

## CHAPTER XI.

## FROM PAARDEBERG TO POPLAR GROVE.\*

Halt now  
enforced by  
weakness of  
horses,

and the need  
of supplies  
for march.

Restoration  
of regular  
organisation.

THE Commander-in-Chief, much as he wished after Cronje's surrender to push on for Bloemfontein at once, found that the condition of the cavalry and artillery horses obliged him to give them a week's rest, during which the more ample forage now obtainable might partially at least enable them to recover from the long strain of work on empty stomachs which had reduced them to inefficiency. Unfortunately adequate forage did not come up in time to restore the horses to efficiency, and the whole story of Poplar Grove turned on that fact. Moreover, he was about to break loose from the Kimberley railway, on which he had hitherto drawn, intending to open a fresh line *viâ* Norval's Pont and Bethulie on his arrival at Bloemfontein. To carry out this plan a few days were needed to accumulate the supplies necessary for the advance eastward, and to clear up and close the old line of communications from the Modder Camp. Orders were, therefore, issued on the 28th of February that the main body of the army should vacate the tainted ground round Paardeberg for fresh bivouacs near Osfontein. Advantage was taken of this move to restore the displaced units to their proper corps. The IXth division (Colville) remained on the right bank of the river, but was moved forward to a site near Vanderberg Drift. The cavalry division still bivouacked close to Koodoos Drift. On the 3rd March further orders were issued for the concentration at Osfontein of the Guards' brigade from Klip Drift and Klip Kraal, of the 15th brigade and Lieut.-Colonel

\* See maps Nos. 25 and 26.

E. M. Flint's brigade division, Royal Field artillery, from Jacobsdal, and of various mounted infantry details from the Modder Camp.

The Guards' brigade reached Headquarters on the 6th, and, until the arrival of the army at Bloemfontein, was retained under the direct orders of the Commander-in-Chief as corps troops. The 15th brigade rejoined its division, the VIIth, on the 9th at Waaihoek after the action of Poplar Grove. Flint's brigade division Royal Field artillery marched in to Osfontein on the 6th, but was not actually united to Colville's division, of which it formed the divisional artillery, until the 9th. The arrival on the 6th at Osfontein of the additional mounted infantry permitted of the redistribution of that arm into four brigades, under Colonel C. P. Ridley and the following Lieut.-Colonels: E. A. H. Alderson, P. W. J. Le Gallais, C. G. Martyr.\*

Mounted  
infantry  
formed in  
four brigades.

On February 28th, Lord Roberts appointed Lieut.-Colonel J. M. Grierson as A.A.G., on the Staff of the Army, to be responsible for the movement and distribution of the troops—a much needed improvement. Hitherto these duties had not been assigned to any particular section of the Staff.† The losses due to De Wet's exploit at Waterval Drift had been partly made good by the convoy from Modder River, partly by the captures made at Bosjespan, partly by transport supplied by the De Beers Company at Kimberley. By the 4th March, twenty-five days' biscuit rations and twenty days' groceries for the whole force had reached Osfontein, or were close at hand. Of forage there were only 30,000 lbs. unissued, but 300,000 lbs. (35,000 rations) were en route from Kimberley or the Modder Camp, and another 900,000 lbs. were to follow. Heavy storms of rain still made the ground soft, and the drifts in many cases impassable. The movements of convoys were impeded not only by the absence of roads and the condition to which the tracks were reduced,

State of  
supplies.

Peculiar  
difficulties of  
transport.

\* For composition, see Appendix 5.

† For the working of the British Staff system prior to 1888 and the history of the changes then made, see the evidence given by Lieut.-General Sir W. Nicholson before the War Commission,—Minutes of Evidence, Volume II., pages 344-6.

but by the perpetual passage of narrow drifts over petty streams, which had been converted in a few hours into raging torrents, so that often it was necessary to wait till the water had run down and then carry the contents of the wagons across by hand. As a set-off to this, the young grass, which the rain, in that semi-tropical climate brought up almost at once, helped to revive the starved horses and mules. Of slaughter cattle there were present with the main army on the 4th March only three days' rations, but just as these had been nearly all eaten, anxiety was relieved by a further capture of cattle enough for two or three days longer. Afterwards meat could be obtained from the farms as the troops marched eastward. Good progress had been made in the evacuation of the Field Hospitals. In the week from the 25th February to the 4th March, convoys of sick and wounded, amounting in all to 742 all ranks, were removed to the Modder Camp and Kimberley. The sudden demand of the medical authorities for 100 wagons for this purpose, withdrew transport badly needed for the feeding of the troops. Had the accumulation of sick been gradually relieved by using the empty wagons on their return journeys, this would not have been required.

March 1st.  
Lord Roberts  
visits  
Kimberley.

Lord  
Kitchener  
sends three  
columns to  
clear country  
round Prieska.

The Field-Marshal himself, in order to discuss with Lord Methuen the situation to the northward, rode on March 1st to Kimberley. There he was joined by the Chief of the Staff. Clements had on 28th February been warned "to act strictly on the defensive until further orders." Lord Kitchener, leaving Naauwpoort, had spent a day at De Aar, and there arranged with Brigadier-General H. H. Settle, commanding the section of the line of communications to the south of the Orange river, for the despatch westward of three small flying columns, under the respective commands of General Settle himself, Colonel J. Adye, R.A., and Colonel Sir Charles Parsons, R.A., to deal with the hostile bands assembling in the direction of Prieska and Van Wyk's Vlei.\*

On the arrival of the Commander-in-Chief and Chief of the Staff at Kimberley the possibility of raising a local force to

\* These operations will be described in Volume III.

effect the immediate relief of Mafeking was considered, but for this events were not yet ripe. Lord Roberts, returning to Osfontein on the 2nd, sent Lord Methuen orders to clear Boshof of the enemy, and when a force of Imperial Yeomanry and other mounted troops sufficient for that purpose should have joined him, to assume the offensive. He was then to cross the Vaal by a flanking movement, and push towards Mafeking. Orders were accordingly given for the despatch to Kimberley of a mounted brigade, under the command of Colonel Lord Chesham, consisting of the newly arrived 3rd, 5th, and 10th battalions of Imperial Yeomanry.

Methuen to  
seize Boshof,  
and with  
Chesham's  
Yeomanry  
push on to  
Mafeking.

The welcome news of the victory of Pieters Hill reached Lord Roberts on 28th February. He telegraphed at once to General Buller:—

Feb. 28th.  
Lord Roberts  
congratulates  
Buller and  
White on  
relief of  
Ladysmith.

“Paardeberg,

“28th February, 1900.

“Your telegram 0428 of to-day has given everyone in this force the greatest pleasure. We rejoice to think that your goal is so nearly reached, and that the courage and endurance, so conspicuously displayed by your troops, are about to be rewarded by their having the great honour and proud satisfaction of relieving Sir George White and the beleaguered garrison at Ladysmith.”

To Sir George White the Field-Marshal telegraphed from Kimberley on the following day:—

“It is impossible for me to express my delight on hearing that Dundonald had reached Ladysmith. The prayers that have been offered up throughout the Empire have been heard, and from one end of it to the other there will be general rejoicing. I wish I could personally congratulate you and your gallant troops on the splendid defence that has been made. Please convey to one and all my high sense of their conduct as soldiers worthy of the best traditions of the British Army.”

The distribution and future action of the four divisions in the eastern theatre, including the Ladysmith garrison, had now to be determined. In reply to Lord Roberts' warning of February 25th that the despatch of one of these divisions to East London would probably prove necessary, General Buller



had telegraphed: "I will send every man I can spare as soon as I get to Ladysmith." On the 3rd March he reported:—

Sir Redvers' proposals, March 3rd.

"I find that the defeat of the Boers is more complete than I had dared to anticipate. . . . My troops want a week's rest, boots, and clothes. The Ladysmith garrison wants a fortnight's food and exercise. I do not think there is any chance of the enemy making a stand this side of Laing's Nek. . . . Will you advise me as to what course you wish pursued. My own view would be that we should send three brigades to occupy Northern Natal, to restore order and repair the railway, and with two divisions attack the three passes, Tintwa, Van Reenen's and Bezuidenhout, and pass through one of them the division you wish sent to your side, or, in the alternative of your not wanting a division, that the force here should reoccupy Northern Natal and the Wakkerstroom-Vryheid district of the Transvaal. The latter is the alternative I incline to, as likely to be most objectionable to the enemy . . ."

Lord Roberts' plans for Natal and Cape.

The Commander-in-Chief deemed it unwise to embark on extensive operations in a country so favourable for the tactics of the Boers as the passes of the Drakensberg. He had, moreover, resolved to strengthen the military situation in the eastern portion of Cape Colony, which had been weak ever since the beginning of the war. He meant to place one of Buller's divisions and General Gatacre's force under the command of Sir George White. He replied at once, therefore, in this sense to Sir R. Buller's telegram, directing him to despatch a division to East London, and with the troops remaining with him "to act strictly on the defensive until such time as the operations of this column (i.e., the army under Lord Roberts' personal command) have caused the enemy to withdraw altogether from or considerably reduce their numbers in the Drakensberg passes."

C.-in-C. orders Buller to send a division to Cape Colony.

These orders changed, March 10th, because of Boer rally and Sir G. White's health.

The Vth division was selected by Sir Redvers Buller for transfer to East London, but for two distinct reasons the scheme for Eastern Cape Colony was not carried out. First, the embarkation of the Vth division at Durban was, with Lord Roberts' sanction, suspended on March 10th in consequence of a representation from Sir Redvers Buller that the enemy had rallied on the Biggarsberg, that a purely passive attitude would allow of the resumption of Boer raids, and that the occupation of Dundee,

was, therefore, desirable. Secondly, Sir George White's health had suffered from the hardships of the long siege, and he was obliged to return to England.

So close had been the net round Cronje's laager during the last few days of the investment, that definite information as to the surrender did not reach Christian De Wet until 1st March, though native reports, which he did not believe, had come in on February 28th. Telegraphing this disastrous intelligence to Bloemfontein, on the day he had it confirmed, the Free State Commandant-General added :—

March 1st.  
De Wet hears  
of Cronje's  
surrender.

"We will bow under this trial and trust that the Lord will strengthen our officers and burghers in this trial, so that they may better appreciate their duties towards Him, our Government, our country, and our people."

On the 3rd the further disheartening news filtered through Bloemfontein to De Wet's commandos that "the burghers have given up their positions around Ladysmith in order to occupy other positions in the Biggarsberg and on the frontier of the Orange Free State, and by so doing to effectively withstand the overwhelming force of the enemy." To soldiers so intelligent as the Boers such messages bore no equivocal meaning.

March 3rd.  
He hears of  
relief of  
Ladysmith.

De Wet, one of those born leaders who show their mettle best when tried by disaster, was not a man to lose courage under this accumulation of misfortune. He at once set to work to reanimate his burghers and to strengthen the ground to which he had fallen back from Kitchener's Kopje on the 21st of February. His main line ran north and south, taking in Table Mountain, and across Nooitgedacht Farm to the southward. On that side its left flank ended at a distance of about six miles from the river in an open plain (see map 26). The right flank was prolonged by an underfeature of Table Mountain, which, flung back to the north-east, stretched down to the Poplar Grove Drift. Thence it was continued across the river due northward by Leeuw Kop, a steep sugar-loaf hill, commanding the drift at a range of about 4,500 yards. Beyond Leeuw Kop a series of kopjes, bending round to the north-west towards Pan-

De Wet's  
action  
thereon.

The position  
he takes up.

fontein (see map 25), offered good posts, from which an attack on Leeuw Kop could be outflanked, if the numerical strength of the defenders should suffice for their occupation.

Its character.

The vital point of this great line of defence was the Poplar Grove Drift, known to the Boers as Modder-rivier-poort. Its seizure by the enemy would not only cut the position in two, but, since the road to Bloemfontein passed close to its southern bank, would also imperil the line of retreat of the whole of the defenders who lay on the northern side of the river. To a direct attack against the drift along the southern bank from the westward, the Table Mountain ridge with its gentle slopes presented a barrier. An advance against this ridge in the face of magazine rifles would prove costly. Nevertheless, its southern end was dangerously *en l'air*, and exposed to a turning movement. On the other hand the northern part, although guarded by the Panfontein Kopjes from being locally outflanked, was not so strong as the southern against frontal attack, for the bush-covered broken bed of the river led to the heart of it, and it was further weakened by three kopjes, Three Stone Hill and the Cactus Knolls (see map 26), which were artillery sites favourable to the attack. There was for the defenders, faced by superior forces, this danger also that the country in rear as far eastward as Abraham's Kraal was open and ill-adapted to defence.

On receiving reinforcements he extends it.

The paucity of burghers with De Wet had at first obliged him to restrict himself to the ground on the south side of the river. But on the 2nd March his strength had been increased by the arrival of men from Bloemfontein and Colesberg, and he sent to Leeuw Kop 1,000 to 1,500 men. On the following day he even reported to Steyn that he had been considering the possibility of seizing Koodoosrand and attacking the British troops lying on the north side of the river, but had come to the conclusion that "a little rest will do the burghers good," and that such an attack would be too risky, as it would weaken his defence. He said he was doubtful whether the burghers had enough picks and shovels "to entrench properly the long stretch of ground which we now occupy." On the night of the

6th, De Wet's right flank was made more secure by the arrival from Fourteen Streams of about 1,000 men, a Free State commando, under Kolbe, chiefly drawn from the Boshof district. They had with them a Krupp field gun, and two smaller pieces. Kolbe at once settled his burghers on the Panfontein ridges, which were separated by a valley, some three miles wide, from Leeuw Kop, the right of the main position. On Leeuw Kop and between it and Poplar Grove Drift lay the Senekal, Bethlehem and Potchefstroom commandos. Another Krupp gun had been dragged by hand over the boulders which covered the almost precipitous sides of the kop. It was mounted on the summit. The section of the defence from the drift to Table Mountain was assigned to detachments of Heidelberg, Bloemfontein, Edenburg, and Ladybrand burghers, three guns being posted on the mountain. Special care had been devoted to the thorough entrenchment of this section. The southern section, including the Seven Kopjes, held by commandos from Ficksburg and Philippolis, assisted by a Bloemfontein detachment, had three guns. Eastward of the Poplar Grove Drift the Winburg commando with two guns was posted on Slaag Kraal Hill as a central reserve and *point d'appui* in case of retreat. De Wet made the Poplar Grove homestead his Headquarters. He was able to send his orders by heliograph to all his commanders. His whole strength, including Kolbe's commando, is estimated by Colonel de Villebois Mareuil, a French officer attached to his staff, at 9,000 men. On the *moral* of this force the same officer records in his diary for March 4th the following notes :—

"Desertion is universal, just as there is utter demoralisation. Those who are frank anxiously question you about the end of the war, whilst those who still pose are generally men who are trying to assume an attitude which will act as a corrective to their cowardice."\*

*Moral of the burghers.*

Steyn had on the 27th February spent the day in De Wet's laager, exhorting the commandos. Kruger was equally in-

Steyn and Kruger strive to rouse them.

\* "War Notes: the Diary of Colonel de Villebois Mareuil": authorised translation from the Paris *Liberté*, page 264.



defatigable in his efforts to revive the national spirit of the two Republics. On the news of Botha's withdrawal from Ladysmith he had issued a proclamation to all his burghers, in which, after recalling to their remembrance the difficulties the Israelites of old successfully overcame in their march from Egypt to the Promised Land, he implored them "to stand fast in the faith and continue to fight." \* Nor was he content with this. Hurrying south by train to Joubert's Headquarters at Dundee, he was able by the influence of his presence to prevent the abandonment of the Biggarsberg by the disheartened commandos in Natal. Thence he again hastened northward, travelled down through the Free State, and, after a brief conference on 6th March with President Steyn at Bloemfontein, started across the veld in a Cape cart, hoping to arrive at Poplar Grove in time to inspire De Wet's burghers with the fire of his zeal and induce them to resist to the last.

Estimated  
strength and  
distribution  
of Boers,  
March 5th.

Throughout the week's pause after Cronje's surrender Lord Roberts' and De Wet's forces were in sight of each other, separated only by five miles of open plain. The movements and dispositions of the enemy were therefore constantly watched by the cavalry; from their reports and from those of Major the Hon. H. A. Lawrence and Captain G. F. Milne, Intelligence Staff, assisted by Mr. F. R. Burnham, the American scout, a fairly accurate plan of the Boer position was prepared on the 5th March. The following estimate of the numbers and general distribution of the Boer forces was submitted by the Director of Military Intelligence to Lord Roberts:—

\* This proclamation, in which Biblical quotations figure very largely, was published in the *Standard and Digger's News* of the 2nd March, but had already been transmitted by telegram to all the Transvaal commandos in the field.

# FROM PAARDEBERG TO POPLAR GROVE. 189

		Men.	Guns.
Poplar Grove	{ De Wet De la Rey Englebrecht Botha }	5,000—6,000	8
About Petrusburg .. .. (A. Cronje)		500—1,000	2
Left Colesberg at end of February and not since located—say .. .. .		4,000	3—10
Reinforcements which left Ladysmith third week in February and not since located— say .. .. .		5,000	
		16,000	20
Norval's Pont .. .. . (Grobelaar)		700—1000	2
Colesberg Bridge .. .. .		500	2
Stormberg—say .. .. .		500	2
North of Dordrecht .. .. .		500—1,000	2
About Boshof .. .. .		500	2
Warrenton .. .. . { Ferreira Du Toit Bredendbach }		4,000	6
Prieska—Griquatown—Kenhardt .. ..		1,000	3
		24,500	39
Mafeking .. .. . (Snyman)—say		1,500	3
O. F. Staters left Van Reenen's Pass for West 1st March .. .. .		2,000	
Joubert's main force, retreating northward		8,000	44
TOTAL ..		36,000	86

It will be seen from the above that, while the commandos immediately facing the Osfontein Camp were known to consist of not less than 5,000 burghers and eight guns, it seemed possible that these numbers might ere long be trebled by the arrival of reinforcements. De la Rey was then believed to be in supreme command at Poplar Grove, though he did not actually join De Wet until after the retirement to Abraham's Kraal. The importance of De Wet's presence was recognised. In a précis of Intelligence, dated Osfontein, 6th March, he is described as "a strong, determined man, good disciplinarian, popular and respected, but not greatly trusted as a leader." Two deserters had reported that the men in the Poplar Grove laagers were thoroughly tired of the

Views at  
Headquarters.

war, but the fact that there were no other desertions and that the enemy were full of activity led the British Staff to expect strong opposition to the march on Bloemfontein.

Lord Roberts  
details his  
scheme of  
attack,  
March 6th.

Assisted by this information and by observations made by himself of the enemy's position, the Commander-in-Chief assembled the whole of his General Officers at Osonfontein in the afternoon of the 6th March, and read to them the following written instructions, a copy of which, together with a sketch, was handed to each Commander on the conclusion of the conference :—

"I have asked you to meet me here this afternoon in order to communicate to you the proposed plan of operations for to-morrow. The enemy, as you know, occupy a strong but somewhat extended position in our immediate front. Their object, of course, is to block the road to Bloemfontein, and so far as the information we can procure goes, it is apparently the only place between here and Bloemfontein where our progress could be checked. It is difficult to calculate the exact strength of the enemy, but, allowing that the troops withdrawn from Colesberg, Stormberg, and Natal have joined, it seems scarcely possible that it can number more than 14,000 at the outside, with perhaps 20 guns. To meet this number we have some 30,000 men and 116 guns.\* My intention is to send the cavalry division with Alderson's and Ridley's mounted infantry, and seven batteries Royal Horse artillery, to threaten the enemy's line of communication with Bloemfontein. To avoid coming under the enemy's fire throughout this distance the cavalry will have to make a détour of about 17 miles. This would bring them to the south bank of the Modder river, probably some two miles above

\* The field state of the 6th March showed the following to be the effective strength of the troops under Lord Roberts' personal command on that day:—

	Officers.	Men.
Cavalry .. .. .	108	2,694
Mounted Infantry .. .. .	230	4,652
Royal Horse Artillery and Royal Field Artil- lery .. .. .	115	3,100
Royal Engineers .. .. .	37	770
Infantry .. .. .	455	16,530
Naval Brigade, etc. .. .. .	39	634
Headquarters Staff .. .. .	49	73
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Total on parade ..	1,033	28,453
15th Brigade (at Brand Vlei) .. ..	85	2,909
Non-Combatants .. .. .	89	935
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GRAND TOTAL ..	1,207	32,297

the Poplar Grove Drift. It is very likely, however, that General French may find some vulnerable points which it would be desirable for him to attack before he reaches the river. The destruction of their laagers practically cripples the Boers, as we have learnt from experience. There are three or four laagers reported to be on the places marked on the plan,\* a copy of which has been supplied to all officers in command, and it would be well worth General French's while to bring the fire of his 42 guns to bear on them. The Boers are very clever at taking cover themselves, but they cannot hide their wagons, transport animals, and riding ponies, and the destruction of these must in time bring them to terms, the more especially as they will be cut off from their supplies at Bloemfontein. It is intended that the VIth division, with its brigade division of artillery, and the Howitzer battery, and also Martyr's mounted troops (except those ordered to join the VIIth division), will follow the route to be taken by the cavalry division for about six miles. It will then be on the south-east of the 'Seven Kopjes,' the southernmost limit of the Boer position. General Kelly-Kenny will not, I think, have much difficulty in driving the enemy off these kopjes. They will be shaken by knowing that the cavalry has passed round their rear, and a judicious use of mounted infantry, and a combined bombardment of 24 guns will further dishearten them. The first position to which the Boers can retire from the 'Seven Kopjes' is 'Table Mountain,' distant four and three quarter miles. They should be followed up by the VIth division, which will be assisted in its attack on 'Table Mountain' by the brigade of Guards, the four 4.7-in. Naval guns, Flint's brigade division of artillery, and Le Gallais' mounted troops. This latter force will assemble at daybreak at the posts now held by Le Gallais' and Martyr's mounted troops, distant nearly two miles from the Headquarters camp. The 'Table Mountain' is the key of the enemy's position, and with that in our possession they will have to retire into the Modder River, as Cronje did, or force their way across it. The VIIth division (14th brigade only) is occupying the ground hitherto held by the 2nd and 3rd brigades of cavalry. It will have with it its brigade division of artillery, Nesbitt's Horse, New South Wales and Queensland mounted infantry. The duty of the VIIth division is to threaten the enemy as best it can, and draw their attention from the main attack on the 'Table Mountain.' Should they show signs of retiring across the river, the VIIth division should move eastwards towards the drift, and endeavour to harass them as much as possible. The IXth division will act in the same way on the north bank of the river. It will have to look out for the hill on its left front, on which the Boers had a gun a day or two ago. This division will be accompanied by three Naval 12-pr. guns, and its left flank will be protected by two regiments of mounted infantry under Lieut.-Colonels de Lisle and Henry. Lieut.-Colonel Rhodes will be good enough to arrange that signalling may be carried on throughout the day between the Headquarters and the several infantry divisions. My Headquarters will be with the Guards' brigade, at the post now occupied by Le Gallais' mounted troops. The P.M.O. will be pleased to see that medical arrangements are made

\* Seven laagers were shown in the plan, but the three or four specially referred to in these orders appear to have been those near Poplar Grove Farm.



suitable for the movements of the several divisions, as above indicated. General officers in command will issue orders that their troops are to take cooked food with them, and that a supply of water is to be arranged for as well as circumstances will admit of. All baggage should be left in camp.

“ ROBERTS.”

Misunder-  
standing about  
hour of  
marching.

It will be observed that no hours for starting are given in these instructions. These were mentioned verbally afterwards. It was probably due to this fact that it was not realised that General French had left the conference under the impression that he was to move at 3 a.m., a fact of which his written orders issued shortly afterwards, are a clear proof (see page 195), whilst General Kelly-Kenny, whose division was to follow the cavalry, understood that they would move off at 2 a.m. He, starting at the hour named for him, found the cavalry division blocking his way, so that, having impassable ground on either side of him, he was obliged to halt. It may also be noticed that as no orders had been previously issued for the packing of the baggage, this caused great delay when it had to be subsequently collected and sent forward by Lieut.-Colonel Grierson.

Summary of  
the C.-in-C.'s  
plan.

Although the form in which these orders are cast is not that usually adopted, they present a perfectly clear picture of the Field-Marshal's plan for the overthrow of the enemy. To summarise the orders : The cavalry division is to swing round the Boers' left flank, making a *détour* of 17 miles, seize the position above Poplar Grove Drift, where the Winburg commando was guarding that crossing, and thus cut De Wet from Bloemfontein. Kelly-Kenny, after the cavalry has arrived in rear of the enemy's main position, is to deliver a flank attack, and gradually roll the left up from Seven Kopjes to Table Mountain, and from Table Mountain to the river bed ; the Guards' brigade is to support the attack on Table Mountain. The 14th brigade, having its left close to the south bank of the Modder, is “ to threaten ” the enemy. The IXth division is to perform a similar rôle on the north bank. In this manner Lord Roberts “ calculated on cutting the enemy from the Bloemfontein roads and forcing him to get entangled in the difficult drifts of the

Modder." \* He conceived in fact that the cavalry division would be able by audacious demonstration and a skilful use of its Horse batteries to paralyse De Wet, as French had paralysed Cronje on 17th February; this being done, Lord Roberts hoped that the infantry would find no difficulty in manœuvring the commandos into the river bed, and would so bring about a second Paardeberg. March 7th was fixed as the date when the scheme was to be put in operation.

\* See Volume I., page 465, Minutes of Evidence before the War Commission.