

# FOULS FOR THE FLAG

## The Siege of San Sebastian

(Continued from last Saturday.)  
 On the morning of the 7th their array was broken by the slippery rocks, over which they stumbled as they charged, and by the fire which scoured them from the summit of the wall on their left. But they reached the breach, swept up it without a pause, and gained its narrow crest. They found themselves on the edge of a gulf, barred at its further edge by a towering rampart, from which flashed incessantly the flame of the French muskets; while from every side a storm of bullets swept over them. The flow of the eager soldiers up the breach was constant, but there was no living in the deadly fire that raged on the crest. The attack on the half bastion of St. John was equally obstinate and bloody, and equally ineffective. The breach was flanked by a traverse held by French grenadiers; it was scourged by guns from every angle. The British could not force their way; they would not yield, and they fell fast and thick. Still the attack was fed by fresh troops; but both breaches were barred as by a sword of flame.

The volunteers from the other divisions had been held back with difficulty so far, and were now calling out to know "why they had been brought there if they were not to lead the assault." They were being let loose, and, to quote Napier, "went like a whirlwind to the breaches, and again the crowded masses swarmed up the face of the ruins; but reaching the crest lines they came down again like a falling wall. Crowd after crowd were seen to mount, to totter, and to sink. The deadly French fire was unabated. The smoke floated away, and the crest of the breach bore no living man."

This dreadful struggle, with its tumult and bloodshed, the passionate heroism of the attack, the unyielding valour of the defence, lasted for two hours. The lesser breach had been assailed by the Portuguese, under Scougras, with no better fortune.

Graham had watched the long struggle from a battery on the farther side of the Trumes. He saw that valor could accomplish no more on the blood-stained breaches, and he restored to an expedient of singular daring. He turned fifty heavy pieces on the parapet of the high curtain, which he barred the breach. The British soldiers clung to the slope of the breach only a few feet below the level at which the British guns were firing; but the British gunners, after five days' continuous firing, knew the ranges precisely, and the practice was perfect. A tempest of shot, which broke the edge of the high curtain, broke down its traverses, and slew the exultant French infantry that lined it. For thirty minutes the whirlwind of flame, the ramparts of the curtain were scoured; then, suddenly, a series of explosions ran along the crest of the parapet. All the stores of powder-barrels, live shells, hand-grenades, &c., piled there took fire. The curtain was lost for a moment to sight in a cloud of smoke through which ran the shock, and the wavering flame of the explosion. Three hundred French grenadiers were destroyed in a moment; then through the smoke, on the staggering French came the British stormers, mad with the passion of combat, and the rage bred of the long slaughter they had suffered. The French colors on the horn-work were plucked down by Lieutenant Gathin of the 11th. The French clung to their broken defences with amazing valor, but were thrust back fiercely and triumphantly by the British; and, after five hours of dreadful combat at the walls, the whirlwind of battle swept into the town.

Fraser, who watched the assault from a battery across the river, describes the spectacle of the assault as "awful." He took pencil notes of the assault, from a moment to moment, part of which is reproduced here. It gives the great struggle, so to speak, as in the present tense.

Minutes taken during the assault of San Sebastian, August 31.—  
 "It begins (5 minutes before 11) They reach the top of the breach. A mine springs, behind them! All seems well. They reach the top and halt—if they are supported it will do."  
 "Mirador of St. Elmo do not fire. Men run too early to old breach—too little to junction of demi-bastion and curtain. 11:35: Much firing. Troops do not advance. Bugles blown across to left in detached columns, men pass creek up to knees; advance nobly at double quick; fourteen taken back wounded with grape, about fifty more turn back; main body advance. Lieutenant Gathin, 11th Regiment, acting engineer, runs to the Portuguese to storm with them. The Portuguese get across at 11:45, but with great loss. At the breaches all is stationary. Another reinforcement runs from trenches to breach. 11:50: More reinforcements from trenches to breach. Noon: Much grape in all directions from the enemy's batteries. Breaches are filled. . . . 12:10: Fire slackens on all sides. At a quarter-past eleven a letter was brought across the water by Private O'Neil, of the 4th (Portuguese run from the breach), from Lord Wellington, asking Sir Thomas Graham if he can spare Bradford's brigade, as Bonje comes on in force. 12:15: Advancing from breach of retired wall; smoke prevents clear view. Lodgement apparently secure. Two more mines blown up on curtain. 12:25: Troops again try the end of curtain; our own shots strike close over their heads. The place will be taken. Our men run from the curtain. . . . 12:40: Men going down from the old breach into the town; will do, they wave their hats from the terre plane of the curtain. Another reinforcement from trenches. Our men fire from right of right round tower. This bounds our ground to right. 1 p.m.: More reinforcements from trenches. This duty is well performed, whoever may direct it. Men enter the town, principally by the end of old breach next round tower. One man of 1st Guards runs alone to the part of the parapet, twenty yards to the right of the right tower, and a sergeant and a few Portuguese by right breach of all. They gain it by getting on the old foundation of Marshal Berwick's wall. The enemy lines the stockade. The enemy runs from the rampart behind that stockade. All goes well. 1:10: Two of our shots go through the stockade; the enemy abandons it. One brave French officer and two men alone remain; they too are gone. 1:15: Enemy still holds end of the curtain next the cav-

aller; he should be forced at that point. The gun at St. Elmo fired. 1:30: And again—it must be silenced. Very heavy fire of musketry in the town. Horse-work decidedly ours. 1:35: The gun at St. Elmo more and more troublesome. Firing in the town continues and increases. Few men comparatively on breaches; chiefly in hollow of retired wall between end of curtain and left tower; they are now entering the town. The flag was struck on the castle when the assault began. 1:35: More reinforcements to breach from trenches. No fire or men to be seen on trenches. Wind very high; sand blows and destroys the view. Many prisoners brought into trenches from the town. Tide has begun to flow. 1:45: Heavy musketry in the town. Our bugles sound the advance in all parts of the town. Our men are pulling prisoners out by the breach. The enemy retire. 1:50: Fire in town slackens. 2 a.m.: Marshal Beresford and Sir Thomas Graham come to the battery. Town seems to be in our hands. 2:00: Heavy firing again on fire near the right breach. 2:5: News of Sir Richard Fletcher's death! 2:15: Firing in town continues, but is decreasing. Grenades carried into town from trenches. 2:45: Great fire and smoke in centre of town near the square. Two mines explode in the town. 3 p.m.: Mules with ammunition going from trenches to town. Three fires in the town. Between rain, and smoke, and black sky, it is very dark. 3:30: Great fire in the town; as dark as it is generally at half-past six. Nothing of the town to be seen from excessively smoke. A thunderstorm which had been gathering round the crest of the shaggy summits of the nearest mountains now broke upon the city; and perhaps a wilder scene than that which was now presented has seldom been witnessed. The town was inflamed. The streets were filled with the crash of musketry volleys, the oaths and shouts of contending men; while overhead rolled the deep voice of thunder, and from the black sky the incessant lightning leaped. The French commandant fell back, fighting with sullen valor; to Monte Orgullo, from which he was only to be driven by a new sally; but the town itself had fallen. Yet at what a price had this victory been won! The slaughter at the breaches was dreadful. Of the 700 volunteers who were "to show other troops how to mount a breach" every second man had fallen. The total loss of the assault, in killed and wounded, amounted to 2000 men. Many officers of rank fell. The troops, it may be added, when they broke into the town, got completely out of hand; and a shadow which blazes the fame of the splendid and obstinate valor by which the breaches were carried is cast by the scenes of cruelty and license which followed the assault. The men who

swept the streets of the unhappy city as that night fall were drunk with the long madness of the fight, and Graham had no fresh troops at hand which he could march into the town to enforce order. Fraser, it may be added, gives a realistic picture of the town as seen after the attack:—"I have been in the town, and over that part of it which the flames or the enemy will permit to be visited. The scene is dreadful; no words can convey half the horrors which strike the eye at every step. Heaps of dead in every corner; English, French, and Portuguese lying wounded on each other; with such resolution did one side attack and the other defend. The town is not plundered; it is sacked. Rapine has done her work, nothing is left. I had occasion, in going to General Hay, to go into several houses. Some had been elegantly furnished. All was ruin; rich hangings, women's apparel, children's clothes, all scattered in utter confusion. The very few inhabitants I saw said nothing. They were fixed in stupid horror, and seemed to gaze with indifference at all around them, hardly moving when the crash of a fallen house made our

men run away. The hospitals present a shocking sight; friends and enemies lying together, all equally neglected. Napier says that "the place was won by accident"—the "accident" being the explosion of the powder-barrels and grenades along the high curtain. But that accident was due to Graham's happy use of the British artillery in the very crisis of the assault. Jones in his "Journal," says that "on inspecting the defences it was found that the tremendous artillery fire on the high curtain, though it lasted only twenty minutes, had dismounted every gun but two. Many of these pieces had their muzzles shot away, and the artillerymen lay mutilated at their stations. The parapet was thickly strewed with headless bodies." But the terrible effects of that cannonade only suggest how gross was the blunder of not making this use of the batteries earlier. It belongs to the alphabet of the engineer's art; that the fire which guards a breach should be mastered before the breach itself is assailed. A great step, however, like a great battle, is usually a catalogue of blunders. In the story of San Sebastian these blunders are thrown into even blacker relief by the dazzling splendor of the course shown by both men and of officers in that great struggle on the blood-stained breach, and through the blackened streets of the city the French had defended with so much skill and courage.

"Did she write her husband's epitaph?"  
 "Yes; she was bound to have the last say."



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