

masses on the hills—when the green turf grew mire, and the leafy coppice a texture of wet brown twigs and roots, and yellow turbid pools settled along the course of the ravines, it was no wonder that the tents of the Arab, who is at least dry and warm in his desert, seemed preferable to the camp before Sebastopol, and the hardest soldiers turned now and then a longing thought to the firesides of England.

CHAP. X.—COMMENCEMENT OF THE SIEGE.

The ravines already mentioned, five in number, beginning in the middle of the plains of the peninsula, descend in courses, more or less winding, to the basin of the harbour. On the slopes of the plain, between these ravines, the English batteries were traced. In front of them, in the angle made by the outer and inner harbours, and on the right of the latter, stand some large public buildings belonging to the dockyard, and a large barrack. These, in the absence of permanent defensive works, were covered by strong and solid earthen batteries on commanding points thrown up simultaneously with the progress of our own trenches. In front of the right of our attack was a round tower, surrounded by an intrenchment armed on all sides with heavy guns. Next was a very large battery, composed of two faces meeting in a salient angle; this was known during the siege as the Redan. Near the inner harbour was another known as the Barrack Battery, capable of firing on our left batteries or on the French. These were all that were immediately opposed to us, besides the broadsides of a line-of-battle ship in the inner harbour, and the long guns of some steamers.

Between the English camps and the fortress the ground sloped upward to a ridge, and then downward towards the Russian batteries. It is evident that the farther down these slopes our trenches were placed, the more they were commanded by the enemy, and the higher must be the parapets to cover us from their fire. In such very stony and deficient soils it would have been almost impossible to obtain the requisite amount of earth very low down on the slopes, and our first batteries were placed on some spots where the ground rose gently upward for a space on the face of the descent.

From the left of the great ravine to Quarantine Harbour the ground is comparatively flat and unbroken, and on the right portion of this space the French trenches were opened at much shorter ranges than those of the English. In the angles of the outer and inner harbours, opposite the French attack, stands the town of Sebastopol, protected partly by parapets of masonry, partly by earthen batteries.

The distinctive features of the campaign have been noticed in a preceding chapter; the siege now commenced has also its peculiarities.

In ordinary sieges, the place having been completely invested so as to confine the garrison to its own resources, the trenches are opened at about six hundred yards, enclosing one or more salient points of the fortifications. Thus the works of the assailants being on the arc of the outer of two concentric circles described from a point within the fortress, while the defences are on the arc of the inner one, six hundred yards nearer the centre, it follows that the besiegers always have space for a far greater number of guns than are mounted on the works to oppose them. When the superior fire from the batteries in the trenches has overpowered that of the place, the works are pushed forward; other batteries are established close enough to breach the walls; and the breach becoming practicable, the assault is made, and the garrison, being overpowered by superior numbers, the place is taken.

In the present instance, the assailing force being insufficient to enclose the whole extent of front, the southern side of the harbour only was invested, leaving the formidable forts on the north unassailed, and the road from the interior free for supplies of all kinds. The front attacked being about three miles in extent, the space at the disposal of the garrison enable them to reply with at least as many guns as the besiegers could bring to attack them. But had the Russian batteries been totally silenced, and the south side taken by assault, the outer harbour, acting as a huge wet ditch, presented a fresh obstacle, backed by a fresh line of batteries, and rendered a new series of operations necessary. If the harbour had remained open the fleet might have come in to support an assault of the land forces; but on entering Sebastopol after the defeat at the Alma, Menschikoff had caused eight large ships to be sunk across the entrance. Henceforward, so long as this obstacle existed, the operation of the fleets was limited to making a diversion by attacking the forts at the entrance; and this was the part it took in the combined attack.

Until the whole of the allied batteries were ready to open together, not a gun replied to the fire which the Russians did not cease to direct, first upon our camps and afterwards on our trenches. Hidden as the allied camps were behind the crest of a hill, there must have been something of mystery and awe for the garrison in this strange silence, almost the only token of the presence of an enemy being the increasing height of the parapets of the trenches.

On the 17th at day light, pursuant to the general orders of the night before, the silence was broken by such a peal of artillery as has scarcely ever before, in the most famous battles or sieges, shaken the earth around the combatants. A hundred and twenty-six pieces, many of them of the largest calibre, opened at once upon the Russian defences, and were answered by a still larger number, of equal range and power. The din was incessant, and the smoke in the batteries so dense that after a few rounds the gunners hid their pieces rather by the line on the platforms than by a view of the object aimed at. The first visible effect of our fire was on the Round Tower, the pieces mounted on which were soon dismounted, and its surface deeply scarred by the shot of the heavy 68-pounder guns in the naval battery on the right, practising at a range of more than 2000 yards. Several explosions took place this day—the first in a French battery, where a magazine blow up at half-past eight in the morning, killing and wounding fifty men and disabling the battery; another less serious one occurred afterwards in the French lines. In the afternoon the Russian magazine in the Redan was fired by a shell from the English batteries, and silenced a great number of its guns; and shortly afterwards a number of cases filled with powder blow

up in rear of the English trenches, doing but little damage. The Lancaster guns (a new invention now tried for the first time in war), of which there were several in our batteries, sent forth the missiles with a rushing noise exactly like that of a railway train, and were distinguishable at each discharge amid the din of the cannonade.

At one o'clock the French and English fleets, whose attack had been anxiously expected, stood in, and engaged the forts at the mouth of the harbour, the former on the south, the latter on the north side; and the deep volleying thunder of their broadsides, continuing without an instant's pause, gave a new character to the cannonade, while a dense canopy of smoke, hanging heavily above the scene, hid the sea, the harbour, and the town, from the spectators on the heights in front of the English camp. The Agamemnon and the Sanspareil maintained on this occasion a position much nearer to the forts than the rest of the fleet, which anchored, for the most part, at upwards of 2000 yards.

When the fire ceased at nightfall, and the gains and losses were counted up, the result was by no means commensurate with the expectations previously entertained by the allied army. High authority had been quoted for the opinion that we should silence the Russian batteries in a few hours. The less sanguine had prescribed three days as the limits of the contest. Our progress hitherto had fallen short even of the latter estimate. On the Russian side many guns had been disabled, the works had been much damaged, and Fort Constantine was said to be seriously shrunken by the fire of the two line-of-battle ships; but on ours, the French attack had totally ceased since the explosions of the morning. The Russian works, being of earth like our own, were repaired with equal facility, and the disabled guns were replaced by fresh ones from the arsenal. It was while watching the renewing vigour of the enemy's fire, and seeing our own wounded borne by from the trenches, that we received on the 18th the mail bringing the absurd and mischievous announcement of the fall of Sebastopol, and read the details of our own imaginary victory—an announcement happily characterised afterwards in a newspaper article as "discounting" the glory of the conquest. It was robbing success of its best rewards thus to give us honours before they were due.

The interest excited by a contest of artillery, without decided advantage on either side, soon languishes; and in a few days the thunder of the bombardment was almost unheeded. But the troops in the trenches and batteries were hardly worked, and exposed by day incessantly to a tremendous fire. The space in the magazines in our batteries was at first insufficient to hold ammunition for the day's consumption, and to take in fresh supplies formed one of the most trying duties which artillery-men can be called on to perform. Waggons filled with powder, drawn by horses of the field-batteries, were driven down the face of a hill for upwards of half a mile, in full view, and quite within range of the enemy's guns. A shell hursting in the waggons would have blown horses and men into the air; and to the risk of this were added the usual chances being struck by shot or splinters; yet neither the officers (often mere boys) nor the drivers ever showed the slightest hesitation in proceeding on their perilous errand. Several horses were killed by cannon-shot, and on one occasion a shell, lodging between the spokes of a wheel, exploded there, blowing off three wheels and the side of the waggon, and blackening the cases of powder without igniting their contents. Hitherto the attention of the Allies had been concentrated on the fortress, but on the 20th October a new element forced itself into their calculations. Russian troops showed themselves on the cluster of low heights which, as before mentioned, divide the valley of the Tchernaya into two defiles. Some Cossack horsemen lounged about the meadows at about two thousand yards from our position, and about fifty infantry soldiers, emerging from a ravine in the heights, crossed to the river for water, remaining for some time on the bank of the stream, and returning with a deliberation which showed they felt secure of support if molested. A body of cavalry with some guns also posted itself on the Bakshimeroad, near the bridge which crosses the Tchernaya there, and close to the meadow where our own artillery had bivouacked on the night of the flank march. From day to day this force seemed to be augmented, and was judged to be the rearguard of an army whose numbers, being hidden in the farther defile, were unknown.

On the night of the 20th a sortie was made by the garrison on the French trenches. The Russians, calling out in French, "*Ne tirez pas, nous sommes Anglais*," penetrated into the works without opposition, and bayoneted some of the defenders, but were speedily repulsed with a loss of six killed and four wounded. During the next few nights some Russian guns of the heights in the valley once or twice opened fire on the Turks garrisoning the outpost in front of Balaklava, without result.

CHAP. XI.—ATTACK ON BALAKLAVA.

In the description of our position, the line of outposts occupied by the Turks was said to be on a range of low hills, crossing the plain from below the heights of the plateau to the opposite mountains near the village of Kamara. Between these hills the plain slopes upward from Balaklava to a ridge, and down on the opposite side, where the valley, as before mentioned, is divided into two defiles, the one sweeping round to the left under the heights of the plateau held by the Allies, the other passing straight on to the Tchernaya. In this latter defile, and on the low eminences dividing it from the other, the Russian army, now numbering thirty thousand men, under General Liprandi, was posted.

At daybreak on the 25th the Russian guns on the eminences and in the valley commenced a cannonade on the outposts held by the Turks. A troop of horse-artillery and a field-battery, supported by the Scots Greys, were ordered up from Balaklava to the slopes between the outposts, and found themselves opposed to the fire of several field-batteries and some guns of position, which covered an advance of infantry against the hills on the right. As the troop was armed only with six-pounders, it and the field-battery were quite overmatched, both in metal and in numbers; nevertheless, our artillery maintained the contest till its ammunition was exhausted, when it retired, having lost a good many horses and a few