

of September comes the fourth bombardment, which preceded the fall of the famous fortress.

It had been rather a sore subject in the —th that Hugh Fleming had met with no reward for the taking of the Quarries. He had brought the victorious but shattered band back to camp, and the regiment, though proud of the "Well done, —th!" with which their Brigadier had ridden up and congratulated them the next day, were still alike hurt that no honours had been vouched to them in recognition of this their first deed of daring in the Crimea. Poor Grogan's step had been filled up by the senior subaltern who happened not to be present in the trenches on that occasion. But that Byng should have had a brevet-majority, and that a company should have been found for Hugh Fleming, the corps was unanimously of opinion. If there was not one vacant in the regiment, there could be no difficulty in finding such a thing just now. Every probability, indeed, of there being considerable promotion to bestow very shortly, as it was pretty generally understood that the assault would take place in the next day or two.

The regiment is for the trenches this night, and Byng and Hugh Fleming are standing in front of the former's tent, watching the storm of shot and shell that is raining down upon the doomed city, and to which the Muscovite still replies sullenly and fiercely, if not quite so vigorously as he did three days ago.

"We shall hear for certain when we get to the brigade grounds," said Byng, "but I should fancy it will come off to-night. This *feu d'enfer* can't go on much longer, we haven't the ammunition for it; we've silenced some of their guns, but it will be a toughish job all the same."

"Yes," replied Fleming, "they are no flinchers, and not likely to give in without hard fighting. Here comes the Adjutant, about to tell you off to some peculiarly delicate piece of work, shouldn't wonder."

"I've just run across, Hugh," said the official in question, "to shake hands and congratulate you on your company, although I'm sorry to say we are going to lose you."

"Lose him!" said Byng. What on earth do you mean?"

"I've just had a note from a chum of mine, Kenyon, he's on the Head-quarter staff you know, and he tells me that the Quarry Gazette has come, and that Hugh here is transferred to a Lieutenantancy and Captaincy in the Grenadier Guards. You've got your brevet old man. There are no general orders to-night. They are too busy, I suppose, down at Head-quarters, but you'll both be gazetted to-morrow."

"We mean business to-night then," said Hugh.

"Assault to-morrow, all along the line," replied the Adjutant. "Three rockets from the French rings up the curtain. Once more, congratulations on your promotion, though as I said before, we shall all be very sorry to lose you."

"Well, I shall have one last turn with the old regiment, anyhow," said Hugh.

"Yes, and a pretty lively one too," said the Adjutant, laughing, "for, from what the brigade-major told me, we are to be in the thick of the fun from the very beginning. However, as far as that goes, I fancy there will be very few left out of the game before it's finished. Ah, there goes the fall in," and all three officers hurried off to the parade-ground in answer to the shrill note of the bugle. "Well," said Tom as they walked up and down, "I wonder how you will get on in the guards? Out here, their life is pretty much the same as ours, but your promotion will most likely take you home, and then you will find soldiering in London very different from soldiering in garrison towns and country quarters."

"But I don't want to go home," said Hugh. "There's a battalion of the Grenadiers out here; I suppose I can join that? Why should I be sent home?"

"Because there's lots of fellows in England dying to come out here; because you've had your chance, and are bound to give some of the others theirs, because you're the junior of your rank, and, like other juniors, must expect to do the dirty work,

drill recruits, lick stout young labourers into soldiers, etc."

"By Jove, I never thought of that!" rejoined Hugh. "This promotion isn't half as good a thing as I thought it. I'd rather hang on, and get a company in my own regiment."

"Nonsense!" said Byng, laughing. "Pay, promotion, and plunder, are the three things that they say a soldier should never pass when they come in his way. But here comes the chief, fall in."

A few minutes more, and the —th found themselves part of a long, dark column, which was winding like a serpent on its way to the trenches. The heavy roar of the artillery was incessant. Shells whistled and spluttered through the soft summer night, the air seemed alive with meteors, and every now and then a heavy thud, followed by an angry explosion that burst close to the winding column, and the sudden stumbling of two or three men, proved the messenger of death had been launched only too successfully. The advanced trenches were gradually crammed with men, and bitterly did the chiefs of the reserves deplore the lack of one or more sheltered *places d'armes* wherein they might bestow their men. That the Russians after all these months of practice should have got the range of pretty well every part of our lines it is easy to imagine, but fortunately the pitching a shell from a distance with accuracy into a ditch, which is what a trench virtually is, is a task that tries the powers of the most expert Artilleryman. But where the trench expanded into a battery, it was very different. There the Muscovite had a bigger target to aim at, and the men who served their guns suffered terribly during the concluding months of the siege. All through the night roared the thundrous cannonade on both sides, the air hissed and hurtled with the savage missiles, while in the crowded trenches pulses beat high, and men strained their eyes in search of the first grey streaks which should herald the coming day.

"Daylight," said Byng, pointing to the sky.

"Now for it," muttered many an anxious lip, and with ears erect men awaited the sharp word of command from their chiefs, and the shrill cry of a bugle. Neither came, and slowly the word ran through the trenches that there would be no assault until the Artillerymen had had some hours' pounding at the Russian lines. Our foes had taught our leaders a lesson, and, shown that much as our guns might knock their defences about in the daytime, their power of restoring those defences by night, was almost magical. If the fire raged furiously all night, it was a very storm of shot and shell now the sun was up, and the gunners on each side had a fair sight of their opponent's batteries. The sun is high in the heavens, yet still goes on the constant roar and crash of cannon and mortar, and still no signal comes for the assault. It is near noon when suddenly three rockets leaped high in the air, and a crash of musketry notified that the French had opened the ball on the right. "Forward the stormers," cried the General commanding the attack. "Forward," cried the Colonels of the leading regiments. "Away there the ladder party," shouted an officer of Engineers. The bugles rang out the charge. "Forward —th," shouts Hugh Fleming, as he and Byng spring over the parapet, and dash forward at a steady double straight for the salient of the great Redan, while the very heavens resound with the sharp rattle of musketry from all sides. The *abattis* is broken rapidly by the Sappers in three or four places, but even that momentary delay occasions fearful havoc in the ranks of the assailants, while the Russian batteries are now sweeping the space between their own lines and the British right attack with a murderous cross fire of grape and canister. Still they press on dauntless as ever, though now every step a man pitches heavily forward and rolls over. What is left of the two leading regiments, the sailors and Sappers have gained the ditch of the Redan. Byng springs into the ditch, closely followed by his men; two or three of the Engineers promptly raised a ladder; he rushes towards it and a terrible malediction escapes his lips as he discovers that it is too short. A little to his right Hugh Fleming has been more fortunate, and having cleared a space by the free use of his revolver, has gained the parapet. His

men swarm up after him. A sharp hand-to-hand fight, and the salient of the Redan is won! Up other ladders their comrades pour to their assistance, and slowly but steadily the foe is driven back to the gorge of the work.

But where are the reinforcements? They have room now to use plenty of men if they had them, but they are too weak in numbers to follow their foe farther than they have already driven him. This the enemy is not slow to perceive; he rallies and stands his ground. The opposing parties pause, and glare at each other like pugilists between the rounds, when the battle is far from sougthen out. But there is this terrible difference between them; whereas no reinforcements are reaching the English, they are steadily pouring in to the Russians.

The gallant Colonel who leads the stormers is beside himself with vexation. He has won the work—is he to lose it, and all the lives it has cost him be wasted in vain? Messenger after messenger he dispatches in search of those sorely-needed reinforcements, but they never come back.

"Look here!" he said, addressing a small knot of officers who had temporarily gathered near the parapet, "do I look as if I was in a funk?"

"Not a bit more than the rest of us, sir," promptly replied a Captain of the Light Division.

"Well," he continued, "reinforcements I must have if I am to hold this work. I've sent four messengers for them, not one of them has returned nor have the reinforcements come. Now, gentlemen, I'm going myself, and if anything happens to me, I trust you to do justice to my memory, and testify that I didn't go into that infernal cross fire because I was afraid," and in another moment he had leapt over the parapet, and was gone.

He did not share the fate of his messengers, but like them, he never returned. Before he could obtain the reinforcements he went for, the Russians had swept the English out of the Redan and driven them pell mell to their own trenches.

It was the lull before the storm, the officers took advantage of the respite to re-form and steady their men, to slip fresh cartridges into their revolvers, and generally to brace themselves for the coming struggle. They could see fresh troops pouring in to the assistance of their opponents, they knew that the strife between them must be renewed in a few minutes, and unless aid came to them, and that soon, they knew well what the result of that strife must be. Not a man wavered, not a cheek blanched, they knew what they had to do, to hold that work as long as they could and then die.

The pause is soon over, cheered on by their officers, and exultant in their replenished numbers, with a wild yell, the Russians once more hurled themselves on the foe; dauntlessly are they met, and one of those savage hand-to-hand melees in which men's eyes, like the Chourineur's in Sue's famous novel, see blood ensues. Bayonet thrusts, and furious blows with clubbed muskets, are exchanged on all sides. In the midst of this very whirlpool of battle Private Phybbs, still sticking close to Hugh's heels with the canine fidelity he had displayed the entire morning, found himself immersed. The confused mass swayed backwards and forwards, when suddenly there came a final rush on the part of the Muscovites, and, by sheer weight of numbers, the English were driven rapidly back. Peter Phybbs was doing his *devoir* gallantly in the fray, when just as this retrograde movement began, his foot slipped on the blood-stained soil, and, at the same moment, he received a blow from the butt end of a musket on the shoulder, which brought him to the ground; another moment, and the bayonet of a powerful Russian Grenadier would have terminated the career of the luckless soldier, when a bullet from Hugh's revolver stretched the Grenadier across the legs of his intended victim. For a few moments Fleming made a gallant stand and, with the aid of his death-dealing revolver, kept his foes at bay. At length, hurling the empty pistol furiously in their faces, he was about to fall back, when a bayonet thrust in the side caused him to reel backwards, and before he could recover himself he was in the fierce grip of his foremost foe. Short had been his shrift, perhaps, for the blood of his assailants was up, and they had seen two or three of their comrades fall by his hand, but luckily