

## THE AUTUMN MANŒUVRES.

## THE SCENE OF OPERATIONS.

(From the Broad Arrow)

(Continued from Page 616, V. I. VI.)

THURSDAY SEPT. 5TH.

*Meeting of the two Armies.*—Yesterday, as we have related, the main body of the Southern Army, composed principally of infantry, halted and encamped at Fontmell Down; the cavalry—as to whose movements it was well, for obvious reasons, not to be too precise—being pushed on a long way ahead, so as virtually to accomplish the distance, which would be traversed in two ordinary day's marches, in the course of a single morning and afternoon. In this manner it was believed that a position would be secured which hereafter would be very important—that is to say, which would command the river Wiley, the turning point in the manœuvres, and possibly secure for the Southern Army possession of some of the many fords and bridges across that stream. The distance to be traversed by both armies, before they came face to face, were as nearly as possible equal; at the worst, therefore assuming the Northern Army patrols to use equal diligence, it was believed that there might be a cavalry skirmish near one of these fords late on the night of the 4th or morning of the 5th. Imagine the surprise of an advanced squadron of the Bays, on accomplishing the distance covered by their forced march, to find that not alone were all the fords and passages of the Wiley strongly held by the Northern Army, but that some at least of their cavalry—two regiments it is believed—had crossed the river, and like themselves were patrolling on the southern bank! Both detachments, after sufficient action to make their presence unmistakable, fell back on their supports; and then arose the question how the Northern Army came to be in that position. It transpired that they, acting up to the letter of instructions, considered themselves at liberty to begin their march at the first hour of the day named for the operations to begin—namely, at one o'clock in the morning. And so far, the construction which they put upon their instructions would seem to have been accurate, though no one appeared to have foreseen the likelihood of such a reading at the time when the orders were drawn up. But it was held that they were not at liberty to cross the Wiley; and the two regiments which had done so were accordingly withdrawn. A release of the prisoners taken was also made. These consisted principally of a baking party of the Control, captured, together with their ovens, by the Northern Cavalry in the first zeal of their raid upon the banks of the Wiley—a feat which well nigh stopped the rations of their own men, among others, for captives obviously could neither continue to receive supplies nor prepare rations for consumption by either of the forces. No time was lost in transmitting, by day signal, and by night flashing, intelligence of the state of things in front to Sir John Michel and the bulk of the Southern Army in rear, and an “early start” was necessarily the word with all the brigades this morning. The march from Fontmell Down towards the Wiley is considerably longer than that from Blandford to Fontmell Down, and on the high grounds especially, the men and horses were much tried by the strong wind which to day has succeeded after a night's

heavy rain, to the soft, relaxing steamy heat of yesterday. Men, however, did not pause to dwell on the details, and as little as possible on the fatigues of the march; their thoughts were occupied with what might be going on in front. And when, having marched to Fontmell Down and Lady Down—sufficiently for small consciences for one day—they heard stirring news of what the cavalry divisions were doing, with renewed spirit, they again got under arms, and pushed forward to a point sufficiently near to have shared in influencing the fortunes of the day had the conflict continued a very little while longer. Passing from the line of march of the main body to the efforts of the divisions actually in position on the heights above the Wiley, it is necessary, for the sake of making events clear, to revert in point of time to the early morning. After the question which had arisen the night before, His Royal Highness the Commander in Chief and the umpire's staff were naturally anxious to find themselves at the earliest moment on the line of operations, and accordingly left Salisbury for Wiley by a special train at seven o'clock. There is an earlier train at half past six o'clock, and by this all officers and others interested in the movements, but not immediately connected with headquarters, or with the umpire staff, were compelled to travel. The contending forces on either side were restrained imperatively from commencing operations upon a scale of any importance before eight o'clock, to afford time for the arrival of their trains and for the umpires to take horse and proceed either to the fords of the Wiley or to the Northern Cavalry Camp at Lamb Down, a distance of about two miles from Wiley station. The placing of outposts, however, was not forbidden, and accordingly preparations were made by the indefatigable Hussar Regiments the 7th and 10th, as well as the 12th Lancers, and Col. Wombwell, for exploring, when the proper moment arrived, every inch of ground in front of the Northern Division. The great object, of course, was to ascertain the practicability of assailing their camp, for there were reasons to believe that it had been pitched in a position very convenient for watering purposes, and well secured as long as their cavalry patrolled both banks of the Wiley, but which became, insecure and exposed, the moment the two regiments were withdrawn to the northern side of the river. Without exposing at any time more than a dozen troopers or so, though three or four regiments lay concealed and ready to spring into action from behind plantations, and haystacks and farmhouses and everything which could afford safe cover the Cavalry of the Light Brigade perseveringly swept backwards and forwards, and right and left, communicating by signals with their headquarters in rear, till the exact position of the Northern camp was ascertained, together with the point from which it could best be enfiladed. This occupied some considerable time, during which strange to say, no hostile signs proceeded from the northern camp to show that they were aware of what was going on, though the infantry posts at the fords and bridges now and then exchanged shots with the nearest vedettes upon our side. At last, the preparations being complete, our batteries placed upon the brow of Wiley Down, one above the other, were unmasked, and the first discharges produced an immediate and almost unhopied for effect. There was a sudden commotion like that which follows the overturning of a beehive, and a buzzing, as it were, of men and horses and trains of Control wagons. Down fell the nearest and

most prominent angles of canvas, and in actual warfare, we know that the destruction actually caused would be as nothing to the effects of the confusion which would be produced by the scattering of the horses frightened by the sudden bursting of shells in their vicinity. The position of the attacking battalions were shifted, the whole camp was now enfiladed, and what so recently were the proud and threatening lines of General Shute were levelled with the ground. To surprise and shell an enemy's camp and to drive him back upon a position two or three miles further off, is on insignificant victory, and had matters rested there, the Southern Army might well have set off this triumph against the undoubted surprise of the night march; but chance and diligent patrolling throw still better things in the way. The Northern Cavalry, notwithstanding their recent disaster, apparently believed that they still had a great preponderance of force, and did all in their power to induce the Southern commander to quit his shelter and attack, and thus to bring himself under the range of batteries, which there was reason to believe were cunningly posted on the commanding points along the river Wiley. For a couple of hours or so their ineffectual attempts to “draw” Sir Thomas MacMahon were persevered in. At last, it seemed as if hostilities were being abandoned by mutual consent, and the artillery and heavy cavalry of the Southern Army had actually withdrawn from the front, and were returning towards the point where they were to encamp, when the intelligence, wonderful if true, was received that the 13th Hussars had crossed the river and were advancing in some force to reconnoitre. Col. Tower, of the 3rd Lagoon Guards, at once led his regiment forward, thinking at the outset that he had only to capture a venturesome squadron. The 13th however, were supported, as it turned out, by the 9th Lancers, and ultimately by the 2nd Life Guards, whose darkened cuirasses we had thus the opportunity of seeing at close quarters. They however, always laboured under the disadvantage of charging uphill and over ploughed ground, while the Southern cavalry delivered their charges with the full impetus of descent. The movements were brilliant and exciting, the horses in some of the charges being reined in not at the prescribed distance of 100 yards, but at little more than ten feet or so from the opposing squadron. This was notably the case with the charges of the 9th Lancers and 2nd Life Guards, who did all that men could do to retrieve adverse fortunes. But the gradients or the accidents of the moment were against them, and in every instance the decision of the umpires was adverse to the attacks proceeding from the Northern cavalry. As already mentioned, had the contest lasted only a little longer, the infantry divisions would have reached the scene, and have imparted a new character to the struggle. Without them, though Sir Thomas MacMahon remained master of the heights, he could not venture to attack the bridges and fords which were guarded by infantry, and thus for to night, at least, the Southern Army is tied to its own side of the river. It was a subject of general remark that after the first signal achievement in shelling the Northern camp, the artillery on both sides was slow in coming into action, and thus the frequency and intensity of the cavalry charges were increased when a few well-directed shots in flank must have made either side turn its rein and gallop off. It was a singular coincidence that during the hottest episodes of the cavalry combat neither General Walpole nor Sir John Michel