



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE

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VOL. VI MONTREAL FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 21, 1855. NO. 6

DIARY OF THE SIEGE

(From Correspondents of London Journals)

RE-OPENING OF THE BATTERIES

FOURTH DIVISION CAMP, August 17.—At four this morning the English batteries opened a heavy fire along the whole of their line. The Russians kept silence for full twenty minutes, when they replied in good style. The French were slow in cooperating with us. It was fully half-past five before they opened on the left, and when they did it was a sort of intermittent fire, their right pausing when their left was active, and vice versa. A report had been current that but for the action on the Tchernaya the long-talked-of bombardment was to have commenced yesterday at noon, and when at day-break to-day the roar of the artillery was heard, it was supposed the cannonade had commenced in earnest, and would be vigorously sustained. After a short time, however, it slackened considerably, and it became evident that no serious bombardment was intended. During the whole day the cannonade has varied in violence, and has often been scarcely more severe than that we are accustomed to witness nearly every evening. At other times, however, the fire has been very heavy. Its real object is, I believe, to enable the French to continue their approaches to the Malakoff. Many conjectures and reports are afloat on the subject. It has been said that the fire is to be succeeded by a feint attack. Then, when it is supposed that the enemy has brought large bodies of troops to the front of his defences, a more effective bombardment is to take place, to be followed by a real attack on a different point. More authoritative information has reached me, which, without entering into details, gives me grounds to believe that something serious will shortly occur; to which to-day's fire has been merely a prelude. Meanwhile, we have casualties to lament, and have suffered some damage to our batteries. Four guns of No. 7 battery, left attack, were silenced, the other two thereupon suspending their fire. Two guns of the naval brigade were disabled. Captain Oldfield, royal artillery, was killed. Major Henry, of the same corps, lost his arm at the shoulder joint, but was doing well this evening. He had just been relieved, and was about to quit the battery when the ball struck him. Lieutenant Dennis, 3rd Buffs, has been very badly wounded, and there is scarcely a chance of his recovery. Captain Hammet, commander of the Albion, was killed in the trenches. He saw the ball coming, called to his men to stand out of the way, and himself remained, and was instantly killed, either by the ball or by a spoke of the wheel which it smashed. I have heard of other similar instances. There is sometimes a sort of fascination, it would appear, in a cannon shot when it comes at you.

THE NEGLECTED NAVAL BRIGADE

The naval brigade suffered severely. About 200 were in the trenches, and they had twenty-three casualties, including six men and an officer killed. This gallant but ill-treated brigade usually gets all the hard knocks, but none of the rewards of good service. It surely is not too much to expect that vacancies made in their ranks by the shot and shell they go so bravely and frequently face should be filled up among themselves; yet for many months there has not been a promotion among them, but very numerous deaths. Three lieutenants, belonging to one ship, have been killed. On the 18th of June a lieutenant fell when gallantly attempting to rescue a wounded sailor. The mate promoted had seen no service before, and has seen none since, for he went to England shortly afterwards, but he is a very near relative of Sir James Graham's. Is Captain Hammet's vacancy to be similarly filled up? The naval brigade has certainly strong grounds for complaint. This afternoon, about six o'clock, one of our mortar batteries on the right discharged six mortars simultaneously, at one spot in the Malakoff, and blew up a magazine of shells, which popped off in succession in beautiful style, while the Russians jumped over the parapets in mortal terror, and our fellows in Gordon's battery jumped on theirs and cheered with delight.

A RUSSIAN SPY—WHERE IS HE?

This evening, about nine o'clock, we were disturbed from our post-prandial pipe by a sudden alarm in the camp of the fourth division, by shouts of "A Russian spy! Seize him!" here he goes, and similar exclamations. Of course we bowled out of our hut in double quick time. There was considerable excitement in the vicinity of the cattle pound, for the empty beer casks, which, after containing the dead provisions of the division, serve to enclose the fire stock. Nobody seemed to have any distinct idea of what the Russian spy was like, but he was said to be mounted, and some Armenian warriors were heard to declare they saw him doubling down the distance, which, considering the still night, is a suspicious circumstance.

darkness, was rather a daring assertion. Finally, the spy—if spy it was, and not some new-come Englishman riding home to his quarters—escaped unscathed. Not so a canteen, which the seekers after the spy entered by mistake, and nearly emptied under the pretence of seeking him.

August 18.—The fire continued more or less all night; at times heavy. This morning it was not very severe. As I write the funeral of poor Captain Oldfield is taking place. It appears he was careless about exposing himself. He was hit in three places by fragments of shell. About half-past twelve there was some very heavy firing. Upon the whole the result of the cannonade appears pretty satisfactory. The Redan has suffered a good deal. Our fire has been very well directed, and that of the Malakoff has been considered checked.

BATTLE OF THE TCHERNAYA

TURKISH CAMP, KAMARA, August 18.—To give you anything like a correct idea of a conflict which, though fought out, considering the number of the combatants, in a very small space, derived a great deal of its incidental importance from the nature of the terrain, it is almost necessary to call attention to a few of the leading features of the well-known, now so often described district around Balaklava. If you descend from the northern side of the plateau, on which the besieging armies are encamped, into the gorge through which the Tchernaya empties itself into the harbor, and follow the banks of the river for a short distance upward, you find yourself in a narrow valley, with the heights of Mackenzie's Farm rising abruptly on your left, like tall cliffs on the sea shore; and on your right a row of small hills, extending, with greater or less intervals between them, onto Tchorgoun. Beyond them is the plain of Balaklava, which is broken in its centre by a somewhat similar line of eminences, but in this instance so small as hardly to be entitled to any better appellation than that of mounds. It was on these last that the Turkish redoubts were thrown up, which were so precipitately abandoned by their defenders on the 25th of October. The highest of these hillocks does not rise above 300 feet from the level of the plain. Between Tchorgoun and Inkermann there are some of the most remarkable features in the landscape; but on crossing the river on the road from Balaklava to the former of those places, they no longer stand apart, each from its neighbor, but become more and more closely crowded together, and are soon lost in the picturesque confusion of the great range of hills which extend without interruption along the whole of the southern coast. On two or three of these, which lie in a cluster on the side of the plain next Inkermann, and directly facing the Mackenzie Heights, the road from which passes between them, have encamped for some time past three divisions of French. On the side next the Tchernaya, the position was defended by a precipitous and escarpé descent, on which some stunted brushwood still remained, but which in most places, stripped of the soil by the rain of ages, presents but the white masses of chalk which plays so important a part in the geology of the whole district; on the side next Balaklava the descent is comparatively easy. On the summit rested the right wing of Liprandi's army on the 25th of October, and on the southern side were planted the greater number of the batteries which mowed down the British Light Cavalry, as they charged along the slope which leads gently toward the ford to the road to Tchorgoun. This ford is reached through a tolerably wide opening, which separates the French position from that of the Piedmontese, who occupied the heights immediately under the village of Kamara, extending a short distance to the right. The valley still further right, which is traversed by the Woronzoff road, leading on to Baidar, was defended by the Turks. The three armies occupied a chain of eminences forming a semi-circle drawn from Inkermann to the sea, and embracing Balaklava and the plain within its two wings—or, in other words, just the position taken up by Liprandi last autumn. The French divisions were encamped on the top of the hills; between these hills runs the road leading up to Mackenzie's Farm, and crossing the river in the valley by a stone bridge for the protection of which a small redoubt had been thrown up in front. This tête de pont was, on the night of the 18th, instant, guarded by the 20th of the line. The Piedmontese had batteries regularly fortified on all the heights overlooking the ford on the road to Tchorgoun, and had the upper end of the valley completely within their range. On the other side of the river, on the top of a hill similar in every respect to those I have been describing, they had on the same night an out-post composed of two companies of infantry, for whose greater security, considering their distance from their own lines, a small entrenchment had been thrown up.

A peloton of Chasseurs d'Afrique went out to patrol during the night, and on the other side of the river fell into an ambushade and were all made prisoners except two men, who escaped and gave the alarm; but even this was treated as one of the ordinary incidents of night-duty in the presence of the enemy. About an hour before daybreak the French sentinels in front of the bridge thought they could perceive shadows gliding past them in the darkness, and fired. There was no reply, and silence deep as death followed; about the same time a few shots were heard from the hill occupied by the Piedmontese outpost, but as the utmost stillness prevailed afterward on every side no precautions were taken, till just as the first streak of light made itself visible in the horizon, a sharp fire was opened from a party of skirmishers against the tête de pont, and a regular assault made upon the Sardinian picket. General della Marmora was already on the ground, and sent a battalion of bersaglieri to reinforce the post, so that they might defend themselves till the troops could be got under arms and the necessary arrangements made. When the reinforcements arrived half the picket was already hors de combat, and the assailants were up on the parapet of the little redoubt firing down into them. To prolong the conflict here would only have caused a useless massacre, and the Sardinians consequently withdrew behind an épaulement on the other side of the river, near the aqueduct, and there defended themselves till the day broke clearly, and the action became general. On the side of the French the tête de pont was assaulted in great force, and carried very soon after the enemy's first showing himself on the ground, notwithstanding the heroic resistance of the 20th regiment of the line, which in one battalion alone lost twelve officers. The bridge was now occupied, two batteries of artillery were brought across so as to sweep the road leading between the two heights toward Balaklava, and a strong column was pushed on to the assault and mounted the declivity. Strange to say, although Gen. Pelissier had received full warning the previous night, he refused to believe in an attack until it actually commenced, and consequently no dispositions were made, and nobody was ready. The Russians had already reached the crest of the hill, while the French were still asleep; many officers were awakened by the roundshot passing through their tents; a sergeant had his head taken off while writing the orders of the day for the division. At this critical moment two battalions alone of the 2d Regiment of Zouaves held the whole assaulting column in check, and contested the ground inch by inch till they were forced back upon their own tents. In the meantime the alarm was sounding, the troops got into order, the artillery into position, and a vigorous onset drove the Russians down the declivity, leaving it covered with their dead and wounded.

All this, it will be remembered, occurred in the gray of the morning, which the smoke of the action converted into something like positive darkness, leaving everybody as yet in complete ignorance as to the force they had to contend with, or the dangers they had to bear. In the short pause which followed, however, and during which both sides prepared for a renewal of the struggle, the sun came out from behind the hills, the smoke rose, and the valley of the Tchernaya lay before us like a picture. The tract of table-land lying at the foot of the Mackenzie heights was covered with masses of cavalry, infantry, and artillery. About 30 guns were ranged in a crescent outside the bridge, and thundered unceasingly against the French position. On the hill from which the Piedmontese picket had been driven were crowds of men round a battery of field artillery, which fired incessantly, though against what I could never clearly make out I must not forget to mention, however, that they had previously shelled two battalions of Turks encamped in the hollow near the Woronzoff road and forced them to retire. This retrograde movement was the only part the latter bore in the whole affair; but it is right to add they were under arms all ready, in case the positions had been attacked. The Piedmontese were drawn up in line behind a small eminence close to the ford on the Tchorgoun road, and their batteries on the heights to the right were vigorously replying to the Russian fire; the three divisions of French, Camoux, Erbilion, and Faucheu were under arms, front line a little way back from the brow of the hill, and a great number of Zouaves were lying down in shelter behind a small ridge. Below, on the plain, along the hollow on which the English light horse died so gallantly last winter, every turf beneath their feet a soldier's sentry were ranged the English and French cavalry squadrons, after squadron, extending back nearly to the Turkish redoubts, ready to act in case the enemy should force the Piedmontese position and attempt to debouch upon the open ground behind. The nenpous of the Danes suffered gaily in long lines

in the fresh morning breeze, and when the sun rose high in glory, and poured down his rays full on the plain, making scarlet look redder, and steel and brass brighter and more resplendent, gilding the hill-tops, making the tents glitter, and rolling smoke and mist in great packs up the valley toward Inkermann, the scene became one of passing splendor, as well as of passing interest. We looked in breathless anxiety for the renewal of the conflict. The combatants had taken breath—their blood was up, for hundreds on both sides lay already stark and stiff on the river-side around the bridge, and the artillery, evidently was simply playing an interlude till the curtain rose upon another act in the tragedy.

We were not kept long waiting. From behind the cloud of smoke which naturally hung around the Russian batteries came two large columns of the enemy, marching in quick time, about 200 yards apart and exactly parallel, a short distance from the river, and in a line with the bank. As they wound and twisted, mounted and descended, following the inequalities in the ground in long compact masses, their bayonets glancing in the sunlight, they looked exactly like two huge serpents creeping rapidly along, their scales glistening, and their prey in sight. On arriving within about 800 yards of the ford, one halted, and the other turned off abruptly toward the river. It was evident they were about to assail the French position more to the right, on the side next the Sardinians. On reaching the water some passed on small bridges hastily thrown over, the rest formed, and on gaining this side the column broke into loose order, and pushed on toward the canal or aqueduct, which rises within an embankment at the very foot of the hill. Before reaching it they had to traverse about 200 yards of smooth green sward; they were no longer exposed to the French artillery, because the guns could not be depressed sufficiently to reach them, but they had their flank turned to that of the Piedmontese, who had got the range to an inch, and fired with an accuracy little short of marvelous. The head of the column had hardly come up dripping from the water when they found themselves in the midst of a storm of round shot, grape, and shell, bent upon relentlessly, unrelaxingly, mowing them down by the score, and covering the survivors with clay and gravel. But I must do these survivors justice, and say that they bore up right gallantly, marched firmly onward and upward, passed the canal though the water was breast high, pushed some yards still on the precipitous side of the hill, though here every wound was mortal, for all who fell rolled helplessly downward into the aqueduct and were instantly drowned; but at last halted, turned, and fled—never stopping till they reached the river, when they got shelter under the banks and among the old willows. An officer remained for some time alone on the declivity, vainly urging them to follow him. Reinforcements now come up from the second column; they re-formed, but again in loose order or rather no order at all, for they marched exactly like a flock of sheep. This was done evidently so that they might present less mass for the artillery to play upon; but it was a great mistake, as will be seen afterward. This time they displayed more pluck and resolution; they fell to be sure by the dozen; but they never wavered nor faltered, climbed on slowly and laboriously, and at last reached the crest of the hill, and came out on the level. When the head of the column attained the point, the Zouaves, who were lying down behind the ridge on the Russian left, jumped up and ran off to join the main body, posted near the artillery on the centre of the plateau, and at the same moment the whole of the French, the artillery included, retired about a hundred yards before the advancing enemy. The firing had ceased, except broken and puny file-firing from the assailants, who now, unable to form in line, and mixed up in disorder, doubtless perceived they should have either mounted in lines, or halted and deployed before coming out on the open ground above. For some moments I thought the French were about to give way and retreat, and the Russians become masters of the height; but I was soon convinced of my mistake. One could see them it is true, falling back on all sides, and closing up in a small round mass, but in the twinkling of an eye this mass opened out like a fan, two black lines shot from it on each side across the plateau—the centre closed, undivided itself, and the next moment a sheet of flame broke from the whole line, followed by a cloud of smoke, and the crash of the musketry fell on our ears in a long, continuous, unflinching whirl, like the roar of a waterfall, drowned every second by the mightier thunder of the artillery, which had made half a wheel to the right, and raked the crest of the hill with a tempest of grape. Strongly as one might wish this might be engaged for the French, it was impossible to repress for the moment a sentiment of pity as one looked upon the crowd of Russians, looming out through the smoke, as it rolled across them,