

direction of Helpmakaar to Beith, and thence to Ladysmith, which was reached on 27th October.

On the 19th October the enemy, advancing from Newcastle, cut the railway line at Elands-laagte; on the 20th the ground was reconnoitred from Ladysmith, and the next day an action was fought in which the Boers were signally defeated. But here again no permanent advantage was gained, as the reported arrival of a strong column of the enemy from the Orange Free State at Bester's Station led to the immediate withdrawal of our troops to Ladysmith. On the 24th Sir George White moved out some 7 miles to the north-east of Ladysmith in order to cover the march of the force returning from Glencoe, under the command of Major-General Yule, and engaged the enemy at Rietfontein, returning to Ladysmith the same evening. He again attacked the Boers on the 30th at Lombard's Kop, the action being without decisive result. By the 2nd November Ladysmith had been invested, and railway communication between it and Colenso interrupted.

3. From the foregoing narrative it is apparent that Sir George White was placed in an extremely difficult position in being called upon to decide, immediately after his arrival in Natal, whether he should concentrate his whole force at Ladysmith, and, subsequently, when the enemy had shown their strength, whether he should attempt to withdraw that force behind the Tugela.

As regards the first question, I think that he would have done better had he ignored the political objections which were urged by the Governor of Natal and concentrated at Ladysmith. The retention of a portion of his force at Glencoe at once involved him in military complications which he foresaw and ought to have avoided. Nor, indeed, was the political situation improved by his being eventually compelled to order a retirement which could have been effected without risk or loss before the enemy had arrived within striking distance.

As regards the second question, I am of opinion that under the existing circumstances, and having regard to the information then available, Sir George White's decision to make a stand at Ladysmith was correct. A position on the Tugela would to some extent have been more secure, as the country is more open, and the reinforcement of the troops holding the river alignment would have presented fewer difficulties. But, as Sir George White explains in his despatch, the Tugela, at the time of the year, was not a formidable defensive obstacle, and if Ladysmith had been evacuated, the Boers would have pressed on, enveloped the British force, and cut off its communication by rail with Maritzburg. The same process might have been repeated if Sir George White had fallen back on Maritzburg. Moreover, a withdrawal to the Tugela would have enabled the enemy to over-run a much larger portion of the Colony, and so encouraged the disloyal Dutch population throughout South Africa that a general rising might not improbably have taken place.

Undoubtedly the protracted siege of Ladysmith caused grave anxiety, and the necessity for its relief diverted a large body of troops from Cape Colony, and thus delayed the concentration of a force sufficient to undertake offensive operations in the enemy's country. But for these consequences Sir George White cannot justly be held responsible, his main obligation being to defend Natal against a Boer invasion. They may be ascribed to several

causes. First, the enemy greatly out-numbered the British force available in Natal when Ladysmith was invested. Secondly, the sharp salient angle formed by the frontier line along the north of Natal, and the convergence on Ladysmith of the railways from the Orange Free State and Transvaal, gave the invaders a decided strategical advantage. This advantage was increased by the general configuration of the country, consisting of a series of rocky terraces sloping gradually downwards from the Drakensberg to the sea. Thirdly, although Ladysmith had been selected as our advanced military station and depot of supplies in Northern Natal, its liability to attack does not seem to have been recognised, and no steps had been taken before the war began to construct the works and provide the armament which would have materially facilitated its defence.

The foregoing review of the situation, as it must have presented itself to Sir George White, shows that he had strong grounds for deciding not to withdraw behind the Tugela, his decision was approved by General Sir Redvers Buller, and though the relief of Ladysmith was an arduous operation which cost many lives, the presence of a strong British garrison at this point prevented the enemy from penetrating further south than Estcourt, and protected the capital and southern portion of the Colony.

4. The behaviour of the Ladysmith garrison through the four months during which it was exposed to continual bombardment, as well as to the privations of a protracted siege, reflects the greatest credit on all ranks. I have much pleasure in bringing to the favourable notice of Her Majesty's Government the resolution and resource displayed by the General Officer in Chief Command, and the cheerful spirit which pervaded the troops, in spite of repeated failures to relieve the town from the south; and I cordially support Sir George White's recommendations on behalf of the Officers (naval and military), the Warrant, non-commissioned, and petty officers, and the men, whose names he has brought forward as specially deserving of recognition.

Praise is also due to the civilians and nursing sisters, who rendered valuable assistance.

5. It is gratifying to observe that, in his account of what occurred on 6th January, when the enemy's determined attack on Ladysmith was gallantly repulsed, a Colonial corps, the Imperial Light Horse, has been singled out by Sir George White for special commendation. By their conduct on this and other occasions during the present war our Colonial kinsmen have proved their readiness to share with their comrades in Her Majesty's Regular Forces the honourable duty of upholding the rights and furthering the interests of the British Empire.

I have, &c.,

ROBERTS, Field-Marshal,
Commanding-in-Chief, South Africa.

From Lieut.-General Sir George White, V.C., G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., late Commanding the Ladysmith Garrison, to the Chief of the Staff to the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief in South Africa.

Cape Town,

23rd March, 1900.

Sir,

In my despatch dated 2nd December, 1899, addressed to the Secretary of State for War, and forwarded through you, I brought down the history of events relating to the force under my command to the evening of 30th