

CHAPTER XII

THE EVOLUTION OF LORD ROBERTS'S PLAN

FROM the interminable, aimless delays of the movement to the Upper Tugela, from the confusion and blundering of Spion Kop, from the painful hesitation of Vaal Krantz, we must now turn our attention to the orderly development and laborious, purposeful preparation of a real plan of campaign, destined ere long, through swift, untiring execution, to lead to well-earned victory, and to change the whole face of the war. But before doing so we must first cast a glance at the man to whom, in the hour of danger, the British Government had turned to restore the shaken prestige of the British Army, and to carry the war through to a successful conclusion. Field-Marshal Lord Roberts of Kandahar was already in his sixty-eighth year. His experience of war dated back to the troubled days of the Indian Mutiny, and nearly twenty years had passed since that Afghan campaign in which he finally established his reputation as a leader of men. Since then he had held for seven years and more* the supreme command of the forces in India, a period marked by many far-reaching reforms, and by a great development of India's military power. After forty-one years of Indian service Lord Roberts had come home to take up the command of the forces in Ireland, and was now fast approaching the expiration of his command and that honourable retirement to which his age and past services entitled him. But to a mind incessantly active, to a body steeled by continuous hard exercise, and to nerves firm strung by simple and abstemious living, the years had made little

Lord Roberts.
His career.

* 1885-1893.

difference. Though the world at large looked upon Lord Roberts as a soldier whose career lay behind him, his friends knew that the sword within the scabbard was as bright and keen as ever, if the occasion for its use should arise.

His character
and military
qualities.

Small, wiry and alert, with quick grey eyes sparkling, as a rule, with good humour, but on rare occasion capable of blazing with fiercest anger, his outward appearance was the true counterpart of his mental disposition. Of his more intimate personal traits this is hardly the place to speak, though no sketch would be complete without a reference to the simple piety which, as in the case of more than one great soldier, formed so large an element in his character. As man and soldier alike he was essentially an Irishman, a typical representative of that adventurous and ambitious breed of Irish gentry, which has played so conspicuous a part in the history of the British Army. His unaffected geniality and kindliness won the hearts of all officers who served with him, while his personal gallantry, his success, and his genuine and untiring interest in the welfare of the common soldier endeared "Bobs" to the Army as a whole. He relied on the personal affection and the natural ambition of his subordinates to secure their good work, rather than on their fear of punishment; and if, perhaps, he lacked somewhat of the impersonal hardness required in a great organizer, he also proved more than once that his officers would work and his men march and fight for him as they would have done for no other leader. Of the qualities essential to generalship, he was gifted with the imaginative intuition necessary to divine the movements and the intentions of an enemy, with the courage of his own judgment, and with the true thirst for victory—the keen will to achieve his main purpose, undistracted by subsidiary issues, and ever fresh in spite of worries or delays. Above all he possessed in a rare degree the unconquerable optimism that can disregard all dangers and difficulties once a course of action is decided on. At Charasiab, at the Peiwar Kotal, on the march to Kandahar, he had shown, as he was to show at more than one critical moment of his South African campaign, that the sense of danger and the haunting fear of failure could never disturb

his serene confidence in the ultimate success of his plans. If we add an almost unerring eye for country, we get a combination of qualities not easy to surpass. As for his defects, they were in the main those of his qualities. His optimism tended on occasion to make him too easily satisfied with success instead of pushing his advantage to the uttermost, too ready to believe that his enemy was crushed when he was only dispersed. His skill in manœuvre, combined with his natural humanity, too often inclined him to forget that killing is the primary and normal method of compassing the great objects of strategy, and that those objects can rarely be secured without freely sacrificing the lives of one's own men. His quickness, confidence and decision displayed themselves at their best in the field and while on the move; the conduct of prolonged and scattered operations from a central office was less suited to the genius of one who was a consummate player of the great game of war, rather than a methodical organizer of manslaughter, regarded only as a vast and complicated business, devoid of the element of personal conflict.

His military experience, confined almost wholly to India, was, perhaps, less varied than that of many other British generals. But that could be reckoned a gain rather than a loss. In India alone had there been within the last forty years operations on a sufficiently large scale, and against enemies sufficiently formidable from the tactical point of view, to afford scope for real strategy. Even in peace the Indian manœuvres provided opportunities for the handling of large bodies of men over considerable areas to which there was nothing comparable in England. And whereas in those days high appointments in the British Army in peace time only meant absorption in administrative routine and forgetfulness of all thoughts of war, the supreme command in India, which Roberts held so long, was an office that kept ever before the mind of its holder a series of great strategical problems.*

Value of
Roberts's
Indian
experience.

* The internal organization of the Indian Army, moreover, though not on the level of modern scientific organization, was far better fitted for training generals than the British system. The Quartermaster-General's department, in which Roberts found his career, was much nearer a

During all his years in command strategy on the great scale had been the one pre-occupation of Roberts's mind. On entering office he had laid down a policy for the North-West Frontier, based partly on his own Afghan experiences, but no less on a wide historical view of war and a clear insight into the plausible folly of passive defence. Year after year he had worked away at it, inspiring viceroys and subalterns alike with his earnestness, and before he left India he had laid securely the foundations upon which his successors have since continued to build.

Roberts accepts the command. The departure from Southampton.

On the morning of December 17 Lord Roberts received the news of his only son's death. A few hours later, at the call of duty, he put his great sorrow behind him, and undismayed by the difficulty of the task, undeterred by the weight of his years, accepted the command, conscious of his fitness to hold it, and confident in his power to retrieve the failure of his predecessor, and to restore victory to the British arms. His preparations were few and brief. The five days intervening before the departure of the next steamer sufficed for them and for the selection of the necessary staff of the new Headquarters. On December 23, a dreary winter day, Roberts left Southampton. There is always something profoundly affecting in the moment when a great ship casts off for a distant voyage. But rarely have events given a deeper significance or a more dramatic emotion to such a scene than on that occasion when in the deepest gloom of defeat the *Dunottar Castle* glided majestically from the quay on her voyage of 6,000 miles, bearing with her the fortunes of the campaign, perhaps of the British Empire—an old sorrow-stricken little man dressed in deep mourning, who raised his hat in response to the respectful and sympathetic cheers from the shore, and then turned away to pace the deck, already revolving in his mind the plan of victory.

general staff than anything that could be found in the British Army, and the complete separation of the military and administrative departments, however inconvenient in some respects, at any rate left generals free to regard the training of their men and the study of military problems as their chief duties.

Of the large staff* that accompanied Lord Roberts, two or three deserve special mention. As Chief of the Staff the Government had selected, at Roberts's own request, Major-General Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, Sirdar of the Egyptian Army. A comparatively young soldier, the victor of Omdurman had not yet completed his fiftieth year. His military experience had been mainly confined to the narrow limits of Egyptian territory, and his reconquest of the Sudan, brilliant as it was, had afforded no opportunity for a display of conspicuous strategy or tactical skill. What it had displayed was the talent for administration and the rigid economy that could build up an army on an infinitesimal budget; the patience and foresight that could plan and prepare a campaign for years; the resolution and driving power that could overcome all the natural obstacles of distance and desert that lay between planning and execution. It would be difficult to find a greater contrast, whether in appearance or in mental qualities, than that existing between Roberts and his Chief of the Staff. Though Kitchener was sprung from a family settled in Ireland, there was little of the Irishman in his burly figure or in his square-jawed, heavy-moustached, inscrutable face. Sure calculation rather than sudden intuition, inflexible strength of will rather than buoyant confidence, were his chief characteristics. Where Roberts trusted to his insight into the personal factor, whether in his enemy or in his subordinates, Kitchener put his faith in energy, organization, and numbers. Without Roberts's consummate mastery of the art of war, Kitchener possessed certain compensating qualities less fully developed in his chief: the instinct to destroy, the indifference to life, and the determination to push the results of victory to the utmost. Towards his subordinates Kitchener was commonly reported to be a second Duke of Wellington—a hard, exacting taskmaster indifferent to their feelings or their interests. Allowing for customary exaggeration

Lord
Kitchener.
His experi-
ence and
qualities.

* See the diagram with the names of the headquarters staff at the end of the volume. It should be borne in mind that in the main it was only the personal and operations staff that Roberts took out with him. The technical and administrative staff, directors of supplies and transport, of railways, of medical services, etc., he took over from Buller, who left these at Cape Town when he called away the rest of his staff to Natal.

tion, the fact remains that he was determined to secure good work, and would let neither good-nature nor indolence prevail against that determination.

His position
on the staff.

Many doubted whether Kitchener was not too self-willed and absolute, both by nature and by habit, ever to accommodate himself to the position of a subordinate. The doubters misjudged a character which was as supple as it was strong and was, under the influence of sincere personal regard and admiration, to prove itself as capable of loyal subservience as of autocratic power. Rarely have characters so different combined, on the spur of the moment, to form so effective and smooth-working a partnership. The particular position of Chief of the Staff for which Kitchener was selected did not, in the absence of a scientific system of staff organization in the British Army, imply any very specific duties or call for any special training. In the sequel he was used by his chief not so much as a staff officer, to work out his plans and convey his orders, but mainly as his right hand man, on whom he could, with implicit confidence, devolve any important piece of organizing work that turned up, or whom he could send round to "hustle" departments and subordinate commanders—an arrangement whose advantages and defects the narrative will show. At the moment of his appointment Kitchener was at Khartoum engaged in the task of building a new city and creating a new administration on the ruins of the Dervish power, the last remnants of which had just been crushed by his lieutenants.* Leaving Khartoum on the 18th of December, he reached Alexandria on the 21st after three days by steamer and train, was there taken on board by the cruiser *Isis*, and joined Roberts at Gibraltar on the 26th.

Major
Henderson,
Director of
Intelligence.

As his Director of Intelligence, Roberts took with him Major G. F. R. Henderson, at that moment Professor of Military History at the Staff College. A brilliant writer and a profound thinker on the great problems of strategy and tactics, Henderson was an officer who under a better system would naturally have risen to the highest positions on the

* On November 24 Colonel Wingate brought the fugitive Khalifa to bay at Om Debrikat. The Khalifa, Ahmed Fedil, most of the principal emirs and over 1,000 Dervishes fell in this action.

General Staff. As it was, his selection for an important post on Roberts's staff was due solely to the latter's wise courage and disregard of convention in picking out from his comparatively humble position—for such it was considered in the perverse and foolish contempt for the scientific student and for the teacher, which pervaded, and still pervades, our military system, and indeed our whole national life—one in whose writings he had discerned a kindred spirit. Unfortunately illness, destined ere long to end fatally,* deprived Roberts of his services within a few weeks of the opening of his campaign. Yet even in that short time, in the long walks up and down the decks of the *Dunottar Castle* on the voyage, in the many colloquies during the days of preparation at Cape Town, the fertile suggestions and sober criticisms of the author of 'Stonewall Jackson' played no small part in confirming the native intuition and strengthening the resolution of his chief.

The only other member of the Staff whose name calls for special mention is Colonel W. G. Nicholson,† an officer of exceptional capacity and of great experience of staff work, whose cautious critical judgment and skilled pen Roberts had long since learned to value in India. It was from that country, where he was occupying the post of Adjutant-General, that Roberts now summoned Nicholson to meet him at Cape Town. Originally appointed as Military Secretary, he was subsequently entrusted with the direction of the transport service, but continued to be largely employed by his chief, in his personal capacity, for a variety of responsible and confidential duties. Not on the staff, but a fellow-passenger, and one of the informal deck council with whom Lord Roberts discussed, without ever fully revealing, the great schemes maturing in his mind, was General Kelly-Kenny, commander of the Sixth Division, a shrewd, drily humorous Irishman of long and varied experience of military administration. As for the rest

Colonel
Nicholson
and General
Kelly-Kenny.

* Colonel Henderson died in March, 1903, leaving a gap in the scanty ranks of British military thinkers which will not easily be filled.

† Now Lieut.-General Sir W. G. Nicholson, K.C.B. Nicholson reached Cape Town on January 18, the same steamer bringing Colonel Neville Chamberlain, Roberts's private secretary, General Tucker, commanding the Seventh Division, and General Hector MacDonald, Wauchope's successor in the command of the Highland Brigade.

of the staff, it is enough to say that it comprised a great many hard-working, capable officers of varied experience, and the usual miscellaneous collection of secretaries, titled aides-de-camp, and other personal attendants.*

The nucleus idea of Roberts's plan. Its difference from the original War Office plan.

Military history contains no more fascinating study than the progressive development of a great strategical plan in the hands of a master. We see it beginning as a mere rough idea or intuition; gradually and slowly shaping itself in contact with the tedious and harassing details of organization, and the necessities of a complicated military situation; then suddenly launched on its career; transformed hourly with the changing fortunes of the field; and yet preserving throughout the under-lying motive and purpose of its author. In this instance the central idea, the nucleus, as it were, of his plan of campaign, had long been fixed in Roberts's mind. Two years and more before the outbreak of the war he had worked out the question with a pair of keen junior officers in the Intelligence Division. Already then he had resolved that the correct course to pursue was, not to push up along the railway lines leading directly to the enemy's capital, either through Natal or Central Cape Colony,† but to utilize the line of railway running along the Western frontiers of the Republics as the jumping-off point of a flank march at Pretoria or Bloemfontein, whose success should afterwards open up the direct and natural lines of communication. The difference between this plan and those discussed at the War Office, of which the advance up the central line was eventually adopted, was not a mere difference as to choice of route, but was based on a fundamental divergence in the strategical point of view. The difficulties and risks of Roberts's plan were obvious. It involved throwing the whole burden of maintaining the army

* H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught, who had already previously applied for any sort of employment in South Africa, had again asked to be attached to Lord Roberts's staff in any capacity, a request which the Government, however, refused to sanction.

† See vol. ii., p. 119. In 1897, however, the contingency of the Free State joining in the war was less certain, and it was in the shape of a march from Mafeking to Pretoria quite as much as in that of a march from Orange River or Kimberley to Bloemfontein that the problem originally presented itself to Roberts's mind.

on a single line of railway, and that the longest and most exposed; it necessitated the organization of a field transport capable of moving a hundred miles or more from its railway base; and it implied the possibility of disaster to the whole force if the march should fail to secure a victory sufficiently decisive to bring about the speedy opening of direct railway communication with the bases on the coast. The War Office plan enabled the troops to be disembarked at three harbours and brought to the front by three converging lines; it allowed of the advance keeping an open railway communication behind it all the way; and in case of failure it involved nothing worse than the standstill of the force or a withdrawal along the line of its advance. And yet, with all its advantages, it neglected one essential factor in strategy, the resistance of the enemy. To avoid mere difficulties of organization and military technique, it tied the British advance down to a prescribed route. And it did so because it assumed throughout that the British force could always push its way through the Boers, wherever it met them and however well prepared they might be to meet it. What was wrong with the "steam-roller" plan of operations—to quote an expression frequently applied to Buller's army at the outset of the war—was not its strategical form, but the underlying assumption of an overwhelming superiority of tactical strength, in other words the fundamental mistake with which the campaign was opened. Roberts was accustomed to take his opponents more seriously, and to his mind the problem was not how to get most conveniently to Bloemfontein, dispersing the Boers on the way, but how to tackle the Boers under conditions most favourable to himself and least favourable to them. The passage of the Orange River in face of the enemy, and at points where the latter could most conveniently concentrate his forces, the slow advance along a fixed route which the Boers would have every opportunity of attempting to bar in force, did not seem to him to fulfil those conditions. And so, in spite of all the technical difficulties and military dangers, he preferred a plan which gave him the crossing of the Orange River without fighting, which turned the Boer front and threatened their lines of communications and their capital,

and which enabled him to march freely across open country in any direction he might choose.

The difference illustrated by Buller's suggestion of a railway to Bloemfontein.

The difference between Roberts's conception of strategy and that of the man whom he succeeded is well illustrated by the suggestion Buller telegraphed home at the very moment Roberts was sailing, namely, that a railway should be built eastwards from Modder River towards Bloemfontein, along which the army should advance.* That such a railway would have facilitated the supplying of an irresistible force marching on Bloemfontein, and would in the long run have made it easier to control the southern Free State, may well be admitted. Unfortunately, the British troops were not irresistible. If they could not force their way along any of the existing railway lines, why should they have been more likely to succeed in forcing their way along a line which they had laboriously to build as they advanced, and which the Boers could equally well head off with their intrenchments? And even if the army had been strong enough to overcome all resistance, its progress would have been too slow† to affect the fate either of Ladysmith or of Kimberley, while the conveyance of the materials for the construction of the new railway would have seriously interfered with the concentration of troops and munitions of war along the existing lines. However applicable to the leisurely reconquest of the Sudan against Dervishes, the idea of setting to work, at the most critical moment of the war, to circumvent the Boers by building a new railway to Bloemfontein was a military absurdity, and Roberts, who received the suggestion at Gibraltar, was fully justified in refusing to treat it seriously.

Evolution of the plan on the journey. Its first shape.

It must not, however, be supposed that Roberts had already settled upon a definite cut-and-dried plan before starting. Such a plan could only be framed in contact with

* See p. 108.

† Colonel Girouard, Director of Railways, declared himself ready to build a mile a day without interfering with the ordinary military traffic. At this rate Bloemfontein would have been reached by April, at the very earliest, and probably not till May. Whether this railway might not, with advantage, have been constructed after the army reached Bloemfontein is, of course, a very different question.

the actual situation on his arrival, and to send any specific instructions at that moment might not only have prematurely betrayed his intentions, but have proved confusing and even mischievous. Accordingly Roberts's first telegram to Buller, sent just before embarkation, contained no more definite statement of his views than an announcement of his intention to adhere to the original plan* of advancing through the Orange Free State in force, and an urgent request for the fullest information on the state of the land transport service to be ready for him on his arrival. If in the meanwhile Buller relieved Ladysmith, Roberts suggested that he should evacuate it and fall back to the Tugela, while Methuen should fall back on Orange River if he succeeded in relieving Kimberley. Failing, however, the relief of Kimberley, Roberts added in his message from Gibraltar, Methuen should stay on at Modder River as long as he safely could. On December 28 he sent a further message from Madeira suggesting the maintenance of the *status quo* at all points, even including Natal. During the voyage the plan began gradually to shape itself. The form it first took was that of an advance directed due east or even south-east from Orange River Station so as to strike the central line of railway at Edenburg or some point nearer Springfontein.† Such a march would threaten, at one and the same moment, the communications of the Boer forces south of the Orange River and the safety of Bloemfontein. The one threat could be relied upon to clear Cape Colony and give Roberts the control of the railway communications through Springfontein to Port Elizabeth and East London, the other to draw off a large part of the Boer forces round Ladysmith and Kimberley, and thus make it easier for Buller and Methuen to relieve those places. That an army's communications are its weakest point, and should be one of the first objects for attack, has been a leading

* *I.e.*, as contrasted with the diversion of forces to Natal. There is no reference to the Norval's Pont-Bethulie advance, though Buller seems to have concluded that this was Roberts's intention. The object of the message was not to explain Roberts's own views, but to prevent Buller committing the forces to any further entanglements or withdrawing more troops from Cape Colony to Natal.

† This view was more particularly advocated by Kelly-Kenny.

principle of most great strategists from Napoleon downwards. The disconcerting effect of a threatened advance on an enemy's capital is another lesson of history that Roberts was not likely to be forgetful of, even if he had not within the last few months refreshed his memory with Henderson's striking descriptions of the effect of the Confederate demonstrations against Washington upon the strategy of the Federal leaders. But above all Roberts realized—and realized it not merely as a theoretical commonplace to be assented to and then dismissed from thought, but as the law of his action—that against any enemy capable of fighting on even approximately equal terms the essence of strategy lies in surprise, and in that rapidity and freedom of movement by which alone it becomes possible to surprise one's enemy and to impose upon him, in the midst of hurry and uncertainty, the alternative of abandoning some important objective or of trying the fortune of battle under conditions not of his own choosing. Whatever modifications the plan might yet undergo, Roberts was resolved that it should neither be obvious in its direction nor slow in its execution.

Situation on
Roberts's
arrival.

On January 10 Roberts landed at Cape Town. It may well have been an anxious moment for him, wondering what fresh change for the worse the military position might not have undergone, setting all his calculations at defiance. But from every quarter the news was satisfactory. From Buller the new Commander-in-Chief found two conflicting missives awaiting him with regard to the situation in Natal: one a letter of December 28,* pointing out that the Boer position on the Tugela could not be turned, as Roberts had suggested in his telegram of December 23, but must be forced; the other a telegram announcing that Buller was just starting on his turning movement by the Upper Tugela. Although, on general grounds, Roberts would have preferred delaying this movement till his own preparations were more advanced, yet, in his ignorance of the exact state of affairs at Ladysmith and on the Tugela, he rightly judged it best not to interfere

* This letter also contained a suggestion that the main advance on Bloemfontein should be made from Modder River by way of Jacobsdal. See Evidence of War Commission, ii. p. 177.

with Buller's discretion. He accordingly confined himself in the following days to sending Buller his good wishes, expressing the hope that White would co-operate, and vainly urging the supreme importance of rapidity. In Cape Colony the British forces were everywhere holding their own, and the gaps between them were gradually being closed. The High Commissioner, indeed, was still extremely anxious about the attitude of the Dutch population, and the danger of a general rising in rear of the British troops was one which Roberts had to take into serious consideration. But the worst was over, and in the absence of fresh defeats in the field there was good reason to hope that things might be kept quiet for a few weeks longer.

Roberts's immediate care, accordingly, was not to begin any offensive operation at once, but simply to safeguard and improve the existing position till everything was ready for him to strike a decisive blow. The Sixth Division was just landing, and Methuen was eagerly asking for it in order to carry out the relief of Kimberley by a flank march through Jacobsdal. But Roberts ordered him to act strictly on the defensive, and, so far from granting the desired reinforcement, hinted that he might even have to withdraw one of his brigades and part of his cavalry.* The division was sent to Naauwpoort, the 12th Brigade, under General Clements, being pushed forward as reinforcement to French, to enable him to save his hard-worked cavalry for more important work in the future, and as a precaution, in case a successful advance by Buller in Natal should induce the Boers to attempt a counterstroke against Cape Colony. Kelly-Kenny with the rest was to work eastward from Naauwpoort and endeavour to restore as much as possible of the Rosmead-Stormberg line of railway, both to take the immediate pressure off Gatacre and to facilitate the strategical transference of troops after the main advance should have taken effect in clearing Cape Colony. Gatacre, too, who was eager to carry out a reconnaissance in force towards Stormberg, was ordered to keep strictly on the defensive for the present. But

Roberts
orders the
generals to
mark time.

* Roberts, however, sent him four 4·7 siege guns to strengthen his position and enable him to keep the Boers occupied.

Roberts was none the less anxious to recover Stormberg and clear north-eastern Cape Colony, and it was for this special object that he destined the Colonial Division under Colonel Brabant, whose formation he sanctioned a few days after his arrival.* This force, eventually some 3,000 strong, was to advance round Gatacre's right, occupy Dordrecht and Jamestown, and, if possible, manœuvre the Boers out of their position at Stormberg.

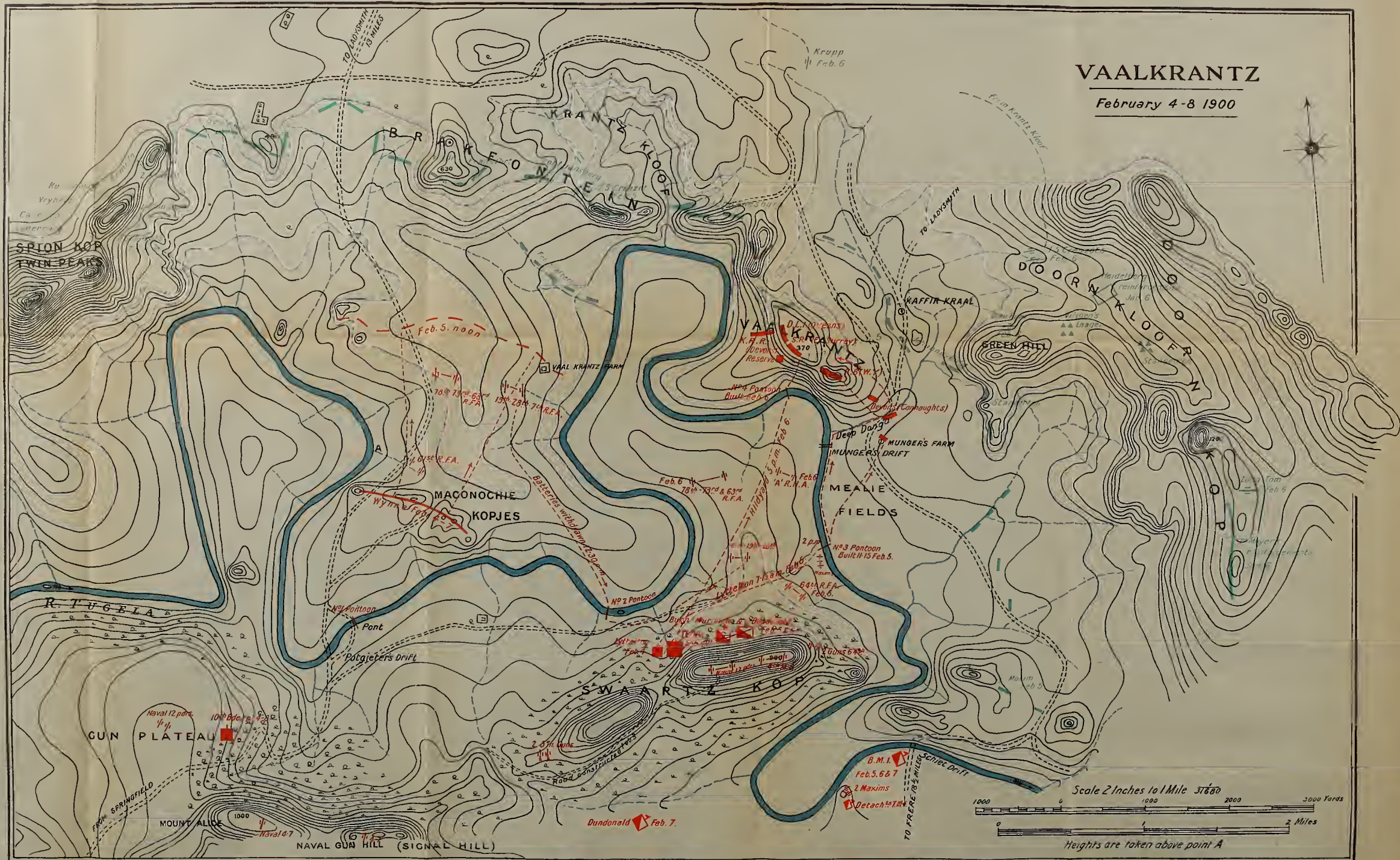
Question of
seizing Nor-
val's Pont.
Misleading
effect of
Roberts's
dispositions.

There was one really bold step, indeed, which Roberts, impressed by French's recent successes, was at first prepared to sanction, if French was convinced of its being possible. The sudden seizure of Norval's Pont bridge by a well-planned *coup de main* would have been of such incalculable assistance to Roberts's schemes that it might well have been worth running some risk to attempt. But, on consideration, the difficulty of securing the bridge intact and of defending a position on the north bank caused the suggestion to be abandoned. Whether Roberts, in making it, had a passing idea of abandoning his own plan and reverting to the original line of advance is doubtful. More probably his chief thought was of the advantage of saving the bridge and thus being able to transfer his communications to the railway the moment he reached it by his flank march. But, in any case, the natural conclusion drawn at the time from the various measures now carried out or discussed was that Roberts intended to carry on the original plan of campaign, and that the clearing of central and eastern Cape Colony would be followed by a direct advance on Bloemfontein along the railway. They thus served most effectively to mislead the world at large, and even his own subordinates, with regard to his real intentions.

Methuen and
French dur-
ing January.

The operations at the front during the next three weeks were, accordingly, of a purely temporizing character. Methuen, confining himself strictly to his instructions, demonstrated with his newly-arrived guns of position against the Boer trenches on January 16 and 23. To check the parties of Boers who were again beginning to roam about in the country west of the railway, a small force under Colonel Rochfort Boyd was sent out from Belmont to camp twelve miles out at Richmond,

* See p. 95. Brabant was gazetted brigadier-general on January 18.





and on the 23rd moved forward to Rooi Pan near Sunnyside, while a handful of Rimington's Guides patrolled the country beyond. At Rensburg French was enabled, by the arrival of Clements with the Royal Irish and Worcestershire Regiments on January 15, to extend his lines still more widely. On the 18th Clements was placed in command of the right wing, and took up his headquarters, with two and a half battalions, two squadrons and four horse-guns, at Slingersfontein. Porter, with four squadrons, two horse-guns, and an infantry company, moved eight miles further east to Potfontein, while Rimington, with two squadrons and his Guides, was posted north of him at Kleinfontein, where by a variety of clever stratagems—ostentatiously reinforcing his posts at daybreak with detachments sent away from the same posts an hour or two earlier, keeping up imaginary outpost lines with cow-dung fires, etc.—he succeeded in creating the impression that he was threatening the Boer communications with a considerable force. On the 20th two 5-inch howitzers, just arrived from England, were brought into action against the Boer positions west of Colesberg, and drew a heavy fire. French now applied to Kelly-Kenny for the loan of some more infantry, and on the 22nd the Wiltshires and Bedfordshires arrived, and most of them were marched out next day to Maeder's. As the result of a reconnaissance on the 23rd by Colonel Stephenson of the Essex and Captain De Lisle, French now planned a movement against the Boer positions at Plessis Poort, which covered their communications with the road bridge. The troops detailed for this operation* were assembled near Hobkirk's Farm on the evening of the 24th, and advanced eastwards next morning on the north side of, and partly along, the Bastaard's Nek—Rietfontein ridge, the infantry under Stephenson and the mounted troops under General Brabazon. Owing to the difficulty of the ground the infantry was not in a position to begin an attack till about 2 P.M., and unfortunately Brabazon, whose orders were to work round on the left and get beyond the enemy's flank and rear as soon as the

* 2nd Wiltshires, 4 companies Yorkshires, 2 companies Essex, 2 squadrons 10th Hussars, 1 squadron Inniskillings, De Lisle's M.I., 4 guns "R," R.H.A., and 3 guns 4th R.F.A.

infantry were in position, made no attempt to carry them out. Accordingly when Stephenson at 2.30 P.M. sent forward the Wiltshires to within 800 yards of the Boers, and asked for permission to drive the attack home, as the heights did not appear very strongly held, French reluctantly decided to abandon the attack in view of his very definite instructions from Roberts not to commit his force. The force was withdrawn to Hobkirk's under heavy rifle and shell-fire, the Wiltshires suffering a few casualties in extricating their firing-line. As always, French took care on the 25th that the attack on the left flank should be accompanied by vigorous demonstrations all along the rest of the line. The operation was not entirely wasted, for it served to alarm the Boers, and helped to keep them on the defensive for the next fortnight, during which the greater part of French's force was secretly withdrawn.

Kelly-Kenny's plan for cutting off Stormberg.

An even more important operation than the capture of Plessis Poort had before this been suggested to Roberts by Kelly-Kenny, who had taken over the command at Naauwpoort on the 16th. This was that he should co-operate with French in a sudden forced march across from Arundel to some point on the eastern railway north of Stormberg, and thus compel the immediate retreat of the Boers opposite Gatacre. The plan was sound enough, but Roberts had even bolder forced marches in contemplation, and was not to be tempted away from his main purpose. Accordingly Kelly-Kenny devoted himself during the rest of January to restoring the railway east of Rosmead as far as Theebus, reconnoitring as far as Steynsburg, and covering the march of long convoys of ox-wagons on their way from Queenstown to Orange River. On the eastern flank, except for the formation of the Colonial Division at Queenstown, military operations remained at a complete standstill.

Troops and reinforcements available.

Roberts and his staff, meanwhile, were concentrating their whole energies on the task of creating a field force which should be an adequate instrument for his strategy. Of men Roberts would have no immediate lack. The Sixth Division would be followed before the end of the month by the Seventh. Two cavalry regiments and five batteries R.H.A. were also due during January. Added to the units

already at the front there was thus plenty of material out of which to create a striking force, and, even if its creation and concentration involved weakening certain important points, it would only be for a short time. February would see the arrival of four more brigade divisions of field artillery, of a second siege-train of heavy guns,* of the Burma battalion of mounted infantry, of the colonial second contingents, of several thousand yeomanry and infantry volunteers, and, not least, of eighteen battalions of Militia, a force which Roberts hoped would prove sufficient both in numbers and in quality to set free all the rest of the first line troops for the further advance to Pretoria.† What was wanting was not so much men as an army. The original Army Corps no longer existed, but even if its constituent parts could have been brought together or replaced by fresh forces from home, the War Office sealed pattern field force was not, in Roberts's view, suited to his requirements. It was too cumbrous, possessing neither the strategical mobility demanded by the vast spaces of South Africa and the relative smallness of the forces engaged, nor the tactical mobility essential in order to contend successfully with an enemy like the Boers.

The only way to secure tactical mobility was to increase the proportion of mounted men. That proportion, throughout the forces in South Africa, had sunk rather than risen, owing to the reluctance of the home authorities to send out the remainder of the cavalry in England with the reinforcing infantry divisions,‡ and vigorous measures were necessary

Measures to increase the proportion of mounted troops. The Regular M.I.

* The first siege-train arrived December 26-January 2.

† According to Lord Kitchener (Evidence, Q. 171) the total force, on paper, in South Africa when Lord Roberts landed was 94,600, of whom 51,600 were in Natal and 43,100 in Cape Colony. By the time he marched from Modder River there must have been over 70,000 in Cape Colony, while another 30,000 or more arrived during February. Mr. Wyndham indeed announced in Parliament on February 1 that the total force in South Africa had been 103,000 on January 7 and would before the end of February be 142,800 foot and 37,800 mounted men, or 180,000 in all. The effective fighting strength was, of course, considerably less, and Roberts reckoned it on January 31 as nearly 40,000 men with 120 guns in Natal, and 60,000 with 150 guns in Cape Colony.

‡ See chap. i., pp. 6, 14. The Yeomanry indeed would begin to arrive by the end of January, but they could not be reckoned as fit to take the field for some time after.

to restore the balance and to create a surplus available for Roberts's special purposes. The raising of fresh mounted forces in Cape Colony was one of the first and most obvious of measures. The creation of the Colonial Division in the Eastern Province increased the patriotic self-confidence of loyal colonists, and opened up new sources to recruiting. Equally well judged in its tactful appeal to the patriotic spirit in the colony was Roberts's selection of a personal bodyguard from picked representatives of the different South African corps. Two more regiments raised in Cape Town (Roberts's and Kitchener's Horse) were available or soon would be. Other Colonial corps at present on foot, but consisting mainly of men who knew how to ride, such as Prince Alfred's Guards and the Australian regiment under Colonel Hoad at Enslin, were converted into mounted infantry. Colonel Nicholson, commandant of the police in Rhodesia, was urged to raise further mounted volunteers, and to spare all available police to co-operate in the relief of Mafeking.* Lastly the existing regular mounted infantry was increased by some 3,000 men by the simple process of ordering every infantry battalion to furnish a mounted infantry company. Eight additional battalions of mounted infantry, each of four companies, were raised in this fashion. It was a glorious makeshift, and there need be no disguising the fact that for the first few weeks of its existence the military value of the mounted infantry was somewhat impaired by the difficulty most of the men experienced in climbing on to their saddles or in remaining on them when they got there. The horses, too, were as untrained as the men. For though South African ponies, hardy, acclimatized and frugal of forage, were plentiful all over the colony, the Dutch farmers were unwilling to part with them, and the political situation was considered so critical that Sir A. Milner hesitated to sanction compulsory impressment. The result was that though most of the colonial corps were with difficulty mounted locally, the mounted infantry had to wait, in

* The suggestion in this case seems originally to have emanated from Mr. Rhodes, who on January 13 sent a message to Roberts from Kimberley urging the relief of Mafeking from Rhodesia.

some cases till within a few days of Roberts's start, for Argentine or Australian horses just landed in hopelessly soft condition from a long sea voyage, and quite unfit for hard work even with good riders and horsemasters. None the less the courage that devised the expedient was amply rewarded in the later course of the campaign when the regular "M.I." proved itself the very backbone of the army in the field. By these means and by the withdrawal of French's cavalry from the Colesberg operations, Roberts could reckon on being able by the beginning of February to concentrate at any point a field force comprising not only three or four divisions of infantry and a greatly enlarged division of cavalry, but also two additional brigades of mounted infantry.

Strategical mobility was in Roberts's eyes even more important than tactical mobility, and there was only one way to attain it. The provision of an adequate and mobile transport for the field force was the one measure of preparation which went before all others; how to provide it was the great problem ever before his mind from the day that he left Southampton. That nothing but deficiency of transport could account for the frontal attacks at Magersfontein or Colenso was a conviction which had immediately impressed itself upon him, and had suggested the further inference that something must be radically wrong with the system on which the transport of the original field force was organized. The actual facts, indeed, with regard to those battles, cannot be said to bear out his conclusion.* And in any case we must never forget that the whole of the preceding operations had, owing to the exigencies of the Boer invasion, been undertaken before the original transport organization could be completed. The War Office preparations had included the provision of adequate field transport for an army corps—adequate, at least, for the line of march and style of advance decided upon—and that transport had all reached South Africa by the appointed date, namely, the

The need of
an adequate
field trans-
port.

* See vol. ii., pp. 321, 392, 426. In both the cases referred to a turning movement was first decided upon as possible, and then abandoned for other reasons than those of transport deficiency alone.

end of December, and by the time of Roberts's arrival was disposed on the lines of communication in readiness for the originally projected advance. Whatever deficiency of transport there may have been at any stage of the earlier operations, or whatever changes Roberts found it necessary to make, the fault lay not with the department responsible for the transport arrangements, but with that fundamental misconception of the strategical problem which was due to the absence of a thinking and planning department at the War Office. At the same time, the fact remains that the original transport for the Army Corps, even with such additions as had been made to it, was inadequate to give to the whole of the now largely increased force the degree of mobility originally intended. Moreover, even that degree of mobility was insufficient for the special effort Roberts required of his striking force. The actual total deficiency in quantity could only be made up by the addition of more ox-transport, as the ordering out of fresh mule-transport would have taken longer than he could afford to wait. On his way out he had urged upon the War Office the necessity of sanctioning a large increase of ox-transport, and only a few hours before his landing, Colonel Bridge, the director of transport at Cape Town, had signed a contract for 300 ox-wagons, in addition to the 700 already in use, to which Roberts added another 200 on the eve of his departure for the front. But for the particular task Roberts had in view a very large proportion of the more mobile mule-transport was considered essential. The wholesale transference to the striking force of mule-transports from units that would not take part in the advance was the necessary consequence, and the working out of this transference, and organizing the transport thus accumulated for the field force, was one of the chief tasks that was to occupy the headquarters staff during the next fortnight.

The
regimental
system.

A detailed discussion of the highly technical controversy with regard to Roberts's reorganization of the transport system would hardly be in place here, and must be left to be dealt with adequately in a later volume. But it is necessary to summarize briefly the main points at issue. The transport in

South Africa when Roberts arrived was organized on a carefully worked out system, which was an essential part and parcel of the British scheme of mobilization. That system is sometimes called the regimental system, but would be more correctly described as the decentralized or articulated system, its essence being that each field unit—battalion, brigade, division, army corps—has attached to it and is responsible for a corresponding transport unit. Each lower transport unit, as its wagons become empty, replenishes itself from the next higher unit; the highest unit or “supply park” continually sending empty wagons back to the advanced depôt and replenishing itself from there. The supply park, indeed, is the real carrier of the army’s supplies, the “supply columns” and regimental wagons being simply distributing pipes, whose object is to enable the issue of supply to adapt itself with the greatest degree of flexibility to the tactical movements of the troops. The merits of the system are obvious. Each unit can move freely for some distance in any direction at a moment’s notice, and is directly interested in the efficiency and safety of its own transport. Its chief drawback is that it involves a great deal of unloading and reloading of wagons. And, of course, if there is not enough transport to go round, or if large portions of the field army are demobilized for any length of time, the system tends to be wasteful, unless the responsible staff at headquarters make the fullest use of their powers of temporarily appropriating transport from stationary units and employing it to increase the mobility of those for which special mobility is required.*

To provide the whole of the supply columns required for the striking force with mule-transport by appropriating regimental mule-wagons from other units, and so to secure the mobility Roberts desired without breaking up the existing organization, was by no means an easy task. But there is no reason to think that it was an impossible one had Roberts or his staff been anxious to make the attempt. That they were not anxious was simply because they were wholly unfamiliar with the working of the British transport organi-

The Indian and Sudan systems. A modified form of the latter adopted.

* Orders expressly providing for this had been printed and issued by Colonel Bridge at the opening of the campaign.

zation.* In India transport had always been under the Military Member's Department, and officers on the combatant side were only concerned with its results and learnt little of its internal organization, which, as a matter of fact, was in principle not so very different from the British system. Even Roberts, than whom no general had shown himself more alive to the importance of an efficient transport, seems to have attributed the merits of the Indian transport not to its internal organization, but to the fact that it was under a separate department. This feature he now wished to reproduce, and considered that he could not do better than to entrust the task of making transport departmental to so proved an administrator as Kitchener. Now the transport of which Kitchener had experience was also "departmental," but in a very different sense from the Indian transport. For the comparatively small force, advancing compactly along a single route, which effected the reconquest of the Sudan, no elaborate system of distribution was required, and the units were supplied direct from a single convoy, which was supply park, supply column and regimental transport in one. The system was extraordinarily simple and economical of wagons and labour, but only because the strategical and tactical conditions were also extraordinarily simple. For more complicated operations, involving the spreading out of units over a considerable area, and continual changes in their dispositions to meet the movements of the enemy, it lacked the necessary flexibility, and, however economical at first sight, was almost bound to lead, in the long run, to the neglect, misdirection, and waste of transport. This was the system which, on the day of his arrival, the new Chief of the Staff announced to the bewildered transport officers that he intended to put in force. In its actual working out it was considerably modified in the next few days.

* Nothing can be more typical of the lack of intelligent co-ordination for military purposes between the different parts of the British Empire than the fact that entirely different systems of organization should develop unchecked in armies that have a common purpose and will have to work side by side in any great war. The transport question in South Africa is a good instance of the difficulties that will manifest themselves on a far greater scale in the next great campaign on the frontiers of India.

Roughly speaking, all that was done was that the whole of the regimental transport, except water-carts, pack-mules and ammunition-carts, the technical vehicles of the artillery and engineer units, and the barest minimum of ambulance wagons, was impounded,* and combined with the existing supply columns to form mule companies consisting of 49 wagons each,† while the ox-wagons of the supply park remained organized, as before, in companies of 100 wagons. A serious difficulty was the officering of these companies. The regimental transport officers were left behind with their units, and as the new mule companies were nearly twice as numerous as the existing supply columns, a great many officers, some with special transport experience, but not a few without, had to be selected to fill up the Army Service Corps establishment. The supervision of transport and supply on the headquarters staff was placed under a single head, in the shape of Colonel Richardson, hitherto director of supplies, while Colonel Bridge was left to look after transport at the base and on the lines of communication. The reorganization was a heavy task, and only the hard work and determination of Lord Kitchener, assisted after the 18th by Colonel Nicholson, and the loyal assistance of the officers who had hitherto been responsible for the transport organization and now found themselves swept along by a whirlwind of what to them seemed misdirected energy, enabled it to be carried through within a fortnight. By the end of January 28 mule companies and six ox companies were ready, and supplementary companies were formed after the advance began. The new system was again modified after the first experiences of it in the field, and eventually came to differ

The re-
organization
of the
transport.

* The cavalry, busy round Colesberg, managed to evade the reorganization, and French's dash into Kimberley and heading off of Cronje were carried out with the help of regimental transport.

† The mule company was calculated to carry the baggage and two days' food and forage for a brigade of infantry, in other words, exactly the same as the old supply column and the regimental transport together, so it cannot be said that the new organization materially increased the mobile transport accompanying the troops. The only people who gained were the cavalry, who were allotted a mule company per brigade and still kept their regimental transport.

very little from the system it replaced. In the meantime, the frequent changes involved by its introduction and improvement can hardly be said to have contributed to the efficiency of the transport service. But, in any case, whatever may be said as to the necessity or advisability of the technical side of the reorganization, the cardinal fact remains that Roberts and his staff saw, in a way their immediate predecessors had not seen, that the collection and organization of an adequate and mobile transport was the key to the whole strategical problem; and that in the face of great difficulties they did succeed in getting together a field transport which served their purpose.

New tactical instructions.

If the want of a sound strategical plan, and of the mobility required to execute it, had been the primary causes of failure, as Roberts clearly saw, a cause hardly less important, and one bulking far more prominently at the moment in the public mind, was the lack of skill shown in the actual tactical handling of troops in the attack. It was not a point which Roberts, who had long been an advocate of advanced views on the subject of the changes in tactics necessitated by modern weapons, was likely to overlook. Two circular memoranda, embodying the conclusions confirmed in Roberts's mind by recent experiences, were issued to officers on January 26 and February 5.* In these the Commander-in-Chief laid stress on the uselessness of direct frontal attacks against an enemy like the Boers, and urged the necessity of flank or enveloping movements, or threats against the enemy's line of communications. More extended infantry formations, coupled with all that they imply in the way of greater initiative to subordinate commanders, more skill in the use of cover, the use of enfilading fire, a less stereotyped handling of artillery, more thorough scouting, less overloading of horses, and more careful horsemanship, on the part of the cavalry—in fact most of the leading features of the newer tactical principles which are now gradually beginning to permeate our army—were indicated in these instructions.

A defect which it was too late ever to remedy effectually

* See Evidence, vol. i., Appendix H, p. 532.

was the lack of adequate intelligence. No amount of money poured out after war has begun can secure the knowledge that only comes from the careful and methodical piecing together and collating of infinite details in time of peace, establish those personal relations between the intelligence department and its agents, which are so essential for successful work, or implant throughout the staff of an army that instinctive, insatiable hunger for information without which generalship can only grope in the dark. But when Roberts arrived, even the free spending of money to secure some of the information that ought to have been available long before had not been thought of. This at least could be set right, and Henderson succeeded, immediately on landing, in persuading Roberts to entrust him with sums of money and the means of collecting a staff which had been denied to his less fortunate predecessors. The compilation from such sources as were available of a proper map of the area of war, beginning with the Free State, was taken in hand at once, and the basis was thus laid of a work that was to prove invaluable in the course of the campaign. Not that the map was by any means perfect. But it at least marked an enormous improvement on the previous failure to attempt to supply officers with one of the most essential implements of war.

Intelligence
and map-
making.

The lack, indeed, of that minute detailed information which cannot be extemporized was from the first destined to have a most important influence on Lord Roberts's decisions, and through a series of modifications to lead to a complete remodelling of his original plan of campaign. No sooner had Roberts begun to work out the details of his projected march east from Orange River than he was confronted by the doubt whether sufficient water to support a large force of men and animals was to be found on the line selected, a doubt which none of his advisers could resolve. It was not a matter in which risks could be incurred lightly. There had been an exceptional drought during the last three months. Failure to secure water on any single day might not only mean the abandonment of the march, but the ruin of the whole laboriously organized transport, and weeks of immobility to follow.

Uncertainty
of water
supply leads
to modifica-
tion of
Roberts's
plan which
suggests new
strategic
objective.

Accordingly Roberts reluctantly decided to shift his starting-point and his line of march further north, and, instead of marching straight across from Orange River through Luckhoff and Fauresmith, to start from Enslin or Honeynest Kloof, strike the River Riet at its nearest point, and follow its course up to the railway. The alteration in the strategical plan may seem a trifling one, but its consequences were momentous. For whereas the plan in its original form looked mainly towards the effect produced upon the Boers south of the Orange River, and contemplated opposition mainly from that quarter, the amended plan inevitably brought the whole operation within the zone of attraction of Cronje's force at Magersfontein and Jacobsdal. To pass so close to the main Boer force without attempting to strike a blow at it was contrary to all Roberts's natural instincts. Such a blow, directed against their communications, would immediately force Cronje and Ferreira to abandon their positions and raise the investment of Kimberley, while a subsequent advance on Bloemfontein along the Modder River would draw the Boers at Colesberg and Stormberg back to the defence of their capital. In fact the principle of the move would be the same as that of the move originally planned, but its application as regards the Boer western and southern armies would be exactly reversed, the primary objective of the first plan becoming the secondary objective of the new plan, and *vice versa*.

Other reasons
for change.

Other reasons besides those of pure strategy contributed to recommend the change. When Roberts landed, the immediate danger seemed to lie in the possibility of a Boer advance into central Cape Colony, followed by a general spread of rebellion. To clear the colony seemed the most pressing need, and Roberts acknowledged this not only by sending the Sixth Division to Naauwpoort and by forming the Colonial Division, but also by making the communications of the Boer forces south of the Orange River the primary objective of his flank march. The fortnight which had intervened had shown that the Boers were too sluggish, and the intending rebels too half-hearted, to make use of their opportunities in Cape Colony. On the other hand, it had brought home more closely to Roberts's mind the enormous

importance the fate of Kimberley possessed in the estimation of South Africans, loyal and disloyal alike. If the speedy relief of Ladysmith had been assured, Kimberley might well have waited a little longer, but after Spion Kop the need for making sure of at least one of the besieged towns, for speedily gaining a universally recognizable success, and averting a terrible moral catastrophe, seemed all the stronger.

Up to the morning of January 26, Roberts was still inclined to favour the south-eastward march along the Riet. That afternoon, after pondering the full bearing of Buller's reverse, he finally made up his mind in favour of the change, and at once proceeded to put the new plan into execution, communicating his general intentions to the Secretary of State by cable on the 27th. On the 28th, French, whom he had summoned down from Colesberg, reached Cape Town, and with him the Commander-in-Chief spent a day in discussing the reorganization of the new cavalry division, the great part he intended it to play in his operations, and the steps necessary for its concentration in rear of Methuen's position without drawing the attention of the Boers to its removal from Colesberg. The concentration and distribution of the whole force destined to take part in the march to Bloemfontein, on whose rapidity and secrecy everything depended, was now worked out by the staff in conjunction with Colonel Girouard, the director of railways, and every train move for the next week, and the starting-point of every single unit, arranged before Girouard left for Modder River to superintend its execution. For over a week this tremendous work of concentration went on busily. The Seventh Division, under Lieutenant-General Tucker, a level-headed, capable officer, best known in the army for a forcible picturesqueness of speech which recalled the old days of "campaigning in Flanders," was now landing, and, together with additional batteries of field and horse artillery, was sent up to Modder River or points on the line to the south of it.* The cavalry

The change finally decided upon after Spion Kop. The concentration.

* Lord Roberts originally selected Honeynest Kloof as one of the principal points of concentration and the starting-point of his march, but on February 3, hearing that the water supply there was wholly inadequate, he ordered Girouard to transfer the concentration point to Enslin-Graspan,

round Colesberg, including the useful New Zealanders, were, regiment by regiment, withdrawn from their positions, their places being scantily filled by detachments from Clements's infantry brigade and by the newly mounted Australians from Enslin, and were sent round to Orange River. Here both they and the mounted infantry were mostly detrained in order to relieve the fearful congestion on the railway, the cavalry being marched up to Modder River, and the mounted infantry concentrating at Orange River. Kelly-Kenny's troops on the line from Naauwpoort to Steynsburg were also withdrawn, their place being taken by the first batch of seven Militia battalions which were just beginning to arrive. As Clements's brigade was required at Colesberg, the Essex and Yorkshires were withdrawn from there and sent round to Modder River, while two more battalions from the line of communications were brigaded with them to enable Kelly-Kenny to complete his division. The accumulation of transport and supplies on the western railway had already begun some time before, but an enormous amount still remained to be done. By February 8 everything was in readiness for the start. When the great distances and the limited capacities of the railway are taken into consideration, the energy and ability shown by Girouard, by Mr. Price, the traffic manager of the Cape Railways, and by all their subordinates in carrying out this great concentration, without a hitch, deserve the highest praise. Whatever defects the British Army displayed in the higher departments of strategy and tactics, the work of moving and of supplying the troops, on which, to a large extent, everything else depends, was, throughout

a task of no small difficulty, involving the laying down of extensive additional sidings within twenty-four hours. As a matter of fact this change only affected the infantry. The cavalry remained at Modder River, and, in any case, the water difficulty made it necessary for mounted troops and transport to remain at Modder River and Orange River up to the last moment. Even so, it was only due to the previous strenuous exertions of the R.E., under Elliott Wood's directions, in developing the water supply by diamond drill boring that the stations along the line could be used as much as they were. As it happened the preliminary massing of most of the force at Modder River helped Roberts's plans by contributing to Cronje's belief that a direct attack on Magersfontein was in preparation.

the war, carried out in a fashion with which the army and the nation had every reason to be satisfied.

Not the least successful feature of this gigantic piece of scene-shifting was the impenetrable curtain of secrecy behind which it was carried out. A few of Roberts's staff, two or three of the senior generals affected, the irreducible minimum of railway officials, perhaps a dozen persons in all, were privy to the concentration orders, and even of these few could have felt certain, till the very last moment, which way the army would move when once it left the railway. Neither the troops themselves, nor the population of Cape Colony, not even Cape Town, where, as a rule, secret information leaked out with surprising rapidity, had the slightest inkling of what was taking place. The despatch of Kelly-Kenny to Naauwpoort, the addition of fresh infantry to French, the attempt to restore the railway connection with Stormberg, and the formation of the Colonial Division, had all tended to create the impression that Roberts's intention was to force the passage of the Orange River at Norval's Pont and Bethulie. The military censorship attempted to strengthen this impression by encouraging the publication of press telegrams hinting at a great concentration near Naauwpoort. The Boers at Colesberg were completely taken in, and as a result of their alarmist appeals Steyn not only sent them considerable reinforcements of Free Staters from various points, but also put such pressure upon Kruger and Joubert that, in spite of the imminence of Buller's next attack, 750 Heidelbergers were brought round from Natal to Colesberg in the beginning of February.* As for Cronje, he seems to have discovered nothing except that Modder River and the line in rear were being considerably reinforced, and to have drawn no inferences from this beyond a belief that another attempt might before long be made to assault the Magersfontein intrenchments.

The only direction, indeed, in which the Boers showed any trace of initiative was in the extreme west of the theatre of war, where they now began to resume the activities temporarily interrupted by Pilcher's sudden raid to Sunny-

Successful
secrecy of the
concentra-
tion.

Boer activity
in the west.
Roberts
orders con-
struction of
fort at
Koedoesberg.

* See p. 312.

side. Boer emissaries had crossed the Orange River and were busy preaching rebellion at Upington and Prieska. The whole of north-western Cape Colony was in a state of ferment and only waiting for a small commando to furnish the nucleus of a general revolt. A scheme for an expedition to this vast, half desert region was laid before Cronje by a prominent rebel from northern Cape Colony, L. P. Steenkamp of Venterstad.* Cronje approved, and appointing Steenkamp head-commandant of the rebel forces destined to be raised, sent him off on January 26 with Commandant Liebenberg—created general for the occasion—two guns, and some 200 burghers. For the moment, however, the expedition did not get beyond Douglas, where its leaders, alarmed probably by news of the British occupation of Prieska,† decided to halt and await events for a few days. Meanwhile reinforcements in small dribblets kept constantly moving from Cronje's camp to join them, while their reconnoitring parties, pushing east, began showing themselves in the Vetberg within twenty miles of Belmont, and at points even nearer to the railway—Rochfort Boyd's force having before this fallen back on Richmond. From Roberts's point of view it was very desirable to put a check on these movements, which might easily develop into a most serious menace to the safety of the whole western line of communications. Orders were sent to Wood at Orange River to push back the Boers from the Vetberg and clear the district, and on the night of February 2 Roberts telegraphed to Methuen to despatch at once a force of all arms under General MacDonald to Koedoesberg Drift, twenty miles west of Modder River camp, to prevent the Vetberg Boers making their retirement that way, and to superintend the construction of a small fort to hold 200 men, which should command the passage of the drift. The object of this fort was to prevent the Boers from using in future what was erroneously believed to be the only easy drift on the Lower

* See vol. ii., pp. 365, 371.

† Prieska was occupied for the second time on January 27 by Colonel Alderson with 6 guns and 600 mounted men from De Aar, of whom 300 were to be left as a garrison. The necessities of the concentration, however, proved too strong and the whole force was recalled on the 28th,

Riet River, and so to put a check on the sending of reinforcements of men or ammunition to the incipient rebellion south of the Orange River. It was, in other words, to play the same useful, if inconspicuous, part that the Zoutpan's Drift fort played to the east of the Orange River camp. But Roberts no doubt also had in his mind the advantage which such a movement to the west, which might be interpreted as evidence of an intention of marching to Kimberley by way of Koedoesberg, would have in screening his own preparations.

Taking the Highland Brigade, two squadrons of the 9th Lancers, the 62nd Field Battery, and the 7th Company, R.E., MacDonald moved off early on the 3rd and bivouacked that night at Fraser's Drift, eight miles down stream. A hot and trying march of thirteen miles brought the force to Koedoesberg Drift at 2 P.M. next day, the cavalry driving out a small party of Boers, who made off northwards. The drift, a picturesque willow-shaded depression hidden away below the surface of the dusty veld, takes its name from a great hill which extends for nearly two miles along the right bank of the river between it and Painter's Drift, some three miles down stream. Dominating the country for a score of miles round, the Koedoesberg more particularly commanded the drift and its approaches at long rifle-range. MacDonald saw at once that a redoubt placed anywhere near the drift would be exposed to fire from the Koedoesberg, as well as from rising ground within 1,200 yards on the left bank. On the other hand a fort either on the Koedoesberg or on the rising ground opposite could easily be cut off from its water supply. MacDonald telegraphed to Methuen advising the abandonment of the project, but was ordered to carry out his instructions. He accordingly decided to construct a redoubt on a small knoll close to the drift on the right bank.

The news of MacDonald's march only reached Magersfontein that afternoon. De Wet at once sent off 100 men under Commandant Du Plooy, who reached the foot of the Koedoesberg late that night. Ascending the hill at daybreak, their patrols met those of the 9th Lancers, who at once gave the alarm. MacDonald, who was watching the construction

Feb. 3-4.

MacDonald
marches to
Koedoesberg.

Feb. 5-6.

Arrival of De
Wet.

of the redoubt below, forthwith ordered the working party of 300 men to drop their tools and rush up the hill, following them up by three more companies of the Highland Light Infantry, and sending round the Lancers to threaten the Boer left flank. Deep re-entrants in its south-western and north-eastern faces almost divide the Koedoesberg in two, the eastern portion being considerably higher, especially at its northern and southern extremities. The British were in time to take up positions on the eastern half commanding both the southern re-entrant and the narrow neck between the two halves of the hill, and strengthened them in the course of the morning. In the afternoon De Wet arrived with another 300 to 400 men, and took them up to the northern and western crest of the hill. MacDonald now sent the Black Watch and two guns to occupy a hill to the north-east of the Koedoesberg and a farm near it, so as to protect his right flank. At night-fall the Boers withdrew, owing to lack of water, some three miles north to a long ridge which sweeps round from beyond Painter's Drift towards Kameel Hoek and Magersfontein. De Wet sent back for reinforcements, which arrived in the shape of 200 men under Commandants A. P. J. Cronje and Froneman, with a gun under Albrecht, at 4 P.M. on the 6th. Meanwhile, MacDonald's presence at Koedoesberg was already exercising its effect upon the Boers south of the Riet, and parties of them began making their way back by Painter's Drift.

Feb. 7. Boers
attack
vigorously.

During the night Albrecht got his gun on to the western half of the plateau of Koedoesberg, and at daybreak opened on the British breastworks, now held by the Seaforths, at 1,600 yards' range. At the same time Froneman, with a small party, worked along from the west in the broken ground between the Koedoesberg and the river, while De Wet attacked from the northern side. MacDonald put Hughes-Hallett of the Seaforths in command on the hill and reinforced him with two companies of the Highland Light Infantry, at the same time telegraphing to Methuen for further reinforcements. By 11 A.M. the engagement had become pretty vigorous, and eventually four companies of the Black Watch were sent up from the farm to support Hughes-Hallett. The artillery

under Major Granet had before this been brought over to the left bank to try and silence Albrecht's single gun. At mid-day the 9th Lancers reported that the Boers were in force at Painter's Drift, and two guns, together with two companies of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who held the left bank, were sent in support. At 1 P.M. two guns were sent back to the farm to search the northern crest. The Boers were now held at all points.

On receipt of MacDonald's message Methuen at once despatched Babington with a scratch cavalry brigade. * Arrival of Babington ; his excessive caution. Starting at 10 A.M. and marching along the north bank Babington arrived within three miles of the Koedoesberg before 2 P.M. The engagement was evidently in full progress, though it was not easy to determine exactly which was friend or foe. Had Babington at once made for the drift, sending a galloper ahead to inform MacDonald, he might have been in time to co-operate usefully. Had he gone straight for the northern end of the hill he might even have scored a great success by cutting off the larger portion of De Wet's force. Instead of this he remained inactive for nearly two hours, trying to get into heliographic communication with MacDonald, and sending out cautious patrols. About 3.30 P.M. one of these, meeting some of the 9th Lancers, brought back some news of the situation. Babington now decided to move across the Boer rear. As he did so the detachments on the Boer left galloped away north-west, under a vigorous shell-fire from the horse artillery, leaving the flank and rear of the Boers on Koedoesberg completely exposed. Babington ordered the Household Cavalry to pursue. But they were not quick enough. De Wet on Koedoesberg had seen what was happening, and taking some forty or fifty men, all he could get hold of at the moment, had galloped to a scrub-covered ridge, just in time to pour a rapid volley into the cavalry as they were checked by a wire fence a few hundred yards beyond. It was now almost dark, so Babington recalled his men and fell back to the drift.

If Babington was inactive and over-cautious, MacDonald

* "O" and "R," R.H.A., Household Cavalry, 16th Lancers, squadron 10th Hussars, squadron 12th Lancers, two troops Scots Greys.

Failure to cut off the Boers, who abandon their position in the night.

hardly seems to have been sufficiently on the look-out for a force whose coming he expected. He made no arrangements for meeting Babington or communicating his wishes to him. It was not till after 3 P.M. that he heard of Babington's approach, and it was not till after 4 P.M. that he discovered that the cavalry were not coming to the drift but going round the hill. Before this he had sent up the rest of the Seaforth's to Hughes-Hallett and had ordered him to prepare for a general advance across the hill at 6 P.M., hoping that by then the cavalry would be in a position to cut off the Boer retreat. Instead of now accepting the situation and sending an officer to explain his views or going himself, the only message he sent was one asking Babington to come to the drift, which the latter, who was just starting off the Household Cavalry, not unnaturally disregarded. It was now too late to do anything, and the plan for encircling the enemy on Koedoesberg was put off till next morning. But the Boers had been thoroughly alarmed by Babington's move, abortive though it was, and not only evacuated the Koedoesberg and Painter's Drift that night, but decided not to reoccupy them. Believing the whole object of the move to Koedoesberg to be an attempt to get through to Kimberley, they now took up an extended position on the long ridge to the north and awaited the British advance. MacDonald and Babington, meanwhile, set their troops in motion to encircle the Koedoesberg early on the 8th, but soon discovered that their bird had flown. The total British casualties in this operation had been about sixty, including three officers killed. The Boer loss was under thirty.

Other operations in combination with Koedoesberg.

The rest of the combined operations had, meanwhile, proved equally inconclusive. By February 6 Colonel Broadwood, to whom Wood had entrusted the clearing of the Vetberg and district, had under him at Richmond some 1,500 men, including Roberts's Horse, Pilcher's and Alderson's mounted infantry, and Rochfort Boyd's original force, and advanced to Thornhill. On the 7th he marched as far as Sunnyside without finding the enemy, who had already withdrawn to Douglas or across the Riet in consequence of MacDonald's move to Koedoesberg. Accordingly he returned

to Richmond on the 8th. But inconclusive though they were at the moment, both Koedoesberg and the march to Sunnyside played, in the event, a most useful strategical part in concentrating Boer attention to the west of the railway. Moreover, Koedoesberg helped to establish in the minds of Cronje and his burghers a false feeling of security with regard to the possibility of a flank march for the relief of Kimberley, while Broadwood's move successfully deferred the Prieska expedition for a week or more, and prevented it from becoming a menace till after the main issue of the campaign had already been decided.

On the evening of February 6 a brougham left Sir A. Milner's door, and half an hour later two passengers quietly boarded the northward mail at Fish River Station just outside Cape Town. They were Roberts and Kitchener. The stealth of their departure was due not only to the desire to prevent the news being transmitted, through disloyal channels, to the enemy, but also to fears of a possible attempt to wreck the train, a fact which throws an interesting sidelight on the anxieties of the situation in Cape Colony. The headquarters staff had gone earlier in the day. The period of preparation was at last over, and the time for action had come. What would action bring with it? Nothing in the study of military history is so difficult as to recover the true perspective of events on the eve of some great decision, undisturbed by the knowledge of what actually followed. Nor is it in criticising failure alone, but no less in the recognition of success that the difficulty lies. Success often seems so simple and obvious that we forget the work and effort that has insured it, or the courage that has ventured unhesitatingly along the right path to victory, heedless of the phantoms and chimeras peopling the fog of war on every side. The preceding pages may have given some idea of the labour and organization involved in collecting so many thousand men, animals and wagons, at a few railway sidings 600 miles from the base at Cape Town. But they have hardly indicated the military difficulties and dangers of the position. The entire force assembled at the front now depended on the safety of the single railway behind it, and would so depend

Roberts's departure for the front.

Feb. 6.
Dangers of the position.

until the whole operation was successfully accomplished—the Boers drawn out of Cape Colony, and the new line of communications across the Orange River established. Yet to the east of that railway, barely 60 miles from De Aar, lay over 7,000 Boers, with only Clements's skeleton force and their own ignorance between them and the complete destruction of Roberts's cherished plans. To the west the whole vast region between the railway, the Orange River and the sea, was reported to be simmering with rebellion, and no troops could be spared to cope with it. Even in the rest of Cape Colony it was by no means certain that the Dutch inhabitants would not rise if they realized how the forces south of the Orange River were reduced, and how great was the opportunity which would present itself to them of cutting off the flower of the British Army in the interior of the sub-continent.

Roberts's
confidence.
His memo-
randum to
Milner.

Roberts knew all this, but, greatly daring, was content to take the risks. For he also knew that none of these dangers equalled the danger of not securing speedy victory under the most favourable tactical conditions. Besides, his sure instinct told him that, once he assumed the initiative and pushed the war into the enemy's country, all Boer schemes and activities elsewhere would have to give way to the imperious necessity of staying his advance. On the eve of his departure he expressed these views in the form of a reply to a memorandum by Sir A. Milner on the measures to be taken for safeguarding the colony. This reply, though in the particular instance based on a partial misconception of the High Commissioner's purpose and attitude, was, nevertheless, an admirable exposition of the principles of sound strategy.* It was not as if the risk was one which would have

* See Evidence of War Commission, vol. i., pp. 529, 530. Sir A. Milner's minute was, as a matter of fact, a criticism of the wasteful method of leaving stationary defensive forces dumped along the railways, and a suggestion for a definite and scientific organization of the troops left behind in Cape Colony, or due to arrive in the next few weeks, with a view to enabling the smallest possible number of them to cope with the still serious possibility of rebellion, and to freeing the Commander-in-Chief at the front from all anxiety on the score of his communications. It contained no hint of the desire, which Lord Roberts seems to have read

to be run very long. Fully 30,000 additional troops were due to arrive in Cape Colony before the end of February. And as an additional precaution, more especially in view of Buller's failure at Spion Kop, Roberts had already, on January 28, applied for an eighth infantry division * and for the long-delayed cavalry brigade. No special arrangements, as suggested by Sir A. Milner, for the organization of mobile forces to protect the communications and suppress rebellion, were made by the Commander-in-Chief, who, no doubt, felt that it was better to run a certain amount of risk than to spend a day more on organization. But General Forestier-Walker was instructed to confer with the High Commissioner and endeavour to do all in his power to meet his views. General Brabazon, who had been brought back from Colesberg, was now left at Cape Town with instructions to organize and train the yeomanry as they arrived. Roberts also, before leaving, strongly urged, though without effect, that martial law should be imposed at the seaports to prevent the movement of undesirables and spies up and down the coast.

Two days of hot and dusty travelling, the last few hours past camp after camp of newly-arrived troops, brought Roberts to the wilderness of tents and railway sidings and transport wagons and loose, burning sand, into which ten weeks of military occupation had turned the once pleasant environs of Modder River Station. The news that there awaited him was not calculated to diminish his anxieties. Vaal Krantz had been abandoned by Buller in direct disregard of his instructions. Such a step, following after Colenso and Spion

Feb. 8.
Roberts's
arrival at
Modder
River.
Serious news
from Natal
and Kimber-
ley.

into it, that the advance into the Free State should be delayed, or the striking force weakened, for the sake of passive precautions against problematical dangers. The real difference in the attitude of the two men may be summed up by saying that Milner regarded Cape Colony as a potential area of hostilities, which it would require a carefully thought out permanent organization to suppress, while Roberts looked only to the guarding of a line of communications for which any troops, not immediately required at the front, would suffice. Immediate success justified Roberts's optimism, but subsequent events proved the soundness of Milner's contention.

* Astonishing as it may seem, this request, as far as it concerned the infantry division, was at first disregarded, and the sending of the division was only sanctioned, after a second request, at the end of February.

Kop, could only mean that the direct relief of Ladysmith was impossible, and indirect relief might well prove too late. However much Roberts discounted for Buller's natural disappointment, he could hardly have remained unaffected by the despairing telegram which announced that the fate of Ladysmith was only a question of days. Even more disquieting was the news from Kimberley. Ever since the end of January the citizens had been getting more and more restless under the effects of shell-fire and reduced rations. The unexpected opening of a siege gun on February 7 had completely upset their nerves, and on the 8th Kekewich considered himself justified in reporting that the situation was becoming serious. On the 9th matters came to a head, and Rhodes informed Kekewich that unless definite information as to Roberts's intentions with regard to the relief of Kimberley were given him, he would in two days call a public meeting of the citizens to consider the seriousness of the situation. Next day a further request for information, laying stress on the importance of relieving Kimberley, was signed by Rhodes and all the leading citizens and handed to Kekewich for transmission to Roberts. Kekewich seems to have assumed that Rhodes deliberately intended to advise the citizens to surrender, and on the 9th communicated this impression to Roberts. Roberts signalled to Kekewich on the 10th to represent to Rhodes and the Mayor "the disastrous and humiliating effect of surrendering after so prolonged and glorious a defence," and to add that active operations would commence on the morrow, and that many days could not possibly pass before the relief would be accomplished. At the same time he authorized Kekewich to make the fullest use of his powers under martial law to forbid any meeting or to put Rhodes under arrest. The message at once produced the desired effect. Rhodes replied that surrender had never been thought or spoken of, and no doubt the friction between him and Kekewich led the latter to put too unfavourable a construction upon his language and attitude, and to attribute to unpatriotic cowardice what was nothing more than ungovernable impatience and irritation at being kept in the dark. But to Roberts the situation cannot but have appeared

terribly critical. Those critics who hold that Roberts allowed the actual relief of Kimberley to bulk too largely in his final plan should always keep in mind the seriousness of the situation as regards both Kimberley and Ladysmith as it presented itself to him during these days at Modder River, and their wonder will be not that he allowed his plan to be modified so much, but rather that he persevered in it so confidently and undeviatingly in the face of dangers and difficulties calculated to unbalance the soundest judgment and dismay the stoutest courage.

Whether Kimberley seriously influenced the form of Roberts's plan or not, one thing seemed certain, that every hour's delay involved danger to the fate of Kimberley, and, perhaps, of the whole campaign. A great part of the force was still entirely unorganized in any formation higher than the regimental unit—one of the consequences of the secrecy of the concentration—and a few days more spent in getting brigades and divisions together and in selecting their staffs were certainly desirable. But time was too precious. Units and staffs would have to be pieced together as best they could, and would have to find themselves after the march started. By scraping together every single cavalry unit in the country, including even the cavalry normally assigned to the infantry divisions, three cavalry brigades were formed, and their command entrusted to Colonels Porter,* Broadwood and Gordon. Seven horse artillery batteries were assigned to the cavalry division and distributed among the three brigades. The mounted infantry, organized in two brigades, each of four battalions, under Colonels Hannay and Ridley, were also to be attached to the division, which they were to join on the march. The whole mounted force was to be under French. The latter part of the organization was, however, never carried out—for reasons that will appear in the narrative—and the only mounted infantry which really formed part of French's division was a provisional brigade of regular mounted infantry

Hurried
organization
of the units.
Feb. 8-10.

* Originally Babington was appointed to command the 1st Cavalry Brigade, but on the 9th he was replaced by Porter, Roberts considering that the caution and slowness displayed by him at Koedoesberg and on previous occasions necessitated his supersession.

and colonial troops, under Colonel Alderson, while the rest of the mounted troops were not regularly organized till March 4. How hurried Roberts's start was may be judged from the fact that, though the Cavalry Division was nominally formed on February 8, not one of its brigadiers was able to reach his brigade till after the march began. Of infantry there was enough available to complete four divisions. The First Division, under Methuen, consisted of the Guards and 9th Brigades, now placed under Generals Pole-Carew and C. W. Douglas, and the 20th and 38th Field Batteries, together with four 5-inch howitzers and some naval guns. This division was destined to remain at Modder River in order to contain Cronje, and afterwards to occupy Kimberley and secure the western line of railway. The Sixth Division, under Kelly-Kenny, was completed by the creation out of miscellaneous battalions of an eighteenth brigade, commanded by Colonel T. E. Stephenson of the Essex Regiment, and by Colonel McDonnell's brigade division R.F.A. and two naval 12-pounders. The Seventh Division, under Tucker, was intact as regards infantry, being, indeed, the first division which succeeded in taking the field exactly as it had been sent out. Its artillery complement was formed by the transference from Methuen of Hall's brigade division, which had done such good work in the advance to Modder River. Lastly, on February 10, a ninth division was created by putting together the Highland Brigade, under MacDonald, with a new nineteenth brigade, under Colonel Smith-Dorrien of the Derbyshire Regiment, and was entrusted to General Colville. In the way of artillery, it was provisionally equipped with the 82nd Battery, borrowed from McDonnell's brigade division, the 65th (howitzer) Battery, and two naval 4·7-inch guns. Of the 28 companies of mule-transport organized up to date, 21 had been concentrated for the advance, sufficient to allow a company for each brigade and division of the force. Of the 600 ox-wagons of the supply park, 125 were loaded with reserve ammunition and 475 with ten days' supply of food and forage for the marching force, whose total strength, including non-combatants, amounted to, roughly, 37,000 men, 14,000



BRIGADIER-GENERAL T. E. STEPHENSON, C.B.,
COMMANDING 18TH BRIGADE.

Photo by Deale, Bloemfontein.



BRIGADIER-GENERAL SIR H. A. MACDONALD, K.C.B., D.S.O.,
COMMANDING HIGHLAND BRIGADE

Photo by Lafayette, Dublin.

horses, 12,000 mules and 10,000 oxen. Insignificant as this force may seem compared with those that can be moved and kept together in fertile and densely populated countries, yet, in view of the conditions that prevail on the African veld, to have collected it at one point ready to march and fight for a fortnight away from all communications was a feat which only the most absolute steadfastness of purpose at the head, and the most devoted co-operation on the part of every subordinate, could have rendered possible.

Immediately on arrival, Roberts had ordered in Babington and MacDonald from Koedoesberg Drift and Broadwood from Richmond. That same afternoon orders were issued that the move was to begin on the 10th with the concentration of the Cavalry Division, the mounted infantry and the Seventh Division, at Ramdam, twelve miles east of Graspan. But the start had to be postponed a day in order to allow the first 200 wagons of the supply park and the mule-transport of the Seventh Division to come up from Orange River, which they had only just received the order to leave. Everywhere along the line, meanwhile, the camps were full of bustle and animation. The heat was terribly oppressive, and the work that had to be got through in those few days, alike by officers and men, would have been exhausting at any time. But all worked with a will and with the cheerful confidence that the long, inglorious period of inaction was over, and that the day of great things had come. On the evening of the 10th Roberts and Kitchener visited the camp of the Cavalry Division, where everything was now in readiness for the morrow's start. The brigadiers and commanding officers were assembled, and Roberts addressed them as follows :—

Start postponed to 11th.
Roberts addresses the cavalry.

“I have asked General French to call you together as I want to tell you that I am going to give you some very hard work to do, but at the same time you are to get the greatest chance cavalry has ever had. I am certain you will do well. I have received news from Kimberley from which I know that it is important the town should be relieved in the course of the next five days, and you and your men are to do this. The enemy have placed a big gun in position and are shelling the town, killing women and children, in consequence of which the civilian

population are urging Colonel Kekewich to capitulate. You will remember what you are going to do all your lives, and when you have grown to be old men you will tell the story of the relief of Kimberley. My intention is for you to make a detour, and get on the railway north of the town. The enemy are afraid of the British cavalry, and I hope when you get them into the open you will make an example of them."

Final form
of Roberts's
plan.

It was, indeed, upon French and his cavalry that the whole success or failure of Roberts's plan depended, in this, the final stage of its evolution. The substitution of the movement against Cronje's communications for the original march eastward had brought with it certain elements of difficulty. It involved the crossing of two considerable rivers within a few hours' distance of the enemy's main body. Everything, therefore, depended on the rapidity of the turning movement. And if the purely strategic reasons for speed had not been sufficient in themselves, the situation in Kimberley seemed such that every hour's delay might well be fraught with disastrous consequences. No forced march by the whole army could make sure of seizing the drifts in time. The only way, as Roberts had already decided before he left Cape Town, was to use the cavalry, with its complement of mounted riflemen and horse batteries, as an independent strategic unit, and to send it ahead to secure the crossings and to relieve Kimberley. The rest of the force would follow, occupying point after point as the cavalry pushed forward. The ever-present consideration of water supply allowed little choice of route. Ramdam, the only spot with abundant water between the railway and the Riet, was selected as the point through which all the columns, horse and foot, were to pass, in fact as the real point of concentration of the whole force, and, indeed, owing to the hurry of the start, as a flying base where units could be made up and fitted out with commanders, guns, or transport as they went through. From there the cavalry was to push across the nearest drift on the Riet and then head due north for the Modder and Kimberley. The infantry divisions were to follow successively, but to incline inwards on crossing the Riet so as to occupy Jacobsdal, and regain touch with the First Division

at Modder River. The mounted infantry, who had already marched from Orange River to Ramah Spring, some ten miles east, on the night of the 9th, were to cover the right flank of the initial movement, in case of Boer reinforcements hurrying up from Colesberg through Fauresmith, and then to support the cavalry, and be available, if necessary, to reinforce rapidly any part of the extended line of troops stretching in a great curve from Modder River to Kimberley.

In its final form, Roberts's plan, with its bold adaptation of the methods of the cavalry raids practised so successfully in the American Civil War to the purposes of combined operations on a large scale, was eminently fitted to meet its author's purpose. Not only were the initial movements, if discovered, calculated to puzzle and mislead the enemy with regard to their direction and design till that design was more than half accomplished, but the first step, the relief of Kimberley, would leave the army disposed in a thoroughly flexible formation, equally ready to destroy Cronje if he waited, or to cope with any move he might make in counter-stroke or flight. That Cronje would sit on at Magersfontein with his communications severed, and await an enveloping attack from the whole British force, including Methuen's division and the garrison of Kimberley, was, to Roberts, unthinkable. Only two alternatives seriously presented themselves to his mind at the time. The first, and least probable, with opponents such as the Boers had shown themselves to be, was that Cronje would, during the march, attempt to fall upon Methuen or upon the flank of one of the infantry divisions. In this case the other divisions could rapidly wheel inwards in support, while the cavalry, closing in upon Cronje's rear, might complete the envelopment and insure the destruction of his whole force. The other, and more likely, alternative was that Cronje, realizing his danger, would at once extricate himself from the narrowing semi-circle of troops, make his way round on one side or the other of Kimberley, and then, together with the besieging forces under Ferreira, fall back eastwards on Boshof, eventually moving south again to take up new positions in order to cover Bloemfontein. In this event French at Kimberley

Discussion of
the plan.

would be admirably posted to intercept his convoy, harass his retreat, and keep in touch with his subsequent movements. The infantry, meanwhile, would be ready either to support French or to march up the Modder directly on Bloemfontein, and, having the advantage of the shorter line over Cronje, would give him no time to select or create a strong position. The criticism has often been made that Roberts should have neglected Kimberley and have devoted his whole attention to crushing the Boer army in its trenches at Magersfontein. Judging after the event, the criticism is not altogether devoid of force. But it assumes that Roberts, without previous experience of Boer generalship, should have counted upon Cronje's slowness and lack of perspicacity. At the time it was more natural to suppose that unless the attack was purely frontal, in which case all the tactical advantages would be on the Boer side, Cronje would simply withdraw out of its reach, leaving Roberts to strike a heavy blow at the empty air. Roberts never supposed that Cronje would allow himself to be caught sitting, except on his own terms, and therefore based no plans on that supposition. What he reckoned on was to compel Cronje to move in such a fashion that he was bound sooner or later to come into collision, voluntary or involuntary, with the momentum of the British advance. The relief of Kimberley, however desirable in itself, and however prominent in Roberts's own thoughts, was from this point of view but the first step in converting a paralysing stalemate into that free motion which is the true opportunity of bold generalship. It was not that he shirked the tactical issue. But he was determined that wherever and whenever that issue was decided, it should be on ground of his own choosing and under conditions less favourable to his enemy than those which British generals had hitherto been contented to accept. Whatever risks he was prepared to run, the risk of defeat in the field was not among them. This was the essence of his policy and the secret of the confidence which inspired him as he now launched his force on the great enterprise on whose issue hung the fate of the war.

THE FOLLOWING TABLE GIVES THE COMPOSITION
AND STRENGTH OF LORD ROBERTS'S
FIELD FORCE.

The organization of cavalry and mounted troops is the one actually in force from February 13 onwards. The strengths are those given in Lord Roberts's despatch (No. 2) of February 16. For the units and strength of the force that marched into Bloemfontein, see the diagram near the end of the volume.

FIRST DIVISION.—LIEUT.-GENERAL LORD METHUEN.

<i>1st (Guards) Brigade</i> —Maj.-Gen. R. POLE-CAREW.	<i>9th Brigade</i> —Brig.-Gen. C. W. DOUGLAS.
3rd Grenadier Guards . . . 915	1st Northumberland Fusiliers 617
1st Coldstream Guards . . . 965	$\frac{1}{2}$ 1st Loyal N. Lancs. . . . 447
2nd Coldstream Guards . . . 921	2nd Northamptonshire Regt. . 850
1st Scots Guards 953	2nd K. O. Yorkshire L.I. . . 840
18th Bearer Co.	1st Bearer Co.
18th Field Hospital	19th Field Hospital

DIVISIONAL TROOPS.

20th and 38th Batteries, R.F.A. 353	17th Field Co. R.E.
4 5-inch. Howitzers, 37th Battery, R.F.A. 160	Balloon section
2 4.7 Naval guns	1st Division Field Hospital .

SIXTH DIVISION.—LIEUT.-GENERAL T. KELLY-KENNY.

<i>13th Brigade</i> —Maj.-Gen. C. E. KNOX.	<i>18th Brigade</i> —Brig.-Gen. T. E. STEPHENSON.
2nd E. Kent Regt. 786	2nd R. Warwickshire Regt.* . 850
2nd Gloucestershire Regt. . 735	1st Yorkshire Regt. 936
1st W. Riding Regt. 750	1st Essex Regt. 787
1st Oxfordshire L.I. 614	1st Welsh Regt. 970
7th Bearer Co.	6th Div. Field Hosp. Bearer Co.
Field Hospital	No. 3 Section Cape Field Hosp.

DIVISIONAL TROOPS.

76th, 81st, 82nd Batteries, R.F.A. 523	38th Field Co. R.E.
2 12-pdr. Naval guns	Field Hospital
Ammunition column 83	

* Followed up after Poplar Grove; till then at Orange River Bridge.

SEVENTH DIVISION.—LIEUT.-GENERAL C. TUCKER.

14th Brigade—Maj.-Gen. SIR H. CHERMESIDE.	15th Brigade—Maj.-Gen. A. G. WAVELL.
2nd Norfolk Regt. 814	2nd Cheshire Regt. 830
2nd Lincolnshire Regt. 858	1st E. Lancashire Regt. 910
2nd Hampshire Regt. 700	2nd S. Wales Borderers 961
1st K. O. S. Borderers 950	2nd N. Staffordshire Regt. 900
Bearer Co.	Bearer Co.
Field Hospital	Field Hospital

DIVISIONAL TROOPS.

18th, 62nd, 75th R.F.A. 523	9th Field Co. R.E.
Ammunition column 123	Field Hospital

NINTH DIVISION.—LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR H. E. COLVILLE, K.C.M.G.

3rd (Highland) Brigade—Brig.-Gen. H. A. MACDONALD.	19th Brigade—Brig.-Gen. H. SMITH-DORRIEN.
2nd Black Watch 649	1st Gordon Highlanders 900
1st Highland L.I. 950	2nd D. of Cornwall's L.I. 836
2nd Seaforth Highlanders 703	2nd Shropshire L.I. 886
1st A. and S. Highlanders 819	Royal Canadian Regt. 925
Cape Vol. Bearer Co.	7th Divn. F. H. Bearer Co.
3rd Co. Field Hospital	No. 1 Section Cape F. H.

DIVISIONAL TROOPS.

83rd, 84th, 85th R.F.A.* 523	7th Field Co. R.E.
65th Howitzers, R.F.A. 243	
2 Naval 4·7, 2 12-prs.	

CAVALRY DIVISION.—LIEUT.-GENERAL J. D. P. FRENCH.

1st Cavalry Brigade.—Colonel T. C. PORTER.	2nd Cavalry Brigade.—Colonel R. BROADWOOD.
2nd Dragoons (Scots Greys) 438	10th Hussars 458
6th Dragoon Gds. (Carabiniers) 464	Composite Household Cavalry 625
1 sq. 6th Dragoons (Innis-killings) 464	12th Lancers 500
1 sq. 14th Hussars	"P" and "G" Batteries, R.H.A. 371
1 sq. N.S.W. Lancers	Ammunition column 66
"Q," "T," "U" Batteries, R.H.A. 551	
Ammunition column 107	

* Joined after Poplar Grove. Till then Colville used 82nd R.F.A.

CAVALRY DIVISION—*continued*.

3rd Cavalry Brigade.—Colonel J. R. P. GORDON.		M.I. Brigade.—Colonel E. A. H. ALDERSON.	
9th Lancers	418	1st Bn. M.I.	413
16th Lancers	540	3rd Bn. M.I.	460
"O" and "R" Batteries, R.H.A.	371	Roberts's Horse.	550
Ammunition column	142	2 sq. Kitchener's Horse . . .	200
		Queensland M.I.	275
No. 9 and 12 Bearer Cos. . .		2 cos. New Zealand M.R. . .	204
No. 6 and 9 Field Hospitals .		Rimington's Guides	150

REGULAR M.I.—COLONELS O. C. HANNAY AND C. P. RIDLEY.

2nd Battalion	440	6th Battalion	460
4th „	450	7th „	450
5th „	480	8th „	480

OTHER MOUNTED UNITS.

Nesbitt's Horse	250	C.I.V. Mounted Infantry . .	250
2 sq. Kitchener's Horse . .	200	Grahamstown 1st City Vols. .	200
N.S.W.M.I.	120		

TRANSPORT.—COLONEL W. D. RICHARDSON (COLONEL W. G. NICHOLSON).

21 mule companies, 1,184 wagons, etc., 11,000 mules, 2,700 drivers, etc.			
6 ox	„	600	„
		9,600 oxen,	1,320 „

APPROXIMATE NUMERICAL STRENGTHS (INCLUDING
NON-COMBATANTS).

First Division	7,400
Sixth Division (excluding Warwicks) . . .	6,700
Seventh Division	7,900
Ninth Division	7,400
Cavalry Division (including Alderson's M.I.) .	8,000
Other Mounted Troops	3,600
Transport	4,000
Total	45,000

Of these some 37,000, representing roughly 30,000 combatants, took part in Roberts's invasion and marched through Ramdam.

Distribution of Troops on February 10.

At Modder River : Cavalry Division (minus sundry units at Ramah Spring) ; 1st Division ; 6th Division (H.Q. 6th Division

and part of 13th Brigade leave for Enslin) ; 9th Division (H.Q. and 3rd Brigade, 19th Brigade still scattered guarding communications between Modder River and Orange River).

At Enslin : 14th Brigade.

At Graspan : 7th Division H.Q. and 15th Brigade.

On road from Richmond to Belmont : Broadwood's column (afterwards bulk of Alderson's M.I.).

At Ramah Spring : M.I. (Hannay) ; Carabiniers, sq. 14th Hussars, details Inniskillings ; 2 sq. Kitchener's Horse ; N.S.W.M.I. ; N.Z.M.R. ; details Rimington's Guides.

Of the transport : six mule companies at Modder River, three at Graspan-Enslin ; 200 ox-wagons supply park at Belmont ; 50 ox-wagons reserve ammunition at Modder River ; the rest of the transport was still at Orange River.