any fighting, as their

services might be required at any moment in their own department. All roads out of Kimberley were closed and watched by sentries, and no one was to be allowed to pass these posts without a regular permit. Arrangements were made for working parties to be kept busy on the defences each day, and these were rapidly strengthened, miles of barbed wire entanglements being erected in front of the improvised ramparts. The enemy kept at first at a very respectful distance. The Boer force was not strong enough to closely besiege the place. Their plan was to hold a number of points on a wide circle round Kimberley, at each of which a small commando was established in a laager and strongly entrenched. Between these points mounted patrols watched the ground, so that it was difficult even for a despatch rider to get through.

In the early morning of October 24th Colonel Kekewich sent out a sortie to the northward along the railway. The first party consisted of 270 volunteers under Colonel Scott-Turner. Moving out in the darkness, they rested till the sun rose, and then about nine o'clock attacked one of the Boer positions with rifle fire. For three hours there was desultory skirmishing between the British and the Boers, both fighting under cover. Then Colonel Murray was sent out with an armoured train, two guns, some

mounted men, and a detachment of the North Lancashires to support Scott-Turner. Later a second train was despatched with ammunition. The guns drove the Boers from their cover, and as they retired they were charged with the bayonet and routed by the Lancashires. The

British loss was only three killed and twenty-one wounded. The Boer loss was unknown, but it must have been much heavier. The object of the operation was to keep the Boers as far as possible from the town, and, by making them fear other bold strokes of the same kind, delay a closer investment. There was no further change in the situation at Kimberley during the rest of October.

By the end of the month Ladysmith also was all but hemmed in by the Boers, though communication with the south of Natal was not actually cut off until November 2nd. After the unsuccessful at-

tack on Boer positions at Pepworth Hill and Farquhar's Farm and the loss of Colonel Carleton's column at Nikolson's Nek on October 30th, Sir George White gave up the attempt to drive back the Boers from the neighbourhood of Ladysmith. In the light of subsequent events, one sees that it would have been better if he had at once retired south of the Tugela, instead of allowing his small army to be invested in the town. But there is reason to believe that he was not left quite free to act on purely



QUESTIONING A ZULU AS TO THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE BOERS.

military considerations. It is said that the Natal Government insisted that a withdrawal from Ladysmith would have a bad effect in encouraging the disaffected Dutch colonists to take action. White therefore prepared to hold his ground in a position that was naturally ill fitted for a prolonged defence. But it was expected that reinforcements would soon reach Natal and be sent to his help, and it was hoped that he would be able, meanwhile, to keep open his communications with Pietermaritzburg and Durban.

During October 31st and November 1st trains were despatched from Ladysmith to Durban conveying wounded men and invalids and a number of civilian refugees. But on November 2nd railway traffic was stopped, and the telegraph line also was cut. The important railway bridge over the Tugela at the small town of Colenso was guarded by a detachment of regulars and volunteers. On the morning of the 2nd the Boers appeared north of the river and placed heavy guns in position on the high ground commanding the road and railway bridges at the town. The fire of these guns made the place untenable; the garrison retired southward, the Boers seized the bridges, and the investment of Ladysmith was complete.

With this event the first stage of the war may be said to have closed. The situation at the beginning of November was briefly this. The Boers had overrun Northern Natal as far as the Tugela, shutting up General White with about 10,000 men in Ladysmith. On the western border they had closely besieged Colonel Baden-Powell at Mafeking, seized Vryburg, and invested Kimberley, destroying the bridges on the Bechuanaland railway, and stopping all traffic on the line north of the Orange River. On the northern border they had only a small force, which was watched by patrols of irregulars under Colonel Plumer, to prevent it from raiding into Rhodesia. On the southern border the Free Staters were holding the crossings of the Orange River. At the beginning of November, having been largely reinforced, they began to pass over into Cape territory in order to raise the Dutch districts in the north of the colony.

So far the general results of the campaign were more favourable to the Boers than the British. But General Buller had reached Capetown, a complete army corps and a cavalry division were on the way, and it was expected that with these reinforcements in the field the whole aspect of the situation would soon be changed.



COLONEL KEKEWICH.
(Photo: Browning, Exeter.)

CHAPTER VIII.

THE REINFORCEMENTS FROM ENGLAND, AND THEIR LEADERS.

IT was no wonder that both at home and among the loyal colonists at the Cape complete confidence was felt in the power of Sir Redvers Buller and the army placed under his command to roll back the Boer invasion and carry the war victoriously into the enemy's country. General Buller had so far had an unbroken career of success. A man of iron frame and nerve, he brought to the task set before him great administrative ability and wide experience of African warfare. The public and the army trusted him, and he had confidence in himself and in his officers and men.

The Government had placed under his command a larger and better equipped force than any British general had ever commanded at the outset of a campaign. For the first time in our military history a complete army corps organised on modern lines was to take the field. Although, on account of the turn that events had taken in South Africa, the army corps was not assembled, as had been originally intended, in one organised body at the railway junctions along the Orange River, but was divided between Cape Colony and Natal, it will be interesting here to set forth its organisation, and to note the careers and characters of the more prominent generals, whose names will appear so often in the subsequent narrative.

An army corps in the British service consists of three infantry divisions, each of two brigades, and provided with artillery, some mounted troops and engineers, and various administrative units. Thus each division can, if need be, act independently as a little army. The general commanding it has further at his disposal what are known as "corps troops," these being made up of a strong force of artillery and engineers, with a battalion of infantry and some cavalry, besides ammunition and supply columns and a field hospital. Besides the small force of cavalry with the army corps, General Buller was to have the help of a cavalry division, made up of a strong body of cavalry, horse artillery, and mounted infantry.

The following list gives the organisation of the 1st Army Corps and the cavalry division embarked for South Africa at the beginning of the war:—

FIRST DIVISION.

LIEUT.-GENERAL LORD METHUEN.

First Brigade (Guards), Major-General Sir Henry Colvile, K.C.M.G.: 3rd Grenadier Guards; 1st Coldstream Guards; 2nd Coldstream Guards; 1st Scots Guards.*

Second Brigade (English regiments), Major-General Hildyard: 2nd West Surrey; 2nd Devonshire; 2nd West Yorkshire; 2nd East Surrey.

Divisional Troops.

One squadron 14th Hussars; 7th, 14th, and 66th Batteries R.F.A.; ammunition column; 17th Field Company R.E.; 20th Company Army Service Corps; 19th Field Hospital.

SECOND DIVISION.

LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR C. F. CLERY, K.C.B.

Third Brigade (Highlanders), Major-General Andrew Wauchope: 2nd Royal Highlanders; 1st Highland Light Infantry; 2nd Seaforth Highlanders; 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

Fourth Brigade (Rifle regiments), Major-General Lyttelton: 2nd Scottish Rifles (Cameronians); 3rd King's Royal Rifles; 1st Durham Light Infantry; 1st Rifle Brigade.

Divisional Troops.

One squadron 14th Hussars; 63rd, 64th, and 73rd Batteries R.F.A.; ammunition column; 17th Field Company R.E.; 20th Company A.S.C.; 3rd Field Hospital.

THIRD DIVISION.

LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR W. GATACRE, K.C.B.

Fifth Brigade (Irish regiments), Major-General Fitzroy Hart: 1st Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers; 2nd Royal Irish Rifles; 1st Connaught Rangers; 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

* A field hospital, a bearer company, and a supply column was attached to each brigade.

Sixth Brigade (Fusilier regiments), Major-General G. Barton: 2nd Royal Fusiliers; 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers; 1st Royal Welsh Fusiliers; 2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers.

Divisional Troops.

Squadron 14th Hussars; 74th, 77th, and 70th Batteries R.F.A.; ammunition column; 12th Field Company R.E.; 20th Company A.S.C.; 7th Field Hospital.

R Battery R.H.A.; Lieut.-Col. Alderson's Mounted Infantry; ammunition column; Field Troop R.E.; Company A.S.C.; Bearer Company and Field Hospital.

Second Brigade, Major-General Brabazon: 1st Royal Dragoons; 2nd Dragoons (Scots Greys); 6th Dragoons (Inniskillings); O Battery R.H.A.; Lieut.-Col. Tudway's Mounted Infantry; ammunition column; Field Troop R.E.; Company A.S.C.; Bearer Company and Field Hospital.



LORD METHUEN.

(Photo: Gregory & Co., Strand, W.C.)

Corps Troops.

13th Hussars; P and G Batteries R.H.A.; 4th, 38th, and 78th Batteries R.F.A.; 37th, 61st, and 65th Howitzer Batteries R.F.A.; ammunition column; Pontoon troop R.E.; Telegraph division R.E. (equipped with both ordinary and Marconi apparatus); 26th Field Company R.E.; 1st Field Park R.E. (conveying reserves of engineering tools and stores); two balloon sections R.E.; 10th Railway Company R.E.; 1st Royal Scots Infantry; 21st Company A.S.C.; Field Bakery H.S.C.; 5th Field Hospital; Ammunition and Supply reserves, each organised in three sections.

CAVALRY DIVISION.

LIEUT.-GENERAL FRENCH.

First Brigade, Major-General Babington: 6th Dragoon Guards; 10th Hussars; 12th Lancers;

Together, the army corps and the cavalry division would make a complete little army of 40,000 men. According to the original plan of campaign, it was to have been massed on the line of junctions just south of the Free State border, and to march across the Orange River and invade the Boer territory, while the Fourth Division, under Sir George White, with a cavalry brigade under Major-General Brocklehurst, held Natal. Colonial troops and a number of regiments in the colony, but not attached to the field force, were to guard the lines of communications. These troops were under the orders of General Forestier-Walker, commanding at the Cape.

The generals commanding Buller's divisions were all men of high reputation in the army. Lord Methuen, as a Guardsman, had been given the command of the First Division, which

included the Guards Brigade. He was best known in South Africa as the commander of a splendid irregular regiment of mounted rifles in Sir Charles Warren's Bechuanaland expedition of 1884-85. Officially known as the 1st Mounted Rifles, it was always called after its colonel, "Methuen's Horse." He had served in Egypt under Lord Wolseley, and he had been with Sir William Lockhart in the Tirah campaign on the north-west frontier of India. His last command

His two brigadiers were also experienced soldiers. Sir H. Colville, who commanded the Guards Brigade, was one of the founders of our East African empire. He had been governor of Uganda, and had directed two campaigns on the great lakes of Central Africa. Hildyard, who commanded the English Brigade, had lately been commandant of the Staff College.

Sir C. F. Clery, who commanded the Second Division, was another ex-professor of the Staff



SIR FRANCIS CLERY.

(Photo: J. T. Cumming, Aldershot.)

had been that of the Home District in England. A tall, strong, athletic man, a good boxer and fencer, he would have made a splendid man-at-arms in the wars of long ago. But he had the reputation of being also a scientific soldier. He had lived in Germany as military attaché at Berlin, and was in touch with the staff of the best-trained army in Europe. Among other decorations, he had received one from the Kaiser for pluckily swimming to the rescue of a would-be suicide who had thrown himself into the River Spree on a winter day. His appointment to the command of the First Division was hailed with enthusiasm by those who were to serve under him.

College, and the author of the best-known book on tactics in the English language. One result of this distinction was that he was regarded by many—quite unjustly—as a mere theorist, a pedantic, bookish soldier. But he had borne his part well in much hard service, some of it in South Africa. He had been with Lord Chelmsford when the Zulu power was broken at Ulundi, he had been with Wolseley in Egypt, and had served as chief of the staff to Sir Gerald Graham in the campaign near Suakin, when the hard-fought victories of El Teb and Tamai were won. His brigadiers were two good soldiers who had commanded the two brigades of British troops that fought at Omdurman. General A.

Wauchope, a typical Highland officer, commanded the Highland Brigade, and General Lyttelton the brigade of rifle battalions.

The Third Division was under the command of one of our youngest generals. Sir William Gatacre had first won distinction in the Chitral campaign. Then he had the good luck to be chosen to command the British brigade that fought under Kitchener at the Atbara. This led to his being given the command of the British division in the advance on Khartoum. At the Atbara he charged, sword in hand, at the head of his men, and was one of the first through the zereba hedge. Recklessly brave, and of untiring energy, knowing as little of weariness as of fear, his one failing in Egypt was that he judged others by himself, and sometimes overtaxed the powers of his men. "General Back-acher" was the soldiers' playful nickname for him; but his pluck made him popular with them even when he worked them the hardest.

General French, of the cavalry division, had the reputation of being one of the best cavalry officers in our army. His mounted infantry commanders were also both men of mark. Alderson had directed the successful operations of the mounted infantry in the Mashonaland campaign. Tudway had seen years of service as commander of the Camel Corps, scouting and fighting along the Upper Nile and across the Soudan deserts.

No wonder great things were expected from Buller with such officers, and with the pick of our army under their leadership.

The embarkation of the Army Corps began in the third week of October. Hildyard's English brigade was the first to go on board the transports. The greater part of it sailed from England on Friday, October 20th, the day of the Battle of Dundee. On the 21st, the day of the Battle of Elandslaagte, the Guards Brigade was embarked. The other infantry brigades

rapidly followed, but it was not till the middle of November that all the details of the Army Corps were on the sea.

In the second week of November the troops began to reach the Cape. The first to arrive at Capetown was the *Roslin Castle*, having on board General Hildyard and the staff of the Second Brigade, with the 2nd West Yorkshire. The brigade was to have been landed at Capetown, according to the original plan; but by this time the Boers had not only invested Ladysmith in Natal, but had crossed the Tugela, and were raiding towards Pietermaritzburg. The Natal Government was pressing for



SIR WILLIAM GATACRE.

(Photo: Bowne & Shepherd, Ca cutta.)

reinforcements, and Buller abandoned the well-devised plan of campaign that had been prepared in England, and sent some of his troops to Natal, some to De Aar to form a relief force for Kimberley, some to the northern border of Cape Colony to keep back the Free State raiders, who had crossed the Orange River and were trying to raise the country in insurrection.

Hildyard's brigade, instead of going up to De Aar, according to the original plan of campaign, was sent round to Natal, and disembarked at Durban, where the 2nd Yorkshire landed on

the 12th. The other brigade of Lord Methuen's division began to reach the Cape on November 11th, when the *Gascon* arrived with the 2nd Coldstream Guards on board. They were at once pushed up to De Aar, where Lord Methuen began to organise a scratch division out of the Guards Brigade, a "Ninth Brigade" formed of troops originally intended for guarding the line of communications, with some cavalry and artillery. This force was the nucleus of the Kimberley Relief Column. Another relief force was formed in Natal to go to the rescue of Ladysmith. General Sir C. F. Clery was put in local command there, but before the advance took place General Buller also proceeded to Natal. General Gatacre was sent up to Queens-town with a small force to meet the Boer invasion of the colony on that side. General French was sent to guard the central line of railway that runs through Naauwpoort Junction.

French had got out of Ladysmith by the last train that ran through. He was fired upon by the Boers, who were closing in on the south of the place. He came out under orders from General Buller to take command of the cavalry division; but within a few days of his arrival at Capetown the whole plan that included the assembly of a cavalry division was broken up, and French was sent to Naauwpoort to face the Boer invasion with a small column, chiefly of

mounted troops. This sudden change of plans in the middle of November exercised a fatal influence on the subsequent campaign. Broken up into comparatively small bodies, our troops had nowhere a marked superiority over the Boers. And our generals found themselves further hampered in their operations by the want of transport. The Government had not begun to collect transport animals or purchase harness and waggons till the very eve of the war. All that had been done was to send officers to various centres where mules and draught animals could be purchased, and to make provisional contracts. At first it had been proposed that the animals thus bought should bring their own pack-saddles or draught collars with them, so as to save time in fitting new gear. But the Government decided that all the harness must be obtained in England, and on the same principle it rejected the offer of some large American firms to rapidly supply carts suited for South Africa. The result was that even at the end of the year the transport for the 1st Army Corps was still incomplete, so that during the operations for the relief of Kimberley and Ladysmith our generals had been obliged to move only along the railways; the want of wheeled and pack transport chained them to the line, and the Boers could know in advance what points to occupy and entrench in order to bar the progress of the relief columns.



MAJOR-GENERAL HILDYARD.
(Photo: Evelyn & Co., Aldershot.)

CHAPTER IX.

THE CAMPAIGN IN NATAL—FIRST DAYS OF THE SIEGE OF LADYSMITH—BOER OPERATIONS.

AT the outset of the campaign the military authorities in Natal were so confident that Sir George White would be able to hold in check any Boer invasion of the northern part of the colony that they had made no preparations for the defence of the country south of the River Tugela. The only troops available for the purpose were a detachment of not more than 2,000 men at Estcourt, made up of some companies of the Dublin Fusiliers, the Durham Light Infantry, a battery of the Natal artillery; and for mounted troops, a squadron of the Natal Carabineers, a squadron of the Imperial Light Horse, and a company of mounted infantry formed from the King's Royal Rifles. Part of this force had been pushed up to Colenso to guard the important bridges over the Tugela at the little town. But they had been forced to retire by the heavy guns which the Boers placed in position on the hills on the north bank, when the invaders swept round to the south of Ladysmith on November 2nd. They fell back on Estcourt. The only reinforcements likely to be soon available were detachments of volunteers which were being hurriedly enrolled and equipped at Pietermaritzburg and Durban, and the seamen and marines that could be landed from the fleet at the latter place.

The fleet had already, as we have seen, sent up a train-load of men and guns to Ladysmith. They arrived in the nick of time, just as the battle of October 30th was turning against White. The guns they brought with them were two 4.7 quick-firers, four smaller quick-firers throwing a shell of twelve and a half pounds, and two light field-pieces. Two of the twelve-pounders were brought into action to cover the retreat of the army from its unsuccessful attack on the Boer positions. During that day and the next the other quick-firers were mounted. They were the only weapons in

Ladysmith powerful enough to contend with the long-ranging fire of the heavy Boer guns on the surrounding hills.

During the afternoon of the 30th, and during the following day and part, at least, of November 1st, there was a kind of tacit armistice. Burial parties and ambulances from both armies were at work on the battlefield under the white flag.

Though the place was not yet cut off from communication with the south, it might be said that the siege had begun. It was felt that the communications would soon be cut, and it was important to reckon up the resources of the garrison.

According to the correspondent of the *Times* in the town, the situation on November 1st was this* :—" Sir George White had at his disposal to defend Ladysmith a force of 9,000 men, thirty-six field-guns, and a naval contingent with two heavy position-guns. Of food-stuffs and

small arm ammunition he possessed a supply which would not, under ordinary circumstances, become exhausted in three months. But the artillery were not so well placed. The supply of shell worked out to a little over 300 rounds per gun in the field batteries, and even with the naval guns it was evident that expenditure would have to be made with a sparing hand. Ladysmith does not lend itself readily to defence. Roughly, the town lies in the bend of a horse-shoe. But the hills which make this formation are disconnected, and the ranges and spurs straggle over a large area. Not only are they uneven, but their continuations stretch away in every direction, and form positions which in the majority of cases actually command the town. With the force at his disposal, it was, of course, absolutely impossible to hold every hill; and even contracting his front so as to hold the majority of the strategical points,

* Letter of November 1st, published December 19th, 1899.



COMMANDER F. G. EGERTON, R.N.
(Photo: Debenham, Southsea.)



BOERS FIRING ON GENERAL FRENCH'S TRAIN.

Sir George White found his 9,000 men, of which only 5,000 odd were infantry, holding a line of posts extending over eleven miles." The attacking force was estimated at upwards of 20,000 men. It was supposed that Joubert had in all from 25,000 to 30,000 men in Northern Natal, so that while holding his positions round Ladysmith he could afford to detach a strong column for operations further south.

Soon after dawn on November 2nd the Boers opened fire upon the town with their heavy Creusot gun, which was mounted on Pepworth Hill. The two heavy guns of the Naval Brigade replied. One of the earlier shots from the enemy's gun mortally wounded Lieutenant Egerton, R.N., of the *Terrible*, who was in command of the naval battery. He was under the long barrel of one of his guns, leaning on the parapet of the battery, when the enemy's shell came through the earthwork without bursting and shattered both his legs. The surgeons tried to save him. They amputated one leg above, and the other below, the knee. After the operation he seemed likely to recover. He was very plucky and cheerful, and chatted and smoked cigarettes with friends who came to see him in the hospital. But in the following night he became worse and died. The news of his injury had been at once cabled to England. It was one of the last messages to come through before the wires were cut. He was at once promoted to the rank of commander, but did not live to hear the good news.

The artillery duel continued during the day. A small force was pushed out to the southward, under Sir Archibald Hunter, to attack the Boers, who were closing in on that side. This was after the cessation of telegraphic communication had shown that the wires were cut between Ladysmith and Colenso. But, hearing guns in action on their flank, and nearer the town, Sir George White sent off a messenger to recall them. He feared that they might be cut off, and that the result might be a repetition of the Ladysmith disaster. On the ridges close to the town the artillery were busy getting guns into position, and the infantry were building breastworks of loose stones. In fact, the first steps were being taken to convert Ladysmith into an improvised fortress. The men worked listlessly, under the first impression of failure and defeat. "We're surrounded—that's what we are," said one of them to his comrades: "Thought we was goin' to have Christmas

puddin' in Pretoria. Not much Christmas puddin' we'll even smell this time!"

At early dawn on the next day, November 3rd, the desultory bombardment began again. In the middle of the day a shell burst in one of the hotels, wrecking the room of Mr. H. H. S. Pearse, of the *Daily News*, happily while he was out of it. In the course of the morning a rumour had come in that the Free Staters were retiring westward towards Van Reenen's Pass. It was as misleading as the many subsequent rumours of the same kind that prevailed from time to time in the garrison. It was probably based on the fact that they were sending back empty waggons under escort to bring supplies into their laagers. Thinking that there might be something in it, Sir George White decided on sending out a strong reconnaissance to clear a ridge about three miles to the westward.

About eleven a.m. the force moved out, under Major-General Brocklehurst, who had taken the command of the cavalry on the departure of French. A battery, escorted by the 5th Dragoon Guards, was to shell the ridge. Then it was to be attacked in front by a force of volunteers made up of the Imperial Light Horse and the Border Mounted Rifles, while the 19th Hussars and what was left of the 18th slipped round the ridge to catch the Boers as they were driven from it.

The ridge was shelled for an hour and a half. The enemy replied at first with a gun on the hill and with long-range rifle fire. But their fire gradually ceased, and it was supposed that they had been driven from their stronghold, or at least badly shaken. Before the end of the campaign our officers learned not to come so quickly to such conclusions. The Boers had merely got under cover, and were "lying low," a regular part of their tactics. At last the volunteers were sent forward to attack the ridge in front and seize a hill to its left.

Mr. Nevinson, of the *Daily Chronicle*, who watched the little fight, gives a description of it which is worth quoting, the affair was so typical of the way in which the Boers met many of our attacks. The Imperial Light Horse and the Mounted Rifles dismounted and went gaily forward. But "at their approach the rocks we had so persistently shelled crackled and hammered from end to end with rifle fire. The Boers had hidden behind the ridge, and now crept back again. Perhaps no infantry could have taken that position only from the front. I watched the volunteers advance upon it in

extended lines across a long green slope studded with ant-hills. I could see the puffs of dust where bullets fell thick round their feet. It was an impossible task. Some got behind a cactus hedge, some lay down and fired, some hid behind ant-hills or little banks. Suddenly that moment came when all is over but the running. They began shifting uneasily about. A few turned round, then more. At first they walked, and kept some sort of line. Then some began to run. Soon they were all running, isolated or in groups of two or three. And all the time those puffs of dust pursued their feet. Sometimes there was no puff of dust, and then a man would spring in the air, or spin round, or just lurch forward with arms outspread—a mere yellow heap hardly to be distinguished from an ant-hill. I could see many a poor fellow wandering hither and thither as though lost, as is common in all retreats. A man would walk sideways, then run back a little, look round, fall. Another came by. The first evidently called out, and the other gave him a hand. Both stumbled on together, the puffs of dust splashing round them. Then down they fell, and were quiet. A complacent correspondent told me afterwards, with the condescending smile of higher light, that only seven men were hit. I only know that before evening twenty-five of the Light Horse alone were brought in wounded, not counting the dead, and not counting the other mounted troops, all of whom suffered.

"It was all over by a quarter-past three. The Dragoon Guards, who had been trying to cover the retreat, galloped back, one or two horses galloping riderless. Under the Red Cross flag, the dhoolies then began to go out to pick up the results of the battle. For an hour or so that work lasted, the dead and dying being found among the ant-hills where they fell. Then we all trailed back, the enemy shelling our line of retreat from three sides, and we in such a mood that we cared very little for shells or anything else."

It was evident that the Boers held strongly to their circle of positions round the town. They were digging trenches, constructing batteries, piling up stone breastworks. The siege had begun in earnest. Early next day Sir George White made a somewhat ill-advised, because hopeless, attempt to get rid, by negotiation with Joubert, of the embarrassment caused by the number of non-combatants—townsfolk and refugees—within his lines. He sent out a flag

of truce to the Boer general, asking that the non-combatants should be allowed to go down to Pietermaritzburg by the railway. Strange to say, many people in Ladysmith expected that the request would be granted, and spent the morning packing up and preparing to move. It was as if General Trochu, in 1870, had asked Bismarck and Von Moltke to allow him to double his resources for resistance by sending part of the non-combatant population out of Paris. Joubert made a more generous answer than any European commander would have sent in. He said he could not allow the non-combatants to go outside the circle of the investment, but if he liked, Sir George White might send them to a selected point outside Ladysmith, but still within that circle; and while camped in this selected position they would be treated as non-combatants. The garrison would have to feed them, but they would not be exposed to the dangers of the bombardment. Intombi's Spruit, between four and five miles out, was suggested as a spot for the non-combatant camp.

White advised the townsfolk to accept Joubert's offer; but a meeting, held on the steps of the Town Hall, and presided over by the mayor, rejected the proffered neutrality, the proceedings ending with the singing of "God Save the Queen." The military authorities, however, decided on forming a camp for the sick and wounded at Intombi, and a number of the townspeople were asked to go there to take care of them. Some more, though they had not been enrolled for this honourable work, went out to squat at the Spruit. Hence the new settlement was known in Ladysmith as "Funkersdorf" ("dorf" being the Dutch for village). The rest of the day was spent in carrying out these arrangements. Many of those who remained in the town were hard at work making themselves cave-like shelters in the steep banks of the Klip River. The course of the stream was soon converted into a kind of human rabbit-warren. Others made bomb-proof shelters in the town, and prepared to live in cellars under their houses. Early on the 5th the Boer guns opened fire again. The siege had begun in grim earnest.

Meanwhile, the Boer invaders who had crossed the Tugela were pushing steadily southwards. Their advance caused something like a panic in Natal. There were rumours, too, that another force had pushed into Natal, and might co-operate with the column that was

coming from the north by crossing the Lower Tugela. Pietermaritzburg was in danger, and even Durban itself did not feel safe. On November 10th Captain Scott, R.N., of the *Terrible*, was entrusted with the defence of Durban. Guns from the ships were promptly landed, together with detachments of blue-jackets in khaki kit, and with straw hats dyed khaki colour. Earthworks were thrown up, guns mounted, and in two days the town was in readiness to resist an attack.

him, and this was sent on a daily run up the line to reconnoitre. An armoured train is very ill-adapted for such a purpose. It must come along a marked track; it announces its approach by the noise it makes; a hostile force can conceal themselves easily during its advance, and cut off its retreat by removing a single rail from the line; it is peculiarly vulnerable to artillery, and guns bearing on the line can be laid for a range that is known to a yard, for the train cannot diverge from the track. It is no



GETTING INTO AN ARMOURD TRAIN.

Colonel Noel, who was in local command at Pietermaritzburg, was working hard with very limited resources to put the capital of the colony in a state of defence. His whole artillery force consisted of twenty-five naval gunners from H.M.S. *Tartar*, with two 12-pounder quick-firers and a 7-pounder field-piece. Volunteers were enrolled and armed, entrenchments were dug, breastworks improvised out of bales of compressed forage, and wire entanglements fixed in front of these hurriedly constructed defences.

At Estcourt General Wolfe-Murray was preparing to make a stand with his small mixed force, about 2,000 men in all. His only guns were the old 6-pounder field-pieces of the Natal Volunteers. He had an armoured train with

wonder that this kind of reconnoitring soon ended in disaster. The only marvel is that the Boers did not dispose of the train and put it out of action at a much earlier date.

The orders to the force at Estcourt were to hold on there as long as possible, watch the movements of the Boers, and try to get into communication with the Ladysmith garrison by heliographing from the neighbouring hill-tops or by sending in native runners. But no determined attempt was to be made to hold Estcourt against a Boer advance in force. Its position in a hollow of the hills made the defence of the village all but impossible, and there would be the further danger of the small garrison having its retreat cut off.

On November 10th, General Wolfe-Murray

handed over the local command to Colonel Long. On the 11th the Boers, who till then had contented themselves with the occupation of Colenso, showed signs of advancing. Parties of their mounted scouts rode into Chieveley, the next station down the line. Others, sweeping round to the eastward, entered Weenen, and precautions had to be taken to guard the line south of Estcourt, which might be raided and torn up by these flanking parties of the invaders. Colonel

waggons, and everything was ready for a retreat in case of the enemy developing a serious turning movement. After some anxious waiting for the attack to begin, the patrols sent out along the Colenso and Weenen roads brought back the news that the enemy was not advancing in force, but the Boers who had been seen were reconnoitring parties, numbering in all not more than 200 men. They exchanged a few shots with our scouts, but no one was hit on either



THE DUBLIN FUSILIERS JUST BEFORE EMBARKING IN THE ARMOURD TRAIN ATTACKED AND WRECKED NEAR CHIEVELEY BY THE BOERS.

Long reported that he might soon have to fight, and on the 13th a newly arrived battalion of the West Yorkshire Regiment was sent up to him from Durban, and part of the naval detachment at Pietermaritzburg was also ordered up to the front at Estcourt. Next day our scouts reported that the Boers were advancing in force to attack the village. An alarm gun was fired, the volunteers hastened to their posts, and Colonel Long marched out with some of his regulars to take up a position on the hills east of the town, as rumour said the main body of the enemy was on the Weenen road. At the same time the baggage and stores were laden on the transport

side. The Boer patrols drew together and bivouacked at a point about five miles north-east of Estcourt. The garrison on its side bivouacked in heavy rain and great discomfort. The tents had been packed on the waggons, and it was not thought advisable to unpack and pitch them again, as it might be necessary to retreat early on the next day.

On the same day of this alarm a patrol sent north along the railway had driven off a party of Boers who were trying to destroy it near a culvert south of Chieveley. Next day the armoured train went north to reconnoitre beyond Chieveley. It was made up of a truck

carrying a 7-pounder muzzle-loader, with a crew of four man-of-war's men; an armour-plated and loop-holed car manned by a detachment of the Dublin Fusiliers; the engine and tender, in the middle of the train; then two more armoured cars manned by Dublin Fusiliers and Durban volunteers; and a truck conveying tools and materials for the repair of the line. The whole force on the train numbered 120 men, and it was commanded by Captain Haldane, of the Dublins, who had just recovered from a wound received at the battle of Elands-laagte. One of the correspondents, Mr. Winston Spencer Churchill, of the *Morning Post*, went out with the train.

"We started at half-past five," says Mr. Churchill, "and, observing all the usual precautions, reached Frere station in about an hour. Here a small patrol of the Natal police reported that there was no enemy within the next few miles, and that all seemed quiet in the neighbourhood. It was the silence before the storm. Captain Haldane decided to push on cautiously as far as Chieveley, near which place an extensive view of the country could be obtained. Not a sign of the Boers could be seen. The rolling, grassy country looked as peaceful and deserted as on previous occasions, and we little thought that behind the green undulations scarcely three miles away the leading commandoes of a powerful force were riding swiftly forward on their invading path. All was clear as far as Chieveley, but as the train reached the station I saw about a hundred Boers cantering southwards about a mile from the railway. Beyond Chieveley a long hill was lined with a row of black spots, showing that our further advance would be disputed."

A telegraphist who was with the train sent back a report of what had been seen, and Colonel Long wired from Estcourt ordering the train to return. As the train reached a point about a mile and a half from Frere, where the line curved round a hill at a range of not more than 600 yards from its crest, it was seen that there were some twenty Boers on the slope in front. But it was supposed that they were only a patrol that would be driven off by a shell from the 7-pounder and a volley from the rifles. What followed can be best told in Mr. Churchill's own words:—

"The Boers held their fire until the train reached that part of the track nearest to their position. Standing on a box in the rear armoured truck, I had an excellent view

through my glasses. The long brown, rattling serpent with the rifles bristling from its spotted sides crawled closer to the rocky hillock on which the scattered black figures of the enemy showed clearly. Suddenly three wheeled things appeared on the crest, and within a second a bright flash of light—like a heliograph, but much yellower—opened and shut ten or twelve times. Then two much larger flashes—no smoke, nor yet any sound—and a bustle and stir among the little figures. So much for the hill. Immediately over the rear truck of the train a huge white ball of smoke sprang into being, and tore out into a cone like a comet. Then came the explosions of the rear gun and the nearer shell. The iron sides of the truck tanged with the patter of bullets. There was a crash from the front of the train, and half a dozen sharp reports. The Boers had opened fire on us at 600 yards with two large field guns, a Maxim firing small shells in a stream, and from riflemen lying on the ridge. I got down from my box into the cover of the armoured sides of the car without forming any clear thought. Equally involuntarily, it seems that the driver put on full steam. The train leaped forward, ran the gauntlet of the guns, which now filled the air with explosions, swung round the curve of the hill, ran down a steep gradient, and dashed into a huge stone that awaited it on the line at a convenient spot. To those who were in the rear truck there was only a great shock, a tremendous crash, and a sudden full stop. What happened to the trucks in front of the engine is more interesting. The first, which contained the materials and tools of the breakdown gang, was flung into the air, and fell bottom upwards on the embankment. The next, an armoured car crowded with the Durban Light Infantry, was carried on twenty yards and thrown over on its side, scattering its occupants in a shower on the ground. The third wedged itself across the track, half on and half off the rails. The rest of the train kept to the metals. We were not long left in the comparative peace and safety of a railway accident. The Boer guns, swiftly changing their position, reopened from a distance of 1,300 yards before anyone had got out of the stage of exclamations."

The shells were now bursting about the disabled train, and its occupants clambered out and gathered under the shelter it afforded from the direct fire of the enemy. The driver, wounded by a splinter of a shell, had left the

engine, declaring that this kind of thing was not the work he was paid for; but on being appealed to, to help to save part of the train, he returned to his post and behaved very pluckily. Captain Haldane, with the Fusiliers and Volunteers, had opened fire on the enemy, but as they kept under cover among the rocks it must have done them very little harm. Churchill, with another party, was working to clear the disabled truck in front off the line, in order that the engine and the rear part of the train might push on to Frere and escape capture. For more than an hour the work was carried on under fire, and at last the engine, already damaged by bursting shells, but still in working order, succeeded in pushing the wrecked truck aside. But the couplings that connected it with the rear of the train had been destroyed during the operation, probably by a direct hit of a small shell, and it had to go forward alone. An attempt to push the trucks up to the engine and recouple them ended in failure, and Captain Haldane then decided to put as many of the wounded as possible on the engine, and move forward to some houses about half a mile ahead, the survivors of the infantry marching under the lee of the locomotive. They could then hold the houses while the engine ran back to Frere and Estcourt to get the wounded away and bring back help.

The plan was only partly successful. As the engine retired rather rapidly under a shower of shells and bullets, the men could not keep up with it. As it ran on down the incline towards Frere and got away, about eighty men found themselves huddled together near the track, and exposed to a fire that soon killed or wounded one-fourth of the number. At this point a wounded soldier displayed his handkerchief as a white flag, and immediately the Boers ceased firing, "and with equal daring and humanity a dozen horsemen galloped from the hill into the scattered fugitives, several of whom were still firing, and called on them to surrender. Most of the soldiers then halted, gave up their arms, and became prisoners of war. Those further away from the horsemen continued to run, and were shot and hunted down in twos and threes, and some made good their escape."

Besides wrecking the train, the Boers had captured of unwounded or slightly wounded men fifty soldiers, four bluejackets, two officers, a correspondent, and three railway men. They were escorted to near the gun position, and

some time was spent looking for the severely wounded who had been left on the ground. The Boers said that they had found five dead and thirteen badly wounded. Besides these, about sixteen wounded had escaped on the engine. The Boers took good care of both the wounded and the prisoners. The commando that had captured them was under the orders of a Dr. Maxwell, a man of Scotch extraction, and among the burghers were two Englishmen. One of them discussed the situation with Churchill. "You are attempting the impossible," said the correspondent. "Pretoria will be taken by the middle of March. What hope have you of withstanding a hundred thousand soldiers?" "If I thought," answered the younger of the two Englishmen, "that the Dutchmen would give in because Pretoria was taken, I would smash my rifle on those metals this very moment. We shall fight for ever." If this was the feeling of the Outlander volunteers in the Boer camp, one can imagine what was the determination of the Boers themselves.

Mr. Churchill confesses that he was surprised at the courtesy and kindness of his captors. "I had read," he says, "much of the literature of this land of lies, and fully expected to be treated with every harshness and indignity." Another surprise was in store for him and his comrades in misfortune as they were marched to the place where they were to spend their first night in bivouac before being forwarded by train to Pretoria. "After a while," he says, "we were ordered to march on; and, looking over the crest of the hill, a strange and impressive sight met the eye. Only about 300 men had attacked the train, and I had thought that this was the enterprise of such a separate detachment, but as the view extended I saw that this was only a small part of a large, powerful force marching south, under the personal command of General Joubert, to attack Estcourt. Behind every hill, thinly veiled by the driving rain, masses of mounted men, arranged in an orderly disorder, were halted, and from the rear long columns of horsemen rode steadily forward. Certainly I did not see less than three thousand, and I did not see nearly all. Evidently an important operation was in progress, and a collision either at Estcourt or Mooi River impended."

When Colonel Long received the first news of the mishap to the armoured train, he sent out from Estcourt all the mounted men he could

muster to attempt the rescue of Captain Haldane's party. The relief force, which was only 180 strong, could, however, effect nothing. The party with the train had been made prisoners before the mounted troops had got clear of Estcourt. As they approached Ennersdale station they came in contact with small parties of Boers, who fell back before them, until at length, about 11 a.m., they found themselves in front of a force of eight or nine hundred mounted Boers. The British column had now in its turn to retire, and withdrew to Estcourt.

Barton's brigade, the 2nd Irish Fusiliers, arrived, and guns and transport were landing at Durban. So it was thought that the danger was over, and the Boers would soon be in full retreat from Central Natal.

The force of them that had crossed the Tugela was about 3,000 strong. But so rapid and daring were its movements, that the appearance of Boer commandoes, now here, now there, gave the impression that the invaders were in much more considerable numbers. They were variously reported as six, seven, and ten thousand strong, but there is good reason to

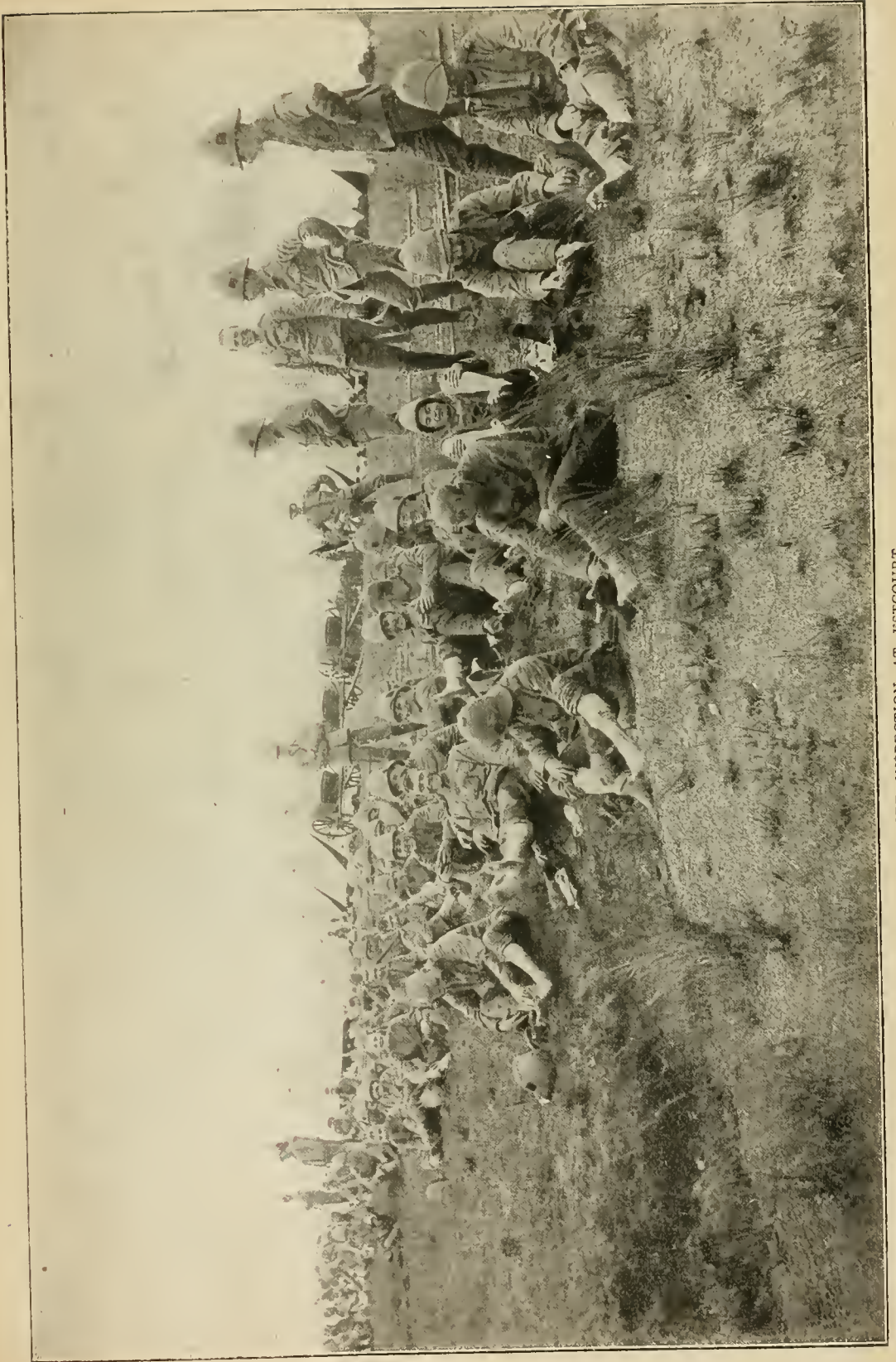


TRYING TO HELIOGRAPH INTO LADYSMITH FROM ESTCOURT.

In the evening of the same day General Hildyard arrived at Estcourt from Durban and took command. In the original scheme, Hildyard was to have landed his brigade at Capetown and gone up with it to De Aar Junction, where it was to form the second brigade of Lord Methuen's division. But General Buller, in his anxiety to protect Natal from the Boer invasion, and to relieve Kimberley, had abandoned the well-devised plan he had accepted before leaving England, and he had sent Methuen to De Aar with only his first brigade (the Guards) to organise a Kimberley Relief Force; while the other brigade of the First Division, formed of Hildyard's English regiments, was sent off to Durban to protect Natal. On November 16th the first two of Hildyard's battalions reached Estcourt, the 2nd West Surrey and the 2nd East Surrey. On the 17th a battalion of

believe that there were never more than 3,000 Boers south of the Tugela throughout the raid. It was the very daring of their operations that enabled them for some days to keep a much superior force idly on the defensive at Estcourt and the camp on the Mooi River, and to spread wild alarm to Pietermaritzburg, and even to Durban.

Advancing by Chieveley and Frere, the invaders swept round Estcourt and cut the railway and telegraph line to the south of it, thus isolating Hildyard's brigade. Then, following the Weston road past Willow Grange, they seized Highlands station on the railway in the range of hills that divides the valley of the Bushman's River from that of the Mooi River. General Barton's brigade of Fusilier regiments was on its way up from Durban. The seizure of Highlands prevented any trains going beyond



FEET INSPECTION AT ESTCOURT.

Mooi River station, and Barton's battalions detrained and formed a camp there, to check the further advance of the raiders. The Boers descended into the valley east of the railway. The district was crowded with refugee farmers who had driven their flocks down from Northern Natal to save them from being commandeered by the invaders, and the Boers made several seizures. Amongst other valuable booty, they drove off a couple of hundred thoroughbred horses from the stud farm of a colonial horse-breeding company. From Durban, where he still had his headquarters, General Clery issued a proclamation warning everyone that martial law was in force in Natal, that severe penalties would be incurred by all who gave any assistance to the enemy, and that full reparation would be exacted for any damage done to the property of loyal settlers.

By the end of the third week of November the situation in Natal was embarrassing and humiliating. Sir George White, with the army originally entrusted with the defence of the colony, was shut up in Ladysmith. The railway for miles south of that place was in the hands of the Boers. General Hildyard's brigade was cut off from its communications and threatened with a siege at Estcourt, and at the Mooi River camp Barton had the invaders on his front and flanks, and ran some risk of being also invested.

On November 22nd Hildyard made an attempt to clear his communications to the southward, and the result was the engagement sometimes described as the Battle of Willow Grange, though it was really only a skirmish on a large scale. On the 20th his scouts had brought in news that a Boer commando of about 700 men, with eight waggons, was camped near Willow Grange. That evening Colonel Martyr, D.S.O., an officer who had distinguished himself under Lord Kitchener in the Soudan, and in independent command in Uganda, was ordered to go out with the mounted troops and attack the Boers at dawn. He had with him a squadron of the Imperial Light Horse, a squadron of the Natal Carbineers, and a company of mounted infantry belonging to the King's Royal Rifles, and two 9-pounder guns belonging to the Natal Volunteer Artillery. It was hoped that Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, who were reported to have reached Highlands station from the Mooi River, would join hands with Martyr's column on the scene of action.

Leaving the guns on the road, Martyr, after a

march of about nine miles with some of his mounted troops, came in sight of the Boer camp in the dusk of the evening. He could see the camp fires burning about a mile and a half away, and he resolved to anticipate the time of attack, and begin by shelling the camp. He therefore sent a messenger back for the guns, but, to his disappointment, was informed that, through some mistake, the artillerymen had returned to camp with the 9-pounders, and he had to do without them. The little column bivouacked for the night. The Boer position was stealthily reconnoitred, and Colonel Martyr still hoped to rush it at dawn; but before the time came for moving he received an order to fall back on Estcourt. The fact was that the authorities there were receiving almost hourly reports of Boer commandoes on the move all round them, and were afraid of the small detached column being cut off.

On the 22nd General Hildyard went out with some of the mounted troop to reconnoitre, with a view to making an attempt to reopen communication with the troops at Mooi River. He decided on an attempt to capture the enemy's position commanding the road southwards. The strong point of it was a high kopje known as Ambouwane, or the Red Hill, five miles south of Willow Grange station. On the afternoon the troops that were to be engaged in this enterprise marched out from Estcourt and occupied Beacon Hill, an eminence about half-way to the enemy's position. The troops were: four companies of the 2nd Queen's West Surrey Regiment, the 2nd Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, the Durban Light Infantry, and seven companies of the 2nd East Surrey Regiment. For artillery, there was the 7th Battery R.F.A. and a naval detachment with a 12-pounder quick-firer. Colonel Kitchener, the brother of Lord Kitchener, was given the command of the column, which was ordered to attack the Boer position at dawn on the 23rd, and "seize the enemy's guns and laager." Colonel Kitchener ordered the Yorkshires and the East Surreys to surprise the position in the darkness before the dawn. The Border Regiment was to come up in support as soon as it was daylight.

With the help of a huge team of oxen, the naval gun was got to the top of Beacon Hill. The Boers saw the gun on the summit, and opened fire from their position with a long-ranging Creusot gun. The sailors replied, but there was no damage done on either side. It

was a mistake to have shown the gun on Beacon Hill. It told the Boers that a movement was in progress against them, and put them on the alert for the night attack. After dark it rained heavily, and the men in their exposed bivouac on Beacon Hill were soaked to the skin, and could get no sleep.

At last the order was given to fall in, and the two regiments started, the direction being taken under the guidance of a local British farmer, a

back to a second position further to the rear. They had removed their big gun, but brought a Nordenfeldt into action. The surprise had completely failed, and reluctantly the order was given to fall back. The retirement was covered by the fire of the big naval gun on Beacon Hill; but there was a good deal of loss, as the Boers almost at once reoccupied the first position from which they had been driven.

The British losses were eleven killed, sixty-



SIR GEORGE WHITE'S HEADQUARTERS AT LADYSMITH.

Mr. Chapman, who had offered his services to Colonel Kitchener, and accompanied him. Half-way up the ridge held by the enemy a Boer picket challenged the advancing troops in English: "Who goes there?" and on getting no reply, fired down the slope. Although strict orders had been given not to fire, some of the Yorkshires replied with a volley. The Boers were now thoroughly on the alert, and as our men rushed the ridge they were met with a straggling fire from various points. It was just the beginning of the dawn, and in the semi-darkness the Yorkshires and the Surrey men, reaching the top at different points, fired into each other. Meanwhile, the Boers had fallen

seven wounded, and nine missing. Both sides claimed a victory. General Buller, in forwarding General Hildyard's report on the action, wrote that the Boers "were so severely handled by Colonel Kitchener's small force that they returned at once to Colenso in a manner that was more of a rout than a retreat." This statement is, however, hardly justified by the facts. Buller admits that "a complete tactical success was not secured," and it would seem that the Boers retired on Colenso chiefly because they realised that Clery's troops were gathering in Central Natal in such numbers that their small force would soon be in serious danger south of the Tugela. Certainly there was no rout of the

invaders. They withdrew in good order, taking with them all their guns and waggons, and the herds of cattle they had commandeered. Their raid had served its purpose in delaying the British concentration for the relief of Ladysmith, and securing large quantities of supplies for the invaders. In their retreat on Colenso they blew up the railway bridge at Frere.

There had been some skirmishing at Mooi River before the Boer raiders retired from the Highlands, and on at least one occasion they fired into General Barton's camp with one of their long-ranging guns and caused a few

casualties. They withdrew as suddenly as they had appeared, and joined in the general retreat across the Tugela.

On the other side of the Buffalo River Boer raiders had advanced into Zululand, where for a long time they met with no opposition whatever. They drove off cattle, and collected supplies for their commandoes in Northern Natal. It is also believed that they escorted into the Transvaal some cargoes of arms and ammunition landed in or near Santa Lucia Bay, while our cruisers had their attention entirely occupied with watching Delagoa Bay.



HUMOURS OF THE SIEGE.

(Illustration from "The Ladysmith Lyre.")



WE'D BETTER TAKE UMBRELLAS, OLD CHAP
I FANCY IT'S GOING TO SNELL."

HUMOURS OF THE SIEGE.

(Illustration from "The Ladysmith Lyre.")

CHAPTER X.

THE BOERS IN CAPE COLONY—FORMATION OF THE KIMBERLEY RELIEF FORCE—THE BATTLE OF BELMONT.

WE must now leave for awhile the operations in Natal and see what was happening during November on the northern border of Cape Colony and on the western frontier of the Free State. At the end of October the Boers were holding with small parties the crossings of the Orange River from the Bethulie railway bridge, north of Stormberg, to Norvals Pont railway bridge, and the road bridge north of Colesberg. The border towns south of the river were held by small detachments of regulars and volunteers. De Aar Junction had a regular garrison, with an advance post at Orange River bridge and station, near the south-western corner of the Free State. In order to simplify the defence of this crossing, the Hopetown road bridge, four miles to the westward, had been blown up by the Royal Engineers. The Boers had a small commando in the kopjes near

Belmont, which was watching our post at Orange River station.

The garrison at De Aar had had a very anxious time. The Dutch farmers of the neighbouring districts were openly disaffected. An enormous quantity of valuable stores had been accumulating at De Aar, and for the first fortnight of the war they were guarded only by a few companies of the Lancashire Regiment, without any artillery. The Lancshires had entrenched their camp. But they owed their safety chiefly to the lack of enterprise of the Boers. A large commando with a few guns could have easily seized the place; and at this stage of the war it would have been a more valuable prize than Kimberley, to the siege of which they were devoting their energies. The commandant at De Aar had repeatedly asked for artillery to be sent up to his help. But it was only after more than a fortnight of anxious

waiting that the guns arrived. The train that brought them up was fired upon on the way by rebel farmers, and at one point it had to be run back to a garrisoned station, and a breakdown gang had to be sent for to relay a gap in the line. Some of the disaffected Dutch farmers of the district had removed a number of rails the night before.

West of De Aar the invaders met with no opposition. In the last days of October the Boers holding the bridges and drifts along the river were reinforced, and made no secret of their intention of soon crossing into colonial territory. At Bethulie they seized the railway bridge. They had an idea that it was mined, so they did not at first venture to set foot on it. But a commando crossed by a neighbouring drift and marched for the south end of the bridge, from which the small colonial police guard beat a hasty retreat. The Boers then cut the telegraph lines, and carefully examined the bridge, and found there were no mines. A larger commando then marched across it. The railway staff evacuated Burghersdorp Junction, the next important station to the southward. Further east a Boer commando crossed at Aliwal North. On entering British territory they received a message, under a flag of truce, from Captain Hooke, the magistrate at Herschel. He informed them that he was in charge of a purely native district, and said that he intended to remain at his post. He reminded them of the understanding that the natives should not be brought into the quarrel, and promised that if the Boers would not enter Herschel, he would keep the Fingoes, the blacks of the district, quiet. The Boer commandant sent back word that he would not invade Herschel. At Barkley East, where there was a considerable Dutch population, the farmers welcomed the invaders, seized a local government magazine containing 630 rifles and 60,000 rounds of ammunition, and hoisted the Transvaal and Free State flags. Dordrecht was then occupied without resistance, and the local farmers came flocking to the Boer standards.

There was a British garrison at Stormberg Junction, consisting of half a battalion of the Berkshire Regiment. They had fortified the hillsides near the junction by erecting breastworks of stone, but they had no artillery, and on the approach of the Boers they were ordered to evacuate the place. They retired by Molteno on Sterkstroom Junction, where a small British force was being assembled.

Further to the west the invasion began on November 1st. The Boers crossed the Orange River by Norvals Pont railway bridge and by the road bridge north of Colesberg. The town had been evacuated, and 600 Boers rode in, after reconnoitring it. They hoisted the Free State flag and proclaimed the annexation of the district. A correspondent of the *Daily Mail*, who left Colesberg immediately after the Boer occupation, notes some interesting incidents of the day of their arrival. "The Boers behaved very well," he writes. "They molested no one, and were most polite. The majority of them spoke good English, and made themselves most agreeable. An incident which happened in the Masonic Hotel bar will illustrate this. Two of the enemy came into the bar and, looking round, asked the company (Britishers) to join in a drink. When all were served, the leading Boer said: 'Well, gentlemen, you need not drink our healths unless you wish, but let us have a toast. Here's to a United South Africa under a republican flag.' The Britishers did not respond; and, seeing the toast was not an agreeable one, the friendly enemy then proposed the Queen—'not as a queen, but as a lady.' 'Here's to the grandest old lady that ever stepped on the face of the earth; a woman every man can admire. Hats off to the Queen!' Needless to say, the toast was drunk with enthusiasm." From the headquarters at Colesberg the Dutch of the district were called to arms by the field cornets sending out letters in the following form:—

"In the name of the Orange Free State Government, you [name] are hereby requested to be at the headquarters, Colesberg, on Tuesday next, with horse, saddle and bridle, rifle and fifty rounds ammunition, and seven days' provisions."

Thus each commando that invaded the north of Cape Colony became the rallying point for the disaffected Dutch of the district; and by seizing the belt of hill country south of the Orange River, the Boer raiders had provided at once for the effectual defence of the crossings and the reinforcement of their fighting strength.

In order to protect the colony, and check the further spread of the insurrection, General Gatacre, with a brigade, was sent up to Queens-town; and French, with a force chiefly of mounted troops, occupied Naauwpoort Junction. At De Aar, on the third and most westerly of the Cape railways, Lord Methuen was organising a strong column to go to the relief of

Kimberley. The original plan of moving one large force to the Orange River had been abandoned. The army corps had been broken up into four bodies, each destined to deal with some local emergency. Clery, soon to be joined by Buller, was in Natal with a division. Gatacre and French were in the east and west of the hill country in the north of Cape Colony. Lord Methuen at De Aar was preparing to move across the Orange River bridge against Cronje's forces on the western border of the Free State.

The first fight on the western line took place on November 10th. It was the result of a reconnaissance pushed forward from Orange River station to examine the position of the Boer outpost on the kopjes near Belmont. Orange River camp was under the command of Colonel the Hon. G. H. Gough. He had about 2,500 with him, camped near the small group of houses near the station. The country round on both sides of the river was open veldt, with here and there little granite hills rising from it, mostly steep-sided, flat-topped, and boulder-strewn. The veldt was covered in places with low scrub, and here and there a clump of trees marked the position of an isolated farmhouse. Leaving Colonel Money, of the Northumberland Fusiliers, to hold the river crossing with his own regiment, the Munster Fusiliers, and the North Lancashires, Colonel Gough rode across the bridge with a small mounted force on Wednesday, November 8th. His troops were: two squadrons of the 9th Lancers, two companies of mounted infantry, and three guns. The first move was northwards along the railway line, the little column being supported by an armoured train under the command of Captain Stewart. The line was found to be unbroken as far as Belmont, no enemy was sighted, and the troops bivouacked for the night at Fincham's Farm, a little to the north of Belmont station. The night passed absolutely quietly, and it looked as if the Boers had withdrawn any force they had in the neighbourhood.

Thursday was spent in reconnoitring round Belmont, and again no enemy was found. The bivouac for the night was again at Fincham's Farm.

Away to the eastward there was a group of kopjes. It was decided to examine these before returning to Orange River camp. Accordingly on the Friday morning the column moved out from Fincham's Farm towards the kopjes, covered

by Lancer and mounted infantry scouts on its front and flanks. Every precaution was taken, but the general impression was that no enemy would be met with.

About eight o'clock some mounted Boers appeared on the left front and exchanged shots with our scouts on that side. At the same time Lieutenant Brock, of the 9th Lancers, who was reconnoitring to the right front with one of his men, had a narrow escape. A couple of marksmen hidden in an undulation of the veldt fired at him. One bullet killed his horse, another went through his helmet. At the same moment some horsemen appeared riding boldly forward to make him prisoner. He got away by mounting behind the trooper who accompanied him.

Two troops of the Lancers were now sent to the front to drive off these Boer patrols, and the advance continued. Suddenly from the rocky ridges there came a heavy rifle fire. Then there was the loud sharp report of a small gun, and a shell whistled through the air and burst harmlessly on the veldt. The Lancers fell back, and Gough halted his column and opened fire with his three guns, the enemy's 9-pounder firing an occasional shot in reply.

At the time it was supposed that this shell fire was producing an effect on the Boers. But this is very doubtful. After the battle fought at the same spot nearly a fortnight later, Lord Methuen reported that in his opinion shrapnel fired at such kopjes was all but useless. The cover for the enemy was too good; the shells were not likely to kill anyone. The most that could be hoped for was that they would frighten the enemy. But the general result of the fighting on such ground has since shown that Boers are stolid, matter-of-fact men who are not easily frightened. After this bombardment Gough pushed forward the Lancers on the right and the mounted infantry on the left to have a closer look at the Boer position. The Lancers galloped boldly past the left front of the enemy, and were fired at with rifles and cannon, but escaped any real loss. All that happened was that two horses were wounded. When they retired they reported all that part of the kopjes to be very strongly held. On the left the mounted infantry were less fortunate. They were under the command of Lieut.-Colonel Keith-Falconer, a young officer who had distinguished himself in the Soudan under Lord Kitchener. He dismounted part of his men, and replied to the fire from the ridge. The

mounted infantry belonged to Keith-Falconer's own regiment, the Northumberlands, and to the North Lancshires. In the skirmishing that followed Keith-Falconer was killed; both his lieutenants, Bevan and Hill, were wounded, as well as two privates. Of the Lancshires, Lieutenant Wood was killed and two privates wounded. This loss was incurred in a few minutes. The mounted infantry then fell back on the main body. Evidently the kopjes were garrisoned by a strong force, and the Boers had been lying low for days in the hope that Gough would commit himself to a hopeless attack.

In the afternoon the column retired to Orange River station. The sound of the guns had been heard there in the morning, and the redoubts covering the north end of the bridge had been manned, and a supporting column had been sent out with the armoured train. The net result of the reconnaissance was to ascertain that the Boers meant to make a stand on the east side of the railway in the kopjes near Belmont against any force advancing to the relief of Kimberley.

News brought by runners from the besieged garrison of the "diamond city" told of a desultory bombardment and occasional sorties and skirmishes. But at the British

headquarters at the Cape there must have been an impression that the place was either short of supplies or in danger of falling before a Boer attack in force. It is otherwise impossible to explain the haste with which Lord Methuen was sent forward to attempt its relief. One brigade of his division had been sent off to Natal; with the other—the Guards, under Sir Henry Colville—he went up to De Aar. A kind of scratch brigade was formed out of some of the line-of-communication troops at De Aar and Orange River, and placed under the command of Brigadier-General Fetherstonhaugh. This improvised brigade was numbered the 9th. The division formed of the 1st and 9th Brigades was concentrated at Orange River bridge. It was weak in cavalry, there was no horse artillery, and, what was more serious, it had not enough wheeled or pack transport to

enable it to move more than a very few miles to right or left of the railway line. Methuen had to depend for supplies on trains on the railway protected by the armoured train. His artillery was reinforced by a couple of naval 12-pounders brought up by a small naval brigade of seamen and marines.

Lord Methuen's division, concentrated at Orange River camp on November 20th, was thus composed:—

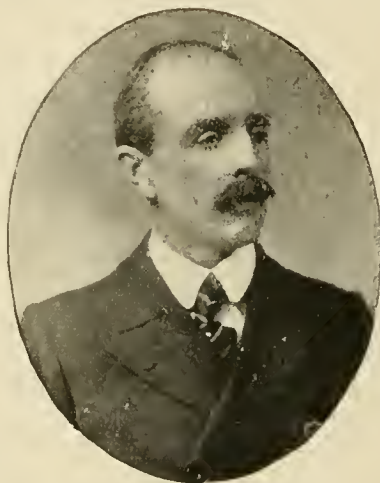
1st Brigade (General Sir Henry Colville): 3rd Grenadier Guards, 1st and 2nd Coldstream Guards, 1st Scots Guards.

9th Brigade (General Fetherstonhaugh): 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, 2nd Northampton, 2nd King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, half a battalion (four companies) 1st Loyal North Lancashire (of which the remainder was in Kimberley under Colonel Kekewich) and two companies of the Munster Fusiliers.

Naval Brigade: a small detachment of seamen and marines, under Captain Prothero, R.N.

Cavalry: 9th Lancers, Rimgton's Scouts, and a part of the New South Wales Lancers.

Artillery: three batteries R.F.A. (the 18th, 62nd, and 75th) and two naval guns.



LIEUT.-COLONEL KEITH-FALCONER.

(Photo: Bassano.)

In all there would be about 9,000 men, with twenty guns. This was the force with which Lord Methuen began his march along the western border of the Free State for the relief of beleaguered Kimberley.

Lord Methuen had established his headquarters at Orange River camp on November 12th. On the 15th the Guards began to arrive. The troops were practised in night marching, in the neighbourhood of the camp. Orders were issued that baggage was to be reduced to the lowest possible limit. Only eight newspaper correspondents were allowed to accompany the column, and even they were not to take servants or to be mounted. They were to have one horse for each pair of journalists, and they naturally used it to carry some light baggage and a few comforts with which to supplement the camp rations. All accoutrements were ordered



THE BATTLE OF BELMONT.

to be stained khaki colour, and officers were allowed, if they thought fit, to wear the men's equipment and carry carbines. It was further ordered that buttons should be dulled, and sergeants should remove the red chevrons from their sleeves. It was hoped thus to make it more difficult for the Boer marksmen to pick off company officers and section commanders. It is, however, doubtful if there was sufficient reason for this general removal of badges of rank. At Dundee the Devons lost very few officers compared to other regiments, probably because their colonel (Yule) had always insisted at drill and manœuvres that officers and sergeants should adopt the same position as their men in the firing line. It is possible that the Boers used difference of equipment and minute marks of rank to pick out officers and sergeants as their targets, but it is much more likely that they were helped by the practice so common in our army of officers and sergeants standing when their men kneel to fire, and kneeling, or even standing, when the men are lying down.

On November 20th, Lord Methuen's force made its first short march to Witteputs Station, some miles distant from the Orange River bridge. Next day the cavalry reconnoitred the Boer position, and on the 22nd there was another reconnaissance, supported with long-range artillery fire. The Boers replied with artillery, and it was ascertained that they had at least one heavy long-range gun on the kopjes. Local rumour said that the enemy were only from 2,000 to 2,500 strong. Boer reports at Bloerfontein made the strength of the garrison only 1,500. In any case, Lord Methuen's division must have outnumbered the enemy at least three to one.

Methuen decided that he could not leave this Boer garrison on the flank of his line of advance, and he therefore issued orders for a march against the kopjes in the dark hours before the dawn on the 23rd and an attack at day-break.

The troops marched off at three a.m. It was a fine night, with some moonlight. The Guards and the naval detachment marched on the right with one battery; on the left were the 9th Brigade and the other two batteries. The Grenadier Guards and the Northumberlands were the leading regiments of the two brigades. On the left, north of Belmont station, were two squadrons of the 9th Lancers and a company of mounted infantry. The other flank was guarded to the southward and eastward by

Rimington's Scouts, another squadron of the Lancers, and a company of mounted infantry.

There were nearly ten miles to march, and the long columns moved silently through the darkness over the undulations of the veldt, the direction being given to each by an officer at the head of it, who laid the course to be taken with a phosphorescent compass. At half-past four the eastern sky was just beginning to whiten with the dawn, and the Guards were closing on the nearest ridge of the hills, when suddenly along more than half a mile of front a flickering line of flashes showed that the Boers were not surprised. They had opened fire with their rifles from the long line of boulder-built breastworks on the kopjes.

The Scots and Grenadiers rapidly deployed and dashed at the ridge; as they came to close range, the Boer fire redoubled in fierceness. But the advance was made under cover of semi-darkness, and there were few losses till the actual ascent of the ridge began. Then several officers and men fell, among them Lieutenant-Colonel Crabbe, of the Grenadiers, shot through the shoulder, and Lieutenant Festing, who had so skilfully guided the night march. Behind the attacking line the two battalions of the Coldstreams were held in reserve. To the left Fetherstonhaugh swung his leading battalion, the Northumberland Fusiliers, round the right of the Boer position, and the enemy, in danger of having their retreat cut off, gave way before the attack of the Guards and made good their retreat through the broken ground to a second and higher line of kopjes. The western ridge had been won, but it was only an outwork of the main Boer position.

The sun was now rising over the hills, his level rays coming right in the eyes of our gunners as the batteries unlimbered to shell the main ridge. The naval guns came up on the right, and the infantry attack again pressed forward under cover of the artillery fire. The range of the battery acting with our right attack was about 1,450 yards, but even at this distance the Boer rifle bullets fell among the gunners. The enemy seemed to have removed their guns; in fact, the commando left to fight at Belmont was engaged in a mere delaying action.

The infantry, pressing forward to the kopjes, was subjected to a heavy fire from the Boer Mausers. "By George! a British infantryman is a plucky chap," wrote one of the gunner officers after the battle. "The bullets were coming quite thick even where we were, so you

can tell what it was like for them climbing those hills. I believe our fire helped the Coldstreams a lot in driving out the Boers; anyhow, they have written to thank us for having lessened much their losses." The infantry, and especially the Guards, had tough work to do, notwithstanding their marked numerical superiority to the enemy. They had to fight their way, not up a single ridge, but into a confused mass of kopjes, where, as they pressed up the hollows in the hills, companies often came under a cross fire at close quarters from the enemy's rifles. The Boer resistance, however, was bound to cease as soon as any serious force had established itself in the kopjes, for the enemy had their horses waiting behind the ridges, and knew very well that if they stayed till the whole position was stormed they might be cut off from them and captured in large numbers. Whoever commanded on the Boer side did his work admirably. He held on till the last moment and withdrew in time to retire without any very serious loss.

By six o'clock the Guards on the right, the 9th Brigade on the left, had gained a footing on the crests of the ridge, capturing a number of prisoners, and the word had been given for the Boers to retreat. They scrambled down to their horses, mounted and rode off northwards across the veldt. "At 6.10," says Lord Methuen in his despatch, "the situation was as follows:—The last height cleared, the enemy in large numbers galloping into the plain, the enemy's laager (*i.e.* waggons) trekking across my front 3,000 yards off, my mounted troops unable to carry out their orders on one side, left, because the retreat was covered by kopjes; on the other, right, because too far; the artillery dead-beat and unable to help me. A cavalry brigade and a horse-artillery battery from my right would have made good my success."

This confession of inability to reap the fruits of victory is rather curious reading. The kopjes that barred pursuit from the left were, it would seem, held by a detached party of the enemy, who took post there to protect the withdrawal of the waggons. But it is not clear why the mounted troops on the right were not able to work round the kopjes during the attack. As for the artillery, notwithstanding Lord Methuen's statement, it is not clear that they were so "dead-beat" as he imagined. They had not made a long march, and they had not been any long time in action. In a letter from an officer of the 18th R.F.A., the end of the battle and what

followed is thus described:—"After the place was taken, the Boers were off down the other side like lightning and away. We went round to the right flank of the hills and saw them a long way off on another range of hills. Eventually we started off to camp about 10.30 a.m. and watered horses, arriving about 1.30. Altogether it was rather a good battle. We were in action, I suppose, about an hour. I was surprised at not feeling more alarmed; as a matter of fact, one has too much to think about." Here the writer describes his feelings, but says not a word about being tired or "dead-beat." He tells of an attempt to catch the retiring Boers with the artillery, but shows that it failed because they got rapidly back to another position. Then he notes that the horses got the guns back to camp, a three hours' march, and then were watered. It does not look as if the artillery was so hopelessly exhausted. If such work had reduced them to a condition of uselessness, there would have been a bad prospect for the whole campaign.

The British losses in the action were heavy. There were fifty-one killed and 238 wounded. Brigadier-General Fetherstonhaugh and Lieutenant-Colonel Crabbe of the Grenadiers were among the latter. Of Colonel Crabbe's battalion Lieutenant Fryer was killed and six other lieutenants were wounded. The Coldstreams had three officers wounded, and in the Scots Guards Major Dalrymple Hamilton was badly wounded and two other officers less severely hit. In the Northumberland Fusiliers, who led the attack of the 9th, Brigade-Captain Eagar and Lieutenant Brine were killed, and Major Dashwood, Captain Sapte, and two lieutenants severely wounded. This was the battalion that lost most heavily of all that were engaged in the attack. It was worthy of its old name of "the Fighting Fifth."

Mr. E. F. Knight, the war correspondent of the *Morning Post*, had gone forward with the Northumberlands as they stormed the ridge. In previous campaigns he had exposed himself with reckless courage on many battlefields, and hitherto had escaped unscathed. He was now severely wounded in the right arm, and the volley that struck him and others down was fired by a party of the enemy who a moment before were displaying the white flag.

In his despatch, Lord Methuen pointed out that in such attacks as he made at Belmont there must be considerable loss, and he argued that it was not easy to avoid having to attack in

front. "My losses," he wrote, "are no greater than are to be expected. To keep in extended order covering an enormous front, to get to the enemy's position at daylight, saves you in the first instance from flanking fire, and in the second from great losses in the plain. There is far too great risk of failure in making flank and front attack in case of a position such as lay before me at Belmont; the very first element of success is to keep touch between brigades from the first. Nor is there any question of taking the enemy

quantity of ammunition. Methuen burnt the waggons. Considering that the Government was just then buying waggons all over the world for use in South Africa, one thinks a better use might have been made of them.

The field was rapidly cleared of the wounded. By one o'clock they were all in hospital. Next morning the hospital train conveyed the less severe cases to Orange River camp, the graver ones to the base hospital at Cape Town. "This," said Lord Methuen, "is the most perfect work



MAJOR-GENERAL POLE CAREW.

(Photo: Gregory, London.)

in flank, as on horses he changes front in fifteen minutes." As to this last point, it has been remarked by one of Lord Methuen's critics that even if the Boers could change front so rapidly, they could not swing round their entrenchments and stone breastworks in fifteen minutes on to the new position.

Eighty-three Boers were found dead in the kopjes, many of them bayoneted. Twenty wounded Boers were taken to the British hospital, and there is no doubt many more were carried off by the retreating enemy in their waggons. Fifty prisoners were taken, including six field cornets and a German commandant. A hundred horses and sixty-four waggons were captured behind the kopjes, as well as a large

I have ever seen in war, and reflects the highest credit on Colonel Townsend," the principal medical officer. At first it was thought that some of the wounds were caused by Dum-dum bullets fired by the Boers. This was supposed to have been the case with Mr. E. F. Knight, whose right arm was so shattered that it had to be amputated. But the surgeon's report shows that it was an ordinary Mauser bullet, fired at short range, which did the harm. Most of the wounds caused by the bullet of the Mauser were small and clean cut, bled very little and healed rapidly. Lord Methuen stated that in two cases the Boers used the white flag treacherously. In one of these all the men who misused the flag, about a dozen, were bayoneted. In the other

they were simply made prisoners by the Scots Guards. Lord Methuen ends his narrative of the battle by saying:—"The entire force is in the best spirit, and my sole regret is that I have lost and must lose many men whenever I have to fight large numbers of mounted Boers in strong defensive positions. Their tactics and courage are indisputable. It is only to be regretted that they are guilty of acts which a brave enemy should be ashamed of."

While regretting with Lord Methuen that there should be occasionally unjustifiable violations of the laws of war on the side of our opponents, it is only fair to them to note that in every war some such complaints are made, even when regulars are engaged on both sides. There is much more likelihood of their arising when a large irregular force is in the field. No doubt the white flag has been abused by the Boers, but they have been often accused of this without justification. Sir George White in his despatches from Ladysmith notes a case where our men were fired on while advancing to meet a party who had displayed the white flag, but adds that the shot did not come from that group. There are other cases like this where one group was ready to surrender while some of their comrades fought to the death. And on the other side the Boers make similar accusa-

tions against us. We have it on the authority of an English correspondent that at Nicholson's Nek, after our men had displayed the white flag, some of them still fired on the approaching Boers. Such things are almost inevitable, for even the best of troops are not always in hand. But it is well to keep this in mind when discussing the conduct of our opponents.

Our heavy loss in officers was doubtless in some degree due to the reckless and often unnecessary way in which they exposed themselves in the attack. Mr. Kinnear, author of "With Methuen to Modder River," in his narrative of Belmont, says, "I ought to mention the excess of gallantry displayed by some general officers along the line of fire. One of the two brigades was thrown into semi-disorder for a few moments at a most critical period by a brigadier commanding dashing up and down the fighting line, attended by his aide-de-camp, the brigade major, and an orderly. He drew a double dose of firing upon the brigade, which was thrown into confusion, and in the midst of the noise a Northern voice from the ranks was heard calling to the intrepid general: "— thee! Get thee to—, and let's fire." This exactly hit the situation. The line dared not fire for fear of killing its own general.



GENERAL COLVILLE.

(Photo: Maull & Fox, London.)

CHAPTER XI.

THE ACTION AT ENSLIN HILL, OR GRASPAN, AND THE BATTLE OF THE MODDER RIVER.

ON Friday, November 24th, the day after the battle of Belmont, Lord Methuen sent the armour train up the line to reconnoitre. It steamed slowly northwards, so as to allow a party of scouts from the Mounted Infantry to keep up with it. Near Graspán station, seven miles from Belmont, the train and the Mounted Infantry were shelled from the kopjes east of the line, and rifle fire was also opened upon them. Lieutenant Lewis and a trooper were killed, and another trooper wounded. Then the train, finding the line blocked, retired to Belmont.

The impression in Lord Methuen's camp was that the kopjes near Graspán were held by about 400 Boers. In his despatch describing the fight of next day, Methuen says that he subsequently ascertained that "instead of 400," he had 2,500 Boers on his hands. They were commanded by Commandant Delarey, and included a contingent of 300 Transvaal men, the rest being Free Staters. They had with them six guns, including a Hotchkiss and a Maxim-Nordenfeldt quick-firer, their artillery being commanded by the German, Colonel Albrecht. In the afternoon of Friday, Rimington's Scouts reported that there were about 500 Boers with a gun to the east of Belmont, at a considerable distance from the railway. Lord Methuen had determined to advance and clear the Graspán kopjes. His original intention was to leave the two companies of the Munster Fusiliers that he had with him to garrison Belmont and protect his line of communications. But the report that this Boer commando was away to the eastward led him to temporarily leave the Scots Guards as well as the Munsters at Belmont station. He marched at 3.30 a.m. on Saturday, while it was still dark. The Ninth Brigade and the artillery were in front; after them, at a considerable interval, came the Grenadiers and Coldstreams

in reserve, and the baggage. Rimington's Scouts were searching the ground in front. The 9th Lancers were on one of the flanks. They were being given easy work this time, in order that they might be ready to take up the pursuit when the Boers were driven from the hills.

This time there was no attempt to surprise the enemy by a night march. At half-past six, Rimington's Scouts having reconnoitred the enemy's position, our artillery came into action. For two hours our guns, to use Lord Methuen's own expression, "covered the Boer position with shrapnel." The enemy's artillery replied, and after the duel had gone on for nearly an hour, Major Rimington, who was scouting on the flank, reported that 500 Boers were behind a kopje to the right rear of the advance. On this the general heliographed orders to the Guards to close up, in order to have them at hand to deal with a possible counter-attack.

Most of the Boer guns were soon silent. The one that was kept longest in action was a light Maxim-Nordenfeldt. It would be kept masked in the



COLONEL ALBRECHT.

kopjes for awhile, then it would suddenly pour a stream of small shells into the British position, and it was itself so well concealed, that all our gunners could see was a thin wreath of light smoke among the rocks. Happily for our gunners, the Boers had not the range accurately, and all that this gun was able to effect was the wounding of five men and two horses. Most of its shells flew harmlessly just above the heads of our men, and exploded, half buried in the veldt, 500 yards behind the line. In the effort to silence this quick-firer no less than 210 shells were aimed at it by the naval guns and Royal Artillery. It is doubtful, however, if the gun was ever really disabled. True, it ceased firing, but this may have been done because the Boer artillery commander had decided on withdrawing his guns in good time before the infantry attack developed. It must be kept in mind that

Graspan was, for the Boers, only a delaying action fought by a small force, which never was meant to fight *à outrance*.

The Boer guns had ceased firing. Even the long-range rifle fire which they had tried from time to time had come to an end. The kopjes were wreathed in the smoke of our bursting shells, and it seemed fairly certain that the few hundreds of Boers who held the hills had been driven out by the bombardment. The order was given, therefore, for the infantry to advance and occupy the enemy's position.

The advance was made by the Ninth Brigade, commanded on this occasion by its senior colonel, Money, of the Northumberland Fusiliers. The Naval Brigade, under Captain Prothero, R.N., pushed forward on its flank. Bluejackets and marines were almost racing each other for the nearest kopje. Not a shot came from the rocks, and it looked as if the Boers had abandoned them. But as the sailors and marines, closing into a dense mass, came within 300 yards of the kopjes, suddenly the rocks in front of them blazed with rifle fire, and the Naval Brigade fell back, leaving the ground it had lately occupied dotted with fallen officers and men.

They promptly rallied, however, and dashed at the rocks under a deadly shower of bullets. Major Plumbe, of the Royal Marines, was shot down, and as he fell called out to his men to leave him where he lay and press forward. Lieutenant W. T. C. Jones, of the same gallant corps, was shot through the thigh, but nevertheless led his men to the top of the ridge, and refused all help till the fighting was over. At the same time the Ninth Brigade began to gain a footing on the ridge, but as our men at last won the crest it was found that all the Boers were gone, and their guns with them. The withdrawal had been managed with wonderful skill. The Boers had stood just long enough to inflict heavy loss on the attacking force.

A number of horses killed and wounded by our shell fire were found behind the first line of kopjes, and a few prisoners, nearly all of them wounded, were taken. The 9th Lancers had been kept together to pursue the retreating enemy, and as our men topped the crest, Colonel Gough started off with his Lancers. Everyone expected that they would be able to charge into a demoralised mass of fugitives, cut them up badly, and take a lot of prisoners. But their pursuit was soon checked. Sweeping round the captured ridge, they sighted the Boers retiring

beyond a wide gap in a second line of kopjes. Into the gap they went, thinking only of the retiring foe on the level beyond, but they were received with a deadly rifle fire at short range from a Boer rearguard posted among the rocks on either side, and Gough gave the order just in time for his men to withdraw out of the trap that had been set for them.

As for the Boer loss, it could only be guessed. It was not known how many wounded they had carried off with them. Twenty Boers were found dead in the kopjes, and about fifty of the enemy's wounded were treated in our hospitals. The British loss was heavy, that of the Naval Brigade being most serious. Commander Ethelston, of the *Powerful*, Major Plumbe, R.M.L.I., of the *Doris*, and Captain Senior, R.M.A., of the *Monarch*, were killed. Captain Prothero, R.N., who commanded the brigade, was badly wounded, and Lieutenant Jones, R.M.L.I., of the *Doris*, wounded. Of the rank and file of the Naval Brigade, six were killed and ninety-one wounded, many of them severely. There were no casualties among the Guards, whose part in the action had merely been to hold in check the Boer detachment that was threatening Methuen's flank and rear. But the Ninth Brigade, which had attacked the kopjes, had three officers wounded, and of the rank and file the losses were nine killed, forty-six wounded, and seven missing. How these seven fell into the hands of the Boers is not easy to explain.

The action near Graspan is officially known as the battle of Enslin Hill, from the name of the ridge held by the Boers. Our success was encouraging to the relief column, which had thus fought and won two battles in three days, and the news was hailed with enthusiasm at home in England, where it was thought that the tide of success had at last turned in our favour. But it is right to bear in mind that neither at Belmont nor at Enslin were the Boers fighting with any determination to hold the ground they occupied. Both were typical delaying or rearguard actions, and Delarey's retirement from the Enslin kopjes was carried out in a way that might be taken as a model for such an operation. Each fight delayed Lord Methuen's advance for two days, and the time thus gained was utilised by the enemy to strengthen their positions nearer Kimberley, on the banks of the Modder River, and on the Spytfontein and Magersfontein ridges.

Sunday, the 26th, was devoted by Lord Methuen to making good the ammunition

supply of his batteries and battalions, and preparing for a further advance. On the 27th the column moved up to Honey Nest Kloof and sent the Lancers and Rimington's Scouts forward to reconnoitre the line of the Modder River.

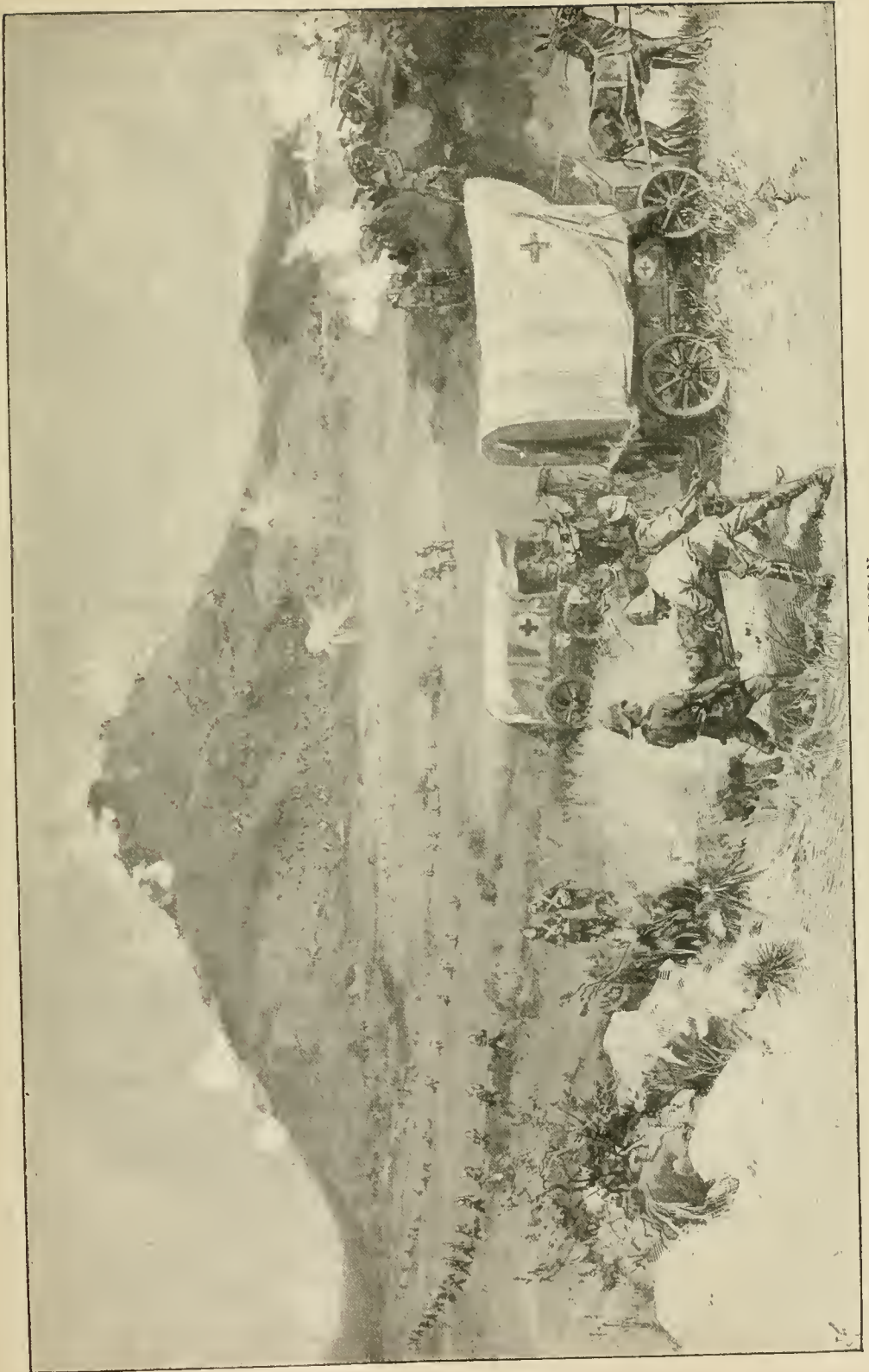
The march had so far been through an almost waterless country, but at Honey Nest Kloof there was abundant water, and the troops camped beside it and enjoyed a needed rest. Mr. Julian Ralph, one of the correspondents, thus describes this pleasant halt at the Kloof:—"To the north of us, in purple bulk, rose the hills that lie a few miles beyond the Modder River. They interested us because many said that in or beyond them we would meet the Boers for the last time before entering Kimberley, a dozen miles farther on. But we had water a-plenty—to drink, to wash in, even for bathing on the part of those who did not mind doing so in the pond where the mules were watered and the mud was some feet deep. We could not see the Modder, but we knew that it somewhere pierced the wide, nearly level field of sage tufts and sparse young grass before us. As the afternoon wore on we heard that somewhere just out of sight there was a village where 300 Boers were entrenched. One story was that a part of the force had shot at another part for trying to desert. Another rumour was that, instead of this, all had shot at Rimington's guides, who had sent in to us for help which we had not supplied. But, as I say, we were encamped beside water, we had fought two stiff battles in five days, and we were resting. Take my own case to show how others fared: I had borrowed a waterproof covering from the ammunition cart, and had made a shelter of it over four uprights—two guns and two sticks. I had filled my water-bottle, and also a two-quart canvas bag, which leaked. And I was lying on a blanket writing a description of the Belmont fight and exulting in the sound of the waste of my water that dripped from the bag. Every half-hour I quaffed the water or treated the colonel or the *Times* correspondent to a drink. This was out of pure camaraderie, for they had plenty also. When it was too dark to write, I washed my other flannel shirt and my other socks, and dabbled in the water. All of us in the Yorkshire Light Infantry did the same, as if we were ducks."

On the evening of the 27th, Lord Methuen, to quote his own words, "came to the conclusion that the entire force of the enemy had assembled

at Spytfontein, and that he would not meet with any determined resistance on the Modder." He therefore decided next morning to seize the crossing of the river, throw up an entrenchment to cover the head of the railway there, and leave the Northamptonshire Regiment, 300 Engineers, and the Naval Brigade with three guns to hold it. Then with the rest of his force, carrying five days' provisions, he intended to move eastward by Jacobsdal, to a point beyond the Boer left at Spytfontein, and thence make an attack on the flank of the enemy's defences. In this position, if he succeeded, he would cut off the Boer retreat over their own frontier. It was an admirable plan, only for the fact that it was based on incomplete knowledge of the enemy's position, and went on the assumption that Commandant Cronje would quietly await attack at Spytfontein without doing anything to secure his communications with the Free State.

Lord Methuen's persuasion that the Modder River crossing would not be strongly held against him was based on very insufficient evidence. The long iron railway bridge had been wrecked by the Boers early in the war, and as the only possible crossings were by a number of fords and the top of a narrow mill weir, it was just the place where the Boer garrison of Spytfontein might with advantage fight another delaying action. His own cavalry patrols brought word that there were Boers on the river, but they were not able to get near enough to be sure of the nature or extent of the enemy's defences. On the morning of the 28th, as the troops broke up from their camp and began to move northwards along the veldt beside the railway, a native brought word that the Boers were in force along the river banks. But then native reports of the enemy's numbers had been generally found to be unreliable; and as Methuen rode with his staff well to the front of the advance, he spoke of being over the river early in the day, and even pointed out a large white house surrounded by trees, near the railway bridge, as a good place for the staff to halt for breakfast and establish the headquarters. At that moment, Boer sharpshooters were watching his advance from the house, and waiting for the word to open fire.

The force with Lord Methuen had been augmented on the eve of the battle by the arrival by railway of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, the first battalion of General Wauchope's Highland Brigade to reach the front. This made up for the small infantry



THE BATTLE OF GRASPAN.

detachments he had left on his line of communications. At sunrise the Lancers had been sent out to scout in front. On the right marched the Guards Brigade, under Colville; on the left the Ninth Brigade, now under the command of Brigadier-General Pole-Carew. The Highlanders formed a link between the two brigades. Lord Methuen's artillery at the beginning of the battle consisted of the naval battery and the 18th and 75th Batteries R.A. The 62nd R.F.A. had been left at Belmont on the line of communications. In the course of the morning a telegraphic message was sent to call it up to the front, and the guns arrived at half-past four in the afternoon, after a march of twenty miles under the blazing sun. The horses were so tired that for the last few miles all the gunners walked in order to help them a little. The fact that the battery was left behind is one more proof that at the beginning of the day Methuen did not expect any serious opposition to his advance.

Before describing the fight, it will be well to say a few words as to the nature of the battle-field. The Modder (*i.e.* "muddy") River is a small stream, about thirty feet wide, flowing from the higher ground of the veldt in the Free State to the westward. Just above the railway bridge at Modder River station it joins another river, the Riet (*i.e.* the "reedy river"). Below the confluence the united stream is called in most maps the Riet, but it is often known also as the Modder. Fifty miles to the westward it joins the Vaal River near Douglas, and a few miles further on the Vaal joins the Orange River.

Near the railway the country south of the Modder is flat, open veldt. The ground is dry and sandy, covered here and there with patches of thorn. Nearer the river on both sides there are some low stony ridges, and the course of both the Modder and the Riet is marked by a line of stunted willows, making a green band across the half-desert landscape. The tongue of land between the rivers just above their confluence is locally known as "the island." It is slightly higher than the ground on the south side of the Modder, and is covered with trees and scrub. The river banks are high, the rivers having cut for themselves deep troughs in the veldt. The sloping banks are covered with bushes and thorns, and when the river is low there is an under bank, covered when it is in flood, as it was on the day of the battle. When flooded, the united stream is about sixty feet wide.

There are two or three substantial farm-houses on the Modder bank, and near the railway bridge there is a group of hotels with gardens and outhouses, and a few cottages. In the gardens of the hotels there are swings and arbours, for Modder River village used to be a favourite pleasure resort for the people of the Diamond City on holidays, and has been aptly described as the Richmond of Kimberley. Punting on the river used to be a favourite amusement.

The Boers had carefully prepared the river banks for about two miles on each side of the railway for defence. So completely were they hidden in their entrenchments that during the long summer day that the battle lasted very few of Methuen's men ever caught sight of an enemy. As one of the correspondents put it, neither telescope nor field-glass revealed a single Boer as a target for our guns and rifles. Our men could only fire almost at random at the fringe of trees that marked the course of the river. Not till after the battle was anyone quite certain as to which bank the enemy were holding. At first it was thought that they were all on the north bank, but it was afterwards found that most of their riflemen were on the south side. They used the river as a gigantic trench. Sheltered in the trough formed by its banks, they could pass from one side to the other, and along the south side they had improved the natural cover by making trenches, or rather throwing up low banks of sand, using planks and sheets of corrugated iron to hold the sand up on the inside, and enable the riflemen to kneel or crouch close to the inner face of the entrenchment. As the Modder runs into the Riet at an obtuse angle, they could bring a cross-fire to bear on any troops that attempted to close upon the entrenchments. They had dug a second line of trenches on the north bank, and as this was slightly higher than the other side, their picked shots could fire from it over the heads of the men on the other bank. They had loopholed the houses and hotels, and prepared entrenched positions for their guns on the north bank. Some of these were hidden among the trees on the island.

About six o'clock the Lancer patrols were fired on from the river bank and fell back. The two brigades were then advancing in a long extended line on both sides of the railway. The nearest battalions were still nearly a mile from the river when the Boer sharpshooters opened fire from various points. The four naval guns

then came into action near the railway, and the two Royal Artillery batteries unlimbered to the right, under the escort of the Lancers and the Mounted Infantry. Methuen was still persuaded that he had only a small force opposed to him. His orders to the Guards Brigade show that he thought that by extending to the right he could overlap and get round the enemy's left. This enveloping movement was to be executed by his own old regiment, the Scots Guards. The 2nd Coldstreams and the 3rd Grenadiers were to advance directly against the enemy's front, with the 1st Coldstreams in reserve behind them. The Highlanders and the Ninth Brigade were on the left. In his despatch, Methuen says that he thought the enemy were actually retiring. "There were no signs," he writes, "that the village was held in strength. We all believed the force in our front was fighting a retiring action, and had no idea 8,000 Boers had been brought from Spytfontein to oppose us."

He was soon undeceived. At eight o'clock, after the artillery had been at work for some time, the infantry advance began. The Boer guns had done very little damage. Most of their shells failed to burst. The most effective they had was a Vickers-Maxim one-pound quick-firer, that from time to time sent a stream of small shells from a sheltered position among the trees of the island. Some of the other guns had ceased firing, and were supposed to have been permanently put out of action, and the fire from the rifles on the river bank was not heavy. But ten minutes after eight, as our infantry came within five or six hundred yards of the river, the long line of willows suddenly bristled with rifles, and a shower of bullets swept the level ground in front like a hail-storm of metal. The Scots Guards were preparing their Maxim for action. Every man dropped dead or wounded around it, and for hours after no one could approach it. The Grenadiers and Coldstreams were caught by a cross-fire from the bank of the Riet on their right front and directly in front from the trenches on the Modder. All along the front the men lay down. In that position they suffered very little loss, and in that position most of them had to remain for hours. Close above them the bullets whistled low through the air, and anyone who rose was almost certainly hit. It was fearfully hot, and the men soon exhausted the supply of water in their bottles, and as the hours dragged on they became exhausted with thirst and hunger, for no water was to be had, and by a strange arrangement they had marched off

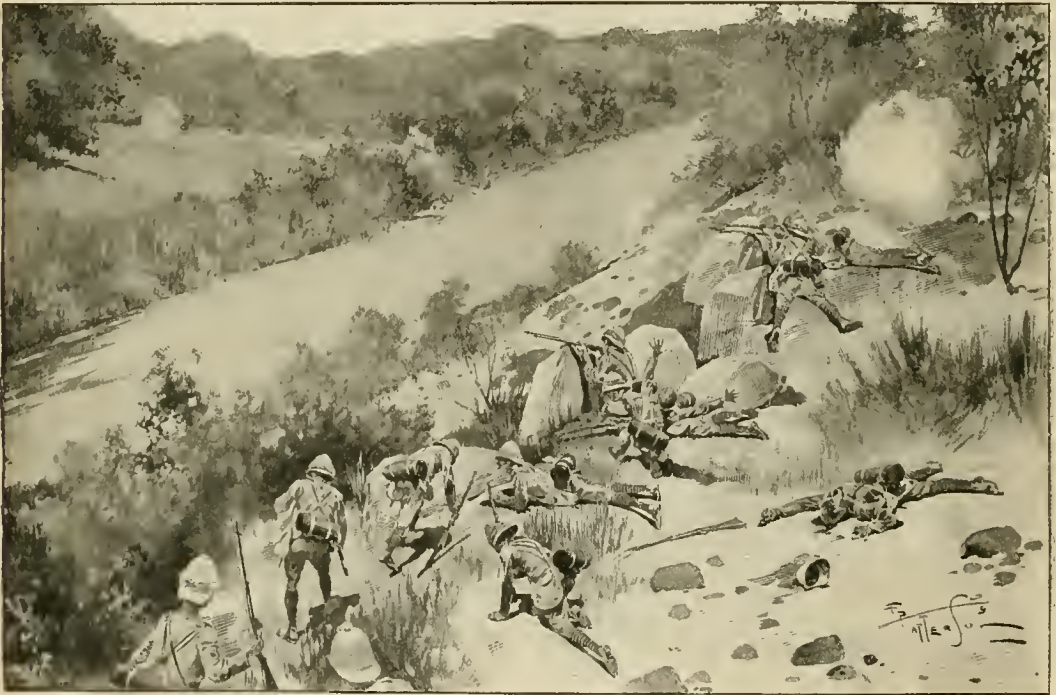
without anything but a cup of coffee, some of them without even that, and they had been told that they could cook when they halted on the far side of the Modder. The companies in front were firing at the line of trees by the river banks. All had started out with 100 cartridges in their possession, some with 150. But before half the day was over several battalions had very little ammunition left. The 2nd Coldstreams fired no less than 128,000 rounds; the Grenadiers fired 82,000. It is very doubtful if one bullet in a thousand struck any of the unseen defenders of the river banks. All the while the artillery were hurling their shells into the trees. The four naval guns fired 514 shells; the 18th Battery fired 1,100; the 75th 900; and the 62nd (which only came into action towards the close of the day) 500 more. In all, more than 3,000 shells were fired, or upwards of sixteen tons of shrapnel. But under this rain of iron and lead the Boer fire never slackened.

What the prolonged fusillade seemed like to those who lay for hours under it may be gathered from a letter written by an officer of the Guards:—"We were on a perfectly flat, open plain, the enemy being entirely hidden among a fringe of trees. All we could do was to lie flat down, fire when we could, and await orders. But no orders came the whole day long! Although thus lying flat down, you would be surprised how tired we got. One longed to get up and walk about, yet every time anyone moved the bullets began whistling all round him. After lying for a long time without receiving either orders or news, we all jumped up together, ran a short distance, about twenty yards, say, and then fell flat at the word 'Down!' Then came the shower of bullets, just too late. Finding no one else seemed inclined to go on, no visible sign of enemy, and the trees perhaps still 500 yards off (though some of the enemy seemed to be nearer), we stayed here for some hours digging little shelter pits with our bayonets as we lay. The heat of the sun was awful, and we longed to know what was going on and what ought to be done. Meanwhile, firing was kept up all along our line to both flanks, probably about two miles long, but our artillery seemed to be very slow in coming into action. A machine gun stood deserted in front of us, all the detachment having been wounded or killed. Gradually the sound of firing seemed to come more and more round both our flanks, and I began to think we should have to retire. In fact, after a time we did retire to a sort of

reservoir there was behind, which made a capital sort of fort, big enough to hold a brigade. We had here a Maxim, which did good work against some Boers we could see miles away on our right, either retreating on their horses or trying to get round our flank. The worst of it was that there was such a mirage on the plain that it was very difficult to make out exactly what they were, and sometimes it looked as if they might be our own cavalry. Somewhere near the centre of their position the Boers had a quick-firing gun which did a lot of execution.

tired out and depressed, having had nothing to eat since morning, and we were all truly glad when it was given out that we would not attack till morning; and all lay down to sleep, but it was so cold that one had to get up occasionally to walk about."

During the day more than one gallant attempt was made to force a passage across the river. One of them was made by a party of Coldstreams, who waded into the water on the right. Two of them were swept away by the current and drowned. The others had to abandon the

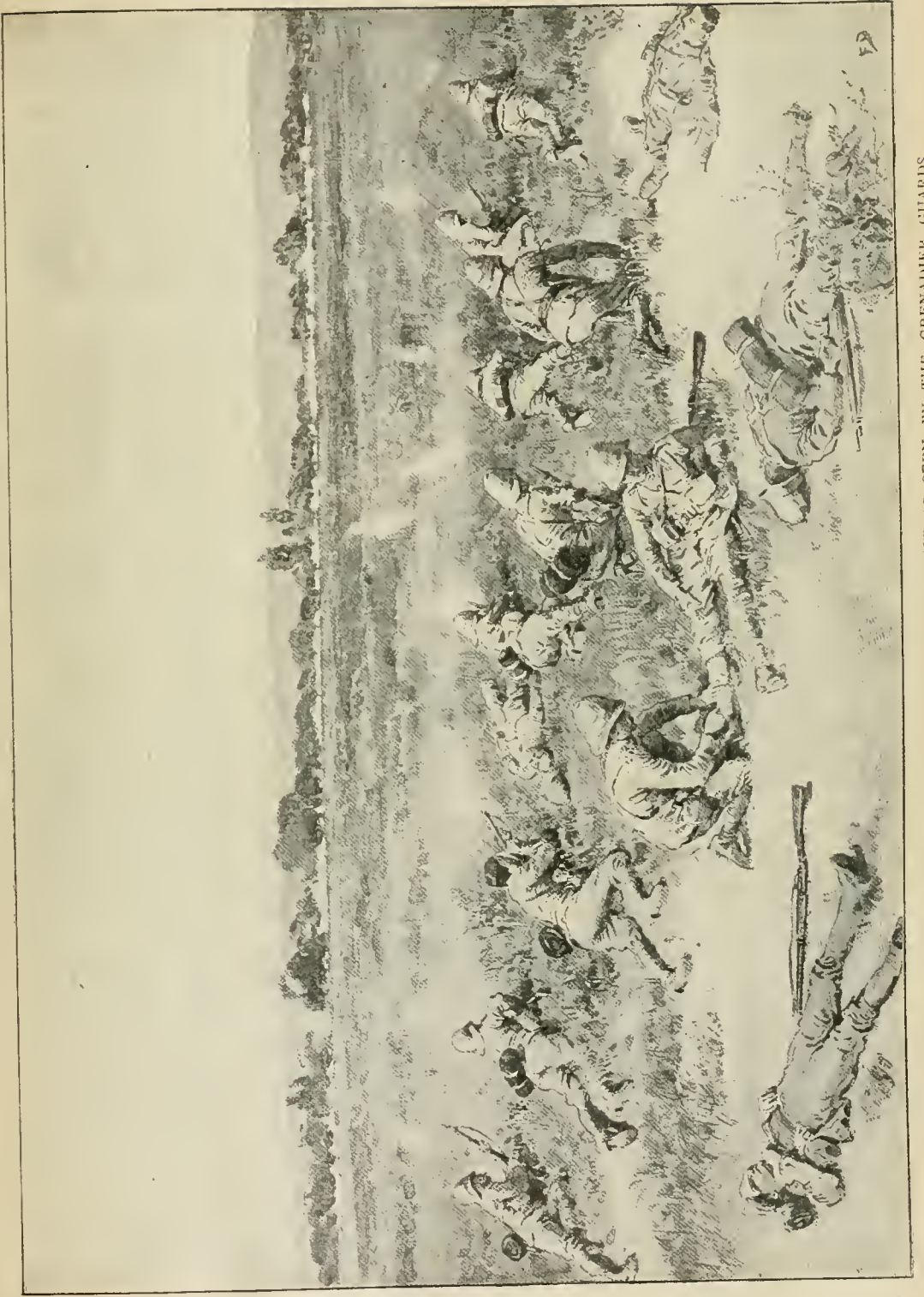


THE MODDER RIVER ENGAGEMENT: A POSITION OF DANGER.

Later in the afternoon, we advanced again to support some Coldstreams who were lying down extended across our front. We advanced by rushes till we got up to them, when we were told that they were short of ammunition, so could do no good advancing. Our company was only about twenty strong, so all we could do was to send back to ask for orders; but we got no reply to our messages, so after a time, when it was so dark that long range was impossible, we retired to the fort, and then our artillery seemed to be coming to the fore, for a shell burst just over the trees. It was said that we were to rush the position in the dark, but it was palpable that we were all thoroughly

attempt. They had reached the river edge at a place where only the north bank was held by the enemy.

In the course of the afternoon, the Ninth Brigade on the left, led by General Pole-Carew, made a determined and partly successful attempt to advance. "They had the same hard task before them that faced the Guards Brigade," writes Lord Methuen in his despatch. "On the extreme left (the Boer right) an outcrop of rocks and small kopjes on the left bank of the river, considerably in advance of the main position, were held by the enemy, and checked the advance of the Loyal North Lancashire. Some 600 yards east, the same side of the river, a



THE BATTLE OF MODDER RIVER; VIEW OF THE ENGAGEMENT AS SEEN BY THE GRENADIER GUARDS

farmhouse and kraal on a slight eminence, covering the dam and drift at the west end of the village, also checked the advance. A withering fire from these buildings checked the advance of the brigade. They were, however, carried, early in the afternoon, by two companies of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, under Lieutenant-Colonel Barter, together with some Highlanders and Northumberland Fusiliers. Lieutenant Fox, Yorkshire Light Infantry, gallantly led this assault; he was severely wounded. Almost at the same moment, the rocks and kopjes on the extreme left were carried by the Loyal North Lancashire. We had now won the river and west side of the village, out of which the enemy were soon chased. Major-General Pole-Carew led his men in a gallant manner for three-quarters of a mile up the bank, when he was forced back, and had to content himself with holding a fairly good position he had gained on the right bank."

Pole-Carew sent to Methuen for help, and some of the Guardsmen were got together, under Colonel Northcott, of the Staff, and began to march across the railway to reinforce the left. On the way, Northcott fell, mortally wounded by a Boer rifle bullet. Not long after, Methuen himself was hit. He had gone down to the river bank to organise another attempt to force a crossing on the right. Here he was shot through the thigh, and handed over the command to Sir Henry Colville. Colonel Paget took command of the Guards Brigade in his place.

General Pole-Carew now made another attempt to obtain a footing on the north bank of the river beyond the Boer right. A small party of the Yorkshires got over on the top of a mill dam, wading part of the way. Some of the Lancashires supported them, and then a number of the Coldstreams and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. When the first of the troops got across there were a number of Free State Boers close by under the shelter of the wall. They fired on our men as they came across; then, seeing that this did not stop them, they withdrew from the wall, which was at once occupied by the Yorkshires. It was just the moment when, if the Boers had been more enterprising, a vigorous counter-attack on the small body of troops that had reached the bank might have driven them into the river before they could be supported. Even when all the reinforcements had crossed, Pole-Carew saw that it would be very rash to try to push his success

any further. With the help of a handful of engineers, he set to work to entrench his men so as to hold the crossing he had won. It could be used next day for the starting point of an attack on the right flank of the enemy.

As the sun went down, the fire on both sides somewhat slackened, but it did not cease for some time after. Through the gathering darkness rifle flashes flickered, and the red trails of the shells showed up against the sky. At last all was silent, and the stretcher-bearers and surgeons were able to continue in safety the work they had carried on amid deadly peril through the day.

The troops, many of them still without food, lay down to sleep on the battlefield, expecting that the struggle would be renewed at dawn. Very few knew that Pole-Carew had won a footing on the other bank. The guns remained in position ready to open fire at sunrise. In one battery at least the exhausted gunners could get nothing to eat or drink.

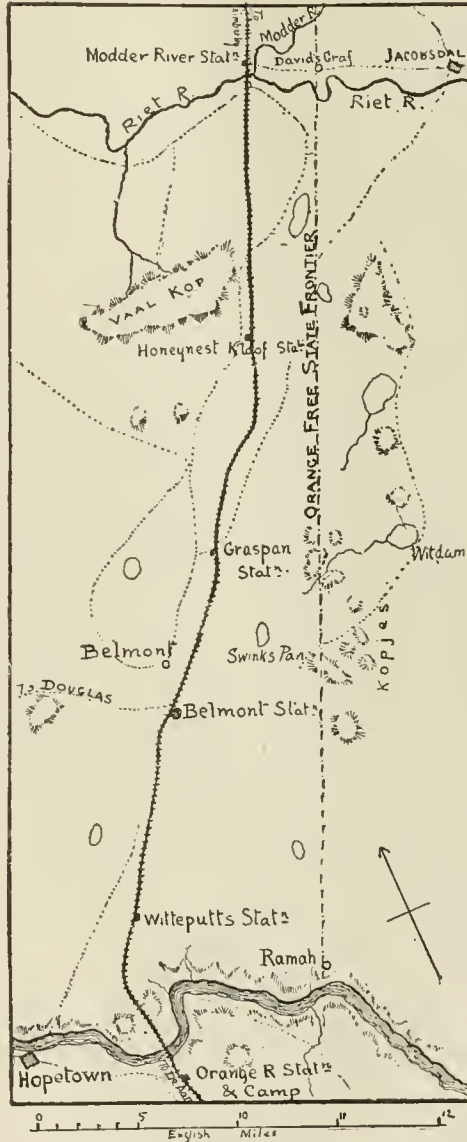
At Belmont and Enslin the Boer position had been stormed after a brief cannonade, and the battle had been finished in the early hours of the morning. Here the advance had begun at dawn, and through a long summer day an invisible enemy had held his position, and delivered a fire that had raged like a storm of lead for hour after hour, killing and wounding men and horses at a range of nearly a mile. This unexpected resistance seemed to many to have been successful. There was a vague impression that the loss was heavy. Telegraphing that night, Lord Methuen spoke of the battle as "one of the hardest and most trying fights in the annals of the British army." He claimed to have driven the Boers from the river bank, though it is difficult to see how this was anything but a guess as to the result of the battle. "After desperate and hard fighting, which lasted ten hours—the men without food and water—made enemy quit his position. General Pole-Carew was successful in getting a small party across the river, gallantly assisted by 300 sappers." This was the pith of his message. A telegram despatched the same night by an officer spoke of the day as "the bloodiest battle of the century." After these telegrams it was naturally expected that there would be a fearful list of casualties. But when the names arrived it was found that the loss was relatively slight.

When day dawned there was no sign of life to be seen in the Boer trenches. But this did not make it certain that they had been abandoned.

The Boers might only be "lying low." So the artillery fired a few shots. There was no reply, and still no sign of life and movement. So the cavalry rode forward cautiously and crossed the river, while at the same time some of Pole-Carew's men pushed forward from his position on the north side towards the head of the ruined railway bridge. The Boers had withdrawn in the night, taking all their guns and waggons with them. In the deserted trenches there were heaps of empty cartridge cases. Here and there among the trees on the north bank were the hastily dug graves of the dead. The hotels and houses were wrecked and riddled with our shell fire. The ground in the island where the Boers had had their quick-firer was torn up with shell-bursts. It was difficult to say what the enemy's loss had been. They had fought under cover, and removed their wounded and hidden away their dead. Early in the afternoon Prinsloe and his Free Staters had mostly retired to Jacobsdal. But Cronje and Delarey, with the Transvaal men and a considerable body of the Free Staters, had held on till after dark, and then retired because they expected an attack at dawn, not only in front, but also from the position that Pole-Carew had seized on their flank.

All things considered, the British losses were not as heavy as might have been expected. The casualties were four officers killed and 19 wounded; 68 men killed and 377 wounded, and 7 missing—a total loss of 475. The officers killed were Lieut.-Colonel Northcott of the Staff; Lieut.-Colonel Stopford, commanding the 2nd Coldstreams; Captain Earle of the same battalion; and Lieut. Long of the Yorkshire Light Infantry. Lord Methuen himself was slightly wounded. Count Gleichen, of the Grenadiers, had a narrow escape of being shot through the neck.

The Boers retired to the positions that were already being prepared for defence on the Spytfontein and Magersfontein Hills. Lord Methuen halted at Modder River crossing, to bury the dead, send back the wounded, replace the ammunition expended, bring up supplies and reinforcements, and construct a bridge across the river on trestles that would carry the railway trains on which he had largely to rely for supplies. Thus some days passed before there was another battle on the western frontier. Meanwhile, there was serious



LORD METHUEN'S LINE OF ADVANCE TO THE MODDER RIVER.

news from General Gatacre, who was endeavouring to clear the hill country on the north-eastern border of Cape Colony of the invading Boer commandoes and the local insurgents.

CHAPTER XII.

GENERAL GATACRE'S REVERSE AT STORMBERG

GENERAL SIR WILLIAM GATACRE had arrived at the Cape expecting to have at his disposal all the fully organised division (the Third of Buller's Army Corps) to which he had been appointed. But his two brigades, the 5th (Irish), under Hart, and the 6th (Fusiliers), under Barton, were ordered to Natal, to join the hastily organised Ladysmith relief force under Buller. General Clery was given these two brigades, originally assigned to Gatacre, and through the Natal campaign they were known as Clery's Division. The correspondents sometimes spoke of them as the Second Division because Clery, who appeared in the Army List as the general of the Second Division, commanded them. Sometimes, however, the Division was described as the Third, because it was made up of the 5th and 6th Brigades, the brigades originally assigned to the Third Division. It was a striking example of the confusion into which the change of plans had thrown the whole organisation of the South African field force.

Of the Irish Brigade one battalion, the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles, had been left to Gatacre. It was replaced in Hart's brigade by a Scotch regiment. Two of his divisional batteries were also landed for him at East London, the 74th and 77th R.F.A. In November the Berkshires had fallen back from Stormberg to Queenstown before the Boer invasion. When Gatacre established his headquarters at Queenstown at the end of the month, he had at first only this battalion and some local volunteers and Cape Police. The Irish Rifles and the two batteries then joined him, and he was also sent the 1st Royal Scots, the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers, some mounted infantry, and a detachment of the Cape Mounted Rifles. Altogether he had at his command not a division, but a brigade, with twelve guns for artillery, and for mounted work some hundreds of mounted rifles and volunteers.

Having got this force together, he moved up from Queenstown to Putterskraal, near Sterkstroom junction, in the beginning of December. His object was to prevent the further advance of the Boer invaders on the eastern line of railway. Methuen held the western line, and French,

with a handful of infantry and some cavalry and horse artillery, was holding the central line north of Naauwpoort junction. Gatacre was operating in very difficult country. The Stormberg range is a wide chain of bold hills running out westward from the mountain mass of Basutoland through Cape Colony. As it runs westward it trends rather more to the south, and forms the northern barrier of the Great Karroo. At Sterkstroom junction a branch line runs eastward through the hills to connect the eastern railway with the Indwe coalfields near Dordrecht. North of Sterkstroom the main line curves round the bold spur of Bushman's Hoek, held by Gatacre's outposts, and after passing Cyphergat village and station, reaches Molteno, the centre of a grazing and coal-mining district. There are numerous farms, and on the hillsides tall chimneys and the headgear of colliery shafts are common objects of the landscape. From Sterkstroom to Molteno (700 inhabitants) the distance is twenty miles.

Eleven miles north of Molteno, Stormberg junction is reached, where a branch line goes off to the westward through Steynsburg, and joins the central railway at Rosmead junction south of Naauwpoort. From Sterkstroom to Stormberg the railway is going gradually up through wild, hilly country, and at Stormberg junction it curves round the great peak of Rooi Kop (the Red Head), a mountain with boulder-strewn slopes, broken here and there by sheer precipices. From Molteno there is a road to Stormberg, and another road branching off north west to Steynsburg. On the Rooi Kop the Berkshire regiments had dug trenches and built up stone breastworks, to enable the hill to be held as a natural fortress protecting the junction. All these had been abandoned when the order was given to retire to Queenstown in November, and they were now held by the Boer commandoes under Van Grobler and Olivier.

The Boers had been raiding and recruiting throughout the district, and their presence at Stormberg was a standing danger to the north-eastern districts of the colony. Gatacre realised that he was not strong enough to make a regular attack on the Boer position. But it was



RIFLE BRIGADE PRACTISING HILL CLIMBING WITH MAXIM.

important to clear the junction of the enemy, and reopen communication with French through Rosmead. He resolved, therefore, to attempt a night surprise of the Stormberg position.

His plans were communicated to at least some of the correspondents at his headquarters. The date fixed for the enterprise was at first Saturday, December 9th, and on the 7th the *Times* correspondent at Putterskraal camp wrote in his diary:—"The move forward is at last at hand. A strong column will leave here by rail to-morrow evening, and, having detrained north of Molteno, march on to the Boer laager at Stormberg, which it is proposed to rush with the bayonet at 3.30 a.m. on Saturday. Only one field battery is to proceed with the troops, and this, having selected horses, is to be also conveyed by rail. The distance is about twenty-five miles, and would be far too much for horses only just off the ship, and General Gatacre has wisely decided against overtaxing their strength by such a march. Everyone is to go as lightly equipped as possible, the baggage being left to follow the column later on. We shall have somewhere about 2,500 of all ranks, including two and a half battalions (less details mounted infantry and artillery). It is a thousand pities that, owing to the delay in sending him reinforcements, the general is not in a position to do as he would have much preferred—make a decided move with the intention of sweeping the enemy right over the border by a continuous advance. But even what is about to be attempted must, if successful, be attended by very important results. The line to De Aar will be reopened within a few days, and the petty commandoes in the Dordrecht and Barkly districts will be obliged to fall back as the only alternative to being destroyed in detail. A concentration of the enemy about Burghersdorp, and a subsequent fight in that neighbourhood—probably at Albert junction—may be expected to follow the Stormberg engagement. At all events, the immediate concentration of the enemy is a certainty; but there is, of course, a chance that his combined strength may be too great for us to tackle with the troops at present available, in which case we shall be obliged to await the arrival of reinforcements. Such delay, if it occurs, will be most regrettable, since much moral effect will thus be lost."

Written before the attempt was made, this very fairly sums up the possibilities of the

situation, and shows that Gatacre was fully justified in risking a *coup-de-main* against the strong Boer position in his front. Unfortunately, the plan was carried out in a way that made the chances of disaster much greater than those of success. The first mistake made was the putting off of the advance for a whole twenty-four hours. Once preparations had been made, and the scheme had been necessarily made known to many in camp by all the little arrangements that men make on the eve of a move, without always realising how much they tell to those who are keenly watching them, every hour of delay increased the danger of the Boers being warned of the impending blow. The reason given for the start being deferred was that on further consideration it had been found that it was advisable to move off at an earlier hour than had first been proposed, and the railway arrangements had therefore to be altered. Moreover, the 16th Field Hospital had only just reached camp, and could not, without great fatigue to men and beasts, march off to a fight the same evening. This was an additional reason for the change of plans.

At last, on Saturday, the movement began. The Boers were to be surprised at Stormberg in the grey light of the Sunday's dawn. The troops detailed for the operation were moved up from Putterskraal by rail during Saturday. The first train, made up of open trucks, started at 4 a.m., and the last did not reach Molteno till late in the day. On the steep grades only short trains working at low speed could be used, so the concentration of the small column took a long summer's day. By evening there were gathered round the station at Molteno two batteries of artillery; the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers, 966 strong; the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles, 840 strong; 257 men of the Mounted Infantry; 258 of the Cape Mounted Rifles; with the Field Hospital and the Royal Engineers, making up altogether a force of 102 officers and 2,596 men. The 1st Royal Scots and the Berkshires, with the exception of their mounted infantry, had been left behind to hold Putterskraal and Bushman's Hoek. It was a mistake to leave the Berkshires on the line of communications. They had held Stormberg at the outset of the campaign; they had worked on the entrenchments at the junction, and knew something of the ground in the neighbourhood. Their presence with the column might have been very useful.

After a rest and a good meal in the square in

front of the station, the column formed up for the night march. In order to make the movement as silent as possible, the gun-wheels of the artillery had been bound with hide, and as few horses as possible were taken out with the column. At 9 p.m. the order was given to march, and it moved out of the square and disappeared in the darkness of the veldt. It was calculated that a twelve-mile march would bring the force to a point opposite the south-western face of the Boer position. The ground was hilly and the track was rough, so that the distance would take between five and six hours to cover. This, it was thought, would give time for a short rest before the rush was made for the enemy's trenches at half-past three in the morning.

An officer and two men of the Cape Police, who knew the district well, were to act as guides. The ordinary rules for such operations had been completely neglected. It was imagined they might be safely dispensed with. It is usually understood that a night attack cannot be ventured upon unless some, at least, of the officers directing it have previously been able to reconnoitre in daylight the ground over which the advance is to be made. Nothing of this kind was attempted, while officers and men who knew the ground were left behind. Then it is laid down in the drill book that the line taken in the night march must be checked by compass and by the stars if they are visible. But there was a blind trust in the guides, and no checking of the route was attempted. Possibly the compass would not have given reliable results among the ironstone hills; but we do not hear of even an experiment being made beforehand to ascertain if this was so. The maps issued to the force proved misleading on more than one important point.

There are two roads running out of Molteno to the north. By the direct road it was only nine miles to Stormberg. To advance by this road would have been to come by the way which the Boers were sure to be watching. Gatacre's plan was to take the other road, which leads across the hills to Steynsburg. After following it for about eight miles he intended to strike off by a path to the right, which in four miles more would bring him to the immediate vicinity of the Boer position.

For hours the column tramped slowly through the darkness, up and down the slopes of the broken ground. The guides missed the point at which they should have turned off to the

right, and held on to the north-westward. If any proper estimate of the distance traversed had been made, either by pacing or otherwise, the mistake would have soon been discovered, but it went unchecked. The tail of the column, made up of a Maxim detachment, a number of ammunition mules, and the ambulances, missed its way at the very outset, and, instead of keeping on the same track as the rest of the troops, went due north along the direct road to Stormberg. It discovered its mistake when some correspondents who had ridden on in front came back with the report that they had found themselves close to Stormberg, and that there were no British troops anywhere on the road. The correspondents then rode back into Molteno for information as to the direction the column had taken, and the ambulances came back after them.

While the column was making its way through the hills, a bright light, like the flashing of a signaller's lamp, was seen to the north-east of Molteno. At the time little attention was paid to the incident, but afterwards it was remembered, and it was suspected that someone who had watched the column out of Molteno was signalling to the Boers at Stormberg to prepare them for the attack. Four miles beyond the correct point the guides turned off to the right, and the column began to march to the north-east. Day was now dawning. Away to the right a bold summit was seen rising above the lower hills. It was Rooi Kop, the hill held by the Boers above the junction; but it was not recognised, for everyone was looking out for Rooi Kop in the front of the line of march, and not on its flank. So the column blundered on, the men utterly tired out with their long journey by rail, followed by the exhausting night march. It ought now to have been realised that the chance of surprising the Boers was gone, and that the best thing to do would be to fall back on Molteno; but Gatacre continued his advance.

The head of the column was now moving into a rocky valley, one side of the mass of rocks of which Rooi Kop is the summit. There was no idea that the enemy's position was so near. Out in front there were a few scouts, but they were following the track. No flankers had climbed the steep hills on either side. Behind the scouts the men were marching wearily in column of fours, the Irish Rifles leading.

Suddenly, at a range of less than 400 yards, the rocks on the right of the column burst into a blaze of rifle fire. The Boers had been for some

time watching the advance of the column. They had manned their stone breastworks among the rocks with 400 riflemen, afterwards reinforced by 400 more. They had let the scouts pass up the valley without firing at them, and had remained silent and ready till the head of the column also had passed and the long line of men in fours was close under the muzzles of their repeating rifles. Then they fired with deadly effect. Several officers and men of the Irish Rifles and of the Northumberlanders fell killed or wounded. But, though taken by surprise, there was no panic among our men. Their first impulse was to make a dash at the Boers. They had been told that when the position was reached they were not to fire, but to "go in with the bayonet." Here was the Boer position, and they went for it with fixed bayonets, in rather confused fashion, some of them led by their officers, some on their own impulse. Others opened fire on the Boer breastworks.

The officers and men who had dashed at the hill soon found that the boulder-strewn slope became steeper and steeper till it broke at last into sheer upright ranges of rock that it was impossible to climb under fire. Some of the foremost of our men were only a few yards below the lowest of the Boer breastworks, but the sheer rock that divided them from the works could not be climbed without ladders. At this moment our artillery came into action against the Boer position. Unfortunately, some of the shells burst among the brave fellows who were struggling up the rocky face of the hill. Only the most accurate ranging could have obviated such a mischance, and it was a pity that with our men so near the target of the batteries they were allowed to open fire. It may be, however, that, thanks to their khaki uniforms, the men on the hillside were invisible to the gunners, and the latter had therefore no idea what a dangerous experiment they were trying.

Unable to climb higher, fired at by the Boer Mausers in front and our own artillery in the rear, some of the men began to retire down the hill. But most of them either continued to seek for some point where they could struggle upwards, or lay among the rocks, firing uphill. Near the summit a heavy Creusot gun was replying to our artillery. General Gatacre soon saw that the confused attack that was in progress could only end in increased losses to the brave fellows engaged in it. He therefore ordered the retire to be sounded.

Some of the men at once came back. Though a heavy rifle and artillery fire had been brought to bear upon the Boer position to cover this retirement, the enemy, undeterred by the shells that were bursting among the rocks, aimed coolly at the retreating men and shot many of them down. Others of our men disregarded the recall and stuck to their positions among the rocks. Most of these were afterwards taken prisoners by the Boers, as were all the wounded and the greater part of the head of the column, which had passed further up the valley before the firing began. Amongst the wounded prisoners taken on the hillside was Colonel Eager, the commanding officer of the Irish Rifles, who had fallen while leading his men to the assault of the Boer breastworks.

Having rallied his men, Gatacre recognised at once that further attack was impossible. The night march had failed. Instead of surprising the Boers, the column had been surprised by them, and had already lost heavily. All that was left to be done was to save what remained of it by a prompt retreat to Molteno. And this retreat would be no easy matter. In its advance the column had marched for some miles round the circumference of something like a quadrant of a circle, of which the Boer position at Rooi Kop was the centre. It had now to retrace its steps with the enemy ready to strike at its flank from the central position. In the rugged country that would have to be traversed there was many a point where a daring enemy might head off the column, and almost without moving from their position, but merely altering the direction in which they were laid, the heavy Creusot guns, mounted high among the rocks of Rooi Kop, could shell the line of retreat for mile after mile. Add to this that the men were so utterly exhausted that as they halted on the hillside many of them threw themselves on the ground and at once fell asleep.

The retirement was covered by the artillery, one battery keeping in action while the other moved back to a new position, the two of them thus alternately fighting and retiring. Unfortunately, two guns were lost. One of them stuck hopelessly in a quicksand on the track. The other was upset at an awkward point under close rifle fire, the horses were shot, and it had to be left to the enemy. It was some time before the column was joined by the ambulances and stretcher bearers, who had, as we have seen, missed their way in the dark, but who struck across the veldt to rejoin the column as soon as

they heard the firing. Until they came up all the wounded had to be left on the road, to fall into the hands of the pursuers. The mounted men proved of the greatest service during this trying time. They repeatedly made a dash for and secured some point commanding the road before the enemy could reach it. Only for them, the whole column would have been captured.

For mile after mile the column was harassed by the rifle fire of the Boers, who hung closely on its flank and rear, and shelled by the long-ranging guns on the kop. The superior range of these guns enabled their gunners to fire as coolly as if they were at target practice. Our fifteen-pounder R.F.A. guns could not reach them, and confined their attention to checking the pursuing riflemen with shrapnel. If the Boer artillery had been provided with better ammunition, the column would have been simply massacred by the enemy's powerful guns. "Their fire," says the *Times* correspondent who accompanied the column, "was beautifully directed, but fortunately harmless, owing to the shells being nearly all plugged. Bursts were quite the exception. Be all this as it may, it is at least certain that before many miles had been traversed in retreat, stragglers were the rule and formed bodies the exception. Amongst the latter a party of the Royal Irish Rifles was most skilfully directed and kept well in hand by the adjutant, Lieutenant Sitwell, whose behaviour was distinctly conspicuous. But I am certain that, say, five miles from Molteno, 300 average good men could easily have rolled up the entire column—all that was needed was to head it and swallow it by driblets as it came along."

Mr. F. W. Walker, of the *Daily Mail*, who was also with the column, says enough to show in what a helpless condition it was in the last stages of the retreat. "The men," he says, "began to show fatigue. They had been on their feet since four a.m. on Saturday, and had marched all night, and then found themselves unexpectedly forced to march back again every step. Men dropped out from sheer inability to walk further. Some actually fell asleep. Others sat on boulders, helpless as children. The column was walked off its feet. In the hour of disaster, however, the grand British spirit showed itself. The officers urged and helped their men, and the latter helped their comrades. As the shells broke hissing on the ground down went the men flat, then up and on with a shake of the fist at the distant guns."

Close up to Molteno the Boer pursuit continued. Early in the Sunday afternoon the defeated column began to straggle into the village. Most of the men, as they reached it, flung themselves on the ground in the station square and slept soundly. The general himself, after giving some directions for the security of the place and sending back a chaplain and some of the doctors under a flag of truce to see what could be done for the wounded, stretched himself on a table in the waiting-room of the station. But he could not sleep. He lay for a while with his head in his hands, and the strong man seemed utterly broken down. But presently he was up again, telegraphing to Sterkstroom and arranging for the retirement of his men to Bushman's Hoek and Putterskraal by railway as soon as they had rested a little.

In the evening, when after a hurried meal the men fell in to entrain again, they cheered the general, and some of them called out that they were ready to have another try for Stormberg. He had failed, but his men had seen him in the thickest of the fire during the long retreat, unsparing of himself, with an eye for every danger to them, now sending the mounted men to seize a point of vantage, now directing the fire of the batteries, now himself rallying the rearguard and beating off the pursuit for a moment. One camp story said that Gatacre had shot the guide who led the column astray, drawing his revolver and firing it at him point-blank as the first Boer volley rang out from the hillside. But there was, it seems, no foundation for the tale. The guide was an experienced and trusted officer of the Cape Police, and a court of inquiry subsequently exonerated him from all suspicion of treachery.

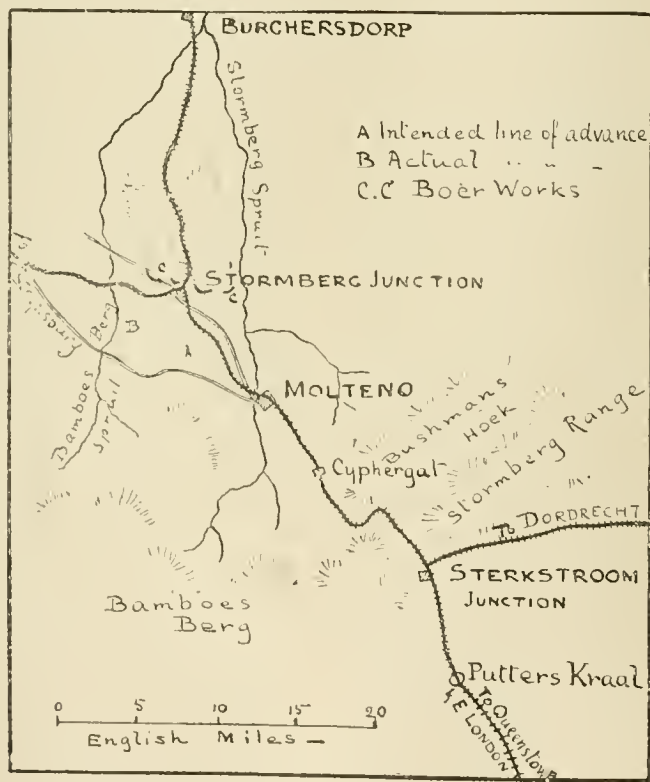
In the evening the retreat was continued by rail. The force was withdrawn to Sterkstroom and Putterskraal, where it was protected by the outpost line of the Royal Scots holding Bushman's Hoek. Nothing more was attempted by Gatacre for some weeks to come, and meanwhile the news of their success brought hundreds of recruits from the colonial Dutch to the Boer laager at Stormberg.

They had had only 800 men in action during the Sunday's fight. They had lost hardly a score of men, for they fought from first to last under cover. If they had been a little more venturesome, no part of the hapless column would have escaped. As it was, the losses of Gatacre's force had been terribly heavy. The

force of about 2,500 men had lost in all 760 men and two guns. There were 24 men killed, 71 officers and men wounded, and 665 missing. Of those first reported missing a few were afterwards found to have been killed, and many were wounded. The loss of the mounted infantry and artillery was very small, two killed and eight wounded, the result of the bad ammunition used by the Boers for their guns. The two infantry battalions had borne nearly the whole loss. That of the Irish Rifles was slightly heavier than that of the Northumberlands in the number of killed and wounded, but the Northumberlands had a much heavier roll of missing. The figures were:—2nd Irish Rifles, 10 killed, 34 wounded, 293 missing; 2nd North-

umberland Fusiliers, 12 killed, 27 wounded, 372 missing.

Lieutenant-Colonel Eager, of the Irish Rifles, remained a prisoner in the hands of the enemy, severely wounded. He, as well as all the other wounded prisoners, was given every attention by the Boers. Colonel Eager had to undergo amputation of one leg, but appeared to be making a good recovery, and in January, 1900, shortly after Lord Roberts had released the wounded Commandant Pretorius, the Free State Government informed the Irish colonel's family that he would be set at liberty as soon as he was strong enough to travel. But he did not survive to experience this kindness. He died at Burghersdorp Hospital in February.



SKETCH MAP TO ILLUSTRATE GENERAL GATACRE'S ATTEMPT TO SURPRISE THE BOERS AT STORMBERG, DEC. 10, 1899.

CHAPTER XIII.

MAGERSFONTEIN.

THE news of the disaster at Stormberg produced a painful impression in England. Within twenty-four hours the gloom was deepened by the news of a still more serious defeat inflicted on Lord Methuen's column.

For twelve days after the crossing of the Modder River Lord Methuen had remained almost inactive in his camp near the end of the ruined railway bridge. He has been blamed for not pushing on at once to the relief of Kimberley. But the criticism is unjust. His men had suffered heavily in the battle of November 28th. He had no transport that would enable him to diverge in his line of advance from the railway, and in his front were the Spytfontein and Magersfontein kopjes, which he knew were held by the same determined men who had long barred his way at the river crossing. He resolved to give his army a rest, bring up supplies and reinforcements, and above all bring up howitzers and heavy naval guns with which to bombard the Boer lines as a prelude to the attack. Meanwhile he had to use part of his force and some of the reinforcements sent to him to secure his line of communications along the western border.

On December 2nd, the Canadians under Colonel Otter and the Australians under Colonel Hood were sent up from De Aar camp to help in garrisoning various points on the line between Orange River station and Modder River camp. For the same purpose two companies of the Northampton Regiment were sent back to Belmont and Graspan. At the same time the Highland Brigade under General Wauchope, consisting of the 2nd Royal Highlanders (Black Watch), the 1st Highland Light Infantry, the 2nd Seaforth Highlanders, and the

Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, was concentrated at Modder camp. The last-named regiment had joined Lord Methuen just before the battle of the 28th. Other reinforcements were the 12th Lancers, G Battery R.H.A., a howitzer battery R.F.A., and a naval 4.7 inch gun from the *Doris*, which the bluejackets christened "Joe Chamberlain."

On December 5th, Lord Methuen, in reporting a small reconnaissance north of the river in which two of the mounted infantry had been wounded, added to his despatch, "Am satisfied that enemy's loss at Modder River more than equals our own, and *moral* much shaken." But the Boers did not show much sign of this assumed discouragement. The very next day they cut off a patrol of the 12th Lancers, and took an officer and four men prisoners; and the day after that Prinsloo, the Free State commandant, with about 100

men and a gun, raided the railway line near Graspan and temporarily cut Methuen's communications.

Prinsloo came across the veldt from Jacobsdal, and in the early morning of December 7th swooped down upon the railway near Graspan station and cut the telegraph wires and tore up the track, blowing up a culvert with dynamite. They tried to capture the station at Graspan, but a detachment of regular infantry held out pluckily against them until a trainload of troops and some guns came to the rescue from Modder camp. The raiders then drew off across the veldt to the eastward. Their losses were unknown; ours were only fourteen men wounded and three missing.

It is curious that this was the only effort that the Boers made to cut Lord Methuen's line of communications, though his army depended for



LIEUT.-COL. OTTER, COMMANDING THE
CANADIAN CONTINGENT.
(Photo: Kennedy, Toronto.)

its supplies and reinforcements on this single track railway running along the open veldt within striking distance of their frontier; and after entering the colony it passed through difficult mountain country, where a band of daring partisans could have cut it again and again.

On Friday, 8th, careful reconnoitring from Modder River camp revealed the fact that the main position of the Boers was not, as had at first been supposed, directly to the north on the railway at Spytfontein, but more to the eastward, on the prolongation of the Spytfontein Hills at Magersfontein. The key of the position appeared to be the huge pointed kopje that rose over Scholz Nek, the place at which the old waggon road to Kimberley crossed the ridge east of the railway.

Lord Methuen could not expect any additional reinforcements for some time. As he says in his official despatch, his orders were to relieve Kimberley, and he felt that if he remained any longer inactive at Modder River camp, the enemy's position would be growing stronger, while he would derive no corresponding gain from delay. There is also reason to believe that during this pause in the operations he was worried by impatient messages from a certain section of the defenders of Kimberley urging him to push on to the relief of the town at once, and using language that suggested that delay might lead to disaster.

But how was the advance to be made? As the merest beginner in tactics could see, the correct method would be to leave a detachment to hold a fortified bridge head at Modder camp, and make a flank march with the rest of the force round one or other flank of the Boer position, round their right by Koedoesberg Drift, or round their left by Jacobsdal. Lord Methuen, of course, saw this as well as his critics have seen it since, but, unfortunately, he had not the transport available for supplying his army once a march was made for more than a few miles from the railway. He was tied to the line. He also exaggerated the strength of the Boers opposed to him, as the result of defective information, and the immediate consequence of this was to make a flank march seem still more hopeless. As he himself puts it in his despatch, after describing the Magersfontein ridge, "So long as this kopje remained in possession of the enemy, I did not feel justified with my small force in marching up the Modder River, for my line of communication would have been in

danger, and my transport could only carry five days' provisions. Had I marched round by Jacobsdal to Brown's Drift I should have had to fight my way across the river in the face of a mobile force consisting of 16,000 men."

It is doubtful if the Boer force in the trenches on the day of Magersfontein reached half this figure. But, however this may be, Lord Methuen, while fully recognising the theoretical advantages of a flank march, decided that with the resources at his disposal it was impossible. He therefore decided upon a frontal attack. After his experience at the battle of Modder River, he had not much hope of being able to advance across the plain against the Boer positions in broad daylight. He therefore determined to make an attack in the early dawn, after approaching the position under cover of darkness. In order to prepare the way for the attack, the Boer positions were to be heavily bombarded on the preceding day with lyddite shells from the howitzers and naval guns. In this campaign lyddite was a kind of military fetish. It held in the popular imagination much the same place that the mitrailleuses held before their failure in the war of 1870. It was expected that lyddite would make the Boer trenches untenable, that its deadly blast would shatter the enemy's defences, fill them with dead, and inspire the survivors with hopeless panic. Before the war so much had been written of this terrible explosive that the Boers called out for service spoke anxiously about it as the chief danger they had to face in the campaign. In England the newspapers alluded to it with satisfaction as a scientific means of making the kopjes untenable for even the bravest of men.

Yet there were facts which made some few sceptical critics warn the British public not to expect too much from the new weapon. Lyddite had been tried in the Soudan. A howitzer battery throwing 50-pound shells had bombarded the Mahdi's tomb at Omdurman for hours. Photographs and sketches of the damage done had been published in the illustrated papers, and they conveyed to anyone who gave the subject more than casual attention serious doubts as to the boasted terrors of howitzers and lyddite shells. The dome was built of sundried bricks. Its brickwork was nowhere more than three feet thick. It had been hit fair by several shells. Others had burst close to it. Theoretically, it should have been blasted into a mere rubbish heap. But at the end of the long bombardment it was still



ROUGHING IT BY THE MODDER RIVER: THE OFFICERS' MESS OF THE 3RD GRANADIER GUARDS.

standing, with a big hole in one side of it and a smaller opening in the other. Those who have handled lyddite say that sometimes not one shell in four explodes properly. Many of them merely fizzle, pouring out smoke, but producing nothing like a heavy explosion. Even when detonation is effected, the damage done is often intensely local. It is true that men are killed by the mere shock without a wound, but they must be close to the bursting shell. And even for those who are close to it its action seems erratic. Some are killed, some stunned, some hardly affected at all. It has the same doubtful character as the old-fashioned gunpowder-laden shells, which often burst so as to kill one man in a group and leave all his comrades uninjured.

But Lord Methuen seems to have had no doubt about the efficiency of his heavy artillery and lyddite shells when on the afternoon of Sunday, December 10th (the same day that Gatacre failed at Stermberg), he began a heavy bombardment of the Magersfontein position as a prelude to the attack.

On the Sunday afternoon the troops had been warned that an advance was to begin that night, and the artillery preparation was to commence immediately. The big naval gun, the howitzers, and the field guns were moved out to the east of the camp to bombard the Magersfontein kopjes. "The thirty oxen that draw the 4·7 gun" (writes the *Times* correspondent) "plunged and swerved away to an eminence a mile from the station, marked by a platelayer's hut, from which point the whole of the enemy's centre, some three and a half miles distant, was within easy range. The howitzers moved out, and the field and horse batteries, convoyed by the Highland Brigade, took up positions about 2,800 yards from the kopjes that had been surveyed for days beforehand and known to be heavily entrenched. Fire was opened about half-past four, and until nightfall a steady and, as was afterwards found, a most effective bombardment was kept up."

Whether the bombardment was at all as effective as it was supposed to be by those who watched it from Lord Methuen's camp is more than doubtful. Till the sun went down the guns thundered against the Boer works and the long line of hills. The kopjes were wreathed in the clouds of smoke and dust from the bursting shells, and through the telescope or field-glass showers of stones and *détritis* were seen flying in the air. Hardly a shot was fired by the Boers in reply, and what little firing there was on the

part of the enemy was at the beginning of the bombardment. Nor were many Boers seen. Now and then there were signs of movement on the kopjes, but it was only some more daring burgher slipping from trench to trench and showing himself for a moment.

A Boer prisoner afterwards stated that when the first shots were fired by our guns the commandoes were holding an afternoon church parade behind the kopjes. Some of the first shells flying high over the ridge burst in or near the dense crowds of men, inflicted some loss, and caused a good deal of alarm. The gatherings dispersed, taking cover close to the ridge and on the reverse sides of the kopjes, but Cronje and his German artillery commander, Albrecht, did not order the trenches and batteries to be manned. They simply kept a few look-out men watching the British lines from sheltered stations. They knew that there was plenty of time to man the works in case our infantry should begin an advance. Albrecht kept his guns silent. He did not mean prematurely to reveal their position to his opponents. The result was that our bombardment spent its fury on deserted rocks and empty trenches. Lord Methuen says in his official report:—"Judging from the moral effects produced by the guns in my three previous attacks, and the additional anticipated effect of lyddite, I expected great destruction of life in the trenches and a considerable demoralising effect on the enemy's nerves, thereby indirectly assisting the attack at daybreak." These hopes and expectations were doomed to disappointment. Indeed, it may be said that the chief effect of the bombardment was merely to put the Boers on the alert and warn them to expect an attack early next day.

While the cannonade was in progress the preparations for the advance had been completed. Trains laden with supplies for beleaguered Kimberley were standing ready in the sidings at Modder River camp. The arrangements had been so completely worked out that even railway passes for the journey to the Diamond City had been issued to those who would be unable to accompany the march of the relief force. The night march was to begin half an hour after midnight.

In the afternoon the sky had been overclouded. About nine in the evening rain began to fall, and after midnight it increased to a heavy downpour. This made the night the darkest and most inclement that had been so far experienced during the campaign. The

troops destined for the attack were lying down in the open to the east of the camp, and officers and men were drenched to the skin. When at last the advance began, it was found impossible to keep touch and direction unless by marching the troops in the close solid formation of mass of quarter columns; that is, the companies, each formed on its full front, followed each other at a distance of six paces, and in each brigade battalion followed battalion.

The Highland Brigade, under General Wauchope, was in the centre. It was to move against the big Magersfontein kopje. To its right rear, and nearer the river, the Guards Brigade advanced in support. The Ninth Brigade, on the left, held the camp and the railway line, and on the other side of the railway the mounted troops were to make a demonstration against the enemy's right.

Before starting on the night march, General Wauchope had seen Lord Methuen, and the two generals had gone carefully over the plan for the attack. There seems not to be any foundation whatever for the story, that found general acceptance for awhile, that Wauchope protested against the orders given to him as likely to lead to disaster. The plan of attack assigned to the Highland Brigade is thus explained by Lord Methuen:—

"The brigade was to march in mass of quarter columns, the four battalions keeping touch, and, if necessary, ropes were to be used for the left guides" (that is, a rope would be held by the sergeants acting as guides on the left flank of the companies, so as to prevent them losing touch and distance). "These ropes were taken, but, I believe, used by only two battalions. The three battalions were to extend just before daybreak, two companies in firing line, two companies in support, and four companies in reserve, all at five paces' interval." Wauchope intended to swing round two of his companies against the left rear of the main kopje and attack it on two sides. It will thus be seen that the plan was not, as was at first supposed in England, copied from Wolseley's at Tel-el-Kebir. On that occasion the troops were brought close up to the Arab lines in the dark and rushed them shoulder to shoulder at dawn. Here Lord Methuen tried to get his attacking force over most of the open ground in front of Cronje's lines under cover of darkness. But there was to be no sudden rush of a mass with fixed bayonets. The men were to deploy in the darkness into three extended lines, and then

advance firing as day broke. The plan was much too elaborate for a night attack. In the pitch darkness and driving rain of the night between December 10th and 11th it was hopeless. It should have been put off when it was found that the conditions of weather were so unfavourable for a prolonged movement of large bodies of men.

So much for the plans. Let us now see what happened. Dawn was at 3.25. At that hour the Highland Brigade was advancing. Wauchope was just about to give orders to deploy. Apparently neither he nor any other of the leaders knew how close they were to the Boer trenches. Just at this time a couple of rifles were accidentally discharged. One wonders why even a single rifle had been loaded! It is said that there had also been some dangerous flashes of light from a badly shaded lantern, and, according to at least one account, at this critical moment the great searchlight of Kimberley sent its white ray of electric light sweeping over the veldt, and it shone for a moment through a gap in the kopjes and revealed, like a ghostly army, the leading battalions of the Highland Brigade.

But whatever it was that warned the Boers that the column was so near, there is no doubt as to what next happened. The Boers were on the alert. They had manned their trenches, so as to be ready to meet an attack at dawn. The dense mass of Highlanders was within two hundred yards of the most advanced trench. Suddenly along half a mile of front the enemy's Mausers blazed and roared in rapid independent fire, and showers of bullets tore through the dense ranks of Wauchope's brigade. Men and officers fell in scores. The general himself was hit in several places. He called out, "Extend, men—extend!" and fell to the ground, dying almost immediately. It is just possible that even then a bold rush would have carried the brigade into the trenches and given the Highlanders a chance with the bayonet. But their leader was down. Some tried to extend into a firing line and answer the Mausers with their Lee-Metfords. A few dashed forward, only to be caught by the barbed wires of a high entanglement that extended along the front of the trench about a hundred yards from it. But most of the brigade were falling back. In a few minutes it was clear that the attack had failed.

But a long, determined effort was made to redeem the day. The Highlanders rallied, and deployed along the veldt a few hundred yards in the rear of the point where they had been

caught by the Boer fire. On their right the Guards had formed for battle, and the artillery had opened fire upon the Boer defences. From various points on the kopjes the Boer guns were replying. The sun, rising over the ridges, lit up a fiercely contested battlefield.

The Seafortns were extended along the front of the ground over which the Highlanders had advanced. The rest of the brigade had been rallied further back, and were lying down along the veldt. To the right the Guards had come

the direction of Spytfontein, others from Jacobsdal.

But the Boer guns had ceased firing. Even their riflemen seemed to be tiring of the prolonged struggle to hold the trenches under the ceaseless shower of bullets and shells. From the kopjes and the works on the level in front of them there came only a desultory sniping fire, with now and then a heavier crackle of musketry from one point or another. It looked as if with an effort the position might be carried, and



MAGERSFONTEIN: ATTENDING TO THE WOUNDED OF THE HIGHLAND BRIGADE.

into action. For some hours it was a repetition of the Modder River fight. The long firing line of the British poured bullets almost at random into the position held, as it was, by an unseen enemy, so that aiming was out of the question. Over the heads of the infantry the artillery sent its shells into the kopjes. The big naval gun had been dragged nearer the hills, and its heavy lyddite shells seemed to be bursting well. Towards noon Lord Methuen brought up the Gordons from the camp, and sent them to the support of the Highlanders. The balloon had been sent up from a knoll near the camp, and the officer in the car reported that the enemy was also receiving reinforcements, some from

orders were sent to the Highland Brigade, now strengthened by the Gordons, to advance.

The long kilted lines rose and pushed forward, the Seafortns and Gordons leading. But this new attempt failed even more disastrously than the attack in the early morning. There are times when, exhausted by the fatigue and exposure, crushed by heavy and sudden loss, and deprived of that confidence in their leaders which is a pledge of victory, even the bravest men will break down and give way to sudden panic. It has happened to the pick of every army in the world. It was the fate of the Highlanders at Magersfontein. As they moved forward they were met with a sudden blast of



GENERAL WAUCHOPE'S FUNERAL.

Mausers fire in front and flank ; the bullets swept along like a storm of hailstones. The advance was checked, and then men began to turn, and nearly the whole brigade rushed back. Only the Gordons made a stand, and they had lately come into action. They had not been caught in the death-trap in the early morning, and they were not exhausted by lying out for eight hours under fire on the sun-scorched veldt.

For some time the story of this reverse was kept back by the military censorship. The telegrams told only of the slaughter of the Highlanders at dawn. They said nothing of this incident of the midday battle. Even the letters of the correspondents were in some cases opened, and the story of the second attack cut out of them. But some narratives of the battle were allowed to pass through telling the plain truth. The correspondent of the *Morning Post* watched the advance from a knoll where a battery of horse artillery had taken up a position to support the Guards Brigade. Here is his impression of the scene :—

“ The sad feature of the day was yet to come. Between half-past one and two the rifle fire, which for some time had been rather desultory, became suddenly louder all along the line. Simultaneously the level ground on our left took a new aspect. A Grenadier on the right looked across and saw the dust rising on the plain, and thought the Boers were coming out of their trenches. An officer beside him, using his field-glasses, assured him that it was only our cavalry galloping across to cut off the enemy in the rear. What both saw was the Highland Brigade in full retreat. Who gave the order I cannot tell, and in any case it is a matter of no importance. Back they came in a wave that no officer could stop. From a point of vantage on the Horse Artillery hill one could see them swarming like bees over the veldt, until they were almost out of range, and the guns were left out in the open with no one to support them. It was, perhaps, the most unpleasant sight that a British soldier of to-day has ever beheld—it was certainly a sight never to be forgotten. The guns, though they were left unprotected within short rifle range of the enemy's trenches, came to the rescue in magnificent fashion, pouring their shells over the trenches until the Boer fire became less destructive. Sitting there on the hill by the Horse Artillery, one thanked Providence that a few Gordons remained in front with a solid line of Coldstream Guards, who never budged an inch in the general retreat :

one thanked Providence, too, that the Boers had no artillery in action to scatter shrapnel over the Highlanders' retreat. It was difficult to say what would happen next, until Major Ewart, the brigade major of the Highlanders, rode up with an order from the commanding officer, which was almost an entreaty to the effect that all he asked of the Highland Brigade was to hold the position until dark. So riddled and shattered was the brigade, that Ewart had actually no other officer with him to help him give the orders to the scattered men, and he was glad to have the assistance of Colonel Dawnay, who was there not as a soldier, but as a civilian, surveying the battle from the Horse Artillery hill. It was only two o'clock now, so that it was no small thing to ask of the Highlanders that they should again face the galling fire from the trenches for five mortal hours. Still, a very fair rally was effected ; the pipers played somewhat dolefully, the bugles blew the assembly, and the brigade, stiffened by the support of the Scots Guards, at least got back to the guns, where they had a certain amount of cover, and were not subject to the dropping fire from the top of the kopjes, where a few Boers were still lying in shelter.”

Lord Methuen, in his report, says that the heaviest losses of the day occurred during this retreat. His idea now was to hold on until dark, and then try to rush the Boer position. So through the afternoon the firing continued. But as the day went on it became more and more clear that the men were not capable of further effort. The Boers, on the other hand, encouraged by having twice repulsed an attack and held the force opposed to them at bay during a long day, seemed to be becoming aggressive. Once or twice there were reports that they were abandoning the kopjes, but these were only the movements of bodies of men being transferred from point to point of Cronje's line of battle. On the left of the Magersfontein hills he tried to push forward a counter attack along the river bank, but this was repulsed by the Guards and part of the Ninth Brigade. At half-past five the Boer guns, till then silent for hours, began to heavily bombard the left and centre of our line. As the first shells burst over the Highlanders the brigade again gave way and fell back as far as the field hospital. With troops thus beaten a night attack was out of the question.

The firing gradually died away as darkness came on. The tired troops bivouacked where

they stood, and the doctors and ambulance parties set to work to bring in the wounded. The Boers had taken a few prisoners. In the early morning, some of the Black Watch, the leading regiment of Wauchope's brigade, had dashed at the trenches, and those of them who were not shot down were cut off from their comrades when the general retreat began, and were taken prisoners. When the second advance was made, an officer and about thirty Highlanders who had pressed well to the front found themselves alone within close range of the Boer trenches. They lay down and found some shelter in a hollow of the ground, from which they kept up a fire at the enemy. Towards evening, as the general conflict lulled for a while, a Boer rose from the trench close in front, held up a hand, and asked them to cease fire. He then told them that an ambulance was being brought up to get away some wounded men, and requested that there should be no firing for a few minutes. The Highlanders agreed to this. When the ambulance moved off, a further suggestion was made. The Boer, apparently an officer, pointed out to the little party that they were quite isolated, and if they left their cover to retire they would be the mark for hundreds of rifles. "But," he continued, "we don't want to take any more prisoners. If you retire leaving your rifles on the ground, no one will fire at you till you have reached your own lines." This proposal was agreed to, and the handful of men got safely back to the brigade.

There is no reason to believe that the Boer loss was at all heavy. So long as they lay on the veldt or behind the slightest cover, our men suffered only trifling loss. All, or nearly all, the casualties occurred when the men rose to advance or retire. Now the Boers throughout the day were under cover, with the exception of one small body of men, the Scandinavian volunteers, who, when they saw the British retirement in the middle of the day, dashed out of their trench to attempt a counter attack. They paid dearly for their temerity. Out of some sixty men thirty were killed and wounded. This was the heaviest loss suffered at any one point by the Boers during the day. Lord Methuen had some hopes of renewing the attack next day, and the troops slept on the battlefield, most of them supperless, many without even a drink of water. As soon as the firing ceased, the ambulance parties set to work to collect the wounded, and, although the men were so exhausted, the

burial of the dead was also begun. There was a vague hope that, as had been the case at the Modder River, the Boers might abandon the position during the hours of darkness. As the day broke, however, it was found that the trenches were still manned. The troops were so exhausted and had lost so heavily, that Lord Methuen gave up the idea of renewing the attack. At 10 a.m. orders were issued to return to camp at Modder Bridge. By two o'clock all the troops had withdrawn. There was a little desultory firing during the retirement. But before it was completed a truce had been arranged for the purpose of clearing the field of the dead and wounded.

There is no doubt the long exposure on the battlefield, under a burning sun, the shock of the first surprise, the sense of failure, and the heavy loss incurred had all broken down to a dangerous extent the nerve and morale of the troops. What this strain and exhaustion can do may be gathered from the letter of a Royal Engineer who was employed with the burial parties on the night of the battle. He and his comrades had settled down in the camp for the night after a hard two days' work, when they were suddenly called upon for help.

"About eight o'clock," he writes, "some officers of the Army Medical Corps came along, and to my surprise asked for volunteers to bury the dead. About twenty of us turned out and went. We had to walk about a mile to the place. At last the officers took off their caps as a sentry challenged us to halt. Well, we passed all right, and then a sight which I cannot describe or ever forget met my gaze—rows upon rows of dead. The commanding officer then came up and spoke to us. He said he would not have asked the R.E.'s for help, knowing how they all had worked, only all the troops were thoroughly done up, as they had been lying in the trenches all day, all the night before, and nearly all the day before that, with nothing to eat but hard biscuits, as, of course, no provisions could be got near them. The dew is enough to wet anyone through, and it must have been horrible. Well, the first grave we dug was about thirty feet long and three feet deep, and—would you believe it?—we put fifty-three Scotsmen into it—thirty-four of the Black Watch alone. It was something horrible, and every man of us was crying all the time we worked; and when, after we had placed them all in, the burial service was going on before we covered them over, three or four fainted, whilst

the others cried so loudly that you could hardly hear the minister. After the bagpipes had played the Dead March we covered them over, and started on another grave, when some of our gallant sailors came and relieved us, and we all went back to our train crying."

The total losses were nearly a thousand. There were—

	OFFICERS.	MEN.	TOTAL.
Killed	- 19 -	- 139 -	- 158
Wounded	- 45 -	- 625 -	- 670
Prisoners	- 3 -	- 119 -	- 122
Total	- 67 -	- 883 -	- 950

Among the officers killed besides General Wauchope were Major the Marquis of Winchester of the 2nd Coldstreams, Lieut.-Colonel Coode of the Black Watch, Lieut.-Colonel Goff of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and Lieut.-Colonel Downman of the Gordons. Lieut.-Colonel Kelham of the Highland Light Infantry was wounded. Thus of the five Highland regiments four lost their commanding officers. Lieut.-Colonel Codrington of the 1st Coldstreams was also among the wounded.

General Wauchope's body was found close up to the Boer trench. It bore several bullet wounds. It was placed in a coffin, and after a solemn funeral service, in which all the Highland Brigade took part, it was removed by train to Matjesfontein, on the Karroo, about half way to Cape Town, where it was entombed in the English cemetery. His loss was felt as a heavy blow to the brigade. But in a few days the men were delighted at the news that he was to be replaced by Hector MacDonald, a typical Highland soldier, who had fought his way to a Major-General's commission, beginning as a private in the Black Watch.

During the two days after the battle there was peace along the veldt by the Modder River. The truce was perilously near being interrupted

when, on the first day, the naval brigade by mistake opened fire. Some of our doctors were talking with Cronje just outside his entrenchments. The Boer general took out his watch and said that he would give them five minutes to get to a place of safety in their own lines before he opened fire. "We made a record run," wrote one of the party, "but before we were half way we met one of Lord Methuen's staff officers riding across to explain to Commandant Cronje that the guns had been fired by a mistake of the officer in command." The Commandant accepted the explanation with the remark that he hoped it would be remembered that mistakes might happen on both sides.

After the unfortunate day of Magersfontein, Lord Methuen remained for some time inactive at Modder Bridge. He entrenched his camp, sent strong detachments down the line to secure his communications, erected huts for officers and men, and began to construct railway sidings near the bridge. Evidently he had made up his mind that no serious attempt could be made to force the Boer lines until he was strongly reinforced, and he had no transport available with which to carry out a turning movement away from the railway line.

Kimberley had listened anxiously to the cannonade of the Sunday afternoon, and the roar of the battle all day on Monday. There was an eager anticipation of speedy relief; but when the guns became silent on the Tuesday morning, and the Boers still remained in position round the town, it was evident that Lord Methuen had failed. It was not, however, till a week later that the people of the town heard the story of the lost battle. At Cape Town the news was kept out of the papers for some days, but somehow the Dutch population knew that there had been another serious check to the British arms.



CHAPTER XIV.

THE BATTLE OF COLENZO.

AT the end of November the Boers were retiring from Central Natal to the line of the Tugela. Before evacuating Frere they destroyed the iron railway bridge across the Blaauwkrans River by blowing up the top of the central pier. Both the iron spans fell with the ends that rested on the pier sunk in the river. As the army advancing to the relief of Ladysmith would have to depend for its supplies on the railway line, the wrecking of the bridge led to the loss of several days, while the Royal Engineers were at work building a new bridge beside the old, laying the line across it and making a curved line at each end of the new bridge to connect it with the old track on both sides of the river. During this period Frere became the advanced camp of the British army in Natal. Clery's division was largely reinforced, and General Sir Redvers Buller came round from the Cape to take the chief command of the operations for the relief of Ladysmith.

The Boers were reported to be massing at Grobler's Kloof in the kopjes on the left bank of the Tugela, north of Colenso. The general impression both in England and at the Cape was that they would not venture upon any determined or prolonged resistance when the relief force advanced. It was anticipated that they would at most fight a rearguard action to cover the withdrawal of their heavy guns from the hills round the besieged town, and then raise the siege and draw off to defensive positions on the line of the Biggarsberg and in the passes leading through the Drakensberg to the Free State. "If they do attempt to hold the line of the Tugela," wrote one prominent critic of the war, "they will certainly be caught between Buller's and White's forces as between hammer and anvil and utterly destroyed."

Ladysmith waited in confident expectation of early relief, and the garrison, as yet on full rations and in good fighting condition, was not content with a mere passive defence, but made more than one dashing and successful sortie against the Boer positions. On November 9th an attempt of the Boers to storm the outlying

defences had been repulsed with heavy loss. As the attacking force fell back, Sir George White, who had taken post at the naval battery, reminded the gunners that it was the Prince of Wales's birthday, and called for three cheers for the Prince, and the victory and the anniversary were celebrated by a salute of twenty-one guns loaded with shell and directed upon the enemy's entrenchments on Mount Bulwan and Lombard's Kop.

On November 14th there was a reconnaissance in force to the westward by cavalry, mounted infantry, and artillery, with some infantry in support. Very exaggerated accounts of this affair were brought out by native runners. They said that our cavalry had charged through and through the Boers, sabring and spearing hundreds of the burghers, "who howled for mercy." Nothing of the kind really happened. Mr. Steevens tells the result of the affair in matter-of-fact fashion in one of his despatches sent out a fortnight later: "The reconnaissance revealed the fact that the Boers are weak. It is stated that only 4,000 were disclosed. I believe there are fewer. Our guns shelled and silenced the enemy's artillery, and our cavalry and mounted infantry advanced against a languid fire. On our retirement the enemy's guns reopened, and the big guns to the north-east peppered the road by which we returned. During half an hour the air was rent by a whole gamut of shrieks, fizzles, and crashes, through which our guns retired at a supercilious walk. Our damage was one wounded. The Boer loss was reported at forty, but this is probably an exaggeration."

For some days after this there was a desultory bombardment from the Boer guns on the north and east. It did surprisingly little damage. But there were a few casualties and some narrow escapes. On the 16th a railway guard was killed by an exploding shell, which wounded three other white men and two natives. The same day a shell came into the breakfast room of the Royal Hotel, just before Colonel Rhodes and some officers were about to enter it to have breakfast. A plank was knocked out of the

floor, the ceiling was damaged, and a lot of crockery was smashed, but the pictures on the walls were untouched. Another narrow escape was that of a private of the Irish Fusiliers. He was in charge of the telephone tent. He left it for a minute to get a light for his pipe, and he had hardly gone out when a shell burst in it. Here, again, there was evidence of the erratic nature of a shell-burst. Some of his clothes, hanging on the tent pole, were torn to rags, but the delicate telephone instruments were uninjured.

There was a sad accident on the evening of the 18th. The sun had gone down, and the Boers were firing their last shots for the day. Mr. Stark, a Natal naturalist, had been visiting the town when the siege began, and was unexpectedly shut up in it. He had been staying at the hotel, and this evening was standing in the doorway enjoying the cool air. Suddenly a heavy shell crashed through the roof, ricocheted from a wall without bursting, and went out through the front door, shattering both of Mr. Stark's legs. Some of his friends ran to his help, but he only said, "Look after my cat!" and then fainted with loss of blood and died. The cat was a stray animal that he had made friends with and adopted as a pet.

For some days after this there were no casualties, though many narrow escapes were recorded. Once a shell dropped among a party of the Gordons who were playing football, and burst without hurting anyone. There was a good deal of destruction of house property. But altogether the bombardment was more worrying than anything else. The naval guns had tried unsuccessfully to put the big Boer cannon out of action. But the range was long, the target relatively small, and the supply of ammunition too scanty to risk wasting much of it. At last General Hunter planned a method of getting rid of some of the Boer guns. The idea was to surprise the enemy by a night sortie and wreck his heavy artillery with dynamite charges.

The first attempt was made in the night between the 7th and 8th of December. Hunter took personal command of the enterprise, the force employed being made up of detachments of the Natal Mounted Volunteers and the Imperial Light Horse, with a few of the Royal Engineers to fix and explode the dynamite cartridges. There were 500 of the Volunteers under Colonel Royston and 100 of the Light Horse under Colonel Edwards. Some Royal

Artillery gunners also went with the party, as it was expected that their practical knowledge of artillery might be of use in disabling the enemy's weapons. The little force was divided into three parties of about 200 each, and their lines of march converged on Gun Hill on the north-west of the town. The Boers had on the hill a 6-inch Creusot gun, a 4.7 howitzer, and a Maxim.

In order to divert the attention of the enemy from the real object, some cavalry were pushed out to the north and east towards Pepworth Hill and Mount Bulwan. Meanwhile the real attacking force was moving silently towards Gun Hill. "The night was so dark," says the *Daily News* correspondent, "and the country so rugged and broken with deep dongas, that it was several times necessary to halt and count off the sections in order to ascertain if all were present. The supports proceeded to within 400 yards of the hill, and occupied a position directly in line with it. The storming party were in two sections, both right and left of the hill being attacked. The Boer sentries, who were evidently taken by surprise, challenged the storming party. The sentries' challenges were not replied to, and finding themselves discovered our troops advanced at the double. When they reached the brow of the hill three ringing cheers were given, and the cry passed along the line, "Give them cold steel!" The attacking party, of course, had no bayonets, but many of the men fixed knives to the ends of their carbines. There was little opposition, however, the Boers, who were not in strong force, retreating almost immediately.

"As soon as the guns were in our possession a small detachment of Royal Engineers, under Captain Foulke and Lieutenant Turner, proceeded to blow them up, the breech-blocks, together with a captured Maxim, being taken to Ladysmith. Our loss was one man killed and three wounded, the latter including Major Henderson, of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. On returning to camp the men were paraded and addressed by Sir George White, who, in the name of General Hunter and on his own behalf, expressed his deep appreciation of the admirable manner in which the enterprise was carried out."

The Boers removed the damaged Creusot to Pretoria, repaired it and fitted it with a new breech-block in their arsenal there, and it was again in action at the front in January—an interesting evidence of the completeness of their military organisation.

Another sortie was made two days later, but was not so completely successful, the sortie against Gun Hill having put the Boers more upon their guard. On the night of the 10th Lieut.-Colonel Metcalfe went out with 500 men of the 2nd Rifle Brigade, and surprised and badly damaged a 4.7 howitzer on the slope of Lombard's Kop. But the Boers rapidly rallied and cut off the retreat of the party by interposing a strong body of men between them and the town. The Rifles fought their way through, but lost in the struggle eleven killed, more than forty wounded, and six prisoners. After this it was thought to be too risky to renew such

Chieveley, facing Colenso. Two 4.7 guns manned by bluejackets and several naval 12-pounders had been brought up, and on Wednesday these long-ranging guns and a number of the R.F.A. 15-pounders, thirty guns in all, began a heavy bombardment of the kopjes beyond the Tugela. The bombardment continued for two hours, and next day, Thursday, the guns were pushed up a thousand yards nearer the enemy's positions and the bombardment was renewed. The hillsides were wrapped in the smoke of the bursting shells. As at Magersfontein, it seemed that nothing could live under such a fire. But from the kopjes



MAIL DAY IN CAMP.

attempts, and the Boers made them more difficult by fitting up a couple of searchlights and entangling the ground in front of their gun positions with barbed wire.

Communication by heliograph had been established with the besieged garrison by means of a signal station on a high hill in the direction of Weenen. On Monday, the 11th, information was sent in that the relief force was at last advancing. On Tuesday, the 12th, General Barton's brigade of Fusilier battalions was pushed up to within three miles of Colenso, and the Boer positions along the river were reconnoitred; but, as subsequent events showed, the examination of the ground in front was not carried out in any complete or accurate manner. Troops and guns were now streaming steadily up from Frere to the advanced camp at

along the river there came not a single shot in reply. It looked as if we were trying our guns on a deserted position. One of the foreign officers who were with the Boers says that this protracted cannonade did practically no damage. It was directed almost entirely on the upper parts of the kopjes where the Boers had very few entrenchments. From these trenches they at once withdrew their men. The trenches at the base of the hills and along the river were not shelled; in fact, our reconnaissance of the ground had been so cursory that these trenches had not been discovered. The Boers kept their guns silent in order not to reveal their positions till the actual attack was attempted. Meanwhile, in order to protect them from the chances of injury by stray shells, the guns were covered up with sandbags.

General Buller imagined that the bombardment must have caused a good deal of damage to the Boers, shaken their *moral*, and generally prepared the way for the attack. He resolved to force the crossing of the Tugela, near Colenso, next day (Friday, December 15th). The result was the most hard-fought battle that had yet taken place in the war.

The force assembled at Chieveley Camp amounted to about 20,000 men. There were four regular infantry brigades—namely, the Second Brigade (General Hildyard), made up of

Colonel the Earl of Dundonald. He had in his mounted brigade the 1st Royal Dragoons, the 13th Hussars, Bethune's and Thorneycroft's mounted infantry, each mustering about 500 rifles, three squadrons of the South African Light Horse, and a composite regiment made up partly of regular, partly of colonial volunteer, mounted infantry, under the command of Major Walter. In all, there were about 2,500 mounted men. For artillery, there were thirty guns of the R.F.A. (the 7th, 14th, 63rd, 64th, and 66th batteries), besides the two heavy naval 47 guns



NAVAL GUN IN ACTION.

English regiments; the Fourth Brigade (General Lyttelton), composed of rifle and light infantry battalions; the Fifth (Irish) Brigade, under General Hart; and the Sixth Brigade (General Barton), composed of Fusilier battalions. The list of regiments in these brigades has already been given in describing the mobilisation of the Army Corps. The only change made in the original order was in the Irish Brigade. One of its battalions, the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles, had been sent up to reinforce Gatacre at Sterkstroom, in the north of Cape Colony. It had been replaced by a battalion of the Border Regiment.

Besides these four infantry brigades, there was a force of cavalry and mounted infantry under

and fourteen naval 12-pounders. Teams of oxen had been provided for the naval guns, and they were manned by 254 naval gunners, chiefly drawn from the cruiser *Terrible*, and commanded by Captain Jenes of the *Forté*.

To oppose these 20,000 men and forty-six guns, it was estimated that the Boers could not have more than 10,000 men available. It is now doubtful if they had anything like as many, for they had to keep a great part of their force to invest and watch Ladysmith. But the fighting on the 15th revealed the fact that they held an almost impregnable position.

The orders for the attack were drawn up by General Clery. They were dated from Chieveley Camp at 10 p.m. on Thursday, December 14th,

the eve of the battle. They were very detailed, and contained some points worth noting here in connection with the subsequent discussion of the next day's operations.

The first paragraph gave the available information about the enemy. It ran thus:—

"The enemy is entrenched in the kopjes north of the Tugela; one large camp is reported to be near the Ladysmith road, about five miles north-west of Colenso. Another camp is reported in the hills which lie off the Tugela in a northerly direction from Hlangwane Hill, a rough scrub-covered kopje."

Here there is no hint whatever that the enemy were holding the south bank of the river near Colenso village as well as the kopjes on the north bank; nor does the Staff seem to have been aware that the Boers were also entrenched on Hlangwane Hill, to the right front on the south bank of the Tugela. They never grasped till much later in the war the importance of Hlangwane Hill as the great outwork of the Tugela position. The information given in the first paragraph of the orders was misleading and defective.

The second paragraph is important on account of the attempts afterwards made to give currency to the strange theory that Buller intended only to make a reconnaissance in force, and that it was turned into an actual attack by the rash impetuosity of one or more of his brigade commanders. This second paragraph, written by Clery, for Buller, and accepted by him, leaves no doubt that there was to be not a reconnaissance, but an attack. The words are few and clear—"It is the intention of the General Officer Commanding to force a passage of the Tugela to-morrow."

The next four paragraphs set forth the work to be done by each of the four infantry brigades. Hart, with the Irish Brigade, was to march out of camp at 4.30 a.m. His was to be the left attack. He was to march to Bridle Drift, a ford said to be about four miles west of Colenso. Crossing the ford, he was to turn to his right, once the north bank of the river was won, and assist in the attack on the kopjes north of the

town. Hildyard, with the English Brigade, was to form the centre. He was to march at 4 a.m., go through Colenso town, and attack by the iron bridge north of it. Having crossed, he was to attack the kopjes, assisted by Hart. Lyttelton, with his brigade of Rifles, was to march at 4.30 to a point between Bridle Drift and the railway, so as to be ready to support Hart on his left or Hildyard on his right if they needed help. Barton, with the Fusilier Brigade, was to march at 4 o'clock east of the railway towards Hlangwane Hill, protecting Hildyard's right, supporting him if necessary, and being ready also to support the advance of Dundonald and the mounted troops on the extreme right of the British line.

Lord Dundonald, commanding the mounted troops, was directed to send detachments of his men to cover the right and left flanks and guard the baggage, and he was himself to take 1,000 mounted men and a battery out on the right in the direction of Hlangwane Hill. Clery's orders to him were to the effect that he should "endeavour to take up a position on Hlangwane Hill, where he will enfilade the kopjes north of the iron bridge." When this order was written there was evi-

dently no knowledge at the British headquarters of the fact that Hlangwane was strongly held by the enemy. The Second Brigade Division of the R.F.A. (three batteries) was directed to take up a position from which it could enfilade the kopjes on the north bank. The First Brigade Division, less one battery detached to assist Lord Dundonald, but reinforced by six naval 12-pounders, was to cover the forcing of the drifts. Colonel Long rode forward with this brigade division, and he had thus with him twelve R.F.A. and six naval guns.

Each soldier was given extra cartridges to bring his supply up to 150 per man. Packs were left in camp. The men carried only their rifles, ammunition, rolled greatcoats, haversacks, and water-bottles. They were sent out in this light marching order to make the work of storming the kopjes easier. Every soldier in the Natal army had unlimited trust in Buller,



EARL OF DUNDONALD.

(Photo: Robert Faulkner & Co., London.)

and when the orders were issued on Thursday evening there was not the slightest doubt that the river would be crossed and the kopjes beyond cleared of the Boers in the course of next day. But no one realised how enormously strong the Boer position was, and how skilful and determined were the peasant soldiers who held it. The north bank of the Tugela is formed by the southern edge of a mass of mountain terraces running out from the Drakensberg. In front of these natural ramparts the broad swift river serves as the ditch of the giant fortress of which the mountain spurs are the walls. The hillsides and the plain below had been furrowed with trenches. Barbed wire had been placed in the river bed, and the drifts had been made almost impassable by damming and deepening the Tugela. Hlangwane Hill, on the south bank, was held as an outwork of the main position from which the right of any force moving against the bridges and drifts near Colenso could be threatened.

Here is Mr. Burleigh's impression of the Boer position as he saw it from Chieveley Camp the day before the battle:—"There we were less than 5,000 yards south of Colenso and the Tugela. The puffing clouds of smoke and the dull roar from Mount Bulwan showed that Ladysmith was still being bombarded. Before us loomed dark and large Grobler's Hill, and the continuous ranges, foreground of meadow, brown ridge and background of hills, were scored with serried lines of Boer trenches punctuated with forts. Upon the right, crowning the rounded shoulder of a reddish foot-hill, was Fort Wylie, a small redoubt built before Colenso was evacuated. That, as well as their new works, was in occupation by the enemy. With characteristic astuteness the Boers were chary of disclosing their whereabouts. We knew that they had numerous camps behind the hills, and were in force before us. Occasionally a few horsemen could be seen cantering swiftly over the plain or making their way up the hill tracks. . . . Small groups also could be caught sight of through good glasses watching our movements from the remote hill-tops. There was a belief, entertained by not a few, but which I did not share, that the enemy would decline battle. The advantages were too much in their favour for that course."

The men were roused in the darkness on Friday morning. They had breakfasted before daylight, and at dawn they were marching out of the camp to take the places assigned to them

in the general scheme of the attack. It was a calm, cloudless morning, cold at first, but with fierce heat later when the sun began to go up the sky. The first shots were fired at a quarter to five. It was then just bright enough to make out the main features of the Boer position, and the two big 4.7 naval guns began shelling the Boer redoubt of Fort Wylie on the spur beyond the town. Until half-past five the two big guns fired slowly. It was then bright day, several other guns had been moved into position, and a general bombardment of the enemy's lines began, our fire being chiefly directed against the upper part of the kopjes. All the while there was no sight of the enemy, and the Boer guns were silent. It looked as if our artillery was practising against a mass of deserted ridges and hill-tops.

Meanwhile the troops were moving out to the attack. Burn-Murdoch, with the Royal Dragoons, rode away east of the camp to cover the right flank. The 13th Hussars turned off in the opposite direction to do the same work on the left. After Burn-Murdoch, Dundonald rode out with his thousand Mounted Rifles and Colonials, and six guns of the R.F.A., moving east of the railway towards Hlangwane Hill. More slowly, on Dundonald's left, Barton's four splendid Fusilier regiments—English, Irish, Scotch and Welsh—tramped along to form the right attack. After them came Long's batteries, with, in their rear, the teams of bullocks tugging at the heavier naval guns. On both sides of the railway Hildyard's English brigade was advancing to form the centre; and west of the railway Hart's Irish brigade was swinging along with a cheery, brisk step, eager to begin the fighting. Three more batteries were moving out to support Hart. Lyttelton's brigade of Rifles was in reserve.

The advance to the river was across an open level plain, extending from the base of the slope on which the camp had been pitched. The plain was cut up in places by dongas or water-courses, which gave the only important cover, minor protection being afforded here and there by clumps of low ant-hills.

The front on which the army advanced was about three miles long. It was supposed at the outset of the battle that our line was sufficiently extended to overlap that of the Boers on both flanks. It was discovered only as the fight developed that the enemy held a fortified line five miles long.

The first heavy fighting was on the British

left, where Hart was marching the Irish brigade down to the Tugela to force Bridle Drift. He moved forward much more rapidly than had been anticipated—so much so that the guns that were to cover his advance were not in action long enough to produce any impression on the enemy before his gallant infantry was thrust forward to the attack. For some strange reason they were not deployed as they approached the river. Perhaps General Hart expected to cross the ford without any serious opposition, and so kept his men in fours as the simplest way of moving them through a defile. They could deploy on the other bank. But excellent as this arrangement might be with an undefended ford, it was deadly for the men thus marched up in solid formation to the bank of the river, the margin and the opposite side of which bristled with hostile rifles. Hart had no complete sketch of the ground by which to direct his march. It is just possible that he had no idea he was so near the Tugela when he thus brought his men crowded together in fours within close range of the Boer Mausers. So defective were the maps that a flooded spruit, or backwater, was at first supposed to be the main stream of the river. The brigade was nearing its south bank when a roar of rifle fire and the crash of a Krupp gun came from the level river margin out in front and the hills beyond.

Men and officers fell fast under the sweeping rush of bullets. The order was given to deploy. The camp story afterwards was that the general ordered markers out to secure that the line should be formed with parade-ground regularity, but this was, one must hope, only a playful bit of soldier sarcasm on Hart's somewhat pedantic methods. One thing, however, is certain. Surprised by this sudden and deadly storm of hostile fire, the Irishmen did not show even a moment's unsteadiness. The Dublin and Iniskilling Fusiliers deployed rapidly into long firing lines, and pressed forward eagerly and cheerfully. Behind them in support came the Connaught Rangers.

Before following the further progress of the battle on the British left, let us see what was passing in the centre and on the right.

Hildyard's brigade had pushed forward towards Colenso on both sides of the railway line, the men moving in long extended lines, erect, with sloped arms, the advance looking for all the world like an Aldershot field day. "It is marvellous, but it is wasteful!" said the American military attaché as he watched the

movement. The Boers, who had taken no notice of our artillery fire, began to shell the advancing infantry. As they approached Colenso, rifle fire began in front. But most of it did not come from the hills beyond the Tugela, where the Boer riflemen were supposed to be entrenched, but from the houses of Colenso and from carefully concealed trenches on the level ground on our own side of the river, where the enemy's presence had not even been suspected. Hildyard's men had to clear the enemy out of these advanced works as a first step towards carrying out the task originally assigned them. They gradually forced their way to within 400 yards of the Boer trenches. Then there was a long check, the men lying down and firing at what was most of the time an absolutely invisible foe.

Further away to the right, Dundonald's mounted troops and battery, as they approached Hlangwane, came under the fire not of rifles only but also of guns placed in position and covered by entrenchments on the upper slope of the long, flat-topped hill. Between the right and centre, but much closer to the latter, Long had brought up his twelve R.A. field guns, followed by the six naval guns, dragged by ox teams with Kaffir drivers. Long had hitherto only been in action with artillery against uncivilised foes, and his theory as to the best way to get decisive results from his batteries was apparently based on that kind of experience. He believed in getting 'to 'close quarters. Mr. J. B. Atkins, the war correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, tells the story of the disaster to the batteries at Colenso so clearly and graphically that his words may be quoted here. The batteries were the 14th and 66th. They belonged to the brigade division of three batteries commanded by Colonel Hunt. The other battery, the 7th, had been detached with the mounted troops. Colonel Long, as Buller's artillery commander, had taken the personal direction of the batteries in the centre, so that he, and not Hunt, was responsible for the tactics employed.

"Colonel Long," writes Mr. Atkins, "as I know, for I travelled with him from England, had a theory, which was this—that you must get near to the enemy with your guns. 'The only way,' he used to say, 'to smash those beggars is to rush in at them.' I was not at Omdurman, where he commanded the artillery, but I know that at Colenso he had every opportunity to employ his theory. He chose to go

with the 14th and 66th Batteries, perhaps because on the east side of the railway he had the best opportunity of getting near the enemy. A long way down the plain he halted, and began to fire at Fort Wylie; but he was not near enough to fulfil the theory, and so Colonel Hunt, who commanded these two batteries, was ordered to limber up, and on the guns went. Colonel Long went with them. This time they halted about five hundred yards from a shelter trench on the south side of the river. Probably the trench was not visible to the batteries, but I could see it easily from my position below the

some deadly sirocco, and at the end of the half-hour there was silence there—at least, on our part; nearly every officer was wounded, the horses lay round dead in heaps."

The naval guns were crossing a donga, or watercourse, a little further back. As the sudden blast of fire opened on the R.F.A. batteries in front, the native drivers of the bullock teams bolted in a panic. The sailors, however, took charge of the teams. Two of the guns were got into action to the left rear of the field batteries; the others were stopped at the watercourse for awhile, and then with great difficulty dragged



FIRING ON COLENZO.

naval battery (*i.e.*, the battery of 4·7 guns on the hill near the camp). This trench was filled with Boers. Beyond was a hedge of trees, also filled with Boers; and beyond that the river banks—also filled with Boers. Colonel Long was still unlimbering in his new position, when—bang!—it was like the signal for a firework display to begin—a shell came down among the guns, and on the signal the air was instantly whipping and singing with bullets all round the gunners. Men and horses fell down just where they stood; the shells were nothing, but the air and ground were furious with bullets. British artillery has never been in a hotter place. If there be such a thing as an ambushade in the middle of a pitched battle, these batteries had run into one. For nearly half an hour the guns were served by men and officers, who seemed to melt down into the ground under

back out of it and brought into action on the south side of the hollow. Meanwhile Colonel Long and Colonel Hunt had both been badly wounded. For half an hour there was ammunition enough in the limbers to keep up a steady fire. Then, as the waggons had not come up, and no more shells were available, the guns were abandoned—it was hoped only for awhile—and what was left of the officers and men of the two batteries took shelter in a neighbouring donga, bringing back their wounded with them. This was at seven o'clock. It appears that it was the want of further ammunition rather than the accuracy of the Boer fire that disabled the guns, though, on the other hand, it must have been the Boer fire that prevented the arrival of the waggons coming up with a further supply of shells. The naval guns, 400 yards further back, kept in action for two hours and a



THE BATTLE OF COLLENSO: THE LOSS OF OUR GUNS.

half longer, and only lost four men. When they at last withdrew it was on General Buller's express order.

Hildyard's brigade had pushed its way over the trenches into Colenso. Some officers and men of the Queen's West Surrey had cleared the railway station of the Boers. On their left, Hart's brigade had fought its way up to the river's edge. They had crossed the first spruit, but then found that they had in front of them not an easy ford, but the river dammed up and flowing in most places ten feet deep. Where it was shallower the river bed was entangled with barbed wire. Some of the Dublin Fusiliers made a splendid attempt to get across. They plunged into the river, and some of the brave fellows, loaded down with their cartridges, sank and were drowned. It was in this advance up to the river's edge that little Bugler Dunn, of the Dublins, had his bugle knocked out of his hand by a bullet, and was hit and wounded in three places. He only left the ranks on an order from his officer, and walked back to the hospital. The heaviest losses in the Irish brigade were caused by a Boer gun cleverly concealed on the hill above Bridle Drift and firing smokeless powder. This hidden weapon sent a deadly shower of shells among the men who were lying thickly in the long grass by the river bank, replying to the rifle fire that came from the other side.

General Buller had made up his mind very early in the day that the attack was a failure. The collapse of the artillery in the centre was what chiefly led him to decide that the attempt must be abandoned. But first he wished an effort to be made to save the abandoned guns from falling into the hands of the enemy. Heedless of the storm of bullets and shells that swept the open ground on Hildyard's right, he rode down towards the river, accompanied by his staff and General Clery. The General dismounted on reaching the position of the naval battery. Three of the staff officers—Lieutenant Roberts, the son of the old Field-Marshal, who was acting as A.D.C. to Clery, Captain Scholfield, A.D.C. to Buller, and Captain Congreve, of the Rifle Brigade—rode out to save the guns. Teams were brought up from the ammunition waggons, and the little party, after having got together in the partial shelter of a donga, dashed out into the open. The Boers saw at once what was being attempted, and concentrated a terrible fire on the abandoned batteries. Young Roberts led the rush for the

guns. He carried a little cane in his hand, and, as he spurred his horse on, he whirled it above his head as if to cheer on the brave fellows who followed him. Three bullets struck him, and as he closed on the guns a bursting shell killed his horse. Congreve, who rode near him, had his clothes torn by bullets, and then was hit in the leg. Scholfield succeeded in hooking on two of the guns. By a wonderful piece of luck, none of the six drivers were hit, but several of the horses were wounded by bullets and shell fragments. Nevertheless, the poor beasts held on and got the guns away. If one of the horses had fallen the whole attempt might have been a failure. Scholfield, when he got safely back, was loud in his praise of the drivers, to whom he gave the full credit of the gallant deed. "I'll tell you how cool the drivers were," he said to a friend. "When I was hooking on one of the guns, one of the drivers said, 'Elevate the muzzle, sir'—that's a precaution for galloping in rough country. But I shouldn't have thought of it—not just then. Pretty cool, wasn't it?"

Still, ten guns remained out in the open. More than one effort was made to save them, but after the rescue of the first two guns nothing more could be done. Lord Dundonald sent Captain Reed, of the 7th Battery, to try to save one of the guns. Reed galloped in with a gun team, but half his horses were killed, and he got back with a bullet in his leg. Nevertheless, he remained in the saddle and wanted to have another try, but Dundonald forbade it. When he was praised by his comrades for the splendid but unsuccessful dash that he had made, he replied, "Nonsense; it was the drivers did the work."

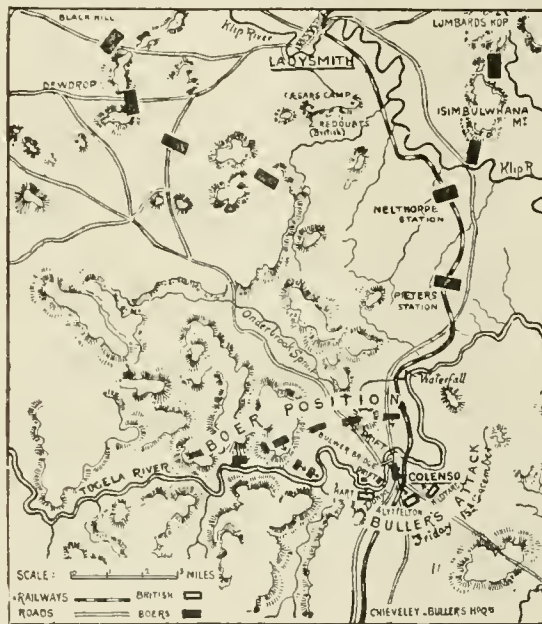
Congreve, though wounded himself, had gone back to the guns, and with the help of another officer, Major Baptie, R.A.M.C., had brought in young Roberts, who, after helping to hook on the rescued guns, had fallen exhausted with loss of blood. He was terribly wounded, and from the first there was little hope of saving him. Sir William MacCormac did all that was possible to save his life, but, after a brief rally, he died on the following Sunday evening. When the Victoria Cross was given to Congreve and Reed, a third Cross was allotted to Roberts. The Queen gave it with her own hands to his mother, Lady Roberts. She drove to the house where she was staying in the Isle of Wight, and just before leaving her said—"I have brought you something that you must not open till I am gone away," and handed her a little packet.

When, after the Queen's departure, Lady Roberts opened it, she found in it the bronze Cross "For Valour" which her son had won at Colenso, as her husband had won it more than forty years before in India.

Captain Scholfield was given the Distinguished Service Order instead of the Victoria Cross, on the ground that he had acted under orders and had not volunteered for the dangerous service. The D.S.O. was also given to the drivers. By a later order the Victoria Cross was given to Major Baptie for his devoted courage in helping the wounded.

But we must return to the story of the battle.

"This is no place for you, sir," said one of them. "No, I am all right here," was the brief reply. Clery, who was beside him, had also had a narrow escape. He was grazed by a Mauser bullet. Captain Hughes, R.A.M.C., the doctor attached to the staff, had been killed. Three other staff officers had been wounded. Others, again, had their horses shot. The dongas in rear of the abandoned guns were full of wounded, among whom the doctors were busy. Colonel Long had at first refused any help. To the doctor who came to him just after the guns were silenced, he said, "No, I can wait. There are many worse off than I am."



THE BATTLE OF COLENZO.

It was drawing on towards noon. Along the river the three brigades were exchanging fire with the Boers. The men and officers had recognised that they could not force their way across, but they had no thought of retreating. They held on grimly, hoping that at some point or another the Boers would be forced to give way. On the right, the mounted men had been forced to abandon the attack on Hlangwane, and Dundonald had to employ some of them to keep at bay a body of daring Boer riflemen who tried to turn his exposed flank. Buller was still well to the front in the centre. He had been struck in the side by a fragment of a Boer shell, and was suffering from the blow. His staff begged him to withdraw to a safer position.

At twelve, Clery, after consulting Buller, ordered the general retirement to begin. "I am afraid," he said, "that we must leave the guns." As the troops drew off, the Boers poured a heavy fire into them, and on the British right they attempted a final attack on Dundonald's troops. On the left, Hart's Irishmen marched back under fire with the same reckless disregard that they had shown during the advance in the morning. Some of them were smoking, others singing, and one of the war correspondents tells how they jestingly complained that the general had missed the way, and ought not to be taking them back to Chieveley.

Of the naval brigade, another correspondent,

Mr. J. B. Atkins, tells a characteristic story. "When the general retirement was ordered," he says, "one of those hearty naval souls thought, on reflection, that retirement was not for him. He slipped away, picked up a rifle, and filled his pouches with ammunition. He trudged along towards the river, and at last selected a spot which suited his modest requirements—a little comfort and reasonable shelter. His officer did not see him again till nightfall, when he came into camp tired, hot, very foot-sore, hungry and thirsty. He had fired away all his pouches of ammunition, and then had trudged home alone, long after the retirement was over. 'I haven't had such a good day,' he said with simple feeling, as he dropped worn out to the ground, 'not for a very long while.'"

Numbers of other men, and with them many officers, had remained near the river when the retirement was ordered. Some of them were not aware till too late that the movement had begun. Others were taking care of wounded comrades. The Boers, who had reoccupied Colenso, now began to move right and left along the south bank of the river, and made most of these small detachments prisoners. Colonel Bullock, of the Devons, with some of his men and a handful of gunners, were left in a donga near the lost guns. They kept under cover, doing what they could to alleviate the sufferings of the wounded, a large number of whom had been collected in the hollow. The firing had gradually ceased, and one of the Devons, about half-past three, crept up to the edge of the donga and reported that a number of Boers were among the guns. Some shots were fired at them by Bullock's men, and they retreated. Presently a Boer approached the donga and called out that if firing was resumed he and his people would have to reply, and that they were surrounding the spot and the wounded would suffer from the fusillade. Some stretchers were coming up from the British side. The situation hardly allowed of any defence being made, for the donga was more like a hospital than anything else. While the stretchers were being brought into the hollow the Boers showed themselves on all sides. They called on Bullock to surrender, and he refused. They evidently admired his pluck and were anxious to save his life. They might have easily shot him; but instead of this, while he was defying one party of Boers another slipped up behind him, and he was knocked down with a rifle-butt and disarmed. Most of the officers and men with him were made prisoners; but

some were allowed to go away, helping to carry off the wounded. In one case an Irish officer protested to a Boer leader that he had only allowed him to approach because he thought that there was an informal truce to assist the wounded. He therefore argued that he ought not to be made a prisoner. The Boer, after a moment's reflection, said good-humouredly, "Well, I don't know that it is my business to watch you. I shall turn my back for a minute to attend to other things, and if you go it's no affair of mine." So the officer reached Chieveley camp a free man.

The day had been fearfully hot, and the soldiers returned to camp wearied and exhausted with their fruitless exertions. The losses had been heavy. For the whole army they amounted to 1,048 officers and men. The following is an analysis of the casualties:—

	KILLED.	WOUNDED.	MISSING.	TOTALS.
Officers ...	9	77	16	102
Men ...	42	699	204	945
Totals ...	51	776	220	1,047

The heaviest losses had fallen on Hart's Irish brigade. The killed, wounded, and missing of the three battalions that tried to force Bridle Drift made up nearly half the total loss on the whole battlefield. The plain record of the figures shows how persistently the Irish battalions tried to close with the enemy:—

	KILLED.	WOUNDED.	MISSING.	TOTALS.
Inniskilling Fusiliers...	19	88	8	115
Connaught Rangers ...	24	104	25	153
Dublin Fusiliers ...	39	151	28	218
Totals ...	82	343	61	486

Of the missing all were not prisoners; some were drowned in their attempts to struggle through the deep water over the dammed-up drift.

Of the other infantry brigades Hildyard's English brigade came next in the roll of losses. It had 12 killed, 187 wounded, and 36 missing—235 casualties in all. The losses of Barton's and Lyttelton's brigades were comparatively trifling. Throughout the small proportion of killed and wounded is very remarkable. It was the result of the Boers using the small-bore Mauser, the bullet of which, about as thick as a blacklead pencil, seldom inflicted really serious injury.

In his official despatch, Sir Redvers Buller attributed the loss of the battle to the destruction of Long's two batteries. "We had closed

in on the enemy's works," he writes, "our troops were in favourable position for an assault, and had I, at the critical moment, had at my disposal the artillery I had, as I believed, arranged for, I think we should have got in. But without the immediate support of guns, I considered that it would be a reckless waste of gallant lives to attempt the assault."

that was based on defective and misleading information. No one knew that the enemy was entrenched on the south bank near Colenso, that Hlangwane was strongly held, and that the drifts had been dammed up and obstructed. Yet this information could have been obtained by proper scouting and by using native spies. For want of it, to use the expression of one of



THE COUNTRY SOUTH OF LADYSMITH.

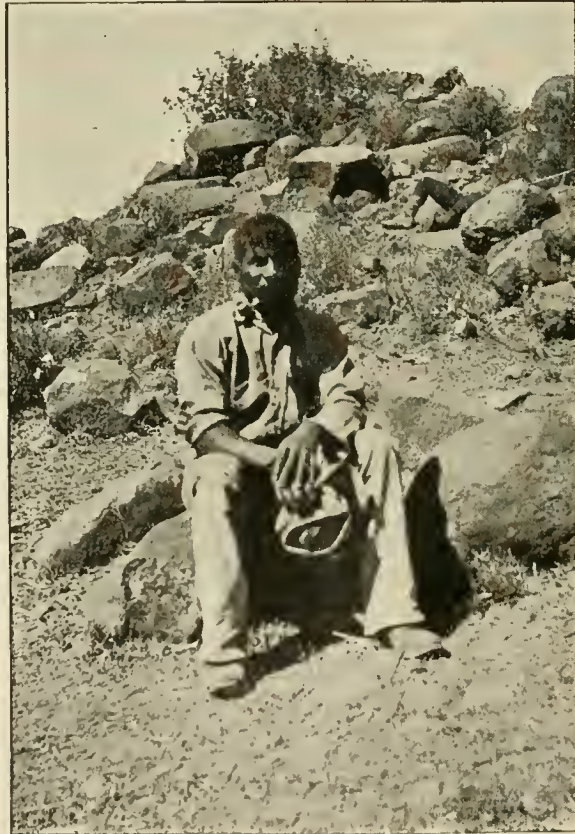
It is not easy to understand what General Buller meant by saying that the troops were in a favourable position for an assault. They had only driven the enemy from part of his advanced trenches on the south bank, and between them and the enemy's main position lay the Tugela River, with its drifts entangled with barbed wire or dammed up so as to be impassable. The loss of the guns made the situation worse, but this incident was not the cause of the battle being lost. It was lost because it was fought on a plan

Buller's officers, "the army was marched into the jaws of death."

One of the foreign officers serving with the Boers tells something of the impression made by the attack in a letter which he wrote to his friends in Germany. He so fully realised that an advance against the drifts near Colenso was hopeless, that when from the heights on the north bank of the Tugela he saw Hildyard's and Hart's brigades approaching the river, he thought it must surely be a false attack, and

that the real attack would develop from the British right against Hlangwane. The Boers realised that Hlangwane was the weak point of their position. As was proved, more than two months later, when Buller at last forced the passage of the Tugela, the first step was to get possession of the heights south of the river, and bring artillery up to them to attack the hills on the north bank. On the morning of the battle of Colenso the Boer leaders thought that this must be Buller's object. Accordingly, they strongly garrisoned Hlangwane, and this was how they were able to spare men to throw forward a counter attack against Dundonald's right flank, which forced him first to stay his advance

and then to retire. On the hills above the drifts and in the trenches near Colenso the Boers had only about half the force that was present on the scene of action. They were greatly struck by the daring displayed by officers and men in trying to recover the guns. Their own losses during the day were trifling, and they were astonished at the ease with which the victory had been won. They had kept a considerable force watching Ladysmith, but the garrison made no attempt to break out and co-operate with Buller. The besieged were doubtless waiting till the advance of the relieving army should have made some progress north of the Tugela.



A TYPICAL "CAFE BOY."

CHAPTER XV.

NEW MEN AND NEW PLANS.

THE news of the disaster at Colenso reached London shortly after midnight, and was published in next morning's papers. It was conveyed in a short official telegram from General Buller, in which he told plainly the essential facts. The news came as a severe shock to the country. A single week had brought tidings of three defeats, each more serious than its predecessor. After Gatacre's defeat at Stormberg, and Methuen's at Magersfontein, there was still a general feeling in England that Buller could not fail, and that when he advanced he would strike a blow that would more than compensate for the losses that had been incurred in other parts of the theatre of war. The very existence of this confidence in the commander-in-chief in South Africa made the blow more crushing. The loss of the guns especially seemed to mark the exceptional gravity of the disaster. It was more than a hundred years since so many of these treasured trophies had been left in an enemy's hands by a British army.

But the effect of the blow, heavy as it was, and all the heavier for being utterly unexpected, was not to cause discouragement. Rather it brought home to Government and people alike the full seriousness of the struggle in which the nation was engaged. Till now there had been a disposition to underrate the effort that would be required to bring it to a successful conclusion. Offers of service made by the volunteers, the yeomanry, and the militia had been refused, sometimes with scant official courtesy. Only a few days before this week of disasters a distinguished general officer, speaking at a volunteer gathering in London, had referred to the offers of men for the front made by Sir Howard Vincent and others as savouring of impertinence. They were quite uncalled for, he said; the regular army would soon show that it was capable of finishing a little campaign like this without the help of those whose proper and useful sphere was that of home defence.

But now a sudden change came over the attitude of the Government. The Defence

Committee of the Cabinet met on Saturday, the day after the lost battle. Its decisions were communicated to the Press on the Sunday evening, and were read with keen satisfaction by the whole country on the Monday morning. The first great step was a change in the supreme command in South Africa. The public confidence in Buller as commander-in-chief of our armies at the seat of war had been shaken and all but destroyed. When he embarked for the Cape his appointment had been regarded as a presage of victory. It was expected that after a brief campaign he would return to England to be rewarded with a peerage, associated with the capture of Pretoria. But two months of war had shown a record of vacillation and defeat. It was felt that he should be replaced by a leader in whom the army in the field and the public at home would repose the confidence that he had forfeited.

There were two generals whose names were certain to be popular with both: the veteran Field-Marshal Lord Roberts of Kandahar, and one of the youngest of our generals, Lord Kitchener of Khartoum. Roberts had been named for the chief command in South Africa on the morrow of Majuba. He had arrived at the Cape only to learn that peace had been arranged and the independence of the Transvaal restored. Now, nineteen years later, and at an age at which for most men active service is over, he was called upon to accept the same mission under more arduous conditions. For him, personally, the circumstances were peculiarly pathetic. On the Saturday he heard not only of the disaster to the British arms, but also of the fatal wound received by his only son. On the Sunday, when the old Field-Marshal received the formal offer of the South African command, that son was dying in the field hospital at Chieveley. Kitchener was the most popular of the younger generals. In Egypt and the Soudan he had won the reputation of a successful fighting general and of an organiser and administrator of exceptional ability. He was actually at Khartoum when the cable brought him the news that he was appointed chief-of-

the-staff to Lord Roberts in South Africa. He had just seen his work as a soldier in the Soudan completed by the defeat and death of the Khalifa. He handed over the command to Sir Francis Wingate, and started for Cairo by the desert railway.

Having provided for the chief command, the next steps taken by the Cabinet were directed to the provision of large reinforcements for the army at the front. When the news of Magersfontein arrived, the mobilisation of the Seventh Division, under General Tucker, had been ordered. There were already forty-six battalions of militia embodied to replace in the home garrisons regular battalions serving abroad. Eight more battalions were called out, and it was announced that several battalions would be given the opportunity of serving in the Mediterranean garrisons and at the seat of war. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand had already provided contingents for active service. When they were accepted, the Home Government had informed the Colonial Governments that as sufficient cavalry would be provided from

the regular army, only infantry should be sent from the Colonies to Africa. But an unsuccessful campaign against the Boer army, consisting almost entirely of mounted infantry, had shown the lack of wisdom that had dictated this restriction. The new contingents were to be made up entirely of mounted men and artillery. Guns and gunners had already been offered by the Colonies and rejected. These offers were now accepted. It was arranged that Canada should send 1,000 mounted infantry and three batteries; Australia another 1,000 and a battery, and New Zealand 200 mounted men and four Hotchkiss guns. Another step towards the provision of mounted men was taken at home by calling for the enrolment of some thousands

of "Imperial Yeomanry." These were to be enrolled first by taking such of the existing yeomanry as would volunteer for service at the front, and secondly by enlisting men who could ride and shoot, even though they had as yet no military training. They were not required to wear any regular uniform. Riding breeches and Norfolk jacket of any dull colour, a broad-leafed hat, and a bandolier would be their fighting costume. At first 5,000 were asked for; but so ready was the response that many thousands more were enrolled and equipped. They were to serve, not as cavalry, but as mounted infantry, and they were armed with rifles and organised in battalions of four strong companies each.

Yet another source of rapid recruiting was found by calling on the volunteers to supply from each existing corps a full company at war strength to be attached to the territorial battalion serving at the front. The volunteers had existed for forty years without seeing active service. In the month of June, before the war, some 20,000 of the London volunteers had been reviewed by the Prince of Wales on the Horse Guards

parade ground. The military spectators were struck by the soldierly bearing of the men, and the skill with which they were led past the saluting point in a narrow space where the battalions had to rapidly change their formation twice within a couple of hundred yards. But next day more than one of the newspapers expressed regret that this fine body of armed men was debarred by its very constitution from firing a shot in defence of the Empire except in the remote, or, as many held, impossible, contingency of an invasion. No one expected that within a few months many of the men and officers who marched past the Prince of Wales on that summer afternoon would be fighting side by side with the regular army in South Africa.



FIELD-MARSHAL LORD ROBERTS, K.P., V.C.
(Photo: Messrs. Robinson & Son, Dublin.)

This appeal to the volunteer force led to a very remarkable development. On the Monday on which the Government proposals were published, the Lord Mayor of London, Mr. Alderman Newton, suggested that action should be taken on lines originally proposed at the outset of the war by Sir Howard Vincent, the Colonel of the Queen's Westminster Volunteers, and a complete battalion of picked officers and men formed from the volunteer corps of the metropolis. His proposal was adopted by the City Corporation, which passed a resolution to provide the necessary funds for the equipment of the battalion and its transport to Africa, and the generous offer was accepted by the War Office. A committee at the Mansion House carried out the organisation and equipment of the new corps, General Turner giving his services as military adviser. At first it was intended to send out only a battalion of infantry; but a detachment of mounted infantry was added, and then a battery of four Vickers-Maxim quick-firing field guns. The men and officers were provided by drawing contingents from all the volunteer corps in London. The new corps was known as the City of London Imperial Volunteers, a name usually shortened to "The C.I.V." Colonel W. H. Mackinnon, of the Guards, was given the post of commandant, and under him Colonel the Earl of Albemarle, of the Civil Service Rifles, commanded the infantry battalion, Colonel Cholmondeley, of the London Rifle Brigade, the mounted infantry, and Major McMiking, of the Honourable Artillery Company, the battery of quick-firers. Within three weeks of the call for volunteers the first detachment of the C.I.V. had embarked.

Howitzer batteries and detachments of engineers and other departmental corps were also

sent to Africa as reinforcements. All through January and February there was a steady stream of embarkations. Men of all classes vied with each other in their eagerness to be accepted for service at the front, and in every town in England there were scenes of patriotic enthusiasm as volunteers or yeomen departed for embarkation. There was no volunteer organisation in Ireland, but there also several corps of yeomanry for the front were rapidly raised.

In the month of January it was decided to mobilise another regular division under the command of Sir Leslie Rundle, who had acted as chief-of-staff to Lord Kitchener during the campaigns for the reconquest of the Soudan. So many regiments had now been ordered to Africa that the home garrison of regular troops, excluding untrained recruits and men rejected as unfit for active service, had been reduced to a few thousands. Nearly all the cavalry and the fully manned and horsed batteries of artillery were abroad. To provide troops for the war, a militia battalion had been ordered to replace one of the regular bat-



MAJOR-GENERAL LORD KITCHENER.

(Photo: G. Lekegian & Co., Cairo.)

talions in our army of occupation in Egypt, and militia had also taken the place of regulars at Malta and Gibraltar. It was felt that in view of the possibility of foreign complications during the war, and especially when the final settlement approached, this was a dangerous state of things. Accordingly, when Parliament met, the Government announced that besides arming the volunteer artillery with modern guns, and calling out the whole force for a period of training in the summer, steps would be taken to encourage recruiting for the volunteers and yeomanry, the whole of the militia would be embodied, and, most important of all, a large body of old soldiers who had

passed through the reserve would be invited to rejoin temporarily and serve for twelve months in "Royal Reserve Battalions," specially enrolled for home defence only during the crisis. A bounty of £22 was to be paid to each of these veterans as compensation for giving up their civil employment.

The general result of the steps taken by the Government was that the army in South Africa would be raised to over 200,000 men. No such numbers had ever before in our history been at one time under the command of a British general. If, twelve months before, anyone had spoken of Britain placing so large an army in the field, and that, too, in a distant theatre of war, the idea would have been rejected as the idle dream of a military enthusiast. It would have seemed still more unworthy of serious attention if it had been suggested that this enormous display of force would have to be made to overcome the resistance of a couple of small republics, with armies composed of a levy *en masse* of farmers.

Lord Roberts left England to take command of this great army on Saturday, December 23rd. Lord Kitchener had hurried down the Nile to Cairo, bade farewell to the Khedive, and then gone on to Alexandria, where he embarked on board the cruiser that was to convey him to Gibraltar; there he was to join Lord Roberts, the *Dunottar Castle*—the Cape liner on which the new commander-in-chief had embarked—going out of her usual course for the purpose.

Lord Kitchener arrived at Gibraltar in the cruiser *Dido* on the morning of the winter day on which Lord Roberts arrived on the *Dunottar Castle*. It was after dark when the huge liner ran into the roadstead below the Rock. A correspondent of the *Morning Post* who was on board the steamer gives a striking account of the dramatic meeting that followed.

"We had sent," he says, "by signal a wire from Cape St. Vincent to Gibraltar to announce the time of our arrival, and while the port officers were still investigating our respectability a gunboat's launch came sliding out to us from beyond the Mole to determine our identity, and a quarter of an hour later another white shape emerged from the darkness with a little group of men in the stern—some in naval uniforms, some in their big Soudan helmets and khaki, some, the Sirdar among them, in evening dress.

"We are a people that omits, if possible, every sort of pageant. The brevity and brusqueness of our salutations are due to our dislike for any kind of show. The Sirdar ran up the companion steps, dropped an exclamation and a name on two or three of the men standing about the gangway, and disappeared into the saloon. That was the fashion in which the most fêted of our generals set his foot in the South African tangle which has obscured so many reputations. There was no official welcome, no guard of honour, no salute. The bluejackets, who might have furnished them, were sleeping peacefully. They do these things differently in other countries. There would have been full dress uniforms, illuminations, and a band of music on such an occasion elsewhere. But our way is, if undramatic, at least significant of our methods and ambitions. We have business ideas of success. It is achievement that attracts us—the solid result. We have little liking for splendid circumstance; we endure pomps dutifully, conceiving them in the order of unavoidable things; but they bore us, and we do them badly. There are people so constituted that they desire a costume for every occasion, even were it but to rob an orchard. We, on the contrary, are somewhat uncouthly indifferent to decorative effects. But there is something dramatic even in that indifference.

"It would hardly have been possible to find two men wider apart in almost every characteristic than the new commander-in-chief in South Africa and his chief-of-the-staff. Lord Roberts is small, as all know, slight, almost delicate; a Celt, with Celtic quickness and fineness of appreciation. He has won success by an imaginative swiftness of decision, which has foreseen his opponents' moves as swiftly and certainly as the possibilities of his own. Lord Kitchener is big of bone and muscle, a Saxon, with the Saxon heaviness of appearance and determination. His victories have been won by a slow, unshakable maturity of resolve, less by intuition of his enemy's plans than by the overpowering completeness of his own."

There was the briefest of delays at Gibraltar before the liner was again steaming south. She called at Madeira on December 28th, and on January 10th Lord Roberts landed at Cape Town.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MILITARY POSITION AT THE CLOSE OF THE YEAR.

AFTER the week of disasters, which included the three defeats of Stormberg, Magersfontein, and Colenso, there was a lull in the operations in South Africa. The only district where any marked activity was displayed was in the country along the railway south of Colesberg, where General French, with a force chiefly made up of cavalry and horse artillery, was engaged in checking the advance of the Boers. So inactive were the commanders elsewhere that there was a report that the Government at home had ordered the commanders at the front to engage in no further operations till Lord Roberts reached the Cape and took over the general direction of the campaign.

On the night after the battle of Colenso General Buller had withdrawn the greater part of his army from Chieveley Camp to Frere. Even at Chieveley the troops fell back some distance in order to be safe from annoyance by the long-ranging Boer guns. For two days the news of the reverse and the subsequent retirement was concealed from public knowledge in Natal and in Cape Colony. The telegrams from home were carefully censored. Even the appointment of Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener was not allowed to be known at the Cape for more than a week after it had been published in England. The change of commanders was such a confession of failure that the effect of it upon the Dutch population was dreaded by the Government. At Durban on the day after Colenso a call came from the front for more ambulance volunteers. They started by train that day, Saturday. On Sunday morning they reached Chieveley. All the way up they heard nothing of the battle. They thought they had been called up to the front in preparation for a general engagement. At Chieveley the camp seemed peaceful enough. A sergeant walked up to the train and said, "We are glad to see you. We want you fellows badly. We have fought and lost the biggest battle of the war." The ambulance men laughed at him, and told him it was no good trying to take them in. A quarter of an hour

later they were at work among the wreck of the lost battle in which they had refused to believe.

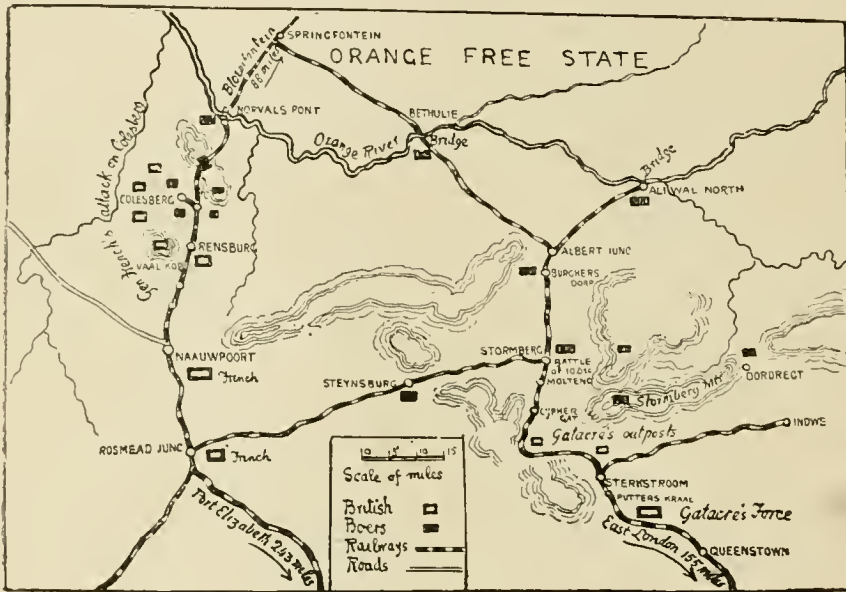
Emboldened by a success that had gone far beyond their utmost expectations, the Boers on the Monday began to show themselves more aggressive. Mounted parties of raiders appeared east and west of the railway, some of them well south of Chieveley, and it was thought that they would make a serious attempt to cut the communications of Buller's army. Strong mounted patrols were sent out from our camps to deal with them, and there were numerous minor encounters in which, for the most part, the Boer's singular aptitude for such guerilla warfare stood him in good stead. But the raiding was checked, even though in this campaign of skirmishes the superior "slimness" of the Boers enabled them to make a few of our patrols prisoners.

After a few days, the heavy naval 4.7 guns, which had been withdrawn after the battle, were again placed in position in front of Chieveley camp, and daily sent a few shells into the Boer positions. The object of this daily bombardment was to prevent the Boers working while the sun was up in strengthening their entrenchments. There was also occasional artillery firing at night. There was some "sniping" with rifles between the outposts along the front, but it was very seldom that the Boer artillery made any answer to our guns.

The Boers were known to be strengthening themselves on Hlangwane, and it was also ascertained that they were sending out strong parties to their right to prepare the passages of the Upper Tugela for defence. They even crossed the river in this district, and occupied the bridge at Springfield over the Little Tugela and the Zwarte Kop heights in rear of it. This was the general position of affairs in Natal at the end of the year. The two armies were watching each other, and the Boers were preparing to resist a new attempt to relieve Ladysmith, which they foresaw would not be by another frontal attack, but by a turning movement. And they rightly conjectured that this movement would be made across the Upper Tugela.

The Ladysmith garrison was annoyed by an irregular bombardment, and the decreasing supplies, the outbreak of sickness, and the bad condition of the horses were reducing it to such a state that there was little prospect of Sir George White being able to do much to cooperate with a future attempt to relieve him. The action of the garrison was now confined to the defence of its extended lines. There was a general belief that its capacity for this work would not be put to any very severe test, as everyone said that whatever the Boers might do they would never venture upon an assault.

Rensburg and Arundel. French had assembled his column at Naauwpoort junction. Early in December he pushed on to Arundel, the Boers retiring on Rensburg after a short skirmish. The country northwards to Colesberg is a plain, broken by numerous groups and ranges of kopjes, volcanic hills that rise sharply and suddenly from the level ground, often in sheer precipices. Many of them are flat-topped—repetitions of Table Mountain on a smaller scale. De Wet, who commanded at Colesberg, made an attempt to manœuvre French out of Arundel, not venturing on a direct attack, but trying to



SCENE OF THE OPERATIONS IN THE NORTH OF CAPE COLONY.

Early in the new year it was seen that on this point everyone was wrong.

General Gatacre, at Sterkstroom camp, had since the Stormberg reverse been able only to provide for the defence of the district round his camp. Numbers of the farmers had joined the Boers, and he had to devote his energies to keeping the insurrectionary movement within bounds, holding the railhead against the enemy and keeping open his communications. General French, who commanded further west, on the Port Elizabeth and Norval's Pont railway line, was able to be more active. He had a larger proportion of mounted troops in his force, and the country was more open and better suited for the action of cavalry and horse artillery. The Boers in his front held Colesberg town and junction in force, with advanced posts at

work round his flank and cut the railway behind him. This led to some sharp fighting on December 13th.

"That morning," writes an officer who took part in the affair, "an officer's patrol, sent out before dawn, reported that a large party of Boers were attempting to work round our right flank. The report was received at four in the morning. The alarm was sounded and the troops were formed up under Colonel Porter, of the Carbineers. They consisted of a battery Royal Horse Artillery (four guns), Carbineers, two squadrons of the Inniskillings, one and a half squadrons 10th Hussars, two companies of Mounted Infantry, and two squadrons of Colonials. The battery took up a position, from which it shelled the kopjes held by the enemy with two guns. The other guns shelled the

large kopje on the left front. One squadron of the Inniskillings was ordered to hold a hill on the right flank to protect the battery. The Carbineers and the 10th Hussars were sent away south to stop the Boers working round our rear. The Boers, seeing their plans checked, retired northwards again, and contented themselves with occupying the kopjes on our right flank, where they were held in check by the Carbineers and Hussars, who dismounted and drove the enemy from the first row of kopjes to a second row. The Boers then opened fire with two 7-pounder field guns on our battery from the low ground to the left front, but were silenced after firing three or four rounds. These guns opened fire again at intervals of an hour, but only succeeded in getting in one shot, when our guns silenced them again. The Boers, about ten o'clock, succeeded in drawing one of their 'Long Toms' on to a kopje straight behind their field guns, at about 3,000 yards' range from the battery. It managed to fire three shots without doing any damage, when it was silenced and never opened fire again. Our other two guns were busy shelling the other Boer positions all day long, and silenced two 7-pounders. They were assisted by the dismounted fire of the Carbineers and 10th Hussars with Maxim guns.

Two squadrons of the Inniskillings were kept mounted to try and cut off the enemy's retreat. At 3 p.m., the Boers, finding our fire too heavy for them, commenced to retire, and an hour later they were in full retreat. On account of the broken ground, it was impossible to cut them off. The engagement lasted twelve hours, and the enemy's losses have since been ascertained from a deserter to be between forty and fifty, while those on our side were very much smaller. The Boers numbered 1,800. The Colonials were protecting the other side of the camp and did not come into action."

The British losses were, one officer (Captain Moseley, 6th Dragoons) wounded, and of the rank and file one man killed and six wounded in the 6th Dragoons (Inniskillings), and two men wounded in the 10th Hussars. The action was typical of much of the fighting on this part of

the northern border. This and other affairs of the same kind were described in the press telegrams as important victories; but they were really little better than desultory skirmishing. It will be observed that this fight on December 13th lasted in all about twelve hours. During that time there were nine casualties on the British side, or one, on an average, every hour and twenty minutes. On the other side, according to a deserter, the loss was from forty to fifty. Deserters usually say what they think will please their new friends, so the loss was probably much smaller; but even taking it at fifty, we have four casualties an hour. The Boers, on their part, appear to have been fairly well satisfied with the day's work. They had worried the British, drawn their fire, and kept them active for a long day. Then they had got away without giving the cavalry a chance to cut in upon them. The silencing of the guns mentioned frequently in the letter that has been quoted did not always mean that the gun was put out of action. The Boer artillerist has ways of his own. He brings his gun into action, fires a few shots, and as soon as he thinks the enemy is beginning to find out where it is, he moves it off to another point, and tries a few more shots.



MAJOR ROBIN.

(In command of New Zealand Mounted Rifles.)

Having repulsed the Boer attack on the 13th, French concentrated all his available force at Arundel and prepared to attempt the capture of Colesberg. For the next fortnight there was almost continual skirmishing between the British and the Boers, and some ground was gained, though no great progress was made till the end of the month. French had been sent as reinforcements some of the Colonial Mounted Volunteers. On December 18th the New Zealanders had their first fight, and particularly distinguished themselves. French thus relates the incident in his official despatch:—

"On December 18th I took out the New Zealand Mounted Rifles, under Major A. W. Robin, with a battery of Horse Artillery, to reconnoitre round the enemy's left flank, and I determined to dislodge him from a farm called Jassfontein, lying on his left rear. The guns

shelled the farm, and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles then gained possession of it. But the enemy very suddenly brought up strong reinforcements and pressed on us with his artillery. Our artillery had been left some way behind to avoid this latter fire, and I had to send back some distance for its support, during which time we were exposed to a heavy musketry fire from the surrounding hills. The conduct of the New Zealanders was admirable in thus maintaining a difficult position till the artillery caused the enemy to retire."

Under pressure of French's continually harassing tactics, the Boers in Christmas week fell back upon the hills round Colesberg. They completed their retirement on December 20th. French followed them up, and the opening of the New Year saw some sharp fighting.

On the western border of the Free State Lord Methuen held his entrenched camp at the Modder River, and worried the Boers with frequent bombardments and an occasional show of a reconnaissance in force. Long sidings were laid down at the railhead by the river. Large barrack huts were built. Stores were accumulated. On the other side the Boers were steadily digging and quarrying, extending their lines, throwing up new works, cutting deep trenches in the solid rock. By the end of the year they had twenty miles of works completed, stretching from the river bank at Jacobsdal on the left to near Koodoesberg on the right. Behind the lines the flash-lights of Kimberley flickered at night, and sent their messages to Modder camp, telling that the Diamond City was still holding out bravely, but anxious for early relief. The story of its successful resistance will be told in a later chapter.

Still further north, Colonel Baden-Powell and his little band of Colonials kept the flag flying at Mafeking. Colonel Plumer, after harrying the Transvaal border near Tuli with his Rhodesian mounted riflemen, had left a small post to hold Tuli fort, and had moved all the men he could spare to the railway line. Two armoured trains had been equipped in the railway workshops at Buluwayo, and Plumer with these and his small column began to move down the line to try to assist Baden-Powell. The line had been torn

up by the Boers, and every culvert had been destroyed. As the trains advanced the line had to be repaired, so progress was very slow. The Boers skirmished with the advancing column. It was not till the New Year that Plumer approached Mafeking.

The year closed with, on the whole, a record of failure for the British arms. Three garrisons were invested by the Boers. The relief columns had been stopped on the way to Ladysmith and Kimberley. There were a few fruitless victories, more than balanced by defeats that had left thousands of prisoners and a score of captured guns in the hands of the enemy. But the despatch of the new reinforcements, and the appointment of Roberts and Kitchener, gave good hope that the tide would soon turn. In an earlier chapter we have given the organisation of the British forces in South Africa at the outset of the war. It will make the subsequent narrative clearer if we now give it as it stood at the close of the year:—

LADYSMITH GARRISON.

FOURTH DIVISION.

GENERAL SIR GEORGE WHITE.

Seventh Brigade: 1st Devons, 1st Gloucesters, 1st Manchesters, 2nd Gordon Highlanders.

Eighth Brigade: 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers, 1st Leicesters, 1st King's Royal Rifles, 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

Not brigaded: 1st Liverpool Regiment, 2nd Rifle Brigade.

Cavalry and Mounted Infantry.

5th Dragoon Guards, 5th Royal Irish Lancers 18th and 10th Hussars, Imperial Light Horse Natal Light Horse, Natal Carbineers.

Artillery.

13th, 21st, 42nd, 53rd, 67th, and 60th R.F.A. (36 guns); two guns of the 10th Mountain Battery; Natal Volunteer battery; naval brigade, with two 47 guns and six 12-pounders.

LADYSMITH RELIEF FORCE (Chieveley and Frere Camps).

GENERAL SIR REDVERS BULLER.

Second (English) Brigade, General Hildyard: 2nd Devons, 2nd West Yorkshire, 2nd West Surrey, 2nd East Surrey.



SIR CHARLES WARREN.

(Photo: Messrs. Bassano, Old Bond Street, W.)

Fourth (Rifles) Brigade, General Lyttelton : 2nd Scottish Rifles (Cameronians), 1st Durham Light Infantry, 3rd King's Royal Rifles, 1st Rifle Brigade.

Fifth (Irish) Brigade, General Hart : 1st Inniskilling Fusiliers, 1st Connaught Rangers, 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers, 1st Borderers (to replace 2nd Royal Irish Rifles, detached to General Gatacre's command).

Sixth (Fusilier) Brigade, General Barton : 2nd Royal Fusiliers, 1st Royal Welsh Fusiliers, 2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers, 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers.

On the line of communications : 2nd Somerset Light Infantry, 2nd King's Royal Rifles, Durban Light Infantry, Natal Rifles.

Cavalry and Mounted Infantry.
(Lord Dundonald.)

1st Royal Dragoons, 12th Lancers, detachment Imperial Light Horse, Bethune's Mounted Infantry, Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry.

Artillery.

7th, 14th, 17th, 64th, 66th and 73rd R.F.A. (30 guns, less 10 lost at Colenso, but soon to be replaced); naval brigade, with two 47 guns and six 12-pounders.

REINFORCEMENTS FOR GENERAL BULLER ARRIVING IN NATAL.

FIFTH DIVISION.

GENERAL SIR CHARLES WARREN.

Tenth Brigade, General Coke : 2nd Warwicks, 2nd Dorsets, 2nd Middlesex. (The 1st Yorks, belonging to this brigade, were detached to reinforce General French at Arundel.)

Eleventh (Lancashire) Brigade, General Woodgate : 2nd Royal Lancaster, 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, 1st South Lancashire, 1st York and Lancashire.

Cavalry.

14th Hussars.

Artillery.

10th, 20th, and 28th R.F.A. Some guns of the siege train were also on the way up to Chieveley.

KIMBERLEY RELIEF FORCE (Modder River Camp).

GENERAL LORD METHUEN.

First (Guards) Brigade, General Sir H. Colville : 3rd Grenadier Guards, 1st and 2nd Coldstream Guards, 1st Scots Guards.

Third (Highland) Brigade, General Hector Macdonald : 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 2nd Royal Highlanders, 2nd Seaforth Highlanders, 1st Highland Light Infantry.

Ninth Brigade (formed out of line of communication troops), General Pole-Carew : 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry, 2nd Northampton.

Not brigaded, employed chiefly on line of communication between Modder Camp and the Orange River : 1st Gordon Highlanders, half battalion 1st North Lancashire Regiment, detachment 1st Royal Munster Fusiliers, and Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Volunteers.

Cavalry.

6th Dragoons, 12th Lancers, Rimington's Scouts, N.S.W. Lancers, and detachments British Mounted Infantry.

Artillery.

G and P Batteries R.H.A., 18th, 62nd, and 75th Batteries R.F.A., a howitzer battery, some heavy guns of the siege train, and a naval brigade with two 47 guns.

STERKSTROOM CAMP, CAPE COLONY.—GENERAL SIR W. GATACRE'S FORCE.

Infantry.

2nd Royal Irish Rifles, 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers, 1st Royal Scots, 2nd Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, half battalion 2nd Berkshires, Prince Alfred's Guards (Volunteers), Grahamstown Volunteers.

Cavalry and Mounted Infantry.

Detachments of 12th Lancers and South African Horse, Brabant's Horse, and British Mounted Infantry.

Artillery.

74th, 77th and 79th R.F.A. and Cape Mountain Battery.

ARUNDEL, CAPE COLONY.—GENERAL FRENCH'S FORCE.

Infantry.

1st Yorks, 1st Suffolks, half battalion 2nd Berkshires.

Cavalry.

Household Cavalry, 6th (Inniskilling) Dragoons, 6th Dragoon Guards (Carabiniers), 10th Hussars, 16th Lancers, New Zealand Mounted Rifles.



GENERAL BARTON.

(Photo: Debenham & Smith, Southampton.)

South African Mounted Volunteers, and Rimington's Scouts.

Artillery.

O and Q Batteries R.H.A. and a battery of R.F.A.

The garrison of Kimberley, under Colonel Kekewich, was composed of half a battalion 1st North Lancashires, some gunners and sappers (R.A. and R.E.), the Kimberley Rifles,

be made for departmental corps and the reduced effective strength of the combatant corps. Under the former head there were, for instance, in South Africa in December, 1899, at least 3,000 of the Army Medical Corps and over 2,000 of the Army Service Corps, both essential to the efficiency of the army, and counted in its total strength, but neither of them combatant forces. Only a rough estimate of the effective



TRANSPORT CROSSING THE PONTOON BRIDGE AT TRICHARDT'S DRIFT.

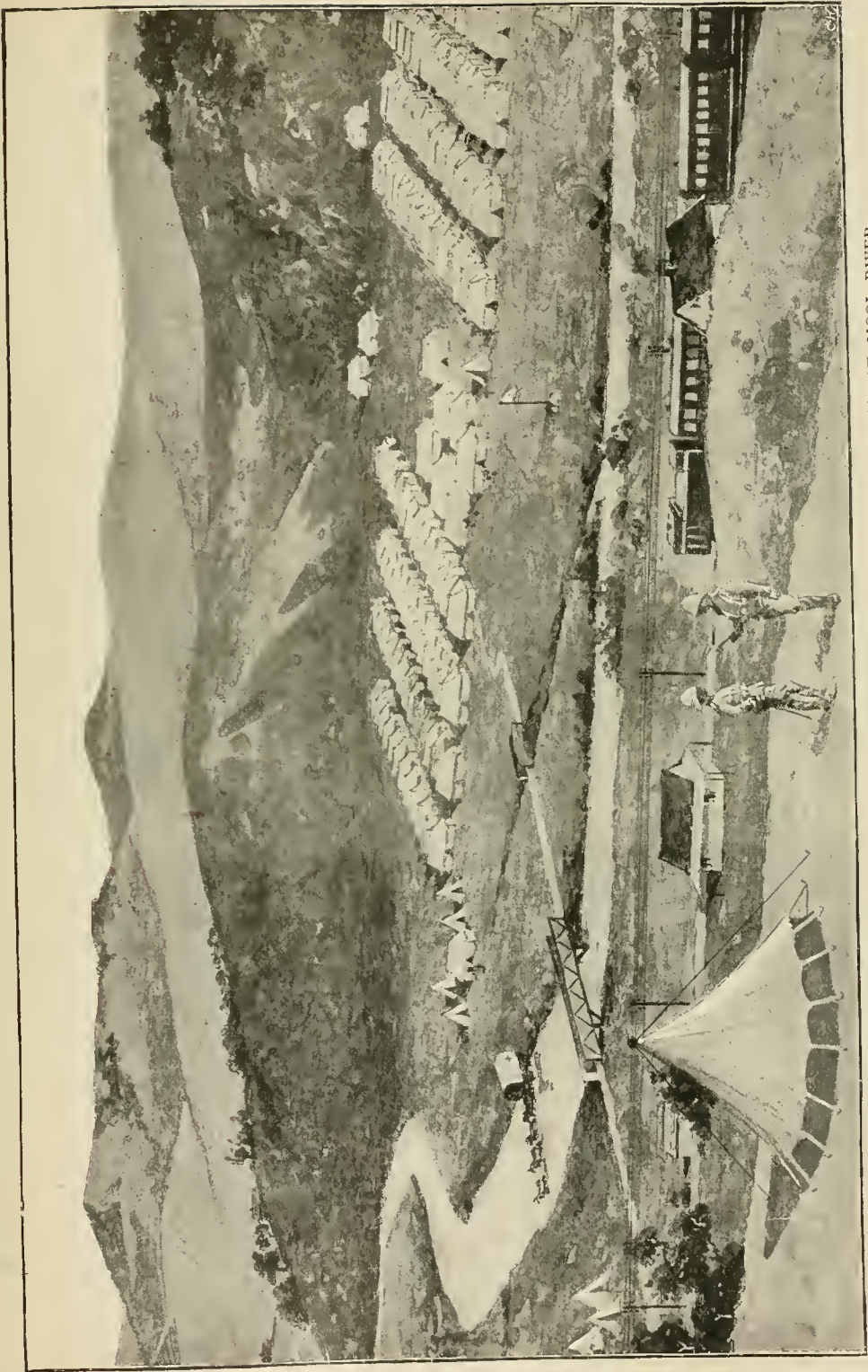
Diamond Fields Light Horse, battery Diamond Fields Artillery, and a force of armed townsmen.

Mafeking was held only by Colonial Volunteers under Colonel Baden-Powell.

A large force of volunteers, stiffened with some regular troops, was employed in garrisoning the ports and guarding the railway lines in Cape Colony.

It is interesting to add a rough estimate of the fighting force represented by this long list of regiments and batteries. The fighting force is a very different thing from the total force in a theatre of war, as large deductions have to

strength of the army at the front can be made. Definite figures are not yet available at the time of writing. There were about 12,000 men besieged in Ladysmith, and about 4,000 more shut up in Kimberley and Mafeking. The Ladysmith Relief Force, under General Buller, was about 20,000 strong, and Sir Charles Warren's division, newly arrived, was about to add some 8,000 more to it. Lord Methuen had about 16,000 men at Modder River camp and on the railway immediately in its rear. There were about 10,000 men under Gatacre and French in the north of Cape Colony, and probably as many more in garrison and on the lines of com-



FOR THE WOUNDED WITH SIR REDVERS BULLER: THE MILITARY HOSPITAL AT MOOI RIVER.

munication in the rest of the colony. Thus we have :—

Besieged garrisons	...	...	...	16,000
Ladysmith Relief Force	(including			
Warren's Division)	...	...	...	28,000
Kimberley Relief Force	...	...	...	16,000
North of Cape Colony	...	...	...	10,000
Lines of Communication	...	...	...	10,000
				<hr/>
				80,000

At this time the force in South Africa was

estimated in round numbers at 100,000 men. The above figures show its fighting strength. About 50,000 more were on the way, or mobilised in England and the Colonies and preparing to embark. The situation had changed since the time, three months before, when men were wondering why the Government had mobilised so large a force as a whole Army Corps and a Cavalry Division for a "little war" with the irregular forces of the Boer Republics.



CAMP AT RONDEBOSCH, NEAR CAPE TOWN.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE OPENING OF THE NEW YEAR.

IN the two last days of the old year and the opening days of the new the situation in the north of Cape Colony and on the western border of the Free State seemed to be changing rapidly for the better. There was at last news of a series of successes, and at home in England everyone was eager to believe that, after so many disappointments, the tide was finally turning in our favour.

The enemy in General French's front had retired on Colesberg. At daybreak on December 30th he left Arundel with a small force of cavalry and artillery to reconnoitre their position. In his despatch he thus describes the "natural fortress" held by the Boers:—

"The town of Colesberg is situated on very low ground; it is surrounded completely by a mass of high, steep kopjes, which are so placed as to flank one another. The place is, therefore, a natural fortress of great strength. These hills form a kind of square, and at each corner there are outlying kopjes within rifle range of the main position. About 2,000 yards west of the centre of the western face is a hill called 'Kols Kop' (in most of the maps 'Coles Kop'), of great height, commanding the whole country for many miles round. It stands quite isolated in the centre of a large plain."

From Colesberg a road, generally spoken of as the "waggon road," goes off nearly due north to a bridge and drift across the Orange River, fifteen miles away. The railway, which runs to the east of the town, and is connected with it by a short branch line, turns off from Colesberg station to the north-east, and twenty-two miles away crosses the Orange River by a long iron bridge at Norvals Pont Ferry.

French brought his guns into action against the southern face of the Boer position in order to make the enemy show his hand. This drew the fire of the Boer artillery, and showed that they had guns in position at the south-western corner of the Colesberg kopjes. French, therefore, occupied a group of hills about 2,000 yards south-west of this point, placed his guns there, under the protection of some of his cavalry and mounted infantry, and set to work to further

secure the ground by entrenchments. This was the position frequently referred to in despatches from Colesberg as "Porter's Hill," being so named in honour of one of French's ablest assistants in the operations.

French then returned to the railway, and selected a position astride of it near Rensburg station. He brought up his main force from Arundel to occupy it, and began to strengthen it with entrenchments.

Having carefully reconnoitred the western side of the Colesberg position on the 31st, he came to the conclusion that by seizing Maider's Farm, about five miles south-west of the town, and some distance north-west of Porter's Hill, and advancing from it under cover of darkness, he could get possession of one or both of two outlying hills on the west side of Colesberg, and from these again break into the Boer defences and seize points that would make the whole of the enemy's position untenable.

On that Sunday afternoon, the last day of the year, a squadron of the 10th Hussars was sent to occupy Maider's Farm, and at dusk a column was formed to carry out the plan. It was made up of ten guns R.H.A., the 6th Dragoons, the 10th Hussars, a company of Mounted Infantry, and four companies of the Berkshire Regiment, part of this last detachment being conveyed in carts to keep them fresh for the hard work they would have to do later on. Colonel Fisher, of the 10th Hussars, was in command of the column, but General French joined it before the fighting began. Before leaving Rensburg he had directed Colonel Porter (6th Dragoon Guards) to move out at dawn against the south side of Colesberg with another column, ascertain how the attack was going, and co-operate in the subsequent operations. Porter's column was made up of two guns R.H.A., two squadrons of the Carabiniers, and a company of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles.

Before dawn on Monday, New Year's Day, the Boer position was attacked. The story of the successful fight is told clearly in General French's despatches:—

"Orders were issued that the column (Colonel

Fisher's) was to be formed at 1.30 a.m. on the road leading across the plain towards Colesberg; that the Berkshire Regiment and the Mounted Infantry were to head this column, followed by the guns and cavalry. The attack and seizure of the hill (the position of which he knew well) was assigned to Major McCracken, Berkshire Regiment. It was arranged that on arriving close to the hill the four companies were to be formed for attack and were to rush it. The Mounted Infantry were to support them closely. The cavalry and artillery were to remain close at hand in their order of march under cover of Coles Kop. I was myself in command of the column and accompanied Major McCracken.

"The attack was carried out in every detail as ordered. The four companies of the Berkshire Regiment rushed the hill most gallantly, driving off a strong picquet of the enemy, who retired in great disorder and with loud shouts. They were completely surprised. The hill to the east of this, immediately overlooking Colesberg town, was strongly occupied by the enemy, and a hot fire was for some minutes poured on the column in the darkness. The Berkshire Regiment commenced their assault at 3.45 a.m., and the dawn of day found our troops in possession of this important outwork of Colesberg. At the first appearance of light I despatched the cavalry to the north-west corner, with orders to seize and hold the hills there with a squadron, and work round the northern face of the square. This was well done, and Colonel Fisher's patrols reached the positions on the Colesberg waggon road. With the idea of driving the enemy away from before the hills we had seized, and if possible from the western face of the position, and distracting his attention from the cavalry on the left, I massed all the ten guns opposite the west face, and so soon as it was light enough to see, opened a heavy fire. This was replied to with great vigour by the enemy's artillery and quick-firing guns, and our artillery were for some time exposed to a most galling fire, fortunately with but comparatively few casualties. I cannot speak too highly of the gallantry displayed by the officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of the Royal Horse Artillery, or of the coolness, intrepidity, and efficiency with which they stood to and worked their guns. Eventually, they succeeded in silencing the enemy's artillery."

As soon as the attack had proceeded thus far on the western side, Colonel Porter moved out against the southern front of Colesberg. He directed his attack against the south-western

angle, sending out the New Zealand Rifles to capture the kopje at that point. But they were outnumbered by the Boers, and after a gallant fight they were forced to fall back. Further to the British right, near Jasfontein farm, east of Rensburg, about 1,000 Boers, led by Commandant Schumann, made a counter attack. They tried to work round the British flank, but the attempt was frustrated by the Carabiniers and Rimington's Scouts. On French's left things did not go so well. Colonel Fisher failed to establish himself on the waggon road. General French, in his despatch, attributes this partial failure to a misunderstanding of his orders. "Owing to a misconception of my order and instructions," he writes in his despatch, "I regret that the cavalry on my left did not quite fulfil the task allotted to them. Throughout the day I sent constant messages to the brigadier to push forward to the Colesberg road and occupy the position indicated. Had he found himself able to do this, I have no doubt that we could have occupied the town on that day. As it was, the enemy was allowed to push too far forward on that flank and to occupy positions from which we have since been unable to move him."

It will be seen from this that altogether the day was only a partial success. Some ground had been gained on the centre, but on both flanks the enemy had advanced. On his right, north of the town, he held ground that secured the road to the waggon bridge; on his left he covered the approach on the north-east of the town to the Norvals Pont railway bridge. The situation may best be described by saying that the Boer position was now a huge wedge pointing towards the British centre. Colesberg, surrounded by its chain of kopjes, was the somewhat blunted point of the wedge. The two sides of it were formed by lines of kopjes stretching away north and north-east, two towards the two bridges. The British occupied a long, semi-circular line curving round the point of the wedge. In the next two weeks French, as reinforcements arrived, extended the horns of this crescent and tried to work round the Boer flanks. The enemy were also reinforced, and met and foiled these efforts by extending the sides of the wedge towards the river. They had throughout the great advantage of working on inner lines, and they could thus reinforce any threatened position in the wedge rapidly and easily from other parts of it.

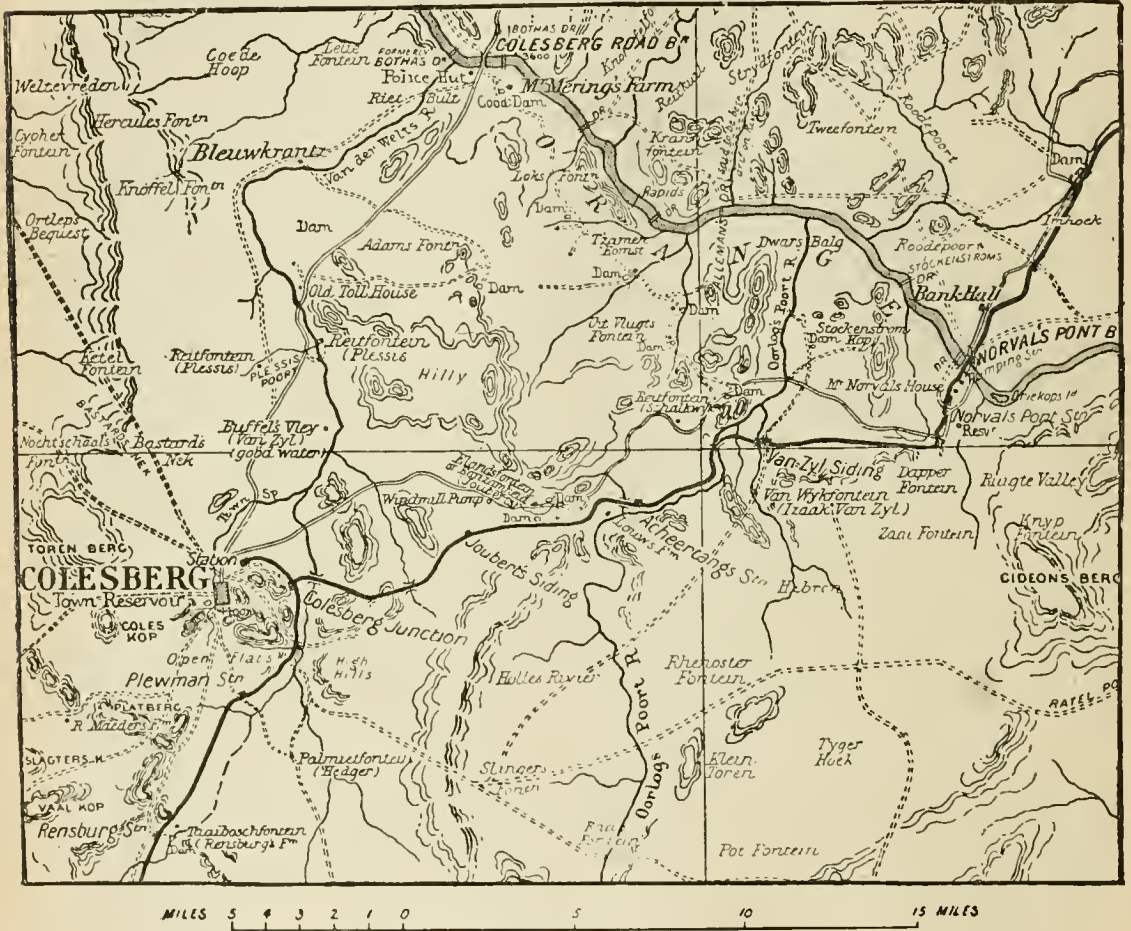
The telegrams sent home by the correspond-



WITH GENERAL FRENCH.

ents on the evening of January 1st were so misleading that it is a wonder the censorship allowed them to be put on the wires. They announced that Colesberg was captured, that the Boers were in full flight, that their line of retreat on the waggon bridge was cut, and there was a prospect of cutting the line towards

the Boers had not been turned out of Colesberg. A heavy train, laden with supplies, was standing in a siding at Rensburg. From the station the line runs down a long incline to the Orange River. According to one account by accident, according to another as the result of treachery on the part of one of the railway men, the train



MAP TO ILLUSTRATE THE OPERATIONS ROUND COLESBERG.
(Reduced from the Intelligence Department Map.)

Norvals Pont. A very partial success was in fact represented as a decisive and complete victory. The result of these misleading exaggerations was general disappointment when, a few days later, the real facts of the situation at Colesberg came to be known.

During the two days after the fight of January 1st, French was busy entrenching the ground he had occupied and bringing up reinforcements and supplies. There was an unfortunate incident, the news of which was, indeed, the first thing that made the public at home realise that

was started down the incline. It left the rails near Plewman siding, the next station. The Boers came out of Colesberg to take possession of the stores with which it was laden. Some guns were brought into action to drive them off. There was some sharp fighting; but, although they secured very little booty during the day, they came down under cover of darkness and carried off a large quantity. Next day the fight for the train was renewed, and it was set on fire to prevent the Boers securing any more of its load.

In the night between the 3rd and 4th General Schumann came out of Colesberg in the darkness and seized some hills on the British left flank. "The cavalry should not have allowed him to do this unseen," says General French. The driving in of the Boers led to a brisk fight. Four R.H.A. guns attacked them in front. The two other guns of the battery and the 10th Hussars worked round them and threatened to take them in the rear. On realising their danger, the Boers began a hasty retreat. The 10th Hussars on one flank, the Inniskillings on the other, dashed at them. Some Boer riflemen holding a kopje stopped the Hussars with their fire, killing Major Harvey and severely wounding Major Alexander. The squadron of the 6th Inniskillings, however, got at the Boers, and several of the enemy fell under their lances. About 200 of the Boers still clung to the hills. They were shelled by the artillery, and then attacked by the Mounted Infantry. They were driven from the kopjes, leaving twenty-one prisoners in the hands of the victors. In the fight, besides the prisoners, the Boers lost ninety killed and wounded. The British loss was only six killed and fifteen wounded.

Next day the Boer position on the west and north-west of the town was carefully examined, and it was decided that an attempt should be made to capture Grassey Hill, a height which would give the British command of the waggon road. The Suffolk Regiment, under Colonel Watson, held the part of the British line which was opposite the hill, and at his own request he was given the task of seizing it. The necessary arrangements were made, and just before dawn French was at the artillery position, on the west side of Colesberg, awaiting the expected advance of the Suffolks, and ready to act as soon as the movement developed. There was a sudden burst of rifle firing towards Grassey Hill, and orders were given for the guns to open on the Boer defences. Then the rifle firing ceased, and in a few minutes word was brought to the general that the attack had failed—and failed with heavy loss. French attributes the failure to a panic among the men. They had gone out to surprise the Boers, and were themselves surprised, finding the enemy on the alert and holding ground in advance of the position which was the objective of the attack. General French in his despatch admits that it was not easy to make out from the conflicting statements of the men exactly what had occurred. A correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, with the

force before Colesberg, gave the following account of the unfortunate affair:—

"At two o'clock on the morning of the 6th four companies of the Suffolks left the hill occupied by them, and, after marching for about a mile, reached the foot of the enemy's kopje. Bayonets were fixed, and they commenced the ascent. Our men had almost reached the top when a heavy rifle fire opened upon them at close quarters—so close, indeed, that some of the Boers were bayoneted. Unhappily, the Colonel, his adjutant, and two other officers and many of the men fell mortally wounded to the first shots.

"When the order to charge was given our men rushed down a dip in the hill, but were immediately confronted with a trench, backed by a wall some fourteen feet high, with two tiers of rifle fire. Some confusion ensued, and the advance was checked. From several quarters the cry 'Retire!' was raised. The men engaged assert that this was a Boer ruse. At any rate, the rear companies retreated rapidly; the remainder attempted to hold their ground, backed by all the officers. Meanwhile the rifle fire was spreading all round them, and they were forced to surrender, despite a gallant resistance.

"Our burying party sent out was received by the Boers sympathetically. They rendered assistance also to our men. Over the grave they sang a hymn, and some of the leaders made impressive speeches, expressing abhorrence of the war, regretting the heavy losses on both sides, and declaring the hope that the war would soon be ended."

The loss of the regiment was very heavy, though the fight lasted only a few minutes. Colonel Watson, whom General French exonerated from all blame for the disaster, was killed. He was one of the first to fall. Three lieutenants were also killed, and Major Graham, the second in command, was wounded. Three captains out of the four present were taken prisoners, as well as two lieutenants. The officers suffered thus heavily because they tried to the last to rally the panic-stricken men. Of the rank and file twenty-four were killed, twenty-three wounded, and 107 taken prisoners. This made a total loss of 164 officers and men out of rather less than 400 who went into action. By a strange coincidence the Suffolks were one of the battalions ordered to proceed to the seat of war on October 31st, 1899, to make good the heavy loss in prisoners at Nicholson's Nek, the news of which had arrived that day.

The disaster to the Suffolks led General

French to give up for the present the attempt to seize the waggon road. He reconnoitred to the east of Colesberg to find a position for an attempt on that side. During this reconnaissance Captain Ricardo, of the Royal Horse Guards, was captured by the Boers with a patrol of four of his men. They had just arrived in Africa, and newly arrived regiments that had not yet had a chance of learning the ways of the country were peculiarly liable to such accidents. General French reported that, with the help of reinforcements, he thought he could take Colesberg. Reinforcements were sent to him; but the Boers were also reinforced. The first opera-

out to the east of General Gatacre's position at Sterkstroom, and had reoccupied Dordrecht. It was commanded by Colonel Dalgety, who had with him a detachment of Brabant's South African Horse and Montmorency's Scouts, a corps of picked Colonial volunteers, raised and commanded by Captain Montmorency of the 21st Lancers, who had won a Victoria Cross in the famous charge at Omdurman. The few Boers at Dordrecht had promptly abandoned the little town on Dalgety's approach. He sent out a patrol next day (December 30th) to the north-westward, along the northern slopes of the Stormberg range, to look out for the



ARUNDEL CAMP.

(From a photo by Lieut. S. K. Kirby.)

tions of the defence had been directed by Commandant De Wet, a Free Stater, by profession a lawyer, and well known in London some years before the war, when he had been a student at the Inns of Court. General Delarey, who had taken part in the actions at the Modder River and Magersfontein, was sent to him with reinforcements, and after the first days of January took the chief command at Colesberg. Delarey and French were opposed to each other all through January without any real progress being made in the attack. Before further following these operations, we shall tell what was being done in other parts of the theatre of war in these first days of the new year.

While French was advancing to Rensburg in the last days of December a small column of irregular horse with four guns had been pushed

enemy, who were said to be approaching from the direction of Stormberg junction. The patrol was made up of 100 men of Brabant's Horse, under Captain Flannigan and Lieutenant Turner. They met and drove in a party of Boers of about the same strength; but as the Boers fell back they were reinforced by 500 more with two guns. Against such unequal odds Flannigan's troopers could not hope to hold their own. They began to retire on Dordrecht, skirmishing as they went, the rough, broken ground giving a good deal of cover. But the nature of the country also made it difficult for the various small parties of our men to keep touch as they fell back, and Lieutenant Milford Turner, with twenty-seven troopers, was cut off from the main body by the advancing Boers. It was thought at first that



GETTING THE GUNS UP COLES KOP.

they had been made prisoners. But they had taken refuge in a donga, or hollow watercourse, and there they defended themselves during the night and successfully kept the Boers at bay. In the morning Captain Goldsworthy, with a company of Brabant's Horse, Montmorency and his scouts, and four guns, came out from Dordrecht, drove off the Boers, and brought the handful of brave fellows safely back into the town.

Dalgety held on at Dordrecht, skirmishing occasionally with the Boers, who threatened him, but did not venture on an attack in force. His presence on the extreme right of Gatacre's district seemed to suggest to Olivier at Stormberg junction that the British were moving away to that flank, and that the force holding Sterkstroom camp had been weakened. Early on the morning of January 3rd he made an attack on Gatacre's outposts at Molteno and Cyphergat. The Molteno outpost was at the police station, two miles south of the village, and on the road between it and Cyphergat. It was held by 250 men, Cape Mounted Police, under Inspector Nawlan, and mounted infantry of the Kaffrarian Rifles (a volunteer corps), under Captain Maclean. The Boer attacking force was a commando of about 2,000 men, with two guns, one of them a heavy long-ranging piece. The men of the outpost took cover on a kopje on the Cyphergat road, the armoured train was run out to their support from Sterkstroom, and a field battery, the mounted infantry of the Berkshires, and some more of the Kaffrarian Rifles were sent forward to Cyphergat. General Gatacre himself rode up to the front to take command, bringing with him four companies of the Royal Scots. The battery came into action near Bushman's Hoek, and, while the infantry deployed for attack in front of the Boers, the mounted men began to work round their flank in the hills. The Boer guns were soon silenced, and their scouts detected the flanking movement, and they began to retire. An attempt to cut off their retreat failed, and early in the afternoon all was over. The curious feature of the day's work was that, though guns and rifles were in action for hours, and hundreds of rounds were fired, there was not a single casualty on the British side. Small as was this affair of outposts, the news of it was received with great satisfaction in England. Everyone was pleased that Gatacre had had a chance of meeting the enemy, and had beaten off their attack.

Another success won in these hopeful days of the opening new year was Colonel Pilcher's raid on Sunnyside and Douglas. The Dutch insurrection had spread west of the railway line through Griqualand and Bechuanaland. A strong body of rebels was reported to be on the move to the west of Belmont, and its presence was a danger to Lord Methuen's line of communications. Colonel Pilcher, who was in command of the post at Belmont, decided to make an attempt to surprise and capture or disperse this dangerous band of rebels. A second object of his enterprise was to bring away from Douglas on the Vaal, near its junction with the Riet (or Modder) river, a number of loyal British colonists who were isolated there in the midst of the insurrection.

All previous attempts to surprise the enemy had failed, and it was rightly suspected that information was generally conveyed to them in advance by native spies. In order to prevent this, Pilcher, before issuing his orders at Belmont and mustering his column, placed guards on the native huts and the approaches to the camp, and directed that, for twenty-four hours after he marched off, no native was to be allowed to leave Belmont on any pretext. He started with his column on the 31st. It was made up of South African mounted volunteers, Queenslanders and Canadians and a Canadian battery, and 200 mounted infantry of the Cornwalls. Thus the little column represented many parts of the empire—Africa, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. By a night march he reached in the early hours of January 1st the laager of the Boers at Sunnyside Farm, thirty miles north-west of Belmont. His arrival was a complete surprise to the enemy. If they had discovered his approach and retreated northwards, they would have found another column waiting for them; for Lord Methuen had sent out Babington's cavalry brigade along the south bank of the Modder to the westward as far as Koedoesrand Drift, in order to cut off their retreat.

Though surprised and outnumbered, the Boers made a good fight. They had no artillery. Their laager was shelled, and then the troops, Regular and Colonial, skirmished up to it in a long extended line, the flanks of which were thrown forward crescent-wise to encircle the position. Some of the enemy, finding their line of retreat thus threatened, bolted, and got safely away through the broken ground. What was left of the garrison was too weak to hold the

laager. The Colonials rushed it, the Canadians being first in. Forty prisoners were taken, and all proved to be British subjects belonging to the neighbouring districts. Besides the prisoners, the Boers lost six killed and twelve wounded, so, even allowing for a number having escaped, the entire force cannot have been a large one. The success was a small affair, but just then even little victories were welcome and encouraging.

From Sunnyside, Pilcher advanced to Douglas, which he reached at noon on January 2nd, and found unoccupied. He received an enthusiastic welcome from the loyal inhabitants. They reported that the Boer landrost had ridden away with a party of mounted rebels at ten o'clock the night before. The Free State flag was still flying on the town hall. It was pulled down and the Union Jack substituted for it. As the little column of troops marched in they were received with every demonstration of joyful welcome. "The inhabitants," writes a correspondent, "were in a frenzy of delight. They crowded round the soldiers, shaking hands with them; and their enthusiasm was increased when they learned that their deliverers were Australians and Canadians as well as Imperial troops."

At home it was at first supposed that Pilcher's seizure of Douglas, and Babington's march to Koedoesrand Drift, were the beginning of a turning movement by Lord Methuen for the relief of Kimberley. The possession of Douglas and Koedoesrand gave him two crossings on the river from which tracks led across the open veldt outside the Boer right flank to Kimberley. There was, therefore, much disappointment when the news came that Babington was leading his squadrons back to the Modder Camp, and that Pilcher had evacuated Douglas and was returning to Belmont. At Douglas the orders for the evacuation of the place were an unpleasant surprise to the loyal colonists. When they welcomed Pilcher's column they thought that the British flag had come to stay. Their action had made it ten times more difficult for them to remain in the midst of the rebels, and they had reluctantly to accept Colonel Pilcher's offer to escort them back to Belmont and send them down by train to Cape Colony. On January 3rd they abandoned their homes and began their march to the railway.

But notwithstanding that our success was in many ways far from what it had first been reported to be, the news of the seizure of

Dordrecht, the Boer repulse at Molteno, the advance on Colesberg, the capture of the Sunnyside laager, and the occupation of Douglas, all seemed to indicate that the tide had turned. After heavy defeats there was a series of victories. They were not of great importance, it is true, but they were taken to be the earnest of better things to come. The greatest hopes were built upon General French's operations at Colesberg. He had said that he could take the place. If Colesberg could be captured he could seize, it was thought, the crossing of the Orange River at Norvals Pont. He could threaten from the westward the communications of the Boers at Stormberg, and under this pressure on their flank, combined with a frontal attack by Gatacre from Sterkstroom, they would be forced to withdraw to the river, and it might be possible for our troops on the northern border of Cape Colony to enter the Free State.

But during January, although there was continual fighting, French made very little progress. On January 9th he moved out a column under Colonel Porter to the Slingersfontein kopjes, on the east side of Colesberg, threatening its communications with Norvals Pont. Porter had with him four guns of the R.H.A., three squadrons of the 6th Dragoons, the New South Wales Lancers, and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles. Next day Porter's scouts found that the enemy were still receiving reinforcements by the Norvals Pont road, and that in order to cover the railway they had occupied the north end of the Slingersfontein ridge and a hill further east. French himself went out next morning (the 11th) and joined Porter in a reconnaissance against this new position of the Boers, and it was intended that while their attention was occupied with the fighting, Major Hunter Weston, R.E. (afterwards famous for exploits of the same kind in the Free State), should slip round them with a party of engineers and a small cavalry escort, reach the railway, and cut it and the telegraph line. French brought out Colonel Neeld's composite regiment of Household Cavalry and some of the Carabiniers to assist in the day's work. The result was the fight officially known as the action of Slingersfontein.

After the four guns had shelled the Boer position, the Carabiniers and the New Zealanders advanced against their front, while the Household Cavalry began to work round their left flank. At first the enemy seemed to be giving way, but they were strongly reinforced,

the flank movement was checked, and French, who was not anxious to bring on a general engagement, decided that the time had come for a retirement. He hoped that meanwhile Hunter Weston had cut the railway; but the party entrusted with this task had failed to reach it, and found the Boer left flank everywhere strongly guarded.

An attempt was now made to shell the enemy out of some of his positions round Colesberg. Coles Kop, a huge precipitous cone towering from the plain to the height of 800 feet, seemed at first sight an impossible artillery position, but Major Butcher, commanding the 4th Battery R.F.A., succeeded in dragging two 15-pounders to the summit. In order to send up the ammunition, the Royal Engineers rigged up an ingenious wire hoist, and the guns got to work. The first effect of the shell fire from this dominant point forced the Boers to withdraw their tents and laagers from the open ground to the shelter of the kopjes. An attempt to cut in upon the Colesberg waggon road was a failure.

On the 15th there was a sharp fight on the Slingersfontein hills.

This time the enemy were the attacking party. They approached under cover an advanced outpost on a hill near Slingers Farm and tried to rush it. The hill was held by a company of the Yorkshire Regiment and a company of the New Zealand Rifles. The attack was very cleverly made. The little garrison of the hill, commanded by Captain Orr of the Yorkshires, had their attention occupied by a heavy fire from the Boer main position in their front. Then through some broken ground on the east side of the hill Boer sharpshooters were seen to be creeping stealthily forward under cover. Orr arranged to meet this advance, but it was a feint. The real attack was being made on the west side of the hill, which was very steep, and the Boers had got some way up it before they were discovered, the very abruptness of the ascent hiding their movement for awhile. As soon as the enemy found that their real attack was dis-

covered they opened a heavy fire. Captain Orr, who was bringing up some of his men to hold the crest of the slope, was severely wounded. The sergeant-major of the Yorkshires, who was beside him, was shot dead. The situation was critical. The Boers were coming on, firing heavily, and the Yorkshires, several of whom had fallen, were without a leader. But the position was saved by Captain Madocks, R.A., who was with the New Zealanders. To quote the official despatch: "With the greatest promptitude he took a few of his men to the west side of the hill, and rallied the troops holding it. He caused them to line their entrenchments and stem the enemy's advance, which had now become very bold, several of

our men having fallen from their fire. Captain Madocks then jumped up, gave the order to fix bayonets and charge down hill, upon which the leading Boers immediately turned and ran down hill, followed by many others who had been under cover of rocks, etc., unseen. Our troops poured many well-directed volleys on the retreating enemy, who left twenty-one dead at the foot of the hill, and it is estimated that their loss



MAJOR-GENERAL BABINGTON.
(Photo: Charles Knight, Aldershot.)

in wounded could not have been less than fifty." The New Zealanders, led by the gallant gunner, had averted what seemed likely to be a disaster. It is curious to note how like those of Majuba the Boer tactics were, and one cannot help thinking that if at Majuba the troops could have been rallied for a bayonet charge, the end of that day would also have been very different.

Three days later General French received an important reinforcement. The Sixth Division, under General Kelly-Kenny, was landing from England, and the 12th Brigade, under General Clements, was sent up to French. The battalions in the brigade were the 2nd Bedfordshire, the 1st Royal Irish, the 2nd Worcestershire, and the 2nd Wiltshire. General Kelly-Kenny, with the other brigade (General Knox) and the divisional troops, went up to Naauwpoort and began an advance along the

cross-line towards Stormberg. The general impression caused by these movements was that Kelly-Kenny's division, with the troops already on the frontier, would be used to clear the way to the Orange River. Two of Clements's regiments, the Royal Irish and the Worcesters, having reached the front on the 18th, they were sent to Slingersfontein, and Clements was given the direction of the operations on the south-east side of Colesberg. French had asked for heavy guns, and two howitzers firing lyddite shells were sent up to him and placed in position against the west side of the Boer defences.

In the last week of January another attempt was made to work round to the north of Colesberg. It was reported that the Boers were holding in very small force the pass of Rietfontein Plessis, running towards the Orange River through a range of hills lying east and west on that side of the town. On the evening of the 24th the mounted infantry under Captain De Lisle seized Bastard's Nek, another pass five miles west of Rietfontein. Next day a column of cavalry, artillery, and infantry moved upon the Rietfontein Pass. The force was made up of a battery of Horse Artillery, a battery of Field Artillery, the 6th Dragoons,

the 10th Hussars, the Mounted Infantry, half the Yorkshire Regiment, half the Essex Regiment, and the whole of the Wiltshires. Major-General Brabazon commanded the cavalry, and Colonel Stevenson, of the Essex Regiment, the infantry. The cavalry and mounted infantry tried to turn the position held by the Boers on the north, but were met by a Boer force watching that side, and so checked and delayed that the movement was ineffective. The infantry made some progress along the main ridge, but as the turning movement had failed, French judged that to push the attack further would entail heavy loss and secure no very important result. Accordingly at four in the afternoon he ordered a retirement. Naturally the Boers counted the day's work a success for their side. While French was out on the north-west of Colesberg, Clements made a demonstration on the other side of the town in order to keep a part of the Boer force occupied. This was the last serious attempt made during January to capture or isolate Colesberg. At the end of the month the position was practically unchanged, except that the successive reinforcements had led to the concentration of a considerable force on both sides.



MAJOR-GENERAL J. P. BRABAZON.

(Photo: Barnett.)



A HOSPITAL CAMP IN NATAL: A SNAP-SHOT OF MISS M'CAULEY, NURSING SUPERINTENDENT, AND MR. TREVES.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GREAT ASSAULT AT LADYSMITH.

LADYSMITH had listened hopefully to the roar of Buller's guns on the disastrous day of Colenso. Next day Mr. Pearse, the *Daily News* correspondent, wrote in his diary: "Sounds of battle reached us in a dull roar from the distant southward. They grew more continuous yesterday, but rolled no nearer, and therefore told us nothing except that Sir Redvers Buller was making a vigorous effort to join hands with beleaguered Ladysmith, and that the Boers were with equal stubbornness trying to beat him back along the banks of the Tugela. From far-off Unkolumbu mountain heliograph signals were flashed to us occasionally, but in cipher, the meaning of which is known only at headquarters. At dawn this morning the Boers celebrated Dingaan's Day by a royal salute from the big Creusot on Bulwana and fourteen other guns. All fired shells, which fell thick about the camp, killing one artilleryman, one Gordon Highlander, and one civilian; several other men were slightly wounded by splinters, but none seriously."

Next day the news of the defeat began to spread in the town. The diary of the same correspondent for the 17th runs thus: "Depressing news is now made public from Sir Redvers Buller, who made his effort on Friday for the relief of Ladysmith and failed. He bids us wait in patience for another month until siege artillery can reach him. The special corre-

spondents were summoned in haste this morning to hear an abridged version of the heliographic message read. They were asked to break this news gently to the town before unauthorised editions could get abroad; but somehow the ill tidings had travelled fast and with more fulness of detail than the Intelligence Department thought fit to divulge. There has been gloom in Ladysmith to-day."

For the next few days the bombardment became hotter and more persistent than ever, for their victory on the Tugela had inspired the Boers with fresh hopes of taking the town.

When Christmas came there was a passable attempt at seasonable festivities. Various little luxuries had been husbanded for the sick and wounded in the town hospital and in the neutral camp at Intombi Spruit, and there were even Christmas trees for the children. Some sports arranged for Boxing Day had to be suddenly interrupted and postponed because the Boer bombardment had become active again. But the closing days of the year were on the whole quiet. A few shells were thrown into the town on New Year's Day. One of them mortally wounded a soldier servant, whose last words to his master were: "I hope you've had your breakfast, sir?"

During the following days there was a desultory bombardment. On January 6th the Boers made their great attempt to take the town by storm, and suffered their first really serious defeat. It is now known that they

had originally intended to venture upon an assault on December 16th, "Dingaan's Day," but Buller's operations on the Tugela on the 14th and 15th and the strain of repulsing his attack had led them to put off the enterprise.

The attack came in every sense of the word as a surprise. Those who knew the Boers best had been strongest in their predictions that the enemy would attempt to reduce Ladysmith only by the slow process of starvation and a continually worrying bombardment, and that they would never have courage to rush the defences, extensive as was the line held by our troops, and necessarily weak as the garrison was at any given point. The section of the circle chosen for attack was the ridge on the south side, including Cæsar's Camp and Waggon Hill, and commanding the town at a range of 5,000 yards. The whole group of hills was known before the siege as Bester's Ridge, from the name of a Dutch family who had a farm near it. The east end was called by the British Cæsar's Camp, in memory of the well-known height at Aldershot. Waggon Hill was the western summit of the range. A "nek" of slightly lower ground connected the two heights. A spur running back towards the town was known as Maider's Castle. From the front of Waggon Hill another "nek" ran out to a lower summit unoccupied by either British or Boers, and known as "Mounted Infantry Hill." The southern face of the main ridge was so steep as to be almost a cliff in places. But it could be climbed, for piled upon or against it were masses of shattered rock bound together here and there by creepers, and often covered with bush. The actual summits of Waggon Hill and Cæsar's Camp were open stone-strewn plateaux, affording very little cover, and unfortunately not much had been done to strengthen them artificially. Some shallow trenches had been dug, and here and there loose stones had been piled up into breastworks, or, as soldiers who have served in India call them, "sangars."

On the night preceding the attack a working party of engineers were busy preparing an emplacement for a heavy naval gun on Waggon Hill. The sailors, with a long team of bullocks and a number of Kaffir teamsters, were dragging the gun up the back of the hill. The southern edge of the heights was watched by pickets of the Imperial Light Horse on Waggon Hill and of the Manchester Regiment on Cæsar's Camp. At one point, at least, a small party of Cape Police, with some Colonial scouts, had been

pushed down the steep slope to the lower ground to watch the approaches to the ridge.

The night was very dark. On one of the hills above Intombi Spruit and the hospital camp the Boers had a searchlight, and its broad ray, glaringly white, flickered all night across the level summit of the ridge, often showing up our pickets on its margin, and making everything in front of the position seem doubly dark.

Just before dawn there was a sudden outburst of rifle fire from the western shoulder of Waggon Hill. At first no one except those near the spot paid much attention to it. Since the siege began the idea of a Boer assault had been scouted as an absurdity. When the rifles flashed and crackled in the darkness most people thought only that the pickets on Waggon Hill had got "jumpy," and were blazing away their ammunition at imaginary foes. But the great assault on Ladysmith had begun in grim reality.

The leading Boers were actually on the summit, rushing the pickets and shooting the men down at the closest of close quarters. It was nearly an hour later that the firing began also on Cæsar's Camp. There, too, the Boers had gained the crest, and for the moment were carrying all before them.

How they had got so far unperceived is still unexplained. "All we know," writes Mr. Pearse, "is that long before dawn Free Staters were in possession of the western end of Bester's Ridge, where Waggon Hill dips steeply down from the curiously tree-fringed shoulder in bold bluffs to a lower neck, and thence on one side to the valley in which Bester's Farm lies amid trees, and on the other to broad veldt that is dominated by Blaauwbank (or Rifleman's Ridge), and enfiladed by Telegraph Hill—both Boer positions having guns of long range mounted on them; and at the same time Transvaalers, mostly Heidelberg men, had gained a footing on the eastern end of the same ridge, where boulders in Titanic masses, matted together by roots of mimosa trees, rise cliff-like from the plain where Klip River, emerging from thorny thickets, bends northward to loop miles of fertile meadow land before flowing back into the narrow gorge past Intombi Spruit camp. How the Boers got there one can only imagine, for neither the Imperial Light Horse pickets on Waggon Hill, nor the Manchesters holding the very verge of that cliff which we call Cæsar's Camp and the Kaffirs' Intombi, nor the mixed force of volun-

teers and police watching the scrub lower down, saw any form or heard a movement during the night. It was intensely dark, but in that still air a steinbok's light leap from rock to rock would have struck sharply on listening ears. Those on picket duty aver that not a Boer could have shown himself or passed through the mimosa scrub without being challenged. Yet four or five hundred of them got to the jutting crest of Caesar's Camp somehow, and to reach

lenged, and at once the reply came, "A friend." But he was suspicious, and raised his rifle. As he did so he was shot dead. The muzzle of the Mauser that killed him was almost at his breast. His comrades sprang up, only to be swept away by a volley. Some of the bullets passed right over the hill, and the men at work pulling up the naval gun at the foot of it, as they heard them whizzing in the darkness overhead, thought some of the sentries were stupidly firing across



THE TUGELA FALLS AND PONTOON BRIDGE.

it they must either have crossed open ground or climbed with silent caution up the boulder-roughened steeps."

It is said that as they crept across the open ground and climbed amid bushes and rocks, the Boers walked barefoot. In the final ascent they mounted faces of the hill so steep, that to the last moment, even in daylight, most of them would have been hidden from the sentries on the summit. It was at a quarter to three that the first Boers, Free Staters of the Harrismith commando, gained the crest of Waggon Hill. At the point where they came up there was a post of eight of the Imperial Light Horse. A sentry slightly in front of the group saw or heard something moving in the darkness. He chal-

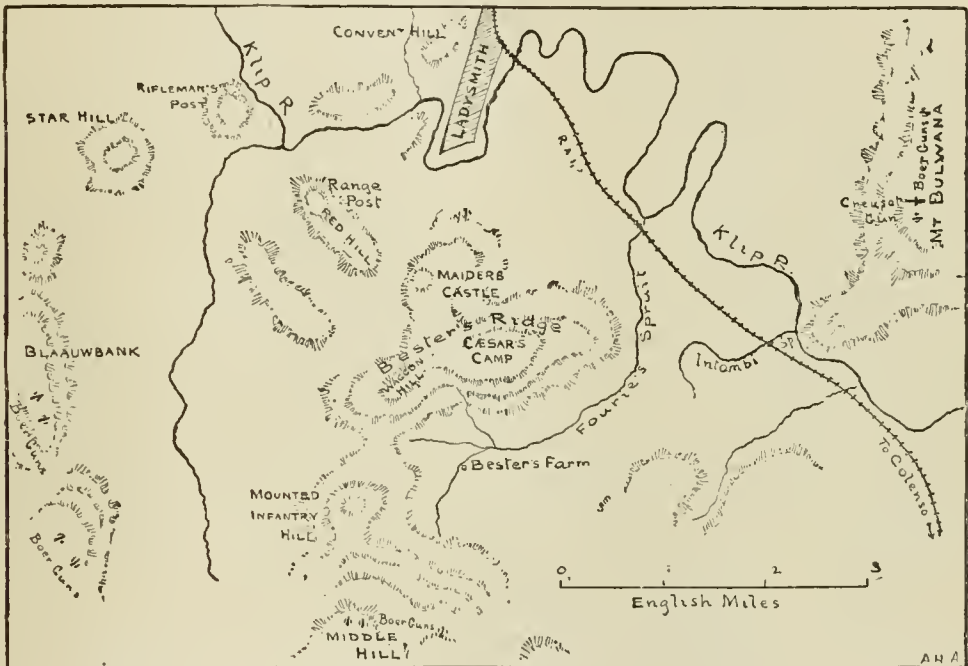
lenged, and at once the reply came, "A friend." But he was suspicious, and raised his rifle. As he did so he was shot dead. The muzzle of the Mauser that killed him was almost at his breast. His comrades sprang up, only to be swept away by a volley. Some of the bullets passed right over the hill, and the men at work pulling up the naval gun at the foot of it, as they heard them whizzing in the darkness overhead, thought some of the sentries were stupidly firing across

the crest—so little did anyone believe in a Boer attack. But as the Boers pressed on, and the confused fight in the darkness with the pickets of the Imperial Light Horse began, everyone on Waggon Hill realised that after all the unexpected had happened. The Engineers dropped pick and spade, took up their rifles, and hurried to the help of their colonial comrades. The blue-jackets of the *Powerful* left the gun and its team of oxen, and doubled up to the front, rifle in hand. In the fierce fight, begun in the darkness and continued in the white light of the early dawn, both the Engineer officers—Lieutenants Dennis and Digby-Jones—were killed, and of their little party of thirty sappers, fifteen were

killed or wounded. Some of the Boers had pushed right up to the gun emplacement, and, leaning on the parapet of sandbags, fired over it at its defenders. It was here that Digby-Jones was killed. A corporal of the Imperial Light Horse had been shot beside him by a field-cornet. The Engineer lieutenant shot the Boer officer down, and then with the two remaining cartridges shot two more of the Free Staters. The enemy were clambering over the sandbags, and Digby-Jones was killed while trying to beat them back with the butt-end of

of the whole ridge. But for awhile Sir George White could not venture to send him any considerable reinforcements, for a long line of many miles had to be held by the garrison of Ladysmith, and it might be that the storm that had burst upon Bester's Hill in the darkness was only part of a more general attack.

While the handful of brave men on Waggon Hill—regulars, sailors and colonial volunteers—were fighting for their lives, there had been a fierce struggle on the eastern summit of the ridge for the possession of Cæsar's Camp. There,



SKETCH MAP TO ILLUSTRATE THE ASSAULT ON LADYSMITH ON JAN. 6TH

his empty revolver. Major Doveton, of the Light Horse, was struck by two bullets—one of them broke his arm. But still he stayed with his men, cheering them on by voice and example. Equal courage was shown by the Boers. Without bayonets on their Mausers they dashed at the fixed bayonets of our men, and exchanged fire with them at a range of a few feet. As the sun rose they held the southern edge of Waggon Hill and part of the plateau, including some of the breastworks.

By this time reinforcements were coming up. A party of the Gordon Highlanders had hastened to Waggon Hill from their bivouac at Maider's Castle. General Ian Hamilton had hurried out from the town to take command of the defence

an hour after the first shots had been fired on Waggon Hill, the pickets of the Manchesters had been surprised and driven in with heavy and sudden loss. The fight on the hill to their left ought to have put them on the alert, but it is quite possible that it rather served to divert their attention from the stealthy movements of the enemy in the darkness to their own immediate front. However this may be, they reached the southern edge of Cæsar's Camp unchallenged, and came on so quietly that they rushed and overpowered one small post of our men in an outlying breastwork without even a shot being fired. Lieutenant Hunt-Grubbe, of the Manchesters, heard some noise and went forward to this point, which he still believed

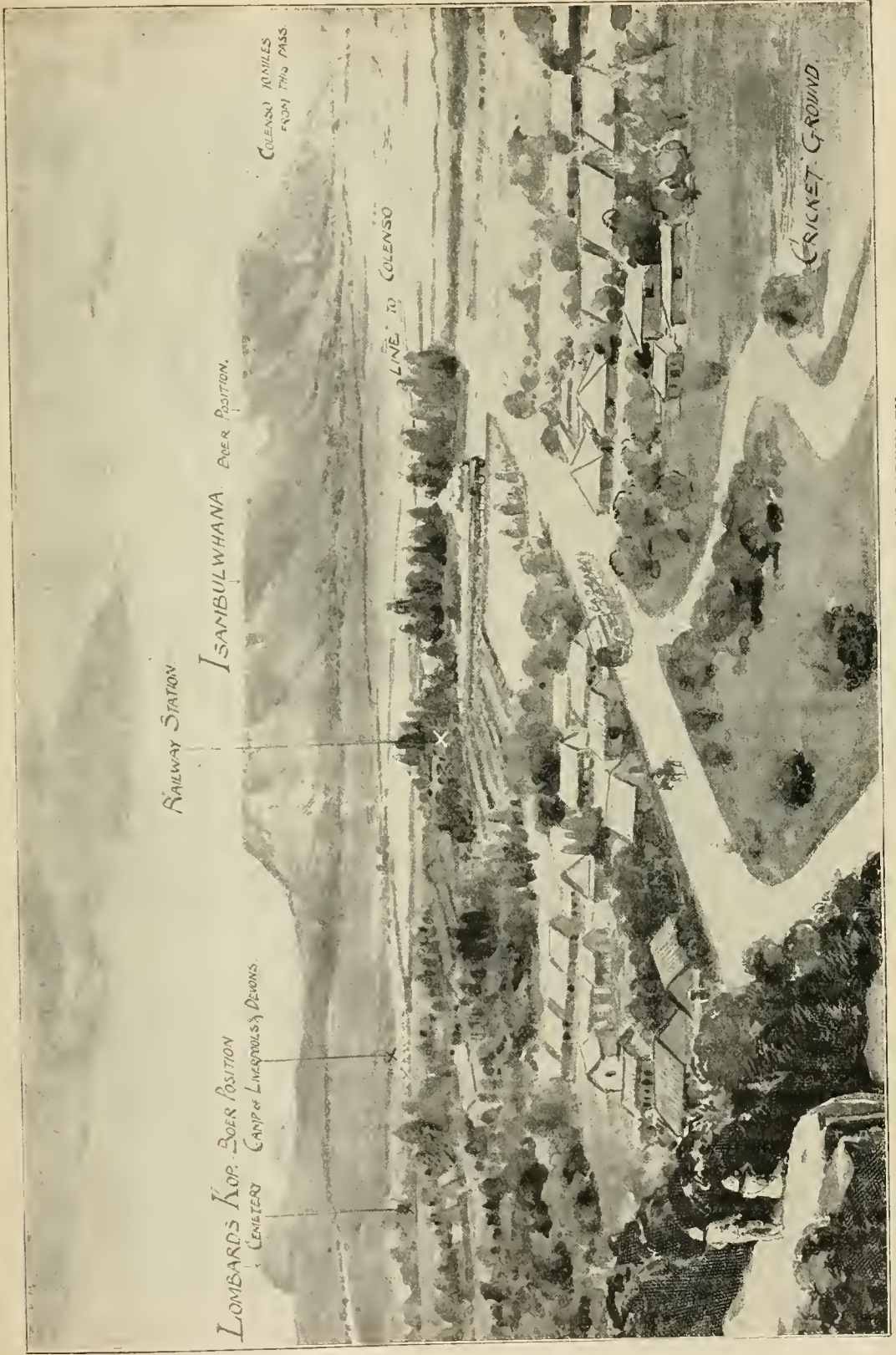
to be safely held by his men. "Sergeant!" he called out as he approached the breast-work. "Here I am, sir," came an answer, and he stepped inside the work to find himself in the midst of a group of Transvaalers, who promptly seized him and took him some way down the slope by which they had ascended, so as to place him in safety.

For now bullets were flying over Cæsar's Camp. Another party of Boers had advanced towards a picket of the Manchesters. "Don't fire, we are the Town Guard," said the leader of the enemy. But the ruse was too transparent. The Town Guard could hardly have been coming from that direction, and the Manchester men replied with a volley. Then the firing burst out all along the edge of the plateau. In places our men were shot down or driven back before the rush of the Boers, but here and there they clung to the rocks well forward. There were many cases of that individual self-reliant action which is the highest test of a soldier's courage. Behind one rock four privates, without even a corporal to direct them, held their own. Two were shot dead. The two others took their cartridges, and used the double supply of ammunition they thus possessed to keep up as rapid a fire as possible at the point, not many yards further down the broken slope, where the Mausers were flashing. These two men checked the enemy's advance at that point for a full hour. They knew that if the Boers made a rush they would be certainly killed or taken, probably the former. They did not know but at any moment they might be cut off by an unseen advance right or left or them. But they held on doggedly and fired to their front. More than once they saw a brave Boer officer rise and call to his men to come on, but no one rose with him. The Boers, luckily for the garrison, had no bayonets, and though the bayonet is seldom actually used, men who carry it will press on to close quarters, while men who are without it are inclined to trust to the last to being able to clear their front by fire, and hesitate at the final rush. This is a point which those stay-at-home critics of war, who write as if the bayonet were a useless encumbrance, have failed to realise.

As the sun rose the position was this. The enemy had captured part of the summit of Waggon Hill, and on that hill and on Cæsar's Camp they were clinging to the rocks along the crest of the southern slope, and exchanging fire with our men, who were holding a line further

back upon the plateau. Cæsar's Camp received its first welcome reinforcement, four companies of the Rifle Brigade, under Colonel Metcalfe, coming up to the help of the Manchesters. And now, as the light allowed longer range weapons to come into action, the artillery opened fire on both sides. On the north of Ladysmith the Boer guns began to thunder against Observation Hill and the neighbouring ridges, and a part of the garrison had to be kept under arms there, expecting another attack from that side. Among the rocks on the slope of Cæsar's Camp the Boers had a heliograph with them. Hunt-Grubbe, a prisoner near at hand, saw the Transvaal signallers working it to speak to the battery on Mount Bulwana. "Maak vecht" ("Make fight") it flickered out in dots and dashes, and the big Creusot gun on Bulwana answered by dropping shell after shell with marvellous precision among the defenders of Cæsar's Camp. It was well for the Manchesters and the Rifles that the Boer ammunition was defective. Very few of the shells burst.

But the British artillery was also coming into action. The first of our batteries to open fire was the 53rd R.F.A., under Major Abdy. It unlimbered among the trees on the low ground by the Klip River, where by careful shooting it could send its shells across the eastern shoulder of Cæsar's Camp and drop them among the Boer stormers. The gunners had to lay their guns most of the time at an unseen target, and some of the shells had to pass over ground held by our own men. But they made splendid shooting. The first effect of their fire was to attract the attention of the big gun on Bulwana. Most of the smaller Boer guns continued to shell Cæsar's Camp, but the long Creusot and another gun opened fiercely upon Abdy's battery among the trees near the river. The conduct of our gunners was the admiration of all who saw them. They worked their guns as if they were at target practice on Dartmoor. "I watched," says Mr. McHugh, of the *Daily Telegraph*, "from the crest of the hill above the battery, and again and again I saw our guns fired right out of the cloud of smoke from the enemy's bursting shell. One gun I noticed in particular. A shell exploded, as I judged, right on the gun, and gunners and all disappeared from view. I gazed, fascinated, through my glasses, expecting to see a dismounted gun and mangled men when the smoke had cleared away. But almost before the first shock of the explosion was over, flash went the crimson lance of flame from the muzzle



RAILWAY STATION.

ISAMBULWHANA BOER POSITION.

LOMBARD'S KOP. BOER POSITION
CAMP of LINDBERG'S DEVONS.

LINE TO COLENSO

COLENSO 10 MILES FROM THIS PASS.

CRICKET GROUND.

A GENERAL VIEW OF THE COUNTRY SOUTH OF LADYSMITH.

of the gun I had thought wrecked, and the shrapnel, aimed as true as if at peace practice, went smash into a group of the enemy, killing or wounding fifteen out of seventeen of them. It was a splendid exhibition of the coolness and nerve of our gunners, and was worth risking something to see. But it was not only one instance. Again and again did I notice shells bursting not a dozen yards from the battery, and the men went on with their work without even turning their heads to look at them. Surely it is an act of blind folly, or worse, for the officials at Pall Mall to insist on keeping such men armed with what is admittedly the worst field-gun in Europe, and one that is inferior in every point to the field-guns used by the Boers."

The 42nd Battery presently reinforced the 53rd. Both batteries suffered heavily. One instance of the heroism of the gunners has been given by Sir George White himself. One of the sergeants had just laid his gun, when a shell, bursting close by, shattered his leg and arm. He fell bleeding across the trail of the piece; but his first words to the men were: "Roll me out of the way, boys, and keep the gun in action." Happily, the brave fellow survived a double amputation; and when, four months later, the Queen visited Netley, he was able to hear from her own lips her admiration of his devoted heroism.

Ian Hamilton had ridden to the highest part of the ridge to watch the fight and direct the defence. He had reinforced Waggon Hill with the Border Rifles and the Natal Volunteers under Colonel Royston. He sent one of his staff officers, Lord Ava, over to Waggon Hill to report how the struggle there was going. The young man was up in the fighting line, and was leaning over a boulder using his field-glasses, when a bullet fired from a point only 150 yards in front pierced his forehead; and he fell, still living, but senseless. Colonel Frank Rhodes, the *Times* correspondent, was with General Ian Hamilton when someone told him that a staff officer had been hit on Waggon Hill, and he at once thought that it must be his friend, Lord Ava. With another staff officer, Lieutenant Lannowe, he made his way to the front, and they carried the wounded man through a storm of bullets to a safer spot. The doctors did all that was possible; but the wound was mortal, and Lord Ava died two days later. He had a host of friends, and his death was felt as a personal loss by many. "A finer fellow never lived," writes Mr. Nevinson, of the *Chronicle*.

"'You'd never have taken him for a lord,' said an Irish sergeant; 'he seems quite a nice gentleman.'"

It is said that about 600 Boers had gained the top of Waggon Hill, and about as many were on Cæsar's Camp. Behind them larger forces were sheltered in the broken ground of the lower slopes. Had these supports been pushed boldly forward early in the day, mere weight of numbers might have carried the position. But the Boers were waiting for their advanced parties to gain more ground, and these were trusting to their rifles. A strong reinforcement would have carried them forward. Happily for the Ladysmith garrison, the reinforcements were not sent up the hills. Only by mere dribbles was the firing line strengthened. A few of our men who had been taken prisoners in the first rush were well treated by the enemy, who shared their food with them and gave them tobacco to smoke as they lay sheltered well down the rocky slope. They noticed the coolness with which the Boers fought. Men would come back from the firing line for awhile, and sit or even lie down for a rest, eat a little, light a pipe, and then, in a matter-of-fact, businesslike way, take up their rifles again and go up to the crest of the hill, where the fight was raging at close quarters.

On both sides fresh guns were being brought into action—by the Boers to crush the dogged resistance of the garrison, by the British to shell the ground where the Boer supports were supposed to be massed. The Boers had guns on Middle Hill and on Blaauwbank, to the south and west of Waggon Hill. These guns were served with marvellous accuracy. Although the fighting lines were within 200 yards of each other, the Boer shells roared over the heads of their own men and fell among the defenders of the plateau, causing a good deal of loss. The 21st and 42nd Batteries R.F.A. came into action against these positions. They checked at least one effort of the enemy to reinforce the attack. The guns of the Natal Artillery Volunteers stopped another, and the naval 12-pounders brought a well-directed shell fire to bear on the Boer gun positions.

On Waggon Hill the enemy's attack was fiercest. The garrison there had been further strengthened with half a battalion of the King's Royal Rifles. The enemy held so much of the summit that our men could not merely confine themselves to a passive defence. Efforts had to be made to recapture the ground that had been



"Fix Bayonets!" In the Trenches at Ladysmith

commandant of the Wetzies Hoek district, a man among men in his disregard of danger. When he fell dead, after making his way close up to our sangar and shooting Major Miller-Wallnut, the Orange Free State lost one of its foremost citizens and bravest fighters."

While Ladysmith was thus battling for its life, there were anxious moments in the camp at Chieveley. Before dawn the roar of guns had been heard away to the northward. As the sun rose the deep booming of cannon increased, till those who listened said to each other that it was "louder than Colenso." Hour after hour the din rose and fell. It was eighteen miles away; but those who heard it even at that distance realised that it was no ordinary bombardment, but the noise of battle. Was the garrison trying to break out, or had the Boers at last ventured upon a general assault? All the morning men listened and wondered, but the generals of the relief force so far did nothing to hold out a hand to the beleaguered garrison. They were waiting for some definite information; and as yet they had only guesswork to go upon, for the heliograph on a hill away to the right rear had tried in vain to flash its questions to distant Ladysmith. Either clouds hid the sun, or when it shone the smoke and confusion of battle prevented the garrison from answering back the flickering flash of the little mirror.

At last, at 9 a.m., Ladysmith flashed its first message:—

"Enemy attacked Cæsar's Camp at 2.45 a.m. this morning in considerable force. Enemy everywhere repulsed, but fighting still continues."

This seemed sufficiently satisfactory, so Chieveley camp remained idle; but the firing still went on, and at one o'clock there came a second message:—

"Attack continues, and enemy has been reinforced from south."

The message was dated 11 a.m. How it took so long to reach General Buller is not easy to explain. But it suggested action on his part; for if the Boers who were attacking Ladysmith were being reinforced from the trenches on the Tugela, a show of attacking Colenso would stop further reinforcements, and perhaps even lead the enemy to draw off part of the assaulting force in order to man the trenches.

Mr. Winston Churchill gives a graphic account of what followed. "At one o'clock," he says, "just as we were sitting down to luncheon, came an orderly at full gallop with the order

for the whole force in Chieveley to turn out at once. Whereat the camp, till then dormant under the midday sun, sprang to life like a disturbed ant-hill. Some said we were about to make a regular attack on Colenso, while many of the covering army of Boers were busy at Ladysmith. Others suggested a night assault with the bayonet. The idea was very pleasant to the hearts of the infantry. But I soon learnt that no serious operation was in contemplation, and that the force was merely to make a demonstration before Colenso with the object of bringing some of the Boers back from Ladysmith, and of so relieving the pressure on Sir George White. The demonstration was, however, a very imposing affair. First of all, the mounted forces threw out a long fringe of patrols all along the front. Behind this the squadrons made a line of black bars. The Mounted Infantry, Bethune's Horse, and the Natal Carbineers formed the left, the South African Light Horse the centre, and the 13th Hussars and Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry twisted back to watch the right. Behind this curtain marched the infantry, Hildyard's brigade on the right, Barton's on the left, line after line of brown men, ten yards apart, two hundred yards between the lines, spreading in this open formation over a wide expanse of country and looking a mighty swarm. Behind these again dark blocks of artillery and waggons moved slowly forward. Behind, and above all, the naval battery began to throw its shells into the village. The cavalry soon cleared the front, the squadrons wheeled about, the patrols retreated."

The men all thought it was going to be a real attack, and were keen and eager. The Boers, too, at first thought that Buller meant business. Groups of them were seen galloping up to the trenches, in which both the horses and men disappeared from view. The infantry halted on our side about 3,000 yards from the enemy's position, and the field guns unlimbered and opened fire.

While these movements were in progress the Boers did not fire a single shot. They were waiting, as on the day of the great battle, for the attack to come to a closer range. Meanwhile the heliograph had sent two more messages from Ladysmith. The first was encouraging. "Have beaten enemy off at present, but they are still round me in great numbers, especially to south, and I think renewed attack very probable."

But a little later came another message that was alarming. "Attack renewed—very hard pressed." Some took it to mean that the attack was pressed fiercely, others that the garrison was under dire stress to hold its own. This was the general view, and the message seemed like a cry of despair. As these few words came the darkening sky cut off all further communication.

For the clouds had been gathering, and as the field artillery opened fire a thunderstorm began to rage. "The bombardment and the storm broke over the Boer entrenchments simultaneously," writes Mr. Churchill. "A swift succession of fierce red flashes stabbed out from the patches of gunners, teams, and waggons, and with yellow gleams soft white balls of smoke appeared among the houses of Colenso, and above the belts of scrub which extend on either side. The noise of explosions of gun and projectile came back to us in regular order; and above them rang the startling discharges of the 47 naval guns, whose shells in bursting raised huge brown dust clouds from houses, trench, or hillside. At the same time the thunder began to rumble, and vivid streaks of blue light scarred the sombre hills."

It was hoped that the Boers would bring their guns into action and reveal their artillery positions; but not a shot did the Boers fire, though for two hours, from five to seven, the British artillery shelled them heavily. At seven the firing ceased, and the troops withdrew to their camps. The demonstration was over.

Let us see now how it fared with Ladysmith. A detachment of the Gordon Highlanders had reinforced Waggon Hill early in the day. Later on three companies of the battalion, led by its gallant commander, Colonel Dick-Cunyngham, moved up to the help of the garrison of Cæsar's Camp. Dick-Cunyngham had been directed by Hamilton to attempt to clear the eastern spur of the hill of the enemy. He moved up from the plain, and marched round the shoulder of the hill. Somewhat rashly he rode at the head of his men, intending, doubtless, to dismount before the actual attack was delivered. A long-ranging Mauser bullet brought him down, mortally wounded. He had only lately completed his recovery from a severe wound in the arm, received on October 21st at Elandslaagte. But the Gordons pushed on, led now by the senior captain, Carnegie. With a fierce rush and a loud cheer they dashed at the Boers with the bayonet, and cleared part of the south crest of the hill. The Boers ran down among the rocks

of the slope, and only one of them was actually bayoneted. He was killed by Price, the colour-sergeant of the leading company, who immediately after fell pierced by three bullets. The Gordons, exposed to a heavy fire, took cover among the rocks, and successfully held the ground they had won.

Through the afternoon the firing went on, the Boers supporting their attack by long-range rifle shots from the ground towards Intombi Spruit, east of Cæsar's Camp, as well as by their artillery. The attack would relax for awhile, then break out again with fresh fury. The summit of Cæsar's Camp was clear of the enemy, who only held part of its rocky slope. But they still clung to part of the top of Waggon Hill. At four o'clock fresh reinforcements were brought up for a great effort to dislodge them. Some companies of the Devon Regiment under Colonel Park had been brought from the north side of Ladysmith. They were sent up to Waggon Hill, with orders to make a counter-attack on the Boers. They worked their way gradually forward in an extended firing line with supports, and they were closing on the Boers when the same thunderstorm that swept over the trenches at Colenso as Buller's bombardment began broke in black fury over Ladysmith. Amid the deluge of tropical rain, and with the lightning flashing on their bayonets, the Devons charged the Boers, who turned and fled from the long-contested summit of the hill.

With this charge the battle really ended. Under cover of the storm the Boers had withdrawn further down the slope of Cæsar's Camp. Till darkness closed in there was some desultory rifle firing, but there was no attempt to renew the attack. Ladysmith had been saved by the dogged valour of the men who held Bester's Ridge from before dawn till dark on that long summer day.

The losses of the Boers must have been heavy, but no precise figures are available. The garrison had paid dearly for its hard-won victory. Fifteen officers had been killed on the spot or mortally wounded, and twenty-four wounded. Of the rank and file 135 had been killed and 244 wounded. The heavy proportion of killed to wounded was doubtless the result of the close fighting, in which many of those who fell were hit by more than one bullet. Most of the men had fought all day without food and water, and when the fight ended could hardly stand. The Imperial Light Horse and the Gordons had suffered most severely. Of the Light Horse,

out of nearly 500 men, there were barely 100 fit for duty at the close of the day. Their commander, Major Edwards (of the 5th Dragoon Guards), and the second in command, Major Karri Davis, were both wounded. At the end of the fight the regiment was under the command of the junior captain. A company of the Gordons was commanded by a lance-corporal. All his seniors were out of action. During the night the wounded were removed from the battlefield. It was a difficult piece of work in the darkness and on the rocky ground. The Boers were also engaged in carrying off their dead. The work was not completed till the next morning, when there was the usual informal Sunday truce.

After this great effort the Boers made no

further attempt to storm Ladysmith. The siege became again a close blockade with a desultory bombardment on most week-days. In the Boer laagers and in the camps of the British relief force it was generally believed that the supplies of the beleaguered garrison could hardly be made to last longer than the end of January—the third month of the siege. The Boers, therefore, calculated that with a little patience the place would fall into their hands. It is even said that trains of trucks and carriages were kept ready at Glencoe junction to convey the expected prisoners to Pretoria. The same belief that the garrison might soon be reduced to extremities caused General Buller to make another attempt to force his way across the Tugela and raise the siege.



GENERAL COKE.

(Photo: Wyrall, Aldershot.)



SPION KOP: DORSETS WATCHING THE FIGHTING.

(Photo: B. W. Caney, Durban.)

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CROSSING OF THE UPPER TUGELA.

WHEN Buller failed at Colenso on December 15th the American military attaché had put into words a question that was in the minds of most men. "Say, General," he remarked, "can't anyone find a way round?" The attempt "to find a way round" was now to be made.

Since the battle of Colenso the army at the front in Natal had received considerable reinforcements. Buller had reorganised his force, forming two divisions, under Generals Warren and Clery, out of four of his six brigades, and taking one of the remaining brigades with him as a reserve, and leaving the other (General Barton's brigade of Fusilier battalions) to hold Chieveley camp and protect the head of the railway, on which his supplies depended. The army that actually attempted to force the line of the Tugela was organised as follows:—

Sir Charles Warren's Division: General Hildyard's English Brigade; General Hart's

Irish Brigade; one squadron 13th Hussars; three batteries R.F.A.

Sir C. F. Clery's Division: General Lyttelton's Rifle Brigade; General Woodgate's Lancashire Brigade; one squadron 13th Hussars; three batteries R.F.A.

Corps Troops: General Coke's Brigade (of three battalions); one squadron 13th Hussars; one battery R.F.A.; a howitzer battery; Naval Brigade with two 4·7 guns and eight 12-pounders.

Lord Dundonald's Cavalry and Mounted Infantry: 1st Royal Dragoons; 14th Hussars; South African Light Horse; Imperial Light Horse (one squadron); Bethune's and Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry; Natal Carbineers (one squadron), Natal Police (one squadron); one company of regular Mounted Infantry (King's Royal Rifles).

The whole force was 22,000 strong (10,000 infantry and 3,000 cavalry), with fifty-eight

guns (forty-two R.F.A. 15-pounders, six R.F.A. howitzers, and ten naval guns).

The camp at Chieveley was strongly fortified by the Royal Engineers and the men of Barton's brigade. The hospitals at the front and at Pietermaritzburg were cleared by sending away by train all patients who could be moved, and some hundreds of civilian stretcher-bearers were brought up from Durban. Twenty-one days' supplies were packed on mule and ox-waggons, and Warren's division, which had been camped at Estcourt, was moved up to Frere on January the 9th and 10th.

On the latter date orders were issued that the march was to begin at dawn next day, Thursday, January 11th. The plan was to turn the Boer right flank by way of the Upper Tugela. The mounted troops under Lord Dundonald were to seize the crossing of the Little Tugela at Springfield. On the 11th Hildyard's brigade was to march from Chieveley to Pretorius's Farm, where it was to be joined by the artillery and supply train, and by Hart's brigade from Frere. Thus Clery's division was to lead the advance on the 11th. Warren's division was to follow next day.

The enormous train of transport waggons seriously delayed the march. "I watched," writes Mr. Churchill, "the almost interminable procession defile. Ox waggons piled high with all kinds of packages, and drawn sometimes by ten or twelve pairs of oxen, mule waggons, Scotch carts, ambulance waggons with large Red Cross flags, ammunition carts, artillery, slaughter cattle, and last of all the naval battery with its two enormous 47 pieces, dragged by long strings of animals and guarded by straw-hatted, khaki-clad bluejackets, passed in imposing array, with here and there a troop of cavalry to protect them or to prevent straggling. And here let me make an unpleasant digression. The vast amount of baggage this army takes with it hampers its movements and utterly precludes all possibility of surprising the enemy. I have never before seen even officers accommodated with tents on active service, though both the Indian frontier and the Soudan lie under a hotter sun than South Africa. But here to-day, within striking distance of a mobile enemy whom we wish to circumvent, every private soldier has canvas shelter, and the other arrangements are on an equally elaborate scale. The consequence is that roads are crowded, drifts are blocked, marching troops are delayed, and all rapidity of movement is out of the

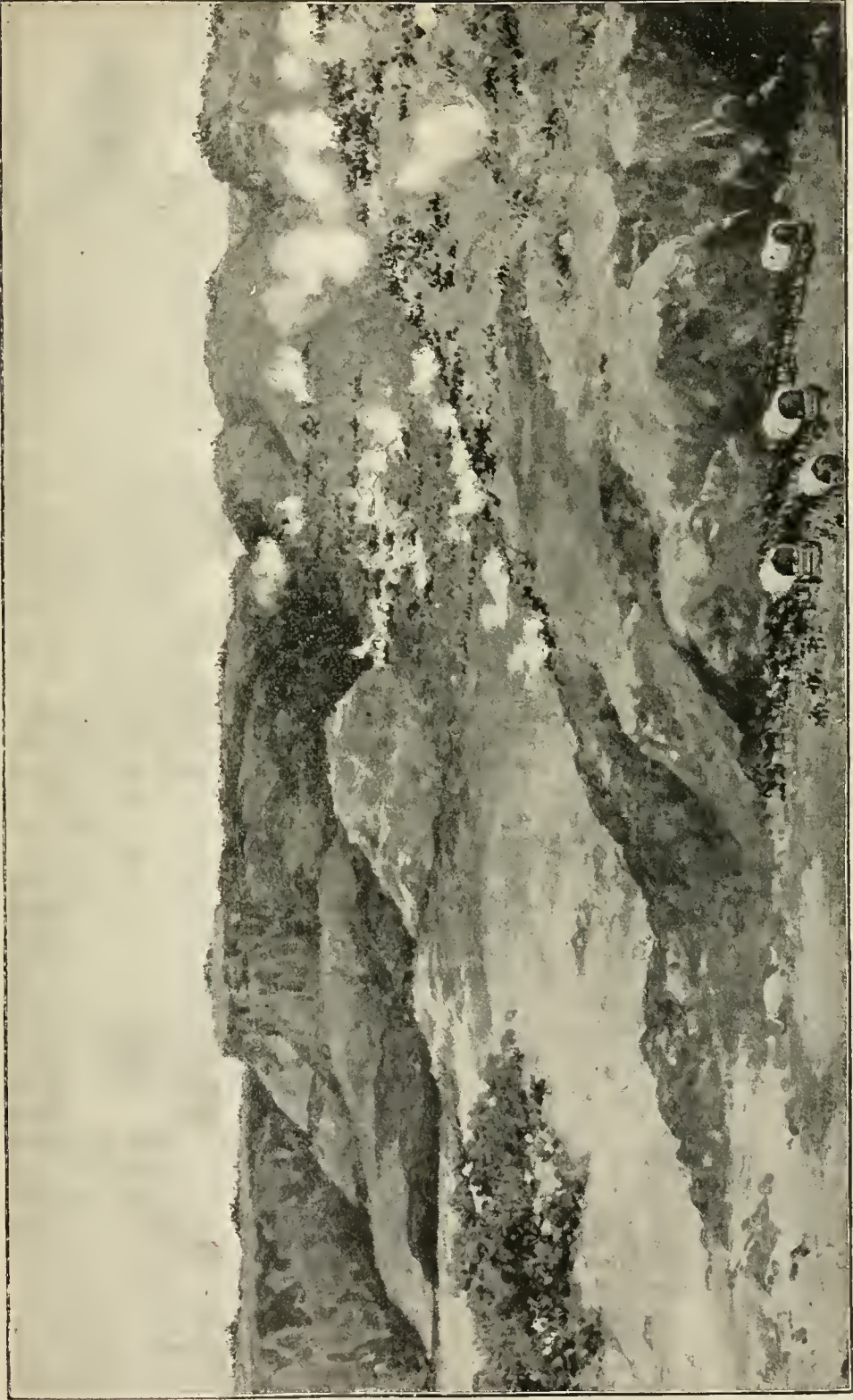
question. Meanwhile the enemy completes the fortification of his positions, and the cost of capturing them rises."

On this first day's march the scenes along the line of march baffled description. At the point where the two roads from Frere and Chieveley join, the two streams of waggons "flowed into one another like the confluence of rivers." The result was confusion and delay that did little credit to the staff officers who arranged the march. The officers on the spot managed somehow to sort out the waggons and keep the column moving at least by fits and starts. But at every spruit there was a check. Waggons stuck fast with deep-sunk wheels. The Kaffir drivers flogged the cattle mercilessly with their long whips, but they struggled in vain till double teams were yoked in, or a traction engine helped the waggon out of the hole. Meanwhile, the rest of the column was blocked for miles.

At first the cavalry had moved with the waggons; but when it was seen that the long column could only struggle onward slowly and painfully, Dundonald collected the bulk of his mounted men at the head of it and began to push on rapidly towards Springfield.

At noon Pretorius's Farm was reached, and here the Royal Dragoons were left to guard the place while Clery's division concentrated round it. Then Dundonald, with about 1,000 mounted men and six guns, rode on towards Springfield, where, rumour said, the Boers were holding the long wooden bridge over the Little Tugela and had entrenched the slopes of the Zwart Kop plateau beyond it, the mountain mass round which the little river runs to join the main stream of the Tugela.

And here again we must quote Mr. Winston Churchill. He was attached as an officer of the South African Horse, and was with the column. He gives a striking description of the country round Springfield and of Dundonald's advance to the Little Tugela: "On we ride, 'trot and walk,' lightly and easily over the good turf, and winding in scattered practical formations among the beautiful verdant hills of Natal. Presently we topped a ridge and entered a very extensive basin of country—a huge circular valley of green grass with sloping hills apparently on all sides and towards the west bluffs, rising range above range, to the bright purple wall of the Drakensberg. Other valleys opened out from this, some half-veiled in thin mist, others, into which the sun was shining, filled with a



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF GENERAL SIR REDVERS BULLER'S ACTION ON JAN. 30TH AFTER CROSSING THE TUGELA

curious blue light, so that one seemed to be looking down into the depths of clear water, and everyone rejoiced in the splendours of the delightful landscape. But now we approached Springfield, and perhaps at Springfield we should find the enemy. Surely if they did not oppose the passage they would blow up the bridge. Tiny patrols—beetles on a green baize carpet—scoured the plain, and before we reached the crease—scarcely perceptible at a mile's distance—in which the Little Tugela flows, word was brought that no Dutchmen were anywhere to be seen. Captain Gough, it appeared, with one man, had ridden over the bridge in safety; more than that, had actually explored three miles on the further side: did not believe there was a Boer this side of the Tugela; would like to push on to Potgeiter's [a drift on the main stream] and make certain. 'Perhaps we can seize Potgeiter's to-night. They don't like having a flooded river behind them.' So we come to Springfield—three houses, a long wooden bridge, half a dozen farms with their tin roofs and tree clumps seen in the neighbourhood—and no Boers. Orders were to seize the bridge; seized accordingly; and after all had crossed and watered in the Little Tugela—swollen by the rains to quite a considerable Tugela, eighty yards wide—we looked about for something else to do."

Patrols sent up to the heights beyond Springfield, the rocky plateau that divides the Little Tugela from the main stream, all brought the same report—that there were no Boers anywhere to be seen. The original idea had been that Dundonald was to remain at Springfield till the infantry arrived next day, when the heights of Zwart Kop could be seized as the next step to forcing the drifts beyond on the Upper Tugela. But after a brief discussion with his officers, who had been out reconnoitring, Dundonald decided to push on to the plateau. If the river fell, and the Boers were to come across and reoccupy it, its seizure might cost hard fighting. Now it could be taken without firing a shot, though the risk had to be run of the little force, pushed so far to the front, being attacked by the enemy in superior numbers.

Accordingly, in the afternoon, Lord Dundonald ventured to go beyond his orders for the sake of a certain advantage attended only by a doubtful risk. He left 300 of his men and two guns of the 78th R.F.A. to guard the crossing of the Little Tugela at Springfield, and with the remaining 700 men and four guns pushed on

into the hills. At six o'clock he held the height of Zwart Kop, looking down upon and commanding the ferry and fords at Potgeiter's Drift. Trenches and loopholed breastworks of stone upon the summit of the plateau showed that the Boers had prepared it for defence, and the position, even without such labour being expended upon it, was a naturally strong one. But they had left it, and recrossed the ferry before our mounted men arrived. There, on the sharp bend of the Tugela below the hill, the big "pont," or ferry-boat, floated, attached to its wire ropes. The Boers had left Springfield bridge undefended and uninjured, they had abandoned their works on Zwart Kop, they had not even sunk or removed the ferry-boat. Yet they must have been aware of our advance. Indeed, the first hint that an attack would be made by way of Potgeiter's Drift had found its way to England days before in a Boer telegram from Pretoria. That the enemy should thus abandon strong positions, and should not even try to harass or delay the march of the mounted troops, suggested to not a few of the venturous riders that followed Dundonald the unpleasant idea that they were being allowed to go quietly into a trap, and that presently some "slim" Boer plan would reveal itself.

It was only by great exertions that the four guns were dragged to the top of Zwart Kop before dark. Dundonald had reported to General Buller his unopposed progress, and had earnestly requested early reinforcements. The night passed rather anxiously. Rain fell, and the bivouac on the hill-top was cold and comfortless. It was obvious that the little column would not be strong enough to make a prolonged defence of the extensive position that it occupied. The men stood to their arms before daybreak, and it was a relief to find when the sun rose that the Boers were as inactive as on the day before.

During this second day of the advance Clery was moving part of his force to Springfield, and Warren was closing up to Pretorius's Farm. But, strange to say, no effort appears to have been made to push even a battalion of infantry up to Zwart Kop to strengthen our hold on that important position. On this day, Friday, the 12th, a gallant deed was done by some men of the South African Light Horse. When the last of the Boers had recrossed the Tugela they had left the ferry-boat, or pont, on the north side. There it lay, apparently unguarded, attached to the wire ropes on which it worked

backwards and forwards across the river. There is a ford at Potgeiter's, but it is deep and not very safe, and with the least rise of the river it becomes impassable. Hence the importance of securing the ferry.

Lord Dundonald asked for volunteers to swim the flooded Tugela and bring back the "pont" to the south bank, and a party from G Squadron of the South African Light Horse undertook the enterprise. "Lieutenant Carlisle was in command," says Mr. Bennet Burleigh, "and down into the Tugela went with him Sergeant Turner, Corporals Cox and Barkley, and Troopers Howell, Godden and Collingwood. The stream was over a hundred yards wide by twenty feet deep, but they all got safely over and gathered in the cutting where the flat ferry-

boat draws up. Launching the boat, they proceeded to work it across by the hauling-line and block. A covering party of their comrades lined the southern bank. The Boers, as usual, were speedily on the alert, and about fifty of them came as near as they dared and began firing heavily at the men in the boat. Very promptly the horsemen jumped back into the water, and their adventure would have proved fruitless but that Corporal Cox got back upon the ferry-boat and cut the hawser on the north side.

Then the firing party told off some of their number to haul in the craft, a task which, with some difficulty, was accomplished. To escape the rain of Boer bullets the men swam back to the south bank. The corporal was attacked with cramp, but Howell and the others stood by him and brought him in safely. Cox stayed for nearly two hours in the water to assist in safely securing the boat. Not a man of the party was hit by the Boer fire." So far as we are aware, no reward or distinction of any kind was given to the brave men who did this gallant deed.

That afternoon the Tugela began to fall rapidly, but in the early hours of next day two battalions of infantry reached Zwart Kop from Springfield, and the position was safe. Later in the morning General Buller, with his staff, arrived on the plateau, and for the best part of an hour was engaged in searching with his telescope the heights on the north bank.

The view from Zwart Kop is one of the most

striking in Northern Natal. On the north the hill falls steeply to the river, six hundred feet below. Its side is almost precipitous; but a little below the summit there is a broad terrace, partly covered with scrub and bushes, on which the naval guns were placed. The river winds in a series of narrow loops and bends in the valley below. There is a deep loop just north of the kop, which is crossed by Potgeiter's Drift. On the north bank within the loop the ground lies low, except that a few hundred yards beyond the ferry there is a line of small kopjes. North of these again is open ground, the fields sloping gradually to the base of the Brakfontein Hills.

These hills are part of a long spur of the Drakensberg that runs eastward for miles along the north bank of the Upper Tugela. Some distance above Potgeiter's Drift a small tributary, known as Venter's Spruit, runs into the river, and its valley offers a fairly easy access to the high ground near Acton Homes, on the road from Van Reenen's Pass to Ladysmith. The Brakfontein Hills turn back to the north-westward along the right bank of Venter's Spruit; and thus the whole mass, known to the natives as Thaba Myana and to the English colonists as the Black Mountain, forms a huge bastion, with



MAJOR E. C. BETHUNE, 1011
LANCERS, COMMANDING
BETHUNE'S HORSE.

the hollow of Venter's Spruit to the west and the Tugela Valley to the south of it. At the point that looks down on the junction of the spruit with the river, where the hills form nearly a right angle, there is a flat-topped summit rising above the general mass. This is the hill that was to become sadly famous as Spion Kop. The plateau of the Black Mountain and the ridge of Brakfontein that fronts Potgeiter's are three to four hundred feet above the Tugela Valley. Spion Kop is some hundreds of feet higher, and from the river bank access to its summit can be gained only by a narrow, rocky footpath.

As far as it can be gathered from the despatches of Sir Redvers Buller, his plan was to seize Potgeiter's Drift and threaten the Boer position on the Brakfontein Hills in front, while at the same time his main force, under the leadership of Sir Charles Warren, was to be sent across Trichard's Drift some six miles to the westward, preceded in its advance by the

mounted troops under Lord Dundonald. The force that crossed at Trichard's Drift would thus be brought into the hollow of the Venter's Spruit Valley. The mounted troops were to push up it beyond Acton Homes, turning the extreme right of the Boer position, while Warren, with three or four infantry brigades, advanced up the slopes of the Black Mountain between Spion Kop and Acton Homes. There were no detailed maps of the ground, and it had been very insufficiently reconnoitred. It was thought that the slopes would not be very difficult to approach and surmount. The movement could be covered by a cross fire of Warren's own field batteries from the ground near Venter's Spruit, and of the long-ranging naval guns on Zwart Kop. Once the plateau was gained, the relief force would have no serious obstacle between it and the hills round Ladysmith.

The Boers, whose numbers were probably not as great as has been generally supposed, and who had at the same time to keep up the siege of Ladysmith, maintain some force on Hlangwane Mountain and in the Colenso trenches to observe Chieveley camp, and concentrate a third force on the Upper Tugela to oppose the main army under Buller, had abandoned the crossing of the Little Tugela, the heights of Zwart Kop, and the drifts on the main river in order to hold the line of heights north of the river, where the extent of the ground was more suited for their limited force. Louis Botha, afterwards better known as the Commandant-General of the Boer forces, was in command, and he showed himself a master of the art of war. There were already some entrenchments on the hills. On the very day after our mounted troops reached Zwart Kop, Botha began to reinforce the height beyond the river and to strengthen their defences. It was unfortunate for Buller that the dash by which the plateau on the south bank had been seized could not be at once followed up by the crossing of the river and the attack on the hills. But he had to wait for the slow advance of his army and its enormous transport train over roads, or rather tracks, that the rain of the preceding days had made into quagmires. Meanwhile, the Boers were busy. From the first grey light of dawn till after dark they were working at their redoubts and shelter trenches. "On the hills opposite us," wrote Mr. J. B. Atkins on Sunday, the 14th, "the Boers work continually. At least this time we can see some of their guns.

'Good navvies, ain't they?' said a gunner; and a comrade rejoined, 'Like moles, the way they turn the earth over.' Then he continued, 'What are we showing ourselves and our guns 'ere for?' Upon that the first gunner replied ironically, 'Don't yer know? That's to give 'em plenty of time to get ready!'

This was the feeling of the army, naturally impatient at its long inaction in the very sight of the enemy. But "time to get ready" was needed by Buller and Warren as well as by Botha. At last Buller had all his army well up the south bank, and the first crossing was made at Potgeiter's Drift.

With heavy guns on the Zwart Kop plateau commanding at short range the drift and the little kopjes immediately beyond it, the Boers could not oppose the passage of the river at this point. But when the troops were across, so long as the enemy held Spion Kop and the Brakfontein ridge they would be pent within the enclosure formed by these hills and the long loop of the river. The object of sending a brigade across at this point was merely to oblige the enemy to keep part of his force on his left, and so lighten Warren's task further west. The concentration had taken an enormous time, and it was not till the evening of Monday, January 15th, that Buller had all his troops and guns up to the south side of the Upper Tugela; next day the move to the north bank began.

Mount Alice, one of the summits of Zwart Kop, was already in heliographic communication with Ladysmith, so that Buller was able to receive news from the besieged garrison and to give Sir George White some information as to his own movements. There was an exceptional difficulty in signalling in this campaign. In the broken country one could not always be sure if the answering heliograph was in British or in Boer hands, and the enemy had a skilled corps of well-trained signallers who could read a message in English. Even the code was not safe, as the Boers had captured General Symons' code signal book in the British baggage lost at Dundee. Mr. Burleigh gives an interesting account of how tests were applied to settle the question as to whether one was flashing a signal to friend or foe. When the signal station was established at Mount Alice, and the flash of another heliograph appeared towards Ladysmith, "there was," he says, "a division of opinion amongst the guides and scouts whether from the position of the heliograph it was our own people or the Boers trying to call us. The

signaller asked who we were—British or Boers? When told, he desired to have the names of Buller's staff or key-words. That looked like entrusting too much without first learning who the questioner was. The reply was, 'Captain Walker, chief signaller.' As I knew that gentleman intimately, it was arranged that I should draft a test message. I therefore prepared the following questions: 'Who is Burleigh? Where did you see him last? Who represents the *Daily Telegraph* in Ladysmith?' The answerer flashed back instanter: 'Yes, I know him. Is he there? I met him on the *Grantully Castle*, when he was going to Madagascar, several years ago. I don't know who represents him here, but I received a message from Burleigh for him through Weenen from Cayzer, and I have sent it round. If he has not replied, I will send and get the answer and send it through you to Burleigh.' That settled the matter to everybody's satisfaction, for probably no one in South Africa but Captain Walker of the Black Watch knew of my voyage upon the *Grantully Castle*, nor that I had sent a message *viâ* Weenen, and heliographed from Umbulange to the *Daily Telegraph* representative in Ladysmith but two days previously." The test having worked satisfactorily, Ladysmith was informed of the new effort being made for its relief, and for the next few days the garrison watched anxiously for the appearance of our columns over the crest of Brakfontein and the Black Mountain.

At noon on Tuesday, January 16th, orders were issued that General Lyttelton's brigade of Rifle regiments was to seize the north bank at Potgeiter's that afternoon, and nearly all the mounted troops were to be ready to march, with five days' rations and 150 rounds per man, leaving all camp equipment and heavy baggage behind them at Zwart Kop; going, in fact, with only what they could carry on their horses. Only Bethune's Horse were to remain with Buller. The two heavy 4.7 guns and the battery of naval 12-pounders were trained on the Brakfontein hills, and Lyttelton's battalions, a detachment of the Royal Engineers, and some of the Natal Naval Volunteers made their way to the margin of the river, with a few of Bethune's troopers to act as scouts.

It was a bright, sunny afternoon, and the Boers were at once aware of the movement. Signal fires sent up long trails of smoke from the Black Mountain and Brakfontein, and reinforcements were seen to be rapidly riding up to the hills on the north bank.

The river was still rather high. No attempt had been made to mark out the ford, but its position was roughly indicated near the rope ferry by some small grassy islands and rocks just showing above the water. The Scottish Rifles and a battalion of the Rifle Brigade were extended on the low ground along the south bank to cover the crossing, and a few harmless rifle shots were fired at them at long range by Boers who had come down from the hills into the fields on the other side. The Engineers launched some pontoon boats, and with the help of the Naval Volunteers, after a long delay, got the pont, or ferry, into working order.

While these preparations were in progress a big thunderstorm, with dense, driving rain, broke over the valley, and though it drenched the men it screened for a while our movements from the enemy's snipers. Two riflemen waded into the river, and were soon almost up to their shoulders in the rapidly rushing stream. But hand in hand they made their way from rock to rock and from island to island, carefully picking out the ford, and at last, after several narrow escapes, reached the other bank. Then they made their way back more quickly, and became the leaders of two long chains of men, who, holding each other's hands, and with their rifles slung at their backs, began to make their way steadily across the ford. Meanwhile the ferry was at work, and the pontoon boats were being paddled across, with horses swimming behind them. The Boer skirmishers had fallen back towards the hills; only a few of them remained on the low detached kopjes north of the ford, and these were driven out as soon as a few companies of the Rifles could be got together. When our men rushed the kopjes the Boers had gone. After this the enemy made not the slightest attempt to interfere with the crossing, which continued long after dark. By three in the morning Lyttelton's four battalions were across the river and bivouacking on a rocky ridge a mile from the bank. A howitzer battery was sent over, and by lantern light was placed in position under cover of the rocks.

At dawn next day the naval guns on Zwart Kop opened fire and began to shell with lyddite the Boer positions at Brakfontein and Spion Kop. Half an hour later Lyttelton's howitzer battery joined in, and all the morning the heavy shells were bursting on the hills, sending up volumes of dark smoke and throwing out volcano-like clouds of dust and stones. The

Boers did not fire a single shot in reply, and although some of the correspondents, eagerly watching through field-glasses and telescopes, thought they saw burghers being blown to pieces, it is very doubtful whether the tons of lyddite shell that were expended inflicted any loss of life or limb on the enemy, or even administered any shock to his nerves. The probability is that, as was the case at Magersfontein and Colenso in December, the Boer trenches were empty. The enemy were sheltered behind the hills, eating, smoking, sleeping in their laagers, while a few look-outs, in safe places, watched what was going on, ready to

give warning in sufficient time to man the trenches if our infantry showed any sign of advancing.

On our part, the work of the two days was a mere demonstration meant to rivet the enemy's attention on his left while the more important movements were in progress on the west; and it is quite possible that Commandant Louis Botha perfectly understood what it all meant. For while the guns and howitzers were thundering over Potgeiter's Drift, his scouts at Venter's Spruit must have been sending him news of our advance against the drifts higher up the Tugela.



MAJOR-GENERAL R. A. P. CLEMENTS,
COMMANDING 12TH BRIGADE.
(Photo: Fradelle & Young, London.)



MAITLAND CAMP, NEAR CAPE TOWN: HOUSEHOLD CAVALRY BRINGING THEIR HORSES TO WATER.

CHAPTER XX.

SIR CHARLES WARREN'S FLANK MOVEMENT.

WHILE Lyttelton's brigade was demonstrating at Potgeiter's Drift, and the heavy guns were harmlessly bombarding the Boer trenches on the Brakfontein and Spion Kop hills, the mounted troops and Warren's infantry and artillery were moving towards Trichard's and Waggon Drifts, near Venter's Spruit.

On the evening of the 16th—the same day that Potgeiter's Drift was crossed—the cavalry marched to the upper drifts, about six miles further west, and Warren made a night march from Springfield with Hart's, Hildyard's, and Woodgate's brigades, six batteries of the Royal Field Artillery, and the Royal Engineers with their pontoon train. His orders were to bridge the river the next day, force the passage at Trichard's, and operate against the right flank of the Boers. The force making this flanking movement amounted to three brigades (twelve battalions), thirty-six guns, and 1,600 mounted men.

The darkness had fallen when the cavalry and mounted rifles halted on the south bank at Trichard's Drift. In the night (the 16th of January) the infantry began to arrive, plodding slowly through mud and driving rain. Why they were pushed on in the dark is not at all clear, as the subsequent delays seem to indicate that surprise was no part of the general plan. One point about the march noted by Mr. Churchill suggests that little attention was paid to the excellent rules for route marches laid down in the drill book. He speaks of watching the long

column go by, "miles of stern-faced men, marching in fours so quickly that they often had to run." This occasional running must have meant that there were checks, loss of distance, and then a scramble to make it up—the surest way to tire men uselessly even in the daytime, much more on a night march. All this could have been avoided by observing the plain, recognised rule of leaving proper intervals in the column, so that a brief check would not result in the men packing upon each other, and there should have been halts from time to time to correct loss of distance.

The pontoons had been dragged up to the bank in the darkness, and one would have expected that when the dawn came the bridges would be at least begun. But nothing had been done in the early hours of the day, or was even attempted. The troops rested, wondering why they had been worried with a night march, when it appeared that after all there was no hurry. To anxious inquirers as to when the crossing of the river was to be commenced, staff-officers replied that the general was waiting for all the transport to come up.

At eight o'clock the troops at last began to show some sign of movement. Two battalions were sent down to the river bank. They occupied some farm buildings near Trichard's Drift, and began to dig shelter trenches in the fields. From the heights behind them the six batteries opened fire, shelling the hills and trees on the north bank in order to drive from their cover any Boers who might be waiting to

dispute the passage. Only a few hostile scouts were in view, and these promptly disappeared. The sappers dragged the pontoons down to the river and began to construct the first bridge. Some sniping shots were fired at them at long range, and a private of the Devons, one of the covering party, was killed. Some of the pontoons not yet incorporated in the bridge were used as boats to ferry over the Devons and the West Yorkshire Regiment, who till now had been engaged in this duty. At eleven the bridge was ready and the Irish Brigade began to tramp across, followed later on by Woodgate's Lancashire Brigade. Lower down the river the mounted troops began to cross by the deep ford of Waggon Drift. The river ran high and strong, and many horses and men were swept away. All were rescued except an unfortunate private of the 13th Hussars, who was drowned notwithstanding a gallant attempt made by his captain to save him.

As soon as the first bridge was finished a second was begun, and by the bridges all through the evening and the following night the artillery and transport were sent across the Tugela. The crossing was not completed till the daylight hours of next morning, January 18th, and until the last waggon was over Sir Charles Warren kept his troops within their extended picket lines.

When at last the passage of the river was complete, the infantry were moved about two miles forward from the north bank, and the mounted troops were pushed out to the left front. This movement led to the first fight and the first success of the flank march, a success that was notable because our men for once secured some Boer prisoners.

The column was moving up the Venter's Spruit Valley towards Acton Homes, the Imperial Light Horse well to the front, and a little to the right flank of the line of advance. A party of Boers about 200 strong had been watching the broken ground, but their scouting was badly done. They afterwards attributed their failure to having trusted too much to some of the foreign volunteers who were with them, and who were not yet well used to the country. They saw the main body of Dundonald's force and began to retire to the higher ground, quite unaware that a squadron of the Light Horse was well forward and almost on their flank. The Colonials had grasped the situation before the enemy recognised their danger. They pushed on rapidly to seize a kopje commanding

the Boer line of retreat. Then they played one of the most effective tricks of Boer warfare. They let the advanced scouts of the little Boer column come quite close up to them, and held their fire and lay low among the rocks. Then, when at last the scouts had reached such a point that the ambushade must soon be discovered, the Imperials poured a volley into the main body of the enemy, who, trusting to their advanced guard, were riding in happy security. The range was only 300 yards. Several of the Boers fell; the rest halted at once, gazed for a moment in surprise at the rocks from which the deadly fire had burst out so suddenly, and then turned, scattered, and rode for cover, followed by a shower of bullets. The ground was broken and rocky, and they were soon ensconced among the rocks. An officer of the Light Horse galloped down the valley to ask Dundonald to push reinforcements up, attack the Boer flank, and capture the party. The Mounted Infantry of the 60th Rifles, the South African Light Horse and Thorneycroft's Horse, were sent up the valley, Dundonald himself going with them. They dismounted and extended in a long crescent to attack the Boer position, the South African Horse taking the extreme left and gradually working nearly to the left rear of the enemy's position. The Dutchmen shot back steadily at the attacking party, and though outnumbered held their own bravely for a long time. It was, however, evident after a while that there were some faint hearts among them, for a white flag was shown more than once, only to disappear quickly, and neither side stopped firing. As one soldier observer put it, there was evidently a difference of opinion among the enemy, but those who wanted to give in were repressed by stronger men when they tried to show the flag of surrender, even as a few days later Colonel Thorneycroft on Spion Kop put a stop to attempts to surrender on the part of some of our own men.

At last, when it was getting late and it was feared that darkness might come on, the 60th Rifles were sent forward to rush the position. They were met by such a heavy burst of firing that they fell back again and took cover, after they had got to within fifty yards of the enemy. Then the white flag appeared again, and Dundonald, not without difficulty, got his men to cease firing, in order to give the Boers a chance of surrendering if they really meant it. Three men stood up on the rocks holding up their hands, and Dundonald and his staff rode

forward to accept their surrender. The fight was over.

And then came something of a disappointing surprise. Most of the Boers, it appeared, had got away early in the affair. Only a handful had held the rocks so long. There were twenty-four unwounded prisoners and eight wounded. Ten more Boers lay dead among the rocks. This made forty-two in all, out of a commando of 200. The British loss had been slight, two of the Rifles killed in the bayonet charge and an officer and a man of the Imperial Light Horse wounded.

The soldiers who had won in the little fight had been furious at what they considered the treacherous use of the white flag, but now they were all admiration at the pluck of the handful of men who had held out so long against them. The wounded men especially excited their sympathy. "The soldiers crowded round them," writes Mr. Churchill, "covering them up with blankets or mackintoshes, propping their heads with saddles for pillows, and giving them water and biscuits from their bottles and haversacks. Anger had turned to pity in an instant. The desire to kill was gone. The desire to comfort replaced it. A little alert officer—Hubert Gough, now a captain, soon to command a regiment—came up to me. Two minutes before, his eyes were bright and joyous with the excitement of the man hunt. He had galloped a mile, mostly under fire, to bring the reinforcements to surround the Boers. 'Bag the lot, you know.' Now he was very sad. 'There is a poor boy dying up there—only a boy, and so cold—who's got a blanket?' So the soldiers succoured the Boer wounded, and we told the prisoners that they would be shown courtesy and kindness worthy of brave men and a famous quarrel. The Boer dead were collected, and a flag of truce was sent to the enemy's lines to invite a burying and identification party at dawn. I have often seen dead men, killed in war—the thousands at Omdurman—scores elsewhere, black and white—but the Boer dead aroused the most painful emotions. Here by the rock under which he had fought lay the field cornet of Heilbron, Mr. De Mentz, a grey-haired man of over sixty years, with firm aquiline features and a short beard. The stony face was grimly calm, but it bore the stamp of an unalterable resolve; the look of a man who had thought it all out, and was quite certain that his cause was just, and such as a sober citizen might give his life for. Nor was I surprised when the Boer

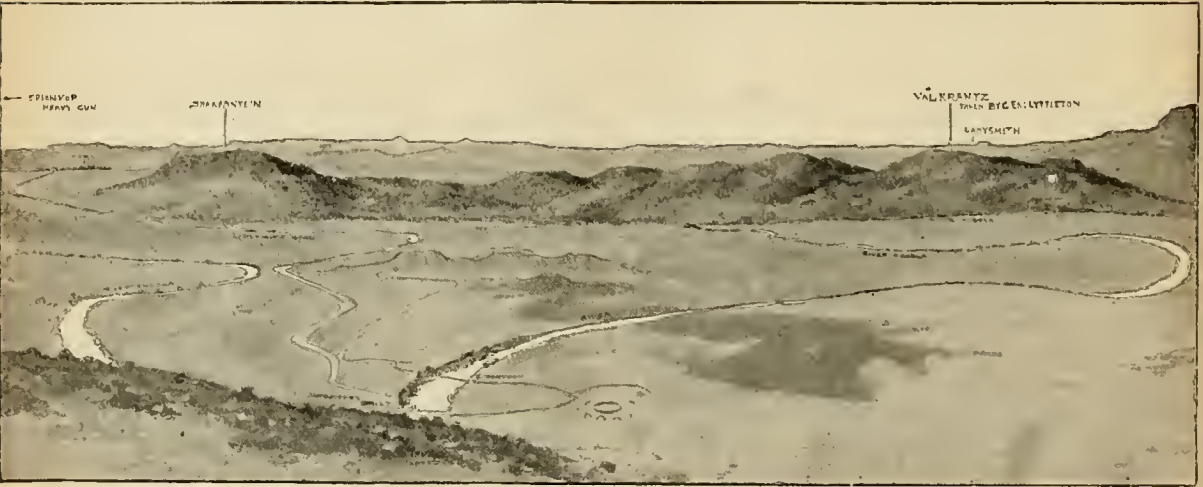
prisoners told me that Mentz had refused all suggestions of surrender, and that when his left leg was smashed by a bullet he had continued to load and fire until he bled to death; and they found him pale and bloodless, holding his wife's letter in his hand. Beside him was a boy of about seventeen, shot through the heart. Further on lay our own two poor riflemen, with their heads smashed like egg-shells, and I suppose they had mothers or wives far away at the end of the deep sea-cables."

The result of the fight, which ended a little before sunset, was that the cavalry advance had to stop for that day, and the greater part of the Boers were able to withdraw from the Venter's Spruit hollow. The cavalry halted near Acton Homes, on the track that leads from Ladysmith to Oliviers Hock Pass in the Drakensberg; and the report of its having penetrated so far gave the impression, at home in England, that Dundonald had gained the plateau on the Boer right and successfully turned their flank. There were even rumours that he had ridden into Ladysmith. These impressions and rumours were the result of the available maps being so defective. As a matter of fact, the furthest point which the cavalry reached was where the Acton Homes road dips down into the Venter's Spruit Valley. The Boers still held the heights on Dundonald's front and flank, and barred his further progress. Sir Charles Warren's orders to him were, to go no further for the present, but to hold his ground and guard the flank and rear of the infantry brigades, which were presently to be engaged in attacking the Black Mountain—*i.e.* the heights forming the eastern wall of the Venter's Spruit Valley and running up to the great blunted cone of Spion Kop.

During the next day, January 19th, Sir Charles Warren was getting his troops into position for the attack, but there was no fighting beyond a desultory exchange of long-range rifle fire between our advanced troops and the Boers on the lower slopes of the hills. Away on the other side of Spion Kop, at Potgeiter's Drift, the howitzers and the naval guns were bombarding the Boer entrenchments. The garrison of Ladysmith knew that a great effort was being made to help them. They listened to the distant roar of the guns, and they watched on the plain to the westward lines of waggons and columns of Boer horsemen moving off to reinforce the enemy on the heights above the Upper Tugela. On the 17th they had seen a British shell bursting in a cloud of dust and

smoke far away on the plain—a shell, aimed too high, that had flown over the Brakfontein ridge from one of the guns at Potgeiter's. Next day, they could see the shells bursting high on the hills, and some of the eager watchers were badly wounded by a bombardment suddenly opened by the besiegers. On the 19th—the day on which Warren was preparing for the attack—the garrison was full of hope, and it was even said the siege might be raised by the evening. "Before noon," writes Mr. Nevinson in his diary of the siege, "as I rode round the outposts, I found the good news flying that good news had come. It was thought best not to tell us what, lest like children we should cry if disappointed. But it is confi-

Relief Force having made any serious progress, Sir Charles Warren was engaged in holding something like a council of war and altering his plans. He had been sent across the river to turn the Boer flank. He had now made up his mind that this would take mere time and require a longer detour than he had originally anticipated, and, perhaps from a misunderstanding of Buller's instructions to him, he thought he had not sufficient supplies available for such a prolonged operation. The published despatches reveal something like a conflict of views between Warren and Buller on the situation, the beginning of a divergence of opinion that had a serious effect on the subsequent operations.



THE BOER POSITIONS.

dently said that Buller's force has crossed the Tugela in three places—Wright's Drift eastward, Potgeiter's Drift in the centre, and at a point further west, perhaps Klein Waterfall, where there is a nine-mile plain leading to Acton Homes. The names of the brigades are even stated, and the number of losses. It is said the Boers have been driven from three positions. But there may not be one word of truth in the whole story. I was early on Observation Hill, watching that strip of plain to the south-west. No shells were bursting on it to-day, and the sound of guns was not so frequent. Our heliograph flashed from the far-off Zwart Kop, and high above it, looking hardly bigger than a vulture against the pale blue of the Drakensberg precipices, rose Buller's balloon, showing just a point of lustre on its skin."

On the evening of this day, so far from the

Warren, after relating that he had on the 19th got his transport up to Venter's Spruit and pushed two of his brigades forward to the hill slopes beyond, goes on to say:—

"In the evening, after having examined the possible routes by which we could proceed, I assembled the general officers and the staff, and the officer commanding the Royal Artillery, and the commanding Royal Engineer, and pointed out to them that of the two routes by which we could advance, the eastern one by Acton Homes must be rejected because time would not allow of it, and with this all concurred. I then pointed out that the only possible way of all getting through by the road north of Fair View would be by taking three or four days' food in our haversacks and sending all our waggons back across the Tugela; but before

we could do this we must capture the position in front of us."

After this council of war he wrote to Buller :

(Sent 7.54 p.m. Received 8.15 p.m.)

LEFT FLANK, January 19th.

To Chief-of-the-Staff.

I find our only two roads by which we could possibly get from Trichard's Drift to Potgeiter's on the north of the Tugela are, one by Acton Homes, the other by Fair View and Rosalie. The first I reject as too long, the

days would be sufficient burden to him, but that I would keep him filled up as he wanted it." Still stranger is it to find that Warren gave Buller, his chief, no information as to the special arrangements included in his plan, and that Buller, who was only a few miles away at his headquarters on Zwart Kop, neither went to see for himself what was being done, nor asked his subordinate for any detailed information. It was not till the 23rd that Buller



UNITED STATES, RUSSIAN, GERMAN, FRENCH, AUSTRIAN, AND ITALIAN MILITARY ATTACHÉS AT CAPE TOWN.

(From a stereoscopic photograph by Underwood & Underwood; copyright 1900.)

second is a very difficult road for a large number of waggons, unless the enemy is thoroughly cleared out. I am therefore going to adopt some special arrangements, which will involve my stay at Venter's laager for two or three days. I will send in for further supplies, and report progress.

WARREN.

Buller's reply was that three days' provisions would be sent to Warren. But it is curious to see him noting in his despatch that Warren was under a mistake when he supposed that his supplies were limited. "I had told him," he writes, "that the transport for three and a half

went across the river to see how things were going, and to remonstrate with Warren on the trifling results of four days' fighting. It was, to say the least of it, a feeble line of action for a commander-in-chief, who, though he did not seem to realise the fact, was responsible for what his subordinate was doing, and could not shift the responsibility on to his shoulders.

At dawn on Saturday, January 20th, Warren began his attack on the western ridges of the Black Mountain. Some of the correspondents in letters and telegrams spoke of the battle

having begun the day before, but on the Friday, Warren himself seems to have considered, and with good reason, that he was only getting his batteries and brigades into position for the coming struggle. One correspondent wrote that the Boers "were step by step forced back upon the outer circle of the lofty ridges stretching from Fair View to Spion Kop." But there was no real "forcing back." The enemy's outposts gradually abandoned ground they never meant to hold, ground outside their well-chosen position.

Nor did they make any determined stand on the 20th. The object of the day's operations was the possession of an outlying ridge of the plateau, and the Boers withdrew from it, fighting what was essentially in its tactics a rearguard action. They were fighting only to gain time for the further strengthening of their main position. Warren put Clery in command of the troops who were engaged. They were the Lancashire and the Irish brigades, supported by his six batteries. Away to the left the cavalry under Dundonald were ordered to make a demonstration against the Boer right, and they demonstrated to good effect, pushing in a real attack against a prominent spur of the plateau called by the soldiers Bastion Hill, and capturing it. The fight lasted twelve hours. From the further heights the Boers brought artillery, heavy Creusot guns and some of the R.F.A. 15-pounders captured at Colenso, into action in support of their riflemen who held the outlying ridge. Major Childe, who led the South African Light Horse in the capture of Bastion Hill, was killed on its summit by a shrapnel, when the Boer guns began to bombard it after the burghers had withdrawn. In the evening, Hildyard's infantry brigade was sent to occupy the hill, and the Colonials rejoined Dundonald. Altogether the day's losses, largely from artillery fire, were 350 killed and wounded. The regiments that suffered most severely were the Dublin Fusiliers in Hart's Brigade and the Lancashire Fusiliers and the Royal Lancashire Regiment in Woodgate's.

During the next three days the fighting continued. Before proceeding with our description of it, it may be well to quote the impression of this long battle given in the letter of an officer who took part in it. "Day after day," he writes, "we lay without tents on rocky hillsides, under a tropical sun that melted our brains and weakened our energies. Night after night we tried to sleep, a bitter cold wind driving through our

thin cotton khaki, without a blanket or even a great coat to protect us. Many of the men walked about half the night, trying to keep themselves warm, but we had abundance of food—tinned, of course, but good and wholesome—and in this wonderful climate our health did not suffer to any great extent. Day after day we sat idle, watching eagerly for some sign of a forward movement somewhere, and listening to the intermittent sniping from morning to night between the hostile lines. Meanwhile our enemies were not so idle. Under our very eyes trench after trench was constructed. Where the ground was too rocky for the spade, stone walls were built at every dangerous corner, and there gradually arose along the crest of the opposite hills a fortress against which an army five times our strength would have dashed itself in vain. Heavy guns were moved from Colenso, and so concealed around the corners of the kopjes that when the shells began to drop amongst us our artillery could not localise a single gun. They did not, however, trouble us very much. An occasional shell was thrown to get the range, and then the fire was reserved till necessity arose. It was perfectly wonderful the self-denial exercised on these occasions by the Boers. Our guns drenched them with lyddite and shrapnel, yet there was not a shot sent in reply, though their ranging shots had been thrown with absolute accuracy, and had killed a few men and horses. For all one could see, the hills and trenches might have been absolutely deserted, and a newcomer might have walked into the midst of them without suspecting that a human creature existed within twenty miles."

This gives a better idea of what the prolonged fight at Venter's Spruit was like than would be gathered from a detailed account of each day's incidents. After the first engagement on the Saturday no real progress was made, though on the Sunday the Irish Brigade pushed forward a little. During that Sunday two of the batteries were moved to the left as the Boers seemed to be in force on that side, and Warren was so impressed by the little effect that his artillery was producing, that he telegraphed to Buller's headquarters asking for four of the howitzers to be sent to him from Potgeiter's Drift. They arrived in the night and were at work next day. Though their lyddite shells burst fairly on the enemy's positions they did not either clear the trenches or silence the Boer guns.

The ridge which Warren's troops had occupied was so narrow and steep that it was impossible

to find upon it gun positions on which the batteries could be brought forward to support the advance of the troops at closer range. Beyond it, the ground dropped sharply, then rose in a long, glaucis-like slope, which was swept by the fire of the Boer trenches along the crescent-shaped crest of the plateau above it. In the two days since the ridge was captured the general situation had, if anything, become worse. The men were exhausted with the long days under fire, and the cold, shelterless, and half sleepless nights; and the enemy had strengthened their works and brought up more guns, the fire of which was becoming annoying. Spion Kop, rising high on the Boer right, appeared, as seen from the outlying ridge, to dominate the enemy's position, and Warren hit upon a plan which had an ominous likeness to Colley's idea at Majuba. It seemed to him that if he could seize the hill by a night march and place guns in position there, he could enfilade the Boer entrenchments; and if they were not evacuated by this bombardment, storm them by a combined frontal and flank attack. He resolved to attempt the enterprise on the night of the 22nd.

And here we must make use again of the officer's letter from which we have already quoted. "On the south of Spion Kop," he says, "a long spur reached out towards the Tugela and presented the only practicable path to the top. It was an admirable feature for a night attack, but it was narrow, in parts rocky and steep, and the ravine had to be crossed before it could be reached. It was eminently a spot requiring careful examination beforehand by the leaders and commanders, and as many of the troops had been lying for days on the border of the ravine overlooking it, there were many officers who were fairly acquainted with the topographical details.

"That day one new regiment had arrived at the front, after a long and tiring march. They had landed only a short time before, and were totally unacquainted with the country. Just before dusk the officer commanding was informed that he had been selected to lead a night attack on Spion Kop. He had never even seen the hill he was to attack, or heard its name, and no correct maps were at hand.

"During the few available minutes he made every effort to view the ground. But time did not allow, and he had to grope his way back to his own camp after dark. So pitch black was the night, and so new was he to the place, that

in that half mile he lost himself completely, and had great difficulty in getting home. But he was a brave man; he had received his orders, and he allowed no doubt of success to cross his mind. To those who knew the ground it presented a gloomy prospect, and threatened a terrible disaster, worse even than the one which overwhelmed General Gatacre.

"The sight of this gallant officer preparing cheerfully for what he knew in his heart to be certain destruction, and yet willingly accepted at the word of a superior, recalled the heroism of Sparta and Rome. God knows what would have happened had he ever started. Two miles of a difficult and circuitous route; a precipitous descent over rocks and boulders; a ravine intersected by deep watercourses twisted and tangled inextricably; a long and narrow path over a rugged spur, with a precipice on one side and the expectation of being encircled in a zone of fire at any moment, are surely operations difficult and dangerous to negotiate under the most favourable conditions. But for an officer to lead two battalions on a pitch dark night, without even an idea of the compass bearings, without a map, without a daylight view of the ground, could hardly, one would have thought, have entered into the wildest dreams of an inmate in Bedlam. Luckily an unexpected difficulty occurred at the last moment, and the movement was delayed till the next night."

Next morning, January 23rd, Sir Redvers Buller went over to Sir Charles Warren's position and discussed the situation with him. He tells the story in his despatch, in a passage that is rather serious reading, for he lets one see how, instead of taking into his own hands the control of the operations, he merely suggested again his own plan of trying to turn the enemy's right, and gave it up in deference to his subordinate's views, only advising that Woodgate's Lancashire brigade should be employed in the operation instead of General Coke's, and stating his reason for the change rather flippantly.

"I pointed out to Sir Charles Warren," writes Buller, "that I had no further report, and no intimation of the special arrangements foreshadowed by his telegram of the 19th, that for four days he had kept his men continuously exposed to shell and rifle fire, perched on the edge of an almost precipitous hill, that the position admitted of no second line, and the supports were massed close behind the firing line in indefensible formations, and that a panic or sudden charge might send the whole lot in

disorder down the hill at any moment. I said it was too dangerous a situation to be prolonged, and that he must either attack or I should withdraw his force. I advocated, as I had previously done, an advance from his left. He said that he had the night before ordered General Coke to assault Spion Kop, but the latter had objected to undertaking a night attack on a position the road to which he had not reconnoitred, and added that he intended to assault Spion Kop that night. I suggested that as General Coke was still lame from the effects of a lately broken leg, General Woodgate, who had two sound legs, was better adapted for mountain climbing."

The day was devoted to preparations for the great enterprise of the seizure of Spion Kop, a desultory exchange of rifle and artillery fire going on all the morning and afternoon. The hill was carefully reconnoitred from every possible point of view, two of Barton's Fusilier battalions were brought up from Chieveley Camp to strengthen Lyttelton at Potgeiter's Drift, General Woodgate was given the command for the night assault, and the troops detailed for it were his four Lancashire battalions, Thorneycroft's mounted infantry, and a detachment of Engineers. Colonel Thorneycroft, who was attached to Buller's staff, was to accompany Woodgate and assist him by his local knowledge.

By some curious chance Buller's telegram—describing the operations of the preceding days, and ending with the statement that, the frontal attack on the Boer position having failed, an attempt was to be made to seize Spion Kop in the night—was issued to the Press by the War Office late on the Tuesday evening. It is hardly credible that Buller intended this account of Warren's plans for the next twenty-four hours

to be made public property; but the Department in Pall Mall, though singularly chary of giving information, sent out the message in full. It was known in Fleet Street and the West End clubs about midnight, and in London, as on Zwart Kop and the ridges above Venter's Spruit, men waited anxiously to know the result of what all recognised to be a last and almost desperate effort to turn unexpected failure into victory.

Before passing on to tell the story of Spion Kop, it may be well, in order to make our record complete, to tell what was passing at Chieveley Camp during these operations on the Upper Tugela. The few incidents of any importance that occurred there are thus noted by Mr. Bennet Burleigh:—"On the 19th and 23rd there was bombarding, and small demonstrations were made by General Barton's brigade, lying at Chieveley, against Colenso, but only a few troops went out upon either occasion. On January 19th half a troop of the South African Light Horse advanced towards Robertson's Drift, which is nearly opposite Grobler's Kloof. Acting under orders, they went close up to the river bank, where they came under a fierce fusillade. Seven of their horses were shot in a detachment of ten troopers. The three other troopers galloped back for assistance, whilst the dismounted men took cover and returned the Boer fire. Our infantry advanced, but did not get close enough to afford the whole an opportunity to retire from the position at the end of the day. Only one other got away, and the remaining six, of whom one or more were wounded, were made prisoners by the Boers. Something of the same kind very nearly occurred on the 23rd in a reconnaissance towards Hlangwane; but the troopers on that occasion, although under a telling fire, managed to escape with the help of their own comrades."

CHAPTER XXI.

SPION KOP.

THE night between Tuesday, the 23rd, and Wednesday, the 24th of January, was dark and rainy. Late on Tuesday evening, Woodgate's brigade and Thorneycroft's men fell in, and after dark they moved forward from the right of Warren's position and began to make their way, first down the slope of the ridge and then across the open ground beyond it, to the base of Spion Kop. The men moved in a column of fours, Thorneycroft leading the way, with General Woodgate and Colonel à Court, of the headquarters staff, close beside him. To reach the southern spur of the mountain, up which the only practicable path lay, a considerable détour had to be made, and the men scrambled and stumbled slowly forward, amongst boulders and rocks, and in and out of the hollows of watercourses and dongas. There were strict orders that there was to be no smoking or talking, that no shots should be fired, and only the bayonet be used. Most of the officers carried rifles—even General Woodgate had one, though why the officer commanding a brigade should encumber himself with such a thing is hard to imagine. At one in the morning the ascent of the steep, narrow path began, nearly all the way in single file. The rain had ceased, but the night was dark with mist. And here a trifling incident occurred which for the moment was very embarrassing. "A large white spaniel came up," says Mr. Burleigh, "and began capering around the head of the column. What was to be done with it? for it was worse than the dog upon the racecourse. A single yelp from the animal would have betrayed the column to the Boers and to defeat. It could not be shot, nor safely knocked upon the head. The trouble was solved by giving it to a soldier to pet and fondle. A string was put round its neck, and it was quietly led off."

The path was steep, rough, and extremely difficult to pick out in the darkness. A Natal colonist, who spent a summer near Spion Kop, tells the writer of this record that even in the daylight he found the climb no easy matter; and it is a marvel how the column effected it without accident, in almost total darkness. Again and again there was a halt at a doubtful point, while Thorneycroft and a couple of his men clambered up the rocks to make sure that further progress was possible and that the track had not been lost. Point after point was passed where a dozen determined men might have barred the way till daylight. But there was no sign of the Boers, and the only difficulties to be surmounted were those presented by the hill itself.

About three o'clock the head of the column reached the summit of the path, from which open, stony ground sloped up to the top of the mountain. They had been nine hours on foot,

and the actual distance covered from point to point on the map was just six miles. Up to this point no bayonets had been fixed. It would have been dangerous for men climbing and stumbling in the dark. But now the whispered order was passed to fix bayonets, and the head of the column formed on a broader front and moved cautiously forward.

"They had not gone far," says the *Times* correspondent, "when they were suddenly challenged by a sentry. Acting on their orders, the men immediately threw themselves flat on their faces, and the picket, not more than fifteen in number, and only thirty yards away, fired their magazines into the darkness and fled for their lives. One brave man alone remained, and he was killed as our men flung themselves into the trench with a cheer that was heard by those who were anxiously waiting in the camp below. There was a second trench, and, the



MAJOR-GENERAL WOODGATE.
(Photo: Elliott & Fry.)

alarm being now given, the Boers kept up a heavy fire from it until the approach of our men, when they too fled, and by four o'clock the south-westerly end of the hill was in our possession. This part is slightly higher than the rest, and hog-backed in shape. On it, in darkness and fog, the men dug trenches; but though care was taken to choose what seemed the best positions, it was found, when the Boers opened fire later on, that they were in some of the most exposed places." Up to this time, ten of our men had been killed or wounded by the random firing of the Boers before the second trench had been cleared.

When day broke, white mists hung closely round the captured summit, and for nearly three hours Woodgate's men could see hardly two hundred yards in front of them. All was silent on the hill, but from the south-west came the heavy reports of the naval guns and howitzers near Potgeiter's Drift, which had again begun to bombard the Boer position on the Brakfontein Hills. Two of Lyttelton's battalions, the 60th and the Scottish Rifles, had formed for attack, and, reinforced by Bethune's Horse, were waiting to advance upon Brakfontein or against the eastern part of Spion Kop, as soon as a signal from Warren told that the capture of the summit was producing its expected effect and the enemy were beginning to give way. Meanwhile, among the clouds on the western summit of the Kop, Woodgate's men, directed by the Engineers, were working at their entrenchments; but the ground was hard and stony, and very little cover was secured. The trenches that were made are described by those who visited the place after the relief of Ladysmith as "mere scratchings in the ground."

Meanwhile, what were the Boers doing? Before dawn, some of the outpost which had been surprised had run back to the nearest laager with the news that the British were upon Spion Kop. But there was no panic in the Boer camp, and there is very little doubt that in what followed Louis Botha was encouraged, and to some extent guided, by the memory of what Joubert and Smit had accomplished, with much smaller resources, in the somewhat similar situation when the alarm was given in the laager at Laing's Nek that the red-coats were on the summit of Majuba.

Botha knew the ground well, and he was aware of the fact—which Woodgate and Thorneycroft only discovered when the mist cleared—that the summit occupied by the British

did not really dominate the Boer position. Spion Kop is a triangular plateau. Roughly, the base of the triangle lies north and south—the third angle pointing eastward towards Brakfontein. The sides of the triangle are about a mile and a half long, and the ground is highest near the three angles, where there are almost three separate summits. Woodgate held only the south-western summit, and it could be brought under a semicircle of fire from the other parts of the Kop, and from the ridge of the Black Mountain to the north-west of it.

While the mist still hung on the hills, Botha moved into position quick-firing guns and swarms of riflemen. Under cover of the white fleecy clouds, picked men were pushed forward among the rocks to prevent the British from gaining any more ground on the summit, and to keep them cooped up and crowded together on the height which they had won, where their very numbers would make their position more difficult once the fighting began.

The foremost Boer marksmen had fired some random shots through the mist; but as the clouds broke and the sun came out about eight o'clock, a sharp fusillade began from a hundred points along a front of more than a mile, across the part of the summit held by the Boers. At the same time, quick-firing field-guns and pom-poms, using smokeless powder and carefully concealed on the adjoining hills, and a big Creusot gun posted at long range on the Black Mountain, began to bombard the captured summit.

The shell and rifle fire of the enemy was at first rather erratic, but it soon began to inflict loss. The heavy guns near Potgeiter's, and Warren's batteries on the other side, in vain endeavoured to silence the Boer guns. Our infantry were so huddled together on the top that only a small portion of them could use their rifles, and the rest were lying down behind the firing line, some of them trying hard to improvise cover, and even digging with their knives. More than one attempt was made to push forward and obtain possession of a wider space on the summit; but these attempts failed, and the Boer riflemen began to press forward, until at last, at one point, about a hundred of them established themselves among the rocks within a hundred yards of our position, so well sheltered that all attempts to drive them out by mere rifle fire were unavailing, and the narrow space between was so swept with fire that it was impossible to make a bayonet charge.

About ten o'clock, General Woodgate, whilst

standing up to point out to his officers something he wished to be done, fell mortally wounded. At first it was thought he was dead. A bullet had struck him just over the eye and passed through his head; but he lived for many days after, and at one time it was even thought that his life might be saved.

By this time the situation on the narrow summit was something terrible. To quote the words of an officer who was there: "The Boer artillery had begun to play upon us with a cross fire. The trenches were each enfiladed by guns from different positions. Shells bursting in the right-hand trench drove a flock of fugitives to the left, only to be hunted from that by the guns on the other side. The most horrible sights met the eye everywhere. Men with half their heads blown off, and others without legs or arms, and many disembowelled, were seen on all sides. And in the narrow and crowded space one not only saw them, but was thrown in contact with them, and was even forced to walk amongst the heap of mangled bodies. Bullets from the Boer positions at long ranges rattled over Spion Kop till the place became a regular hell on earth." When General Woodgate fell mortally wounded, Colonel Crofton, of the Royal Lancaster Regiment, the senior officer on the summit, had assumed command. He could not communicate directly with Sir Charles Warren, as it was impossible to find a sheltered place for the heliograph on that part of Spion Kop which looks towards Venter's Spruit. The signallers had been posted on the east side, from which they sent their heliograph signals to Buller's headquarters on Zwart Kop, whence they were repeated by signal to Warren. After Woodgate's fall, some important heliograms were exchanged. Before the Boer fire became heavy Colonel à Court, of the staff, had come down from the summit, and between nine and ten o'clock he reached Warren's headquarters and informed him that the summit had been occupied, and that "everything was satisfactory and secure." Warren telegraphed this news to Buller, and à Court rode off to recross the river and give detailed information to the Commander-in-Chief. He had hardly started when a message came from Crofton: "Reinforce at once, or all lost. General dead."

Buller had already seen this message, which passed through his headquarters. In his official despatch he says:

"The telegram did not give me confidence in its sender, and at the moment I could see

that our men on the top had given way, and that efforts were being made to rally them. I telegraphed to Sir Charles Warren: 'Unless you put some really good hard-fighting man in command on the top, you will lose the hill. I suggest Thorneycroft.'

It is generally felt that Buller expressed an unnecessarily hard judgment on Crofton, and this too without any adequate knowledge of what the situation was on the summit. Crofton's message was strongly worded, but it reads very like other messages from other British commanders who were not judged to have lost their heads because they declared their position to be very serious.

And now came one of the curious results of the divided command. After receiving Crofton's message, and before Buller's reached him, Warren ordered General Coke to take with him two of his battalions—the Middlesex and the Dorsetshire regiments—to proceed to the summit, and to assume command of all the troops there. He then signalled to Colonel Crofton: "I am sending two battalions, and the Imperial Light Infantry are on the way up. You must hold on to the last. No surrender."

This message had hardly been sent, and Coke had just marched off, when Buller's telegram arrived "suggesting" the appointment of the "good hard-fighting man" Colonel Thorneycroft. On this, Warren heliographed to the summit, "With the approval of the Commander-in-Chief, I place Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft in command of the summit, with the local rank of Brigadier-General." There is a curious want of completeness about the information conveyed in these messages to the officers on Spion Kop. Crofton was told he was going to be reinforced, but he was not told that Coke was going up to take command. There is nothing to show that Coke was told that while he was on his way another local commander had been appointed, nor was Thorneycroft informed that Coke was coming up, or given any hint as to how the rival claims to command were to be reconciled.

Immediately after this, all signalling from the summit ceased. A Boer shell had burst among the signallers, killed and wounded several of them, and wrecked the heliograph. Messages could still be sent to the summit, but no replies could be received from it, and Warren had to depend for information on officers who slowly made their way down the narrow path, which was encumbered with reinforcements and

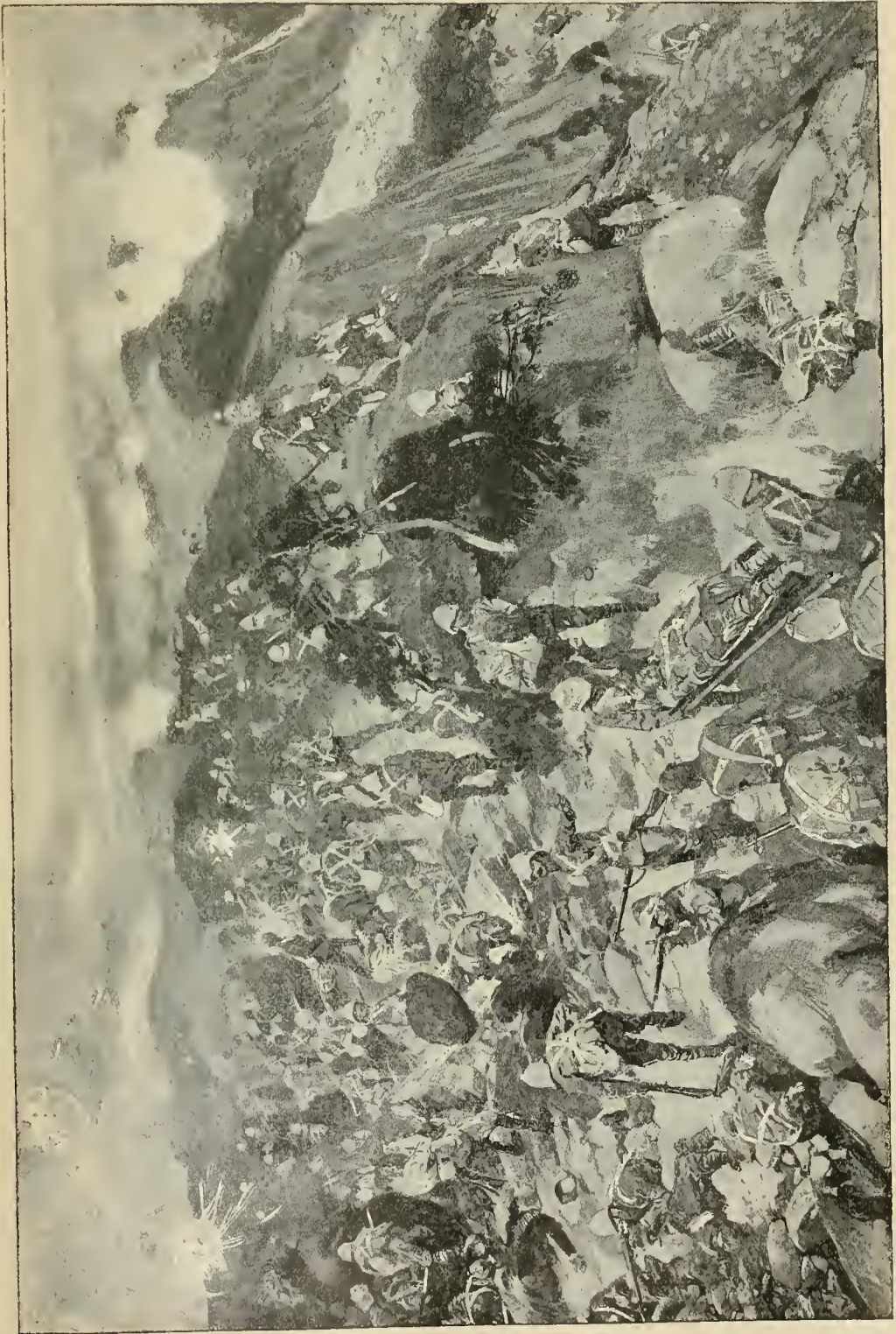
ammunition-carriers climbing up, and wounded men struggling painfully down, or being brought down by the volunteer stretcher-bearers. These last were mostly civilians recruited in Natal, and many of them had never been in action before ; but they went bravely in and out of the storm of fire on the summit. Many of them were killed or wounded, and their commander, Major Walter, a young officer who had served with great distinction in the Soudan, was very seriously wounded, being hit in three places.

The arrival of Coke with the reinforcements did very little to relieve the situation. It could only be improved by bringing up guns and entrenching the summit, and this could not be done until darkness came on. Sand bags were sent up, but on the rocky ground they were all but useless, there was so little earth to put in them. Something might have been done if a larger space could have been occupied on the hill-top ; but all efforts to accomplish this only ended in more loss. The packing together of men on the exposed crest of the hill really only made the position worse ; and after a while this was realised, and some of the exhausted troops were sent back to obtain shelter on the south-western slope of the Kop. About the middle of the day the Boers rushed an advanced trench, and though they evacuated it again almost immediately, they carried off a number of prisoners. More prisoners would have been taken, and a general *débâcle* might have ensued, but for the vigorous interference of Thorneycroft. In one of the advanced positions a party of our men, discouraged by the loss of their officers, actually ceased fire and showed the white flag. The Boers were coming forward to disarm them, when Thorneycroft rushed among the men, pulled down the white flag, and called out to the Boers, "Get back to your trench before we open fire ! There's going to be no surrender here !" General Buller in his despatch acknowledges that it was Thorneycroft's reckless courage and personal influence that kept the men together on the Kop. Thorneycroft is a tall, broad-shouldered man, six feet two high, and all day long he was moving about in the midst of the fire, exposing himself freely in order to encourage others ; and yet, where so many fell around him, he escaped without even a wound.

As the afternoon went on, General Buller resolved to make an attempt at effecting a diversion by sending part of Lyttelton's force to attack the other side of Spion Kop. The 60th and the Scottish Rifles were employed for this

purpose, but before telling what they accomplished, it may be well to describe the situation on the summit while they were advancing. About four, Warren sent one of his staff officers, Captain R. Brooke, 7th Hussars, to Spion Kop to report on the state of things there. He was accompanied by Mr. Churchill, the war correspondent, and the latter gives an interesting account of what he saw.

"We passed through the ambulance village," he says, "and, leaving our horses, climbed up the spur. Streams of wounded met us and obstructed the path. Men were staggering along alone, or supported by comrades, or crawling on hands and knees, or carried on stretchers. Corpses lay here and there. Many of the wounds were of a horrible nature. The splinters and fragments of the shell had torn and mutilated in the most ghastly manner. I passed about two hundred while I was climbing up. There was, moreover, a small but steady leakage of unwounded men of all corps. Some of these cursed and swore. Others were utterly exhausted and fell on the hillside in stupor. Others again seemed drunk, though they had had no liquor. Scores were sleeping heavily. Fighting was still proceeding and stray bullets struck ail over the ground, while the Maxim shell-guns scourged the flanks of the hill and the sheltering infantry at regular intervals of a minute. The 3rd King's Royal Rifles were out of reach. The Dorset regiment was the only battalion not thrown into the fight, and intact as an effective unit. I had seen some service, and Captain Brooke has been through more fighting than any other officer of late years. We were so profoundly impressed by the spectacle and situation that we resolved to go and tell Sir Charles Warren what we had seen. The fight had been so close that no proper report had been sent to the general, so he listened with great patience and attention. One thing was quite clear—unless good and efficient cover could be made during the night, and unless guns could be dragged to the summit of the hill to match the Boer artillery, the infantry could not, perhaps would not, endure another day. The human machine will not stand certain strains for long. The questions were : Could guns be brought up the hill ? and if so, could the troops maintain themselves ? The artillery officers had examined the track. They said "No," and that even if they could reach the top of the hill they would only be shot out of action. Two long-range naval 12-pounders, much heavier than the field guns, had arrived. The naval



SPION KOP: THE FIGHT ON THE SUMMIT.

lieutenant in charge said he could go anywhere, or would have a try, any way. He was quite sure that if he could get on the top of the hill he would knock out the Boer guns or be knocked out by them, and that was what he wanted to find out. I do not believe that the attempt would have succeeded or that the guns could have been in position by daylight, but the contrast in spirit was very refreshing."

Sir Charles Warren held a kind of informal council of war with his staff. While it was proceeding, the reinforcements sent by Buller from Potgeiter's—viz. Bethune's Horse, a battalion of the King's Royal Rifles, and the Scottish Rifles—were working their way up the south-eastern side of Spion Kop, and eventually, before sunset, they effected a lodgment on the eastern summit. At the same time, the rest of Lyttelton's brigade was making a demonstration against Brakfontein to prevent the enemy reinforcing their centre from their left. The splendid advance of the 60th and the Scottish Rifles up Spion Kop is thus described by a correspondent of the *Times* who watched it from the heights of Zwart Kop on the other side of the Tugela :

"The Scottish Rifles were sent back across Potgeiter's Drift, thence along the river to a Kaffir ford higher up, which they crossed and then ascended the hill by the same path as the other troops had used. The 60th Rifles were sent the same way, but after crossing the ford turned to the right, and after skirting along the foot of the hill commenced the ascent near the northern extremity of the eastern face. North of the large re-entrant in these faces there are two peaks, and half a battalion ascended each of these. What followed was one of the finest sights of the day. The mountain side was in places almost precipitous, and all the way up the men were under fire from the top and from sharpshooters in trenches and behind rocks on the flanks, yet they never wavered once. The climb took over two hours, and when they at last reached the summit they surrounded it and went up the last part with a rush and cheer. It was a stirring sight, and to those who watched it seemed that now, at any rate, the hill was ours. The only ominous thing was that not a Boer left the hill, and the ceaseless fire went on without even a break. This was at 5.15, and things were not going well with the main attack."

Beyond turning some of their guns upon the new point seized by the Rifles, the Boers took little notice of their appearance on the hill. They continued to fire heavily into the narrow

space where Coke and Thorneycroft's men were huddled together, the nearest Boer firing line being within eighty yards of the position. A small breastwork of stones, earth, and sandbags had been put together, and the men lay behind it four or five deep, with many dead and wounded among them. In other places, they were huddled together behind the piled-up dead bodies of their comrades. Companies and battalions were mingled together, and all organisation was fast disappearing. The men were exhausted with the terrible nerve strain, the long exposure to the sun, and the want of food and water. It had been reported that there was a spring upon the hill, but when it was found it proved to be almost dry. But with all this, the men had not lost courage. They were holding on grimly, and watching anxiously the sun sinking down towards Mount Bulwan, over which hung a great cloud of smoke from the Boer guns bombarding Ladysmith. They were hoping for the time when sunset and darkness would bring them a respite from the shower of hostile fire. General Coke had gone down the hill to confer with Warren, and Thorneycroft was in sole command upon the summit.

The struggle on the hill-top was watched by many spectators—on the outlying ridge above Venter's Spruit, where Warren's guns were in action; on the plateau of Zwart Kop south of the Tugela, where Buller had his headquarters; and fifteen miles away from the hills around beleaguered Ladysmith, where officers and correspondents were risking their lives in order to try to make out, with field-glasses and telescopes, how the far-off battle was going.

To these anxious watchers it seemed that relief was near at hand. One of them, Mr. Nevinson, of the *Chronicle*, tells in his diary how he made out something of the movement of Lyttelton's two rifle battalions which we have just described, and how there were signs also that some at least of the Boers were giving way. The passage is worth quoting on account of its vivid description of how the fight for Spion Kop looked to the men for whom its result meant so much :

"From Observation Hill one could see the British shells bursting along the ridge all the morning, as well as in the midst of the Boer tents half-way down the double peaks and at the foot of the hill. In the afternoon I went to Waggon Hill, and with the help of a telescope made out a large body of men—about 1,000, I suppose—creeping up a distant crest and spread-

ing along the summit. I could only conjecture them to be English from their presence on the exposed ridge and from the irregular, though widely extended formation. They were hardly visible except as a series of black points. Thunder-clouds hung over the Drakensberg behind, and the sun was obscured, yet I had no doubt in my own mind that the position was won. It was five o'clock or a little later. Others saw large parties of Boers fleeing for life up dongas and over plains, a carriage and four driving hastily north-westward after an earnest

had got his two naval 12-pounders across the Tugela, and was waiting with them at the bottom of the hill. The 4th Mountain Battery was coming into camp after marching all day from Springfield, and after a short rest was to take its guns to Spion Kop in the night, though it is doubtful whether the small, old-fashioned muzzle-loaders would have been of much service against the heavier Boer artillery. It had also been arranged with Warren that at dawn on Thursday Hildyard's brigade should attack the Boer right on the crest of the Black Mountain along Venter's



DURING THE BATTLE: SNAPSHOT OF GENERAL WARREN ISSUING HIS ORDERS.

warning, and other such melodramatic incidents which escaped my notice. The position of the falling shells and the movement of those minute black specks were to me enough of drama for one day's life. In the evening, I am told, the general received a signal from Buller: 'Have taken hill. Fight went well.' No one thought or talked of anything but the prospect of near relief."

These high hopes were doomed to bitter disappointment, both at Ladysmith and at Buller's headquarters. The Commander-in-Chief was busy making arrangements for strengthening the position on Spion Kop during the night. Six hundred of the Royal Engineers had received orders to go up in the darkness and entrench the summit. Lieutenant James, R.N., of the *Tartar*,

Spruit. But all these arrangements depended upon the hard-ried battalions upon Spion Kop being able to maintain their position there; and this proved to be impossible.

The breakdown of the signalling arrangements had prevented any ready communication between the officers in command on the summit and the headquarters during the day. After dark, the signalling on Spion Kop again failed. The whole story is a chapter of accidents and miscalculations, and here again, at a most important moment, there was a failure that seems almost incredible. The lamps for night signalling had been taken to the summit, but they were of no use because no oil had been taken with them! This, however, does not explain why

the signallers on Zwart Kop sent no message to Colonel Thorneycroft to tell him of the elaborate preparations that had been made to reinforce him during the night.

Soon after darkness set in, Mr. Churchill, whose visit to the summit during the afternoon had familiarised him with the way up, was sent to Spion Kop with a message from Warren to Thorneycroft. Before he could reach the top, events had occurred that completely changed the situation. When the firing ceased after sunset, and the long tension of the day was relieved, there was something like a collapse among many of the defenders. Hundreds lay on the ground, unwounded, but utterly exhausted and fast asleep. The effect of the terrible experience of the day on some of them was very curious. "Soldiers who had gone through the day without a scratch," writes an officer, "were so overwrought that when, overcome with fatigue, they lay down to sleep, they sprang up again and ran off in the dark without knowing what they were doing or where they were going. At other times they ran round and round in circles, and threw themselves down again, crying out for the companions they had lost."

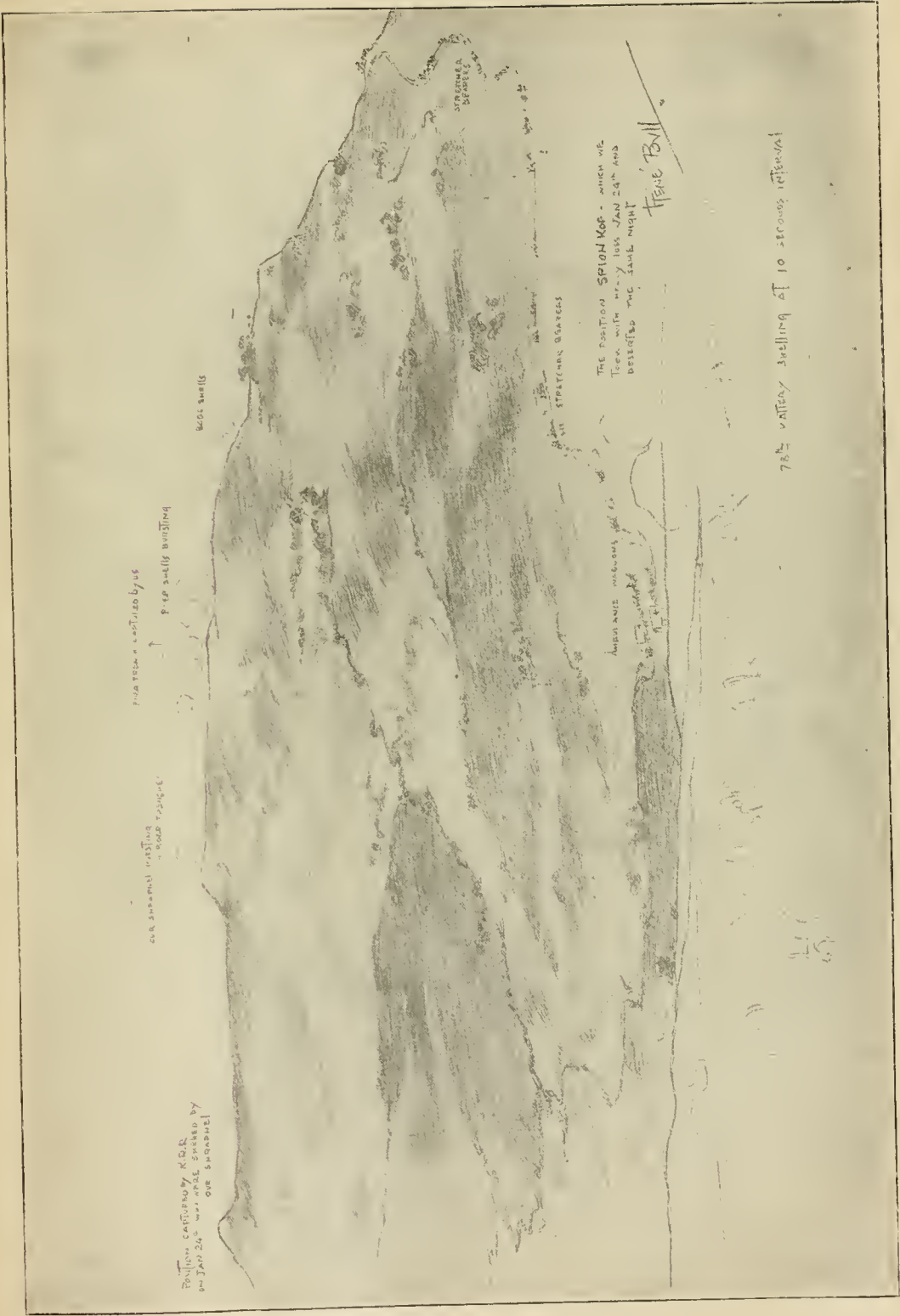
Colonel Thorneycroft had decided that the position must be evacuated under cover of the darkness, and that only thus could a great disaster on the morrow be avoided. If the evacuation was to be accomplished before morning, the retirement must be begun at once. There were strong protests from some of the other officers, who wished to hold on, and his action has been blamed by Sir Charles Warren and Lord Roberts. Sir Redvers Buller, in his despatch, expresses the opinion that, considering the general want of organisation and method with which he had to contend, "Colonel Thorneycroft exercised a wise discretion." He does not seem to realise that he was himself answerable for some of the disorganisation. Thorneycroft had shown himself resourceful, determined, and brave. He had averted a great disaster, and we may surely conclude that he was a better judge of what could be done than generals who themselves had never set foot on the mountain, or even than the new Commander-in-Chief, writing at his headquarters hundreds of miles away.

It was Mr. Churchill who brought Thorneycroft the first information of what had been arranged for next day. But the orders had already been given for a retreat, and the colonel

evidently did not believe that the mountain-guns and the engineers could make the summit tenable. "He was sitting on the ground," says Mr. Churchill, "surrounded by the remnants of the regiment he had raised, who had fought for him like lions and followed him like dogs. I explained the situation, as I had been told and as I thought. Naval guns were prepared to try, sappers and working parties were already on the road with thousands of sandbags. What did he think? But the decision had already been taken. He had never received any messages from the general, and had not had time to write any. Messages had been sent him. He had wanted to send others himself. The fight had been too hot, too close, too interlaced for him to attend to anything but to support this company, clear those rocks, or line that trench. So having heard nothing, and expecting no guns, he had decided to retire. As he put it tersely, 'Better six good battalions safely down the hill than a mop up in the morning.' Then we came home, drawing down our rearguard after us, very slowly and carefully, and as the ground grew more level the regiments began to form again into their old solid blocks."

The retreat in the darkness was carried out without confusion, and without giving the Boers any hint of what was in progress, although the difficulty of the operation was increased at first by the men as they descended meeting the reinforcements coming up. The wounded, with some of the surgeons and ambulance men to look after them, were left upon the summit.

It was not until sunrise on the morning of Thursday, the 25th, that General Buller learned that the position had been abandoned during the night. He was early on foot, and when the sun rose was mounting in order to ride with his staff to Warren's position, where he hoped to see the operations completed for the clearing of the hills that barred the way to Ladysmith. As the result of the general disorganisation and confusion that prevailed, no message had been sent to him during the night, and he only realised that Spion Kop was lost when he and his officers, looking at the summit through their field-glasses, saw that it was crowded with Boers, some of whom were collecting Lee-Metfords lost during the fight, while a few of our khaki-clad men were moving about among them and carrying off the wounded on stretchers. Some desultory shots had been exchanged between Warren's outposts and the Boers in his front on the Black Mountain, but, though there was no formal truce,



Position captured by us

our advanced position

8-10 shells bursting

Position captured by us
on Jan 24th was held by us
our advanced

8-10 shells

SPION KOP

AT STRETCHING BARBERS

THE POSITION SPION KOP - WHICH WE
TOOK WITH HEAVY LOSS JAN 24th AND
RETOOK THE SAME NIGHT

~~THE BULL~~

THE VALLEY SWELLING AT 10 SECONDS INTERVAL

THE BATTLE OF SPION KOP.

this firing soon ceased, for both sides were anxious to collect and remove their wounded.

Buller rode by the bridge at Trichardt's Drift to Warren's headquarters, and there learned the details of what had happened, and at once decided that nothing more could be done, and ordered a general retirement across the river. It was fortunate for him that the enemy were not in an aggressive mood, for they could easily have brought the drifts and bridges under artillery fire from the ground they had won. Louis Botha had ridden to the top of Spion Kop, and at first seemed inclined to keep all the wounded men as prisoners, saying that the British had done so in the case of the wounded burghers who fell into their hands after Dundonald's skirmish at Acton Homes. He yielded the point after a discussion with Father Reginald Collins, one of the Catholic chaplains, whose name is well known in the army in connection with his heroic conduct at the surprise of McNeill's zereba in the Eastern Soudan. Father Collins and the Rev. Mr. Gedge, a Church of England chaplain, spent nearly three days on Spion Kop, succouring the wounded and burying the dead. When Botha at last yielded the point, he told one of the medical officers to let General Buller know that he gave him twenty-four hours to remove his wounded and return to the other side of the river, and that when the time expired he would reopen fire.

Once this was settled, Boer and Briton worked cheerfully together in doing all they could for the wounded men. As for the helpful kindness and courtesy of the Boers, there is abundant evidence. Reuter's correspondent with Buller's army says:—

"The Boer forces on this side are not in want, and whether it was tactfulness or kindness, the fact remains that they were liberal to our bearers. They offered them cigars and cigarettes, and gave them a plentiful supply of water. They also, it is a satisfaction to state, helped in the relief of the wounded. Some of the Boers blurted out that they had lost heavily, while others satisfied the question as to their loss by replying, 'Oh, one or two.'"

On the same point, and on the general conduct of the victors, Father Collins writes:—

"I venture to think it a matter of considerable importance to draw attention to the attitude of the Boers whom we met during the carrying out of our duties on these days. For my part, I confess that the deepest impression has been made on me by these conversations, and by the manly

bearing and the straightforward, out-spoken way in which we were met. There were two things I particularly noted. As there was no effort made to impress us by what was said—they spoke with transparent honesty and natural simplicity, and in nearly all cases the conversations were begun by us—so there was a total absence of anything like exultation over what they must consider a military success. Not a word, not a look, not a gesture or sign that could by the most sensitive of persons be construed as a display of their superiority.

"Far from it; there was a sadness, almost anguish, in the way in which they referred to our fallen soldiers. Such expressions as these were frequently used:

"My God! What a sight!" "I wish politicians could see their handiwork!" "What can God in Heaven think of this sight?" "What a cursed war that brings these poor fellows to such an end!" "We hate this war. This war is accursed. Every day on our knees we all pray that God will bring this war to an end." "It is not our war; it is a war of the millionaires. What enmity have we with these poor fellows?" "Would that Chamberlain, Rhodes, and the millionaires could see these trenches and graves!" "When will this unjust war end?" "We hate all war. We are men of peace. We want to go back to our homes and farms; to sow our seed and reap our fields, and not to make war. Good God! When will it end?"

The retirement of the waggon train, the artillery, and the wounded was a long and difficult operation. In the fight, 204 officers and men had been killed, 670 wounded, and 101 had remained prisoners in the enemy's hands, making altogether a loss of nearly a thousand. Besides the wounded, a considerable number of sick had to be removed, and the ambulances passed backwards and forwards across the bridges, over which, besides the guns and their ammunition-waggons, nearly five hundred transport-waggons had to be moved. All the waggons were not over until the afternoon of the 26th. The troops returned to the camps on Zwart Kop and near Springfield. As the last of them were crossing the river, the enemy fired a few long-range shots. In his despatch General Buller mentions, as showing the difficulty of the operation, that when the last of the men were over, the planks of the bridge at Trichardt's Drift were so worn by the traffic that it was thought they would not have lasted another half-hour.

His final comment on the operations reads



AFTER THE BATTLE: A MELANCHOLY RETURN.

somewhat strangely. "Thus," he says, "ended an expedition which I think ought to have succeeded. We have suffered very heavy losses and lost many whom we can ill spare; but, on the other hand, we have inflicted as great or greater losses upon the enemy than they have on us, and they are by all accounts thoroughly disheartened; whilst our troops are, I am glad and proud to say, in excellent fettle."

In an earlier message he had claimed credit for having effected the retreat across the Tugela

of the failure, which was not fully known until a few days later, was a terrible blow. Early on Thursday morning the anxious watchers had gone to the hills and turned their telescopes on to Spion Kop. They heard the reports of guns, and saw some of Warren's shells bursting on the Black Mountain. On Spion Kop itself they saw a crowd of men, but they clung to the hope that they were British—and the fact that trains of Boer waggons were moving back across the plain, and some of them heading towards the



GENERAL LOUIS BOTHA.

"without losing even a pound of stores." He left out of account the obvious fact that he had effected the retirement so easily, thanks to the forbearance of Louis Botha. The British troops deserved all praise for the splendid way in which they bore up under their trying experiences and under this great reverse; but all that we have subsequently learned tends to show that Buller was mistaken in his impression that the enemy had suffered at all heavily, while no one can believe that they were in any sense disheartened; they were exulting in a second great victory, won by a judicious use of the ground against superior numbers.

To the heroic garrison of Ladysmith the news

Drakensberg passes, was taken to be another sign of success. At eight o'clock the firing ceased. "There must be an armistice!"—for such was the confidence in Buller that the accepted theory was that the Boers were about to surrender. The morning was dull and rainy, and for many hours—indeed, until late in the afternoon—it was impossible to communicate by heliograph with Buller's headquarters. Still, everyone was hopeful, though there was no sign of the Boers abandoning the siege. On the contrary, the Boer guns on the western and northern heights were from time to time throwing shells into the town.

But as the day went on, things began to look

less hopeful. "At about 4 p.m.," says Mr. Nevinson, "we witnessed a miserable sight. Along the main track, which crosses the great plain and passes round the end of Telegraph Hill almost within range of our guns, came a large party of men tramping through the dust. They were in khaki uniform, marched in fours, and kept step. Undoubtedly they were British prisoners on their way to Pretoria. Their numbers were estimated at fifty, ninety, and a hundred and fifty by different look-out stations. In front and rear trudged an unorganised gang of Boers, evidently acting as escort. It was a miserable and depressing thing to see."

Then a cypher message began to come through on the heliograph from Buller's headquarters. At last there would be news! Its publication was eagerly awaited. When it was issued, it was both puzzling and disappointing. Perhaps it contained more than was made public. All

that the correspondents were allowed to know was that a sentence in it, dated 23rd, ran as follows: "Kaffir deserter from Boer lines reports guns on Bulwan and Telegraph Hills removed." It was little consolation to the garrison, for at that very moment the two guns named were bombarding them. It only showed the absurd faith reposed by Buller's Intelligence Department in mendacious Kaffir messengers who could not even lie artistically.

Next day, there was still no news, and fears began to get the better of hopes. But it was not till the afternoon of Saturday, two days after the retirement had begun, that at last the heliograph on Zwart Kop flashed out the bad news—how Spion Kop had been captured in the early hours of Wednesday, only to be lost in the following night. The British casualties were stated at "five hundred and some prisoners." So that even then the true story of the disaster was not told.



GENERAL LUCAS MEYER.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BATTLE OF VAAL KRANTZ.

BEFORE he advanced to the Upper Tugela, Buller had told his soldiers that there was to be "no turning back." But he had been forced to go back. It was no discredit to him, for the best leaders and the bravest soldiers have often failed to obtain success. But it is a received maxim among leaders of men never to indulge in absolute predictions of what is to be accomplished. For, in case of failure, the rash promise makes the subsequent disappointment and depression all the greater. It is even laid down by recognised authorities on such matters, that in issuing orders to a force in the field and in presence of an enemy it is best only to say enough to start the columns in a proper direction without telling too much about the results you hope to secure. For thus, "if it thereafter proves impossible to carry out the enterprise in hand, your subordinates will not notice the failure of your undertaking. It is only too easy to shake the confidence of your troops in you as a leader by issuing indiscreet orders." Indiscreet speeches are even worse; yet in the camp at Spearman's Farm, Buller, instead of taking warning by his recent experience, made another unfortunate speech. He told the men that he had the key of the road to Ladysmith in his hands, and that they would be there in a week.

This was the prelude to another attempt against the Boer position on the north bank of the Tugela. He had tried to turn the enemy's right, and after that had failed he had attempted to break through their centre at Spion Kop and failed again. An attempt was now to be made against the Boer left at Brakfontein.

But before this new attempt was begun there was a ten days' halt, during which the men had a much-needed rest in their camps, reinforcements arrived, and the artillery placed in position on the heights south of the Tugela was considerably strengthened. The operations that ended in the failure at Spion Kop had cost the army 1,600 men killed, wounded and missing. This loss was more than made up by the arrival of drafts for various regiments, amounting in all to over two thousand men, a battery of Horse

Artillery, two heavy guns of the siege train, and two squadrons of the 14th Hussars.

On Sunday, February 4th, the new movement began. Hildyard's and Hart's brigades moved down to the river from Zwart Kop, and Lyttelton's brigade of riflemen, which had so long held the low range of kopjes beyond Potgeiter's Drift, was withdrawn and replaced by the brigade of Lancashire regiments, of which Colonel Wynne acted as brigadier-general in place of Woodgate. On the level summit of Zwart Kop there had been placed in position two fifty-pounder siege guns, six naval twelve-pounders, two R.F.A. fifteen-pounders, and six mountain guns. These were all screened behind a mass of dense bush on the eastern end of the hill. The stems of the trees in this leafy screen had been cut half-way through with a saw, so that when the guns opened fire the trees would be blown down, and great embrasures would suddenly open in the bush. Till then the position of these new batteries was completely hidden from the Boers.

On the afternoon of that first Sunday in February General Buller assembled his brigadiers and other principal officers, and explained his plans to them in detail. On the Monday morning Wynne's Lancashire brigade, supported by six R.F.A. batteries, was to make a demonstration, or false attack, against the Brakfontein position. While this was in progress a second pontoon bridge was to be thrown across the Tugela about a mile below the bridge at Potgeiter's Drift, and Clery was to mass Hildyard's, Hart's, and Lyttelton's brigades near this second bridge as if he intended to cross it in support of Wynne's attack. But the bridge was really to be used to withdraw the artillery rapidly to the south bank, and on the west loop of the river, about two miles from Potgeiter's, a third bridge was to be made. Across this Clery was to push forward the real attack, which was to be directed against Vaal Krantz, a long ridge projecting some miles to the eastward and southward from the Brakfontein Hills. The small sketch map on page 191 will explain the nature of

the projected operation better than a long description.

The movement against Vaal Krantz was to be prepared and covered by the fire of the batteries mounted on the eastern end of Zwart Kop. Having driven the enemy from Vaal Krantz, Clery was to bring the six R.F.A. batteries across the river and get them into position on the ridge to prepare the way for his further advance. Then, swinging round his three brigades to the northward, pivoting on the left, he was to attack the flank of the Brakfontein position, at the same time threatening the Boer line of retreat towards Ladysmith. Colonel Burn-Murdoch, with a regular cavalry brigade made up of the Royal Dragoons (his own regiment), the 13th and 14th Hussars, and A Battery R.H.A., was to make a dash for the open ground behind the Boer position. Dundonald, with the irregular cavalry, was to guard the right flank and rear of Clery's infantry as they swung round and advanced. Wynne's Lancashire brigade was to co-operate by a real attack in front on Brakfontein when the opportunity offered. Coke's brigade was held in reserve. The plan was simpler than it seems in this long description. Buller was going to give the Boers the impression that he was about to risk a frontal attack in force at Brakfontein; then suddenly his main strength would be put forth to seize the more weakly-held ground to their left, and the attack, if its first stage succeeded, would be pushed on against their flank and left rear. The plan was thought to offer good prospects of success, and everyone was hopeful about it.

The fighting began on Monday, February 5th. The false attack on the Brakfontein Hills was to have commenced at sunrise. But it had to be delayed for some time, as until the sun was well up a heavy mist hung over all the river valley. When it cleared, the 47 naval guns opened fire from their position on the heights round Mount Alice, and General Wynne advanced with the Lancashire brigade against Brakfontein from the line of low kopjes north of Potgeiter's Drift. He had the six field batteries with him, and soon brought all their guns into action against the Boer position in front. The balloon was also sent up from the north side of the river a little to the rear of the line of guns, and the officer in its car watched and reported the effect of our fire, which was further reinforced by four howitzers placed in position near the kopjes at Potgeiter's.

For some time the Boers took no notice of the heavy fire directed against them; but at last they seemed to have come to the conclusion that an attempt was being made to push the attack home, and they opened fire with a heavy gun from the heights of Spion Kop. Two other guns were shortly afterwards brought into action on Brakfontein, and later three or four more joined in the cannonade. It went on for nearly two hours, and the enemy's shell fire became so galling that some of the guns on Zwart Kop, which it had been intended to keep masked until the real attack developed against Vaal Krantz, were brought into action against Brakfontein. The situation was now curious, and absolutely unlike anything contemplated in the received text-books on war. Fifty guns, several of them of very heavy metal, were in action against only six or seven scattered about here and there in the Boer position. But this mass of guns utterly failed to silence even one of the few that were opposed to them. The positions of the Boer guns, mostly firing smokeless powder, were so well concealed that our gunners were firing almost at random. One heavy gun on the Boer side was using black powder, and it was thought at times that some of the others were doing so, and our gunner, fired at the puffs of smoke; but there is reason to believe that in some cases there was no gun in action at the point where the smoke appeared. It was found out afterwards that it was a trick of the Boer artillerymen to place a large charge of black powder, fitted with an electrical fuse, a couple of hundred yards away from a gun position, and to fire it by pressing a button at the moment when the gun using smokeless powder was discharged.

There was some delay in getting the pontoon bridge across the Tugela in front of Vaal Krantz. It was not ready until about two o'clock, and then the orders were given for the real attack on the right to begin and for Wynne's brigade to fall back. From the east end of Zwart Kop the heavy guns began to bombard the long flat summit of Vaal Krantz, and the first battalions of Lyttelton's brigade at the same time moved across the new pontoon bridge. One by one, the batteries on the north bank trotted back to the bridge on the bend below Potgeiter's, crossed to the south bank, and came into action against Vaal Krantz, while the infantry fell back to the kopjes near the drift.

At first the Boers did not realise that the movement was simply the transference of our

field batteries from the false attack on the left to the real attack on the right. They thought Wynne's advance had been repulsed, and they pelted the retiring batteries and battalions with rapid shell fire and showers of long-ranging Mauser bullets. The batteries limbered up, and marched off as steadily as if they were on parade. Three ammunition-waggons of the 78th R.F.A. were the last to go. "All the wounded and left material were placed very deliberately upon the two which had teams," says Mr. Burleigh. "For over five minutes they waited, putting things to rights and rearranging harness under a rain-storm of shells. Then they walked off the field, followed by shells step by step. The last waggon, belonging to the 78th Battery Royal Artillery, had no horses. They had been wounded, and one or two of them killed. Thereupon the artillerymen took charge, and whilst one handled the bar, or tongue, the other four bent themselves upon the wheels, trundling the lumbering vehicle back from the field. Under a scathing fire they rolled the waggon nearly two hundred yards. Then comrades, noting the state of affairs, ran out under fire and helped them to bring in the vehicle safe and sound. How all or any escaped seemed little less than miraculous. The balloon, which also had to shift, had its visitation. From its lofty altitude, it was wound down to the ground, only to be made the steady target for Boer guns and rifles. The wire hawser was disconnected. Then the six sailors and two sappers, with bullets and shells dropping at their feet, marched away after the batteries with the bobbing, big, translucent sphere. For sailors they walked remarkably well, holding on whilst the smoke and dust raised by the Boer shells almost blinded them."

To cover Lyttelton's advance, seventy guns poured their fire upon Vaal Krantz. The hill was covered with the smoke of bursting shells and clouds of dust thrown up by the explosions. To use the words of an officer who watched the bombardment, "it looked as if a mouse could not live upon the hill." But, though it was not strongly held, the Boer riflemen were there, lying low in watercourses and hollows and in a few trenches. Lyttelton's brigade had crossed, the Durhams leading, and lay under the shelter of the bank on the opposite side of the river. Hart's and Hildyard's brigades were ready to follow. The word was given to advance, and the Durhams, company by company, climbed the bank and spread out in a long firing line in the fields of mealies that sloped upward to the

hill. As our riflemen pressed forward, getting a good deal of cover behind ant-heaps, and sometimes slipping into a winding watercourse, the Boers began to retire. The 3rd King's Royal Rifles had come up on the right of the Durhams, and the line suddenly surged forward with bayonets fixed, the Durham men in front. There were only about 200 Boers in the trench on the summit, and most of them gave way at once. A few were killed, and a few more made prisoners. The grass had caught fire, and clouds of smoke were driving along the hill. Through this smoke a Boer gun, one of the pom-poms or Vickers-Maxim quick-firers, was seen standing on the hill, abandoned by the men who were trying to remove it. But before our men could rush forward and secure the prize a Boer officer, said to have been Ben Viljoen, dashed up with a team of horses and, amid a shower of bullets, galloped away with the gun.

Ten prisoners had been taken. Some of them were Boers, but others were foreign volunteers. Among them were Knight, an Englishman, who said he had lately been in Cape Town; Tully, an Irishman, who had long lived in the Transvaal; and Moeller, an Austrian. Some Kaffirs lay dead in the trench, and the soldiers said they had seen black men firing at them; but it is more likely that the dead Kaffirs were native servants, whom the Boers often bring with them to the field, to act as gun-bearers and ammunition carriers.

As soon as Vaal Krantz was secured, the Boers began to bombard it heavily, from Spion Kop and Brakfontein to the west and north, and from the high wooded ridge of Doorn Kloof to the eastward. The disagreeable discovery was made that the crest of the captured ridge was so narrow that it would be difficult to establish our batteries upon it, and there was an unpleasant suspicion that the Boers had abandoned it so easily because they did not attach much importance to its possession. General Buller, who was near the pontoon bridge during the whole afternoon, sent across Hildyard's brigade to reinforce Lyttelton. It was too late to press the advance further to the northward, even if the converging fire of the Boer guns would have permitted such a movement. The men set to work to entrench the ground, and shortly before sunset the Durhams, the Scottish Rifles, and the King's Royal Rifles repulsed an attempt made by the enemy on the back of the ridge.

During the night grass and bush fires were burning on the east side of the ridge, and by



A SUDDEN ALARM: ONE OF BULLER'S PATROLS.

their light the Boers occasionally shelled the bivouac on the hill with pom-poms. As the sun rose on the Tuesday morning, a heavy gun—a 96-pounder Creusot—began to shell Vaal Krantz. It was a surprise to find that the enemy had so quickly succeeded in dragging this huge gun to the summit of the rocky kopje. Five other guns were at work from Spion Kop and Brakfontein. The troops who held Vaal Krantz thus found themselves in the middle of a semicircle of artillery fire. It was found to be impossible to obtain sheltered positions for our field artillery on Vaal Krantz, but efforts were made to silence the Boer artillery with the heavy guns on Zwart Kop and Mount Alice. The heaviest fire was directed against Doorn Kloof in the hope of putting the big Creusot out of action. Sometimes it would be silent for a while, and it was hoped that it was done for. But then it would appear again among the bushes, drop a big shell on Vaal Krantz, and suddenly vanish again into cover. Our gunners thought that it must be mounted upon a disappearing carriage, but such appliances for a 96-pounder are enormously heavy and cumbersome, and it is more likely that it was simply mounted in a large gun-pit, from which it could be run backwards into better cover along a few yards of tramway. Once, as a British shell burst on Doorn Kloof, there was a second heavy explosion, and a great column of smoke rushed up into the sky. A Boer ammunition-waggon had been blown up; but in a few minutes the big gun was at work again.

Till the enemy's artillery was silenced, it was felt the infantry could make no further advance. In order to be able to reinforce them more rapidly, a second pontoon bridge was laid across the Tugela just below Vaal Krantz, and quantities of sandbags were sent up to improve the cover on the hill.

Emboldened by the inaction of our infantry, the Boers ventured on a counter-attack in the afternoon. "At four o'clock," writes an officer, "our attention was drawn to Vaal Krantz by a sudden development of musketry; the rapid rattle of the Mausers could plainly be distinguished from our more deliberate shooting; and then, as we watched the hill through our glasses, our hearts seemed to stand still. Pouring over the top of the mountain and down our side came dozens and hundreds of men in rapid retreat. Was it possible that nearly four thousand of our men could fail to hold so strong a position against a rush from the enemy? Was

another and a greater Majuba possible? Reinforcements were rapidly sent from the right, and gradually the stream of fugitives was stemmed. The Boers had gathered in a donga and made a sudden rush on the hill under cover of a flood of musketry. But the first assault being repelled, it was seen that their numbers were comparatively small, and they were driven back with some loss."

After this, the artillery duel went on until sunset. As in the days of the fighting at Venter's Spruit and Spion Kop, Ladysmith was listening anxiously to the roar of guns on the Upper Tugela, watching the bursting shells, and hoping for the best. But it was depressing to see that there was no advance.

During the night between Tuesday and Wednesday, the entrenchments on Vaal Krantz were further strengthened, and on the Wednesday morning the artillery fight began again. General Buller had already made up his mind that it was unlikely that the Boer lines would be penetrated. He had said so to his staff and some of the correspondents late on Tuesday afternoon, but he held on for one day more on the off-chance that the Boer guns might be mastered. Our artillery fire was concentrated chiefly on the big Creusot at Doorn Kloof. "Twenty guns," says Mr. J. B. Atkins, "were firing at the 100-pounder. It used black powder, and the shaft of white smoke that it belched up out of its mouth would not have done discredit to the whole of our mountain battery. The ground near it smoked like a lime-kiln from our shells, but the gun itself smoked away too with no hitch in its regularity. 'There it is. It's up again!' was the cry. Its barrel, plain against the sky, vacillated till it settled on its object. 'It's pointing this way.' The white cloud spouted forth. Those who liked lay behind rocks, but in any case in the quarter of a minute during which you waited for the shell were some of the strangest moments of anticipation in a man's life. The gun rose from its den, pointed, fired, and disappeared in twelve seconds. Our shells from the nearest guns took eighteen seconds to reach it, so that they were always six seconds too late. Night fell, and still no advance had been made. Our casualties in the three days' fighting were nearly 400."

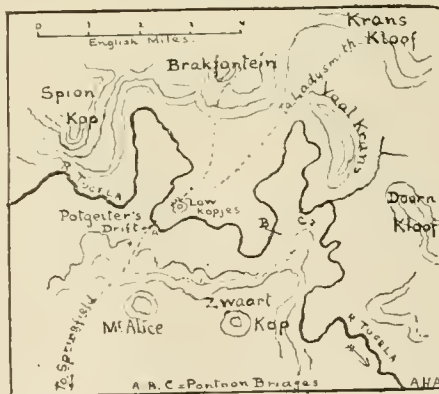
After dark on the Wednesday evening the retirement began. At six p.m. the orders had been issued, and the waggons of the supply column began to move away. All night men, guns, horses and waggons were streaming along

the steep hill-tracks. On Thursday morning, the last of our men had been withdrawn from Vaal Krantz. The heavy guns remained in action on Zwart Kop, to cover the working parties who were taking up the pontoon bridges. General Wynne's Lancashire brigade was withdrawn from the kopjes north of Potgeiter's to the south bank of the Tugela. Then Zwart Kop and Mount Alice were evacuated, the heavy guns being removed with infinite labour, and all through Thursday and Friday the retreating army poured across the bridge at Springfield. The march did not end till Sunday, the long columns moving back to the camps at Chieveley and Frere, protected on the flank and rear by the mounted troops. The Boers promptly reoccupied the Zwart Kop heights. The attempt to turn their right, on the Upper Tugela, which had cost the loss of more than 2,000 men, had been definitely abandoned.

General Barton, who held the railhead at Chieveley, had had some skirmishes with the Boers while Buller's army had been away on the Upper Tugela. But the enemy, splendid on the defensive, had, luckily for our army in Natal, shown little enterprise in the attack. A regular army, in their position, would have raided the railway south of Chieveley during the operations, and when the retreat began would have hung upon the rear of the defeated army and struck

boldly at its flank on the difficult ground between the Little Tugela and Chieveley camp. All that the Boers did during the retreat from Vaal Krantz across the Tugela was to bombard our columns at long range during the Thursday.

Our men had suffered terribly, and the hospitals of Natal, right down to Durban, were crowded not only with wounded from the battle-fields, but also with thousands of sick, the result of the long days and nights of exposure in driving rain and steaming mist on the Upper Tugela. But, though defeated, the men who were now once more concentrated at Chieveley and Frere were not disheartened, and after three great failures they had still a touching confidence in General Buller. If Ladysmith could only hold out, they believed that he would still lead them successfully to its relief; but the reports brought through the Boer lines from Ladysmith by Kaffir runners, and the briefer messages flashed by the heliograph, were not encouraging. The garrison were eating their horses. Sickness had increased to an alarming extent, and the entire absence of any attempt on the part of Sir George White to co-operate with the relieving force showed that his army was no longer in a condition for active operations in the field, and that the most that could be hoped for was that it would hold on behind its defences until help came.



THE ADVANCE ON VAAL KRANTZ: SKETCH MAP.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PREPARATIONS FOR LORD ROBERTS'S ADVANCE.

WE must now turn our attention from the Natal campaign to the more important and more successful operations which were soon to begin upon the western border of the Free State. Lord Roberts, with his Chief-of-the-Staff, Lord Kitchener, had landed at Cape Town on January 10th, and he remained there for some time, organising the transport and pushing forward by rail, to the north of the Colony and to the western border of the Free State, the large reinforcements which were daily being landed.

At the beginning of November there had been 24,000 British regulars in South Africa. By the end of the year 70,000 more had been landed. In the course of January and the first days of February, 30,000 more arrived. Natal had provided 7,000 volunteers, and Cape Colony 12,500. The other Colonies of the Empire provided about 20,000 men, so that altogether, after allowing for losses, there were by the end of January about 150,000 fighting men under the Union Jack in South Africa.

A large part of this force had to be employed in garrison duties and in guarding the railway lines. We have seen how Buller's army in Natal was engaged during January and the first part of February in making ineffectual attempts to succour the force under Sir George White that was locked up in Ladysmith. On the northern border of Cape Colony, General Gatacre, in front of Stormberg, was only able to keep the insurrection, provoked by the Boer successes, from spreading round his flanks. Further west, on the same frontier, General French was skirmishing round Colesberg, but had failed either to drive the Boers out of the place or to cut their communications over the Orange River. Clements's brigade, belonging to Kelly-Kenny's newly-arrived division, had been sent up to his assistance, and the rest of the division had been pushed forward to the junction at Middelburg in his rear. On the western border Methuen, with three brigades, a large force of artillery, and some cavalry, was at Modder River camp, and his further progress towards Kimberley had been barred for weeks by Cronje's army in the

Magersfontein kopjes. Far away to the north, Colonel Baden-Powell was holding out at Mafeking with a few hundred men, and Colonel Plumer, with a force not much larger, was making a plucky attempt to work down the railway from Rhodesia to his assistance.

The Boers, outnumbered though they were at least two to one, had the great advantage that they held the centre of a large circle, and by means of the railways, and from the fact of nearly all their men being mounted, they could rapidly reinforce any threatened point. Hitherto the want of transport had forced the British generals to confine their operations to the neighbourhood of the railway, and to make all extended flank movements by large bodies of troops impossible, or at least extremely difficult. No large body of mounted troops had been assembled on our side. In all the operations the British troops had moved slowly along lines marked out for them in advance by the position of the railways, and the Boers had been able to take up fortified positions to bar their advance. The only flank movement of importance that had been attempted during the war was Buller's campaign on the Upper Tugela, and in this case the extent of the turning movement was limited by the nearness of the precipitous Drakensberg, and the Boers were able to check it by the good use they made of entrenched positions on the spurs of the berg. It was country in which, on our side, cavalry were almost useless.

Lord Roberts had at least three possible courses open to him. He might make Natal the scene of his first great effort, or he might clear the north of Cape Colony and advance across the Orange River, or, again, he might strike at Bloemfontein from the western border. Many expected that he would choose Natal for the scene of his first great effort. By largely reinforcing Buller he might hope to crush the Boer resistance on the Tugela and liberate the besieged garrison at Ladysmith. But from the first the best judges of such matters here in England expressed the opinion that he would divert no considerable portion of his forces to Natal. A victory there would have no far-

reaching results. The crossing of the Tugela and the defeat of the army that held it would relieve Ladysmith, but it would leave the Boers in possession of the natural fortress of Northern Natal, and an advance through that country into the republics would mean the forcing of the Drakensberg passes and Laing's Nek. It was evident that Buller could be more effectually assisted by using the main army for an invasion of the Free State, thus forcing the Free State burghers to leave Natal in order to defend their own country. This would be equivalent to an indirect reinforcement of our army in Natal, and it might be hoped that, as proved to be the case, it would weaken to breaking point the barrier that had so long opposed the progress of the Ladysmith relief force.

The campaign in Natal being thus left aside as a subsidiary operation of the war, it remained to choose between the two other possible plans. Reconnaissance reports, drawn up some months before the war, had indicated as the best line of advance upon Bloemfontein that which lies along the railway north of Stormberg by Burgersdorp Junction, Bethulie Bridge on the Orange River, and Springfontein. Once Springfontein was occupied, a second line of communications would

be opened by Colesberg and Norvals Pont Bridge. An army advancing on this line would directly cover its communications, and once the Orange River was crossed it might be expected that the threat against Bloemfontein might force Cronje to abandon the siege of Kimberley. There are many well-qualified judges who still think that this would have been the soundest plan of operations. In the middle of January it looked as if Lord Roberts meant to adopt it. Kelly-Kenny was pushing forward along the railway from Rosmead Junction, near Middelburg, to Stormberg. His advance guard reached Thebus, the railway was repaired up to that point, and his mounted patrols were in touch with those sent out from Gatacre's camp at Sterkstroom. It was expected that a combined front and flank attack by Gatacre and Kelly-Kenny would drive Olivier

out of Stormberg. The seizure of the river crossing at Bethulie would follow, and De Wet and Delarey would have to abandon Colesberg. This would clear the Colony of the enemy and open the way for the march on Bloemfontein.

But the third course (in favour of which this plan was rejected), though it had some great drawbacks, offered also considerable advantages, and had in its favour a political—one might almost say a personal—reason of some importance. The British already held the river crossing and the great iron railway bridge at Orange River station, and the carefully guarded railway line beyond to the temporary bridge that led to the extensive sidings at Modder

River camp. This offered a railway base about fifty miles long, from many points on which waggon tracks led into the Free State: and the open veldt between the railway and Bloemfontein, though not the level, featureless plain which many suppose it to be, presents no formidable obstacle to the advance of an army. By acting on this side, Lord Roberts would be able to render very speedy help to Kimberley; and ever since the failure of Magersfontein, Kimberley, voiced by Mr. Cecil Rhodes, had been begging earnestly for relief and protesting that it was reaching the end of



LIEUTENANT-GENERAL KELLY-KENNY.
(Photo: Charles Knight, Aldershot.)

its power of resistance. The relief of Kimberley was therefore to be the first object of the coming operations. By a wide-sweeping turning movement to the eastward, the besieging lines were to be broken through and Cronje's retreat to the Free State cut off. His army was to be dispersed or captured, and then Lord Roberts would make a rapid advance across the veldt on Bloemfontein, which, it was expected, would force the Boers to fall back from the Orange River in order to defend it, and at the same time lead to large numbers of the Free Staters withdrawing from the Boer army round Ladysmith and on the Tugela.

The disadvantage of the plan was that during an advance of a hundred miles across the veldt, the large army engaged in the operation would have to abandon the railway and depend for its supplies on trains of mule and bullock waggons

starting from Modder River camp. An enterprising enemy might strike at the western railway and cut the long line of communications. The waggon tracks in the rear of the army might be raided and the convoys cut off, and a defeat or a serious check in the heart of the enemy's country might become a disaster, for the army, if forced to retire, would not directly cover its line of communications. These dangers were, it is true, less serious because the enemy to whom Lord Roberts was opposed had shown himself singularly unenterprising, and was nearly always more inclined to await attack in prepared positions than strike boldly at his adversary's weak points.

Before telling how Lord Roberts carried out his plan, we must briefly note certain events which took place in the latter part of January and the beginning of February, and say something of what was passing at Kimberley during the last anxious weeks that preceded the relief. In order to conceal from the Boers the fact that the concentration was to be made on the western border and the blow struck on that side, there was a somewhat ostentatious increase of activity on the British side in the north of Cape Colony. With the same object of misleading the enemy in Lord Methuen's front and making Cronje suspect that if an attempt was made to turn his position it would be by the right and not by the left, an expedition was made by the Highlanders, now under Hector MacDonald, to Koodoosberg Drift, on the river, some miles to the west of Modder Bridge.

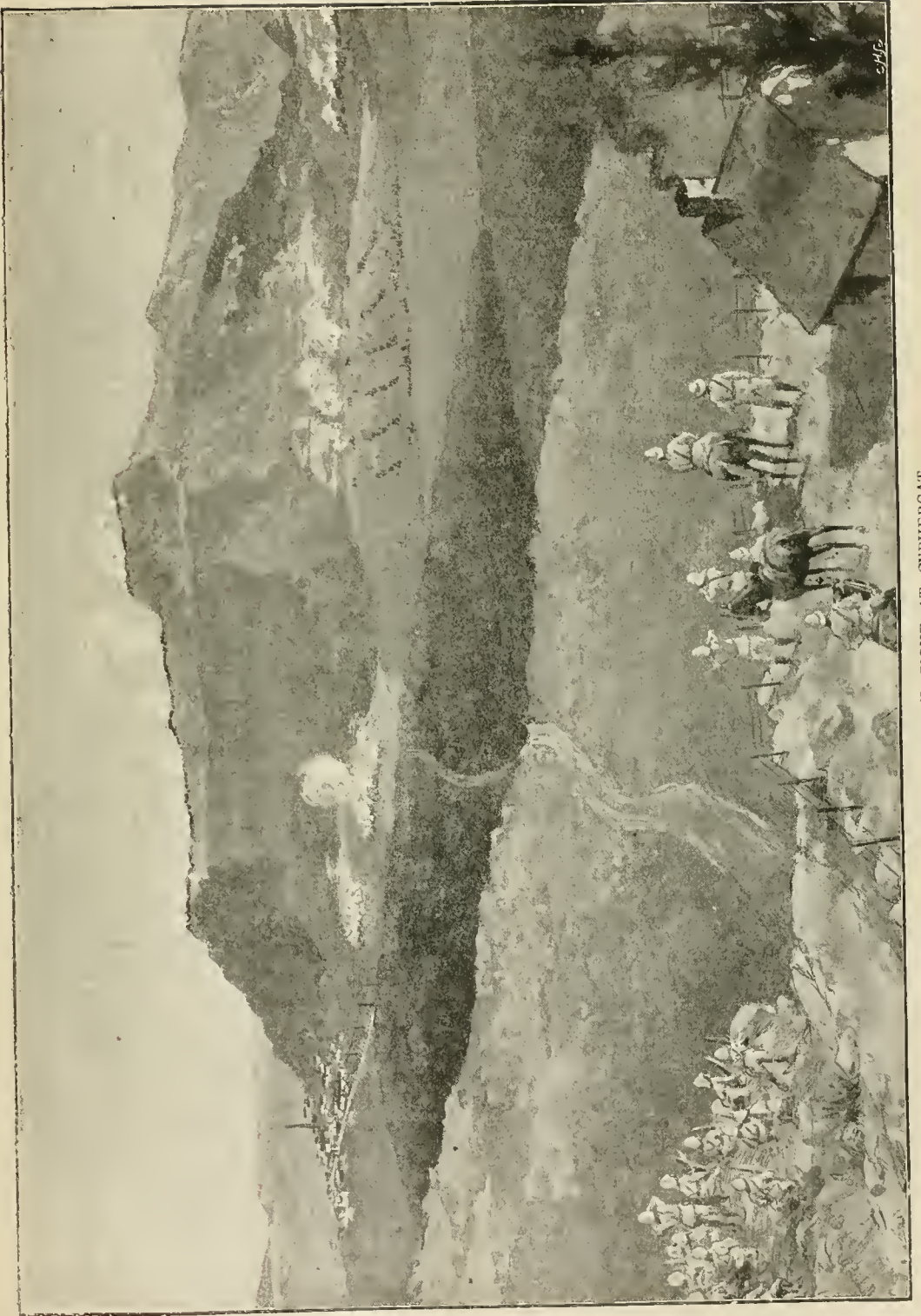
In the north of Cape Colony, Gatacre made use of his mounted scouts to skirmish at the enemy in the direction of Stormberg. On January 10th, Montmorency with his Scouts, supported by the armoured train, made a raid in which he captured a large number of the enemy's horses and cattle north of Molteno. Olivier at Stormberg evidently anticipated a serious attack, and began to blow up the culverts on the line near the junction and to destroy the branch railway by Steynsburg to Rosmead junction, by which he expected Kelly-Kenny would attack his right. On January 24th, a patrol of Brabant's Horse, sent out by Gatacre in the direction of Steynsburg, joined hands with Kelly-Kenny's mounted patrols. Thebus, half-way between Rosmead junction and Stormberg, was held by our troops, and the branch railway was being repaired behind it.

On January 28th Gatacre made a reconnaissance beyond Cyphergat, which led to some

fighting. The Boers were found to be holding their positions near Stormberg in force.

In the beginning of February the Boers began to reinforce Stormberg from the Free State, and are even said to have withdrawn some men from Natal for this purpose. French was meanwhile hammering away at the Boer positions round Colesberg, trying to cut in, now on the left between the main position and the waggon bridge, now on the right about Achtertang, on the railway between Colesberg and Norvals Pont. Everywhere he found the enemy on the alert, and one suspects that in the last days of January his attacks were not very serious, but were rather of the nature of demonstrations intended to rivet the enemy's attention on the Orange River frontier.

In the first week of February a message was sent by a press agency from the British headquarters at Naauwpoort, south of Colesberg, which seems to have been really intended to conceal from the enemy what was actually in progress. "Great activity prevails here and at Rensburg and Hanover Road, owing to the fact that an overwhelming force of infantry has been sent to seize Norvals Pont, the cavalry, having completed a reconnaissance of the enemy's position, being retired in order to recoup losses." It was evidently intended that this message should come to the knowledge of the Dutch and mislead them as to what was happening before Colesberg. On the day on which it was despatched (February 5th), French's cavalry were being withdrawn from the Colesberg district in order to be moved to the western border by the railway through De Aar. It was hoped the enemy, when their absence was perceived, would suppose that they had only gone for a few days and would soon be back with reinforcements, and that meanwhile De Wet at Colesberg would have his attention riveted on his left by the demonstrations of Clements' infantry brigade towards Norvals Pont, which he would take to be the beginning of the advance of the "overwhelming force of infantry." No such force was in the neighbourhood; French was getting away his cavalry and horse artillery, and was handing over the local command to General Clements, who had only an infantry brigade, two field batteries, and a very few mounted troops with him. General Kelly-Kenny's other brigade was being withdrawn from Thebus and Rosmead junction, and was to be sent after the cavalry by the cross line through Naauwpoort to De Aar on the western border.



GATACRE'S FIGHT AT CYPHERGAL.

Further east, in the Stormberg district, Commandant Olivier, finding that Kelly-Kenny's threatened attack against his right was a mere feint and that Gatacre in his front was attempting nothing serious, made use of the reinforcements that had been sent to him for a sudden and well-directed attack on the British posts to the east of Sterkstroom camp. The movement was utterly unexpected, because it was still a fixed idea with most of our officers in South Africa that the Boers would never take the initiative.

From Sterkstroom a branch railway runs eastward through the hills to the Indwe coalfields near Dordrecht. In order to protect his right, Gatacre had pushed out two posts to the stations at Penhoek (seven miles) and Bird's River siding (thirteen miles away) on this line. Penhoek, a bold spur of the mountain range below which the railway runs, was held by Colonial mounted volunteers and six companies of the Royal Scots Regiment. Bird's River siding was held by a smaller detachment. At dawn on the morning of Wednesday, February 7th, the Boers appeared at both places and opened fire upon them with artillery. The attack at Bird's River was the more serious of the two, and it was believed that the attack at Penhoek was chiefly intended to prevent the more advanced post from being reinforced. But Gatacre recognised where the real danger lay, and pushed on to Bird's River with Montmorency's Scouts, four companies of the Royal Irish Rifles, and two guns of the Royal Artillery. The reinforcements arrived just in time to check a serious attack by the enemy, and the Boers withdrew under cover of their guns. At Penhoek the Royal Scots held their own, assisted by Brabant's Horse and the Cape Mounted Rifles, who had with them two 7-pounders and a couple of Maxims. Here the enemy made no attempt to close, and they retreated through the hills soon after the cessation of the cannonade at Bird's River told them that the other column had withdrawn. There was only trifling loss on the British side, but in their advance the Boers surprised and carried off a patrol of six men of Brabant's Horse. During the fighting Gatacre's armoured train had run out from Sterkstroom, but it was at once made a target for the Boer guns, and their shells burst so dangerously near it that it was considered prudent to withdraw it out of range.

Having thus brought up to the end of the first week of February the record of what was

happening in the north of Cape Colony, let us see what was being done upon the western border, which was soon to be the theatre of important events. During January, Lord Methuen had been laying down new sidings at Modder River camp. His engineers had made a second bridge across the river, and stores were accumulating in the large depôt at the entrenched camp. There was an occasional exchange of shell fire between the heavy naval guns and the Boer artillery at Magersfontein. The enemy were working steadily at their entrenchments, which by the middle of January extended in a great crescent nearly twenty miles long, the left in front of Jacobsdal, the right near Koodoosberg. On Wednesday, January 17th, Lord Methuen, in order to ascertain if the enemy were still holding the lines in strength, made a reconnaissance in force. It was also hoped that the movement would prevent the enemy from sending reinforcements to Colesberg, and would draw off some of the pressure from Kimberley. Half an hour before the movement began, only the staff and a few of the higher officers knew that anything was intended; and when the troops turned out, there was such a show of being thoroughly in earnest, that the men themselves thought another attack was to be made on the Magersfontein lines.

At half-past three in the afternoon the troops were suddenly ordered to fall in. At four o'clock they marched out, only the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and the 62nd Battery R.F.A. being left to guard the camp. The troops moved out over the same ground by which they had advanced to the battle of Magersfontein, the right flank resting on the Reit River. At a range of 2,800 yards, or rather more than a mile and a half, the 75th and 18th Batteries R.F.A. opened fire on the Boer trenches, while the Guards deployed in fighting formation on the right and the 9th Brigade on the left. Near the railway the 47 naval gun and three heavy guns of the siege-train began to bombard the Boer position at longer range.

"By five o'clock," says the *Daily News* correspondent, "the whole of our artillery was in action, vomiting a continual stream of fire. A rain of lyddite was poured into the Boer trenches with wonderful accuracy, wherever the enemy could be seen. Shortly after the firing commenced, reinforcements could be seen arriving post haste from Jacobsdal. The demonstration was evidently quite unexpected, and the foe was in total ignorance of what was going to happen.

For two hours, from 5 to 7 p.m., the booming of the artillery lasted. Every nook, corner, and crevice of the ridge where the Boer trenches were was thoroughly searched by the deadly lyddite. Earth and rocks were thrown about in the air in all directions. A remark I overheard seemed rather appropriate. 'Poor devils,' said a gunner, 'those who are not killed must be buried alive.' And indeed it did seem as if none could live through such a cascade of fire, through such an avalanche of rock and earth."

The infantry had pushed on to a range of about a thousand yards, and fired some volleys in the hope of drawing a reply from the enemy. But the Boers only replied by a few rifle shots on their extreme left. They were evidently waiting till the attack should come to closer range, when the guns would have to cease fire and would no longer cover the advance of the infantry. As darkness began to close in, the order was given for a general retirement, and then the Boer artillery opened fire and began to shell the retreating troops; but every shell fell short, and there was not a single casualty. It was dark, and the moon was up before the retirement had concluded, and the exchange of shell fire went on for some time by moonlight.

Next day, at half-past four, the infantry were again moved out in order to make the Boers man their trenches, and then the artillery began another bombardment; but this time the advance was not pushed so far, nor was the artillery duel continued so long. The Highland Brigade moved out along the river and exchanged some long-range rifle fire with the Boer left. During the following days, the naval gun had an occasional duel with one of the Boer heavy guns at Magersfontein. The sailors had a profound professional admiration for one of the Boer gunners in charge of it, who could be seen through the telescope quietly walking out between the shots and sitting down in front of the trench to watch what was going on. He was a heavily-built, bearded man, generally in his shirt-sleeves. When he saw the smoke of our gun, he would rise and step back into cover, appearing again as soon as the shell had burst.

On Monday, the 22nd, there was another reconnaissance by the Highlanders, and the Boers unmasked three guns on a kopje, which was heavily bombarded by our artillery. One of our last shots blew up a Boer magazine of black powder.

In the first week of February, the Boer reply to Lord Methuen's desultory bombardment be-

came less frequent, and it was reported that they had sent away some of their heavy guns from Magersfontein, either to Colesberg or to the siege lines before Kimberley. At daylight on the morning of Saturday, February 3rd, General Hector MacDonald marched from Modder River camp, with the Highland Brigade, the 9th Lancers, the 9th and 62nd batteries R.F.A., and a pontoon section of the Royal Engineers, and moved westward along the south bank of the river. The column bivouacked for the night at Fraser's Drift, and on Sunday afternoon reached, by a forced march, Koodooosberg Drift, an important river-crossing fifteen miles from Modder Bridge and beyond the extreme right of the Boer lines. The Koodooosberg, a large kopje with steep sides, rises from the river bank to the north and a little to the west of the drift. As the Lancers and the Highland Light Infantry crossed the river, a small picket of mounted Boers retired northwards after exchanging a few shots. Our troops entrenched themselves on both sides of the river and seized the Koodooosberg kopje, establishing themselves on that part of the summit which is nearest to the river. The summit of the kopje is about six hundred feet above the drift. Two long spurs run out from it, one northward, the other westward along the river bank. The ground on the top is very broken, strewn with large boulders, and covered with thorn bush, which grows very thick and high. The lower ground near the kopje is cut up with dry watercourses.

Sunday night passed quietly, and on Monday there were no Boers in sight during the morning. A couple of guns were dragged to the summit of the kopje, and the Lancers were sent out patrolling to the northward and eastward. In the afternoon MacDonald felt so secure that permission was given to a large number of the Highlanders to bathe in the river. While the men were thus enjoying themselves, suddenly sharp firing was heard to the north, and from the summit of the Koodooosberg the Lancers were seen galloping in, pursued by a large number of Boers, some of whom would dismount and fire while the others rode on after the retiring cavalry. The alarm was sounded, and the men rushed up half-dressed from the river and seized their rifles.

More than a mile from the kopje, the Boers stopped their pursuit and took cover on some low hills, sending forward only a few riflemen, who began firing an occasional sniping shot. The Lancers were sent forward under Major

Little, with orders to skirmish with the enemy, to retire again before them, and try to bring them under fire at close range from the main position. But the Boers would not be trapped. Some of them crept forward along a donga to within several hundred yards of a detached kopje held by a party of the Black Watch. They were driven back by the volleys of the Highlanders. Another party succeeded in obtaining a footing in the bush on the northern spur of the Koodoosberg, from which they kept up a desultory fire at a range of about a thousand yards against our men on the summit. The bush was so thick that neither party could see the other, and the firing was mostly at random and did not cause much loss. The British guns were brought into action, but the gunners, like the riflemen, had no very definite target to aim at.

During the Tuesday desultory skirmishing went on, and on the following night the Boers were strongly reinforced. Up to this point, both sides had been playing a waiting game, each hoping that the other would venture on a close attack. On the Wednesday morning it was found that during the night the Boers had succeeded in dragging a couple of guns to the top of the northern spur of the Koodoosberg, from which they opened fire at dawn against the main summit. The guns used smokeless powder, and were so well hidden among the boulders and bush that it was almost impossible to be sure of their position. Our guns shelled the Boer position on the spur, but failed to silence the enemy's artillery. MacDonald had on the Koodoosberg, under command of Colonel Hughes-Hallett, the Black Watch, four companies of the Seaforth Highlanders, a company of the Highland Light Infantry, and four guns. The rest of the Highland Light Infantry (seven companies) held the lower ground near the drift. On the south bank were the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and the remaining four companies of the Seaforths. The 9th Lancers guarded the flanks.

After shelling the main summit for some time, the Boer riflemen began to work forward through the bush to a closer attack. MacDonald sent up in succession to the summit three more companies of the Highland Light Infantry and the rest of the Seaforths, so that by noon Hughes-Hallett had on the hill two of the half-battalions of Highlanders and four guns. While an attack was in progress on the kopje, the Lancers reported that a strong force of the enemy was

crossing by Sand Drift two miles to the westward. The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders—MacDonald's last reserve—were sent out with two guns to check this flank attack, and after some hard fighting drove the enemy from the drift. After repelling the first attack of the enemy on the summit, the Seaforths attempted to work forward under cover against the Boer position on the north spur. But this counter-attack failed, and during the earlier part of the afternoon the Highlanders on the main summit had to endure an annoying fire of shrapnel, and at the same time to be on the alert to meet and drive back attacks made by the Boers through the bush.

On the Tuesday evening MacDonald had sent a message to Modder River camp, asking for reinforcements and suggesting that a mounted force should be sent to act against the flank and rear of the Boers who were attacking him. As we shall see later on, the request came at rather an inconvenient time, for General French was organising his cavalry division for the coming advance into the Free State, and was anxious to keep the mounted troops together and give the horses as much rest as possible. There seems to have been some hesitation in complying with MacDonald's request, and it was not until eleven o'clock on the Wednesday morning that Major-General Babington started off with the 9th Lancers and two batteries of Horse Artillery. About three o'clock that afternoon, the Boer attack at Koodoosberg became less persistent, and a little later it was perceived that the enemy were drawing off. Their scouts, thrown far out to their left flank, had warned them in good time of Babington's approach, and the Boer commandant had given the order to retreat. At four o'clock Babington's column arrived to the north of Koodoosberg. The 9th Lancers joined him, and he started in pursuit of the enemy. But he did not go far. His guns fired a few shots at long range at the retreating Boers, but when the cavalry, whose horses were already very tired, rode forward, they were met by a sharp rifle fire from a Boer rearguard safely hidden in a long donga, and all the ground in the neighbourhood was made difficult for our mounted men by the large number of barbed wire cattle-fences that crossed it in all directions. The cavalry therefore withdrew to Koodoosberg Drift, and the same evening Babington and MacDonald received orders to return with all their force to Modder River camp. The Highlanders had lost about fifty men during the fight,



A CLEVER CAPTURE BY MONTMORENCY'S SCOUTS.

including several officers. As the telegrams from the front had represented the fighting at Koodoosberg as a brilliant victory, some disappointment was felt in England at the news of MacDonald's retirement, but the fact was that Lord Roberts was engaged in concentrating every available man and gun in preparation for his great movement to the relief of Kimberley.

The Diamond City, which had been besieged since the first days of the war, had been having a dreary time, and some of the messages sent out by runners and by the electric signal light in the latter part of January and the beginning of February were not very pleasant reading for Lord Roberts. They told of dissensions between Mr. Rhodes and the powerful De Beers party on the one hand and the regular military authorities on the other; and then came pressing requests for immediate relief, some of which seemed to indicate that under the pressure of the Boer bombardment there existed something like the beginning of a panic.

After Methuen's repulse at Magersfontein, Kimberley had been very depressed. Until that disastrous day, there had been absolute confidence that the relief column would have no difficulty in fighting its way through. The subsequent reconnaissances from Modder camp and bombardments of the Boer lines resulted in wild rumours that the Boers had been defeated and their positions captured—rumours which were, of course, followed by speedy disappointment. On January 1st strict regulations as to the use of the food supply came into force, and the killing of horses for food began on the 10th January. The large native population of the town presented a serious problem. Thousands of blacks had been thrown out of work by the stoppage of the mines, and, though employment was found for many of them, they had also to be fed, whether they were employed or not, and they had also to be kept in order. There were about 15,000 in the compounds at the beginning of the siege. An attempt was made to get a large body of them out in November, but the Boers promptly turned them back. In December and January smaller parties were sent out. Some of these were turned back, but others the Boers kept and employed them on their entrenchments. About 2,000 Basutos were allowed to pass through the Boer lines, Cronje treating them kindly and giving them cattle for their journey to their own country. The Boers were at this time very anxious to be friendly with the Basutos, the only large black tribe in South

Africa that had succeeded in retaining its weapons in defiance of Boers and British alike.

Early in January, the military authorities published an order that all lights were to be extinguished at 9.30 in the evening. The object of this regulation was to economise the stock of candles and paraffin oil. Exceptions to the rule were permitted only when there was illness in a house.

Mr. Labram, an American engineer employed in the De Beers workshops, had set to work at the end of December to make a long 30-pounder gun. He had to adapt his machinery to this new work, and improvised his tools and made his patterns with the help of one of the artillery officers. The gun and its carriage were completed on January 19th, a supply of shells was also ready, and, after having been named "Long Cecil" in honour of Mr. Rhodes, it was mounted on the defences. The gun made some very good shooting, and it was anticipated that it would outrage and silence the heaviest guns in the besiegers' lines. But the Boers had also been preparing some unpleasant surprises for the garrison. "On the morning of Wednesday, the 24th," says Dr. Ashe in his diary of the siege, "the Boers began to shell us again quite early in the morning, and we soon found it was quite different to the shelling we had had before. The shells came from all sides, and, as we found out later, at least eight guns were at work. None of them were bigger than they used before, but they were either better guns or better worked, and had better ammunition, for they reached every part of the town except one small area near the De Beers mine. This new bombardment went on through the 25th, and ended with a few shells on the morning of the 26th. Then for some days the bombardment was more irregular. As a whole, it did very little damage, but the result of it was that the townspeople felt less comfortable in their houses, and began to work hard at improvising earthwork shelters against the Boer shells."

On Sundays there was usually a truce. "No one can imagine the relief it was when the shelling ceased," writes Dr. Ashe on Sunday, January 28th. "It is not altogether a question of fear, but the knowledge that, wherever you are, a shell may drop on you at any moment, and that you have to do your work all the same, does not much exhilarate you. To-day (Sunday) I don't think a shot has been fired on either side, but there are heaps of rumours as to what is in store for us to-morrow. More guns, bigger

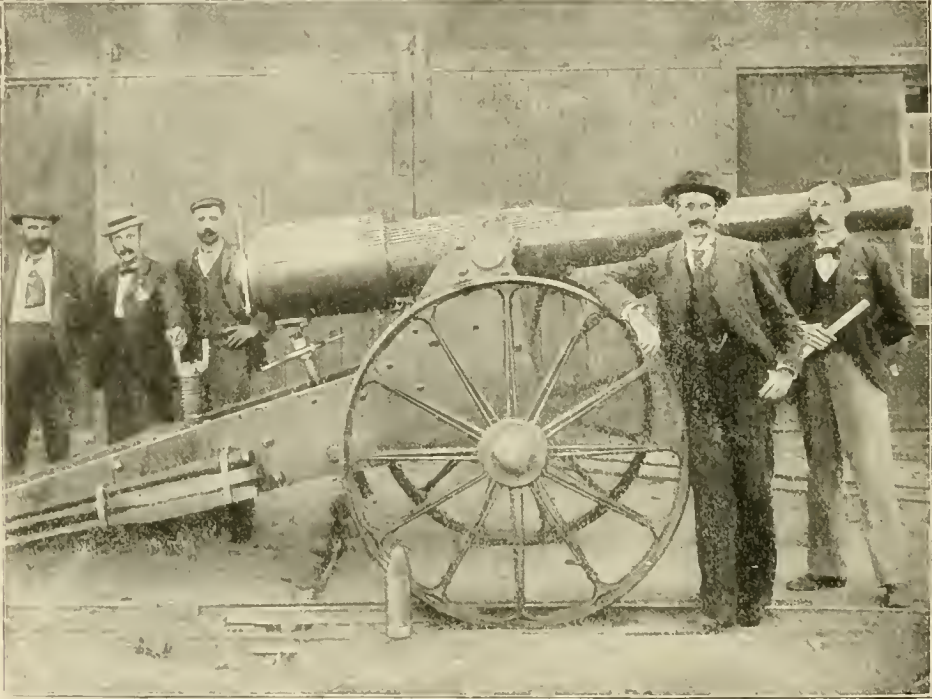


THE SMALLEST MAN AND THE BIGGEST MAN IN THE BOER ARMY.

guns, and closer to us, is what most of the rumours amount to, but no one will know whether there is any truth in them till to-morrow. Nearly all the town has been busy building shell-proof shelters, but we have decided not to do so. Our house is pretty solid, and unless they bring very big guns to bear upon us, we are only liable to be reached by the shells that come from the long side of the house, in the direction in which most of the windows face. If we keep in the bottom storey and in

roofed them with anything that came handy, and then either just sandbags or the loose earth out of the hole was put on top. In these you can't stand up, and there is no ventilation at all, so I guess they would be about as deadly as the Boer shells; but lots of people seem to find comfort in being in them. One woman I know fled into hers early on the Wednesday morning, and never came out till late Friday afternoon."

The expected heavy bombardment did not



"LONG CECIL."

(Photo: Hancox, Kimberley.)

the hall, I do not think we can be damaged. All the shells that have burst did it in the first room they came to, and the pieces only went through into the second if the wall was very flimsy. Our walls are good and solid, so I think we should be pretty well all right in the hall.

"The shell-proof places are ghastly little dog-holes—like the Black Hole of Calcutta in most cases. Some of the rich people have put up good ones, double layers of sandbags built up on their verandahs to a decent height, and roofed either with sheet steel or old railway iron, or thick deals with plenty of sandbags on the top of them; and in these there have been some attempt at ventilation; but the poorer people have dug holes in their yards or gardens and

begin next day, but Long Cecil, or its carriage, was disabled by the first shot it fired on the Monday morning, by something giving way, and had to be taken back to the workshop for repairs. But on Wednesday, February 7th, the rumoured heavier bombardment began. The Boers had placed a 96-pounder Creusot gun in position at Kamfer's Dam, and began dropping its huge shells into the town—beginning soon after daylight, going on till noon, then resting till three and beginning again. The gun could reach every part of Kimberley, and the bursting of the huge shells, twenty inches long and six inches in diameter, which fell now here now there, produced something like a panic in the town, though Mafeking and Ladysmith had been

subjected to the same ordeal and had borne it with a good deal of composure.

"One of the early shells," says Dr. Ashe, "burst in the air, and a piece of it dropped through a roof near the Bank, and knocked a man's brains out, killing him on the spot. Another came through a photographer's opposite the club and burst on the pavement, and fragments of it flew on to the club verandah and out at the side, one of them rising high again and knocking the cross off the end of the Catholic church at the side of the club. A patient of mine got a chunk of this in his leg as he stood at the club. Just where the shell came through the photographer's wall a big portrait of Rhodes hung, and the shell landed squarely in the middle of this and knocked it into smithereens. A little later on another shell dropped into a big shop next door to S.'s and set fire to it. The whole place burned down and S.'s place caught fire, but they managed to put it out."

Next day a system of signalling was established on the Mafeking plan. The big Creusot was three and a half miles away, and used black powder; so when the smoke was seen bells were rung, and there was a brief interval during which people could make a dash for their shelters. On the 9th the bombardment was particularly heavy, and went on from 6 a.m. till dark. Some of the shells did not explode, but those that burst often did terrible damage. The last shell fired that evening struck the Grand Hotel and killed the American engineer, George Labram, the maker of "Long Cecil."

Next day the bombardment was slacker, and a good deal of work was put in by those who were making or improving shelters; but

occasional shells were fired till near midnight. The following day (Sunday, the 11th) brought the usual weekly truce, doubly welcome on this occasion. But it was no day of rest.

"I shall not forget this Sunday in a hurry," says Dr. Ashe. "It *was* a day. First of all, everybody was so delighted that it was Sunday, as that meant rest from the shells. Kimberley

is not exactly composed of Sunday School superintendents, and, as a rule, is rather bored by Sundays, but not this one. Then, again, everywhere you went forts (*i.e.* shelters) were being built, and the clang of sheet steel, railway rails, old iron railway sleepers, etc. etc., was heard all over the place. The streets were full of carts and hand-carts and wheelbarrows, and even natives, carrying materials for forts. Many people could not get boys, as the demand was so great for labour, and so they had to do work themselves. Several of the merchants had large stocks of the coarse Boer salt, which is got by crystallisation from the salt-pans, and they made forts of this. It is packed in large sacks, and answered splendidly. In the first bombardment I had seen at a baker's a fort made entirely of sacks of flour. Towards afternoon the vague

rumours of heavy bombardment beginning directly after midnight began to take shape, but the shape was different in each house. Anyhow everybody was sure that Monday was going to be a bad day, and whether there were to be two new big guns or twenty was immaterial. Early in the afternoon notices signed by Mr. Rhodes were posted up in many places and sent round the town on a cart, to the effect that women and children were advised to take shelter in the two big mines. It was promised that arrangements



ONE OF THE DEFENDERS OF KIMBERLEY: COLONEL SCOTT-TURNER.

(Killed in a sortie from Kimberley.)

would be made to lower them down and make them as comfortable as possible. This being signed by Mr. Rhodes was looked upon as a confirmation of the rumours as many people at once concluded that Mr Rhodes had had private information as to what was going to happen on the morrow, and a regular panic ensued."

The streets were filled with people hurrying to the mines, many of them carrying blankets, bedding, or food. Many even of the richer people who had built good shelters abandoned them for the underground refuge offered by Mr. Rhodes. There were crowds round the mine shafts. The first parties were lowered at half-past five, but it was long after midnight before all were in shelter. About fifteen hundred were sent down the De Beers mine, and a thousand more down the Kimberley mine. Notwithstanding the almost panic-stricken crowd round the shafts, there was not a single accident.

Next day, to everyone's surprise, there was only a comparatively slight bombardment, which did not do much damage. That was the day on

which the relief column started across the drifts of the Reit River, for Kimberley had not much longer to endure the strain. On the Tuesday, the local newspaper ceased publication, issuing a slip to its subscribers to inform them that, "for reasons which would be explained afterwards," the paper had stopped for awhile. The fact was, it had practically been suppressed by the military authorities on account of a sharp attack upon the methods of the censorship which it had published on the previous Saturday. The newspaper, controlled by Mr. Rhodes, had been complaining of the apathy of the military authorities in leaving Kimberley to its fate at the very moment when, as a matter of fact, the most effective measures had been taken for its relief. The town was allowed to know that a reassuring message had come from Lord Roberts promising speedy help; and during Wednesday, the 14th, when only about twenty large shells were thrown into Kimberley, there were rumours that firing had been heard to the southward, and that the relief force was approaching.



GENERAL TOBIAS SMUTS.

CHAPTER XXIV.

GENERAL FRENCH'S FLANK MARCH.

LORD ROBERTS had spent nearly a month at Cape Town preparing for the campaign. He left it towards the end of the first week of February, and on Friday, the 9th, he reached Modder River camp, accompanied by his staff, including Lord Kitchener.

Before he reached the camp the work of preparation had been completed. With wonderful secrecy a great concentration had been in progress along the railway from De Aar junction to the Modder camp. General Tucker's division (the 7th), made up of Wavell's and Chermide's brigades, was brought up from Cape Colony, where they had just been landed. General Kelly-Kenny's division (the 6th) was in the north of Cape Colony. One of its brigades, under General Clements, was left to hold the Boers at Colesberg, while the other, under General Knox, was moved to De Aar camp. There a second brigade was improvised out of troops originally destined for General Gatacre and for the line of communications, and the 6th Division, thus reconstituted, was moved up the line to Modder camp. Another division, numbered the 9th, was formed under General Pole-Carew, who commanded the 9th brigade in Lord Methuen's force. It was made up of his former brigade and another organised out of recently-arrived battalions. Thus Lord Roberts had, on the western border, three divisions—the 6th, 7th, and 9th—available for the invasion of the Free State, and could still leave at the Modder River camp, to hold Cronje in his intrenchments, another division under Lord Methuen, made up of the Guards and the Highland Brigade.

It may be noted here that of the other divisions the 3rd, or rather a portion of it, was under Gatacre in the north-east of Cape Colony. The 2nd, 4th, and 5th were with Buller in Natal, and the 8th, under Rundle, was on its way from England.

The artillery detailed for the march into the Free State amounted to ninety-eight guns of all kinds. There were seven Horse Artillery

batteries, six 15-pounder field batteries, one howitzer battery, and with the naval brigade four long 12-pounders and four 4.7 guns.

The most important arm of all, the cavalry division under French, was made up of three brigades—the 1st under Major-General Porter, the 2nd under Broadwood, and the 3rd under Gordon. The seven R.H.A. batteries were added to the division, and there were also two small brigades of mounted infantry.

The whole force that was to move into the Free State amounted to nearly 40,000 men. Of these, 23,000 were infantry and 11,000 mounted men. The transport train was made up of 700 waggons and about 9,000 oxen and mules. In order to make the force as mobile as possible, tents and all other impedimenta that could be dispensed with were left behind. The cavalry were not even allowed to carry their cloaks, and the baggage and supplies of the brigades and divisions, as well as the waggons of the supply train, were grouped together in large convoys. The most important of these was a convoy of 200 waggons, which, besides other things, carried half a million rations, sufficient to supply the whole army for twelve days.

The secret of the coming movement was admirably kept. Till the last moment, a large part of the force remained at the great base camp at De Aar, where their presence gave no information to the Boers, for the troops concentrated there might have been destined, as many thought, for a campaign on the Orange River. At Modder River camp there was a great show of activity. The Boers were allowed to see that troop trains were coming in daily, and Cronje was quite persuaded that a great attack was to be made upon the Magersfontein lines. When at last the move began, the tents were all left standing, and the cavalry made its first march under cover of darkness. Until Saturday, the 10th February, even the officers commanding divisions were not informed of Lord Roberts's plans. That day commanding officers were informed confidentially that they must be ready to move at once, and they were

given a general idea of what was to be done; while not even a hint was given to the men as to the direction that was to be taken. That evening Lord Roberts rode round the cavalry camps and told the officers that he relied on them for a rapid dash to Kimberley, which would relieve the garrison and at the same time cut Cronje's lines of communication. Orders were then issued that the cavalry and horse artillery were to begin their march at three a.m. on Sunday, the 11th. The three infantry divisions and the convoys were to follow later.

French had only about 4,800 men with him at the Modder camp, but he was to be joined on the march by the rest of the mounted troops, who were at various points between the Orange River and the Modder. At two o'clock on the Sunday morning, squadrons and batteries began to parade for the march as silently as possible in the starlit darkness. Even then the men did not know what line was to be taken, and most of them were very much surprised when at three o'clock the column moved off almost due south along the veldt, gradually diverging from the railway line, and with their backs to Kimberley and the Boer positions. When the sun rose, they were miles away towards Graspan and well out of sight of the Magersfontein kopjes. There was nothing to show the Boers that the great cavalry camp had been deserted in the night. Behind the cavalry, Kelly-Kenny's division had also moved off in the darkness and was tramping steadily southwards along the veldt.

At midday on Sunday General French halted at the farm of Randam, in the Free State, about half-way between Graspan station on the railway and Waterval and De Kiel's Drifts, a crossing on the Reit River just at the point where, after running east and west across the Free State from the Basuto hills, it bends north-westward towards Jacobsdal and its confluence with the Modder twenty miles away. At Randam the force bivouacked, and men and horses had a long rest through the afternoon and evening and the first hours of the night, while the strength of the division grew rapidly as troops came riding in from Graspan, Belmont, and Orange River camp.

At three a.m. on the morning of Monday, the 12th, the march began again, this time due east, towards the drifts at the bend of the Reit River. The best narrative of French's march that we have seen is that of Captain Cecil Boyle, of the Imperial Yeomanry, who served on the general's staff during the dash to Kimberley, and was not

long after killed at the head of his men in Lord Methuen's action with Colonel Villebois de Mareuil at Boshof. We must quote Captain Boyle's description of the march across the veldt to the river and the first brush with the Boers:—

"Our goal was Waterval Drift, but, after pushing forward for about an hour, the darkness was so intense that the general halted the division till some daylight should pour over the adjacent kopjes. Then, as the light rose, the whole division moved on Waterval, which lay at the end of a plain bounded on both sides by the usual kopjes, and with a very strong frontal position on the other side of the drift. The usual advanced parties, patrols, flankers, advanced squadrons, were thrown out. It was not known whether this drift was held in force until a gun was galloped into the plain by the Boers, and opened fire immediately with such a nicety of range that the first shell just whizzed over our heads and the second burst between the general and his staff. 'There are too many of us riding together,' the general said, as he galloped to the top of a kopje to look around, and soon discovered a hill in our immediate front to be strongly held by the enemy. Colonel Eustace, R.H.A., was at once ordered to engage and silence this Boer gun, which he did. The gun soon retired, while the general swung the whole division to the right round the kopje, and after a few hours crossed the Reit River at De Kiel's Drift with one brigade and before sunset with the whole division and artillery. The rapidity with which the general, after making a feint at Waterval, brought his batteries round under cover of the hills and developed his attack at De Kiel's Drift, evidently disconcerted the Boers, for they left their strong position and galloped across to our right front in one long stream directly their rear was threatened. Could the Horse Artillery have come into action more quickly on the right, we might have inflicted a severe blow."

There was a halt for that night at De Kiel's Drift. According to the original plan, the cavalry should have moved forward again a little before daylight on the Tuesday, but this was rendered impossible by the delay of the convoy in coming up. The waggons conveyed not only food for the men, but also forage for the thousands of horses; and when they arrived in the early hours of Tuesday, a long time had to be spent in distributing the forage to the squadrons and batteries and feeding the horses. During the night the infantry had been closing in—



WHAT THE WAR HAS DONE TO OUR CAVALRY HORSES.

Kelly-Kenny's division from Ramdam and Tucker's from Orange River camp. Up to this time the Boers were quite in the dark as to the nature of the movement. They clung to the idea that Roberts would make another attempt to storm the Magersfontein kopjes, and seem to have regarded the appearance of French's cavalry force at the drifts of the Reit River as only a raid into the Free State territory like those which Babington's cavalry brigade had carried out, but on a larger scale.

Kelly-Kenny's division was halted near Waterval Drift, a few miles to the north of French. Lord Kitchener was with him. Pole-Carew, with the 9th Division, the mounted infantry, and the large convoy behind him, was coming up from Ramdam. Tucker, with the 7th Division, was at De Kiel's Drift, ready to cross. Lord Roberts with his staff reached De Kiel's Drift at 10 a.m. French, with the cavalry division and the horse batteries, was just starting for the north bank of the river. He was to march that day northwards to the crossing of the Modder at Klip Drift, about twenty miles distant. The country was open veldt, broken by a few groups of kopjes. The ground was so burnt up that there was hardly a mouthful of grass for the horses, the few farms were mostly deserted and could yield no supplies, and, worst of all, the country was almost destitute of water. The march to Klip Drift would not only secure a crossing on the Modder within striking distance of the Boer lines round Kimberley and about fifteen miles outside the entrenchments at Magersfontein, by which Cronje had so long barred the direct way to the Diamond City, but it would also cut the direct line between the Boer depôt of supplies at Jacobsdal and Bloemfontein.

Even at 10 a.m., when the march began, the heat of the sun was of tropical intensity, and about a hundred horses either died on the track or had to be left behind utterly broken down. A little after midday a well and a pool of good water were reached, but orders were given that it was to be left for the infantry who were following, and neither man nor horse was to touch it. The division moved on, covered by a widely extended fan of advanced patrols. The heat had become so great that even staff officers, sent with important messages, could only walk their horses. More than once the brown, sun-scorched grass of the veldt caught fire, and one of these sudden blazes destroyed the telegraph cable which the engineers were paying out behind the column,

and thus cut off communication between General French and Lord Roberts' headquarters at De Kiel's.

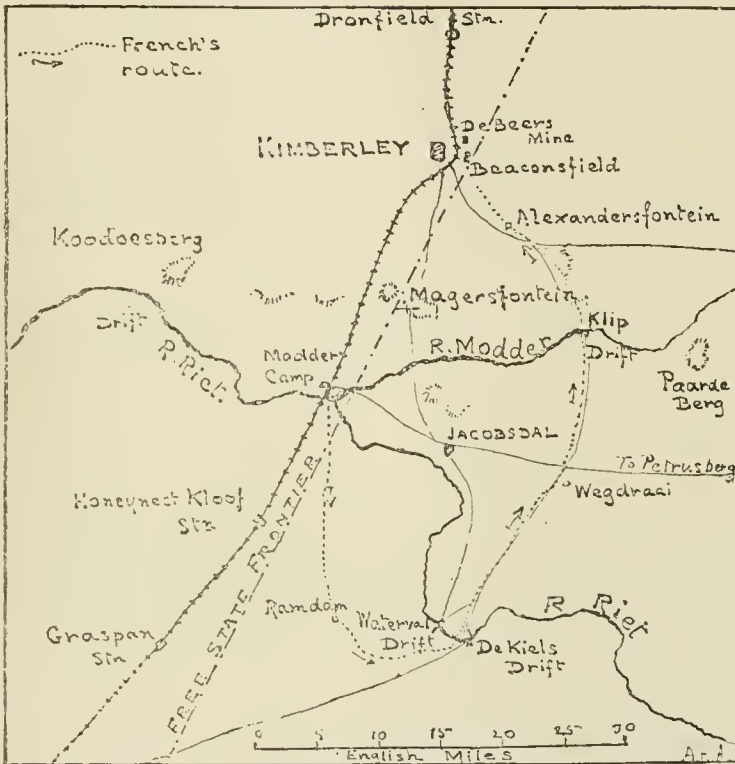
In the afternoon a body of mounted Boers appeared on the right front. Porter's brigade was moving on that side, and his R.H.A. battery came into action, and after it had fired a few shots the enemy rode away to the northwards. Porter's brigade was in the centre, and Gordon's on the left. He had the 9th and 16th Lancers with him, and he pushed a strong patrol out towards Jacobsdal, as it was thought the Boers might attempt something from that side. But the enemy at Jacobsdal seemed to be still unconscious that this large cavalry force was moving round them to the eastward. It was, however, quite certain that the mounted men who had retired before the fire of Gordon's guns would soon send word to Cronje's headquarters of what was happening, and though his men and horses were exhausted, and the artillery teams could just drag the guns at a slow walk, French decided that at any cost Klip Drift must be reached and forced before evening.

Gordon's brigade (9th and 16th Lancers) and Broadwood's (Household Cavalry, 10th Hussars, and 12th Lancers) were ordered to push on to Klip Drift. The drift itself is not an easy one. There is a sharp descent to the river on each side of it, and it is commanded by some low kopjes within easy range of the north bank; but there are other crossings within two or three miles, to the right and left of it, and while Gordon moved up in front, and on finding the drift was held opened fire with four of his Horse Artillery guns, Broadwood got across the river to the eastward, without being opposed, and as soon as the Boers found that he was across they abandoned the kopjes at Klip Drift and fell back towards Kimberley. They seem to have been quite surprised by the appearance of the cavalry, and they abandoned a large number of waggons and their camp, in which cooking fires were burning, and a lot of bread which was just ready for baking. One waggon was loaded with fruit, a welcome booty for the thirsty troopers. There was a pursuit for a few miles, but only some ambulances were captured. Gordon's horses were too tired to push on farther, and one of Broadwood's regiments, which had its horses in better condition, was stopped by a heavy fire from a Boer laager. The pursuit was abandoned, and, having secured the kopjes north of the drift, the cavalry bivouacked along the river. During Wednesday, the 14th, French halted at Klip

Drift to rest his tired horses and to allow the infantry divisions to close up. But the rest for the cavalry division was very incomplete, for the Boers appeared on front and flanks in small bodies, now here now there, sometimes bringing guns with them, so that more than once shells fell in the bivouac on the north bank of the Modder. But they never ventured on a real attack, and when a few squadrons and a battery

talions and batteries, with two 4.7 naval guns, arrived at the drift, very tired with their long night march, and took over the positions held so far by the cavalry.

At nine o'clock the cavalry brigades were formed up in three columns on the north bank, with the Horse Artillery on the left, as it was expected that if any attack were made it would be on that flank. The plan of the day's opera-



THE ADVANCE ON KIMBERLEY.

turned out to meet them they always disappeared. It looked as if the enemy's only object was to worry and further tire the weary men and horses.

During the day the infantry reached Wegdraai, a farm about half-way between the Reit and the Modder. In the afternoon Colonel Gorringe, Lord Kitchener's principal staff officer, rode into French's bivouac with a message that Kitchener and General Kelly-Kenny, with their staffs, would ride in during the night, and would be glad to have a light shown to guide them in. Captain Laycock, of French's staff, rode out to show them the way, and brought them in safely about midnight. Before sunrise on the Thursday morning Kelly-Kenny's bat-

tions was that French should push on to Kimberley with the cavalry division, Kelly-Kenny should hold Klip Drift, and Lord Roberts, with General Tucker's division, was to march on Jacobsdal so as to threaten the left rear of the Magersfontein positions. Pole-Carew's division was behind Kelly-Kenny, and the great convoy was to be brought across Waterval Drift.

Let us now follow the operations of the cavalry division. The march began at half-past nine, the 6th Lancers being thrown out to protect the right flank. Gordon's brigade was on the right, Porter's in the centre, Broadwood's on the left. There was a good deal of broken ground in front, through which the enemy had disappeared after their worrying attacks of the

previous day. The three brigades had hardly started when the enemy's guns opened from the left front, and the Horse Artillery came into action against them. The division swung round, bringing forward its right, when suddenly an unexpected fire was opened from a kopje on that flank. A long valley ran up through the hills, its surface nearly level, and a few hundred Boers were moving across it. It looked at first sight as if the right thing to do would be to clear the kopjes on the flanks before advancing up the plain towards Kimberley. But French took, on the moment, a decision which marked him as a first-class cavalry leader. He had found at De Kiel's and Klip Drifts that the Boers were not disposed to make a very determined stand, and he sent off a galloper to Gordon, ordering him to disregard the fire from the kopjes and to charge from the right front up the plain towards Kimberley.

Under a heavy fire from front and flank, which, however, was very unsteady and did little harm, Gordon led the 9th and 16th Lancers forward at a gallop. The Boers in the plain broke and tried to get away, but the Lancers rode over them, killing and wounding more than 100. The rest of the division, with the horse battery, swept after them, and for nearly five miles the cavalry pushed on at alternate gallop and trot, leaving the detached parties of Boers in the hills behind them. "About two miles from the head of the plain," writes Captain Boyle, "the main body was halted to allow the guns from the left to rejoin us, but Broadwood's brigade continued the gallop to the very top of the pass on the left, and the 12th Lancers dismounted and held the kopjes in front. The right front was held by the Household Cavalry and Gordon's Lancers. A general halt was now ordered. The artillery came up, and the advance began again, through low brushwood and scrub and broken ground. Just beyond the head of the plain, on some rising ground, the tall chimneys of Kimberley and the machinery of the mines were descried. A loud cheer was raised by the men, for the day was won, and Kimberley was relieved; but we had still ten miles to march. We heard the guns of Kimberley as we advanced, we saw the never-to-be-forgotten range of Magersfontein kopjes, grim, and apparently impregnable, to our left rear, and we knew then that Cronje must soon discover his false position. The centre brigade was now ordered to send two advanced squadrons to push right into Kimberley till

they found themselves in actual contact with the enemy. On they pushed through the Benaueheidsfontein farm, through the suburb of Beaconsfield, and halted, returning to bivouac for the night at Benaueheidsfontein, where there was a spring of water. The enemy in their front soon disappeared as the division was seen approaching over the rising ground, and bodies of men were seen galloping away in hasty confusion to our right. The general now moved the remainder of the division to the right with all his guns; and after some hours' marching got close enough to shell a Boer laager to the east of Kimberley, and, bringing up his right, finally entered Kimberley with his staff at about 7 p.m. The rejoicings were great, but what surprised everybody was the fat and sleek appearance of both horses and inhabitants of relieved Kimberley as compared with that of the relievers."

The day before the relief the Boers were still persistently shelling the town. Early that morning (Wednesday, the 14th, the same day that French was resting at Klip Drift) some natives came into Beaconsfield from near the Boer lines at Alexandersfontein, about four miles out, to say that the Boers there had all cleared out to help another commando which was in difficulties. They had probably gone to help in worrying French in his bivouac, but of course the garrison knew nothing of this. They rather suspected at first that the natives meant to lead them into a trap; but some scouts were sent out, and came back with the report that the native story was true, and that there were hardly any Boers at Alexandersfontein. Colonel Kekewich accordingly made a sortie in that direction with some of the Lancshires, the Kimberley Light Horse, Kimberley Rifles, and the Beaconsfield Town Guard. A handful of Boers offered some opposition at Alexandersfontein, but they were driven out with slight loss, and four of them were taken prisoners. Part of the troops held Alexandersfontein, while the rest marched back into the town in triumph, escorting twenty captured horses, a lot of cattle, and twelve waggon-loads of provisions. In the afternoon the Boers attempted to recapture Alexandersfontein, and attacked the place with rifles and artillery. But the Kimberley men had good cover, and held out there successfully.

"It is rumoured," wrote Dr. Ashe, in his diary for this day, "that General French is coming on through Jacobsdal to our relief, and is burning every Dutch laager and homestead that he comes

across on the way. Certainly I saw three or four columns of smoke over in the Jacobsdal direction this afternoon, but I guess the rumour was made to fit them, for, as far as we know, French is over Colesberg way still. A rumour that Cronje has been captured is probably equally false. It is too good to be true."

At ten o'clock next morning—the day of the relief—the big Boer gun began firing again, but the rumours that "French was coming" became more persistent, and the townfolk began to believe them. All the morning skirmishing was going on at Alexandersfontein, and about noon the big gun ceased firing. At half-past three the word went round that, from the look-outs at the De Beers Mine and the heaps of mining *débris* at Beaconsfield, khaki-clad cavalry could be seen on the high ground far away to the south-east. Great clouds of dust were rising, showing that large bodies of men were on the move; but the news of immediate relief still seemed too good to be true, and some of the look-out men per-

sisted in saying that the mounted men in the distance were really Boers. But a little later the glad news spread that French was really coming, and, after dark, he rode into the town amid a scene of wild excitement. In his dash for Kimberley he had not lost fifty men, but hundreds of horses had died or broken down, and, though it was known that the Boers were dragging away their heavy guns, the cavalry were in no condition for immediate pursuit.

Thus, after a resistance of 124 days, the siege of Kimberley ended. It now remained to accomplish the second task—the capture of Cronje's army, which was supposed to be safely hemmed in in the Magersfontein lines.

But before relating what followed the relief of Kimberley, we must see what the infantry divisions were doing during the last day of French's ride, and what was happening on Roberts's left at Jacobsdal and in his rear at Waterval Drift.



SOME OF FRENCH'S HORSES AFTER THE ADVANCE TO KIMBERLEY.

CHAPTER XXV.

JACOBSDAL AND WATERVAL DRIFT.

WHILE French was pushing forward to Kimberley on Thursday, February 15th, Lord Roberts, with Tucker's division and some of the mounted infantry, moved from Wegdraai westwards upon Jacobsdal. A patrol pushing on in advance found the place evacuated. The hospital was full of wounded, many of them British wounded prisoners from Colesberg. But the Boers returned in force, and the patrol fell back skirmishing.

On the approach of the main body of Tucker's division a half-hearted attempt was made to defend the town. A body of riflemen held its eastern edge, but they had no guns with them, and in the afternoon, when Tucker's batteries arrived and opened fire, they were quickly driven out. The mounted infantry were sent in to clear the town. The action was interesting because it was the first time that a body of British volunteers was engaged. The mounted infantry companies of the City Imperial Volunteers, under Colonel Cholmondeley, of the London Rifle Brigade, were sent forward with the fighting line, and Lord Roberts reported that "they behaved most gallantly." Their colonel had his horse killed, and several other horses were hit. Of the men, a sergeant and two privates were wounded. It appears that the resistance at Jacobsdal was no part of Cronje's plans. He had given orders for the place to be evacuated, but one of his commandants went back with a small party of burghers and made this attempt to check the British advance.

Lord Roberts entered the town with Wavell's brigade of Tucker's division, the 2nd North Staffordshire Regiment leading the way. A Free State flag was still flying on the town hall, and the Staffords hauled it down. On most of the other buildings round the square, which is the centre of the town, the Red Cross flag was flying, and they were full of wounded men and sick,

suffering chiefly from enteric. The place had long been the hospital for Cronje's army in the Magersfontein lines, and also for De Wet's and Delarey's force at Colesberg. Several British officers and men were in the chief hospital, which was under the charge of a German ambulance corps. Lord Roberts visited the hospitals, and reported that they were in excellent order, and that the British sick and wounded in them had been treated well.

Jacobsdal was not to be permanently occupied. Tucker's troops were ordered to turn to the northward, so as to be in position to advance on a parallel line to Kelly-Kenny's division. It is not easy to understand why the mounted infantry were not used to clear the country immediately to the west of the Boers and get touch with the left of Cronje's main position.

There was the same absence of all attempts to keep touch with

the enemy on French's part. His cavalry badly needed the short rest which they had on Thursday night, but more vigorous leadership would have found a means of still watching Magersfontein and the roads leading from it. When it was found that the way was clear to Kimberley, if even a single squadron had been left behind to guard the track to the Modder drifts, much serious trouble that came later would have been avoided. Or part of the mounted troops of the Kimberley garrison, who had done no heavy work lately, and whose horses were in relatively good condition, might have been sent out even in the night over the country they knew well by Wimbledon and Spytfontein to get touch with Cronje's force. Still stranger was the absolute inactivity of the fine division left with Lord Methuen at Modder River camp in Cronje's front. He had with him a brigade of the Guards and a brigade of Highland regiments. These eight battalions represented as good fighting material as a general could wish for. He had



MAJOR-GENERAL C. TUCKER.

at least three batteries to act with them. There was no need for him to try to storm Magersfontein; indeed, such an enterprise would have been out of place, for the object in view was not to force the famous fortified lines, but to surround Cronje's army and compel it to surrender. It was important to keep Cronje at Magersfontein till Lord Roberts's force was safely established on his line of retreat, and to do this the simplest way was to make a demonstration against the Boer lines, draw the enemy's fire, and, if he tried to retreat, turn the demonstration into a real attack. Touch should have been kept with the Boers day and night. But instead of this, Lord Methuen remained quiet in his fortified camp, and Cronje was allowed to do what he pleased. One can hardly suppose that Methuen was thus inactive from choice. He himself, and Colvile with the Guards and MacDonald with the Highlanders, must all have been eager for a share in the great stroke that was being carried out for the relief of Kimberley. For some reason Lord Roberts must have ordered the splendid division at Modder camp to remain idle in its lines. He appears to have considered that it was doing enough by waiting there and giving Cronje the impression that he was to be attacked in front.

The Boer leader had at first utterly misjudged the situation. He persisted in his belief that no large British force could or would go far from the railway, and that when the move for the relief of Kimberley came it would be by a frontal attack from Modder camp. This opinion seems to have been strengthened by what he considered to be MacDonald's failure to turn his right flank by way of Koodoosberg Drift. The dash of French's squadrons to the drifts of the Reit and Modder he regarded as a mere cavalry raid that could be checked if any attempt were made to push on to Kimberley. He was unaware that three divisions of infantry were moving up behind the screen of cavalry. Villebois de Mareuil, the French colonel who was serving with the Boers, was in the Magersfontein lines at the time. When the news of French's advance began to come in, his trained mind saw at once what it meant. He went to Cronje and told him that he was sure Roberts was carrying out an important movement to outflank him on the left and cut his communications with the Free State. He there-

fore urged that steps should at once be taken to meet this danger. He suggested that the main force should be moved eastward to check the advance across the Modder drifts. But having so often beaten European generals, the Boer leaders were rather inclined to despise what they considered the pedantry of the foreign scientific soldiers. Cronje told Villebois de Mareuil that he was unnecessarily alarmed. On the Frenchman urging his proposals, Cronje abruptly put an end to the conversation. "Young man," he said, "you cannot teach me how to fight. I was winning battles when you were still at school." It was not till late on the Thursday afternoon, when French had broken through on the south-east of Kimberley and Tucker's guns were shelling Jacobsdal, that Cronje at last realised his danger. We shall see that then, when a less resourceful leader would have given up all as lost, he acted with skill and energy that almost saved him.



COLONEL VILLEBOIS DE
MAREUIL.

But on this same Thursday afternoon a blow was struck by one of the younger Boer leaders that well-nigh wrecked Lord Roberts's plans, and had a lasting effect on the course of the campaign. Grobler, Delarey, and Christian de

Wet, who commanded at Colesberg against Clements, had earlier information than Cronje of the great flank march, and judged the situation more justly. They had begun to suspect that the force in their front had been weakened by the withdrawal of most of the mounted troops. Their scouts found infantry holding most of the positions on which they had so long been met by cavalry and mounted infantry, and they soon ascertained that the force in their front was a weak one. Clements had only his brigade, the Inniskilling Dragoons, some colonial volunteers, and three batteries, and these few thousand men were spread out on a long horse-shoe-shaped series of positions about twenty-five miles from point to point. Of course, this line was not continuous. Groups of kopjes were held at various points along it, and on the great cone of Coles Kop, south of Colesberg, the two 15-pounders could shell a wide extent of ground to the front and flanks. A howitzer battery had also been brought up to bombard the Boer positions round the town.

Against a more active enemy than the Boers had yet shown themselves to be, an enveloping

attack on such a wide front, and with so small a force, would have been a very rash undertaking. But the probability seemed to be that the Boers would remain strictly on the defensive in their fortified lines, and Clements's task was not to drive them from Colesberg, but merely to hold them there while the more important campaign, that would eventually decide the fate of the commandoes south of the Orange River, was developing in the Free State itself.

But Delarey and De Wet were enterprising soldiers, who understood and acted on the great principle that a mere passive defence is doomed to failure, and that the parry is useless without the counter-stroke. Lord Roberts's great movement, far to their rear, had not yet begun when they discovered that the force in their front was greatly weakened. On Saturday, February 10th (the eve of French's start from the Modder camp), they boldly assumed the offensive against Clements. On that day the Boers from Colesberg tried to turn the British left, and occupied the hills at Bastard's Nek and Hobkirk's Farm. On Sunday, the 11th, they were shelled out of these positions by our guns, but they reoccupied them in great force under the cover of darkness during the following night, and when the sun rose on the Monday morning (the day De Kiel's Drift was seized by French), it was found that the enemy had a heavy gun mounted on Bastard's Nek—a big Creusot of the Long Tom type. Our guns failed to silence it, and a strong force of Boers was found to be working round the left flank under cover of its fire. Under this pressure, Clements was forced during the day to abandon all the positions to the westward. The guns on the summit of Coles Kop were in danger of being captured, for the Boer advance threatened before long to envelop the isolated hill. By great efforts the two 15-pounders, and all the artillery material, were lowered from the top of the huge rugged cone and got away safely.

As the attack on the British flank developed, another Boer force, supported by artillery, came out to the eastward, and threatened in front and flank Clements's right, far away on the Slingersfontein Hills. A general retirement was ordered, and by evening the British force was concentrated about Rensburg.

It was hoped that the Boers would be satisfied with having thus raised the siege of Colesberg, but next day it was seen that they meant to follow up their advantage. At daybreak, shells

began to fall into the Rensburg bivouacs, and a little later the Boer riflemen came on in superior force, using their numbers to carry out again the same enveloping tactics that had succeeded so well the day before. Attempts to check the Boer flanking movement ended in failure. If Clements held on longer at Rensburg, he ran the serious risk of being invested there by a force outnumbering his own and possessed of more powerful artillery. This would be to expose De Aar and Naauwpoort junctions to attack, and if the western railway were cut, Lord Roberts's great army away to the north might be in a perilous position. Reluctantly Clements gave orders for another retirement, this time to Arundel, from which French had made his successful advance at the beginning of the year.

The retirement was carried out without very great loss. On one flank the Inniskilling Dragoons, the only regular cavalry that had been left with Clements, made a successful charge that checked the Boer advance on that side, but on the other flank two companies of the Wiltshire regiment were cut off by the Boers, surrounded, and made prisoners. It was expected that the Boers would follow up their victory once more and make an attack on the Arundel position. Clements asked for reinforcements, which could ill be spared to him. But instead of attacking in force, the Boers contented themselves with advancing within long range of Arundel, and sent patrols out to their right, towards the cross line from Naauwpoort to De Aar, and to the left to work round the British flank and threaten the line to Naauwpoort. These small parties were held in check by the Inniskillings and some of the Australian mounted volunteers.

The soundest policy would have been for the Boers to throw all the force they could spare against the western line, and cut the communications between De Aar and Modder camp. On this line our forces on the western border depended for their supplies. To the west of the line, in the Prieska and Kenhardt districts, the Dutch colonists were in arms. Along the railway to the south of De Aar there had been attempts to cut the line. The appearance of a strong Boer column on the railway, either north or south of De Aar, and the cutting off of all communication with Lord Roberts and the Modder camp, might have sent the flame of insurrection like wildfire through the west of Cape Colony. It was a crisis full of peril for the British arms.

But at this moment, in the midst of their success, the Boer leaders, advancing south from Colesberg, received the news of Lord Roberts's advance through the Free State. There was a hasty council of war. The great opportunity that was in the grasp of the burghers was let pass, but the commandants did what was next best for the success of their arms. Grobler and Delarey were to hold Colesberg and harass Clements at Arundel, and try to force him back on Naauwpoort, while Christian de Wet, with a couple of thousand well-mounted men and some light guns, was to hurry northwards into the Free State and try to fall on the flank or rear of Lord Roberts's advance and cut off his convoys, on which the mobility of his large army depended.

The move that had been selected was carried out with startling rapidity. De Wet's men and horses and guns were hurried in heavy troop trains from Colesberg, over the Orange River by the great bridge at Norvals Pont, and through Springfontein junction, and on to a station in the Reit valley, where they detrained, and made a forced march across the veldt, pushing on by day and night, their objective being the drifts on the Reit, over which the army had passed, and on which they hoped to find part of the supply train.

De Wet had moved off from the south on Tuesday. On Thursday he was fighting on the Reit.

The convoy had bivouacked during the night between Wednesday and Thursday at Waterval Drift. There were so many war correspondents in South Africa that there was sure to be at least one of them present where anything was happening. Only one was with this convoy. He was Mr. Charles Hands, of the *Daily Mail*, and he told the story of how De Wet raided it. The story had been only vaguely hinted at till his letter reached England. It was said that the convoy was surprised by the Boers, but afterwards rescued by our own troops, and the whole matter was treated as a minor affair. It was really very serious. It has a special interest in the history of the war, on account of the way in which it illustrates the importance of the line of supplies to an army in the field.

The convoy was what is technically known as the supply park of Lord Roberts's army; that is, the great moving depôt of stores from which the supply columns with the various divisions would be refilled when their first store was exhausted. There were in it 200 huge Cape waggons, 3,200

draught oxen, and between 500 and 600 native drivers. The waggons were laden with half a million rations and an endless variety of miscellaneous stores and equipment left behind by regiments and individuals to lighten their own load. The value of the convoy and what it carried has been estimated at about £400,000. Mr. Hands, who joined the convoy while it was halted at the drift on the Wednesday evening, gives his impression of it as "a city of waggons, streets and streets of them, ranged in double rows." Two companies of the Army Service Corps, the 21st and 40th, were in charge of the convoy, and for further escort it had a company of the Gordon Highlanders and a few mounted men of Kitchener's Horse, one of the new irregular colonial corps.

The Reit at Waterval Drift was shrunk to a rivulet of water in the middle of the channel and strings of stagnant pools along the bottom of the long ravine formed by the river bed. The hollow was about fifty feet deep. When the convoy began to cross it, each of the huge waggons, laden with nearly three tons of stores, had to be got down from the south bank by a steep cutting, hauled through the sandy river bed, and then dragged up through a similar cutting on the other side. It was a slow process. "For an army to pass through that ravine was bad enough," writes Mr. Hands. "For an army's supplies to pass it was as if the entire traffic of London to-day had still to negotiate Temple Bar. You saw here the terrific magnitude of the task of supplying an army in this unproductive wilderness of a country."

Half the Gordons were out on one flank, holding a small ridge near the drift on the south side. But this appears to have been done more as a matter of form than anything else, for no one had the least idea that any hostile Boers were in the neighbourhood. The curious thing is that no scouting was attempted. Apparently it was thought to be quite unnecessary, yet a dozen mounted men sent out a few miles to the right flank and rear would have sufficed to avert a disaster. That happy-go-lucky self-confidence that has been at the root of so many of our mishaps in South Africa was at work here too. So certain was everyone that the convoy was absolutely safe that a number of the native drivers, while waiting for the time when their waggons would be able to move, were amusing themselves by chasing some half-wild ponies that were loose on the veldt. Some of the soldiers were joining in the sport, and the fun was in full swing when

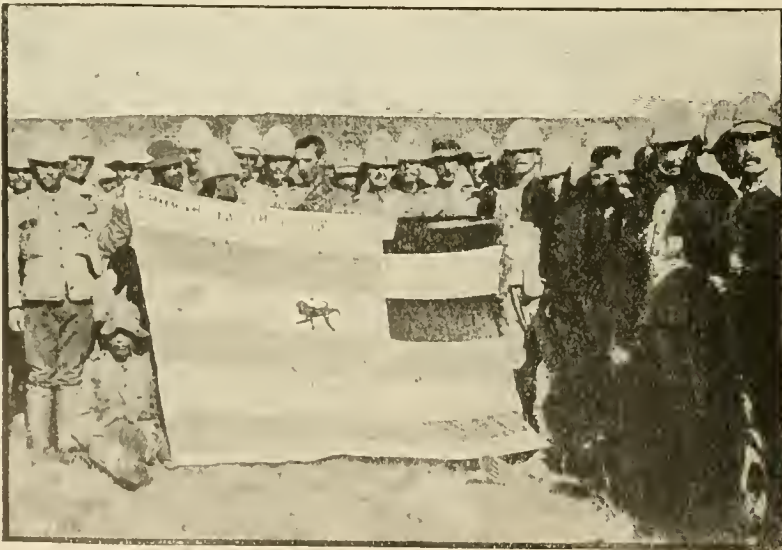
suddenly a sharp crackle of Mauser rifles rang out from a kopje a thousand yards away to the right; the pony hunters came running in, and here and there a waggon ox dropped on his knees or rolled over on his side, showing that Boer bullets were finding their mark in the vast target presented by the halted convoy.

The commander of the convoy sent out the reserve half-company of the Gordons to reinforce their comrades, and try to keep down the fire of the Boer marksmen, which was now spreading along a mile of low kopjes on the flank and right rear. A mounted messenger was sent off to ask for help from the army in front. An attempt was made to get a telegram through, and a little later the wire sent a reply that a battalion and a battery would march back to the rescue. Meanwhile the Army Service Corps men and the native drivers were dragging the waggons into a big square or laager, and building up breastworks with boxes of biscuits and sacks of oats.

The situation became more serious when the Boers brought into action, first a Vickers-Maxim quick-firer of the 1-pounder "pom-pom" type, which made deadly practice on the crowded convoy, hitting very few men but killing numbers of horses and oxen. Then a bigger gun opened fire with shrapnel, and the bullets from the bursting shells fell in showers amongst the waggons. The native drivers were slipping away and deserting in twos and threes. An effort was made to get some more waggons to the north

side. As a preliminary a drove of oxen were taken down into the river bed to be watered, but the native driver abandoned them there, and most of them were captured by the Boers as they grazed along the hollow between the banks.

No relief came, and towards evening the Boer fire slackened; they had crippled the convoy, and felt sure of securing it. So many of the oxen had been killed, wounded, or lost that the waggons could not be moved. After sunset the Army Service Corps men and the escort crossed the drift, abandoning the waggons, and glad to get away without being themselves captured. De Wet inspanned the oxen he had captured and moved off part of the convoy. What he could not move he burned on the river bank, and then his commando rode off towards Fauresmith, escorting its valuable prize. When Lord Roberts heard at dawn next day that the convoy had been lost, he must have realised how serious the mishap was. But he did not utter a word of blame for anyone. "Never mind how many waggons you have lost," he said to the officer who brought him the news, "as you have lost so few men." Probably he hoped that, with Kimberley free and Cronje surrounded, he would be able almost immediately to supply his army by the western railway line through Modder camp. But he was soon to hear even more serious news. Cronje was not surrounded. He had made his escape at the last moment from the net that was being drawn around him.



A BOER FLAG CAPTURED BY THE IRISH RIFLES.



CRONJE'S MAUSERS SURRENDERED AT PAARDEBERG.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PURSUIT OF CRONJE—PAARDEBERG.

WHEN the Boers invested Kimberley, they brought their heavy guns down from the north, along the line from Fourteen Streams. Now that the siege was raised, a considerable part of the besieging force, with the heavy artillery and stores, began to retreat by the same route. It is curious that at home in England the possibility—and, indeed, the necessity—of a considerable proportion of the Boer army taking this line was overlooked by almost everybody writing on the subject.

General French, after a very short rest, was in the saddle at 3 a.m. on Friday, and at half-past three rode out with two brigades and some of the Horse Artillery, moving to the northward in the hope of capturing some of the Boer guns. Some of the infantry from Kimberley followed in support. A little after dawn they came on the Boer rearguard, which was in position across the railway near Macfarlane's siding, about ten miles north of Kimberley. The Horse Artillery began to shell the kopjes, and some of the Boers were seen riding away westward towards the drifts of the Vaal and eastwards towards Boshof. No real attack was attempted on the enemy's rearguard position, and the bombardment made no impression upon them. After a couple of hours French withdrew towards Kimberley. The failure to accomplish anything was explained

as the result of the fatigue of the horses, which made a real pursuit impossible.

When the cavalry drew off, the Boers continued their retreat in a very leisurely way, but abandoned a small gun which had been disabled, and some stores and ammunition waggons. The fact that these were left behind suggests that a more vigorous pursuit would have given great results; but French was anxious, and with good reason, to get some rest for his squadrons and gun-teams. After speaking of the morning's work, Captain Boyle, in his narrative of French's operations, tells how, "weary, hungry, footsore, the horses returned to their bivouacs, and it was thought that with a few days' rest and plenty of food the poor lean skeletons we saw in horses' skins would soon be filled out again. But about 10 a.m. that Friday morning a despatch rider came in from one of the kopjes we had left protected in our rear the day before with the news that a large body of men and convoy, believed to be Cronje's force from Magersfontein, were in full retreat, and were being engaged in a rearguard action with the infantry we had left behind us at Klip Drift on the Modder River, and that they had destroyed a considerable length of our field telegraph cable."

Boyle was serving on French's staff, so there can hardly be a doubt that this important message was received at the time named. French, how-

ever, seems to have had his doubts about it, but it is strange that he seems to have done nothing whatever to ascertain if it was true. His own horses were tired, but there were plenty of irregular horsemen in Kimberley whose mounts were in good condition, and one would have thought that some of these would at once have been sent away towards Klip Drift, or southward to the Magersfontein lines. Even a small body of scouts would have brought back important news and saved some valuable hours. But nothing was done. Up to midnight no further

and Bloemfontein, for there was a deadly counter-stroke open to him had he moved down the Reit Valley towards Douglas, from which he could have joined hands with the rebels in the north-west of Cape Colony, and then marched upon De Aar, or even cut the line south of it. But his natural tendency was to act upon the defensive, and he had many Free Staters in his army whose desire was to regain their own country and assist in the defence of Bloemfontein. He chose the least effective of the three courses open to him, but once he had decided to retire



DANGEROUS DUTY AT MODDER RIVER.

news had come into Kimberley, and when General French bade his staff good-night he told them they might sleep late next morning.

The report which had reached French fourteen hours before was perfectly true. On the Thursday afternoon Cronje had decided on evacuating the Magersfontein lines during the following night, under cover of darkness. He had at last realised that Villebois de Mareuil's view of the situation was correct. If he had known how thoroughly tired out French's horses were, he might have boldly marched across the veldt to the west of Kimberley, and in one long march placed his army in safety behind the drifts of the Vaal at Barkly West. Had he been a more enterprising leader, he might have disregarded the fact that Roberts had broken in between him

to Free State territory he carried out the first stage of his retreat in a masterly manner.

On that Thursday evening French was at Kimberley, and Cronje had Lord Methuen's troops in his front, and away to his left Tucker's division at Jacobsdal and Kelly-Kenny holding Klip Drift on the Modder. Between the head of Kelly-Kenny's column on the Modder and the British troops in and around Kimberley there was a gap of more than fifteen miles, and for this gap Cronje made a forced march. It is quite certain that the gap could and ought to have been closed. It was not necessary to hold all the ground in force for this purpose. A few companies of mounted infantry, properly posted, could have watched it and given early notice of Cronje's movement, and there is no doubt, too,

that Cronje at Magersfontein should have been effectively watched by troops from Kimberley to the northward and by Methuen's brigades on his immediate front. The subsequent success of Lord Roberts's operations has made most people quite overlook or forget the many glaring defects in the execution of his plans.

Cronje, with his guns and a large waggon train, moved off silently after sunset on Thursday, and marched all night eastwards along the north bank of the Modder. As the sun rose on the Friday morning (the same morning that French was fighting with the Boer rearguard north of Kimberley), Kelly-Kenny's outposts at Klip Drift saw the rear of a long Boer convoy moving eastward on the right front. They were the last waggons of Cronje's column. Had they been able to move a little faster in the night, or had Cronje abandoned a few of them at Magersfontein, his whole army would have vanished unseen in the darkness, and for weeks after his escape would have been a mystery.

The heavy naval guns at the drift began to shell the retreating waggons at long range, and Kelly-Kenny sent off the news to Lord Roberts, and himself started in pursuit with part of his infantry. We have seen how French got news of Cronje's retreat at ten in the morning, and treated the report as an unreliable rumour, so convinced was he that Methuen was holding the Boers in the Magersfontein lines. Lord Kitchener, who hurried up to Klip Drift, tried to get a message through to Kimberley, but the Boers had come upon the telegraph cable in their retreat, and had cut up and carried off a considerable part of it. One of the many puzzling questions in the history of these eventful days is why it was that no message was got through to Kimberley by a despatch rider for nearly twenty hours. One wonders also why Methuen at Modder camp was not at once informed by telegraph that the enemy had disappeared from his front. If he had known it, he could have sent the news into Kimberley in a couple of hours. As it was, he watched the abandoned kopjes and trenches at Magersfontein all day Friday, and only occupied them on the Saturday morning.

French, as we have seen, had wished his officers good-night on Friday, and told them they might take a long sleep next morning. He had hardly gone to bed himself when he was roused and handed a message from Lord Kitchener that had just been brought in. It confirmed the report he had received so many

hours before, and informed him that "Cronje, with 10,000 men, was in full retreat from Magersfontein, with all his waggons and equipment and four guns, along the north bank of the Modder River towards Bloemfontein, that he had already fought a rearguard action with him, and if French, with all available horses and guns, could head him and prevent him crossing the river, the infantry from Klip Drift would press on and annihilate and take the whole force prisoners."

Of his three brigades, the only one on which French could count for immediate action was General Broadwood's. Broadwood had throughout managed to keep his horses more fit than those of the other brigadiers, and his squadrons lay to the east of Kimberley. At 3.30 a.m. Broadwood received orders to march at once and try to head Cronje's column off at Koo-doodsrand Drift on the Modder, about forty miles away. French, with his staff, followed at a quarter past four, and overtook the brigade after it had covered about fifteen miles.

Meanwhile, during the Friday, Kitchener, with the mounted infantry and part of Kelly-Kenny's division, had been keeping up a running fight all day long with the Boer rearguard. In his message to French, Kitchener had estimated the Boer force at 10,000 men, with four guns. He was right about the guns, but he made the number of the men more than double what it actually was. Cronje had only between four and five thousand with him. Some of the Boers had their wives and families with them at Magersfontein, and the retreat was therefore encumbered by a number of women and children.

The mounted infantry had been the first to cross Klip Drift in pursuit of the Boers, and they made a gallant but unsuccessful attempt to gain the head of the enemy's column. Meanwhile Kelly-Kenny had pushed across the river two of his batteries, with the Buffs, the Oxforde, the West Ridings, and the Gloucesters. The Boer rearguard had taken up a position on a line of kopjes, and they held on there until the main body had gained some distance. Then Cronje halted the rest of his force, sending his waggons on under a strong escort, and brought his guns into action to cover the retirement of the rearguard, which rapidly rejoined him, and then faced round again to cover his further retreat. In this way, disputing the ground inch by inch, Cronje had retired slowly hour after hour, keeping his pursuers at bay. In the afternoon he moved a couple of thousand men rapidly to seize the crossing of the Modder at Klip Kraal Drift,

some miles to the east of Klip Drift. The movement had made some progress before its meaning was perceived, but then our mounted infantry were hurried along the south bank to bar the Boer retreat over the river crossing.

There was some skirmishing at the drift, and Cronje gave up the idea of crossing there, and headed for the drifts at Paardeberg and Wolverand Drifts, still further east. He halted at sunset, after throwing across the river part of his force, before which the mounted infantry retired. Cronje had abandoned a few of his waggons during the day. Just before dark, near Klip Kraal, he abandoned a number of others, of which the oxen were tired out, but he drove most of the teams across the drift. In all, the pursuers captured seventy-eight waggons, but, taking the day's operations as a whole, when the sun set that Friday evening, Cronje might fairly consider that he had had a successful day. He had got outside the circle drawn round him by Lord Roberts—he held a crossing of the Modder—and there was nothing in his front on the veldt track by Petrusburg to Bloemfontein. French had not yet stirred from Kimberley. If the Boer leader had, after a short rest, abandoned most of his waggons and made a forced march to the eastward, he would certainly have got away, and if De Wet had not been so occupied with removing the stores he had captured at Waterval, he might have helped his comrade effectually by moving to the north of the Reit River and harassing the flank of the pursuit.

On Saturday morning French's cavalry were on the move. Broadwood's brigade was marching rapidly with few halts, for time was now all-important. "As we pressed on," writes Captain Boyle, "large herds of bucks, hares and foxes, and numerous birds were put to flight. At about 11 a.m. we caught sight in the distance of the green, wooded banks of the Modder River. The excitement was intense. On our left we saw a fairly large body of men moving eastward. Was this Cronje's force? At 11.15 we debouched into the plain from behind a long range of kopjes, and the fact of surprising the farm of Kameelfontein with its Boer inhabitants, and taking some Boer waggons, increased our hopes that Cronje too would be taken by surprise. The horses were ordered to water whilst the general personally reconnoitred, as is his invariable custom, some rising ground, afterwards called Artillery Hill. And there, at about 4,000 yards' distance, to our joy we saw the long line of Cronje's

convoy streaming away into the distance, with the leading waggon on the very point of dipping down into the drifts which lead to the main road to Petrusburg and beyond to Bloemfontein. A galloper was immediately sent back to order up all the guns from watering, at a walk, that no dust might betray our presence. Up to this moment Cronje must have been in ignorance of his fate, so completely were our movements concealed by the rising ground between."

Cronje had made but slow progress during the Saturday morning. His waggon teams and horses were tired with the forced march of Thursday night and the long rearguard action of Friday. He had made an early start and shaken off the infantry pursuit, and but for French's opportune arrival he might have got safely across the river. Even then, if he had only abandoned the waggons and held the drift for a while with a rearguard and his guns, he could have gained the Petrusburg road.

Kelly-Kenny's division, which was accompanied by Lord Kitchener, had recrossed the Modder, and was moving slowly along the south bank, the men suffering greatly with the blazing heat and the dense dust that rose from the dried-up veldt. His object was to occupy the ground to the south of Wolverand and Paardeberg Drifts, so as to bar the Petrusburg road to Cronje. Lord Roberts, with Tucker's division, was following from Jacobsdal. The loss of the great convoy that De Wet had surprised at Waterval was already making itself felt. The columns were short of supplies. When Lord Roberts heard of Cronje's escape and decided to swing his divisions round to the eastward in pursuit and leave the railway far behind, he had sent for the head of his Supply Department and asked him if he could find full rations for the troops engaged in the new movement. "I cannot, sir," said the staff officer. "Three-quarter rations?" asked Lord Roberts. "No, sir." "Half?" "I cannot promise." There was a pause, and then Lord Roberts asked "Quarter rations?" "Yes." Then there was another pause, and Roberts said, "Well, I think they will do for me," and word was sent to Kitchener and Kelly-Kenny to push on, with the promise that Tucker's division would march to their support.

It was a little after noon on the Saturday that French's guns opened fire from near Artillery Hill. The first shell burst on the slope to the drift, just in front of the leading waggon of Cronje's convoy. As the shot was fired a small party of Boers—not more than thirty—galloped

out and tried to seize a kopje on the right of the battery that had come into action. But the 10th Hussars started out to race them from the hill, got there first, and opened on them with carbine fire. The Boers wheeled round and rode back to the cover of the river margin. In the subsequent operations the kopje thus seized by the Hussars in the nick of time was known as Roberts's Hill.

The accurate fire directed by the R.H.A. guns upon the drift showed Cronje plainly that he

struggle with French's batteries, and for the rest of the afternoon Cronje endured a continual bombardment without making any attempt to reply to it. "Shell after shell from Artillery Hill fell plump into the laager," says Captain Boyle. "Finally, our second battery was moved to a little distance from Roberts's Hill, and opened fire from the southern slope on to a kopje to which the Boers had retired. All that afternoon at intervals our guns poured shells into the laager, but no response came, and we spent our



SOME OF CRONJE'S OFFICERS CAPTURED AT PAARDEBERG.

could not move his convoy across it in column in broad daylight. Waggon would be wrecked and teams destroyed, and the graded slopes on both sides of it would be hopelessly blocked. Still he clung doggedly to the idea of eventually saving the convoy. He laagered some of the waggons in such cover as the broken ground afforded, got some more of them, one at a time, down to the river bed, brought three guns into action to cover the movement, and set to work with pick and spade to entrench the river margin, and to make a new way down to it for the waggons at a point that was sheltered from the hostile artillery.

The Boer guns soon gave up the unequal

time watching the Boers, now 3,000 yards away, entrenching themselves in the open and along the river bank. Their waggons caught fire and the ammunition exploded, and as they realised their position more and more, so must their hearts have sunk. Anxiously must they have waited for the first sign of the infantry gathering round, as anxiously as we did in our turn. The cavalry, worn out as they were and without food, had to hold the kopjes and water their horses in turn some five miles off. They got what grazing they could in the kopjes as they lay there, for no corn had come on from Kimberley; and neither men nor horses had had any food except the three days' rations with which they originally

started from Klip Drift the Thursday before, a good deal of which had been shaken off the saddles or lost in the long gallop up the plain to Kimberley. The general, the men, the horses, all alike had to live on what was found at Kameelfontein—a few mealies, a few onions, and the crumbs of biscuits in our pockets were all we had until some Free Staters' sheep and cattle were rounded and killed. Had it not been for this plentiful supply of meat, the men must have fared very badly for the next three days. No transport came in until Monday night, and the horses had but $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of corn in three days. The men were put on half rations of biscuits even after the transport arrived."

It was not till near five o'clock in the afternoon that there were signs of the approach of Kitchener and Kelly-Kenny with the 6th Division. All this time Cronje could have got at least his mounted men away. But now the British would soon be hemming him in on the south bank. Far away could be seen the low, thick cloud of dust that indicated the approach of infantry columns. They moved slowly and wearily, and even when the sun set they had not yet reached the south side of the river opposite the drift. It was after dark when at last they halted on ground that commanded Cronje's line of retreat from the drift to Petrusburg.

General French and his staff spent a few hours on Saturday night resting at Kameelfontein farm. It was generally expected that Cronje would escape in the dark. There was nothing to prevent him except his obstinate clinging to the convoy. Before dawn on the Sunday morning (February 18th) French was at Artillery Hill, waiting anxiously to see what the daylight would show. When the sun rose the Boers were seen in their old position, holding the kopjes by the drift, the broken ground along the margin of the Modder, and the great ravine formed by the river-bed itself.

On the south side, Kelly-Kenny, with the mounted infantry and some of the Colonial troops, was within striking distance. Lord Kitchener was with him. On the north bank, General MacDonald, with the Highland Brigade, whom Lord Roberts had called up from Modder camp, was near Klip Kraal Drift, making a forced march to support French. Apparently all unknown to the British, De Wet, who had been joined by Delarey, was working round Kelly-Kenny's position from the southward in the hope of bringing help to Cronje, and he had been reinforced by mounted troops hurried up to him

from the Basuto border. Lord Kitchener, as Chief of the Staff, took the general control of the operations for the day, and on his own responsibility ordered that, under cover of a heavy bombardment, an attempt should be made to storm Cronje's position. The result was the battle of Paardeberg. Even at the time of writing this narrative, many months later, only very defective information is available as to what occurred. The battle was anything but a success. Some of the heaviest losses of the whole campaign were incurred by our troops in the attack, and the censorship exerted its full powers to keep the details not only out of the telegrams, but also out of the letters written by the correspondents in our camp.

The battle began at a few minutes before 7 a.m., by French's guns opening fire from the hills on the north bank, while Kelly-Kenny's field batteries and the heavy naval guns shelled the Boer position from the opposite side of the Modder. The Boers were thus for hours exposed to a converging fire from a great semicircle of batteries. "All that day, without intermission till 7 p.m.," says Captain Boyle, "the guns threw shrapnel and lyddite into the laager and river-bed. Waggon after waggon of ammunition exploded like a terrific fusillade for over an hour, and meanwhile the infantry began their advance across the open and up the river-bed. It seemed as if no living man could ever come out of that laager. Shell after shell, the livelong day, dropped into their very centre, yet no surrender, no white flag was shown."

MacDonald's brigade having come up, the infantry attacked again about half-past seven, before there was any possibility of the bombardment having produced much effect. It has been suggested that Lord Kitchener attacked thus early because he did not wish to give the Boers time to further strengthen their entrenchments. Three brigades were thrown into action, the Highlanders on the left, while the mounted infantry pushed forward on the right. The attack moved forward rapidly until the firing lines on both banks of the river were within five or six hundred yards of the Boer position. After that very few were able to get any further forward. As in Methuen's fight on the Modder River, the men were for hours lying down, while the Mauser bullets whistled overhead. The Boers brought their guns into action from time to time, their pom-poms especially making very good practice. On the extreme right, the mounted infantry attempted to seize some



PAARDEBERG: THE CANADIANS STORMING AN OUTLYING KOPJE.

kopjes to the south-east of the Boer laager, but at this moment De Wet's commando came up from the south and succeeded in seizing the kopjes and driving our men back. On the north bank the 81st Field Battery, which was with the Highland Brigade, tried to get to closer range of the laager, but many of the horses were shot down, the battery was thrown into confusion, and was only withdrawn to a place of safety with the help of the Gordons. General MacDonald was wounded while leading the Highland Brigade, and General Knox was wounded at the head of the 13th Brigade. Colonel Aldworth was killed at the head of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, and the colonel of the Black Watch was wounded. In the afternoon General Smith-Dorrien made a gallant attempt to fight his way into the laager with his brigade, the Canadian Infantry leading. It was noted at the time that the first company of the Canadian Infantry, made up almost entirely of French-speaking Canadians, charged to the cry of "*Vive la Reine!*" Gallantly as the attack was pressed home, the brigade had at last to give up the attempt, and fell back after suffering heavy losses.

Late in the afternoon the attempt to storm the Boer position had been practically given up. But it was impossible, without terrible loss, to withdraw the troops from the ground they held as long as the daylight lasted. So, as at Modder River, the men lay down, exchanging fire with the Boers, and suffering greatly from the intense heat and want of water. A thunderstorm, with a driving shower of heavy rain, was a welcome relief. As the sun set, the firing ceased on both sides, and our troops were withdrawn to their bivouacs.

The losses of the day amounted to more than 1,200 men killed, wounded, and missing. Of these last, thirty or forty were prisoners in De Wet's hands. After dark, many stragglers came in, and a few deserters stole out of Cronje's laager. Some of them—as deserters generally do—declared that the Boers were in desperate straits and utterly disheartened. One man said that Cronje had lost at least 800 men, which we now know to be more than three times his total loss during all the days he held out at Paardeberg. A Boer who walked up to Roberts's Hill just after dark and gave himself up to the Horse Artillery said that just before he came out he saw Cronje sitting in the entrenchments in the river-bed "holding Mrs. Cronje's hand and comforting her." He said there were about sixty women in the laager.

The seizure of the outlying kopje on the south-east by De Wet was an unpleasant result of the day's work. He had two pom-poms with him and a field gun, with which he could sweep the ground to Kelly-Kenny's right. The general expectation was that the attack would be renewed next morning, and at daybreak our guns opened fire again; but when a white flag was seen flying from the Boer laager, the guns ceased fire. A Boer officer then rode out with the white flag, and was met by Lord Kitchener. The Boer said that Cronje had sent him to ask for a twenty-four hours' armistice in order to bury the dead. Kitchener evidently took this to be a sign that the Boer resistance was on the point of collapsing, and he replied that he would grant no truce for any purpose. Unless Cronje would surrender unconditionally, the attack must go on. The Boer messenger went back to the laager, and the rumour spread through the British lines that that day would see the surrender of the enemy. But presently the party with the flag of truce were seen coming out again. They brought a message of defiance. Cronje said that as his request had been refused he meant to fight to the death.

So the bombardment opened again, and the infantry began to move into position for a renewed attack. Late on the Sunday, Broadwood's brigade on the north bank had been relieved by Gordon's cavalry brigade, or rather a fragment of it, which had come up from Kimberley. Gordon had less than 200 mounted men with him, and to bring even these he had had to borrow 120 horses from the Kimberley volunteers! The 6th Lancers were represented by only twenty-eight mounted men! All he could do was to act as an escort to the Horse Artillery batteries. Broadwood's horses, which had been on short supplies for some days, were quite exhausted, and many of them had died.

In the course of the morning Lord Roberts arrived with Tucker's division and several batteries, and as soon as he had seen the situation he countermanded the attack on the laager and ordered that the infantry should rest while the artillery continued the bombardment. Cronje was to be reduced to submission by being closely invested and heavily shelled. No more men were to be wasted in attacks across the open. Rumour says that the commander-in-chief had a somewhat stormy interview with Lord Kitchener. "I look to my Chief of the Staff," said Lord Roberts, "to take my orders and not to fight battles on his own account!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CAPTURE OF CRONJE.

CRONJE'S small force, of a little more than 4,000 men with four guns, held about a mile of the river-bed on a bend of the Modder and the broken ground for some distance from the river margin on both sides of the drift, which was near the middle of the bend. The river was so low that it was really fordable anywhere, but it could only be crossed by horses, waggons, and guns at the drifts, for the river-bed formed a long ravine with steep banks forty or fifty feet high, and only at the drifts was it at all easy to go down and come up out of it.

The Boers had been at work digging and entrenching since they first halted there. They had dug trenches on the veldt near the banks, and, considering how rapidly they had been constructed, these entrenchments were very strong, and they were splendidly designed to afford cover from shell fire. They were four, sometimes five, feet deep. They had been traced out, not in straight lines, but broken into zigzags, which made it impossible to really enfilade them. As a further protection against enfilade fire, ground was left unbroken every five or six feet for a distance of a foot or two, and this unbroken ground formed traverses, or solid walls, across the trench, dividing it into short sections, and if a shell dropped or burst in one of these, it would only injure the two or three men in the section, without hurting those on the right or left. The trenches were dug in a stiff, stony soil, and the excavation was a little wider at the bottom than at the top, so that men crouching in the trench close to its side were very completely sheltered. Besides these trenches, the Boers dug little caves and holes in both sides of the river bank. A few of these were large enough to stable horses in them. They had two British officers prisoners with them, and they dug a cave for them, where they could crouch during the bombardment, and so be sheltered from the fire of their own countrymen. After the battle on the Sunday, Cronje buried his dead in the dry bed of the river, but he could not thus dispose of the large number of horses, draught oxen, and mules that had been killed by the bombardment. Some of

these he succeeded in floating down the river; some of the oxen were cut up and cooked for food; but do what he would, there were hundreds of carcasses rotting in the hot sun, fouling the air and the water, and making the entrenched laager almost uninhabitable. The marvel is that under such conditions the Boers held out so long.

About four miles to the south-east De Wet's small force held a group of kopjes, and his presence there prevented Cronje from being completely surrounded during the first four days of the attack upon him. De Wet was not strong enough to bring him effectual succour, but was in hopes of being reinforced—for the news had spread through all the Boer armies that Cronje, the besieger of Mafeking and Kimberley, and the victor of Krugersdorp and Magersfontein, was himself besieged, and in desperate straits, at Paardeberg. From Colesberg, from Stormberg, and from the camp before Ladysmith, the Free Staters were trooping back into their own country to co-operate with De Wet in an attempt to relieve him. The Boers who had besieged Kimberley and escaped to the northward had been skirmishing with Methuen's outposts on the railway between Kimberley and Fourteen Streams. But a portion even of this force was making its way into the Free State, part of it across the veldt by Boshof, and part of it through the Transvaal. This latter force marched up the north bank of the Vaal to Klarksdorp, and was then sent on by railway to Johannesburg and Kroonstad. If the Boer leaders had anticipated that Cronje would be able to hold the river-bed for ten days, they might have arranged a combined movement of a large force for his rescue; but they thought, not unnaturally, that he might be forced to surrender at any moment, and in their eagerness to assist him, they came up in an ill-organised, fragmentary way, and these small parties, coming into action in succession, were driven off or held at bay by our cavalry and mounted infantry. Meanwhile the movement had for its chief result the weakening of the resistance they could oppose to Clements at Arundel, to Gatacre near Stormberg, and to

Buller on the Tugela. They might have hoped for better results if they had kept their army intact in Natal, and used the forces that were actually moved northwards to the Orange River for a march westward against the railway and the convoy route on which Lord Roberts depended for his supplies.

Beginning as soon as he reached the scene of action, Lord Roberts proceeded to entrench the positions held by his own troops, and to bring up every gun and howitzer he could dispose of to bombard Cronje's laager, until at last he had 120 guns in position. Day after day these poured a storm of shells into the laager, so that those who watched the bombardment wondered how anyone could survive in the Boer lines. But the loss of life was remarkably small, so well had the Boers entrenched themselves. In other ways, however, the bombardment did great damage, killing horses and oxen, burning supply waggons, and occasionally blowing up ammunition. Towards the end of the week the British engineers began to sap their way towards the western end of the Boer lines, digging trenches and zigzag connecting saps on both banks of the river and in the bed of it, so as to gradually get sufficiently near to the enemy's position for an attempt to be made to rush it.

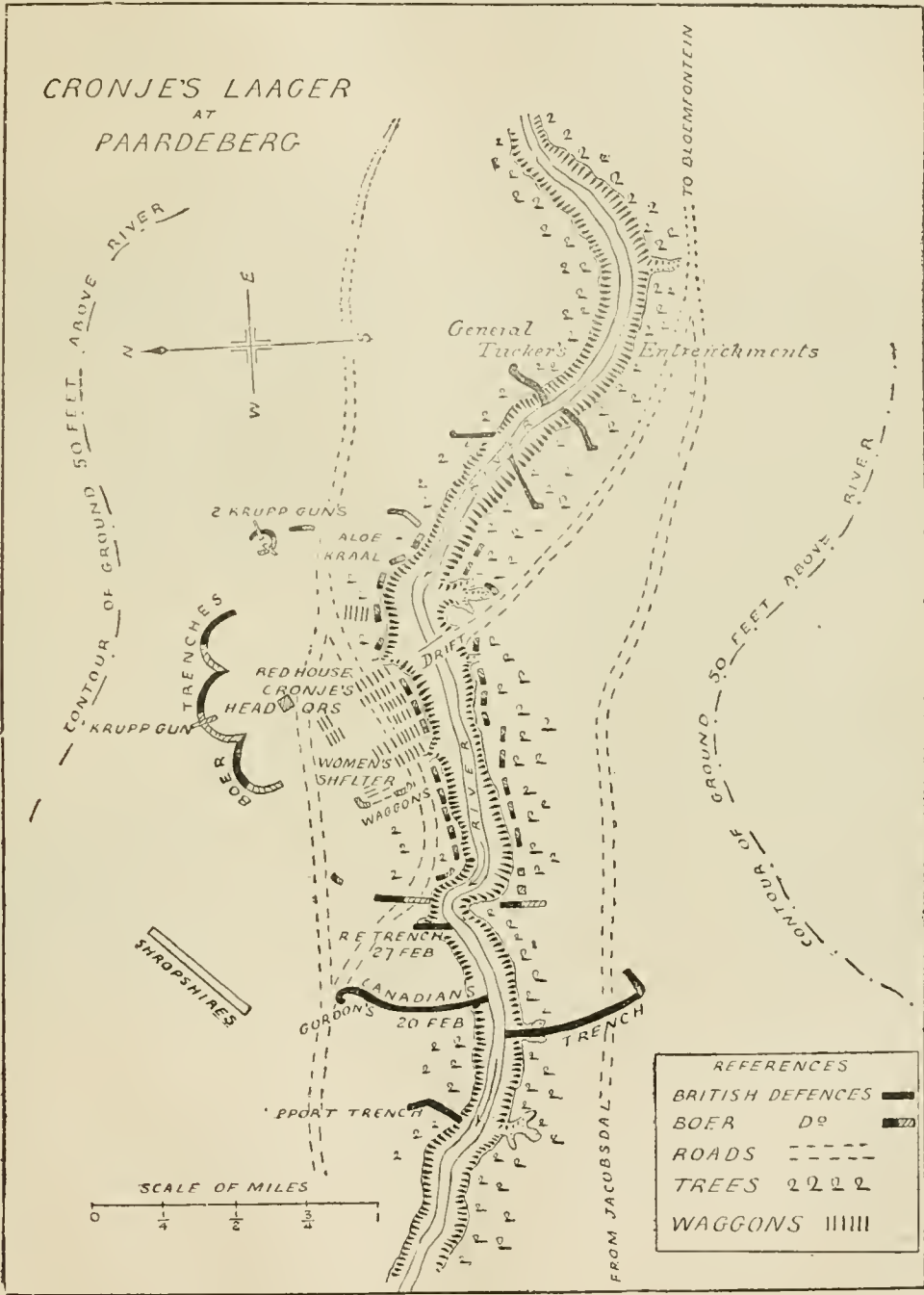
On Tuesday, the 20th, French carried out a successful attack on the outlying kopjes held by De Wet. A mixed force of cavalry and mounted infantry, with some of the field and horse batteries, simultaneously threatened De Wet in front and made a flanking movement against his line of retreat. The attack was made at dawn, and the Boers did not make a long stand. As soon as the movement against their line of retreat began to develop, they abandoned the kopjes, taking their guns and waggons with them. An attempt to pursue them and capture the guns ended in failure, and one of our batteries itself had a very narrow escape. The mixed Household Cavalry regiment, with the battery, started after the Boers at a gallop, but the horses soon tired, and then the guns unlimbered and shelled the Boer column. The only result of this fire was to disable a waggon, which the enemy abandoned. It was found to be a captured British Royal Engineer waggon full of miscellaneous stores. After securing the disabled waggon the cavalry and guns again moved forward, and five or six hundred mounted men were seen to the right front. They were thought at first to be Broadwood's brigade, which was on that side, but suddenly a number

of them dismounted and began to advance, firing rapidly with their rifles. The guns were ordered to come into action against them, but the ground was encumbered with wire fences, and some of the teams got mixed up with them, so that there was an anxious moment of confusion. But as soon as the battery opened fire the enemy again retreated. Gordon's brigade now came up and pursued for a while, capturing about thirty prisoners and some waggons, but his horses were so tired that it was impossible to go far. So De Wet got away with his guns. Nevertheless, the morning's work had a substantial result, for the kopjes which they had held for two days were now clear of the Boers, and Cronje was completely surrounded. French established his headquarters at Koodoosrand Drift, east of Paardeberg, and during the remaining days of the siege his special work was to watch with patrols the country to the east and south, while two cavalry brigades and some batteries were kept ready to turn out on the briefest notice, to deal with any party of the enemy that might be coming up to the rescue.

On the Wednesday morning there was a brief truce, as Lord Roberts sent in a messenger with a white flag to inform Cronje that he was willing to allow the Boer women to come out of the laager. He also offered to send him doctors and a supply of medicine for the sick and wounded. Cronje replied that he did not want any medical assistance, and that the women would remain in the laager. The bombardment then began again. There was some skirmishing to the eastward between French and the Boer parties that were in movement on the veldt, and about seventy prisoners were taken. Altogether during the investment the cavalry captured more than 400 of the enemy. A few more prisoners were made every night by the infantry, as in the dark some of the burghers would steal out from Cronje's lines and surrender individually. A few others left the laager in the same way under cover of darkness, but not to surrender. They were more determined men, who recognised that the Boer resistance in the river-bed must end before long, and who had resolved to escape the surrender and continue the fight under the Transvaal flag. They eluded our sentries, stole in the darkness along some watercourse or ravine between the camps, and succeeded at last in joining one of the many parties of Boers that were hovering round our lines. Among those who thus escaped was the French colonel, Villebois de Mareuil.

On the Thursday afternoon there was a heavy thunderstorm, and the rain filled for a short time a great part of the river-bed and flooded some

the outposts on the south bank, and when his first attack failed he held his own for some hours on some low ridges near the Petrusburg road.



of the Boer trenches. At dawn on the Friday morning De Wet made another attempt to succour the besieged. He had about 1,500 men with him. He nearly succeeded in surprising

During the fighting Cronje tried to bring his guns into action, but they were soon silenced by the converging fire of Roberts's artillery. It was not till the afternoon that De Wet retreated,

and about eighty of his men, who delayed their retirement too long, were made prisoners by the East Kent Regiment ("The Buffs"). Some of the prisoners said they had come from Colesberg, others that they had just arrived from the Boer laagers before Ladysmith.

When the second week of the siege began, the engineers were put to work to the east as well

failure. Even before the end of the first week, several of the commandants were anxious to surrender, but day after day Cronje refused to listen to any talk of negotiations, and his iron determination forced the rest to continue the resistance.

On Monday, the 26th, there was a council of war. The two commandants who stood next to



PAARDEBERG: HOLES WHERE TWO BRITISH PRISONERS WERE CONFINED BY THE BOERS.

as to the west of the laager, their approaches having the double purpose of preparing for the storming of the Boer position and preventing the enemy from escaping eastward along the great ravine of the river-bed. The situation of the Boers was becoming every day more difficult to maintain. So much of their provisions had been destroyed that supplies were running short. Enormous quantities of ammunition had been blown up by the bombardment; the water, and even the air, in the ravine were becoming pestilential, and it was evident that De Wet's efforts to open a way for relief had ended in

Cronje in rank—Wolmarans, who acted as his chief of the staff, and De Roos, one of the Free State leaders—both strongly urged that further resistance had become impossible, and could only end in useless death and suffering. De Roos was too ill to leave the hole dug in the river bank, in which he had been lying down for some days; but he set forth his views in a letter to the council of war. Cronje at first maintained his "no surrender" attitude, and protested that for his part he preferred to die in the entrenchments rather than become a prisoner. But he soon saw that most of his officers would not support him,



THE BATTLE OF PAARDEBERG.

and at last a compromise was reached. The council decided that resistance should continue till next day. If the relief that had been so long expected did not then arrive, the white flag would be hoisted.

By a strange coincidence, the next day (Tuesday, February 27th) was the anniversary of Majuba, and Lord Roberts had decided that an attempt should be made that morning to storm the Boer laager. The attack was to be made, in the darkness before the dawn, along the river-bed on the western side of the laager. On that side, the trench in the bed of the river was now only 500 yards from the Boer defences. The Canadian infantry of Smith-Dorrien's brigade

happened was this: the Canadians, the 1st French Company again leading, had stolen silently forward until they were about fifty yards from the nearest Boer trench. Then the enemy became aware of their danger, and suddenly the trench in front of the Canadians blazed with Mausei flashes, and the flying bullets swept the ravine, at this point only 150 yards wide. Some officers and several men of the Canadians fell, but the rest were perfectly steady and obeyed their orders. It was no longer possible to rush the trench, so they lay down, and without firing a shot began to work their way backward along the ravine. The Shropshire Regiment, which had moved forward along the high bank of the



BOER OFFICERS BEING MARCHED THROUGH JAMESTOWN TO DEADWOOD CAMP.

were to steal forward from the trench, and if possible surprise the Boer defences and carry them with the bayonet. The rest of the brigade was placed in position partly on the banks on each side, to protect the Canadians if they were forced to retire, partly in the river-bed to follow them up and support them if the first rush succeeded. The orders to the Canadians were that if the surprise failed and the Boers opened fire, they were at once to throw themselves on their faces and then slip back into the trench.

It was a bright starlit night. The secret of the coming attempt had been so well kept that there was general surprise, even in the British lines, when, an hour before dawn, a heavy rifle fire burst out along the river on the west side of the laager, and the rumour spread that the Boers were making a desperate sortie and trying to cut their way out in the darkness. What had really

happened was this: the Canadians, the 1st French Company again leading, had stolen silently forward until they were about fifty yards from the nearest Boer trench. Then the enemy became aware of their danger, and suddenly the trench in front of the Canadians blazed with Mausei flashes, and the flying bullets swept the ravine, at this point only 150 yards wide. Some officers and several men of the Canadians fell, but the rest were perfectly steady and obeyed their orders. It was no longer possible to rush the trench, so they lay down, and without firing a shot began to work their way backward along the ravine. The Shropshire Regiment, which had moved forward along the high bank of the

river on their flank, protected their retreat by firing into the Boer trench, and it had also exchanged fire with some Boers in its own front. After a few minutes the heavy firing ceased, but for some time after occasional shots were fired from various parts of the Boer lines, as the enemy, now thoroughly on the alert, imagined they saw signs of an attack upon them in the dark. As the twilight began this irregular firing ceased, and as the sun rose all was quiet along the lines. For the first time for many days the British guns remained silent, while it was seen that a white flag had just been hoisted on a small kopje near the drift and within the Boer lines.

Cheer after cheer was raised by the British at this sign of surrender, and men reminded each other that it was Majuba Day. But it was a few hours yet ere the surrender was completed.



After Paardeberg : Cronje's Followers delivering up their Rifles.

Cronje was making a last despairing attempt to obtain terms. Commandant Wolmarans and another Boer officer rode out with a white flag to Lord Roberts's headquarters. It was noticed that both of their horses were slightly wounded, probably by shrapnel bullets during the investment. The riders looked haggard and worn, as they well might be. They suggested that Cronje's army had by its honourable resistance deserved to be given lenient terms, and they asked that the burghers should be allowed to depart to their homes. Lord Roberts, while expressing his admiration for the way in which the Boers had kept their flag flying for so many days, told Wolmarans that the surrender must

granted, and that he would be sent to Cape Town, escorted by a British general officer to ensure that he should be treated with due respect upon the way.

The Boers had already begun streaming out of the laager in crowds and laying down their arms. It was with surprise that our men discovered that the force which had so long held its own against them was a little over 4,000 strong. Two thousand seven hundred were Transvaalers; the rest men of the Free State. Their losses had been less than 300, and they had nearly 100 severely wounded among them, and many sick. The men were of all ages, from grey-bearded veterans who had fought against



CRONJE'S MEN MARCHING TO CAPE TOWN AFTER PAARDEBERG.

be unconditional, and that Cronje and his army must become prisoners of war. The officers rode back to the laager with this message, and at seven o'clock Cronje himself rode out with Wolmarans. Lord Roberts received him with chivalrous courtesy. An officer rode into the headquarters' camp with the news that the Boer general was coming, and Roberts at once ordered that on his arrival the headquarters' guard should turn out and present arms to the defeated Boer leader. As he dismounted, Roberts walked forward to meet him, shook hands with him, and warmly congratulated him on the splendid defence that he had made. Cronje asked that he should be allowed to take with him, wherever he was sent, his wife, who was just then coming from the laager in a small cart, his grandson, his secretary, and one of his staff officers. Lord Roberts told him that his request would be

the Zulus in the early days of the republics, to young boys who seemed hardly big enough to handle a rifle. All looked haggard and worn, and very many were evidently ill. They had thrown away their bandoliers with their rifles, and as they wore no uniform, and moved in no military formation, they looked more like a crowd of ragged men out of work than soldiers who had fought through a campaign. It must be said, to the honour of our own men, that as soon as the Boers came out among them, they thought less of their success and of "Majuba Day" than of succouring the prisoners. Our soldiers were themselves on half-rations, but on all sides they were seen sharing their biscuits with the prisoners, giving them water from their bottles, and offering them tobacco from their pouches. This was as it should be; but one is sorry to have to add that there were

one or two men present, among the English and American newspaper correspondents, who so far departed from the general soldierly courtesy of all around them as to sneer at the prisoners, and describe them as a dirty, unwashed horde of misshapen tramps, unworthy to contend against a civilised army. They were, no doubt, dirty enough, for they had been ten days in the

Cronje and his companions were sent off during the morning *en route* for the railway to Cape Town, under the escort of the Mounted Infantry of the C.I.V., and accompanied by Lord Roberts's old comrade of the Afghan war, General Pretymann. There were very few of the foreign officers among the prisoners, and the only one of importance was Colonel Albrecht,

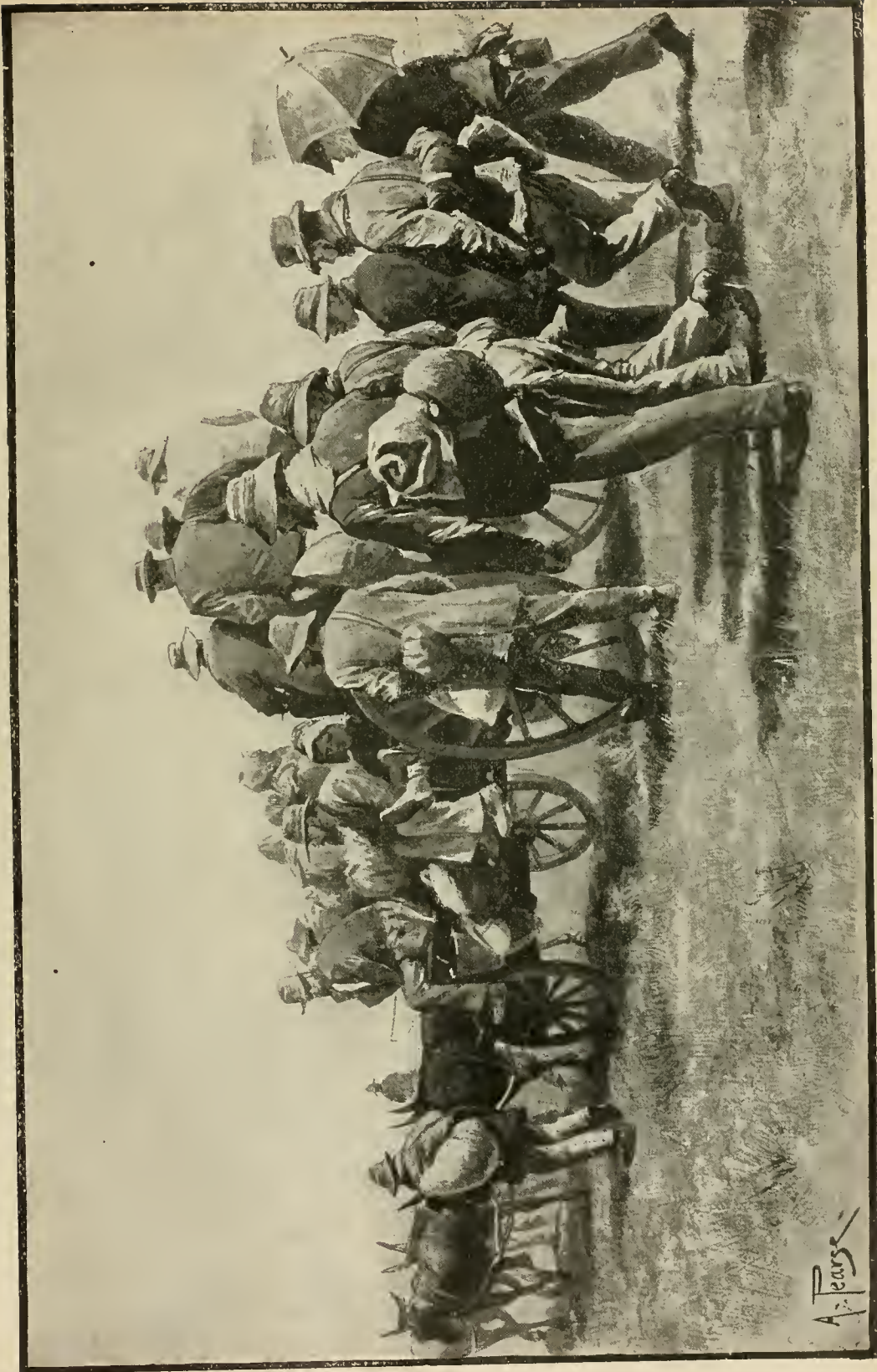


AFTER PAARDEBERG: BRINGING IN THE SPOILS OF WAR.

burrows and trenches of the river-bed, where even the scanty water was foul and thick with mud. But they had proved themselves men, and a brave soldier who fought against them did not hesitate to write of their long endurance as an example even to Englishmen. Those who insulted them were not soldiers, and they gave a fair measure of their own baseness of mind when to their sneers at the prisoners they added unmanly gibes and jests at the brave woman who had shared with Cronje the ten days of danger and misery among the indescribable horrors of the laager at Paardeberg.

the German commander of the Free State Artillery. Four of his Krupp guns were found in the laager, but their sights, breech-blocks, and elevating screws had been taken out and buried somewhere before the surrender.

The Boer prisoners were sent down in parties to Cape Town, where a number of them were soon ill with enteric fever, the result of drinking the infected water at Paardeberg. As our own troops had had to use the water of the Modder during the siege, the same disease soon showed itself in many of the regiments. About 1,500 men had been killed and wounded on our side



SOME OF CRONJE'S FELLOW-PRISONERS ON THEIR WAY TO THE CAPE.

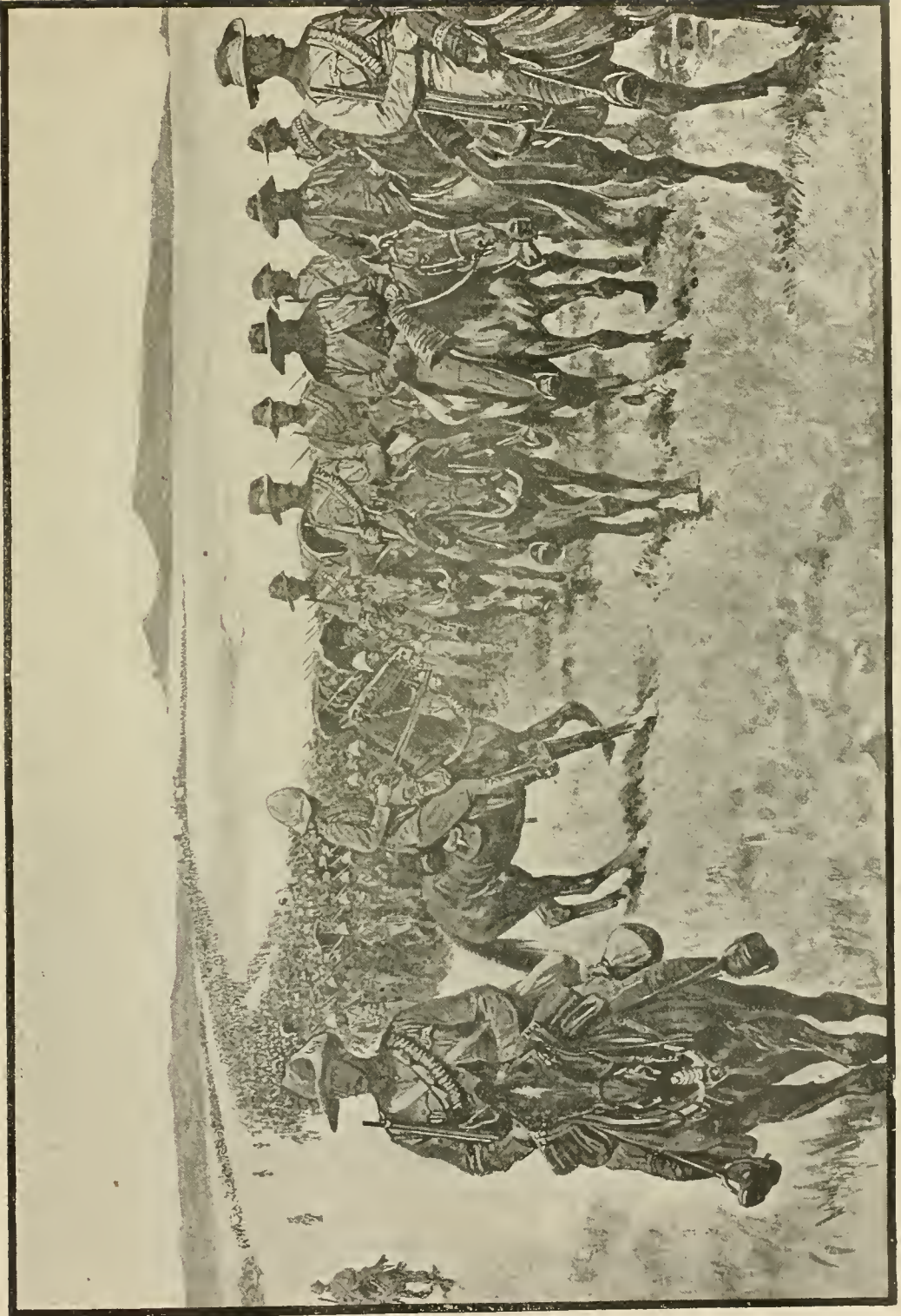
during the operations, mostly in Kitchener's battle, and the subsequent loss, by disease contracted during the same period, was even greater. On the day of the surrender, the victorious army was almost as short of supplies as Cronje's force, and after the victory Lord Roberts halted his army for some days to give the men a rest, obtain some more horses for the cavalry, and accumulate a much-needed reserve of forage, provisions, and ammunition.

Cronje's capture at Paardeberg was undoubtedly a heavy blow to the cause of the Dutch Republics, but its importance was greatly exaggerated at the time from one point of view, though from another it might be said that its value was underrated. Only a detachment of about 4,000 men with four disabled field pieces had been secured as the result of the siege of Cronje's river-bed fastness by an army outnumbering the Boers more than seven to one. But in the matter of mere numbers this success was more important than it seemed. To capture 4,000 men out of 100,000 was not a great matter for self-gratulation, and naturally with this widespread opinion that perhaps 100,000 Boers and foreigners were in the field against us there was a feeling of disappointment at the numbers taken at Paardeberg bearing so small a proportion to those that were yet to be dealt with. But the information gathered in the later stages of the war all goes to show that the Boers, of both Republics had never at any time more than some 40,000 men in the field—that, in fact, the estimates as to the enemy's numbers made by the British Intelligence Department before the outbreak of the war were marvellously near the mark, the error being in our undervaluing the fighting qualities of this small army and the military capacity of its leaders. Now the loss of 4,000 men out of 40,000 was a very different matter to the deduction of the same number from 100,000. The blow to the Boer forces was in this respect far heavier than anyone at home in England realised. Cronje's force was remarkable among the Boer levies for the fact that, as an American correspondent who saw the war on the Dutch side puts it, "ninety-nine per cent. of his followers were fighting men, while under the other leaders the proportion was often as low as fifty per cent." The fact was that the Boer forces, with the exception of such regular corps as the State Artillery and the Johannesburg Mounted Police, were throughout undisciplined levies. Instead of ordering men to go into action, the com-

mandants and field cornets used to appeal for volunteers before an engagement or a raid. No one was surprised at seeing burghers remaining behind with the waggons, cooking, smoking, or sleeping while a fight was going on. The men who thus rested on one day would be fighting in the front line on another. But in every commando there was a considerable body of men who were always to the front when fighting was going on; and partly from the character of the burghers themselves who followed Cronje, partly from the strong personal influence of the veteran leader, it might be said practically all his force was available for action at any moment that he called upon them. This made the loss of his large commando of greater importance than its mere numbers showed.

But, as we have said, from another point of view, the blow to the Boer cause resulting from the capture of Cronje was less important than people at home in England supposed at the time. When the news came that the man who had held Methuen at bay so long at Magersfontein was a prisoner, the general impression was that we had disposed of the most formidable of the Boer leaders. But it is a question whether Cronje's long command on the western border of the Republics had brought much solid advantage to the side on which he fought. Cronje was over sixty when the war began. He had reached the age when men do not adapt themselves easily to new conditions, and are likely to be stubbornly attached to old and familiar methods, and do not realise the necessity of adapting themselves to altered conditions. As the successful leader of his countrymen in many native wars, as a soldier of the war of independence, and as the victor of Krugersdorp and Doornkop, he enjoyed a reputation in the Transvaal that ensured him a high command. But he was closely wedded to the purely defensive tactics by which he had secured victory on so many occasions. He had never grasped the fact that defence without attack is doomed to ultimate failure; and he did not seem to realise the value of time and the very fleeting character of opportunity in war. A more enterprising leader would have seized the many chances offered to him from the outbreak of the war up to the day when he was invested at Paardeberg. But throughout he was content to act on the defensive, and even after his victories did nothing to reap their fruits.

When he advanced upon Mafeking in October, 1899, the place was practically an



CRONJES FOUR THOUSAND ON THEIR MARCH SOUTH AS CAPTIVES.

open town, and he had sufficient force to storm it. But instead of this he camped before it and began to dig trenches, as he had done eighteen years before at Potchefstroom. When he took over the command before Kimberley he did next to nothing to harass the garrison, but again dug trenches, and staked his hope of reducing the place on a long blockade. The forces which were employed on the Orange River might have spread the flame of insurrection far into Cape Colony, but kept idle in the laagers round Kimberley. When Methuen advanced to the relief of the place, Cronje barred his way at Magersfontein; but splendid as he

war was not fitted for high command. His real place would be as a subordinate leader, carrying out the plans of some man of wider views. Had he escaped from Paardeberg there is little doubt that his high reputation would have ensured his succession to the chief command on the death of Joubert, and Lord Roberts would have had an easier task than with an enterprising soldier like Louis Botha at the head of the forces opposed to him.

But though the capture of Cronje's men meant more, and the capture of Cronje himself was of less importance than most people thought at the time, Paardeberg had an importance that



COLONEL SCHIEL.

was on the defensive, he seemed not to understand that his adversary had a long, vulnerable line of communications behind him; and only one feeble attempt was made to cut the railway south of the Modder River. We have seen how, though his danger was pointed out to him, he refused to believe in the reality of Roberts's and French's advance round his left flank. Thanks to weak points in our own operations and to the splendid marching qualities of his men, Cronje withdrew his command successfully from Magersfontein only to halt at Paardeberg and sacrifice everything in the hope of saving his waggons. His characteristic obstinacy was well shown on this occasion, when he acted in opposition to the reiterated advice of every one of the combatants who were acting under him. A leader with such defects and such limited views of the necessities and methods of modern

could not be overrated as definitely marking the turn of the tide of war in South Africa. Hitherto we had had more failures than successes, and had been fighting against invaders of our own territory; but now the war had been carried across the frontier of the Republics. In little more than a fortnight the first stage of the invasion of the Free State had resulted in the relief of Kimberley, the capture of Cronje's force, and the advance of Lord Roberts's army about one-third of the way on the western border to Bloemfontein. At the same time, as an indirect result of his operations, the Boer resistance to the Ladysmith relief force had been considerably weakened, and General Buller had been enabled to secure more than one important success which paved the way for the relief of Ladysmith. We must now turn to the story of the operations in Natal.



GENERAL CRONJE IN CAPTIVITY.



VIEW IN THE TUGELA VALLEY.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FIGHT FOR HLANGWANE.

WHEN, after his failure at Spion Kop and Vaal Krantz, General Buller retired to his old camps at Chieveley and Frere, Lord Roberts was just beginning his victorious advance to the relief of Kimberley. It was on Thursday, February 8th, that Buller retreated from the drifts of the Upper Tugela. It was on Saturday, the 10th, that the orders were issued by Roberts for the advance across the western border, just as Buller's columns reached their camps on the railway.

The Natal field force was badly in need of a long rest before being called upon for another effort. Had it been given such a time for recuperation its subsequent advance would have been all the easier, not only because men and horses would be in better condition for hard work, but also because the weakening of the Boer army on the Tugela by the withdrawal of the Free State burghers to their own country would have made greater inroads on the strength of the force that was blockading Ladysmith and barring the approach of the relieving army. But Buller could not afford to wait, much as his

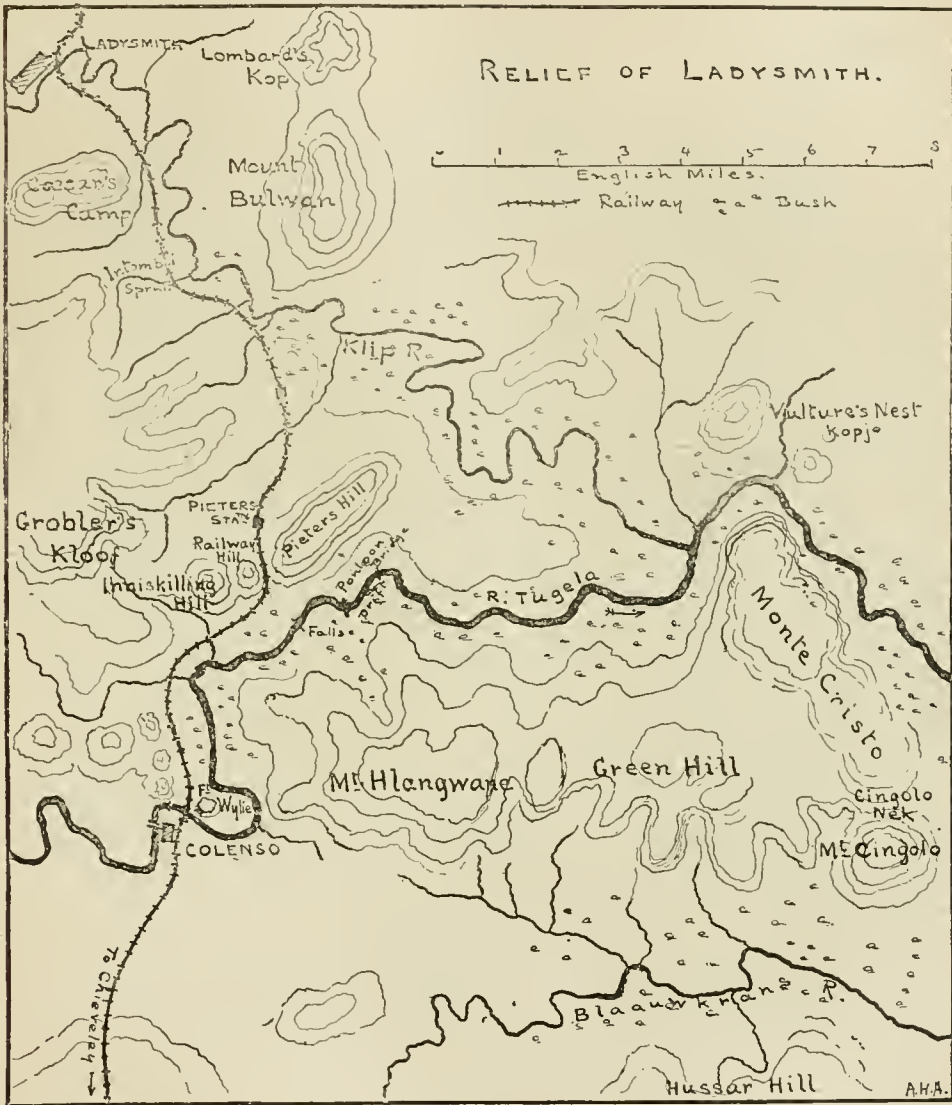
men needed rest, for Ladysmith was in dire straits, and if the Natal army remained inactive the beleaguered garrison might come to the end of its power of resistance.

At half-past two on the morning of February 9th the Boers had celebrated their victory of the day before by beginning a heavy bombardment of Ladysmith. On the same day, though there were rumours in the town that Buller had been successful, the officer in charge of the supplies announced a further diminution of the rations to be issued daily. This showed plainly enough that those in the best position to know what had happened had no hope of immediate relief. "If things are going well," wrote Mr. Pearse in his diary of the siege on February 9th, "why in the name of success should our universal provider, Colonel Ward, take this occasion to reduce rations? We are now down to one pound of meat, including horse, four ounces of mealie meal, four ounces of bread, with a sausage ration daily 'as far as possible.' Sausages may be mysteries elsewhere, but we know them here to be horseflesh, highly spiced, and nothing more. Bread is a brown mixture of mealie

meal, starch, and the unknown. Vegetables we have none, except a so-called wild spinach that overgrew every neglected garden, and could be had for the taking until people discovered how precious it was. Tea is doled out at the rate of

of the railway, which had been the signal station weeks ago, before Buller advanced to Springfield.

On the 12th there was an incident worth noting to the credit of the Boer besiegers.



one-sixth of an ounce to each adult daily, or, in lieu thereof, coffee mixed with mealie meal."

February 10th had been hoped for as the day of deliverance, but though no news was published there was evidence that all could understand that Buller had abandoned his attempt to break through the Boer lines on the Upper Tugela. The heliographs of the relief force were no longer flashing from Mount Alice and Zwart Kop, but from the distant hill near Weenen, east

Major Doveton, of the Imperial Light Horse, was dying in the hospital camp; before he passed away, his wife was allowed to come in through the Boer lines to stay with him to the end; and Doveton was not only a soldier who fought against them, he was one of their best-known political opponents. Mr. Pearse's record of the incident in his diary is worth quoting. "The enemy," he says, "have done a courteous, kindly thing in allowing Mrs. Doveton, whose

husband lies wounded and dying at Intombi, to pass through their lines. Not only so, but their general placed an ambulance cart at her disposal, with an escort, from whom she received every mark of respectful sympathy. Yet Major Dove-ton was well known as one of their most strenuous opponents, a prominent member of the Reform Committee."

more. He had dashed at the Boer centre at Colenso in December, and he had failed in the disastrous battle of the 15th. He had attacked their right among the hills of the Upper Tugela in January and the first days of February, and failed again. Now, in the middle of February, he was trying to break through on their left.

South of the Tugela and to the east of Colenso



VIEW IN THE HILL COUNTRY SOUTH OF THE TUGELA.

On February 13th the heliograph sent in good news at last. Lord Roberts had entered the Free State with a large force, and hoped that his movement would soon relieve the pressure on Ladysmith. Perhaps it was producing this effect already, for Kaffir runners who came in through the Boer lines reported that large numbers of the Free State burghers were trekking with their waggons towards Van Reenen's Pass.

And Buller was already on the move once

the Boer army that covered the siege held the group of hills that culminate in the long, flat summit of Hlangwane Mountain. Hlangwane was the real key of the Boer position at Colenso. The Boers themselves had long been aware of this, and when Buller advanced from Chieveley camp, on December 15th, they thought at first that the great force of guns and infantry deployed in front of the drifts was a false attack and that the real blow would be struck on their left at Hlangwane. This was why they held it

so strongly, though Buller had so misjudged the situation that he was not even aware of their presence there in force, and though the occupation of the mountain entered into his plans for the day, it appeared in the orders only as a subsidiary operation.

15th its capture might have proved a fairly easy operation, for it had only recently been occupied and the Boers had done little to strengthen their hold upon it. But eight weeks had passed since then, and they had not only elaborately entrenched the hill, but also extended



NEAR HLANGWANE MOUNTAIN: BOERS CLIMBING A KOPJE.

He had now discovered the importance of the position. If he could expel the Boers from it and place his batteries on the summit, he might, under cover of their fire, force the crossing of the river behind the hill and below Colenso.

Had Hlangwane been attacked on December

their lines well to the left, to prevent the position being outflanked. Eastward of Hlangwane they held the entrenched heights of the hills known as the Green Hill and Mount Cingolo. To its left rear they had guns on the ridge of Monte Cristo which commanded Cingolo and the Green

Hill, and they had pushed out a force to hold the lower hills to the front and threaten the British right at Chieveley.

Buller's plan was to attack the left of this extensive position, and, once he had a footing there, try to clear hill after hill, forcing the Boers back over the river. This would give him possession of good artillery positions with which to cover his advance across the Tugela and support the attack on the heights beyond, his subsequent line of advance being up the valley by which the railway from Colenso reaches Ladysmith.

The operations began on Monday, February 12th, with a reconnaissance in force under Lord Dundonald. The place to which it went out was known to the British as Hussar Hill, a low wooded ridge in front of the Green Hill, and thus facing the centre of the mass of hills formed by the Boer left. The ground was a good deal cut up with dongas and watercourses. It was not permanently held by the Boers, but they came out from their lines to it nearly every day.

At 8 a.m. on the 12th Dundonald marched from the camp. He had with him three mounted corps, namely, Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, the South African Light Horse, and what was known as the "composite regiment," made up of a squadron of the Imperial Light Horse, a squadron of the Natal Carbineers, and a company of mounted infantry of the 60th Rifles. The regular cavalry brigade, under Colonel Burn-Murdoch, was away on the extreme left watching Springfield. Besides the mounted troops Dundonald had with him a battery of the Royal Field Artillery, a battery of Colt machine guns, and a battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers.

Only a small Boer picket was found in possession of Hussar Hill, and it was easily driven off. The hill was then occupied, and a strong outpost line was formed to the north and east of it, so as to keep the enemy at a distance. Presently Buller arrived with his staff, and spent a long time carefully examining with a telescope the Boer positions from Hlangwane to Mount Cingolo. Meanwhile the small parties of the enemy in the broken ground north of the hill kept up a dropping fire of sniping shots at long range.

When Buller had completed his examination of the Boer positions the order was given to evacuate Hussar Hill and withdraw to Chieveley camp. The pickets of the outpost line fell back under a sharp fire from the Boers, without losing a man, and the column then began its retirement, the mounted troops acting as a rearguard to the

guns and infantry. As soon as our troops left it the hill was reoccupied by the Boers in considerable force, and they then made an attack upon the rear of the column.

"After you leave Hussar Hill on the way back to Chieveley," says Mr. Churchill, "it is necessary to cross a wide dip of ground. We had withdrawn several miles in careful rearguard fashion, the guns and the battalion had gone back, and the last two squadrons were walking across this dip towards the ridge on the homeward side. Perhaps we had not curled in our tail quite quick enough, or perhaps the enemy has grown more enterprising of late, but in any case, just as we were reaching the ridge, a single shot was fired from Hussar Hill, and then without more ado a loud crackle of musketry burst forth. The distance was nearly 2,000 yards, but the squadrons in close formation were a good target. Everybody walked for about twenty yards, and then, without the necessity of an order, broke into a brisk canter, opening the ranks to a dispersed formation at the same time. It was very dry weather, and the bullets striking between the horsemen raised large spurts of dust, so that it seemed that many men must surely be hit. Moreover, the fire had swelled to a menacing roar. I chanced to be riding with Colonel Byng in rear, and looking round saw that we had good luck. For though bullets fell among the troopers quite thickly enough, the ground 200 yards further back was all alive with jumping dust. The Boers were shooting short."

Some of the Colonials were dismounted to reply to this fire, and Captain Arthur Hill's battery of four Colt machine guns was brought into action. Thorneycroft's men turned a couple of Maxims on to Hussar Hill, and the field guns of the R.F.A. opened fire at longer range. There was a considerable amount of rifle firing, though the opposing forces were more than a mile apart. But, great as the distance was, plenty of bullets fell among the British and a few men were wounded, among them Lieutenant John Churchill, the brother of the war correspondent, and Mr. Garrett, an expert who had been sent out by the Colt Gun Company to help in teaching the men with the battery how to work their machine guns. The total loss was twelve wounded. As the object of the reconnaissance had been accomplished, there was no reason for continuing the fight, so, under cover of the field battery's guns, the retirement was completed, and the Boers doubtless reported the result of the skirmish as a victory. But this is what

generally happens with a reconnaissance in force. On Wednesday, February 14th, Lord Dundonald again marched out to Hussar Hill—this time not to reconnoitre, but to seize and hold it. General Hart was left temporarily to guard the camp at Chieveley with the Irish Brigade; Burn-Murdoch, with the regular cavalry, continued to watch the hills away to the westward about Springfield. The rest of the army streamed away eastwards after Dundonald's mounted men.

As soon as the Boers became aware of the general movement towards Hussar Hill, they hurried out a commando to seize it and forestall the British. But the South African Light Horse, the leading regiment in Dundonald's Brigade, fairly raced them for the possession of the hill and reached the summit first, winning only by a few minutes. The Boers, perhaps expecting a repetition of the little fight of two days before, opened fire upon the hill, and only fell back to their main position on the heights east of Hlangwane when they found that infantry and artillery were reaching Hussar Hill in considerable strength. In the afternoon the enemy showed again in considerable numbers to the east of the hill. They seemed bent on making a serious attack, but they were driven back by a heavy fire of artillery.

That day and the two following days, the 15th and 16th, Buller's army was concentrating on and near Hussar Hill, entrenching the ground, bringing up guns and placing them in position, and keeping up a not very vigorous exchange of shell fire with the Boers on the ridges north of the long hollow in which the Blaauwkrans River flows. During these days Buller's line was extended, on the prolongation of Hussar Hill, a little further to the eastward. The drawback of the position he had occupied was the almost complete absence of water. The deficiency was partly met by laboriously hauling up full water-tanks mounted upon ox waggons.

By Friday afternoon Hussar Hill bristled with guns. The Boer position had been carefully reconnoitred, and it was decided that on the Saturday morning an attempt should be made in good earnest to gain a footing on the heights held by the enemy's left. The men were in high spirits, for so far all had gone well, and encouraging news had arrived of Lord Roberts's successful advance and the relief of Kimberley. The Natal army was eager to show that, at last, it could do as much for Ladysmith.

On this (Saturday) morning the Boer position was to be heavily bombarded, and then, while

one brigade held Hussar Hill, three other brigades, under the general direction of Lyttelton (who had replaced Clery, temporarily invalided), were to attack the enemy's left, while Dundonald with his mounted troops made a still wider turning movement further east. Early in the morning the naval guns, howitzers, and field guns began to steadily bombard the opposite heights, firing in rather leisurely fashion, for there were more than sixty guns in action, and the rate of fire was only about thirty shots a minute for the whole lot. The Green Hill and Mount Cingolo were dotted with bursting shells; the higher ridges of Monte Cristo beyond were not as yet attacked by the artillery. Along the lower ridges below it great jets of red earth were blown out of the Boer trenches by the bursting shells; and here and there they lighted the grass and bushes, and great clouds of dense smoke spread over the hill sides, but not a Boer showed himself, and not a shot was fired in reply.

Meanwhile, Lyttelton was cautiously moving his infantry forward, working somewhat to the right, through the bushy hollow of the Blaauwkrans Valley in front of Hussar Hill. General Barton with the Fusilier Brigade formed his left, Hildyard's English Brigade was on the right, and the centre was formed by Lyttelton's own brigade of rifle regiments, now placed under the command of Colonel Norcott. The Boers soon became aware of this advance, and opened a gradually increasing rifle fire from the slopes of Cingolo and the Green Hill. Very slow progress was made, but by evening Hildyard had fought his way round the Boer left, Mount Cingolo, and held the neck or saddle between the hill and Monte Cristo. Norcott's and Barton's brigades, which had merely been holding the Boers in front, were then drawn back through the bush so as to follow and support Hildyard in his further advance next day.

For what the mounted troops under Dundonald were doing during Saturday's fight we must rely upon Mr. Winston Churchill's narrative. As an officer of the South African force, he rode with his regiment, and seems to have been the only correspondent with Dundonald.

"The Cavalry Brigade," he says, "marched ten miles eastward through most broken and difficult country, all rock, high grass, and dense thickets, which made it imperative to move in single file, and the sound of the general action grew fainter and fainter. Gradually, however, we began to turn again towards it. The slope

of the ground rose against us. The scrub became more dense. To ride farther was impossible. We dismounted and led our horses, who scrambled and blundered painfully among the trees and boulders. So scattered was our formation that I did not care to imagine what would have happened had the enemy put in an appearance. But our safety lay in these same natural difficulties. The Boers doubtless reflected, 'No one will ever try to go through such ground as that'—besides which, war cannot be made without running risks. . . .

At length we reached the foot of the hill and halted to reconnoitre the slopes as far as was possible. After half an hour, since nothing could be seen, the advance was resumed up the side of a precipice, and through a jungle so thick that we had to cut our road. It was eleven o'clock before we reached the summit of the ridge and emerged on to a more or less open plateau, diversified with patches of wood and heaps of great boulders. Two squadrons had re-formed on the top and had deployed to cover the others. The troopers of the remaining seven squadrons were working their way up about four to the minute. It would take at least two hours before the command was complete, and meanwhile—! Suddenly there was a rifle shot, then another, then a regular splutter of musketry. Bullets began to whizz overhead. The Boers had discovered us. Now came the crisis. There might be a hundred Boers on the hill, in which case all was well. On the other hand, there might be a thousand, in which case—! And retreat down the precipice was, of course, out of the question. Luckily there were only about a hundred, and after a skirmish, in which one of the Natal Carbineers was unhappily killed, they fell back and we completed our deployment on the top of the hill."

The mounted troops now advanced along the ridge, driving in the small party of Boers opposed to them, and gaining touch with the extreme right of Hildyard's infantry. The appearance of

Dundonald on the Boer flank had greatly facilitated Hildyard's advance. In the night the Boers evacuated the whole of Mount Cingolo, and on Sunday Buller continued his operations, the principal objective now being the high ground of Monte Cristo, the possession of which would facilitate the further operations for clearing all the other lower ridges on the south bank. The Green Hill was also to be cleared of the enemy by an advance from Mount Cingolo,

which would bring the attacking force on to the flank of its trenches—for the Boers had prepared it for defence, on the assumption that the British would, as they had so often done before, attack in front.

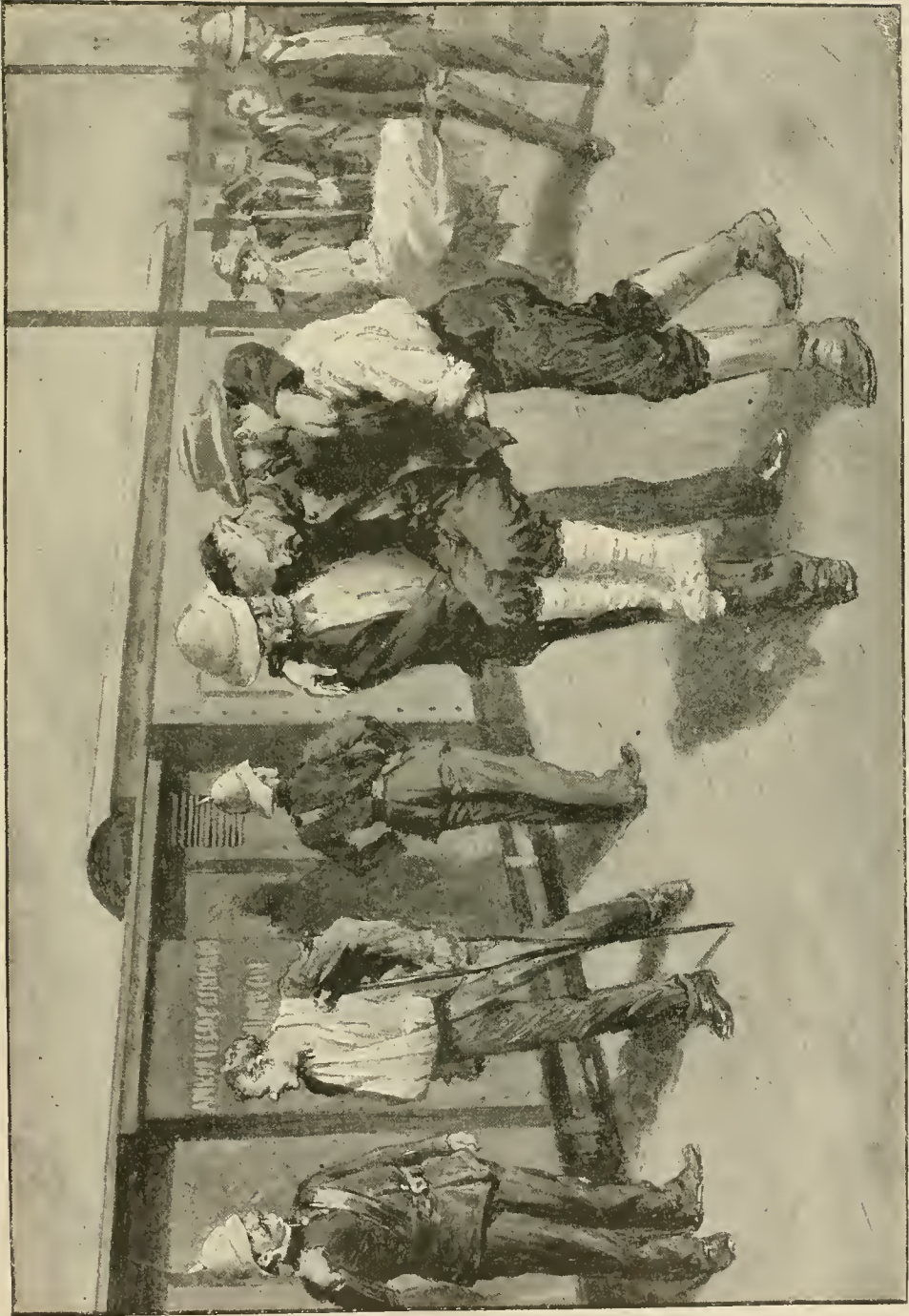
The artillery began to bombard the Green Hill and Monte Cristo at dawn on the Sunday morning, and for the first time in these operations the Boers replied with Creusot guns and pom-poms. At eight o'clock Hildyard's brigade began to advance against the south-eastern end of the Monte Cristo ridge, the West Yorkshire Regiment leading. To their right Dundonald's cavalry were working gradually forward on to the reverse slope of the ridge. To the general surprise, it was found to be not very strongly held. By half-past eleven Hildyard's men were on the crest, and immediately the Boers began

to retire along the summit towards the Tugela, fighting only a rearguard action.

General Buller had ridden up to Mount Cingolo, and he rightly judged that, with the higher ground of Monte Cristo in our hands, the Boers would not attempt any stubborn defence of the lower ground of the Green Hill which it commanded. The two other brigades of Lyttelton's force were therefore sent forward against the trenches of the Green Hill, Barton's brigade in front, with the Irish Fusiliers leading. The Boers made practically no stand, and they even abandoned the standing camp at the back of the hill. The attack suffered only a few casualties, and the whole of the day's loss only amounted to 179 killed and wounded, of which more than 100 were in Hildyard's brigade. Buller had at



GENERAL ERASMUS.



A HOSPITAL TRAIN.

last scored an important victory. As the result of the two days' fighting, the key of the Boer position south of the river, and the high ground commanding several possible crossings on the Tugela, were in his hands.

The comparatively feeble resistance offered by the Boers was probably due to the fact that from the first Louis Botha, who was in command, was only fighting to gain time and delay the crossing of the river, intending to make the real stand on the stronger positions on the north bank. His force had been diminished by large numbers of the Free Staters having trekked through the Drakensberg passes on the news that Roberts was invading their country. With his army thus weakened, the Boer general wisely resolved to stake his chance of success on holding the smaller extent of front afforded by the northern positions.

On Monday, the 10th, Hlangwane Hill was abandoned by the Boers as soon as our troops

advanced to occupy it. Hlangwane commands Colenso and the crossing near the village, and by Monday morning the Boers had evacuated it, and later in the day General Hart's Irish brigade marched into the village from Chieveley, and the Royal Engineers got the railway into working order up to the old station. During the Monday and Tuesday Buller was at work improving the roads from Chieveley to the captured-hills, bridging the stream, and bringing up guns and ammunition to prepared positions on the heights south of the river. From the high hill of Grobler's Kloof, on the north bank, the Boers from time to time shelled our positions at Colenso and Hlangwane, and a couple of 4.7 naval guns at Chieveley replied to them. There was also occasional sniping along the river banks. On Tuesday afternoon the engineers began dragging their pontoon-trains across the hills. The passage of the Tugela was to be attempted next day.



CAPTAIN LAMETON, R.N.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE RELIEF OF LADYSMITH.

AT Colenso village the River Tugela makes a sharp bend to the northward, running for about three miles through a valley between Hlangwane Hill on the right bank and the mass of low kopjes south of Grobler's Kloof on the left. As it bends round the northern spur of Hlangwane there is half a mile of rapids, and then two beautiful waterfalls extending from bank to bank. Below the falls the river winds for about four miles to the north-eastward, and then sweeps round the northern end of the Monte Cristo ridge. From the bridge at Colenso (destroyed by the Boers) the railway on the north side of the Tugela gradually approaches the bend of the river, and follows its left bank through the valley as far as the falls. It then leaves the river bank, and runs generally northward by Pieters station through a ravine-like valley which lies east of Grobler's Kloof, and opens into the basin of the Klip River south of Ladysmith.

Having cleared the south bank of the Tugela of the enemy and met with such a feeble resistance in doing so, Buller was under the impression that he would not have to encounter a very stubborn resistance even on the north bank. The reports of his Intelligence Department confirmed him in this impression, for native runners brought the news that the Boers were withdrawing in thousands through the Drakensberg passes with their waggon-trains, and that they were already preparing to raise the siege of Ladysmith. He even stated in his telegraphic despatches that he had now only a strong Boer rearguard in front of him.

He discussed with his staff the question as to which was the best point for the crossing of the river. Two plans were proposed. One, strongly supported by Sir Charles Warren, was to bridge the river under the commanding height of Monte Cristo near the great kopje on the northern bank known as the Vulture's Nest, and to endeavour to get possession of the heights on the east of the valley by which the railway approaches Ladysmith. This plan would have kept the advance at a considerable distance from the strong Boer artillery positions

on Grobler's Kloof, and, if the Boers made a stand, it would have led to a fight on a part of the open ground to the south-east of Ladysmith towards Mount Bulwan. The other plan, which was finally adopted, was based on the idea that the Boers had not much fight left in them, and that therefore the shortest route might be taken, even though it brought the army close beneath some of their naturally strongest positions, and made our possession of the commanding ridge of Monte Cristo comparatively useless. This plan was, to mass our artillery on Hlangwane, bridge the reach of the Tugela where it runs north and south between Colenso and the falls, and then advance along the railway line. This was the plan that General Buller adopted.

On the morning of Wednesday, the 21st, the army concentrated towards its left on and near Hlangwane. In the afternoon a pontoon bridge was thrown across the river about a mile north of the wrecked railway bridge, and Coke's and Wynn's brigades began to cross.

It was late in the afternoon when General Wynn's Lancashire regiments deployed on the left bank and began to ascend the low kopjes, covered by the fire of a field battery which had followed them across. As they advanced they came under a heavy shell and rifle fire, and by the time the sun set they had won very little ground, and had lost 150 men, including their general, who was hit by a rifle bullet. Colonel Walter Kitchener, the brother of Lord Kitchener, took over the command of the brigade.

During the night, Boers and British were in close contact in the labyrinth of broken ground formed by the kopjes. There was very little sleep for anyone, for all night long rifle fire was going on over a long front. On the Thursday, Buller, still convinced that he had only a strong rearguard in front of him, pushed across most of his infantry to clear the kopjes, and sent over most of his artillery. From Grobler's Kloof the Boers heavily shelled the great masses of men and guns. Some progress was made during the day, though not very much, and it cost a good deal of loss. Just before dusk, and again after

dusk, the Boers made two furious counter-attacks, and the fighting went on for some hours in the darkness, the artillery joining in on both sides, though firing almost at random. In this night battle the Boers ventured to close quarters, and there were two bayonet charges. The loss of the day and night was about 300 killed and wounded, and a few prisoners were taken by both sides in the close fighting after dark.

As the result of the two days' battle, Buller had gradually gained ground along the railway until, by Friday morning, he had reached the point near the falls where the river bends to the eastward and the railway diverges from it to go up the valley by Pieter's station. After leaving the river bank, the railway bends round two hills. They are the ends of long spurs jutting out from the mass of Grobler's Kloof. They had no name on the map, but in the next few days they became famous as "Inniskilling Hill" and "Railway Hill." They were strongly held by the enemy, and before any further progress could be made along the railway the Boers would have to be driven from them.

The firing began again by the first grey light of the dawn on Friday morning. General Buller, with his staff, moved up the railway near the bend and personally examined the position. The Boer riflemen were in force on the heights to his left, and on the spurs near the railway on his right front, and their guns, higher up behind them, were firing at any good target that offered itself. They shelled the cavalry as they rode across the pontoon bridge in the early morning. Why they were brought across is not quite clear, for there was as yet no ground available on which they could act. Nevertheless, Burn-Murdoch's regular cavalry and Dundonald's Colonials and mounted infantry were transferred to the left bank, and then sent to find what shelter they could near the hill of Fort Wylie, north of Colenso.

Buller had decided to storm the height now known as Inniskilling Hill. The only infantry that had not yet been engaged was Hart's Irish Brigade, which was holding Colenso. As the work to be done would probably mean some very hard fighting, Buller was anxious to employ fresh troops in it, and between eight and nine o'clock he sent back a staff officer with an order to Hart to bring up his brigade across the pontoon bridge and along the railway.

The Irish Brigade consisted of the Inniskilling Fusiliers, the Dublin Fusiliers, the Connaught Rangers, and the Imperial Light Infantry—this

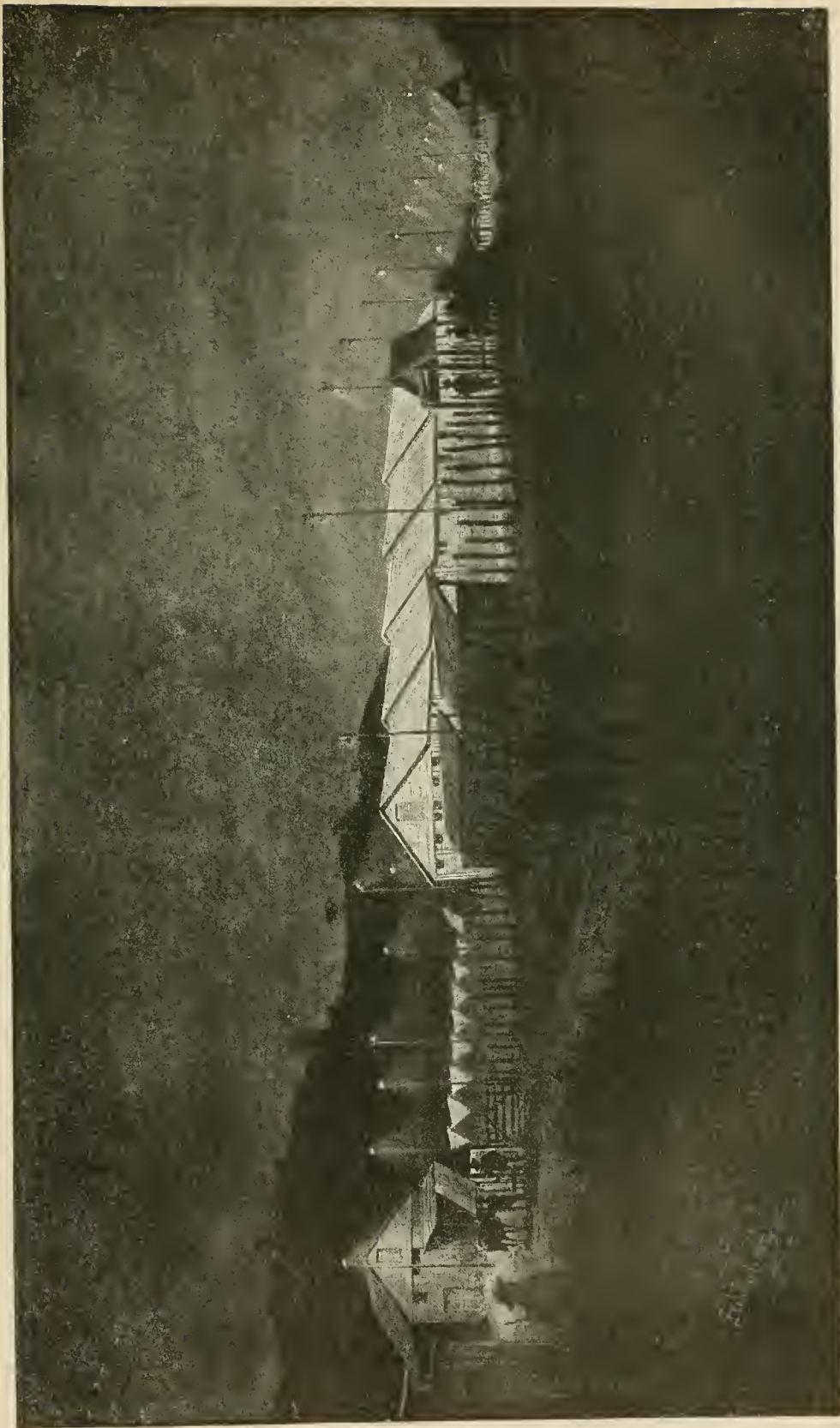
last a newly raised Colonial corps which had taken the place of the Border Regiment. At full strength the brigade would have been about 4,000 strong; but after allowing for heavy losses, which had only partly been made good by new drafts of men, the brigade mustered about 3,000. Buller had decided to support it with two strong battalions from one of Lyttelton's brigades, so that the entire force which Hart would have to lead against Inniskilling Hill would be about 4,600 men.

During the morning there was a continual exchange of rifle fire between our troops, holding the advanced positions which they had won, and the Boers in front of them; and the artillery on both sides was also hard at work. During their long march along the river valley from Colenso Hart's battalions were frequently shelled by the Boers, and occasionally fired upon with rifles at long range from the left. They had thus lost a few men before they reached the position occupied by Buller about noon. They were in high spirits at being given a prominent place in the fight after so many days, during which they had only listened to the din of battle along the river valley.

The men were given a short rest while General Buller pointed out to Hart what he wished to be done, and the brigadier explained the plan of attack to his officers.

The brigade had been lying down under the cover of stone walls and boulders on the sheltered slope of a low ridge in front of the wooded hill on which Buller and his staff had halted. The Durham Light Infantry and the 2nd Rifle Brigade were ordered to take the place of Hart's battalions on the advanced ridge, and support them if the opportunity offered, and at half-past twelve the Irish Brigade was ordered to advance.

At first they could move forward without coming under fire except from stray bullets, for the high ground to the immediate left was held by Lyttelton's battalions. But a mile from Inniskilling Hill there was a stretch of open ground near where the railway passed by an iron bridge across the stream of Langverwacht Spruit. Beyond the bridge there was cover again for awhile, as the railway ran through broken ground, over little embankments and through small cuttings. Hart's plan was that his men should stream rapidly across the open ground and the bridge in single file, and form for the attack in the open ground beyond. This would take some time, but it would avoid the heavy loss that would otherwise be inevitable.



HOW THE CAPTURED BRITISH PRISONERS WERE GUARDED AT NIGHT TIME AT PRETORIA.

As the brigade crossed the open, the Boers caught sight of them and opened fire with rifles and pom-poms from Inniskilling Hill and the kopjes to the west of it. Long as the range was, many of the bullets and bursting shells found their mark. The Boer pom-pom had the range of the bridge exactly, and covered it again and again with its shower of bursting shells. The Boers on Inniskilling Hill could see it too, and the telescope showed them standing up in the trenches to fire more easily, regardless of the fact that they were at once made the target for the concentrated fire of several of our batteries. The soldiers ran across the bridge, hurrying to the comparative safety of the other side; but sixty of them were shot down as they crossed.

It was not till near four o'clock that Hart's battalions were ready for the attack on the hill. The Inniskillings were given the post of honour, closely supported by the Dublins and the Connaughts. It had originally been intended that there should be four companies in the front line. But as they moved up the hill the spur by which they ascended became so narrow that there was only room for two, and the men became dangerously crowded together. As they reached the "fixed sight" range of the Mauser, at about 500 yards from the Boer trenches, the enemy's fire became deadly; and though supported by a heavy cannonade, which must have caused the Boers serious loss, the attack could only move slowly and painfully onward, and officers and men fell rapidly.

Sixty British guns concentrated their fire upon the hill in the hope of shaking the defence and enabling the attack to push forward. But, through the clouds of smoke from the bursting shells, the Boers fired steadily. "Amid the smoke and the dust the slouch-hats could still be seen. The Dutch, firm and undaunted, stood to their parapets and plied their rifles with deadly effect. The terrible power of the Mauser rifle was displayed. As the charging companies met the storm of bullets, they were swept away. Officers and men fell by scores on the narrow ridge. Though assailed in front and flank by the hideous, whispering death, the survivors hurried obstinately onwards until their own artillery were forced to cease firing, and it seemed that in spite of bullets flesh and blood would prevail. But at the last supreme moment the weakness of the attack was shown. The Inniskillings had almost reached their goal. They were too few to effect their purpose; and when the Boers saw that the attack had withered they shot all the

straighter, and several of the boldest leapt out from their trenches and, running forward to meet the soldiers, discharged their magazines at the closest range. It was a frantic scene of blood and fury. Thus confronted, the Irish perished rather than retire. A few men, indeed, ran back down the slope to the nearest cover and there savagely turned to bay, but the greater part of the front line was shot down."

Colonel Thackeray, of the Inniskillings, had been killed. Of his two majors, one was killed and another wounded, and many of his officers were down. Colonel Sitwell, of the Dublin Fusiliers, with some companies of his own regiment and of the Connaughts, tried to renew the attack, but again the charge melted away before the Mauser fire, and Sitwell himself was one of the first killed. As darkness came on, the survivors of the attack were lying down on the ground, trying to make some kind of shelter by piling up stones, and still exchanging fire with the Boers. About 1,200 men had been closely engaged in the actual attack, and of these more than 600 men and officers had fallen.

During the night the wounded lying out on the hillside, without help of any kind, must have suffered terribly. Firing was continually breaking out in the darkness, for the Boers not unnaturally conjectured that Hart's men had held on so doggedly, and made efforts to entrench themselves after the attack had failed, because they meant to rush the trenches in the night with the bayonet. The guard in the trenches was thus on the alert, and they fired on anyone they saw in the dark, thinking the rush was coming. Thus several men who tried to help the wounded were shot down. At dawn, the Boers came out of the trenches with a Red Cross flag and removed some of their men who had been wounded when they rushed forward to meet the attack. This was the opportunity that should have been taken to send forward a Red Cross party from our own lines and arrange a brief truce for the relief of the wounded. The Boers gave water to the British wounded, and might have done much more; but unfortunately some of the Boers began to take the boots off the dead, and the cry was raised among our soldiers that they were plundering the dead and wounded, and some shots were fired at them, although the Red Cross was flying. The Boers at once went back to their trenches, and firing began on both sides.

During the day there was a good deal of



THE CHARGE OF THE INNISKILLINGS — THE BATTLE OF PIETERS HILL, Feb. 27, 1900.

artillery and rifle firing, but no attempt was made to renew the attack on the hills, and most of Hart's brigade was kept sheltered in the broken ground between the railway and the river. The Boer artillery fire caused some loss, and Colonel Thorold, of the Royal Engineers, was killed by a bursting shell. Buller's advance had come to a standstill. He realised that the Boers meant to make a stand, and that his army, attempting to move up the narrow trough between the hills and river, fired on from the flank for miles, and with a barrier of strongly entrenched kopjes in front, was in a very dangerous position. He decided to abandon his plan and to fall back on a modification of Warren's original proposal.

Considering that nothing was done during the Saturday, it was most unfortunate that no attempt was made to succour the wounded and dying on Inniskilling Hill. They had lain there, suffering untold horrors, since Friday afternoon, and they had to lie there till Sunday morning, by which time many had died whose lives could easily have been saved. Buller seems to have shrunk, to the last moment, from sending a flag of truce up to the hill. Though nothing would have been lost by arranging an armistice, to ask for it would seem like a confession of defeat. At last, at sunrise on the Sunday, a party with a white flag and an ambulance went up the hill, and an informal truce was arranged. As at Spion Kop, the Boers received our officers courteously, and co-operated with them in succouring the wounded and burying the dead.

The Boers had refused a formal armistice, but had practically granted it, as they said that if their positions were not fired upon during the day they would not interfere with our bearer companies in their work. This refusal to grant a regular armistice was on the whole a gain to Buller, for while the Boers worked at the entrenchments he spent the day moving his heavy guns, preparing a new bridge, and redistributing his troops so as to carry out his new plans. The informal truce enabled him to do this rapidly and without interruption.

The new plan was to operate against the Boer left. The wooden bridge built by the Boers below the falls of the Tugela was still standing. A pontoon bridge was to be constructed across the river to the east of it. The artillery was to be massed along the northern spurs of Hlangwane and Monte Cristo to cover the passage, and the infantry attack was then to be thrown against the heights on the north bank to the east of the

railway, Railway Hill, to the north of Inniskilling Hill, and the long ridge looking down on Pieter's station, known as Pieter's Hill, but now marked on some maps as Barton's Hill. The dispositions made by Buller during the Sunday were:—Coke's brigade to hold Colenso and Fort Wylie, now connected by a temporary bridge; Hildyard's brigade, less one battalion, was to hold the low kopjes on the west of the bend opposite Hlangwane; Hart's brigade, supported by two battalions of Norcott's, to hold the ground in front of Inniskilling Hill, and Lyttelton to attack the Boer left with Barton's and Kitchener's brigades (the Fusilier and Lancashire battalions) and a scratch brigade under Norcott made up of two of his own rifle battalions, the Border Regiment lately with Hart, and the West Surreys lent by Hildyard—twelve battalions in all.

During Sunday guns, waggons and battalions were streaming across the old pontoon bridge west of Hlangwane. The men thought at first that another retreat to Chieveley had begun, and were so dispirited that they had to be reassured by the explanation that they were only being moved to a more favourable point in order to renew the attack. During the afternoon the Boers too thought that Buller had again turned back, and they opened fire, apparently with a view to ascertain whether the kopjes on the left bank of the Tugela were still occupied by the British. When their rifle fire was answered with steady volleys they ceased firing, though till sunset there were occasional sniping shots.

On Monday, February 26th, our guns were in their new positions, and the artillery duel began again. The movements of the infantry to the places assigned to them were completed, the columns being occasionally exposed to shell fire at long range. By evening all was ready, and men reminded each other that the morrow, which was to see a great effort made to break through the Boer lines, was already a famous day. It was the anniversary of Majuba.

The plan of the attack was this. The artillery on the southern heights were to cover the crossing. The mounted troops were on the northern shoulder of Monte Cristo, from which they could help the right attack with long-range rifle and machine-gun fire. Barton was to move upon Pieter's Hill. Kitchener, in the centre, was to attack Railway Hill; Norcott was to follow Kitchener, work to his left, and then join Hart in a second attack upon Inniskilling Hill. The attacking troops were to employ part of each brigade to cover the advance of the firing line

with long-range volleys, which it was hoped would force the Boer sharpshooters to be cautious about exposing themselves, and so would keep down the fire from the enemy's trenches. Norcott left two of his battalions on the heights on the south bank to help in this way, and only took two across to support General Walter Kitchener's brigade.

Barton's men were the first to march over the bridges below the falls. They were sheltered from fire in the deep gorge of the Tugela, and having crossed, they moved to the right deep down by the river margin, with scouts above them on the higher ground to their left. They halted when they were opposite their objective, and began to move up from the river's edge. Meanwhile Kitchener's Lancashire brigade was crossing and filing away to the left in the same way. Norcott followed him with his two rifle battalions.

At nine the crossing had begun. At ten Barton was beginning his advance to the attack. The heavy guns on Monte Cristo almost looked down on Pieter's Hill, and poured a deadly shower of shells upon the Boer trenches, while a cross fire came upon them from the batteries on Hlangwane. Steadily Barton's four Fusilier battalions closed upon the trenches. But the Boers made no stand. Not many remained to meet the final rush. A few were bayoneted, about forty were taken prisoners, when the Fusiliers gained the crest of the hill, a few minutes before noon.

Barton was now able to give some help to Kitchener, who was attacking Railway Hill to his own left. But the fighting on Pieter's Hill was not yet over. A number of the Boers had taken up a position in the donga and broken ground to the north-east of it. They had a gun with them, and they ventured on a counter-attack upon Barton's right, in repelling which the Irish and Scots Fusiliers suffered more loss than in the actual attack on the hill.

The British artillery was now concentrating its fire upon Railway and Inniskilling Hills and the ridge that joins them. Rocks and broken ground, and the embankments and short cuttings of the railway, afforded a good deal of cover to the Lancashire brigade. Norcott's two battalions came up and prolonged its line, so that the Boers had to disperse their fire over a broad front, instead of, as had been the case at Inniskilling Hill, pouring it upon men crowded together on the neck of a narrow spur. At four o'clock Railway Hill was rushed with the

bayonet, and the South Lancashire Regiment cleared the near end of the ridge between it and Inniskilling Hill. In these bayonet charges there was no real bayonet fighting. The attack had merely to turn out or secure the few who remained in the trenches when the greater number of the Boers abandoned them.

Inniskilling Hill was carried by Norcott's riflemen and light infantry so quickly that Hart's Irish battalions could only help with long-range rifle fire. It was lost, by the Boers abandoning the position without any prolonged struggle, because the capture of the neighbouring heights made it all but untenable. But the brave men who had held it against the reckless charge of the Irish made a last effort to hold it still.

"Its slopes," says Mr. Churchill, "were on three sides alive with the active figures of the Light Brigade, and the bayonets sparkled. The hill ran into a peak. Many of the trenches were already deserted, but the stone breastwork at the summit still contained defenders. There, painted against the evening sky, were the slouch-hats and moving rifles. Shell after shell exploded among them: overhead, in their faces, in the trench itself, behind them, before them, around them. Sometimes five or six shells were bursting on the very apex at the same instant. Showers of rock and splinters fell on all sides. Yet they held their ground, and stayed in greater peril than ever mortal man before. But the infantry were drawing very near. At last the Dutchmen fled. One, a huge fellow in a brown jersey, tarried to spring on the parapet and empty his magazine once more into the approaching ranks; while he did so, a 50-lb. lyddite shell burst, as it seemed, in the midst of him, and the last defender of Inniskilling Hill vanished."

The three hills were taken, and General Buller, at a comparatively small cost, had won a great victory. The firing went on in a desultory fashion till after dark, for from various points of the north and west the Boer guns shelled the captured positions, and their riflemen crept up the hollows of the ground, and here and there a crackle of musketry broke out suddenly, and then died away in dropping shots. Buller had at first thought of sending the cavalry forward to pursue the retreating Boers, but, finding them still aggressive, he gave up the idea and cancelled his orders.

It was expected that there would be yet another general action before Ladysmith was relieved; but the battle of Pieter's Hill was the



LOER SHARPSHOOTERS NEAR LADYSMITH.

last stand the Boers made to cover the siege. It was a great day of victory for the British arms. After the battle ended, Buller was enabled to inform the troops that Cronje had surrendered to Lord Roberts that same morning. Majuba Day was henceforth to be the day of Paardeberg and Pieter's Hill. A double victory had atoned for the defeat of long ago.

The advance to Pieter's Hill had cost more than a fortnight of marching and fighting, during which there was not a day on which rifles and cannon were silent. Once more Ladysmith had listened eagerly to the sounds of the fight. This time they knew that Buller was making progress, though after the bitter disappointment of Spion Kop they hesitated to the last to count upon his final success. Mr. Pearse's diary of the siege enables one to follow from day to day the impressions of the garrison during this last period of anxious waiting for sorely needed relief. "On Saturday, February 17th," he says, "the artillery fire sounded far off on the other side of the Tugela. Next morning we could see shells bursting along the nearer crest of Monte Cristo, and up to eleven o'clock the cannonade was ceaseless. How the action ended we could only judge from Boer movements. From Observation Hill I saw their ambulance waggons trekking heavily across the plain by Rifleman's Ridge, then a bigger waggon, uncovered, drawn by a large span of oxen. There may have been a long gun in that waggon, its movements were so slow and cumbersome. Two ambulance waggons passed in the opposite direction, light, and moving at a gallop. Yesterday (the 19th) came the news of General Buller's success in the capture of Cingolo Hill, but before it was signalled we had seen from Cæsar's Camp British infantry crowning the nearer ridge of Monte Cristo. They came up in column, and deployed with a steadiness that showed them to be masters of the position."

On the 20th the British shells could be seen bursting on the hills to the south of Cæsar's Camp, and next day there was great rejoicing in Ladysmith, for it was known, by heliograph, that Buller was crossing the Tugela, and Sir George White felt so confident in the relief being effected this time that he put an end to the reduced rations. "To-day," says Mr. Pearse, "soldiers greeted each other with a cheery 'Ave you 'eard the noos? They say there'll be full rations to-day.' An extra half-pound of meat, five biscuits instead of one and a quarter, and a few additional ounces of mealie meal, were

more to them at that moment than a British victory."

On the Klip River, below Intombi Spruit, gangs of native labourers, under the direction of Boer engineers, were building a dam across the river. What the object of this work was is not quite certain. Some thought it was intended to raise the level of the river and drive the people out of their shell-proof shelters that had been hollowed in its banks. But it was never finished. The work on it was greatly delayed by the fire of the naval 12-pounders, which the Boer guns on Bulwan tried in vain to silence. On the 26th Mr. Pearse wrote in his diary: "Yesterday numbers of Boers were seen retiring from Pieter's station across the ridges towards Bester's Valley, but no sign of a general retreat yet beyond the reports of scouts, who say that several guns have been seen going back at a gallop behind Bulwan, followed by nearly 200 waggons. Last night we heard rifle-firing on the ridges south of Cæsar's Camp and Waggon Hill. It sounded so near that for a time we thought our own outposts were engaged with the enemy. Kaffirs say this was a Boer attack on Pieter's station, but their story was not confirmed. General Buller heliographs that he is still going strong, but the country is difficult and progress slow. Lord Roberts, according to another helio-signal, has Cronje surrounded. Two attempts to relieve him have been frustrated. All this puts new life into the garrison here. A newspaper telegram was also heliographed announcing that Cronje had surrendered with 6,000 men, after losing 1,700 killed and wounded. This is probably a bit of journalistic enterprise in anticipation of events."

Next day Ladysmith could plainly hear, from sunrise to sunset, the heavy firing of the battle of Pieter's Hill. In the afternoon the guns of Bulwan fired a few shots into the town. After dark all the British camps round Ladysmith were cheering, for General Buller had signalled, "Doing well," and then a longer message, saying that Cronje and all his army had surrendered that morning. Shortly after midnight Ladysmith was roused by a sound of firing, which gave many the impression that the Boers were about to attempt to storm the town. "Rifles rang out sharply around the whole of our positions," says Mr. Pearse. "The furious outburst began on Gun Hill. Surprise Hill took it up. It ran along the dongas in which Boer pickets lie hidden, and was carried on to the south beyond Bester's Valley. Our troops did

not fire a shot, but still the fusillade continued for half an hour. The Boers were evidently in a state of nervous excitement, brought on by nothing more formidable than twelve men of the Gloucesters who, under Lieutenant Thesbit, had gone out to destroy a laager at the foot of Limit Hill."

It will be noticed that, in his message to the garrison on the night of Majuba Day, Buller had simply said that he was "doing well." He did not himself realise the importance of his victory, for he could not be aware how greatly the power of resistance of the Boers had diminished in the last few days. Large contingents had been sent away to the Free State, and it is probable that, at the very outside, only 5,000 men held the hills against him. According to letters from officers who fought on the Boer side, many of those who held the hills during the battle of the 27th had not had any real rest for two days, and at the end of the long fight they were utterly exhausted. The original idea of defending the approach to Ladysmith mile by mile had therefore to be abandoned, and the Boers decided, on the evening of the 27th, to begin the retreat next day. On the same evening Buller told his staff that he meant to give his army a much-needed rest on the 28th, and hoped to finally relieve Ladysmith on the 1st of March by attacking the Boer left at Mount Bulwan, and breaking through their lines east of the besieged city.

But early on the morning of Wednesday, the 28th, there were signs that the end had come. From Buller's balloon the Boers could be seen everywhere retiring towards Ladysmith, and as the morning mists rose the outposts of the besieged garrison saw the long convoys of the enemy trekking away to the northward and westward. "Waggons were crowded together by hundreds," writes Mr. Pearse in his diary. "If one could not go fast enough it had to fall out of the road, making way for others. Above them hung dense dust-clouds. Elsewhere in the open, dust whirled in thinner, higher wreaths above groups of horsemen hurrying off in confusion, and paying no heed to the straits of their transport. A beaten army in full retreat, if I have ever seen one! Still people doubted and were uneasy because of General Buller's silence. Bulwan fired a single shot by way of parting salute, and then a tripod was rigged up for lifting 'Puffing Billy' from his carriage. It was a bold thing to do in broad daylight, and our naval 12-pounders made short work of it by battering

the tripod over. After that a steady fire was kept up on the battery to prevent, if possible, the Boers from moving their guns. Afternoon sunshine enabled General Buller to heliograph the reassuring message for which Ladysmith had been waiting so anxiously. He said: "I beat the enemy thoroughly yesterday. Am sending my cavalry on as fast as very bad roads will admit to ascertain where they are going. I believe the enemy to be in full retreat."

As soon as the observer in the balloon informed him that the enemy were retreating, Buller had prepared to push on to Ladysmith. The cavalry and artillery were passed over the pontoon bridge, and the mounted men, with the horse artillery, were assembled near the railway south of Pieter's station, where a long train of twenty trucks had been abandoned by the Boers. Some of the mounted infantry were pushed on to the railway station, but they were fired on from a ridge to the west of it, and retired with some loss. A battery of horse artillery was brought up and began to shell the ridge. The cannonade went on for more than an hour. To the right front the 13th Hussars were sent out to reconnoitre toward Bulwan, but they were checked by the fire of Boer guns placed in good cover near the hill. Evidently there was no panic. The Boers were not routed, but had a strong rearguard well posted to cover their retirement. Something more than the "very bad roads" was delaying Buller's pursuit.

About four o'clock it was found that the ridge near Pieter's station had been evacuated by the enemy, and Lord Dundonald rode up it with his staff and then moved forward his brigade. There was a long halt on the ridge while the broken country to the north of it was carefully reconnoitred. The Boer guns near Bulwan were still firing, and the reports of British artillery at Ladysmith could also be heard. Shortly after six o'clock, as the ground in front had not been reported clear, and it would soon be dark, Dundonald ordered his brigade to fall back to the lower ground and bivouac for the night. Just then the mounted scouts in front sent back word that they believed that the last ridge south of Ladysmith had been evacuated by the Boers. Dundonald then decided, on his own responsibility, to leave the bulk of his brigade near Pieter's station, and to try to push on into the town with two squadrons of the Imperial Light Horse and the Natal Carbineers. Dundonald invited Mr. Churchill to accompany him, though he did not belong to

either of these regiments, so that we can give the story of the adventurous ride as it appeared to one of those who pushed on through the darkness to bring the first tidings of relief to the beleaguered town. "Never shall I forget that ride," he says. "The evening was deliciously cool. My horse was strong and fresh, for I had changed him at midday. The ground was rough with many stones, but we cared little for that. Beyond the next ridge, or the rise beyond that,

houses and dark trees we had come so far to see and save. The British guns on Caesar's Camp were firing steadily in spite of the twilight. What was happening? Never mind; we were nearly through the dangerous ground. Now we were all on the flat. Brigadier, staff, and troops let their horses go. We raced through the thorn bushes by Intombi's Spruit. Suddenly there was a challenge. 'Halt! Who goes there?' 'The Ladysmith relief column,' and



BURIAL-GROUND AT INTOMBI CAMP.

or round the corner of the hill was Ladysmith—the goal of all our hopes and ambitions during weeks of almost ceaseless fighting. Ladysmith—the centre of the world's attention, the scene of mighty deeds, the cause of mighty efforts—Ladysmith was within our reach at last. We were going to be inside the town within an hour. The excitement of the moment was increased by the exhilaration of the gallop. Onward wildly, recklessly, up and down hill, over the boulders, through the scrub, Hubert Gough with his two squadrons, Mackenzie's Natal Carbineers and the Imperial Light Horse, were clear of the ridges already. We turned the shoulder of a hill, and there before us lay the tin

thereat, from out of trenches and rifle-pits artfully concealed in the scrub, a score of tattered men came running, cheering feebly, and some were crying. In the half-light they looked ghastly pale and thin. A poor white-faced officer waved his helmet to and fro and laughed foolishly, and the tall, strong Colonial horsemen, standing up in their stirrups, raised a loud, resounding cheer, for then we knew we had reached the Ladysmith picket line."

From the outpost line, Dundonald rode through the drift of the Klip River into the town. The long main street was crowded, for the news had spread that Buller's cavalry had arrived. Sir George White and General Hunter,



THE RELIEF OF LADYSMITH: TOMMY ATKINS IN REQUEST.

G. STEWART MANNION

with their staff, had hurriedly mounted to go and meet them. They rode up to the head of the column, and White and Dundonald shook hands in the midst of a dense, cheering crowd of soldiers and citizens. By a curious chance the meeting took place just outside the gaol, from the balcony of which a number of Boer prisoners were looking on. With some difficulty the cheering was silenced, and White addressed the crowd: "I thank you, men," he said, "one and all, from the bottom of my heart, for the help and support you have given me, and I shall always acknowledge it to the end of my life. It grieved me to have to cut your rations, but I promise you that I will not do it again. I thank God we have kept the flag flying."

The relief had come in the nick of time. When the siege began, it was expected that it would last at most for a fortnight. Ladysmith had held out for 119 days. No one ever expected either that the Boers could have maintained the siege so long, or that the supplies of the garrison could have been made to last for such a time. On February 28th there were only four days' full rations left. The garrison was reduced to such a state of exhaustion that the least effort could not be made to interfere with the Boer retreat. It was doubtful if the garrison could muster even a small column capable of marching a few miles and fighting a battle. Had the Boers risked another assault in those last days of February, Ladysmith must have fallen through the mere physical weakness of its defenders.

During this last day of the siege the Boers had been withdrawing their guns and stores to the northward, and loading them on trains at Modderspruit station. Even the big gun on Mount Bulwan was got away safely after dark. About ten o'clock a tremendous explosion was heard to the north of the town. The Boers had blown up the railway bridge over the spruit south of the station.

Buller's army had lost heavily in the operations that ended in the relief of Ladysmith. The following are the figures given in the official returns:

	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing and Prisoners.	Total.
Feb. 15-18	14	188	4	206
Feb. 18-27	263	1621	12	1896
Total	277	1809	16	2102

The loss in officers (included in these figures) had been 23 killed, 99 wounded, and one missing (123 in all), among them two generals

and six colonels commanding regiments. The heaviest losses had been those of the Irish Brigade in the attempt to storm Inniskilling Hill.

On March 1st General Buller entered Ladysmith with his victorious army. Sir George White had asked, on the evening of the relief, for volunteers to march five miles at dawn next day to attack the Boers on Pepworth Hill, in the hope of capturing some of their guns and seizing some of the rolling stock at Modderspruit station. Everyone was eager to go, and about 1,500 were selected from those who were most fit. Before dawn on March 1st they were formed into a column under the command of Colonel Knox. There were two batteries of artillery, about sixty men each of the 19th Hussars and 5th Lancers, and detachments, each about 250 strong, from the Gordons, the Manchesters, the Liverpools, the Devons, and the 60th Rifles. One wonders why Dundonald's two squadrons were not attached to this little force.

A Boer rearguard was found in possession of Pepworth Hill, and they held it until two o'clock. When they withdrew, the batteries went up the hill and opened fire on Modderspruit station. Three crowded trains were standing on the railway, but they all steamed away in safety, and then a series of explosions further up the line showed that the Boers were destroying every bridge and culvert as they retired. Our men were by this time utterly exhausted, and several of the horses had dropped down dead. Knox therefore gave up all idea of further pursuit, and retired into the town.

Meanwhile Buller had been advancing cautiously towards Mount Bulwan, which was found to be still occupied by another Boer rearguard. Shortly after eleven o'clock they withdrew without any attempt being made to pursue them, though Buller had with him some horse artillery, Burn-Murdoch's brigade of regular cavalry, and Dundonald's mounted irregulars. Mr. Churchill suggests that Buller so deeply felt the heavy losses his troops had already suffered that he hesitated to ask them for further sacrifices now that Ladysmith had been relieved and the substantial object of his operations obtained. In the afternoon Buller rode into the town at the head of his army. They passed in review before Sir George White, who was on horseback with his staff in front of the Town Hall. At first the long procession moved by silently, till Colonel Donald, of the Irish Fusiliers,

reached the saluting-point at the head of his regiment, and, waving his helmet, called for three cheers for Sir George White. After this, the men moved by amid a continual roar of cheering, the relieved garrison hurraing for their rescuers and Buller's men answering them back with louder cheers.

"It was a pitiful contrast which the two forces presented," says Mr. Harding Davis. "The men of the garrison were in clean khaki, pipe-clayed and brushed and polished, but their tunics hung on them as loosely as the flag around its pole, the skin on their cheek-bones was as tight and as yellow as the belly of a drum, their teeth

land. The men of the two battalions had parted five years before in India, and they met again in Ladysmith with the men of one battalion lining the streets, sick, hungry, and yellow, and the others who had been fighting six weeks to reach it marching toward them robust, red-faced, and cheering mightily. As they met they gave a shout of recognition, and the men broke ranks and ran forward, calling each other by name, embracing, shaking hands, and punching each other in the back and shoulders."

More than 20,000 men marched past—Imperial troops and Colonials, horse, foot, artillery and engineers, the naval brigade with their guns



GENERAL BULLER ENTERING LADYSMITH.

protruded through parched, cracked lips, and hunger, fever, and suffering stared from out their eyes. They were so ill and so feeble that the mere exercise of standing was too severe for their endurance, and many of them collapsed, falling back to the sidewalk, rising to salute only the first troop of each succeeding regiment. This done, they would again sink back, and each would sit leaning his head against his musket, or with his forehead resting heavily on his folded arms. In comparison the relieving column looked like giants as they came in with a swinging swagger, their uniforms blackened with mud and sweat and blood-stains, their faces brilliantly crimsoned and blistered and tanned by the dust and sun. They made a picture of strength and health and aggressiveness. Perhaps the contrast was strongest when the battalion of the Devons that had been on foreign service passed the 'reserve' battalion which had come from Eng-

drawn by teams of oxen, the Indian stretcher-bearers and the Colonial volunteer ambulances. None were more heartily cheered than these two last corps, for they had acted with splendid intrepidity in helping the wounded on every battlefield. When, after long hours, the last soldier had passed, and Sir George White dismounted and entered a carriage to drive back to his headquarters, the citizens of Ladysmith crowded round it, took the horses out, and drew the general through the town, cheering as they went. So ended the day of well-won triumph. The cheers of Ladysmith found loud echo throughout the empire. In London it seemed as if half the population had gone mad with joy at the news of the rescue of the beleaguered city, coming swift upon the tidings of the surrender of Cronje. Roberts, White, Buller and Dundonald were the popular heroes of the hour.

The relief of the besieged town improved

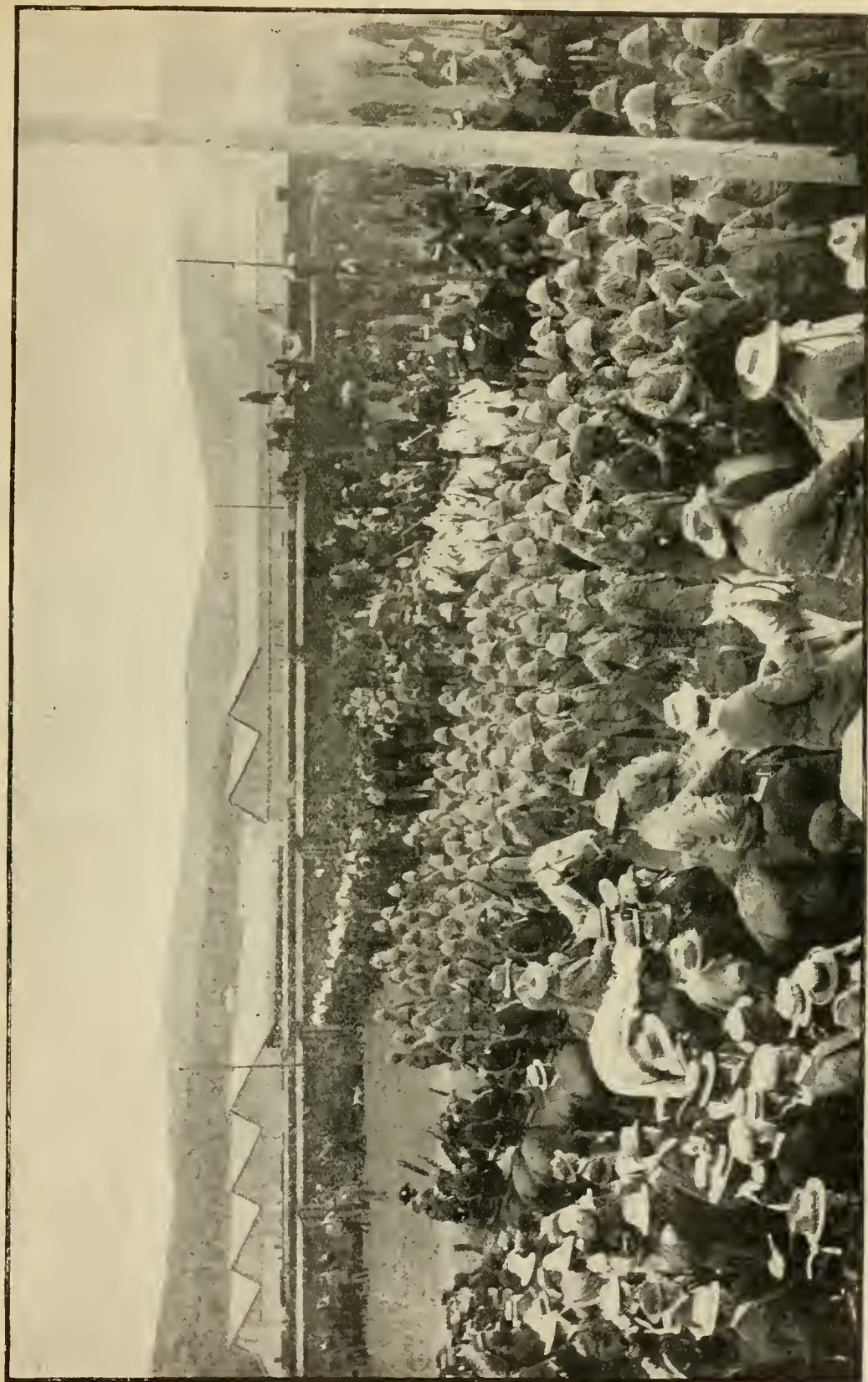
the general military situation not merely by averting a great disaster, which must have had a serious effect throughout South Africa, but also by freeing those who were charged with the general conduct of the campaign in Natal from the "entanglement" of Ladysmith, as it was called by critics of the war. So long as the Boers were able to maintain the investment, General Buller's army was forced to act upon lines which they dictated. His advance was necessarily confined to the narrow space which was barred by the formidable Tugela positions. The great precipices of the Drakensberg, the passes of which were held by the Free Staters, forbade any wide turning movement to the westward, and any such operation on the other flank was equally out of the question. Stay-at-home critics frequently suggested a great flank march to the eastward across the Lower Tugela and through Zululand, striking back across the Buffalo River against the Boer communications to the north. It was one of those plans of campaign that look excellent upon the map, when the special character of the country is left out of account. But no large army could march and keep itself supplied far away from the railway in that almost roadless district. With the movements of the relief force thus limited on the right and on the left, the Boers were able, with a very moderate force, to strongly entrench every possible line of advance. The result was that whenever there was fighting to be done they could act upon their favourite defensive tactics.

But here, as throughout the earlier stages of the campaign, the very strength of the Boer position, which increased their confidence in a purely defensive attitude, made them close their eyes to the line of action which might have given them important, even if transitory, successes of greater value than the mere repulse of Buller's various attacks. Not only did they make no attempt to follow up their victories, but they absolutely neglected the opportunities which they more than once had of striking at the long line of communications of the relief force, interrupting its supplies, and obliging Buller to diminish his fighting strength on the south bank of the Tugela in order to protect the railway in his rear. After each repulse of the relief force they seemed quite content to await another attack. They never realised the large part that mere lapse of time was playing in the problem which they had to solve. Their

passive attitude was doubtless confirmed by their calculations that Ladysmith could not possibly hold out beyond the end of January. This estimate was probably based upon a message from Colonel Frank Rhodes to the *Times*, at the beginning of November, in which it was stated that the garrison could only make its provisions last for about three months. This view was very widely held by competent authorities at the front in South Africa and at home. At the beginning of the new year one of the war correspondents, who was always particularly well informed and was in close touch with Buller's headquarters, was allowed, by the censorship to telegraph to England that if Ladysmith was to be relieved it would probably have to be done before the end of January. That the garrison was able to eke out its resources until the end of February was due to the long-suffering patience with which all in the besieged town endured the misery of living upon scanty rations, in which horseflesh and Kaffir meal played a large part; and, secondly, it was due to the wonderful organising power of the two senior officers of the Army Service Corps, Colonel E. W. D. Ward, C.B., and Lieutenant-Colonel Stoneman.

The Boer assault on January 6th was probably planned under the impression that the supplies of the garrison were lower, and consequently the physical power of resistance of the men less, than was actually the case. If it had been deferred until February, when soldiers and townfolk were really on short rations, the result might have been different. As it was, having failed so disastrously, the burghers did not renew the attempt.

Crowded together in the narrow space included within the lines of the defence, exposed to a trying climate, living under insanitary conditions, and without sufficient food to maintain their strength, it is no wonder that both the garrison and the townfolk suffered severely, during the later weeks of the siege, from various kinds of illness. Dysentery and enteric, those two scourges of besieged armies, were fearfully prevalent, and many valuable lives were lost, not amid the inspiring excitement of battle, but in the depressing surroundings of the hospital camp. We cannot close our record of the siege of Ladysmith without referring to one of the youngest of its victims, a journalist of more than ordinary enterprise and ability, whose early death was felt as a personal loss by thousands throughout



ONE OF THE PAINFUL INCIDENTS OF THE WAR; CAPTURED BRITISH TROOPS BEING MARCHED INTO PRETORIA.

the English-speaking world. Mr. G. W. Steevens had won a high reputation by the work he had done as a special correspondent in the United States, in Thessaly, and above all, with Kitchener in the Soudan campaign of 1898. He had sent home stirring descriptions of the first battles of the Natal campaign, and the earlier stages of the siege of Ladysmith. Physically he was not a strong man, but a certain reserve of nervous energy had carried him through the hard work of three previous campaigns. Before he left England for South Africa he had told his friends that this would be his last experience as a war correspondent, that when it was over he would settle down to journalism in England. It proved to be his last campaign in a sadder sense. Until December he had enjoyed fairly good health, but in the middle of the month he became weak and ill, although at first the deadly nature of his sickness was not recognised. On the terrible day when the Boers were flinging themselves in desperate attack against Caesar's Camp and Waggon Hill, Steevens for the first time during his war experiences listened in his sick-bed to the thunder of the battle which he would have described so well. The end came nine days later, after one of those disappointing rallies which are so frequent in cases of fever.

During this brief interval of hope, his colleague Mr. Maud, the artist-correspondent of the *Graphic*, wrote to Mrs. Steevens: "How he contracted enteric fever I cannot tell. It is unfortunately very prevalent in the camp just now. He began to be ill on the 13th of December, but on that day the doctor was not quite sure about its being enteric, although he at once commenced with the treatment for that disease. The following day there was no doubt about it, and we moved him from our noisy and uncomfortable quarters in the Imperial Light

Horse camp to our present abode, which is quite the best house in Ladysmith. Major Henderson of the Intelligence Department very kindly offered his own room, a fine, airy, and well-furnished apartment, although he was barely recovered of his wound. At first I could only procure the services of a trained orderly of the 5th Dragoon Guards lent to us by the colonel, but a few days later we were lucky enough to find a lady-nurse. . . . When he was at his worst he was often delirious but never violent; the only trouble was to prevent him getting out of bed. He was continually asking us to go and fetch you, and always thought he was journeying homewards. It never does to halloo before one gets out of the wood, but I do really think that he is well on the road to recovery."

A few days later, a cablegram from Ladysmith told of his death on January 15th. It ran: "Steevens, a few days before death, had recovered so far as to be able to attend to some of his journalistic duties, though still confined to bed. Relapse followed; he died at five in the afternoon. Funeral same night, leaving Carter's house (where Steevens was lying during illness) at 11.30. Interred in Ladysmith Cemetery at

midnight. Night dismal, rain falling, while the moon attempted to pierce the black clouds. Boer searchlight from Umbala flashed over the funeral party, showing the way in the darkness. Large attendance of mourners, several officers garrison, mostly correspondents. Chaplain M'Varish officiated."

Amongst the many messages expressing regret for his loss was one from Lord Kitchener, who had seen so much of him in the Soudan. "He was a model correspondent," he said, "the best I have ever known, and I should like you to say how greatly I am grieved by his death."



THE GRAVE OF MR. C. W. STEEVENS.

(Photo: Biograph Co., London)

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ADVANCE ON BLOEMFONTEIN.

COMMANDANT CRONJE had surrendered on Tuesday, February 27th. Lord Roberts did not continue his advance on Bloemfontein till Wednesday, March 7th. This gave the troops a clear week's rest, during which the prisoners and wounded were sent away, much-needed supplies were brought up, and the line of waggon transport was organised from the railway to the positions where the troops were encamped. On March 1st, as the dead horses and cattle and the *débris* of the laagers made the neighbourhood of Paardeberg very unhealthy, the army was moved to Osfontein, four miles south of the river, where it remained encamped during the preparations for the advance.

Meanwhile, the collapse of Cronje, and the withdrawal of so many men from the Boer commandoes in Cape Colony in the hope of succouring him and to guard the Bloemfontein road, had put a stop to Grobler's advance beyond Rensburg against Clements, and had weakened Olivier's force at Stormberg in front of Gatacre. Clements was thus enabled to advance, and after some sharp fighting reoccupied Rensburg on the same day that Cronje surrendered. Brabant, whom Roberts had promoted to the rank of major-general and given command of a force of mounted rifles which was known as "the Colonial Division" (though its strength was never greater than that of a brigade), had been detached by Gatacre to his right, and, moving up the Indwe Railway, had reoccupied Dordrecht, and was pressing back a small Boer force to the north of it towards the Orange River. After some skirmishing he drove the Boers from Jamestown, twenty-two miles north-west of Dordrecht, a point from which he could threaten Olivier's line of retreat from Stormberg to the Orange River. Gatacre had advanced to Bushman's Hoek and Molteno. On February 27th he had pushed forward a reconnaissance towards Stormberg. The enemy were found in force near their old position at Rooi Kop, and in the sharp skirmish that followed Montmorency's Scouts lost heavily. De Montmorency himself was killed. He was a brave and skilful cavalry

leader whose career gave high promise. He had won the Victoria Cross in the famous charge of the 21st Lancers at Omdurman. With him fell Colonel Hoskier, who was serving with the Scouts. Hoskier was the first volunteer officer from England to be killed in action. On Monday, March 5th, another reconnaissance was made, and the Scouts discovered that the Boers under Olivier had withdrawn from the strong positions at Stormberg which they had held for more than three months. Gatacre occupied Stormberg next day. Clements had moved up to Colesberg, which the Boers had abandoned without any fighting. Grobler was retiring from the place by Norvals Pont bridge, while Olivier was falling back on the other railway bridge at Bethulie. The north-east of Cape Colony was thus practically clear of the Boer invaders by the end of the first week in March.

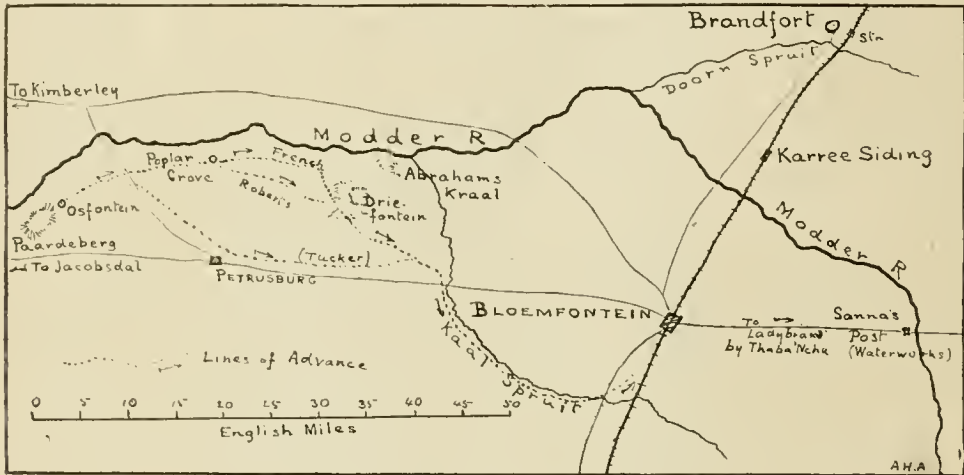
But further west, in the Dutch districts of Kenhardt and Prieska, on the lower course of the Orange River, several bands of Colonial rebels were in the field, supported by Boer raiders from Griqualand. A commando of a few hundred men, with three guns, which had taken part in the capture of Kuruman at the beginning of January, and after that had given some trouble in Griqualand, formed the nucleus of the rebel forces in the north-west of the Colony. It crossed the Orange River at Prieska, and occupied Kenhardt after a fight with a party of natives who opposed the raiders until the local magistrate ordered them to desist. It then marched upon Upington and occupied the village. The rising gradually spread a hundred miles to the southward from the river, as far as the Carnarvon district. The danger was that the insurrection would spread to the southward and eastward until it threatened the railway in the Victoria West district, where the Dutch farmers were already showing an aggressive spirit. Lord Roberts was so impressed with the risk to his line of communications that he sent Lord Kitchener, his Chief of the Staff, by way of Victoria West to the Carnarvon district, to take general control of the operations against the rebels. Kitchener had at his disposal some Colonial troops and some of the newly arrived Imperial Yeomanry, and the infantry

battalion of the City Imperial Volunteers. There is no need of describing in detail the marches and skirmishes of this campaign in the north-west of the Colony. The small bands of rebels endeavoured by rapid marches in difficult country, where most of the farmers were on their side, to elude pursuit and tire out our flying columns. There was very little fighting, and none of it was of any importance. The general result of Lord Kitchener's operations in the month of March was that the railway was made secure and the rebel bands were gradually forced back into the districts along the Orange River.

We can now return to the operations of Lord Roberts and the main army in the Free State.

even the official estimates of the enemy's forces differed very widely within a few days. The main force of the enemy was concentrated at Poplar Grove, a small hamlet on the river, and rumour said that the two Presidents, Steyn from Bloemfontein and Kruger from Pretoria, had come there to encourage the burghers to make a stubborn resistance.

French had reconnoitred the position, and found that the enemy were entrenched on both sides of the river, along a front of about eleven miles—four miles to the north of it and seven to the south. There was a double line of entrenchments, so placed that after the first line had been carried the troops would be under fire from the

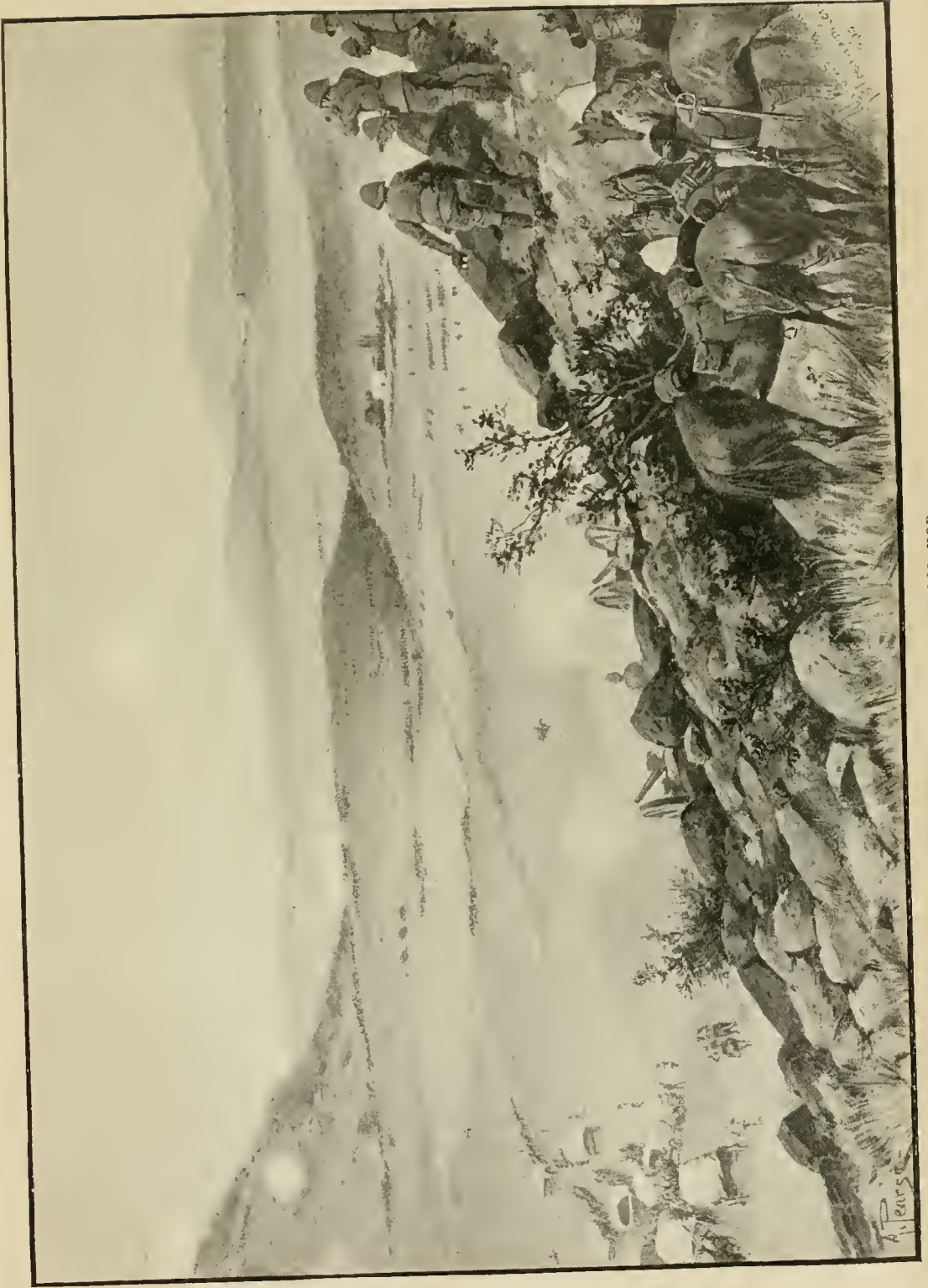


THE ADVANCE ON BLOEMFONTEIN.

He had called up the Guards Brigade from Kimberley, leaving Lord Methuen there as military commander of the district. By the end of the first week of March, Roberts had a force of more than 30,000 men camped in the district round his headquarters at Osofontein. Besides the Guards Brigade, he had three infantry divisions—the 6th, under Kelly-Kenny, the 7th, under Tucker, and the 9th, under Colville, as well as French's cavalry division and two brigades of mounted infantry. During the week's halt the Boers had assembled a considerable force about twenty miles to the westward, at Poplar Grove, on the Orange River, and at Petrusburg, on the main road from Jacobsdal to Bloemfontein. To make up this force they had added to De Wet's and Delarey's commandoes by bringing up men and guns from Natal, from the Transvaal, and from the Orange River frontier. What was their exact strength it is impossible to say, for all through this war

second. De Wet and Delarey were in actual command. The weak point of the position was that its flanks rested on no important obstacle and could easily be turned. When, therefore, Roberts advanced to attack it on March 7th, he made a mere threat with the infantry against the front of the Boer lines, while French with the horse artillery and cavalry, by a long détour, swept round the Boer left to the southward to menace their line of retreat.

On the evening of the 6th orders were issued for next day's advance. Twenty miles would have to be covered by the infantry, but French would have to go more than thirty; so the horse artillery started off, in the darkness, at 2 a.m. on the 7th. Kelly-Kenny's infantry division was to follow and support French in the turning movement against the Boer left, while Colville's division marched along the north bank of the Modder, against their right. The



THE ACTION AT ROOI KOP.

Guards Brigade, under Pole-Carew, followed by Tucker's division, advanced in the centre. All the troops were moving before daybreak, and as the sun rose they saw, far away against the bright eastern sky, the broken tops of the line of distant kopjes that marked the Boer position.

There were some hours of steady marching in the sun before any of the troops were within striking distance of the enemy. Far away to the south-east, high broken clouds of white dust showed the line of French's march, and the first sounds of battle came from that direction—the reports of a Boer gun on the extreme left firing at the cavalry at long range. The gun was soon withdrawn, and the Boers on the left fell back to another position. Roberts had by this time brought his guns into action against the Boer front, and presently Colville's artillery was heard on the north bank. The Boers, however, made no stand. They saw that if they held on much longer the cavalry would cut their line of retreat. Their waggons were already moving off, and the only fight they made was on the left, where they used their guns to delay the turning movement and force French to make a wider *détour*. Presently the main body began to abandon the entrenchments. The retirement was so sudden that when our infantry marched in they found meat cooking on fires in sheltered corners, and equipment and miscellaneous belongings of all kinds scattered about. But though there was considerable disorder in the Boer flight, not a gun or a waggon was abandoned. The cavalry attempted a pursuit, but the horses were too tired for it to be continued very far. In the first dash among the fugitives one of French's squadrons nearly captured President Kruger. They had no idea at the time how valuable was the prize that they had missed.

The British loss was only about fifty killed and wounded. There was a general impression in Roberts's army that the Boer resistance had finally collapsed. A passage from Mr. Hands's letter describing the fight may be taken to represent the opinion that prevailed in the army as to its results. "For the first time," he says, "the Boer had been set running—not merely abandoning a position to occupy another equally advantageous—but running, running for dear life. The new tactics had established their value. The policy of the easy way round had proved itself practicable. We had a few prisoners, mere stragglers, we had killed and wounded a few Boers, and we had knocked off

another fifteen miles or so of the road between us and Bloemfontein. But the Lancers looked at their unflashed spearheads, and the foot-weary infantry felt the weight of their unexpended ammunition, and some of us felt down in the mouth, and felt that it was rather an empty victory. But we knew better later on. For we knew that the Boer learned that day that his policy of sitting tight was no longer of any avail against the generalship that went the easy way round his positions, instead of the impossible way over them. We knew that he not only fled, but fled demoralised and disorganised. And we knew later that when we swept him from his kopjes, we swept away also the personal authority of Kruger himself."

Similar opinions were expressed in many letters and telegrams from the front, but those who had so rashly concluded that all the hard fighting was over were soon to discover their mistake. The Boers had fled because they saw that if they stood they must be surrounded, and they feared the fate of Cronje's commando. But they fled only to rally again a few miles to the eastward, and there is proof that the discouragement that resulted from the failure of Cronje at Paardeberg soon wore off, for in long months of warfare that followed the Boers never once again fled from the battlefield as they did at Poplar Grove.

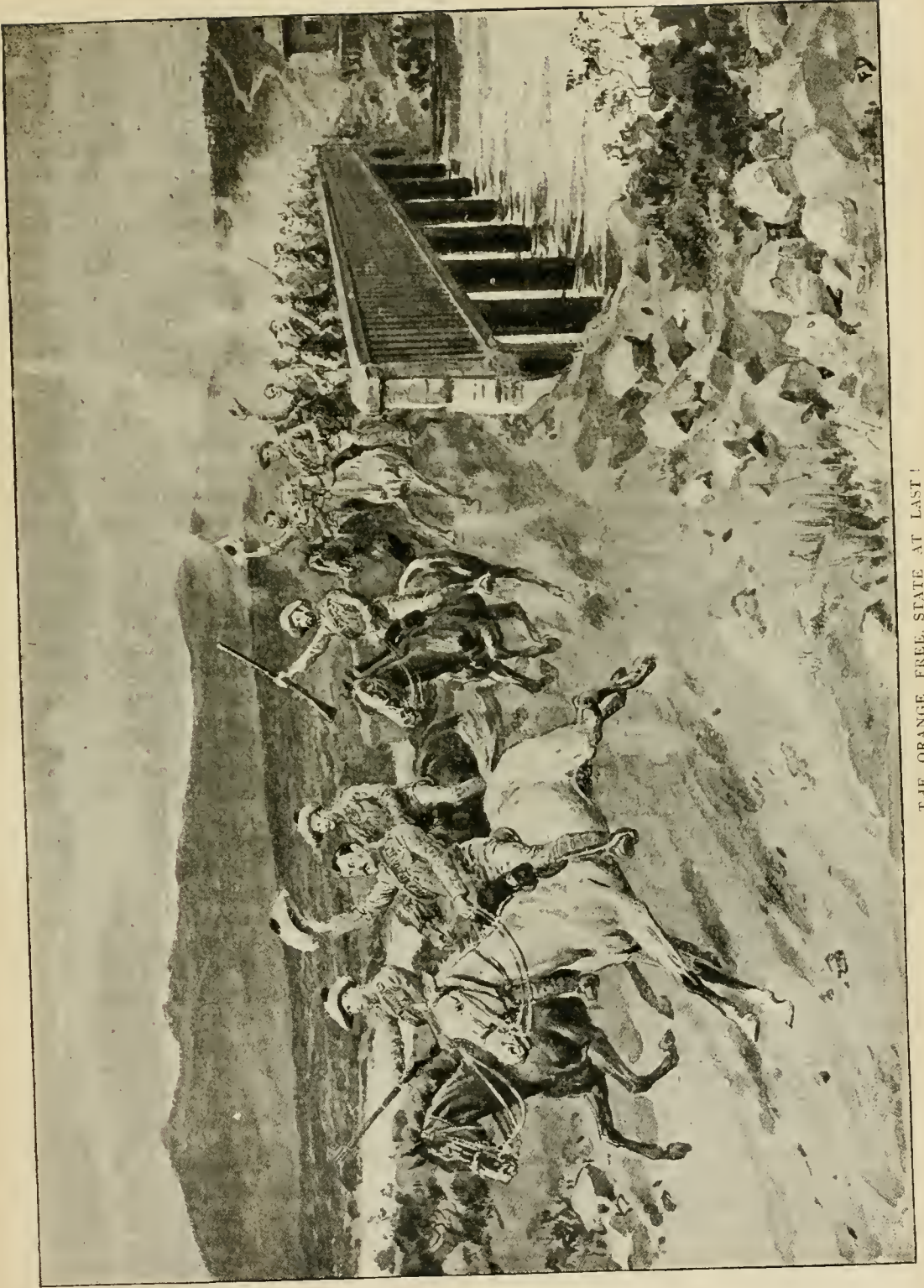
Lord Roberts rested at Poplar Grove during the 8th and 9th, bringing Colville's division across the river from the north bank. On Saturday, the 10th, the march eastward began again. The army advanced in three columns, in the following order:—

Left Column.—General French. 1st Cavalry Brigade (Porter); Colonel Alderson's Mounted Infantry; and the 6th Infantry Division (Kelly-Kenny)—moving along the road on the south bank of the Modder.

Centre Column.—Lord Roberts. 2nd Cavalry Brigade (Broadwood); Colonel Martyn's Mounted Infantry; the Guards Brigade (Pole-Carew); and the 9th Infantry Division (Colville)—marching directly against the centre of the Boer position on the Driefontein kopjes.

Right Column.—General Tucker. 3rd Cavalry Brigade (Gordon); Colonel Ridley's Mounted Infantry; and the 7th Infantry Division—marching by the Petrusberg - Bloemfontein road.

The right column did not come into action during the day. The battle of Driefontein was fought almost entirely by the left column, the



THE ORANGE FREE STATE AT LAST!

troops in the centre taking very little part in the actual fighting.

The Boer position was a small plateau or group of kopjes, with rocky spurs running out from it to the south-east and south-west, about half-way between the river and the Petrusberg-Bloemfontein road. At 8 a.m. French, advancing along the south side of the river, on a line that would carry him round the Boer flank, came under long-range artillery fire from a group of kopjes further east near the river, at the farm of Abraham's Kraal. The Boers had placed the guns there to guard their right flank from being turned, and they did it effectually. One of the guns was a long Creusot, which quite outranged French's batteries. To continue the advance in the original direction would have been to move between the river and the main Boer position at the Driefontein kopjes under a cross-fire from the front and the right flank. French changed the direction of his advance, and swung round to the right towards the front of the Driefontein kopjes. This saved his column from the annoying artillery fire of the guns at Abraham's Kraal, but it completely upset the whole plan of Roberts's advance, for the left column, swinging round to the southward, found itself on the ground over which Lord Roberts intended to advance with the centre column, so that for some critical hours Broadwood's cavalry, Pole-Carew's Guards, and Colville's infantry were all held back by French and Kelly-Kenny having got in front of them.

The whole plan of the battle being thus changed, Kelly-Kenny's infantry division became the centre of the attack. French, with the 1st Cavalry Brigade and the mounted infantry, supported later by Broadwood, manoeuvred to turn the Boer left and cut in upon their line of retreat. The artillery engaged the Boers in front, and when the cavalry moved forward it was expected that the Boers would give way as they did at Poplar Grove. But they answered the artillery with the fire of a few guns well placed so as to be sheltered by rocks, and the cavalry, when they appeared on the left flank, were checked with pom-pom shells and rifle volleys from the long southern spurs of the position. For more than three hours the advance on this side was successfully barred. The cavalry brigade and the mounted infantry, with a battery of horse artillery, were alternately advancing and retiring, trying to find a spot among the kopjes, further and further south, by which to break through and strike at the enemy's left rear.

When the afternoon came some of the enemy's guns were withdrawn from the western and northern part of their position, where up to this time none of their infantry had been in action. From the British right French sent word to Kelly-Kenny that he believed the Boers were gone from the ridges immediately in his front, and that the infantry division might safely advance. General Kelly-Kenny rode forward with his staff to the first ridge in perfect confidence that French had judged the position accurately, but as the group of mounted officers came out upon the sky line a shower of bullets whistled round them from the kopjes a few hundred yards higher up the plateau, and the general and his staff turned and rode back into cover. Neither horse nor man was hit, though they had offered a splendid target.

This incident was one more proof of how very slow our officers were in understanding that the Boer riflemen had a way of holding their fire and lying low for hours, so that the fact of not a single shot coming from a kopje or a trench was no proof that it was unoccupied. In this case the Boers had exercised more than ordinary patience, for during the preceding three hours the cavalry had more than once come within easy range of them—yet they had held their fire, waiting for the infantry attack; but they could not resist the chance of firing at a general and his staff.

Kelly-Kenny's infantry had been moving forward when the Boers opened fire, and the advance was continued, the four battalions which led the attack being the Welsh Regiment in the centre, the Essex Regiment on their left, the Buffs on their right, and the Yorkshires coming up on their flank and extending the line. They were met by such a heavy fire that the advance up the slope, covered with long grass and scattered stones, was very slow, and it was nearly five o'clock when at last the infantry closed on the Boer trenches and rushed them with bayonets fixed. Very few of the Boers were there, and most of them got away. The cavalry, meanwhile, made another attempt to work round the south end of the Boer position. The enemy were able to hold them in the broken ground that guarded their flank until the main position had been evacuated, and as the Boers retired to the eastward and northward no attempt was made to pursue them—the horses were so tired out.

The enemy had fought a delaying action, and had done it very well. Considerably out-



MEETING OF THE FORCES OF LORD ROBERTS AND GENERAL CLEMENTI.

numbered as they were, they had prevented their flanks being turned, they had checked our advance for a whole day, and they had effected their retreat in good order. They fell back across the Kaal Spruit (a tributary of the Modder), where they took up another position barring the direct road to Bloemfontein. They had carried off their wounded, but they left 120 dead on the field and 20 prisoners. Our loss was: 5 officers killed and 15 wounded, and 56 non-commissioned officers and men killed and 313 wounded—a total loss of 399. The Welsh Regiment suffered the heaviest loss. The failure to cut the Boer line of retreat, or to make any pursuit, was largely the result of the poor condition in which most of the horses were. They had been working hard and living on scanty forage. Officers and men, too, were living on reduced rations during the advance. The loss of the convoy at Waterval was still making itself felt.

During the next day (Sunday, the 11th) Lord Roberts, with the left and centre columns united, marched about sixteen miles, to Aasvogel Kop, on the right bank of the Kaal Spruit. On the Sunday afternoon and during the Monday instead of advancing directly on Bloemfontein—, the direction in which the Boers expected him—he turned to the south-east, marching up the east bank of the Kaal Spruit so as to bring his army round to the south of the Free State capital. French, with some horse artillery and the 1st and 2nd Cavalry Brigades and the mounted infantry, pushed on and seized the railway six miles south of Bloemfontein, and word was sent to the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, which was with Tucker on the Petrusberg road, to hurry up in order to reinforce him. It was considered to be of great importance to prevent the Boers from removing the large quantity of rolling stock in the sidings of Bloemfontein station. French therefore sent Major Hunter-Weston, R.E., with the American scout, Captain Burnham, and a few mounted sappers, to ride round the east side of the town and try to cut the line to the north of it, under the cover of darkness. Towards evening French himself closed in upon the south side of the town, driving some small parties of the Boers before him, but meeting only with slight resistance. He then placed his guns in position on some low hills overlooking the railway station. Several field batteries were also pushed forward so as to be ready next morning, if need be, to open fire on Bloemfontein.

After the fight at Poplar Grove, the two Presidents, Kruger and Steyn, had returned to Bloemfontein. When the Boer army retreated on the 10th from Driefontein, it was expected that there would be another battle to the west of the town. But this Lord Roberts had avoided by his march up the Kaal Spruit. In doing this he gave the Boers a chance which they let slip, as he rightly expected they would. Once more they showed a strange lack of enterprise, and, considering that Christian De Wet was one of their leaders, it is surprising that they did not grasp this opportunity. The whole of Lord Roberts's army was to the south of them—the cavalry and the 6th and 9th Divisions south of the Petrusberg-Bloemfontein road, the 7th Division on the road close to the crossing of the spruit. Along the road seventy miles to the westward, as far as the frontier at Modder River and Kimberley, Lord Roberts's convoys were moving slowly after the army. If De Wet and Delarey had made a dash to the westward with a few guns and all their best mounted men, they might have lived upon their captures, taken convoy after convoy, and reduced the great army that was marching on Bloemfontein to a state of semi-starvation. But instead of attacking they waited till the chance was gone, and then fell back along the Modder to Brandfort and the kopjes at Karree Siding north of Bloemfontein.

In the city itself there were divided councils. Some of the Free State leaders were anxious to defend it. Others held that a stand at Bloemfontein would only lead to useless loss of life and destruction of property. Finally this party prevailed. Kruger had gone north on the day after the battle of Driefontein. Steyn followed him on the evening of the 12th. All the Government officials were paid three months' salary in advance, and the mayor of the town was empowered to make arrangements for handing it over peacefully to Lord Roberts.

For many years there had been a large English element in the population of Bloemfontein. In fact, it has often been described as the most English-looking town in South Africa. Several of the leading men, even among the Dutch, had been opposed to the policy of alliance whereby the Free State threw in its lot with the Transvaal. The presence of so many British sympathisers and half-hearted Free Staters in the town is sufficient to explain not only the absence of all resistance, but also the fact that no effort was made to get away the



BLOEMFONTEIN: THE FORMAL ANNEXATION OF THE ORANGE FREE STATE.

seventeen or eighteen locomotives and the hundreds of railway carriages at the station. It is surprising that the fighting burghers who were in the neighbourhood did not take steps to remove or destroy all this rolling stock, the possession of which was of the utmost aid to Lord Roberts in the further prosecution of the war. Hunter-Weston had managed to blow up a culvert a few miles north of the town, after dark; but even then a few determined men on the Boer side could easily have wrecked the engines and burned the carriages and waggons.

Early on Tuesday, the 13th, Lord Roberts sent an officer with a flag of truce to demand the surrender of the city. The officer was met by a deputation of the citizens, who were already on their way out with a white flag to arrange with Lord Roberts to hand over the town to him. Among them were Mr. Fraser, the leader of the opposition in the Free State Volksraad, who had been a member of the Government under President Brand; Mr. Kellner, the land-rost or mayor of the town; and several of the Town Council. They met Lord Roberts at Spitzkop, five miles from the southern suburbs, and made a formal surrender to him of the Free State capital.

At noon Lord Roberts rode into the town with his staff, at the head of Kelly-Kenny's division. The troops were surprised at the welcome they received. It was more like a triumphal march into some English town than

the entry into an enemy's capital. There were cheering crowds everywhere, and the Union Jack was seen flying on all sides from shops and private houses. Lord Roberts halted in the great open space in front of the Government buildings, on which the British flag was run up, and then a salute was fired, and the troops marched past. Then came a visit to the hospitals of the town, and Lord Roberts dismounted at the President's house and established his headquarters there. All through the evening the troops and the townsfolk were rejoicing together, and men were saying that the Free State was now done with the war, which would soon be carried into the Transvaal, and that it would not be many weeks until the flag which had just been hoisted at Bloemfontein would be flying at Pretoria.

So the first stage of the war ended. It was not five weeks since Lord Roberts had arrived at Modder River camp. During that time he had relieved Kimberley, captured Cronje, cleared the road to Bloemfontein, and occupied the Free State capital. And the indirect result of his victorious march had been the withdrawal of the Boer invaders from the north of Cape Colony, the collapse of the resistance to Buller, and the relief of Ladysmith. It is no wonder that, seeing such great successes obtained in so short a time, many thought that a few weeks more would suffice for the old Field-Marshal to bring the war to a victorious conclusion.



CHAPTER XXXI.

A PERIOD OF ANXIETY.

WHEN the Boer leaders in the north of Cape Colony heard of Cronje's surrender at Paardeberg, and realised that Lord Roberts would soon be at Bloemfontein, they became anxious about securing the retreat of their own commandoes. Their forces were already weakened by the large numbers of men they had sent northwards under De Wet and Delarey. They feared that if they held on much longer on the Orange River they might be caught between the main army under Roberts on the one hand and the forces under Gatacre and Clements on the other. So, abandoning Colesberg, Grobler made for Norvals Pont bridge, crossed it and blew it up behind him, wrecking the tall masonry piers and chrowing the huge iron girders into the river. Further east Olivier abandoned Burghersdorp to Gatacre and retreated across the road and railway bridges at Bethulie. Burghersdorp was promptly occupied by a party of Montmorency's Scouts under Captain McNeil, an Irish Colonial officer. Olivier wrecked the Bethulie railway bridge, but McNeil followed up the retreating Boers with a mere handful of Scouts, and by a daring dash saved Bethulie road bridge from destruction. One who was with the little party has thus described this splendid exploit :—

"Captain McNeil had conceived the idea of attempting to save the bridges at Bethulie, forty-five miles away, but he could not get ordered to dare so greatly. He was told to reconnoitre in the direction of Knapdaar Station, fifteen miles ahead. The enemy were supposed to have taken up their position there, and he was instructed to get into touch with them. That concluding phrase gave him his opportunity. The Boers were not at Knapdaar—as he already knew, by virtue of that special information which it is the duty of a scout to possess—and so he pushed on until he got into touch with them at Bethulie bridge. Here he paused and reconnoitred. The Boers swarmed on the bridges, busily engaged in putting into position packets of gun-cotton for their destruction. The position was awkward. Captain

McNeil had but thirty men with him, and was at least as many miles in advance of any possible relief. He was afraid that if he were to let his presence be discovered he would only hasten the destruction of the bridges. He sent some of his men to take such rest as could be taken, and, watching with the others, had to stand idle while the railway bridge was blown up. He had hoped for the arrival of guns and mounted infantry; as they did not come he was helpless. But in the evening he gathered that the Boers were just on the point of blowing up the other bridge, and so he decided that he must at all costs make an attempt to save it. With about ten of his men he approached within 1,600 yards of the bridge and waited patiently until a party of Boers appeared on it. Then he and his men, with only ant-heaps for cover, opened fire vigorously, and had the pleasure of seeing the enemy bolt like so many rabbits. This is one of the pleasing stories of the war. These ten or eleven men succeeded not only in clearing the Boers off the bridge: they also kept them off it during the night, for it was never guessed how insignificant were their numbers."

Next day guns and mounted infantry arrived, and the bridge was safe. The railway line was laid across it, and though it was not strong enough to carry locomotives and complete trains, loaded trucks could be hauled across it by oxen and then coupled up and taken on by the engines on the other side. Gatacre's mounted troops, pushing north along the railway, found the country clear of the Boers, rode into the station at Springfontein junction, and captured a train there. On March 14th Lord Roberts, who had information that the line was clear, had started off General Pole-Carew with a battalion of the Guards in a train from Bloemfontein, with orders to go south and join hands with Gatacre. That such a movement was possible shows how completely the Boer resistance had collapsed for the moment. Pole-Carew steamed into Springfontein station on the 16th, and found Gatacre's men in possession. Railway communication was thus opened from Port

Elizabeth and East London by Stormberg junction, Bethulie bridge, and Springfontein junction to Bloemfontein. Lord Roberts's army had no longer to depend for its supplies on the hundred miles of waggon-track across the veldt from the western railway. It is true that the new railway line could bring up, for some time to come, only a moderate amount of supplies daily. But the possession of it made the position of the army no longer one of danger, though it must continue to be one of difficulty. Thanks to the rigid censorship, it was some time before anyone in England realised what was the condition of our victorious army in the Free State capital. Lord Roberts had paid dearly for the rapidity of his advance. He had with him at Bloemfontein what one of the correspondents described as "the wreck of an army." At home, it was expected that he would at once pursue the retreating Boers, but no pursuit could be attempted. It was hoped that he would at once send help to the gallant little band that was holding Mafeking—but it was six weeks before Lord Roberts was able to advance from Bloemfontein, and two months before Mafeking was relieved.

River) to March 14th (the day after the occupation of Bloemfontein) :—

SIXTH DIVISION SOUTH AFRICAN FIELD FORCE.

DIFFERENCE IN STRENGTH BETWEEN FEBRUARY 12TH AND MARCH 14TH, 1900.

Units.	Strength on Feb. 12th.		Strength on March 14th.		Decrease.		Killed.		Died of Wounds.		Wound'd.		Sick.		Missing.		Other Causes.	
	Off. & cers.	W. & men	Off. & cers.	W. & men	Off. & cers.	W. & men	Off. & cers.	W. & men	Off. & cers.	W. & men	Off. & cers.	W. & men	Off. & cers.	W. & men	Off. & cers.	W. & men	Off. & cers.	W. & men
Divisional Troops ...	38	2 1006	36	2 877	2	129	2	4*	—	—	17	—	95	—	1	—	—	42†
2nd Buffs (East Kent) ...	18	1 780	10	1 575	8	211	2	25	—	105	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3‡
2nd Gloucestershire Regt. ...	23	1 710	10	1 572	4	144	—	—	3	40	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1st West Riding Regt. ...	23	1 780	17	1 500	6	103	—	23	1	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1st Oxford Light Infantry ...	20	1 505	14	1 430	6	105	2	16	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1st Yorkshire Regt. ...	21	1 953	12	1 723	9	230	1	40	—	7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1st Welsh Regt. ...	23	1 875	10	1 600	13	232	2	32	—	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1st Essex Regt. † ...	23	1 936	11	1 747	12	179	1	21	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	189	9 6050	129	9 5190	00	1400	8	179	3	5	28	700	7	400	2	43*	2	52

When French advanced to the southern suburbs of Bloemfontein, he had with him only a fragment of the splendid cavalry division with which he had ridden across the Free State frontier a month before. Horses had died by the hundred during the long forced marches, and hundreds more were unfit for work of any kind. The gun teams of the artillery had suffered in the same way, and there had been a terrible mortality among the transport animals. The transport had been further crippled by the loss of the hundreds of waggons captured by De Wet at Waterval, which it was impossible to replace. The ranks of the infantry divisions had been thinned not only by losses in action, but still more by sickness resulting from fatigue and exposure, most of the time with insufficient food. For days the men had been on half, or even on quarter rations. In order to lighten the transport of the army, a considerable portion of the ambulances and field hospitals had been left behind, and there was thus no means of taking proper care of many of the sick and wounded. One may judge of the extent of the losses during the advance from the following table, given by one of the correspondents of the *Morning Post*, which shows the decrease in strength of General Kelly-Kenny's division from February 12th (the day when it marched to the drifts of the Reit

Heavily as the troops had suffered during their advance, their condition grew much worse during the first weeks of the long halt at Bloemfontein. When men are marching and fighting and moving on from victory to victory, the effort and excitement help in some degree to keep sickness at bay, even under unhealthy conditions. The frequent changes of camp are also an advantage, but during a prolonged halt, unless in an exceptionally good climate, there is always danger of an outbreak of disease. When the army settled down in its camps around Bloemfontein, many of the men were already infected with enteric, and an epidemic soon

* 1 died (disease). † Left at Kimberley and Enslin and with Balloon Section. ‡ 1 killed by lightning; 2 men left with wounded officers. § Since heard of at Pretoria. ¶ 1 officer, Staff employ; 1 officer to Mounted Infantry; 7 men fell out on march. ¶ This has been considerably reduced.

showed itself—the result in the first instance of having drunk for days the water of the Modder at Paardeberg, where dead horses and men came drifting down the stream when it rose with the rain. And to make matters worse, most of the camps round Bloemfontein were unsheltered bivouacs. There were neither huts nor tents, except in a few instances, and the weather began to be cold and rainy, and the men slept in the mud under the downpour. “That is the other story of war,” wrote Mr. Prevost-Battersby a month after the occupation; “the story not of battle, not of daring, nor of the red honour of wounds, but of sickening impotence and insidious disease. We have every chance to ponder on it here in Bloemfontein—2,500 of the force are now in hospital, there are seven deaths a day. That, in a town of London’s size, would mean a rate of close on 12,000 a week. London would not look cheerful under that sort of sickness, and typhoid is perhaps the least cheerful of epidemics: so dragging, so intractable, and with its sleeping menace in every cup of milk and glass of water for those that remain. It had been eating the inwards out of many a man who, so long as a fight was to be faced or a march to be made, kept his place in the ranks and staggered triumphant into Bloemfontein with no life but fever in his starved body. In our remembrance of brave things, the fashion in which the boys of the Essex, the Buffs, and the Welsh cleared the ridge at Driefontein will outlast other memories of this short campaign; but the hand of a more competent Remembrancer may inscribe above the silent fortitude with which those others, all aflame with fever, carried their kits and clung to their rifles along the last interminable miles of the way. The tension past and rest possible, they sickened like cattle with the pest. The field hospitals were swamped at once with the sudden influx, and every home and hospital in the town was strained to hold it.”

The Raadzaal and other public buildings were turned into improvised hospitals. The Red Cross flag was flying all over the town, and instead of being busy with the further prosecution of the campaign, much of the energy of Lord Roberts and his staff had to be devoted to struggle with this new enemy, which was making larger gaps in the ranks of the victorious army than a score of battles would have made. With the cavalry so reduced in numbers, it proved impossible even to cut off the retreat of the Boer commandoes from the Orange River. Com-

mandant Grobler, with the Boers from Colesberg, had passed through Springfontein on March 15th, the day before it was seized by our men. He had struck across country to Smithfield, and then made good his retirement through the hill country on the Basuto border, by De Wet’s Doop and Ladybrand. General Clements had crossed the Orange River north of Colesberg and marched northwards in two columns, clearing the country west of the railway of the scattered parties of the enemy. He marched in two columns, his right along the railway, his left through Philippolis and Fauresmith. Every day numbers of Free State burghers came in and made submission; but it was noticed that the weapons they gave up were seldom Mauser rifles—they were generally Martinis, Westley-Richards, and sometimes still more antiquated weapons, including even old muzzle-loaders that might have been used in the days of the Great Trek.

The other Boer column, that of Commandant Olivier, about 6,000 strong, retreated through Bethulie and Aliwal North, by Smithfield and Rouxville, as far as Wepener. They were pursued by Gatacre and Brabant. Had French’s cavalry been in fighting condition, they might have been headed off by a march eastwards through Thaba 'Nchu, on the Bloemfontein-Msru road, but no sufficient force could be detached from Bloemfontein in this direction till it was too late; and meanwhile Olivier, holding his pursuers at bay with a small rearguard, worked his way safely through the Basuto border country, although he was encumbered with a convoy of waggons that stretched for miles. He joined hands with Grobler at Ladybrand, and while part of the force remained in the hills in the neighbourhood, the remainder escorted the convoy by Wynburg to Smaldeel junction, on the railway north of Brandfort, about half-way between Bloemfontein and Kroonstad. The Boer army holding the line was thus reinforced with a large number of veteran fighting-men and several guns, and received with them the great convoy laden with ammunition and supplies. The Boer headquarters were at Brandfort. Their outposts were along the north bank of the Modder, about sixteen miles from Bloemfontein. President Steyn and the civil officials of the Free State were at Kroonstad, which had been declared the temporary capital.

On March 27th General Joubert died at Pretoria. He had been ill for some weeks, and

had taken little part in the direction of military affairs. He was the most trusted leader in either of the Boer republics. He had directed the operations of the Boers in the successful campaign that ended at Majuba. He had organised the new army, and commanded in several native wars. In the great war that began in October, 1899, he had acted as general director of the operations, and personally commanded in the first months of the Natal campaign. He had won the respect even of those who fought against him, and when the news of his death reached Bloemfontein Lord

of age, and when the war began he was an absolutely unknown man. He had property in the Wakkerstroom district, not far from Laing's Nek, and in his farm there, more like an English country house than a Boer farmstead, he and his Irish wife had welcomed many an English traveller visiting the south of the republic. He had served in two campaigns against the natives, under Lucas Meyer, and had been selected by his district as a member of the Volksraad, in which he seldom spoke and always voted with the Progressive minority, which sided with Joubert against the policy of Kruger and the Hollanders.



JOUBERT'S FUNERAL, MARCH 29TH.

THE COFFIN ON A GUN CARRIAGE.

Roberts sent a message of condolence to Joubert's family at Pretoria.

Joubert was sixty-five years of age when the war began. He was personally opposed to it, and his immediate friends knew well that he never believed in ultimate success, but hoped at most to make a good fight and preserve some fragment of the independence of the republics. Some of the younger leaders had more than a suspicion that this was his state of mind, and they held that the veteran commander had grown too old to be really enterprising, that he was too slow in his operations and half-hearted in his attacks. Presidents Kruger and Steyn agreed that one of the younger men should be offered the vacant post of Commander-in-Chief, and, to the delight of the burghers, the choice fell upon Commandant Louis Botha.

He was a Transvaal Boer, not yet forty years

of age, and when the war began he was an absolutely unknown man. He had property in the Wakkerstroom district, not far from Laing's Nek, and in his farm there, more like an English country house than a Boer farmstead, he and his Irish wife had welcomed many an English traveller visiting the south of the republic. He had served in two campaigns against the natives, under Lucas Meyer, and had been selected by his district as a member of the Volksraad, in which he seldom spoke and always voted with the Progressive minority, which sided with Joubert against the policy of Kruger and the Hollanders.

During the anxious months of the summer of 1899, Louis Botha more than once urged that peace should be maintained with England even at the cost of considerable sacrifices. But as soon as war became inevitable he made his preparations for the campaign, and he was with the commando which seized Laing's Nek, acting as a staff officer to Joubert. In the operations in Northern Natal his marked talent for war made itself felt, and he sprang suddenly into fame and popularity as the successful commander who defeated Buller at Colenso and Spion Kop. When he was given the chief command at the end of March he was hampered by the jealousy of some of the older commandants and by the constant necessity of referring his plans to the War Office at Pretoria for approval. But even with these disadvantages he proved himself a master of war, and prolonged

the struggle for months in spite of the overwhelming forces that were arrayed against him.

Botha, when he was appointed to the chief command, was with Delarey, with the Boer forces north of Bloemfontein, and Delarey, though an older man, gave the most cordial co-operation and support to the young general. In the fortnight after the occupation of Bloemfontein the position of the Boer forces had been greatly improved. They had quite recovered from the depression that followed Cronje's surrender, and the obvious fact that Roberts's army was unable to advance from Bloemfontein greatly encouraged them. The escape of Grobler and Olivier's column from the south further raised their hopes, and they began a series of minor harassing operations against the invaders of the Free State.

On the western border Lord Methuen had pushed forward a brigade of infantry and some artillery to Warrenton, where a railway bridge crosses the Vaal at Fourteen Streams station on the north bank. The Boers had destroyed the bridge, and had a force on the north bank, with some heavy guns, with which they watched the crossing, and day after day bombarded the British position at Warrenton, notwithstanding the efforts of our artillery to silence their guns. Methuen had marched out with a small column to the crossing of the Vaal further south, at Barkly West, and rumour said he was on his way to raise the siege of Mafeking. But he was recalled by a message from Lord Roberts at Bloemfontein, apparently because the British headquarters had information indicating that for the present all Methuen's available force would be necessary to secure the country round Kimberley. Lord Chesham, with a force of the Imperial Yeomanry, while marching westward from Kimberley on the Douglas road, found the Boers in such strength in that direction that he had to retire. Another Boer force moved across the veldt east of Kimberley, cut the telegraph wire to Bloemfontein, and occupied for a while the kopjes at Koodoosrand Drift on the Modder, near the scene of Cronje's surrender. So active were the enemy's columns in the country round Kimberley that the outlying defences were again manned, and preparations were made to meet the contingency of a second siege.

The enemy were also unpleasantly aggressive in the neighbourhood of Bloemfontein itself. Their best-mounted corps, the Johannesburg Police, were continually raiding south of the

Modder within sight of the suburbs of Bloemfontein, and levying contributions on the local farmers who had made their submission. One morning four officers of the Guards who were riding out near the British outposts met a small patrol of the Johannesburg Police, and made a rash attempt to capture them. The Boers galloped back to a group of rocks on the veldt, dismounted behind them, waited rifle in hand for their pursuers, shot one of them dead, and wounded and captured all the rest. They carried the wounded officers to a farmhouse, treated them very kindly, and skilfully gave them first surgical aid, and then sent a flag of truce to the British outposts asking that an ambulance waggon might be sent out to bring the wounded officers in.

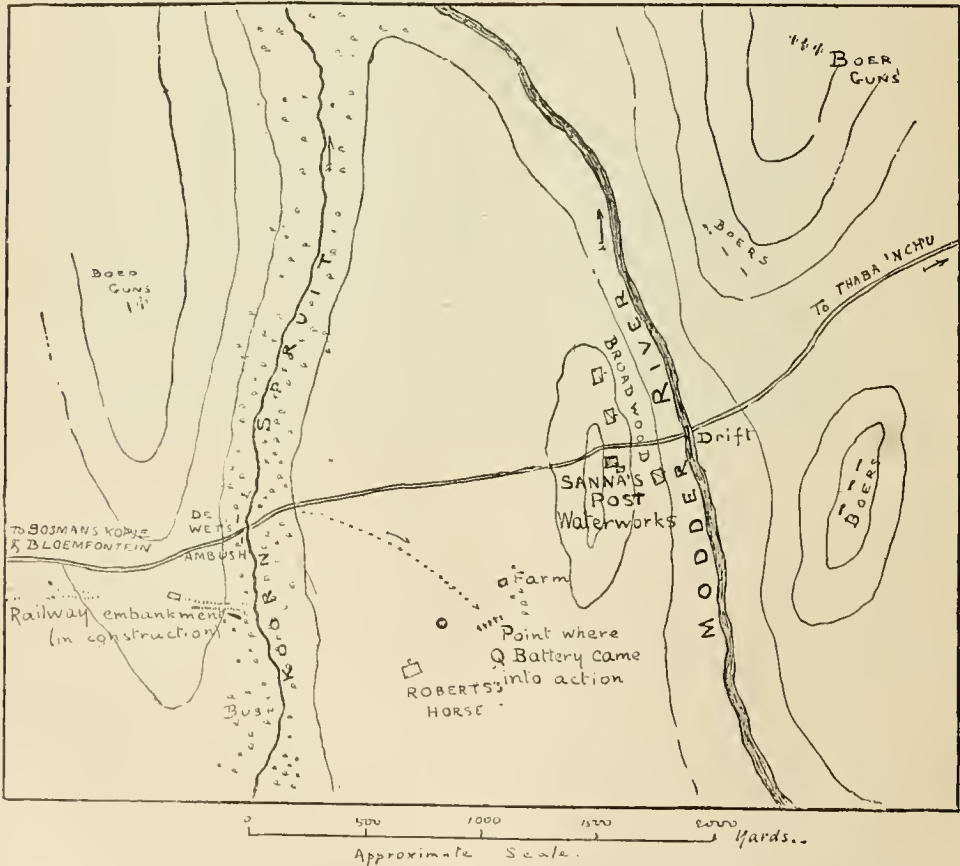
Though he was yet unable to begin the general advance—for he had not received sufficient remounts or reorganised his transport—Lord Roberts decided, in the last week of March, to put an end to this continual harassing of his outposts by driving the Boers from their advanced position on the north bank of the Modder. This led to the battle of Karree Siding on March 30th.

Before describing this action it must be noted that Louis Botha, who had his headquarters at Brandfort, had been preparing to take the offensive on the British right flank. A portion of Olivier's commando had remained on the Basuto border between Ficksburg and Ladybrand. Botha had now sufficient forces under his command to detach another strong column under Christian de Wet in the same direction. He himself intended to hold the line of the railway in Roberts's front, while Olivier was to move south through Ladybrand, taking with him some hundreds of empty waggons, and carry off from the rich corn district along the Basuto border as large a quantity of supplies as possible, to be subsequently sent through Wynberg to the Boer depôts farther north. Besides thus sweeping the country of supplies which would otherwise fall into the hands of the invaders, Olivier was to push to the southwards and westwards, threatening the Orange River frontier and the railway. There was a small force of cavalry and horse artillery, under Broadwood at Thaba 'Nchu, on the Bloemfontein-Ladybrand road. De Wet's column was to co-operate with Olivier in forcing Broadwood to retire, and an effort was to be made to seize and temporarily put out of working order the pumping station and waterworks at Sanna's Post, where the Thaba 'Nchu road crosses the railway. On these waterworks the Free State

capital depends for its supply of good drinking water. After this De Wet was to move southwards and raid the railway. The Boers had at last realised that no serious results could be obtained by the system of mere passive defence on which they had so long acted, and as the armies at the front had greatly increased in numbers, with the consequent necessity for a heavier daily transport of supplies by the railway, they might reasonably hope for important results from an even temporary interruption of the line. They probably did not themselves anticipate that their temporary seizure of the

waterworks would cause such terrible loss to the force at Bloemfontein as eventually resulted from it. They failed to cut the railway; but, as we shall see, the blow at Sanna's Post succeeded to an extent that no one could have anticipated.

Thus, in the last days of March, Roberts and Botha were preparing to strike at each other—the British in order to clear their front north of Bloemfontein, the Boers from the eastward against Lord Roberts's communications. The British blow was the first to be struck, though the Boer counter-stroke came swiftly after it, and was the more successful of the two.



THE AMBUSCADE AT KOORN SPRUIT.

CHAPTER XXXII.

KARREE SIDING AND SANNA'S POST.

THE Boers, when they retired from Bloemfontein, had blown up the railway bridge over the Modder and held a line of kopjes near Karree Siding, five miles to the north of it, from which their patrols raided across the river and sniped the outposts. To put an end to this continual annoyance, Lord Roberts decided to clear the Karree Siding kopjes of the enemy.

The kopjes form the southern boundary of an open plain which stretches ten miles away to the crossing of the Doorn Spruit at Brandfort. If our outposts could be pushed forward to this line of low hills they would have the open veldt before them, and raiding and sniping would be more dangerous work for the enemy.

Lord Roberts made his attack on Thursday, March 29th. His plan aimed at not merely obtaining possession of the kopjes, but also surrounding and capturing the smaller Boer force which held them. The troops employed were General Tucker's division, made up of the 14th and 15th Brigades under Generals Wavell and Chermiside; the 1st and 3rd Cavalry Brigades, under General French, consisting of the 10th Hussars, the Scots Greys, a squadron of the Inniskillings, the Carbineers, the 12th and 16th Lancers, and the Australian Horse and New South Wales Lancers; and Colonel Le Gallais' Mounted Infantry Brigade. The mounted troops started early in the morning, having moved out from Bloemfontein on the previous afternoon. French, with the cavalry brigade and some horse artillery, made a long turning movement on the extreme left. Le Gallais, with the mounted infantry and three Vickers-Maxim pom-poms, moved out in the same way on the right. When the mounted troops had been given a fair start, Tucker advanced against the front of the position, having Kitchener's and Nesbitt's Horse attached to his division to help him in scouting. Chermiside's brigade formed the right of the frontal attack, and Wavell's the left. The troops thus advanced in a great crescent, the horns of which, formed by the

mounted troops, were to envelop the Boer position.

"The country," wrote one of the correspondents, "is the prettiest we have yet campaigned in out of Natal. In place of the usual brown veldt and stony kopje were undulating hills covered with long, luxuriant grass; and the troops marched and fought amid green maize fields, with here and there an orchard and smiling homestead. The enemy's position consisted of three waves of hills, the last stiffened by a long, high, flat-topped mountain of the usual South African style. Across the plain to the north, ten miles away, Brandfort was plainly visible. The first two lines of hills were unexpectedly found unoccupied, and as no enemy was visible anywhere, it looked as if the bird had flown. Suddenly shots came from a kopje on our right front, which just previously had been scouted by a party of Nesbitt's Horse and reported clear. The Mauser music swelled along the ridge in front, and the enemy began to disclose himself in all sorts of unexpected places, from clumps of trees, from the dry bed of a watercourse, and from the brow of the big, flat-topped kopje. Where, a few minutes before, there was not the sign of an enemy's presence, at least 2,000 invisible rifles began to crackle and spit at us. The infantry slowly marched back out of range, and lay lazily on the slopes of the hills, watching the effect of the artillery. Two batteries opened fire, and for a couple of hours the Boer position was shelled from end to end. Not a clump or vantage point of any kind suspected of Boers was left unvisited. Yet whenever the artillery fire slackened the Mausers cracked again. One clump of trees covering less than two acres received over twenty shells. Yet afterwards I could find no trace of dead or wounded Boers in it. Possibly there had never been any live ones."

For three hours, from one o'clock in the afternoon, the bombardment went steadily on. Tucker had no intention of sending his infantry forward to push the attack home until the

turning movement on one or other flank was producing some effect on the Boers. The enemy had two British 15-pounders, four Creusots, and several pom-poms in action, but they did little damage. Le Gallais' turning movement on the right made very little progress, the enemy extending in prolongation of their line on that flank, and checking our mounted infantry with a heavy rifle fire. Three batteries of artillery were sent to their assistance. On the other flank, French gained a position from which he could threaten the Boer line of retreat and enfilade the Boer position with his horse artillery guns. But the Boers brought four Creusots into action near a farm in the plain behind their right flank and checked the further advance of the cavalry.

This was about four o'clock. The Boer commander had realised that if he held on any longer the mounted troops might break in between him and Brandfort, and the burghers began to evacuate the ridge. There was a lull in the firing, and Tucker pushed forward his infantry—the Norfolks, the East Lancshires, and the South Wales Borderers leading. As our fighting line pushed forward the fire of the Boer rifles again blazed out hotly; but it was only the rearguard making a stand in order to gain time for the withdrawal of the guns. The last fighting took place on the flat-topped summit of the third ridge, which was gallantly rushed by the East Lancshires. The Boers used their artillery very cleverly to check all pursuit, and they made good their retreat to Brandfort without leaving a prisoner, a gun, or a waggon behind them.

The British loss was about 100 killed and wounded; that of the small Boer force engaged was probably less. Our men bivouacked on the hills which they had won. The night was bitterly cold, and the infantry had neither overcoats nor blankets with them. They lit large fires and huddled together round them. The first object of the operation had been obtained. Roberts had cleared his front and driven the enemy back on Brandfort and the line of the Doorn Spruit. But he had failed to accomplish the capture of the enemy's force. The Boers had successfully employed the tactics they invariably followed during the whole of our advance along the railway, fighting what was essentially a rearguard action—holding on until their line of retreat was in danger, and then getting away without serious loss. They were fighting, not to stop, but to delay, the British advance.

The news of the victory at Karree Siding caused considerable rejoicing in England, as it was supposed to indicate that at last Lord Roberts had begun his advance northwards from Bloemfontein. But swift upon the news of our success came tidings of a Boer counter-stroke that for a time changed the whole situation. Louis Botha's plan of using De Wet's and Olivier's forces to threaten Lord Roberts's right flank had begun to develop.

We have seen that Broadwood's cavalry brigade had been sent out to the east of Pretoria along the Ladybrand road. Broadwood was holding the village of Thaba 'Nchu, a small place surrounded by a circle of great hills, the western buttresses of the Basuto mountain-land. The district was once part of the Basuto country, and this part of the Free State was, in fact, generally known among the Boers as "the conquered territory." It is a country of bold ridges and kopjes, and, like the Basuto hills, it has a more humid climate throughout the year than the open veldt of the Free State; and the valleys through which the numerous spruits and rivers run bear heavy crops of corn, while there is good pasture for great herds of cattle on the higher slopes. Broadwood had with him two batteries of horse artillery (Q and U), and his mounted troops were a portion of the 10th Hussars, Roberts's Horse, the Burmese Mounted Infantry, the New Zealanders, and some companies of the Imperial Mounted Infantry. In the last week of March, Colonel Pilcher had been sent forward with some of the mounted infantry towards Ladybrand. He seized the Leeuw corn-mills, on the plateau above the river of the same name west of the town, secured a large quantity of corn and flour, loaded it on waggons which he had brought up with him for the purpose, and sent the convoy back to Thaba 'Nchu. The neighbourhood seemed to be clear of the enemy, and Pilcher rode forward into Ladybrand with a small detachment of his mounted infantry. There were thirty or forty British colonists residing in the town. On Pilcher's arrival they hoisted the Union Jack and cheered the soldiers through the streets.

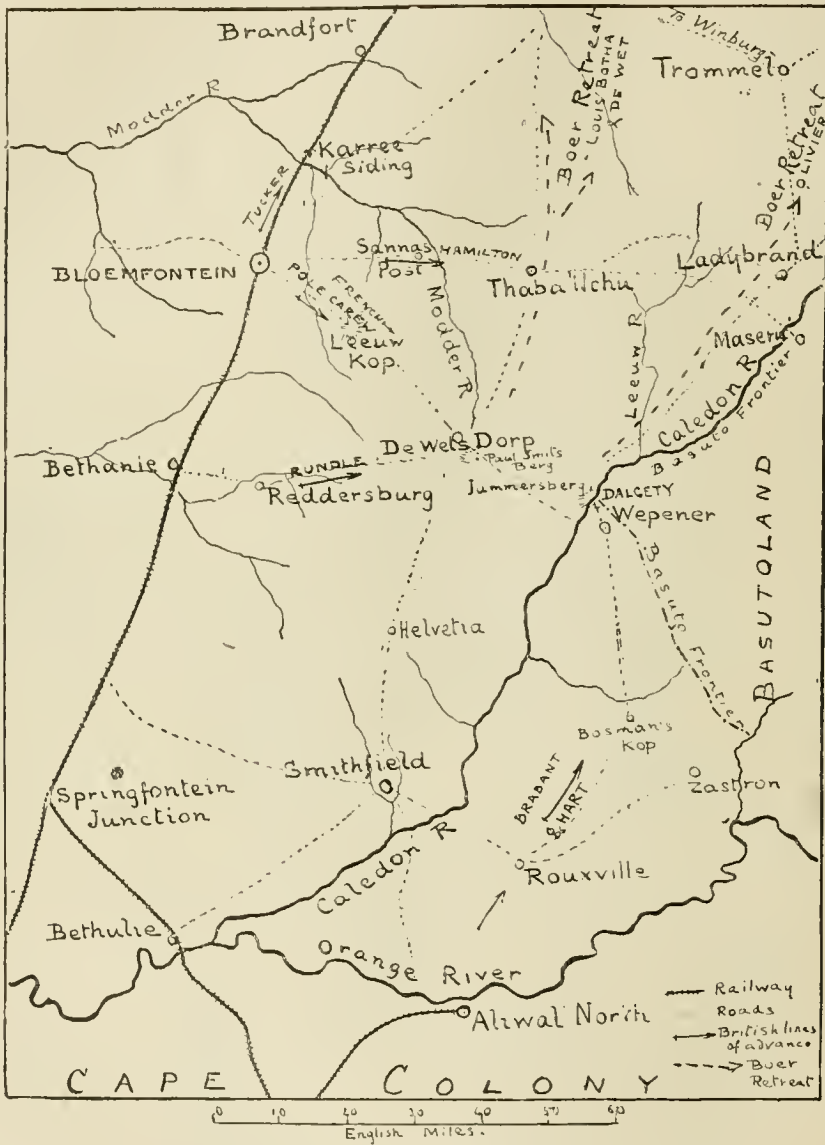
But Pilcher's exploit proved to be a repetition of his occupation of Douglas at the beginning of January. He came without sufficient force to hold the town, and the chief result of his arrival was to inflict a great amount of suffering and loss on the little British community. During the months the war had lasted they had lived on friendly terms with the burghers. They had



THE CAPTURE OF THE LANDROST OF LADYBRAND.

been in no way molested, but had carried on their business as before the war. When they saw the soldiers arrive in the town they thought the British authority was to be permanently established there. Before the day was over they

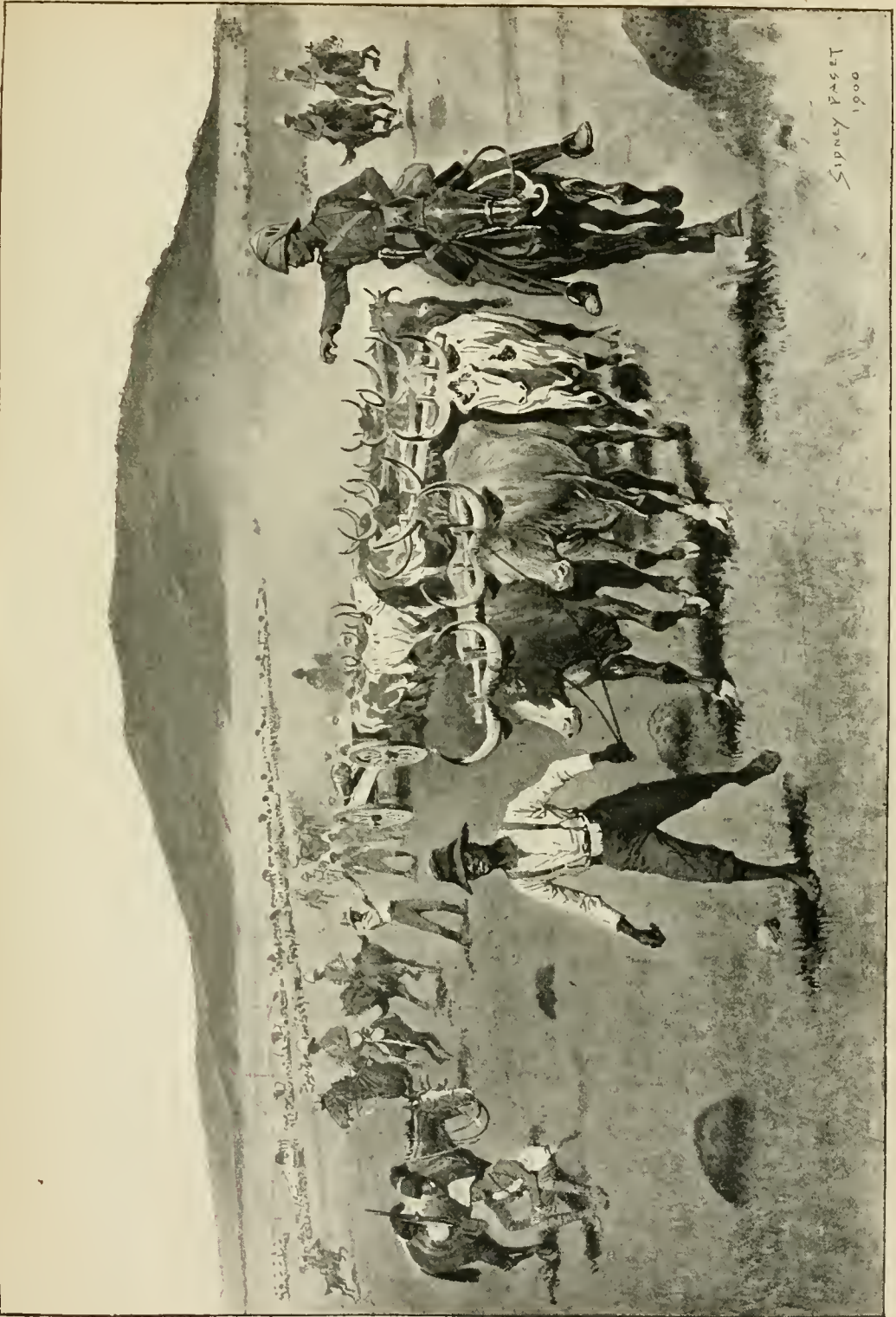
so he made prisoners of the Boer Landrost and his clerk, and rode out of the town, rejoined the rest of his men, and retired after the convoy along the Thaba Nchu road. He was hardly gone when Olivier marched into the town at



THE OPERATIONS IN THE S.E. OF THE FREE STATE.

found they had been misled into prematurely taking a hostile attitude towards their Boer neighbours. Pilcher had hardly entered the town when he received a friendly warning that a Boer commando was approaching on the Ficksburg road. It was the vanguard of Olivier's force. If he had remained with his handful of men he would have been captured,

the head of his burghers. The Union Jacks had disappeared, the *Vierkleur* was hoisted again, and in his indignation at the carrying-off of the Landrost the Boer commandant ordered the arrest of the British inhabitants. About twenty were made prisoners and marched off to Ficksburg. The others escaped into Basutoland, some of them with the assistance of Boer



BRINGING UP THE FIVE-INCH SIEGE GUNS.

neighbours. Olivier pursued Pilcher across the Leeuw River and captured a patrol of four mounted men; but the pursuit was checked by Pilcher's rearguard with a Maxim, and the mounted infantry rejoined Broadwood at Thaba 'Nchu early on the morning of March 29th, the day of the battle of Karree Siding. The Boers had followed up the retirement, and it was reported that their force amounted to 8,000 men and 20 guns under Olivier and Grobler. Probably the numbers of both men and guns were exaggerated.

Thaba 'Nchu village is almost surrounded by a great circle of flat-topped hills, and cannot be held against an enemy coming from the eastward unless those hills are occupied, and to do this would require a much larger force than Broadwood had with him. Broadwood therefore decided to retire to the waterworks at Sanna's Post, where the Thaba 'Nchu road crosses the Modder. The waterworks had been occupied by a small force of infantry, and four miles nearer Bloemfontein there was a brigade at Bosman's Kopje. The country between the Modder and Bloemfontein was reported clear of Boers, and it was therefore thought that once Sanna's Post was reached the column and its convoy would be in safety.

Broadwood's convoy reached the neighbourhood of Sanna's Post at six p.m. on Friday, the 30th, crossed the Modder, and bivouacked on the rising ground between the river and Koorn Spruit, one of its tributaries. The bivouac was close to the waterworks, but the garrison which held them had been withdrawn before the convoy arrived. The rest of Broadwood's force reached the bivouac about two on Saturday morning. Until late the previous afternoon they had been fighting a continuous rearguard action with the pursuing Boers, but the firing had ceased shortly before sunset, and it was hoped that the night march had given the column such a start of the enemy that it could continue its retirement next day without being seriously molested. Bloemfontein was a little more than twenty miles away, and the troops in the bivouac felt that they were at last within the territory which was securely held by Lord Roberts's army.

But during the night between Friday and Saturday the Boers were taking steps to cut off the retreat of the convoy and its escort. On the day after the battle of Karree Siding, Christian de Wet had moved south-eastwards from Brandfort with about a thousand men and a couple of

guns. His intention was to seize Sanna's Post and cut off the water-supply of Bloemfontein. After dark on the Friday evening his scouts brought him news that there was a large British convoy in laager near the waterworks, and that a force of mounted men and guns, pursued by a Boer commando from the eastward, was retiring along the Thaba 'Nchu road to join the bivouac. Without communicating with Grobler and Olivier, of whose precise position he was ignorant, De Wet resolved to make a night march and endeavour to ambuscade the British force next morning at the crossing of the Koorn Spruit. He had only a few hours in which to move his force to the scene of action and complete his arrangements, and everything had to be done in the darkness close to the British laager and without revealing his presence to Broadwood's men. But De Wet did his work so perfectly that the result was a disastrous surprise for the retreating column.

At the last moment De Wet had a narrow escape of seeing all his plans defeated. On the evening of the 30th Burnham, the Canadian scout, who was attached to Lord Roberts's Intelligence Department, had been ordered to ride out to Sanna's Post, make a sketch of the ground in the direction of Thaba 'Nchu, and obtain as much information as possible about the country in that vicinity. It is strange that, although Broadwood had been retreating for two days and the post at the waterworks had been withdrawn, the Intelligence Department had no news of these movements, and Burnham rode out of Bloemfontein under the impression that there was no enemy nearer than thirty miles to the eastward. As day was breaking on the Saturday morning he was within a mile of Koorn Spruit. He saw some horsemen near the spruit in the dim light, and, thinking they must belong to the British garrison at Sanna's Post, he was riding up to them when he discovered in the nick of time that they were Boers. He tried to ride round them, but wherever he approached the spruit he found it watched by the Boers. His horse was too tired to make a dash through the enemy, and at last he gave up the attempt to pass through and hid in the bushes, hoping to have a chance, later on, of communicating with the British at the waterworks.

Broadwood's men were preparing their breakfasts in the bivouac when, just as the sun rose, the Boer artillery began to shell them from the east side of the Modder. The pursuers had followed them closely during the night, and only



THE AMBUSCADE AT KOORN SPRUIT.

waited for the daylight to open fire. The range was too great for the horse artillery guns to reply. For the convoy to remain where it was would have entailed a heavy loss, and accordingly it was ordered to inspan its teams and retire across Koorn Spruit. The two batteries were sent off with the convoy, with orders to take up a position on the further side of the spruit, so as to cover the subsequent retirement of Broadwood, who remained behind with all the mounted troops except Roberts's Horse, to check the pursuit until the guns and baggage were safe through the Koorn Spruit crossing.

Who was in command of the convoy and its escort it is impossible to say at the time of writing. There has been a strange conspiracy of silence on the subject, and the natural result has been a number of rumours and conjectures, laying the blame for the disaster on more than one distinguished officer. Whoever it was, it is quite certain that Broadwood, who remained at what he considered the post of danger, relied upon his subordinate to carry out the withdrawal of the convoy and guns with the usual military precautions, and for this purpose he placed Roberts's Horse at his disposal to act as scouts and flankers. If the escort had been British regulars it would have been said that they were ambushed through their ignorance of Colonial ways; but Roberts's Horse was a newly raised, irregular regiment, chiefly composed of colonists. They appear to have ridden in a mass on the flank of the column, with no scouts out in front. They felt quite sure that the only enemies in the neighbourhood were behind them, with the guns which were shelling Broadwood's position near the waterworks. They thought they were on their own ground at last, where to move with an advanced guard, with scouts searching the ground in its front and on its flanks, would be mere pedantic observance of the drill-book. Stay-at-home critics of the war, and even some ill-informed writers at the front, have talked of the "pedantry of the drill-book" and its "German methods" as crippling our officers in the field, and have talked vaguely of the necessity of adopting more common-sense principles in war. On this, as on many other occasions, if officers and men had observed the plain rules laid down in the drill-book, they would have been acting on common-sense lines and a disaster would have been avoided.

Koorn Spruit, which at that time of the year was almost a dry watercourse, runs along the bottom of a wide, bushy hollow. On both sides

the ground rises gradually, and on the western side, near the road, there was the unfinished embankment of the new railway from Bloemfontein to Ladybrand, the construction of which had been begun a few months before the war. A farmhouse and a group of buildings roofed with corrugated iron, erected to serve as a railway station of the future line, had been occupied by De Wet. His riflemen were lying down under cover of the embankment, and swarmed in the bushy hollow on both sides of the road. If a few horsemen had been sent forward in front of the convoy, the ambushade would certainly have been discovered; but this obvious precaution was not taken, and the long line of waggons began to descend into the hollow of the spruit, most of the men sitting carelessly on the waggons, many of them with their rifles out of their reach, no one having the least idea that danger was so near.

As the first waggon reached the bottom of the spruit and began to ascend on the opposite side, suddenly a Boer stepped out of the bushes, with a dozen riflemen behind him, who pointed their Mausers at the drivers. The Boer leader, in a low voice, warned the convoy men not to cry out or attempt to use their weapons, and told them to move quietly off the track, behind the screen formed by the bushes. As they turned off the track and disappeared from the view of those who were following, another party of Boers seized the heads of the teams, took away the rifles, and made the men get off the waggons. Standing beside the track, the Boer leader moved off waggon after waggon to the right and left, forming up the whole convoy on the west side of the spruit. The waggons, and the soldiers who were with them, had no idea what was happening, until the muzzles of the Mausers were levelled at their faces. Waggon after waggon was thus quietly captured, the noise of the convoy scrambling down into the valley to the eastward preventing anyone from hearing what was going on in front. The Boer officer gave his orders and saw them carried out, as if he was the commander of the convoy instead of its captor. He was Christian de Wet.

The last waggon of the convoy had been secured, and now the guns were coming through the bushes, U Battery of the Royal Horse Artillery leading. Burnham, the scout, had left his hiding-place when the first waggons entered the spruit. He had ridden up a knoll on the west side and tried to signal their danger to the British. But his signals were unseen, and a

party of Boers quickly surrounded him and made him prisoner. From one of the cattle kraals of the farm, where he was kept under guard, he saw what followed. De Wet, who expected the gunners would be less submissive than the convoy men, had called up a strong party of Boers to assist him. The first gun was surrounded and secured at once, but the drivers of the next saw what was happening to their comrades and tried to turn and make their way back out of the hollow. At the same time, a troop of Roberts's Horse, riding on the flank of the column, perceived that something was going wrong, and made an attempt to enter the thickets. Several rifles were fired almost in their faces, a number of men and horses were shot down, and the rest turned and rode back, leaving killed, wounded, and prisoners behind them. At the same time, a heavy rifle fire was poured from both sides into the long line of guns packed together in the spruit. U Battery was in a hopeless position. It was in the bottom of the hollow amongst the bushes, and all its guns were at once captured. Q Battery was on the slope into the spruit, and had a better chance. Its commander, Major Phipps-Hornby, shouted the order to retire, and the guns swung round under a shower of bullets that brought men and horses to the ground. The first gun—the last in the retirement—had all its horses shot down, and was rushed and captured by the Boers. The other five struggled up the slope, halting again and again to cut adrift a wounded horse, till at last some of them had only two horses left, and the gunners had to help the team by pulling and pushing at the wheels. Every man with one of the guns was killed or wounded, and it was saved by its team running away with it. One of the horses was shot dead, but the others in their wild fright dragged it along with the gun and limber.

Roberts's Horse had dismounted and formed a firing line to cover the retreat of the guns. Broadwood, the moment he heard of the disaster, had hurried back the Burmese Mounted Infantry to support them. The remnant of Q Battery unlimbered and came into action, shelling the spruit, and De Wet's guns opened upon them in reply from some high ground to the north of the Bloemfontein road. All the while Grobler's and Olivier's artillery, on the east of the Modder River, was shelling Broadwood's rearguard, and some of the shells, fired too high, burst among the British near Koorn Spruit. Roberts's Horse made a gallant attempt

to work their way round the flank of the Boers in the spruit, but were driven back with heavy loss. Some of them did good service by making a wide détour and carrying the news of the disaster to Bosman's Kopje, where Colonel Alderson was in command. He sent out a regiment of mounted infantry, which towards the end of the fight gained touch with the British left.

Burnham, who watched the fight from the Boer position, gives an interesting account of the way in which the Boers worked. They concentrated their fire on the battery, though the range was very long for riflemen—about 1,400 yards. He says the Boer fire-discipline was extremely good. Before they opened on the battery with their rifles, one of them, evidently a picked marksman, found the range by a succession of carefully placed trial shots, and then gave it to the rest. An attempt was made to work round the left flank of the British, but this was abandoned apparently because the Boer scouts had become aware that Alderson's mounted infantry were approaching. Between ten and eleven De Wet gave up the attempt to capture the remnant of our artillery, and began to march northwards along the left bank of the spruit, carrying off with him 300 prisoners, seven guns, and about eighty waggons which he had captured. Half a dozen waggons which had been damaged in the fighting were abandoned among the bushes in the spruit. Burnham, the scout, was carried off among the prisoners, but he managed to escape by slipping out of a waggon in the dark and lying by the roadside till the column had passed on, when he made his way safely back to Bloemfontein.

Broadwood's column, besides losing the guns, waggons, and prisoners, had lost heavily in killed and wounded. Of Roberts's Horse and Q Battery nearly half the officers and men had been hit. The total loss amounted to 28 killed, 123 wounded, and 425 missing—a total of 576. It was generally felt that a still greater disaster had been averted by Q Battery in saving most of its guns and bringing them so promptly into action against the Boers; so a few weeks later four Victoria Crosses were awarded to the gunners.

Broadwood, having joined Alderson, halted at Bosman's Kop. Besides securing their booty, the Boers occupied the waterworks, and by removing a number of valves put the pumping engines out of gear and stopped the supply of good water to Bloemfontein. For more than

three weeks of the month of April the large British force assembled in the Free State capital had to depend for its water supply upon a number of shallow wells, so that water was both scanty and impure. The result was an alarming spread of the typhoid epidemic, and before the end of the month all the hospitals were crowded with fever patients, and there were great hospital camps established in the suburbs. There were neither men nor appliances at the disposal of the Royal Army Medical Corps to deal properly with this sudden increase of sickness. A break in the weather—a downpour of rain that lasted for days—added to the difficulties of the situation. The hospital camps were soon in a miserable condition, and the sufferings of the sick were pitiable. There was abundance of hospital stores and equipment at the base, but the army had to be fed, and hospital supplies could only be brought up in limited quantities. The scarcity of horses for the cavalry and of field transport added to the difficulty of setting on foot any operations to drive off the Boers, or even to recover the waterworks.

Swift on the news of Koon Spruit there came tidings of another disaster, at Reddersburg. General Gatacre was guarding the railway to the south of Bloemfontein, and he had sent out a detached post of three companies of the Royal Irish Rifles and the mounted infantry of the Northumberland Fusiliers to hold the village of De Wet's Dorp, about forty miles south-east of Bloemfontein. De Wet's Dorp, a small village in the hilly country between the railway and the Basuto border, was a point of great military importance, as it stands at the junction of four roads, leading westward to Bloemfontein, northward to Thaba 'Nchu and Wynberg, eastward to Wepener and Basutoland, and southward to Smithfield and the Orange River. The Boer force which had driven Broadwood back from Thaba 'Nchu, as soon as it had secured the waterworks and the crossing of the river at Sanna's Post, sent a strong column southward to seize De Wet's Dorp, whilst another column, under Olivier, marched upon Wepener, which

had just been occupied by the advance guard of Brabant's force coming up from the Orange River. The five companies at De Wet's Dorp (three of the Irish Rifles and two of the Northumberlands, about 400 men in all), who had no guns with them and no supporting force within many miles, began to withdraw towards the railway on the approach of the Boers, who were reported to be several thousands strong and to have artillery with them. On Monday, April 2nd, the detachment reached Reddersburg, eleven miles from Bethanie Station on the railway, where the officer in command halted his men, as his business was to guard the eastern flank of the line, and he naturally supposed that even if he were attacked he would be quickly reinforced from Bethanie. Several roads unite at Reddersburg, and the position was a good one from which to watch the neighbouring country.

Early on Tuesday morning Reddersburg was attacked by a Boer force, which surrounded the village, placed guns in position, and began a heavy bombardment. For more than twenty-four hours the Irish Rifles and the Northumberlands defended themselves with their rifles, watching anxiously all the while for relief from the westward. Late in the day, news reached Lord Roberts's



GENERAL ERABANT.

headquarters at Bloemfontein that Reddersburg was isolated, and that the detachment there was being attacked by superior numbers. He at once sent off the Cameron Highlanders by train to Bethanie, and telegraphed to Gatacre, who was at Springfontein Junction, telling him to bring up reinforcements and go to the rescue of the besieged garrison. Gatacre sent up to Bethanie by train a battery of artillery and some infantry, took personal command of the relief force, and at dawn on the Wednesday morning started from Bethanie Station along the road to Reddersburg. Perhaps his recollection of his experiences at Stormberg prevented him from making an earlier start and risking a night march.

At half-past ten a.m. Gatacre reached Reddersburg. As he approached the place he heard no firing, and this made him naturally anxious

about the fate of the garrison. When he entered the village he saw everywhere the signs of a heavy bombardment, but both besiegers and besieged had vanished. At nine that morning the garrison, having fired their last cartridge, having no provisions, and having suffered heavy loss, had hoisted the white flag and surrendered.

The dead were hastily buried, and the Boers, taking the prisoners and wounded with them, had marched off towards De Wet's Dorp. Gatacre had no mounted men with him, and could not attempt a pursuit. His column was marched back to the railway, and his failure to relieve Reddersburg led to his being deprived of his command by Lord Roberts six days later.

He was directed to return to England, and the command of his division was given to Sir Herbert Chermiside, who commanded a brigade in the Seventh Division. We have not yet the full facts of the Reddersburg affair, as no official despatches on the subject have been published, and very little information was allowed to be sent home by the correspondents. But many felt that Gatacre was harshly treated, and that Lord Roberts had snatched at an opportunity of getting rid of a divisional commander whom he mistrusted on account of his failure at Stormberg.

Throughout the campaign Gatacre had been in a very unfortunate position. He was never given the complete division to the command of which he had been appointed. He was sent with a handful of troops to hold the Boers in check in the north-east of Cape Colony, where he had to operate in a difficult country and in the midst of a thoroughly disaffected population. Notwithstanding the failure at Stormberg, he had held his own and checked every attempt of the enemy to advance further south. The rapid retreat of Olivier after Cronje's surrender gave Gatacre no opportunity of redeeming his earlier

defeat by some successful action on a great scale; and when he advanced across the Orange River he was given the task of guarding a long stretch of railway without having any cavalry at his disposal, and only a handful of mounted infantry, although the enemy against whose enterprises he had to protect the line were nearly all horsemen.

Lord Roberts's action in depriving him of his command four months after Stormberg seemed all the more harsh because other generals who had failed even more disastrously were allowed to retain their commands. When Sir William Gatacre reached England, the home Government made some amends to him by again giving him the command of the Eastern district, at Colchester, one of our most important military posts, and the same that he had held before he went to South Africa.

On April 4th, the day on which the disaster at Reddersburg occurred, the Boers under Olivier, reinforced by large numbers of local burghers, surrounded General Brabant's advance-guard, under Colonel Dalgety, near Wepener. Dalgety had abundant supplies and plenty of ammunition, and, as we shall see, made a successful defence. Another Boer force advanced down the valley of



COMMANDANT CHRISTIAN DE WET.

the Caledon River, gathering reinforcements as it went, and threatened Rouxville, held by the other half-battalion of the Irish Rifles. As they had no guns with them, the Rifles abandoned the town and retired across the Orange River to Aliwal North, which was held by the main body of Brabant's Colonial Division. Rouxville was occupied by the Boers. In one week they had cleared the south-eastern corner of the Free State of the British, and had captured seven guns, eighty waggons, and nearly 1,000 prisoners. The burghers of the district, when they made their submission, had mostly

given up Martinis and more antiquated weapons, and hidden their Mausers. They now took up arms again, and joined in hundreds the commandoes under Grobler, De Wet, and Olivier, or raided in small parties along the Orange River. Only the presence of considerable forces on the south bank prevented another rising among the burghers in the neighbouring districts of Cape Colony.

The situation was decidedly serious. The army at Bloemfontein had no large reserves of provisions to fall back upon, and if the railway had been cut it would have been threatened with semi-starvation. Lord Roberts's first step was to strengthen the garrisons along the railway under Chermiside, and he also threw up earthworks on the hills round Bloemfontein itself. When he occupied the city, in the middle of March, the welcome given to him by British residents and British sympathisers, and the apparent acquiescence of the rest of the population in the new state of things, had led most people to the hasty conclusion that resistance in the Free State was at an end. Little more than a fortnight had passed, and there was an end of that pleasant illusion. In Bloemfontein itself there were unmistakable signs of hostility amongst the population. Most of the British flags which had been flying from hotels and shops disappeared one by one. People spoke openly of the place being recaptured by the Boers. In the outlying villages there were more open manifestations of hostility. "Most of the men have gone away," wrote a British officer. "The women will not even speak to us, and one sees the children come out and hoot at the soldiers as they pass by."

At home in England, where, thanks to the rigorous censorship, no one realised to what an extent the army at the front had been weakened by sickness, shortness of supplies, and the want of horses, it was expected that the success of the Boers would be very short-lived, and that Lord Roberts would take advantage of the daring march of the enemy into the south-east of the Free State to cut off their retreat and surround and capture the commandoes. There were confident predictions of another Paardeberg, and

some of the military critics proved to their own satisfaction that the Boer leaders had been guilty of a piece of rash folly, and were stupidly playing into Lord Roberts's hands. At the headquarters at Bloemfontein a less inaccurate judgment had been formed of the situation, but even there the resourcefulness of the Boer leaders was inadequately realised, and it was hoped that they would be made to pay heavily for their bold raid to the southward.

The 8th Division, under General Sir Leslie Rundle, was arriving at the Cape, from England, just as the Boer raid took place. Lord Roberts ordered these reinforcements to be moved up at once, to co-operate with Chermiside in guarding the railway. About the same time two of the brigades of Buller's army were united into a new division (the 10th) under General Sir Archibald Hunter, and sent round from Natal, by way of the Cape, to the western border, where the Boers in front of Methuen were successfully holding the line of the Vaal north of Kimberley. Some batteries of artillery and the greater part of the Imperial Light Horse were also withdrawn from Natal for service on the



COLONEL J. F. BROCKLEHURST.
COMMANDING 2ND NATAL CAVALRY BRIGADE.
(Photo: Elliott & Fry, London.)

western border of the Free State. Various minor changes were made in the distribution of divisions and brigades, the mounted infantry being collected in a special division under General Ian Hamilton, and a new infantry division (the 11th) being given to General Pole-Carew. Although this reorganisation was not completed in all its details till the latter part of the month of April, with a view to the easier understanding of the course of the Free State campaign, it may be well to note here the new organisation and distribution of the British army in South Africa:—

TROOPS IN THE ORANGE FREE STATE AND CAPE COLONY.

Cavalry Division.—Lieut.-Gen. J. French.

1st Brigade.—Brig.-Gen. T. Porter.

2nd Brigade.—Brig.-Gen. R. Broadwood.

3rd Brigade.—Brig.-Gen. J. R. Gordon.

4th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. J. Dickson.

Mounted Infantry Division.—Maj.-Gen. Ian Hamilton.

1st Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. E. Hutton.

2nd Brigade.—Brig.-Gen. C. Ridley.

Infantry Divisions.

1st Division.—Lieut.-Gen. Lord Methuen.

9th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. C. Douglas.

20th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. Arthur Paget.

Division.—Lieut.-Gen. Sir Herbert Chermiside.

22nd Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. R. Allen.

23rd Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. W. Knox.

6th Division.—Lieut.-Gen. T. Kelly-Kenny.

12th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. R. Clements.

13th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen.

A. Wavell.

7th Division.—Lieut.-Gen. G. Tucker.

14th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen.

J. G. Maxwell.

15th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen.

C. Knox.

8th Division.—Lieut.-Gen.

Sir H. Leslie Rundle.

16th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen.

Barrington Campbell.

17th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen.

J. E. Boyes.

9th Division.—Lieut.-Gen.

Sir Henry Colville.

3rd Brigade.—Maj.-Gen.

H. MacDonald.

19th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen.

H. Smith-Dorrien.

10th Division.—Lieut.-Gen. Sir Archibald Hunter.

5th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. A. FitzRoy Hart.

6th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. G. Barton.

11th Division.—Maj.-Gen. R. Pole-Carew.

1st Brigade (Guards).—Col. Inigo Jones, Scots Guards.

18th Brigade.—Brig.-Gen. T. Stephenson.

Colonial Division.—Brig.-Gen. E. Brabant.

TROOPS IN NATAL.

General Commanding.—General Sir Redvers Buller.

Cavalry.

1st Natal Cavalry Brigade.—Brig.-Gen. J. Burn-Murdoch.

2nd Natal Cavalry Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. J. Brocklehurst.

3rd Natal Cavalry Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. the Earl of Dundonald.

Infantry Divisions.

2nd Division.—Lieut.-Gen. Sir F. Clery.

2nd Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. H. Hildyard.

4th Brigade.—Brig.-Gen. C. D. Cooper, Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

4th Division.—Lieut.-Gen. Hon. Neville Lyttelton.

7th Brigade.—Brig.-Gen. W. Kitchener.

8th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. F. Howard.

5th Division.—Lieut.-Gen. Sir Charles Warren.

10th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. J. Coke.

11th Brigade.—Maj.-Gen. A. Wynne.

The Imperial Yeomanry had been organised at home as companies of mounted infantry, which were numbered from 1 to 79. These

were then grouped in twenty battalions, as a rule of four companies each. The following list gives the organisation of this useful force in South Africa:—

1st Battalion:—Lieut.-Colonel R. G. W. Chaloner, M.P. 1, Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry; 2, Royal Wiltshire; 3, Gloucestershire; 4, Glamorganshire.

2nd Battalion:—Lieut.-Colonel M. A. Burke, 32, Lancashire Hussars; 5, Warwickshire; 21 and 22, Cheshire.

3rd Battalion:—Lieut.-Colonel G. C. Young-
husband, 9, Yorkshire Hussars; 10, Notts (Sherwood Rangers); 11, Yorkshire Dragoons; 12, South Notts.

4th Battalion:—Lieut.-Colonel F. G. Blair, 6, Staffordshire; 7, Leicestershire; 8, Derbyshire; 22, Bedfordshire.

5th Battalion:—Lieut.-Colonel F. C. Meyrick, 14 and 15, Northumberland; 13, Shropshire; 16, Worcestershire.

6th Battalion:—Lieut.-Colonel C. R. Burn, 17, Ayrshire; 18, Lanarkshire; 19, Lothians and Berwickshire; 20, Fife Light Horse.

7th Battalion:—Lieut.-Colonel C. H. W. Helyar, 27, Devonshire; 48, North Somerset; 25, West Somerset; 26, Dorset.

8th Battalion:—Lieut.-Colonel A. P. Crawley, 23, Duke of Lancaster's Own; 24, Westmoreland and Cumberland; 52, Manchester (Paget's Corps).

9th Battalion:—Lieut.-Colonel H. R. Howard, 29, Derbyshire; 30, Pembrokeshire; 31 and 49, Montgomeryshire.



SIR H. CHERMSIDE.

(Photo: London Stereoscopic Co.)

- 10th *Battalion* :—Colonel Lord Chesham. 37 and 38, Buckinghamshire; 39, Berkshire; 40, Oxfordshire.
- 11th *Battalion* :—Lieut.-Colonel W. K. Mitford. 34 and 35, Middlesex; 33, Royal East Kent; 36, West Kent.
- 12th *Battalion* :—Lieut.-Colonel H. F. W. Wilson. 41, Hampshire; 42, Hertfordshire; 43 and 44, Loyal Suffolk Hussars.
- 13th *Battalion* :—Lieut.-Colonel B. E. Spragge, D.S.O. 45, Dublin; 46 and 54, Belfast; 47, Duke of Cambridge's Own.
- 14th *Battalion* :—Lieut.-Colonel A. M. Brookfield, M.P. 53, Royal East Kent; 55, Northumberland; 62, Middlesex; 69, Sussex.
- 15th *Battalion* :—Lieut.-Colonel S. Sandwith. 56, 57, and 58, Buckinghamshire; 59, Oxford.
- 16th *Battalion* :—Lieut.-Colonel H. M. Ridley. 50, Hampshire; 63, Wiltshire; 65, Leicester; 66, Yorkshire.
- 17th *Battalion* :—Lieut.-Colonel R. St. L. Moore. 60, Northern Irish (Belfast); 61 and 74, Southern Irish (Dublin).
- 18th *Battalion* :—Colonel R. K. Parkes. 67, 70, 71, and 75, "The Sharpshooters."
- 19th *Battalion* :—Colonel H. Paget, C.B. 51, 52, 68, and 73, "Paget's Horse."
- 20th *Battalion* :—Lieut.-Colonel R. B. Colvin. 72, 76, 78, and 79, "The Roughriders."



LIEUT.-COL. D. M. LUMSDEN.

(Photo: Bourne & Shepherd, Calcutta)

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DE WET'S DORP AND WEPENER.

AS we have seen, Lord Roberts's first efforts, on learning of the Boer raid into the south-east of the Free State, were directed towards making his line of communications perfectly secure. The arrival of Rundle's division increased the force that was guarding the line south of Bloemfontein to about 20,000 men. In and around Bloemfontein he had French's cavalry, Ian Hamilton's mounted infantry, and four infantry divisions—viz. the 6th (Kelly-Kenny), the 7th (Tucker), the 9th (Colvile), and the 11th (Pole-Carew). Instead of profiting by their first successes to attempt to cut the railway, the Boers had divided their forces, and were employing a large part of them in carrying on a regular siege of Dalgety's position near Wepener. There was another body of the enemy, under De Wet, at De Wet's Dorp, which was vaguely estimated at about 8,000 men, though it is quite possible he never mustered half that force. Other commandoes covered the line of retreat of the raiders by holding Thaba 'Nchu and the waterworks at Sanna's Post.

By the middle of the month, the army being sufficiently reorganised, Lord Roberts abandoned the purely defensive attitude he had first adopted and began active operations against the raiders. Chermiside's division was concentrated about Bethanie, and Rundle's was brought up by railway to Edenburg Station, twelve miles further south. The two divisions, united under Rundle's command, were then pushed eastward to Reddersburg, the 3rd Division leading, with the 8th in support. Colvile's division was sent out towards Sanna's Post by the Thaba 'Nchu road, and Ian Hamilton's mounted infantry, and as much of French's cavalry as had been

provided with remounts, and Pole-Carew's division, were sent out of Bloemfontein to the south-eastward along the De Wet's Dorp road. To bar the further progress of the Boers to the southward, Hart, with the Irish Brigade, was temporarily detached from Hunter's division, and sent up by railway to the north-east of Cape Colony, to support Brabant in an advance from Aliwal North to the relief of Wepener, which was closely besieged by Olivier.

The object of Lord Roberts was not merely to drive back the Boers to the northward. He hoped to cut off their retreat and capture large numbers of prisoners and the greater part of their waggon-train and artillery. But it looks as if—perhaps from an exaggerated idea of the enemy's strength—the plan he adopted was hardly calculated to secure this end. Five divisions of infantry and mounted troops converged from the eastward on De Wet's Dorp, in the hope of surrounding the Boers at that

point; but all the while they were left in undisturbed possession of the country between Sanna's Post and Thaba 'Nchu. It seems, however, that the first step in the campaign ought to have been to advance in force on Thaba 'Nchu, and thus close the gate behind the Boers before turning them out of De Wet's Dorp. The vastly superior numbers at Lord Roberts's disposal ought to have made it perfectly safe for him thus to divide his forces, and it is probable that the mere advance on Thaba 'Nchu would have compelled the Boers to retreat, forced them to raise the siege of Wepener, and exposed them to serious loss during their retirement.

The Boers had perfect information as to the steps which were being taken against them. So long as they held Thaba 'Nchu they felt perfectly safe at De Wet's Dorp. While Roberts's



COLONEL DALGETY.

(Photo: Healey, Queenstown.)

columns were concentrating for the advance against De Wet's Dorp, the natives brought in more than one report that the Boers were retreating; but the only basis for these rumours was that long trains of grain-laden waggons and herds of cattle were passing northwards to Thaba 'Nchu. The Boers were systematically clearing the country of supplies. By the same route they received some reinforcements; but, including the besiegers of Wepener, the force at De Wet's Dorp, and that which was guarding their communications at Thaba 'Nchu, they never had more than 10,000 men in the district, and it is not certain that they ever had so many. But though they were thus so weak in numbers, the operations against them were conducted in the most leisurely fashion by the forty or fifty thousand men that Roberts had placed in line.

Recognising the importance of the operations in the south-east of the Free State, Louis Botha, the Boer Commandant-General, left Brandfort in the middle of April and proceeded to De Wet's Dorp, where he took personal command of the defence. The British concentration had been delayed by heavy rains. It was not until the 15th that Chermiside moved the 3rd Division from Bethanie to Reddersburg. He was followed by Rundle with the 8th Division. The united force advanced towards De Wet's Dorp. On the 22nd, the 11th Division, under Pole-Carew, with two brigades of cavalry, marched out from Bloemfontein by the De Wet's Dorp road, and Colville and Ian Hamilton reoccupied Bosman's Kopje, and prepared to attack the Boer position at the Sanna's Post waterworks.

The Boers had been making demonstrations against the British outposts north of Bloemfontein, in order to induce Lord Roberts to keep a large force concentrated there. Kelly-Kenny's Division formed the garrison of the city, and there was never any doubt about its safety, or any expectation that the enemy would attack it in force. Rundle advanced from Reddersburg on De Wet's Dorp with the 3rd and 8th Divisions, skirmishing with the Boers and gradually driving them in, but not pressing his attacks home, as the part which he had to play in the general plan was merely to hold them until the troops coming from the north-east were in their rear. On Saturday, the 21st, he halted to the south-west of De Wet's Dorp, with his troops on both sides of the Smithfield road. The enemy held a strong position, on a semicircle of low hills in his front, which they were busily entrenching.

Louis Botha and De Wet felt no particular

anxiety about Rundle's movements, as all his force was in their front, but the advance of Pole-Carew and French from Bloemfontein threatened to cut their line of retreat, and they employed the bulk of their forces to delay this movement. The result was a series of hard-fought rearguard actions on the Bloemfontein-De Wet's Dorp road.

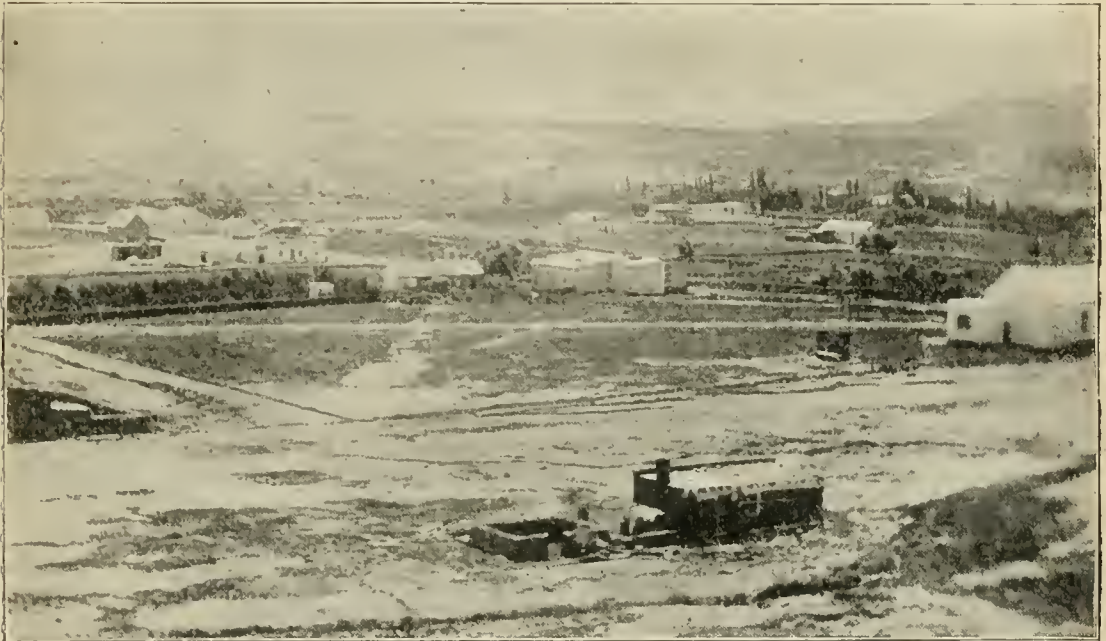
The first fight took place on the afternoon of Sunday, the 22nd, at Leeuw Kop, about eighteen miles from Bloemfontein. The forces engaged were the Guards Brigade under Inigo Jones, the 18th Brigade under Stephenson, French's 3rd and 4th Cavalry Brigades, Alderson's mounted infantry, three batteries of the Royal Artillery, and a battery of naval guns under Commander de Horsey. Towards noon the cavalry scouts found the enemy holding the line of kopjes at Leeuw Kop, a mass of rocky hills with almost precipitous sides to the northward, extending along a front of about three miles. There were guns in position on the kopjes, which commanded both the main Bloemfontein-De Wet's Dorp road, on which the Guards were marching, and another road to the east of it, which had been assigned to Stephenson's brigade. There were at first some doubts as to whether the hills themselves were held in force, or only some farms in the broken ground to the east of them. But the doubt disappeared when the enemy opened fire with four pom-poms from the top of the Leeuw Kop precipices. They had also a 12-pounder in position, which is believed to have been one of the guns captured at Koorn Spruit.

The naval guns and two of the batteries had missed their way, and Pole-Carew had only six guns with him when he advanced to the attack at one o'clock in the afternoon. He was engaged for a long time in attempting to silence the pom-poms, and the reports of the guns brought the other batteries upon the scene. Pole-Carew had meanwhile deployed his two brigades in a long line, so as to threaten both flanks of the Boer position, with the help of the cavalry and mounted infantry. To the Boers it must have looked as if three infantry brigades were arrayed against them, for the British commander used a few companies in the centre to occupy some low bush-covered kopjes, and then threw out the Guards Brigade far to the right and the 18th to the left, making a good show of having another brigade in the centre.

Early in the afternoon the enemy abandoned all their advanced positions in front of the Kop.

They held on to the high ground for two or three hours longer. Against a frontal attack it was impregnable, but they had not the force with which to meet the threatened turning movement. Indeed, it is probable that they had not more than a couple of thousand men in the position, and if they stayed too long they ran the risk of being surrounded upon it. About an hour before sunset they began to withdraw, and they made good their retreat under the cover of darkness without leaving

barred the advance. On this same day, the 23rd, Ian Hamilton's mounted infantry, supported by the 19th Infantry Brigade under General Smith-Dorrien, advanced to recapture the waterworks at Sanna's Post. They marched by the crossing of Koorn Spruit, where more than three weeks before De Wet had ambushed the convoy and Horse Artillery batteries. The slope leading to the spruit was strewn with the *débris* of broken waggons and the skeletons of oxen and horses. The neighbouring farms were



VIEW OF WEPENER.

(Photo: Berenssohn, Hamburg.)

even a single prisoner behind them, and having inflicted more loss than they had suffered. Christian de Wet is said to have been in command in this engagement and in the actions of the following days on the Bloemfontein road.

The advance was continued next day (Monday, the 23rd), but very little progress was made, as the road ran among low bushy hills, and the Boer rearguard, under De Wet, again and again halted and showed fight. There were not six miles of road between the bivouacs of the Sunday and the Monday. In one of the skirmishes Colonel Brazier Creagh, who commanded Roberts's Horse, was mortally wounded at the head of his men. Late in the afternoon the Boers made a determined stand, and when night fell were still successfully holding a position that

deserted, and there was no sign of life at the waterworks. The mounted infantry approached them carefully, and found that they had been abandoned by the enemy. Singularly little damage had been done to the machinery and the pumping-station, perhaps because the Boers hoped soon to reoccupy Bloemfontein and therefore did not wish permanently to destroy its water supply. Only a few valves had been removed from the engines, and the main had been broken in one place. All the damage could be easily repaired.

A small garrison was left at the waterworks, and General Hamilton ordered the rest of his troops to withdraw to bivouacs on the other side of Koorn Spruit. As the troops retired, a few shells were fired at them at long range from the

east bank of the Modder, showing that the Boers still held the kopjes on the other side of the drift of the Thaba 'Nchu road. This random rring was taken as an indication that the enemy would not make any prolonged stand on the hills beyond the river, for throughout the campaign, when the Boers meant to offer a determined resistance, it was their custom to conceal the position of their guns till the last moment.

On the Tuesday morning Hamilton placed his guns in position near the waterworks and shelled the hills across the river, while Smith-Dorrien's infantry battalions crossed the drift and formed for attack, and 1,700 of the mounted infantry, crossing higher up, began to work round the Boer left. The enemy fired a few cannon-shots while these preparations to turn him out were in progress, and as soon as they were complete he slipped away to the eastward and occupied another line of kopjes, a few miles further up the road to Thaba 'Nchu and completely commanding it. Hamilton contented himself with occupying the hills along the east side of the Modder, and made no attempt at pursuit.

On the Tuesday Pole-Carew was fighting all day, De Wet engaging in several brief rearguard actions in very favourable country. That evening the British halted at Slangfontein Farm, only twelve miles north-west of De Wet's Dorp. It was confidently expected that next day would see De Wet and Louis Botha as completely surrounded near De Wet's Dorp as Cronje had been at Paardeberg. For three days Rundle had been exchanging a desultory artillery fire with them along a semicircle of hills to the south and west of the village. Pole-Carew now hoped to drive in De Wet's small rearguard from the northward, while French with his cavalry swept round to the eastward and cut off all chance of retreat in that direction.

But French should have made this move and seized the crossings of the Modder on the Tuesday. On the Wednesday morning it was too late. During the night between Tuesday and Wednesday Botha silently evacuated De Wet's Dorp. His march would lie, for the first five or six miles, by a waggon-track that leads across the Modder, passes to the north of a mass of kopjes known as Paul Smitsberg, and then enters the hills and strikes northward through very broken country to Thaba 'Nchu. The only place where cavalry could deal rapidly and effectually with them would be in the first four

or five miles across the comparatively open ground of the Modder valley. Once over this the Boers would have, on every mile of the road, a splendid position for a rearguard action. The dangerous ground was safely crossed in the night. Towards morning De Wet cleared his small force away from Pole-Carew's front, and, marching to the eastward, joined Botha on the hill-track from De Wet's Dorp to Thaba 'Nchu.

On the morning of Wednesday, the 27th, the day when it was hoped the Boers would be caught between hammer and anvil, there was a strange silence in the enemy's entrenchments around De Wet's Dorp, and soon after sunrise Rundle discovered that the place had been abandoned, and marched in and took possession of it. He was told by the townsfolk that there never had been more than 6,000 Boers in the place. Pole-Carew, advancing from Slangfontein, was surprised to find no enemy in his front, and early in the day signallers on the hills in front told him of the occupation of De Wet's Dorp. French's cavalry, sweeping round to the left to seize the crossings of the Modder, met some mounted infantry sent out by Rundle to make sure of the enemy's line of retreat. The huge net had been spread round De Wet's Dorp, but Botha, De Wet, and all their men and guns were many miles outside of it. There was still a faint hope of their line of retreat being cut near Thaba 'Nchu. Rundle followed them up along the De Wet's Dorp road, while Ian Hamilton, with Smith-Dorrien's infantry brigade, advanced directly against Thaba 'Nchu, French's two cavalry brigades moving to his assistance by the line of the Modder River. The Boers abandoned the village, but held the great masses of hills that command it until De Wet and Botha had joined them.

On Thursday, April 26th, Ian Hamilton found the Boers in position on his line of advance at the pass of Israel's Poort, six miles from Thaba 'Nchu. They held a line of kopjes which formed a barrier across the valley by which he was marching. He deployed the Canadian Infantry and the Grahamstown Volunteers as if for a frontal attack and bombarded the kopjes with his two batteries. Masked behind this screen of extended infantry and guns in action, he moved the remaining three battalions of Smith-Dorrien's brigade to the left, and they gained the crest of a long ridge projecting from the Boer right. Meanwhile his mounted infantry, under Colonel Ridley, had swept round to the further side of the ridge and menaced the

Boer line of retreat. Under this pressure they abandoned the kopjes and retired hastily through Thaba 'Nchu to the hills beyond it. Hamilton occupied the village that afternoon. Next day French arrived with the cavalry and, as Ian Hamilton's senior in rank, took up the direction of the operations.

The Boers held Thaba 'Nchu Mountain, a great crescent-shaped ridge of precipitous heights immediately to the north-east of the village. From our earlier occupation of Thaba 'Nchu it was known that the ground just behind the ridge was fairly open. Here the Boers had their laagers. Local native report said that they were in great force, but this the Intelligence Officers for some reason refused to believe. Along the lower ridges to their right the Boers had extended a weak screen of detached parties, to prevent the British at Thaba 'Nchu seeing what they were doing behind the mountain.

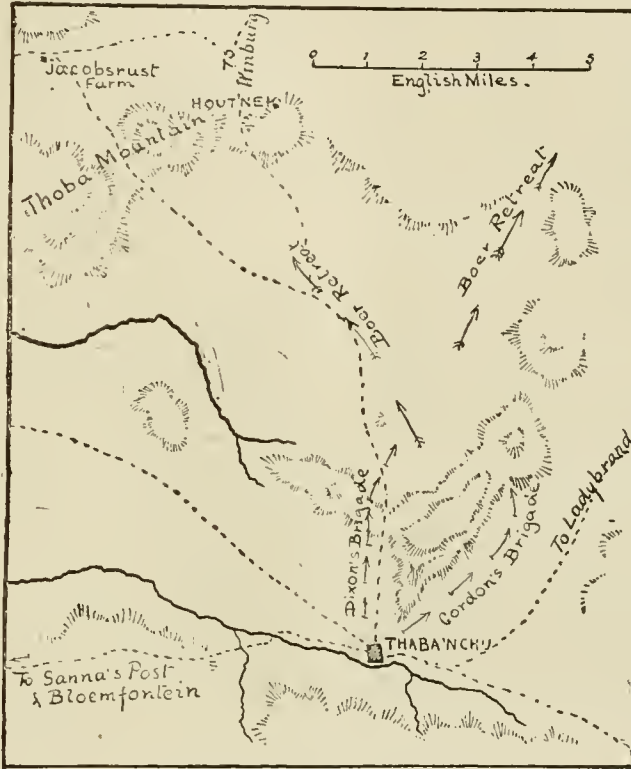
Rundle's division was expected to arrive on the evening of the 27th, and French had decided to drive the Boers from Thaba 'Nchu Mountain next day by a double movement round their flanks. On the afternoon of the 27th he sent Kitchener's Horse, a company of the Lincoln Mounted Infantry, and two Maxims to seize a small hill on the first ridge west of the mountain and north of the village. The Boers posted there abandoned the hill without fighting, and it was occupied by the detachment. Their orders were to hold it through the night, but for some reason the plan was changed late in the day, and at sunset the party began to retire on Thaba 'Nchu. The Boers were on the alert, and as soon as the hill was abandoned they re-

occupied it, and then made a fierce attack on the little column in the twilight. The detachment had to halt and fight hard to extricate themselves. The firing was heard at Thaba 'Nchu, and the Gordon Highlanders were sent out to their support. But by some strange chance, though the Gordons had only a few miles to go to the northward, they missed their way in the broken

ground, turned round a half circle, and finally occupied another hill five miles to the southward. Nothing was heard of them till the following afternoon, and their disappearance caused much painful anxiety. Happily Kitchener's Horse and the mounted infantry extricated themselves unaided and got safely back to Thaba 'Nchu late in the evening.

French's plan for next day's fight was that Ian Hamilton, with Smith-Dorrien's brigade of the mounted

infantry, was to occupy the long ridge to the west of the mountain. He was thus to open the way for General Dickson's cavalry brigade, with horse artillery and pom-poms, to pass round the western spur of the mountain. At the same time Gordon's cavalry brigade, with the rest of the horse artillery, was to make a wide détour to the eastwards, and force a defile on that side of the mountain which it was believed was very lightly held. Dickson and Gordon were to converge behind the mountain, cutting in upon the Boer line of retreat and enclosing all who did not get quickly away, in the plain between their squadrons and the concave line of precipices that formed that side of Mount Thaba 'Nchu. Rundle had just arrived with his division, but the men were tired with a long march, and he decided to leave the general direction of the action to French, he



ACTIONS AT THABA 'NCHU AND HOUTNEK.

himself occupying the village and employing part of his force in a demonstration against the Boer front.

The day began well. Hamilton sent Smith-Dorrien's brigade (three battalions, for the Gordons were still missing) directly against the hill that Kitchener's Horse had occupied the day before, and sent Ridley with the mounted infantry round it to the westward. Assailed in front and flank, the Boer detachment on the hill retired and the first ridge was won.

At nine o'clock French, with Dickson's brigade and the horse artillery and pom-poms, passed between Ian Hamilton's position and the mountain and began to drive the Boers from ridge after ridge, moving first north and then east, so as to work round the western spur of the Thaba 'Nchu heights. At last the open ground behind the mountain was coming into sight. Groups of Boer horsemen were seen riding in scattered formation across the front of the brigade. The artillery opened on them, bringing here and there a rider or horse to the ground, but most of them got away and rallied at an isolated hill to the left of the line of advance, where they found some cover.

Pushing on, the cavalry reached a point between this hill and the concave bay formed by the back of the mountain. On the open ground to the right front three or four hundred of the enemy were riding about as if uncertain where to turn. A heliograph message was sent back to Ian Hamilton asking him to come up in support and help to secure as prisoners the enemy whose retreat was cut off. Hamilton hurried up with his mounted infantry, a battery, and some of Smith-Dorrien's brigade, and, with this force guarding his flank and rear, Dickson dashed forward to reach the open ground. He hoped to see Gordon's brigade riding to meet him from behind the eastern shoulder of Thaba 'Nchu Mountain. All that was left of the Boers would then be caught in a trap.

And here we must quote the graphic narrative of Mr. Churchill, who had ridden forward with Dickson's squadrons. "The whole brigade advanced nearly another mile. At length we overtopped a smooth ridge, and found ourselves looking right into the bay or horseshoe of mountains. Now at last we must see Gordon. 'There he is,' cried several voices, and looking in the direction shown I saw a majestic body of horse streaming out of the centre of the bay towards the north-west. But was it Gordon? At least 4,000 mounted men

were riding across our front, hardly two miles away. Surely no brigade was so numerous. Yet the array was so precise that I could not believe them Boers. Boers, however, their numbers proved them to be, and not their numbers alone, for before we had watched this striking spectacle long, two large puffs of smoke leapt from the tail of the hostile column, and two well-aimed shells burst near our horse battery. At the same time patrols from our left rear hurried in with the news that the Boers who had already escaped from our imagined trap were advancing in force, with two more guns, to cut us from the rest of the army. As for Gordon, there was no longer any doubt about his fortunes. Far away to the eastward the horseshoe wall of mountains dipped to a pass, and on the sides of this gateway little puffs of smoke, dirty brown against the darkening sky, showed that Gordon was still knocking with his artillery at the door, and had never been able to debouch in the plains behind it. Moreover, the dangerous hour of twilight was not long distant. Dickson determined to retreat while time remained, and did so without any unnecessary delay. Whereat the Boers came down on our rear and flank, opening furious fire at long range, and galloping eagerly forward, so that the brigade and its guns, so far from entrapping the enemy, were all but entrapped themselves; indeed, the brigadier's mess-cart, the regimental water-carts, and several other little things, which being able only to trot could not 'conform to the general movement,' were snapped up by the enemy, who now pressed on exulting."

Ian Hamilton covered the retreat of Dickson's brigade by checking the dangerous flank attack. As the fighting had been chiefly at long ranges there were few casualties. The Boers had checked the flanking movement on their left and roughly handled the cavalry brigade that broke in upon their right. Then the Boer army fell back partly along the Ladybrand road and partly northwards to take up a new position at Houtnek to check the British advance on that side. The force on the Ladybrand road remained in position until Olivier had made good his retreat from Wepener, and then retained possession for a few days longer of the fertile valleys on the Basuto border, from which the Boers were carrying off to the northward immense quantities of cattle and corn.

Wepener had been relieved indirectly in consequence of the Boer retreat from De Wet's Dorp, and directly by the advance of Brabant

and Hart from Aliwal North. The garrison, a few hundred Colonials, had made a gallant defence for more than three weeks, from April 4th to the 26th. They worked and fought by day and by night with spade and rifle, suffering heavy loss, living on short rations, and keeping at bay, along a line that extended for miles, a greatly superior force of the enemy. More than one attempt to rush the trenches in the dark was repulsed. On April 24th the Boers fought an action south of the town against the relieving force. Driven from their position the Boers fell back on their lines round Wepener and raised the siege in the early hours of the 26th. They carried off all their guns and retired along the Ladybrand road, checking the attempt made by Brabant to pursue them.

Louis Botha had halted at Houtnek, to the north of Thaba 'Nchu. Here he could threaten the flank of any advance towards Ladybrand, and so indirectly helped Olivier to make good his retreat from Wepener. De Wet had fallen back more directly towards Ladybrand, and was ready to co-operate more closely with Olivier.

Altogether the events that occurred in April in the south-east corner of the Orange Free State formed a very disappointing episode in the campaign. The Boers had profited by the temporary breakdown of Lord Roberts's mounted troops to take the offensive, and though their counterstroke had not secured all the far-reaching results that the more sanguine among them hoped for, it had been crowned with a very fair measure of success. It had been supposed after the occupation of Bloemfontein that the resistance of the Free State burghers was at an end. Not only journalists and public men at home gave expression to this view; it was put forward with confidence by war correspondents and officers at the front in their letters to England. It was not unnatural that this sanguine view of the situation should be generally accepted, for there was a widely held theory that the Free State men, who for long years had had no native wars to trouble them, and had never been as a nation involved in a conflict with England, were less warlike than their northern neighbours of the Transvaal. It was thought that they had been dragged into a quarrel in which they had no real part by the personal ambition of President Steyn and his adherents; that they were reluctant allies of the Transvaal burghers, and were only waiting for the chance to make their peace with England

and return to their homes. But the events of April, 1900, completely disillusioned even the warmest advocates of these comfortable theories. The men who had fought at Sanna's Post and Reddersburg, at De Wet's Dorp, Wepener, and Thaba 'Nchu, against the conquerors of Bloemfontein were almost to a man Free State burghers. The exceptions were mostly Dutch rebels from beyond the Orange River, and all the leaders were Free State commandants. They had shown more enterprise and initiative than any of the Transvaal leaders had yet displayed. They had swept boldly forward into territory that was supposed to be completely pacified. They had secured as tangible results of their operations a thousand prisoners, seven guns, and a great store of cattle and corn. They had rallied numerous recruits to their banners. Then, threatened by forces outnumbering them many times, and led by men whose names were famous in the recent history of our army, the burghers had fallen back, fighting, without losing a prisoner, a gun, or a waggon.

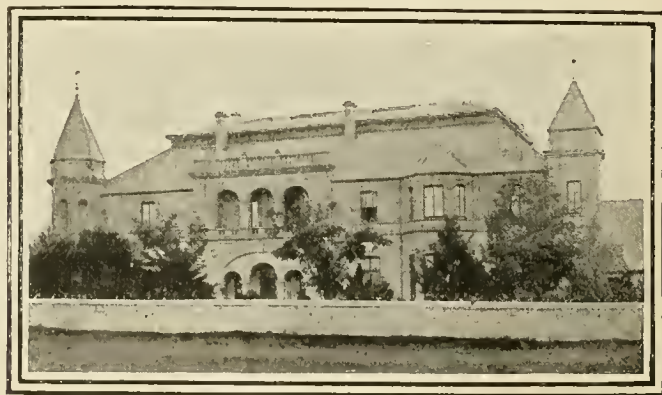
There is no doubt that the experience of the Free State leaders during their four weeks' raid into the De Wet's Dorp district and the Basuto borderland was a powerful encouragement to them and to their followers to continue the unequal struggle. It destroyed the temporary impression of powerlessness before a disciplined army of superior numbers which had followed the raising of the siege of Kimberley and the capture of Cronje at Paardeberg, and which had made the occupation of Bloemfontein such an easy operation for the invaders of the Free State. It is difficult to understand why the burgher leaders were allowed to hold on so long in the country they had raided. It is one of the mysteries of this South African War why, with Bloemfontein full of troops, the Boers were left in possession of the waterworks a few miles away. Every day they held them cost more lives than have been lost in many of our battles in the Boer War, for with the good water cut off, typhoid fever was raging among the captors of the Free State capital. Had the waterworks been promptly attacked and retaken, many a life would have been saved and weeks of misery would have been spared to thousands. Had their recapture been followed by the reoccupation of Thaba 'Nchu by a strong force, and an advance along the Ladybrand road, the Boers must have retired at once with a prospect of having to fight for their line of retreat. If they hesitated to go, the door would have been closed

behind them. Instead of all this, an elaborate attempt was made to surround them at De Wet's Dorp, and we have seen how easily they slipped out of the net.

On the evening of April 28th Roberts ordered Rundle and Brabant to clear the country of the enemy on his right flank by advancing on Senekal ; Chermiside, with the 3rd Division, was to protect the railway in the south of the Free State ; Kelly-Kenny, with the 6th Division, was to hold Bloemfontein. The rest of the army, which had been recently operating round Bloemfontein and in the south-east of the Free State, was to advance northwards on Kroonstad. This advance was to be made in two columns. The left column, under Lord Roberts's immediate command, was to march along the railway by the road through Brandfort. It was to be made up

of the 7th Division (Tucker), the 11th (Pole-Carew), French's cavalry, and a brigade of mounted infantry. The right column, under General Ian Hamilton, was to advance from Thaba 'Nchu by way of Winburg, to the east of the railway. It was to be made up of the remainder of the mounted infantry, the 9th Division (Colvile), and a brigade of infantry under General Bruce Hamilton. The Boer forces on these two lines of advance were reported to be at Brandfort, under Delarey, and at Houtnek, under Louis Botha.

Before telling the story of the successful march northwards from Bloemfontein in May, we must briefly note the events that had been occurring on the western border of the Free State and in Natal during the month of April.



THE PRESIDENCY, BLOEMFONTEIN.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

EVENTS IN NATAL AND IN THE WEST DURING THE MONTH OF APRIL.

AFTER the relief of Ladysmith, the Boers in Natal had fallen back upon the line of the Biggarsberg. They were seriously weakened by the large numbers of men that had been sent into the Free State, and the line of hills which they occupied was far too extensive a position for the force at their disposal. Louis Botha was at first in command. When, at the end of March, he was summoned to Pretoria to take Joubert's place as generalissimo of the Boer armies, he handed over the Natal command to his brother, Christian Botha. At the beginning of March there were perhaps 10,000 Boers on the Biggarsberg. By the end of April they had been reduced to 7,000 by further drafts being sent into the Free State. They had a good many guns with them, two Long Toms, and several field pieces and pom-poms. To use a familiar phrase, they played a very successful game of bluff against General Buller from the end of February till the second week of May, ten weeks in all, and for some time gave him the idea that they had been strongly reinforced from the Transvaal. There is very little doubt that if he had advanced boldly immediately after the relief of Ladysmith, he could have easily cleared the country up to Laing's Nek of the invaders. He did not begin his advance till May 10th, and he then moved by order of Lord Roberts. It is possible that he had been told to remain quiet in his positions immediately north of Ladysmith during the preceding ten weeks. It is difficult otherwise to account for his long inaction, considering the large force he had at his disposal. Even after Hunter's division had been sent away in March, he had with him three infantry divisions and four mounted brigades, or about 30,000 men, with 120 guns.

After the relief of Ladysmith and the Boer retirement to the Biggarsberg, Buller had occupied a crescent-shaped line of heights north of the rescued town, with his centre at Elands-laagte, his right thrown back along the line of the Sundays River, and his left towards Ladysmith.

The Boers held a much longer line, concave toward the British. Their right rested on the Drakensberg, of which they still held all the passes as far south as Basutoland; their centre at the pass below the heights of Mount Hlatikulu, where the road and railway run through the Biggarsberg; their left at Helpmakaar. Their main strength was in the centre, where they had elaborately entrenched the heights commanding the pass, and where most of their artillery was concentrated. By keeping most of their men and guns at this point they made their retreat secure, as they had behind them the railway to Glencoe and Laing's Nek and the only good road in northern Natal. They never had any intention of making a prolonged resistance on the Biggarsberg, and, as a matter of fact, they were surprised at being allowed to hold it so long.

At the end of March there were some indications in Buller's camp of a forward move. Transport was being put in order, and some hundreds of stretcher-bearers were brought up from Pietermaritzburg; but after some days of excitement and anticipation, the plan of advancing—whatever it was—was given up, and the officers were told that there were orders to remain on the defensive. On the morning of Tuesday, April 10th, the Boers suddenly became aggressive. Everything had been so quiet for weeks that there was general surprise when the guns opened fire from the spurs of the Biggarsberg. The Leicester and Liverpool Regiments were busy moving to new camping-grounds. The Queen's Regiment was on parade, practising the attack formation as if they were at Aldershot, when suddenly seven of the Boer guns opened from the hills on the other side of the Sundays River, and shells began to burst in the camp. Hurriedly orders were given to strike all the tents except those of the hospitals on which the Red Cross flags were flying. The naval guns were brought into action against the Boer battery, and the troops took up positions to resist a possible attack.

For nearly six hours the cannonade went on,

very little damage being done on either side. One Boer gun was dismantled, and a bursting shell killed two and wounded three of the Naval Brigade. All along the British front the pickets were on the alert, but there was no advance of the enemy.

Mr. Nevinson, of the *Chronicle*, who was with the outposts, relates a curious incident that occurred during the action:—

“Four horsemen,” he says, “suddenly appeared, calmly walking up the further side of the river at about 1,000 yards from us. They were well within Boer fire also, and we wondered at their courage, for we took them for our own scouts, the uniform of our Irregulars being much the same as the Boer dress at the distance. The horsemen had to ride some distance before they found a convenient crossing. They crossed and rode straight up the front of the reddish kopje where our men were. Probably they were in dead ground or got into some donga, where in the end they may have left their horses. From us they disappeared for about a quarter of an hour, and then, to our astonishment, they came leisurely walking their horses back again, and recrossed the river. I called to the corporal of picket that they were Boers, but he still hesitated to fire, thinking they must be our own men. Next moment we saw them cantering easily away into the Boer lines. No doubt they had thoroughly reconnoitred our position and numbers, and enjoyed the reward of their coolness and deliberate courage.”

Soon after two o'clock the enemy ceased firing. The entire loss on the British side was four killed, eight wounded, and three of Thorneycroft's Horse captured whilst scouting on the left flank. In the evening, Buller withdrew his camps out of artillery range of the hills, leaving only a line of pickets watching the south bank of the Sundays River.

Early in April two brigades were sent away to Cape Colony under the command of General Hunter. After the cannonading on the Sundays River, things were quiet at the front for nearly a fortnight. There was a little skirmishing occasionally between scouting parties, but the guns were silent until early on the morning of Saturday, the 21st, when the Boers began another bombardment. This time the enemy's target was the colliery buildings at Elands-laagte, from which the shells scared away the native labourers. On the Monday work was resumed at the colliery, and the Boers did not interfere with it again.

At the end of the month everything was quiet at the front. The general belief in the British lines was that a very large Boer force was holding the Biggarsberg. Reconnaissances sent westward towards the Drakensberg and eastward towards Helpmakaar always found their way barred by bodies of mounted Boers, who acted boldly, as if they had plenty of support behind them. The troops were tired of the long waiting, but the health of the camp was generally good. The typical South African sickness had, however, broken out among the horses, and everyone was disappointed at the mildness of the season, for it was hoped that the first frosts of the coming winter would put an end to this dreaded horse-sickness.

During the month of April very little progress was made on the western border of the Free State, where Lord Methuen was in command, with his headquarters at Kimberley. It will be remembered that after the raising of the siege a considerable portion of the Boer army, with the greater part of their artillery, had retired northwards to the crossing of the Vaal at Fourteen Streams, where they entrenched themselves on the north bank. Methuen moved up a brigade of infantry to Warrenton, on the south side of the crossing, and sent some guns there, and for weeks a desultory artillery duel was carried on across the river. There were frequent rumours that a British force had crossed the Vaal above or below the Boer position, but it does not appear that even an attempt was made to effect a crossing. So secure did the Boers feel at Fourteen Streams that they sent away some of their men and guns, by way of Klerksdorp, to reinforce the main Boer army on the Kroonstad line. The fact was that Lord Methuen had not a sufficient force at his disposal to engage in any serious operations. The country round Kimberley was disturbed by roving commandoes of Boers, and he had to make use of some regiments of the newly arrived Imperial Yeomanry to keep them in check. It had been hoped that as soon as Kimberley was relieved a column would have been sent northwards to raise the siege of Mafeking; but Lord Roberts decided that nothing could be done in this direction until the month of May.

Meanwhile Lord Methuen planned and carried out some minor expeditions against the Boer commandoes in the west of the Free State. In the first week of April he learned that a small party of the enemy, under Colonel Villebois de Mareuil, was moving by Boshof towards Jacobsdal

and set out with a column composed of a battery of artillery, the Kimberley Light Horse, and four companies of the Imperial Yeomanry, to attack him. Villebois de Mareuil had been with the Boers on the Tugela in December; in January he joined Cronje's headquarters at Magersfontein, and we have seen how he tried in vain to warn him of his danger when Lord Roberts invaded the Free State. The French colonel accompanied Cronje in the retreat to

ignorant of the country, they moved along well-known routes where it was impossible to conceal their march. Methuen's column came up with them in the neighbourhood of Boshof, and the handful of volunteers took post on a kopje, Villebois de Mareuil declaring that he would not be taken alive, and calling upon his comrades to fight to the death.

They were shelled by Methuen's battery, while the Yeomanry and the Kimberley Light Horse



3RD BATTALION MIDDLESEX REGIMENT MANNING THE TRENCHES BEFORE JONONOS KOP, APRIL 10TH.

Paardeberg, and was one of those who escaped from the laager on the night before the surrender. Finding that his advice was not taken at the Boer headquarters, and that he had little influence among the Dutchmen, he asked and received permission to form a flying column of foreign volunteers and attempt some enterprise against the western railway line. He organised his party at Klerksdorp, and marched by Hoopstad to Boshof. He had only about eighty men with him, all of them European volunteers—Frenchmen, Russians, and Germans. They had a quantity of explosives and tools in a cart, which also carried a reserve of provisions. Being

extended to right and left and completely surrounded them. The situation was hopeless, but they fought until Villebois de Mareuil was killed, and then the white flag was raised. None of the little party escaped. Seventeen were killed, eight wounded, and fifty-four taken prisoners. The British loss was only two killed (Captain Cecil Boyle and Sergeant Patrick Campbell, of the Imperial Yeomanry) and seven or eight wounded. Lord Methuen paid military honours to the dead French soldier, whose body was covered with a tricolour; and he erected a monument on his grave, the inscription on which told how he had

"died on the field of honour at Boshof on April 5th."

In the following week he made a less successful expedition to clear the country of the enemy to the north of Boshof. A column composed of the Imperial Yeomanry and Northampton Regiment, with two guns, marched out to Zwartkopjesfontein, on the Hoopstad road, but had to retire to Boshof, as the country was found to be swarming with the enemy, who nearly captured the convoy. After this, Lord Methuen confined his activity to the Boshof and Kimberley district, General Paget at Warrenton continuing the bombardment of the Boer position at Fourteen Streams.

In the last week of April General Hunter arrived at Kimberley with one of his brigades, and another followed in the first week of May. This raised the force on the western border to two infantry divisions, with several companies of mounted infantry and a large number of guns. In the month of May, while Roberts advanced on Kroonstad and Johannesburg, the western force was pushed across the Vaal and a flying

column sent north to the relief of Mafeking. The story of these operations will be told in a later chapter. In order to complete our brief record of what was happening in various parts of the theatre of war in the month of April, we may note that, by arrangement with the Portuguese Government, a force of about 5,000 Colonial troops, including a battery of Canadian artillery, was landed at Beira and sent by rail to Umtali in Rhodesia, and then forwarded by the Rhodesian railways to Marandellas, on the Salisbury Railway. Thence they were to march to Bulawayo, from which they could proceed by railway to the north-western frontier of the Transvaal, or by road to Fort Tuli on its northern border. Sir Frederick Carrington commanded this force. The object of the expedition was said to be to prevent the Boers from trekking into Rhodesia when driven northwards by Roberts's advance. Part of the force was used to reinforce Colonel Plumer, who since the month of January had been trying to fight his way to Mafeking along the Bulawayo railway.



THE MARKET PLACE, LADYSMITH.



CROSSING A SPRUIT.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE MAIN ADVANCE RESUMED.

AT the end of April Lord Roberts, having disposed of the Boer raiders in the south-east of the Free State and completed the reorganisation of his army, resumed his advance northwards from Bloemfontein. We have indicated in a previous chapter the general plan of the advance, but we may remind the reader that the following was the way in which Lord Roberts distributed his forces. The 6th Division was to hold Bloemfontein, the 3rd was to guard the railway south of it, the 8th was to advance towards Senekal, clearing the country to the eastward. The rest of the army in the Free State was to march northwards in two columns. The left or main column, under Lord Roberts himself, was to move by the direct Kroonstad road, and it was made up of the 7th and 11th Divisions, French's cavalry, and a brigade of mounted infantry. The right column, under Ian Hamilton, made up of the rest of the mounted infantry, a cavalry brigade, and the 9th Infantry Division, was to march by Thaba 'Nchu along the Winburg road.

It would protect the right flank of the general advance, the flank on which the enemy was strongest, and once the Boers had been driven from its front it would turn the left of any position they might take up on the main road south of Winburg.

All available information seemed to indicate that the enemy would make no determined stand south of Kroonstad, where they were said to be fortifying a strong position. They had a force, under Delarey, in Lord Roberts's front at Brandfort, about eighteen miles from the British outposts at Karee siding. Louis Botha was in command of another advanced force at Houtnek, north of Thaba 'Nchu on the Winburg road.

The first fighting took place on this side. Ian Hamilton had with him at Thaba 'Nchu only a portion of the force which was to compose his column. The troops actually present when he marched off at daybreak on April 30th were Ridley's brigade of mounted infantry, two batteries of artillery, and the 10th Infantry Brigade under Smith-Dorrien. His first ob-

jective was the village of Jacobsrust, where he was to be joined by Bruce Hamilton's infantry brigade, Broadwood's cavalry brigade, three more batteries, and two heavy guns of the siege train. But between him and Jacobsrust lay the pass of Houtnek, "two parallel grassy ridges separated by a smooth shallow valley a little more than a mile across, and devoid of cover." On the eastern flank the pass was protected by rocky kopjes, on the west by a great mountain mass, and Houtnek was held by a small Boer force under Louis Botha.

Hamilton had made up his mind to force the pass by threatening it in front with his infantry brigade, and sending forward his Colonial Mounted Infantry to make a turning movement well to the left and seize Thoba Mountain, on which the Boer right rested. Kitchener's Horse succeeded in obtaining a footing on the hill, and then Smith-Dorrien moved part of his infantry to the left to support them, sending up in succession the Gordons, four companies of the Canadian infantry, and two of the Shropshires. The rest of the infantry, supported by the artillery, engaged the Boers in front, while the remainder of the mounted infantry guarded the right.

The Boers, who had at first expected to have to meet only the usual frontal attack, soon recognised that the action would be decided by the possession of Thoba Mountain on their flank, and began to push forward reinforcements to the small party they had originally posted among the rocks, and Thoba Mountain became the scene of some particularly sharp fighting.

"At first," writes Mr. Churchill, who witnessed the fight, "our troops made good progress, but as the enemy received continual reinforcements their resistance became more severe, until presently far from gaining ground we began to lose it. At last, about two o'clock, some one hundred and fifty of the German corps of the Boer force advanced from the northern point of Thoba in four lines across the table top to drive the British off the hill. So regular was their order that it was not until their levelled rifles were seen pointing south that they were recognised as foes and the artillery opened on them. In spite of an accurate shell-fire they continued to advance boldly against the highest part of the hill, and, meanwhile, cloaked by a swell of the ground, Captain Towse, of the Gordon Highlanders, with twelve of his own regiment and ten of Kitchener's Horse, was steadily moving towards them. The scene on the broad stage of

the Thoba plateau was intensely dramatic. The whole army were the witnesses. The two forces, strangely disproportioned, drew near to each other. The unexpected collision impended. From every point field-glasses were turned on the spectacle, and even hardened soldiers held their breath. At last, with suddenness, both parties came face to face at fifty yards distance. The Germans, who had already made six prisoners, called loudly on Captain Towse and his little band to surrender. What answer was returned is not recorded, but a furious splutter of musketry broke out at once, and in less than a minute the long lines of the enemy recoiled in confusion, and the top of the hill was secured to the British. Among the foreigners wounded in this encounter was Captain Maximoff. Captain Towse, for his conspicuous gallantry, and for the extraordinary results which attended it, was recommended for the Victoria Cross; but in gaining what is above all things precious to a soldier he lost what is necessary to a happy life, for in the moment when his military career was assured by a brilliant feat of arms, it was terminated by a bullet which, striking him sideways, blinded him in both eyes." In the following July the blind hero of the fight on Thoba Mountain was received by the Queen at Windsor, and decorated by her own hands with the coveted cross "For Valour."

The struggle for the hill-top was again and again renewed during the afternoon, and when night fell the battle was still undecided. The British only held part of Thoba, and the Boers on the other flank were threatening their right. Ian Hamilton ordered the men to bivouac on the ground they occupied, and to be prepared to renew the fight at sunrise on May Day.

Next morning the British were strongly reinforced. Two regiments of cavalry, a battalion of infantry, and a battery joined Ian Hamilton from Thaba 'Nchu, and his other brigade, under Bruce Hamilton, was coming within striking distance of the Boer right. Ian Hamilton sent the cavalry with a battery of horse artillery to make a wide détour round to the westward of Thoba Mountain. Meanwhile the summit was cleared of the Boers by Smith-Dorrien's infantry, and as soon as the turning movement of the mounted troops had made sufficient progress he attacked the Boer position on the right of the nek.

The enemy recognised that if they held on much longer their line of retreat would be in danger, and they fell back in the direction of



HILL STREET, BLOEMFONTEIN.
(Photo: W. A. Wright, Bloemfontein.)

Jacobrust, getting all their guns safely away. The 8th Hussars charged a party of the enemy on the left of the retreating commando and inflicted some slight loss upon them. The loss of the British in the two days' fighting was less than a hundred killed and wounded.

On the 2nd Ian Hamilton made a junction with his second brigade and continued his march towards Jacobrust. General Colville followed him in support with the Highland Brigade and the naval guns.

On the same day Lord Roberts, with the main column, advanced from Karree Siding against Delarey's position at Brandfort. Between

The start was made at daybreak. One of the correspondents with the army gives a striking word picture of the start on the march northwards. "It is a memorable sight," he says, "to witness the on-moving of a great army in the grey light of a dawning day. Wherever the eye turns it falls upon animated groups busy making ready for the march. Camp fires are smouldering down, cooking-pots are being packed in long rows, rugs and coats are being rolled into stout bundles, rifles are being overhauled, men are donning their kits, horses are being harnessed, and the huge trek waggons piled with the heterogeneous baggage of ten thousand fighting



PARLIAMENT HOUSE, ORANGE FREE STATE.

Karree Siding and the little town the ground was absolutely open, and at Brandfort itself there was no position suited to Boer tactics. There was, indeed, a small group of kopjes, but both flanks were open veldt round which the British mounted troops could ride freely. The place had been held by the Boers for seven weeks merely as an outpost from which to watch the invading army at Bloemfontein.

The troops bivouacked on the veldt that night, and on the 3rd they cleared the Boers out of Brandfort after a brief action. Tucker, with the 7th Division, formed the right. One of his brigades (the 15th, under Wavell) marched along the railway directly upon Brandfort; the other (the 14th, under Maxwell), with a body of mounted infantry, moved to the east of it, so as to threaten the enemy's left flank. West of the railway marched Hutton's mounted infantry and Pole-Carew with the 11th Division, including the Guards Brigade. If the Boers made a stand it was to envelop their right.

men. High above the clattering noises of those preparations for the road resound the voices of the native drivers as they drag forward and inspan their teams of stubborn mules."

The C.I.V. infantry, who had the place of honour in the front of Wavell's brigade, were the first in action. They were fired on from a flat-topped hill on their right front, and then a gun opened from another small kopje directly on the line of advance. Wavell formed for attack, but the Boers must have thought he was showing a strange reluctance to come on. But he was using his brigade only to hold them where they were till the enveloping movement made some progress on both flanks. The Boers were soon aware of their danger. Suddenly the fire from the kopjes ceased, and the enemy were seen to be in swift retreat. A number of loud explosions told that they were blowing up every culvert and little bridge on the railway as they went. They had got their convoy away in good time, and they were soon all safe beyond

the Vet River. The troops marched on to Brandfort, and Lord Roberts established his headquarters in the little town. The action had cost neither side any serious loss. It was, in fact, a big skirmish, the first of a series of rearguard actions which the Boers fought as they retired northwards along the railway to Kroonstad.

On May 4th the mounted troops had some fighting on both lines of advance. On the right Ian Hamilton advanced as far as Welcome Farm, sixteen miles from Winburg. His cavalry had some skirmishing with the retreating Boers, in which Lord Airlie was slightly wounded while leading the 16th Lancers in the pursuit. On the left, in front of Lord Roberts's main advance,

ment. Away to the eastward Hamilton also crossed the Vet further up the stream, without meeting with any opposition, though the bold bluffs and high kopjes of the north bank offered a good position for Botha if he had wished to make a stand at the river.

Advancing from the crossing of the Vet on the morning of the 6th, Hamilton found that there was no enemy between him and the town of Winburg. He sent one of his staff officers to summon the place, and after some discussion it was evacuated by Philip Botha, a cousin of Louis Botha, who had ridden in that morning with a commando of 500 Boers. In the afternoon the mayor formally handed over possession of the



THE LAST PROCLAMATION OF PRESIDENT STEYN.

General Hutton reconnoitred up to the Vet River with the mounted infantry. He found the enemy still holding the south bank, and they fell back to the line of the river before him, fighting as they went, and occasionally bringing their guns into action. Close to the river they made a stand for some time, and inflicted a good deal of loss on the New Zealand Volunteers. Their attitude was so determined that everyone expected they would defend the crossing, but next morning it was found that they had all disappeared to the northward.

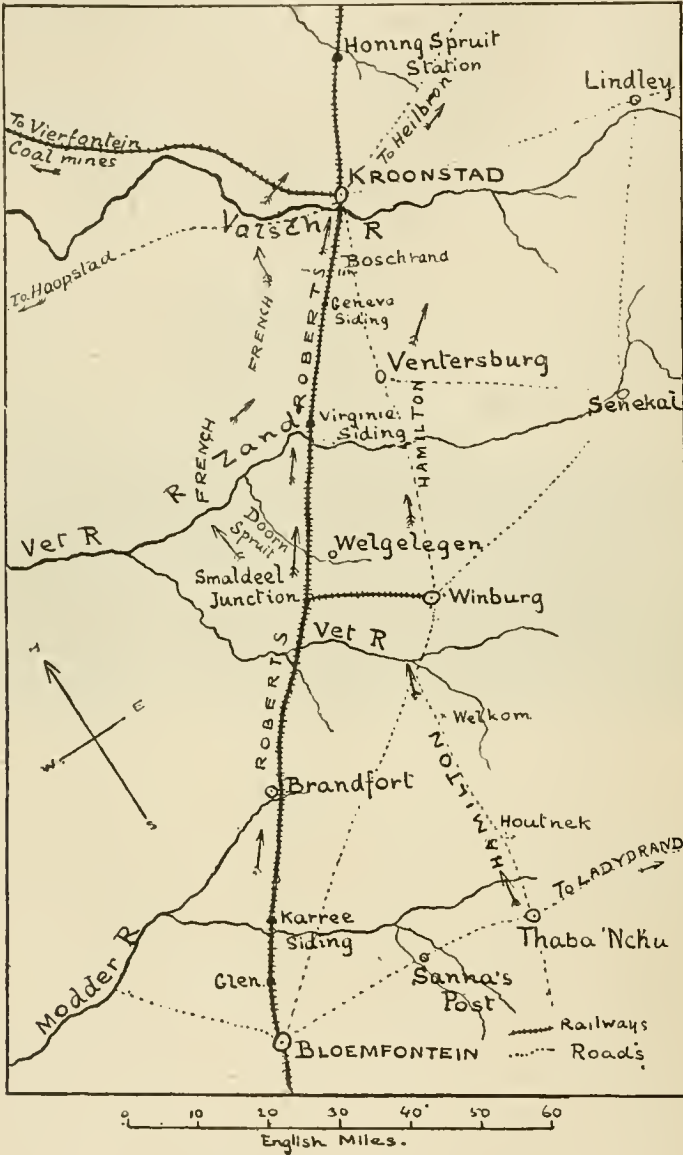
Next day Lord Roberts's main column marched across the drift of the Vet River, close to the broken railway bridge, and before noon had occupied Smaldeel junction, where the branch line goes off to Winburg. The Boers had destroyed the railway in several places, but at the junction they had abandoned some engines and a large number of railway trucks, which were a valuable prize for the transport depart-

ment. Thus, on Sunday, May 6th, Lord Roberts's two columns had reached the Smaldeel-Winburg line. Louis Botha and Delarey had joined their forces, and were retreating northward to the Zand River, Botha taking command of the combined force.

Lord Roberts halted during the Monday and Tuesday. The engineers were engaged in repairing the railway, and the transport was bringing up supplies. So far, only one brigade of French's cavalry had taken part in the advance. This was Broadwood's, which had been attached to Ian Hamilton's column on the right. The remainder of the division had been resting near Bloemfontein, and waiting to complete the work of substituting fresh remounts for the horses that had broken down. On Monday, the 7th, French marched with his cavalry from Bloemfontein, and next day joined Roberts at Smaldeel. During the rest of the advance the cavalry division formed the left wing of the army.

Hutton with his mounted infantry on the left, and Broadwood with his cavalry brigade on the right, had reconnoitred up to the Zand River, and found the enemy with several guns in force on the north bank. In May there is very little water in the Zand River, and as it

evening of Wednesday, the 6th, had his whole army concentrated near Welgelegen Siding, where the railway crosses the Doorn Spruit, a tributary of the Zand River. The crossing of the river at Virginia Siding was nine miles away to the northward.



THE ADVANCE TO KROONSTAD.

does not flow in a deep gully between high banks, but in a hollow of the veldt with easy slopes on both sides, it can be crossed almost anywhere. As the preliminary to forcing the passage, Lord Roberts drew in his right column nearer the railway line, leaving Colvile with the Highland Brigade to hold Winburg, and on the

The ground on the north bank of the Zand rises with a gentle slope from the river. The slope is broken by deep-cut watercourses, and there are numerous groups of farm buildings, each with its clump of trees and walled cattle enclosures. To the east of the railway bridge the ground near the river is covered with scrub,

and beyond it some low hills make the slope of the north bank more abrupt. At this point Botha had his left, but, instead of being placed anywhere near the river, his centre and right were thrown back from it diagonally along the high ground. The whole force he brought into action was estimated at not more than 6,000 men, with fifteen guns of various kinds. As usual with the Boers, the guns were not grouped in batteries, but placed singly here and there along the line. In his official telegram Lord Roberts said that the total length of the front held by the Boers was twenty miles. With such a small force, this long line was very lightly held. But the South African war has shown that with modern long-range weapons a comparatively small number of men, acting on the defensive, can hold a very extended front.

In fact, as weapons have improved, the number of men to the mile on a position has been rapidly diminishing. Wellington at Waterloo held about two miles of front with something like 50,000 men. In the battles of the Franco-German war there were from

5,000 to 10,000 men to the mile of front. In these South African battles, on the Boer side the proportion has frequently been as low as a few hundred men to the mile.

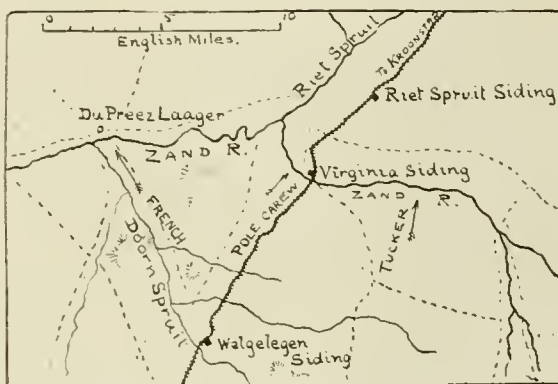
When he advanced, on the morning of May 10th, Lord Roberts hoped not only to force the passage of the river, but also to cut off the Boer retreat. With this object in view, while Pole-Carew crossed near the wrecked railway bridge (of which four out of five spans had been destroyed) and Tucker's division attacked the Boer left, French with the newly arrived cavalry division was to cross the river some miles to the west of the railway, sweep round the Boer right, and endeavour to seize Ventersburg Station, some miles to the rear of their position.

The actual crossing of the river by the two infantry divisions was effected without any difficulty. It was only when they began to deploy on the north bank that the Boer guns opened fire. Roberts then brought several batteries into action against the enemy's centre

and left. Far away to the right French had crossed with his cavalry at dawn. Porter, with the 1st Brigade, led the way, the Inniskillings being pushed well to the front. As they reached the high ground above the river, they saw approaching at short range three small columns of mounted men in khaki uniforms. They moved in such regular order that they were at first supposed to be some of our own mounted infantry. Just before they appeared Porter had sent back word to French that there was no sign of the enemy in front, and the Inniskillings did not realise that they were in the presence of Boers until the khaki-clad men suddenly halted at short range and poured in a deadly fire from their Mausers. The enemy were said to be the

newly raised regiment known as the Afrikaner Horse, each man of which was provided with a spare horse in order to enable the corps to make more rapid marches.

The Inniskilling scouts were driven in with a loss of fourteen killed and many wounded. The ground was favourable for dismounted tactics, and the enemy formed a strong firing line along



THE CROSSING OF THE ZAND RIVER.

the slope, and successfully kept Porter's brigade at bay. French now sent his 4th Brigade still farther to the westward, in the hope of at last getting outside the Boer right; but the enemy's scouts marked this new turning movement, and on their side another body of men was pushed out to check the cavalry. At this point the 8th Hussars and 7th Dragoons succeeded in charging and dispersing a body of about 300 Boers; but a number of the enemy galloped off to a piece of higher ground, dismounted there, and opened a well-directed fire upon the British cavalry, under cover of which their comrades retreated.

French now withdrew the 1st Brigade under cover of his horse batteries, brought it round behind the 4th Brigade, and then sent it out more than a mile to the westward, to make another attempt to get round the Boer flank. But again the cavalry found a screen of riflemen in their front. For the first time in the war the Boers were using the correct tactical method of foiling a turning movement by the cavalry—

by gradually extending successive bodies of mounted infantry behind and beyond the threatened flank. It was now between 12 and 1 o'clock, and the left and centre were retreating. Five heavy explosions told that the bridges on the railway were being blown up in succession as the last of the Boer trains passed over them. The Boer right fell back, protecting the exposed flank of the line of retreat, and French's horses were so tired with manœuvring on the battlefield that no pursuit was attempted. The British loss was about 200. Of that of the Boers no reliable estimate has ever been published, but it was probably less than that of the attacking

that President Steyn was with the retreating army, and that the burghers were greatly discouraged by their repeated failures to stop the British advance, and were anxious to abandon the struggle. As prisoners and deserters usually talk in a very depressed fashion about the army they have left, these statements were received by the Intelligence Department without attaching very much importance to them.

While the infantry closed up to Geneva Siding, Gordon pushed on six miles farther to Boschrand, or Boschplaats, where he found Botha's rear-guard again in position. Here the ground rises in a wide, grassy ridge, through which the rail-



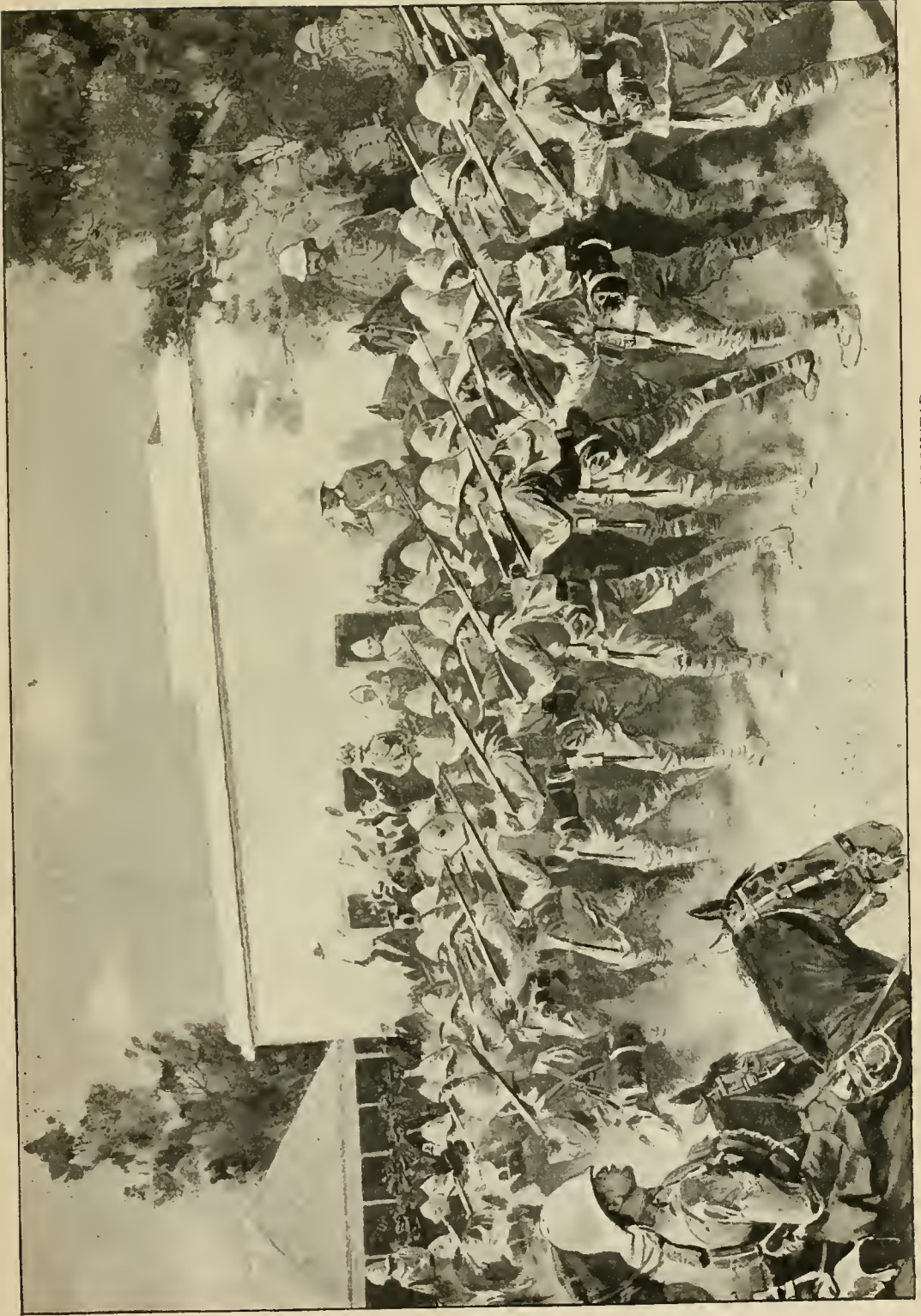
BOER PRISONERS AT KROONSTAD.

force. In the afternoon Hutton's mounted infantry pushed on to the town of Ventersburg, which lies some miles to the east of the railway, and found it had been abandoned by the enemy.

On the evening after the fight Lord Roberts's army bivouacked at Reit Spruit, eight miles north of the crossing of the Zand River. At dawn on the 11th the advance was resumed, the point to be reached that day being Geneva Siding, on the railway sixteen miles from Kroonstad. Gordon's cavalry brigade and Tucker's mounted infantry led the advance. At 7 a.m. Gordon occupied Ventersburg station. The buildings had been burned, and the railway track and the sidings completely wrecked. At noon Geneva Siding was reached. Here a number of Boer stragglers, who had waited behind to make their submission, laid down their arms and were made prisoners. They said

way runs in a deep and wide cutting. The rising ground is wooded in places, and broken with rocky bluffs. Here the Boers had some guns in position, and they had dug some trenches on the hillside. The trenches had been less carefully constructed than usual. The brown earth had been thrown up in a breastwork along the front of them, showing up sharply against the grass, and making a well-defined target for the Horse Artillery guns that Porter had brought up with him.

Keeping the cavalry and mounted infantry under cover behind a hill in advance of the heights held by the Boers, Porter shelled the Boer trenches with the twelve guns of J and R Batteries R.H.A. He drove the enemy out of some of their works and silenced their guns. Meanwhile Ian Hamilton, with a brigade of mounted infantry, was pushing forward on the east of the railway towards Lindley, and



THE GUARDS BRIGADE MARCHING THROUGH KROONSTAD

to the westward of the line French, with three cavalry brigades, was making a wide turning movement with the object of reaching the railway line north of Kroonstad before Botha's army could make good its retreat through the town. Lord Roberts was not anxious to hurry the Boers away from Boschrand, and Porter made no attempt to occupy the trenches there, and withdrew his guns in the course of the Friday afternoon. If the Boers would only make a stand there, there would be some chance of their being cut off and captured.

But Louis Botha was too good a soldier to run any such risks with his small force. He kept his rearguard in position only long enough to give time to withdraw his convoy and complete the wrecking of the railway. His whole object was to delay Roberts's advance, for he knew he had not sufficient force to attempt to do more than check it for awhile. His best-mounted troops were pushed out to guard his flanks on the east and west, and chiefly in the latter direction, for on that side French was operating with the cavalry division.

French was marching upon Bloemhof, a farm 20 miles west of Boschrand. His object was to seize and cross the drifts of the Valsch River to the west of Kroonstad and cut both the branch railway to Verfontein and the main line to the north. He was handicapped at the very start by a breakdown in his supply arrangements. "Already," says the *Times* correspondent, "his men and horses had been one day without food, as the transport had gone back to the main column on the Zand River." When the Valsch River was at last reached, it was found that the enemy had discovered and anticipated the flanking movement. A Boer force was in position to dispute the passage of the drifts. French made another attempt to cross still further west, and his weary horses covered nearly forty miles in ten hours. But still a screen of watchful Boer horsemen was in his front. The flanking movement had failed. As a last resource, the scout Burnham and Major Hunter-Weston, R.E., were sent out in the dark with a small mounted escort to get through the Boer lines and destroy the railway. They had to leave their escort, and by an adventurous night journey they reached the line near Virginia Siding and blew up a culvert. But it was too late; the last Boer train had just passed.

In the night between Friday, May 11th, and

Saturday, the 12th, Botha had withdrawn his rearguard from Boschrand. It retreated through Kroonstad, and as it withdrew a train provided with tools, explosives, and expert workers thoroughly destroyed the railway line. "As we advanced north from the Zand," says Mr. Donohoe, of the *Chronicle*, "we became aware that bridge-destroying and line-wrecking had passed into the hands of men who thoroughly understood the work and the practical handling of explosives. Previously it took the burghers any time from half a day to a week to demolish a bridge or blow out a section of the line. Now the explosive charge is always applied at the right place, and rarely fails. Throughout Thursday and Friday, as the British moved north, one could see the train with its brigade of wreckers, just out of range, steaming slowly north, keeping pace with our advance. A succession of explosions told too eloquently the fate of bridges and culverts shattered to atoms. For miles along the line from Zand River a forest of damaged rail-ends could be seen sticking upright, twisted into most fantastic shapes."

During the night between Friday and Saturday the station and goods sheds at Kroonstad were burned and great heaps of stores destroyed. The bridge over the Valsch River was blown up. The burghers moved off by rail and road to new positions at Honings Spruit and on the Rhenoster River. Mr. Steyn had left the town on Friday evening, after proclaiming Lindley his new capital.

At 9 a.m. on the Saturday Lieutenant Davis rode into Kroonstad with a patrol of the 17th Lancers. Mr. Robertson, the landrost, formally made his submission, the Free State flag was hauled down, and the Union Jack hoisted. At noon Lord Roberts rode in at the head of the Guards Brigade.

Thus, in eleven days, the first great stage in the advance from Bloemfontein to Pretoria—the 128 miles to Kroonstad—had been accomplished with only slight opposition from the Boer army. Lord Roberts halted at Kroonstad for ten days to rest his men, repair the railway, and accumulate supplies for the next stage of the advance. Meanwhile, on May 17th, Ian Hamilton, with the mounted infantry, occupied Lindley after a slight skirmish, and Mr. Steyn had removed his capital for the third time, the village of Vrede, in the extreme north-east of the Free State, being this time proclaimed the seat of his government.



A CORNER OF THE WOMEN'S LAAGER, MAFEKING.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE SIEGE AND RELIEF OF MAFEKING.

BEFORE following further the progress of Lord Roberts's advance on Pretoria, we must relate the important operations that were in progress in other parts of the theatre of war during the march on Kroonstad and the ten days' halt in the captured town. But before describing them in detail we must briefly indicate the general course of these events.

In the south of the Free State Rundle and Brabant had cleared the country immediately to the east of Thaba 'Nchu and to the north of Wepener, the Boers retiring as they advanced. In Natal, on the very day on which Kroonstad was occupied (May 12th), Sir Redvers Buller, by order of Lord Roberts, began the operations that resulted in the Boers being driven northwards from the Biggarsberg. In the west of the Transvaal, during the successful advance of the main army from Bloemfontein, Sir Archibald Hunter had crossed the Vaal with his division and a strong mounted force, and had organised and started off a flying column to the relief of Mafeking. Lord Methuen's division had at the same time marched from Boshof and occupied Hoopstad, pushing forward reconnoitring parties to the line of the Vaal, and giving the Boers the impression that he intended to seize Klerksdorp. As this led them to mass in force in that neighbourhood while they withdrew from near Fourteen

Streams, Methuen's march to Hoopstad greatly facilitated Hunter's operations on the western border of the Transvaal. While he was halted at Kroonstad, Roberts ordered Methuen to march his division eastward from Hoopstad to that place, and when the advance of the main army northwards was resumed Methuen was left at Kroonstad to guard the line of communications in the north of the Free State.

We shall now tell the story of Hunter's operations, the chief object of which was the relief of Mafeking, but before doing so we must say something of the gallant defence which Baden-Powell had been making in the little border town. In our earlier chapters we have narrated the events that marked the first weeks of the memorable siege.

At the end of October the Boers had failed in a determined assault on the little fort known as Cannon Kopje. There was some hard fighting in the first half of November, Cronje being still in command of the besieging force. There was daily shelling and sniping, and on the 4th the Boers tried to run a truck-load of dynamite, fitted with percussion fuses, down the railway incline into the town. Thanks to the roughness of the line, it blew up a mile and a half before reaching its destination. At first the garrison did not know what had occurred. "The curious part of the explosion," says Major Baillie in his

diary of the siege. "was that everyone insisted that a shell had burst exactly over the spot he happened to be in, and it was not until the next day (Sunday) that the occurrence was explained."

As at Kimberley and Ladysmith, each Sunday brought a welcome truce. There were church services in the morning, and then various amusements were organised to enliven the weekly holiday. The band played, and there were sports and games. Sunday, the 5th, being Guy

ing into Rhodesia by the Boers. But when he found that no raids were attempted, and that the enemy had only a handful of men engaged in police work on their side of the frontier, he left a small garrison at Tuli, and moved the rest of his force, seven or eight hundred men, to Palapye on the Bulawayo railway. To the south the railway had been wrecked for miles by the Boers. Plumer organised a railway corps to relay it, and brought down from Bulawayo a construction



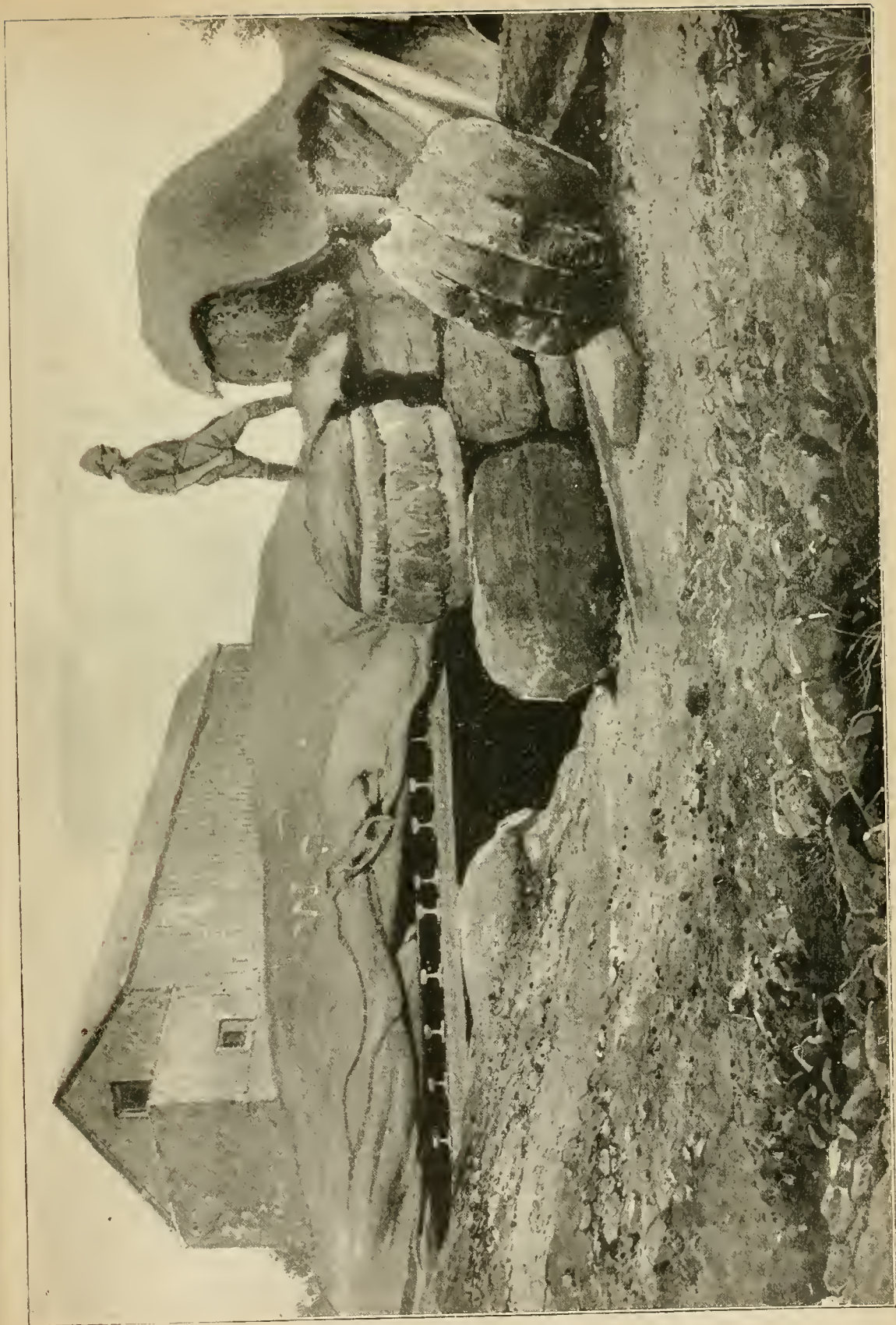
LIMESTONE FORT, MAFEKING.

Fawkes Day, there was a display of fireworks in the evening, a flag of truce being sent out in the afternoon to tell the Boers what it meant, lest they should be alarmed into opening fire. On the 7th a sortie was made in order to interfere with an attack which it was reported that the Boers had arranged for that morning.

In the middle of the month the garrison was cheered with the news that Colonel Plumer, commanding the forces on the Rhodesian frontier, was trying to advance from the north to their relief. At the beginning of the war Plumer had established his headquarters at Fort Tuli with a few hundred mounted men, and patrolled the northern border of the Transvaal to check raid-

train and two armoured trains, and then began to advance slowly southwards towards Mafeking, relaying the line as he went. It was not until January that he established his headquarters at Gaberones, and then his presence on the railway to the northward began to be of use to the defenders of Mafeking by drawing off a part of the besieging force to bar his way.

For a few days before November 18th the bombardment of Mafeking had slackened, and the garrison enjoyed comparative peace. On the 18th, Major Baillie wrote in his diary:—"To-day is the beginning of the end, I hope. Cronje's laager to the south-west is breaking up and trekking south. All squadrons have been warned



COLONEL BADEN-POWELL'S SHELTER.

to be ready to start at once, and we hope our turn is coming at last, but General Cronje is capable of any ruse to draw us out and endeavour to overwhelm us in the open." What was happening was that Cronje had information of Lord Methuen's impending advance northwards from the Orange River to the relief of Kimberley, and was going south to assume the chief command of the army that was to cover the siege of that place. He was taking some of the best of the fighting burghers with him. He left in command of the besiegers of Mafeking Commandant Snyman, a much less capable and enterprising soldier.

a sortie, at most, we could only hope for two hundred to two hundred and fifty men, and the rapidity with which the Boers concentrate, and their vast superiority in artillery, would give them a very good chance of inflicting a defeat, which would be ruinous. No! their shell and musketry fire is annoying, but with the precautions that have been taken they cannot inflict sufficient damage to compel surrender. Thus the whole thing resolves itself into a game of 'patience, our turn is coming soon.' For if we cannot get out, neither they nor three times their number can get in."

He adds the following details of the positions



A BOER COMMANDO TAKING IT EASY.

Major Baillie's summary of the state of affairs in the weeks that immediately followed Cronje's departure will give a better idea of the course of events than a record of the minor incidents that occurred from day to day. "The Boers," he says in his diary, "have been compelled to detach a large portion of their force to the south, leaving, however, ample men to invest the town. They have had four severe lessons, and seem more disinclined than ever to come to close quarters. They have, however, intrenched themselves in suitable positions round the town, and it is impossible to say at any given point what their strength might be. Our strength is about nine hundred rifles, including all available white men, and a sortie, even if successful, might seriously impair our strength, whereas, as we are, we can hold the town, which is our primary object. For

on both sides at the end of November;—"The fighting on the western and southern fronts had almost ceased, but the Boer intrenchments were occupied by pickets, who indulged in occasional sniping, and it was unknown how many were in rear of them. The fort to the north, Game Tree Fort, was armed with a five-pounder gun, and was occupied fairly strongly, and between that and the waterworks was another trench, occupied by the Boers, from which they were eventually ousted by the fire of the Bechuanaland Rifles. To our eastern front lay the trench by the racecourse, strongly held; and south of that, in front of McMullen's Farm (the Boer main laager), a trench about 1,300 yards from the town. There are four or five brick-kilns about 1,100 to 1,200 yards from the town, running in a diagonal

direction from the trench down towards the Malopo, and it was about here that the continuous skirmishing took place; our works being pushed out to meet theirs from the bed of the river, which was connected with the town by a trench running due east from Ellis's Corner past the old Dutch church. Their guns were admirably placed for raking the town, (native) stadt and defences on the south-eastern heights, about 3,000 yards from the town. To the south of the river, the Cape Boys occupied a trench near the eastern end of the location and about 2,000 yards from the enemy's big gun."

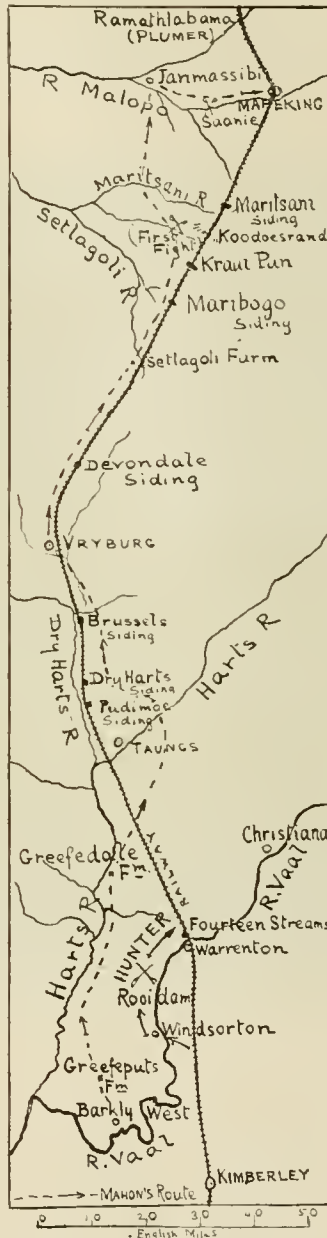
The garrison had only a very few small field pieces with which to oppose the heavy artillery of the besiegers, but they managed to inflict some loss on the Boer gunners, and render their practice less accurate, by long-range rifle fire from the advanced positions. Work was continually being done in improving and extending the defences and making bomb-proof shelters in the town. An ingenious electrician, after all available material of the town had been commandeered for the purpose, connected the defences with a system of telegraphs, telephones, and electric bells. Serious damage was done to the defences and the works in the town by a tremendous flood on December 5th. It inflicted not only discomfort but considerable danger to the besieged, for they were driven from their shelters and had to run the risks of the bombardment. The Malopo rose over its banks, the trenches became canals, and for a short time the market-square was a lake.

In the middle of December Baden-Powell sent out a circular letter to the burghers, warning them that the main body of the British was now arriving daily in thousands, and was about to invade the republics. He went on to say: "In

a few weeks the South African Republic will be in the hands of the English. No sacrifice of life on your part can stop it. The question to put to yourselves is this: Is it worth while losing your lives in a vain attempt to stop the invasion, or to take a town beyond your borders which, if taken, would be of no use to you—and I may tell you that Mafeking cannot be taken by sitting down and looking at it, for we have ample supplies for several months to come." He went on to argue that there was no chance of foreign interference, and called on the burghers to avoid loss of life and of their property by returning to their homes and remaining there peaceably till the war was over. He promised to secure protection for those who thus deserted before the 14th inst. The circular was dated December 10th. It was a characteristic piece of bluff on his part, but it was certainly against the laws of war, which forbid any communication with a hostile force except through its officers. It produced no effect whatever on the Boers, and only convinced them that the Mafeking garrison knew very little of what was happening in Africa. The week in which it circulated in the Boer lines was that which witnessed the three disasters of Stormberg, Magersfontein, and Colenso, and at such a time even the most timid of the burghers was not likely to be much affected by Baden-Powell's attempt to prove that in a few weeks the country would be overrun by the troops who were arriving from England. General Snyman replied to the pro-

clamation simply by sending in a copy of a newspaper with the news of the English defeats underlined.

The besiegers celebrated December 16th, "Dingaan's Day," one of the national festivals of the Boers, by an exceptionally heavy and more



THE RELIEF OF MAFEKING.

than usually effective bombardment of the town. On Christmas Eve, which fell on Sunday, Christmas Day was celebrated by anticipation, as there was some doubt as to whether the Boers would keep a truce on the day itself, for their great winter holiday is not Christmas but New Year's Day. There were no less than 250 children of English and Dutch parentage in the town, and Mr. Weil, the proprietor of the great stores at Mafeking, and Lady Sarah Wilson organised a Christmas tree and a tea for them. There were open-air sports for the adults, and the day was generally voted a success. On the Monday—Christmas Day—the Boer guns were silent. They were keeping a truce, so the garrison had an unexpected holiday of two days' duration.

The 26th witnessed some of the hardest fighting of the whole siege. Colonel Baden-Powell had decided to attack the Boer work known as Game Tree Fort, which commanded the approach to the town on the north side. He had three reasons for this action. In the last few weeks the locusts had destroyed a good deal of the grazing near the town, and he wished to push the Boer line of investment further back so as to secure more food for the cattle. It had been reported that the relief force under Plumer had reached Gaberones, and he hoped by capturing Game Tree Fort to secure command of a stretch of the railway towards the north, and thus lessen the distance which Plumer would have to cover in order to join hands with him. Finally, he expected that by attacking the Boers he could prevent them from sending reinforcements to strengthen the commando under Eloff which was opposing Plumer.

The preparations for the sortie were quietly made on Christmas afternoon and evening, but

it was afterwards suspected that some spy in the town sent the Boers information of what was coming. However this may be, the enemy had improved and strengthened Game Tree Fort, so that it was a much more formidable place to attack than Baden-Powell anticipated. It had originally been an open earthwork. They had built inside it a blockhouse with three rows of loopholes, and they had torn up the railway track to the south of the fort, so as to prevent the armoured train coming out to co-operate in the attack.

The troops were in position at three on the Tuesday morning. They were formed in two bodies, the right attacking column under Major Godley, the left under Colonel Hore. The right column was made up of two squadrons of the Protectorate Regiment (dismounted). Their flank was to be guarded by the Bechuanaland Rifles, and they were to be supported by the armoured train. The other column was formed of three troops of the Protectorate Regiment, and had three 7-pounders and a machine gun with it.

At half-past four, when there was just light to see, Colonel Hore's guns began to

shell the fort. Major Godley's column had begun to advance in the darkness, but the armoured train had to be left behind on account of the gap that the Boers had made in the line. The two attacking parties then approached the fort by alternate rushes. It was partly concealed by bush, and only when they had passed through this screen the leading troop saw that they had to attack not a mere earthwork but a loopholed blockhouse with an iron roof. They made a desperate attempt to storm it. Through a shower of bullets fired at close quarters they dashed up to the loopholes and fired into them with rifle and revolver. Some were shot dead at the very



GENERAL SNYMAN.

muzzles of the Boer rifles. A few scrambled up on to the roof in the hope of finding some entrance there, but they were fired on through ventilators in the corrugated iron. One of them, a sergeant of the Protectorate Regiment, had four bullets through his jacket, but escaped unhurt.

It was soon realised that the attempt upon the fort was hopeless, and orders were given to

fifty-one officers and men, or just half the force that was closely engaged. Lieutenant Paton and Sergeant-Major Paget had been killed while firing their revolvers into the loopholes. Captain Sandford had been hit by two bullets just as his troop reached the work. His last words were a call to his men to press on. Only four of his troop came out of the action unwounded. Every one had behaved with the utmost intrepidity,



MAFEKING: NATIVES DIGGING A TRENCH.

(Photo: Rev. W. H. Weckes, Mafeking.)

retire. The men fell back as steadily as if they were at drill, so that at first those who watched from the northern outworks of Mafeking could hardly realise that they had suffered a defeat with exceptionally heavy loss. About a hundred officers and men had been engaged in the actual attempt to storm the fort. In the few minutes during which the fighting lasted they had lost three officers (Captains Vernon and Sandford and Lieutenant Paton) and twenty-one men killed, and an officer (Captain Fitzclarence) and twenty-two men wounded, and four prisoners, a total of

When the ambulances went out under a flag of truce to bring in the wounded, the Boers spoke enthusiastically of the bravery of their adversaries. They said that they had never seen greater courage displayed in battle. There was a kind of truce for the rest of the day that had begun so disastrously for the garrison. The Protectorate Regiment, though they had failed, were rightly proud of their exploit. They had been recruited in September by Baden-Powell, and started the campaign 400 strong, the men being organised in four squadrons. Up to date it had,

lost 110 men, and after the fight at Game Tree Fort it was reorganised as a regiment of only three squadrons.

In January typhoid began to be troublesome. From the 6th the bombardment increased in intensity and began to do more damage. There was a system of signalling with a bell when the big gun was pointed, and again when it was fired, so that the garrison might take cover before the shell arrived. But the Boers partly frustrated this by sometimes keeping the gun pointed for a long time and then suddenly letting it off. Loss was also caused by smaller Creusot guns firing smokeless powder. Their flash could seldom be seen, and the shell arrived before the report could be heard. To reply to this formidable artillery, the garrison at first had only three small 7-pounders and a Hotchkiss, and the supply of ammunition for the 7-pounders was very scanty. But Lieutenant Daniels succeeded in making shells and fuses with the help of Mr. Conolly and the workmen and machinery in the Mafeking railway workshops. A quantity of smaller shells, which Dr. Jameson had left at Mafeking at the time of the Raid, were also adapted for the 7-pounders by fitting them with thick copper driving-bands. An old smooth-bore naval 32-pounder, which had once been the property of a local chief, was discovered in the town; a carriage and ammunition were manufactured for it, and it proved a great success. In allusion to the probable age of the old gun, it was christened "Lord Nelson." After it had been brought into action, Daniels and Conolly set to work to manufacture a long steel gun at the railway works.

There were a large number of natives and half-breeds in the town—Cape Boys, Fingoes, and Baralongs, and a few Basutos and Zulus. Some of them had tried to escape, but were fired upon and driven back by the besiegers. There had been a tacit understanding at the beginning of the war that the black men should not be armed on either side. It was to be a white man's quarrel, and they were to have no share in it. This was a measure of prudence, as the black population outnumbers the white in South Africa, and if they once took up arms a general native rising was quite possible. One of the accusations frequently made against the Boers was that they had armed blacks fighting on their side. The origin of the charge probably was that they had black servants with them acting as gun-bearers. At Mafeking, at first only the white population were armed, but they

had to defend a very extensive line of works, and Baden-Powell gradually added to his forces a considerable number of armed blacks. He defended his action on the ground that the Boers had fired into the native women's quarter, and that the blacks were so excited that it would have been difficult to control them if they had not been allowed to take part in the defence, and they were at first engaged in defending their own quarter of the town—the native *stadt*, or village. By the end of January there were several bodies of armed natives in the garrison. Major Baillie says in his diary on January 23rd: "In addition to the white troops employed, and to the Baralongs, who defend their own *stadt*, we have four other black contingents—the Fingoes, under Webster; the Cape Boys, under Corporal Currie; a detachment of Baralongs under Sergeant Abrahams; and the 'Black Watch,' under Mackenzie, a mixed Zulu crowd. These gentry, to their huge delight, are continually engaged in endeavouring, with some success, to spend as much gunpowder and spill as much blood as in them lies." In the brickfields the Boer and British trenches were pushed forward until at last the advanced trenches were within a few yards of each other. The methods of old-time sieges were revived, and the parties in the nearest trenches tried to drive each other out by flinging at each other grenades improvised out of cans loaded with dynamite. From the British side they were hurled to a great distance by means of long bamboos, the lower end of which was fixed in the ground, while the upper was bent back and suddenly let go when the dynamite can had been loosely fixed to the top of it. Baden-Powell learned the trick from watching the little native boys playing at besiegers and besieged and bombarding each other with pellets of mud, which they shot at each other with bent canes.

In the first week of February a runner brought in a letter warning the garrison that they might have to hold out for another four months. But at the end of the month came the cheering news of the relief of Kimberley, and everyone was in hopes that it would be soon followed by the appearance of a relief column coming up from the south. On March 2nd the new gun made at the railway workshops was placed in position and made very good practice. During the first part of this month there was very heavy fighting in the brickfields, where the trenches were within forty yards of each other. On the 8th the garrison was rejoiced by the news of Cronje's

surrender at Paardeberg. The 13th brought news of the relief of Ladysmith. Colonel Plumer, marching down from the north, was reported to be at Lobatse, and the garrison were hopefully discussing whether Plumer or a column from Kimberley would be the first to bring them relief.

Almost every night parties of the natives were sent out to raid the Boer cattle-kraals. Sometimes they succeeded in bringing in supplies, but occasionally they were cut off and killed by the Boers. "Vices in time of peace," wrote Major Baillie, "become virtues in war-time. The most expert Baralong cattle thief, who under other circumstances would assuredly be in durance vile, is now indeed a *persona grata* and leader of men, and, whilst enjoying himself to the top of his bent, is making the most of his fleeting opportunity."

Towards the end of March the garrison scored a decided success. On the night between the 23rd and 24th an inspector and trooper of the Cape Police, after carefully reconnoitring the advanced Boer trench in the brickfields, concluded that it was unoccupied, and crept stealthily into it. The Boers had gone, but they had left behind them some cases of dynamite connected with a wire, which the Cape policeman promptly cut and thus made the mine harmless. At daybreak it was discovered that all the other brickfield trenches were abandoned, and the garrison occupied them amid much cheering. The Boers had retired about 700 yards, and for the first time for many weeks the town was freed from the dangerous sniping fire that had been directed at it from the advanced brickfield trenches. In one of the works some Dutch newspapers were found which contained an account of Lord Roberts's occupation of Bloemfontein. Next day the report was confirmed by runners who came in from Plumer's camp, and on the 26th there was great rejoicing in the town at a report that an English column, marching up from Kimberley, had reached Vryburg. This last report had no foundation in fact. Vryburg was not occupied until six weeks later.

On March 27th the Boers, who had been quiet for a few days, began another bombardment. It did very little damage, but in attempting to reply to it the new gun burst.

On the last day of March (Saturday, the 31st) Colonel Plumer, who had reached the neighbourhood of Ramathlabama station, a few miles north of Mafeking, made an attempt to break

through the Boer lines, but found his way harred by a large force under Commandant Eloff. The runners whom Plumer had sent on to arrange for the co-operation of the garrison had all been captured or turned back; and the besieged were unaware of the effort that was being made to help them. On this day Major Baillie wrote in his diary:—

"In the afternoon a body of 400 or 500 Boers and three guns hastily left their eastern laager in a northerly direction. I took up a position in the convent, and from there could see considerable confusion and excitement amongst the Boers, galloping backwards and forwards in the direction of Signal Hill. The sound of guns, too, was distinctly audible to the north, some six or seven miles away. The garrison livened up. The guns under Major Panzera and Lieutenant Daniells commenced playing from every face. A mounted squadron under Major Godley demonstrated towards Game Tree Fort on the north. For an hour or so things were lively, but quieted down."

Next day (Sunday, April 1st) the Boers sent in a flag of truce, asking the garrison to send out a waggon to assist in bringing in the dead who had been killed in the fight of the day before with Plumer's column. On the 3rd a despatch from Plumer was brought in, saying that in his unsuccessful fight on March 31st he himself had been wounded, two officers had been killed and two wounded, another officer was missing, and of the rank and file seven were killed, twenty-six wounded, and eleven missing. Of the "missing" one officer and eight men were prisoners in the Boer camp. The three other men had been killed. Next morning one of Plumer's officers, Lieutenant Smitheman, a veteran African traveller, succeeded in making his way into the town through the Boer lines. He stayed in the place till the end of the week, concerting with Baden-Powell the plan of operations for the relief of the town, and then succeeded in making his way out again and rejoining Plumer, who had retreated northwards to Crocodile Pools. Smitheman took out a basket of pigeons with him, and they were used to send letters back into Mafeking. Plumer endeavoured to send in a herd of cattle under a native escort, but the Boers waylaid them and killed or captured all the native drivers.

During the month of April the defences were further improved by the fitting up of acetylene searchlights, which were also used for signalling. A post-office with a local issue of siege-stamps

was at work, the letters being sent out by runners; and as all coin had disappeared, there was a local currency of banknotes produced by a photographic process. A message had been received early in the month from Lord Roberts, promising relief about May 18th; but on April 20th there came another letter, saying that owing to unforeseen delays the relief column would not be able to reach Mafeking by that date, and asking the garrison to try and husband

keep the Boers occupied at Fourteen Streams on the other bank, himself marched westward, with Barton's brigade and a strong force of Imperial Yeomanry under Lord Chesham, to cross the bend of the river where it runs from north to south between Fourteen Streams and Barkly West. Barton crossed the river at Windsorton without opposition, and next day his brigade and the mounted troops attacked a Boer force between 2,000 and 3,000 strong, holding a line



MAFEEKING MAXIM GUN DETACHMENT OF CAPE POLICE.

(Photo: Rev. W. H. Weekes, Mafeking.)

their resources for a few weeks longer. On the 25th the Boers advanced to the attack on one side of the town, but did not attempt to press it home, and the general impression in the garrison was that it was a feint. On May 1st there was another half-hearted attack, with very slight loss on either side. On Tuesday, the 15th, the news arrived that at last a strong column from the south had arrived almost within striking distance, and was ready to co-operate with Plumer in the relief of the town.

This column, under the command of Colonel Mahon, had been sent off to the relief of Mafeking by General Hunter at the beginning of May. On Friday, the 4th, Hunter, leaving Paget's brigade at Warrenton, on the Vaal, to

of low bushy hills at Rooidam. The enemy made a very poor stand, and they were driven northwards from ridge to ridge, Barton halting from time to time to shell them with his artillery. This successful advance along the right bank of the Vaal made the position which the Boers had held for so long at Fourteen Streams untenable. On Sunday, the 6th, they evacuated it, some of them retiring northwards towards Vryburg, but the main body retreating in the direction of Klerksdorp. On Monday Hunter, with Barton's brigade and the Yeomanry, occupied Fourteen Streams, and Paget's brigade began crossing from Warrenton on a pontoon bridge laid by the Royal Engineers, who also set to work to repair the railway bridge.



"LONG TOM" FIRING ON MAKEING.

Mounted patrols were sent eastwards across the Transvaal border, and found that the Boers had halted and entrenched themselves near Christiana. Hunter remained halted at Fourteen Streams for ten days, and during this time railway communication across the river was restored.

Before he crossed the Vaal at Windsorton he had organised at Kimberley a picked mounted force for the relief of Mafeking. He selected for the command of it a brilliant young cavalry officer who had served with him in the campaigns for the reconquest of the Soudan. In 1896, when the advance from Akasha began, Captain Mahon, of the 8th Hussars, was in command of a squadron of Egyptian cavalry. He did hard work scouting and escorting convoys in the desert. He took part in the action of Firket, and during the long halt before the advance was resumed he performed a brilliant exploit, making a forced march with a handful of cavalry and camelmen, and scaring the Dervish rearguard out of the villages below the Third Cataract. He took part in the cavalry fighting before the battle of the Atbara; and at Omdurman, when the Egyptian cavalry had to retire before an overwhelming force of Dervishes, he saved the horse battery from capture by a daring charge at the head of his squadron. In the final campaign, in which the Khalifa was killed and his last army destroyed, Mahon commanded the cavalry; and in the official despatches Sir Reginald Wingate, who was in command, paid a high tribute to his energy and ability. These services won him the rank of major and brevet lieutenant-colonel. He was in Egypt when the Boer war began, and he only reached South Africa a few weeks before Hunter chose him to command the Mafeking relief force.

Great efforts were made to keep the organisation of the column and its object a secret, but nevertheless the Boers knew it was on the road almost as soon as it had started. The force was made up of the Imperial Light Horse, 440 strong; a picked body of mounted Kimberley volunteers, 460 strong; a small detachment of Cape Mounted Police; four 12-pounders of M Battery R.H.A., under Major Jackson; and two pom-poms, under Captain W. H. Robinson, R.G.A., with 100 picked men from Barton's Fusilier Brigade, under Captain Carr. This little body of infantry was intended for the special duty of escorting the convoy of fifty-five waggons. Twenty of the waggons were loaded with stores and five with medical comforts for Mafeking. The other thirty waggons carried

the stores for the expedition, which were to be supplemented by cattle and forage requisitioned on the line of march. The waggons had been specially selected for strength and lightness, and they were drawn by carefully picked teams. The total strength of the column was about 1,000 men and officers.

On May 4th—the day that Hunter crossed the Vaal at Windsorton—Mahon had his force concentrated at Barkly West. A force of Imperial Yeomanry had been sent out to clear the country to the northward of any small bodies of Boers. This done, they were to join Hunter's left as he marched to Fourteen Streams. On that day Mahon moved out nine miles from Barkly West to Greefeput's Farm. At 2 a.m. on the 5th he started again on his march northwards, and that day covered thirty-five miles in two stages—the first from 2 a.m. to 9 a.m. (nineteen miles) and the second from 1.30 to 7 p.m. (sixteen miles). During the earlier march Hunter's guns could be heard far away to the right. It was the day of the action at Rooidam. Next day (May 6th) twenty more miles were covered in two marches, with a midday halt between them, and the column halted in the evening at Greefedale, on the east bank of the Harts River. In the afternoon Hunter's balloon was seen miles away to the eastward, a dull grey spot in the sky above the broken horizon of the veldt.

On Monday, May 7th, there was another march of twenty miles in two stages, which brought the column to a point on the veldt eight miles due west of Taungs. The Boers were reported to be there, but Major Berringe, who rode into the town with the Cape Police, found that there were no armed men in the place. A party of the Imperial Light Horse seized the railway station and telegraph office. Just as they arrived the Dutch telegraph clerk smashed up his instruments, but a number of important telegrams were seized, which pointed to a hostile force, under one of Cronje's sons, being in position a few miles in advance at Pudemoe, a farm where the road runs through a large group of kopjes. The natives near Taungs said this Boer force was only about 100 strong.

Colonel Mahon was anxious, if possible, to avoid fighting until he was much nearer Mafeking. For a serious engagement would have meant the loss of a day, and Mafeking was believed to be so hard pressed that any delay was deemed dangerous. One of the Imperial Light Horse, who had served in the Bechuanaland Police, and had been stationed for a long

time in that neighbourhood, offered to guide the column by a road passing some miles to the eastward of the Pudemoë kopjes, and the column started at 4 a.m. on the 8th by this route. But soon after starting the scouts reported that young Cronje and his hundred men had disappeared. At the first halt, after a march of twelve miles, some rifles were found hidden in a farmhouse. The Light Horse immediately looted the farm and set fire to the house, but Colonel Mahon, as soon as he saw the smoke and blaze, rode up and indignantly forbade such proceedings. There was to be no more burning or looting, greatly to the regret of some of the South African Volunteers, in whose eyes every Dutchman was a rebel and burning and looting the most agreeable part of a campaign. There were three marches that day, from 4 to 8.30 a.m., from 10 to noon, and from 5 to 9 in the evening. The midday halt was at Dryhart's Siding on the railway; the evening bivouac twelve miles further on to Jacobsdal, near Brussels Siding—the whole day's work being a march of twenty-eight miles.

Next day (May 9th) the column marched into Vryburg (twenty-one miles). The Boers had abandoned the place two days before. There was a long rest at Vryburg through the greater part of May 10th; but at 5 p.m. the column was again on the way, and in the seven hours till midnight made a march of twenty miles over the veldt, the greater part of it in the dark. At sunrise the column was again on the move, and did fifteen miles more, making a short march in the early morning to reach a point where the horses could be watered, halting there till late in the afternoon, and then marching again till nine in the evening. Several Boers had surrendered at Vryburg, and some more gave themselves up during this march of May 11th. They were all set at liberty, but their horses were taken and their rifles smashed. On Saturday, the 12th, three short marches, making twenty miles in all, brought the column to Setlagoli Farm, the house of a Scotch settler, a Mr. Fraser, who did everything he could for the officers and men.

The column had been nine days on the road, and had covered 168 miles without meeting with the slightest opposition from the enemy. Next day, Sunday, May 13th, Mahon came into touch with the Boer force which had been sent southwards from Mafeking to bar his way. Mahon had been able to send off a messenger to Colonel Plumer from Vryburg, to inform him that instead of advancing directly to Mafeking along

the railway he would turn off to the left and march to Janmassibi, on the Malopo River, about twenty-five miles west of Mafeking, where he hoped Plumer would join hands with him, and assist in the final attack on the besiegers. The enemy expected that he would take the more direct route, and were in position to oppose him at Koodoosrand, north of Kraaipan Station, where the road runs over a low ridge in the midst of rugged, bush-covered slopes. At this point the country to the west of the line is very broken, and covered in places with dense bush. During the march on the Sunday morning the scouts reported that a Boer force was moving on the right of the column, and that there was another force directly to the northward, which was retiring through Maribogo and Kraaipan stations on to the Koodoosrand position, where, according to native report, the ground was entrenched and guns were mounted. Unseen by the enemy, Mahon moved off the direct track, and began to march north-westwards through the bush.

But the Boers had another small force in the bush on this side, which the scouts had failed to discover. This party of Boers had been posted there to fall on the left flank of the column as it advanced to the attack of Koodoosrand. Mahon's advance guard was now moving directly against this Boer detachment, which was extended in the bush, carefully hidden, with their horses in hiding further back amongst the trees. The Boers remained absolutely quiet, while the scouts of the Imperial Light Horse rode through them without seeing one of them in the dense growth. Then as the head of the column came in sight they poured a volley into it and ran back to their horses, exchanging fire with some of the scouts at close quarters as they went.

The sudden outburst of fire surprised the column and inflicted a good deal of loss. Amongst others who were hit was Mr. Charles Hands, of the *Daily Mail*, who was badly wounded as he rode at the head of the column. Although there was a surprise, there was no confusion. Mahon brought his guns into action and poured a shower of shells into the bush, and then the Imperial Light Horse and the Kimberley men were sent forward to clear it. There was some sharp skirmishing among the trees, but the Boers, who were greatly outnumbered, were retiring from the very first. The whole affair lasted about half an hour. The British loss was six killed and twenty-one wounded.

When the column halted after the fight the

native guides failed to find any water, and the force had to spend a very uncomfortable night in the bush. At sunrise on the Monday the advance was resumed, every precaution being taken against surprise. After a march of an hour and a half, the crossing of the Maritsani River was reached, but at this season the river is a long line of sand in a deep gully between steep banks, and there was great difficulty in getting the waggons across it. A small supply of very bad water was obtained by digging holes in the river-bed. The whole country during this march to the westward was almost waterless, and this was why the Boers felt so certain that Mahon would have to approach Mafeking by the direct road from the south, on which plenty of water could be had. During this march of May 14th many of the animals suffered terribly, and there was a good deal of anxiety about the artillery horses, though they had been given a larger supply of water than the rest.

There was a rest during the heat of the day, and in the afternoon the march was resumed till 10 p.m., when there was another waterless bivouac. Twenty-one miles had been covered in the two marches, and Janmasibi, where Plumer was expected to be, was only seven miles away. At 2 a.m. on the 15th the men were roused in the dark, and half an hour later the column started. It had to move over very bad ground, and it took three hours to go the seven miles. While still riding in the dark many fires were seen out in front, and as the dawn came the scouts sent back word that they were the camp fires of Colonel Plumer's bivouac. Plumer had reached Janmasibi the day before, with some hundreds of his Rhodesian Mounted Riflemen, the Queensland Bushmen, and a battery

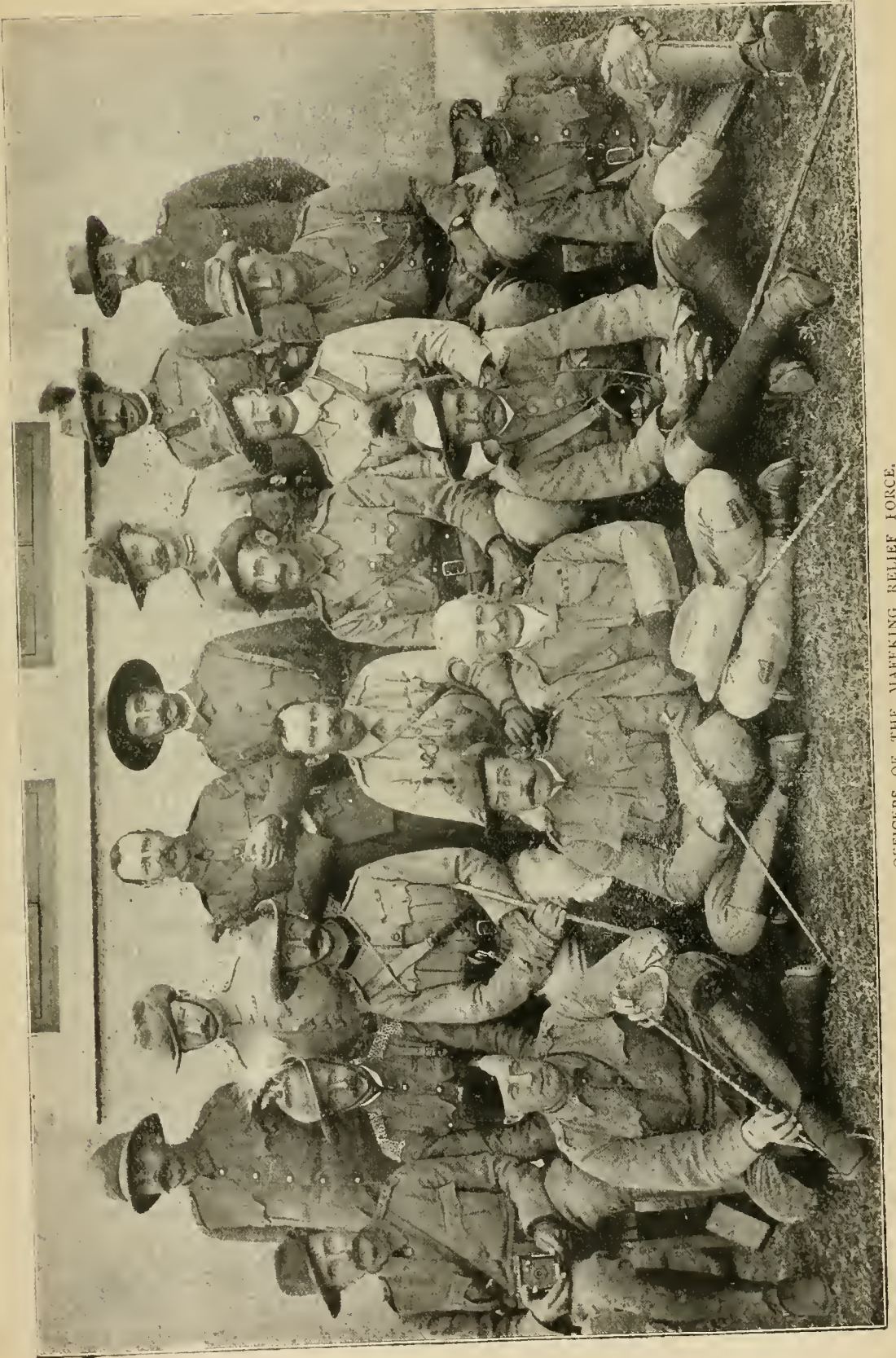
of Canadian Artillery under the command of Major Hudon, a French-Canadian officer. It was an agreeable surprise to Mahon to find the Canadian battery with Plumer. The guns and gunners had started from Manitoba in January, had been landed at Beira, and sent up by train to Marandellas, where they had detrained and made a rapid march to Bulawayo. Thence they had been sent down the line to Plumer's advanced camp on the railway, which they had reached in the nick of time to take part in the relief of Mafeking.

The two forces joined hands in the early morning of the 15th, and men and horses were allowed a rest for the whole of the day. Mahon's column needed the rest badly. They had done 223 miles in eleven days, and for the last three days had been marching through a waterless country. Before describing the advance of the combined relief force to Mafeking, we must tell of what was happening in the town during the last anxious days of the siege. On the Saturday before Mahon and Plumer united their forces at Janmasibi



COLONEL MAHON.
(Photo: Elliott & Fry.)

the Boers made a desperate attempt to capture Mafeking, and very nearly succeeded. Between 3 and 4 a.m. Commandant Eloff stole close up to the town along the hollow of the Malopo River at the head of a force variously estimated at from 250 to 700 men. Probably the former estimate is nearer the truth. They were a mixture of many nationalities. Some of them were Boers of the Transvaal and the Free State, but a great many were European volunteers—Frenchmen, Hollanders, Germans, and Russians. Having got close up to the works, Eloff and his storming party lay quietly hidden in the gully of the river bed, ready when the time for action came to dash into the native



OFFICERS OF THE MAFEEKING RELIEF FORCE,

Photo: Taylor, Magdaling.

stadt and the work close to it known as the British South African Police Fort.

The firing came from the Boer lines facing the eastern front of Mafeking, and was intended to divert the attention of the garrison from the real point of danger. In the town everyone turned out, but the general impression was that the fusillade would end not in a real attack but, as on some previous occasions, in a half-hearted show of attacking. "We hung about in the cold," says Major Baillie. "After about an hour and a half the firing on the eastern front began to slacken. Jokes were freely bandied, and we kept saying, 'When are they going to begin?' Suddenly on the west a conflagration was seen, and betting began as to how far out it was. I got on the roof of a house, and saw a very magnificent sight. Apparently the whole *stadt* was on fire, and with the sunrise behind us and the *stadt* in flames in front, the combination of effects was magnificent, if not exactly reassuring. However, nobody seemed to mind much. Our guns, followed by the Bechuanaland Rifles, hurried across the square, men laughing and joking, and saying 'we were going to have a good fight.' Then came the news that the B.S.A.P. fort, garrisoned by the Protectorate Regiment, had fallen into the enemy's hands. Personally I did not believe it to be true, and started with a carbine to assure myself of the fact. I got close up to the fort, met a squadron running obliquely across its front, and though the bullets were coming from that direction, could not believe but that they were our own men who were strolling about outside it. That is the worst of being educated under black powder. Both sides were inextricably mixed, but, having ridden about and got the hang of things, I am certain that within twenty minutes order and confidence were absolutely restored on our side. You saw bodies of men, individuals, everybody armed with what they could get, running towards the firing, a smile on every man's face, and the usual remark was, 'Now we've got the beggars.' The 'beggars' in question were under the impression that they had got us, and no doubt had a certain amount of ground for their belief. The fight then began. At least, we began to fight, for up till then no return had been made to the very heavy fusillade to which we had been subjected. I have soldiered for some years, and I have never seen anything smarter or better than the way the Bechuanaland Rifles, our artillery, and the Protectorate Regiment ran down

and got between the Boers and their final objective."

That objective was the centre of the town. They were not far from it. As the sun rose, Eloff, with his stormers, had dashed suddenly over the defences of the native *stadt*. Some of his party remained here to clear out the armed Baralongs, and in the skirmishing between Boers and blacks the huts were set on fire. Meanwhile Eloff himself had pushed on straight for the B.S.A.P. fort and was into it before the little garrison, a handful of men under Colonel Hore, were aware of their danger, for the rush came not from the front of the fort, but from the native *stadt*, which was, of course, inside the defence lines. The attacking party poured in, cheering in half a dozen languages, some of the French volunteers shouting, "Fashoda! Fashoda!" Hore and his little party were made prisoners. Eloff was so delighted with his success that he made his first mistake. The fort was connected by telephone with the headquarters offices in a bomb-proof shelter in the middle of the town. Eloff went to the telephone, rang up the headquarters, and said, "We are in the South African Fort; we have got Mafeking at last." "No, you have not got it yet," replied the clerk in charge of the headquarters office, and he then disconnected the telephone. This school-boy freak of Eloff's gave Baden-Powell news of what had happened on the west side of the town some minutes before he would otherwise have had tidings of the mishap.

The plan of attack had been very cleverly arranged, and Eloff's own part of it had been so far executed with courage and ability. But now, when everything depended upon his being promptly reinforced, Snyman failed to send up support. He should have boldly pushed every available man into the town by the opening which Eloff had won; but, instead of this, he contented himself with firing at long range at the defences still held by the garrison. Eloff expected to have 1,400 behind him. It is doubtful if he had a third of that number, and he afterwards openly said that Snyman had treacherously abandoned him.

An effort to support him was defeated by Major Godley, who moved out to the north-west of the fort with a strong party and opened fire on some Boers who were coming up from their lines. Eloff was waiting to be reinforced before advancing further, and meanwhile Baden-Powell had rapidly organised an

inner line of defence, and then commenced operations for the recapture of the fort and the native *stadt*. The situation was felt to be so critical that even the prisoners in the gaol were released and given rifles, and among the townsmen men fought who had never fought before. Mr. Julius Weil, whose stores were only 400 yards from the fort, was hard at work breaking open cases of arms and ammunition, which he had for sale, and handing rifles and cartridges to whoever asked for them. After the first hour, when it was seen that the Boers were not being reinforced, it was felt that the danger was over, and the garrison devoted its energies to capturing the storming party.

"The scene inside the fort must have been a most extraordinary one," says the *Chronicle* correspondent at Mafeking. "The men were packed literally like sardines in a box, and the variety of nationalities represented by captives and captors, who were themselves quite as effectually prisoners, though they did not recognise the fact till later in the day, has probably never been compressed into so small a compass since the building of the top storey of the Tower of Babel. Eloff had Frenchmen, Germans, Portuguese, Hollanders, Swiss, Greeks, and even Jews amongst his detachment. During the morning Major Panzera rode over to the fort and suggested to Eloff the advisability of his surrendering. But the latter, who must have been ignorant of the fact that some of his supports had turned back, while others never started, and that the Boers in the *stadt* were cut off and hemmed in, replied that since they had the town he saw no reason to capitulate. The major did not consider it advisable to explain the position, and Eloff was left to enjoy his fool's paradise a little longer. Parties of the B.S.A. Police, Cape Police, Railway Volunteers, Bechuanaland Rifles, and Town Guard held positions at the railway workshops, Major Hepworth's house, and other commanding points, whence they kept up a hail of bullets at batches of Boers who had got into the stables and some neighbouring buildings, from which they replied as vigorously. No one on either side could show for a second without drawing a volley. At the *stadt* the majority of the enemy, who were mostly *bonâ-fide* Transvaal Dutchmen, with a slight sprinkling of rebels from the colony, had crept away before Major Godley, with three squadrons of the Protectorate Regiment, through the thick cover along the Malopo River, but two parties of them still remained:

one, numbering some twenty-five, in an old mud kraal inside the *stadt*; the others, estimated as being four or five times as numerous, in a stone cattle kraal outside. The smaller party was captured in the afternoon, having no stomach for the bayonets of the Protectorate Regiment, by an escort of which they were marched into town about 5 p.m. amidst tremendous enthusiasm on the part of the town-folk."

At last Eloff recognised that his situation in the fort was becoming desperate, and he handed over his sword and pistol to his prisoner, Colonel Hore, and told him that he and his party wished to surrender to him. Some of the Boers at the last moment rushed out of the fort, and ran the gauntlet of a heavy rifle fire, through which some of them got back to their own lines. A small party, said to have been all Transvaal Boers, held out for a while in a stone-walled cattle kraal outside the native *stadt*. But at last they were shot, driven out, or captured, and the firing ceased everywhere. Flags of truce were sent in by the Boers, and they removed some of their wounded; but altogether, considering the amount of ammunition that had been expended at close ranges, the losses were remarkably light on both sides. Two killed and seven wounded was the record for the garrison. Six Boers were buried in the lines, ten more dead were handed over under the white flag, and there were sixteen badly wounded in the hospital and about 100 prisoners in the town. The Boers who came in with the flag of truce admitted that there were a good many more missing, perhaps 80 or 100, many of whom were supposed to be lying dead or wounded in the bush between the lines.

Baden-Powell courteously invited Eloff and his officers to dine with him, though the fare he could offer them was not very abundant. They got on very well with their captors. Major Baillie, in his diary, gives an interesting account of a visit he paid to them on the Sunday afternoon. The greater number of them were foreign volunteers. "They were very civil," he says, "and so were we. I like a Frenchman, and was chaffing them more or less for having left *la patrie*. They didn't seem to mind being prisoners. They apparently enjoyed their plight, but they objected to the food. I did what I could for them, and I could not help feeling that they were absolutely uninvited guests. It wasn't their quarrel, and why they wanted to shove their nose into it we all failed to understand.

There is really a very charming man amongst them, who asked me to procure him a grammar, as he wished to improve his mind by learning Dutch and English. Of course, I got him a grammar, but I couldn't help suggesting that it might have been as well to remain in comfort in France without travelling all this way to learn the language. . . . Some of these men had only been in the country a week. One told me he passed a battery of our relieving column in harbour at Beira. I never liked Eloff much—

and the Canadian battery; and the 2nd, under Colonel Edwards, being made up of the force which had marched up from the south. At sunrise on the 16th the relief force began to march towards Mafeking in two columns, Plumer's brigade on the right, Edwards's on the left. The march was slow, as Plumer's brigade had only ox-waggons for its transport. Nine miles from the starting point, the besieged town was sighted in the distance. "Precisely at eleven o'clock," says Mr. Stuart, of the *Morning*



MAFEEKING: A FORTRESS ON RAILS.

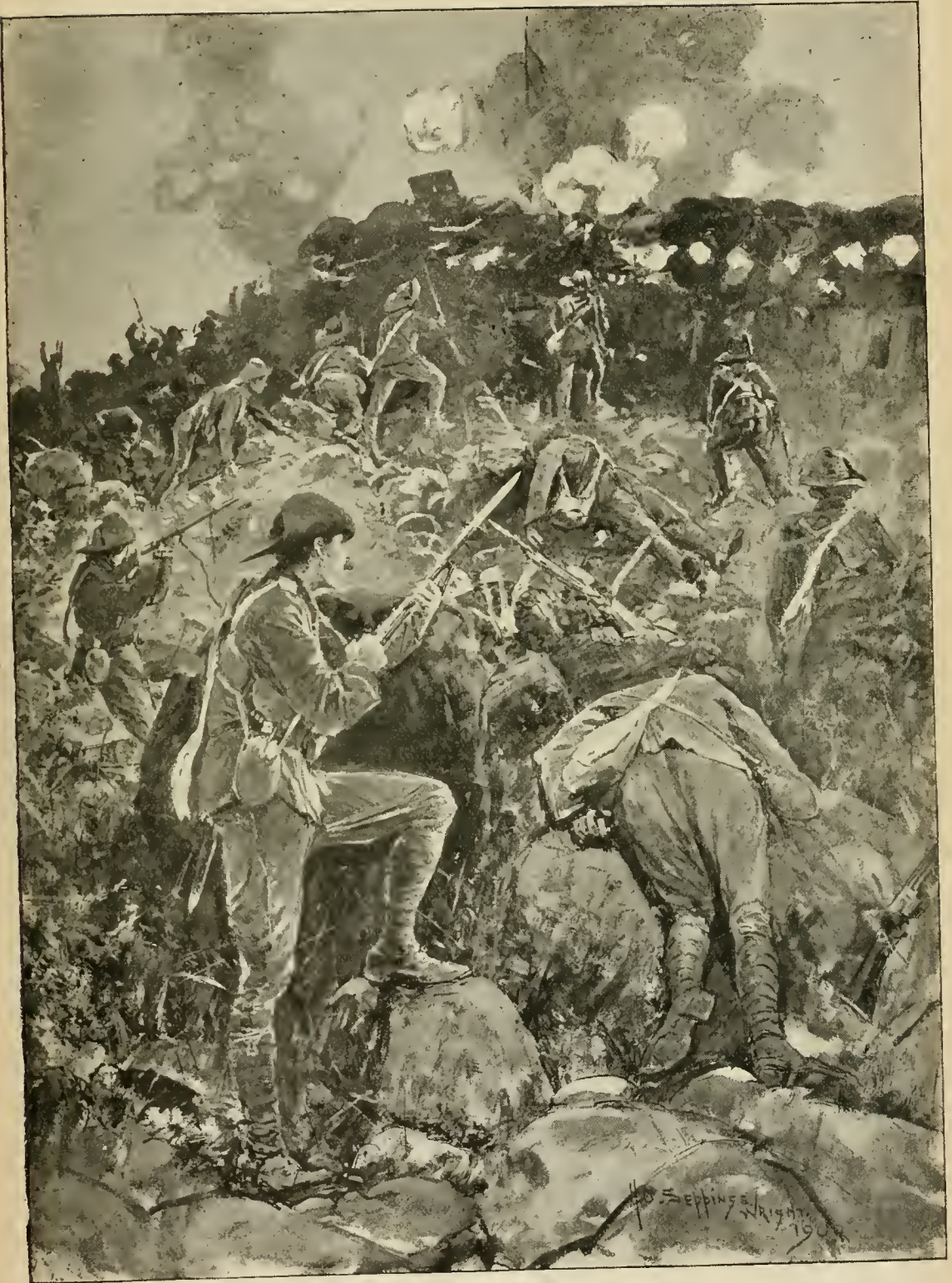
(Photo: Rev. W. H. Weekes, Mafeking.)

not that I knew him personally—but now I like him better for his performances. He very nearly did a big thing; but both sides have apparently an ineradicable mutual contempt for each other, which has led to some very pretty fighting through the whole war."

Mafeking had escaped its great danger, and the garrison now knew that relief was near at hand. But they were in such an exhausted condition that there was not much prospect of their giving any effective co-operation to their rescuers. On the 15th Mahon had reorganised the relief column, forming it into two brigades, the 1st Brigade, under Colonel Plumer, being composed of the Rhodesians, the Queenslanders,

Post, "we first saw Mafeking—a few dabs of white on a distant flat grey plain." Soon after the colonel bore a little to the right to Saanie's Pool, on the Malopo, where there was a halt for men and horses to get water.

Shortly after noon the Imperial Light Horse were moving out to the left to regain their position in the advance, when they were fired upon by a Boer force, which during the halt had taken up a position on the flank of the line of march. The rest of Colonel Edwards's column moved out to support the Light Horse, and then the Boers opened fire from a long semi-circle of positions in front and on both flanks of the relief force. They brought four guns into



THE ATTACK ON GAME TREE FORT.

action, and some of them opened fire from the south bank of the Malopo. Plumer sent a force across the river to prevent the enemy working round to his right rear. The attempt of the enemy on both flanks was soon checked, but in front of the relief force the Boers fought steadily, and retired very gradually before the superior fire of Mahon's artillery. The British were about 1,500 strong, the Boers about 2,000; but as they were extended over three-fourths of a circle, and the line was at least four miles long, it was easy for Mahon, from his central position, to bring a superior force to bear now on one point, now on another, of the enemy's line. About six o'clock the enemy were retiring, the greater part of them going off to the north and south of Mafeking. The garrison and town-folk, looking out from the roofs of the houses, could see the shells bursting among the Boers, and the enemy everywhere in flight. It was quite expected that Mahon would march straight into the town; but when the relief force did not appear there was something like disappointment, and such was the general listlessness produced by the long siege that during the evening everyone was thinking chiefly of getting supper and having a quiet night's rest. Mahon had sent on Major Karri Davis, of the Imperial Light Horse, with eight of his men, with orders to try to get through the Boer lines and communicate with the town. He got in, but at first had rather a disappointing reception. "He told one passer-by," says Major Baillie, "that he was the advance guard of the relief force. The other only murmured, 'Oh, yes, I heard you were knocking about'—and went to draw his rations, or whatever he was busily engaged in." However, when it became generally known, the crowd assembled and began to cheer.

Mahon had signalled from his bivouac that he would fight his way in next day, and he had given orders that the relief force was to start at 4.30 a.m. But this appears to have been only a ruse to conceal his real plans. He had lost about sixty men in the fight at Saanie's Pool, and he was anxious, if possible, to get in without another action. He had had a signal from the town that Major Karri Davis had got safely in, and he counted upon being able to reach Baden-Powell's lines by a night march. At eleven o'clock on the Wednesday night orders were quietly passed for the men to rise and form up and then to move forward silently. Every precaution was taken, but no Boers were met on the line of march, and at 3.30 a.m. the head of the column

passed through Baden-Powell's outpost line. The people turned out in the moonlight to welcome them, and as the sun rose there was a general scene of enthusiasm.

But the column had only a brief rest before it was in action again. Reinforced by a part of the garrison, Mahon moved out early in the morning to clear the Boers away from Game Tree Fort and McMullin's Farm, where they had had their headquarters during the siege. The enemy's position was shelled by the combined artillery of both forces, and then there was a general advance. The enemy apparently were not aware that Mahon's whole force was in the town, and they very soon gave way before the unexpected attack. They abandoned a small field gun in the trenches, taking away its breech-block, and they left pots and kettles boiling on their camp fires, for they were cooking breakfast when the attack began. Parties of mounted men pushed forward to reconnoitre found that the Boers were everywhere retreating, and then the troops marched back into the town, headed by Baden-Powell and Mahon.

The march of the relief force into the Market Square was a scene of wild enthusiasm. "The roars and cheers were continuous during the fifteen minutes that the column occupied in passing the reviewing officers," writes one of the correspondents. "Leading the advance by their inalienable right came the splendid battery of 12-pounders—M Battery of the Royal Horse Artillery. Perhaps it was the sight of the guns that they had so long hoped for that made every man on the parade attempt to break his vocal chords; perhaps it was the sight of the genuine Imperial soldiers, whose coming had been so ardently prayed for since that Saturday when we first made our fighting acquaintance with the enemy. Unit followed unit. Now it was a helmeted section, now a lot with 'smasher' hats that had seen extended service, and were decorated with the ostrich plume; mounted and foot heroes, who formed a strikingly fine body of troops—men with tanned faces, men without the glitter of the British full-dress parade—useful fellows with sturdy mien. At any time they must have drawn applause, but as the people watched them march past they remembered that these couple of thousand troopers had passed through the fire of the enemy to take us out of our captivity. The supreme moment of enthusiasm was reached when the representatives of Britain's Union Brigade went by. They were composed of bodies of the Royal Irish Fusiliers,

Royal Welsh Fusiliers, Royal Fusiliers, and Royal Scots. Assuredly the column was composed purposely so that England, Ireland, Scotland, and the Colonies—even distant Canada—might have it to say that they each had a part in effecting the relief. The rear was brought up by the Rhodesian contingent, many of whom were known to the spectators, and the result, in the matter of cheering, may be guessed. It was a sight that will ever be remembered by those who saw it, this going past: the wild joy on the hunger-stricken faces of the recently beleaguered ones, the tears that flowed unbidden from the eyes of dozens of those who spent the time in alternately cheering and choking down sobs. More than one woman, and man too, turned away from the crowd for a moment or two to wipe their eyes or go where nobody was to gather up composure. It was evident enough that the gallant 'B.-P.' himself was not unmoved. There were visible signs of the emotion that was within him as he sat on his horse and witnessed the wild outbursts of the people he had worked so well to protect. His eyes were within an ace of overflowing."

So ended the seven months' siege of Mafeking. It will long be remembered as an example of what a handful of brave men may do under a determined and resourceful leader—to win victory by long endurance even in the most adverse circumstances. The first news of the relief reached London by a Boer despatch from Lorenzo Marques on the evening of Friday, May 18th. Though it was not officially confirmed by a British despatch till the following Monday, there could be no doubt about the fact. Baden-Powell had long been a popular hero, and the news of the relief of Mafeking was celebrated during Friday night and the whole of Saturday with scenes of popular rejoicing such as had probably never before been witnessed in the history of England.

Much had still to be done to complete the relief of the lately beleaguered town. Mahon had brought only a small convoy with him, and for ten days the garrison and their deliverers had to live upon reduced rations. During Mahon's advance Barton's brigade had moved up to Taungs without meeting with any opposition. Supplies were sent down by rail from Bulawayo, a large waggon-convoy was moved up from the south, and engineers began to repair the railway. The besieging force had retired to Zeerust and Lichtenberg, and large numbers of Boers in the immediate neigh-

bourhood came into Mafeking and made their submission.

Before closing our account of the siege of Mafeking we must refer to the success with which a local journalist, Mr. Whales, kept his newspaper going throughout the long blockade of the town. The *Mafeking Mail* was not, like the *Ladysmith Lyre*, a serio-comic publication got up by the correspondents to relieve the tedium of the siege. The *Mail* was a useful summary of local news, with occasional items from outside; and it did good service by reproducing, for general information, the garrison orders and reports from day to day. By the middle of December the supply of white printing paper had been exhausted, and the *Mail* was reduced to a small page about twelve by fifteen inches in size, printed on thin, coloured wrapping paper, and on one side only. The cost to the purchasers was a shilling a week "payable in advance"; and it was announced that it would be "issued daily, shells permitting." This proviso was important, for on one occasion a large Boer shell had burst in the dug-out shelter which was used as an editorial office, and had done such damage that the issue had to be suspended for that day. Luckily Mr. Whales, who was himself the entire staff of the paper, had left the office just before the Boer visitor arrived.

An account of the contents of a single issue will show what the little paper was like. The *Mafeking Mail* for December 18th, 1899, consists of four short columns. It was made up on the Sunday evening, and most of the local news refers to the events of Saturday. First come the garrison orders for that day. The last paragraph is interesting as showing the shifts to which the defence was reduced to obtain material for the improvised fortifications. "All persons," it runs, "having empty packing-cases or boxes in their possession are requested to notify the same, stating number, etc., available, to Captain Ryan, as they are urgently required for use in connection with local defence works."

Then there is a report from Colonel Baden-Powell of the military operations of the Saturday, which amounted to an exchange of shots between the Boer guns and some of their lighter pieces and the artillery of the defence. The result was thus summed up:—"The little artillery duel which resulted was again a success to us, as we drew the big gun to waste shots in trying to hit guns she could not see, and we were

meanwhile busily engaged knocking holes in their advance works, and possibly in the men inside them."

There is a short report of the trial of a man charged with using seditious language. There is a record of the polo tournament held the day before, Sunday; and there are just three advertisements—one of the sale of a horse by auction; another from a local trader who has clothes, boots, Transvaal tobacco, and general groceries for sale; and a third for a waiter who is wanted at the Surrey Hotel, where candidates are requested to "apply sharp."

Outside news is scanty. Nearly a column is taken up with extracts from a stray copy of the *Standard and Diggers' News*, dated six days before, which had somehow been brought in by a runner. It gives some details, from the Boer side, of the battle of Elandsplaagte. The Mafeking editor punctuates his extracts with contemptuous comments on the enemy's proceedings. The Mafeking garrison seem throughout to have had a special hatred for the Boers, and after quoting from the *Diggers' News* a

statement that the Boer force at Elandsplaagte was only 850 men, "Germans, Hollanders, and Afrikanders," Mr. Whales remarks: "The composition of the force accounts for the report sent by our people of the brave manner in which the enemy fought. We guessed it could not have been Boers."

Under the head of "latest news," the editor gives some reports brought in by Kaffir runners. "They may only be rumours," he says; but he is inclined to attach some importance to them. "Cronje's men have been beaten, and are now trying to find shelter behind the kopjes of the Transvaal. Young Pete Cronje is running as fast as he can for Pretoria." And finally: "General Buller says it is the intention of the British flag to wave itself over Pretoria on New Year's Day, 1900. Rule Britannia!"

This was in the week after Magersfontein and Colenso, and the Kaffirs were, as usual, telling the story which they thought would be welcome to their hearers. Such was journalism in Mafeking during the siege.



SOME OF PLUMER'S SCOUTS.



PIETERMARITZBURG; LANCASHIRE FUSILIERS WAITING TO BE SERVED OUT BEER.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

GENERAL BULLER'S ADVANCE OVER THE BIGGARSBERG.

SIR REDVERS BULLER had halted for nearly ten weeks in the neighbourhood of Ladysmith. Lord Roberts had directed him to make no serious forward movement until he had himself made some progress with his advance from Bloemfontein towards Kroonstad. On Monday, May 7th, Buller was informed that he might proceed to attack the Boer positions on the Biggarsberg.

General Buller's plan was to make a demonstration against their strong position in the centre, but push his real attack home by a turning movement against the enemy's left in the direction of Helpmakaar. Buller's army had been reorganised since the relief of Ladysmith. Hunter, with two brigades, had been withdrawn from Natal. The Imperial Light Horse (less one squadron) and some of the artillery had been sent to the western border of the Transvaal, and Sir Charles Warren had been appointed commissioner for Griqualand West and was engaged in stamping out what was left of the rebellion on the north-western border of Cape Colony. General Hildyard had been given the command of Warren's division. After providing for a reduced garrison at Ladysmith and troops to protect the line of communications, Buller was able to take the field with the equivalent of an army corps and a cavalry division. This was the force that in October had been judged quite

sufficient for the conquest of the two Boer Republics. He was now commanding it in what was one of the subsidiary operations of the war.

Of the three cavalry brigades, the first, composed of regular regiments, was commanded by Colonel Burn-Murdoch, of the Royal Dragoons. The other two brigades, made up of colonial troops, were under Lord Dundonald and Colonel Dartnell. The appointment of Dartnell to the command of a mounted brigade had been made since the relief of Ladysmith, and was a very well-judged step on Buller's part, and it was rightly popular in Natal. After serving in the regular army and retiring with the rank of major, Dartnell had held for some years before the war an appointment in the Natal Police. He had an intimate knowledge of the northern districts of the Colony, and we have already seen how, after the battle of Dundee, he showed General Yule the route over the eastern Biggarsberg by which his brigade made good its retreat to Ladysmith. But for Dartnell's skilled help as a guide the whole course of the earlier campaign might have been much more advantageous to the Boers. Dartnell's promotion to the rank of colonel was well earned, and now that the army in Natal was to advance over the Biggarsberg to Dundee and Newcastle, his presence with it as a cavalry commander was of the highest value.

Buller had with him three infantry divisions ;

the divisional commanders and brigadiers were as follows :—

2nd Division—General Sir C. F. Clery.—2nd Brigade, Major-General E. O. F. Hamilton ; 4th Brigade, Major-General C. D. Cooper.

4th Division—General Lyttelton.—7th Brigade, Major-General F. W. Kitchener ; 8th Brigade, Major-General F. Howard.

5th Division—General Hildyard.—10th Brigade, Major-General J. T. Coke ; 11th Brigade, Major-General A. S. Wynne.

On the morning of May 7th the 4th and 5th Divisions faced the Boer centre, Hildyard with the 5th at Elandslaagte, near the crossing of the railway over the Sundays River, Lyttelton with the 4th to his left on the old road to Newcastle. Still further to the left Burn-Murdoch, with the 1st Cavalry Brigade, watched the passes of the Drakensberg. For the turning movement against the Boer left, Buller proceeded at once to concentrate on his own right, east of Ladysmith on the road to Beith, the 2nd Infantry Division under Clery, the colonial cavalry brigades under Dundonald and Dartnell, sixty guns, and a supply and ammunition train of 400 waggons. The force thus assembled on the right mustered about 14,000 fighting men.

The advance was to be by the road over the Waschbank River by Beith to the Helpmakaar-Dundee road—the same route that Yule had marched by in the opposite direction during his retreat from Dundee in October. But in order to assist in driving the Boer garrison out of Helpmakaar a mounted force, with artillery, was sent further east to the ferry on the Lower Tugela, south of Pomeroy. This detached force was placed under the orders of Colonel Bethune, the organiser and commander of Bethune's Horse.

By the evening of Tuesday, the 8th, Bethune's detached force was concentrated at Tugela Ferry. On Wednesday afternoon the river had been crossed, and the force advanced to the kopjes at Sandspruit, two miles south of Pomeroy, nearly capturing a patrol of twenty Boers on the way. On Thursday a squadron was sent forward to reconnoitre. It found that Pomeroy village had been abandoned by the enemy's outposts. Pushing on towards Helpmakaar, they were fired upon by Boer pickets south of the little town. On the heights near it the enemy could be seen hard at work digging trenches and building rough stone breastworks. With this information the squadron rode back to Pomeroy.

On this same day (Thursday, May 10th) Clery's division, with the cavalry, artillery, and convoy, concentrated at the drift over the Sundays River on the Ladysmith-Helpmakaar road. Here they were joined by General Buller and the headquarters staff. Next day (Friday) the column moved forward and crossed the Sundays and Waschbank Rivers, Dundonald with the cavalry scouting in advance, but meeting with no opposition. In front, in a great semicircle, rose the bold slopes of the Biggarsberg and the spur it sends off southwards towards the Tugela, west of Helpmakaar, known as Umumba Mountain. Near the point where the spur joins the main range a rough road winds up a pass 1,200 feet high, and from its crest one looks down on Helpmakaar. On the other side of Umumba Mountain was the valley up which Bethune's detachment was advancing by Pomeroy. He was in telegraphic communication with Buller, and was not to push on further till the main column was ready to cooperate.

The numbers of the Boer force guarding the left flank at Helpmakaar had been greatly exaggerated by native report. It is tolerably certain that they were not more than 2,000 strong ; it is even doubtful if they were so many. They had a 15-pounder field gun with them and three or four pom-poms. The country would have been favourable for defence if they had enough men and guns to guard the passes to the south and to the west. But they had only been strong enough to keep at bay the reconnoitring parties pushed towards Helpmakaar by Buller during his halt after the relief of Ladysmith. When he came on with two converging columns, Bethune from the south and Clery from the west, with 14,000 men and 60 guns, the 2,000 Boers with their four guns would have to go. If they tried to hold their ground at Helpmakaar, Buller could easily move by Beith and cut in upon the road to Dundee north of them. Then they would have a small chance of evading capture. They had, however, no intention of risking anything of the kind. Christian Botha, who commanded the central position in the Biggarsberg north of Elandslaagte, was facing two divisions with a force of some 5,000 men. He did not mean to have his left flank guard destroyed by an obstinate resistance. His orders to his lieutenant at Helpmakaar (who is said to have been Lucas Meyer) were that as soon as he was attacked in force he was to return by Dundee on Laing's Nek. Christian Botha himself, with

the main body, would at the same time retreat along the railway. The narrower ground at Laing's Nek would afford a position where, with the small force available, there would be a better chance of making a stand than on the excessively long front required to be occupied if the Biggarsberg was to be held.

On Saturday, the 12th—the same day on

The converging attack upon Helpmakaar was to be made at dawn next morning, Sunday, May 13th. It was a bright moonlight night,* but intensely cold. In the valley south of Helpmakaar Bethune's troops were on the move soon after midnight to occupy the points from which they were to advance to the attack in the morning. The artillery—naval guns and field pieces—



BULLER'S OPERATIONS IN THE BIGGARSBERG.

which Lord Roberts occupied Kroonstad—Buller with the main body moved to the right, crossed the Ibusi River, a tributary of the Waschbank, and camped in the afternoon at Vermaak's Farm, at the foot of the steep ascent by which the road winds over the Biggarsberg to Helpmakaar. The Boer scouts retired up the hills as our troops advanced, and they carried off three prisoners with them—troopers in one of Dundonald's squadrons, who rode into the midst of a party of the enemy, mistaking them for comrades of their own corps.

was placed in position facing the heights held by the Boers south of the town. Major Walter with two squadrons and three Maxim guns was sent out to the left to seize a pass over the lofty spur of Umumba Mountain, by which he could communicate with the main advance under Buller. He was to establish signalling connection between it and Bethune's column.

At dawn on the Sunday morning Buller sent forward his mounted troops under Dundonald from Vermaak's Farm. At seven, a Boer field piece, a 15-pounder, opened fire from the ridge

above the pass. Buller replied with his long-ranging naval 12-pounders, and the gun was either silenced or withdrawn. The mounted men reached the ridges at the crest of the pass without any further opposition. Then there was some skirmishing with the Boers, who were falling back to the high ground near Helpmakaar.

Meanwhile Bethune had been in action on the other side of the place. Soon after dawn the Boers opened fire against his right from some of their advanced trenches, but a few shells from his guns dropped in the trench and the firing ceased. Then for some hours there was only desultory skirmishing. At 11 a.m. Major Walter signalled with the heliograph from Umumba Mountain that he was in touch with Buller and that the main column was closing upon Helpmakaar from the west, after clearing the pass of the enemy. Bethune then gave the order for the attack from the south to begin in earnest. The naval guns heavily shelled the heights in front, and then the troops advanced and cleared them with very little opposition. To the west of the town the Boers had opened with the 15-pounder and some pom-poms upon Dundonald's advance, but they were silenced by a Horse Artillery battery, whose guns were the first over the pass. To the great surprise of the Boers, a battery of pom-poms then came into action on the British side. Some of Clery's infantry were now deploying to support the mounted men. The Boers began to fall back, and at 3 p.m. Buller's right and Bethune's left joined hands close to Helpmakaar.

The Boers fell back to some kopjes north of the town, where their pom-poms again opened fire to check the pursuit. Desultory firing went on till about six in the evening, when the battle ended. Helpmakaar had been won, and the Biggarsberg position was turned and no longer tenable. Thanks to his great superiority in numbers, Buller had won this success with very trifling loss.

At dawn on Monday it was found that the Boers were retreating by the Dundee road, and Dundonald moved off in pursuit of them with his brigade and A Battery R.H.A. The infantry followed them. The Boers had set fire to the grass and dry scrub, and for miles the country was covered with drifting clouds of dense, blinding smoke, through which here and there rose crackling flames and showers of sparks. More than once the Boer rearguard made a stand, and the guns were brought into action against them.

Late in the afternoon the Boers seemed disposed to fight another battle. They halted and faced about on the hills at Blesboklaagte, seven miles south of Dundee, and opened fire with their artillery. For two hours they fought a good rearguard action, completely checking the pursuit. After sunset, when the firing ceased, Dundonald's brigade bivouacked where they stood. They had marched eighteen miles during the day. Buller with the main body had reached Beith.

Next morning, May 15th, it was found that the Boers had again retreated. They passed northward through the town of Dundee, which was immediately occupied by Dundonald's cavalry. Buller arrived there with his staff at nine in the morning. It had been ruled by a Boer landrost for more than six months. The *vierkleur* had been hauled down, and the British flag replaced it on the Town Hall. Another Union Jack was hoisted over the grave of General Symons in the churchyard. In the afternoon Dundonald, with the cavalry, occupied Glencoe junction.

The Boer main body, under Christian Botha, had already retreated safely through Glencoe, carrying with them on the railway all their guns and stores, and wrecking the line as the last train passed over it by blowing up all the bridges and culverts. It is strange that notwithstanding his great superiority in numbers Buller made no attempt to cut off the Boer commandoes that had held the Biggarsberg. On the 14th—the day on which Lucas Meyer evacuated Helpmakaar—Hildyard, with the 5th Division, had advanced a few miles from Elandslaagte to Wessel's Nek. But no effort was made to hold Christian Botha's force or to interrupt its retreat. The Boers had begun sending their guns and stores north by rail on the 13th; on the 14th they had only a small rearguard facing the two divisions under Lyttelton and Hildyard; in the night between the 14th and 15th these were moved northwards past Glencoe, followed by the train that conveyed the engineers, who destroyed the line as they went. On the morning of the 15th, explosion after explosion marked their progress northwards.

On the 17th Buller advanced to Dannhauser, and next day he established his headquarters at Newcastle. The Boer rearguard fell back before his advance without offering any opposition. On the 18th Christian Botha's force was concentrated at Laing's Nek, on the positions which the Boers had successfully held against General Colley in the war of 1881.

Buller halted at Newcastle till the beginning of June, and he was occupied in repairing the railway, concentrating his army, bringing up supplies, and preparing for the attack on the formidable positions held by the Boers in his front.

The situation on the Natal border was for awhile almost precisely the same as it had been in January, 1881, during General Colley's unfortunate campaign. The chief difference was that more powerful forces were in the field on both sides. The Boers were on the historic

ground at Laing's Nek; but, warned by the story of 1881, they had occupied and entrenched Majuba on their right and Mount Pogwane, across the Buffalo River, on their left. Some of Buller's troops were actually encamped on the very ground at Mount Prospect where Colley's headquarters camp had been pitched nineteen years before. Buller's advance had brought his troops to historic ground rich in inspiring memories for both sides in the struggle.

Meanwhile, Lord Roberts had advanced from Kroonstad to Johannesburg and Pretoria.



NORVALS FONT BRIDGE, AFTER ITS DESTRUCTION.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE ADVANCE ACROSS THE VAAL TO JOHANNESBURG.

LORD ROBERTS halted for ten days at Kroonstad to rest his army and reorganise it, and to wait for the railway to be repaired behind him. The halt was badly needed. All the way back to Bloemfontein the veldt was strewn with the carcasses of dead horses and transport cattle. In some of the cavalry regiments sixty per cent. of the horses had died or were utterly exhausted and unfit for work. Food was already scarce, and the supplies of it depended on a single line of narrow gauge railway running through a half desert country. In reckoning up the difficulties that Lord Roberts had to surmount, one must not leave out of account the character of the railway on which he had for so long to depend for all the supplies needed by his army. How it had to be worked is well described in a letter written by one of the civilian surgeons with the army in the Free State.

"At each river," he says, "where a bridge has been blown up—and there are three between Bloemfontein and Kroonstad—a 'deviation' track has to be made by the engineers down the near side of the river bank, a descent of say thirty to fifty feet, across a temporary low bridge, whose pillars are made of boulders or of sleepers, and up the far bank. Each such deviation delays a train considerably, for the engines are all in a more or less worn-out condition, and are seldom able to pull their loads up the steep ascent without the subdivision of the train into two or three fragments, each of which is taken up separately until level ground is again reached. And each train delayed in this way affects the whole section of the line, for as the track is always a single one, not only the trains coming behind, but also those approaching from the front, are kept waiting until the one in difficulties arrives at the next stopping station. As an instance in point, the train we travelled by from Bloemfontein to Kroonstad, although it was the first to do the journey, and therefore had the line open, took twenty-six hours to accomplish the 120 miles. Nor are these difficulties of inefficient engines and deviations at the bridges the only ones to

be contended against. There is also a great scarcity of fuel and a still more pressing scarcity of water, which not unfrequently renders it necessary for an engine-driver to abandon his train and run his engine on to the next place where there is enough water (once it was thirteen miles) to fill his tanks, and then back again to pick up his train. On my way down from Kroonstad, when again I was travelling in a train which had precedence of all others because we were carrying down 241 sick, we passed three trains trying to go in the opposite direction, but all hung up in a siding. They contained the siege artillery and heavy guns. The occupants of these trains were all very annoyed because a fourth one, which had been running behind them all day, had had the sense to send its engine back thirteen miles to the Zand River to refill its tanks and thus replenish and slip by the other three engines which were waterless."

This was before De Wet's raids upon the line. One wonders, not that Lord Roberts had to halt occasionally and that his army had sometimes to live on the scantiest of rations, but that he was able to get forward at all.

Lord Roberts waited at Kroonstad till the railway was open to the town, then, after calling up Methuen from Hoopstad to defend his line of communications in the north of the Free State, he began again to advance. At the beginning of the movement the order of march was the same as in the advance on Kroonstad—French, with the main body of the cavalry and a brigade of mounted infantry, on the left to the west of the railway; Roberts, with the main column, in the centre, advancing along the railway line; Ian Hamilton on the right, moving up from Lindley with the rest of the mounted infantry, Broadwood's cavalry brigade, and an infantry division. Moving off on Monday, May 21st, with Heilbron for his objective, Ian Hamilton appeared before the place on the morning of the 22nd. President Steyn, after spending a week there, had left the little town on the Sunday night. On the Tuesday, at sunrise, Christian de Wet marched in with a thousand

burghers, five guns, and a convoy of sixty waggons. He had no intention of remaining there, and the action at Heilbron which followed when Ian Hamilton closed in upon the place was one more illustration of what not unfrequently happens in war—a fight in which both parties are fairly well satisfied with the result. Ian Hamilton wanted to occupy Heilbron. De Wet intended to leave Heilbron and go away to the eastward in order to work round the extreme right of the British advance and then go south and attack Lord Roberts's communications. De Wet got away as he intended. Ian Hamilton occupied Heilbron, which was his object. There was, however, one additional gain on the English side which gave Ian Hamilton the clear balance of advantage. He captured part of De Wet's convoy.

Within an hour of De Wet's arrival at Heilbron Broadwood's cavalry brigade had appeared to the south of it. Broadwood had with him the composite regiment of Household Cavalry, the 10th Hussars, and the 12th Lancers, and a formidable array of guns, including the P and Q Batteries R.H.A. (each with its six 12-pounders), two pom-poms, and two Maxims. De Wet had hoped for a rest at Heilbron. When Broadwood's squadrons and batteries appeared, he knew he had Ian Hamilton's vanguard in front of him, and if he was to carry out his plan of the new raid to the south, he must get clear of Heilbron without any unnecessary delay.

Broadwood, anxious to avoid, if possible, injury to the town and its non-combatant population, sent in an officer with a flag of truce to demand its peaceful surrender. While the officer was parleying with the Boer outposts clouds of dust began to rise above a low ridge beyond the town. Behind this ridge ran the road to the north. The Boers were getting their convoy away. Broadwood at once resolved to attempt its capture, and signalled to the bearer of the flag of truce to come back.

He sent out the 12th Lancers, with one of the batteries, to work round to the right of the town; the Household Cavalry, with the rest of the guns, advanced directly upon it; the 10th Hussars were pushed forward on the left. From the ridge in front De Wet's rearguard opened fire with rifles. One of Broadwood's batteries unlimbered and replied with shrapnel. The Boers very soon retired over the crest, and the Household Cavalry occupied it and fired with their carbines at the retreating enemy.

Forward came the batteries to the crest, but

as they reached it and unlimbered, a Boer gun opened fire from the next ridge to the northward. It was quickly silenced by our artillery, and the Boers limbered it up and got it away at full gallop under a shower of pom-pom shells. Then Broadwood hurried forward with his horsemen and guns, topped the next ridge, and there, full in sight, was the rear of the Boer convoy within easy range. Promptly 12-pounders, pom-poms, and Maxims opened on the waggons and their teams. The convoy was moving up a steep incline. For a few minutes the drivers tried to urge their teams of mules or oxen forward, but soon the shower of machine-gun bullets and bursting shells was too much for them, and they abandoned the waggons and fled into the bush on the hillside. A few beasts in the teams had been hit and had fallen, blocking the track; the rest began to graze quietly on the herbage by the roadside.

The cavalry moved forward and secured their prize—fifteen waggons of the convoy; the other forty-five had got away safely. Seventeen of the teamsters came out of the bush and surrendered. The fight had been almost bloodless. The Boer loss was certainly very trifling, and that of the British was only one man and five horses wounded. De Wet was from the first only anxious to get away, and, having secured the fifteen waggons, Broadwood made no further attempt at pursuit, but went into Heilbron to wait for Ian Hamilton and the main body.

A Boer ambulance had been left behind in the town. There were a couple of German doctors with it, a Dutch chaplain, and about a dozen ambulance men. Mr. Churchill tells of a conversation he had with them just after the action. It is worth quoting, as showing the temper of the Free State men at this moment, when it was so generally supposed that all resistance south of the Vaal was practically at an end.

"They inquired," says Mr. Churchill, "the issue of the pursuit; how many prisoners had we taken? We replied by other questions—'How much longer will the war last?'"

"'It is not a war any more,' said one of the Red Cross men. 'The poor devils haven't got a chance against your numbers.'"

"'Nevertheless,' interposed another, 'they will fight to the end.'"

"I looked towards the last speaker. He was evidently of a different class to the rest.

"'Are you,' I asked, 'connected with the ambulance?'"

“No, I am the military chaplain to the Dutch forces.”

“And you think the Free State will continue to resist?”

“We will go down fighting. What else is there to do? History and Europe will do us justice.”

“It is easy for you to say that, who do not fight; but what of the poor farmers and peasants you have dragged into this war? They do not tell

ened. It had to come. We did not deceive them. We told them. I told my flock often that it would not be child's play.”

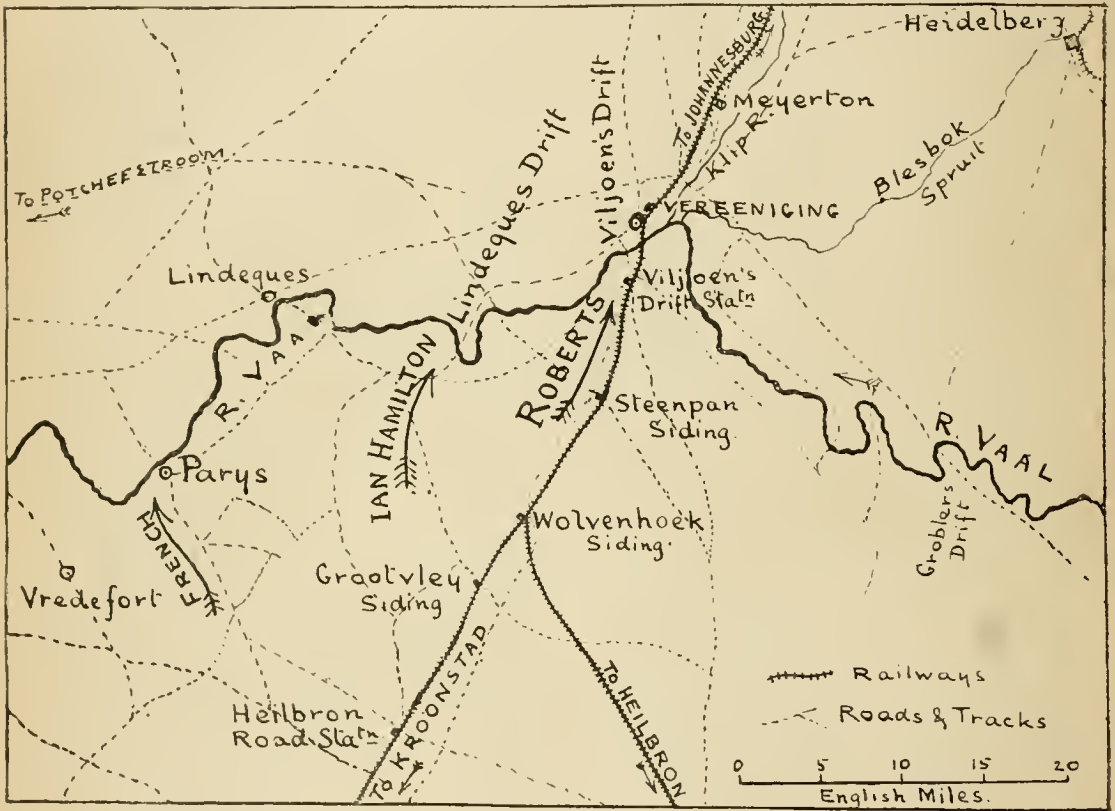
“Didn't you tell them it was hopeless?”

“It was not hopeless,” he said. “There were many chances.”

“All gone now.”

“Not quite all. Besides, chances or no chances, we must go down fighting.”

“You preach a strange Gospel of Peace.”



THE CROSSING OF THE VAAL.

us that they wish to fight. They think they have been made a catspaw for the Transvaal.”

“Ah,” he rejoined, warmly, “they have no business to say that now. They did not say so before the war. They wanted to fight. It was a solemn pledge. We were bound to help the Transvaalers; what would have happened to us after they were conquered?”

“But surely you, and men like you, knew the strength of the antagonist you challenged? Why did you urge these simple people to their ruin?”

“We had had enough of English methods here. We knew our independence was threat-

ened. It had to come. We did not deceive them. We told them. I told my flock often that it would not be child's play.”

“And you English,” he rejoined, “have strange ideas of liberty.”

The ease with which Heilbron had been occupied seemed to confirm the view that the Free Staters were sick of the war. Nor did Lord Roberts meet with any active opposition as he moved forward from Kroonstad to the drifts of the Vaal. On the day that Ian Hamilton entered Heilbron, Roberts with the main column advanced to Honing Spruit. On the east of the line, from the point where the railway crosses this spruit, a mass of kopjes extends for miles northwards, and it was expected that the Boers would show fight at this point. They had



a Patrol examining Boer rifle pits
at Phenvoster drift.
(The pits were deserted on our approach)

at Phenvoster

entrenched the hills, but they abandoned them as soon as Lord Roberts advanced, probably because they were anxious about Ian Hamilton's movements on their flank further east.

To the west of the line French had pushed well to the front and reached the Rhenoster River near the point where the Honing Spruit flows into it. Some miles further east, near the place where the railway crosses the Rhenoster, the Boers were reported to be holding a strongly fortified position and ready to dispute Lord Roberts's further advance. At the British headquarters it was hoped and expected that they would make a stand there. If they would only risk a prolonged defence of the river crossings there would be some chance of French's cavalry from the westward gaining their rear and cutting off their retreat.

The ground they occupied might well have tempted them to hazard a general action. "As a position," says Mr. Battersby, of the *Morning Post*, "it offered a variety of advantages. First, coiled across its front is the Rhenoster River, running east to west in a vast grassy plain which slopes ever so gently down to its either border. The river, unlike any we have crossed in South Africa, unsheltered by a tree, unsignalled by a wisp of green, is cut sheer as a Boer shelter-trench, with banks of sandstone, often quite precipitous, some twenty-five yards apart, to a clear trickle of water forty feet below the surface. Ten thousand horsemen could have been hidden in the river bed and withdrawn in absolute concealment to the drifts on either flank. Yet so steeply were the banks cut that the presence of a river could not be suspected until one was close on it. The river was the Boers' first line of defence, and wherever landslips had lowered accessible platforms on the southern side squared spaces had been cut for riflemen along the edge. Not a spadeful of earth had been thrown on the surface, and the work done was quite indiscernible till one stood above it. . . . The railway had no influence on the position, offering no cover and only slightly obscuring the enemy's field of fire. It ran some 1,500 yards from the north bank over a level plain, before disappearing round the eastern corner of a kopje which formed the centre of the position. This hill, which was really the advanced edge of a plateau, was powdered with ironstone boulders and had a face too steep to scale. Thus guns could have been removed northward at a gallop from its very crest without a visible hint or removal, while in

shape it formed almost an ideal advanced work, affording a cross-fire not only along its own front but across the main position on either flank. This, the remaining edge of the plateau, was more gently sloped and had been prepared with trenches, and there were gun positions in echelon on either flank."

This position, naturally strong and so carefully fortified, was abandoned by the Boers without firing a shot. They retreated from it in the night between May 22nd and 23rd, blowing up the iron bridge over the river and all the culverts, and further wrecking the line by fringing off dynamite charges upon it that made great holes in the road-bed, and twisted up the rails from the sleepers. The reason of their retreat was doubtless the presence of French's cavalry at the drift lower down the river, at its confluence with the Honing Spruit. They would not risk their line being turned on that flank by the cavalry, and they had not men enough to watch the advance of French on their right and Ian Hamilton on their left as well as to guard the main position. Louis Botha had been called away to Pretoria for a council of war and had left Lemmer in command at Rhenoster, but there is no doubt that before going away he had given him directions to retire as soon as his flanks were threatened, and whatever happened, not to risk another Paardeberg. As Lemmer retired he burned the veldt grass on both sides of the line.

On the 23rd Lord Roberts crossed the Rhenoster and occupied the strong positions on the north bank without meeting with the least opposition. No one could foresee that after the main army had passed on to the northwards, the crossing of the Rhenoster River was to be the scene of more than one sharp fight. The retreat of the Boers from the last strong position between Bloemfontein and the Vaal was taken to be one more proof that resistance in the Free State was at an end.

Lord Roberts's object was now to get across the Vaal as soon as might be and seize Johannesburg by a rapid march, for there were rumours that the Boers were preparing to destroy the shafts and machinery of the gold mines on the Rand—rumours which later on were found to be, like so many other reports current during the war, false and built on the scantiest foundation. If the Boers should attempt a stand at the railway crossing on the Transvaal frontier he intended to turn their right, and with this object in view he had ordered Ian Hamilton to transfer

his force to the west of the railway line and support French. As the army moved up to the Rhenoster from Honing Spruit Ian Hamilton's column streamed across its front, greatly delaying the advance. Mr. Battersby gives an interesting description of the novel spectacle afforded by this crossing of the columns on the 23rd:—

"Had Ian Hamilton pushed straight ahead," he says, "he would have struck the railway, as the Boers feared, at Wolvenhoek, and might have cut off and captured the Long Tom, which was being dragged back along the line from the Rhenoster on a damaged trolley. As things were, however, he afforded the most interesting spectacle of one force with its huge train of transport crossing another at right angles. As the head of our column crept over the hill the stream of his was ebbing through the drifts beneath it, and the valley eastward was filling with moving masses of men and beasts. A spreading fan of horsemen, grey battalions of infantry, sombre batteries of guns, teams beyond teams of mules and oxen, the white-hooded ambulance in ordered rows, and huge parks of waggons, acre on acre, choked with seeming confusion, but each part moving in its ordered turn. And across and over its wake came the dark flood of our advance, submerging the stragglers and drawing the unwary into its obliterating way. Four miles to the westward the process was repeated, though here it was Hamilton that waited while Tucker's force filed past before him."

Once he was across the Rhenoster River, Lord Roberts, in his advance along the railway to the Vaal, had the advantage not only of superior numbers but also of position. As even the small scale maps of the seat of war show, the railway approaches the Vaal, where it forms a great curve concave towards the Free State and some eighty miles long from the drift leading to Potchefstroom on the west to Zand Drift on the Heidelberg road to the east. A force holding the railway north of the Rhenoster is in a central position from which it can strike at any point on this curve; and to reinforce the threatened point, a Boer force guarding the northern bank would have to make longer marches than the invaders, who are in the centre of the long crescent. Thus, even if the numbers were more equal than was actually the case, the defence would still be heavily handicapped.

French, pushing well out to the north-westward, crossed the Vaal unopposed by a drift near the village of Parys on the evening of May 24th

—the Queen's birthday, as Lord Roberts noted in his official telegram announcing that the invasion of the Transvaal had at last begun. Ian Hamilton, moving between French and the main advance, was directed to march by Boschbank and cross at Lindeques Drift, about ten miles west of the railway. Roberts himself, with Tucker's and Pole-Carew's divisions, was moving along the line. He intended to pass the Vaal by Viljoen's Drift, where the old wagon road to Pretoria crosses the river a little below the long iron bridge that carries the railway line into the Transvaal. On the north bank are some coal mines, with great rubbish heaps of shale around the tall chimneys and the head-gear of the shafts, and close by is the village of Vereeniging (*i.e.* "Union"), with its frontier railway station and customs house.

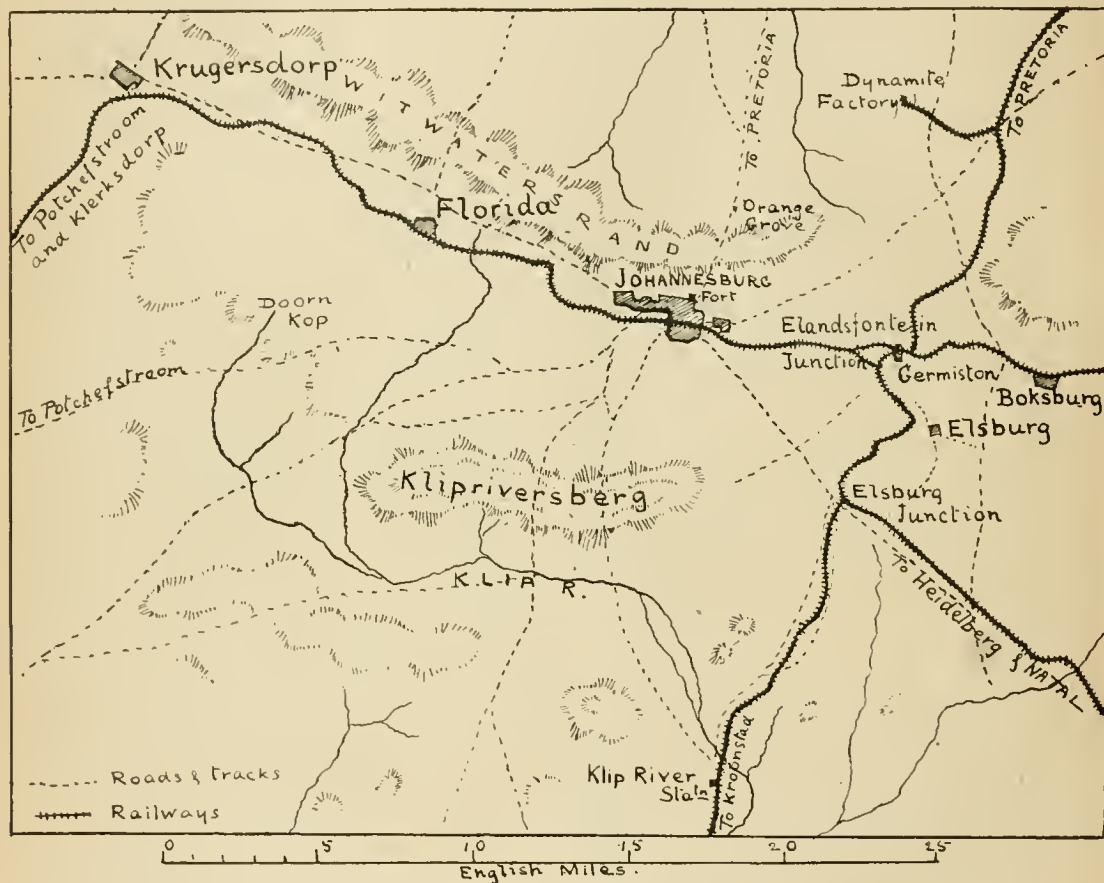
On May 25th Lord Roberts reached Wolvenhoek Siding, twenty-four miles from Vereeniging. From this point the veldt slopes gradually to the Vaal. Ian Hamilton was farther to the front. He had nearly reached Boschbank, close to Lindeques Drift. The Boers had left only small bodies of men to watch the river. Even if they had hoped to seriously dispute the crossing at Lindeques and Viljoen's Drifts, they knew by this time that French was across the river to the westward and moving along the north bank against their right flank. All their operations in front of Lord Roberts were now directed only to delaying his advance. Their real hopes were built upon the attempts that were soon to be made to raise the country and cut the line in the rear of the invaders. Already, though the fact was not known for some days later, De Wet had reoccupied Heilbron and was preparing for his first enterprise against the railway.

In the night between the 25th and 26th Broadwood's cavalry pushed on to the river and in the twilight seized the crossing at Lindeques Drift without meeting with any resistance. Early in the day the infantry arrived and the division began to cross the river.

On the same day at dawn Colonel Henry's brigade of mounted infantry was at Viljoen's Drift, having pushed on in the night in advance of Lord Roberts. South of the bridge, where the road turns away from the line to go down to the drift, stands Viljoen's Station, the last on the line in the Free State. As the sun rose a train came across the bridge from the Transvaal side. It was the "dynamite train," manned by the engineers who had been wrecking the line as the Boers retreated northwards. They were

not aware that enemies were so near them until they saw some of Henry's mounted men gallop out from behind a sheltering swell of the veldt and make for the line between the bridge and the train in the hope of obstructing the track and cutting off the retreat of the wreckers. At once the engine was reversed, and it ran back full speed to the bridge and thundered over the iron girders. The mounted infantry sent a volley

rifle fire was opened from the buildings and shale heaps by a party of about 200 Boers. A few shells from the pom-poms, and a few minutes' firing from a rapidly extending line of skirmishers, was all that was needed to put an end to this show of opposition. The Boers galloped off, and the coal mines were found to be uninjured and proved very useful for the working of the railway. Another welcome



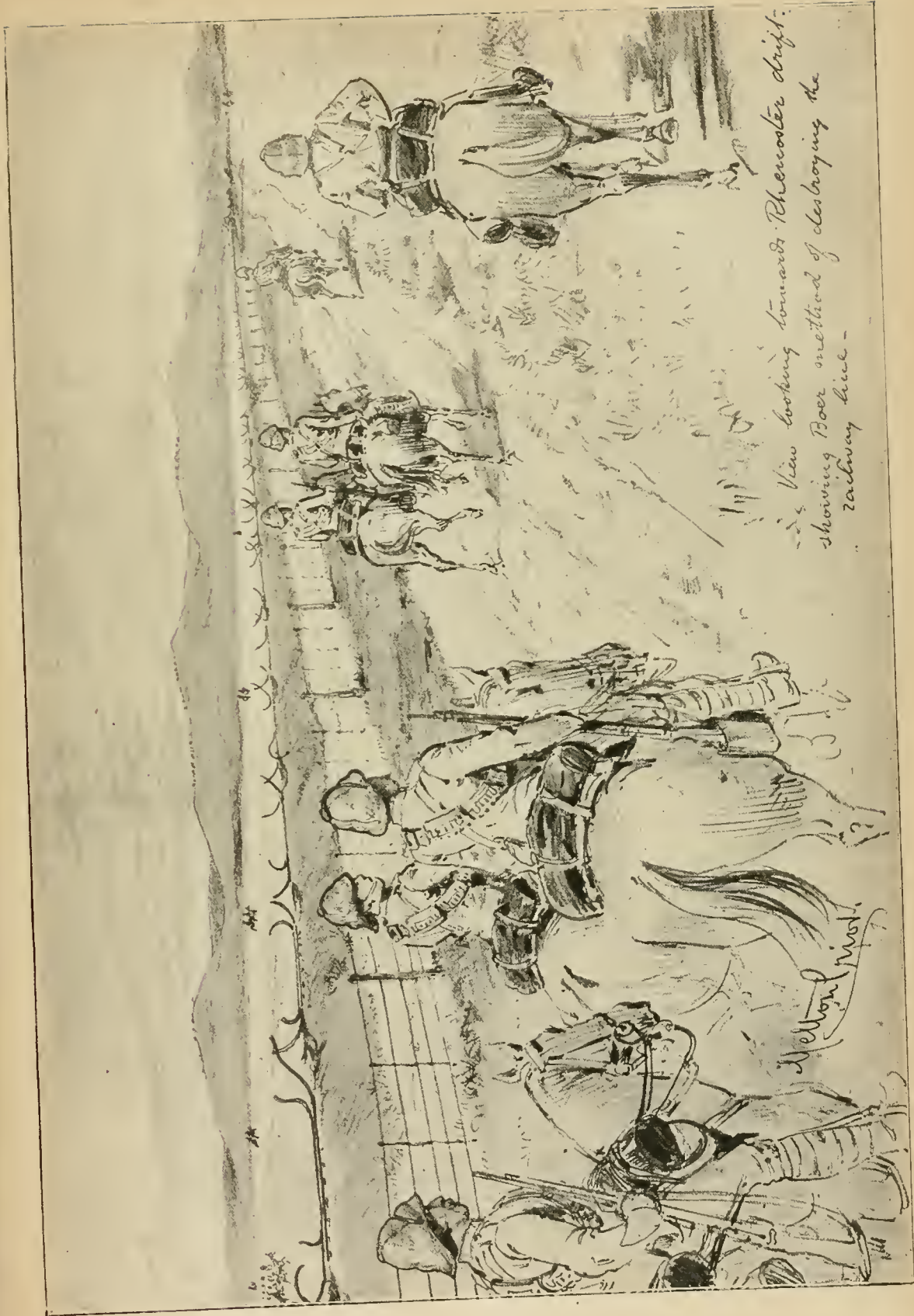
SCENE OF THE FIGHTING NEAR JOHANNESBURG.

after it, but it was already out of range. Beyond the bridge there was a pause. The engineers were busy as ants, and everyone knew what their activity meant. Then there was a burst of smoke in the middle of the bridge, a bright flash through it even in the sunlight, a dull roar, and a resounding series of crashes as the lattice girders and roadway of the central span fell into the river bed.

But meanwhile the mounted infantry with a couple of pom-poms were moving towards the drift. They crossed it without being fired upon, but as they advanced towards the coal mines

capture was that of three big stacks of forage near Vereeniging. They had been left unburned by the Boers of the rearguard, who, as they rode away to the northwards, set fire to the bush and herbage of the veldt in all directions.

By evening on Sunday, the 27th, Lord Roberts had his main body across the river at Viljoen's Drift, and the engineers were busy repairing Vereeniging railway bridge. On the Saturday morning, as soon as he had news of the seizure of the drift and the prompt retreat of the Boer rearguard, he had sent a message to Ian Hamilton at Lindeques telling him that the



View looking towards Phenooster drift showing Boer method of destroying the railway line -

Newton Wood

enemy's resistance along the Vaal had everywhere collapsed, and ordering him to push on as quickly as possible from the north bank of the river. Hamilton marched eighteen miles that day, though both men and horses were short of supplies, and so long a march could not have been made had not a little forage been seized at some abandoned farms. Marching again on the Sunday morning, Ian Hamilton that afternoon joined hands with French, who had come up from the south-westward. By evening Lord Roberts's army was concentrated in two masses—the main body on the Vaal at Vereeniging; and French's cavalry and Hamilton's column thrown well forward on the left towards the hills that lie to the south of Johannesburg.

On Monday, the 28th, Lord Roberts advanced along the railway to the Klip River. The Boers fell back before him without doing any serious damage to the line. Up to the Vaal bridge at Vereeniging they had thoroughly wrecked it with a lavish use of dynamite, but once the Vaal was passed they left it almost untouched. It has been suggested that the Transvaal Boers, ready as they were to destroy railway property in the Free State, were reluctant to wreck the same kind of property in their own country, and some of the correspondents indulged in gibes at the selfish prudence of the northern Boers in this connection. But the line south of the Vaal as well as north of it belonged to the Netherlands Railway Company, and the destruction of it in the Free State was carried out by the company's own employees. The Boers must have had some reason for holding their hands north of the river. It was probably the result of a miscalculation due to their over-sanguine expectations as to what De Wet was going to do south of the Vaal. They apparently hoped that he would seriously interrupt Lord Roberts's communications before he could occupy Pretoria or even Johannesburg, and they expected that he would thus be forced to halt near the Vaal. In that case the Boers themselves would gain by being able to move south on the railway with supply trains following them. It was one of their bad mistakes. De Wet's raids did not begin till Pretoria had fallen, and meanwhile it was a great advantage to Lord Roberts to secure the railway practically in good working order.

On the same day that Lord Roberts reached the Klip River, French was in action further west upon the same line. On the 27th it had been reported that the Boers under Botha would

make a stand to protect Johannesburg. Possibly it would be on the line of heights of the Rand itself, using the battery buildings and rubbish heaps of the long series of mines for improvised defences, as Cronje had done on a small scale when he stopped Jameson at Krugersdorp in 1896. But it was more probable that they would hold an advanced position along the Klipriviersberg, the line of hills north of the Klip, which are, as it were, a first wave of the Rand uplands. French's operations on the 28th were of the nature of a reconnaissance to make sure as to what position the Boers held to the south-west of Johannesburg. Ian Hamilton moved only a few miles forward, wishing to give his men an easy day in view of the great chance there was of a general action on the Tuesday. French pushed forward on his left with the cavalry and horse artillery. The point on which both Hamilton and French were converging was Florida, an outlying western suburb of Johannesburg on the Krugersdorp line. Lord Roberts's plan was that his left column should push round the west side of the Gold Reef City while the main body moved up to the east of it. If the Boers tried to hold the city they would be surrounded in it, by the two columns joining hands to the north of it.

In order to give some idea of the nature of the ground over which French and Hamilton had to advance once the Klip River was reached, we must once more quote from a letter of Mr. Churehill, of the *Morning Post*. On the morning of the 28th he rode forward with Broadwood's brigade, which was covering Ian Hamilton's advance. "The troops," he says, "had now entered a region of hills which on every side threatened the march and limited the view. At nine o'clock we reached a regular pass between two steep rocky ridges. From the summit of one of these ridges a wide landscape was revealed. Northwards across our path lay the black line of the Klipriviersberg, stretching to the east as far as eye could see, and presenting everywhere formidable positions to the advancing force. To the west these frowning features fell away in more grassy slopes, from among which, its approach obstructed by several rugged under-features, rose the long smooth ridge of the Witwatersrand reef. The numerous grass fires which attend the march of an army in dry weather, the results of our carelessness or perhaps of the enemy's design, veiled the whole prospect with smoke and made the air glitter and deceive like the mirages in the Soudan.

But one thing showed with sufficient distinctness to attract and astonish all eyes. The whole crest of the Rand ridge was fringed with factory chimneys. We had marched nearly five hundred miles through a country which, though full of promise, seemed to European eyes desolate and wild, and now we turned a corner suddenly and there before us sprang the evidences of wealth, manufacture, and bustling civilisation. I might have been looking from a distance at Oldham."

So the advanced cavalry of the army came in sight of the city which was, in many ways, the cause of the whole war. Lord Roberts was pressing on with all speed to save the mines from destruction, with which it was said the Boers were threatening them. But they were never in real danger, for Louis Botha had protested against any such vindictive destruction of private property, and Commandant Krause, who was in charge of the police of Johannesburg, had taken special precautions to prevent any unauthorised individual from satisfying his hatred of the foreign capitalists by damaging their mining gear and machinery. Throughout perfect order was maintained in the Gold Reef City.

As Broadwood's cavalry came in sight of the long line of tall chimneys on the ridge of the Rand, French, further west and more to the front, was in action with Louis Botha on the north side of the Klip River. His object was merely to make the Boers reveal their positions, and for this purpose he made a show of attacking with his cavalry and mounted infantry, and opened fire with his horse artillery batteries. The fighting was never serious, and the losses of the day on the British side were only one officer and eight men. Just before nightfall the troops fell back to the positions on which they were to bivouac for the night. As always happens after a reconnaissance in force, the advance was taken to be a serious attempt to attack, and when French's men retired it was supposed that they had found the hostile artillery fire too much for them, and the affair was reported by the enemy as a victory.

Tuesday, the 29th, saw the general engagement which is usually known as the battle of Johannesburg. There were really two engagements. On the western line of advance Ian Hamilton attacked Botha's position in front, while French endeavoured to turn its right. It was on this western line that the Boers had massed their chief force, and here the fighting was hardest. At the same time there was another fight on the eastern line of advance, where Lord Roberts was

moving up on both sides of the railway with Tucker's and Pole-Carew's divisions. Roberts's immediate object was the seizure of the two important railway junctions east of Johannesburg—Elsburg junction, where the line from Natal through Standerton and Heidelberg joins the Bloemfontein-Pretoria line, and the still more important railway centre known as Elandsfontein junction, near the village of Germiston, on the very crest of the Rand, and ten miles due east of Johannesburg. From Elandsfontein the main line runs north to Pretoria (forty-six miles), and branch lines go off to the westward through Johannesburg to Potchefstroom and Klerksdorp, and to the eastward through Boksburg to the collieries at Springs. Elsburg and Elandsfontein junctions were the centres through which, in the earlier stages of the war, the Boers had been able to move their forces from point to point of the theatre of operations as the needs of the moment required. The seizure of them by Lord Roberts would be more important from the military point of view than the occupation of Johannesburg itself.

The Boers made no attempt to hold Elsburg junction, and Colonel Henry's brigade of mounted infantry, pushing on in advance of the main body, first came in contact with the enemy near Elandsfontein junction. But the fighting was much heavier away to the westward, where Louis Botha confronted French and Ian Hamilton; and before following in detail Lord Roberts's advance along the railway to the east of Johannesburg, we must see how the fight went on the Klip River hills.

French had bivouacked on the south side of the river. At dawn on the 29th he sent his mounted infantry forward north of the river, over the ground on which the reconnaissance of the previous day had been carried out. This movement was intended to occupy the attention of the Boers and screen the march of his cavalry and artillery further westward. He was trying to work round Botha's extreme right. The firing began at seven o'clock. The Boers at first thought that mounted infantry were really the first wave of a frontal attack upon their right. They easily checked the forward movement of the weak force which French had left in contact with them, and after awhile they discovered how weak it was and began a counter-attack. They pressed upon the front of the mounted infantry, and, taking advantage of the broken ground, they brought a couple of pom-poms and a number of rifles out upon the right flank of

the British mounted infantry, and subjected them to an enfilading fire under which they fell back to the river.

But they had held their own long enough to serve French's purpose, and now his advance drew off the Boers who were pressing upon them. For Botha had become aware that he was fighting a mere skeleton force in his right front and that the real danger was away to the west, where French, after moving out from behind the screen of mounted infantry, was now riding northwards with his squadrons and horse batteries. Botha rapidly prolonged his line to the right. Clouds of Boer horsemen galloped forward to hold for a while the outlying ridges of the long Klipriversberg, in order to delay French's advance till the defence of the main crest could be organised. For two miles north of the river line French pushed on, clearing ridge after ridge with his guns. But so far he had met only these advanced troops of the Boers. The real struggle was yet to come. As the leading squadrons pushed on they came under a heavy fire of guns and rifles from the main ridge of the berg—a mass of rocks rising from the top of a long, glacis-like grass slope. Before this natural rampart French's advance came to a standstill.

The cavalry brigades halted, to wait until Ian Hamilton's column could come into action to the eastward. Hamilton's line of advance from the Klip River to Florida lay across the Doornkop hills, where Cronje had forced Jameson to surrender four years before. French himself rode over to Hamilton's ground to arrange for the co-operation of the two columns. It was one o'clock when the generals met, and it was settled that Hamilton should send off Broadwood's cavalry brigade and two battalions of mounted infantry to assist in the turning movement round the Boer right, while he himself pressed the enemy in front with the remainder of his force. It was all-important that the Boers should be driven that day from the Klip River hills, for French and Hamilton's columns had moved far away from the railway, their supplies were nearly exhausted, and they could not hope for any large quantity of stores to replace them until Johannesburg was reached.

Ian Hamilton waited until two o'clock in order to give Broadwood time to unite his force with the rest of the cavalry division, when French would resume the turning movement. At two he began his own advance. His two brigades were sent forward on parallel lines of

advance in attack formation, each brigade covering a front of about a mile and a quarter with its leading regiment. Bruce Hamilton, with the 21st Brigade, was on the left, the C.I.V. forming a widely extended fringing-line in its front, with thirty paces between the men. Colonel Spens, with the 19th Brigade, advanced on the right, its first line being formed by the Gordon Highlanders. General Smith-Dorrien, the commander of the 10th Brigade, had handed it over to Spens for the day in order to take the general direction of the infantry attack.

The Boer right, against which Bruce Hamilton was advancing, soon began to feel the pressure of French's turning movement. Nevertheless, the enemy on this side made a good fight, and only gradually yielded their ground before the advance of the C.I.V., who were supported by the Sherwood Foresters and the Cameron Highlanders. It was the first serious action in which the London Volunteers had been engaged. They moved forward steadily under a heavy fire of rifles and artillery, and fully justified the confidence which Bruce Hamilton had placed in them when he put them in the first line of his attack. But on the Boer left, where there was no turning movement to assist the frontal attack, the fighting was much harder, and the onward march of the Gordons was one of the finest military spectacles of the whole campaign. "Their extension and advance," says Mr. Churchill, "were conducted with machine-like regularity. The officers explained what was required to the men. They were to advance rapidly until under rifle fire, and then to push on or not as they might be instructed. With impassive unconcern the veterans of Chitral, Dargai, the Bara Valley, Magersfontein, Paardeberg, and Houtnek walked leisurely forward, and the only comment recorded was the observation of a private, 'Bill, this looks like having a kopje day.' Gradually the whole battalion drew out clear of the covering ridge, and long dotted lines of brown figures filled the plain. At this moment two batteries and the two 5-in. guns opened from the right of the line, and what with the artillery of French and Bruce Hamilton there was soon a loud cannonade. The Dutch replied at once with three or four guns, one of which seemed a very heavy piece of ordnance, and another fired from the kopje against which the Gordons were marching. But the Boer riflemen, crouching among the rocks, reserved their fire for a near target. While the troops were thus approaching the enemy's



S. BEGG
FROM SKETCH BY
M. F. R.

IAN HAMILTON THANKING THE GORDONS.

position the two brigades began unconsciously to draw apart. Colonel Spens' battalions had extended further to the right than either Ian Hamilton or Smith-Dorrien had intended. Bruce Hamilton, pressing forward on the left, found himself more and more tempted to face the harassing attack on his left rear. Both these tendencies had to be corrected. The Gordons were deflected to their left by an officer, Captain Higginson, who galloped most pluckily into the firing line in spite of a hail of bullets. Bruce Hamilton was ordered to bear in to his right and disregard the growing pressure behind his left shoulder. Nevertheless a wide gap remained. But by this mischance Ian Hamilton contrived to profit. Smith-Dorrien had already directed the only remaining battalion—the Sussex—to fill up the interval, and the general-in-chief now thrust a battery forward through the gap, almost flush with the skirmish line of the infantry on its left and right."

The Boers were already beginning to give way on the right, but on the left they held their ground for some time longer. When the Gordons came within 800 yards of the position, the enemy's rifle fire swelled into a loud roar, and as the khaki-clad Highlanders were advancing over a track of burnt grass, where their uniforms showed up brightly against the black ground, they suffered heavily. The Boers waited until the bayonets were within a hundred yards of them, and then, after a last burst of firing, fell back from the crest of the hill. The ground beyond was a broken plateau, and across this the Boers retreated slowly, halting again and again to check the advance of the two brigades. When the sun went down they were still fighting, and for some time after darkness had closed in firing went on here and there by the light of the burning veldt grass and bush. When at last the firing ceased and the men gathered in their bivouacs, Ian Hamilton rode over to the Gordons and told them how proud he was of their conduct, reminding them that his father had once commanded the regiment. They had lost nine officers and eighty-eight men in the attack—about half of the total losses of the whole force.

While French and Hamilton were thus clearing the hills to the south-west of Johannesburg, Roberts was advancing upon the railway junctions to the east of it. Colonel Henry, with the mounted infantry, seized Elsburg junction early in the morning without meeting with the slightest opposition. Pushing on along the

railway, Henry found a considerable Boer force, with some 12-pounders (probably captured R.H.A. guns), a number of pom-poms, and a heavy Creusot gun, holding an extended position barring the approach to Elandsfontein junction. For some hours the Boers succeeded in stopping the further progress of the mounted infantry, though they were reinforced by two horse artillery batteries. During this time several trains were seen moving out from Johannesburg through the junction and away to the north towards Pretoria. It was not till the afternoon, when Lord Roberts's main body was approaching the scene of action, that the Boers gave way, and Colonel Henry occupied Germiston and seized the junction just in time to stop a train laden with stores. The mounted infantry then pushed on into the eastern suburbs of Johannesburg, where desultory skirmishing went on till evening.

Lord Roberts established his headquarters at Germiston, and sent a flag of truce to demand the surrender of Johannesburg. Commandant Krause, whom Botha had left in charge of the town, sent back a message in which he explained that, as part of the Foreign Legion and other detachments of the Boer army were still in the place, any attempt to occupy it that evening would lead to useless street fighting, but that he expected it would be clear of the armed burghers next morning, and that he would be prepared to hand over the fort and town at noon. This fort had been built in 1896, after the Jameson Raid. It stands on the north side of Johannesburg, and was built for the double purpose of closing the route by which the raiders had approached and overawing the restless population of the town. It was of no use to protect it against an invader coming from the southward, and its heavy guns had been withdrawn and sent to the armies in the field.

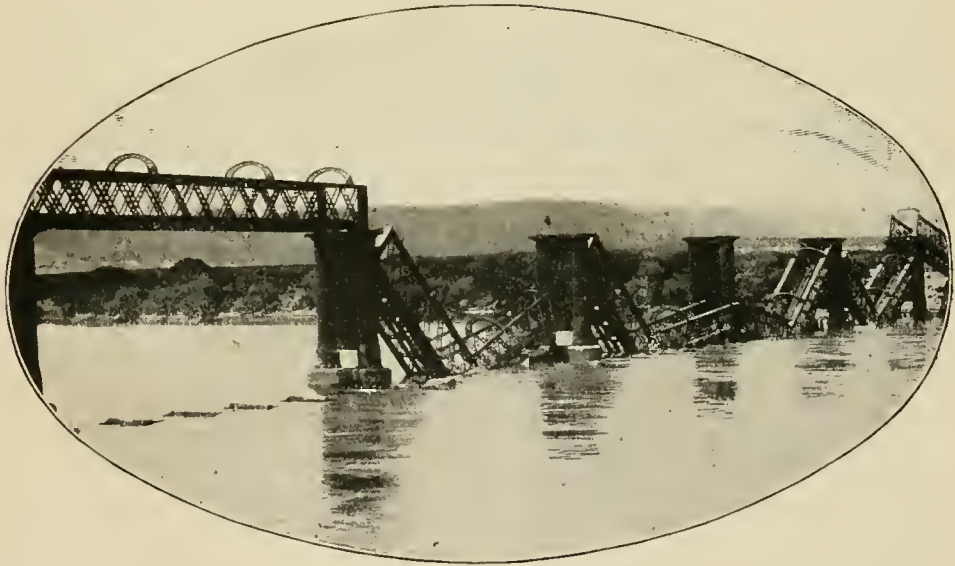
Lord Cecil Manners, one of the correspondents of the *Morning Post*, had ridden into the town in the afternoon, after the capture of Germiston. He was arrested by the Boer police and carried off that night towards Pretoria with one of the retreating commandoes. In his narrative of his experiences he describes how he saw the Boers everywhere retiring in good order, and in no way depressed by their enforced retreat. The officers seemed quite satisfied at having extricated their army from the position near Johannesburg and evaded the double turning movement of the British.

On the morning of the 30th there was some

skirmishing to the north-east of the town and to the west near Florida, as the British mounted troops moved round Johannesburg to join hands on the north side of it. The enemy who took part in these skirmishes were the strong mounted patrols that formed the Boer rearguard. In the town itself there was no resistance whatever. Commandant Krause used the small special police force under his command to maintain order and prevent any damage being done to property. But it was not until the morning of the 31st that he formally handed over the possession of Johannesburg to Lord Roberts, who rode in at the head of his victorious troops.

Nine locomotives and a large quantity of rolling-stock were captured at the railway station, and as the line of the Vaal was intact, these could at once be used to bring up supplies. Lord Roberts left the town almost immediately, and established his headquarters at Orange Grove, a small farm in the northern suburbs. He issued a proclamation protesting against what

he described as "the malicious lies" which had been circulated among the Boers as to the intentions of the British, promising that private property would be respected, non-combatants would be safe, and burghers other than those who had taken an active part in the war or in directing the operations would be allowed to return to their farms on surrendering their horses and taking an oath not to fight again during the war. Reports from Pretoria pointed to complete disorganisation having set in at the Boer capital. The enemy's forces north of Johannesburg were everywhere retiring without attempting to make a stand against the cavalry under French and the mounted infantry under Hutton who had been sent in pursuit of them. Lord Roberts determined to press on at once to Pretoria without giving the enemy time to rally, and the information collected by the Intelligence Department all pointed to no prolonged effort being made to defend the capital, from which it was said that President Kruger and the Boer Executive had already taken flight.



PETHULIE BRIDGE, AFTER ITS DESTRUCTION.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE OCCUPATION OF PRETORIA.

PRETORIA, though older than Johannesburg, had not yet half a century of history when the British army under Lord Roberts marched upon it. The place was founded in 1855, the ground upon which the first houses were built being the property of Martin Wessel Pretorius, one of the leaders of the Boers in the "great trek." The new village was named after him. It was still only a large village when, five years later, in 1860, the seat of government of the South African Republic was removed to it from Potchefstroom.

It stands in a hollow between the ranges of hills that run east and west in parallel ridges like great natural ramparts. The low ground is well watered and fertile. As the village grew into a town the houses were not crowded together, but for the most part built with ample garden space around them. The main thoroughfares are shaded with rows of trees, and streams of clear water run down beside the footways. "Viewed from the neighbouring heights," says a visitor to the Boer capital, "it is one lovely mass of trees, covering an area of many miles, with here and there a small patch of white-washed bricks and mortar, or a tower or dome, obtruding itself. Willows, gums, firs, and pines grow in profusion. Every variety of vegetation is abundant. The soil is exceptionally rich."

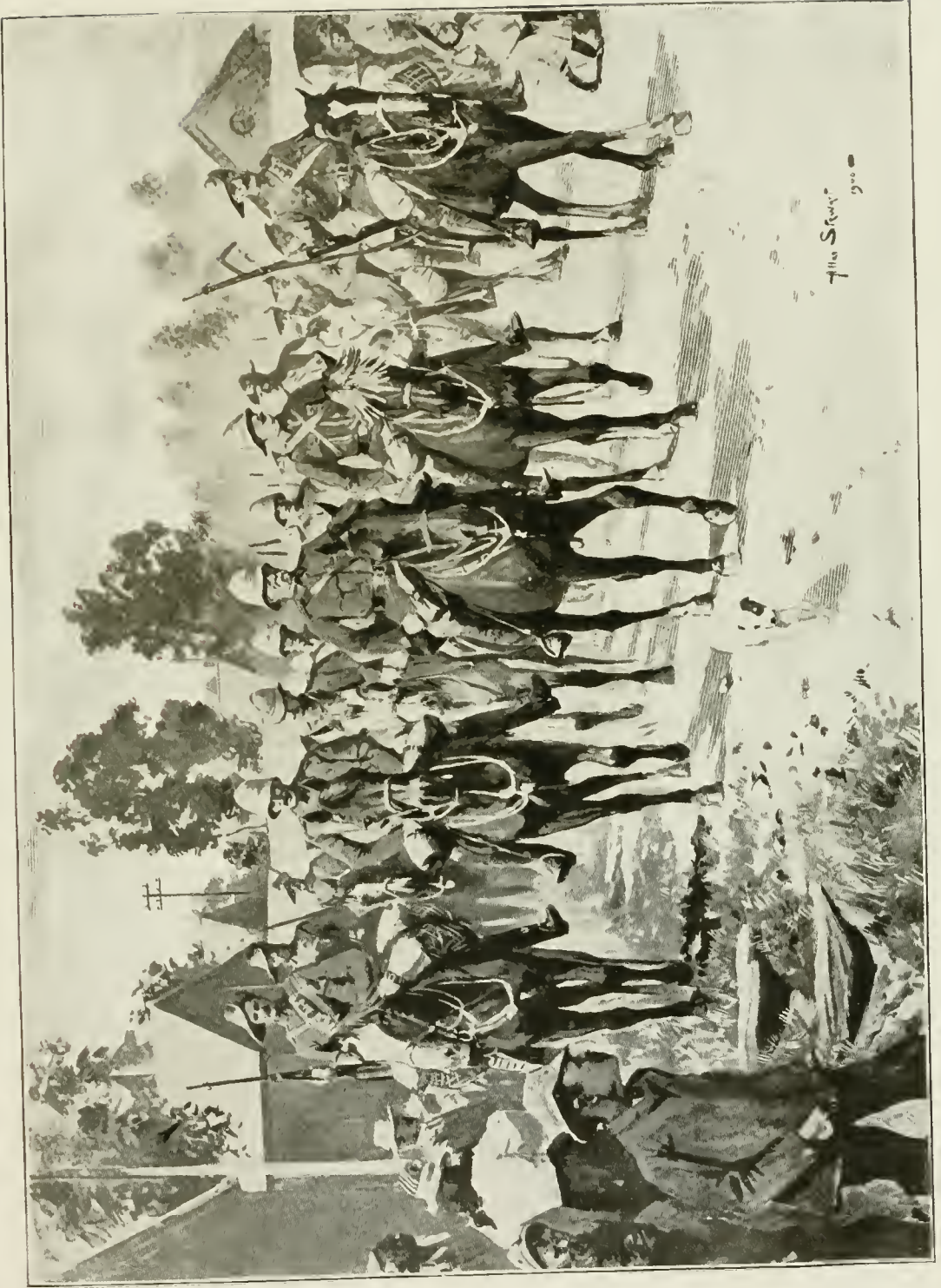
When the discovery of gold and the development of the mines brought wealth to the Transvaal Government, Pretoria was adorned with many handsome public buildings. Then the erection of banking premises, large shops or stores, a club and hotels, the laying down of tramways, and the introduction of the electric light gave further evidence of prosperity.

Up to 1896 the Transvaal capital had been an open town. As a result of the alarm created by the Jameson Raid it was converted into a great fortress. At the end of 1895, when the Raid was being organised, one of Jameson's officers visited Pretoria and reported on its military resources. He described them as being of the most limited character. The so-called arsenal was a group of small sheds, in which were stored

some antiquated cannon. The Staats Artillery, the only regular corps in the service of the Republic, possessed a battery of Krupp field pieces, but the supply of ammunition was very small. So impressed were the conspirators with the military weakness of the Boer Government that a scheme for surprising the arsenal at Pretoria by a small party sent up from Johannesburg formed a feature in their plans.

But the Raid startled the Boer Government out of its fancied security, and the feeling of alarm was intensified by what was considered at Pretoria to be the immunity allowed to some of its chief promoters. Large sums were expended on buying arms and military stores, and expert engineers were employed to erect forts armed with heavy guns on the heights commanding the passes by which the roads and railways enter the hollow of the hills in which Pretoria is built. These passes, or *poorts*, as they are locally called, are mostly narrow defiles capable of easy defence so long as an enemy was prevented from climbing the heights above them; and the forts were intended to prevent an attacking force from doing this. A writer in the *Daily Chronicle*—a South African engineer who knows the ground well—gives the following description of the defences of the Boer capital:—

"There are three defiles on the south side, admitting respectively the Kimberley road, the Johannesburg coach-road and railway line, and the Natal road. Between the line and the Natal road flows the Aapies River. These tracks have to pass through several defiles at different points before they reach those finally giving admission to the capital, and each one of them could be stubbornly contested. There are two forts: Signal Hill Fort, to the west of the railway poort, and the other known as Fort Klapperkop, about two and a half miles distant, to the east of the line. They command the main southern poorts, as well as others, less used, to the west and east of them. On the west the hills have not such a tendency to pack on each other, and defiles are fewer, the country in parts being comparatively open. The road from Mafeking, and the west country generally, takes a sharp

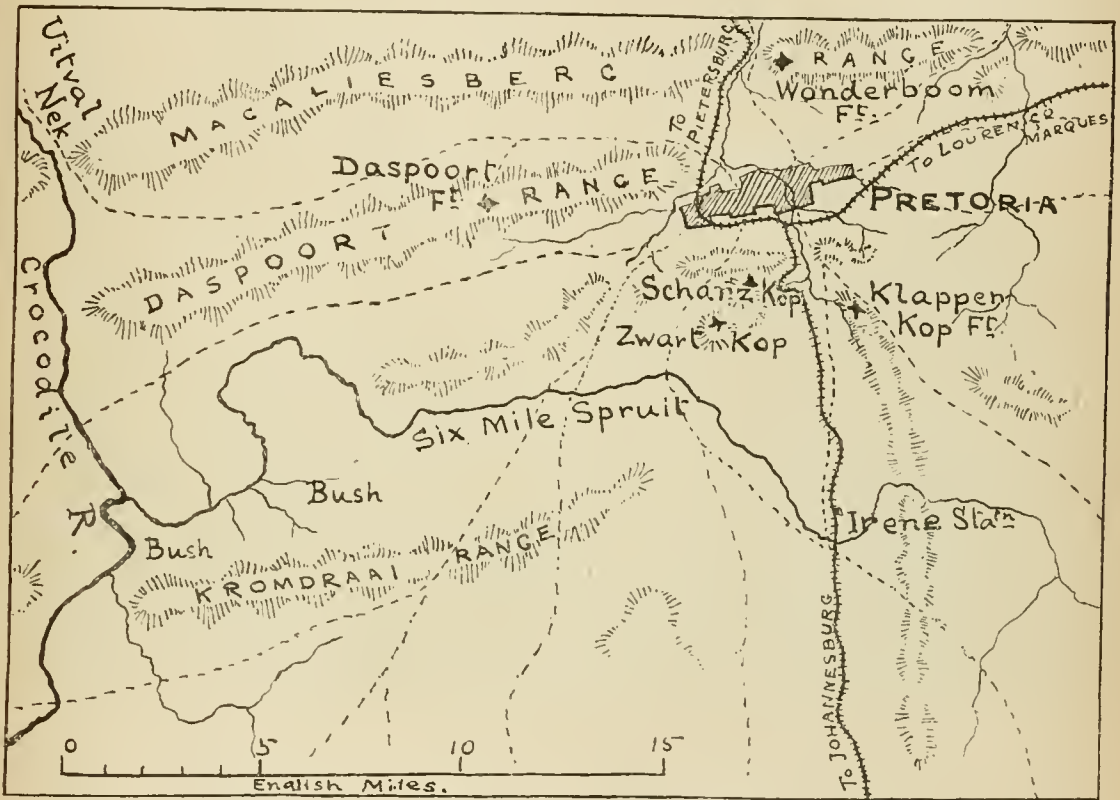


LORD ROBERTS AND HIS COLONIAL BODYGUARD.

turn near the town and enters by a defile, Daspoort, on the north side, only wide enough to admit a banked roadway and the Aapias River closely packed between its walls of sheer cliff. On the western wall, 20ft. or so above the road, is cut the railway track of the Pietersburg Company. A few charges of dynamite would render this defile impassable. A ridge extends west from the defile, and on it is the third fort, Fort Daspoortrand, so placed as to sweep the

much denser, while Forts Klapperkop and Wonderboom are additional protection there."

When Lord Roberts advanced into the Transvaal, two of the forts were unfinished, and guns and ammunition had been withdrawn from several others to strengthen the artillery employed with the armies in the field. Even if the defences had been complete, it would have been difficult for the Boers to hold Pretoria on account of the great extent of ground included



THE SCENE OF THE FIGHTING NEAR PRETORIA.

Mafeking road for miles, and to command the south-western approaches to the town. On the north Pretoria is protected first by a continuation of the Daspoort Hills, and behind them by the Magaliesberg Mountains, an extensive range. Its only important break for miles is at Wonderboom Poort, where the northern main road and the Pietersburg Railway pass between two mountains. On the western of these is the last fort, Fort Wonderboom, commanding the country north and east. To the east is the final barrier of hills. In this direction the Delagoa Railway and the various roads, like their neighbours, encounter several poorts. The hills are

within the circle of forts and the enormous front that would have to be manned. This extended altogether to nearly thirty miles, and would have required a far larger army than that which Botha had at his disposal; and it would have been useless to shut up many thousands of men and several batteries of artillery in Pretoria unless another force could be provided to take up a position to the east or north of the place and harass the operations of the besiegers. To shut up all that was left of the Boer army behind the forts of Pretoria would have been to play into Lord Roberts's hands. The detached forts that formed the defences of the Boer

capital had, as we have seen, been built to make it safe against a raid, and to make it impossible for any but a large army to assail the place. But against a large army they were of little use unless the city were treated as an entrenched camp and manned by a larger garrison than the Boers could muster. The Boer Government would have spent its money to much better purpose if it had contented itself with erecting a strong citadel on the hills south of the town, which would have prevented an invader from occupying the capital until the fortress was captured—a fortress on such a limited scale that it could be held for some time by a garrison of moderate strength.

As soon as they realised that their invasion of British territory had failed and that they would have to resist the advance of a large army into the republics, the Boer leaders had determined upon a plan of campaign the essential features of which were that there was to be a steady retirement before the British advance, delaying actions, not pitched battles, being fought by the Boer force opposed to it. Pretoria was to be defended, but it was expected that by the time it was reached the invading army would be reduced to a comparatively small force by losses from sickness and in action, and by having to leave large detachments to guard its enormously long line of communications. Persistent attacks were to be made on these communications, and if Lord Roberts succeeded in capturing Pretoria, the northern Boer army was to fall back on the Lydenburg hills, thus further lengthening the line of communications and increasing the difficulty of supplying the British army at the front. It was hoped that the war would be prolonged until the breaking out of trouble in other parts of the world, or the intervention of some of the Continental Powers would induce England to treat for peace and agree to the maintenance of at least some form of independence for the republics.

These tactics of delay had met with some qualified success, but it was nothing like what the Boers anticipated. Lord Roberts had been forced to halt for six weeks at Bloemfontein, but when he resumed his advance he had moved steadily forward, without allowing his progress to be stopped by difficulties of supply or threats against the flanks of his line of advance. If food ran short because the broken railway had not yet been repaired behind him, he trusted to the dogged endurance of his men, and they marched and fought on half rations. The country on his

flanks was not cleared of the Boers, the hundreds of miles of railway were in places very lightly guarded, but he took the serious risks that resulted from this state of things for the sake of an early occupation of the Transvaal capital. It is not certain that the old Field-Marshal would have thus hurried forward the campaign if his action had been entirely free from outside influences. He might perhaps rather have chosen to have acted on the safer and slower lines that Kitchener had adopted in Egypt, clearing the country as he advanced and halting at the end of each stage to establish large supply depôts, thus rendering himself secure from any serious results from a temporary interruption of his line of communications. But however this may be, the Government at home had urged him to spare no effort to reach Pretoria early in the summer, as it was expected that, on the occupation of that place, the Boer resistance would collapse and the war would come to an end.

He had reached Johannesburg at a much earlier date than the Boers anticipated. They had hoped that as soon as his army was across the Vaal the commandoes in the Free State would strike such a blow at his line of communications that the invading army beyond the Vaal would be reduced almost to starvation and its further advance arrested. But De Wet and his colleagues, who were on the war-path in the north of the Free State, seemed to be slow about striking the expected blow—and meanwhile Lord Roberts came on, and drove Botha's rearguard before him and entered Johannesburg.

On Monday, May 28th, the day of the fighting round the Gold Reef City, an important council was held at Pretoria. Lord Roberts would appear before it within a week, and it was decided that sufficient troops were not available to defend it. Accordingly it was arranged that President Kruger, Mr. Reitz, and the other State officials should leave the capital, taking the archives with them, and establish themselves at Machadodorp, a station on the Lourenço Marques railway, on the borders of the Lydenburg hill country. A committee of burghers was appointed to preserve order in Pretoria, and Botha was to use the Boer forces then about Johannesburg to delay for a few days longer Lord Roberts's advance upon the capital, from which all military stores and supplies were to be removed by railway. On the Tuesday night, after the departure of

President Kruger and the Executive, there was a sudden change in the situation at Pretoria. Late in the afternoon the sound of guns had been heard to the southward. Rumour said that the British were close at hand, that Lord Roberts was driving Botha's army before him, and that next morning at latest he would be in the city. The departure of the President seemed to give colour to this rumour, and most people in Pretoria believed it. But, as a matter of fact, the firing was more than twenty-five miles away. The guns, the distant sound of which was heard in Pretoria, were those which

suggested that on the approach of the victorious army thousands of British soldiers who were prisoners at Waterval, eleven miles north of the town, might overcome the small guard that was taking care of them and make a raid on Pretoria on their own account. The British officers, over 100 in number, were prisoners in Pretoria itself. Only one of them had chosen to share the fate of the men at Waterval. He was Captain Nesbitt, who had been taken prisoner in the armoured train at Kraipaan in the first week of the war.

The officers, in their quarters at the Model



A SUNDAY SERVICE AT GREEN POINT COMMON, CAPE TOWN.

were in action to the west of Johannesburg, where, as we have seen, on that afternoon, French and Ian Hamilton were fighting their way over the Klipriversberg hills towards Florida and Johannesburg. Mr. de Souza, the burgomaster of Pretoria, hurriedly convened a meeting of some of the leading citizens, most of them representatives of the moderate or peace party. Prominent among these were Mr. Gregorowski, the Chief Justice, and Mr. Samuel Marks and Mr. Loveday, two local merchants. Fully believing that the Boer resistance had completely collapsed and that Lord Roberts was close at hand, they set to work to arrange for the peaceful surrender of the city, their chief fear being that if there was a fight the place might be bombarded. There was another source of anxiety, for it was

Schools in Pretoria, had just sat down to dinner on the Tuesday evening, when Colonel Hunt, who, as the senior in rank, received all messages from the Government, was told that the commandant and the American Consul wished to see him. He left the mess-room, and after a few minutes returned with the two visitors. The firing had been heard by the prisoners in the afternoon, and everyone felt that they were going to receive important news. So the visitors were received with a loud cheer. Then Colonel Hunt spoke. "I want twenty officers," he said, "to go to Waterval to look after our men there." And then he went on to tell how President Kruger had gone and Lord Roberts might arrive at any moment. There was more cheering, "God Save the Queen" was sung, there were cheers for the American Consul, and

one of the officers rose amid general applause to return thanks to the Boer commandant for his treatment of the officers while they had been under his care, and then the Boer officer returned thanks in excellent English.

Meanwhile Colonel Hunt had picked out the twenty officers who were to proceed to Waterval, and had given the command of the party to Colonel Carleton, of the Irish Fusiliers. Three captured correspondents were also liberated on parole—viz. Lord Rosslyn, of the *Daily Mail*, Lord Cecil Manners, of the *Morning Post*, and

must be no attempt at escape. We ourselves are on parole, and will see the men to-morrow." De Souza had promised Colonel Carleton that if the men were kept quiet no attempt would be made to remove them from Waterval. The Boer military authorities afterwards refused to recognise this undertaking of the burgomaster's, and took away nearly 2,000 of the prisoners two days later. On the Wednesday morning (May 30th) Lord Rosslyn was allowed to send a telegram, which reached London shortly after midnight. It said that Pretoria would be



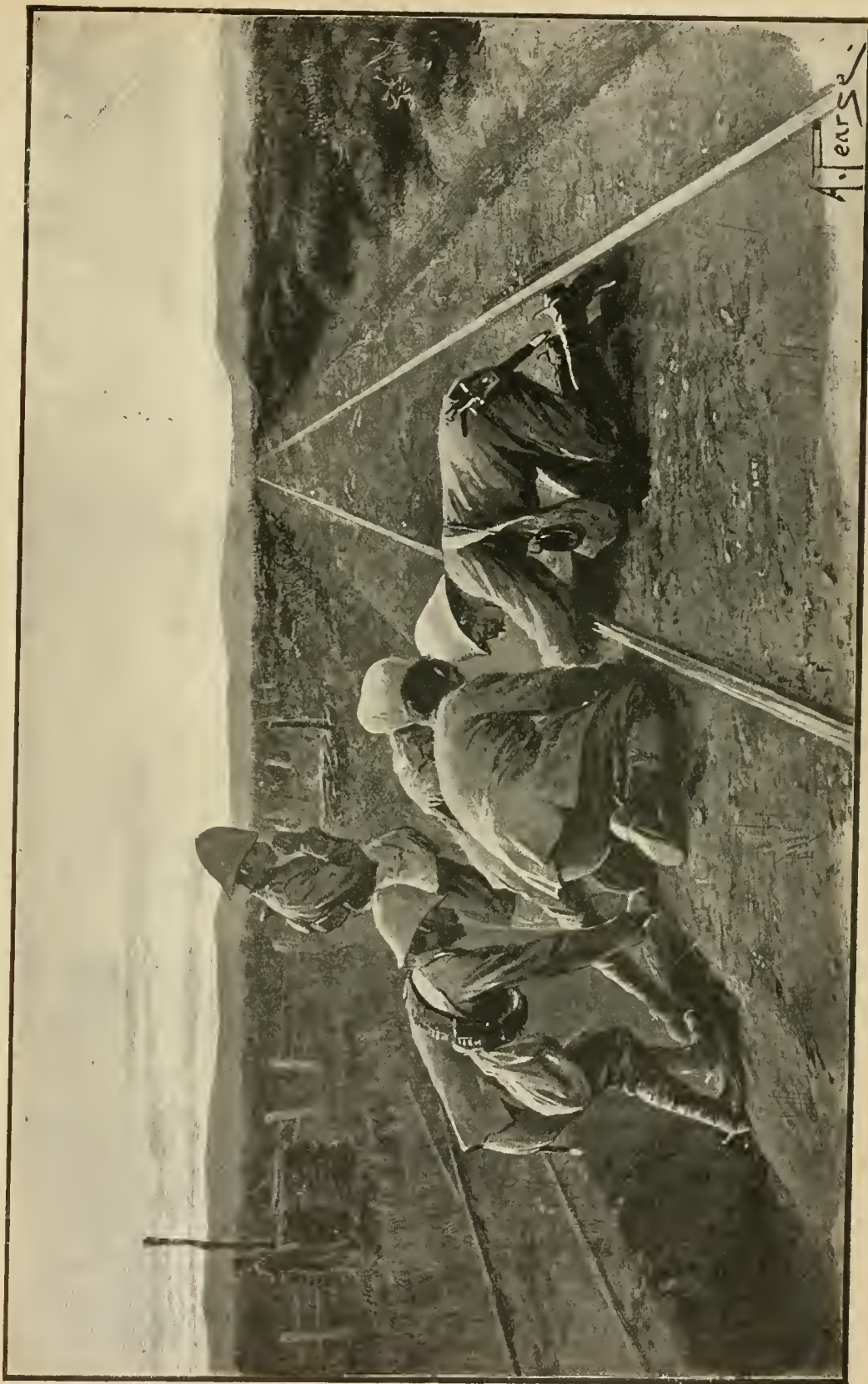
"FREE AT LAST!"

BRITISH PRISONERS LEAVING THEIR PRISON.

Mr. Donohoe, of the *Daily Chronicle*. De Souza arrived to conduct the party to Waterval, and they were taken out there in a special train.

When they reached Waterval it was late in the evening. "Lights out!" had sounded, and the men had retired to rest in the barrack-sheds in the great barbed wire enclosure. In order to prevent a scene of riotous excitement, Colonel Carleton sent for Captain Nesbitt, and, after a consultation with him, went to the quarters of the non-commissioned officers and told them the good news. "I want you," he said, "to see that perfect order is maintained among the men. Lord Roberts is momentarily expected, if not to-morrow, at any rate within a week; so there

occupied in about two hours' time, that everything was quiet in the town, and crowds were waiting in the church square to see the British march in. Next morning most of the London papers somewhat prematurely announced the "fall of Pretoria" and the "end of the South African war." But some days were to elapse before Pretoria was occupied, and there were still some months of hard fighting before the British army in South Africa. The fact was that the burgomaster, De Souza, and the citizens' committee had misjudged the situation, and made engagements which they had not the power to execute. Before evening some hundreds of the fighting burghers, retiring from



OUR TROOPS BLOWING UP RAILWAY NORTH OF BLOEMFONTEIN

Johannesburg, entered the town and declared that Pretoria should not be given up without a fight, and Botha and Delarey had taken up a position across the roads leading to Johannesburg on the hills near Six-Mile Spruit, south-west of the town, where they intended to risk another battle.

Lord Roberts had occupied Johannesburg on May 31st. In order to give men and horses a much-needed rest and to bring up supplies, he halted there until the morning of Sunday, June 3rd. There were unpleasant reports of the activity of the Free Staters on the flank of the line of communications. They had reoccupied Heilbron and were threatening Lindley, and further south they had fought a great battle against Rundle at Senekal, the result of which was at best a qualified success for the British arms. But, relying upon the great moral effect of the occupation of the enemy's capital, Lord Roberts did not depart from his plan of advancing as soon as possible on Pretoria. On the Sunday morning the march was resumed in the same order as in the advance on Johannesburg—the main body along the railway, French and Ian Hamilton's force some miles to the west of it. There was no fighting that day beyond some slight skirmishing in French's front. In the evening the main body halted south of Irene station, and the left column at Reitfontein Farm, on the Jokeskei River, a small stream that runs into the Crocodile River, and beyond which rises the range of hills that forms the south side of the Six-Mile Spruit valley. Moving forward on the Monday morning, Hamilton's mounted infantry and French's cavalry passed this ridge without meeting with any opposition.

The country beyond was broken and covered in places with bush, and the advance to Six-Mile Spruit was slow. As Colonel Henry's mounted infantry approached the spruit, a Boer gun began to shell them from the hills on the north side of it. One of the Horse Artillery batteries galloped up, unlimbered, opened fire in reply, and the Boers immediately withdrew and the British advance continued.

When they reached the crest of the hill north of the spruit, the mounted troops saw that the Boer rearguard had fallen back to the long ridge which forms the southern wall of the valley in which Pretoria stands. Far to the right of Hamilton's advance, and in front of Lord Roberts and the main body, bold summits rising from this ridge were seen to be crowned by the southern forts; but during the day not

a shot came from them, for all their guns had been removed. The Boers had heavy guns and pom-poms in position at various points along the line of hills, and on their right they held the mounted troops at bay for some hours.

On the other flank, Lord Roberts advanced near the railway against the hills and the disarmed forts, with Tucker's division on the left, Pole-Carew's on the right close to the railway, and Gordon's cavalry brigade guarding his flank to the east of the line. Crossing Six-Mile Spruit, they came into action in the rough ground north-west of Irene station. In order to silence the Boer artillery on the hill, some fifty guns, including the heavy naval pieces, were brought into action, and the balloon was sent up to observe the effect of their fire. The enemy was now only fighting to gain time for the clearing away of what was left of the large accumulation of stores at Pretoria. About four o'clock in the afternoon the Boer guns had been silenced. On the left, Ian Hamilton's column had pushed on to the crest of the hills, and Broadwood's cavalry brigade had actually entered the Pretoria valley. Pole-Carew's division, the Guards brigade in front, was close up to the silent forts.

June is the winter season in the Transvaal, and at half-past five it was too dark for further fighting. Pushing on through the twilight from the left, Colonel De Lisle, at about six o'clock, reached the western suburbs of Pretoria, capturing on the way a small party of Boers with a Maxim. He sent a flag of truce into the town to demand its surrender, and the officer returned with a message from General Botha and Burgomaster de Souza to the effect that the place would be surrendered next morning.

All through the night trains were steaming out of the town, some of them northwards by the Pietersburg railway, but most of them eastwards by the Delagoa Bay line. They were taking away stores, guns, men and horses. As soon as the sun rose on the 5th, the British troops began to march forward to enter the town, Ian Hamilton from the west and Pole-Carew from the south. The forts were occupied, and the Guards, with the Grenadiers in front, soon reached the railway station. As they approached it, a train drawn by two engines, with ten truckloads of horses and one truck crowded with men, steamed out of the station. Another trainload of Boers was standing at the platform. The leading company of the Grenadiers doubled forward to capture them.



THE BRITISH ARMY MARCHING THROUGH THE STREETS OF PRETORIA

Some pistol-shots were fired from the train, and the Guards halted and fired two volleys at short range. Then the Boers held up their hands and surrendered. No one had been even wounded by this firing at close quarters.

Three engines and a large quantity of rolling stock were secured at the station. The Guards then marched into the town with fixed bayonets. As they reached the Model Schools the Boer guards threw down their arms and the British officers rushed out to join their comrades; 129 officers were thus set at liberty. The town was now clear of the enemy, and at two o'clock Lord Roberts made his formal entry, and the British flag was hoisted on the Parliament House. The victorious army then marched past in front of it, the Guards leading, and it was three hours before the long procession had gone by.

So ended the second stage of the Boer war. The first had closed when Kimberley and Ladysmith were rescued and the Boer invaders retired from the north of Cape Colony. In the second, the capitals of the two republics had been occupied. It was four months from the declaration of war to the day when French's cavalry crossed the Free State frontier on the flank march to Kimberley. In a few days less than four months more Lord Roberts had advanced to Pretoria. Before hostilities began, those who knew South Africa best had predicted that the most difficult period of the war would be after the occupation of Pretoria, when the burghers, avoiding great battles, would have recourse to a harassing guerilla warfare. That third period of the conflict was now about to begin.



MASS MEETING IN CAPE TOWN (IN FRONT OF THE TOWN HALL) AFFIRMING THE NEED OF ANNEXING THE REPUBLICS, APRIL 3, 1900.

(Photo: Mr. C. Ray Woods, Cape Town.)

CHRONOLOGY OF THE BOER WAR UP TO THE FALL OF PRETORIA.

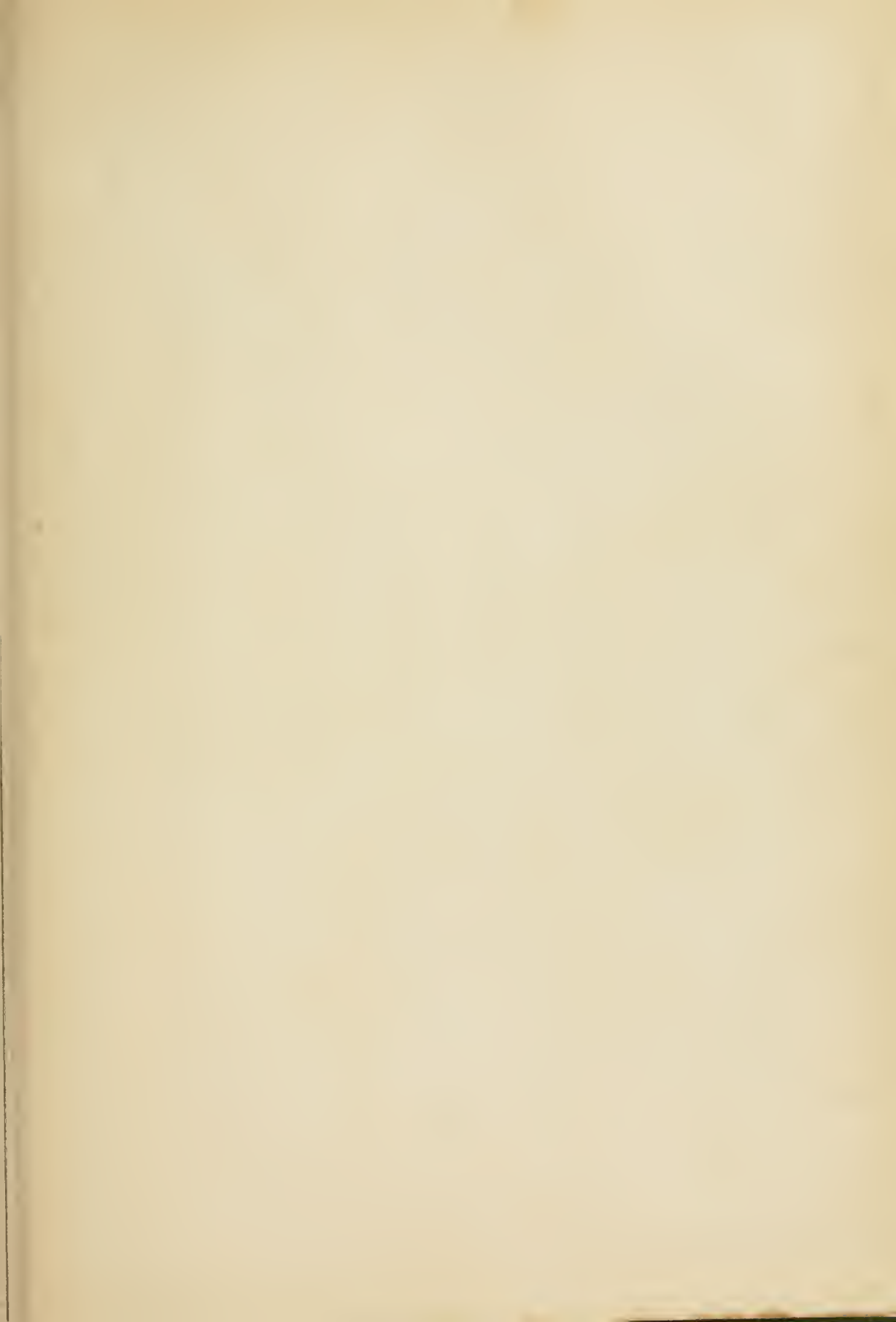
- 1899.
- June 1.—First sitting of the Bloemfontein Conference, where Sir A. Milner met President Kruger to discuss the Transvaal question—the Conference was broken off without coming to any conclusion.
- „ 9.—The Volksraad adopted President Kruger's franchise proposals.
- „ 14.—Papers setting forth the grievances of Outlanders were published.
- July 3.—The Volksraad instructed Transvaal Government to frame a law providing for an increased Parliamentary representation.
- „ 8.—Revised Boer proposals were published.
- „ 13.—Full text of Transvaal Franchise Bill published.
- „ 18.—The Volksraad reduced retrospective qualifying term for franchise from 9 to 7 years, and announced pending abolition of dynamite monopoly.
- „ 22.—Mr. Schreiner telegraphed President Kruger urging him to yield no further, but to await a despatch then on its way.
- „ 25.—Publication of Blue Book with Sir A. Milner's account of the Bloemfontein Conference.
- „ 27.—Publication of further Transvaal Blue Book. New Franchise Law for the Transvaal came into operation.
- Aug. 2.—The British Agent at Pretoria, Mr. Conyngham Greene, presented a despatch to the Transvaal Government.
- „ 7.—Mr. Chamberlain stated, in despatch to the Transvaal, that after the matter of a Joint Mixed Commission had been settled the High Commissioner would be willing to discuss the matter of arbitration.
- „ 8.—Transvaal Government declined Mr. Chamberlain's proposal for a Joint Commission, while requesting that friendly discussion of the general question should be continued.
Arrival at Buluwayo of Colonel Plumer and eight special service officers.
- „ 9.—Parliament prorogued. Mr. Chamberlain announced that reinforcements would be sent for the defence of Natal and for all contingencies, and that the Government had put their hands to the plough and would not draw back.
- „ 11.—Five years' residential qualification and a simplified registration granted by Transvaal Government.
- „ 15.—Lieut.-General Sir F. Forestier Walker succeeded Major-General Sir W. Butler as Commander-in-Chief at the Cape.
- 1899.
- Aug. 18.—Secret session of the Volksraad.
- „ 22.—Parliamentary paper published with correspondence relating to the *status* of the South African Republic.
- „ 24.—Thirty officers and 841 men sailed from Southampton for the Cape.
- „ 25.—Further Transvaal Blue Book published.
- „ 28.—President Kruger stated that he would make no further concessions.
- „ 29.—President Steyn stated that the Orange Free State would only take up arms to defend themselves or enforce treaty obligations.
Troops ordered to Transvaal frontier.
- „ 31.—Her Majesty's Government announced that it waived its demand for a joint franchise inquiry, and authorised Sir A. Milner to undertake an inquiry single-handed.
- Sept. 1.—Publication of the text of the Boer alternative proposal and of Mr. Chamberlain's reply thereto.
- „ 6.—Transvaal reply to the British Government's last despatch agreeing to the proposal for a fresh conference at Cape Town to discuss franchise proposals, but still disputing suzerainty.
- „ 8.—The Imperial Government decided to send 10,000 fresh troops to South Africa.
- „ 12.—Mr. Chamberlain's latest despatch was read in the Volksraad. It embodied demands for a five years' franchise, one-fourth representation in the Raad for the goldfields, equality of English and Dutch languages, and in Presidential and other elections.
- „ 13.—The text of Mr. Chamberlain's despatch was published through the Brussels agency of the Transvaal Republic.
- „ 16.—General Sir George White and his staff left England.
- „ 21.—Publication of Sir A. Milner's despatch to President Steyn regarding the movements of troops, and of Mr. Steyn's reply thereto. Latter stated he could not advise President Kruger to yield, and advised the Free State to be true to its alliance to the Transvaal.
- „ 23.—Mr. Cecil Rhodes, in the House of Assembly at Cape Town, accused several of its members of high treason.
- „ 25.—Text of two despatches to President Kruger published, stating that Her Majesty's Government felt compelled to reconsider the whole situation and to formulate their own proposals for a settlement.

- 1899
- Sept. 27.—Army Service Corps ordered to embark for the Cape.
- „ 28.—The New Zealand Government offered the services of 200 men to the Imperial Government.
- Oct. 3.—Sir George White arrived at Cape Town.
The Mining Commissioner stated that the offer of protection to miners was being withdrawn.
- „ 4.—Ultimatum by the Transvaal Government demanding the withdrawal of British troops from the frontier in 48 hours.
The Boers seized a large quantity of gold in transit.
- „ 5.—Statement that Newcastle was not to be defended.
- „ 6.—Army Service Corps and special officers sailed from Southampton.
- „ 7.—First-class Army Reserve called out.
- „ 10.—Ultimatum from the Transvaal to Great Britain.
New South Wales Lancers passed through London *en route* to South Africa.
- „ 11.—Limit fixed by the Boer ultimatum expired and a state of war commenced.
- „ 12.—Reply to the ultimatum. The Imperial Government deemed the conditions such as it was impossible to discuss.
Mr. Conyngham Greene recalled from Pretoria.
Armoured train taken by the enemy near Mafeking.
Colonel Baden-Powell took up a strong position at Mafeking.
- „ 14.—Sir Redvers Buller and staff left England for the front.
Reports from Mafeking that the Boers had twice attacked and been twice repulsed
Sir G. White reconnoitred the enemy's position at Acton Homes.
- „ 15.—Occupation of Newcastle by the enemy.
- „ 16.—Additional correspondence on South African affairs published, covering the period Sept. 8th—Oct. 13th.
- „ 17.—Opening of Parliament, when the Opposition leaders in both Houses declared their intention of supporting the Government on the South African question.
Colonel Baden-Powell made successful sortie from Mafeking—British lost 18 killed.
Reconnaissance by armoured train near Kimberley: 5 Boers killed.
- „ 18.—Mr. Balfour announced the impending embodiment of the Militia and Militia Reserves.
- „ 19.—Transvaal flag hoisted at Vryburg.
- „ 20.—Battle of Glencoe and repulse of the Boers. Enemy's guns captured. The British lost 33 killed and 181 wounded, including Major-General Sir W. P. Symons (mortally). Squadron of the 18th Hussars captured.
In the House of Commons an address to Her Majesty, *re* the Militia embodiment, was agreed to, as well as votes for 35,000 men and £10,000,000.
- „ 21.—General French attacked Boer force under Kock at Elandsplaagte, and took their camp, artillery, and stores. British loss, 42 killed, 205 wounded, and 10 missing. General Viljoen killed,
- 1899.
- and General Kock, General Pretorius, and Colonel Schiel captured.
- Oct. 22.—General Yule's retreat from Dundee to Ladysmith.
- „ 23.—Death of General Symons. Message from the Queen appraising the victories of Glencoe and Elandsplaagte, but deploring the heavy losses.
Bombardment of Mafeking by the Boers.
- „ 24.—Battle of Rietfontein. British commanded by Sir G. White. Our loss, 13 killed, 106 wounded, 3 missing.
Transvaal and Free State Governments issued proclamation laying claim to large areas of Imperial territory.
Successful sortie from Kimberley by Major Scott-Turner.
Sir William MacCormac (President of the Royal College of Surgeons) offered his services to attend to the wounded.
- „ 25.—Reported invasion of Zululand by the Boers.
- „ 26.—Bombardment of Mafeking.
Generals Yule and White joined hands at Ladysmith.
- „ 28.—Beginning of investment of Ladysmith.
Proclamation issued declaring the Boer "commandeering" of portions of Cape Colony null and void.
- „ 30.—Major Wilson's party retired from Rhodes, Drift to Tuli.
Sir G. White sent the Irish Fusiliers, Gloucesters, and a mountain battery, to Nikolson's Nek against the Boer right flank. Mules with guns and ammunition stampeded into Boer lines. After six hours' fighting the British ammunition gave out and about 800 were captured.
- „ 31.—Sir Redvers Buller landed at Cape Town.
- Nov. 1.—Invasion of Cape Colony by the Boers.
- „ 2.—Colenso evacuated by British. Telegraphic communication from Ladysmith to Pietermaritzburg interrupted.
Besters Station brilliantly taken by British cavalry.
Mobilisation of the British Militia.
- „ 3.—Death of General Kock.
Evacuation of Stormberg and Naauwpoort by British.
- „ 5.—Ladysmith cut off. British retirement from Estcourt.
- „ 9.—Boer attack on Ladysmith repulsed with loss.
Fifth Division ordered to be mobilised.
- „ 11.—Captain Percy Scott, of the *Terrible*, appointed commandant of Durban.
- „ 14.—Lieut.-General Sir C. Warren appointed to command the Fifth Division.
President Kruger threatened to shoot British officers, prisoners at Pretoria, if a Boer spy were shot.
- „ 15.—Boers repulsed at Estcourt.
Armoured train wrecked near Frere. Capture of Mr. Winston Churchill, Dublin Fusiliers, and volunteers.
- „ 17.—British prisoners at [Pretoria now numbered 1,338.
- „ 20.—Her Majesty announced her intention of

- 1899.
- making Christmas presents to the troops in South Africa.
- Nov. 23.—Victory of Lord Methuen at Belmont. British loss 297; heavy Boer losses.
Defeat of Boers at Willow Grange. British loss 87.
- „ 24.—The Queen congratulated Lord Methuen.
Boer repulse at Ladysmith.
- „ 25.—Victory by Lord Methuen at Enslin (Graspan). British loss 197, including Commander Ethelston of the Naval Brigade.
- „ 26.—Mooi River column joined by General Hildyard at Frere.
- „ 28.—Battle of Modder River. Boers repulsed after 10 hours' desperate fighting. Lord Methuen slightly wounded. British losses 475.
- „ 30.—Announcement of Sixth Division for South Africa.
- Dec. 1.—Major-General Sir Mansfield Clarke appointed to command of Sixth Division
- „ 2.—Arrival of General Clery at Frere.
- „ 6.—Kimberley in communication with Lord Methuen. News received of sortie from Kimberley, in which our casualties were 53, including Major Scott-Turner (killed).
- „ 8.—Sekwani raided by a Rhodesian force. Brilliant sortie from Ladysmith and capture of Lombard's Kop. Boer "Long Tom" destroyed and other guns taken. Second skirmish near Pepworth Hill, also successful. British loss, 4 killed, 7 wounded
- „ 9.—Defeat of General Gatacre at Stormberg.
- „ 10.—Sortie from Ladysmith and capture of Surprise Hill. Capture of Vaal Kop by General French.
- „ 11.—Repulse of Lord Methuen at Magersfontein, British lost nearly 1,000, including General Wauchope and Lord Winchester killed.
Major-General Yule left Cape Town for England
- „ 12.—Garrison of Mafeking on reduced rations.
- „ 13.—Victory by French between Arundel and Naauwpoort.
- „ 14.—It was stated that a Seventh Division would be held in reserve.
Arrival of Sir Charles Warren at Cape Town.
- „ 15.—Defeat of Sir Redvers Buller at Colenso, and retreat to Chieveley. British lost 1,119 officers and men and 11 guns.
General Hector Macdonald appointed to command Highland Brigade in succession to General Wauchope.
- „ 18.—Lord Roberts appointed Commander-in-Chief in South Africa, with Lord Kitchener as Chief of Staff. Remainder of the Army Reserve to be embodied.
Renewed fighting at Ladysmith.
- „ 20.—City of London decided to send a special volunteer corps to the front.
Picket of 13th Hussars surprised near Chieveley.
- „ 21.—Message by Lord Roberts to the American and Canadian peoples.
Colonel Plumer entered the Transvaal at Tuli.
- „ 23.—Lord Roberts and staff left England.
- „ 24.—Occupation of Dordrecht by the British.
- 1899.
- Dec. 25.—Naval Brigade blew up Tugela railway bridge.
- „ 28.—The Government agreed to accept services of 10,000 yeomanry. Colonel Sir H. Vincent appointed to command Infantry Battalion of C.I.V.
- „ 31.—The Queen's Christmas message to her troops in South Africa published.
- 1900.
- Jan. 1.—Kuruman surrendered to the Boers.
Successful action by General French at Colesberg.
- „ 3.—Fighting near Colesberg.
- „ 6.—Great Boer attack on Cæsar's Camp and Waggon Hill, Ladysmith
- „ 10.—Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener reached Cape Town.
- „ 11.—Sir Redvers Buller occupied the south bank of the Tugela at Potgieter's Drift
Lord Dundonald and Mounted Brigade crossed the Tugela at Potgieter's.
- „ 15.—Boers repulsed by French near Colesberg.
- „ 18.—The Tugela bridged and crossed at Trichardt's Drift.
- „ 20-22.—Warren's troops retreating to heights north of the Tugela.
- „ 23.—Spion Kop seized, General Woodgate wounded.
- „ 25.—Spion Kop abandoned.
- „ 27.—Sir C. Warren's force withdrawn to the south of the Tugela.
- „ 28.—Kelly-Kenny occupied Thebus.
- „ 30.—British reoccupied Prieska.
- Feb. 4.—General Macdonald occupied Koodoosberg.
- „ 6.—Buller crossed the Tugela and captured Vaal Krantz.
- „ 7.—Vaal Krantz evacuated and the Tugela re-crossed.
- „ 9.—Macdonald retired to Modder River camp. Lord Roberts arrived there.
- „ 13.—French forced Klip Drift and captured three laagers.
- „ 14.—Lord Roberts advanced to Dekiel's Drift.
- „ 15.—French reached and relieved Kimberley.
- „ 16.—Retreat of Cronje and occupation of Magersfontein by the Guards.
- „ 17.—Cronje surrounded at Paardeberg.
- „ 18.—Cronje's laager bombarded. General Macdonald wounded.
General Brabant occupied Dordrecht.
General Buller captured Monte Cristo.
- „ 19.—Cronje asked for an armistice, which was refused.
- „ 20.—General Coke entered Colenso
Lord Roberts defeated the Boer reinforcements for Paardeberg.
- „ 27.—Cronje surrendered to Lord Roberts with 4,000 officers and men.
Pieters Hill stormed and Boer position carried.
Rensburg reoccupied by General Clements.
- „ 28.—Relief of Ladysmith by Buller.
- Mar. 2.—Cronje arrived at Cape Town, a prisoner.
General Buller's formal entry into Ladysmith.
- „ 5.—Gatacre occupied Stormberg.
- „ 7.—Roberts dispersed enemy near Poplar Grove
- „ 8.—Clements occupied Norvals Pont.

- 1900.
- Mar. 10.—Boers defeated by Roberts.
- .. 12.—General French arrived before Bloemfontein.
- .. 13.—Lord Roberts occupied Bloemfontein.
- .. 15.—Gatacre occupied Bethulie.
Boers attacked Colonel Plumer, but were repulsed.
- .. 16.—Fighting at Fourteen Streams.
- .. 17.—Gatacre reached Springfontein.
- .. 19.—Lord Kitchener entered Prieska and received submission of rebels.
- .. 20.—Rouxville occupied by Major Cumming.
- .. 21.—Smithfield occupied by the British.
- .. 23.—Party of Guards' officers ambushed near Bloemfontein.
- .. 27.—Clements occupied Fauresmith.
Death of General Joubert.
- .. 31.—Loss of British convoy at Sanna's Post.
- April 4.—Capture of five companies by the enemy near Reddersburg.
- .. 5.—Colonel Villebois de Mareuil killed near Boshof, and seventy foreign volunteers captured by Methuen.
- .. 9.—Colonial force attacked at Wepener.
- .. 18.—Spion Kop despatches published.
- .. 23.—Arrival of General Carrington at Beira.
- .. 24.—Siege of Wepener raised.
General Rundle occupied Dewetsdorp.
Bloemfontein Waterworks recaptured.
- .. 26.—Sir C. Warren appointed Governor of Griqualand West.
- .. 27.—Thaba 'Nchu occupied.
- .. 30.—General Hamilton captured Houtnek.
- May 4.—Colonel Mahon with relief column started for Mafeking.
- .. 5.—British occupied Brandfort.
- 1900.
- May 6.—The Vet River crossed after some fighting and Smaldeel occupied.
- .. 7.—Hunter occupied Fourteen Streams.
- .. 8.—Ladybrand evacuated by the Boers.
- .. 9.—Lord Roberts at Welgelegen.
Mafeking relief force at Vryburg.
Crossing of Zand River.
Occupation of Ventersburg.
- .. 12.—Lord Roberts occupied Kroonstad.
Native quarter of Mafeking burned by the enemy.
- .. 13.—Boer attack at Mafeking—Commandant Eloff and 108 Boers captured.
- .. 15.—Mafeking relief force defeat the enemy at Kraaipan.
Occupation of Glencoe.
- .. 16.—Occupation of Christiana.
- .. 17.—Relief of Mafeking by Colonels Mahon and Plumer.
General Ian Hamilton occupied Lindley.
Lord Methuen entered Hoopstad.
- .. 20.—Colonel Bethune's Mounted Infantry ambushed near Vryheid; 66 casualties.
- .. 22.—Capture of Heilbron.
- .. 23.—Rhenoster position turned; retreat of the Boers.
- .. 24.—British army entered the Transvaal.
- .. 28.—Orange Free State formally annexed.
- .. 29.—Defeat of the Boers at Doornkop.
Railway junction and rolling-stock captured at Johannesburg.
- .. 30.—Occupation of Utrecht by General Hildyard.
- .. 31.—Lord Roberts entered Johannesburg.
- June 5.—Occupation of Pretoria.





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