

CHAPTER III

AT POPLAR GROVE

BEFORE going on, it must be noted that on the 19th Lord Roberts had issued a proclamation to the Burghers of the Free State in English and Dutch. He said that the British having entered the Free State, he felt it his duty to make known the cause, and to do his utmost to end the war. Should the Free Staters continue fighting, they would do so in full knowledge of their responsibility for the lives lost in the campaign. Before the war, the Imperial Government desired the friendship of the Free State, and solemnly assured President Steyn that if he remained neutral the Free State territory would not be invaded and its independence would be respected. Nevertheless, the Free Staters had wantonly and unjustifiably invaded British territory, though the Imperial Government believed that the Free State Government was wholly responsible, under mischievous outside influence, for this invasion.

The Imperial Government bore the people no ill-will, and was anxious to preserve them from the evils which the action of their Government had caused. Lord Roberts warned the Burghers to desist from further hostilities, and he undertook that Burghers so desisting should not suffer in their persons or property. Requisitions of food, forage, fuel, and shelter must be complied with. Everything would be paid for on the spot, and if supplies were refused they would be taken, a receipt being given. Should the inhabitants consider that they had been unjustly treated, and should their complaint on inquiry be substantiated, redress would be given. In conclusion, Lord Roberts stated that British soldiers were prohibited from entering houses or molesting the civil population.

By the terms of this proclamation it was necessary to abide, though, by degrees, as will be seen, it began to be discovered that generous concessions made to our enemies were misinterpreted and taken advantage of in ways which tended to prolong the war.

Lords Roberts and Kitchener paid a flying visit to Kimberley on the 1st of March, and attended a crowded meeting in the Town Hall. Lord Roberts, with his usual grace, dwelt on the courage, endurance, and heroism exhibited by the troops and residents, not only in Kimberley, but in the other besieged towns.

Cronje's fate being sealed, the Field-Marshal shifted his head-

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quarters to Osfontein, seven miles up the Modder from Paardeberg. Near here it was rumoured that such Boers as had failed to come to the succour of Cronje had flocked. These, numbering some 10,000, had gathered at the summons of their chief from the regions round Stormberg, Colesberg, and Ladysmith, and were now busily entrenching a position some fifteen miles long. Of this the flanks rested on kopjes to the south of the river on a group called Seven Sisters, and to the north across the river on a flat-topped kopje, behind which were further fortified kopjes, forming a formidable position at Poplar Grove, a place so called because of a sparse display of poplar and Australian gum-trees in the vicinity.

At this time the two Presidents of the Republics, finding things getting too hot to be comfortable, made magnanimous proposals for peace. The following is the text of their despatch.

"BLOENFONTEIN, *March 5, 1900.*

"The blood and the tears of the thousands who have suffered by this war, and the prospect of all the moral and economic ruin with which South Africa is now threatened, make it necessary for both belligerents to ask themselves dispassionately, and as in the sight of the Triune God, for what they are fighting, and whether the aim of each justifies all this appalling misery and devastation.

"With this object, and in view of the assertions of various British statesmen, to the effect that this war was begun and is being carried on with the set purpose of undermining Her Majesty's authority in South Africa, and of setting up an Administration over all South Africa independent of Her Majesty's Government, we consider it our duty solemnly to declare that this war was undertaken solely as a defensive measure to safeguard the threatened independence of the South African Republic, and is only continued in order to secure and safeguard the incontestable independence of both Republics as sovereign international States, and to obtain the assurance that those of Her Majesty's subjects who have taken part with us in this war shall suffer no harm whatsoever in person or property.

"On these conditions, but on these conditions alone, are we now, as in the past, desirous of seeing peace re-established in South Africa, and of putting an end to the evils now reigning over South Africa; while, if Her Majesty's Government is determined to destroy the independence of the Republics, there is nothing left to us and to our people but to persevere to the end in the course already begun, in spite of the overwhelming pre-eminence of the British Empire, confident that that God who lighted the unextinguishable fire of the love of freedom in the hearts of ourselves and of our fathers will not forsake us, but will accomplish His work in us and in our descendants.

"We hesitated to make this declaration earlier to your Excellency, as we feared that as long as the advantage was always on our side, and as long as our forces held defensive positions far in Her Majesty's Colonies, such a declaration might hurt the feelings of honour of the British people; but now that the prestige of the British Empire may be considered to be assured by the capture of one of our forces by Her Majesty's troops, and that we are thereby forced to evacuate other positions which our forces had occupied, that difficulty is over, and we can no longer hesitate clearly to inform your Government and people, in



SHELL FROM THE NAVAL BRIGADE DISPERSING BOERS FROM BEHIND THE SEVEN SISTERS KOPJES, DURING THE
ACTION OF 7th MARCH AT LE GALLAIS KOPJE, NEAR OSFONTEIN.

Drawing by Sidney Paget, from a Sketch by W. B. Wollen, R.I.

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the sight of the whole civilised world, why we are fighting, and on what conditions we are ready to restore peace."

The answer to this effusion, addressed by Lord Salisbury on behalf of Her Majesty's Government to the Presidents, ran :—

"FOREIGN OFFICE, *March 11, 1900.*

"I have the honour to acknowledge your Honours' telegram, dated March 5, from Bloemfontein, of which the purport is principally to demand that Her Majesty's Government shall recognise the 'incontestable independence' of the South African Republic and Orange Free State as 'sovereign international States,' and to offer, on those terms, to bring the war to a conclusion.

"In the beginning of October last, peace existed between Her Majesty and the two Republics under the Conventions which then were in existence. A discussion had been proceeding for some months between Her Majesty's Government and the South African Republic, of which the object was to obtain redress for certain very serious grievances under which British residents in the South African Republic were suffering. In the course of these negotiations, the South African Republic had, to the knowledge of Her Majesty's Government, made considerable armaments, and the latter had, consequently, taken steps to provide corresponding reinforcements to the British garrisons of Cape Town and Natal. No infringement of the rights guaranteed by the Conventions had, up to that point, taken place on the British side. Suddenly, at two days' notice, the South African Republic, after issuing an insulting ultimatum, declared war upon Her Majesty; and the Orange Free State, with whom there had not even been any discussion, took a similar step. Her Majesty's dominions were immediately invaded by the two Republics, siege was laid to three towns within the British frontier, a large portion of the two Colonies was overrun, with great destruction to property and life, and the Republics claimed to treat the inhabitants of extensive portions of Her Majesty's dominions as if those dominions had been annexed to one or other of them. In anticipation of these operations the South African Republic had been accumulating for many years past military stores on an enormous scale, which, by their character, could only have been intended for use against Great Britain.

"Your Honours make some observations of a negative character upon the object with which these preparations were made. I do not think it necessary to discuss the questions you have raised. But the result of these preparations, carried on with great secrecy, has been that the British Empire has been compelled to confront an invasion which has entailed upon the Empire a costly war and the loss of thousands of precious lives. This great calamity has been the penalty which Great Britain has suffered for having in recent years acquiesced in the existence of the two Republics.

"In view of the use to which the two Republics have put the position which was given to them, and the calamities which their unprovoked attack has inflicted upon Her Majesty's dominions, Her Majesty's Government can only answer your Honours' telegram by saying that they are not prepared to assent to the independence either of the South African Republic or of the Orange Free State."

To return to Osfontein. There was now a short and much-needed interval of repose, in which men and horses tried to recuperate. It was, however, necessary for the cavalry to be continually scouring the country to ascertain the whereabouts of the enemy.

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On the 6th of March Lord Roberts welcomed the Ceylon Mounted Infantry, and sent the following telegram to Sir West Ridgeway, Governor of Ceylon:—"I have just ridden out to meet Ceylon Mounted Infantry, and welcome them to this force. They look most workmanlike, and are a valuable addition to Her Majesty the Queen's army in South Africa." These troops were in excellent condition, so also were their handy Burma ponies, smart, knowing, and game little beasts, warranted to turn on a sixpence and stand any amount of wear and tear.

On the same day the Colonials had a smart set-to with the Dutchmen, who were endeavouring to locate themselves in the vicinity, and the New Zealanders and Australians made themselves more than a match for the Boers, losing themselves only six wounded, while they put ten of the enemy out of action. The rest of the gang disappeared, on the principle of those who fight and run away live to fight another day. In fact, they moved to some strong eminences that commanded either side of the river, the centre of the position being at Poplar Grove Farm. Here the Federals thought to embarrass the British advance, but Lord Roberts decided to undeceive them. The Field-Marshal's plan was now to turn their left flank with the cavalry division, and then to meet their line of defence with the infantry divisions, and thus enclose them as Cronje had been enclosed.

Accordingly the troops got themselves into battle array. The Naval Brigade brought their 4.7 guns four miles north-east of Osfontein, while the cavalry prepared to turn the Boer left, and started before daybreak of the 7th to accomplish this feat. On the north bank was left the Ninth Division with some handy Colonials and guns. Moving to the east were the Sixth and Seventh Divisions, with the Guards Brigade in the centre.

The dawn grew. The Boers in the golden rays of morning were disclosed massed in the far front, and later was seen the glorious mass of French's cavalry sweeping south—a martial broom which the Boers began to know meant business.

At eight o'clock the music of battle started, the Naval guns on one side and the batteries of General French on the other. Lyddite and shrapnel bounced and spluttered over all the small kopjes wherein the Dutchmen had made a lodgment. It was sufficient. The Boer guns spat impotently—the puling cry of dismay—then, knowingly, the Federals made preparations for a stampede. They saw in the distance the Sixth Division advancing, the Colonials cleaving the columns of dust, the Highland Brigade coming on and on, their dark kilts cutting a thin line across the atmosphere—they saw enough! To east they flew, speeding towards Bloemfontein—guns, waggons, horsemen—as arrows from the bow, and leaving behind them their

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well-constructed trenches, their ammunition, tents, and supplies. After them went the Colonials and City Imperial Volunteers, all keen sportsmen, exhilarated with the heat of the chase, but the Boers were uncatchable. No one has yet beaten them in the art of running away. Nevertheless, Lord Roberts was left in undisturbed possession of Poplar Grove. In the early afternoon the Boers certainly endeavoured to make one futile, feeble stand, but their effort was unavailing, and by sunset they were careering into space, while the cavalry vainly endeavoured to hem them in. Horse-flesh had come to the end of its tether; poor food and much galloping had reduced the noble steeds to helpless wrecks, and unfortunately the manœuvres of Paardeberg could not be repeated. Curiously enough, though no Boers were caught, the military net was full of strange fish, a Russian, a Hollander, a German all being left in the lurch. It was a humorous episode. While the Boers were making off as fast as legs—the mounts of some had been shot—and horses could carry them, a dilapidated country cart, surmounted by a red flag, was seen to be approaching. From this cart presently emerged several forlorn personages, looking very sorry for themselves indeed. They accounted for their plight by saying that while the final fight was taking place their mule-waggon had broken down. The mules having been unloosed, promptly stampeded, and left them between two fires, that of the Boers (to whom they were attached) and the British. The name of one foreigner, in dark blue uniform, was Colonel Prince Gourko, of the Russian army; the other, attired in plain clothes, was Lieutenant Thomson, of the Netherlands (Military Attaché of the Boers). With them was a German servant in attendance on the Russian prince. Finding themselves in an uncomfortable quandary, one from which there was no escape, they decided to join the British. They were introduced to Lord Kitchener, and thereupon presented to the Commander-in-Chief, who received them with his usual courtesy.

Lord Roberts, telegraphing home in the afternoon, thus described the day's work :—

“OSFONTEIN, *March 7* (4.30 P.M.).

“March 7.—Our operations to-day promise to be a great success.

“The enemy occupied a position four miles north and eleven miles south of Modder River.

“I placed Colville's division on north bank; Kelly-Kenny's and Tucker's, with cavalry division, on south bank.

“The cavalry division succeeded in turning the left flank, opening the road for 6th Division, which is advancing without having been obliged to fire a shot up to present time (twelve noon).

“Enemy are in full retreat toward north and east, being closely followed by cavalry, horse-artillery, and mounted infantry, while the 7th (Tucker's) and 9th (Colville's) divisions, and Guards Brigade, under Pole-Carew, are making

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their way across the river at Poplar's Drift, where I propose to place my headquarters this evening."

Later on the Commander-in-Chief wired from the said headquarters:—

"POPLAR GROVE, *March 7* (7.55 P.M.).

"We have had a very successful day and completely routed the enemy, who are in full retreat.

"The position they occupied was extremely strong, and cunningly arranged with a second line of entrenchments, which would have caused us heavy loss had a direct attack been made.

"The turning movement was necessarily wide owing to the nature of the ground, and the cavalry and horse-artillery horses are much done up.

"The fighting was practically confined to the cavalry division, which, as usual, did exceedingly well, and French reports that the horse-artillery batteries did a great deal of execution amongst the enemy.

"Our casualties number about fifty.

"I regret to say that Lieutenant Keswick, 12th Lancers, was killed, and Lieutenant Bailey, of the same regiment, severely wounded. Lieutenant De Crespigny, 2nd Life Guards, also severely wounded."

Though the state of the cavalry was deplorable, it was thanks to the splendid execution of General French that the Boers showed so little fight, and there were so few casualties. The enemy saw the cavalry menacing their line of retreat, and pelted off from kopje to kopje, now and then sniping at the leading squadrons, and occasionally plumping a shell or two into the British midst. With the Dutchmen, Presidents Steyn and Kruger were said to be, and these worthies made a desperate attempt to rally the forces, but without success. Some say they even shed tears to encourage their countrymen, which tears had evidently a damping effect, for the Boers—some 14,000 of them—retreated all the faster. They were absolutely demoralised by Lord Roberts' tactics, and felt seriously injured that the trenches which had been prepared against a frontal attack should have been ignored. They had been so accustomed to be attacked in front that they began to look upon the Commander-in-Chief's "roundabout way of doing things" as distinctly unfair. They took themselves off, and when General French, who advanced ten miles ahead of the main body, scoured the front, he reported that not a Boer was to be seen. A vast amount of ammunition was left behind, and this, including several boxes of explosive bullets, labelled "Manufactured for the British Government," was promptly destroyed.

Good news now arrived. The A and B squadrons of Kitchener's Horse, reported missing, suddenly returned to camp at Paardeberg. They, with E squadron, were cut off on the 13th of February, and given up for lost. Though E squadron was captured by the enemy, A and B squadrons succeeded in escaping, and, after losing their

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bearings on the veldt, and enduring three weeks' somewhat unpleasant experiences, found their way into safety.

Quantities of the Transvaalers disbanded and returned to their farms. In other quarters, too, progress was announced. General Gatacre occupied Burghersdorp and General Clements had reached Norval's Pont, and thus the sporadic rebellion in Cape Colony was slowly beginning to die out.

The army advanced and formed a fresh camp beyond Poplar Grove, where on the 8th and 9th more of the troops concentrated. The force was now moving through a fine grassy country, made additionally green and refreshing by plentiful rains, and the horses were improving in condition and spirits, while the men were in first-rate fettle.

On the 10th of March the army proceeded onwards. By this time the Boers had posted themselves on the kopjes eight miles south of Abraham's Drift. It was imagined that they would be able to offer little resistance to the advancing force, but they, however, made a very determined stand.

THE FIGHT AT DRIEFONTEIN

On leaving Poplar Grove, Lord Roberts' force, rearranged and divided into three, advanced on Bloemfontein *via* Driefontein, a place about six miles south-west of Abraham's Kraal and some forty miles from the capital of the Free State. Along the Petrusberg Road, to the right, moved General Tucker's division, with the Gordons and a cavalry brigade. The central column, composed of General Colville's division, the Guards Brigade (General Pole-Carew), and Colonel Broadwood's brigade of cavalry, accompanied Lord Roberts, while on the left, advancing along the Modder River, was General French with Colonel Porter's cavalry brigade and General Kelly-Kenny's division. The ranks had been filled up by detachments from the Modder and Kimberley, which latter place had been converted into the advanced depot. Among the additional troops were the Ceylon Mounted Rifles, a soldierly lot and much admired by those who saw them. At 10 A.M. the brigade of cavalry under Colonel Broadwood, which was marching in advance of the central column, came in touch with the enemy. Their position was a strong one, an open, crescent-shaped group of kopjes, with the centre a plateau, dropping on all sides to flat ground. At the extreme end of the semicircle (on the crescent at the north-east) was posted a formidable gun, and this weapon, perched on a commanding kopje at Abraham's Kraal, protected the position from advance from the north-west. It also provided the Republicans with a loophole for escape. Colonel Broadwood had no sooner discovered the enemy

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in his snake-shaped array of kopjes than he commenced to shell him and drive him forth from the lower projections of the position. That done, he there planted his mounted infantry till reinforcements should come to his aid.

On the right Colonel Porter had now come in contact with the foe. General French's orders were to avoid imbroglio with the enemy and to keep in touch with the centre. On a message being



DIRECTING AN ARMY FROM A MILITARY BALLOON.

sent by Colonel Porter to inform General French of the presence of the Dutchmen, the infantry division changed its course. They now marched twenty miles to the south, reaching the position about one o'clock. The march was an achievement. Twenty miles across the blistering, blinding veldt, as a commencement to a fighting day six hours in length, was a feat of endurance of which the infantry division might well have been proud. The change of course had

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the effect of avoiding the necessity to attack Abraham's Kraal, though at the same time it unfortunately left open the enemy's line of retreat to the north, which, later on, he was not slow to make use of. With the arrival of General French's force, Colonel Broadwood was free to continue his movement to the left of the enemy's position, and working round it, found himself assailed by the 9-pounder of the enemy. He nevertheless pursued his course, gaining ground very slowly but surely, and by nightfall the brigade of cavalry had worked eight miles to the rear of the Dutchmen's position. This flanking movement, though not concluded at dusk, resulted in the eventual retirement of the enemy.

Meanwhile in the centre of the plateau hot fighting was taking place, General Kelly-Kenny's division having made a bold attack on the north of the stronghold, whence the troops were greeted from behind a screen of boulders with a storm of shot and shell. The Dutchmen, safe and invisible, could not, however, succeed in arresting the dogged advance of the Welsh Regiment, who formed the first line of the attacking force. They went on and on despite the fierce fusillade of the Federals, their numbers growing momentarily thinner, but their nerve and perseverance showing no diminution. The Boers, ingenious as ever, offered a skilful and stubborn resistance, pouring a heavy enfilading fire from kopjes both east and south-west, while they plied two 12-pounders with intense vigour.

From the south now came the artillery, T Battery R.H.A. sweeping the way for the infantry advance. But they had no easy task. Before they could get into action the Vickers-Maxim of the Federals commenced its deadly activities, and while the gunners were unlimbering killed first one man then another, and laid low several horses. But the brave artillerymen undauntedly pursued their work, and presently, with the loss of very few minutes, exchanged hearty greetings with the weapon which had wrought such havoc among their numbers. At this time U Battery, at the north of the Boer centre, was active, but later on, when the 76th Field Battery moved towards the enemy with a view to clearing a way for the rush of the infantry, U Battery joined T, and together they blazed away at the ridges held by the Dutchmen. But throughout the whole period they pursued their work under showers which unceasingly rained down from the rifles of the foe. Meanwhile the Welsh Regiment, supported by the Essex and Gloucesters, moved on and on till they reached the shelter of the crest of the ridge. Here, at 500 yards range, a crackling concert of musketry was heard, the Boers firing with great ferocity and stubbornness, the British with coolness and accuracy. From the centre of the position the Yorks, supported by the Buffs, did mag-

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nificent work, and they, together with the Essex Regiment, later on in the afternoon began doggedly to ascend towards the stone sangars of the enemy, which yet vomited forks of flame.

Now they crawled and now they wormed themselves along through the grass, dripping with gore and covered with sweat, many of their officers gone, comrades dropping to right and to left of them, while the fire of the enemy continued to rattle down in their midst. Then, as the fusillade slackened, they leapt up and made for the ridge, taking it, going over the crest with glittering steel and ringing cheer, and finding not one single Boer had awaited their coming. The Dutchmen had vanished into thin air! It was a magnificent deed—the finest that had been witnessed for a long time—but it was dearly paid for. The way was paved to Bloemfontein, but with the corpses of the honoured dead. The brunt of the fighting fell on the Sixth Division, more particularly on the Welsh and Essex Regiments, the Ninth Division, with the Guards, arriving too late in the day to take part in the fight. A great number of officers were put out of action—so many, indeed, that some of the leading companies were led, and admirably led, by their colour-sergeants. A characteristic feature of the engagement was the Dutchmen's slim and ingenious mode of firing a big gun from amid a group of red houses, each floating a white flag, an arrangement which served to cover the retirement of the enemy, and on the success of which he doubtless complimented himself not a little.

At dusk a splendid sight was visible. In the last glimmer of day Lord Roberts and his staff entered the central plateau, followed by degrees by all the troops—an imposing force, which evidently determined the Boers in their resolution to make themselves scarce. This they did, guns included, with really creditable and surprising rapidity. They were much disheartened by defeat, however, and though they had offered most stubborn resistance, the character of their defence was lacking in evidence of the determination which had hitherto been noticeable. Among the mortally wounded was the gallant officer commanding the Royal Australian Artillery, Colonel Umphelby.¹ The Boers lost over 100, but the list of our own killed and wounded was a long one. Amongst the killed were:—Captain Eustace, the Buffs; Lieutenant Parsons and Second Lieutenant Coddington, Essex Regiment; Captain Lomax, Welsh Regi-

¹ Lieutenant-Colonel C. E. E. Umphelby, who died of the wounds which he received during the fight, was forty-six years of age. He commanded the Victorian portion of the Royal Australian Regiment of Artillery. He joined the Victorian Militia Garrison Artillery in 1884, and in the following year was appointed lieutenant in the Permanent Artillery. He was promoted to be captain in 1888, major in 1891, and lieutenant-colonel in 1897. Sent to England by the Victorian Government in 1885, he passed through various artillery courses, including the long course at Shoeburyness. Lieutenant-Colonel Umphelby was attached to the staff of Major-General M. Clarke at Aldershot from June to August 1890. See vol. iii, "Victoria."



SERGEANT OF THE INNISKILLING DRAGOONS.

Photo by Gregory & Co., London.

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ment ; Mr. McKartie, a retired Indian civilian attached to Kitchener's Horse. Wounded—Colonel Hickson, the Buffs, Lieutenant Ronald, the Buffs ; Captain Jordan, Gloucesters ; Second Lieutenant Torkington, Welsh Regiment ; Second Lieutenant Pope, Welsh Regiment ; Second Lieutenant Wimberley, Welsh Regiment ; Captain Broadmead, Essex Regiment ; Lieutenant Devenish, Royal Field Artillery ; Major Waite, Royal Army Medical Corps ; Lieutenant Berne, Royal Army Medical Corps ; Colonel Umphelby, Royal Australian Artillery (since dead) ; Lieutenant C. Berkeley and Second Lieutenant Lloyd, Welsh Regiment ; Second Lieutenant G. H. Raleigh, Essex Regiment.

The Australians came in for a heavy share of the fighting. The 1st Australian Horse, brigaded with the Scots Greys, were fiercely fired on by the enemy as they advanced to within 800 yards of the wide bend of kopjes. The New South Wales Mounted Infantry, under Colonel Knight, and the Mounted Rifles, under Captain Antill, engaged in animated pursuit of the enemy as they fled towards the north, their fleet horses showing a marked contrast in condition to the jaded steeds of the English cavalry.

Lord Roberts expressed his satisfaction at the brilliant work performed by the Welsh Regiment in the storming of Alexander Kopje, a feat in which they displayed consummate skill as well as amazing pluck. Some heroic actions took place during the day, particularly in connection with the supply of ammunition, which ran short owing to the necessity of relieving the infantry for their heavy march, of fifty rounds apiece. Some dastardly ones were also practised by the Boers, who, finding themselves in a perilous situation, the artillery in front and a squadron of mounted infantry hovering on their flank, hoisted a white flag and threw up their hands in token of surrender. Naturally the British accepted the sign, and, while they were approaching the Dutchmen, some others of their number hastened to pour a volley into the British ranks. Lord Roberts himself having been a witness of this treacherous act, remonstrated with the Boer leaders, and ordered that in future if such action were repeated the white flag should be utterly disregarded. The following protest was made by the Commander-in-Chief :—

“To their Honours the State Presidents of the Orange Free State and South African Republic.

“Another instance having occurred of a gross abuse of the white flag, and of the signal of holding up the hands in token of surrender, it is my duty to inform your Honours that if such abuse occurs again, I shall most reluctantly be compelled to order my troops to disregard the white flag entirely.

“The instance occurred on the kopje east of Driefontein Farm yesterday evening, and was witnessed by several of my own staff-officers as well as by myself, and resulted in the wounding of several of my officers and men.

“A large quantity of explosive bullets of three different kinds was

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found in Cronje's laager, and after every engagement with your Honours' troops.

"Such breaches of the recognised usages of war and of the Geneva Convention are a disgrace to any civilised Power.

"A copy of this telegram has been sent to my Government, with a request that it may be communicated to all neutral Powers."

The Boers had now entirely disappeared. It was nevertheless hinted that they might be collecting in some new and unexpected region. The column, however, resumed its victorious march, proceeding twelve miles without coming upon the enemy. The beating of yesterday had produced a good effect, for the Dutchmen kept their distance, though in the kopjes all along the direct road to Bloemfontein, which lay due east, they were said to be swarming. It was also reported that Transvaalers and Free Staters had fallen out, and that the former, under Joubert, were determined to make a stand behind a magnificent entrenchment that they had built. The advance was supposed to come from the west, and consequently the Boer line of entrenchments extended some six or eight miles from the town facing towards Bam's Vlei. There were shelter trenches, made not on the kopjes, but about a hundred yards out on the plain beneath. They used sandbags, and had gun epaulements besides. In addition to all this, they had made sangars and piles of stones on the kopjes. Unfortunately for them, our troops made a cunning detour, which again dislocated the Dutchmen's programme, and forced them in their mountain fastnesses to sit inactive, while the cavalry was wheeling south to the outskirts of Bloemfontein! Here there were no fortifications and very few Boers.

Mr. Steyn now secretly left Bloemfontein for Kroonstad, as, in spite of Mr. Kruger's representations, it had been decided to surrender the capital of the Free State. Lord Roberts, who had sent in a formal demand for surrender, received no reply. General Joubert made preparations, with some 3000 men, to avert the surrender, but his approach, veritably at the eleventh hour, was barred by the clever manœuvres of the British. This splendid piece of work was executed by Major Hunter-Weston, R.E. He was sent by General French to cut the railway north of Bloemfontein, and thus preclude any chance of Boer interruption to the triumphal progress into the town. In the dead of night the Major, with seven men of the field-troup, all mounted on picked horses (a precaution that was very necessary considering the hard work done by the troops both before and after the relief of Kimberley), started on their hazardous expedition. Darkness cramped, though it cloaked their movements, and the ground over which they sped was seamed with dongas and many impediments; and, moreover, a wide sweep had to be made to avoid Boer pickets. Before the peep o' day they

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reached their destination. Then they began to search for a place suitable for demolition. They came on a culvert supported with iron girders, one of which was hastily but cautiously prepared by placing two 10-lb. charges of gun-cotton against the web, which was fired within twenty minutes. Then, with a detonation that seemed to shake the day into dawning, the line was completely wrecked and rendered impassable, and Joubert, whose "special" was timed to arrive at Bloemfontein at 8.10 A.M., lost his last chance of interfering with the proceedings! This in itself was an excellent *coup*, and particularly serviceable, since it secured to the British the use of twenty-six locomotives at a time when they were much needed.

General French had also seized and destroyed some portions of the railway south of Bloemfontein. His headquarters were made at the house of Mr. Steyn's brother—who had tried unsuccessfully to get away, and was forced to remain at his farm—while the troops were now posted at different points outside the town, and were, in comparison with their former state, in clover.

Early on the 13th the 1st Cavalry Brigade moved slowly towards some kopjes to the east of Bloemfontein and occupied them. All knew the great day was come when Lord Roberts with Kelly-Kenny's and Colville's divisions, the Guards Brigade, and the Mounted Infantry would be presently marching into the Free State capital. Whereupon the adventurous journalist, determined there should be no pie without the impress of his finger, put his best leg foremost and decided to lead the way. The correspondents of the *Sydney Herald*, the *Daily News*, and the *Daily Telegraph* were seen like madmen spurring over the plain. There was ten to one on the favourite, the Burleigh veteran, and the Colonial was only backed for a place. yet he it was who won! They were received in the Market Square with beams. There was a shade of relief even on the most surly countenances. Mr. Fraser, a member of the Executive, the Mayor of Bloemfontein, and others, "bigwigs of B.," as somebody called them, came out and did the honours. These gentlemen were invited to take carriages out to welcome the British force, which—diplomacy being the better part of hostility—they accordingly did. In starting they encountered the first of the British victors, Lieutenant Chester-Master, with three of Remington's scouts. At last they came to the Chief's halting-place, and the surrender of the town was made known. The mediæval ceremony of delivering up the keys of Parliament and Presidency was gone through. Formalities over, Lord Roberts made the gracious assurance that, provided no opposition was offered, the lives and properties of the Bloemfontein public were safe in his hands. Having notified his intention to enter the capital in state, the Mayor, Landrost, and others departed to acquaint the townspeople.

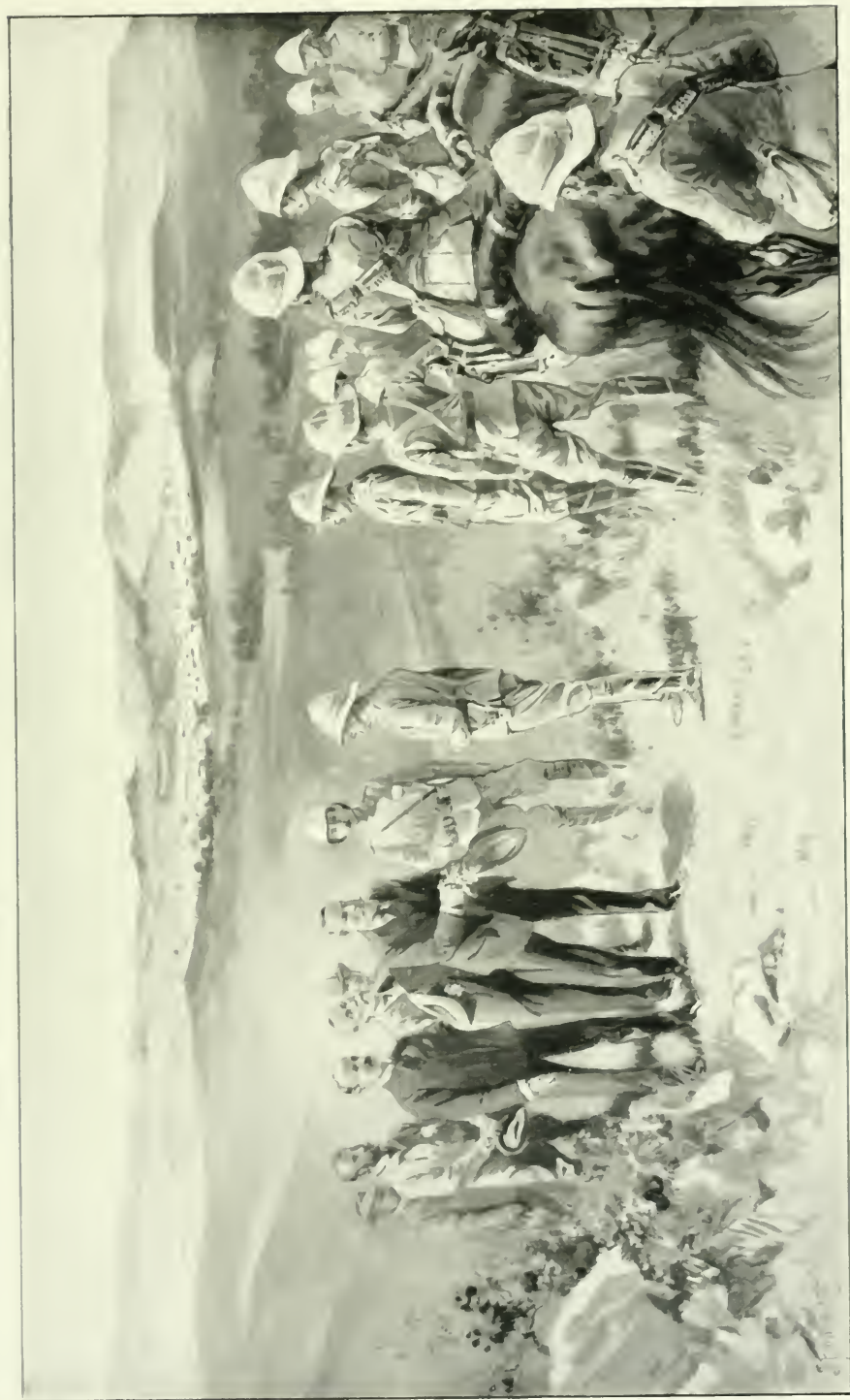
The Transvaal War

AT BLOEMFONTEIN

Bloemfontein! A name of milk and honey, of flowers and dew! Every vowel breathed of pastoral simplicity, of luscious grasses and lowing kine, of gambolling game and purling stream. A name for a poet to conjure with! a talisman to awaken the mellow music of a Herrick and recall the soul of Walton to benevolent rejoicings in the "sights and sounds of the open landscape." Unfortunately, the mellifluous name was not derived from the German for flowers or from the melody of fountains. It owed its origin to a Boer peasant who stood godfather to the hamlet and also to an adjacent stream. Here in other days the innocent Voertrekker unpacked his waggons and set out his little farmstead, choosing green rising ground, an oasis in the sandy veldt, and the neighbourhood of a refreshing rivulet for comfort's sake, and not because he foresaw that in fifty years this spot would be the central scene in one of the largest dramas of the world! In the year 1845 the Union Jack first waved its protective folds over the homestead. At that period it was converted into the official abode of a British Resident, and from that time, with an expansion which was truly British, the tiny village developed till it became a town, and finally passed over, through British apathy and dislike for responsibility, to the hands of the Free Staters. And there it might and would have remained had not President Steyn, who owed us no grudge, and with whom we were on the best of terms, decided to put his finger in the diplomatic pie, in the hope that some of the plums would fall to his share. Thus, in his greed for power and his contempt for the British, he embroiled his country, and being unable to defend his capital, was forced to scurry off to his birthplace, Winburg, some miles to the east, where, with the assistance of his foreign mercenaries, he yet hoped to save himself from the consequences of his ill-advised interference. So it came to pass that on the 13th of March 1900, thirty-nine days after the commencement of his great march, Lord Roberts, with the magnificent British army in his wake, moved unopposed towards the capital of the Free State.

The entry into the town was an imposing spectacle. The Mayor, Dr. Kellner, the Landrost, Mr. Papenfus, and Mr. Fraser, as we know, had driven out in a cart to meet Lord Roberts, and four miles outside the town the keys of the town were given up. Then the Field-Marshal, the most simply dressed man in his whole army, appeared at the head of a cavalcade a mile long. He was followed by his military secretary, his aides-de-camp, the general officers on his staff with their respective staffs. Then came the foreign attachés, some war-correspondents, and Lord Roberts' Indian ser-

Mr. Kellner
Mr. Baughman,
Mr. Collins,
Lord Kitchener,



THE FORMAL SURRENDER OF BLOEMFONTEIN.

Drawing by J. Finnemore, from a Sketch by W. B. Wollen, R.I.

At Bloemfontein

vants, who contributed a warm note of colour to the sombre files of kharki. After this came a serpentine train of cavalry and guns, which entered the city at one o'clock. It was the most wonderful military display that has been seen for years. A gigantic army—not a peace but a war army, not the crude army of Salisbury Plain but the perfected article, the army minus its raw recruits and plus its trained reserves, which owed its magnificent development to the man whom Lord Wolseley has called “the greatest War Minister we ever had.” Looking at the splendid physique of the warrior multitude, it was impossible for military men, even those who had criticised most severely the short service system, to deny that to-day the triumph of Lord Cardwell’s principle was complete!

The crowds collected from far and wide, all business was suspended, and knots and cliques gathered together to witness the procession moving up the slopes towards the town itself. Cheer after cheer rang through the air, kerchiefs waved and blessings were prayed for, as the procession marched through the collected crowd and on into the market square. Lord Roberts then went to the Government Buildings, and took formal possession in the name of the sovereign. There was renewed cheering and singing of “God save the Queen,” when, half-an-hour later, at twenty minutes to two, a small silken Union Jack, specially worked by Lady Roberts, was seen floating over the town.

The day passed without notable incident. A public holiday was observed, and the kharki-clad crowds rejoiced themselves by singing “Tommy Atkins” and feasting right royally. They were quite undisturbed by the scarcely complimentary remarks of the Burghers, who compared them in number and colour and appetite to a swarm of locusts!

Mr. Steyn’s brother, who, it may be remembered, had failed to get away with his belongings in time, remained discreetly at his farm, where he entertained General French, and subsequently Lord Roberts. One of the curious features of the entry into the capital of the Free State was the extraordinary welcome given by the inhabitants to the conquerors. Regiment after regiment filed past to the tune of hearty cheers, and surprised pleasure at the orderly and humane entry of the enemy was visible on every face. While the public offices were taken over by Lord Roberts’ staff, the banks were visited by Colonel Richardson. This officer was accounted one of the heroes of the hour, for sufficient praise could not be given to the achievements of the Army Corps or to Colonel Richardson, whose task of provisioning, foraging, and transporting 40,000 men and 18,000 horses savoured of the labours of Hercules. There were quibblers, of course; but, practically considered, all had gone off without a hitch, and the whole arrangements moved, as the

The Transvaal War

phrase is, "on greased wheels," the influence over all of the beloved "Bobs" having been simply magical.

The next day Lord Roberts inspected the Guards Brigade, complimented them on their splendid march, and expressed his regret that through a mistake he had been unable to enter Bloemfontein at the head of the Brigade. He consoled them by saying, "I will lead you into Pretoria!" In these gracious words the troops were rewarded for their disappointment, for the Chief, though he had promised them to lead them into the town, had finally decided that it was expedient to enter the capital without waiting for the infantry.

The Guards Brigade had made a magnificent march of thirty-eight miles in twenty-eight hours, taking from 3 P.M. on the 12th to 1 P.M. on the 13th, with an interval of only two and a half hours for sleep. Yet, in spite of this, and of having been in some of the toughest fights of the campaign, they were cheery and elated. One of their number (the Scots Guards) described their arrival:—"We waited three hours outside Bloemfontein for Lord Roberts, as we were told that the Commander-in-Chief wished to ride at the head of the Guards Brigade into the town. But he did not come, and our Colonel got orders to go in on his own. Our reception in Bloemfontein would have surprised you. It was quite funny in its way—not in the least like entering an enemy's town. The people simply came forth and cheered us as friends. A small group of nuns who came out to meet us wished us 'Good evening,' and said we were very welcome. To myself, as an Aberdonian, it was very home-like to pass by a shop with the inscription, 'Bon-Accord Restaurant.' The proprietor was standing at the door shouting himself hoarse. I was not surprised afterwards to learn that he was a pure Aberdonian. We camped outside the town, and next day Lord Roberts reviewed the Guards Brigade. His Lordship made a short speech, in which he complimented us on our rapid march, and said he was sorry he had not been able to lead us into Bloemfontein. 'But,' said his Lordship, 'I hope to be at your head when we go into Pretoria.' We all gave three very hearty cheers for the Commander-in-Chief, who has always been the soldier's friend. We would follow him anywhere."

To return to the closing events of the momentous 13th. At 8 P.M. a telegram was sent home describing with simple brevity the entry into the capital:—"From Lord Roberts to the Secretary for War.—Bloemfontein, March 13, 8 P.M.—By the help of God and by the bravery of Her Majesty's soldiers, the troops under my command have taken possession of Bloemfontein. The British flag now flies over the Presidency, vacated last evening by Mr. Steyn, late President of the Orange Free State."

At Bloemfontein

An army order was issued on the 14th, in which the Chief said:—

“On February 12 this force crossed the boundary of the Free State; three days later Kimberley was relieved; on the fifteenth day the bulk of the Boer army under one of its most trusted generals was made prisoner; on the seventeenth day news came of the relief of Ladysmith; and on March 13, twenty-nine days from the commencement of operations, the capital of the Free State was occupied.

“This is a record of which any army would be proud—a record which could not have been achieved except by earnest, well-disciplined men, determined to do their duty, whatever the difficulties and dangers.

“Exposed to the extreme heat of the day, bivouacking under heavy rain, marching long distances often on reduced rations, all ranks have displayed an endurance, cheerfulness, and gallantry which is beyond all praise.”

Lord Roberts added that he desired especially to refer to the heroic spirit with which the wounded had borne their suffering. No word nor murmur of complaint had been uttered. The anxiety of all when succour came was that their comrades should be attended to first.

So the great march was over—the hurry, the fatigue, the loss of life, the perpetual anxieties had brought about the desirable end—and the tremendous first act in the historic drama of the century was nearing its conclusion. Looking back on the difficulties that had been surmounted—the movement of some 40,000 men and 20,000 quadrupeds across over 100 miles of mostly dry veldt, where water was scarce and heat tropical, and where the enemy lurked in masses in kopje or donga, and had to be fought at intervals—the march appeared little short of miraculous. Now the curtain was shortly to go up on the first scene of the second act, an act which would have for its background the Orange River Colony, formerly known as the Orange Free State!