



VIEW OF THE C. P. R. BRIDGE AT LACHINE, P. Q.

which we so rarely witness. It cannot be said that many flowers came with the spring in '55, for everything that would burn had been burnt by the army during that pitiless winter, and the poor flowers had been so ruthlessly trampled in the mire that the few which survived had a hard struggle to get their heads above the ground.

However, with the sunshine as aforesaid came great exhilaration throughout the camp; copious supplies of all sorts, and such a multiplication of stores, canteens, cafés, restaurants, etc., as to look as if the allies would be permanent colonists, with no intention of ever returning to their native countries, to which the establishment of a railway from Balaklava to the front still further contributed. About half-way between these two points on the main road, a large wooden building, half-store, half-restaurant, had been opened by a middle-aged coloured lady, who had somehow or other obtained considerable popularity amongst the military men in the West Indies. What she had done out there I don't know, but Mrs. Seacoles soon became a familiar name to the Crimean army. Horse and foot, hussars and artillery, naval officers and newspaper correspondents, all drank and dined at Mrs. Seacoles'. It was a sort of high change for gossip and stories. Men from all parts brought the news of the camp thither, as a common mart for the exchange of all such commodities. Many dinners came off in the snug room at the back of the front saloon, which was the general lounge; matter of no little diplomacy at times, these dinners, as, unless previously ordered, the procuring of a table was impossible.

Perched upon a barrel in the saloon, with a short pipe in his mouth, and bearing no sign whatever of having been severely wounded, sat Tom Byng, indulging in gayist badinage with an old friend, who was chaffing him about his late narrow escape.

"It won't do, Tom," said the hussar; "you must be ruled out of it, by all the conditions of war. You were carried away for dead, and we really can't have you coming to life again in this way. Just think of the confusion it would make out here if other people behaved as you have done! Why, we should never know where we were, or who commanded anything. Now, I'm very sorry for you, but in justice to the regiment—"

"Shut up, Lockwood!" cried Byng. "Just ask how long it's going to be before that dinner's ready; I'll show you then whether I am alive or not."

"But you're not, my good fellow; in justice to the regiment you can't be. I don't want to counsel extreme or immoral measures. There is no reason for your completing what the Russian so clumsily attempted; but you must surely see that it is your duty to withdraw yourself from the army as quietly as may be, and so allow the step to go in the regiment. Consider, my dear fellow, you were killed!"

"No more of your chaff!" replied Tom Byng. "Let's have a sherry and bitters. I don't think any of our fellows would care to get their step at my expense."

"No, old man," returned the other, as they made their way to the counter, "I'm sure they wouldn't. And nobody can be more pleased than myself that the Russian miscalculated the thickness of your head."

And now a gentleman in his shirt sleeves, called by courtesy a waiter, announced to Lockwood, the presiding genius of the feast, that dinner was ready; and the *convives*, some half dozen in number, trooped into the back room to do it justice.

"Are you going to run that big bay horse of yours, Fleming, for the Division Cup next week? If they don't make the hurdles too stiff he ought

to have a great chance," said Lockwood, the keen edge of their appetite appeased.

"Yes," replied Hugh, "he's improved a good deal in his jumping of late."

"Well, he needs to," remarked an officer of the Rifles. "I was over the course yesterday, and they've got a stone wall in it that will take some doing I can tell you. It's a good four foot and a half high, and no give about it. A real proper crumpler for those who happen to hit it hard."

"Well," rejoined Hugh, laughing, "I shall find out if the 'Bantam' can jump, anyhow."

"For your sake it's to be devoutly hoped he can," said the Rifleman. "However, the Meeting will be great fun, and we want something to wake us up a bit, this — damned trench work is getting monotonous. 'Pon my word I haven't heard a joke or a good story for the last week."

"Right you are," said Byng, gravely. "The whole thing is getting slow, deuced slow. If it wasn't for Mickey Flinn I'd have forgotten how to laugh."

"And who's Mickey Flinn?" enquired Lockwood. "A distinguished ornament of my company," said Byng, "with a very poor opinion of those who guide and direct him. We were down in the trenches the other night, and amongst the men was a young recruit only just out from England. Whether the poor fellow was a little flustered, or being his first time under fire, or whether, as he said, he had strayed a little from his party and lost his way, I don't know, but Mr. Flinn took to his sagacious head that the boy was trying to desert. Well, he got hold of a young non-commissioned officer and they made the boy a prisoner. And then came the formulating a charge against him. They could not bring him up for deserting because he obviously had not deserted, they had only caught him straying towards the town, so they