

no more than one-fifth of them visible to their English assailants. When Egerton made up his mind to engage the troops straight before him, he was blind to those Catherinburg battalions which we last saw confronted by Grant, and had had no glimpse of the thousands then advancing on his right front.

But the force directly opposing him disclosed itself gradually to the sight. First, after the line of the Russian skirmishers, and indeed partly mingled amongst them, there came shapeless clumps of the gray-coated soldiery, disposed in what seemed to be a crowd somewhat loosened, but all as with one intent keenly forcing their way through the brush-wood; and in close support to these there marched a dense column so formed that, whilst plainly ample in depth, it still showed as broad a front as Egerton's slender line.

The Russian troops thus advancing were two battalions of the Tomsk regiment, with a strength of about 1500, and this force, as we know, Colonel Egerton was undertaking to meet with his 259 men; but the troops he commanded, if small in numbers, were of a splendid quality, well officered, highly disciplined, and full of trust in their leaders, in themselves, in their regiment. And, along with the small English force, there was one very simple, nay, primitive spring of action which the enemy for some reason had thought fit to discard. Amongst the whole fifteen hundred Russians confronted by Egerton, our people from first to last could see but one horseman, whilst the English with their modest strength, scarce reaching 260, had with them a number of officers, who, remaining throughout on their chargers, could see and be seen by the men. Besides General Buller himself, and his aid-de-camp, Lieutenant Hugh Clifford, Colonel Egerton, commanding the regiment, and Straton and Dixon, field-officers, and Morgan the adjutant, were all in their saddles; and in spite of the mist there was never perhaps a moment throughout the whole fight when a man of the 77th could look abroad in his doubt or bewilderment, without seeing above him, though dimly, the form of a mounted officer in whom he knew he could trust.

It has been surmised that the foremost of the Russians, unacquainted with the English custom of fighting in line, and inferring that the mist which disclosed to view one or two ranks must conceal the depths of a column, may have fancied they were met by such numbers as would be implied in their own service in a front like the one they now saw. At all events when they descried the English force marching against them, they faltered and stopped, not as though they inclined to flight, but rather like soldiery coming suddenly upon a new phase of battle, and looking about

for guidance. Meantime they opened a fire that was not without effect; and although the apparition of Egerton's line had stopped their advance, the great column behind them refused to share their hesitation, and continued to heave its way forward.

Colonel Egerton, seeing thus much, judged that now the moment was ripe; therefore, turning to General Buller, by whose side he rode, he said to him, "There are the Russians, General, what shall we do?" Buller's answer was short. He only said, "Charge them!" Egerton at once gave the word to "Halt, then fire a volley, and charge."

The foremost of the Russians had not long stopped their advance, when across the dim, narrow space, now dividing them from Egerton's force, they heard English words of command. They saw their foe come to a halt. They saw his long hedge-row of firelocks, now ingrafted with bayonets, bend down, come level, then blaze, and in the instant a pitiless volley tore through their loose masses in front, and swept down like a blast on the face of the column behind them. Then, from under the new ridge of smoke which Egerton's troops by this fire had piled up along their whole line, there rose the "Hurra!" of the English, as though in some outburst of joy. Whilst the Russians yet listened to the roar of their enemy's welcome, all before them lay still wrapped in cloud; but presently, those who stood calm, and could look in the eye of the storm, saw here and there moving in dimness, the shadowy form of a rider, the naked gleam of a sword, then the wing of the 77th, along its whole front, bursting out once more into sight through the bank of the smoke, and tearing straight down at a run, with bayonets brought low to the "charge."

Though the Russians first exposed to the charge had sought, as we know, to maintain that formation of "company columns," which grew afterwards famous in Europe, the thickness of the brush-wood or some other cause had prevented them from giving fair trial to the lessons of their German advisers, and they hung together in knots, or grosser aggregates, neither having the formidable massiveness of a close battalion column, nor the agile, sagacious vivacity which belongs to smaller units of strength. They did not stand. They broke away as they could, or threw themselves down in the thick, affecting to be slain, and their overthrow was but a beginning of evil, for the solid column behind them, being now all at once laid bare to the onslaught descending against it began to waver, and stopped. Then it heaved, then broke, and before the swift-coming line had yet touched it with steel, was turning as though for flight.