

LETTERS FROM HEAD QUARTERS;

— OR THE —

REALITIES OF WAR IN THE CRIMEA.

By an Officer of the Staff. With a Portrait of Lord Raglan, and Plans. 2 vols. 8 vo. London, 1856.

(Continued from our last.)

In everything which depended upon himself, the calculations of the English Commander-in-chief had been fulfilled.—The line occupied by the Allied troops extended for upwards of fifteen miles. To protect the whole of this vast circuit and to carry on the siege, not only demanded the entire strength of the army, but required that it should be overtaken. There were many things which were proper to be done in the line, but the less was obliged to be neglected for the greater. It was desirable to occupy Kerch, and Admiral Dundas volunteered after the battle of the Alma to seize the place with the assistance of two thousand soldiers, but neither the French nor the English could spare a man. It was desirable to construct more efficient defences on many parts of the line, but the siege must have languished the while, and the chance have been lost of reducing the fortress before it grew too strong. It might have been desirable to detach several thousand men to make a substantial road against the coming winter, but in the interim Sebastopol would have been rendered impregnable. The true policy, since it was imperative to select, was to concentrate the force on the third great object of the expedition—the capture of the town and the fleet—and obviate the need to winter in the Crimea at all. This was the plan which Lord Raglan pursued; and if the fire of our allies has proved as effective as our own, there is every reason to believe that the result would have been attained.—What would the country have said if he had left Sebastopol to itself, and employed his troops in strengthening the coast by digging a road?

While the Allies were preparing for a second bombardment, immense reinforcements were rapidly advancing to the assistance of the enemy. The effects were felt in the action of Balaklava on the 25th of October, and in the mighty battle of Inkermann on the 5th of November. Sir De Lucy Evans had several times pointed out the policy of strengthening the latter position; and while his chief obtained from General Canrobert a promise, which he delayed too long to perform, to send a division to our support, Sir John Burgoyne carried the principal French engineer, General Bizot, to the spot, that he might satisfy himself by personal inspection of the necessities of the case. There can be no stronger evidence of the impossibility in which Lord Raglan found himself, of supplying all the requirements suggested by his military prudence. The battle of Inkermann might be described in the same terms as the Duke of Wellington employed to describe the battle of Waterloo. The English positions were attacked, and the soldiers held them with unsurpassable gallantry; but the narrative of the Staff Officer will undeceive those who have imagined that generalship had no concern in the result of that glorious day. Lord Raglan assigned each brigade its place, and by the desire of General Canrobert he even directed the French troops as they arrived. An unhappy incident, which lost our front ranks a support that might have earlier converted a balanced

contest into victory, yet served to show the justness of his discernment. Sir George Cathcart, whose division he had placed in reserve, sent by his permission to enter a ravine where he hoped to take the Russians in flank. Lord Raglan deemed the danger, and steadily refused. The movement was made before the reply was received, the troops were mowed down by the murderous fire which was opened on them, and their distinguished leader, one of the ablest officers in the British service, was among the slain. At a later period Lord Raglan ordered a couple of siege-guns to be placed where they could command the battery which was decimating our troops. He was told it was impossible. 'I don't like that word impossible,' he said, addressing himself to another officer, Major Ayle, who immediately undertook the task. The guns were brought with exceeding difficulty, the Russians concentrated their fire on the point, and Lord Raglan, in the midst of the slaughter to keep up the courage of the men. Under the skilful command of Colonel Dickson the guns quickly began to get the mastery over the hostile battery, and as at the Alma had an immense effect in turning the doubtful day. Again, as at the Alma, Lord Raglan eagerly urged the French Commander-in-chief to employ his fresh troops in converting the retreat into a rout, as in the opportunity was lost, and again the error was acknowledged when it was too late.

The Staff Officer signifies the placed bravery of Lord Raglan and the iron temper of Inkermann, as he sat on horseback straining his eyes into the mist, or slowly rode from post to post. But there is a courage far higher and rarer than that which faces undaunted the bullet and the sword—the courage which takes a daring resolution, and which stands firm as the Monument when minds less robust are shaken with alarm—the courage, in short, of the great general, and not of the fighting soldier. This intrepidity was now displayed by Lord Raglan. He surmised that on the 5th of the Russians returning to the coast could appear at a point among the gorges. To complete it he proposed that a fire should be opened from the whole line of our trenches, and that the assault, which, previous to the action, had been fixed for the 7th, should take place while the alarm of the enemy was at its height. Timidity of tactics was the fatal defect of the French commander, and he insisted that the Allies must await reinforcements, and remain in the interim on the defensive. There were other generals who were eager to embark on the army—a step impossible if it had been politic—or else for abandoning the advanced works, and taking up a more contracted position. Lord Raglan foresaw, as Sir Richard Airey has explained in his masterly defence before the Chelsea Board, all that it would cost to hold his ground—conflicts by day and night, incessant suffering from toil and climate—but he equally saw, on the other hand, that retreat was destruction, that our siege-guns would be lost, that the enemy would advance to the high ground we had abandoned, that they would push forward with a converging and irresistible fire upon the French at Kamiesch and upon the British engaged in the little basin of Balaklava, till there would have been no other choice than to die or surrender. With an unfettered discretion he would have trusted his soldiers to complete the business on which they came, and have retired triumphant. But since his opinion had been overruled, it became un-

avoidable that they should winter on the ridge and, relaxing the labours of the siege, they turned their attention for a while to completing the fort-works which were now essential to secure the allies from the increasing force which hemmed them in.

Before it was decided to linger on in the Crimea—while yet it was only a possibility, in consequence of the failure of the French boat-adjutant and the uncertainty when they would gain the ascendancy—Lord Raglan wrote, on the 23rd of October, to his Government, to inform them that the climate in winter was most severe, that every precaution was necessary for the bare preservation of life, that his troops could not remain under canvas even with the aid of great and constant fires, and that, so far from being possessed of this alleviating resource, there was barely sufficient fuel to cook the food. This representation, it is known, did not produce the effect which was the final determination taken to remain before Sebastopol, than, without waiting for supplies from England, Sir Richard Airey sent in every direction to collect materials for building fires. The bad weather set in on the 10th of November. The tempest which swept away the tents, and wrecked the 'Prince' with the winter clothing for the army, occurred on the 14th: and on the 16th Colonel Webster was, by the order of Lord Raglan, on his way to Constantinople to purchase every thing which could supply the loss. An emergency arose but he took his measures with equal rapidity, and no more pain to his health could have been termed than that all who were responsible for the enterprise and for the welfare of the troops should have acted like himself.

Now occurred the circumstance which aggravated every evil, and for some time neutralised in a great degree the beneficial effects of the previous precautions. The transport broke down. The hats, the food, the comforts collected at Balaklava could no longer be conveyed to the front, and the men encamped but a few miles' distance languished for the want of supplies which could not be dragged across the intervening morass. The English army is formed for resting always upon some base of supplies; it does not require a commissariat or transport corps during peace; and there has never been a period in our history in which Parliament in its economy has thought fit to keep it prepared for foreign war. The inettiness of the Government in organising a force which could not, with any exertion, have been perfect at the commencement, may be inferred from the severe judgment of the greatest military authority living, Sir William Napier, 'that the army was consigned by various means, incapable Ministers to misery and death with a self-laudation sickening to the souls of honest men.' It is enough for us to say that the Commissary-General was not provided with the staff which ought to have been collected in England for his special use, and that, contrary to the rules of the service, he had long to borrow a large portion of his assistants from the Commander-in-chief. Limited in numbers, and without experience in their duties, they had to perform a more arduous task than was ever before imposed on their department. In former instances the country in which the war was carried on had furnished the necessary transport. The

* It can hardly be necessary to state that the General who commands in the field has no more to do with providing and organising the staff of the Commissariat than with providing the staff of a regiment.