CHAPTER III

THE PROBLEM BEFORE KITCHENER

(December, 1900)

On the 29th of November, 1900, Lord Kitchener definitely took over the command of the army in South Africa.

To describe the task which lay before him as the most serious military problem that a British general has ever been called upon to face, would be an exaggeration. The struggle was confined to a portion of a single continent, and so long as the flames of war did not extend beyond the confines, wide as they were, of South Africa, so long too as the resolution of the British people remained inflexible, there could not be the slightest doubt regarding the final issue of the war. Those great sources of strength which had carried the nation triumphantly through so many historic crises remained, throughout all the changes and chances of the long-drawn struggle, unimpaired.

By her navy, Britain held command of the world's highways, and by these highways the necessary military resources passed uninterruptedly to the Cape from the four corners of the Empire and from its citadel, the British Isles, teeming with the accumulated wealth of centuries of national effort. All the work of reinforcement and supply went on with an ease and a celerity which had been unknown in the history of any previous war. The navy, too, stood between England and the intervention of jealous rivals who viewed her adventure with unconcealed displeasure, who were willing to wound but afraid to strike. At home, in spite of much baneful opposition, there was a more genuinely united people at the back of the Government during the long struggle with the Boer republics than there had been in any of the great
campaigns of the past; and the patriotism of the people at home was equalled by that of the citizens of the great self-governing communities whom the spirit of adventure had planted widely among the seven seas, and who had come forward freely to assume the duties inseparable from the rights of citizenship. Where these mighty reserves of strength and wealth existed, the general in command had only to state his needs in plain terms for his every want to be supplied with a liberal hand.

If we glance back through history and consider how widely different were the circumstances in past campaigns, and what stupendous risks our generals were forced continually to incur, owing to sheer inability of the mother-country to supply even the men and money which are the raw material of war, we are forced to admit that the enormous increase in the resources of the Empire, of their accessibility and what may be termed their mobilizable qualities, allow of no comparison between the difficulties of a Kitchener on the one hand and those of a Wolfe, a Cornwallis, or a Wellington on the other. But, with all this admitted, it may fairly be questioned whether any British general in the past ever had been confronted by such a grave and complex problem as South Africa presented in December, 1900.

The British aim was not merely the conquest but the absorption of a free white race, a race no longer retaining the weaknesses of colonial pioneers, but firmly rooted in the soil. It was an aim unparalleled in the history of our nation. Yet it was an aim whose character and magnitude the greater part of the nation but dimly apprehended. This was not unnatural; for the relation of vassal and suzerain, which in varying degrees had existed for so long between the two peoples, had shrouded from the vision of the suzerain power the growth of a Boer national sentiment as intense as that possessed by any of the historic polities of the old world. Even to the Boers themselves the depth of this sentiment was a late discovery. Full national consciousness did not exist among them when the war broke out, and now, after a year's war, there were hundreds of brave and patriotic men who had definitely accepted defeat and who were ready to submit to
British rule. But at the time when Kitchener took command, a new spirit, stimulated indeed from a safe distance by the exiled President and the old warlike clique, but upheld in arms mainly by men who had been averse to the war, had begun to assert itself. It was this spirit which Kitchener had to fight. The conflict bore not the least analogy to any waged by Britain in the past, save the great struggle with her own colonies in North America. But, owing to the poverty of our military literature and the narrow horizon of our general education, the history of that war had become almost a sealed book to several generations of British officers. If, in the long run, a Tarleton found many imitators, the compliment of imitation was unconscious. The dashing leaders of light horse were evolved, not by study nor professional training, but by the light of nature, by the practice of the playing fields and the custom of sport continued and developed in the greater fields of war.

When Kitchener succeeded to the command, even after deducting the 15,000 prisoners of war and the 5,000 to 6,000 men who had fallen in the campaign or had been interned in Portuguese territory, there were still in the field about 60,000 Boers, foreigners and rebels. If the truth was not known and not recognised until, at the close of the war, numerical calculation placed the matter beyond all possibility of doubt, the fact remains unaltered that these 60,000 men, most of them armed and most of them mounted, existed in flesh and blood. Scarcely a quarter of them, it is true, was ever on a war-footing at the same time; but the men were there, and large numbers could be assembled by commanders who possessed authority. On the British side the total number of troops, amounting, when Kitchener took command, to some 210,000 men, was overwhelming only on paper. Nearly 100,000 were disseminated along the railways, upon almost purely passive duties, and many thousands more were immured in isolated garrisons. Large numbers were detained at the coast towns and at dépôts, or were employed upon escorts, guards, safe-conducts, and other minor duties. Casualties and sickness were a constant drain. The dispersion of the troops and the long and often rapid
marches had left stragglers scattered all over the country at stations, garrisons, rest camps, and even in remote farmsteads. One of the great faults of the British system was proved to be the loss of touch between regiments and the men thus dropped, all count of whose existence was frequently lost for months at a time. On their side these derelicts found a life of ease not uncongenial, and, while some passively awaited marching orders which never came, others became employed as servants, grooms, cooks, waiters, hospital orderlies, and even as gardeners. Officers disappeared in a similar manner. Some, convalescent from wounds or sickness, found the pleasures of a few weeks' idleness too attractive to be resisted; others, belonging to disbanded corps, to the transport, intelligence, or other accessory services, crowded the clubs and hotels of the chief towns; while individuals of all sorts, both military and civil, connected with the many supplementary services which grow up around an army in the field, thronged the stations, bars and restaurants of many a town upon the lines of communication. Thus, although, generally speaking, the state of the army in South Africa was thoroughly sound, there were disintegrating causes at work which called for the control of an iron hand.*

Nor was this all. Even in the active force still available for offensive operations, influences were present which could not fail to give a prudent commander grounds for anxious thought. The first concerns leadership. It is true that the ordeals of the campaign had turned most of the troops into seasoned veterans; but the moral strain upon the commanders had been very severe. Many of the older men had grown disinclined to take risks, and were unequal to the fresh calls about to be made upon them by the infusion of redoubled energy into the operations of both sides. The war about to be waged required commanders

* When precedents are studied the wastage was not remarkable. Napoleon, crossing the Niemen with 363,000 men, reached Moscow, 500 miles distant, with only 95,000. Steam, railways, the telegraph, and the increase of national resources have increased so enormously the range and striking power of a great maritime empire that distant expeditions can now be undertaken with success which a hundred years ago would have entailed the exhaustion and ruin of the country which launched them.
possessing attributes but rarely associated with advancing years; the power of remaining long hours in the saddle, of enduring extremes of temperature and climate, of bivouacking on sodden ground with no covering but a blanket, of thriving on hard biscuits and bully beef, and of yet remaining always fresh and alert, ready to risk their reputations and their lives in the keen pursuit of a skilful foe. There is no army in the world possessing a larger number of officers capable of fulfilling these conditions than one created from the joint resources of Britain and her Colonies, yet even in this army the number of young leaders who combined the best qualities of head and heart was not large.

Nor was it easy to find suitable columns for these leaders. Since a man on foot is incapable, save by accident or an act of God, of catching a man on horseback, it follows that for the pursuit and capture of the Boers the imperative need of the army was for mounted men. In this respect the prospect before Kitchener was sombre. Neither in numbers nor in quality were the mounted troops sufficient; and in numbers, as we shall see presently, they were about to suffer a diminution for which large reinforcements of untrained men were at first but indifferent compensation.

The regular cavalry formed the permanent foundation; but the profound conservatism which, as in most regular armies, characterised this arm, debarred it from setting such an example of vigorous originality as was urgently needed for the conduct of the campaign. It must be conceded that to convert cavalry into mounted riflemen was a drastic and difficult change. Their training and equipment rendered them incapable of competing tactically with the Boers. The long-range magazine rifle, that final arbiter of modern combat, was unknown to them. Their manoeuvres in mass were based on shock with the arme blanche. Individual intelligence was not high enough for skilled skirmishing, much less for skilled reconnaissance. Something had already been done to correct these defects. The lance had been eliminated, and, when Kitchener assumed the command, instruction had begun in the use of the infantry rifle. But proficiency with this weapon is not to be won
in a day; some regiments—so potent were the influences of orthodox cavalry training—took unkindly to the new methods; that subtle and sensitive quality, the "cavalry spirit," was destroyed, and there was nothing to take its place. Hence, although the cavalry always set a fine example of discipline, bravery and endurance, and although they produced a certain number of excellent leaders, the guerilla war added but little lustre to their historical achievements. Nor can the argument be pushed too far that the emergency was exceptional and peculiar; that a system good in itself and suitable for all normal occasions was unfairly tested by the unprecedented needs and strains of the guerilla war. Even before the war broke out there was abundant evidence that the system already was antiquated even for normal occasions, and that the best lessons for the cavalry were to be learnt, not from the continental wars of the seventies, but from the American Civil War of the sixties, when men of our own race, unhampered by prejudice or tradition, attacked and solved cavalry problems on fresh and original lines. To enlarge on this theme would lead too far into regions of acute controversy. But, unless his narrative is to be dull and unilluminating, no writer on the guerilla war in South Africa can shirk an estimate of its bearing on the tactics and training of cavalry. And the more soberly and carefully the campaign is studied, the more freely unessential circumstances are discarded and the essentials gripped, the stronger grows the conviction that, for all purposes, the old training and equipment is obsolete, and that skilled mounted riflemen can do all that cavalry of the old stamp can do, can do it better, and can do much more besides. One of the ablest of contemporary writers,* deeply impressed by the lessons of the Civil War, but, unhappily, not familiar with the final phase of the Boer war, has gone nearly as far as this in advocating change; but, on the ground that the cavalry spirit must not be tampered with, that the cavalry spirit, in one word, is "dash," and that the acme of dash is inherent in shock and is incompatible with the use of the rifle dismounted, he stops short of his logical conclusion,

* The late Colonel Henderson, in his "Science of War."
Such an objection can scarcely now be sustained. As the future narrative will show, all the tactical successes of the guerilla war—most of them, unfortunately, Boer successes—were won by dash, and by just that sort of dash which in former days inspired the decisive strokes of cavalry; with this vital difference, that the charge employed by the Boers with such success in the last phase of the war had no elements of physical shock, and derived its destructive efficacy from the rifle alone.

The mounted infantry, starting with better marksmanship and more instinct for skirmishing, had also improved rapidly in their riding, and now, together with some of the colonial irregulars and the old yeomen, represented a most valuable category of mounted troops. But the mounted infantry had been used unsparingly, and, while their ranks had become greatly attenuated, they possessed no reserves. Here, again, conservatism, but conservatism of a very pardonable kind, was at work; for infantry regiments were naturally most reluctant to undergo depletion and weakening for the sake of the new arm. The new arm, indeed, was a makeshift, and, although strenuous efforts were now being made to strengthen the force both in numbers and in efficiency, the power it contained was still in embryo.

With the colonials and irregulars the prospect was even darker. Originally, nearly all these bodies had been enlisted "for a year, or for such longer period as their services might be required." The exact terms of enlistment, which varied a good deal, had been established more or less at the will of the officers or others by whom the corps had been raised. For many corps this period of one year already had reached its term, or would reach it in the near future. Strictly speaking many of these troops could have been compelled legally to remain at the front, but the mention of one year in the terms of enlistment would have caused such an act of authority to be viewed as a grievance. Since it was necessary to do nothing to discourage the patriotic ardour which had called these men to the ranks, voluntarily and of their own free will at a moment of emergency, it was decided that the men who wished to leave...
could do so. It is no reflection on the spirit of these men to say that the great majority complained of a surfeit of soldiering. The work had been hard, and there had been little of the glamour associated with war by those ignorant of its seamy side. Many required only a short rest, and the South Africans in particular, as the event proved, were eager to return to their old corps when they had visited their friends, spent their money, and enjoyed a respite from continual trekking. Of the over-sea colonials, also, many were ready to return, whether for service in new colonial contingents or as members of the South African Constabulary, which was now in process of formation; but, for the moment, one and all desired to leave the front.

The first contingent of Yeomanry, whose conduct had been excellent, was also approaching the limit of its utility. No reserves existed to maintain the strength of units in the field, and in a few short months the period of enlistment would expire.

On the Boer side exactly the opposite process was at work. Incapables and laggards had been shed in thousands, and although, under the bitter tests of war, thousands more were to fall out, the nucleus of tried and ardent veterans, constantly fed by a counter-current of accessions from below, suffered no permanent diminution, and indeed, until a point still far in the future, actually increased. For subjugating this nucleus, the mounted force was even now painfully inadequate. It will have been noticed that in his first individual effort to checkmate de Wet, Kitchener had been compelled to deplete many columns of their horsemen in order to strengthen the troops under Charles Knox. Strathcona's Horse were taken from French; Thorneycroft and Byng from the old army of Natal; Parsons from Settle; while the columns of White, Herbert and Barker were created only by breaking up an entire brigade of cavalry. When the raiders burst into Cape Colony it was necessary to organise troops for their pursuit, and Peter was continually being robbed to pay Paul. Many of Knox's units were diverted to the new objective, and the pursuit of de Wet himself languished for want of sustenance. The strain upon the resources of
the army was already at breaking point; and it was at this very moment that the most essential arm was beginning, for the reasons just given, to crumble in Kitchener's hands.

The infantry, resting on the solid and unfailing support of a professional artillery, still remained in the field, holding in an unshaken grip the ground already won; but the nature of the guerilla war made infantry and guns the last category of troops that were required for a strong offensive campaign. In a sense this was not a misfortune since, by the end of September 1900, the last men of the regular infantry, and of its reserve, had been despatched from England, and nothing remained behind but raw recruits.

The War Office had met every call for material of war and supplies with praiseworthy promptitude. It is its custom to maintain sealed patterns of every article of dress, equipment or material of war required by an army in the field, and upon receiving an indent from a commander it has only to exhume the sealed pattern and place contracts in the trade for any required quantity of the article in question. The only thing that was in general use in South Africa, and of which no sealed pattern existed, was the horse; and when it became necessary to supply horses, the War Office failed. The history of the Remount department during the war in South Africa is given in various Blue-books which are somewhat painful reading. We are concerned here only to note that the deliveries of horses never kept pace with the expenditure of horseflesh by the columns in the field. This was due partly to the false estimate of the military situation after the flight of President Kruger. The week before Lord Roberts left Pretoria the Remount department at home was ordered to stop buying and to recall their purchasing commissions from abroad; consequently the officers in Italy, Spain, and Canada returned home. But on the assumption of command by Kitchener the demands rose in December to 7,600 horses and 2,000 mules a month, and as these numbers steadily increased, the Remount department could never wholly make up the lost ground. There were also faults in
South Africa which were at least as great as those at home. Owing to the scarcity of remounts and the constant demands for them the horses arriving in South Africa were rarely given the necessary time to recover from the effects of a long voyage. Depôts indeed were formed and horses were sometimes drafted to them, but, owing to the want of veterinary officers and of other persons skilled in the management of horses, the animals lacked individual attention. Constantly a shipload of horses was put ashore, placed in railway trucks, despatched to the front, detained in a soft condition and sent on long marches for which the poor animals were totally unready. There resulted an immense wastage of horseflesh, and this wastage was aggravated by the exceedingly low standard of horse-mastership prevalent among the mounted troops. In the country itself the measures taken for sweeping up the local supply of horses lacked thoroughness and foresight. There were still large areas in the new colonies where horses were abundant, while in Cape Colony hardly anything had yet been done to prevent horses from falling into the wrong hands.

In addition to all these heavy disadvantages Kitchener was faced with the invasion of Cape Colony. Whether prudence and foresight could have averted it is an open question. To meet this very contingency Sir Alfred Milner, for some time past, had urged the permanent maintenance of a mobile force in Cape Colony. The line of the Orange, reinforced too weakly and too late, might have been held in force by troops which practically were idle elsewhere. Judging by later experience, however, when the strongest barriers were overleaped and the most vigilant guards eluded, we may fairly conjecture that the invasion could never have been prevented. At any rate the mischief was done, and it was useless to lock the door behind the stolen steed. Even at the cost of weakening the mobile columns in the north, which could ill spare a mounted man, troops had to be detached for the pursuit of the raiders. It was necessary also to make a new call upon the loyal elements in Cape Colony, not only for fresh enlistment in active corps, but for the local defence of towns and villages by the inhabitants them-
selves. To both demands the reply of the Colony was prompt and generous; but this hasty assembly of untrained men to withstand the veteran troops of the enemy was not devoid of elements of danger. Would the resistance of these raw forces, and particularly of the Town Guards, weak and scattered bodies under inexperienced leaders, prove of serious military value, or would the issue of horses and material of war to the new levies serve rather to place these tempting resources within easier reach of the Boer raiders? The future alone could decide, and, in the meantime, the risks had to be accepted.

Although at the moment of the Boer incursion into Cape Colony the propaganda of rebellion was virulent, there were facts which tended to mitigate the military dangers of the situation. The Dutch sympathisers, already much discouraged by the abortive rebellion of the year before, were distributed over a very wide area, and it required a master spirit of acknowledged standing and authority to effect a general insurrection. Thanks to the hot pursuit of de Wet, that famous partisan had been disposed of temporarily, and none of the other leaders had the repute necessary to arouse enthusiasm or impose obedience. The well-to-do farmers for the most part were averse to further adventures; and though from among the young men a small but steady stream of recruits joined the invading bands, it was mainly in the shape of good information and moral and material assistance that the raiders gained strength. But desultory, in consequence, as the war in Cape Colony became, it always presented elements of great peril, and whether the flame burnt high or low, the drain upon the mounted men of the army was constant and exhausting.

The military problem was gravely complicated by the question of the civil population of the new colonies. To a certain extent, but far from entirely, Kitchener had been relieved of his responsibilities concerning the civil administration by a change in the duties of the High Commissioner. Under the commission of 1889 the Governor of the Cape of Good Hope was ex officio High Commissioner. But by a commission of October 6, 1900, Sir A. Milner, who already

A general rebellion not likely.
held both these offices, was entrusted further with "the prospective administration" of the Transvaal and Orange River Colonies. Such an onerous combination of responsibilities being necessarily of a temporary character, Mr. Chamberlain proposed in his despatch of October 18 that her Majesty's pleasure should be taken as to Sir A. Milner's appointment as Governor of the two new colonies, with a Lieutenant-Governor for the Orange River Colony, and that he should cease to be Governor of Cape Colony; an arrangement which was duly carried out, but which did not take effect until February of the next year. The apportioning of duties between the chief representatives of the army and the civil power in a country in which a state of war exists has always been one of the most delicate and difficult tasks that can beset a Government, but in this instance the causes of friction were reduced to a minimum by the close support which Lord Kitchener and Sir A. Milner afforded to one another. Both men had worked in Egypt under somewhat similar circumstances, and the experience thereby gained proved useful to both. Although no two men could have differed more widely in temperament, and although on fundamental points of policy they were, in fact, often at variance, it is a pleasant duty to record that in mutual loyalty they never failed. No discordant element due to divided responsibility was permitted to hamper the conduct of affairs.

The treatment of the civil population was, indeed, a critical question. Into its past history, which was discussed exhaustively in Chapter XIV. of the preceding volume, we need not re-enter. Since March, 1900, there had been a rain of proclamations whose tone and substance varied with every passing phase of the struggle. On both sides there were errors, due mainly to ignorance of the rules of the war, and on the British side there was a vacillation produced by the unrealised transition from regular to guerilla war. Now, however, the atmosphere was clearing. To strike at an enemy's sources of supply is and must be one of the principal aims of a belligerent. The regular sources of supply once possessed by the Boers—
towns, railways, magazines—all, or nearly all, had been lost. Their new base was the farmstead and all appertaining thereto; private property had become indistinguishable from the magazines, stores and depôts of an army in the field. Since respect for property never can supersede the rights of a belligerent, the destruction of these resources on military grounds became an absolutely legitimate aim. So much is indisputable. Whether on broad grounds of expediency it was an absolutely necessary measure, is one of those questions which perhaps never can be answered finally. Sentiment pleaded strongly against it; and, from the purely military point of view, it is undeniable that the work of destruction distracted the troops from their primary aim of crushing the Boers in the field, and had a profound effect on the strategy and tactics of the campaign. But, whether for good or ill, the policy, inaugurated by Roberts in the proclamations of September, had been accepted in principle and was being put into practice, though not with any system or thoroughness, when Kitchener took the command. As yet the visible results were almost negligible, but a question, whose difficulty and magnitude, should the policy be extended, was not now realised, had begun to declare itself.

Nearly all the farms were inhabited by women and children. It was not possible, on the plainest grounds of policy and humanity, that these defenceless people should be left to the chance of starvation or to the tender mercies of the Kaffirs. Thus, the removal of the families to a place of safety, where they could be fed from British resources, was the inevitable corollary of the policy of devastation. Camps for non-combatants, therefore, were growing up informally at many military bases on the lines of communication. At present they were small, and not a source of much embarrassment. But the difficulties inherent in their expansion were of altogether unsuspected gravity.

Such was the situation when Kitchener took command. It was not till two months later, when Milner's dispatch of February 6, 1901, laid bare the whole truth, that the nation at large learnt how illusory had been the promises of an early pacification, how steady the retrogression since Devastation already an established policy.
those promises were uttered, and how heavy were the sacrifices that still remained to be made. The Government was partially but not wholly awakened to the gravity of the position. In making their provision for the year 1900 they had calculated that until the end of September it would be necessary to maintain the army in Africa at a strength of 230,000 men, that from October to December these figures might be cut down to one-half, and during the first months of 1901 to one-quarter. These calculations having proved mistaken, Mr. Brodrick, who, upon the reconstruction of the Government and the transfer of Lord Lansdowne to the Foreign Office, had succeeded to the post of Secretary of State for War, was compelled to ask for a supplementary vote for sixteen millions. On making this announcement to Parliament on December 11, Mr. Brodrick described with pardonable pride the great military effort which the nation had put forth. He showed that Napoleon had been compelled to detach 400,000 men in Spain for five years against an enemy miserably equipped and inexpert in the field; that 30,000 to 50,000 Cubans, in a small island, had held at bay 227,000 Spaniards for two years, and that even America had been compelled to send 100,000 men to the Philippines to suppress the insurrection in her new possession. But he failed to draw the true logical inference. The future, not the past, was in question. In justice to Mr. Brodrick it must be recorded that he fulfilled to the letter the demands made from the seat of war; but it would have been better if, instead of allowing himself to become involved in the details of a grandiose scheme of army reorganisation, which could not possibly be carried into effect until the end of the war, he had thrown his industry, his energy, and his imagination whole-heartedly into the prosecution of the campaign.

Kitchener, meanwhile, attacked the complex problem with thoroughness and courage. Where vitality was lacking in the army he infused fresh spirit. Either personally or by deputy, he raided the clubs, hotels, and rest-camps, and sent off officers and men to the front in considerable numbers. To meet the most urgent want of all, that of
mounted men, he appealed at once, through the Government, to all parts of the Empire; to England for the small residue of regular cavalry, for mounted infantry, for horses, and for a new contingent of Yeomanry; to South Africa for a return to their old corps of the irregulars who had been disbanded, and for fresh enlistments. He stimulated by every means in his power the creation and development of a new defence force in Cape Colony, and he issued orders that every horse available for military purposes in South Africa should be taken up for the use of the army. To the colonies oversea he appealed either for drafts to maintain the strength of contingents in the field or for fresh troops, and he urged that all these troops should bring their horses with them. By an Order dated December 13 the mounted infantry in South Africa were placed on a thoroughly organised basis, under the control of Colonel Alderson. A depot and a training camp were formed at Pretoria and every provision made for healthy and rapid expansion. At the same time, every regiment of infantry then at the front was asked to send all the men it could spare to join the mounted branch. To this and every other appeal there came a hearty and generous response. But the organisation and despatch of reinforcements took time. Many months elapsed before the new mounted army was complete, and if we outline here the strength and character of the troops provided it must be constantly borne in mind that most of these troops were not available for use until April of the following year.

In England there was vacillation during December. Some members of the Cabinet fully realised the urgency of the crisis; others, in view of the reassuring declarations of their highest military adviser, still hesitated. It was not till the second week in January, when Lord Roberts had reached England, that vigorous steps were taken. Two cavalry regiments, the 1st and 3rd Dragoon Guards, and a thousand mounted infantry, trained at Aldershot, were sent at once to the front, and arrangements were made to despatch two or three thousand more mounted infantry in the course of the next few months. Lastly, measures were taken to raise a new force of Yeomanry. This new force
suffered cruelly from the errors and miscalculations of the past. It will be remembered that in the case of the first contingent, despatched in the early months of 1900, no provision had been made for drafts to replace wastage in the field. The mistake could have been repaired; for the organisation, brought into existence with so much patriotic energy, still existed. Nor was the will lacking. On May 2, 1900, and again on May 16, Colonel A. G. Lucas, the D.A.G., I.Y., wrote to the War Office, asking for explicit instructions and offering to raise drafts. The answer was a polite sentence of death for the Yeomanry organisation. Any recruits thereafter enlisted were to be raised directly by the War Office, and, the War Office added with a touch of impressive particularity, were to be trained and formed into drafts at Aldershot. Nothing was done; the existing machinery fell into disuse, and the force in South Africa was allowed to perish slowly of inanition. At the end of the year, under the ordinary wastage of war, the companies had fallen to an average strength of only 35 officers and men. On December 19, when bad news from the front had startled the whole nation, Colonel Lucas proposed to reconstruct the old machinery and raise 5,000 men as drafts for the old contingent. Mr. Brodrick’s answer was a refusal on the ground that enlistment was going on for the South African Constabulary. The meaning of this was that Yeomanry, if recruited, as heretofore, at cavalry rates of pay, could not possibly compete with the Police, which was being raised at 5s. a day, and which offered a prospect of good permanent employment.

On January 15, however, the logic of facts prevailed and Mr. Brodrick was permitted to call for Yeomanry at 5s. a day. The old organisation was revived: General A. R. Badcock, Colonel T. Deans and Colonel Lucas were appointed to act as a committee to confer with the War Office, and in the latter part of the month recruiting began at 51 Yeomanry agencies. Sanction was first given for only 5,000 men, but the limit was gradually raised. On March 5, while men were still pouring in, recruiting was stopped. By the end of March the total of 16,431 men and 506 officers had been
enrolled. Notwithstanding the zeal and ability which were thrown into the work, the long period of inactivity culminating in feverish haste produced the inevitable results. It is true that the stamp of man engaged was not as high as it had been a year before; for the national enthusiasm had cooled and, although there were many re-enlistments, the majority of men were now drawn from classes in which ability to ride and shoot is rare. There was also a great dearth of the necessary material for officers. But had there been more time to compare opinions, think, plan and train, many errors would have been avoided. Men poured into Aldershot and the Curragh before there was accommodation for them and long before officers were present to take them in hand. The tests in the case of the men were often hurried and perfunctory and in the case of officers many commissions were given on misleading recommendations. Owing to the complete loss of touch between the parent organisation and the Yeomanry now in South Africa, confusion arose as to the primary functions of the second contingent, whether, that is, it was to supply new drafts to the existing battalions or to constitute an entirely new force. In the first instance Kitchener took the latter view, so that, except in a few privileged cases,* the old territorial system was abandoned; the men were formed provisionally into “sections” of 110 men, and complete regimental organisation was deferred till the force reached South Africa. This system was found to be so unpopular that a belated attempt was made to revert to the old one. In the end a sort of compromise was reached.*

By Kitchener’s express desire, the men, as soon as they

* The privileged cases were those of the 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th Battalions, which were raised in London as complete units (Sir H. Seton Karr taking a prominent part in the work), the 88th and 89th Companies (Montgomery) and the 98th Company (1st North Riding). There is no doubt that the Territorial Battalion system, which was reverted to in the case of the Third Contingent, should have been retained throughout. The best men preferred it, and many of the best men were lost through its abandonment. Against it was the difficulty of providing senior officers. Except in the privileged cases, only second lieutenants were furnished in England, and this no doubt was wise, but it did not warrant a complete change of system.

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were ready, were shipped out to South Africa, there to receive horses, equipment and training in certain specified base-camps. This, probably, was a wise decision, but, unfortunately, the promise of thorough preliminary training was not fulfilled. To meet the urgent need for mounted troops, most of the drafts were distributed immediately to the various columns, hastily equipped, given a rude smattering of military education and thrown into the field against the finest mounted riflemen in the world. The natural result followed. A certain proportion of officers and men, five per cent. at the utmost, who under ordinary circumstances would have been weeded out at an earlier stage, were found to be incompetent and were sent home, a step which threw altogether undeserved discredit on the whole force. Another result was that parties of these half-trained men constantly fell an easy prey to the enemy, to whom they served as magazines for the supply of rifles and ammunition. In one or two unfortunate cases a whole column was made to suffer severely. Nevertheless, in relation to the great risk run, it is wonderful how little ill resulted. The men, generally speaking, were willing, tractable and brave, and did much admirable work. Their greatest fault, and this they shared with most irregular troops, was an incurable aversion to the minutiae of military discipline, which at moments of emergency are apt to prove of vital importance. As must always be the case with improvised corps, the volunteer officers were less efficient, relatively, than the men. The best were obtained either by promotion on the field or from re-enrolled veterans of the first contingent. It only remains to say that in the case of the new Yeomanry, as in the case of the old, in spite of renewed appeals to the War Office, no system was arranged for feeding the field force with regular drafts from home. The consequence was that at the end of 1901 a third and wholly new contingent had to be raised.

With a long start of the Yeomanry, with the great advantage of offering good permanent employment, with severe tests and methodical organisation, Colonel Baden-Powell obtained for the South African Constabulary a remarkably high stamp of men. It is a pity that the best
and most prompt military use was not made of this fine force. Originally intended for peace duties under the illusion that the war was over, it should have been treated, as soon as that illusion died, as an integral part of the field army, to be employed to the best possible advantage. Its organisation, if thorough, was leisurely: it was of little practical use in South Africa until May of the following year, when it numbered 7,500 officers and men, a large proportion of whom had been raised in Canada and Australia; and then it was used not for the most active sort of work but for semi-passive duties which will be described later.

Of the over-sea colonies, Canada, owing to political controversies which it is needless to dwell on, sent no more organised troops to the front until the close of 1901, but the Australasian colonies vied with one another in the zeal with which they forwarded draft after draft to the seat of war; 5,000 fresh troops were to arrive before the end of May, 1901.* The standard of excellence was naturally somewhat lower than it had been among the earlier contingents. As in the case of the Yeomanry, a larger proportion of men was drawn from the great cities, and a smaller proportion from the classes bred up to ride and shoot. Here again officers were the weak point, and in some cases discipline was dangerously lax; but the troops came to South Africa trained, and on the whole excelled the Yeomanry in aptitude for war. It is probable that, had they been raised on a territorial basis, as the first Canadian contingents had been raised, they would have done themselves still more credit.

Many thousands of recruits were raised in South Africa itself.* They fall into two distinct classes: those enlisted for service anywhere within the theatre of war, and those whose service was confined to Cape Colony. There was a third and somewhat nebulous class, with a very fluctuating strength of somewhere about 2,000, consisting of corps raised locally in Griqualand and Bechuanaland, primarily for defence, but partly also for active work in the western parts of the Transvaal and Free State. Under the first and most important head the number of new men obtained is impos-

* See Appendices.
sible to compute with accuracy, owing to the frequency of re-enlistment; but fresh blood was infused into all the numerous corps already in existence, and many new regiments, such as the Scottish Horse, Kitchener's Fighting Scouts, and the Johannesburg Mounted Rifles, were formed, bringing the total of irregular corps of this class up to about 30. The Scottish Horse, raised and organised by its commanding officer, Captain the Marquis of Tullibardine, was unique in its widely imperial character, and should, in strict accuracy, form a class by itself, for its men were drawn from Scotland, Australia and South Africa. The first regiment was recruited mainly in Natal during December and January. The second regiment was raised partly in Victoria and partly in Scotland, men from the latter country being classed as Imperial Yeomanry. At a later stage fresh drafts, principally from Scotland and partly also from Australia, raised the strength of the two regiments to 1,800. Unique in composition, the Scottish Horse deserve mention as a good example of thorough organisation, esprit de corps and an efficiency in the field which was destined to be put to many severe and deadly tests.

To cope with the invaders and rebels in Cape Colony defence forces were organised by General Brabant and, as regards the local volunteers in the Cape Peninsula, by Colonel Cooper, the base commandant. Here a further sub-division is necessary. On the one hand there was the Colonial Defence Force, strictly so called, consisting of about 3,000 men, divided into nine or ten corps, which were on a permanent war-footing and were available for use in any part of the Colony*; on the other hand there was a large body of local levies, which under the name of District Mounted Troops and Town Guards, though they could and occasionally did volunteer for work in a wider sphere, were liable to be called out only in cases of emergency to defend their districts or towns. By May, 1901, this local militia had reached a strength of about 20,000, of whom rather more

* E.g., the Midland Mounted Rifles, the Western Province Mounted Rifles, Colonial Light Horse, Frontier Light Horse; and in this class may be included Scott's Railway Guards, a valuable body of 500 men.
than a third were Town Guards. By October the numbers had risen to 23,000.

Of the irregulars raised in South Africa it is difficult to make any general appreciation. Though some of the older corps had been maintained in a high state of efficiency, none, not even the Imperial Light Horse, which continued to hold the highest place, was quite as good as in former days. Some of the newer corps also turned out first-rate soldiers; but others were of inferior quality. There can be no doubt that at this stage of the war the enrolment of irregulars was overdone and a great deal of laxity shown in the choice of recruits. Acute competition for men raged at the seaport towns. Loafers and wastrels of many races, attracted by the high pay, were engaged promiscuously, to the great detriment of many promising corps. Some of the Griqualand and Bechuanaland corps were mixed in race and colour, and though very useful in a limited sphere, were not fit to be pitted against Boer veterans. In Cape Colony the local militia, as distinguished from the active corps, was far from satisfactory. The root fact here was that the British colonist on the average was not so good a soldier as the Boer. Moreover most of the best Britishers had already been attracted to the more adventurous life of the active corps. There remained a quantity of very doubtful material for military purposes. It was drawn mostly from townsmen, who naturally were not as good as farmers, and it was in some cases infected with a secret sympathy for the enemy. Much good service was done by District Mounted Troops and still more by Town Guards, but surrenders, with their fatal result of supplying the enemy with arms and ammunition, were only too common.

Having set in train the machinery for the supply of reinforcements, Kitchener made arrangements for another important measure, the evacuation of needless garrisons. This was an absolutely necessary step, since it was impossible to increase the number of mobile columns unless many garrisons were abandoned. The reform principally affected the Free State, where a quantity of small towns
unconnected with a railway were given up.* All railway garrisons were maintained, but strong efforts were made, by improving their local defences, to reduce the number of troops which they absorbed. Allied with this reform was the no less important duty of protecting the lines themselves from the destructive ingenuity of the Boers; and it was in the measures taken to achieve this object that there appeared the first small beginnings of the blockhouse system.

With regard to the closely connected questions of devastation and the treatment of non-combatants, Kitchener formed a momentous decision. Pushing to their logical extreme the principles already in vogue, he issued the following memorandum to general officers on December 21.

**MEMORANDUM.**

The General Commanding in Chief is desirous that all possible means shall be taken to stop the present guerilla warfare. Of the various measures suggested for the accomplishment of this object, one which has been strongly recommended, and has lately been successfully tried on a small scale, is the removal of all men, women and children, and natives from the Districts which the enemy’s bands persistently occupy. This course has been pointed out by surrendered Burghers, who are anxious to finish the war, as the most effective method of limiting the endurance of the Guerillas, as the men and women left on farms, if disloyal, willingly supply Burghers, if loyal, dare not refuse to do so. Moreover, seeing the unprotected state of women now living out in the Districts, this course is desirable to ensure their not being insulted or molested by natives.

Lord Kitchener desires that General Officers will, according to the means at their disposal, follow this system in the Districts which they occupy or may traverse. The women and children brought in should be camped near the railway for supply purposes, and should be divided in two categories, viz.: 1st. Refugees, and the families of Neutrals, non-combatants, and surrendered Burghers. 2nd. Those whose husbands, fathers, and sons are

*E.g., in the south, Dewetsdorp, Rouxville, Philippolis, Pauresmith, Luckhoff, Jacobsdal. In the north, Vrede and Frankfort were evacuated in March, 1901, Hoopstad in April.*
on Commando. The preference in accommodation, &c., should, of course, be given to the first class. The Ordnance will supply the necessary tents and the District Commissioner will look after the food on the scale now in use.

It should be clearly explained to Burghers in the field, that, if they voluntarily surrender, they will be allowed to live with their families in the camps until it is safe for them to return to their homes.

With regard to natives, it is not intended to clear Kaffir locations, but only such Kaffirs and their stock as are on Boer farms. Every endeavour should be made to cause as little loss as possible to the natives removed, and to give them protection when brought in. They will be available for any works undertaken, for which they will receive pay at native rates.

Pretoria, 21 December, 1900.

Simultaneously and in accordance with the policy here expressed the following proclamation was published:

It is hereby notified to all Burghers that if, after this date, they voluntarily surrender they will be allowed to live with their Families in Government Laagers until such time as the Guerilla Warfare now being carried on will admit of their returning safely to their homes. All stock and property brought in at the time of surrender of such Burghers will be respected, and paid for if requisitioned by Military Authorities.

Kitchener,
Commander-in-Chief.

Pretoria, 20th December, 1900.

It will be seen that the policy was inspired by two motives. In the first place, it was supposed that the removal of the families would induce fighting Boers to surrender, and would thus shorten the war. In the second place, it was a measure of humanity towards the unprotected occupants of lonely farms. The decision was taken somewhat lightly. In its primary object it failed absolutely. Far from providing an inducement to surrender, it lifted from the fighting burghers a load of embarrassment. To the British the military consequences were disastrous. To the Boers the gain was twofold. On the shoulders of their enemy lay
the heavy tasks of removal and maintenance, involving enormous expense and a grave hindrance to military operations, while they themselves, relieved of all responsibility for their women and children, were free to devote their energies with a clear conscience to the single aim of fighting. While one of the British aims was signally defeated, the other, that of humanity, was at first only partially attained. The scheme for the concentration camps was lacking in foresight. Adequate provision was not made for the hosts of refugees requiring shelter. The regular medical and sanitary staff were already fully occupied with the needs of the army, and men were lacking for the organisation and supervision of the camps. Sites chosen on purely military grounds often proved wholly unsuitable. Too much reliance was placed on the capacity for self-help to be shown by the Boers themselves, and the Boers proved to be helpless, utterly averse to cleanliness and ignorant of the simplest elements of medicine and sanitation. The result was that for a certain period there was a very high rate of mortality among these unfortunate people.

But in touching on this evil, as in sketching the other measures taken by Kitchener on his accession to the command, we are anticipating the narrative of the war. For two months the army had little leisure for deportation or devastation, and nearly five months elapsed before the reinforcements called for were all placed in the field.

Immediately before Kitchener lay a period crowded with emergencies; first a fierce outbreak of activity in the Transvaal; then a second and this time a successful effort by de Wet to invade Cape Colony; everywhere on the Boer side a growing spirit and skill in arms; everywhere on the British side a harvest to be reaped of apathy and unpreparedness. Not till April of the next year did the British Commander-in-Chief regain the initiative in any real sense, and just when he did so the old mounted army, into which he had breathed new life, ceased practically to exist, and a new unseasoned force took its place. In the meantime there were no heroic measures to be applied. All Kitchener could do was to inculcate energy, to hold his ground patiently
and doggedly and to use every short breathing-space for such returns to the offensive as were feasible.

Problems multiplied as time went on. In the foregoing paragraphs some have been stated at length, some only foreshadowed; others were wholly new. To pronounce on them at this stage would be premature; but in order to give the reader clues to guide him through the intricate maze of the guerilla war, it may be as well to indicate and summarise.

One of the most important of the strictly military issues was that of control. The regular organisation of the army was already obsolete. Its terminology survived, it is true, for some time longer. In some quarters troops continued to be classified under divisions and brigades, but for practical purposes this classification had ceased to have significance. In the field army the column became the unit; 38 columns existed when Kitchener took the command, and the number ultimately was doubled. How were these columns to be manipulated? Singly, or in groups large or small? By districts or otherwise? And what were the degrees of responsibility to be given to the column commander, the group or district commander and the headquarters organisation? Was devolution or centralisation to become the rule? Kitchener began by grappling with these problems in a perfectly practical spirit. In meeting emergencies he did what seemed to him to be the expedient thing, regardless of tradition and precedent. He hoped at first, no doubt, to make his will effective through eight or ten senior men who should interpret his general directions, and through them and their subordinates to propel the machinery of war in a systematic fashion. But from the very first circumstances warred against this system. So long as the Boers remained dispersed it operated well enough, but as soon as they coalesced and undertook big enterprises it broke down. In these circumstances we shall find Kitchener descending upon the scene of disturbance, superseding local commanders, choosing on the spur of the moment and regardless of seniority the best men he could find, robbing distant districts of columns for the benefit of the threatened area, and, when he had started the new machinery, returning to await the result.
We shall find him going further; intervening in the operations, sending orders, sometimes to the general in charge, sometimes even directly to that general's subordinates. To the old school such interference was anathema, yet there were strong reasons to be urged for it. In a silent, distant room, linked up by telegraph to every post and garrison in the country, sensible of the slightest shock at the remotest extremity, the Commander-in-Chief often was better able to judge of a situation than his lieutenant on the spot, immersed in the immediate object in hand, groping somewhat blindly, perhaps, in a remote and difficult region, and out of touch with the strategic point of view of the higher command. On the other hand, interference was a dangerous weapon to handle. Employed too freely, and especially in the hands of a man of powerful will and imperious instincts, it was liable to impair responsibility and personal initiative, to discourage that spirit of spontaneous and unselfish co-operation which above all things needed stimulating, and to crystallise into a system of cast-iron control exhausting to the organiser and weakening to the virility of the army as a whole. But was there in Kitchener's subordinates a sufficient foundation of capacity for guerilla war and of readiness to take responsibility? This, after all, was the main question; for in every great undertaking, military or civil, men are apt to follow the same rule of devolving when they can trust their subordinates and of centralising when they cannot. To strike a just balance, to elicit the maximum of individual enterprise and combine it with firm central control, this always is a task demanding the highest qualities of an administrator; and in war, which is not an exact science but a moving drama full of incident and passion, full of momentary opportunities and sudden emergencies, the commander who relies too much on central schemes and too little on the men who carry them out must be prepared for a measure of sterility in both.

The problem, of course, was not an isolated problem. Involved in it, though the connection is not always apparent, were many subsidiary questions of mobility, intelligence, tactics and training, together with that ever-present difficulty of combining the two antagonistic functions of devastation...
and pursuit; and all these questions, each with its own independent interest and each affecting others, will confront the reader at every step. The less mobile a column, the fewer its openings for independent enterprise; the worse its scouting, the greater its dependence on centralised intelligence, and the more feeble its tactical efficiency, the more inclined would its leader grow to avoid decisive engagements and become the passive slave of a scheme. Analysing the matter to its roots, we come finally to the individual efficiency of the private soldier in marksmanship, cleverness and dash, and we find that this individual efficiency governed in varying degrees all other questions, even to the highest. It may be as well to remind the reader, who has heard much of the dearth of mounted men and the urgent need for more, that it was not merely a question of pursuing Boers and bringing them to action, but of beating them when caught and, in the alternative case where the Boer was the aggressor, of retaliating effectively. In tactics the Boers did not stand still. If not by conscious organised effort, at any rate by native vigour and resource, they made astonishing progress; and indeed, as we hinted in some remarks upon cavalry, it is open to question whether in some respects they did not revolutionise the art of handling mounted men. An especially interesting point for the reader to watch is their growing independence of artillery and the vitality which this independence imparted to their tactics.

Mingled with the purely military problems which lay before Kitchener, there was a political issue of scarcely less importance. What was to be the British attitude in regard to peace? Here we return to the fundamental aim of the war—absorption. Both sides were tired of war, but both were equally determined to win and clung to their purpose with all the tenacity of their consanguineous races. Technically the Boer territories were already annexed, and the practical issue of the future, when the echoes of war had died away, was to make these stubborn farmers loyal and contented citizens of the Imperial family. A settlement calculated to realise this object was not easy to attain. With whom was the main responsibility for its
attainment to rest? By analogy with most wars it should rest with the civil power, represented in South Africa by Milner. But once again the situation was unique. No general in the past had been placed in Kitchener's position. He was fighting a nation in arms, so that the military surrender and the political surrender must, in the nature of things, be closely intertwined. His army, moreover, was, in a very peculiar sense, arbiter of the settlement. Unidentified with the fierce political antagonisms of the past, it represented the first intimate contact between the empire at large and the Boer race. Its commander-in-chief, therefore, was marked out to play a leading, perhaps the leading, part in the final pacification. Whether, from the highest political standpoint, this position was a desirable one, the reader must be left to judge. At this point we are only concerned to indicate the conditions which gave rise to it and to prepare the reader for a difference of opinion between Kitchener and Milner, which at a later stage assumed a somewhat important aspect. Broadly speaking, the difference was this: that Milner, from the political point of view, favoured unconditional surrender; Kitchener, primarily from the military, but incidentally from the political point of view, was content to obtain a surrender on terms. But, in the meantime, there was one expedient which both could unite in trying. This was to encourage the movement towards peace which had arisen within the Boer nation. Kitchener promptly placed himself in communication with influential men among the surrendered Boers, and it was partly on their advice that the proclamation of December 20 was framed. Nor did he stop here. At a meeting held early in December, under the presidency of Mr. Meyer de Kock, of Belfast, a Peace Committee was formed, with de Kock as secretary, for the purpose of urging upon the commandos the hopelessness of resistance and the need for a general surrender. A meeting of surrendered Boers convened by this Committee was held in Pretoria on December 21, and was addressed sympathetically by Kitchener. He promised the Committee his advice and support, spoke of the military conditions which exacted the formation of concentration
camps, of his determination to give the enemy every possible chance of submitting voluntarily and of the just and progressive government which at the end of the war it was proposed to establish. The speech was printed in Dutch and English, and steps were promptly taken to give it and the proclamation of December 20 wide circulation. To this end emissaries were appointed to visit the commandos and preach the gospel of peace.

Like the proclamation itself the peace propaganda produced the contrary effect to that hoped for. It exasperated the fighting burghers, who viewed its promoters, sincerely patriotic as they were, as cowards and traitors, and, when they obtained the opportunity, treated them as such. Though most of the emissaries escaped in the course of time to the British lines, many were tried by court-martial and sentenced to fines and imprisonment. Meyer de Kock himself, having ridden into Viljoen’s lines at the end of January, was tried, sentenced to death for high treason, and executed. In one notorious case there is, at least, a grave suspicion that an irregular and violent course was taken.* On the whole, however, the treatment accorded to the peace emissaries was regular and not, under the circumstances, unduly harsh. In taking the risk of attempting to seduce the men on commando, they acted with their eyes open according to their own sense of patriotism. The fighting burghers, holding a different standard of patriotism, were within their rights in applying even extreme penalties.

The failure was discouraging. What was to be the next step? The answer to that question must be left for a later chapter. For the present Kitchener flung all his strength and energy into meeting and overcoming a grave military crisis.

* Messrs. Morgendaal and Wessels, who left Kroonstad at the end of December, were captured almost immediately, taken to de Wet’s laager, and there court-martialled and sentenced to death. The burghers protested, however, and the sentence remained in abeyance. So much is certain, and it is also certain that on January 10, when the commando was inspanning in view of a British attack, Morgendaal was flogged and then shot outright. It is said that this was done by Commandant Frone-
man in a fit of violent temper, and that de Wet himself was present; but full evidence is lacking as to the exact circumstances of the affair. At the end of the war it was not thought advisable to take action in the matter.