Sinclair's Monthly Circular,

AND LITERARY GAZETTE.

Volume 1. **QUEBEC, JUNE, 1855.** **Number 6.**

THE STORY OF THE CAMPAIGN. (*)

WRITTEN IN A TENT IN THE CRIMEA.

In the earlier chapters I have rather avoided comment, confining myself to a plain narrative of the course of events as they flowed one into another. The public had been more than content with the campaign, and demanded only an intelligible and detailed account of the occurences which had led to such pleasing results. But opinion had begun to exercise so large an influence on the war, that a record of its progress would be defective in which this new element should be left unrecognised.

The dull expanse of the siege, unrelieved, after Inkermann, by any bright red spots of victory in the foreground, was kept incessantly before the eyes of the public in its most dismal and lurid colours. Inflamed by the letters from the camp, and leading articles, with which every newspaper teemed, descriptive of the sufferings and losses of the army, and charging the authorities, military and ministerial, as the chief sources of disaster, the nation joined in one indignant outcry against the Government and the General. The plaudits of anticipated victory were changed to threats, foreboding, and despondency. Where a speedy triumph had been expected, there had been comparative failure—where national glory was to have been cheaply obtained, there had been losses and misery amounting to national disaster: therefore there must be blame. Such was the process of reasoning conducting to a conclusion almost unanimously assented to; the clamour swelled daily;—Mr. Roebuck gave notice of his motion of inquiry into the conduct of the war;—Lord John Russell suddenly quitted the Government; and the Ministry, defeated on Roebuck's motion by a majority of two to one, went out amidst such a clamour as greets the last moments of a criminal on the scaffold.

Amid the din of invective, those who read the parliamentary debates and leading articles of the time, will be puzzled to detect the true ground of censure. They will see that the nation was dissatisfied, and with whom, but will have some difficulty in knowing why. Everyboby has been ready to indicate the culprits, but none to specify the crime, except in the general terms of neglect, ignorance, and apathy. But though the accusers were confessedly in want of specific charges, yet the causes of our failure, in those points where we had failed, having been divined, or imagined to be divined, it was easy to ask why those causes had been allowed to exist.

For instance, it was known that the severest hardships of the army had arisen from the want of a communication between Balaklava and the camp; and it was asked why a road had not been made? It should have been made, it was urged, at the commencement of the siege, and should have been the first thing thought of.

Now, at the commencement of the siege, and for six weeks afterwards, the roads were hard and good. Before us was a place which we hoped to take after a short cannonade, and, notwithstanding that all the men available were employed in the trenches and batteries, and transporting armament and material for the works, the delay still seemed very tedious to the impatient troops. The trenches, once constructed, must be manned; and, thinned as the army was by sickness, to do this adequately absorbed all our available men. To make a road seven miles long was no light task, even if men and time could have been spared for it.

After a time, it began to be seen and admitted by the press, that the army once landed in the Crimea, the events, up to the end of October, followed in a sequence easily accounted for, without fixing culpability on the chief actors. It was seen that to have occupied the first period of the investment in making a road, would have called forth deservedly a charge of deferring the completion of the enterprise, in order to carry on an extensive work which might never be wanted. As the season wore on, the days between us and winter, like the Sibylline books, grew in value with each diminution of their number, and not one could be spared from the business of the siege. The enemy were seen throwing up their defensive works, and unless we kept pace with them, we must expect to break ground under an overwhelming fire. On the other hand, to have pushed the enterprise to a rash termination, by assaulting the town without waiting for the batterring-train to do its work, would have entailed, even with success, the yet more serious charge of incurring an unnecessary waste of life, when a little patience and trouble spent in availing ourselves of the means we possessed, might secure a comparatively bloodless victory—a charge which all but men of surpassing self-reliance would shrink from the risk of. Viewed in retrospect, it is easy to detect our errors, and to point to a better course of action; and the least sagacious and resolute general of the allied army would, if the problem were again set before him, apply the lesson of experience in the alternative of a speedy assault or deliberate provision for wintering on the heights. It is a cheap sagacity, and pleasant to exercise, which points out the faults of the past. In fighting our battles o'er again, mediocrity becomes infallible, and doubt and difficulty are no longer elements of warfare.

If, then, it is granted that, up to the end of October, things had gone as well with us as could fairly be expected, let us take that as the starting-point of imputed error. It is said that, it being then clear that no prospect remained of a speedy capture of the place, measures should at once have been taken to provide against winter. A road should have been made, provisions stored, and huts and stables constructed—all very desirable measures, but unfortunately not practicable. As already mentioned, the duty of the trenches exceeded our means, when guards, pickets, and the covering force where provided for, and our men were already dying of fatigue. Therefore, in order to begin other works, men must be taken from the trenches. But to guard the trenches insufficiently would be worse than not to guard them at all: it would be adding the slaughter of men to the loss of guns, therefore they must be abandoned; and to withdraw the guns and ammunition, and dismantle the batteries, would have been of itself a considerable labour. But our lines once abandoned, the French could no longer holds theirs, as they would have been liable at any time to be taken in reverse; therefore the whole siegeworks must have been given up, to be reconstructed at a more convenient season, while the Russians augmented their defences without interruption. Would this have suited either army or either nation? Or would it have been considered preferable to the severe losses we have suffered? Besides, our attention was no longer confined to the siege. The army in the field against us was daily increasing, and had already attacked our position under which it is said roads ought to have been made, provisions stored, and the troops sheltered.

The asserted superiority in the condition of the French army was cited as proof that we were in much worse state than we need be. It is by no means certain that our allies were much better provided than ourselves; at the same time, it is difficult to compare with accuracy the condition of the two armies, because the French systematically represent their own affairs in the most favourable light. And without presuming to doubt the advantages of a free discussion by the public press of our military system and operations, yet we must admit it to be, if a weakness, yet a natural one, on the part of our allies, to veil their own proceedings as much as possible from an equally severe scrutiny. Assuming, therefore, that inquiries made from the French as to the progress, reinforcements, and general state of their army, did not always elicit unadulterated facts, we may still find indulgence for the motives which tinged those facts with a roseate hue. To hear that its army was disorganised, famished, and dying of disease, and to be held up to the world as an example of disastrous military policy, might, however interesting to the public, be somewhat obnoxious to the vanity of a warlike nation, proud of its achievements, and fond to excess of glory.

There is no doubt that, during the early part of the campaign, the French suffered more from disease than we did. If, during the winter, the case was reversed, the change is easily accounted for. Large and constant reinforcements from France lightened the labours of the siege, and left plenty of men for the construction of the road from Kamiesch to their camp. While our men, from the fewness of their numbers, were often two, even three, nights in succession in the trenches, the French spent four nights out of five in their tents. Six days enabled them to communicate with Marseilles, and six or eight more to procure from thence any supplies which might be suddenly found needful.

It was said we ought to have insisted on the labours of the siege being proportioned to the strenght of the two armies respectively. But at the commencement of the siege we rather outnumbered the French, who offered us our choice of the right of the attack; with Balaklava as a port, or the left, with Kamiesch. We chose the right, principally for the sake of holding Balaklava, which was altogether in our hands, and its harbour filled with our vessels. When reinforcements arrived to the French, they had a greater extent of trenches to occupy than we, owing to the nature of the ground in their front permitting a nearer approach to the place. The whole of the French troops, with the exception of Bosquet's division, which was posted near the Woronzoff road, encamped in rear of their own lines, where, however convenient for the relief of their trenches, and for supplies from Kamiesch, they were at a great distance from any point of the position liable to be attacked. It would certainly appear to have been more desirable that they should have contributed a larger proportion to the covering force; and after the battle of Inkermann, they sent troops of all arms to reinforce our first and second divisions, and placed a brigade of infantry in the lines of Balaklava. At the beginning of February, the French, numbering more than seventy thousand, which was five times our effective force, took the whole of the lines and field-works on the hills around Inkermann while we armed the

(*) See the February, March, April and May Numbers.