



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 1856.

VOL. VII.

No. 4.

THE ALMA REVISITED.

(From the Special Correspondent of the Times.)

I have now gone twice to the Alma, and have examined the ground of the battle with the ignorance of a civilian and the interest of a Great Briton. The road from the place upon which for one long year the hopes and fears and anxieties of civilised Europe were concentrated leads down from the ridge on which the battle of Inkermann was mainly fought to the deep ravine out of which materials for the mansions, quays, harbors, docks, and forts of Sebastopol have been hewed. It presents a wild and desolate aspect. The slabs of oolite tower perpendicularly for several hundred feet on the right hand and the left to the verge of the elevated plateau, and rise, like great white walls of masonry, aloft from a base of huge blocks and disintegrated masses of the same substance. This ravine, deepening as it descends, falls at right angles to the valley through which the Tchernaya eats its way to the head of the Roads of Sebastopol. At the lower end of the ravine the aqueduct spans it, and then is carried on a light and handsome bridge of masonry, supported on ten or twelve arches right across, and disappears in a tunnel through the solid rock on the left hand side. Passing underneath through one of the arches, you find yourself by the banks of the sluggish Tchernaya, and a ride of five hundred yards or so past the perpendicular cliffs, perforated with caves, which bound the margin of the valley, leads you to the causeway across the marsh towards Inkermann. An excellent wooden bridge built by our engineers stretches across the river; and the marsh beyond is crossed by a high causeway. Arrived at the end of the causeway, the cliffs of northern Inkermann are above you, and the road winds up a ravine which leads you to their recesses. A curious chapel and monastery in the caves is visible in the face of the cliff. Embrasures are above, before, and on each side of you on entering these fastnesses.—The black pupils of these dull eyes have been removed, but there is enough of the works left to show how hot and frequent they could have flashed on you in their anger. There are five batteries on various points of this ravine, and the slopes of the plateau afford many fine sites for field artillery or guns of position. The road is good. On the right about a mile from the entrance of the ravine, are numerous deep shafts in the clay, from which the Russians draw their supply of water. The road winds gradually upwards till it leads you to the level of the north plateau of Inkermann, just as the Quarries road took you down from the south plateau to the level of the valley of the Tchernaya, from which you are now ascending. Here is the Russian camp, at which we have so often gazed from the heights on the right of our position. It is now very much altered in appearance. The huts have been abandoned, and the men are living in a very pretty, clean, and well kept tent of canvas; but the purloins are very dirty, and have the usual disagreeable smell of Russian quarters.—The tents are square in shape, and at the top, which tapers to a point from the side of the wall, there is a knob, gilt or painted, which gives them an air of finish. The paths or streets of the camp are bordered with wild flowers and fir branches. The regiments stationed here belong to the Seventh Division, which forms the First Division of the third corps d'armes, and number about 6,000 men. There is a brigade of field artillery—two batteries—close to this camp, and the pieces are very well kept, and in excellent condition. The cantonments extend as far as the heights over the valley of the Belbek on the left hand side, and could have contained 18,000 men, which considerably exceeds the strength of the whole of the Seventh Division. A steep road descending from the verge of the plateau at the point where the Russian bazaar is established leads to the Belbek, which is crossed by two bridges. One of these is a fine, well-built new structure of wood; the other is that by which the army crossed in the flank march, and the post-house near which Sir George Cathcart took up his quarters still remains intact. The Fourth Division bivouacked here the night before we entered Balaklava, when Lord Raglan slept at Traktir on the Tchernaya, and Sir George was very uneasy on account of his isolated position, separated, as he was, from the rest of the army, and believing that a body of Russians intervened between them. It was from this that General Windham rode with despatches to the Katcha, anticipating Commander Maxse's arrival from the Tchernaya by more than an hour, and from this neighborhood the army turned towards Mackenzie. Lord Raglan reconnoitred Sebastopol from a hillock close to the road on the right, a short time before we fell in with the rear guard and baggage of the enemy. Duvarkoi, or Belbek, is greatly changed since then—the trees have been cut down, and the valley once so beautiful, blooms no more. The villas have been used as hospitals, and there are many Russian graves, marked with black wooden crosses, in the neighboring ravines. From this valley you ascend another steep hill to

the top of the plateau which lies between it and the valley of the Katcha. The ground is covered with dwarf trees and thick brushwood, full of lizards and small birds, which are persecuted by numerous falcons and hawks. There are patches of naked ground and ashes scattered over the plateau which show where parties of the enemy were encamped; but the country is not suited for large bodies of men, as water is not to be had, except at the rivers. The plateau is intersected by numerous woods and ravines, and the tracks followed by the Allied armies are plainly visible. They have been much used by the Russians. A ride of three quarters of an hour takes us to the valley of the Katcha, still beautiful and rich with verdure, for this part of it is too far from the immediate operation of war, and too much out of the track from Bakshisera, to have suffered much. The place which we approach was once the village of Eskel; it is now in ruins. The Tartar houses are pulled down or unroofed, the population have fled, and the Russian houses are just as they were left by the Cossacks on our approach after the Alma. The church gleams brightly through the dense branches of the fruit trees, which are covered with blossoms, but the large tracts of vineyards which welcomed us nearly three years ago are now uncultivated.—The doctor's house is in a sad plight, one of the first we entered after the Alma, and is still the picture of neglect and ruin. Lord Raglan's comfortable residence is in the custody of an old Tartar, who shows the broken furniture, the sofas ripped open, the chairs smashed, and the beds cut up, with great pride, and leads one to infer pretty plainly that Ruskie did all the mischief. It was at this village that the Russians halted to recover breath after their headlong flight from the Alma, and from it they fled the same night in panic on the cry being raised that the Allies were coming. The Katcha is a deep narrow stream with rotten banks, and some people think it would have afforded a better position than the Alma; but, in fact, it is too near Sebastopol. We found a few Russian soldiers in the houses; and on the first occasion it happened to be the Greek Easter Sunday, and we were most hospitably entertained by a poor Russian family, who insisted upon our partaking of painted eggs, of salt pork steeped in vinegar, and cabbage, of brown bread, butter, vodka or white home-made brandy, and Crimean tobacco, and then on embracing us because we were Christians—a severe punishment, which, if often repeated, might lead to recantation. Crossing the Katcha by the bridge over which our army fled into Eskel, we find ourselves on the steppe—the dry barren plain studded with tumuli, which extends in wavy folds right away to Perekop.—At this season of the year it is glorious, with large beds of wild flowers, sweet pea, roses, nigronette, thyme, orchids of all kinds, sweet William, and many other varieties, whose tame and developed species are the ornaments of our gardens at home; it is musical, too, with the song of birds singing to mates in the nest; but in September it is an arid scorched waste, covered with coarse hay, and, as it is devoid of water, it is unfit for pasture. The ride to the Alma from the Katcha is not more than eight miles, but it seems twice the distance. The white telegraph station, over the river, which stood on the Russian left, can be seen for many miles on a clear day, but on the steppe mirage is very common, and the horizon rarely well defined. It is often lost in a fantastic margin resembling the sea line of an agitated ocean. Bustards, on the qui vive about their young ones, soar slowly before us, and eagles, vultures, and many species of falcons are visible in pursuit of their prey, which must consist for the most part of hares, which are very large and numerous. Some of these hares have been found to weigh 10 lb. or 12 lb., and I have heard of a monster who turned the scale at 14 lb. In one of the hollows in the steppe, about three miles from the Alma, there is a small hamlet, but, with this exception, not a habitation is visible over the whole of this vast expanse of land sea. It is famous ground for a long canter, or as much of a gallop as your horse will stand; so with the help of an occasional scurry after a hare the distance melts away, and as we go crushing through the sweet flowers the telegraph rises higher and clearer till we pull up at the mound on which it stands. This was the scene of a fierce struggle, and it was here the French had some really hard fighting before they forced the enemy to fly. The French had put the right date, the 20th, but the Russians had obliterated it and altered it to their own style.—There are 15 large sepulchral mounds, around the telegraph, wherein lie French and Russians, and the ravines are still full of bones, and of fragments of clothing and accoutrements. Cannon shot appear to have been carefully removed. There is an excellent view of the French position and attack from the edge of the plateau. The enemy must have had every movement of the Allies under their eyes from the time they left Bouljanak till they halted to form for battle, during the action by Captain Montagu, Royal Engineers, and a party of Sappers and Miners. The bridge has been substantially rebuilt by

Russians declare they had only 33,000 or 34,000 on the field; but, admitting that to be so, they made a bad fight, considering the position they occupied, and their cavalry exhibited that passive and unenterprising character which it maintained through the war. An officer of the old Pestal regiment told me that he charged our first attacking body when they were checked with the bayonet, and that if all the troops inside and on the flanks of the redoubts had rushed out simultaneously the day would have been lost to us; but he was surprised when he heard that our Third and Fourth Divisions were still intact, and that the Guards, whom he supposed to have been routed, were never broken except in the centre, where the Scots Fusiliers wavered for a moment in their advance under the heavy fire of the Russians, and the pressure of the disjoined groups of the Light Divisions. The French are disposed to think that the English were too slow in beginning the attack, which it was agreed should not take place till our allies had gained the left of the Russian position. It is certain that Lord Raglan received one, if not two, pressing messages from Marshal St. Arnaud to hasten his columns; but one may ask how it was that here, as everywhere else, the honor of taking the initiative was ceded to our allies, and the opportunity given to them of saying—"The English were too late?" They only numbered 23,000, whereas we had about 27,000. Standing on the banks of the Alma, one has many bitter reflections to make, and all the glories of that field cannot sweeten them. The battle itself was one of the most brilliant in the world—the shortest and sharpest—and our army, young in battle but veteran in service, displayed the best qualities of British infantry. We have since heard of the incredulity, of the dismay, with which the news was received in St. Petersburg, and of the subsequent eagerness of the Russian army to avenge the defeat, and to hurry to the Crimea to drive the Allies into the sea. They found a barrier they could not break at Inkermann; but they are a people prone to put faith in their own invincibility, and slow to credit defeat, and they believe in themselves even yet.

The position of the Alma is so well marked that it can never be mistaken by any future visitors. The French attacked the steep and almost perpendicular cliffs, which are broken here and there by ravines which mount upwards from the river. They were divided from us by the most marked and extensive of these ravines, and eastward of that boundary the whole of the ground suddenly falls, and instead of rising abruptly from the Alma, gains the high level of the hills by a series of sweeping undulations, offering many positions for guns, with extensive glacis to the front. Descending from the plateau, some of our party crossed the bridge, and went out on the plain towards Bouljanak to the tunuks which stud the plains, and which denote the extreme range of the Russian guns. On turning round towards the south the eye takes in the whole scene of battle, from the sea on the right to the low slopes which formed the right of the Russian position. Their left was separated from their right by a deep ravine running at right angles towards the Alma, and this ravine also is the boundary between the high and steep cliffs which overhang the tortuous course of the Alma on the south bank from the ford to the sea, and the gentler rising grounds on which the enemy's left lay, and which were strengthened by the redoubt and by the mass of the Russian artillery. It will then be seen how the Russian left depended on the nature of the ground as its best defence, and what a fatal mistake Menschikoff committed when he omitted to take into consideration the effect of the fire of the ships. That fire soon drove back their left, and forced it to re-form on the centre, which it put into confusion, and the French, ascending by the ravines with the utmost courage and activity, made good their footing on the right, and turned the Russian left completely, with comparatively little loss. The advance of our allies was covered to a great extent by the thick foliage on the banks of the Alma, and the cliffs are so high and rotten that guns could not be used with success against them. The river is much further from the base of the cliffs than it is from the slopes on the Russian right, where the British attacked, so that it would be scarcely commanded by guns on the top of the plateau, whereas we were under fire for several hundred yards before we reached the Alma at all.

A huge mound, composed of 15 or 16 gigantic graves, at the distance of 400 or 500 yards from the river on its north side, denotes the resting-place of those who fell before the army crossed the stream, or who died after flight in the ambulances. The road by which we advanced to the bridge is just as it was on the 20th of September, and on the right, close to the stream, are the blackened ruins of the village of Bourliouk. It will be remembered that the enemy partially destroyed the bridge, but that it was repaired during the action by Captain Montagu, Royal Engineers, and a party of Sappers and Miners. The bridge has been substantially rebuilt by

means of a strong wooden way thrown across the stone arches, and supported by beams and uprights. The old post-office on the right of the road before you come to the bridge is about being reconstructed, and a guard of soldiers were lodged in its ruins. It will be, to all appearances, a handsome house of fine white freestone when it is finished. I surveyed its ruins with peculiar interest, for I know a person very intimately who took shelter in this house, part of which was on fire, to get out of a fire still hotter, till he was driven out by a shell falling through the roof, and it was at the wall outside, which is yet torn by shot, that I met the first two wounded officers I saw that day—two officers of the 30th, one hit through the chest or side; the other wounded, I think, in the leg or arm. They were helping each other from the river, bleeding and weak, and I was fortunate enough to be able to bring to their aid a Staff Surgeon, belonging, I believe, to the Cavalry Division, who kindly examined their wounds under fire. Close to this I had previously seen the first man killed—a drummer, who was carrying a litter, and who was struck by a round shot which bowled slowly along the road and hit him, with a peculiar squashing sound, on the hip. He fell broken in two, and never moved; nor did his comrade, who was carrying the other end of the litter, stop to mourn over his death. After the intrepid rush of the Light Division up the hill, its wavering, its slow and broken and unwilling halt, the bold advance of Pennefather's Brigade, and the billow-like march of the Guards, I was happy again in being able to warn Colonel Waddy, as he approached at the head of the 50th, that he was moving right along the line of fire of the enemy's guns, and, as there was a very conclusive proof given of the correctness of the statement just as I spoke, that gallant officer moved off his men, who were in dense column, a little to the left, and got off the road to the fields, whence he rapidly advanced towards the heights. All these things, and many more came back upon me as I looked around. I could recall that narrow road filled with dead and dying—poor young Burgoyne going past on his litter, crying out cheerily, "It's all right—it's only my foot!" "Billy Fitzgerald," shot through both legs, lying up against the wall, and chattering away as if he had just sat down after a quadrille; a white-haired field officer (of the 55th), whose name I don't know, badly wounded through the body, who could only moan bitterly, "Oh my poor men! oh my poor men! they hadn't a chance;" then the river stained here and there with blood, still flowing from the dead and dying who lay on the shallows and the banks, lined nevertheless by hundreds, who drank its waters eagerly; the horrid procession of the dripping litters going to the rear of the fight; the solid mass of Adam's brigade, halted by Lord Raglan's orders, as it merged from the smoke of Bourliouk; the staff itself and the Commander-in-Chief, gathered on the rising ground close by; that ghastly battle-field where so many lay in so small a place putrescent with heat and wounds, the grey blocks of Russians melting away like clouds, and drifted off by the fierce breath of battle; the shriek and rush of the shells from the brass howitzers in the battery, the patter of the rifle, the rattling roll of the musketry, the frantic cheers of our men as they stood victors on the heights, drowning the groans and cries which for a moment succeeded the roar of battle; the shrill flourish of the French bugles, and the joyous clangor of their drums from the other side of the ravine—all came back upon the ear again, and the eye renewed its pleasure as it gazed from the ridge upon the plain where it had before seen the Russians flying in disorder, with their rear still covered by the threatening squadrons of their cavalry. Then one recaptured the spot where one had seen some friend lying dead, or some one—friend or foe—whom it were no mercy to strive to keep alive—Watkin Wynn, stretched on the ground in front of the trench, with a smile on his face—Colonel Chester, with a scornful frown, and his sword clutched in the death grasp—Monck, with the anger of battle fixed on every feature—these and many another friend in the peaceful camp of Aladyn or Devno rose up as they lived in the memory. The scowling Russians who glared so fiercely on their conquerors and seemed to hate them even as they supplied their wants, then seen for the first time, left an impression respecting the type of the Muscovite character which has scarcely been effaced now that they have ceased to be "messieurs nos amis l'enemis." I recalled the two days passed as no army ought to pass two days—on the field of battle, amid the dead—the horrid labors of those hours of despondency and grief where all should have been triumph and rejoicing and the awakened vigor with which the army broke from its bivouac on the Alma and set out with no certain aim, no fixed project, on its chance march which fate has made so successful and so prosperous.

The intrenchment can be distinctly seen for a mile north of the river. It is a place half-way down the slope of the little hillside. There were no other works, trenches, redoubts, or fieldworks

of any description, and all the accounts of such defences filled with riflemen and guns which have been made public were erroneous. The enemy had very few riflemen, and the ground, except on the extreme left, was of such a nature that good cover for guns could be had for the seeking. For many years to come the battlefield is likely to remain as it is now, the only difference being that the vines which flourished on the 20th of September, 1854, may be cultivated once more. On ascending from the river towards the intrenchment, you find yourself on the left completely covered by a rise of the hill in front of the parapet, so that men could form in this hollow for the attack without being exposed to fire; but the Russians, aware of this, sat down on their extreme right large bodies of infantry who fired at the Left Brigade of the Light Division as they were trying to get into order after crossing the river. On the right, nearer to the bridge, the ground is more exposed to guns from the parapet of the trench, and on advancing a few yards the fair open glacis, gently sloping upwards to their muzzles, gives a terrible solution of the reason for a time the Light Division was held in check, and lost in a few moments upwards of 1000 men. At the base of this glacis, and scattered along the ridge towards the river, are mounds of earth about 30 feet long by 15 in breadth, which are covered with large stones and slabs of slate. There are 15 or 16 of these mounds, and many of them contain the remains of friends and foes. Some small black wooden crosses are placed here and there among these mounds, which rise to the height of two or three feet above the level of the plain, and are all covered with rank vegetation and wild flowers. The parapet of the work is still about three feet outside, and a foot deeper in the trench inside. Near the centre is placed a handsome monument of white stone, with the following inscription:—"During the attack on these heights, 20th Sept., 1854, her Britannic Majesty's 23rd Royal Welsh Fusiliers lost their commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel H. Chester, Captains A. W. Wynn, F. Evans, J. Conolly, Lieutenants P. Radcliffe, Sir W. Young, Bart., J. Anstruther, and J. Butler, all killed on the field; also Lieutenant Appletonwhite, mortally wounded, who died 22nd Sept., 1854. This stone is erected to their memory." On the other side,—"The regiment also lost Sergeant J. H. Jones, Colour-Sergeant R. Hitchcock, J. F. Edwards, L drummer, and 40 privates killed on the field."

In the ditch of the fieldwork there are about 20 large graves covered with long grass and wild flowers. The trench is about 150 yards long, and it is filled with earth which has tumbled down into it from the parapet; the traces of the embrasures still remain. There are two stone crosses erected inside the trench on heaps of dead. This is all that remains to betoken the scene of action on our side, except a few pieces of threadbare rags, and bits of accoutrements, leather straps, old slaks, and fragments of cowhide knapsacks. And so I take leave of the Alma, which henceforth shall be celebrated in history to the end of time.

HIRED HEROES.

(From the Nation.)

The military ardor of a nation is irrepressible; it must have vent, and if denied opportunity of developing itself in the ordinary and legitimate way, it does in some other. Let warlike people be brought into subjection by a stronger power, and denied the privilege of bearing arms for their own country, and they are at once found joining into bands of brigands, or flying to some country where they can give play to their martial tastes, as volunteers, free lances or mercenaries. When the remnant of the Irish army that fell, covered with glory, on the slopes of Kilemadaun, sailed from Limerick with Sarsfield at their head, and transferred to a foreign country their fealty and valour, their ranks were continuously recruited from Ireland, and from end to end of the land, that immortal Legion was regarded as the Irish army. No matter for what king or crown they fought; no matter in what cause they drew their swords, their glory and renown was Ireland's and every deed that rung through Europe, from Fontenoy to Cremona, was a national victory for the island of the West. All this time the army of Queen Victoria's ancestor held the Irish towns and castles; and, we need scarcely remark, that the most glorious victory of the Irish army was that where the two crossed swords on slopes of St. Antoine. But even at home, and in a far less chivalrous manner, the martial spirit, denied other means of exercise, displayed itself; guerrilla bands spread over the country, and, years after they had degenerated to mere brigands, were objects of boast and pride to the Irish people who gloried in the daring feats by flood and field, of the bold Rapparees. When the penal law forbidding an Irish Catholic to bear arms was relaxed, and the master removed the gyve that the slave might strike the better for him, the Irish army abroad had ceased to exist,