

RECORD AND REVIEW

THE SOUTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN

ALL the news goes to show that the Boer forces under Generals DeWet and Olivier operating in the south-east corner of the Free State have slipped through the net spread for them by Lord Roberts, and made good their retreat to the northeast. The British are apparently in close pursuit, but owing to the rough and broken character of the country northeast of Thaba N'Chu, the Boer rearguard can easily retard their advance sufficiently to assure the withdrawal in safety of the Boer guns and transport. The movement has been one of the most interesting of the campaign, and but for the heavy rains which greatly hampered the British operations, would probably have resulted in the capture of the Boers investing Col. Dalgety's colonial force at Jammersburg Drift, near Wepener, as General Cronje was captured at Paardeberg. The British plan was to close in on the Boers in a wide circle, two divisions under Generals Rundle and Chermiside advancing eastward from Reddersburg and Dewetsdorp, another division under Brabant, with Hart's brigade in support, marching northeast from Rouxville, and a fourth division under General Pole-Carew, with two cavalry brigades under French, moving southeast from Bloemfontein. With retreat eastward closed by Basutoland, these converging columns from the west, northwest and south should under ordinary conditions have effectually barred every line of withdrawal open to the Boers, and had the latter waited a day longer, it seems probable that they would have been caught in the trap. But warned by Cronje's disaster, they established strong outposts on the British lines of advance, which not only gave them timely warning of the movement, but offered such resistance to it as with the muddy state of the country, to prevent the closing of the lines of retreat northeastward, along the Basuto border. Maintaining the siege at Jammersburg Drift as long as they could do so with safety, when the British net was about to be drawn, the Boers moved suddenly and rapidly north through Ladybrand, protected by their outposts, which fell in on their flank and rear. Aside from the failure to capture Dalgety's force, the whole movement about Wepener has been invaluable to the Boers, keeping General Roberts in Bloemfontein for several weeks, affording the Boers time to prepare their defenses on the line of his northward advance, and enabling them to carry off large supplies of food from the granary of the Free State. Moreover, the remarkable mobility shown by their commandos, and the ease with which they have adapted themselves to British tactics, promise to create a good many similar problems for the British when the general advance begins anew. When it will begin there is, of course, no means of knowing, the censorship being as rigorous as ever, though the news that comes to hand indicates that it cannot be begun with safety until the southern part of the Orange State is more thoroughly subjugated, the spirit of resistance among the burghers there being evidently very much alive. Meanwhile it will be interesting to note what the next movement of the Boers will be.