

and critical. The Cape Colony was quivering with rebellion. The Republican forces were everywhere advancing. Kimberley and Mafeking were isolated. A small British garrison held a dangerous position at Orange River bridge. Nearly all the other bridges had been seized or destroyed by rebels or invaders.

From every quarter came clamourings for troops. Soldiers were wanted with vital need at Stormberg, at Rosmead Junction, at Colesberg, at De Aar, but most of all they were wanted in Natal—Natal, which had been promised protection 'with the whole force of the Empire,' and which was already half overrun and the rest almost defenceless. So the army corps, which was to have marched irresistibly to Bloemfontein and Pretoria, had to be hurled into the country—each unit as it arrived—wherever the need was greatest where all were great.

Sir Redvers Buller, thus assailed by the unforeseen and pressed on every side, had to make up his mind quickly. He looked to Natal. It was there that the fiercest