

The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Romance of Modern Sieges, by Edward Gilliat

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: The Romance of Modern Sieges

Author: Edward Gilliat

Release date: October 16, 2015 [EBook #50231]

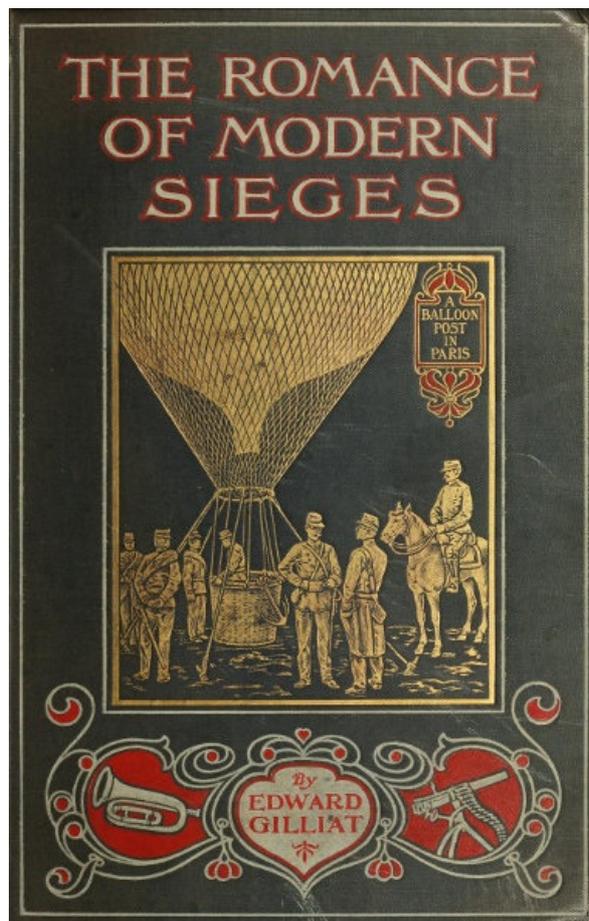
Language: English

Credits: Produced by Shaun Pinder, Paul Clark and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net> (This file was produced from images generously made available by The Internet Archive)

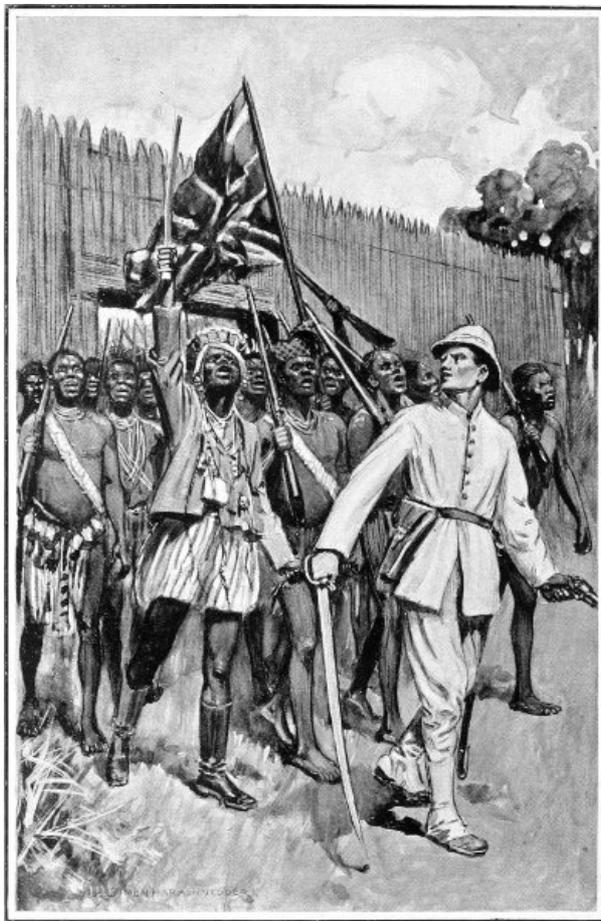
*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ROMANCE OF MODERN SIEGES ***

Transcriber's Note:

Every effort has been made to replicate this text as faithfully as possible, including some inconsistent hyphenation. Some minor corrections of spelling and punctuation have been made.



The Romance of Modern Sieges



THE SALLY FROM THE FORT AT KUMASSI

Led by Capt. Armitage, some two hundred loyal natives sallied forth. At their head marched the native chiefs, prominent amongst whom was the young king of Aguna. He was covered back and front with fetish charms, and on his feet were boots, and where these ended his black legs began.

THE ROMANCE OF MODERN SIEGES

DESCRIBING THE PERSONAL ADVENTURES,
RESOURCE AND DARING OF BESIEGERS
AND BESIEGED IN ALL PARTS OF
THE WORLD

BY
EDWARD GILLIAT, M.A.
SOMETIME MASTER AT HARROW SCHOOL
AUTHOR OF "FOREST OUTLAWS," "IN LINCOLN GREEN," &c., &c.

WITH SIXTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

PHILADELPHIA
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
LONDON: SEELEY & CO. LIMITED
1908

PREFACE

[Pg vii]

These chapters are not histories of sieges, but narratives of such incidents as occur in beleaguered cities, and illustrate human nature in some of its strangest moods. That "facts are stranger than fiction" these stories go to prove: such unexpected issues, such improbable

interpositions meet us in the pages of history. What writer of fiction would dare to throw down battlements and walls by an earthquake, and represent besiegers as paralysed by religious fear? These tales are full, indeed, of all the elements of romance, from the heroism and self-devotion of the brave and the patient suffering of the wounded, to the generosity of mortal foes and the kindness and humour which gleam even on the battle-field and in the hospital. But the realities of war have not been kept out of sight; now and then the veil has been lifted, and the reader has been shown a glimpse of those awful scenes which haunt the memory of even the stoutest veteran.

We cannot realize fully the life that a soldier lives unless we see both sides of that life. We cannot feel the gratitude that we ought to feel unless we know the strain and suspense, the agony and endurance, that go to make up victory or defeat. In time of war we are full of admiration for our soldiers and sailors, but in the past they have been too often forgotten or slighted when peace has ensued. Not to keep in memory the great deeds of our countrymen is mere ingratitude.

[Pg viii]

Hearty acknowledgments are due to the authors and publishers who have so kindly permitted quotation from their books. Every such permission is more particularly mentioned in its place. The writer has also had many a talk with men who have fought in the Crimea, in India, in France, and in South Africa, and is indebted to them for some little personal touches such as give life and colour to a narrative.

CONTENTS

[Pg ix]

CHAPTER I

SIEGE OF GIBRALTAR (1779-1782)

	PAGES
The position of the Rock—State of defence—Food-supply—Rodney brings relief— Fire-ships sent in—A convoy in a fog—Heavy guns bombard the town—Watching the cannon-ball—Catalina gets no gift—One against fourteen—Red-hot shot save the day—Lord Howe to the rescue	17-27

CHAPTER II

DEFENCE OF ACRE (1799)

Jaffa stormed by Napoleon—Sir Sidney Smith hurries to Acre—Takes a convoy—How the French procured cannon-balls—The Turks fear the mines—A noisy sortie— Fourteen assaults—A Damascus blade—Seventy shells explode—Napoleon nearly killed—The siege raised—A painful retreat	28-36
--	-------

CHAPTER III

THE WOUNDED CAPTAIN IN TALAVERA (1809)

Talavera between two fires—Captain Boothby wounded—Brought into Talavera— The fear of the citizens—The surgeons' delay—Operations without chloroform— The English retire—French troops arrive—Plunder—French officers kind, and protect Boothby—A private bent on loot beats a hasty retreat	37-52	[Pg x]
---	-------	--------

CHAPTER IV

THE CAPTURE OF CIUDAD RODRIGO (1812)

A night march—Waiting for scaling-ladders—The assault—Ladders break—Shells and grenades—A magazine explodes—Street fighting—Drink brings disorder and plunder—Great spoil	53-61
---	-------

CHAPTER V

THE STORMING OF BADAJOS (1812)

Rescue of wounded men—A forlorn hope—Fire-balls light up the scene—A mine explodes—Partial failure of the English—Escalade of the castle—Pat's humour and heroism—Saving a General—Wellington hears the news—The day after the storm	62-75
---	-------

CHAPTER VI

A PRISONER IN ST. SEBASTIAN (1813)

The *coup de grâce*—The hospital—A cruel order—An attempt at escape—Removed to the castle—The English at the breach—Many are wounded—French ladies sleep in the open—A vertical fire—English gunners shoot too well—A good sabre lightly won 76-89

CHAPTER VII **JELLALABAD (1842)**

Position of the town—Sale's brigade rebuilds the defences—A sortie—Bad news—A queer noise—A ruse that did not succeed—The only survivor comes in—Story of a massacre—The earthquake—The walls are down—Are rebuilt—English magic—Pollock comes—Fight outside—The peril of Lady Sale 90-109

CHAPTER VIII **SIEGE OF SEBASTOPOL (1854-1856)**

The English land without tents—Mr. Kinglake shows off before Lord Raglan—The Alma—Strange escapes—Looted houses—Fair plunder—Balaklava Bay—Horses lost at sea—A derelict worth having—Jack very helpful—The Heavy and Light Brigades—Spies—Fraternizing [Pg xi] 110-125

CHAPTER IX **AFTER INKERMANN (1854)**

Valiant deeds—Lord Raglan under fire—Tryon the best shot—A Prince's button—A cold Christmas—Savage horses—The Mamelon redoubt—Corporal Quin—Colonel Zea 126-136

CHAPTER X **THE INDIAN MUTINY—DELHI (1857-1858)**

The Mutiny begins—A warning from a sepoy—A near thing—A noble act of a native officer—In camp at Delhi with no kit—A plan that failed—Our first check—Wilson in command—Seaton wounded—Arrival of Nicholson—Captures guns—The assault—The fate of the Princes—Pandy in a box 137-158

CHAPTER XI **THE DEFENCE OF LUCKNOW (31ST OF MAY TO 25TH OF SEPTEMBER, 1857)**

Firing at close quarters—Adventures of fugitives—Death of Sir H. Lawrence—His character—Difficulty of sending letters—Mines and counter-mines—Fulton killed—Signs of the relief coming—A great welcome—Story of the escape from Cawnpore 159-174

CHAPTER XII **THE RELIEF OF LUCKNOW (1857)**

The scene at Cawnpore—Fights before Lucknow—Nearly blown up—A hideous nightmare—Cheering a runaway—All safe out of the Residency—A quick march back—Who stole the biscuits?—Sir Colin's own regiment 175-190 [Pg xii]

CHAPTER XIII **RUNNING THE BLOCKADE (1861)**

North v. South—A new President hates slavery—Port Sumter is bombarded—Ladies on the house-top—Niggers don't mind shells—A blockade-runner comes to Oxford—The *Banshee* strips for the race—Wilmington—High pay—Lights out—Cast the lead—A stern chase—The run home—Lying *perdu*—The *Night-hawk* saved by Irish humour—Southern need at the end of the war—Negro dignity waxes big 191-201

CHAPTER XIV **THE FIRST IRONCLADS (1862)**

Will they sink or swim?—Captain Ericsson, the Swede—The *Merrimac* raised and armoured—The *Monitor* built by private venture—*Merrimac* surprises Fort Monroe—The *Cumberland* attacked—The silent monster comes on—Her ram makes an impression—Morris refuses to strike his flag—The *Cumberland* goes down—The *Congress* is next for attention—On fire and forced to surrender—Blows up at midnight—The *Minnesota* aground shows she can bite—General panic—Was it Providence?—A light at sea—Only a cheese-box on a raft—Sunday's fight between two monsters—The *Merrimac* finds she is deeply hurt, wounded to death—The four long hours—Worden and Buchanan both do their best—Signals for help—The fiery end of the *Whitehall* gunboat 202-212

CHAPTER XV
CAPTURE OF NEW ORLEANS (1862)

New Orleans and its forts—Farragut despises craven counsel—The mortar-fleet in disguise—Fire-rafts rush down—A week of hot gun-fire—A dash through the defences—The *Varuna*'s last shot—Oscar, aged thirteen—Ranged before the city—Anger of mob—Summary justice—Soldiers insulted in the streets—General Butler in command—Porter nearly blown up in council—Fort Jackson in ruins—“The fuse is out” 213-219 [Pg xiii]

CHAPTER XVI
THE SIEGE OF RICHMOND (1862 AND 1865)

Fair Oaks a drawn battle—Robert Lee succeeds Johnston—Reforms in the army—Humours of the sentinels—Chaffing the niggers—Their idea of liberty—The pickets chum together—Stuart's raid—A duel between a Texan and a German—Effect of music on soldiers—A terrible retreat to James River—Malvern Hill battle-scenes—Three years after—General Grant before Richmond—Coloured troops enter the Southern capital in triumph—Lee surrenders—Friends once more 220-230

CHAPTER XVII
THE SIEGE OF PARIS (1870-1871)
WITH THE GERMANS OUTSIDE

The Germans invest Paris—Trochu's sortie fails—The English ambulance welcomed—A Prince's visit to the wounded—In the snow—Madame Simon—A brave Lieutenant—Piano and jam—The big guns begin—St. Denis—Old Jacob writes to the Crown Prince—A dramatic telegram—Spy fever—Journalists mobbed 231-240

CHAPTER XVIII
THE SIEGE OF PARIS—Continued
WITH THE BESIEGED (1870-1871)

Moods in Paris—The Empress escapes—Taking down Imperial flags—Playing dominoes under fire—Cowards branded—Balloon post—Return of the wounded—French numbed by cold—The lady and the dogs—The nurse who was mighty particular—Castor and Pollux pronounced tough—Stories of suffering 241-250

CHAPTER XIX
METZ (1870)

Metz surrounded—Taken for a spy—Work with an ambulance—Fierce Prussians rob an old woman—Attempt to leave Metz—Refusing an honour—The *cantinière*'s horse—The grey pet of the regiment—Deserters abound—A village fired for punishment—Sad scenes at the end 251-263 [Pg xiv]

CHAPTER XX
PLEVNA (1877)

An English boy as Turkish Lieutenant—A *mêlée*—Wounded by a horseman—Takes letter to Russian camp—The Czar watches the guns—Skobelev's charge—The great Todleben arrives—Skobelev deals with cowards—Pasting labels—The last sortie—Osman surrenders—Prisoners in the snow—Bukarest ladies very kind 264-279

CHAPTER XXI
SIEGE OF KHARTOUM (1884)

Gordon invited to the Soudan—The Mahdi—Chinese Gordon—His religious feeling—Not supported by England—Arabs attack—Blacks as cowards—Pashas shot—The *Abbas* sent down with Stewart—Her fate—Relief coming—Provisions fail—A sick steamer—*Bordein* sent down to Shendy—Alone on the house-top—Sir Charles Wilson and Beresford steam up—The rapids and sand-bank—"Do you see the flag?"—"Turn and fly"—Gordon's fate 280-288

CHAPTER XXII
KUMASSI (1900)

The Governor's visit—Pageant of Kings—Evil omens—The Fetish Grove—The fort—Loyal natives locked out—A fight—King Aguna's triumph—Relief at last—Their perils—Saved by a dog—Second relief—Governor retires—Wait for Colonel Willcocks—The flag still flying—Lady Hodgson's adventures 289-302 [Pg xv]

CHAPTER XXIII
MAFEKING (1899-1900)

Snyman begins to fire—A flag of trace—Midnight sortie—The dynamite trolley—Kaffirs careless—A cattle raid—Eloff nearly takes Mafeking—Is taken himself instead—The relief dribble in—At 2 a.m. come cannon with Mahon and Plumer 303-317

CHAPTER XXIV
THE SIEGE OF KIMBERLEY (1899-1900)

The diamond-mines—Cecil Rhodes comes in—Streets barricaded—Colonel Kekewich sends out the armoured train—Water got from the De Beers Company's mines—A job lot of shells—De Beers can make shells too—Milner's message—Beef or horse?—Long Cecil—Labram killed—Shelter down the mines—A capture of dainties—Major Rodger's adventures—General French comes to the rescue—Outposts astonished to see Lancers and New Zealanders 318-325

CHAPTER XXV
THE SIEGE OF LADYSMITH (1899-1900)

Ladysmith—Humours of the shell—The *Lyre* tries to be funny—Attack on Long Tom—A brave bugler—Practical jokes—The black postman—A big trek—Last shots—Some one comes—Saved at last 326-340

CHAPTER XXVI
SIEGE OF PORT ARTHUR (1904)

Port Arthur—Its hotel life—Stoessel not popular—Fleet surprised—Shelled at twelve miles—Japanese pickets make a mistake—Wounded cannot be brought in—Polite even under the knife—The etiquette of the bath—The unknown death—Kondrachenko, the real hero—The white flag at last—Nogi the modest—"Banzai!"—Effect of good news on the wounded—The fleet sink with alacrity 341-352

[Pg xvi]

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<u>THE SALLY FROM THE FORT AT KUMASSI (see p. 294)</u>	<i>Frontispiece</i>
<u>THE LAST SIEGE OF GIBRALTAR BY FRANCE AND SPAIN</u>	<i>To face p.</i> 26
<u>THE NIGHT ASSAULT OF CIUDAD RODRIGO</u>	" 56
<u>THE ESCALADE OF THE CASTLE</u>	" 66
<u>THE LAST OF AN ARMY</u>	" 96

GETTING RID OF HIS CAPTORS	"	128
A DARING DEED: BLOWING UP THE CASHMERE GATE, DELHI	"	154
THE LIGHTER SIDE OF WAR AT LUCKNOW	"	180
SHOT DOWN BY THEIR FELLOW-CITIZENS	"	216
A DUEL BETWEEN A TEXAN AND A GERMAN	"	224
THE BALLOON POST USED DURING THE SIEGE OF PARIS	"	244
A STRANGE WEAPON OF OFFENCE	"	282
THE BOERS, TAKEN BY SURPRISE, WERE UNSTEADY AND PANIC-STRUCK	"	304
A BRITISH AMAZON AT MAFEKING	"	308
A RUSSIAN TORPEDO-BOAT DESTROYER ELUDING THE JAPANESE FLEET	"	344
A HUMAN LADDER	"	348

[Pg 17]

THE ROMANCE OF MODERN SIEGES

CHAPTER I

SIEGE OF GIBRALTAR (1779-1782).

The position of the Rock—State of defence—Food-supply—Rodney brings relief—Fire-ships sent in—A convoy in a fog—Heavy guns bombard the town—Watching the cannon-ball—Catalina gets no gift—One against fourteen—Red-hot shot save the day—Lord Howe to the rescue.

Gibraltar! What a thrill does the very name evoke to one who knows a little of English history and England's heroes! But to those who have the good fortune to steam in a P. and O. liner down the coast of Portugal, and catch sight of the Rock on turning by Cabrita Point into the Bay of Algeciras the thrill of admiration is intensified. For the great Rock lies like a lion couched on the marge of the Mediterranean. It is one of the pillars of Hercules: it commands the entrance to the inner sea.

From 712 to the beginning of the fourteenth century Gibraltar was in the hands of the Saracens; then it fell into the hands of the Spaniards. In 1704, the year of Blenheim, a combined English and Dutch fleet under Sir George Rooke captured the Rock from the Marquis de Salines, and Gibraltar has since then remained in the possession of the English, though several attempts have been made to wrest it from us. Before we follow Captain Drinkwater in some details of the great siege, a few words must be said about the Rock and its defences as they then were.

[Pg 18]

The Rock itself juts out like a promontory, rising to a height of 1,300 feet, and joined to the Spanish mainland by a low sandy isthmus, which is at the foot of the Rock about 2,700 feet broad. On a narrow ledge at the foot of the north-west slope lies the little town, huddled up beneath the frowning precipice and bristling batteries excavated out of the solid rock. At different heights, up to the very crest, batteries are planted, half or wholly concealed by the galleries. All along the sea-line were bastions, mounted with great guns and howitzers, and supplied with casemates for 1,000 men. In all the fortifications were armed with 663 pieces of artillery. Conspicuous among the buildings was an old Moorish castle on the north-west side of the hill: here was planted the Grand Battery, with the Governor's residence at the upper corner of the walls. Many caves and hollows are found in the hill convenient both for powder magazines and also for hiding-places to the apes who colonize the Rock. The climate even at mid-winter is so mild and warm that cricket and tennis can be played on dry grass, wherever a lawn can be found in the neighbourhood, as the writer has experienced. But at Gibraltar itself all is stony ground and barren rock; only on the western slope a few palmettos grow, with lavender and Spanish broom, roses and asphodels.

In 1777 a good opportunity seemed to be offered for Spain to recover the Rock from England. The North American colonies had seceded, and the prestige of Britain had suffered a severe blow. The fleets of France and Spain, sixty-six sail of the line, were opposed by Sir Charles Hardy's thirty-eight, but with these he prevented the enemy from landing an invading army on the English shore. But Spain was intent on retaking Gibraltar, and had already planted batteries across the isthmus which connects the Rock with Spain.

[Pg 19]

General Elliot, the Governor of Gibraltar, had a garrison 5,382 strong, 428 artillerymen, and 106 engineers. Admiral Duff had brought his ships—a sixty-gun man-of-war, three frigates, and a sloop—alongside the New Mole. All preparations were made to resist a siege. Towards the middle of August the enemy succeeded in establishing a strict blockade with the object of reducing the

garrison by famine. There were not more than forty head of cattle in the place, and supplies from Africa were intercepted by the Spanish cruisers. In November the effects of scarcity began to be felt, though many of the inhabitants had been sent away. Mutton was three shillings a pound, ducks fourteen shillings a couple; even fish and bread were very scarce. General Elliot set the example of abstemious living, and for eight days he lived on 4 ounces of rice a day. The inhabitants had for some time been put upon a daily ration of bread, delivered under the protection of sentries with fixed bayonets. But even with this safeguard for the week there was a scene of struggling daily. Many times the stronger got more than their share, the weaker came away empty-handed, and eked out a wretched existence on leeks and thistles. Even soldiers and their families were perilously near starvation. So that a listless apathy fell on the majority, and they looked seaward in vain for a help that did not arrive.

It was not until the 15th of January, 1780, that the joyful news went round the little town of a brig in the offing which bore the British flag.

"She cannot pass the batteries!"

[Pg 20]

"She is standing in for the Old Mole! Hurrah!"

That brig brought the tidings of approaching relief, and many a wet eye kindled with hope.

But the look-out on Signal Point could see the Spaniards in Algeciras Bay preparing for sea eleven men-of-war to cut off the convoy. Again the hopes of the garrison went down. They did not know, neither did the Spaniards, that Admiral Sir George Rodney, an old Harrow boy, was escorting the convoy with a powerful fleet of twenty-one sail of the line. He quickly drove the eleven Spaniards into headlong flight, but before rounding into the bay he fell in with fifteen Spanish merchant-men and six ships of war, which became his prize.

Then for a time the town and garrison enjoyed themselves frugally, and life became worth living. But on the departure of Rodney the Spaniards tried to destroy the British vessels in the bay with fire-ships.

It was on a June night that the fire spread, and the gleam shot across the water, lighting up Algeciras and the cork forests that clothe the mountain-side. Then the alarm was given. The *Panther*, a sixty-gun man-of-war, and the other armed ships opened fire on the assailants; officers and men sprang into their boats and grappled the blazing ships, making fast hawsers, and towing them under the great guns of the Rock, where they were promptly sunk.

Again the blight of ennui, sickness, and famine came on the little garrison; but in October a cargo of fruit came just in time to save them from scurvy. In March, 1781, the want of bread became serious: biscuit crumbs were selling for a shilling a pound. "How long?" was the anxious cry that was felt, if not expressed in words. Had England forgotten her brave men?

On the 12th of April, to the joyful surprise of all, a great convoy was signalled, escorted by a strong fleet. Every man, woman, and child who could walk came out upon the ramparts and gazed seawards with glistening eyes. At daybreak, says the historian of the siege, "Admiral Darby's much-expected fleet was in sight from our signal-house, but was not discernible from below, being obscured by a thick mist in the Gut. As the sun rose, however, the fog rose too like the curtain of a vast theatre, discovering to the anxious garrison one of the most beautiful and pleasing scenes it is possible to conceive. The ecstasies of the inhabitants at this grand and exhilarating sight are not to be described; but, alas! they little dreamed of the tremendous blow that impended, which was to annihilate their property, and reduce many of them to indigence and beggary."

[Pg 21]

For this second relief of the garrison stung the Spaniards into the adoption of a measure which inflicted a large amount of suffering on the citizens. They at once began to bombard the town with sixty-four heavy guns and fifty mortars. All amongst the crowds in the narrow, winding streets, through the frail roofs and windows, came shot and shell, so that one and all fled from their homes, seeking cover among the rocks. This was the time for thieves to operate, and many houses were rifled of their contents. Then it was discovered that many hucksters and liquor-dealers had been hoarding and hiding their stocks, and a fire having broken out in a wine-shop, the soldiers tasted and drank to excess. Then in a few days the discipline became relaxed; many of the garrison stole and took away to their quarters barrels of wine, which they proceeded to stow away, to their own peril and ruin. At length General Elliot was compelled to issue orders that any soldier found drunk or asleep at his post should be shot.

What surprises us in our days of long-distance firing is the strange fact that a man with sharp vision could see one of the cannon-balls as it came towards him. One day, we are told, an officer saw a ball coming his way, but he was so fascinated by it that he could not move out of the way. Another day a shot fell into a house in which nearly twenty people were gathered together: all escaped except one child. On another occasion a shot came through the embrasures of one of the British batteries, took off the legs of two men, one leg of another, and wounded a fourth man in both legs, so that "four men had seven legs taken off and wounded by one shot." A boy who had been posted on the works, on account of his keenness of vision, to warn the men when a cannon-ball was coming their way, had only just been complaining that they did not heed his warnings, and while he turned to the men this shot which did all this hurt was fired by the enemy. A large cannon-ball in those days weighed 30 pounds, others much less. The author remembers Admiral Colomb telling the Harrow boys in a lecture that a Captain of those days could carry two or more cannon-balls in his coat-tail pocket; the balls of modern guns have to be moved by hydraulic

[Pg 22]

machinery. Yet it is astonishing how much damage the old cannon-balls could inflict, lopping along like overgrown cricket-balls as they did.

Sometimes incidents happened of an amusing character.

One day a soldier was rummaging about among the ruins of a fallen house, and came upon a find of watches and jewels. He bethought him at once of a very pretty Spanish girl who had coquetted with him in the gardens of the Alameda.

"Now, let me see," he murmured to himself, "how can I put this away safe? Little Catalina will laugh when she sees them there jewels, I'll be bound! Humph! I can't take this lot to quarters, that's sartin! Them sergeants, as feel one all round on return from duty, will grab the lot."

[Pg 23]

So he walked on, musing and pondering over his weighty affair.

As he was passing the King's Bastion a happy thought struck him.

"By George, sir!" he said to himself, "it's just the very thing. Who would think of looking for a watch inside a gun?" and he chuckled to himself.

It was high noon; the sentinel seemed half asleep. The soldier tied up his prize in his handkerchief, took out the wad of the gun, and slipped his treasure-trove into the bore of the cannon, replacing the wad carefully. That evening he met Catalina, and managed to inform her that he had a pleasant surprise for her, if she could come to the King's Bastion.

Her dark eyes glanced mischievously.

"No, not in the evening, I thank you, Jacko. I will come to-morrow, an hour after sunrise."

"Very well, Catalina; I see you do not trust me. To-morrow, then, you shall come with me to the King's Bastion, and see with your own eyes how rich I can make you."

Catalina understood enough English to laugh heartily at her lover's grave and mysterious words.

"He has stolen a loaf and a bottle of wine," she thought in her simplicity.

However, Catalina did not disappoint Jack, and together they paced towards the semi-circular platform of the King's Bastion.

Jack was a very proud man as he tried to explain to his lady-love what a surprise was in store for her: he touched her wrists to show how the bracelets would fit, and her shapely neck to prove the existence of a splendid necklace, and Catalina began to believe her boy.

But as they came out upon the gun platform, Jack stopped suddenly, and uttered a fearful oath.

[Pg 24]

"O dios!" cried the maid, "what is there to hurt, Jacko?"

"Don't you see? Oh, Catalina, the game is up! That devil of a gunner is wiping out the bore of his gun!"

Jack ran up, and, seizing the man by the arm, said: "I say, mate, if you have found a parcel in that gun, it's mine! I put it in last night. I tell you it's mine, mate! Don't you try to make believe you have not seen it, 'cos I know you has."

The gunner stared in open-mouthed astonishment at the speaker. At last he said, with a touch of sarcasm:

"What for do you think I am wiping out her mouth, you silly! You must have slept pretty sound not to know that them gun-boats crept up again last night."

"The devil take them! Then, where's that gold watch of mine and them jewels? I put 'em for safety in that fool of a gun."

"Oh, then, you may depend upon it, my lad, that the watch-glass has got broke, for we fired a many rounds in the night."

"What for you look so to cry?" asked little Catalina in wonder.

"Oh, come away, sweetheart. You'll get no rich present this year; them Spaniards have collared 'em all. O Lord! O Lord!"

On the 7th of July the Spaniards at Cabrita Point were seen to be signalling the approach of an enemy. As the mists melted away, the garrison could see a ship becalmed out in the bay. Fourteen gunboats from Algeciras had put out to cut her off; on this, Captain Curtis, of the *Brilliant*, ordered three barges to row alongside, and receive any dispatches she might have on board. This was done just before the leading Spanish gunboat got within range; then came a hideous storm of round and grape shot as the fourteen gunboats circled round the *Helma*.

[Pg 25]

But Captain Roberts, though he had only fourteen small guns, returned their fire gallantly. The English sloop was lying becalmed about a league from the Rock, and the garrison in Gibraltar could do nothing to help her. They looked every minute to see the *Helma* sink, but still she battled on against their 26-pounders.

Then, when hope seemed desperate, a westerly breeze sprang up; the waters darkened and rippled round the *Helma*, her canvas slowly filled out, and she came away with torn sails and

rigging to the shelter of the Mole.

In September, 1782, a grand attack was made by the Spaniards with ten men-of-war, gunboats, mortar-boats, and floating batteries. They took up their position about 900 yards from the King's Bastion. Four hundred pieces of the heaviest artillery were crashing and thundering, while all the air was thick with smoke. General Elliott had made his preparations: the round shot was being heated in portable furnaces all along the front, and as the furnaces were insufficient, huge fires were lit in the angles between buildings on which our "roast potatoes," as the soldiers nicknamed the hot shot, were being baked.

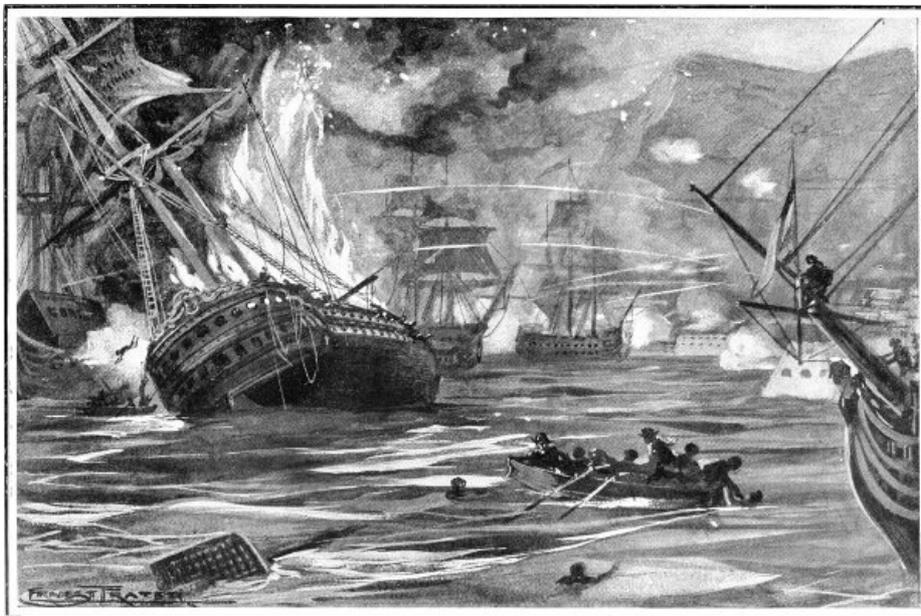
But the enemy's battering-ships seemed invulnerable. "Our heaviest shells often rebounded from their tops, whilst the 32-pound shot seemed incapable of making any visible impression upon their hulls. Frequently we flattered ourselves they were on fire, but no sooner did any smoke appear than, with admirable intrepidity, men were observed applying water from their engines within to those places whence the smoke issued. Even the artillery themselves at this period had their doubts of the effect of the red-hot shot, which began to be used about twelve, but were not general till between one and two o'clock." After some hours' incessant firing, the masts of several Spanish ships were seen to be toppling over; the flag-ship and the Admiral's second ship were on fire, and on board some others confusion was seen to be prevailing. Their fire slackened, while ours increased. Then, as night came on, the gleams spread across the troubled waters; the cannonade of the garrison increased in rapidity and power. At one in the morning two ships were blazing mast-high, and the others soon caught fire from the red-hot shot or from the flying sparks. The light and glow of this fearful conflagration brought out the weird features of the whole bay: the sombre Rock, the blood-red sea, the white houses of Algeciras five miles across, the dark cork forests, and the Spanish mountains—all stood out in strange perspective. Amid the roar of cannon were fitfully heard the hoarse murmurs of the crowds that lined the shore and the screams of burning men. Sometimes a deep gloom shrouded the background of earth and sea, while gigantic columns of curling, serpent flame shot up from the blazing hulls.

[Pg 26]

Brigadier Curtis, who was encamped at Europa Point, now took out his flotilla of twelve gunboats, each being armed with a 24-pounder in its bow, and took the floating batteries in flank, compelling the Spanish relieving boats to retire.

Daylight showed a sight never to be forgotten: the flames had paled before the sun, but the dark forms of the Spaniards moving amongst the fire and shrieking for help and compassion stirred all the feelings of humanity. Some were clinging to the sides of the burning ships, others were flinging themselves into the waves. Curtis led his boats up to the smoking hulks in order to rescue some of the victims. He and his men climbed on board the battering-ships at the risk of their lives, and helped down the Spaniards, who were profuse in their expressions of gratitude.

[Pg 27]



THE LAST SIEGE OF GIBRALTAR BY FRANCE AND SPAIN

A floating battery may be seen to the extreme left beyond the heeling ship.

But as the English thus worked for the rescue of their enemies, the magazine of one of the Spanish ships blew up with a crash at about five o'clock, and a quarter of an hour after another exploded in the centre of the line. Burning splinters were hurled around in all directions, and involved the British gunboats in grave danger. In the Brigadier's boat his coxswain was killed, his stroke wounded, and a hole was forced through the bottom of the boat. After landing 357 Spaniards, the English were compelled to retire under the cover of the Rock, leaving the remainder to their dreadful fate. Of the six ships still on fire, three blew up before eleven o'clock; the other three burned down to the water's edge.

Thus ended the attempt to take the Rock by means of floating castles. The loss sustained by the Spaniards was about 2,000 killed, wounded, and taken prisoners; whereas the losses in the garrison were surprisingly small, considering how long a cannonade had been kept up upon the forts: 16 only were killed; 18 officers, sergeants, and rank and file were wounded. Yet the enemy had been firing more than 300 pieces of heavy ordnance, while the English garrison could bring to bear only 80 cannon, 7 mortars, and 9 howitzers; but even for these they expended 716 barrels of powder.

As Admiral Lord Howe was sailing with a powerful fleet to the help of Gibraltar, he heard the news of General Elliot's splendid defence. On the night of the 18th of October, 1782, a great storm scattered the French and Spanish ships; and soon after the delighted garrison saw Lord Howe's fleet and his convoy, containing fresh troops and provisions, approaching in order of battle. The blockade was now virtually at an end. The siege had lasted three years, seven months, and twelve days. Since then no attempt has been made to capture Gibraltar.

CHAPTER II

DEFENCE OF ACRE (1799)

[Pg 28]

Jaffa stormed by Napoleon—Sir Sidney Smith hurries to Acre—Takes a convoy—How the French procured cannon-balls—The Turks fear the mines—A noisy sortie—Fourteen assaults—A Damascus blade—Seventy shells explode—Napoleon nearly killed—The siege raised—A painful retreat.

Napoleon Bonaparte had crushed all opposition in Central and Southern Europe, but there was one Power which foiled him—Great Britain.

The French Government compelled Spain and Holland to join in a naval war against England, but Jervis and Nelson broke and scattered the combined fleets.

Bonaparte had conceived a bitter hatred against the only Power which now defied the might of France, and was causing him "to miss his destiny."

"I will conquer Egypt and India; then, attacking Turkey, I will take Europe in the rear." So he wrote. In the spring of 1798 he set out for Egypt, reducing Malta on the way, and just eluding Nelson's fleet.

He had got as far as Cairo when he heard of Nelson's victory in Aboukir Bay, where his French fleet was destroyed.

But Bonaparte, undaunted, pressed on to attack Syria. He stormed Jaffa, and put the garrison to the sword. Not content with this cruelty, he marched the townfolk, to the number of 3,700, into the middle of a vast square, formed by the French troops. The poor wretches shed no tears, uttered no cries. Some who were wounded and could not march so fast as the rest were bayoneted on the way.

[Pg 29]

The others were halted near a pool of dirty, stagnant water, divided into small bodies, marched in different directions, and there shot down. When the French soldiers had exhausted their cartridges, the sword and bayonet finished the business. Sir Sidney Smith, a Captain commanding a few ships in the Levant, hearing of these atrocities, hurried with his ships to St. Jean d'Acre, which lies north of Jaffa, on the north end of the bay which is protected on the south by the chalk headland of Carmel, jutting out like our Beachy Head far into the sea.

Sir Sidney arrived in the *Tigre* at Acre only two days before Bonaparte appeared. On the 17th of March he sent the *Tigre's* boats by night to the foot of Mount Carmel, and there they found the French advanced guard encamped close to the water's edge. The boats opened with grape, and the French retired in a hurry up the side of the mount.

The main body of the army, hearing that the sea-road was exposed to gun-fire from British ships, went round by Nazareth and invested Acre to the east. A French corvette and nine sail of gun vessels coming round Mount Carmel, found themselves close to the English fleet, and seven of them were made prizes, manned from the ships, and employed to harass the enemy's posts.

The French trenches were opened on the 20th of March with thirty-two cannon, but they were deficient in balls. The French General, Montholon, tells us how they made the English provide them with cannon-balls. It reminds us of our own plan at Jellalabad. He says that Napoleon from time to time ordered a few waggons to be driven near the sea, on sight of which Sir Sidney would send in shore one of his ships and pour a rolling fire around the waggons. Presently the French troops would run to the spot, collect all the balls they could find and bring them in to the Director of Artillery, receiving five sous for each ball. This they did, while laughter resounded on every side. The French could afford to be merry. Under Bonaparte they had become the masters of the greater part of Europe. Nothing seemed impossible to them under that military genius. Here they were besieging a little trumpety Syrian town, which they calculated they could take in three days; "for," said they, "it is not so strong as Jaffa. Its garrison only amounts to 2,000 or 3,000 men, whereas Jaffa had a garrison of 8,000 Turks."

[Pg 30]

On the 25th of March the French had made a breach in the tower which was considered

practicable. A young officer with fifteen sappers and twenty-five Grenadiers, was ordered to mount to the assault and clear the tower fort; but a counter-scarp 15 feet high stopped them. Many were wounded, and they hastily retired. On the 28th a mine was sprung, and they assaulted again; but "the Turks exerted themselves so far on this occasion," writes Sir Sidney, "as to knock the assailants off their ladders into the ditch, where about forty of their bodies now lie." Montholon writes: "The breach was found to be too high by several feet, and Mailly, an officer of the staff, and others were killed. When the Turks saw Adjutant Lusigier fixing the ladder, a panic seized them, and many fled to the port. Even Djezzar, the Governor, had embarked. It was very unfortunate. That was the day on which the town ought to have been taken."

Early in April a sortie took place, in which the British Marines were to force their way into the French mine, while the Turks attacked the trenches. The sally took place just before daylight, but the noise and shouting of the Turks rendered the attempt to surprise the enemy useless; but they succeeded in destroying part of the mine, at considerable loss. The Turks brought in above sixty heads, many muskets and entrenching tools. "We have taught the besiegers," writes Sir Sidney, "to respect the enemy they have to deal with, so as to keep at a greater distance." On the 1st of May the enemy, after many hours' heavy cannonade from thirty pieces of artillery brought from Jaffa, made a fourth attempt to mount the breach, now much widened, but were repulsed with loss.

[Pg 31]

"The *Tigre* moored on one side and the *Theseus* on the other, flank the town walls, and the gunboats, launches, etc., flank the enemy's trenches, to their great annoyance. Nothing but desperation can induce them to make the sort of attempts they do to mount the breach under such a fire as we pour in upon them; and it is impossible to see the lives, even of our enemies, thus sacrificed, and so much bravery misapplied, without regret. I must not omit to mention, to the credit of the Turks, that they fetch gabions, fascines, and other material which the garrison does not afford from the face of the enemy's works."

By the 9th of May the French had on nine several occasions attempted to storm, but had been beaten back with immense slaughter. On the fifty-first day of the siege the English had been reinforced by Hassan Bey with corvettes and transports; but this only made Bonaparte attack with more ferocity, having protected themselves with sand-bags and the bodies of their dead built in with them. It was a touch and go whether the French would not fight their way in. A group of Generals was assembled on Cœur-de-Lion's Mount, among whom Napoleon was distinguishable, as he raised his glasses and gesticulated. At this critical moment Sir Sidney landed his boats at the mole and took the crews up to the breach armed with pikes. The enthusiastic gratitude of the Turks—men, women, and children—at sight of such a reinforcement is not to be described. The few Turks who were standing their ground in the breach were flinging heavy stones down on the heads of the advancing foe, but many of the French mounted to the heap of ruins in the breach so close that the muzzles of their muskets touched and their spear-heads locked.

[Pg 32]

Djezzar Pasha, on hearing that so large a force of the English were fighting in the breach, left his seat, where, according to Turkish custom, he was sitting to distribute rewards to such as should bring him the heads of the enemy, and coming behind our men, the energetic old man pulled back his English friends with violence, saying, "If any harm happen to the English, all is lost."

A sally made by the Turks in another quarter caused the French in the trenches to uncover themselves above their parapet, so that the fire from our boats brought down numbers of them. A little before sunset a massive column came up to the breach with solemn step. By the Pasha's orders a good number of the French were let in, and they descended from the rampart into the Pasha's garden, where in a very few minutes their bravest lay headless corpses, the sabre proving more than a match for the bayonet. The rest, seeing what was done, fled precipitately. The breach was now practicable for fifty men abreast. "We felt," says Sir Sidney, "that we must defend it at all costs, for by this breach Bonaparte means to march to further conquest, and on the issue of this conflict depends the conduct of the thousands of spectators who sit on the surrounding hills, waiting to see which side they shall join."

With regard to the cutting off of heads by the Turks, one day, when out riding, Sir Sidney questioned the superior metal of the Damascus blade, when Djezzar Pasha replied that such a blade would separate the head from the body of any animal without turning the edge.

[Pg 33]

"Look!" said the Pasha; "this one I carry about with me never fails. It has taken off some dozens of heads."

"Very well, Pasha," said Sir Sidney. "Could you not give me ocular proof of the merit of your Damascus, and at the same time of your own expertness, by slicing off, *en passant*, the head of one of the oxen we are now approaching?"

"Ah, q'oui, monsieur, c'est déjà fait;" and springing off at a gallop, he smote a poor ox as it was grazing close to the path, and the head immediately rolled on the ground. A Damascus sabre regards neither joints nor bones, but goes slicing through, and you cannot feel any dint on the edge thereof.

On the 14th of May Sir Sidney writes to his brother: "Our labour is excessive: many of us have died of fatigue. I am but half dead, and nearly blinded by sun and sand. Bonaparte brings fresh troops to the assault two or three times in the night, and so we are obliged to be always under arms. He has lost the flower of his army in these desperate attempts to storm, as appears by the

certificates of former services which we find in their pockets. We have been now near two months constantly under fire and firing. We cannot guard the coast lower down than Mount Carmel, for the Pasha tells me, if we go away, the place will fall, so that the French get supplies from Jaffa to the south. I sent Captain Miller in the *Theseus* yesterday to chase three French frigates off Cæsarea; but, alas! seventy shells burst at the forepart of Captain Miller's cabin, killing him and thirty-two men, including some who jumped overboard and were drowned." The ship got on fire in five places, but was saved. By the 16th of May Bonaparte had lost eight Generals and most of his artillerymen—in all upwards of 4,000 men. The Turks were becoming quite brave and confident. They boldly rushed in on the assaulting columns, sabre in hand, and cut them to pieces before they could fire twice. But they were struck with terror at the thought of the mines which they imagined might blow up at any time, and could not be forced to remain on the walls or in the tower. However, the knowledge which the garrison had of the massacre at Jaffa rendered them desperate in their personal defence.

[Pg 34]

In the fourteenth assault General Kleber led his victorious troops to the breach. It was a grand and terrific spectacle. The Grenadiers rushed forward under a shower of balls. Kleber, with the gait of a giant, with his thick head of hair and stentorian voice, had taken his post, sword in hand, on the bank of the breach. The noise of the cannon, the rage of the soldiers, the yells of the Turks, were all bewildering and awful.

General Bonaparte, standing on the battery of the breach, looking rather paler than usual, was following the progress of the assault through his glass, when a ball passed above his head; but he would not budge. In vain did Berthier ask him to quit this perilous post—he received no answer—and two or three officers were killed close to him; yet he made no sign of moving from the spot. All at once the column of the besiegers came to a standstill. Bonaparte went further forward, and then perceived that the ditch was vomiting out flames and smoke. It was impossible to go on. Kleber, in a great rage, struck his thigh with his sword and swore. But the General-in-Chief, judging the obstacle to be insurmountable, gave a gesture and ordered a retreat. After this failure the French Grenadiers absolutely refused to mount the breach any more over the putrid bodies of their unburied companions. Bonaparte for once seems to have lost his judgment, first by sacrificing so many of his best men in trying to take a third-rate fort; and, secondly, because, even if he had succeeded in taking the town, the fire of the English ships must have driven him out again in a short time.

[Pg 35]

One last desperate throw was made for success by sending an Arab dervish with a letter to the Pasha proposing a cessation of arms for the purpose of burying the dead. During the conference of the English and Turkish Generals on this subject a volley of shot and shells on a sudden announced an assault; but the garrison was ready, and all they did was to increase the numbers of the slain, to the disgrace of the General who thus disloyally sacrificed them. The game was up after a siege of sixty days: in the night following the 20th of May the French army began to retreat. But as they could not carry their guns and wounded with them, these were hurried to sea without seamen to navigate the ships, in want of water and food. They steered straight for the English ships, and claimed and received succour. Their expressions of gratitude to Sir Sidney were mingled with execrations on their General for his cruel treatment of them. English boats rowed along the shore and harassed their march south. The whole track between Acre and Gaza was strewn with the dead bodies of those who had sunk under fatigue or from their wounds. At Gaza Bonaparte turned inland, but there he was much molested by the Arabs. The remnant of a mighty host went on, creeping towards Egypt in much confusion and disorder.

Sir Sidney Smith had thus defeated the great General of France, who grudgingly said: "This man has made me miss my destiny." In the hour of victory Sir Sidney was generous and humane, for he had a good heart, good humour, and much pity. Nor did he forget the Giver of all victory, as the following extract from a letter testifies:

[Pg 36]

"*Nazareth, 1799.*—I am just returned from the Cave of the Annunciation, where, secretly and alone, I have been returning thanks to the Almighty for our late wonderful success. Well may we exclaim, 'the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.'—W. S. S."

CHAPTER III

THE WOUNDED CAPTAIN IN TALAVERA (1809)

[Pg 37]

Talavera between two fires—Captain Boothby wounded—Brought into Talavera—The fear of the citizens—The surgeons' delay—Operations without chloroform—The English retire—French troops arrive—Plunder—French officers kind, and protect Boothby—A private bent on loot beats a hasty retreat.

Captain Boothby, of the Royal Engineers, left behind him a diary of his experiences in Spain during part of the Peninsular War in 1809. It will help us to understand how much suffering war inflicts, and how much pain we have been saved by the inventions of modern science.

He tells us he had been provided with quarters in Talavera, at the house of Donna Pollonia di Monton, a venerable dame. She was the only person left in the house, the rest having fled to the mountains in fear lest the French should come and sack the city; for in the streets those who remained were shouting in their panic, "The French have taken the suburbs!" or "The British

General is in full retreat!" or "O Dios! los Ingleses nos abandonan!" ("O God! the English are deserting us!"). The fact was that Wellesley was not sure if he could hold his ground at Talavera.

Captain Boothby went out one morning towards the enemy's position; he was brought back in the evening on a bier by four men, his leg shattered by a musket-ball. The old lady threw up her hands when she saw him return.

[Pg 38]

"What!" she exclaimed, while the tears ran down her cheeks. "Can this be the same? This he whose cheeks in the morning were glowing with health? Blessed Virgin, see how white they are now!"

She made haste to prepare a bed.

"Oh, what luxury to be laid upon it, after the hours of pain and anxiety, almost hopeless, I had undergone! The surgeon, Mr. Bell, cut off my boot, and having examined the wound, said:

"'Sir, I fear there is no chance of saving your leg, and the amputation must be above the knee.'

"He said the operation could not be performed until the morning, and went back to the hospital.

"I passed a night of excruciating pain. My groans were faint, because my body was exhausted with the three hours' stumbling about in the woods. Daylight was ushered in by a roar of cannon so loud, so continuous, that I hardly conceived the wars of all the earth could produce such a wild and illimitable din. Every shot seemed to shake the house with increasing violence, and poor Donna Pollonia rushed in crying:

"'They are firing the town!'

"'No, no,' said I; 'don't be frightened. Why should they fire the town? Don't you perceive that the firing is becoming more distant?'"

So the poor lady became less distraught, and watched by him with sympathizing sorrow. But at length, finding the day advancing, his pains unabating, and no signs of any medical help coming, he tore a leaf from his pocket-book, and with a pencil wrote a note to the chief surgeon, Mr. Higgins, saying that, as he had been informed no time was to be lost in the amputation, he was naturally anxious that his case should be attended to. The messenger returned, saying that the surgeon could not possibly leave the hospital. He sent a second note, and a third, and towards ten o'clock a.m. the harrassed surgeon made his appearance.

[Pg 39]

"Captain Boothby," said he, "I am extremely sorry that I could not possibly come here before, still more sorry that I only come now to tell you I cannot serve you. There is but one case of instruments. This I cannot bring from the hospital while crowds of wounded, both officers and men, are pressing for assistance."

"I did but wish to take my turn," said the Captain.

"I hope," he added, "that towards evening the crowd will decrease, and that I shall be able to bring Mr. Gunning with me to consult upon your case."

"Will you examine my wound, sir," said Boothby, "and tell me honestly whether you apprehend any danger from the delay?"

He examined the leg, and said:

"No, I see nothing in this case from which the danger would be increased by waiting five or six hours."

There was nothing for it but patience.

"I taxed my mind to make an effort, but pain, far from loosening his fangs at the suggestion of reason, clung fast, and taught me that, in spite of mental pride, he is, and must be, dreadful to the human frame."

Mr. Higgins came to him about three o'clock, bringing with him Mr. Gunning and Mr. Bell, and such instruments as they might have occasion for.

Mr. Gunning sat down by his bedside, and made a formal exhortation: explained that to save the life it was necessary to part with the limb, and he required of him an effort of mind and a manly resolution.

"Whatever is necessary, that I am ready to bear," said the Captain.

Then the surgeons, having examined his wound, went to another part of the room to consult, after which they withdrew—to bring the apparatus, as he imagined. Hours passed, and they did not return. His servant, Aaron, having sought Mr. Gunning, was told that he was too much occupied. This after having warned him that there was no time to be lost!

[Pg 40]

"Go, then," said the Captain to Aaron—"go into the street, and bring me the first medical officer you happen to fall in with."

He returned, bringing with him Mr. Grasset, surgeon of the 48th Regiment.

After examining the wound, Mr. Grasset declared that he was by no means convinced of the necessity of the amputation, and would not undertake the responsibility.

"But," said the wounded man, "I suppose an attempt to save the leg will be attended with great danger."

"So will the amputation," he replied. "But we must hope for the best, and I see nothing to make your cure impossible. The bones, to be sure, are much shattered, and the leg is much mangled and swollen; but have you been bled, sir?"

"No," said Captain Boothby.

Mr. Grasset conceived bleeding absolutely necessary, though he had already lost much, and at his request he bled him in the arm.

He guessed that Mr. Gunning's departure proceeded from his conviction that a gangrene had already begun, and that it would be cruel to disturb his dying moments by a painful and fruitless operation.

As he had taken nothing but vinegar and water since his misfortune, his strength was exhausted, and the operation of bleeding was succeeded by an interval of unconsciousness. From this state he was roused by some one taking hold of his hand. It was his friend Dr. FitzPatrick.

"If I had you in London," said he with a sigh, "I might attempt to save your limb; but amid the present circumstances it would be hopeless. I had been told that the amputation had been performed, else, ill as I could have been spared, I would have left the field and come to you."

[Pg 41]

"Do you think you are come too late?" asked the Captain.

He said "No"; but he dissembled. At that time Boothby was under strong symptoms of lockjaw, which did not disappear until many hours after the operation. The doctor took a towel, and soaking it in vinegar and water, laid it on the wound, which gave much relief. He stayed with him till late, changing the lotion as often as needed. The operation was fixed for daylight on the morrow.

The patient passed another dismal night. At nine o'clock next morning FitzPatrick and Miller, Higgins and Bell, staff-surgeons, came to his bedside. They had put a table in the middle of the room, and placed on it a mattress. Then one of the surgeons came and exhorted him to summon his fortitude. Boothby told him he need not be afraid, and FitzPatrick said he could answer for him. They then carried him to the table and laid him on the mattress. Mr. Miller wished to place a handkerchief over his eyes, but he assured him that it was unnecessary; he would look another way.

"I saw that the knife was in FitzPatrick's hand, which being as I wished, I averted my head.

"I will not shock the reader by describing the operation in detail, but as it is a common idea that the most painful part of an operation lies in sundering the bone, I may rectify an error by declaring that the only part of the process in which the pain comes up to the natural anticipation is the first incision round the limb, by which the skin is divided, the sensation of which is as if a prodigious weight were impelling the severing edge. The sawing of the bone gives no uneasy sensation; or, if any, it is overpowered by others more violent.

[Pg 42]

"'Is it off?' said I, as I felt it separate.

"'Yes,' said FitzPatrick, 'your sufferings are over.'

"'Ah no! you have yet to take up the arteries.'

"'It will give you no pain,' he said kindly; and that was true—at least, after what I had undergone, the pain seemed nothing.

"I was carried back to my bed much exhausted. Soon hope returned to my breast; it was something to have preserved the possibility of yet being given back to happiness and friendship."

For some time after the operation his stomach refused sustenance, and a constant hiccough was recognized by the surgeons as a fatal prognostic.

His faithful friend, Edmund Mulcaster, hardly ever left his bedside. General Sherbrooke came to see him often, and evinced the most earnest anxiety for his welfare. They wrote to his friends for him, and to his mother. This last he signed himself.

In the night of the 30th, by the perseverance of Mulcaster, he managed to retain some mulled wine, strongly spiced, and in the morning took two eggs from the same welcome hand. This was the "turn." The unfavourable symptoms began to subside, and the flowing stream of life began to fill by degrees its almost deserted channels.

On the 2nd of August some officers, entering his room, said that information had been received of Soult's arrival at Placentia, and that General Wellesley intended to head back and engage him.

"If the French come while we are away, Boothby," said Goldfinch, "you must cry out, 'Capitaine anglais,' and you will be treated well."

On the 3rd of August his friends all came to take leave of him. It was a blank, rugged moment. Mr. Higgins, the senior surgeon, was left behind to tend the wounded.

[Pg 43]

The mass of the people of England is hasty, and often unjust, in its judgment of military events.

They will condemn a General as rash when he advances, or revile him as a coward when he retreats. News of the battle of Talavera had been announced by the trumpet of victory. The people of England expected the emancipation of Spain. Now were they cast down when told that the victors had been obliged to retire and leave their wounded to the mercy of a vanquished enemy.

If Lord Wellington knew the strength and condition of the force under Soult, it would be hard to justify his conduct in facing back. In Spain, however, it was impossible to get correct information. The Spaniards are deaf to bad news and idiotically credulous to all reports that flatter their hopes. Thus the rashness of Lord Wellington in placing himself between two armies, Soult and Ney, the least of whom was equal to himself, may be palliated.

The repulse and flight of the French after the Battle of Talavera restored confidence to the fugitive townfolk. They left the mountains and re-entered Talavera. The house was again filled with old and young, who strove to wait on the Captain. But soon the evacuation of the town by the British awoke their fears; but with thankfulness let us record that a British officer, wounded and mutilated, was to the women of the house too sacred an object to be abandoned.

The citizens of Talavera had clung to the hope that at least their countrymen would stay and protect them; but on the 4th, seeing them also file under their windows in a long, receding array, they came to the Captain—those near his house—beating their breasts and tearing their hair, and demanded of him if he knew what was to become of them.

[Pg 44]

Boothby sent Aaron to take a message to the Colonel left Commandant by General Wellesley, but he came back saying that the Colonel was gone, having given orders that those in the hospitals who were able to move should set off instantly for Oropesa, as the French were at hand. The sensation this notice produced is beyond all description. The Captain lay perfectly still; other wounded men had themselves placed across horses and mules, and fruitlessly attempted to escape. The road to Oropesa was covered with our poor wounded, limping, bloodless soldiers. On crutches or sticks they hobbled woefully along. For the moment panic terror lent them a new force, but many lay down on the road to take their last sleep.

Such were the tales that Aaron and others came to tell him. He tried to comfort them, and said the French were not so bad as they fancied. Still, his mind was far from being at ease. He thought it possible that some foraging party might plunder him and commit excesses in the house, or on the women, who would run to him for protection, however uselessly. The evening of the 4th, however, closed in quietness, and a visit from the senior medical officer, Mr. Higgins, gave him great comfort.

The 5th of August dawned still and lovely. A traveller might have supposed Talavera to be in profound peace until, gazing on her gory heights, he saw they were covered with heaps of ghastly slain. The tranquil interval was employed in laying in a stock of provisions. Pedro argued with him.

“But, signore, the Brencone asks a dollar a couple for his chickens!”

“Buy, buy, buy!” was all the answer he could get from the Captain.

Wine, eggs, and other provender were laid in at a rate which provoked the rage and remonstrance of the little Italian servant.

[Pg 45]

About the middle of the day a violent running and crying under the windows announced an alarm. The women rushed into his room, exclaiming, “Los Franceses, los Franceses!” The assistant surgeon of artillery came in.

“Well, Mr. Steniland,” said the Captain, “are the French coming?”

“Yes,” he answered; “I believe so. Mr. Higgins is gone out to meet them.”

“That’s right,” said Boothby.

In about an hour Mr. Higgins entered, saying, “I have been out of town above two leagues and can see nothing of them. If they do come, they will have every reason to treat us with attention, for they will find their own wounded lying alongside of ours, provided with the same comforts and the same care.”

On the 6th, reports of the enemy’s approach were treated with total disregard. Between eight and nine o’clock the galloping of horses was heard in the street. The women ran to the windows and instantly shrank back, pale as death, with finger on lip.

“Los demonios!” they whispered, and then on tiptoe watched in breathless expectation of seeing some bloody scene.

“They have swords and pistols all ready,” cried Manoela, trembling.

“How’s this?” cried old Donna Pollonia. “Why, they pass the English soldiers. They go on talking and laughing. Jesus! Maria! What does it mean?”

Presently Mr. Higgins came in. He had ridden out to meet the French General, and had found that officer full of encomiums and good assurances.

“Your wounded are the most sacred trust to our national generosity. As for you, medical

[Pg 46]

gentlemen, who have been humane and manly enough not to desert your duty to your patients (many of whom are Frenchmen), stay amongst us as long as you please. You are as free as the air you breathe."

The town owed much to Mr. Higgins!

To prepare for the approaching crisis, to ride forth and parley with the enemy and persuade him that he owes you respect, gratitude—this is to be an officer of the first class. Throughout Mr. Higgins displayed the character of no common man.

We should say something of the household among which the Captain was placed.

Servants and masters and mistresses in Spain associate very freely together, but the submissive docility of the servants keeps pace with the affability with which they are treated. First after Don Manoel and Donna Pollonia came Catalina—a tall, elegant woman of forty, a sort of housekeeper held in high estimation by the señora. Then come two old women, Tia Maria and Tia Pepa "tia" means "aunt"); then Manoela, a lively, simple lass, plain and hardy, capable of chastising with her fists any ill-mannered youth. Then the carpenter's daughters, two pretty little girls, often came to play in his room—Martita, aged about ten, and Maria Dolores, perhaps fifteen, pensive, tender, full of feminine charm. These fair sisters used to play about him with the familiarity and gentleness of kittens, and lightened many an hour.

Well, it was not all plain sailing, for stories of pillage and plunder came to their ears. Three troopers had gone to the quarters of his wounded friend, Taylor, and began coolly to rifle his portmanteau.

Taylor stormed and said he was an English Captain.

"Major, 'tis very possible," said they; "but your money, your watch, and your linen are never the worse for that; no, nor your wine either!" and the ruthless savages swallowed the wine and the bread which had been portioned out as his sustenance and comfort for the day.

[Pg 47]

Feeling that such might be his case, Boothby put his money and watch in a little earthen vessel and sent it to be buried in the yard; then calling for his soup and a large glass of claret, he tossed it off defiantly, saying to himself, "You don't get this, my boys!"

Next morning they heard that the French infantry were coming, and the town was to be given up to pillage, as so many of the citizens had deserted it.

The women came to him. "Shall we lock the street door, Don Carlos?" they said.

"By all means," said he. "Make it as fast as you can, and don't go near the windows."

Soon they heard the bands playing, and the women rushed to the windows, as if to see a raree-show, forgetting all his injunctions.

Soon after thump! thump! thump! sounded at the door.

"Virgin of my soul!" cried old Pollonia, tottering to the window. "There they are!" But, peeping out cautiously, she added, "No, 'tis but a neighbour. Open, Pepa."

"You had better not suffer your door to be opened at all," said the Captain.

But Pepa pulled the string, and in came the neighbour, shrieking:

"Jesus! Maria! Dios Santissimo! The demons are breaking open every door and plundering every house; all the goods—chests—everything—dragged out into the street."

"Maria di mi alma! Oh, señora!"

The crashing of doors, breaking of windows, loud thumpings and clatterings, were now distinctly heard in all directions. All outside seemed to boil in turmoil.

[Pg 48]

Ere long, thump! thump! at their own door.

But it was only another neighbour. Pepa pulled the string, and in she came. Her head was piled up with mattresses, blankets, quilts, and pillows. Under one arm were gowns, caps, bonnets, and ribbons. Her other hand held a child's chair. Add to all this that her figure was of a stunted and ludicrous character, and she came in puffing and crying under that cumbrous weight of furniture. They could not resist laughing.

"For the love of God, señora," she whined, "let me put these things in your house."

She was shown up into the garret. Others followed after her.

But soon there was a louder knocking, with a volley of French oaths. The house shook under the blows.

"Pedro, tell them in French that this is the quarter of an English Captain."

Pedro cautiously peeped out of the window.

"Dios! there is but one," said Pedro, "and he carries no arms. Hallo, sair! la maison for Inglis Captin! Go to hell!"

This strange language, and his abrupt, jabbering way of talking, forced a laugh out of his master.

"Ouvrez la porte, bête!" shouted the Frenchman. "I want some water."

"Holy Virgin!" cried Pollonia. "We had better open the door."

"No, no, no!" said Boothby. "Tell him, Pedro, that if he does not take himself off I shall report him to his General."

Pedro had not got half through this message, when suddenly he ducked his head, and a great stone came in and struck the opposite wall.

"Il demonio!" groaned the women, as they, too, ducked their heads.

[Pg 49]

Then the fellow, who was drunk, just reeled off in search of some easier adventure.

Pedro had hardly finished boasting of his victory when the door was again assailed.

"Oh," said Pollonia, "it's only two officers' servants;" and she shut the window.

"Well, what did they want?" asked the Captain.

"They wanted lodgings for their masters, but I told them we had no room."

"And have you room, Donna Pollonia?"

"Yes; but I didn't choose to say so."

"Run, Pedro, run and tell those servants that there is plenty of room. Don't you see, señora, that this is the best chance of preserving your house from pillage?"

They returned—one a Prussian lad who spoke French very ill. The Captain's hope that these fellow-lodgers would prove gentlemen lent him a feeling of security.

Little Pedro was watching the motions of the two servants like a lynx.

"Signore," said he, "those two *diavoli* are prying about into every hole and corner."

On this Aaron was sent to dig up the watch and money and bring the wine upstairs.

Soon after in came Pedro, strutting with a most consequential air.

"The French Captain, signore," said he.

There followed him a fine, military-looking figure, armed cap-à-pie, and covered with martial dust. He advanced to the bedside with a quick step.

"I have had the misfortune, sir, to lose a limb," said Boothby, "and I claim your protection."

"My protection!" he replied, putting out his hand. "Command my devoted services! The name of an Englishman in distress is sufficient to call forth our tenderest attention."

[Pg 50]

The Captain was a good deal affected by the kindness of his manner. Kindness can never be thoroughly felt unless it be greatly wanted.

He begged he would visit him sometimes, and he promised to bring a friend.

Señora Pollonia was charmed with M. de la Platière, who, with his young friend Captain Simon, often came in for a chat.

Alas! they had to go away after a few days' stay, but de la Platière wrote his name in chalk on the door, in the hope that it might discourage any plunderers.

One day Boothby was suddenly aroused by the appearance in his room of an officer whom he had seen before, but did not much like.

"Eh, Capitaine, comment ça va-t-il? Ça va mieux! Ha! bon!"

Then he explained that the blade of his sword was broken. "As prisoner of war," he said, "you will have no use for a sword. Give me yours, and, if you will, keep mine. Where is yours?"

"It stands," said Boothby, "in yonder corner. Take it by all means."

"Je vous laisserai la mienne," he said, and hurried off.

Boothby wished his sword in the Frenchman's gizzard, he was so rough and rude.

One afternoon Pedro rushed in, excited, and said: "The General himself is below, sir!"

"Bring him up, Pedro."

Quickly he ushered in an officer of about the age of five-and-thirty. He was splendidly dressed, of an elegant person, his face beaming with good nature and intelligence.

He came up to the bed, and without waiting for the form of salutation, seated himself in a chair close to the pillow, and laying his hand on Boothby's arm, he said, in a mild and agreeable voice:

[Pg 51]

"Ne vous dérangez, mon ami! Solely I am here to see if I can possibly lighten a little the weight of

your misfortune. Tell me, can I be useful to you? Have you everything you want?"

For all these kind inquiries the Captain expressed his gratitude, and added, "I have really nothing to ask for, unless you could send me to England."

"Ah! if you were able to move, Captain, I could exchange you now; but by the time you will have gained strength to travel you will be at the disposal of the Major-General of the army."

That visit gave much comfort and hope.

In the evening de la Platière and Simon returned with the news that Sir Arthur Wellesley had met with disasters.

"Taisez-vous, mon cher," said Simon. "It may have a bad effect on his spirits."

But he insisted on hearing all they knew, and while they were talking a French soldier walked calmly up into the room, and coming up to the foot of the bed, stood before his officers, astounded, petrified.

When, after sternly eyeing him a while, they sharply demanded his business, his faculties returned, and he stammered out:

"Mon Capitaine, I—I—I took it for a shop! I beg pardon." And off he went in a hurry. But what would he have done if he had found the English officer alone?

On October 1 Captain Boothby was allowed to go out on crutches. He says: "The sense of attracting general observation hurried me. The French soldiers who met me expressed surprise at seeing the success of an amputation which in the hands of their field surgeons was nearly always fatal. The Spaniards were most sympathizing. 'What a pity!' 'So young, too!' 'Poor young Englishman!' were pathetically passed along the street as he hobbled by."

[Pg 52]

In July, 1810, Captain Boothby was exchanged with a French prisoner and returned to his father and mother in England.

This gives us the kindlier side of war; but there is another side.

In the prison of Toro were some French soldiers kept by the Spaniards. Nothing could be worse than the cruelty under which these Frenchmen suffered. In their prison was a cell, with a window strongly barred, and covered by an iron shutter pierced with small holes. The dungeon was about 10 feet square and 5 feet high. At the furthest end was a block of stone for a seat, with an iron collar for the neck, fixed by a short chain in the wall. Another chain was passed round the body. The poor wretches were chained in one position all day, which often hurried them to a miserable death. Their food was a little bread and water.

It is easy, however, to bear any amount of suffering when you know the time will soon come when you will be free.

It is not so easy to bear a whole lifelong penalty for having dared to fight for one's country. One would think that a national gratitude would rescue our wounded soldiers from a life of beggary or the workhouse. Yet after every war how many one-armed and one-legged soldiers or sailors are pitifully begging along our streets and roads!

There is no animal so cruel as man. *Corruptio optimi pessima.*

From a "Prisoner of France," by Captain Boothby. By kind permission of Messrs. A. and C. Black and Miss Boothby.

CHAPTER IV

THE CAPTURE OF CIUDAD RODRIGO (1812)

[Pg 53]

A night march—Waiting for scaling-ladders—The assault—Ladders break—Shells and grenades—A magazine explodes—Street fighting—Drink brings disorder and plunder—Great spoil.

After Talavera Sir Arthur Wellesley became Lord Wellington; he was opposed by Soult, Marmont, and Masséna. On the 1st of January Wellington crossed the Agueda, and advanced to the assault of Ciudad Rodrigo, which had to be hurried on because Marmont was advancing to its relief. Fortunately, we have descriptions from more than one eyewitness of the siege. Ciudad Rodrigo is built on rising ground, on the right bank of the Agueda. The inner wall, 32 feet high, is without flanks, and has weak parapets and narrow ramparts. Without the town, at the distance of 300 yards, the suburbs were enclosed by a weak earthen entrenchment, hastily thrown up.

It was six o'clock on the evening of the 19th of January. The firing on both sides had slackened, but not ceased. The chiefs were all bustle and mystery. They had had their instructions. Soon the 5th and 77th were ordered to fall in, and halted on the extreme right of the division. Whilst the men hammered at their flints the order was read to the troops. They were to take twelve axes in order to cut down the gate by which the ditch was entered. The 5th Regiment were to have twelve scaling-ladders, 25 feet long, to scale the Fausse Brage, clear it of the enemy, throw over

[Pg 54]

any guns, and wait for General M'Kinnon's column in the main attack.

"Whilst waiting in the gloom for the return of the men sent for the ladders, we mingled in groups of officers, conversing and laughing together with that callous thoughtlessness which marks the old campaigner.

"I well remember how poor McDougall of the 5th was quizzed about his dandy moustaches. When next I saw him, in a few short hours, he was a lifeless and a naked corpse.

"Suddenly a horseman galloped heavily towards us. It was Picton. He made a brief and inspiring speech to us—said he knew the 5th were men whom a severe fire would not daunt, and that he reposed equal confidence in the 77th. A few kind words to our commander and he bade us God-speed, pounding the sides of his hog-maned cob as he trotted off."

Major Sturgeon and the ladders having arrived, the troops again moved off about half-past six. The night was rather dark, the stars lending but little light.

They were enjoined to observe the strictest silence. It was a time of thrilling excitement as they wound their way by the right, at first keeping a distance of 1,200 yards from the town, then bending in towards the convent of Santa Cruz and the river. The awful stillness of the hour was unbroken save by the soft, measured tread of the little columns as they passed over the green turf, or by the occasional report of a cannon from the walls, and the rush and whizz of its ball as it flew past, or striking short, bounded from the earth over their heads, receiving, perhaps, most respectful, though involuntary, salaams. Every two or three minutes a gun was fired at some suspicious quarter.

They had approached the convent and pushed on nearer the walls, which now loomed high and near. They reached the low glacis, through which was discovered a pass into the ditch, heavily palisaded with a gate in the centre. Through the palisades were visible the dark and lofty old Moorish walls, whilst high overhead was the great keep or citadel, a massive square tower, which looked like a giant frowning on the scene. The English still were undiscovered, though they could distinguish the arms of the men on the ramparts, as they fired in idle bluster over their heads.

[Pg 55]

Eagerly, though silently, they all pressed towards the palisades as the men with hatchets began to cut a way through them. The sound of the blows would not have been heard by the enemy, who were occupied by their own noises, had it not been for the enthusiasm, so characteristic of his country, which induced a newly-joined ensign, fresh from the wilds of Kerry, to utter a tremendous war-whoop as he saw the first paling fall before the axes. The cheer was at once taken up by the men, and, as they instantly got convincing proofs that they were discovered—the men on the walls began to pepper them soundly—they all rushed through the opening. In the ditch the assailants were heavily fired on from rampart and tower. The French tossed down lighted shells and hand-grenades, which spun about hissing and fizzing amongst their feet. Some of these smashed men's heads as they fell, whilst others, exploding on the ground, tossed unlucky wretches into the air, tearing them asunder. Seldom could any men have passed three or four minutes more uncomfortably than the time which was consumed in bringing in and fixing the ladders against a wall, towards which they all crowded.

Amongst the first to mount was the gallant chieftain of the 5th, but the love they bore him caused so many of the soldiers to follow on the same ladder that it broke in two, and they all fell, many being hurt by the bayonets of their own comrades round the foot of the ladder.

[Pg 56]

"I was not one of the last in ascending," writes an officer of the 77th, "and as I raised my head to the level of the top of the wall, I beheld some of our fellows demolishing a picket which had been stationed at that spot, and had stood on the defensive.

"They had a good fire of wood to cheer themselves by, and on revisiting the place in the morning, I saw their dead bodies, stripped, strangely mingled with wounded English officers and men, who had lain round the fire all night, the fortune of war having made them acquainted with strange bed-fellows.

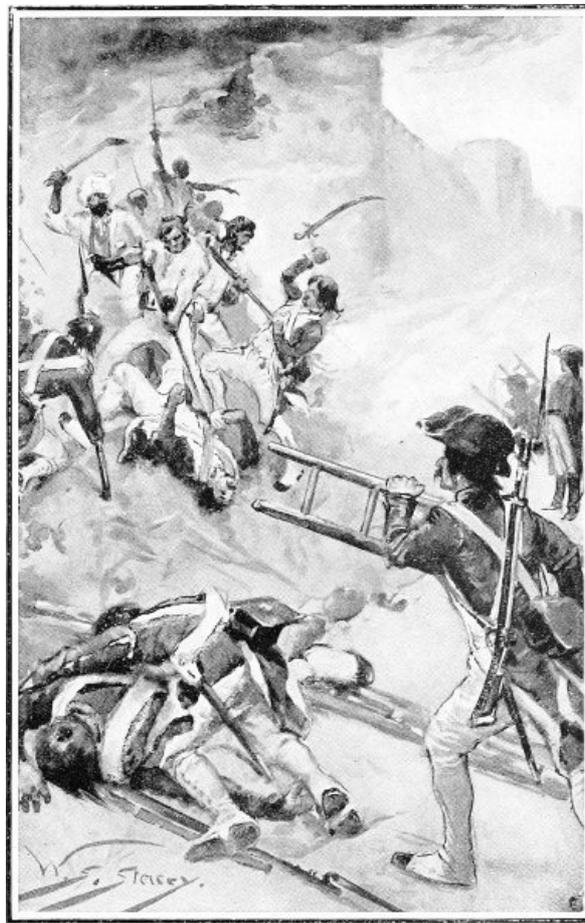
"Our ascent of the ladders placed us in the Fausse Brage—a broad, deep ditch—in which we were for the moment free from danger.

"When about 150 men had mounted, we moved forward at a rapid pace along this ditch, cowering close to the wall, whilst overhead we heard the shouts and cries of alarm. Our course was soon arrested by the massive fragments and ruins of the main breach made by our men, and here we were in extreme danger, for instead of falling into the rear of a column supposed to have already carried the breach, we stood alone at its base, exposed to a tremendous fire of grape and musketry from its defences.

"For a minute or two we seemed destined to be sacrificed to some mistake as to the hour of attack, but suddenly we heard a cheer from a body of men who flung down bags of heather to break their fall, and leaped on them into the ditch.

"It was the old Scots Brigade, which, like us, having been intended as a support, was true to its time, and was placed in the same predicament as we were."

[Pg 57]



THE NIGHT ASSAULT OF CIUDAD RODRIGO

The enemy, immediately on discovering the presence of the British soldiers, commenced firing and throwing lighted shells and hand grenades at them.

On the appearance of the 94th the fire of the garrison was redoubled, but it was decided by the officers that it was better to die like men on the breach than like dogs in a ditch, and so, with a wild "Hurrah!" they all sprang up, absolutely eating fire. The breach must have been 70 feet wide, and consisted of a nearly perpendicular mass of loose rubbish, in which it was very difficult to obtain a footing.

The enemy lost no time. They pointed two guns downwards from the flanks and had time to fire several rounds of grape, working fearful destruction on the British. On the margin of the breach were ranged a quantity of shells, which were lighted and rolled down on them; but they acted rather as a stimulus to push up, and so avoid their explosion. The top of the breach was defended by a strong body of the garrison, who maintained a heavy fire of musketry, and hurled down hand-grenades and fire-balls. However, a night attack, with all its defects, has the advantage of concealing from the view much of danger and of difficulty that, if seen, might shake the nerve.

But there was no time for hesitation, no choice for the timid. The front ranks were forced onwards by the pressure of those in the rear, and as men fell wounded on the breach, there they lay, being trodden into and covered by the shifting rubbish displaced by the feet of their comrades. Some few, more lucky, when wounded fell or rolled down the slope into the ditch, and they added by their outcries to the wildness of the scene. The enemy's resistance slackened, and they suddenly fled. Some guns they left behind in their panic.

It was now seven o'clock; the breach was carried, and the town virtually ours. About that time a wooden magazine placed on the rampart blew up, destroying our General and many with him, as well as a number of the garrison. Patterson of the 43rd and Uniacke of the 95th were of the number.

[Pg 58]

"I distinctly remember the moment of the explosion and the short pause it occasioned in our proceedings—a pause that enabled us to hear the noise of the attack still going forward near the little breach. I met Uniacke walking between two men. One of his eyes was blown out, and the flesh was torn from his arms and legs.

"I asked who it was. He replied, 'Uniacke,' and walked on.

"He had taken chocolate with our mess an hour before!

"At this time a gigantic young Irish volunteer attached to our regiment, observing a gallant artilleryman still lingering near his gun, dashed at him with bayonet fixed and at the charge.

"The man stepped backwards, facing his foe; but his foot slipping, he fell against the gun, and in a moment the young Irish fellow's bayonet was through his heart. The yell with which he gave up

the ghost so terrified B— that he started back, the implement of death in his hands, and, apostrophizing it, said, 'Holy Moses! how aisy you went into him!' This saying became celebrated afterwards through the whole division.

"Colonel McLeod caused Lieutenant Madden of the 43rd to descend the small breach with twenty-five men, to prevent soldiers leaving the town with plunder. At eleven o'clock I went to see him. He had very judiciously made a large fire, which, of course, showed up the plunderers to perfection. He told me that no masquerade could, in point of costume and grotesque figures, rival the characters he stripped that night."

Well, to go back to the storming party. The men who lined the breastwork having fled, our men dropped from the wall into the town and advanced in pursuit. At first they were among ruins, but gradually made their way into a large street which led nearly in a straight line from the principal breach to the *plaza*, or square. Up this street they fought their way, the enemy slowly retiring before them. At about half the length of the street was a large open space on the left hand, where was deposited the immense battering train of "the army of Portugal."

[Pg 59]

Amongst this crowd of carriages a number of men ensconced themselves, firing on the British as they passed, and it required no small exertion on their part to dislodge them. In the meantime many of the French ahead of them had entered the square, for which place our fellows pushed on with as many men as they could lay hands on, formed without distinction of regiment, into two or three platoons. For the great proportion of the men who had started with the column had sneaked off into the by-streets for the purpose of plundering—a business which was already going on merrily.

As they reached the head of the street, which entered the square at one angle, and wheeled to the left into the open space, they received a shattering volley, which quickly spoiled their array. The French were drawn up in force under the colonnade of the cathedral, and we were for the moment checked by their fire.

At length, when they were meditating a dash at the fellows, they heard fire opened from another quarter, which seemed to strike the French with a panic, for on our men giving a cheer and running forward, they to a man threw away their arms as if by word of command, and vanished in the gloom like magic.

It was the Light Division who entered the square by a street leading from the little breach, and their opportune arrival had frightened away the game which had been brought to bay, leaving the pavement of the square littered with arms and accoutrements.

But now begins a part of the story which does not reflect much credit on our fellows. When the men had sipped the wine and brandy in the stores which they plundered, most extreme disorders began, which it was impossible to check. A whole division could not have restored order.

[Pg 60]

Three or four large houses were on fire—two of them were in the market-place—and the streets were illuminated by the flames.

The soldiers were growing very drunk, and many of them for amusement were firing from the windows into the streets.

"I was myself talking to the barber Evans in the square, when a ball passed through his head. This was at one o'clock in the morning. He fell at my feet dead, and his brains lay on the pavement. I then sought shelter, and found Colonel McLeod with a few officers in a large house, where we remained until the morning.

"I did not enter any other house in Ciudad Rodrigo. If I had not seen it, I never could have supposed that British soldiers would become so wild and furious.

"It was quite alarming to meet groups of them in the streets, flushed as they were with drink, and desperate in mischief, singing, yelling, dealing blows at man, woman, or child like so many mad things loose from Bedlam.

"In the morning the scene was dismal and dreary. The fires were just going out; all over street and square were lying the corpses of many men who had met their death hours after the town had been taken.

"At eleven o'clock I went to look at the great breach. The ascent was not so steep as that of the small one, but there was a traverse thrown up at each side of it on the rampart. I counted ninety-three men of the Third Division lying dead on the rampart between the traverses. I did not see one dead man on the French side of those traverses.

"I saw General McKinnon lying dead. He was on his back just under the rampart. He had, I think, rushed forward and fallen down the perpendicular wall, probably at the moment of receiving his mortal wound. He was stripped of everything except his shirt and blue pantaloons; even his boots were taken off.

[Pg 61]

"There were no others dead near him, and he was not on the French side either. It is said that he was blown up, but I should say not. There was no appearance indicating that such had been his fate. Neither his skin nor the posture in which he was lying led me to suppose it. When a man is blown up, his hands and face, I should think, could not escape. McKinnon's face was pale and free from the marks of fire. How strange! but with his exception I did not see a man of the Third

Division who had been stripped."

Besides possession of the fortress, the whole of Masséna's battering-train had become prize, as well as an immense quantity of light artillery which Marmont brought against us on the retreat from El Boden.

The fortress was so well supplied with warlike stores that not an article of any kind was wanting, in spite of the great expenditure during the siege.

What would not the French and English say now?

Ciudad invested, bombarded, stormed, and taken in twelve days! and this it cost Masséna fifty-one days to do, sixteen of which he was bombarding the town. Every part of the proceeding seems to have astonished the garrison, as in erecting works, opening batteries, etc., they were always a day or two out in their calculations.

The George and Dragon had nearly disappeared from the King's colours by a shell passing through it, but "the men were splendid" in attack, and followed their leaders unto death.

CHAPTER V

THE STORMING OF BADAJOS (1812)

[Pg 62]

Rescue of wounded men—A forlorn hope—Fire-balls light up the scene—A mine explodes—Partial failure of the English—Escalade of the castle—Pat's humour and heroism—Saving a General—Wellington hears the news—The day after the storm.

Badajos is situated on the left bank of the Guadiana, which is about 400 yards broad and washes one-fourth of the enceinte. The defences along the river are confined to a simple and badly flanked rampart, but on the other sides there are eight large and well-built fronts with covered way. The scarp of the bastions is more than 30 feet in height. In advance of these fronts are two detached works, the Bardeleras and the Picurina, the latter being a strong redoubt 400 yards from the town. As the bombardment went on for some days, preparing a breach for an assault, incidents were few; officers sometimes strolled round to explore for themselves.

One writes: "One day I saw two men stretched on the ground. One was dead, a round shot having passed through his body; the other had lost a leg. His eyes were closed; he seemed to be quite dead. An adventurous Portuguese—one of our allies—was beginning to disencumber him of his clothes.

"The poor man opened his eyes and looked in the most imploring manner, while the villain had him by the belt, lifting him up. I ran forward and gave the humane Portuguese a sharp blow with my blunt sabre, so that with a yell he threw himself down by the side of the soldier whom he was stripping, thinking his last hour had come.

[Pg 63]

"Soon after I saw a heavy shot hopping along and kicking up the dust. It struck one of our soldiers on the hip, and down he went, motionless.

"I felt confident that the wounded man was not dead, and I begged that some of his comrades would carry him off to the rear. They were retiring under a heavy cannonade. Two soldiers, at the risk of their lives, rushed back and brought him in, or he would have been starved to death between our lines and the ramparts of the town. His hip was only grazed and his clothes untorn; but, of course, he was unable to walk, and seemed to feel much pain, for he groaned heavily.

"Towards the end of the siege the weather became beautiful. One day I call to mind the enemy scarcely fired a shot. All our troubles were forgotten, and two or three of us amused ourselves by reading a novel in the trenches."

The garrison of Badajos fired every morning for a few days before the grand assault a certain number of rounds, as if for practice and to measure the ground.

On the 6th of April a long order was issued relative to the position the troops were to occupy. The day was fine, and all the soldiers in good spirits, cleaning themselves as if for a review.

"About two o'clock I saw poor Harvest. He was sucking an orange and walking on a rising ground, alone and very thoughtful. It gave me pain, as I knew he was to lead the forlorn hope. He said, 'My mind is made up, old fellow: I am sure to be killed.'"

At half-past eight that night the ranks were formed and the roll called in an undertone. The division drew up in deep silence behind a large quarry, 300 yards from the breaches. They had to wait long for ladders and other things.

[Pg 64]

At ten a very beautiful fire-ball was thrown up from the town. This illuminated the ground for many hundred yards. Two or three more followed, showed a bright light, and remained burning some little time.

The stillness that followed was the prelude to one of the strangest scenes that could be seen. Soon after ten a little whisper went round that the forlorn hope were stealing forward, followed

by the storming parties, composed of 300 men.

In two minutes the division followed. One musket shot (no more) was fired near the breaches by a French soldier who was on the look-out. Still our men went on, leisurely but silently. There were no obstacles. The 52nd, 43rd, and 95th closed gradually up to column of quarter distance. All was hushed; the town lay buried in gloom. The ladders were placed on the edge of the ditch, when suddenly an awful explosion took place at the foot of the breaches, and a burst of light disclosed the whole scene. The very earth seemed to rock and sway under their feet. What a sight!

The ramparts stood out clear, crowded with the enemy. French soldiers stood on the parapets, while the short-lived glare from the barrels of powder and stuff flying into the air gave to friends and foes a look as if both bodies of troops were laughing! A tremendous fire now opened upon the English, and for an instant they were stationary; but the troops were no ways daunted. The ladders were found exactly opposite the centre breach, and the whole division rushed to the assault with amazing resolution. The soldiers flew down the ladders into the ditch, and the cheering from both sides was loud and full of confidence. Fire-balls were rising, lighting up the scene. The ditch was very wide, and when they arrived at the foot of the centre breach eighty or ninety men were clustered together. One called out, "Who will lead?"

[Pg 65]

Death and the most dreadful sounds and cries encompassed all. It was a volcano! Up they went: some killed, others impaled on the bayonets of their own comrades, or hurled headlong amongst the crowd.

The chevaux-de-frise atop looked like innumerable bayonets.

"When I was within a yard of the top I felt half strangled, and fell from a blow that deprived me of all sensation. I only recollect feeling a soldier pulling me out of the water, where so many men were drowned. I lost my cap, but still held my sword. On recovering, I looked towards the breach. It was shining and empty! Fire-balls were in plenty, and the French troops, standing upon the walls, were taunting us and inviting our men to come up and try it again. What a crisis! what a military misery! Some of the finest troops in the world prostrate—humbled to the dust."

Colonel McLeod was killed while trying to force the left corner of the large breach. He received his mortal wound when within three yards of the enemy. A few moments before he fell he had been wounded in the back by a bayonet of one of our men who had slipped. It was found out afterwards that the woodwork of the cheval-de-frise was heavy, bristling with short, stout sword-blades and chained together. It was an obstacle not to be removed, and the French soldiers stood close to it, killing every man who drew near. To get past such obstacles by living bodies pushing against it up a steep breach, sinking to the knees every step in rubbish, while a firm and obstinate enemy stood behind—it was impossible.

Round shot alone could have destroyed these defences, which were all chained together and vastly strong. Had it not been for this, the divisions would have entered like a swarm of bees. It was fortunate that Lord Wellington had made arrangements for assaulting the town at other points.

[Pg 66]

"Next morning I was searching for my friend Madden. At last I found him lying in a tent, with his trousers on and his shirt off, covered with blood, and bandaged across the body to support his broken shoulder, laid on his back and unable to move. He asked for his brother.

"Why does he not come to see me?"

"I turned my head away, for his gallant young brother was amongst the slain. Captain Merry, of the 52nd, was sitting on the ground, sucking an orange.

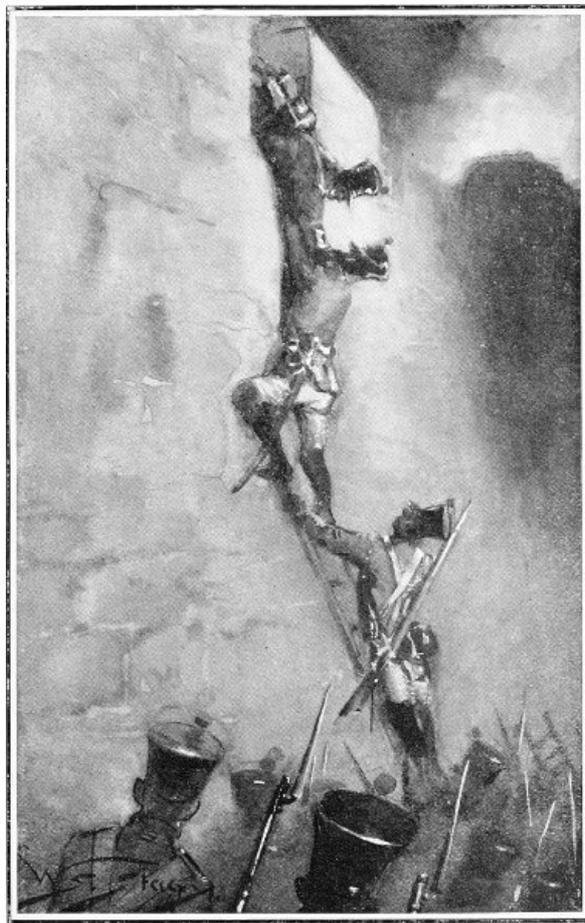
"He said: 'How are you? You see that I am dying: a mortification has set in.'

"A grape-shot had shattered his knee. He had told the doctor that he preferred death rather than permit such a good leg to be amputated."

ESCALADE OF THE CASTLE.

General Picton with the Third Division was ordered to attack the castle by escalade. The castle was an old building on the summit of a hill about 100 feet high, on the north-east of the town.

At about ten o'clock on the night of the 6th of April, 1812, the Third Division advanced in that profound silence that rendered the coming storm more terrific. Our men were not perceived until they arrived at a little river not very distant from the works, when they distinctly heard the entire line of the French sentries give the alarm, and all the guns of the garrison opened at once.



THE ESCALADE OF THE CASTLE

Many of the ladders were too short. In one case a brawny Irish private of herculean strength pulled up first his captain, "clever and clane," as he said, and then five others.

Volley after volley of grape-shot was fired upon our troops as they advanced; fire-balls rose, and showed the enemy where they were. They quickened pace and got so close under the wall that the guns could not bear upon them, but the fire-balls burned so vividly that they were enabled to direct their musketry upon the assailants, and hurl with fatal precision every kind of missile.

[Pg 67]

The ladders were placed, the troops cheered and swarmed up, and nothing was heard but mingled cries of despair and shouts of victory. Several ladders broke down under the weight, and men were precipitated on the heads of their comrades below.

"The ladder I mounted was, like many others, too short, and I found that no exertion I could make would enable me to reach the embrasure or descend. In this desperate state, expecting immediate death from the hands of a ferocious Frenchman in the embrasure, I heard a voice above call out:

"'Mr. —, is that you?'

"'Yes!' I shouted.

"The same voice cried out: 'Oh, murther! murther! What will we do to get you up at all, at all, with that scrawdeen of a ladherr? But here goes! Hould my leg, Pat!' and, throwing himself flat on his face in the embrasure, he extended his brawny arm down the wall, seized me by the collar with the force of Hercules, and landed me, as he said himself, 'clever and clane,' on the ramparts.

"In the same manner five more were landed. Thus did this chivalrous soldier, with noble generosity, prefer saving the lives of six of his comrades at the risk of his own to the rich plunder which everywhere surrounded him. And this was Tully O'Malley, a private in my company, one of the 'ragged rascals.' Well, I found myself standing amongst several French soldiers, who were crowding round the gun in the embrasure. One of them still held the match lighted in his hand, the blue flame of which gave the bronzed and sullen countenances of these warriors an expression not easily forgotten.

[Pg 68]

"A Grenadier leaned on the gun and bled profusely from the head; another, who had fallen on his knees when wounded, remained fixed in astonishment and terror. Others, whose muskets lay scattered on the ground, folded their arms in deep despair. The appearance of the whole group, with their huge, bushy moustaches and mouths all blackened with biting the cartridges, presented to the eye of a young soldier a very strange and formidable appearance.

"'Don't mind them boys, sorr,' said Tully. 'They were all settled jist afore you came up: and, by my soul, good boys they were for a start—fought like raal divils, they did, till Mr. S— and the

Grenadiers came powdering down on them with the war-whoop. Och, my darlint! they were made smiddreens of in a crack, barring that big fellow you see there, with the great black whiskers—see yonder—bleeding in the side, he is, and resting his head on the gun-carriage. Ah! he was the boudest of them all. He made bloody battle with Jim Reilly; but 'tis short he stood afore our Jim, for he gave him a raal Waterford puck that tumbled him like a ninepin in a minute; and, by my own sowl, a puck of the butt-end of Jim's piece is no joke, I tell you! He tried it on more heads than one on the hill of Busaco.'

"Away then flew Tully to join his company, forming in double-quick time to oppose the enemy, who were gathering in force at one of the gates of the citadel."

They had already opened a most galling fire of musketry from this dark gateway, which was warmly returned by our men, who, under Lieutenant Davern, charged up to the massive gate. This, however, the French closed, so little impression was made. At last a number of the light infantry of the 74th and 85th helped each other to climb up on the archway over the gate, and thence they fired down so unexpectedly that a general panic seized the enemy, and they fled in confusion, followed by many of our men, who now dashed through the gateway.

[Pg 69]

Here Captain C—— came upon Major Murphy, of the 88th, quite exhausted and unable to move from loss of blood, as he had not been able to bind up his wound. This he did for him, and they moved on. One more bayonet struggle in the castle, and the French again fled, leaving the place literally covered with dead and wounded, several of them being officers, whose long narrow-bladed sabres with brass scabbards instantly changed masters.

One officer who was wounded made several thrusts at the sturdy Ranger who was trying to disarm him, but had awkwardly caught the sharp sword-blade in his hand, and was so angry at being cut that he was preparing to rush upon his antagonist. However, the Frenchman unbuckled his waist-belt and threw away his sword.

But Pat was angry, and was not now satisfied with the sword only, for, perceiving a handsome silver-mounted calabash, or flask, by the officer's side, he coolly transferred it to his own shoulders, after first taking a copious swill. Then, gravely addressing the wounded man, said, while reloading his piece:

"Now, my tight fellow, ye see what ye lost by your contrariness."

"Ah! monsieur, je suis grievement blessé: rendez-moi mon calabash, je vous prie."

"Grieving for your calabash! Is that what you mane?" said Pat. "Why, then, I'll tell you what, my boy: no man shall say that Pat Donovan ever deprived either friend or foe of his little dhróp of dhrink—so there 'tis for you!"

"Grand merci! grand merci!" murmured the officer.

"Oh, don't bother about axing mercy from me," said Pat; "but take my advice and keep roaring out 'Mercy! mercy!' to all our fellows as they come up to ye, and, by Gor! they'll not take the least notice of you."

[Pg 70]

"Ah! merci! merci! Mais c'est fait de moi! c'est fait de moi!" repeated the poor wounded young French officer.

Fatal presentiment! One hour afterwards the Irishman returned and found him lying on the same spot; but the gallant fellow was at rest, "where the wicked cease from troubling."

As we were occupied in disarming and securing the prisoners Captain C—— happened to capture and save the life of the Colonel commanding the artillery in the citadel at the very moment our men were pursuing him at the point of the bayonet.

He threw himself upon the Captain, and finding he understood French, entreated he would save him from our infuriated soldiers; but this he found it extremely difficult to do, as each successive group, on perceiving his large gold epaulettes and orders, evinced a strong anxiety to make further acquaintance with him. Upon one occasion the Captain was obliged to use his sword to protect him from a few of the 60th, who advanced upon him in rather a suspicious and business-like manner.

The poor Colonel was in a state of violent agitation, and kept a firm hold of his protector's arm through all the changes of the fight, until they met a field-officer of the British artillery, to whom he gave him in charge.

The Frenchman wanted to bring C—— to the bomb-proof, where his baggage was secured, to give him some tokens of his gratitude, and overwhelmed him with thanks; but duty called, and he left him with the field-officer, who, he heard afterwards, reaped a rich reward for his small service.

The first rays of a beautiful morning showed the incredible strength of Badajos, and how dearly the capture of it had cost us. The gallant hearts that beat with devoted bravery the night before now lay in the cold grasp of death. Silence had succeeded to the dreadful din of arms, and rendered more awful the contemplation of this fearful scene of death and suffering and desolation.

[Pg 71]

A vast number of the enemy lay dead in a heap close by the spot where our men were forming,

and while they gazed on these unhappy victims of a fierce and deadly fight, they were not a little astonished to observe a very young French officer who lay amongst them, and whom they thought to be dead also, slowly and cautiously raise himself up; then, after looking about him with a wild stare, he coolly walked over to the other side where the prisoners were standing and delivered himself up!

This wily hero had not been wounded, nor had he received the slightest scratch, but, being more frightened than hurt, he lay concealed in this manner until all fear of danger, as he thought, was over and gone.

It excited a good deal of merriment amongst our men, but the French curled their moustaches, gave him a hearty "Sacre!" and their deep contempt.

ANOTHER ACCOUNT.

"I was on a hill with the medical staff during the night of the assault of Badajos. For two hours we watched the fire, the bursting of shells and hand-grenades. Then the wounded began to arrive, and we were busy.

"Lord Wellington rode up with his staff, and soon after a staff-officer came up at a gallop, shouting, 'Where is Lord Wellington?'

"'There, sir.'

"'My lord, I am come from the breaches. The troops after repeated attempts, have failed to enter them. So many officers have fallen that the men, dispersed in the ditch, are without leaders. If your lordship does not at once send a strong reinforcement they must abandon the enterprise. Colonel McLeod, of the 43rd, has been killed in the breach.'

[Pg 72]

"A light was called for and instantly brought, and Lord Wellington noted the report with a steady hand. His face was pale and expressed great anxiety. In his manner and language he preserved perfect coolness and self-possession. General Hay's brigade was ordered to advance to the breaches.

"You may think that it was nervous work hearing this.

"Our General had wisely planned two extreme attacks by escalade on the castle by the Third Division and on the south side of the town by the Fifth Division, and on Fort Pardoleros by the Portuguese. It was known that Soult was within a few leagues. Marmont had pushed his advanced Dragoons as far as the bridge of boats at Villa Velha; the river Guadiana was in our rear.

"It was a crisis, and we wondered what thoughts were passing through the mind of our gallant chief as he sat motionless on his horse.

"Presently another staff-officer galloped up, out of breath.

"'General Picton—has—got possession of—the castle, sir.'

"'Who brings that intelligence?' exclaimed Lord Wellington.

"The officer saluted and gave his name.

"'Are you certain, sir—are you positively certain?'

"'I entered the castle with the troops. I have only just left it. General Picton in possession. He sent me.'

"'Picton in possession! With how many men?'

"'His division.'

"It is impossible to describe to you the change this news produced in the feelings of all around. A great sigh of relief could almost be heard.

[Pg 73]

"'Return, sir, and desire General Picton to maintain his position at all hazards.'

"Having dispatched this messenger, Lord Wellington directed a second officer to proceed to the castle to repeat his orders to General Picton.

"Next morning at dawn I set out to visit the breaches. I was just thinking of two friends, Major Singer and Captain Cholwick, of the Royal Fusiliers, both of whom had been with me two evenings before. I was wondering how they had fared in the assault when I met some Fusiliers and asked for Major Singer.

"'We are throwing the last shovels of earth upon his grave, sir.'

"'Is Captain Cholwick safe?' I inquired.

"'In the act of climbing over that palisade he was wounded, fell into the water, and we have seen nothing of him since.'

"That did not make me disposed to be very cheerful.

"I found the great breach covered with dead from its base to its summit. Many were stripped. Amongst them I recognized the faces of many well known to me. In climbing up the breach my feet receded at every step in the débris, so as to make my progress slow and difficult. Behind the chevaux-de-frise a broad and deep trench had been cut, into which our men must have been precipitated had they succeeded in surmounting this huge barrier. Above was a battery of 12-pounders completely enfilading the great and the small breach, near to each other. No wonder we failed there to enter.

"I next visited the castle, at the bottom of whose walls, nearly 40 feet high, were lying shattered ladders, broken muskets, exploded shells, and the dead bodies of many of our brave men. Amongst the dead I recognized the body of the gallant Major Ridge, of the 5th Regiment, lying near the gate that leads to the town, in forcing which he had fallen, riddled with balls.

[Pg 74]

"I met a soldier of the Connaught Rangers, overpowered by excitement and brandy. The fellow looked at me suspiciously, and appeared disposed to dispute my passage. He held his loaded musket at half present, and I was prepared to close with him; but fortunately flattery succeeded. He allowed me to pass.

"Soon after entering the town a girl about nine years of age implored my protection, 'por el amor de Dios,' for her mother.

"A number of soldiers of a distinguished regiment were in the house, armed, and under the influence of every evil passion. Alas! I was powerless. I met a man of the 88th dragging a peasant by the neck, with the intention of putting him to death—so he declared—in atonement for his not having any money in his pockets! I appealed to the gallantry of his corps, and saved the life of his victim."

The town had now become a scene of plunder and devastation. Our soldiers and our women, in a state of intoxication, had lost all control over themselves. These, together with numbers of Spaniards and Portuguese, who had come into the city in search of plunder, filled every street. Many were dispossessed of their booty by others, and these interchanges of plunder in many cases were not effected without bloodshed. Our soldiers had taken possession of the shops, stationed themselves behind the counters, and were selling the goods contained in them. These were, again, displaced by more numerous parties, who became shopkeepers in their turn, and thus continual scuffling and bloodshed was going on.

In addition to the incessant firing through the keyholes of the front doors of houses as the readiest way of forcing the locks, a desultory and wanton discharge of musketry was kept up in the streets, placing all who passed literally between cross-fires. Many of our own people were thus killed or wounded by their own comrades.

[Pg 75]

An attempt was made next day to collect our soldiers. The troops, however, that were sent into the town for that purpose joined in the work of plunder.

We may feel shocked at the excesses which our soldiers committed after the storming of such towns as Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajos. Folk sitting by their quiet firesides may wonder how sane men can be so dead to the higher and better feelings of humanity; but when the fever of war is followed by the poison of drink, it is no wonder if the minds of rude men are thrown off their balance. War is a most awful thing to witness, and many officers have declared to the writer that, had they known what war meant in all its dreadful reality, they would not have been so eager in their youth to join the army. All the more reason is there that every youth in our islands should be compelled by law to learn the use of the rifle, that when the time comes—as come it will—when an invader shall set foot upon our shore, we may not be helpless and unarmed. Perhaps it is necessary that we should sometimes hear the horrid truth about war; we may thus be stimulated to use a little self-denial for our country's security, when we realize that life is not made up of games and money-making, and when we can see what our fatherland would be to us, devastated by a savage enemy, with farms and barns blazing, women and children starved to death, towns sacked and plundered, and the honour of old England trodden beneath the foot of a foreign invader. The story of these sieges has many lessons—military, ethical, and economic. Let us at least learn one—the duty that is incumbent upon all of us, men and boys, to defend mother and wife and child.

CHAPTER VI

A PRISONER IN ST. SEBASTIAN (1813)

[Pg 76]

The *coup de grâce*—The hospital—A cruel order—An attempt at escape—Removed to the castle—The English at the breach—Many are wounded—French ladies sleep in the open—A vertical fire—English gunners shoot too well—A good sabre lightly won.

Colonel Harvey Jones, R.E., has left us an interesting account of the siege of St. Sebastian by the British forces. The town, situated close to the French frontier, just south of the Pyrenees and by the sea, contains 10,000 inhabitants, and is built on a low peninsula running north and south. The defences of the western side are washed by the sea, those on the eastern side by the river Urumea, which at high-water covers 4 feet of the masonry of the scarp. The first assault in July

failed. Colonel Jones was wounded and taken prisoner.

His diary begins: "After witnessing the unsuccessful attempts of Lieutenant Campbell, 9th Regiment, and his gallant little band to force their way on to the ramparts, and their retreat from the breach, my attention was soon aroused by a cry from the soldier who was lying disabled next to me:

"'Oh, they are murdering us all!'

"Looking up, I perceived a number of French Grenadiers, under a heavy fire of grape, sword in hand, stepping over the dead and stabbing the wounded. My companion was treated in the same manner. The sword, plucked from his body and reeking with his blood, was raised to give me the *coup de grâce*, when, fortunately, the uplifted arm was arrested by a smart little man—a sergeant—who cried out:

[Pg 77]

"'Oh, mon Colonel, êtes-vous blessé?' and he ordered some men to remove me."

They raised the Colonel in their arms and carried him up the breach on to the ramparts. Here they were stopped by a Captain of the Grenadiers, who asked some questions, then kissed him, and desired the party to proceed to the hospital.

They met the Governor and his staff on the way, who asked if the Colonel was badly wounded, and directed that proper care should be taken of him.

After descending from the rampart into the town, as they were going along the street leading to the hospital, they were accosted by an officer who had evidently taken his "drop." He demanded the Englishman's sword, which was still hanging by his side.

The reply came: "You have the power to take it, but certainly have no right to do so, as I have not been made a prisoner by you."

This seemed to enrage him, and with great violence of manner and gesture he unbuckled the belt and carried away the sword.

Upon reaching the hospital, the Surgeon-Major was very kind in his manner. After he had enlarged the wounds, according to the French system, and then dressed them, the Colonel was carried across the street and put into a bed in one of the wards of the great hospital, which a soldier was ordered to vacate for his use. This man returned later in the day for his pipe and tobacco, which he had left under the pillow.

In the course of the morning they were visited by the Governor, who made inquiries as to their wounds, and whether they had been plundered of anything; for a great number of English soldiers had been taken, and were lodged in the town prison. The only persons permitted to visit them were some staff-officers, a few Spanish ladies, and a Spanish barber. From the former the Colonel was made acquainted with all that passed in the British lines—at least, as far as the French could conjecture. Although boats arrived nightly from Bayonne, the other side of the frontier, bringing shells, medicine, charpie, or lint, engineers, etc., the garrison remained in great ignorance of the movements of the two armies. Soult kept sending word that he would soon come and raise the siege; thus, by promises of immediate relief, he kept up the spirits of the garrison. He also rewarded the gallantry of particular defenders during the assault and in the sorties by promotion, or by sending them the decoration of the Legion of Honour. In the French Army there seemed to have been a system of reward for good and gallant conduct by promotion into the Grenadiers or Voltigeurs, which had an excellent effect. A French soldier was extremely proud of his green, yellow, or red epaulettes. They were badges of distinguished conduct and only those who had shown great gallantry in action were admitted into their ranks. What with the success attendant upon the sorties and the numerous decorations which had been distributed among the officers and privates, such a spirit of daring had been created that the idea of a surrender was scouted by all.

[Pg 78]

After the stones had been extracted which had been blown into his leg and thighs by the bursting of shells and grenades, the Colonel was enabled to move about and get into the gallery running round the courtyard of the hospital, and into which all the doors and windows of the rooms respectively opened. It was the only place where they were allowed to breathe the fresh air.

[Pg 79]

One day, whilst sitting in the gallery, he observed a table placed in the balcony below him, on the other side of the courtyard. Soon he saw an unfortunate French gunner laid upon the table. They amputated both his arms, his hands having been blown off by an accident in one of the batteries. In the course of the morning, whilst conversing with the surgeon who had performed the operation, he told the Colonel that he had acted contrary to his instructions, which were never to amputate, but to cure if possible. When he was asked for the reason of such an inhuman order having been issued, his reply was that the Emperor Napoleon did not wish numbers of mutilated men to be sent back to France, as it would make a bad impression upon the people.

"You must be a bold man to act in opposition to this order."

He replied: "Affairs are beginning to change, and, moreover, it is now necessary that the soldiers should know they will be taken proper care of in the event of being wounded, and not left to die like dogs. We send as many as we can at night to Bayonne by the boats; thus we clear out the hospitals a little."

In conversations with many of the officers they detailed acts committed by their soldiers in Spain so revolting to human nature that one refuses to commit them to paper. A *chef de bataillon* once asked him how the English managed with their soldiers when they wanted them to advance and attack an enemy.

The reply was simply, "Forward!"

"Ah! that way will not do with us. We are obliged to excite our men with spirits, or to work upon their feelings by some animating address; and very often, when I have fancied I had brought them up to the fighting pitch, some old hand would make a remark which in an instant spoilt all I had said, and I had to begin my speech all over again."

[Pg 80]

The Colonel asked how they managed to provision their men when they went out on expeditions that lasted ten or twenty days.

The answer was: "Our biscuits are made with a hole in the centre. Each biscuit is the ration for a day. Sometimes twenty are delivered to each soldier, who is given to understand that he has no further claim on the commissariat for those days."

"But it is impossible for the soldier to carry twenty."

"We know that very well, but he has no claim; and how he lives in the meanwhile we do not ask. Perhaps he lives on the country." In other words, he steals!

In the hospital he was attended by a Spanish barber. As he could speak Spanish fluently, they had a good deal of talk. The barber used to tell all he heard and saw of what was passing both inside and outside the fortress. When he learnt that the Colonel was an engineer, he offered to bring him a plan of all the underground drains and of the aqueduct.

The attendant, although a good-natured man, kept a sharp eye on the barber; so it was a difficult matter for him to give anything without being detected.

At last, one morning when preparing to shave him, he succeeded in shoving a plan under the bedclothes. The Colonel seized the earliest opportunity of examining it, and from the knowledge he had before acquired of the place he soon mastered the directions of the drains, etc. From that moment his whole attention was fixed on the means of making his escape.

He knew that the hospital was situated in the principal street, the ends of which terminated upon the fortifications bounding the harbour. If once he could gain the street he had only to turn to the right or left to gain the ramparts, and so make his escape from the town in the best manner he could.

[Pg 81]

One evening just at dusk, when the medical men took leave of them for the night, one of them left his cocked hat on the bed. As soon as the Colonel noticed this he put it on his head, hurried downstairs, and made direct for the great door; but he found it so completely blocked up by the guard that, unless by pushing them aside, it was not possible to pass undiscovered. He therefore retreated upstairs in despair, and threw the hat down on the bed. Scarcely had he done so when he rushed the doctor, asking for his *chapeau*.

They were more than once visited by the crews of the boats which arrived nightly from France. The sight of the prisoners seemed to afford the Frenchmen great gratification, but there was nothing in their manner which could in any way offend.

Very unexpectedly one evening the Governor's aide-de-camp came to the prison and told the officers to prepare immediately to go to France.

A Portuguese Captain, one of the party of prisoners, was dreadfully in fear of being sent there, and with great warmth of manner told the aide-de-camp that Lord Wellington would soon be in possession of the place, and if the prisoners were not forthcoming he would hold the Governor answerable in person.

It is supposed that the aide went and reported this conversation to the Governor, as he did not return for some time, and then told them it was too late to embark that night, as the boats had sailed. They were never afterwards threatened to be sent away.

About the middle of August the garrison began to flatter themselves that the siege was turned into a regular blockade, and that they would be relieved by the successes of Marshal Soult. Their spirits ran high, their hopes were elated.

[Pg 82]

The 15th of August, the birthday of Napoleon, was observed as a day of rejoicing among the garrison, and at nightfall the letter "N" of a very large size was brilliantly lighted up on the face of the donjon.

When the operations of the second siege began a Captain who visited the Colonel kept him *au fait* of all that was going on. One day a Spanish Captain who had sided with the French came into the hospital—it was on the evening of the assault. He was wringing his hands, tearing his hair, and swearing he had heard the shrieks of his wife and daughters, and had seen his house in flames. The French officers took the poor man's outcries with great merriment, and the Spaniard must have bitterly regretted the day when he deserted the English. The French officers did not fail to taunt him with having done so, and ridiculed his frantic actions.

In the course of the next day Colonel Jones was asked if he would like to speak with a corporal of

sappers who had been made prisoner during the sortie.

To his surprise, a fine, tall youngster, a stranger to him, walked into the ward, dressed in a red jacket. Now, blue was the colour when the Colonel was taken prisoner.

"When did you join the army, corporal?" he asked.

"Yesterday morning, Colonel. I was put on duty in the trenches last night, and in a few minutes I was brought into the town by the enemy."

"I could not help laughing, though he wore a rueful expression," says the Colonel.

One morning a Captain of artillery, whom he had never before seen, came into the ward and commenced conversing about the siege. He observed that the whole second parallel of the British trenches was one entire battery, and if there were as many guns as there were embrasures, he said, "*we shall be joliment fouettés.*"

[Pg 83]

The Colonel's reply was: "Most assuredly you will. Depend upon it, there are as many guns as embrasures. It is not our fashion to make batteries and stick logs of wood into the embrasures in the hope of frightening the enemy."

He made a grimace, and with a shrug of the shoulders left the ward.

Next morning the surgeon came, as usual, to dress the wounds. This was about half-past seven. All was still, and he joyously exclaimed, as he entered:

"So, gentlemen, we have another day's reprieve!"

In about half an hour afterwards, whilst Colonel Jones was under his hands, the first salvo from the breaching batteries was fired. Several shot rattled through the hospital and disturbed the tranquillity of the inmates. The instrument dropped from the surgeon's hands, and he exclaimed, "*Le jeu sera bientôt fini!*" Then very composedly the good doctor went on with his work.

The opening of the batteries made a great stir amongst all hands. A hint was given the prisoners to prepare to be removed into the castle. A private hint was given to the Colonel to be *sage* on the way up, as the Captain of the escort was *méchant*, and that it would be better to be quiet and orderly.

This, perhaps, was intended to deter any of them from attempting to escape. The wounded prisoners were moved in one body up the face of the hill to the entrance of the castle. Under the Mirador battery they were exposed to a sharp musketry fire. Some of the party were wounded, the Portuguese Captain severely.

A building on the sea-side, which had been constructed for a powder magazine, was now converted into their hospital, the interior being fitted up with wooden beds. In the area surrounding the building were placed the unwounded prisoners. As the number of wounded from the ramparts increased, the hospital filled rapidly, and to prevent the fire from the English batteries being directed upon them some of the prisoners were desired to hoist a black flag on the roof. While they were doing so the Colonel told the French officer that it was labour in vain, as the British had learnt that this building was their great depot for powder, and so hoisting a flag would be regarded as a ruse to preserve their ammunition. Little benefit did they get from the ensign. After the capture of the island Santa Clara, hardly could anyone move about that part of the castle opposite to the island without the risk of being hit. Grape and shrapnel swept the whole of the face, and it was only at night that fresh water could be fetched from the tank.

[Pg 84]

The garrison had a fixed idea that the assault would take place at night, so each morning they rose with happy faces—another twenty-four hours' reprieve!

On the 31st of August, when the first rattle of musketry was heard in the castle, an inquiring look pervaded each countenance; but no one spoke. As the firing continued and the rattle grew and grew, little doubt remained as to the cause. Every soldier seized his musket and hurried with haste to his post. The Colonel was then ordered not to speak or hold converse with the unwounded prisoners outside. One French officer asked him if he thought that the English prisoners would remain quiet if an assault of the breach should take place, adding, "If they were to make any attempt they would all be shot."

Colonel Jones replied: "Do not fancy you have a flock of sheep penned within these walls. Happen what may, shoot us or not, you will be required to give a satisfactory account of us when the castle is taken."

From the commencement of the assault until the rush into the castle upon the capture of the town, not the slightest information could they obtain as to the state of affairs at the breach. The period that intervened was to the prisoners one of the most anxious and painful suspense. At last the tale was told by the awful spectacle of the interior of the hospital.

[Pg 85]

In an instant the ward was crowded with the maimed and wounded. The amputation-table was in full play, and until nearly daylight the following morning the surgeons were unceasingly at work.

To have such a scene passing at the foot of one's bed was painful enough. Added to this the agonizing shrieks and groans and the appearance of the sappers and Grenadiers who had been blown up by the explosion in the breach, their uniforms nearly burnt off, and their skins blackened and scorched by gunpowder—all this was truly appalling. The appearance of these

men resembled anything but human beings. Death soon put an end to their sufferings, and relieved all from these most distressing sights. Of all wounds, whether of fractured limbs or otherwise, those caused by burns from gunpowder seemed to produce the most excruciating pain.

In the rear of the donjon was a small building, in which was stored much gunpowder. Shells were falling fast and thick around it, so a detachment of soldiers was sent to withdraw the ammunition. This dangerous service they were performing in a most gallant manner, and had nearly completed their work, when some shells fell into the building, exploded the barrels that remained, and blew the building, with some of the soldiers, into the air, not leaving a vestige to show that such an edifice had stood there.

There were three French ladies in the garrison. They were on their way to France when the investment took place. These ladies were permitted to enter the hospital, and were allowed a small space at one end of the wooden bedsteads. There they were for several days and nights. The only water they could obtain to wash in was sea-water. As the number of the wounded increased, some of the officers who were lying upon the floor were loud in their complaints that madame and her daughters were occupying the space which properly belonged to them. They succeeded in getting the ladies turned out, to find shelter from shot and shell where best they could!

[Pg 86]

The day the castle capitulated Colonel Jones went in search of his fair companions, and found them, nearly smoke-dried, under a small projecting rock.

One of the young ladies was extremely pretty. Shortly after the siege she was married to the English Commissary appointed to attend upon the garrison until sent to England. The change from the hospital to the naked rock relieved them from witnessing many a painful scene, as the amputating-table was placed near their end of the ward.

After the capture of the town a heavy bombardment of the castle took place, by salvos of shells from more than sixty pieces of artillery. There were only a few seconds between the noise made by the discharge of the mortars and the descent of the shells. Those of the mutilated who were fortunate enough to snatch a little sleep and so forget their sufferings were awakened by the crash of ten or a dozen shells falling upon or in the building, whose fuses threw a lurid light through the gloom. The silence within, unbroken save by the hissing of the burning composition, the agonized feelings of the wounded during those few moments of suspense, are not to be described. Many an unlucky soldier was brought to the table to undergo a second operation. The wretched surgeons were engaged nearly the entire night. Rest was impossible. You could not choose but hear. The legs and arms were thrown out as soon as amputated, and fell on the rocks.

[Pg 87]

It was not an agreeable sight. Those who vote for war do not realize these little details in the programme. War, they say, breeds heroes.

It is but justice to the French medical officers to state that their conduct during the whole period of their harassing and laborious duties was marked by the greatest feeling and kindness of manner, as well as by skilful attention to the relief of all who came under their hands.

The unfortunate prisoners who were not wounded had been placed in the area round the hospital, and being without cover, suffered at every discharge.

The Colonel exerted himself to obtain a few pickaxes and shovels to throw up some sort of splinter-proof, but it was in vain he pleaded, and in the end fifty were killed or wounded out of 150.

From the surgeons and hospital attendants they experienced great kindness. Their diet was the same as that of the French wounded soldiers. Their greatest luxury was three stewed prunes!

The effects of the vertical fire on the interior of the castle were so destructive that, had it been continued six hours longer, the garrison would have doubtless surrendered at discretion. They had lost all hope that Soult could relieve them.

Everybody now sought shelter where best he could among the rocks. Still, no nook or corner appeared to be a protection from the shrapnel shells.

A sergeant of the Royals, standing at the foot of a bedstead, was struck by a ball from a shrapnel shell, and fell dead while talking. An Italian soldier, while trying to prepare some broth for dinner, was blown into the air—soup, bowl, and all!

The excellence of the British artillery is well known. Nothing could surpass the precision with which the shells were thrown or the accuracy with which the fuses were cut. During the siege our men in the British trenches little heeded the lazy French shells which were thrown into our batteries. From the length of the fuses sufficient time was often allowed before they burst to put themselves under cover; and when they did burst, the splinters flew lazily around. But when the sound of an English shell was heard in the castle, or when the men stationed in the donjon cried, "Garde la bombe!" everybody was on the alert. Touching the ground and bursting were almost simultaneous, and the havoc from the splinters was terrible. It appeared to be of little avail where a man hid himself: no place was secure from them.

[Pg 88]

A French officer of Engineers, who was very badly wounded, kindly lent the Colonel some of the professional books which were supplied to him. Many were works which he had never been able

to procure. Much pleasure and instruction did he derive from their perusal. He found out that the French Engineers were supplied with them by the Government, and their Generals also with the best maps of the country.

One day the Colonel was called to the door of the ward by a French officer, who exclaimed, as he pointed to a large convoy of English transports coming in under full sail: "Voilà les fiacres qui viennent nous chercher!" ("There are the cabs coming to fetch us.") It was a most cheering and beautiful sight—the cabs that were sent to fetch us home!

When Colonel Jones was told, shortly after, that he was no longer a prisoner, he began to look round for the best sword in the castle to replace the one which that rude French Captain had taken from him.

He discovered a handsome sabre belonging to a wounded staff-officer, so he sent and desired that it might be taken down from the place where it was hanging, as he wanted such a weapon.

[Pg 89]

"I have it still by me. It was the only sword I wore until the end of the war, and often, when at the outposts with a flag of truce, have I seen the French officers regard the eagles on the belt with anything but a gratified look.

"In 1815 I was quartered at Paris, being engineer in charge of the fortifications on Mont-Martre. There I frequently saw several of the St. Sebastian officers, and from my old friend the Chirurgien-Major I received many visits.

"We both agreed that, though the tables were turned, our present position was far more agreeable than when our acquaintance began in St. Sebastian."

From Muswell's "Peninsular Sketches." Henry Colburn, publisher.

CHAPTER VII

JELLALABAD (1842)

[Pg 90]

Position of the town—Sale's brigade rebuilds the defences—A sortie—Bad news—A queer noise—A ruse that did not succeed—The only survivor comes in—Story of a massacre—The earthquake—The walls are down—Are rebuilt—English magic—Pollock comes—Fight outside—The peril of Lady Sale.

In November, 1841, the English Resident at the Afghan Court of Cabul was treacherously assassinated. General Elphinstone, who was left in command of the English troops, being in feeble health, attempted to leave the country with his 4,500 troops and three times that number of camp followers. On the 11th of March, 1842, Akbar Khan with a large army attacked General Sale at Jellalabad.

Jellalabad is a walled town on the right bank of the Cabul River. The upper end of the valley is very fertile and picturesque, studded with forts and villages, but all round the city it is sandy and arid. Snow mountains close in the valley on all sides.

South of Jellalabad, at a distance of 1,200 yards, is a low range of limestone hills, and on the south-west other low hills command the town at 200 yards' distance. All round the walls were houses, mosques, old forts, gardens, and trees—in fact, every species of cover that an enemy could desire.

The walls of the town were 2,100 yards in extent, all in ruinous condition, and in many places not more than 9 feet high, and easily scaled. Through breaches in the wall laden cattle and droves of asses went in and out daily.

[Pg 91]

Into this town on the evening of the 12th of November, 1841, wearied, footsore, hungry, short of ammunition, Sale's brigade entered, to undertake the desperate task of defending it against the whole power of the country, the people of which not only hated us as invaders, but regarded us as infidels to be rooted out.

At a distance of 600 miles from our own frontier, with the formidable defiles of the Khyber Pass to cross, what would be our condition if Runjeet Sing should refuse to allow another army to traverse his territories?

In the meantime these ruinous walls were better than the open plain; so, after viewing the fortifications, Sale marched the brigade in, and the inhabitants fled out at the other side as we entered.

It was decided to hold the whole town and try to make it defensible. Our supply of provisions was so low that the troops had to be put on half, and the camp followers on quarter, rations. As to ammunition, we had only 120 rounds per man. We set to work and collected grain, flour, pulse, and food of all sorts which had been left behind, and in a few hours supplies for several days had been gathered in.

As parts of the walls had no parapets and the sentries were quite exposed, hundreds of camel saddles were ranged, two deep and two high, for the sentries to kneel behind.

The next day many thousands of the enemy came swarming round and set fire to the grass huts and sheds on the eastern side. Some of them seemed to be bent on getting into a small mosque near the town, so a party of sappers, under Major Broadfoot, were sent to see what it contained.

[Pg 92]

They discovered a quantity of carbine ammunition, which proved to our men a timely and welcome supply. From dusk till midnight they kept firing on our sentries with wild yells. Then they withdrew, and the troops could snatch some rest.

At early dawn Sale determined on a sortie, and all were aroused without sound of bugle. Seven hundred infantry and two guns, commanded by Colonel Monteath, were ordered to sally out at sunrise and attack the Afghans. There were some 6,000 Afghans waiting to meet them in the rocky hills at the south-west angle of the city, but they did not resist long, and the cavalry rolled them over and pursued the fugitives, while Abbot's guns ploughed through them wherever they massed together.

By ten o'clock it was all over. The panic was so great that they deserted the forts, and we secured all the grain and fodder.

Two great results followed this fortunate victory: it gave the garrison a little breathing-time, and we had a few days of uninterrupted quiet to repair our walls and destroy cover.

The people of the valley now adopted the usual Oriental policy of trying to keep well with both parties, and sent in donkey-loads of flour, wheat, etc.

Working parties were told off to clear away the rubbish, to destroy houses outside, and to build parapets on the walls; for with the enemy's marksmen so near, no one could look over the walls or show a cap without getting a shot through it.

"Jellalabad" means "the abode of splendour," but our men found it squalid and mean. There were two main streets, crossing each other at right angles; the rest were narrow, filthy lanes. The mountain tribes have fair complexions and the Grecian type of face. They are believed to be the descendants of the Greeks left by Alexander the Great. All their implements and household utensils are totally different from those used by the Afghans.

[Pg 93]

As soon as the enemy was driven off by our sortie the troops set to work on the defences. No one was allowed to be idle. Officers and men, with spade, pickaxe, bill-hook, or mining tools in hand—all were at work from daybreak to sunset.

Parties of the enemy hovered about, but never dared to molest us. Strong detachments of cavalry were sent out every day to protect our grass-cutters.

On the 21st of November the garrison received bad news. The little fort of Pesh Bolak (half-way between Jellalabad and the Khyber) had had to be evacuated, and Captain Ferris had been seen going over the mountains away to Peshawar in hasty retreat.

Then from Cabul they heard that our troops there were shut up by the insurgents in their fortified cantonment, that there was a general rising of the whole country, and the roads were closed against messengers.

Every night now parties of the enemy used to creep round and fire at our sentries. At twelve o'clock on the night of the 28th there was a tremendous report, like the firing of a heavy gun. The alarm was sounded, and in two minutes every man was at his post. Seaton was Captain of the day, so he hurried off to learn what all the row was about. He found Sale and his staff in the west gate, looking earnestly in the direction of the enemy, and discussing with the heroic Havelock the probabilities of an attack. It was a bright moonlight night; everything visible near or far. All at once some one called out:

"Here they come, sir! Don't you see those two dark columns of men 500 yards off?"

Ah! yes. Every one saw them clearly enough.

[Pg 94]

"I looked a little, and then laughed right out. The General called to me in his short, sharp way:

"Seaton, what is it, sir?"

"General, where is the back wall of the old fort?"

"Eh! eh! what! what!' said he testily.

"Why, General, you sent me out yesterday to destroy the back wall of that old fort behind which the enemy used to muster. The clay was too hard for us, so, as the wall was just over a sunk road, and the bank below the wall soft, I threw a dam across the lower part of the road and turned in yon little stream. I guess it has softened the bank, and the wall has fallen with a slap into the water and produced the explosion. The columns of men are only the shadows of the north and south walls.' So we all had a hearty laugh."

Seaton was on guard every third day. Though the duty was hard, it was comparatively a day of rest. During the night officers visited the guards and sentries every two hours, and made the sentries report everything they had seen or heard. They patrolled the streets, too, every two hours, and the picket in the centre of the town sent patrols to each gate every hour during the night. Every day, when not on special duty, he went out with a large working party to destroy the old walls and houses outside the town, to fell and cut up the trees, and to bring them in for

firewood.

The enemy had some capital marksmen, and several of our men were shot through the loopholes. Sale now thought it time to put a stop to this, for they cut off our supplies and we had only thirty days' food in store. So he quietly waited until noon, when the enemy would be thinking more of food than fighting, and a column of 1,100 infantry was formed in the west street. All the cavalry that could be mustered, with two of Abbott's guns, assembled in the south street. They had a tough job at first. The Afghans stood bravely and poured in a heavy fire; but the moment the cavalry and guns appeared on the plain clear of Piper's Hill the whole body of the enemy fled in every direction. Many were drowned in the river.

[Pg 95]

During the pursuit Captain Oldfield, who commanded the cavalry, as he galloped up to a party of the fugitives, saw one man suddenly stop, throw off his turban, tear off his clothes, wrap his waist-cloth round his loins and attempt to personate a Hindoo, calling out, "Shah bash, Angrèz!" ("Well done, English!"). But our troopers were not to be deceived: the Hindoo gentleman was instantly cut down.

Doubtless if the Afghans had possessed the needful tools they might have succeeded in their plan of cooping us in and starving us out.

It was to Major Broadfoot's firmness and foresight that the brigade was mainly indebted for its honour and safety. When they were first sent out, Broadfoot was ordered to proceed without his tools. This he respectfully but firmly declined to do, and by his manly representations he carried his point, and was allowed to take them.

They returned at dusk, very hungry and tired. Our loss had been small, our gain great, and a further result was that provisions at once began to flow in. People flocked to the gates to sell flour, grain, and vegetables. But the officers were all so poor that very few of them could purchase anything. The soldiers and camp-followers were still worse off. The commissariat officer had now six weeks' food in store, but would the treasure-chest hold out? Copper coinage had nearly disappeared.

The New Year, 1842, opened ominously, and brought more evil tidings. A letter from Cabul, from Pottinger, told them of the murder of the Envoy, that Ghusnee was besieged, and the whole country in insurrection.

But our garrison was not dismayed. All scouted the idea of any great disaster happening to our troops at Cabul, and our works were pushed on with increased vigour. Provisions kept coming in, and the surplus was carefully stored.

[Pg 96]

On the 9th of January a letter from General Elphinstone was brought in by a horseman, ordering Sale to retire with his brigade to Peshawar.

It was a crushing, humiliating blow, spreading a gloom over every heart; but when Sale's determination was made known—to hold Jellalabad until the Cabul force arrived—the men's confidence in their commander was greater than ever.

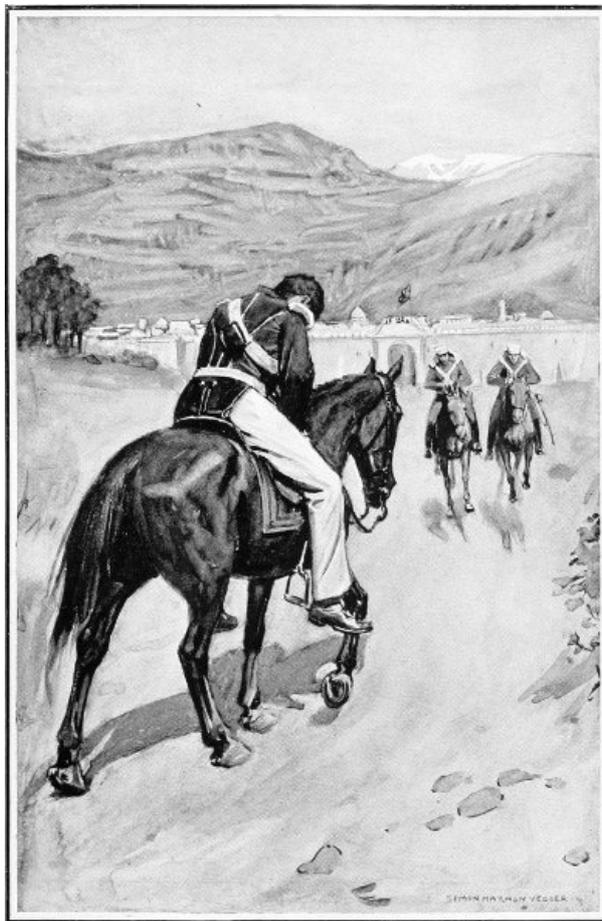
The greatest harmony existed between the European and native soldiers, and there was but one mind in the garrison—to defy the Afghans and to redeem as far as possible the reverses of the Cabul force. They had no money, they were short of ammunition, and had not too much food; but there was no thought of giving way.

On the 13th of January Seaton was on guard at the south gate when, a little after twelve o'clock, some one came rushing along the passage leading to the guardroom. The door was burst open, and Lieutenant B— threw himself into Seaton's arms, exclaiming:

"My God, Seaton! the whole of the Cabul army has been destroyed!"

"What! man, are you mad? The whole army?"

"All but one—Dr. Brydon! We saw from the top of the gateway a man riding on an old pony. He seemed to be wounded; he was bending over the pommel. We sent two horsemen out to bring him in—it was Dr. Brydon. He could not speak at first. Then he murmured: 'The only survivor of Cabul army!—all killed.'"



THE LAST OF AN ARMY

The whole of the Cabul army but one man, Dr. Brydon, was destroyed.

After thinking this over in silence for a minute or two, they went outside and saw Sale and his staff at the Cabul gate hoisting up the colours, a sign to any poor fugitive who might have escaped. A hearty cheer went up as they looked on their country's glorious colours. Their spirits were still high.

[Pg 97]

Instantly the cavalry rode out. About four miles from Jellalabad they found the bodies of three of Brydon's companions—Lieutenant Harper, Collyer, and Hopkins—all terribly mangled.

At night lights were hung out over the Cabul gate, and two buglers were put on duty in the south-west bastion to sound the advance every quarter of an hour, in hope that some poor fugitive might hear it and be saved.

"The terrible wailing sound of those bugles I shall never forget," says Seaton. "It was a dirge for our slaughtered soldiers, and had a most mournful and depressing effect." Dr. Brydon's tale struck horror into the hearts of all who heard it, but mingled with the sorrow and pity came a fierce desire for vengeance. Little was said, but the stern looks of the soldiers, the set teeth, and the clenched hands, showed how deep was the feeling that had been stirred, and how stern the vow registered in each man's heart.

On the 19th a servant of Captain Bazette came in, and on the 30th a Goorkah. On the 31st they had the pleasure of welcoming another white face—a sergeant-major. From the accounts of the sergeant they gathered many particulars of this tragedy—how, after the murder of our Envoy, General Elphinstone agreed to evacuate the country and retire with the whole of his force, Akbar, on his part, undertaking to escort the Cabul force and guarantee it from attack; how the Afghans rushed into our cantonments, even before the rear of the British force had got outside the walls, and began their plundering; how our men were shot down in the Khoord Cabul Pass; how Akbar pretended he could not control his men, and advised the English officers to surrender to him; how the native soldiers, chilled to death in the snow, went over to the enemy in hundreds.

[Pg 98]

The sergeant said in their excuse: "I can't blame the natives. I myself was born in a cold climate. I was well clad, yet my sufferings from the cold were terrible: my fingers were frost-bitten, and all my joints were sore. Why, sir, in the next pass the Afghans, after slaughtering our men till they were tired, stripped hundreds of poor Hindoos stark naked and left them there to die in the cold."

Stories such as these only spurred on the garrison of Jellalabad to greater exertion, for, as they would have now to face Akbar Khan and all his warriors, on them devolved the task of redeeming our country's fame.

On the 30th of January our cavalry brought in 175 head of cattle that had been grazing at some

distance off, and on the next day they shepherded in 734 sheep.

Now, work on Sunday was remitted. Men came to morning service with sword and pistol, or musket and bayonet, and sixty rounds in pouch, ready at a moment's notice to march to battle.

"To me," says Seaton, "it was always an affecting sight to see these great rough fellows with their heads bowed, humbly confessing their sins before God, and acknowledging their dependence on His goodness and mercy; and I am sure that afterwards, when we were surrounded by greater perils, there were many who felt the comfort there was in having One to whom they could appeal in all their troubles."

In February they knew that Akbar was collecting his forces for an attack. On our side the General ordered that all able-bodied camp-followers who were willing should be armed and receive the pay of native soldiers.

Those for whom there were no muskets were armed with pikes, which were made for them.

On the 16th rain came down in torrents; on the 18th heavy rain again. On the morning of the 19th Seaton was at work outside when he felt a smart shock of earthquake, with a rumbling noise. At first he did not take much notice, but when the rumbling increased and swelled to the loudest thunder, as if a thousand heavy waggons were being driven at speed over a rough pavement, he turned quite sick. An awful fear came over him. The ground heaved and set like the sea, and the whole plain seemed to be rolling in waves towards them. The motion was so violent that some were nearly thrown down, and expected every moment to see the whole town swallowed up.

[Pg 99]

The houses, the walls, and the bastions were rocking and reeling in a most terrific manner, and falling into complete ruin, while all along the south and west faces the parapets, which had cost us so much labour to erect, were crumbling away like sand. The whole was enveloped in one immense cloud of dust, out of which came cries of terror from the hundreds within.

When the dreadful noise and quaking ceased, a dead silence succeeded, all being so deeply impressed by the terror of the scene that they dared not utter a sound. The men were absolutely green with fear. Presently a gentle breeze sprang up. Officers encouraged the men to go on with their work, but, looking round the valley, they saw every fort and village wrapped in dense clouds of dust. From some the dust was streaming away like smoke, from others it rose high in the air in dense columns.

When the breeze had cleared away the dust from Jellalabad an awful scene of destruction appeared. The upper stories of the houses were all gone, and beams, posts, doors, windows, bits of wall, ends of roof, earth and dust, all were mingled in one confused heap. It was as if some gigantic hand had taken up the houses and thrown them down in one rubbish-heap.

[Pg 100]

The parapets all round had fallen from the walls. The walls were split in many places. In the eastern wall a breach had been made large enough for two companies abreast to walk through.

Sale's bugle sounded the assembly, and they went in at once. On muster being taken, it was found that the loss of life was happily only three men crushed in the cavalry hospital.

On looking round, it was found that a month's cannonading with a hundred pieces of heavy artillery could not have produced the damage that the earthquake had effected in a few seconds. "The hand of the Almighty had indeed humbled our pride, and taught us the wholesome lesson that He alone is a sure defence."

The Colonel narrowly escaped with his life. He had been standing on the wall, which, he said after he was taken up from the ruins, wriggled like a snake.

In one place, as an officer was passing along the ramparts, the ground opened beneath him, and he fell in, but only to be thrown out again—an operation which was twice repeated. At a spot near the river the wall had opened so wide that a man could have slipped through. All the barracks and sheds were in ruins; all shelter for the men was destroyed.

This, however, was not the time for idle wonder or for despair. Without delay every man in garrison was set to work, and though there were frequent shocks of earthquake during the day, the ruins had been cleared away by dusk, and a temporary parapet of clods of earth and clay made all round the walls.

Towards sunset a small body of horsemen from Akbar's camp came to reconnoitre. Abbott, who was looking out, sent a shot right into the party, making them scamper off, probably to report to their chiefs that the fortifications were uninjured, and that our "magic" had caused the earthquake.

[Pg 101]

But we were in a critical state, with all defences levelled, a huge breach in the works, and the destroyer of our Cabul force within a few miles of us, with the whole power of the country at his back.

They had now daily fights for their forage. The grass-cutters went out at early dawn under a strong escort. The grass in India is a creeping grass: the shoots run along under ground, or it would perish in the droughts of summer.

The grass-cutter, armed with a small hoe, sits down on his heels, and with a sweeping motion

cuts the grass half an inch below the surface of the ground. He then collects it, beats off the earth, and brings it home on his head. This grass is very sweet and nutritious. As the hot weather advanced they had to go further afield for grass. On the 2nd of March Akbar sent a large force round to the east, and they were invested.

"I find this in my journal for the 2nd of March: 'All our comforts are vanishing. Tea has long been gone; coffee goes to-day; sugar on its last legs; butter gone; no grass for the cows; candles not to be had. Akbar is trying to starve us out.'"

Lead for the rifles was in great request. Some officers of the 13th hit upon a very comical method of procuring it. They dressed up a figure—cocked hat, red coat, painted face—and put it on a short pole. Hoisted up above the ramparts and managed adroitly, it created no end of fun.

Eagerly the Afghans fired at it. Thousands of bullets went over their heads or battered against the wall below. Whenever they thought the General was hit or saw him bob down, they yelled and shouted like madmen.

How many Generals must they not have killed! Generals running short! The figure was hit sometimes. In the evening or early morning they used to go outside and pick up the bullets, of which immense numbers were found. In the course of half an hour one morning Seaton picked up 121, but several officers picked up more.

[Pg 102]

From the 2nd of March, the day on which the enemy established a camp east of the city, they all slept at their posts on the walls. No one took off his clothes. None of them wore uniform, but clothes made of camel-hair cloth. Too much digging for fine uniforms! On the 10th of March, as the Afghans had been thronging the ravines for many days, Sale thought it wise to see to it, so a sortie with 800 men was ordered. They thoroughly examined the ravines at night and destroyed the enemy's shelters. As they were retiring into the town the enemy came on, pursuing with loud yells and screams. Their horse came boldly down towards the town, offering a splendid mark for Abbott, whose guns plied them with shot and shell with deadly effect.

Not a single horseman could stand before Abbott's gun within 1,200 yards, his aim was so unerring. Ever since the siege of Bhurtpoor he had been celebrated for his skill as an artilleryman, and they had daily proof of his prowess.

So the month progressed, fighting or working by day, watching on the walls by night, and all the time on half rations.

They knew that Government was assembling a force at Peshawar under Pollock in order to relieve them, for they got a stray letter now and then.

Hard work, poor food, anxiety, were making all thin and pale; and some of them were angry with Sale that he would not go out and fight, for they felt perfectly capable of squaring accounts with Akbar and his legions; but "Fighting Bob," as he was called, would not come up to his name.

[Pg 103]

Night after night they were roused from their short sleep by earthquakes. A sharper shock, a violent heave, a short cracking sound, and all would start up, listen, grumble, try to get to sleep again.

Some messengers came in from Peshawar on the 25th. They heard the men of the 13th in fits of laughter at some absurd game they were playing, and all the native soldiers singing in chorus their festival songs. They were astounded.

"Why," they said, "you are besieged, and ought to be sad and dispirited; but you are all as merry as possible."

When they saw the ease with which a party of Akbar's men were beaten in a fight for some grass they were utterly confounded. When they returned to Peshawar all this went down the road to the Khyber, with wonderful additions. It was just the sort of tale that in the mouths of such men would not lose in the telling.

All this time the greatest cordiality and good feeling prevailed between the European and native soldiers.

"I remember one case of disagreement," says Seaton. "A sepoy of my company met a soldier of the 13th on a narrow path in the town. The soldier overbalanced himself, and stepped into the mud.

"Being very hot-tempered, he struck the sepoy a violent blow. The latter came to me to make his complaint. The matter was referred to Sale, who was furious, blew up the English soldier fearfully, and ordered him to confinement.

"As the Adjutant was marching the soldier off the sepoy took the soldier by the hand and said: 'General Sahib, forgive him. There has not been one quarrel between any of us ever since the regiments have been together. You have scolded with him, so I ask you please forgive him.'

[Pg 104]

"The General granted the sepoy's request. The soldier said he was sorry he had given way to temper and struck a man who could behave so generously.

"Many of our soldiers had friends among the sepoys, and I have known more than once a soldier, when dying, send for his sepoy friend to be with him in his last moments."

Akbar had a new idea: he caused large flocks of sheep to be driven over the distant forage grounds. On the 30th they saw these flocks going within range of the guns. They looked at them with hungry eyes.

On the morning of the 1st of April a flock of sheep was driven by the enemy's shepherds close to the old ruined fort. Several officers got round Sale and fairly badgered him into making an attempt to carry them off. Four hundred men, all the cavalry, and some pikemen, were ordered out. As they sallied forth Seaton heard a man on the walls say to a friend, "I say, Bill, what a lark if we can get in all them sheep!"

The cavalry rode out and got round them. The sheep were given to the pikemen. The infantry extended in skirmishing order to check the enemy, who were running up. The sheep were got in, the last one dropping a lamb on the very threshold.

They had one man killed and eight wounded, but were all in the highest spirits, and when the Afghans, dancing with rage, showed themselves on the hills, they were saluted with shouts of laughter and a thousand cries of "B-a-a! b-a-a!"

The garrison got 481 sheep and a few goats. The General gave forty sheep to the men of Seaton's regiment (natives); but they, with great good-feeling, desired that the sheep should be given to the English soldiers, for whom, they said, such food was necessary, while they could do very well on their rations. Bravo, 35th Native Infantry! A grateful letter came in return from the non-commissioned officers and privates of the 13th L.I. to Colonel Dennie, ending with, "Believe me, sir, that feeling is more gratifying to us than the value of the gift, and we shall ever feel the obligation our old comrades and brother campaigners have placed us under."

[Pg 105]

On the 3rd a spy came in and told them that when Akbar learnt that they had captured his sheep, he burst into such a transport of fury that his people were afraid to go near him.

On the 6th of April they heard that Pollock had been repulsed in the Khyber Pass, and at noon Akbar fired a royal salute in honour of his victory.

All the officers now went to Sale and urged on him the absolute necessity of going out and fighting Akbar.

Sale saw that the time for action had arrived.

On the morning of the 7th strong guards were posted at the gates, a picket in the centre of the town, and all pikemen, sick and wounded soldiers, etc., were sent to man the walls, and a very respectable show they made.

With the first peep of dawn the gates were quietly opened, and the three columns, under Dennie, Monteath, and Havelock, sallied out.

The plan was to march direct on Akbar's camp, burn it, drive him into the river, and bring off his guns.

They wasted some time in attacking a ruinous fort, and Colonel Dennie was mortally wounded. Then Sale called off the troops, and they went straight for Akbar.

The sound of the guns had roused all the enemy's force, and they were turning out in thousands. It was a grand sight to see their large masses of horse coming down from the hills. They charged boldly on Havelock's column, which, rapidly thrown into square, received them with the greatest coolness, and repulsed them with heavy loss.

[Pg 106]

They then made an attack on Seaton's regiment, but at this moment two guns of Abbott's battery came up and sent shot and shell crashing into the enemy's ranks, making them recoil faster than they had advanced.

The English soon came within sight of the Afghan camp, from whence the enemy opened fire on them, which caused some loss. But they made a rush and carried the camp without a check, while the enemy fled through the groves of trees beyond. They tried to carry off one of the guns, but a shot by Abbott killed the two horses attached to the limber, and the artillerymen fled. Numbers of the fugitives threw themselves into the river, which, swollen and rapid, destroyed the greatest part of them.

The whole of Akbar's camp fell into our hands. His guns, ammunition, standards, plunder—everything he had with him. The bugle soon recalled the skirmishers, and Seaton was detached with a party to fire the tents and the huts, made of boughs and reeds. The smoke of the burning proclaimed our victory to the whole valley. Numbers of camels and mounds of grain fell into our hands.

"I secured three noble camels for myself, and right good service they did me afterwards."

Sale was anxious to get back to Jellalabad, so the men returned in triumph, each man carrying off what he pleased, and were received with loud cheers from the walls. A little after dark the news was brought in by some Hindoos living in the valley that every fort and village within eight miles had been deserted.

This night they slept in bed, perfectly undisturbed. After passing the last thirty-six nights on the ramparts, armed and accoutred, constantly roused by the enemy, by their own rounds, by the relief of sentries, by those terrible earthquakes, many nights drenched by rain without shelter,

[Pg 107]

quiet rest in a real bed for the whole night was an unspeakable luxury; "but coupled with the thought that, unaided, we had broken the toils cast round us by Akbar Khan; that we had beaten in fair fight the chief who had destroyed our Cabul army; that months of toil, watching, anxiety, and peril had been crowned with glorious success; that our country's honour was safe in our hands, it was positive bliss, such as few have had the happiness to taste."

On this night even the earthquakes spared them—no sudden roar, no sharp electric shock, no far-off rumbling sound, no sharp crack of doom to startle them from their well-earned repose. It was bliss!

It was observed that earthquakes usually followed much rain, thus raising the question whether steam may not often be the origin of the phenomenon.

Next day they found 580 rounds of ammunition for the captured guns. Now food began to pour in from the country, and they lived on the fat of the land.

News came in that Pollock had forced the Khyber, and would arrive about the 15th.

At length, on the morning of the 14th, they could see with their glasses Pollock's force coming near. They had not arrived in time to help the garrison in their imminent peril. They had lost the grand opportunity of joining with them to crush the man whose treachery had destroyed their brothers-in-arms, whose bones lay scattered in the icy passes of Cabul. A fifth part of Pollock's cavalry would have enabled them to annihilate Akbar and all his troops.

So when next morning Pollock's force did arrive, there was a hearty welcome, but a sly bit of sarcasm in the tune to which the band of the 13th played them in, "Ye're ower lang o' comin'."

It was not Pollock's fault, however. He had to wait for the troops to join him at Peshawar.

[Pg 108]

"Let me relate one incident," writes Colonel Seaton, "that will tend to illustrate the character of my old commander, General Sir R. Sale.

"Shortly after Akbar's camp appeared in sight it was whispered about in garrison that Akbar intended to bring Lady Sale, then a prisoner in his hands, before the walls, and put her to torture within sight, and so compel Sale to surrender.

"Every day when the men were at dinner Sale used to take a turn on the ramparts, ostensibly to have a quiet look round at the progress of our works, but in reality, I believe, to ponder on the desperate situation of his wife and daughter, and debate with himself the means of effecting their rescue.

"We knew that they were well, had hitherto been kindly treated, and were in Akbar's fort, not many miles off.

"One day Sale, in going his rounds, came and stood over the south gate, where I was on duty; so, as I had enjoyed the privilege of great intimacy with him and Lady Sale at Cabul, I went out and joined him. I ventured to mention this report, and asked him what he would do if it should prove true, and if Akbar should put his threat into execution.

"Turning towards me, his face pale and stern, but quivering with deep emotion, he replied:

"I—I will have every gun turned on her. My old bones shall be buried beneath the ruins of the fort here, but I will never surrender!"

Could Lady Sale have heard it, her heart would have bounded with pride, for the heroine was worthy of her hero.

The reception of the garrison by Lord Ellenborough at Ferozepoor was a noble and ample return for all their toil and suffering. His lordship had taken care that each officer and man of the "illustrious garrison," as he termed them, should have a medal, and they were sent out to them before they reached Ferozepoor.

[Pg 109]

Not an English officer in India at this time had such a mark of distinction. They were the first to be so honoured, and were highly gratified by it.

On the morning on which they marched in, the bridge of boats over the Sutlej was gaily ornamented with flags and streamers. His lordship met them at the bridge head, and was the first to welcome them as they stepped on the soil of our own provinces. All the troops in camp were drawn up in line at open order, and received them as they passed with presented arms. Lord Ellenborough also ordered that at each station they marched through on their way to their destination the same military honours should be rendered to them. The garrison were received with similar marks of distinction at Kurnaul, at Delhi, and at Agra.

"We may forget everything else, but we shall never forget Lord Ellenborough's noble and ever-ready kindness and the many honours he caused to be shown us. One word more: After the Mutiny, it is not to be wondered at that the sepoy was written down as a demon and a coward; but we had known him as an excellent soldier, generally mild and humane and temperate as a man, sometimes even generous and forgiving, as the best of Christians."

When will it become the English custom to recite before our young of both sexes some of the deeds which have saved the Empire, "lest we forget"? If not in church, at least in school, we should make this effort to save our children from ignorance, which is ingratitude.

CHAPTER VIII

SIEGE OF SEBASTOPOL (1854-1856)

[Pg 110]

The English land without tents—Mr. Kinglake shows off before Lord Raglan—The Alma—Strange escapes—Looted houses—Fair plunder—Balaklava Bay—Horses lost at sea—A derelict worth having—Jack very helpful—The Heavy and Light Brigades—Spies—Fraternizing.

The Crimean War, fought between Russia on the one hand and England, France, Turkey, and Sardinia on the other, consisted mainly in the Siege of Sebastopol, a strong fortified port in the South of Russia. They fought ostensibly about the guardianship of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, but really because Turkey was thought to be decaying, and Russia wished to protect the Slavonic races in her own interest, and to extend her power to the Dardanelles. The war was characterized by the great sufferings of the troops during the winter, intensified by storms in the Black Sea, where so many transports laden with warm clothing went to the bottom that our men were left unprotected.

Even at the first landing, on the 14th of September, 1854, these sufferings commenced. Imagine a bare and desolate beach, the home of seagull and wild-fowl, suddenly turned into a barrack-yard. From one end to the other bayonets glistened, red coats and brass-mounted shakos gleamed in solid masses. The transports were tossing yonder out in the offing, and as gig or cutter grounded on the sand the officers of each company first landed, each in full dress, and carried his greatcoat, fastened by a strap round his body. After the officers came the men, bearing rations for three days in their wallets. Before they were all well on shore the rain began, and the wind was sending a little surf on the beach. The horses were not yet landed, so Generals and staff-officers might be seen sitting on powder-barrels on the shore, retiring gloomily within the folds of cape and mackintosh. Disconsolate doctors were groaning after hospital panniers which had not yet arrived; for, strange to say, more than one man died on that beach.

[Pg 111]

The country people, though at first full of fear of the invaders, soon brought food to sell, and retired with twinkling eyes. They were of Tartar race, with small eyes set wide apart and high cheek-bones.

That first night in the Crimea! Twenty thousand Englishmen, and not one tent amongst them! The wind rose and the rain fell in sheets, piercing through the greatcoats and blankets of the soldiers. Their only bed was the reeking puddles. They had no fire to cheer them, no hot grog. They were just miserable, while the French and the Turks were lying snug under canvas.

No wonder that there was a great increase in illness among the troops. Next day the surf was so heavy that many boats were stove in, and the work of landing horses and guns was difficult.

On the morning of the 20th, as Lord Raglan, the Commander-in-Chief, was waiting, surrounded by his staff, for the troops to get into position, a gentleman joined them on a handsome grey pony.

The pony began neighing and screaming so loudly that no one could hear a word that was said. Lord Raglan turned and asked:

"Does anyone know who that gentleman is?"

[Pg 112]

One of the staff replied: "I think it is one of the newspaper reporters, my lord. Shall I ask him to go away?"

Lord Raglan laughed, and said: "If you do, he will show you up, you may depend upon it."

"It is Mr. Kinglake, the author of 'Eöthen,'" said another.

"Oh," said my lord, "a most charming man," and was going to speak to him, when the French Marshal St. Arnaud rode up and prevented it.

About an hour after, as Lord Raglan was nearing the Russian position, a pony dashed past at a furious pace, and who should it be but Mr. Kinglake, the future historian of the Crimean War? On he went right through the skirmishers, with his horse's head between his legs. Fortunately for the rider, the saddle got forward, and soon went over the horse's ears. Of course the author of "Eöthen" went with the saddle, which was better than riding into the enemy's lines.

It struck the staff as rather an absurd thing just before a battle, and they all laughed; but Lord Raglan rode up and offered him another pony. Mr. Kinglake has not mentioned this personal adventure in his history.

Then came the Battle of the Alma, a river at that time of year only knee-deep. It cost us nearly 3,000 men killed or wounded. They say the individual escape of officers and men was miraculous. Chin-straps were shot off, buttons carried away, belts torn, coats ripped—all without further injury to the wearer. Many hundred Russians threw away their arms and accoutrements in their

flight. On the further heights, about a mile and a half from the Alma, the British troops ceased their pursuit; and then arose such a cheer—a cheer from 20,000 victorious men. Even some of the wounded fellows joined in it.

[Pg 113]

“I shall never forget that cheer as long as I live,” writes an officer. “It was indeed thrilling. I almost pitied the fallen enemy; it must have been so galling to them. I heard a man of the Guards say to a comrade: ‘I say, Bill, pleasant for them poor devils’ (pointing to some wounded Russians), ‘hearing our chaps cheer like that.’

“Lord Raglan rode up and down the line, the men cheering him heartily. There was such a shaking of hands. One felt very choky about the throat and very much inclined to cry as one wrung the hand of a friend. ‘God bless you, old fellow! So glad to see you all right!’ and so on. It was a touching sight to see the meeting between Lord Raglan and Sir Colin Campbell. The latter was on foot, as his horse had been killed under him. He went up to his lordship and, with tears in his eyes, shook hands, saying it was not the first battle-field they had won together. The battle was over at twenty minutes to four p.m.”

Next morning the poor wounded were far more quiet. Many had died during the night. Numbers of our men were going about among the wounded before it was light, giving them drinks of water. All those shot through the head died with a smile on their faces. “Some looked so happy, poor fellows! that one felt comforted.” On the 23rd of September order was given to prepare for marching, and the army left the heights of the Alma.

But what is that grey mass on the plain, almost lying without life or motion? Now and then, indeed, an arm may be seen waved aloft, or a man raises himself for a moment, looks around, and then lies down again.

Alas! that plain is covered with the wounded Russians still.

Nearly sixty long hours have they passed in agony on the wet ground, and now the English must leave them as they lie. Seven hundred and fifty wounded men are still on the ground, and we can do nothing for them. Their wounds have been bound and dressed by us, and Lord Raglan has told the head-man of a Tartar village to do what he can for them.

[Pg 114]

At first the country was hilly and barren, but on coming to the valley of the Katcha there were beautiful verdure, shrubs, white villas and snug cottages, vineyards and gardens.

A guide-post showed they were ten miles from Sebastopol. The road now looked like a byway in Devon or Hampshire. Low walls were surmounted by fruit-trees, laden with apples, pears, peaches, and apricots, all ripe and fit for use.

The first villa they came to was the residence of a country surgeon. It had been ruthlessly destroyed by the Cossacks. A veranda, laden with clematis, roses, and honeysuckle, was filled with broken chairs and tables. All the glass of the windows was smashed. There lay on the grass outside the hall-door two side-saddles, a parasol, and a big whip. The wine-casks were broken and spilt; the barley and corn of the granary were tossed about; broken china and glass were scattered over the floors; and amid all the desolation and ruin of the place a cat sat blandly on the threshold, winking her eyes in the sunshine at the new-comers. The scene within was awful. The beds had been ripped open, and the feathers littered the rooms a foot deep; chairs, sofas, bookcases, pictures, images of saints, needlework, bottles, physic-jars, all smashed or torn, lay in heaps in every room. Even the walls and doors were hacked with swords. It was as if the very genius of destruction had been at work and had revelled in mischief. Every other house and villa that they passed was a similar scene to this. Grand pianos and handsome pieces of furniture covered with silk and velvet, rent to pieces with brutal violence, were found in the larger houses.

[Pg 115]

The houses consist of one story only, size being gained by lateral extension. Each house has a large patch of vineyard round it. A porch covered with vines protects the entrance. They learnt from a deserter that the natives were hiding because they expected to be shot; also, that the Russians in their retreat had been seized with panic in the night, and had rushed off pell-mell; indeed, the state of the roads favoured this, for they were littered with linstocks, cartridges, and caps all the way. Our soldiers now fared on the richest of grapes and the choicest pears, but they were not allowed to waste or plunder.

September 25.—On the march to Balaklava they got near the enemy. They proved to be the baggage-guard of a large detachment. A few rounds, a cavalry charge, the Rifles in skirmishing order, and they broke, leaving baggage of every description strewed over the ground for two miles.

This was fair and lawful plunder, and the troops were halted and allowed to take what they liked and what they could carry. The officers presided over it to see that there was no quarrelling. Immense quantities of wearing apparel, dressing-cases, valuable ornaments, and jewellery were found in the carts.

A Russian artillery officer, found in one of the carriages, was in a very jovial mood, beside an empty champagne bottle. Fine winter cloaks, lined with fur, were found in abundance. This plunder put our soldiers in great good-humour, and they marched on the whole day in excellent spirits.

As the baggage was some miles behind, Lord Raglan had to put up in a miserable little lodge, while his staff slept on the ground in a ditch outside.

[Pg 116]

Not the smallest attempt was made by the enemy to annoy the English during this march to Balaklava; but we could have been greatly harassed by the smallest activity on their part. The march lay through woods, along bad and often precipitous roads, and a few trees felled at intervals could have stopped our army for hours. We had, it seems, taken the Russians by surprise, and they showed themselves quite destitute of resources.

"*Balaklava, September 24.*—I never was more astonished in my life," writes Sir W. Russell, "than when I halted on the top of one of the numerous hills of which this part of the Crimea is composed, and looking far down, saw under my feet a little pond, closely shut in by the sides of high, rocky mountains. On this pond floated six or seven English ships, for which exit seemed quite hopeless. The bay is like a highland tarn. It is long ere the eye admits that it is some half-mile in length from the sea, and varies from 250 to 120 yards in breadth. The shores are so steep and precipitous that they shut out the expanse of the harbour, and make it appear much smaller than it really is.

"Towards the sea the cliffs close up and completely overlap the narrow channel which leads to the haven, so that it is quite invisible.

"On the south-east of the poor village which straggles between the base of the rocky hills and the margin of the sea there are extensive ruins of a Genoese fort, built some 200 feet above the level of the sea, all crumbling in decay—bastion and tower and wall. A narrow defile leads to the town. A few resolute men posted here might have given great trouble to a large army."

The staff advanced first on the town, and were proceeding to enter it, when, to their surprise, from some old forts above came four spirts of smoke, and down came four shells close to them. The dose of shell was repeated; but by this time the *Agamemnon* outside the rocks was heard busily sending her shot against the fort. After a few rounds the fort was summoned, hung out a flag of truce, and surrendered. There were only sixty men—all made prisoners.

[Pg 117]

As Lord Raglan entered at noon the principal street, the inhabitants came out to meet him, bearing trays laden with fruit and flowers. Others bore loaves of bread cut up in pieces and placed on dishes covered with salt, in token of goodwill and submission. The fleet and army were once more united. Lord Raglan had secured his base of operations. Towards evening the huge bulk of the *Agamemnon* glided in between the rocks of the entrance, to the joy and delight of all on shore.

"*October 3.*—Sebastopol is not yet invested. It is only threatened on the south and south-east side by the army, while the fleet attacks it from the east. There is an enormous boom across the entrance, and many ships have been sunk close to shore. The Russians can throw shot further from their batteries than we can from our decks. Their shot went over us the other day when ours were falling 500 yards short.

"Since we landed in the Crimea as many have died of cholera as perished at the Alma. The deserters say that thirty Russian ladies went out of Sebastopol to see the Alma battle, as though they were going to a picnic. They were quite assured of the success of the Russian troops, and great was their dismay when they had to fly for their lives.

"Bad news to-day about the Dragoons' horses. Some 200 horses coming from Varna have perished *en route*. The sea ran high: fittings and horse-boxes gave way, and the horses got loose upon the deck, and were killed or washed overboard.

"*October 9.*—An amusing incident has happened. Towards noon a large ship, under Austrian colours, was seen standing in towards Sebastopol. The Russian Fort Constantine opened fire on her at 2,500 yards, but the ship paid no attention to the shot and shell which flew over her. The other Russian batteries followed suit; still the Austrian cared not. Not a sheet did she slack, while the shot struck her hull and rigging. She came right past the batteries, and passed them unscathed, nearing the shore as she came. The *Firebrand* went to her assistance, and received several shot in her hull while doing so, but Captain Stuart persevered and brought her off. What do you think? Why, she had been deserted by her crew when the wind failed and she was getting too near Sebastopol. But she was laden with 600 tons of hay for the English army. Her escape is almost miraculous, but it is a proof of the bad gunnery of the Russians.

[Pg 118]

"*October 13.*—It is now eighteen days since our army, by a brilliant march on Balaklava, obtained its magnificent position on the south side of Sebastopol. Up to this moment not a British or French gun has replied to the fire of the enemy. The Russians have employed the interval in throwing up earthworks, trenches, and batteries, to cover the south side of the town.

"The delay had been quite unavoidable. We had to send all our guns and material round by sea, and land it as best we could. All these enormous masses of metal were to be dragged by men or a few horses over a steep and hilly country a distance of eight miles. You have some idea of the severity of the work in the fact that on the 10th no less than thirty-three ammunition horses were found dead. We had now opened out about 1,500 yards of trench fit for the reception of heavy guns.

"'Jack' made himself very useful to us. The only thing against him was that he is too strong. He pulls strong carts to pieces as if they were toys; he piles up shot-cases in the waggons till the horses fall under the weight, for he cannot understand 'the ship starting till the hold is full.' But it is most cheering to meet a lot of these jolly fellows working up a gun to the camp: from a distance you can hear a hearty English chorus borne on the breeze. The astonishment of the

[Pg 119]

stupid, fur-capped Crim Tartars, as they stare at the wondrous apparition of our hairy Hercules, is ludicrous to a degree; but 'Jack' salutes every foreigner who goes by with the same cry, 'Bono, Johnny!' and still the song proceeds.

"October 22.—Lord Dunkellin, Captain Coldstream Guards, was taken prisoner this morning. He was out with a working party of his regiment, which had got a little out of their way, when a number of men were observed through the dawning light in front of them. 'They are the Russians!' exclaimed one of his men. 'Nonsense! they're our fellows,' said his lordship, and went off towards them, asking in a high tone as he got near: 'Who is in command of this party?' His men saw him no more. The Russians fired no shot, but merely closed round and seized him before he could get away.

"October 25.—At half-past seven this morning an orderly came galloping in to the head-quarters camp from Balaklava with the news that at dawn a strong corps of Russian horse, supported by guns and battalions of infantry, had marched into the valley, and had already nearly dispersed the Turks of the redoubt No. 1, and that they were opening fire on the other redoubts, which would soon be in their hands unless the Turks offered a stouter resistance. Sir George Cathcart and H.R.H. the Duke of Cambridge were ordered to put their divisions, the fourth and the first, in motion for the scene of action. Sir Colin Campbell, who was in command of Balaklava, had drawn up the 93rd Highlanders in front of the road to the town. The French artillerymen and Zouaves prepared for action along their lines.

[Pg 120]

"Lord Lucan's little camp was full of excitement. The men had not had time to water their horses; they had not broken their fast yet, and had barely saddled at the first blast of the trumpet, when they were drawn up on the slope behind the redoubts. Soon after eight o'clock Lord Raglan and his staff cantered up towards our rear; a French General, Bosquet, with his staff and an escort of Hussars, followed at a gallop.

"Never did the painter's eye rest on a more beautiful scene than I beheld from the ridge. The fleecy vapours still hung around the mountain-tops, and mingled with the ascending volumes of smoke from the cannonade; the patch of sea sparkled freshly in the rays of the morning sun, but its light was eclipsed by the flashes which gleamed from the masses of armed men below.

"To our disgust, we saw the Turks fly at the approach of the Russians; but the horse-hoof of the Cossack was too quick for them, and sword and lance were busily plied among the retreating herd. The yells of the pursuers and pursued were plainly audible. The Turks betake themselves to the Highlanders, where they check their flight, and form into companies on the Scotsmen's flanks.

"The Russian cavalry, seeing the Highlanders, halt till they have about 1,500 men along the ridge—Lancers, Dragoons, and Hussars. They drew breath for a moment, and then in one grand line dashed at the Highlanders, who were drawn up two deep. The ground flies beneath their horses' feet; gathering speed at every stride, they dash on towards that thin red streak topped with a line of steel.

"The Turks fire a volley at 800 yards and run. As the Russians come within 600 yards, down goes that line of steel in front, and out rings a rolling volley of minié musketry. The distance is too great; the Russians come on. With breathless suspense every one awaits the bursting of the wave upon the line of Gaelic rock; but ere they come within 150 yards, another deadly volley flashes from the levelled rifle, carrying death and terror into the Russians. They wheel about, open files right and left, and fly back faster than they came. 'Bravo, Highlanders! well done!' shout the excited spectators.

[Pg 121]

"But events thicken. The Russians—evidently *corps d'élite*—their light blue jackets embroidered with silver lace, were advancing at an easy gallop towards the brow of the hill. A forest of lances glistened in their rear, and squadrons of grey-coated Dragoons moved up to support them.

"The instant they came in sight the trumpets of our cavalry gave out the warning blast which told us all that in another moment we should see the shock of battle beneath our very eyes. Lord Raglan, all his staff and escort, groups of officers, Zouaves, French Generals and officers, bodies of French infantry on the heights, were spectators of the scene, as though they were looking on the stage from the boxes of a theatre. Nearly every one dismounted and sat down in deep silence.

"The Russians rode down the hill at a slow canter, which they changed to a trot, and at last nearly halted. Their line was at least double the length of ours, and it was three times as deep. Behind them was a similar line, equally strong and compact. They evidently despised their insignificant-looking enemy, but their time was come. The trumpets rang out again through the valley: the Scots Greys and the Enniskillens went right at the centre of the Russian cavalry.

"The space between them was only a few hundred yards; it was barely enough to let the horses gather way. The Russian line brings forward each wing as our horse advance, and threatens to annihilate them as they pass.

[Pg 122]

"Turning a little to the left to meet the Russian right, the Greys rush on with a cheer that thrills to every heart; the wild shout of the Enniskillens rises at the same instant. As lightning flashes through a cloud, the Greys and Enniskillens pierce through the dark masses of the Russians. The shock was but for a moment. There was a clash of steel, a light play of sword-blades in the air, and then the Greys and the red-coats vanish in the midst of the shaken and quivering columns. In another moment we see them emerging and dashing on with diminished numbers, in broken

order, against the second line, which is advancing against them as fast as it can to retrieve the fortune of the charge.

"It was a terrible moment. God help them! they are lost!

"With unabated fire the noble hearts rode at their enemy. It was a fight of heroes. The first line of Russians, though broken, had turned, and were coming back to swallow up our poor handful of men. By sheer steel and sheer courage Enniskillen and Scot were winning their desperate way right through the enemy's squadrons, and already grey horses and red coats had appeared at the rear of the second mass, when, with irresistible force, the 1st Royals, the 4th Dragoon Guards, and the 5th, rushed at the remnants of the first line of the enemy, went through it as though it were made of pasteboard, and dashing on the second body of Russians, still disordered by the terrible assault of the Greys and Irish, put them to utter rout. A cheer burst from every lip. In the enthusiasm officers and men took off their caps and shouted with delight, clapping their hands again and again."

[Pg 123]

Lord Raglan at once despatched Lord Curzon to convey his congratulations to General Scarlett, and to say "Well done!"

The gallant old officer's face beamed with pleasure when he received the message. Our loss was very slight—about thirty-five killed and wounded.

Presently General Canrobert, attended by his staff, rode up to Lord Raglan, and complimented him upon the magnificent charge of our cavalry.

It was shortly after this that the historic charge of the Light Brigade took place, owing to an order misinterpreted. Lord Lucan received a written order from Brigadier Airey through Captain Nolan to advance his cavalry nearer to the enemy.

"Where are we to advance to?" asked Lord Lucan.

Captain Nolan pointed with his finger to the mass of Russian cavalry, the six battalions of infantry, and the thirty guns that faced them, and said: "There are the enemy, sir, and there are the guns; it is your duty to take them."

Don Quixote in his tilt against the windmill was not so rash and reckless as the gallant fellows who prepared thus to rush on almost certain death.

It is a maxim of war that "cavalry never act without a support," that infantry should be close at hand. The only support our light cavalry had was the reserve of heavy cavalry a long way behind them.

As they swept proudly past, officers could scarcely believe the evidence of their senses. Surely that handful of men are not going to charge an army in position! At the distance of 1,200 yards from thirty iron mouths there belched forth a flood of smoke and flame. There were instant gaps in our ranks—dead men and horses, riderless horses starting aside—but the remnant rode on into the smoke of the batteries. You could see their sabres flashing as they cut down the gunners; you saw them return, break through a column of infantry, then, exposed to a flank fire from the battery on the hill, scattered, broken, wounded, dismounted, flying towards their base. But at this moment a large body of Lancers was hurled on their flank. They were cutting their way through this mass when there took place an act of atrocity without parallel in modern warfare. The Russian gunners had returned to their guns: they saw their own cavalry mingled with the troopers who had just ridden over them, and, to their eternal disgrace, poured in a murderous volley of grape and canister, thus mingling friend and foe in one common ruin.

[Pg 124]

All our operations in the trenches were lost sight of in the interest of this melancholy day, in which our Light Brigade was annihilated by their own rashness and by the brutality of a ferocious enemy.

"*November 3.*—There were many spies in our camp—sometimes dressed like French officers—and we not clever enough to detect the bad French. The other night the sentinel before the house of the Provost-Marshal in Balaklava was astonished to see a horse, with a sack of corn on his back, deliberately walking past him in the moonlight. He went over to seize the animal, when the sack of corn suddenly became changed into a full-grown Cossack, who drove the spurs into his horse and vanished!

"Our sentries often fraternized with the Russian sentries. A few nights ago our men saw some Russian soldiers coming towards them without arms, and they supposed them to be deserters; but, on coming nearer, they made signs that they wanted a light for their pipes, and then they stayed a few minutes, talking. First Russian: 'Englise bono!' First Englishman: 'Ruskie bono!' Second Russian: 'Oslem no bono!' Second Englishman: 'Ah, Turk no bono!' pretending to run away as if frightened, upon which all the party go into roars of laughter, and then, after shaking hands, they retire to their respective beats, ready for the bloody work of war."

[Pg 125]

CHAPTER IX

AFTER INKERMANN (1854-55)

[Pg 126]

Valiant deeds—Lord Raglan under fire—Tryon the best shot—A Prince's button—A cold Christmas—Savage horses—The Mamelon redoubt—Corporal Quin—Colonel Zea.

The Battle of Inkermann was fought on the 5th of November, 1854, in a thick fog. It began very early in the morning with a surprise, and developed into a series of desperate deeds of daring, of hand-to-hand fights, of despairing rallies, of desperate assaults in glen and valley, in brushwood glades and remote dells. At six o'clock in the morning our men of the Second Division were roused by their tents being ripped to pieces by Russian shells. In darkness, gloom, and rain the British troops sallied forth to meet the foe—with the bayonet if they could.

Many valiant deeds were done. Some were noted, many were unmarked. Lieutenant Crosse was surrounded by Russians, who attacked him with the bayonet, though he was badly wounded. He shot two with his revolver. Then a private, running up to help him, shot another, bayoneted the fourth, and carried the Lieutenant away in his arms.

MacGrath was captured by two Russians, but while they were leading him away he seized the firelock of one of them, shot the Russian, and dashed out the brains of the other.

Burke was surrounded just as a ball broke his jawbone. He rushed amongst his enemies, shot three dead with his revolver, and cut two men down with his sword. He fell at last with more than thirty wounds in his body.

[Pg 127]

When Sir George Cathcart was shot and our men were retiring, Colonel Seymour, of the Guards, a dear friend who had served with him through the campaign in Kaffirland, rushed forward to help him, and in so doing was shot through the leg.

"Come back, Colonel!" the men shouted as they swept past the two officers.

"No, no; my place is here with Sir George," replied Seymour.

"You must leave him," cried General Torrens; "the enemy are close at hand. You will be killed, man!"

But nothing could persuade the Colonel to leave the side of his dying chief. There he remained, alone against the rushing tide of battle, and met a hero's death in endeavouring to protect his friend from insult and mutilation.

When, later in the day, some of the French troops were seen to retire before the impetuous onslaught of the Russian masses, Lord Raglan despatched an aide-de-camp to General Pennefather, who was near the French division, to ask how he was getting on.

The General sent word in reply that he could hold his own perfectly well, and that he thought the enemy looked like retiring.

"If I can be reinforced with fresh troops, I will follow the Russians up and lick them to the devil."

Lord Raglan was so delighted with this spirited answer that he galloped over to the French General Canrobert and translated General Pennefather's words literally to him.

"Jusqu'au diable, Général!" That was what he said.

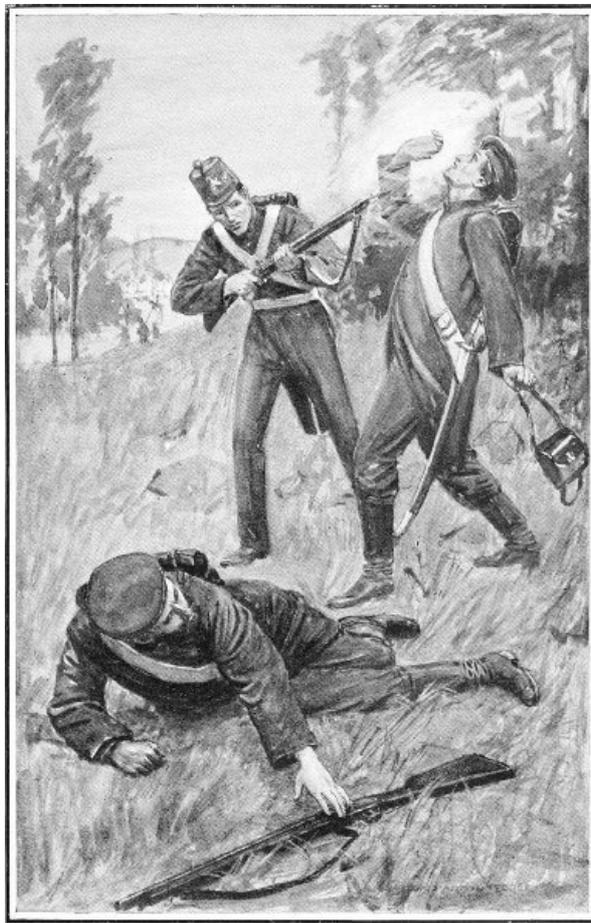
Canrobert, who had just remounted his horse, after having his arm bound up, exclaimed: "Ah! quel brave garçon! quel brave homme! quel bon Général!"

[Pg 128]

The day ended with a great artillery duel, in which Colonel Dickson won great renown, and mowed down great lanes through the massed forces opposed to him, until they broke and fled.

Captain Peel, of H.M.S. *Diamond*, greatly distinguished himself for his marvellous sang-froid in action. A shell fell close to a gun which he was laying in the trenches. Instead of running to take cover, he picked up the shell and lifted it over the parapet. The shell exploded just after it left his hands, and did no damage, whereas had it burst on the spot where it fell, probably many men would have been killed and wounded.

A private of the 33rd (Duke of Wellington's) Regiment was surprised and made prisoner by two Russian soldiers when an advanced sentry. One of the Russians took possession of his musket and the other of his pouch, and they marched him between them towards Sebastopol. It was not the direction which Tommy wanted to take, so he kept wary watch, and when he fancied his captors were off their guard, he sprang on the one who carried his musket, seized it, knocked the fellow down, and then shot dead the Russian who carried his pouch. Meanwhile the Ruskie from whom Tommy had taken his own musket rose up from his recumbent position, fired and missed his aim. Tommy promptly hit him on the head with the butt end of his musket. After this the Englishman proceeded at leisure to take off his foes' accoutrements, and he returned to his post laden with spoils, being fired at by the Russian sentries and cheered loudly by the English pickets.



GETTING RID OF HIS CAPTORS

An English private was taken prisoner by two Russians. When he thought they were off their guard he snatched his own musket and felled one of them, and then shot the other dead. The first tried to shoot the Englishman, but missed, and was then promptly hit on the head with the butt end.

But Lord Raglan himself gave several instances of great coolness under fire. He was sitting on horseback during the Battle of Inkermann, in the midst of a battery of artillery, watching our men working the guns. A very heavy fire was being directed against this part of the field, and one of his staff suggested the propriety of his not putting himself in quite so dangerous and conspicuous a place, especially as, from the number of bullets that came singing by, it was clear he was being made a mark for the enemy's riflemen.

[Pg 129]

Lord Raglan, however, merely said: "Yes, they seem firing at us a little; but I think I get a better view here than in most places."

So there he remained for some time, and then, turning his horse, rode along the whole length of the ridge at a foot's pace. Some of the hangers-on about the staff found they had business elsewhere, and cantered unobtrusively away.

Towards evening of the same day Lord Raglan was returning from taking his last leave of General Strangways, who had been mortally wounded, and was riding up towards the ridge. A sergeant of the 7th Fusiliers approached, carrying canteens of water to take up for the wounded. As Lord Raglan passed, he drew himself up to make the usual salute, when a round shot came bounding over the hill and knocked his forage-cap off his head.

The man calmly picked up his cap, dusted it on his knee, placed it carefully on his head, and then made the military salute, all without moving a muscle of his countenance. Lord Raglan was delighted with the sergeant's coolness, and, smiling, said to him: "A near thing that, my man!"

"Yes, my lord," replied the sergeant, with another salute; "but a miss is as good as a mile."

One of the most painful things during the battle was the number of wounded horses. Some of the poor creatures went grazing about the fields, limping on three legs, one, perhaps, having been broken or carried away by a shot. Others were galloping about wildly, screaming with terror and fright. At times two or three horses would attach themselves to the staff, as if desirous of company or for human protection. One poor beast, who had its nose and mouth shot away, used to edge in amongst the staff and rub its gory head against their horses' flanks. He was at last ordered to be put out of his pain, being in this more fortunate than many poor soldiers, who lay out for several nights in their agony.

[Pg 130]

It was a day or two after that the best shot in the British Army was killed. Lieutenant Tryon, of the Rifle Brigade, was shot through the head when in the act of firing at the retreating Russians.

He was a great loss, much beloved by his men. It is stated that he had himself killed over a hundred Russians. At the Battle of Inkermann he employed himself the whole day in firing at the Russian artillerymen. He had two of his men to load for him, and they say that he knocked over thirty Russians, besides wounding several more.

General Canrobert issued a general order eulogizing the conduct of our Rifles, and lamenting in just terms the death of Lieutenant Tryon.

This must be the first occasion on record of a French General particularizing the bravery of a British officer of Tryon's rank.

There is a story told which proves that Russian Generals were not dead to a sense of humour.

A Mr. C—, an officer in an English regiment, was taken prisoner in a sortie of the Russians, and was sent on to Simferopol. A day or two after his arrival there he received some letters from England which had been sent in with a flag of truce. One of these letters was from a young lady who was engaged to Mr. C—. In this letter she wrote:

"I hope, dearest, that if you take Prince Menchikoff prisoner, you will cut a button off his coat and send it to me in a letter, as you know how fond I am of relics."

All these letters had been opened and translated at the Russian headquarters, as is usual. Prince Menchikoff was shown this letter, which amused him not a little; so he wrote to Mr. C—, saying how much he regretted he was unable to pose as a prisoner, when it was the other way about; but he had much pleasure in sending him the enclosed button off his best coat, which he trusted Mr. C— would forward to the young lady with his compliments.

[Pg 131]

By December the whole army was suffering, worn out by night work, by vigil in rain and storm, by hard labour in the trenches, by cholera and short allowances. For nine days there was no issue of tea, coffee, or sugar to the troops. Food, corn, hay were stowed in sailing-vessels outside the harbour. A hurricane arose. To the bottom went provender and food for twenty days of all the horses. You could hardly tell an officer from a corporal. They were all hairy and muddy, filthy, worn, mounted on drabble-tailed ponies. Yet withal we are told they were the noblest, cheeriest, bravest fellows in Europe—ready to defy privation, neglect, storm, and wounds. Letters, it is true, sometimes came from the Crimea in which the writer showed a righteous indignation against those who mismanaged affairs and caused so much unnecessary loss and suffering. In one of these we read:

"January 2.—We have had a rough and dreary Christmas. Where are our presents? where are the fat bucks, the potted meats, the cakes, the warm clothing, the worsted devices made by the fair sympathizers at home? They may be on their way, but they will be too late. Why are our men still in tents? Where are the huts that were sent out? Some of them I have seen floating about the beach; others are being converted into firewood. There are 3,500 sick men in camp; there are 8,000 sick and wounded in the hospitals on the Bosphorus.

"Snow is on the hills, and the wind blows cold. We have no greatcoats. Our friends the Zouaves are splendid fellows, always gay, healthy, well fed. They carry loads for us, drink for us, eat for us, bake for us, forage for us—and all on the cheapest and most economical terms.

[Pg 132]

"The trenches are two and three feet deep with mud, snow, and slush. Many men, when they take off their shoes, are unable to get their swollen feet into them again. The other day I was riding through the French camp, 5th Regiment, when an officer came up and invited me to take a glass of the brandy which had been sent out by the Emperor as a Christmas gift. He had a bright wood fire burning in his snug warm pit. Our presents have so far all miscarried.

"January 19.—After frost and snow milder weather. Our warm clothing has come! Many thousands of fine coats, lined with fur and skins, have been served out to the men, together with long boots, gloves, socks, and mits.

"What a harvest Death has reaped! How many are crippled by the cold!

"January 24.—I have been viewing Sebastopol from a hill. The suburbs are in ruins. All the streets I saw had their houses broken down. Roofs, doors, and windows were all off, but the Russian riflemen shoot from them. I saw many walking from the sea with baskets of provisions. The harbour is covered with boats.

"May 18.—The Sardinians are encamped on the slopes of pleasant hills. Their tents are upheld by their lances, one at each end of the tent. Their encampment, with its waving pennons, has a very pretty effect. The Sardinians' horses are rather leggy, but not such formidable neighbours as the horses of the 10th Hussars, which are the terror of the camp, breaking their picket-ropes and tearing about madly.

"Yesterday I was riding peaceably along with an officer of artillery and of 8th Hussars, when suddenly we heard cries of 'Look out!' and lo! there came a furious steed down upon us, his mane and tail erect. He had stepped out of a mob of Hussar horses to offer us battle, and rushed at full gallop towards our ponies.

[Pg 133]

"'Out swords!' was the word, as the interesting beast circled round us, now menacing us with his heels, now with his teeth; but he was repelled by two bright swords and one strong whip, and at last, to our relief, he caught sight of Colonel Mayo, who was then cantering by in ignorance of his

danger, till he was warned by the shouts of the soldiers. The Colonel defended himself and horse with great resolution, and, drawing his sword, gave point or cut right and left as the case required, till the men of the 10th came up and beat off the creature. It is rather too exciting this hot weather to have to run the risk of being demolished by the heels of an insane Arab.

"June 7.—It has leaked out that something of import was to take place to-day. Between 5 and 6 p.m. Lord Raglan and his staff took up a conspicuous position looking straight into the teeth of the Redan. The man with the signal rockets was in attendance. About half-past six the French attacking column was seen to be climbing the arduous road to the Mamelon fort.

"The rocket was fired, and our small force rushed for the quarries to divert the Russians. The French went up the steep to the Mamelon in beautiful style and in loose order. Their figures, like light shadows flitting across the dun barrier of earthworks, were seen to mount up unfailingly in the evening light—seen running, climbing, scrambling like skirmishers up the slopes amid a plunging fire from the guns.

"As an officer who saw Bosquet wave them on said at the moment, 'They went in like a clever pack of hounds.' Then we see the Zouaves standing upon the parapets and firing down into the fort from above. Now they are in the heart of the Mamelon, and a fierce hand-to-hand encounter, with musket and bayonet, is evidently taking place. It was only seven minutes and a half from the commencement of the enterprise. There is still another sharp bayonet fight, and this time the Russians run out on the other side, spiking their guns. But the roar of guns is heard on the side towards the town: the Russians have been reinforced!

[Pg 134]

"When rocket after rocket went up ominously from the French General's position we began to be nervous. It was growing darker, and the noise of the fight seemed to be on our side of the fort. At last the swell and babble of the fight once more rolled down the face of the hill. 'They are well into it this time,' said a General, handing over his glass to his neighbour. All was still. No more musket flashes, no more lightning of the heavy guns from the embrasures. A shapeless hump upon a hill, the Mamelon was an extinct volcano, until such time as we should please to call it again into action.

"'How are our men getting on?' says one.

"'Oh, take my word for it they're all right,' says another.

"They were in the quarries, but had to fight all night and repel six successive attacks of the Russians, who displayed the most singular pertinacity and recklessness of life. Meanwhile the Zouaves, emboldened by success, carried their prowess too far, and dreamt of getting into the round tower by a *coup de main*. The fire of the musketry from the round tower was like a shelf of flame, and the shells of our gunners—for we were supporting the French—stood out dark against the heavens as they rose and swooped to their fall.

"June 9.—As an illustration of character I note that one of our sailor artillerymen, being desired to keep under cover and not put his head out to tempt a rifle bullet, grumbled at the prohibition, saying to his comrades: 'I say, Jack, they won't let a fellow go and look where his own shot is. We ain't afraid, we ain't. That's what I call hard lines.'

[Pg 135]

"Lance-Corporal Quin, of the 47th, has been brought to notice for bravery. In one of the attacks made by the enemy on the quarries the Russians had some difficulty in bringing their men again to the scratch. At length one Russian officer succeeded in bringing on four men, which Corporal Quin perceiving, he made a dash out of the work, and with the butt-end of his musket brained one, bayoneted a second, and when the other two took to their heels he brought in the officer as a prisoner, having administered to him a gentle prick by way of quickening his movements.

"After delivering him up he said to his comrades: 'There's plenty more yonder, lads, if so be you've a mind to fetch in a prisoner or two.'

"June 20.—A plan of attack was proposed—that the French were to assault the Malakoff and we the Redan; but though they got into the Malakoff, they were driven out again, with loss. As our 37th Regiment advanced they were met by a well-aimed fire of mitraille, which threw them into disorder.

"Poor Colonel Zea in vain tried to steady them, exclaiming: 'This will never do! Where's the bugler to call them back?'

"But at that moment no bugler was to be found. In the gloom of early dawn the gallant old soldier by voice and gesture tried to reform his men, but as he ran to the head of the column a charge of the deadly missile passed, and he fell dead. Next day we had to ask for an armistice to bury our dead, which was not granted until 4 p.m. It was agonizing to see the wounded men who were lying out under a broiling sun, to behold them waving their caps or hands faintly towards our lines, over which they could see the white flag waving, and not to be able to help them. Many of them had lain there for thirty hours.

[Pg 136]

"As I was riding round I came upon two of our men with sad faces.

"'What are you waiting here for?' said I.

"'To go out for the Colonel, sir,' was the reply.

"'What Colonel?'

“Why, Colonel Zea, to be sure, sir,” said the good fellow, evidently surprised at my thinking there could be any other Colonel in the world.

“Ah! they liked him well. Under a brusque manner he concealed a most kind heart, and a soldier more devoted to his men and to his country never fell in battle. The Fusiliers were the first who had hospital huts. When other regiments were in need of every comfort Zea’s regiment had all that exertion and foresight could procure. I ride on, and find two Voltigeurs with a young English naval officer between them. They are taking him off to shoot him as a spy. He has not enough French to explain his position to his captors.

“He tells us he is an officer of the *Viper*, that he got into the Mamelon by mistake.’ The matter is explained to our allies, who let him go with the best grace in the world. As to the attack which failed, we are disappointed, yet we do not despair; but we learn now that we are going to attack the Redan and Malakoff by sap and mine—a tedious process of many weeks.

“September 5.—The Russians have evacuated the forts of Sebastopol and withdrawn to the north side of the harbour. The Crimean War is over!”

From Sir W. Howard Russell’s “Letters from the Crimea.” By kind permission of Messrs. George Routledge and Sons, Ltd.

CHAPTER X

THE INDIAN MUTINY—DELHI (1857-1858)

[Pg 137]

The Mutiny begins—A warning from a sepoy—A near thing—A noble act of a native officer—In camp at Delhi with no kit—A plan that failed—Our first check—Wilson in command—Seaton wounded—Arrival of Nicholson—Captures guns—The assault—The fate of the Princes—Pandy in a box.

A rumour had been going through the bazaars of India that the British rule was to be limited to one hundred years from the date of the Battle of Plassey (1757). The sepoy troops had grown self-confident and arrogant through the victories they had won under English officers, and fancied that they held the destiny of India in their own hands. Then came the story that the cartridges of the new Enfield rifles, which were just then being introduced among the native troops, were greased with fat of beef or pork, and were thus rendered unclean for Mohammedan and Hindoo alike. The sepoys, or native troops, believed that the new cartridges were being given out solely for the purpose of destroying their caste, and so of introducing Christianity by force.

Delhi, where the deposed King Bahadur Shah was living, was the centre and focus of rebellion; it was to Delhi that the first mutineers marched after killing their English officers. Sir Thomas Seaton has left us some picturesque stories of his part in the Mutiny. He had rejoined his native regiment at Rohtuck, forty-five miles from Delhi, after some years’ leave in England, and found the manners of the sepoy greatly changed for the worse. He writes:

[Pg 138]

“On the 4th of June I was in the mess-tent writing to the Adjutant-General about the hopeless state of the regiment, when the native Adjutant came in and said:

“Colonel, I wish particularly to speak to you.’

“It was close upon 5 p.m., and, as several officers were in the tent, I went outside with the Adjutant.

“Well, Shebbeare, what is it?’

“Why, Colonel, I have just heard from two of our drummers, who have their information from friends amongst the men, that the regiment is to mutiny to-night, murder the officers, and be off to Delhi.’

“Though I expected this, it was startling enough to hear it was so close at hand. And now that the great difficulty stared me in the face, how, with this small body of officers, was I to meet and grapple with reckless and determined mutineers? But as this was not the time to flinch or show indecision, I said:

“Well, Shebbeare, let me see the men. I’ll make a few inquiries first. I will go to the hospital. Do you lounge out that way too.’

“As I had been used to visit the hospital about this hour, my going there would excite no suspicion.

“In a few minutes I had found out that it was too true that an outbreak was planned for that night. Meanwhile I addressed the Adjutant:

“Now, Shebbeare, will you stand by me?’

“Yes, Colonel,’ replied the gallant fellow, ‘that I will.’

“Very well. Now, I’ll tell you what I propose to do. I will go on parade, and, as there is nothing like facing a difficulty, I’ll tax them with their intended outbreak, and we will see what they will

[Pg 139]

do. Tell the officers to look out.”

Seaton’s idea was that the men, finding he knew all about their plans, would be so disconcerted that they would put off the mutiny; we should probably gain a day or two of delay, and might hear that Delhi was taken or the mutineers defeated. So at sunset he went on parade, assembled the native officers in front, at some distance from their companies, and taxed them with their intended treachery. As he had expected, the sepoy were utterly confounded; they flatly denied the intended treachery, and swore by all their gods that they would be faithful to their salt, and that no harm should happen to the officers.

The native officers then begged permission to appoint a guard to keep watch in the camp at night, as there might be some *badmashes* in the regiment.

It was a dangerous experiment, but the only chance was to take things coolly, still seeming to trust the men, keeping at the same time a sharp look-out.

It was Seaton’s duty to keep the regiment together as long as possible at any risk. The Commander-in-Chief was marching on Delhi with a small force hurriedly got together; to have placed at this critical moment a regiment of mutineers in his rear would simply have been destruction, for they could have fortified some spot on the road and so cut off supplies from our camp.

Whilst he was taxing the native officers, the men of their companies were looking on—they were too far off to hear; but they took their cue from their officers and were quiet and respectful. Seaton left the circle of native officers, and went up and addressed each company, meeting with the same vows of fidelity.

As he came from parade after this trying scene, some officers inquired anxiously: “What is it, Colonel? Is it all right?” [Pg 140]

“Oh yes. I think our throats will not be cut to-night.”

But his mind was not at ease until he had seen the guard for the night.

However, a few days passed quietly enough; but on the 8th a curious thing happened. As Seaton was going in the evening to visit the hospital, and was crossing a ditch, a young sepoy gave him a hand and whispered in his ear:

“Colonel Sahib, when your highness’ people shall have regained the Empire, I will make my petition to your highness.”

This was all he said, but Seaton could not help pondering on his meaning. Was this a warning to him of the coming outbreak of the regiment?

Resistance was out of the question, as he had only twelve English officers with him and one English sergeant. He was tormented by the ever-recurring thought that not only the lives of his officers, but perhaps the safety of our little army, might be dependent on himself. “All I could do,” he says, “was to trust in God’s mercy and goodness.”

The night of the 9th passed off quietly—all was still. In the morning he could detect nothing suspicious in camp. The men were civil and respectful to him personally. Some were parading for guard, some going to bathe, others preparing their food. Five of the young officers asked leave to go out shooting. Seaton had no objection, and they went. At 4 p.m., when he was in the usual camp hot-weather *deshabille*, all at once he was startled by a loud explosion. He ran out to see what was the matter, but neither saw nor heard anything strange—no crowd, not a sound, the men mostly sleeping after their day’s meal. He was going on when the havildar-major (native sergeant-major) came rushing up to him. Catching him in his arms, he said in a very agitated voice:

“Colonel Sahib, don’t go to the front.”

“Why not?”

“The Grenadiers are arming themselves. They have mutinied!”

The hour for which he had trembled had come at last. He tried to collect one or two of the native officers, but in vain. The havildar-major entreated him to be off whilst there was time. While the grooms were saddling the horses they heard musket-shots, and the havildar rushed past him. Immediately the whole body of the Grenadiers burst out of their tents, firing and shouting, in order to rouse the regiment and hurry it into mutiny.

The shouts and cries of terror, the galloping of horses, the report of muskets, all tended to confusion. Seaton had not time to take his sword, for the mutineers were within ten paces of him. He had got a few seconds’ start, and in a *mêlée* like this a second makes all the difference between life and eternity.

Just outside camp they overtook Major Drought, who was walking.

The havildar instantly cried: “Colonel, the poor old fellow will be murdered. I’ll put him on my horse and run for it.”

It was a noble and heroic act, for Shebbeare had been wounded by the mutineers. So they made

Shebbeare get on the lee side of the Colonel's horse; he laid hold of the stirrup, and off they went at a round canter.

After running 400 yards he got blown, and they pulled up to a walk. Soon they found the officers waiting for them at a bend in the road; they were all unhurt. After a time they saw clouds of smoke ascending, and knew that they were burning the tents. They kept on all night at a moderate pace. About 3 a.m. they heard a horseman coming along. Who could it be? They drew up and challenged.

[Pg 142]

"Who is there?"

"Sowar" (trooper).

"What sowar?"

"Hodson Sahib Ka Sowar" (one of Captain Hodson's troopers). And then, saluting, he continued: "Are you the Sahib log? I have a letter for Colonel Cheetun Sahib."

"Yes, come along; here is the Colonel Seaton."

Seaton read the note by the light of a cigar vehemently smoked by an officer. It was to the effect that we had driven the rebels from the ridge into Delhi, and that our camp was pitched in the cantonments. So now they were all right, and knew where to find their camp. At 9 a.m. the Colonel dismounted at Sir H. Barnard's tent.

They were all surprised to see him, as they had been informed that he and his officers were all killed: the young officers who had gone out shooting had been so informed, and had ridden to Delhi before them with the news.

Now all the belongings the Colonel had were his horse and the few clothes he stood in. He had to go round camp and beg: one gave him a coat, a shirt, and some cigars, another a sword and belt. He was made a member of the mess of the 1st E. B. Fusiliers, but had neither fork, spoon, plate, nor glass—for the mess merely provides food and dishes. However, he soon begged these or bought all he needed at a sale of an officer's effects.

"My first night's rest was heavenly," he says. "I heard distinctly the firing, but it did not disturb me. I was lulled by a feeling of security to which I had been a stranger for many nights before the 60th mutinied. No wonder my sleep was profound."

Delhi is situated on the right bank of the river Jumna. The walls are pear-shaped, on the river or eastern side rendered irregular by the excrescence of the old fort of Selimgurh. To the south the walls run to a point. Inland from Delhi is a ridge of rocks, which at its nearest point is about 1,400 yards from the walls. Our camp lay under the ridge, on the side away from the city; there were canals and swamps to protect us in rainy seasons. It was quite evident that a regular siege was out of the question, from the vast size of the place and from our want of guns, etc. A *coup de main* was our only resource. Accordingly a plan was drawn up by the Engineers and Hodson, and approved by the General. It was a hazardous step, but one and all were crying out "Take Delhi!"

[Pg 143]

Nor was this cry to be wondered at. Delhi, once the capital of the great Mogul Empire in India, strongly fortified, and supplied with war material, was now in the possession of our own trained sepoys. The King, once our puppet, had placed himself at the head of the rebellion, and Delhi had become the focus of insurrection.

Moreover, there was a vehement desire in camp for instant vengeance on the traitors in the city, who had cruelly murdered their officers, our brethren in arms, with their wives and little ones. One bold stroke now, every one said, would make us masters of Delhi. At the appointed hour the troops began to move down to their allotted posts.

All were waiting impatiently for the pickets from the ridge, but the proper time slipped by, and the assault was countermanded.

The storm of indignation in camp at the failure of this bold design was frightful. But, as Colonel Norman justly remarked, "It was one of those happy interpositions in our behalf of which we had such numbers to be thankful for."

[Pg 144]

For, even if the rebels should have been driven out of Delhi, what if they rallied and returned in force? Our poor 3,000 men would have been swallowed up in the immensity of the city. The postponement of the assault gave the rebels full scope: it bred anarchy, confusion, and disorder, and the native trading population soon felt the difference between the violence and robbery of the sepoy domination and the peace and security they had enjoyed under us. But in camp the abandonment of the assault was followed by a period of despondency and gloom.

In a few days cheering news came from the Punjab. The Chief Commissioner, John Lawrence, aided by worthy officers, had made all safe at the chief points of danger. All through the Punjab the Hindoo cavalry and sepoys were being disarmed; the magazines had been secured; the Sikhs and Punjabees, men who had no sympathy with the mutineers, were being enrolled and formed into corps and re-armed. With bold and daring hand, that "out of this nettle, danger, plucks the flower safety," Lawrence was gathering as volunteers from the warlike frontier tribes all the restless, turbulent spirits who might have been bitter foes in extremity. He took them into pay, and made them eager to march on Delhi, to assist in its capture and share in its plunder.

There were several sorties to repulse, and these small successes kept up the men's spirits. In the first six weeks of the siege, or until the reinforcements began to flow in, night or day no man undressed, except for a few minutes for the necessary ablutions and changes of clothes, and this was not always possible. They lay down and slept in their clothes, with arms and ammunition either on or by their sides, ready to slip on the moment the alarm should be sounded.

The heat was fearful, yet day after day they had to stand for hours in the sun and hot wind, or, worst of all, to endure the torture of lying down on the burning rocks on the Ridge—baked by them on one side, whilst the sun was “doing” the other. Many an officer and man, struck by the sun and unable to rise, was carried off to hospital delirious and raving. The flies were in myriads, and added to their torments; they clung to hands and faces, they covered the food until it was uneatable, and they worried all incessantly until dusk. Many men had sunstroke twice; some who were wounded suffered from it also, and the great heat and fatigue began to tell on the soldiers, and sent them into hospital, from whence many were never to return.

[Pg 145]

Fortunately, food in camp was both abundant and good; the troops got their meals and their dram of grog with great regularity.

It was quite amusing to see the cook-boys of companies bring up the dinners to their respective squads. Battery or advanced picket, it was all the same to them; cannonade or no cannonade—it made no difference, they were sure to come.

A large flat shallow basket held twenty or more metal plates; on each a piece of beef and some nicely browned potatoes, all smoking and frizzling from a few bits of live charcoal in a small earthen pan under each.

On the 18th, the 15th and 30th Native Infantry, with the famous Jellalabad battery—Abbott's battery that was—marched into Delhi, to the great joy of the mutineers and the King.

At noon on the 19th the rebels began to pour out of Delhi in great numbers. The alarm was sounded, and in a few minutes every one was at his post; but as no enemy appeared, the troops were allowed to return to their tents.

A gun fired in their rear startled the English; then galloped up a trooper to say that the Pandies (as they called the rebels) were killing the grass-cutters and carrying off the cattle. Then troops were sent out, and fighting went on long after dusk. The casualty list was heavy: a limber of Scott's battery was blown up, while one of Turner's guns was disabled and left on the field. “I well remember the gloomy impression which the result of this fight made on our minds. It was our first check.”

[Pg 146]

Next morning a strong party was sent out to the scene of action. To their great surprise, there was Turner's gun; there also a gun and two ammunition waggons abandoned by the rebels. There were so many evidences on the field that the enemy had suffered severely that all gloom and despondency were quite relieved.

This was the most trying period of the whole siege. If an officer sat down to write a letter or to shave himself the alarm was sure to sound, and he was compelled to throw down his pen or razor, buckle on his sword, and rush out to his post.

The 23rd of June was the centenary of the Battle of Plassey, and their spies told the English officers they were to be attacked at all points. They began to fight at sunrise, and, strange to say, in the very height of the *mêlée* our first reinforcements marched into camp! Three times the rebels assaulted our position, each time being repulsed with great loss. “We drove them back, and then we began a series of attacks on houses, gardens and enclosures filled with mutineers, whom we cleared out; our heavy guns hastened or retarded their flight into the city.

“I look upon this day as the turning-point in the siege: our first reinforcements had come in, and we had gained an important victory over the rebels.”

Soon was seen a great smoke beyond Delhi: they were burning their dead!

[Pg 147]

“Of the many interpositions of a merciful Providence in our behalf during this wonderful siege,” says Seaton, “I think the most striking was this—that the rains were so abundant and the season so favourable that cholera was in a comparatively mild form. The rains filled the Jumna on one side and the canal on the other, thus forming, as it were, a wall to the right and left of our road to the Punjab, guarding it more effectually than many thousand men could have done.”

During the night of the 4th it rained in torrents. Colonel Seaton was driven into the Flagstaff Tower for shelter, but could only get standing room, so he went and visited the pickets, and sentries, and returned soaked through and through. He then lighted a cigar and stood about till daylight, when the picket turned out and he turned in and slept till sunrise.

At sunrise he was relieved, after thirty-six hours on duty. On getting into camp he found his own tent pitched, his servants all waiting, clean clothes, washing tackle, a clean breakfast table, and Hodson, with a smiling face, waiting for him.

“We felt like men who had just inherited large fortunes! My things had been sent on from Alipore. Oh! it was a comfort to get my own clothes and uniform, to be able to appear in camp once more dressed like a gentleman, and to have the attendance of my own servant.”

On the night of the 5th of July General Sir H. Barnard died of cholera, brought on by fatigue and

anxiety of mind.

General Wilson began on a new system. They no longer attacked the villages, losing men and gaining little. They were now to remain on the defensive, and to burn or bury all corpses. For it was sickening to see the dogs and jackals, disturbed by the burying-parties, slowly waddling off, fat and gorged with their horrible feast.

[Pg 148]

Until buried the rebels were still enemies: their effluvia carried death into our ranks. As a sergeant once said: "Them Pandies, sir, is wuss when they are killed."

On the 19th they received the first intelligence of the Cawnpore tragedy—of Wheeler's capitulation and destruction—causing great depression in camp and more cholera.

They had been clearing the gardens of rebels beyond the Metcalfe grounds when Seaton saw two of Coke's men coming along, carrying Captain Law, who had just been killed. He stopped to help them, and was stooping to take the men's muskets when he was struck full on the left breast by a musket-ball fired at thirty-five paces' distance. The blow was so violent that he was nearly knocked off his horse, and for some seconds could not breathe, the blood rushing from his mouth in foam. He naturally thought he was done for, but as soon as his breath came again, he opened his clothes and found out the course of the ball.

Seeing that no air issued from the wound, he secured his sword and pistol, and, dismounting from his horse, led him over a broken wall, and was on the point of falling headlong in a faint when the two men he had tried to help took him under the arms and got him to the Metcalfe picket.

The men there ran to meet him: one gave him a drop of rum and water, others brought a *charpoy* (native bedstead) and carried him off to the doctor. On the way he met Hodson, who galloped off at once to camp, so when they reached his tent, he found the doctor waiting and everything ready. The ball had struck on a rib, fractured it, driven it down on the lung, and then had passed out at his back. Hodson cared for him with the affection of a brother. He was to lie quite still and not speak for a week.

[Pg 149]

On the 1st of August the doctor took off this embargo—Seaton was recovering rapidly. In Delhi, our spies said, the Pandies were all jealous of one another and would not act in concert. The rebel sepoy carried in a purse round his waist the gold he had made by selling his share of our plundered treasures; this gold made him unwilling to risk his life in battle and made him suspect his comrades.

Their wounded were in a horrible state: there were no surgeons to perform any operations, no attendants to bring food or water. The limbs of some were rotting off with gangrene, others had wounds filled with maggots from neglect; all were bitterly contrasting their lot with the life of comfort they had enjoyed under British government. The old King, too, was in despair, and vented it in some poor poetry.

On the 7th of August there was a tremendous explosion in the city, and next day they heard that a powder manufactory had blown up, killing 400 people.

"About this time"—to quote the words of one who wrote a history of this siege—"a stranger of very striking appearance was remarked visiting all our pickets, examining everything, making most searching inquiries about their strength and history. His attire gave no clue to his rank; it evidently never gave the owner a thought. He was a man cast in a giant mould, with massive chest and powerful limbs, and an expression ardent and commanding, with a dash of roughness, features of stern beauty, a long black beard, and deep, sonorous voice. There was something of immense strength, talent, and resolution in his whole gait and manner, and a power of ruling men on high occasions that no one could escape noticing at once. His imperial air, which never left him, and which would have been thought arrogant in one of less imposing mien, sometimes gave offence to his own countrymen, but made him almost worshipped by the pliant Asiatics. Such a man would have risen rapidly from the ranks of the legions to the throne of the Cæsars; but in the service of the British it was thought wonderful that he became a Brigadier-General when, by seniority, he could only have been a Captain."

[Pg 150]

The stranger thus described was Nicholson, the best man that Sir John Lawrence possessed in the Punjab. He had ridden ahead of his force to consult with General Wilson before Delhi. On the following day he returned to his force, On the 14th he again rode into the English camp at the head of his column—a splendid addition of 4,200 men to the besiegers. The small force upon the ridge now amounted to 8,000 men of all arms; the siege-train was on its way, and despair began to settle down on the rebels in the city and on the Princes.

They had heard of the defeat of the Nana, and of Havelock's entry into Cawnpore; they knew that fresh troops were coming from Calcutta, and that Nicholson, whose name had spread far and wide, had arrived in our camp with a large force. They knew, too, that this compact force of white men was swayed by one arm and governed by one will. Every soul in Delhi knew that John Lawrence directed the storm that was gathering around them, and the cold, dread shadow of the coming event was creeping over the shuddering city. A look through our camp would have shaken the courage of the boldest rebel. Instead of tents half filled with sick men, our camp now was teeming with soldiers of various races, all cheerful and confident. Hodson's men were mostly Sikhs, tall and slender, yet wiry and strong; their clothes of ash colour, with wrist-band, turban, and sash over the left shoulder, all of bright crimson. In contrast with these were Coke's men,

[Pg 151]

more wild and picturesque, with large turbans of dark blue and enormous waist-bands. Their lofty stature, long hair, bright black eyes, sandalled feet, and bold look, would have made them remarkable anywhere.

Our artillery park, too, was filled with guns captured from the mutineers. The battery-train was on its way, but it was reported by spies that a very strong body of rebels was about to leave the city to attempt its capture. Nicholson was sent out with 700 cavalry and 1,200 infantry, and three troops of horse artillery, to head them off. He returned in triumph, bringing with him thirteen captured guns. In Nicholson's fight the following incident occurred, which shows a little bit of the native character:

A rebel native officer was overtaken in his flight from the field by a man of Green's Punjab regiment. The officer immediately went down on his knees in the midst of a pool of water, and putting up his hands, roared out: "I've been forty years in the Company's service, and thirteen years a Subadar. Spare—oh, spare my life!" With an execration and a very rude term of abuse the Punjabee thrust his bayonet into the traitor.

On the 4th of September the long-expected battery-train arrived in camp, with an ample supply of shot, shell, and powder for all the guns.

The activity in the Engineers' camp was now pushed to the utmost, and all the material for trenches and batteries was accumulated with great rapidity.

To prevent the men plundering, the General promised that all the captured property should be prize, and prize agents were appointed.

We were about to throw a small force of about 4,500 men into a city seven miles in circumference, a perfect maze of narrow streets and gullies, abounding in strong blocks of houses, where one might expect that the defence would be obstinate. [Pg 152]

On the night of the 7th 1,300 men in working and covering parties were sent down with the Engineers to open trenches and erect the first siege-battery against Delhi. On the 12th the whole of the batteries were completed, and in full play on the parts of the walls intended to be breached or shelled. The parapet was soon knocked off, each block of masonry rarely requiring more than two well-planted shots to demolish it completely. There was outside the wall a ditch 25 feet wide and 16 feet deep, before crossing which it was necessary that all the parapets and bastions should be cleared of their defenders. The army inside Delhi numbered at least 40,000 men; the besiegers only 11,000, after all their reinforcements had come in. Of these only 3,300 were Europeans. Our heavy guns were 54 in number, while those in the city amounted to 300.

There was considerable risk in attempting to storm under such conditions. One of the batteries was only 160 yards from the Water Bastion, and the heavy guns had to be dragged up to it, through the open, under a heavy fire of musketry. Baird Smith, the Chief Engineer, prepared all the plans; Alexander Taylor superintended their execution. With the very first shot the masonry of the fortifications began to fly. Fifty-four guns and mortars belched out havoc on the city. Cheers rang out from our men as the smoke cleared away, and they saw the dreaded bastions crumbling into ruins, while the defenders were forced to seek shelter far away in the city. For the next forty-eight hours there was no cessation of the roar of artillery. The worn-out gunners would throw themselves down to snatch a short sleep beneath their very guns, while volunteers filled their place; then, springing up again, they would go on with their task with fresh ardour. [Pg 153]

The sepoys were fighting on with the courage of despair. They ran out light guns to enfilade our batteries; they manned the gardens in front of the city with sharpshooters to pick off our gunners.

On the evening of the 13th the breaches in the walls were to be examined, and so at dusk Lieutenants Greathed, Home, Medley, and Lang, of the Engineers, were sent to execute their dangerous mission. As the hour struck ten the batteries ceased firing, and the four young officers, slipping out of the gardens with a small covering party of the 60th Rifles, crept forward to the edge of the glacis, Greathed and Home going to the Water, Medley and Lang to the Cashmere Bastion. A ladder was quietly lowered, Medley and Lang descended, and found themselves on the edge of the ditch; but the enemy heard them, and several ran towards them. The Englishmen saw that the breach was practicable, so rose and ran back, being followed by a harmless volley. Greathed and Home returned safely also, and reported that all was favourable.

Then was the thrilling order made known: "The assault at 3 a.m.!"

No. 1. column, under Nicholson, were to assault the Cashmere Bastion; No. 2, under Colonel James, the Water Bastion; No. 3, under Colonel Campbell, to enter by the Cashmere Gate; No. 4, under Major Reid, to attack Kissengunge.

To Nicholson fell the post of honour. Sir John Lawrence had sent him down "to take Delhi," and the whole army was willing that he should have that honour. He was to head the first column in person. Our batteries redoubled their roar whilst the columns were taking up their positions, throwing shells to drive the enemy away from the breaches. The morning was just breaking; the thunder of our artillery was at its loudest, when all at once it stopped. Every one could hear his heart beat. [Pg 154]

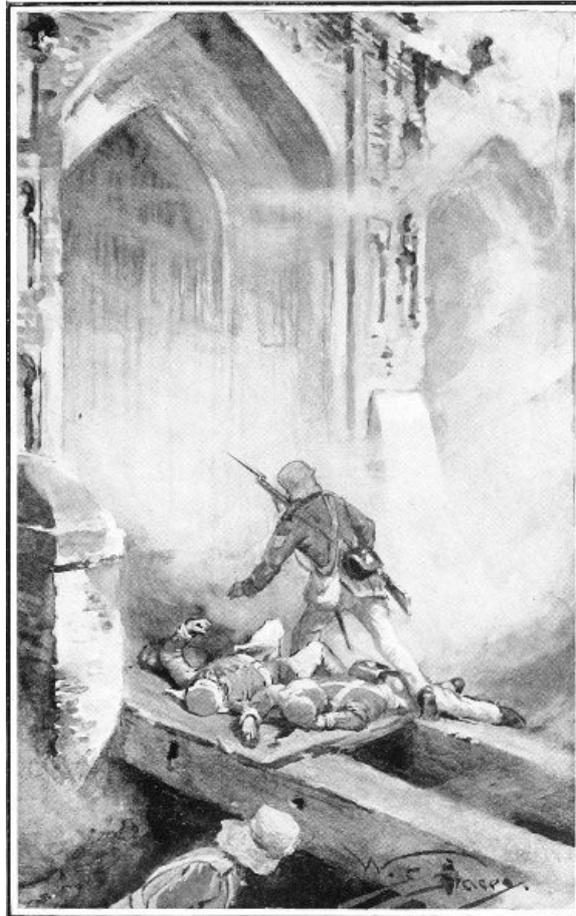
The Rifles now ran forward as skirmishers to cover the advance of the assaulting columns, and the men, who had been lying on the ground, now sprang up, and, with a cheer, made for the

walls. They crossed the glacis, and left it behind them dotted with wounded men; they went down into the ditch—many to stay there; but the ladders were planted against the scarp, and very soon the dangers of the escalade were over. Soon the whole line of ramparts which faced the ridge was ours; the British flag was once more run up upon the Cabul Gate.

Meanwhile at the Cashmere Gate there had been some delay. Lieutenants Home and Salkeld, with some sergeants and native sappers, had at sunrise crossed the beams of the bridge, from which the rebels had removed the planking, and in broad daylight, without a particle of cover, had laid their powder-bags. The enemy were so daunted by this daring act that, when they saw Home coming, they hastily shut the wicket, and he and his men laid the bags and jumped down into the ditch unhurt.

Salkeld was not so fortunate. The rebels fired on him from the top of the gateway, and he fell. Sergeant Burgess caught up the portfire, but was shot dead. Carmichael fired the fuse, and fell mortally wounded.

Sergeant Smith, finding the fuse was alight, threw himself into the ditch, and instantly the gate was burst open with a tremendous crash.



A DARING DEED: BLOWING-UP THE CASHMERE GATE, DELHI

In broad daylight, and without a particle of cover, Lieuts. Home and Salkeld, with a few sappers, laid their powder bags and fired them. Salkeld and some of the others were shot before they could escape.

The bugler sounded the advance, and with a cheer our men rushed through the gateway, and met the other columns, who had carried their respective breaches. The Lahore Gate alone defied our attempts, and Nicholson called for volunteers to follow him through the narrow street towards the Lahore Gate.

[Pg 155]

As he strode forward, sword in hand, though there was death in every window and on every house-top, his great stature marked him out as a target for the enemy, and he fell, mortally wounded, the one man England wanted most.

The long autumn day was over, and we were in Delhi, but had not taken it. Sixty-six officers and 1,100 men had fallen, while not a sixth part of the city was ours. Many of our men were lying drunk in the shops. Had the sepoys possessed a General, they might have recovered the ridge, and taken our whole camp, defended as it was mainly by the sick and wounded.

On the next day, by order of General Wilson, vast quantities of beer, wine, and brandy were destroyed. On the 16th active operations were resumed. By sapping gradually from house to house we managed to avoid street fighting and slowly pressed the rebels back into the ever-narrowing part of the city from which, like rats, they streamed.

Whilst Seaton was in the Cashmere Gateway, he saw some artillerymen who were on duty there rummaging about. One of them was looking into a long arm-chest, when all at once he slammed down the lid, sat upon it sharp, and roared out: "Hi! Bill, run! be quick! Here's a devil of a Pandy in the box!"

Bill lost no time in attending to his comrade's request, and others running up to see what it was, they pulled out of the box a fine powerful sepoy, who was taken at once to the ditch and disposed of without more ceremony.

On the 18th, between 9 and 10 a.m., there was an eclipse of the sun. There is little doubt that this had a great effect on the minds of the superstitious natives, for they now began to leave the city in streams.

On the morning of the 20th, as the city in the direction of the palace seemed to be deserted, Colonel Jones came down with a column; a powder-bag was applied to the palace gates, a few defenders were slain, and the British flag was hoisted. [Pg 156]

That night the mess dinner was laid in the celebrated Dewan Khas, the marble building that Moore describes in "Lalla Rookh."

The inner room is the King's throne-room, and round the walls, inlaid with black marble, are the famous words: "If there be an elysium on earth, it is this."

The habits of the late King and family rendered that elysium a very dirty one, though the white marble was inlaid with coloured stones in flowers and arabesques. The houses and huts in which the Princes of the royal blood lived with their wives and children were a perfect rabbit-warren, so closely packed were they. The exterior walls enclosing the palace are 60 feet high, and built of red sandstone, loopholed and crenellated, and make a noble appearance.

But the squalor and filth in the whole place were inconceivable. As none of the Princes could engage in any business, the pittance they had to live on barely supplied the necessaries of life. Seaton saw some of the Princes. He says: "There was no trace of nobility, either of birth or of mind, in their faces. They were stamped with everything vile, gross, ignoble, sensual. Noble blood is a fine thing, but a noble heart is better, and will shine through the most forbidding features; but these wretches, with the cold, calm hand of death on them, showed nothing of kingly descent or nobility of heart, their countenances being as forbidding as the despicable passions in which they had indulged could make them."

It was laughable to see what rubbish was found in the palace. In one room were found at least 200 pair of those trousers which Mohammedan ladies wear instead of petticoats. Some of these were so stiff with brocaded silk that they must have needed a hearty kick with each foot at every step. [Pg 157]

The quantities of pots and pans which they had amassed would have furnished a whole street of dealers; then, there were telescopes and guns and other valuables.

Much blame has been cast on Hodson for his severity to the royal family. He fetched out the King and three Princes from the tomb where they had taken refuge. The Princes were in a native carriage, and as they drew near to Delhi an immense crowd surged round them, which was increasing every moment, pressing on Hodson's few men. They could hardly proceed. Hodson, perhaps fearing a rescue, ordered the three prisoners to get out. The poor wretches, seeing that something was about to happen, put up their hands and fell at his feet, begging that their lives might be spared.

Hodson merely said, "Choop ruho" (be silent); "take off your upper garments." They did so. Then, "Get into the cart." They obeyed.

Hodson then took a carbine from one of his men, and shot them all three. Then, turning to his men, he said: "These three men whom I have just shot are the three Princes who contrived and commenced the slaughter of our innocent women and children, and thus retributive vengeance has fallen on them."

The crowd, overawed, parted, and the carriage passed on. The bodies were exposed on the very spot where our unfortunate countrymen had been exposed. It seems cruel and vindictive, but we are judging in security. Hodson had an angry people to daunt, and their sense of justice to satisfy.

One must do our soldiers the justice to say that, though infuriated by the slaughter of their officers and countrymen, with their wives and children, inflamed by the news of the Cawnpore massacre, not an old man, not a woman or child, was wilfully hurt by them. As Seaton was waiting on the 20th by the Palace Gate, some soldiers were bringing along an old man, whom they held by the arms. He went up and said to them: "Remember you are Christian men, and he is very old." [Pg 158]

"Oh, sir!" was the reply, "we doesn't forget that. We don't mean him no harm. We only wants a bit of baccy."

So he let them go on, and in a few minutes saw them stuffing their pipes, and the old fellow genially bringing a coal to light them.

"I have seen hundreds of instances where the greatest humanity and kindness were shown, both

to young and old, as well as to females, by our noble-hearted fellows, even in their wildest moments."

From Major-General Sir Thomas Seaton's "From Cadet to Colonel." By kind permission of Messrs. G. Routledge and Sons.

CHAPTER XI

[Pg 159]

THE DEFENCE OF LUCKNOW (31ST OF MAY TO 25TH OF SEPTEMBER, 1857)

Firing at close quarters—Adventures of fugitives—Death of Sir H. Lawrence—His character—Difficulty of sending letters—Mines and counter-mines—Fulton killed—Signs of the relief coming—A great welcome—Story of the escape from Cawnpore.

For about ten days previous to the outbreak at Lucknow daily reports were made that an *émeute* was intended, and Sir Henry Lawrence, the brother of Sir John Lawrence, had ordered all kinds of stores to be bought and stored. The ladies and children had been removed from the cantonments to the Residency in the city, which was already occupied by a party of the 32nd foot and two guns.

The 9 p.m. gun on the 30th of May was evidently the signal for the mutiny to begin, as a few minutes after it had been fired, whilst Sir Henry and his staff were at dinner at the Residency, a sepoy came running in, and reported a disturbance in the lines.

Sir Henry took two guns and a company of the 32nd, and took post on the road leading to the town. Meanwhile bands of insurgents began to plunder and burn our officers' bungalows. Many officers had wonderful escapes from death; some were killed by the rebels. Muchee Bhawun, the residence of the late King, had been selected as a fitting place of security and retreat: it was being strengthened and supplied with stores.

[Pg 160]

On *June 10* houses and buildings around began to be demolished; tents were set apart for the European refugees who arrived daily from the districts.

On *June 12* the military police mutinied in a body, and went off to Cawnpore; they were pursued for eight miles and about twenty were killed.

On *June 15* a hundred barrels of gunpowder were brought from the Muchee Bhawun and buried in the Residency enclosure; twenty-three lacs of rupees were also buried in front of the Residency to save the use of sentries. Cash payments were now suspended, the men being paid by promissory notes.

On *June 20* large stacks of firewood, covered with earth, were placed to protect the front of the Residency: they formed an embankment 6 feet high, and embrasures were cut through them for the guns, of which there were four 9-pounders on that side.

A letter arrived from Cawnpore giving very bad news. The enemy had shelled them for the last eight days with fearful effect within their crowded trenches, and one-third of their number had been killed. More guns are brought in. They hear that eight or ten regiments of rebels are within twenty miles of Lucknow.

On *June 28* Mrs. Dorin, wife of Lieutenant Dorin, arrived at evening in a country cart, disguised as a native and accompanied by some clerks. The enemy are nine miles off. Though a force was sent out to meet them, we had to retire before overwhelming numbers, with the loss of the 8-inch howitzer and three 9-pounders.

The rebels came boldly on, investing the English on all sides, and firing from all the houses round, which they rapidly loopholed.

July 1.—We managed to send message to blow up the Muchee Bhawun fort and come to the Residency at 12 p.m., bringing the treasure and guns. We opened fire from our batteries in order to distract the attention of the enemy from them.

[Pg 161]

At 12.15 they were at the Lower Water Gate. Here there was some delay, as the gates had not yet been opened. A very serious accident had nearly happened, for the leading men, finding the gate closed, shouted out, "Open the gates!" but the artillerymen at the guns above, which covered the entrance, mistook the words for "Open with grape," and were on the point to fire when an officer ran up and put them right. The whole force came in safely, not a shot being fired. The explosion which had been ordered had not yet taken place, but soon a tremor of the earth, a volume of fire, a terrific report, and a mass of black smoke shooting up into the air announced to Lucknow that 240 barrels of gunpowder and 594,000 rounds of ball and gun ammunition had completed the destruction of Muchee Bhawun, which we had fortified with so much labour.

Strange stories were told by some of the refugees from outlying districts. Here is one told by the wife of a surgeon: "I heard a number of shots fired in our station, and looking out, I saw my husband driving furiously from the mess-house. I ran to him, and, catching up my child, got into the buggy. At the mess-house we found all the officers assembled, with sixty sepoys who had

remained faithful.

"As we went our homes were seen to be on fire. Next morning our sepoy escort deserted us. We were fired on by matchlock men and lost one officer. We had no food. An officer kindly lent us a horse. We were very faint. Our party now was only nine gentlemen, two children, the sergeant, and his wife. On the 20th Captain Scott took my little two-year-old Lottie on to his horse. Soon after sunrise we were followed by villagers armed with clubs and spears. One of them struck Captain Scott's horse on the leg. He galloped off with Lottie, and my poor husband never saw his child again.

[Pg 162]

"We rode on several miles, keeping away from villages, and then crossed the river. Our thirst was extreme. Soon I saw water in a ravine. I climbed down the steep descent. Our only drinking-vessel was M.'s cap (which had once been a sepoy's). Our horse got water and I bathed my neck. I had no stockings and my feet were torn and blistered. My husband was very weak, and, I thought, dying. He wished me good-bye as he lay on the ground. My brain seemed burnt up: no tears came. Our horse cantered away, so that escape was cut off. We sat down on the ground waiting for death. Poor fellow! he was very weak; his thirst was frightful, and I went to get him water. Some villagers came and took my rupees and watch. I took off my wedding-ring, twisted it in my hair and replaced the guard. I tore off the skirt of my dress to bring water in; but it was no use, for when I returned, my beloved's eyes were fixed, and, though I called and tried to restore him and poured water into his mouth, it only rattled in his throat. He never spoke to me again, and he gradually sank down and died. I was alone. In an hour or so about thirty villagers came. They dragged me out of the ravine and took off my jacket; then they dragged me to a village, mocking me all the way. The whole village came to look at me. I lay down outside the door of a hut. They had dozens of cows, and yet refused me milk. When night came and the village was quiet, some old woman brought me a leafful of rice. The next morning a neighbouring Rajah sent a palanquin and a horseman to fetch me, who told me that a little child and three sahibs had come to his master's house. That little child was my Lottie! She was sorely blistered, but, thank God! alive and well."

[Pg 163]

That is the sort of experience some ladies went through—ladies that had never before known what thirst or privation or insult was like.

July 2.—About 8 a.m. Sir Henry returned to the Residency and lay down on his bed. Soon after an 8-inch shell from the enemy's howitzer entered the room at the window and exploded. A fragment struck the Brigadier-General on the upper part of the right thigh near the hip, inflicting a fearful wound.

Captain Wilson, who was standing alongside the bed with one knee on it, reading a memorandum to Sir Henry, was knocked down by falling bricks. Mr. Lawrence, Sir Henry's nephew, had an equally narrow escape, but was not hurt. The fourth person in the room, a native servant, lost one of his feet by a fragment of the shell. The ceiling and the punkah all came down, and the dust and smoke prevented anyone seeing what had happened.

Neither Sir Henry nor his nephew uttered a sound, and Captain Wilson, as soon as he recovered from the concussion, called out in alarm: "Sir Henry, are you hurt?"

Twice he thus called out and got no reply. After the third time Sir Henry said in a low tone: "I am killed."

His bed was being soaked with blood. Some soldiers of the 32nd soon came in and placed Sir Henry in a chair. When the surgeon came he saw that human aid was useless. Lucknow and England had lost what could never be replaced. For all who ever came in contact with Sir Henry Lawrence recognized in him a man of unstained honour, a lover of justice, pure, unselfish and noble. His successor, Brigadier Inglis, wrote of him: "Few men have ever possessed to the same extent the power which he enjoyed of winning the hearts of all those with whom he came in contact." He gained also by his frankness the trust of the natives, who said of him: "When Sir Henry looks twice up to heaven and once down to earth, and then strokes his beard, he knows what to do." His dying wish was that, if any epitaph were placed on his tomb, it should be this: "Here lies Henry Lawrence, who tried to do his duty." He had indeed tried to do his duty towards the defence of Lucknow. Three weeks before anyone else thought of a siege he began to collect supplies, and even paid for them much over their market value. He collected and buried much treasure in the grounds of the Residency; he stored up in underground cellars guns and mortars, shot and shell and grain; strengthened the outworks, and cleared the ground of small buildings around. Even then the assailants and the besieged were quite close to each other, and no man on either side dared expose himself to fire his musket: they fired through loopholes in the walls. This placed a never-ending strain on the besieged, for they never knew when to expect an assault. On the one side of a narrow lane were myriads of swarthy foemen, on the other side a few hundreds, who were bound always to be ready, day and night, to meet a storming party. All through the siege officers and men alike stood sentry; all bore an equal burden of toil and fighting.

[Pg 164]

The stench, too, from dead animals was dreadful: they had so few servants, and the fighting men were so harassed, that they were helpless to bury them.

Heavy showers night and day kept the garrison drenched to the skin, and they had no change of clothes. The sick and wounded were much crowded, as they could not use the upper story of the hospital because it was under fire of round shot.

August 12.—A letter to General Havelock, rolled up and put inside a quill, was despatched by the

[Pg 165]

hands of an old woman. She left the position about 9 p.m., and it was hoped she would be permitted to pass the enemy's sentries. During the past forty-five days they had sent by different hands, in a similar manner, some twenty letters. To only one of these was any reply received.

August 18.—At daylight the enemy exploded a large mine under one of the principal posts. The three officers and three sentries on the top of the house were blown up into the air; the guard below were all buried in the ruins. The officers, though much stunned, recovered and escaped. A clear breach had been made in our defences to the extent of 30 feet in breadth. One of the enemy's leaders sprung on the top of the breach and called on his comrades to follow; but when he and another had been shot the rest hung back. Boxes, doors, planks, etc., were rapidly carried down to make cover to protect the men.

August 23.—There was work nightly for at least 300 men, as they had the defences to repair daily, mines to countermine, guns to remove, corpses to bury, rations to serve out. The Europeans were not capable of much exertion, as from want of sleep, hard work, and constant exposure, their bodily strength was greatly diminished. The ladies had to be removed, as the upper story of Mr. Gubbins' house was no longer safe, owing to the number of round shot through it. It was difficult to find quarters for them, every place being so crowded, and the ladies were already four and five together in small, badly ventilated native dwellings. Dreadful smells pervaded the whole place, from the half-buried bodies of men, horses, and bullocks, and also from the drains.

September 9.—During the night a shell exploded in a room occupied by a lady and some children, and, though almost every article in the room was destroyed, they all escaped unhurt. Finding that the enemy were rapidly mining towards the Cawnpore battery, they sprung a mine containing 200 pounds of powder. The effect was tremendous, and it evidently astonished the enemy to see their miners going up skywards in fragments.

[Pg 166]

As the uniforms wore out they clothed themselves as they could. One officer had a coat made out of an old billiard cloth; another wore a shirt made out of a floor-cloth. They had no tobacco, and had to smoke dried tea-leaves.

September 14.—A grievous loss to-day: Captain Fulton, of the Engineers, while reconnoitring from a battery, was killed by a round shot which struck him on the head. He had conducted all the engineering operations of the siege for a long time. He was a highly gifted, brave and chivalrous officer, and a great favourite."

September 22.—About 11 p.m. Ungud, pensioner, returned to Lucknow, bringing a letter containing the glad tidings that the relieving force, under General Outram, had crossed the Ganges, and would arrive in a few days.

His arrival and the cheering news he brought of speedy aid was well timed, for daily desertions of servants were becoming the rule. All the garrison were greatly elated at the news, and on many of the sick and wounded the speedy prospect of a change of air and security exercised a most beneficial effect.

September 25.—About 11 a.m. increasing agitation was visible among the people in the town. An hour later they heard guns and saw the smoke. All the garrison was on the alert; the excitement amongst many of the officers and men was quite painful to witness. At 1.30 p.m. many were leaving the city with bundles of clothes on their heads. The rebels' bridge of boats had evidently been destroyed, for they could see many swimming across the river, most of them cavalry, with their horses' bridles in their hands. During all this apparent panic the guns of the enemy in position all round were keeping up a heavy cannonade, and the riflemen never ceased firing from their loopholes.

[Pg 167]

At 4 p.m. report was made that some officers dressed in shooting-coats and caps, a regiment of Europeans in blue pantaloons and shirts, could be seen near Mr. Martin's house. At 5 p.m. volleys of musketry, rapidly growing louder, were heard in the city. But soon the firing of a minie-ball over their heads gave notice of the still nearer approach of their friends. It was very exciting, but they as yet could see little of them, though they could hear the rebels firing on them from the roofs of the houses.

Will they again be repulsed? The heart sickens at the thought. No. Five minutes later, and our troops are seen fighting their way through one of the principal streets, and though men are falling at almost every step, yet on they come. Nothing can withstand the headlong gallantry of our reinforcements. Once fairly seen and all doubts and fears are ended. And now the garrison's long pent-up feelings of anxiety and suspense burst forth in a succession of deafening cheers. From every pit, trench and battery, from behind the sand-bags piled up on shattered houses, from every post still held by a few gallant spirits, rose cheer on cheer—aye, even from the hospital.

Many of the wounded were crawling forth to join in that glad shout of welcome to those who had so bravely come to their assistance. The ladies were in tears—tears of joy; some were on their knees, already thanking God for a deliverance from unspeakable horrors. It was a moment never to be forgotten. Soon all the rearguard and heavy guns were inside our position, and then ensued a scene which baffles description. For eighty-seven days the Lucknow garrison had lived in utter ignorance of all that had taken place outside. Wives who had mourned their husbands as dead were again restored to them; others, fondly looking forward to glad meetings with those near and dear to them, now for the first time learnt that they were alone in the world. On all sides eager

[Pg 168]

inquiries were made for relations and friends. Oh, what a hubbub of voices, what exclamations of delight, what sad silences!

The force under the command of Sir James Outram and Havelock had suffered heavily. Out of 2,600 who had left Cawnpore nearly one-third had been either killed or wounded in forcing their way through the city. Indeed, their losses were so heavy that they could effect little towards the relief, for the rebels were in overpowering force, so that the garrison remained on three-quarter rations, as closely besieged as before, looking for a day when they might be more effectually relieved by a larger and stronger force.

Then, after the personal inquiries had died down, with bated breath they asked for news of Cawnpore. What a tale of horror, of pride, of shame! On the 5th of June, so they were told, the Cawnpore regiments mutinied and set off for Delhi. On the 6th they were brought back by Nana Sahib, a man who had once been well received in London drawing-rooms, now the arch-traitor and murderer.

Not less than 1,000 persons took refuge in the Residency, which Nana proceeded to invest. It was a poor, weak place to defend, yet they kept the flag flying till the 24th of June, when their ammunition and provisions were all gone. Time after time the gallant little garrison repulsed all the Nana's attacks. At length he approached them with treacherous smiles, and offered to transmit them safely to Allahabad on conditions of surrender. General Sir Hugh Wheeler undertook to deliver up the fortifications, the treasure, and the artillery on condition that our force should march out under arms, with sixty rounds of ammunition to every man; that carriages should be provided for the conveyance of the wounded, the women, and the children; that boats provided with flour should be in readiness at the landing-place.

[Pg 169]

What happened was described by one who had been on the spot. He said:

"The whole of Cawnpore was astir at an early hour to see the English depart. They poured down to the landing-place in thousands. Meanwhile a crowd of carriages and beasts of burden had been collected outside the entrenchments. The bullock-carts were soon filled with women and children. A fine elephant had been sent for the General, but he put his wife and daughters in the state howdah, and contented himself with a simple palanquin. The wounded were placed in litters with such care as soldiers could employ. Many sepoys mingling with the crowd expressed admiration for the British defence; some even wept over the sufferings of their late masters. Eleven dying Europeans were left behind, too ill to be moved.

"They set off, with the men of the 32nd Regiment at their head; then came a throng of naked bearers, carrying the palanquins full of sick and wounded; then came the bullock-carts crowded with ladies and children; and next, musket on shoulder, came all who could still walk and fight. Major Vibart of the Second Cavalry came last. Colonel and Mrs. Ewart started late, she on foot, walking beside her husband, who was borne by four native porters. As they dropped astern some natives belonging to the Colonel's own battalion approached him. They began to mock him, and then cut him in pieces with their swords. They did the same to his wife.

"The road to the landing-place, which is about a mile from the entrenchments, runs down a ravine, which in summer is dry, and is enclosed on either side by high banks and crumbling fences. As the van turned down this ravine a great mob of natives watched them go in a strange silence.

[Pg 170]

"Rather disorderly, with swaying howdahs and grunting beasts, the unwieldy caravan wound along the sandy lane. When they were all entangled in the little defile some sepoys quietly formed a double line across the mouth of the gorge, shutting, as it were, the top of the trap.

"Meanwhile the head of the caravan had reached the landing-place, being a little surprised at the want of a pier or planks to serve as gangway.

"But the English officers went in knee-deep and hoisted the wounded and the women into the covered barges, which had been hauled into the shallows, and were in many cases grounded on the sandy bottom. The boats were 30 feet from stem to stern and 12 feet in beam, roofed with straw, having a space at each end for the rowers and the steersman. They looked very old and dilapidated, but beggars may not choose. Hindoo boatmen were waiting sullenly and silently, not deigning to return a smile to the little English children, who already began to scent fun and enjoyment in a long river excursion.

"All at once a bugle rang out from the top of the defile. Away splashed the native rowers, jumping from their boats into the water.

"The rebels put up their muskets and fired point-blank into the laden boats; but the English had their rifles, and returned the fire.

"Yet another surprise! Suddenly the straw roofs of the native boats burst into flame, and from either shore of the river grape and musket shot were poured in relentlessly. The wounded lay still and were burnt to death. Ladies and children sought the protection of the water, and crouched in the shallows under the sterns of the barges. The men tried to push off, but the keels stuck fast. Out of two dozen boats only three drifted slowly down from the stage. Of these three two went across to the Oude bank, where stood two cannon, guarded by a battalion of infantry and some cavalry. The third boat, containing Vibart and Whiting and Ushe, Delafosse and Bolton, Burney and Glanville and Moore, the bravest of the brave, got clear away, and drifted down the main

[Pg 171]

channel.”

Mrs. Bradshaw thus describes what she saw: “In the boat where I was to have gone were the school-mistress and twenty-two missies. General Wheeler came last in a palkee. They carried him into the water near a boat. I was standing close by. He said, ‘Carry me a little further near the boat.’ But a trooper said, ‘No; get out here.’ As the General got out of the palkee, head foremost, the trooper gave him a cut with his sword into the neck, and he fell into the water. My son was killed near him. I saw it—alas! alas! Some were stabbed with bayonets; others were cut down with swords and knives. Little infants were torn in pieces. We saw it, we did, and tell you only what we saw. Other children were stabbed and thrown into the river. The school-girls were burnt to death. I saw their clothes and hair catch fire. In the water, a few paces off, by the next boat, we saw the youngest daughter of Colonel Williams. A sepoy was going to kill her with his bayonet, when she said, ‘My father was always kind to sepoys.’ He turned away, and just then a villager struck her on the head with his club, and she fell into the water.”

After a time the women and children who had not been shot, stabbed, or burnt were collected and brought to shore, some of them being rudely handled by the sowars, who tore from ear or finger such jewels as caught their fancy. [Pg 172]

About 120 sat or lay on the shore or on logs of timber, full of misery, fear, and despair. There they waited in the blinding sun on the Ganges shore all that morning. Then they were herded back along the narrow lane by which they had come with hope in their bosoms, while the sepoys who guarded them grinned with fiendish delight, and showed gleefully all their spoils. Past the bazaar and the chapel and the racquet-court and the entrenchments they limped along, until they were paraded before the pavilion of the Maharajah, who looked them well over, and ordered them to be confined in the Savada House. Two good-sized rooms, which had been used by native soldiers for a month, were given them to live in, and a guard was placed over them.

One witness says: “I saw that many of the ladies were wounded. Their clothes had blood on them. Some were wet, covered with mud and blood, and some had their dresses badly torn, but all had clothes. I saw one or two children without clothes. There were no men in the party, but only some boys of twelve or thirteen years of age. Some of the ladies were barefoot and lame. Two I saw were wounded in the leg.”

And what of the third boat which floated down-stream?

More than 100 persons had taken refuge in it. Some officers and men, seeing how hopeless was the fight on the bank, had swum out to Vibart and his crew. Now they stranded on a mud-bank, now they drifted towards the guns on the other shore, ever under a hot fire of canister and shell, and continually losing brave men who were shot at point-blank range. Down in the bottom of the great barge lay dying and dead, till at last the survivors were compelled to throw the bodies overboard. [Pg 173]

At night a fire-ship was sent down to set them alight, and fire-tipped arrows were shot into the thatched roof, forcing our people to cut them away. Then they came under a fierce fire from the militia of Ram Bux. Pelting rains came down, and they drifted up a backwater, and soon after a host of rebels surrounded the poor, stricken fugitives and took them back to Cawnpore.

The doomed boat-load were seen to be drawing near the landing-place early on the morning of the 30th. This is what a native spy said of them:

“There were brought back sixty sahibs, twenty-five mem sahibs, and four children. The Nana ordered the sahibs to be separated from the mem sahibs, and shot by the 1st Bengal Native Infantry. But they said, ‘We will not kill the sahibs; put them in prison.’ Then said the Nadiree Regiment: ‘What word is this—put them in prison? We will kill the males ourselves.’

“So the sahibs were seated on the ground. Two companies stood with their muskets, ready to fire. Then said one of the mem sahibs, the doctor’s wife: ‘I will not leave my husband. If he must die, I will die with him.’ So she ran and sat down behind her husband, clasping him round the waist.

“When she said this the other mem sahibs said: ‘We also will die with our husbands;’ and they all sat down, each by her husband.

“Then their husbands said: ‘Go back;’ but they would not do so.

“So then the Nana gave order, and his soldiers went in and pulled them away by force. But they could not pull away the doctor’s wife, who stayed there. Then the padre asked leave to read prayers before they died. He did so, and then shut the book. Then all the sahibs shook hands and bid good-bye. Then the sepoys fired. One sahib rolled one way, one another, but they were not quite dead; so the sepoys went at them and finished them off with their swords.” [Pg 174]

Can you imagine the breathless horror with which the garrison of Lucknow listened to these details of a most cruel and treacherous onslaught upon wounded men, upon refined ladies, and innocent children? How they sighed for a force strong enough to take an adequate revenge upon these miscreants! But for the present they were besieged themselves, though reinforced; and who of them could count upon a day’s security? Perhaps, if the bullet spared them at Lucknow their would-be rescuers might be unable to fight their way through the city, and these poor ladies and children of the Lucknow garrison might be reserved for a lot even worse than death. “Will they come?—will they come to help us here at Lucknow? That is our anxious thought night and

CHAPTER XII

THE RELIEF OF LUCKNOW (1857)

[Pg 175]

The scene at Cawnpore—Fights before Lucknow—Nearly blown up—A hideous nightmare—Cheering a runaway—All safe out of the Residency—A quick march back—Who stole the biscuits?—Sir Colin’s own regiment.

“I had enlisted in the 93rd Sutherland Highlanders to go to India to put down the Mutiny,” writes Mr. Forbes-Mitchell, an old friend of the author. “We reached Cawnpore on the 27th of October, having marched the last forty-six miles in two days. We were over 1,000 strong, and many of us had just been through the Crimean War. After a few hours’ rest we were allowed to go out in parties of ten or twelve to visit the scene of the late treachery and massacre.”

Wheeler’s entrenchments at the highest place did not exceed 4 feet, and could not have been bullet-proof at the top. The wonder was how the small force could have held out so long. In the rooms were still lying about broken toys, pictures, books, and bits of clothing. They then went to see the slaughter-house in which our women and children had been barbarously murdered and the well into which their mangled bodies were flung. On the date of this visit a great part of the house had not been cleaned out. The floors of the rooms were still covered with congealed blood, and littered with trampled, torn dresses, shoes, locks of long hair, many of which evidently had been severed by sword-cuts. But the most horrible sight they saw was an iron hook fixed into the wall. This was covered with dried blood, and from the marks on the whitewashed wall it was evident that a little child had been hung on to it by the neck, with its face to the wall. There the poor thing must have struggled for long, because the wall all round the hook was covered with the hand-prints, and below the hook with the footprints, of a little child—in blood.

[Pg 176]

The number of victims killed at Cawnpore, counted and buried in the well by Havelock’s force, was 118 women and 92 children. This sight was enough, they said, to make the words “mercy” and “pardon” appear a mockery.

The troops crossed into Oude on the 2nd of November, and on the 3rd a salute fired from the mud fort on the Cawnpore side told them that, to their great delight, Sir Colin Campbell had come up from Calcutta. They were all burning to start for Lucknow. Every man in the regiment was determined to risk his life to save the women and children from the fate of Cawnpore.

On their march they saw they were at once in an enemy’s country. None of the villages were inhabited. There was no chance of buying chupatties (girdle-cakes) or goat’s milk. It was the custom to serve out three days’ biscuits at one time, running four to the pound. Most men usually had finished their biscuits before they reached the first halting-ground.

Before they made their first halt they could hear the guns of the rebels bombarding the Residency. Footsore and tired as they were, the report of each salvo made the men step out with a firmer tread and a more determined resolve to relieve those helpless women and children.

On the 10th of November they were encamped on the plain about five miles in front of the Alumbâgh, about 5,000 of them, the only really complete regiment being the 93rd Highlanders, of whom some 700 wore the Crimean medal. They were in full Highland costume, feather bonnets and dark waving plumes—a solid mass of brawny-limbed men.

[Pg 177]

The old chief rode along the line, saying a few words to each corps as he passed. The regiment remarked that none of the other corps had given him a single cheer, but had taken what he said in solemn silence. At last he came to the 93rd, who were formed close column, so that every man might hear. When Sir Colin rode up he seemed to have a worn and haggard expression on his face, but he was received with such a cheer, or rather shout of welcome, as made the echoes ring. His wrinkled brow at once became smooth, and his weary features broke into a smile as he acknowledged the cheer by a hearty salute. He ended his speech thus: “Ninety-third, you are my own lads. I rely on you to do the work.” A voice from the ranks called out: “Ay, ay, Sir Colin! ye ken us, and we ken you. We’ll bring the women and children out of Lucknow or die in the attempt;” and the whole regiment burst into another ringing cheer.

On the morning of the 14th of November they began the advance on the Dilkoosha Park and Palace. The Fourth Brigade, composed of the 53rd, 93rd, and 4th Punjab Regiments, with a strong force of artillery, reached the walls at sunrise. Here they halted till a breach was made in the walls. The park swarmed with deer—black buck and spotted. There were no signs of the enemy, and a staff-officer of the artillery galloped to the front to reconnoitre. This was none other than the present Lord Roberts, known to the men then as “Plucky Wee Bobs.” About half of the regiment had passed through the breach, when a masked battery of six guns opened fire on them from behind the palace. The first shot passed through the column, the second cut in two a trooper’s horse close to Roberts, who dismounted and helped the trooper to his feet. They all cheered the young Lieutenant for his coolness under a point-blank fire of 9-pounders. They kept on pegging away until the sepoy bolts down the hill for shelter in the Martinière. About two o’clock they drove the rebels out, occupied the Martinière and erected a semaphore on the roof to communicate with the Residency.

[Pg 178]

They next fought their way to a village on the east side of the Secundrabâgh. Here they saw a naked wretch with shaven head and body painted and smeared with ashes. He was sitting on a leopard-skin, counting a rosary of beads. James Wilson said:

"I'd like to try my bayonet on that fellow's hide;" but Captain Mayne replied:

"Oh, don't touch him. These fellows are harmless Hindoo *jogees*" (mendicants).

The words had scarcely been uttered when the painted scoundrel stopped counting his beads, slipped his hand under his leopard-skin, brought out a short brass blunderbuss, and fired it into Captain Mayne's chest, a few feet off. The fellow was instantly bayoneted, but poor Mayne died.

From the Secundrabâgh came a murderous fire, and they had to wait for the guns to make a breach.

"Lie down, 93rd, lie down!" shouted Sir Colin. "Every man of you is worth his weight in gold to England to-day."

When the breach was large enough the 4th Punjabis led the assault, but seeing their officers shot down, they wavered. Sir Colin turned to Colonel Ewart and said:

"Bring on the tartan. Let my own lads at them."

Before the buglers had time to sound the advance the whole seven companies, like one man, leaped the wall with such a yell of pent-up rage as never was heard before nor since. The bayonet did the work effectually. Many of the Highlanders were wounded in the leg because the native tulwârs were as sharp as razors, and when the rebels had fired their muskets they hurled them like javelins, bayonets first, and then drawing their tulwârs, slashed in blind fury, shouting, "Deen! Deen!" ("The faith!"), and some threw themselves down and slashed at the legs of the Highlanders. [Pg 179]

In the centre of the inner court of the Secundrabâgh there was a large peepul-tree (Indian fig), with a very bushy top, and round the foot of it were set some jars full of cool water. Captain Dawson noticed that many of our men lay dead under this tree, and he called out to Wallace, a good shot, to look up and try if he could see anyone in the top, as the dead seemed to be shot from above.

Wallace stepped back and scanned the tree. "I see him, sir," he shouted, and cocking his rifle, he fired. Down fell a body dressed in a tight-fitting red jacket and rose-coloured silk trousers. The breast of the jacket bursting open with the fall showed that the wearer was a woman.

She was armed with a pair of heavy old-pattern cavalry pistols. From her perch in the tree, which had been carefully prepared before the attack, she had killed more than half a dozen men. Poor Wallace burst into tears, saying: "If I had known it was a woman I would never have harmed her."

When the roll was called it was found that we had lost nine officers and ninety-nine men. Sir Colin rode up and said: "Fifty-third and Ninety-third, you have bravely done your share of this morning's work, and Cawnpore is avenged."

"On revisiting Lucknow many years after this I saw no tablet or grave to mark the spot where so many of the 93rd are buried. It is the old, old story which was said to have been first written on the walls of Badajos: [Pg 180]

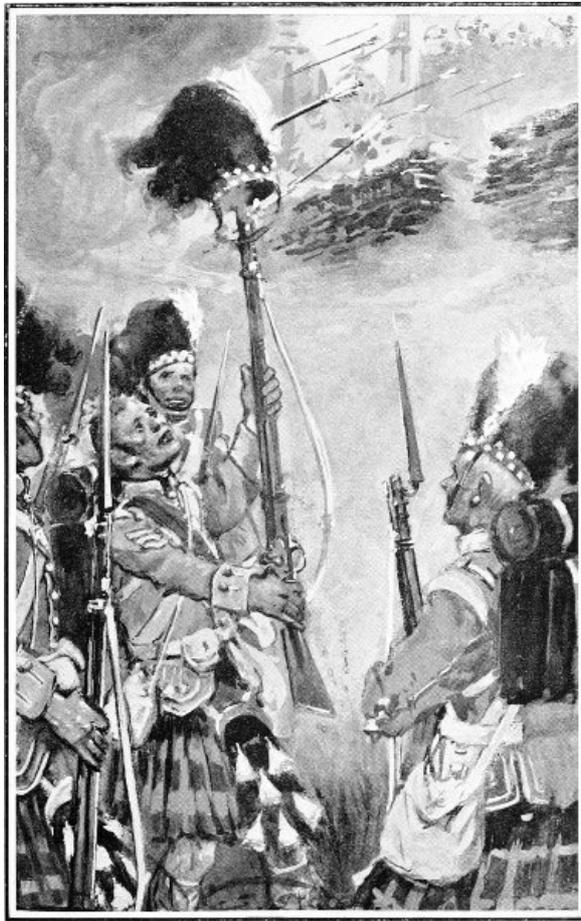
"When war is rife and danger nigh,
God and the soldier is all the cry;
When war is over and wrongs are righted,
God is forgot and the soldier slighted."

"After the Secundrabâgh we had to advance on the Shâh Nujeef. As the 24-pounders were being dragged along by our men and Peel's sailors a poor sailor lad just in front had his leg carried clean off above the knee by a round shot, and although knocked head over heels by the force of the ball, he sat bolt upright on the grass, with the blood spouting from the stump of his limb like water from the hose of a fire-engine, and shouted:

"Here goes a shilling a day—a shilling a day! Pitch into them, boys! Remember Cawnpore, 93rd—remember Cawnpore! Go at them, my hearties!" and then he fell back in a dead faint. He was dead before a doctor could reach him."

Sir Colin himself was wounded by a bullet after it had passed through the head of a 93rd Grenadier.

Amongst the force defending the Shâh Nujeef there was a large body of archers on the walls armed with bows and arrows, which they discharged with great force and precision, and on Sergeant White raising his head above the wall an arrow was shot right into his feather bonnet. Inside the wire cage of his bonnet he had placed his forage-cap, folded up, and instead of passing right through, the arrow stuck in the folds of his cap. White, drawing out the arrow, cried: "My conscience! Bows and arrows! Have we got Robin Hood and Little John back again? Well, well, Jack Pandey, since bows and arrows are the word, here's at you!" and with that he raised his bonnet on the point of his bayonet above the top of the wall, and at once another arrow pierced it through, while a dozen more whizzed past a little wide of the mark. [Pg 181]



THE LIGHTER SIDE OF WAR AT LUCKNOW

A body of archers were amongst the defenders of the Shâh Nujeef. A Highland sergeant put his bonnet on his bayonet and held it up, and it was at once pierced by an arrow.

Just then Penny, of No. 2 Company, looking over the wall, got an arrow right through his brain, the shaft projecting more than a foot at the back of his head.

Then they all loaded and capped, and, pushing up their bonnets again, a whole shower of arrows went past or through them. Up they sprang and returned a well-aimed volley from their rifles at point-blank distance, and more than half a dozen of the rebels went down. But Montgomery exposed himself a little too long to watch the effects of the volley, and before he could get down into shelter an arrow was sent through his heart, passing clean through his body, and falling on the ground a few yards behind him. He leaped about 6 feet straight up in the air and fell stone dead.

But as yet we had made little impression on the solid masonry walls, and one of our ammunition waggons exploded, killing several men, and our storming party was repulsed. Just then Sergeant Paton came running up out of breath to say he had found a wide breach on the other side. It seems our shot and shell had gone over the first wall and had blown out the wall on the other side. Paton had climbed up easily and seen right inside the place. So Captain Dawson and his company were sent with Paton, and when the enemy saw them come in behind them they fled like sheep.

Thus ended the terrible 16th of November, 1857.

"An adventure happened to me in the Shâh Nujeef," says Forbes-Mitchell, "which I still sometimes dream of with horror. This place was the tomb of the first King of Oude, and a place of Mohammedan pilgrimage. It had a number of small rooms round the enclosure for the pilgrims. These the enemy had used for quarters, and in their hurry to escape many had left their lamps burning. As I had lost my greatcoat in the fight, and felt very cold at night, so that I could not sleep, it struck me that some of the sepoys might have left blankets behind them. With this hope I went into one of the rooms where a lamp was burning, took it off its shelf, and walked to the door of the great domed tomb, which was only 20 yards or so away from the spot where the arms were piled and the men lying round the still burning fire. I peered into the dark vault, but could see nothing, so I advanced slowly, holding above my head the clay saucer of oil containing a loose cotton wick. I was looking cautiously round, for fear of surprise from a concealed foe, till I came near the centre of the great vault, where my progress was obstructed by a big black heap about 4 feet high, which felt to my feet as if I were walking in loose sand. I lowered the lamp to see what it was, and discovered that I was standing up to the ankles in loose gunpowder!

"About 40 hundredweight of it lay in a great heap in front of my nose, while a glance to my left showed me a range of some thirty barrels also full of powder, and on the right lots of 8-inch shells, all loaded, with the fuses fixed.

"By this time my eyes had become accustomed to the darkness of the mosque, and I took in my position at a glance. Here I was up to my knees almost in powder—in the very bowels of a magazine—with a naked light!

"My hair literally stood on end. I felt the skin of my head lifting my feather bonnet off my scalp. My knees knocked together, and, despite the chilly night air, the cold perspiration burst out all over me and ran down my face and legs.

"I had neither cloth nor handkerchief in my pocket, and there was not a moment to be lost, as already the overhanging wick was threatening to shed its smouldering red tip into the live magazine at my feet.

[Pg 183]

"Quick as thought I put my left hand under the down-dropping flame and clasped it firmly. Holding it so, I slowly turned to the door and walked out with my knees knocking one against the other. I never felt the least pain from the wick, fear had so overcome me; but when I opened my hand on gaining the open air, I felt the smart acutely enough. I poured the oil out of the saucer into the burnt hand, then kneeling down, I thanked God for having saved me and all our men around from horrible destruction. I then got up and staggered rather than walked to the place where Captain Dawson was sleeping. I shook him by the shoulder till he awoke, and told him of my discovery and fright.

"'Bah, Corporal Mitchell!' was all his answer. 'You have woke up out of your sleep and have got frightened at a shadow'—for he saw me all trembling.

"I turned my smarting hand to the light of the fire and showed the Captain how it was scorched; and then, feeling my pride hurt, I said: 'Sir, you're not a Highlander, or you would know the Gaelic proverb, "The heart of one who can look death in the face will not start at a shadow," and you, sir, can bear witness that I have not shirked to look death in the face more than once since morning.'

"He replied: 'Pardon me. I did not mean that. But calm yourself and explain.'

"I then told him that I had gone into the mosque with a naked lamp, and had found it half full of loose gunpowder.

"'Are you sure you're not dreaming from the excitement of this awful day?' he asked.

"With that I looked down to my feet and my gaiters, which were still covered with blood from the slaughter in the Secundrabâgh. The wet grass had softened it again, and on this the powder was sticking nearly an inch thick. I scraped some of it off, throwing it into the fire, and said:

[Pg 184]

"'There is positive proof for you that I'm not dreaming, nor my vision a shadow.'

"On that the Captain became almost as alarmed as I was, and a sentry was posted near the door of the mosque to prevent anyone entering it.

"The sleeping men were aroused, and the fire smothered out by jars of water. Then Captain Dawson and I, with an escort of four men, went round the rooms. As Wilson, one of the escort, was peering into a room, a concealed sepoy struck him over the head with his tulwâr; but his bonnet saved him, and Captain Dawson put a pistol bullet through the sepoy to save further trouble.

"After all was quiet the men rolled off to sleep again, and I too lay down and tried to sleep. My nerves were, however, too much shaken, and the burnt hand kept me awake, so I lay and listened to the men sleeping round me. And what a night that was! The horrible scenes through which the men had passed during the day had told with terrible effect upon their nerves, and the struggles with death in the Secundrabâgh were fought over again by some of the men in their sleep, oaths and shouts of defiance being often strangely intermingled with prayers.

"One man would be lying calmly asleep and then suddenly break out into a fierce battle-cry of 'Cawnpore! you bloody murderer!' Another would shout, 'Charge! give them the bayonet!' and a third, 'Keep together, boys; don't fire yet. Forward! forward! If we are to die, let us die like men!'

"Then I would hear one muttering, 'Oh, mother, forgive me, and I'll never leave you again.' So it was through all that memorable night, and I have no doubt it was the same at the other posts. At last I dozed off and dreamed of blood and battle, and anon of Dee or Don side and the Braemar gathering; then the scene would change, and I was a little boy again, kneeling beside my mother, saying my evening hymn. Verily Campbell's 'Soldier's Dream' is no fiction."

[Pg 185]

Next morning they found plenty of pumpkins and piles of flat cakes already cooked, but no salt; but Mitchell had an old matchbox full of salt in his haversack. An old veteran who used to tell stories of Waterloo had said to him at home: "Always carry a box of salt in your haversack when on active service: it will be useful." So it was very often. After breakfast they sponged out their rifles, which had become so foul that the men's shoulders were black with bruises from the recoil.

They had to assault the mess-house next, and after they had driven the rebels into the River

Goomtee they peppered every head that showed above water.

One tall fellow acted as cunningly as a jackal. Whether struck or not, he fell just as he got into shallow water on the opposite side, and lay without moving, with his legs in the water and his head on the land. He appeared to be stone dead, and every rifle was turned on those that were running across the plain, while many that were wounded were fired on, as the fellows said, in mercy to put them out of pain. For this war of the Mutiny was a demoralizing war for civilized men to be engaged in. The cold-blooded cruelty of the rebels branded them as traitors to humanity and cowardly assassins of helpless women and children.

But to return to our Pandy. He was ever after spoken of as "the Jackal," because jackals often behave as he did. After he had lain apparently dead for about an hour, some one noticed that he had gradually dragged himself out of the water. Then all at once he sprang to his feet and ran like a deer. He was still within easy range, and several rifles were levelled at him; but Sergeant Findlay, who was on the rampart, called out: "Don't fire, men; give the poor devil a chance." So instead of a volley of bullets the men's better feelings gained the day, and Jack Pandy was reprieved, with a cheer to speed him on his way. As soon as he heard it he realized his position, and like the Samaritan leper of old, he halted, turned round, and putting up both his hands with the palms together in front of his face, he salaamed profoundly, prostrating himself three times on the ground by way of thanks, while the men on the ramparts waved their bonnets and clapped their hands to him in token of goodwill.

[Pg 186]

Just at this time was heard a great sound of cheering near the Residency, the cause of which they shortly learned. It was because General Sir Colin Campbell had met Havelock and Outram. So then they knew the Residency was relieved, and the women and children were saved, though not yet out of danger. Every man in the force slept with a lighter heart that night.

A girl in the Residency—Jessie Brown—had stated that she heard the skirl of the bagpipes hours before the relieving force could be seen or heard by the rest of the garrison, "and I believe it was quite true. I know we heard their bagpipes a long way off. Well, we had relieved Lucknow, but at what a cost! No less than forty-five officers and 496 men had been killed—more than a tenth of our whole number."

The Residency was relieved on the afternoon of the 17th of November, and the following day preparations were made for the evacuation of the position and the withdrawal of the women and children. To do this in safety, however, was no easy task, for the rebels showed but small regard for the laws of chivalry. There was a long stretch of plain, exposed to the fire of the enemy's artillery and sharpshooters from the opposite side of the Goomtee. To protect this part of the route all the best shots were placed on the north-west corner of the ramparts next to the Goomtee. They were under the command of Sergeant Findlay. One very good shot that excellent marksman made. A rebel officer rode out with a force of infantry from the east gate of the Bâdshâh-hibâgh. They had a couple of guns, too, to open fire on the line of retreat. They might have played havoc with the retiring garrison, but Findlay managed to unhorse the officer at long distance, and as soon as he was knocked over the enemy retreated into the bâgh, and did not show themselves any more that day.

[Pg 187]

By midnight of the 22nd of November the Residency was entirely evacuated, and the enemy completely deceived as to the movements. The women and children had passed the exposed part of their route without a single casualty.

The roll was called on reaching the Martinière, and two were found to be missing. They had been left asleep in the barracks, and came in later, saying that the rebels had not yet discovered that the English had gone and were still firing into the Residency. Shortly after the roll-call a most unfortunate accident took place. Corporal Cooper and four or five men went into one of the rooms of the Martinière in which there was a quantity of loose powder which had been left by the enemy, and somehow the powder got ignited and they were all blown up, their bodies completely charred and their eyes scorched out. The poor fellows all died in the greatest agony within an hour or so of the accident, and none of them could tell how it happened.

"This sad accident made me very mindful of and thankful for my own narrow escape and that of my comrades in the Shâh Nujeef.

"An amusing thing occurred on the march to Cawnpore. As all the subaltern officers in my company were wounded I was told off, with a guard of twenty men, to see all the baggage-carts across Bunnee Bridge. A commissariat cart, loaded with biscuits, got upset, and its wheel broke just as we were moving it on to the road.

[Pg 188]

"The only person in charge of the cart was a young bâboo, a boy of eighteen years of age, who defended his charge as long as he could; but he was soon put on one side, the biscuit bags were ripped open, and the men commenced filling their haversacks.

"Just at this moment an escort of the 9th Lancers, with some staff-officers, rode up from the rear. It was the Commander-in-Chief and his staff.

"The boy bâboo seeing him, rushed up and called out aloud:

"'Oh, my lord, you are my father and my mother. What shall I tell you? These wild Highlanders will not hear me, but are stealing commissariat biscuits like fine fun!'

"Sir Colin pulled up, and tried not to smile. 'Is there no officer here?' he asked.

"The bâboo replied: 'No officer, sir—my lord—only one very big corporal, and he tell me grandly "Shut up, you! or I'll shoot you, same like rebel mutineer.'"

"Hearing this, I stepped out of the crowd, and, saluting Sir Colin, told him that this cart had broken down, and as there were no other means of carrying the biscuits, the men had filled their haversacks with them rather than leave them on the ground.

"Then the bâboo again came to the front with clasped hands, saying: 'Oh, my lord if one cart of biscuits short, Major Fitzgerald not listen to me; rather order thirty lashes with Provost Marshal's cat. Oh, what can a poor bâboo do with such supreme and wild Highlanders?'

"Sir Colin replied: 'Yes, bâboo, I know these Highlanders are very wild fellows when they are hungry. Let them have the biscuits,' and turning to one of the staff, he directed him to give a voucher to the bâboo that a cart loaded with biscuits had broken down, and the contents had been divided amongst the rearguard by order of the Commander-in-Chief. Sir Colin then turned to us and said: 'Men, I give you the biscuits. Divide them with your comrades in front; but you must promise me should a cart loaded with rum break down, you will not interfere with it.'

[Pg 189]

"We all replied: 'No, no, Sir Colin; if rum breaks down, we'll not touch it.'

"'All right,' said Sir Colin, 'remember! I trust you, and I know every one of you.'

"We honestly shared those biscuits, and it was well we had them, for about five miles further on a general halt was made for a short rest and for all stragglers to come up. Sir Colin ordered the 93rd to form up, and calling the officers to the front, he announced to the regiment that General Wyndham had been attacked by the Nana Sahib and by the Gwalior contingent in Cawnpore; that his force had been obliged to retire within the fort at the bridge of boats; and that we must reach Cawnpore that night, because if the bridge of boats should be captured before we got there, we should be cut off in Oude, with 50,000 of our enemies in our rear, a well-equipped army of 40,000 men in our front, together with a powerful train of artillery numbering over forty siege-guns to face, and with all the women and children, sick and wounded, to guard. 'So, 93rd,' said the old chief, 'I don't ask you to undertake this forced march in your present tired condition without good reason. You must reach Cawnpore to-night at all costs.'

"As usual, when he took the men into his confidence, he was answered from the ranks: 'All right, Sir Colin, we'll do it.' And we did."

[Pg 190]

By this time they could hear the guns of the Gwalior contingent bombarding General Wyndham's position in Cawnpore. Although terribly footsore and tired, not having had their clothes off for eighteen days, they trudged on their weary march, every mile hearing the guns more clearly. There is nothing to rouse tired soldiers like a good cannonade in front. It is the best tonic out.

But they will never forget the misery of that march. They reached the sands on the banks of the Ganges, on the Oude side of the river opposite Cawnpore, just as the sun was setting, having covered the forty-seven miles under thirty hours. And when they got in sight of Cawnpore the first thing they saw was the enemy on the other side of the river making bonfires of their spare kit and baggage, which had been left at Cawnpore when they advanced for the relief of Lucknow.

How on the 29th of November they crossed the bridge of boats; how by the 3rd of December all the women and children and wounded were on their way to Allahabad; how they smashed up the famous Gwalior contingent and sent the Nana flying into the desert—all this belongs to another story. Sir Colin thanked his old regiment for their great toil and prowess. "But we old soldiers should like our deeds and the deeds of those who gave their lives for England to be remembered by our children's children, and to be studied with a grateful sympathy."

From "Reminiscences of the Great Mutiny," by William Forbes-Mitchell. By kind permission of Messrs. Macmillan and Co.

This is one of the most interesting books that has been written by a soldier who took part in the Mutiny War.

CHAPTER XIII

RUNNING THE BLOCKADE (1861)

[Pg 191]

North v. South—A new President hates slavery—Fort Sumter is bombarded—Ladies on the house-top—Niggers don't mind shells—A blockade-runner comes to Oxford—The *Banshee* strips for the race—Wilmington—High pay—Lights out—Cast the lead—A stern chase—The run home—Lying *perdu*—The *Night-hawk* saved by Irish humour—Southern need at the end of the war—Negro dignity waxes big.

In November, 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States. As the new President was in sympathy with those who wished to abolish slavery, and as the Southern States were mostly inhabited by large landholders possessing thousands of slaves, this election was felt to doom their ascendancy unless they could resist the will of the North. Therefore, on the 17th of December a convention of the State of South Carolina was held at Charleston, which formally repealed their acceptance of the United States Constitution.

Neither side at first foresaw the results of secession. Each thought the other would offer little

resistance. The North were totally unprepared for war; the South were weakened by internal dissensions, but they fought as long as they had any soldiers left, and at last “robbed the cradle and the grave.” The South were in the end quite exhausted, while the North seemed to gather new strength every month. As the war went on the soldiers of the South, or Confederates, wore out their clothes, and could not replace them. Things were so scarce and dear that it became a proverb, “In going to market, you take your money in your basket and bring your purchases home in your pocket.” Planters in the South had to borrow money to support their hordes of negroes in idleness while they themselves were away at the front.

[Pg 192]

On the 4th of March Lincoln formally entered on office. Secession, he said, meant rebellion. The Constitution must be preserved, if necessary, even by force.

Major Anderson, who held a small fort in Charleston Harbour for the North, spiked his guns and moved into Fort Sumter, also in the harbour. This was considered an act of war, and Fort Sumter was bombarded and taken. The little town was full of excited soldiers, singing and shouting. We have a peep of what was going on and what it felt like in Mrs. Chestnut’s diary for the 12th of April:

“I do not pretend to go to sleep. How can I? If Anderson does not accept terms at four the orders are he shall be fired upon. I count four. St. Michael’s bells chime out, and I begin to hope. At half-past four the heavy booming of a cannon! I sprang out of bed, and on my knees prostrate I prayed as I never prayed before. There was a sound of stir all over the house, pattering of feet in the corridors. All seemed hurrying one way. I put on my double gown and went on the house-top. The shells were bursting. The roar of the cannon had begun. The women were wild there on the house-top. Prayers came from the women and imprecations from the men. Then a shell would light up the scene, and we all wondered why Fort Sumter did not reply.”

On the next day Fort Sumter was on fire. The warships of the North were outside the bar, and could not enter for want of depth of water. On the 15th Anderson had to give the fort up to the South.

[Pg 193]

The slaves were taking it all very quietly, seemed not much moved by the thought of being free—rather preferred to be slaves and be well fed.

A negro was rowing in the bay towards Charleston during the bombardment with some supplies from a plantation. He was met and asked: “Are you not afraid of Colonel Anderson’s cannon?”

“No, sar. Mars Anderson ain’t daresn’t hit me. He knows marster wouldn’t ’low it.”

The next step taken by the President was to declare all the Southern ports in a state of blockade, in order that the seceding States might be starved out. The coast-line was some 3,000 miles in length, and the whole fleet of the United States did not reach 150 ships, of which many were unseaworthy. But the energy of the North increased this fleet to nearly 700 vessels. Thus any attempt to run in through the blockading squadron was very dangerous.

A royal proclamation in England admonished all loyal subjects to respect the Federal blockade; but the high profits to be made tempted many Liverpool firms to adventure their argosies. A ship taken while running the blockade is treated as an enemy, and if she resists she is treated as a pirate.

During the first year of the war many captures were made, and stories came to England of hairbreadth escapes which set many young men longing to join in the exciting game.

I remember a man coming to Oxford when I was an undergraduate with a letter of introduction from a friend. He was running into Charleston, and had brought from that port a store of watches and jewellery, which he persuaded us to take in exchange for a quantity of discarded clothing. The lady’s gold watch which I got is, I hear, still going strong, and belies the suspicion with which I took it. At this time there were no mills, and almost no manufactories in the Southern States, so that they soon began to feel the want of clothes, buttons, boots, socks, medicines, and chemicals. Nassau, a little island in the Bahamas, was the chief base for the steamers that were running the blockade. It is about 560 miles from Charleston and 640 from Wilmington.

[Pg 194]

The Bahama group afforded neutral water to within fifty miles of the American coast, but it required a very fast vessel to succeed in evading the chain of cruisers which soon patrolled the coast. These fast vessels were being built in England and elsewhere. Let us follow the fortunes of one of them—the *Banshee*.

She arrived safely across the Atlantic and put into Nassau. There she was stripped for the work that lay before her. Everything aloft was taken down, and nothing was left standing but the two lower masts, with cross-trees for a look-out man. The ship was painted a dull white, and the crew wore a grey uniform. As the success of a blockade-runner depends much on her speed, the qualities of the engineer are important.

The *Banshee* possessed a model chief engineer in Mr. Erskine, a man cool in danger and full of resource. In her pilot, Tom Burroughs, she had a man who knew the waters thoroughly, and was a genius in smelling out a blockader on the darkest night. A good pilot received about £800 for the trip there and back, for there was some risk in the service, and if they were captured they went to prison. The pay of the seamen was from £50 to £60 for the trip. So the *Banshee* stole out of Nassau Harbour on a dark night, laden with arms, gunpowder, boots, and clothing, on her way to Wilmington.

Wilmington lies to the north of Charleston, some sixteen miles up the Cape Fear River. Off the mouth of this river lies Smith's Island, which divides the approach to the port into two widely different channels.

[Pg 195]

Fort Fisher, placed at the northern point, obliged the blockaders to lie far out, beyond the range of the guns. Further out still was a cordon of cruisers, and outside these were gunboats always on the move; so that it required speed and a good look-out to elude the three lines of blockaders. They crept as noiselessly as possible along the shores of the Bahamas, and ran on safely for the first two days out, though as often as they saw a sail on the horizon they had to turn the *Banshee's* stern to it till it vanished. The look-out man had a dollar for every sail he sighted, and was fined five dollars if it were seen first from the deck. On the third day they found they had only just time to run under cover of Fort Fisher before dawn, and they tried to do it.

"Now the real excitement began," says Mr. Taylor, who was in charge of the cargo, "and nothing I have ever experienced can compare with it. Hunting, pig-sticking, big-game shooting, polo—all have their thrilling moments, but none can approach 'running a blockade.' Consider the dangers to be encountered, after three days of constant anxiety and little sleep, in threading our way through a swarm of blockaders, and the accuracy required to hit in the nick of time the mouth of a river only half a mile wide, without lights, and with a coast-line so low that as a rule the first intimation we had of its nearness was the dim white line of the surf."

They steamed along cautiously until nightfall. Though the night was dark it was dangerously clear. No lights, not even a cigar. The hatchways of the engine-room were covered with tarpaulins, and the poor stokers had to breathe as best they could.

All hands were on deck, crouching down behind the bulwarks. On the bridge were Taylor, the captain, Mr. Steele, and the pilot, all straining their eyes into the "vasty deep."

[Pg 196]

Presently the pilot muttered: "Better cast the lead, captain."

Steele murmured down the tube that led to the engine-room, and the vessel slowed down and then stopped. A weird figure crept into the fore-chains and dropped the leaded line, while the crew listened to see if the engines would seize the opportunity to blow off steam and so advertise their presence for miles around. In two minutes came the seaman, saying: "Sixteen fathoms, sir. Sandy bottom, with black specks."

"We are not so far in as I thought," said the pilot. "Port two points and go a little faster."

He knew by the speckled bottom where they were. They had to be north of that before it was safe to head for the shore.

In an hour or less the pilot asked for another sounding. No more specks this time. "Starboard and go ahead easy" was the order now.

The paddle-floats were flapping the water softly, but to the crew the noise they made was terrifying. They could be heard a long way.

Suddenly the pilot said: "There's one of them, Mr. Taylor, on the starboard bow."

Presently straining eyes could see a long, low, black object lying quite still. Would she see the *Banshee*?

They passed within a hundred yards of her and were not heard.

Soon after Burroughs whispered: "Steamer on the port bow."

A second cruiser was made out close to them.

"Hard a port," said the captain, and the steamer swung round, bringing the enemy upon her beam. No sound! The enemy slept! Then suddenly a third cruiser came out of the gloom and steamed slowly across the *Banshee's* bows.

[Pg 197]

"Stop her," said Captain Steele down the tube, and the blockade-runner gurgled to a standstill, while the cruiser moved across and was lost in the darkness.

Then "Slow ahead" was the order, until the low-lying coast and the grey surf came dim to the eye. But it was getting near dawn, and there was no trace of the river mouth.

They knew not quite where they were, and thoughts of prison and prison fare would come uppermost.

At length the pilot said: "All right, boys. I can see the big hill yonder."

The only hill on the coast was near Fort Fisher. Now they knew where they were; so did six or seven gunboats, which, in the silver light of early dawn, catching sight of their prey, steamed hard and fast towards the *Banshee*, with angry shots from the bow gun. The balls were dropping all around and churning up the sea. It was mighty unpleasant to men who knew they had several tons of gunpowder in the hold; and just then they were obliged to steer out to avoid the North Breaker shoal, so that the gunboats crept ever nearer and nearer, barking like disappointed puppies.

The pilot looked at the captain and the captain at the supercargo. Their lips tightened and their breath came faster as they eyed the gunboats askance.

"One good shot into the paddle will end this trip," thought Mr. Taylor; "and it is my first run in, too!"

Then came a welcome sound overhead. A shell from the fort whirred its way towards the gunboats and warned them off.

With a parting broadside they sheered off out of range, and after half an hour's run the *Banshee* was over the bar and in quiet waters. They soon sped up the sixteen miles to Wilmington, and found a large posse of willing slaves ready to discharge their cargo.

[Pg 198]

The poor folk at Wilmington were then very much pinched for want of good food and drink, and the advent of the *Banshee* restored smiles all round. Living on corn-bread, bacon, and water grows monotonous, and invitations to lunch on board the *Banshee* were never declined—in fact, many friends did not even wait for an invitation.

Within a very few days the *Banshee* was again ready for sea, ballasted with tobacco and laden with cotton—three tiers even on deck! High profit tempted them to pile up their vessels like hay-waggons, and put to sea in a condition quite unfit to meet a boisterous wind.

It was fortunately more easy to run out than to run in, as there was no harbour mouth to find in the dark, and the open sea lay before them. They learnt that the Admiral's ship remained at anchor during the night, while the other vessels moved slowly to and fro across the mouth of the river; so they formed a bold plan, thinking that security lay in a startling impudence. They hid the *Banshee* behind Fort Fisher till nightfall, rowing ashore to get the latest news from Colonel Lamb, who commanded the fort.

"Which, sir, is the Admiral's flag-ship?"

"The *Minnesota*, a sixty-gun frigate. Don't go too near her."

"That is just what we mean to do, Colonel; but first we will take her bearings exactly. We don't want to bump into her."

The Colonel was very kind and helpful, and they often enjoyed his society and that of his wife, who lived in a cottage not far off.

As soon as night fell over the sea the *Banshee* slipped quietly from her secret anchorage, crossed the river bar, and following the observations they had taken, ran close by the flagship, and so out to sea, clear of the first cordon. But in trying to pass the second they ran across a gunboat, which at once opened fire. The men lay down on the deck, and the engines throbbed and thumped. Luckily the gunboat was very slow, and they soon lost one another; but as they could hear her pounding along behind, they attempted a ruse. The helm was put hard over, so that they steamed in a direction at right angles to their former course, and in a few minutes their engines were stopped. The *Banshee* lay perfectly still. The crew rose on their elbows and peeped over the bulwarks, following the course of the gunboat by the flashes of her guns and by the rockets she was sending up madly to attract or warn her consorts. So they saw her go plunging past them and firing madly into the dark abyss of the night.

[Pg 199]

After resting five minutes on the heaving wave, the *Banshee* started again as noiselessly as she could. One danger remained—the third cordon. You may be sure they stared wide-eyed round the horizon as morning broke. With the *Banshee* so heavily laden it would be fatal to meet a cruiser in the daylight.

No smoke visible—no sail! All that day and for two days more they steamed on with fear beside them. On the evening of the third day they steamed proudly into Nassau, though a heavy list to starboard made them present a rather drunken appearance.

The profits of blockade-running may be estimated by the fact that though the *Banshee* afterwards became a total loss by capture, she earned enough on her eight successful trips to pay the shareholders 700 per cent. on their investment. The Northerners turned her into a gunboat, but she asserted her sympathies for the South by running foul of the jetty in the naval yard at Washington.

On another run in the *Night Hawk*, after getting safely through the blockading fleet, they grounded on the bar, and two launches speedily boarded them. The Northerners were very excited, and evidently expected to meet with desperate resistance, for firing of revolvers and wild cutlass blows surprised the crew of the *Night Hawk*, who stood quietly on the poop waiting to be taken prisoners.

[Pg 200]

"This roused my wrath," says Taylor, "and I expostulated with the Lieutenant upon his firing on unarmed men."

They then cooled down and began a search for portable valuables; but, perhaps because they feared Colonel Lamb might come to the rescue, they made haste about this, and then set fire to the ship fore and aft.

They were quickened in their departure by the humour of an Irish fireman, who sang out lustily:

"Begorra! begorra! but we shall all be in the air in a minute, with this ship full of gunpowder!"

The men who were holding Taylor dropped him "like a hot potato," and away they rowed, taking some of the crew as prisoners. The gunpowder existed only in the fancy of the Irishman.

The blockaders opened fire on the *Night Hawk*, which was blazing merrily, and Colonel Lamb shelled the blockading fleet; then through the boiling surf the rest of the crew rowed safely, wet through and exhausted.

With the rising tide she bumped herself over the sandbank, still burning. They telegraphed to Wilmington for help, and some 300 negroes came down the river to assist in baling and pumping. So they managed to save the *Night Hawk* and make her fit to undertake other voyages, though to look at she was no beauty, for her sides were all corrugated with the heat, and her stern twisted, and not a bit of woodwork on her was left unconsumed by the fire. Yet she managed to stagger across the Atlantic through some very bad weather.

[Pg 201]

Such were some of the adventures of the blockade-runners in the Civil War of the United States. To those who bought the ships it was a matter of pecuniary profit merely; to the Southerners in Richmond, Wilmington, and Charleston, and even on the plantations inland, the arrival of these vessels staved off famine and cold and nakedness. To the Northerners they meant a prolongation of the unequal struggle, and it was no wonder that they dealt rather harshly with those whom they caught.

A rich lady of South Carolina wrote during this war: "I have had an excellent pair of shoes given me. For more than a year I have had none but some dreadful things made by our carpenter, and they do hurt my feet so. Uncle William says the men who went into the war to save their negroes are abjectly wretched. Neither side now cares a fig for these beloved negroes, and would send them all to heaven in a hand-basket to win the fight."

The negroes on the whole were very faithful to their old masters, for many of them had been treated with all justice and kindness. Of course, some of them gave themselves airs on becoming free and independent voters. One old negro said to his master: "When you all had de power you was good to me, and I'll protect you now, massa. No niggers nor nobody shall tech you. If you want anything, call for Sambo. Ahem! I mean call for Mr. Samuel: dat my name now."

From "Running the Blockade," by T. E. Taylor. By kind permission of Mr. John Murray.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FIRST IRONCLADS (1862)

[Pg 202]

Will they sink or swim?—Captain Ericsson, the Swede—The *Merrimac* raised and armoured—The *Monitor* built by private venture—*Merrimac* surprises Fort Monroe—The *Cumberland* attacked—The silent monster comes on—Her ram makes an impression—Morris refuses to strike his flag—The *Cumberland* goes down—The *Congress* is next for attention—On fire and forced to surrender—Blows up at midnight—The *Minnesota* aground shows she can bite—General panic—Was it Providence?—A light at sea—Only a cheese-box on a raft—Sunday's fight between two monsters—The *Merrimac* finds she is deeply hurt, wounded to death—The four long hours—Worden and Buchanan both do their best—Signals for help—The fiery end of the *Whitehall* gunboat.

The War of Secession between the Federals and Confederate States gave rise to a new kind of warship—the ironclad. The *Merrimac* was converted into such a vessel by the South, and the *Monitor* was built by the North, or Federals, in the space of 100 days.

Most people, experts and others, predicted a watery grave for a ship cased in iron. Very few ventured on board at the launching of the *Monitor*, and even the builders provided a steam-tug to save the passengers in case she went to the bottom. But the *Monitor*, after the first graceful dip, sat like a wild duck on a mere, being flat-bottomed, having a turret 9 feet high, capable of revolving, with two circular portholes to fire from. Captain Ericsson, a Swede, was her architect.

The South had seized all the forts and dockyards below Chesapeake Bay, and had struck great consternation into the Federal hearts. When the Federals burnt and evacuated the Norfolk Navy Yard they scuttled the steam frigate *Merrimac*; but the Confederates raised her, plated her with railroad iron, and fitted her with a slanting roof to serve as a shield. The *Merrimac*, when finished, did not take the water so gracefully as the *Monitor*, for her weight was so enormous that she nearly broke her back in launching. It was known that both sides were at work upon some monster of the deep, but which would be ready first no one could predict.

[Pg 203]

However, on the 8th of March the *Merrimac* left Norfolk, accompanied by two other war vessels—the *Jamestown* and *Yorktown*—and followed by a little fleet of armed tugs. She was heading for Newport News, where there was a Federal garrison, guarded by the sailing frigates the *Cumberland* and the *Congress*, which rode at anchor within half a mile of the shore battery. Their boats were hanging at the booms, and the week's washing fluttered in the rigging—as peaceful a scene as could be imagined.

But the look-out on Fortress Monroe caught sight of a monster vessel ploughing the waves, and signalled to the war-ships to get under way. The *Minnesota* had her steam up and soon went off towards Newport News, where the *Cumberland* and *Congress* lay on blockading duty. The crew of the *Cumberland*, seeing a strange ship come round Craney Island, recognized her as the expected ironclad. All hands were beat to quarters, and the *Cumberland* swung across the channel in order to bring her broadside to bear. The slanting roof of the *Merrimac* puzzled them,

and the long iron ram churned up the water as she advanced relentlessly and in silence. At the distance of a mile the *Cumberland* began to use her pivot guns, but the *Merrimac* made no reply, only steamed majestically on, though broadside after broadside was poured upon her like hail; but the heavy shot glanced off harmlessly, and ever the *Merrimac* came closer and closer.

[Pg 204]

As she passed the *Congress* the *Merrimac* fired one broadside, and then, leaving her to the tender mercies of the *Jamestown* and the *Yorktown*, made straight for the *Cumberland*. Both the Federal ships discharged their broadsides against the armoured monster. She just quivered under the blow and came on in silence. The National battery at Newport News opened upon her at point-blank range, and every man on board the *Cumberland* drew a breath of relief. "Now," they thought, "our massive guns will teach her a lesson." But it seemed as if the *Merrimac* had received no damage. Not a soul could be seen on her decks, not a splinter on her sides; but she was coming towards them—coming madly, as it seemed, to destruction.

What did the *Merrimac* mean? Why did she not fire her guns? The crew on the *Cumberland* soon found out, when the great ram struck their frigate amidships with a shock that threw every man down on the deck, crushed in the ribs, and heeled the ship over till her topsail yards almost splashed the water. The *Merrimac* reversed her engines and backed away under a murderous broadside, replying as she too turned her broadside with a deadly volley of shot and shell, which swept her enemy's decks of guns and men. Meanwhile the water was pouring into the terrible gaping wound in the side of the *Cumberland*; but Lieutenant Morris, who was in command, fought her to the last with unflinching courage. Yet once again the *Merrimac* turned her prow and crushed in close upon the old wound, and the great oak ribs snapped like twigs under the weight of iron. The *Cumberland* began to ride lower in the water, but still aimed with calm accuracy at the *Merrimac*, riddling her smoke-stack and bending her anchor. But the *Merrimac* lay off a little and poured a storm of shot into the sinking frigate, dealing death and mutilation. Yet Morris refused to yield, and the whole crew in their desperate plight thought of nothing but saving the honour of the flag. One sailor, with both his legs shot off, hobbled up to his gun on bleeding stumps and pulled the lanyard, then fell in a swoon by the gun.

[Pg 205]

"She is sinking!" was the cry; but they still fought on, though the frigate was settling deeper every minute. Then the water came gurgling into the portholes, and choked the guns and drowned the gunners. The last gunner was knee-deep in water when he fired the last shot, and then the *Cumberland* careened over on her side. Down she sank amid a whirl of circling waters, a caldron of wave and air—caught in one, and vomiting steam all around and over the dying vessel, and in a moment 400 men were on the verge of death, some being carried down into the revolving vortex, some being cast up on the outside, some swimming frantically towards the shore, or reaching desperately for fragments of wreck. About 100 went down with the ship. The chaplain went down with the wounded who were below deck.

It took forty-five minutes for the *Merrimac* to finish off the *Cumberland*, and she now turned her ram towards the *Congress*, which spread all sail and endeavoured to get clear away.

But at this moment the *Congress* grounded and became helpless. The gunboats of the Confederates were still firing heavily at her from a respectful distance, but as they saw the *Merrimac* approaching they too drew near under her protection.

The *Merrimac* chose her position at about 100 yards' range, despising the guns of the *Congress*, and raked her fore and aft, dismounting guns and covering her deck with mangled limbs. In three places the *Congress* burst into flames, and the dry timber crackled and blazed and smoked like a volcano. The men could not stand by the guns for the fervent heat. The wounded were slowly burned alive. The officers could not bear this sight, and hauled down the flag.

[Pg 206]

A tug was sent by the Confederates to take off the prisoners from the burning wreck, but, unfortunately, some sharpshooters from the shore still kept up a hot fire upon the Southern vessels. In consequence of this the *Merrimac* fired another broadside into the sinking *Congress*, and killed many more of her crew. The *Congress*, being deserted, still burned on till darkness fell, and the ruddy glare lit up the moving waters as if they had been a sea of blood. At midnight the fire reached her magazine, and with a thunder of explosion the *Congress* blew up into a myriad fragments. The Northern warship *Minnesota* had also grounded, so had the frigate *St. Lawrence*, and the *Merrimac*, while it was still light enough to aim a gun, steamed towards them to see what little attention she could bestow upon them. The *Merrimac* was, perhaps, a little overconfident in her coat of mail. Anyhow, she risked receiving a broadside at very short range from the heavy guns of the *Minnesota*.

A shot seems to have entered her porthole and damaged her machinery, for she hesitated, put about, and returned to safe anchorage behind Craney Island.

Meanwhile, a very natural terror was gnawing at the hearts of the Federal crews and garrison in Hampton Roads.

They had listened to the sounds of the conflict and seen the dire results in wonder, almost in despair. The *Merrimac*, they said, was invulnerable. Not a shot could pierce her. On Sunday morning she would return and destroy the whole Federal fleet at her leisure. She would shell Newport News Point and Fortress Monroe, at the entrance of Hampton Roads, set everything on fire, and drive the garrisons from their guns. Nay, as the telegraph wires flashed the news to Washington, it was foreseen with an agony of horror that the *Merrimac* might ascend the Potomac and lay the capital in ashes. Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, were in a state

[Pg 207]

of panic. No one knew what might not follow. It was a blind horror of a new and unknown danger. For the experience of one hour had rendered the shipbuilding of the past a scorn and a laughing-stock. Wooden frigates might go to the scrap-heap now. With the *Cumberland* had gone down morally all the great navies of Europe. A new order had to be found for ship and battery, and steel must take the place of planks of oak.

Such a night of anxiety and alarm the Northern States had never experienced. It was ten o'clock at night when the look-out in the garrison thought he saw lights out at sea in Chesapeake Bay. He called his mate. By-and-by they made them out to be two small steamers heading for Old Point Comfort. An eye-witness from Fort Monroe thus describes what happened:

"Oh, what a night that was! I can never forget it. There was no fear during the long hours—danger, I find, does not bring that—but there was a longing for some interposition of God and waiting upon Him, from whom we felt our help must come, in earnest, fervent prayer, while not neglecting all the means of martial defence. Fugitives from Newport News kept arriving. Ladies and children had walked the long ten miles from Newport News, feeling that their presence only embarrassed their brave husbands. Sailors from the *Congress* and *Cumberland* came, one of them with his ship's flag bound about his waist, as he had swum with it ashore. Dusky fugitives came mournfully fleeing from a fate worse than death—slavery. These entered my cabin hungry and weary. The heavens were aflame with the burning *Congress*. But there were no soldiers among the flying host. The sailors came only to seek another chance at the enemy, since the *Cumberland* had gone down in deep waters, and the *Congress* had gone upward, as if a chariot of fire, to convey the manly souls whose bodies had perished in that conflict upward to heaven.

[Pg 208]

"The heavy night hung dark the hills and waters o'er,"

but the night was not half so heavy as our hearts, nor so dark as our prospects. All at once a speck of light gleamed on the distant wave. It moved; it came nearer and nearer, and at ten o'clock at night the *Monitor* appeared.

"When the tale of bricks is doubled, Moses comes!"

"I never more firmly believed in special Providence than at that hour. Even sceptics for the moment were converted, and said: 'God has sent her!' But how insignificant she looked! She was but a speck on the dark blue sea at night, almost a laughable object by day. The enemy call her 'a cheese-box on a raft,' and the comparison is a good one. Could she meet the *Merrimac*? The morrow must determine, for, under God, the *Monitor* is our only hope now."

Lieutenant Worden, the Commander of the *Monitor*, on arriving at Fort Monroe was instructed to lie alongside the *Minnesota*, to guard her in case of a night attack. At eleven o'clock she set out, and her arrival was hailed with delight by the men on board the frigate, though some shook their heads at the strange unshapely toy which a private individual had constructed to save the Federal fleet. But few slept that night. The odds against the *Monitor* seemed too great. She mounted but two guns, while the *Merrimac* carried ten. Sunday morning broke sunny and beautiful, and the sea was peaceful and calm. Near Sewell's Point, opposite Hampton Roads, three vessels were at anchor, one of them the *Merrimac*.

[Pg 209]

About nine o'clock glasses showed a stir amongst them, and instantly the *Monitor* awoke to life and action, closing her iron hatches and putting on the dead-light covers. The *Monitor*, like a great girdle-cake, only stood 2 feet out of the water; her smooth surface was broken only by the turret and pilot-house.

Then they saw the *Merrimac* coming, looking like a submerged house, with roof only out of the water. After her came the *Jamestown* and *Yorktown*, and a fleet of tug-boats crowded with ladies and gentlemen from Norfolk eager to see the fun.

The *Merrimac*, entirely unconscious of the new enemy she had to encounter, steamed slowly along and fired upon the *Minnesota*, which was still aground. The *Minnesota* replied with a broadside and the usual result; but the *Monitor* steamed out from behind and boldly advanced to meet her antagonist, and when at a distance of half a mile Lieutenant Worden from the pilot-house gave the order to fire. The ball, weighing 170 pounds, rattled against the mailed side of the *Merrimac*. She staggered under the force of the concussion, and at once seemed to realize that in this floating turret she had no mean antagonist. At the range of only a few yards she poured in a terrible broadside. To her disgust, the shots seemed to have glided off and done no harm. Then the two vessels closed and poured a hail of heavy metal upon each other. The *Monitor* being the quicker, would circle round the *Merrimac*, while the turret, turning with ease, always presented the guns to the foe.

Worden in his pilot-house could speak through tubes to Lieutenant Green, who commanded the gunners in the tower. Once Green trained his guns on the *Merrimac's* water-line, and the shot penetrated.

[Pg 210]

"Splendid, sir! splendid!" roared Worden. "You have made the iron fly."

But the spectators who lined the ramparts of Fort Monroe could not see what was happening for the clouds of smoke, and they stood, silent and wretched, almost afraid to look.

But at last the veil parted, and they saw the little *Monitor* lying alongside the *Merrimac*, trim and

spiteful, with the Stars and Stripes flying proudly from her stern, and a great cheer arose from every throat. Then they saw the *Merrimac* bear down upon the little flat cheese, as if to sink her. She struck fair and square, but the iron ram glided up on her low-sheathed deck and simply careened her over; but in so doing the *Merrimac* showed her unarmed hull below the iron coat of mail, and the *Monitor* planted one of her shots in a vital place.

For four long hours had this strange duel lasted, the *Merrimac* firing heavily, the *Monitor* steaming round and choosing her place and time, with careful aim at rudder, screw, and water-line. At last Buchanan, the Commander of the *Merrimac*, was severely wounded, and as his ship began to take in water through three gaping wounds, the helm was put over and the conqueror of yesterday limped away. But her last shot struck point-blank upon the iron grating of the pilot-house just where Lieutenant Worden was looking out. The concussion threw him down senseless, and minute pieces of iron and powder were driven into his eyes, so that he was blinded. When after a time he recovered his consciousness he asked:

"Have I saved the *Minnesota*?"

"Yes, sir, and whipped the *Merrimac*," was the reply.

"Then I care not what becomes of me," murmured the Lieutenant.

[Pg 211]

The *Merrimac* slowly made her way to a safe anchorage under the batteries at Sewell's Point. Here she signalled for help, and tugs came up, took her in tow, and escorted her to Norfolk. Her injuries were so severe that after months of work upon her she never ventured to quit her retreat, whereas the *Monitor* seemed but slightly damaged. She had been hit twenty-two times, and only showed slight indentations, but a ball striking full on the pilot-house had bent a huge iron beam. The ram of the *Merrimac* had torn off some of the plating from the side of the *Monitor*. The latter drew only 10 feet of water, and could go where the *Merrimac* could not venture.

But though the *Merrimac* had fired her last shot, she gave the North a great fright in the night which followed the battle. At midnight thousands of people along the coast were roused from their sleep by cries that came over the water: "Fire! fire! For God's sake, save us!"

The shore was soon lined by spectators, who stood unable to get a boat to put out or help in any way. There was the gunboat *Whitehall* roaring with flames, and the dark figures of the crew were plainly visible on her deck, either wrapped in red fire or jumping into the deep water beneath.

The *Whitehall's* shotted guns were going off here and there through the thick crowds or clustering houses, and one shell struck the hospital, making the inmates believe that the *Merrimac* had returned. It transpired that a red-hot shot had been thrown from the *Merrimac* during the day and had lodged between the *Whitehall's* timbers, where the fire smouldered until late at night.

The general conclusion from this momentous fight between the first ironclads was that "England's naval supremacy is gone for ever." But men are more potent than masses of metal. America and England have navies now in comparison with which the *Merrimac* and *Monitor* are but tin kettles. Yet we must remember that Russia, too, a few months ago possessed a strong navy as far as metal goes. But once again the Japanese proved to the world that it is in the hearts of brave men, the science of clever men, and the enduring patience of patriotic men, that the issues of victory or defeat are mainly determined.

[Pg 212]

CHAPTER XV

CAPTURE OF NEW ORLEANS (1862)

[Pg 213]

New Orleans and its forts—Farragut despises craven counsel—The mortar-fleet in disguise—Fire-rafts rush down—A week of hot gun-fire—A dash through the defences—The *Varuna's* last shot—Oscar, aged thirteen—Ranged before the city—Anger of mob—Summary justice—Soldiers insulted in the streets—General Butler in command—Porter nearly blown up in council—Fort Jackson in ruins—"The fuse is out."

New Orleans, on the Mississippi River, was the great market of the South, a rich and powerful city of 200,000 inhabitants. Everything possible had been done to defend it from the Northern arms. Sixty miles below New Orleans the river makes a sharp bend, and here, fronting each other on either side, stood the forts of Jackson and St. Philip. These strong forts the Confederates had seized, and the Federal fleet had to pass them on its way to New Orleans. They were heavily armoured with 180 pieces of ordinance, but besides the forts the warships would have to cut through an iron cable stretched across the river and supported by seven hulks and rafts. Above these were eighteen gunboats and floating batteries, with fire-rafts and rams; so that the city felt itself tolerably secure behind these obstructions, and laughed to scorn any thought of being besieged. Besides, had not English and French officers examined the forts and pronounced the attempt to pass them madness? But Commodore Farragut, who was in command of the National fleet, answered them in these words:

[Pg 214]

"You may be right, gentlemen, but I was sent here to make the attempt. I came here to reduce or pass the forts and to take New Orleans, and I shall try it on."

The Federal mortar-fleet was getting ready for action. Topmasts were lowered, all spars and booms unshipped, the main-decks cleared, and armour of chain cables was improvised to protect the gunners. The ships were painted with mud to make them invisible. On the 17th of April the order was given to advance up-stream. There was a thick forest on the western bank, a low bank and marshy ground on the east. In order to confuse the enemy, the masts and rigging of the Northerners were festooned with leafy branches; others were sheathed with reeds to blend with the background of the river-bank. Five sloops of war waited behind the mortar-boats, carrying 104 guns; 150 boats supplied with grapnel-ropes, axes, and buckets, were ready to deal with the fire-ships. And they soon had the work to do, for one dark night a blazing raft came down upon them, lighting up water and bank, trees and rushes; but the *Westfield* dashed into the burning pile and turned her hose upon it; and the boats leapt forth to hack and grapple and plunge the burning timbers into the river. Then cheers broke forth when the peril had been subdued.

At 9 a.m. of the 16th of April Fort Jackson threw a shell into the Northern flotilla a mile off, and at once the mortar-boats replied, sending their big shells with great accuracy into the very ramparts. New Orleans, seventy-two miles away, distinctly heard the thunder of the bombardment, kept up for more than a week. The citadel was set on fire, the walls cracked and shattered, and the forts were flooded. The men on deck would fall down and sleep in the midst of the great thunder, so exhausted were they by toil night and day. On the second day the *Carleton* received a shell into her magazine, which exploded, and she sank. At the end of a week, after all this terrible storm of flying metal, only one man had been killed and six wounded in the Federal fleet. But the forts had not been silenced.

[Pg 215]

On the 24th of April, at 2 a.m., two red lights were run up on the flag-ship, and very soon the fleet was under way for the passage between the forts. As each ship passed it delivered its broadside and swept on towards the gunboats beyond. Fire-rafts kept floating down, and the roar of 500 cannon shook the air.

The *Ithaca* was riddled by shot and fell behind. The ram *Manasses* came down on the flag-ship, and Admiral Farragut got aground while trying to avoid her. His ship took fire from a fire-raft, but it was extinguished.

Captain Boggs in the *Varuna* sunk five gunboats one after another, then his vessel's sides were stove in by a ram; but with his last broadside before he sank he disabled her. A boy named Oscar was on board the *Varuna*, only thirteen years old, and during the fight was very busy passing ammunition to the gunners. All covered with dirt and powder-begrimed, he was met by Captain Boggs, who asked where he was running in such a hurry.

"To get a passing-box, sir. My other was smashed by a ball."

When the *Varuna* went down with her crew Boggs missed the boy, and feared he was among the drowned. But presently he saw the lad gallantly swimming towards the *Oneida*, a neighbour ship. Oscar clambered on board, dripping and grinning from ear to ear, as if he had just enjoyed the finest fun in life. Seeing his Captain, he put his hand to his forehead in the usual salute, and saying, "All right, sir; I report myself on board," shook off the water and was ready for the next duty to hand.

On the morning of the 25th the Federal ships ranged up near the city batteries and silenced their fire in a few minutes. Soon the whole fleet was moored opposite New Orleans, with the Stars and Stripes proudly flying from every masthead, and the bands playing their national airs.

[Pg 216]

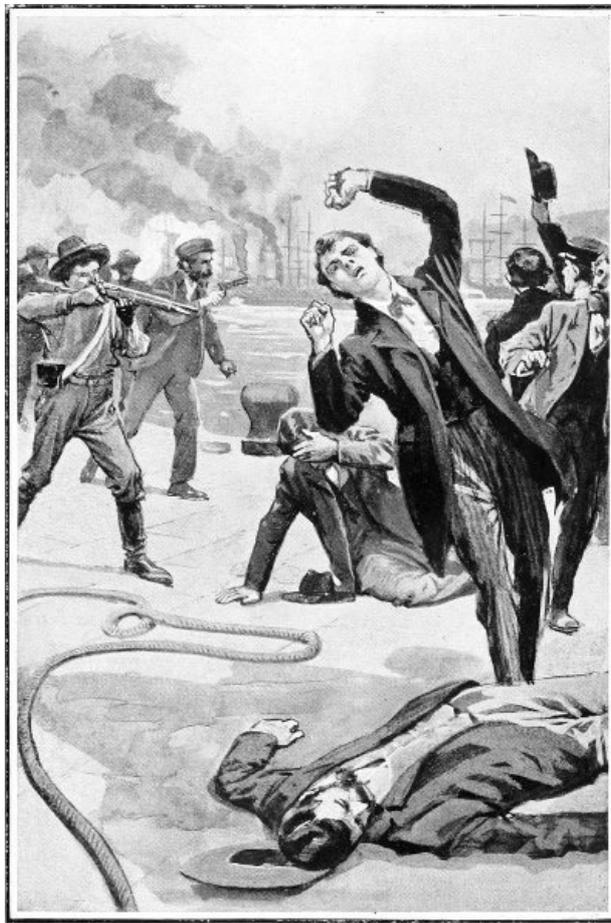
The citizens of New Orleans had rested in full persuasion that they were absolutely safe behind their forts and gunboats, and now that they saw the enemy actually threatening their city, they were transported by a passion of panic, mortification, and rage.

When they first heard that the forts had been passed and that the Yankee ships were coming up the river, the mob of the city became so desperate in their fury that martial law had to be proclaimed. At least, they said, these hated Yankees should not get the wealth of the city, and they put the torch to everything that would burn. Offices, banks, ships, cotton, piers, warehouses, coal, and sugar—all were fired and consumed in one vast conflagration. The river was dotted with floating islands of flame, as richly freighted merchantmen were fired and cut adrift.

The Confederate General Lovell and his troops were withdrawn, as no reasonable promise of a successful defence remained.

Two iron rams of immense power which had been in building were destroyed before Admiral Farragut arrived.

As soon as the fleet appeared before the city some of the citizens who favoured the Union foolishly expressed their delight by cheers. Civil war is always conducted with greater bitterness than war with a foreign Power. These unfortunates were promptly shot down in the street or on the quay.



SHOT DOWN BY THEIR FELLOW-CITIZENS

During the siege of New Orleans, some of those who favoured the North were foolish enough to cheer when the Northern fleet arrived.

On the 26th of April the city was formally surrendered, and a body of troops was landed to raise the Stars and Stripes over the public buildings. Crowds of angry men followed the marines with hoot and yell, and were only prevented from inflicting actual outrage by the fear of being shelled from the ships. It is said that Captain Bailey and his men on landing at the crowded pier were jostled and jeered at by angry bands of rowdies. We have to remember this when we pass judgment on General Butler's order to treat all ladies who insulted the troops as disorderly women. We may wonder how the Germans would have treated the French in Paris had the Parisians dared to conduct themselves so outrageously.

[Pg 217]

General Butler writes thus to a friend: "We were 2,500 men in a city seven miles long by two to four wide, of 150,000 inhabitants, all hostile, bitter, defiant, explosive—standing literally on a magazine. The devil had entered the hearts of the women to stir up strife in every way. Every opprobrious epithet, every insulting gesture, was made by these bejewelled, becrinolined and laced creatures, calling themselves ladies, towards my soldiers and officers from the windows of houses and in the streets. How long do you think our flesh and blood could have stood this?..."

It is clear that General Butler was as angry as the ladies. The *Albany Journal* adds this fact: "Women who have been regarded as the pattern of refinement and good breeding not only assail our men with the tongue, but with more material weapons. Buckets of slops are emptied upon them as they pass, decayed oranges and rotten eggs are hurled at them. The forbearance of our troops is wonderful."

Commander Porter had been left behind to receive the capitulation of the forts Jackson and St. Philip, when the Federal fleet steamed up to New Orleans. He pitched a few shells into Fort Jackson, but there "was no response; the fight had all been taken out of them." On the 28th a flag of truce from Fort Jackson came on board the *Harriet Lane* with offer to surrender. When officers of both sides were assembled in the cabin of the *Harriet Lane* discussing the details of surrender, an officer came below and informed Commander Porter that the Southern battery *Louisiana* had been set on fire and was drifting down upon them. She was a steam floating battery of 4,000 tons, mounting sixteen heavy guns. The battery had been fired so quietly that no one suspected any such thing until it blazed up, for flags of truce were flying upon both forts and ships.

[Pg 218]

Porter proceeded with the conference as if nothing were the matter. Soon another officer came down, reporting that the battery, on fire from stem to stern, was drifting down upon them.

Turning to the Confederate officers, Porter asked: "Has she powder and loaded guns on board, gentlemen?"

"We presume so, but we know nothing of naval matters here."

Just at this moment the hot guns began to go off and throw shot and shell at random amongst friends and foes.

Commander Porter, with severe coolness of manner, only said: "Then we will go on with our business, gentlemen. If you don't mind the effect of the explosion which is soon to come, we can stand it."

Fortunately, the *Louisiana* drifted across towards St. Philip, and exploded her magazine when just abreast of it. The sound of the explosion was heard for miles up and down the river. When the smoke cleared away the battery had gone into fragments and sunk in the Mississippi. If it had drifted upon the *Harriet Lane*, as had been intended, and blown into smithereens the consulting officers of both North and South, that would have been a consequence of treachery almost worse than the insults of the New Orleans ladies or the indiscreet edict of General Butler.

Fort Jackson had crumbled into powder under the impact of the huge shells from the mortars. On the first night of the bombardment the magazine was in such danger that only wet blankets saved it from blowing up. One bomb came leaping into the officers' mess-room when they were dining. With a thud and a rumble it rolled under the very table. All rose and clustered in a corner in some consternation, expecting to go skywards with the crockery. They waited one minute, two minutes. Not yet had death come! Then a young officer crawled under the table and burst into a hearty laugh.

[Pg 219]

"What is it, Jimmy?"

"Oh, you can go on with that Irish stew now. The fuse is out."

They returned to their dinners with such appetite as they could. Fortunately, men who are living at high pressure and strain, meeting death at every turn, are easily moved to see the funny side of things.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SIEGE OF RICHMOND (1862 AND 1865)

[Pg 220]

Fair Oaks a drawn battle—Robert Lee succeeds Johnston—Reforms in the army—Humours of the sentinels—Chaffing the niggers—Their idea of liberty—The pickets chum together—Stuart's raid—A duel between a Texan and a German—Effect of music on soldiers—A terrible retreat to James River—Malvern Hill battle-scenes—Three years after—General Grant before Richmond—Coloured troops enter the Southern capital in triumph—Lee surrenders—Friends once more.

The battle of Fair Oaks had been fought, and General McClellan began to entrench himself in view of the siege of Richmond. It had been a drawn battle: the South had taken some guns, but the Federal forces were too strong for them, and swamps, rough ground, and woods all helped to throw the South into confusion. Upon a field hardly a mile square were lying some 7,000 or 8,000 dead and wounded, many of them having been there for twenty-four hours. Some had gone deep into the muddy swamps and stuck fast there, dying or laying the foundation of some terrible disease. Acres of forest had been slashed, or cut about 5 feet from the ground, to prevent the passage of troops and artillery.

The Southern Commander-in-Chief, General Johnston, had been killed by a shell in this battle, but the substitution of General Robert E. Lee as Commander led to great reforms in the Confederate Army. Lee at once removed the camps from malarious swamps; he provided supplies of wholesome provisions, and re clothed the hungry, starving and mutinous men, so that in a few weeks they looked stronger, fought better, and behaved as men under discipline.

[Pg 221]

Every evening the countersign was given out, and sentinels were posted to prevent spies crossing the Chickahominy. In the Federal Army were men of many nations—Scotch, Irish, German, Norsemen, and others. It was told of an Irish sentinel that he stopped a stranger.

"Halt! Who comes there?"

"Me—a friend of the chaplain."

"Have ye the countersign?"

"No."

"Faith! an' if ye were a friend of the divil and had no counthersign ye couldn't pass this way—not on no account, sor."

"But I tell you I am a friend of your chaplain, and I forgot to ask him for the countersign. Don't you see?"

"Is that it, sor? Then, be jabbers! what's to prevint me giving to ye the counthersign, eh?"

"Nothing, I suppose, if you will be so kind."

"Come closer, and, be jabbers! I'll just whisper it in your ear. There! Now stand and answer. Who

comes here?"

"A friend."

"A friend! Right! and maybe ye have the counthersign?"

"I have; it is 'Good-night, mother.'"

"Quite correct, sor. Pass on, and good luck to ye!"

A long siege is such dull work that the Northerners used to amuse themselves by chaffing the young negroes when they caught them in the lines. Perhaps they would give the nigger-boy a bit of food, then suddenly say:

"Sambo, what relation are you to Jeff Davis's coachman?"

[Pg 222]

The black eyes would roll and the whites enlarge as the grinning nigger replied:

"I ain't no sort o' connexion with that ere, sah."

"You're a Secesh, I reckon."

"No, sah; I'm Union boy."

"Oh, then we shall have to flog you, Sambo. Don't you know that in this part of McClellan's army we are all at heart good rebels?"

"Lord ha' mercy! I never thought o' that; and now I do think on it, I do agree dat I am a bit of a rebel, anyhow."

Then all the listeners would burst out laughing at poor Sambo, and he left the camp befogged and bewildered.

Once an old grey-headed negro came into camp, and some young officers began to tackle him.

"Think we can take Richmond, boy?"

"Dar be right smart o' men round here, but I dunno 'bout dar being able for to take Richmond, sah."

"Right smart o' men!" said a Captain. "Why, this is only a flea-bite to what's coming to eat up the rebel army. You'll see them coming up like locusts. Here's McClellan with half a million around here, and there's Burnside down there, coming from Carolina with a hundred thousand more, and General Banks with two hundred thousand more, and General Fremont—why, he can't count his men he has so many!"

The old fellow opened his eyes wider and wider as the list of imaginary armies was run over. Then, gazing up intently in the officer's face:

"Got all dem men?" he asked in a subdued voice.

"Yes, and more."

The negro threw out his arms and ejaculated:

"Oh! dear Mesopotamia! Whatever will become of massa, I wonder?"

[Pg 223]

The negroes wanted to be free, but they did not want to work. Many of them who had run away from their masters were employed by the Federals in unloading stores. They worked from daylight until dark, singing over it, talking, shouting, arguing, making such a shindy. A Virginian negro never did a quarter of a day's work on his master's plantations, and they soon found out the difference when they became free niggers and earned wages. They did not much relish their rise. A party of niggers would come up to the Colonel's tent.

"Well, boys, what made you leave your master? Wasn't he kind to you?"

"Oh yes, massa berry kind—berry kind indeed."

"Well, didn't he give you enough to eat?"

"Oh yes, plenty of dat, plenty of dat—'nuff to eat."

"Well, boys, what made you leave him?"

"Why, de trufe am dat he made us work 'mong sugar-canes," said one.

"And we heerd 'bout de Norf am such a nice place, so we tort dat we would go to um," said another.

"Nice place? Why, how do you mean a nice place?"

"Well, sah, we was told dat nobody did no work up dar."

Even the white peasants in Virginia seemed to be lazy and indolent. They lived in little cabins, and only the very young or old were left, as every able-bodied man was in the army. They were dressed in homespun and spoke with a drawl. They did not wish to be richer, content with one acre and a single cow—Tories of a most old-fashioned kind; and the women, like the Boers, were

far more dangerous rebels than the men, and tried to entrap unwary Federals when they got them drinking in their houses.

All round by the river four miles from Richmond was a succession of dark swamp, yellow field, and brown hill-side. Batteries were placed on all the ridges, guarded on either side by woods and in front by earthworks. The Confederates on the other side of the river had fewer trees but stronger earthworks. On the 1st of June there was an artillery duel, begun by the Richmond batteries, but they had to beat a retreat into the woods before the precision of some German gunners. Sometimes the pickets of both armies were so close to each other that they made an agreement not to fire at one another. Then they got to exchanging newspapers and tobacco, telling the news, and altogether behaving as if they were rational human beings, and not machines sent to kill one another for political ideals far beyond their ken. Once when a New Jersey regiment was upon picket Federal scouts were being served with their allowance of coffee, and one of these latter observing a Southerner gazing wistfully at his smoking cup, beckoned to him to come over and have a drink. He came, drank, smacked his lips, and walked slowly back. Then he looked round and said:

[Pg 224]

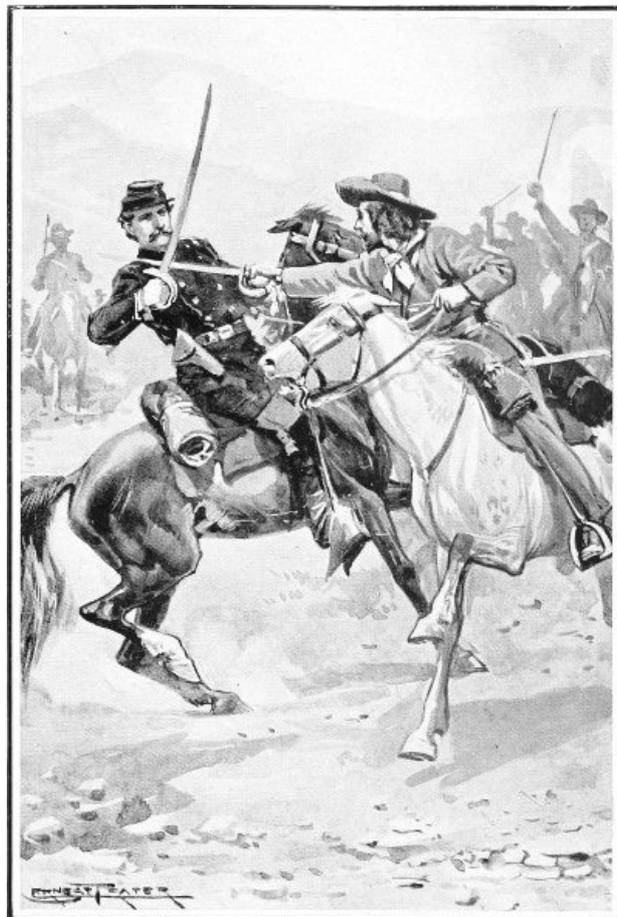
“I say, friend, how many times a month do you fellows get this good coffee?”

“Oh, just three times a day,” said the Jersey man.

“Three times a day! Why, if that’s true I’ll not stay a day longer in the Confederate Army. Here, lad, I give myself up.” And the fellow actually let his friend take him prisoner.

On the 20th of June General McClellan reported that he had 156,839 men, but he could get no reinforcements, and the armies of the South were increasing. The rains were making quagmires all around, and disease was rife among the troops. About this time the Confederate General Stuart led a successful raid with 1,200 horse and two pieces of artillery round the rear of the Federals, driving in their cavalry pickets till he came to Garlick’s Landing, where he destroyed two schooners and many waggons and captured many prisoners. One Federal—a German Dragoon—scorned to fly with his comrades, and fought a duel with a Texan trooper. The German was a veteran in the wars of Europe, and attacked the Texan, who was a little in advance of his troop. Both were skilled swordsmen, and while they fought the rest pulled rein and looked on. The German sat his horse as if he were a part of the animal and wielded his sword with parry, cut, and thrust like lightning flash. The Texan, on his fleet barb, wheeled swiftly round and round, seeking in vain for an opening. At last the Texan slashed the German’s shoulder, and as blood spirted from the wound the Texans, looking on, raised a cheer. But as quick as thought, with a back-stroke the German cut through the sleeve and flesh of the Texan’s left arm, and his blood began to flow. Then the Texan backed his horse and spurred again upon his opponent, making a lunge at his breast. This the Dragoon parried with great dexterity, and brought down his sharp blade upon the other’s shoulder. Thereat the Texan wheeled his horse once more, drew a pistol and shot the Dragoon through the heart.

[Pg 225]



After a successful raid by the Southerners, the Federals had almost all fled, but one—a German dragoon—scorned to do so, and instead attacked a Texan. The other Southerners let them fight a duel, and the German was having the best of it, when the Texan drew a pistol and shot him dead.

Colonel Estran, a Prussian officer in the service of the South, who witnessed this scene, but disapproved of the Texan having recourse to his pistol, writes thus: "Much moved by his fate, I ordered a grave to receive the remains of the brave German trooper. We buried him in his regimentals, with his trusty sword on his breast and his pistols by his side. I then sent for the Texan, and, after reprimanding him severely for his cowardly conduct, I ordered him to seek service in some other corps, telling him that I could not think of allowing a fellow of his stamp to remain in my regiment. The Texan scowled at me with his cat-like eyes, and, muttering a curse, mounted his horse and rode away."

[Pg 226]

I think some of us may deem that the Texan was hardly treated by this Prussian officer who felt so indignant at the shooting of the German trooper. The Texan had received two severe wounds. He was not bound to fight only with the sword. He carried pistols; so did the German. Why? if they were not to be used, why carry them? It was the Texan's duty to kill the German, and he did so. No wonder the poor fellow muttered a curse.

Days of disaster were coming for the Northern Army. They were spread along the river and through the swamps for more than twenty miles. The South could sally out of Richmond and strike any one point before support could be sent up. Part of the army was north of the river, part south. They dared not march on Richmond, now so strongly fortified, and to retreat was fatal. General Jackson had joined General Lee, and every day there was fierce fighting. In the battle of Gaine's Mill, where the North lost twenty-two guns, the Federal General Butterfield at a critical moment came coolly down the knoll in the thick of a hot fire, and sword in hand, seized the colours, waved them aloft, and so encouraged the valour of his regiment, shouting:

"Your ammunition is never exhausted while you have your bayonets; and use them to the socket, my boys!"

Seventy thousand men were hurling grape, canister, and bullet against 30,000. It was one loud and continuous roar. It was only gradually that it was forced upon the Federal troops that they were beaten and were in full retreat to the James River.

Battles are like games of chess. The great thing is to bring as many pieces into play as you can and mass them on one or two points. The Federals had over 100,000 fighting men, but only 30,000 were engaged in the battle of Gaine's Mill.

[Pg 227]

On the 28th McClellan wrote to the Secretary for War: "I have lost the battle because my force was too small. If I save this army now I tell you plainly that I owe no thanks to you or to any other person in Washington. You have done your best to sacrifice this army."

The Federal rearguard did their best to cover the retreat. They blew up the ammunition which had to be deserted, emptied the barrels of whisky and molasses, bent the muskets, and dismantled the forsaken waggons. But the roads were thronged with the sick and wounded, and hundreds lay down to die in the awful sun.

Ever the victorious South were riding in upon them and making havoc. On one of these charges General Butterfield, seeing the utter misery and downheartedness of the men, gathered together all the regimental bands and placed them at the head of a brigade. In one great burst of sound, which rose above the clamour of the battle, they started "The Star-spangled Banner." With the first few notes the men's spirits rose and a new energy came to them. They stepped out and sang lustily, and other regiments caught the brave infection and cheered in chorus.

Such are the uses of music in war. In our own regiments in the Boer War, when the men got weary with the long march, a Colonel would shout to his sergeants: "Have you any men who can sing? Put them in front." Then the regiment would step out and forget their weariness.

The *Richmond Dispatch* describes the battle-field thus: "Money was found abundantly among the slain. One man found not less than 150 dollars in gold. One lucky finder had no less than six chronometers ticking in his pocket at the same time. Our men seemed to take great delight in assuming Federal officers' uniforms, and strutted about serio-comically, much to the amusement of powder-begrimed youths who sat lolling and smoking in the shade. The cannon and arms captured in this battle were numerous and of very superior workmanship. The twenty-six pieces were the most beautiful we have ever seen, while immense piles of guns could be seen on every hand, many even hardly tarnished."

[Pg 228]

The road to James River was strewn with stragglers, tired to death. Hospitals were filled to overflowing. When they came to White Oak Swamp Bridge there was a block of waggons, cannon, ambulances, etc. Twenty rows of waggons stood side by side; teamsters swore, and horses gibbed, and officers shouted.

A Confederate officer, writing of the battle of Malvern Hill, describes how the gunboats on the James River helped the Federal retreat, how shot from rifled guns came hurtling through the woods, tearing down the largest trees. "We passed over four lines of our own men who lay close

to the ground and dare not rise to face the grape and canister. Our men trampled them into the mud like logs. One man in his haste to get out of danger shoved me on one side, and just at that instant a canister-shot tore his head off. As you may suppose, I was not much vexed at his want of politeness. Early next morning I rode over the battle-ground. I came upon numbers of dead and dying horses—and the wounded! One, a fair-haired Yankee boy of sixteen, was lying with both legs broken, half of his body submerged in water, his teeth clenched, his finger-nails buried in the flesh, his whole body quivering with agony and benumbed with cold. In this case my pity got the better of my resentment, and I dismounted, pulled him out of the water and wrapped him in my blanket, for which he seemed very grateful. One of the most touching things I saw was a couple of brothers, both wounded, who had crawled together, and one of them, in the act of arranging a pillow for the other with a blanket, had fallen. They had died with their arms around one another, and their cheeks together. But your heart will sicken at these details, as mine did at seeing them, and I will cease.”

[Pg 229]

The word “resentment” in this letter reveals the bitter feeling that springs up when men of the same nation are at war. The battle of Malvern Hill was the fiercest of the seven days’ battles, and the loss on both sides was terrible. When the troops came in sight of James River, muddy current and low banks, they rushed down with mad impetuosity. Many plunged into the stream in a very frenzy of delight. Those who for hours had suffered agonies from thirst now stood knee-deep in the water and drank like fish. The horses were as delighted as the men, and neighed to their friends. Here the troops rested and enjoyed the supplies sent up from White House. But a storm came on the 2nd of July and changed all to mud and sticky surfaces; but the sound gave up their tents to the wounded, and soon many steamers took the poor victims of the fight to a more comfortable abode.

McClellan had lost 15,000 men in the awful struggle of the last seven days, but the South had suffered more heavily, and Richmond was crowded with the wounded and dying. The President thanked the General in a letter, saying: “I am satisfied that yourself, officers, and men have done the best you could.”

It was not until three years after this—in April, 1865—that Richmond was evacuated by General Lee before Generals Grant and Sheridan. President Davis was in church when an orderly, splashed with mud, walked up the aisle and handed him a paper. In the first glance he saw that all was over, and a few hours after he was in full flight. On Monday morning Weitzel with his army, composed partly of coloured troops, marched into Richmond with bands playing. The city had been fired and the stores plundered. Main Street was in ruins, and the bridges over the river were broken. A thousand prisoners were taken and 500 pieces of artillery.

[Pg 230]

It is said that the coloured troops entered Richmond with proud gait and shouts of ecstasy, welcomed enthusiastically by their dusky brethren who thronged the streets. They laughed and shouted, prayed and wept, and kissed one another in a delirium of happiness. They thought that now at last the white races would acknowledge their equality; but the world has not yet got rid of its old prejudices, and their sun of happiness was doomed to suffer an eclipse. In a few days Lee surrendered. The Federals first heard the news from the cheers of the poor famished army of the South. Twenty-two thousand—all that was left of them—stacked their arms and filed past in a great and solemn silence. The cruel, devastating war was over. Now was seen the strange spectacle of the enemy sharing their rations with a conquered foe. They were no longer North and South now: they were all Americans—citizens once more of the United States, destined, perhaps, in a not distant future to teach Europe that peace is better than war, love is stronger than hate, God’s kingdom supreme over the transient empires of this little world.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SIEGE OF PARIS (1870-1871)

WITH THE GERMANS OUTSIDE

[Pg 231]

The Germans invest Paris—Trochu’s sortie fails—The English ambulance welcomed—A Prince’s visit to the wounded—In the snow—Madame Simon—A brave Lieutenant—Piano and jam—The big guns begin—St. Denis—Old Jacob writes to the Crown Prince—A dramatic telegram—Spy fever—Journalists mobbed.

After the French Emperor was defeated and taken prisoner at Sedan a revolution broke out in Paris, and the terms of peace which had been agreed upon were refused by the Parisians. So the Germans marched on Paris, arriving on the 18th of September. By the end of October 240,000 men began to encircle the ring of fifteen outer forts which guarded Paris.

Trochu was the Governor of Paris. On the 30th of September he made a vigorous sortie across the Marne, to the south-east, where he hoped to join the French army of the Loire, and also at the same time to relieve Paris of some hungry mouths.

But the grip of the Germans was too strong. They had been allowed time to strengthen their positions, and the sortie failed, though the great guns of the forts had boomed and crashed until they were glowing hot.

An English ambulance under Mr. Young and Captain Furley was received by the German doctor

[Pg 232]

with great enthusiasm, for medical comforts were growing scarce in the field hospital.

The stores were carried into the doctor's own room, and as the box of sundries was unpacked it was splendid to see the delight of the good man.

"Porter," he cried—"ganz gut! Ale—ganz gut! Chloroform—ach Gott! Twelve hundred cigars—du lieber Gott!" and his hands and eyes went up in delight and gratitude.

The woollen clothing alone must have saved many lives. After supper that evening the German doctor got up and made a little speech.

"Gentlemen, some people go about and make large promises which are never fulfilled. What an example of the contrary we have now before us! Mr. Young and Captain Furley heard of our state; they let no red tape stand in their way, and now this afternoon there comes jogging up our avenue a waggon bringing what is health—nay, what is life—to our poor sick and wounded. Here is the Englander all over, gentlemen—the bulldog that has no wind to spare in superfluous barking."

The officers present raised their glasses and shouted "Hochs!" for the English ambulance. It is pleasant to hear of such comradeship between men of different nations.

The next day we are told that, after desperate fighting, the Head-quarters Staff of the German 12th Army Corps sat down to a very sombre dinner-table and spoke to one another in hushed voices, for many chairs were empty this dinner-time that had been occupied at breakfast. Not a man in the room but had lost dear friends, and many had lost kinsmen, and some had brothers lying out on the snow. On the forenoon of the fourth day there were found eight poor wretches who had survived the inclemency of two nights' hard frost. Frostbitten, they lived two days after they were found.

[Pg 233]

The Germans, after two days' hard fighting, drove the French back into Paris, with the loss of 6,000 men; but they themselves were very disheartened.

Their loss in officers was very large. The 108th Regiment lost thirty-six officers out of forty-five. In the knapsacks of the French soldiers were found provisions for six days, showing that they had hoped to co-operate with the Southern Army of the Loire.

One day the Prince of Saxe-Weimar went to visit the wounded Würtembergers, a big man and a kindly heart. He went round with a box of cigars under his arm, asking each patient, "Can you smoke?" It was pitiful to see how they all tried to smoke, though some were too weak to enjoy their weed. Now the Prince comes upon a stalwart under officer.

"Are you married?"

"No, Highness; but my mother—she has three sons down, all wounded, and it might be bad for her."

The Prince took out a gold piece.

"Here, my man, send that to the mother, and let her know it comes from your Queen."

It seems that the Germans had quite mistaken the amount of provisions existing in Paris. According to their calculations by the middle of December Paris ought to be feeling very hungry, on salt rations at the very best. They had not yet prepared for a bombardment with siege guns, hoping that Lady Famine would drive the Parisians to surrender. But they made no sign.

Down at Argenteuil, on the north-west of Paris, there was the crackling of the chasse-pot from over the river, and yet most of the population had come back to their shops. They gossiped in the streets with French gaiety and unconcern, while the bullets sang overhead pretty freely. The steeple of their beautiful church made a good observatory, though its sides were riddled with holes made by shells. The French peasants drove their carts into the market-place below the church and sold eggs and butter full merrily; yet somehow, if a German stood at a window to gaze out, the French sharpshooters would aim at him. At Lagny there were generally 1,000 prisoners a day passing through to Germany. Some were so ravenous with hunger that they stooped to pick up turnip-tops and bones from the gutter, until the British Society organized a relief with stores of preserved meat and bread. And there was no hospital for the wounded! the poor creatures were dumped down in sheds, vans, the station-rooms, the church, the *mairie*. In one day there arrived 1,800 wounded. They were bestowed—frozen, hungry, hopeless—in the cold comfort of the church. Madame Simon, the lady superintendent of the Saxon ambulance, did noble things day and night—a most devoted woman. There were feats of quiet bravery done every day. There was a colporteur of the English Bible Society who used to drive his waggon on a road between Gonesse and Aulnay, a road exposed to shell-fire more than most.

[Pg 234]

"Yes," he said, "it is a good time for the men to read good words when they are standing with the shadow of death hanging over them."

There is a story of a boy Lieutenant, von Schramm, who found himself suddenly in a crowd of Frenchmen. He leapt from his horse and hid in a house, in the hope of escaping by the back-door; but his pursuers caught him, and were taking him towards St. Denis, which lies to the north of Paris. In going through the park of Le Bourget the officer who carried von Schramm's sword was shot and fell. The boy made a dash for his own sword, grasped the hilt and cut down the man on his other side, rushed for the small lake, dived to avoid pursuing bullets, and swam safely across

[Pg 235]

to rejoin his regiment. The strange thing was that he had been on the sick-list before his winter ducking, but now he was blessed with a boy's appetite.

It spoke well for the German besiegers that they got on so cordially with the villagers round Paris. These were mostly of the humbler sort; or servants left behind to take care of their master's house. There were lovely country houses inhabited by a few German officers, and, were it not for the rents made by shot and shell, the owners would not have grumbled much at their condition when they returned to them, though, of course, there were cases where the boisterous fun of German Lieutenants played havoc with ormolu and gilding. I remember hearing^[A] of a grand piano which gave forth reluctant sounds when the notes were pressed down. It was discovered that the strings had been plentifully smeared with jams and sweetmeats! But these jests were the exception.

The bombardment by the big guns had begun late in December with much excited wonder on the part of the Germans. Surely in a few days the Parisians will have had enough of exploding shells! Now here was almost the middle of January, and no effect visible. But the forts round Paris had no living population: no houses to be burnt, no women and children to mutilate. They had to be battered to bits, if possible; and Paris was behaving very heroically now. By the middle of January she was living very poorly indeed, but she endured yet another fifteen days longer.

As for the German soldiers, they began now to feel bored to death, as so often happens in a long siege. The first excitement evaporates; each day's unlovely duties recur with abominable sameness—and the Germans could find no beer to drink. A German is used to drink plenty of beer, and can carry it without ill effects; but when Fritz took to drinking rum, schnapps, or arrack, he began to reel about the village streets and look rather disreputable.

[Pg 236]

It was a strange sight to mount some hill and get a view of Paris surrounded by its fifteen forts, and in a yet wider circle by the German lines. The foam of white smoke surged up all round; the thundering roar of cannon, the dull echo of distant guns made dismal music to the ear. The air of Paris is so clear compared to our English cities that all was quite visible; and now that wood was scarce and fires few, it was easy to mark the outlines of the larger buildings, though above them hung a brown pall of smoke, caused by exploding shells or houses that had caught fire.

Day after day there were rumours of this or that fort having been silenced. Now it was St. Denis, on the north side; now Valérien, on the west; now Vincennes, on the east; but the respite was only given to cool the guns or renew the emplacements, and all was as it had been. Besides this there was the daily fear of a new sortie, as Issy or Ivry broke out into fierce clamour on the south-west and south-east. Then troops would be hurriedly transferred along frozen or sometimes muddy roads, while splinters of shell were whizzing about rather too familiarly.

It was calculated that on a fierce day of firing the Germans shot away 10 tons of powder, and nearly 200 tons of heavy matter—iron and steel—were hurled upon the forts and city in twenty-four hours.

There is a story of the Crown Prince of Prussia which illustrates his kindness of heart. In the 3rd Würtemberg Dragoons was a certain Jacob, who had an aged and anxious father. This father had not heard from his son Jacob for so long a time that the old man, in his rustic simplicity, sat down and laboriously wrote a letter to the Crown Prince, asking, "Can Your Highness find out anything about my son?" The old man knew his son had fought at Wörth and at Sedan, but nothing later than Sedan. The Crown Prince did not throw this letter into the waste-paper basket, but sent it to the officer commanding the 3rd Würtembergers, requesting that the old man's mind should be set at ease. Jacob was sent for by his commanding officer and asked why he had not written home.

[Pg 237]

"Do you know that His Royal Highness the Crown Prince wants to know why you have not written home for many weeks?"

The man saluted. His purple face was a study.

"Go and write instantly, and bring the envelope to me, sirrah."

How that story got about among the men! How often has the same experience come to house-masters, when some loving mother appeals for help: "Please make Harry write home." Both Harry and Fritz need a touch of the spur at times, but how promptly the letter is written when they feel that touch!

The town of St. Denis suffered terribly. The front of the theatre was in ruins. The cathedral, being banked up high with sand-bags, had not suffered so much. The tombs of the kings had all been thus protected, so had the statues, and not even a nose had been knocked off. But the bombardment had shattered many houses and churches, and the shells had ploughed up the streets, or rather hoed them into holes. It was only in the cold and dark cellars that safety could be found. Even there people were not always safe, and when they were pressed to take refuge in Paris they peeped forth shuddering, and swore they would rather die in their own cellars than sally forth through a tempest of shell-fire.

"At nine o'clock on the evening of the 28th of January, 1871, while the Head-quarters Staff of the Maes Army were assembled in the drawing-rooms of the Crown Prince's château after dinner, an orderly brought in a telegram to the Crown Prince. His Royal Highness, having read it, handed it to General von Schlottheim, the Chief of the Staff. That officer perused it in his turn, and then

[Pg 238]

rising, walked to the door communicating between the billiard-room and the saloon, and there read the telegram aloud. It was from the Emperor, and it announced that, two hours before, Count Bismarck and M. Jules Favre had set their hands to a convention, in terms of which an armistice to last for twenty-one days had already come into effect."

This startling news meant that Paris was ready to surrender. How many hearts were lighter in both camps next day! War is not all glory and heroic achievement. Those who know what war is pray to God that statesmen and nations may think twice before they rush into so terrible a calamity. In this war of 180 days the Germans had won fifteen great victories, captured twenty-six fortresses, and made 363,000 prisoners.

"Paris is utterly cowed, fairly beaten"—so they said who came from Paris to the German lines, and a few non-combatants, journalists, and philanthropists, ventured to enter the city before the German troops passed in on the 1st of March. They found the streets crowded with men in uniform. The food shops had nothing to sell. There were a few sickly preserves, nothing solid worth eating—some horses' fat for a delicacy to help down the stuff they called bread. A fowl was priced at forty-five francs; stickleback were fourteen francs a pound; butter, forty francs a pound. Outside the bakers' shops stood a shivering line of ladies and women, waiting their turn for loaves that tasted like putty, and pulled to pieces like chopped straw.

But there were in side streets many of the roughest, the most cowardly and cruel ruffians of the worst parts of Paris. They were on the prowl, waiting for their prey; so no wonder that Mr. Archibald Forbes, journalist, and several others in divers parts of the city had unpleasant experiences.

[Pg 239]

Forbes tells us he was walking down the Champs Elysées when he met the Crown Prince of Saxony with his staff riding by. Forbes raised his hat; the Prince returned the salute and passed on. But the dirty *gamins* of Paris had been looking on. They hustled the Englishman, called him *mouchard* (spy), *sacré Prussien*, *cochon*, tripped him up, hit him on the back of the head with a stick; then, when he was down, they jumped on his stomach with their sabots or wooden shoes. He struggled, as a Scotsman can, got up, hit out right and left; but numbers prevailed, and he was dragged by the legs on his back, with many bumps and bruises, to the police-station. There he showed his papers, and the Prefect released him in a humour that said, "I am mighty glad you Parisians have had a good thrashing."

Another journalist—so he told me in London a few weeks later—also had ventured to stray away from the German sentries in order to see what Paris thought of a siege. He soon found himself the centre of an angry throng.

Some cried: "He is a *sacré Prussien*! See his yellow hair!"

"No; I am an English artist," shouted my friend, still smiling.

"He is a confounded spy! Take him to the Seine! duck him in the river!"

They dragged him towards the river-bank. Out of his eye corners my friend saw several boys pick up stones to help him to sink. He thought his last hour was come. They were close to the river: the water looked very cold. Then there came to his ears the "tuck" of a drum. A company of French soldiers was marching by; a Colonel on horseback rode beside them.

[Pg 240]

The artist recognized him, for they had once chummed together near Metz. He called to him by name, and the Colonel cried "Halt!"

He spurred his horse through the evil-smelling crowd, and seeing who it was whom the rascals were going to plunge into the Seine, held up his hand and cried:

"Let that English gentleman go. He is no Prussian, but an artist who has drawn my portrait—mine, I tell you—for the London journals. He is my friend—an English friend, like Mr. Wallace."

This testimony was enough for them. The excitable crowd flew to the opposite extreme. Those who had made ready to stone him like a water-rat now dropped those stones, and rushing up with remorse and even affection in their changed looks, threw fusty arms round his neck, kissed him on both cheeks, sobbed and cried for forgiveness for their little mistake.

Indeed it is not safe to enter too soon into a conquered city.

From "My Experiences of the War," by Archibald Forbes. With the kind permission of Messrs. Hurst and Blackett.

FOOTNOTES:

[A] My informant was an English artist.

WITH THE BESIEGED (1870-1871)

Moods in Paris—The Empress escapes—Taking down Imperial flags—Playing dominoes under fire—Cowards branded—Balloon post—Return of the wounded—French numbed by cold—The lady and the dogs—The nurse who was mighty particular—Castor and Pollux pronounced tough—Stories of suffering.

One who was in Paris on the 3rd of September, 1870, might have heard strange things said in the cafés as evening came on. The French had suffered a great disaster; they had surrendered to the Germans at Sedan! MacMahon was wounded and taken prisoner; the Emperor had given himself up, and was going to Germany as a first-class prisoner; 80,000 men captured, and 200 guns. Was not that news enough to sell every paper in the street?

Shouts were heard of “Déchéance! Vive la République!”

Where was the poor Empress all this time? “Never mind her; it was she who had stirred up the Emperor Napoleon III. to make this horrible war.” So the papers print cruel caricatures of her. On Sunday, the 4th, very early in the morning, a huge crowd thronged the Place de la Concorde; men were pulling down Imperial eagles while the mob cheered. The regular soldiers met the National Guard and made friends.

[Pg 242]

Men said to one another: “What will become of the Empress?” “Will she fall a victim to the new patriots?” And whilst some wondered, a few friends were even then helping her to escape to England.

Everywhere on walls of houses were bills fixed announcing the Republic, and inviting all men to rally to the rescue of “La patrie en danger.”

But the railway-stations were very full of men, women, and children, who were trying to get a little country air. Could it be possible that they feared Paris might before long be besieged?

Drums and bugles incessant, uniforms always, rifles and side-arms very often. Men stood before the black-draped statue of Strasbourg, and waved arms wildly, shouting and screaming, “Revenge!” “Liberty!” and the like.

By the 10th of the month the Prussian forces, 300,000 strong, were about twenty-five miles from the capital. People began to look grave, and the more thoughtful went to the stores, and made secret purchases of coffee, rice, sugar, and other portable provisions. Still, the Parisians have not lost their gaiety yet; comic songs and punchinello evoke hilarious laughter.

Then came the news, “Versailles has honourably capitulated.”

What! so near as that! People are becoming nervous, so that the new authorities proclaim by billposters that the fifteen strong forts beyond the line of ramparts are fully armed and manned by the sailors from the fleet.

A captive balloon goes up from Montmartre to watch the enemy. Then it occurs that obstacles outside the city must be cleared away, so that the chassépot may have space to reach the Prussians; and many houses and bridges go down.

[Pg 243]

“Well, if there is a siege, have we not got a goodly store of food—enough for two months? Are there not plenty of cattle and sheep, fodder and grain collected within the walls? Who cares for the Prussians?”

Yet when they see notices posted on the walls instructing the newly enrolled how to load their muskets, some have a twinge of doubt and anxiety. A few days more, and Paris begins to feel she is being encircled by the enemy. Great movement of troops towards Vincennes. Official notices now state that all men liable to military service must report themselves within twenty-four hours, under penalty of being treated as deserters—and shot.

Yet still many are placidly playing dominoes, or calmly fishing from the bridges in the Seine, quite content if they catch a gudgeon two inches long.

Yet, if some are betraying levity and selfishness, others are filled with a desire to do something for their country. The doctors offer their services in a body, and hospitals for the wounded are being established at various points.

Ladies wearing a *brassard* on the arm (the Red Cross badge) were almost too numerous; and some of these had more zeal than strength, and failed lamentably when brought face to face with horrible sights.

On the 19th of September some French forces, who occupied the heights of Chatillon, were attacked in force by the Germans, and driven away, and they ran through Paris crying, “We are betrayed!” but the people gloomily replied, “Cowards!”

The next day many of these fugitives were marched along the boulevards, their hands tied behind their backs, and the word *Lâche* (coward) printed in large letters between their shoulders. Yet still crowds of men in uniform and ladies fashionably dressed crowded the cafés, laughing and full of mirth.

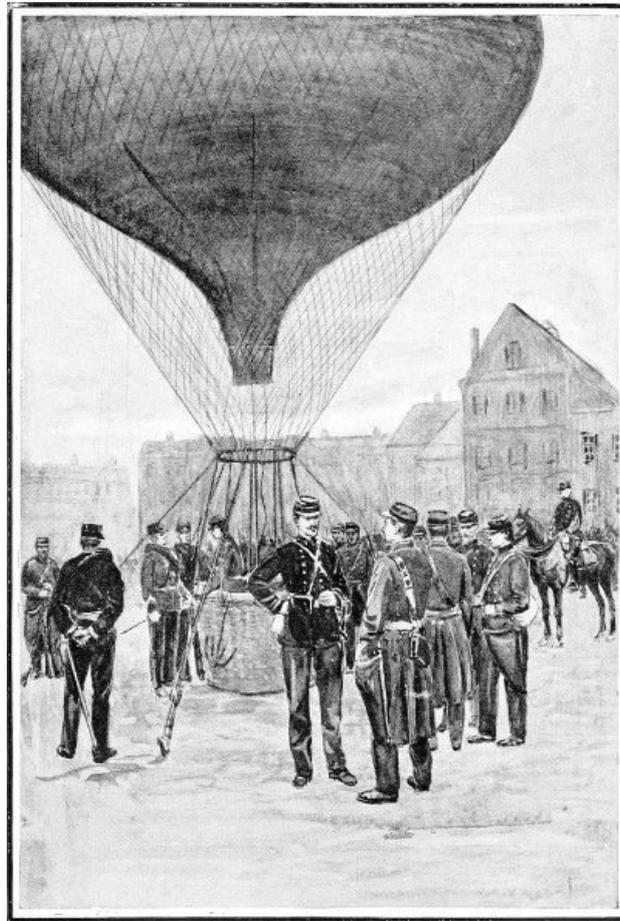
[Pg 244]

As the bombardment grew, it became the fashion to gather at the Trocadero, and watch the Prussian shells exploding in mid-air.

The village folk who had lived within the lines of investment were brought inside the ramparts, and formed a class of *bouches inutiles*, though some of the men were employed to cut down trees and build barricades.

The Palace of St. Cloud was burnt down about this time—some said by the French themselves, either by accident or design.

A post by balloon and by carrier-pigeons had been introduced—*par ballon monté*—by which letters were sent away, but could not be received.



THE BALLOON POST USED DURING THE SIEGE OF PARIS

Letters could be sent away by this method, but not received.

In the middle of October Colonel Lloyd Lindsay arrived from England, bringing with him £20,000 as a gift from England to the sick and wounded. He came into Paris in the uniform of his rank. This did not prevent his being captured as a spy, and suffering some indignities at the hands of the great unwashed of Belleville. Some with questionable taste said, "The English send us money—all right!—but why do they not help us with men and guns?"

Trochu, the Governor of Paris, was thought to be rather infirm of purpose; his sympathies were given more to Napoleon than to the Republic, and he evidently distrusted the fighting men within Paris. Indeed, there were many officers quite unfit for work, who used to lounge about the cafés, their hands buried in a warm muff and their noses red with the little glasses they had emptied. Many battalions of Federals elected their own officers, and some men were seen to be soliciting votes, bottle in hand. The National Guard, which was somewhat like our militia, was distinct from the French army, and contained many bad characters; they were apt to desert in time of danger.

[Pg 245]

On the 21st of October there was a sortie against the Prussians on the west of Paris. They started at noon, as Mont Valérien fired three guns in quick succession. They took with them some new guns, called mitrailleuses, from which great things were expected. In the evening there came back a long procession of sixty-four carriages, all filled with wounded. Crowds of anxious mothers came clustering round, inquiring for friends. The people in the street formed two lines for the carriages to pass between; the men respectfully uncovered their heads.

November came, with snow and bitter frost. Strange skins of animals began to be worn; fuel was scarce, gas was forbidden, and epidemics arose. The very poor received free meals from the *mairies*, while the more respectable poor stayed at home, making no sign, but starving in dumb agony.

On the 30th of November another sortie was attempted. Some villages were taken by the French, Champigny and Brie, the mitrailleuses being found very useful in sweeping the streets; but towards evening the French were repulsed, and the commander of the 4th Zouaves was left by

his own men on the ground wounded, a shell having dropped near them. Fortunately, the English ambulance was close by, and rendered such help as was possible. Then they drove the helpless officer in a private brougham back to Paris. What was their indignation when they found great crowds of people of both sexes indulging in noisy games, as if it was a holiday! The poor Chef de Bataillon only lived a few hours after being taken to the hospital.

Next day ambulances were sent out to search for the wounded, but they came upon many stragglers bent on loot. The wounded were in sore plight after spending a night on the frozen ground. Some had been able to make a little fire out of bits of broken wheels, and to roast horse-flesh cut from horses which the shells had killed. The French troops had remained in bivouac all that night, their strength impaired by fatigue and cold; the German troops, on the contrary, were withdrawn from the field of battle, their places being taken by others who had not seen the carnage of the previous day, who were well fed and sheltered, and thus far better fitted to renew the fight. No wonder that the poor benumbed French failed to make a stout resistance. Hundreds of wounded returned to Paris all the following day, and it became evident that no effort to break the circle of besiegers could succeed. Paris awoke at last to the humiliating truth. The day was cold and foggy; the transport of wounded was the only sound heard in the streets; in the evening the streets were dimly lit by oil-lamps, shops all closed at sundown, and the boom of heavy guns seemed to ring the knell of doom. All hope was now fixed on the provinces, but a pigeon-post came in, telling them of a defeat near Orleans.

[Pg 246]

“The Army of the Loire has been cut in two! Tant mieux! (So much the better!) Now we have two Armies of the Loire.” So the dandy of the pavement dismissed the disaster with an epigram.

The scarcity of meat was felt in various ways; even the rich found it difficult to smuggle a joint into their houses, for it was liable to arrest on its way: some patriots would take it from a cart or the shoulder of the butcher’s boy, saying, “Ciel! this aristocrat is going to have more than his share.” One day a fashionable lady was returning home carrying a parasol and a neat parcel under her shawl. After her came six hungry dogs, who could not be persuaded to go home, though she hissed and scolded and poked them with her gay parasol. On meeting a friend, she first asked him to drive them away, and then confided to him that she had two pounds of mutton in her parcel. And so the poor dogs got none!

[Pg 247]

Amongst the hungry folk we must not forget that there were nearly 4,000 English in Paris, about 800 of whom were destitute, and would have starved had it not been for the kindness of Dr. Herbert and Mr. Wallace. The wounded were well looked after, for there were 243 ambulances, of which the largest, the International, had its headquarters at the Grand Hotel. In one of the Paris journals it was stated that a lady went to the Mayor’s house of her district to ask to be given a wounded soldier, that she might nurse him back to life. They offered her a Zouave, small and swarthy.

“No, no,” she exclaimed; “I wish for a blonde patient, being a brunette myself.”

It was hardly worth while going to pay a visit to the Zoological Gardens, for most of the animals had been eaten.

Castor and Pollux were amongst the last to render up their bodies for this service. Castor and Pollux were two very popular elephants, on whose backs half the boys and girls in Paris had taken afternoon excursions. Poor fellows! they were pronounced later on by the critical to be tough and oily—to such lengths can human ingratitude go when mutton is abundant.

They were twins and inseparables in life. Their trunks were sold for 45 francs a pound, the residue for about 10 francs a pound. Besides the loss of the animals, all the glass of the conservatories in the Jardin des Plantes was shattered by the concussion of the big guns, and many valuable tropical plants were dying.

The citizens, usually so gay and hopeful, presented a woebegone appearance whenever they saw their soldiers return from unsuccessful sorties. They began to look about for traitors. “Nous sommes trahis!” was their cry. There was one private of the 119th Battalion who refused to advance with the others. His Captain remonstrated with him; the private shot his Captain rather than face the Germans. A General who was near ordered the private to be shot at once. A file was drawn up, and fired on him; he fell, and was left for dead. Presently an ambulance stretcher came by, and picked him up, as a wounded man; he was still alive, and had to be dealt with further by other of his comrades. Let us hope that this man’s relations never learnt how Jacques came to be so riddled by bullets.

[Pg 248]

The houses on the left bank of the Seine were so damaged that the citizens had to be transferred to the right bank. In a few days the terrible battery of Meudon opened fire upon the city. The shells now fell near to the centre of Paris; day and night without rest or stay the pitiless hail fell, and this went on for twelve days and nights. Meanwhile the cold increased and the fuel failed; diseases spread, and discontent with the Government arose. Women waiting in the streets for their rations would fall from exhaustion; others were mangled by shells. The daily ration for which the poor creatures struggled consisted now of 10 ounces of bread, 1 ounce of horse-flesh, and a quarter litre of bad wine.

One more effort the starving Parisians made to break through on the 19th of January. Early that morning people were reading the latest proclamation on the walls: “Citizens, the enemy kills our wives and children, bombards us night and day, covers with shells our hospitals. Those who can shed their life’s blood on the field of battle will march against the enemy—suffer and die, if

necessary, but conquer!"

Three *corps d'armée*, more than 100,000 men, were taking up their positions under cover of Mont Valérien; but a dense fog prevailed, and several hours were lost in wandering aimlessly about, so that the French became worn out with fatigue, whereas the Germans had passed a quiet night, with good food to sustain their strength. Yet for many hours the French obstinately held their ground; then stragglers began to fall away, and officers tried in vain to rally their companies. Night fell on a beaten army hurrying back through the city gates.

[Pg 249]

Meanwhile the bombardment went on with increasing violence, until early on the night of the 26th there was a sudden lull; just before midnight a volley of fire came from all points of the circle round Paris, then a weird silence. Then it was known that the terms of surrender had been signed—not too soon, for all were at starvation point, and only six days' rations remained. Paris had been very patient under great sufferings through the cold winter. It is pleasant to remember that supplies of food sent from England were then waiting admission outside the northern gates.

An English doctor residing in Paris during the siege writes thus:

"One lady to whom I carried a fowl was prostrate in bed, her physical powers reduced by starvation to an extremely low ebb. When I told her that she was simply dying from want of food, her reply was that she really had no appetite; she could not eat anything. Yet when I gave her some savoury morsel to be taken at once, and then the fowl to be cooked later on, her face brightened; she half raised herself in bed, and pressed the little articles I had brought to her as a child presses a doll. I was told also that the nurses in an ambulance which I had aided with the British supplies danced round the tables, and invoked blessings on our heads. As regards myself, what I most craved for was fried fat, bacon, and fruit, and, above all, apples."

Besides the wild animals of the French Zoological Gardens, most of the domestic pets had been eaten. A story is told of one French lady who carefully guarded her little dog Fido, feeding him from her own plate with great self-sacrifice. One day the family had the rare treat of a hot joint, and in the middle of dinner the lady took up a small bone to carry to Fido in the next room. She returned in trouble, saying:

[Pg 250]

"Fido is not in the house; he would so have enjoyed this bone. I hope he has not got out. They will kill him—the brutes!—and eat him."

The members of that starving family exchanged uneasy glances; they were even now engaged upon a salmi, or hash, formed from a portion of the lady's pet!

"From Memoirs of Dr. Gordon." By kind permission of Messrs. Swan Sonnenschein and Co.

CHAPTER XIX

METZ (1870)

[Pg 251]

Metz surrounded—Taken for a spy—Work with an ambulance—Fierce Prussians rob an old woman—Attempt to leave Metz—Refusing an honour—The *cantinière's* horse—The grey pet of the regiment—Deserters abound—A village fired for punishment—Sad scenes at the end.

One Englishman, the Special Correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, contrived to enter Metz shortly before it was besieged. But he had not been there long before a disagreeable experience befell him. He was riding quietly outside the city towards the French camps which were pitched all round it, when suddenly a soldier stepped across the road, and cried, "Halt!"

Two men seized his reins, asking, "Have you any papers?"

"Yes; here is my passport," he replied confidently.

The passport puzzled them; it was taken to a superior officer, who knew that it was English, but looked suspiciously at the German visé which it bears.

The Englishman was taken to a General across the road, who shook his head and remanded him to another officer of the staff, a mile back towards Metz. It begins to look serious; this man may be shot as a spy.

Two gendarmes were called up to guard him; soldiers came up to stare with savage scowls—he was a spy undoubtedly; but cigarettes were offered by the spy, and things began to look less cloudy. Then up came General Bourbaki, and fresh questions were put and answered; then a mounted messenger was sent to Metz to find out if the prisoner's statements were correct. On his return with a satisfactory account, the prisoner was told to mount and ride with escort to the head-quarters of the Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Bazaine. As he rode soldiers jeered and prophesied a speedy death in a ditch, which made him feel ill at ease.

[Pg 252]

A ride of a mile brought him to a pretty château, where he was received with courtesy and kindness. At a long common deal table in a wooden pavilion in the garden sat the Marshal and some twenty officers of the staff. Dispatches were being written, signed, and sent off by mounted

messengers. In the corner was an electric telegraph, ticking off reports from distant points.

When the conference broke up, Marshal Bazaine motioned the suspect to a seat, and questioned him, made him show on a map where he had been riding, found he understood no German and was a fool at maps (perhaps a little stupidity was put on), then he left him to his secretary.

The latter said, with a sly glance: "We have so many spies that we are bound to be careful, but the arrest in this case is a stupid thing (*une bêtise*). I will give you a *laissez-passer* for the day, monsieur."

So he went off, relieved at not being shot for a spy, but somewhat mortified.

There was hard fighting going on in the country round Metz. Our countryman managed to get attached to an ambulance, and went on to a battle-field at night.

"We lit our lanterns," he says, "and went cautiously into the valley. There were Prussian sharpshooters in the wood beyond, and I confess I was very nervous at first: the still night, the errand we were on, all awed one. But so soon as we reached the outskirts of the battle-field all personal feelings gave way to others. Here at every turn we found our aid was wanted. Thousands of dead and wounded were around us, and we, a few strangers sent by the International Society of London, were all that were present to help them. Plugging and bandaging such wounds as were hopeful of cure, giving a life-saving drink here and there, moving a broken limb into a more easy position, and speaking a word of encouragement where the heart was failing—this was all we could do. But all that night each worked his utmost, and when our water failed two of us walked back four miles to Gravelotte and brought a bucketful. We can dress, but not remove, the wounded now. Often have I been tempted to put a poor fellow out of his pain; it seems kinder, wiser, and more Christian to blow out the flickering lamp than let it smoulder away in hours of anguish. Daylight begins to dawn, and we seek carriages—that is, jolting unhung carts—to convey some of the wounded. Now, as we raise them up and torture their poor wounds by moving them, for the first time we hear a cry. The groans of the dying, the shrieks of the wounded, are absent from the battle-field, but far more dreadful and awe-inspiring is the awful stillness of that battle-field at night. There is a low, quivering moan floats over it—nothing more; it is a sound almost too deep for utterance, and it thrills through one with a strange horror. Hardly a word is uttered, save only a half-wailed-out cry of 'Ohé! ma pauvre mère!' Nothing is more touching, nothing fills one's eyes with tears more, than this plaintive refrain chanted out as a death-chant by so many sons who never more on this side the grave will see again that longed-for mother—'Ohé! ma mère, ma pauvre mère!'"

[Pg 253]

"We select sixty or seventy of those whose wounds will bear removal, and turn our faces towards Metz. Slowly and sadly we creep out of the death-valley. The quaint hooded forms of the sentinels who challenge us cut out strangely against the green and gold of the morning sky. Not a walking-stick, not a pipe is left us: they were cut up into tourniquet-keys. I am ashamed to say I regretted my pipe; but it came back to me after many weeks, being brought to me by the man whose life it had saved. Very grateful he was. As we toil upwards, musing on life and death, bang! right in our very faces spits out a cannon. Good heavens! they surely are not going to begin this devil's work again! Yes; there goes a battery to the crest of the hill. We must take care of ourselves and those we have so far rescued from slaughter. On we tramp, but there is no food, not a crust of bread, not a drop of water for our wounded. It is nine miles more back to Metz, and tired as we are, we must walk it. Very tired and hungry and cross we enter Metz, and there see the French ambulances waiting with waggon-loads of appliances and well-groomed horses. They had stopped to breakfast, and many hundreds have died because they did so. Well, we have earned ours, at any rate."

[Pg 254]

It was now the 28th of August. Metz was blockaded. No letters could be sent, for the German hosts were holding the heights all round. Ruthless rough-riders were riding into every French village. In one of these, the story goes, a poor old woman was washing her little store of linen. She was very old, and her grey hair sprouted in silver tufts from her yellow skin. All the rest had fled in panic; she alone was left busy at her tub, when up rode some score of huge Dragoons. They pulled up in front of her, speaking their barbarous tongue. One Dragoon dismounts and draws his sword. Poor old woman! she falls upon her knees and lifts up wrinkled hands and cries feebly for mercy. It is in vain! Neither age nor ugliness protects her. Raising his sword with one hand, he stretches out the other towards her—the Prussian monster!—and grasps her soap. He quietly cuts it in two, pockets the one half and replaces the other on the well wall, growling out, "Madame, pardon!"

[Pg 255]

The reaction was too great. When they rode away laughing, the old woman forgot to be thankful that they had not hurt her, and swore at them for hairy thieves.

On the 15th of September there were around Metz 138,000 men fit to take the field, 6,000 cavalry and artillery. The Prussians had not anything like that number. They were dying fast of dysentery and fever, and yet Bazaine did nothing. Yet, though Metz was not strongly held, it was very difficult to get through the lines, and many a man, tempted by the bribe of 1,000 francs, lost his life in the attempt.

The English journalist tried to be his own courier and carry his own letters. He presented himself at the Prussian outposts in daylight, showed his passport, and demanded permission to "pass freely without let or hindrance." In vain. The German soldiers treated him to beer and cigars, and suggested he should return to Metz. Next time he dressed himself up as a peasant, with blouse,

and sabots on his feet, and when it was growing dusk tried to slip through the posts. "Halte là!" rang out, and a sound of a rifle's click brought him up sharp. He was a prisoner, taken to the guard-house, and questioned severely. He pretended to be very weak-headed, almost an idiot.

"How many soldiers be there in Metz, master? I dunno. Maybe 300. There's a power of men walking about the streets, sir."

They smiled a superior smile, and offered the poor idiot some dark rye-bread, cheese, and beer, and some clean straw to lie down upon. Officers came to stare at him, asked him what village he was bound for. One of them knew the village he named, and recognized his description of it, for luckily he had got up this local knowledge from a native in Metz. However, he was not permitted to go to it, for before dawn next morning they led him, shuffling in his wooden sabots, to a distant outpost, turned his face towards Metz, with the curt remark: "Go straight on to Metz, friend, or you will feel a bullet go through your back."

[Pg 256]

Grumbling to himself, he drew near the French outposts, who fired at him. He lay down for some time, then, finding he was in a potato-field, he set to work and grubbed up a few potatoes to sell for a sou a piece. So at last he found his way back to Metz, and got well laughed at for his pains.

He then tried his hand at making small balloons to carry his letters away; but the Germans used to fire at them, wing them, and read the contents.

Many spies were shot in Metz, and some who were not spies, but only suspected. It was the only excitement in the city to go out to the fosse and see a spy shot.

There was one man whom all raised their hats to salute when he passed. He was a short, thick-set man, wore a light canvas jacket and leather gaiters. Under one arm hung a large game-bag, and over the other sloped a chassepot rifle. His name was Hitter, and he had made a great name by going out in front of the *avant-poste* and shooting the Prussian sentinels. One night he encountered some waggons, shot down the escort from his hiding-place, and brought four waggons full of corn into Metz, riding on the box by the driver, pistol in hand. This man organized a body of sharpshooters for night work, and many a poor sentinel met his death at their hands.

One favourite dodge was to take out with them a tin can fastened to a long string. When they got near the Prussian outposts they made this go tingle along the ground. Then cautious heads would peep out; more tingle from the tin can, until the sentinels jump up and blaze away at the weird thing that startles them in the dark. Their fire has been drawn, and Hitter's men have the outpost at their mercy. They either shoot them or bring them into Metz as prisoners.

[Pg 257]

At length Marshal Bazaine heard of Hitter's prowess, and sent for him, wanting to decorate him; but Hitter was sensitive, and thought he ought to have been decorated weeks ago. He came reluctantly.

"My man, I have heard of your doings—your clever work at night—and in the name of France I give you this decoration to wear."

"I don't want it, Marshal. Pray excuse me, if you please."

"Nonsense, my fine fellow. I insist on your acceptance of the honour."

"Oh! very well," said Hitter, "if you insist, I suppose I must; but, by your leave, I shall wear it on my back—and very low down, too."

The Marshal glared at Hitter, turned red, and ordered him out.

As the siege went on the poor horses got thinner and thinner. Their coats stood out in the wet weather rough and bristly; often they staggered and fell dead in the streets. They were soon set upon, and in a short time flesh, bones, and hide had vanished, and only a little pool of blood remained behind to tell where some hungry citizens had snatched a good dinner.

One day a *cantinière* had left her cart full of drinkables just outside the gate while she went to the fort to ask what was wanted. She tarried, and her poor horse felt faint, knelt down, and tried to die. No sooner was the poor beast on his knees than half a score of soldiers rushed out to save his life by cutting his throat—at least, it made him eat better. They quickly slipped off his skin and cut him up in all haste. So many knives were "e'en at him," they soon carried off his "meat." Then, in a merry mood, seeing the gay *cantinière* was too busy flirting to attend to her cart, they carefully set to work and built him up again. They put the bones together neatly, dragged the hide over the carcass, and arranged the harness to look as if the animal had lain down between the shafts. Then they retired to watch the comedy that sprang out of a tragedy. Madame comes bustling out of the fort. Eh! what's that? Poor Adolfe is down on the ground! The fat woman waddles faster to him, calls him by name, taunts him with want of pluck, scolds, gets out her whip; then is dumb for some seconds, touches him, cries, weeps, wrings her hands in despair. Sounds of laughter come to her ears; then she rises majestically to the occasion, pours out a volley of oaths—oaths of many syllables, oaths that tax a genius in arithmetic: *diable! cent diables, mille diables, cent mille diables!* and so on, until she loses her breath, puts her fat hand to her heart, and again falls into a pathetic mood, passing later on into hysteria, and being led away between two gendarmes. Poor madame! She had loved Adolfe, and would have eaten him in her own home circle rather than that those *sacrés* soldiers should filch him away.

[Pg 258]

Well, they ate horses, when they could get them; but donkeys were even more delicious, though

very rare, for they seldom died, and refused to get fat. Food was growing so scarce in October that when you went out to dinner you were expected to take your own bread with you. Potatoes were sold at fifteen pence a pound; a scraggy fowl might be bought for thirty shillings. The Prussians had spread nets across the river, above and below, to prevent the French from catching too many fish. As for sugar, it rose to seven shillings a pound. Salt was almost beyond price. The poor horses looked most woebegone. Many of them were Arabs, their bones nearly through their skin, and they looked at their friends with such a pitiful, appealing eye that it was most touching. You might have gone into a trooper's tent and wondered to see the big tear rolling slowly down the bronzed cheek of a brave soldier.

[Pg 259]

"What is it, m'sieur? I have just lost my best friend—my best friend. He was with me in Algeria. Never tumbled, never went lame. And he understood me better than any Christian. He would have done anything for me—in reason! Now he has had to go to the slaughter-house. Oh, it is cruel, m'sieur! I shall never be the same man again, for he loved me and understood me—and I loved him."

At last there was only one horse left in that camp, and this was how he survived: He had laid himself down to die; his eyes were fogging over, he felt so weak; but one of the sick soldiers happened to pass that way, and being full of pity from his own recent sufferings, he bethought him of a disused mattress which he had seen in the hospital close by. He returned and took out a handful of straws, with which he fed the poor beast, a straw at a time. The flaccid lips mumbled them awhile. At last he managed to moisten the straw and eat a little. Another handful was fetched, and the horse pricked his ears, and tried to lift his head. That was the turning-point; life became almost worth living again. The story rapidly spread, and it became the charitable custom to spare a bit of bread from dinner for the white horse of the Ile Cambière. In time that spoilt child would neigh and trot to meet any trooper who approached, confidently looking for his perquisite of crust.

There were 20,000 horses in Metz at the beginning of the siege; at the time of the surrender a little over 2,000.

[Pg 260]

We are told by an Englishman who was with the German Army outside Metz that in October a good many Frenchmen deserted from Metz. On the 11th a poor wretch was brought into the German lines. He said that his desertion was a matter of arrangement with his comrades. The man was an Alsatian, and spoke German well. His regiment was supposed to be living under canvas, but the stench in the tents was so strong, by reason of skin diseases, that nearly all slept in the open air. The skin disease was caused by the want of vegetables and salt, and by living wholly on horse-flesh. The deserter reported that the troops had refused to make any more sorties, and they were all suffering from scurvy.

There was one village, Nouilly, which contained secret stores, to which the French used to resort, and which the Germans could not find; so the order was given to burn it. Most of its inhabitants had gone to live in Metz.

"I was sitting at supper with Lieutenant von Hosius and Fischer when an orderly entered with a note. It was read aloud:

"'Lieutenant von Hosius will parade at nine o'clock with fifteen volunteers of his company, and will proceed to burn the village of Nouilly.'

"Von Hosius was fond of herrings, so he stayed at table to finish them, while Fischer went out for volunteers. In a few minutes von Hosius was putting on his long boots, taking his little dagger, which every officer wore to ward off the vultures of the battle-field in case of being wounded; then, taking his revolver, he sallied out to meet his little band. The service was full of danger, for the French lay very near, and had strong temptations for entering it by night. If he did encounter a French force inside the village, where would his fifteen volunteers be?

"A little group of us watched by the watch-fire as they marched down at the German quick step. For a while we could hear the crashing through the vines, then the hoarse challenge of the German rear sentry; then all became quiet. For a few minutes the officer in command of the outpost and myself were the only persons who enjoyed the genial warmth of the fire; then through the gloom came stalking the Major, who squatted down silently by our side. Presently another form appeared—the Colonel himself—and in half an hour nearly all the officers of the battalion were round that bright wood fire. They all tried to look unconcerned, but everybody was very fidgety.

[Pg 261]

"Von Hosius was a long time. An hour had gone, and Nouilly was but ten minutes or so distant, and the Colonel's nervousness was undisguised as he hacked at the burning log with his naked sword. Suddenly the vigilant Lieutenant gave a smothered shout, and we all sprang to our feet. Flame-coloured smoke at last, and plenty of it. But, bah! it was too far away—a false alarm.

"The Colonel sat down moodily, and the Major muttered something like a swear. One thing was good: there was no sound of musketry firing.

"Another half-hour of suspense, and then a loud "Ha!" from both Lieutenant and sentry. This time it was Nouilly, and no mistake. Not from one isolated house, but in six places at once, belched out the long streaks of flame against the black darkness, and the separate fires made haste to connect themselves. In ten minutes the whole place was in one grand blaze, the church steeple standing up in the midst of the sea of flame until a firework of sparks burst from its top and it

reeled to its fall.

"Presently they came back, von Hosius panting with the exertion (he was of a portly figure). The duty had been done without firing a single shot, and they brought with them a respectable old horse which they had found in a village stable."

[Pg 262]

One evening, when the German officers were discussing the causes of the French defeats, a First Lieutenant told this story to illustrate it:

The Chief Rabbi of the Dantzic Jews had taken a new house, and his flock determined to stock his wine-butt for him. On a stated evening his friends went down one after another into the Rabbi's cellar, and emptied each his bottle into the big vat. When the Rabbi came next day to draw off his dinner wine he found the cask was full of pure water. Each Jew had said to himself that one bottle of water could never be noticed in so great a quantity of wine, and so the poor Rabbi had not got a drop of wine in his butt.

Now, it was just the same with the French army. One soldier said to himself that it would not matter a copper if he sneaked away; but the bother was that one and all took the same line of reasoning, and the result was that nobody was left to look the enemy in the face.

In order to bring about the fall of Metz a little sooner, the Prussians drove out all the peasants from the neighbouring villages, and forced them down to Metz. The Mayor of Metz ordered them back; then the Prussians fired over their heads, and tried to frighten them down again. Meanwhile, the women and children were worn out and hungry, and sat down to cry and wish for death. These are some of the glories of war. Sometimes, when they returned to their village home after a week's absence, they found a remarkable change. They had left a pretty villa, trim gardens, and tiny pond and summer-house. This is what an Englishman saw one day:

"I came on a little group, the extreme pathos of which made my heart swell. It was a family, and they sat in front of what had once been their home. That home was now roofless. The stones of the walls were all that was left. The garden was a wreck, and the whole scene was concentrated desolation. The husband leaned against the wall, his arms folded, his head on his chest. The wife sat on the wet ground, weeping over the babe at her breast. Two elder children stared around them with wonder and unconcern—too young to realize their misfortune. No home, no food, a waggon and a field with four graves in it—a sight enough to melt the hardest heart."

[Pg 263]

But there were so many similar scenes, and some much more terrible to witness.

On the 29th of October, in torrents of rain, the French soldiers went out of Metz, casting down their rifles and swords in heaps at the gate, many glad enough to become prisoners of war and have a full stomach. The Germans came in very cautiously, examining fort and bastion and bridge, to prevent any mine explosions, and in a few hours "Metz la Pucelle" had become a German city. Marshal Bazaine, who had done so little to help them, was the object of every citizen's curses. The women pelted him with mud and called him "Coward!" as he set off for the Prussian headquarters.

From "The Siege of Metz," by Mr. G. T. Robinson, by kind permission of Messrs. Bradbury and Evans.

CHAPTER XX PLEVNA (1877)

[Pg 264]

An English boy as Turkish Lieutenant—A *mêlée*—Wounded by a horseman—Takes letter to Russian camp—The Czar watches the guns—Skobelev's charge—The great Todleben arrives—Skobelev deals with cowards—Pasting labels—The last sortie—Osman surrenders—Prisoners in the snow—Bukarest ladies very kind.

After Turkey had put down the insurrection in Bulgaria (1876) and had beaten Serbia (October, 1876), Russia made her tenth attempt to seize Constantinople. The Czar, Alexander II., declared war against the Sultan, Abdul Hamid II., and the result was a war which in cruelty and horrors has had no equal since the first Napoleon retired to St. Helena.

There were a few young Englishmen fighting on the side of the Turks, one of whom, Lieutenant Herbert, has left us a full account of the siege of Plevna. He says in his preface:

"I have witnessed much that was heroic, much that was grand, soul-stirring, sublime, but infinitely more of what was hideous and terrible. If you have too firm a belief in the glories of soldiering, try a war."

Herbert was soon made Mulazim, or Lieutenant, and his friend Jack Seymour was in the same company. The first successes of the Russians were checked when Osman Pasha stood at bay at Plevna, and the Turks literally dug themselves into the hills around the city, while the Russians lost thousands of men in vain assaults upon the earthworks.

[Pg 265]

It was in the second battle of Plevna that a Bimbashi, or Major, came up to Herbert and said:

"The General has sent for reinforcements. Take your company; an orderly will show the way. Do

your best, Mulazim. You are but a boy, in a position which might unnerve a man twice your age. Rise to the occasion, as Englishmen are wont to do. The soldiers love you. You and your compatriot have but to lead, and they will follow. Remember the Czar Nicholas' furious cry in the Crimean War: 'We have been beaten by a handful of savages led by British boys!'"

As they climbed to a distant hill they suddenly overlooked a battle-field of twenty square miles in area—terrible to see, terrible to hear. The thunder of 240 guns seemed like the crash of so many volcanoes; the earth trembled like a living thing. It was like standing in the centre of a raging fire. Presently the Russian troops drew near. The Turks began a quick fire of three minutes' duration. Deep gaps showed in their lines, but they were soon filled up, and still they drew nearer. The Russian "Hurrah!" and the wild Turkish cry of "Allah!" mingled together. Now there were only 100 paces between the charging lines, the Russians coming up hill, the Turks rushing down. Then came a chaos of stabbing, clubbing, hacking, shouting, cursing men: knots of two or three on the ground, clinging to each other in a deadlier Rugby football; butt-ends of rifles rising and falling like the cranks of many engines; horses charging into solid bodies of men; frantic faces streaming with blood. All the mad-houses of the world might be discharging their contents into this seething caldron of human passion.

"I remember nothing; all I know is that I discharged the six chambers of my revolver, but at whom I have no notion; that my sabre was stained with blood, but with whose I cannot tell; that suddenly we looked at one another in blank surprise, for the Russians had gone, save those left on the ground, and we were among friends, all frantic, breathless, perspiring, many bleeding, the lines broken, all of us jabbering, laughing, dancing about like maniacs. Fifteen minutes after the first charge the Russians returned. Of this charge I remember one item too well. A giant on a big horse—a Colonel, I think—galloped up to me and dealt me a terrific blow from above. I parried as well as I could, but his sword cut across my upturned face, across nose and chin, where the mark is visible to this day. I felt the hot blood trickle down my throat. He passed on. Sergeant Bakal, my friend and counsellor, spoke to me, pointing to my face. Jack said something in a compassionate voice. I fainted. When I came to myself, my head had been bandaged, the nose plastered all over. Water was given me. How grateful I was for that delicious drink! Then I was supported by friends to the outskirts of Plevna. As we went along I noticed a Russian Lieutenant who, after creeping along for a space, had sat down by the side of the track, leaning against the belly of a dead horse. He was calmly awaiting death in awful forsakenness. He counted barely twenty summers, poor boy! He looked at me, oh! so wistfully and sadly, with the sweet, divine light of deliverance shining in his tearful eyes. He said faintly: 'De l'eau, monsieur?'"

[Pg 266]

"I had some cold coffee left in my flask, which I got my companion to pour down his throat. He bowed his poor bruised head gratefully, and we left him to die. The ground was strewn with haversacks, rifles, swords, wounded men; riderless horses, neighing vehemently, trotted about in search of food. These sights were revealed to me by the peaceful, dying golden light of a summer sunset. Even war, that hell-born product of the iniquity of monarchs and statesmen, receives its quota of sunshine."

[Pg 267]

A few weeks later Herbert was summoned to the Ferik, or General of Division, and asked if he could speak French well enough to take a letter into the Russian camp. He said "Yes," made himself smart in new tunic and boots, and flattered himself that his tanned, smooth, youthful face looked well below the bright red fez with its jaunty tassel, in spite of his chin being still under repair. A corporal carrying a white flag and a bugler well mounted rode with him. They were handsome, strapping fellows, in the highest of spirits. After a ride of six miles they came in sight of a detachment of Cossacks. A young Russian Lieutenant rode to meet them, waving his handkerchief. Herbert stated his business in French, was asked to dismount while awaiting instructions. The Russians crowded round out of curiosity; the horses were fed and watered, cigarettes were exchanged, and friendly talk ensued. In half an hour a horseman rode up, and Herbert was bidden to mount. His eyes were bandaged, his horse was led. After a sharp trot of twenty minutes they halted, the handkerchief was taken off, and he found himself in a battery. An officer came up and took the letter, then handed Herbert over to an infantry Colonel, who took him into a small tent. Here, with some other officers, they had a cosy meal—wine, bread, and soup—a pleasant chat and smiles all round. It was a fortnight since the last battle, and the Russians were still lost in admiration of the bravery with which the Turks had defended their positions.

"Vos hommes, mon camarade, sont des diables. Jamais je n'ai vu pareille chose."

That was just a glimpse of the enemy, and proved that, though men may fight by order, they may yet be friends at heart.

[Pg 268]

The Czar Alexander had been present, watching the varied issues of every fight and assault. The sappers had built for him a kind of outlook on a little hill beyond the line of fire, where he could see far away on all sides. A large tent was standing behind, supplied with food and wine, where his suite made merry; but the poor, worn, anxious Czar could not eat, could not bide in his safe tower, but would go wandering round among the gunners and the guns. It was his fête-day when the great September battle was being fought. There he stood alone on his little balcony, under the lowering sky of an autumn day, gazing through his glass at the efforts of his soldiers to storm the Gravitza redoubt. All the afternoon assault had followed assault in vain, and now the last desperate effort, the forlorn hope, was being pushed to the front. The pale, drawn face on the balcony was now quivering with agonized sorrow; the tall figure was bent and bowed, and seemed to wince under the lash of some destroying angel. With awful losses the Russian

battalions staggered and struggled up the slopes slippery with their comrades' blood.

"See, sire, they have entered the redoubt; it is carried at last!"

Hardly has the Czar time to smile and breathe a prayer of gratitude when from a second redoubt higher up a terrible fire is turned on the Russians, and they are swept out of the place they had so hardly won.

There was one Russian officer who seemed to have a charmed life. He was the bravest of the brave, was beloved by his men, and did marvels of heroic feats—Skobelev. On a day of battle Skobelev always wore a white frock-coat, with all his decorations. Seeing the battalions coming back from the Gravitza in disorderly route, the tall white figure on the white horse dashed at full speed down the slope, passed the linesmen, who gave their loved chief a great cheer as he galloped by, caught up the riflemen who were advancing in support, and swept them on at the double. Men sprang to their feet and rapturously cheered the white-clad leader. He reached the wavering beaten mass, pointed upwards with his sword, and imparted to daunted hearts some of his own courage and enthusiasm. They turned with him and tried yet once more. Then the white horse went down. The glass trembled in the hands of Alexander.

[Pg 269]

"He is down!"

"No, sire; he rises—he mounts again! See, they are over and into the Turkish entrenchments!"

What a medley of sights and sounds—flame and smoke and shouts and screams! But the Russians were for the present masters of the redoubt.

In the evening Skobelev rode back without a scratch on him, though his white coat was covered with blood and froth and mud. His horse—his last white charger—was shot dead on the edge of the ditch; his blade was broken off short by the hilt. Every man of his staff was killed or wounded, except Kuropatkin.

"General Skobelev," wrote MacGahan to the *Daily News*, "was in a fearful state of excitement and fury. His cross of St. George twisted over his shoulder, his face black with powder and smoke, his eyes haggard and bloodshot, his voice quite gone. I never saw such a picture of battle as he presented."

But a few hours later the General was calm and collected. He said in a low, quiet voice:

"I have done my best; I could do no more. My detachment is half destroyed; my regiments no longer exist; I have no officers left. They sent me no reinforcements. I have lost three guns!"

"Why did they send you no help? Who was to blame?"

[Pg 270]

"I blame nobody," said Skobelev; then solemnly crossing himself, he added: "It was the will of God—the will of God!"

Skobelev's heroism was magnificent, and did much to nerve the common soldier to face the Turkish batteries; but success came not that way. Men and officers began to ask one another why the Czar did not send them the help of the great Todleben, who had defended Sebastopol so brilliantly. It seems that the Grand Duke Nicholas had nourished a grudge against Russia's most eminent engineer, and had kept him out of all honourable employment. But Alexander had sent for Todleben, and this was the turn of the tide. Todleben came in such haste from Russia that he had brought no horses with him. Now he was at last in the Russian camp—a handsome, tall, dignified man of sixty, straight and active, and very affable to all. The attack was to be changed. No more deadly assaults in front, but a complete investment, and wait till famine steps in to make Osman submit.

But Skobelev had not yet finished with daring assaults. One day the "Green Hill," which the Russians had taken under his command, was being endangered by Turkish sharpshooters. Russian recruits who were posted near had fallen back in a scare, thrown down their rifles, and simply run like hares. Skobelev met them in full flight, and in grim humour shouted: "Good health, my fine fellows—my fine, brave fellows!"

The men halted and gave the customary salute, being very shamefaced withal.

"You are all noble fellows; perfect heroes you are. I am proud to command you!"

Silent and confounded, they shambled from one leg to another.

"By the way," said Skobelev, still blandly smiling, "I do not see your rifles!"

[Pg 271]

The men cast their eyes down and said not a word.

"Where are your rifles, I ask you?" in a sterner tone.

There was a painful silence, which Skobelev broke with a voice of thunder. His face changed to an awful frown, his glance made the men cower.

"So you have thrown away your weapons! You are cowards! You run away from Turks! You are a disgrace to your country! My God! Right about face! My children, follow me!"

The General marched them up to the spot where they had left their rifles, and ordered them to take them up and follow him. Then he led them out into the space in front of the trench, right in

the line of the Turkish fire, and there he put them through their exercises, standing with his back to the Turks, while the bullets could be heard whistling over and around them. Only two of them were hit during this strange drill. Then he let them go back to their trenches, saying: "The next time any one of you runs away, he will be shot!"

The investment of Plevna went on relentlessly through October, November, and part of December. By the 9th almost all their food was exhausted, and Osman determined to try one last sortie before surrendering. Herbert had charge of a train of a battalion outside the town. He made up a fire, saw his men installed for the night, and then walked to the town. A snowfall was coming down lazily; bivouac fires lit up the gaunt figures of men and beasts. The men, talking of to-morrow's fight in a subdued tone, were yet excited and eager. Many Turkish residents, with their carts and vehicles, were spending the night on the snow-covered plain, the men brooding and gloomy, the veiled women sobbing, the children playing hide-and-seek around the fires and among the carts. It was a weird sight—all these thousands eager to go out after the army when the last struggle should have carved them an open road through the surrounding foe.

[Pg 272]

At head-quarters an officer met Herbert, and asked him to post some labels at the ambulance doors of a certain street. He says:

"Armed with a brush and paste-pot, I turned bill-sticker, and affixed a notice on some twenty house doors which were showing the ambulance flag. Anything more dismal than that deserted town, abandoned by all but dying and helpless men and some 400 starving Bulgarian families, cannot be imagined. Desolate, dead, God-forsaken Plevna during the night of the 9th and 10th of December was no more like the thriving and pretty Plevna of July than the decaying corpse of an old hag is like the living body of a blooming girl. The streets, unlighted and empty, save for a slouching outcast here and there bent on rapine, echoed to the metallic ring of my solitary steps; while occasional groans or curses proceeding from the interior of the ambulances haunted me long afterwards as sounding unearthly in the dark. Twice I stumbled over corpses which had been thrust into the gutter as the quickest way of getting rid of them.

"As I walked I had to shake myself and pinch my flesh, so much like the phantasy of an ugly dream was the scene to my mind. As I plied my brush on the door-panels, I felt like one alive in a gigantic graveyard.

"At one of the ambulances I was bidden to enter, and found, by the feeble light of a reeking oil-lamp, some invalids fighting for a remnant of half-rotten food which they had just discovered in a forgotten cupboard. Men without legs, hands, or feet were clutching, scratching, kicking, struggling for morsels that no respectable dog or cat would look at twice. I pacified them, and distributed the unsavoury bits of meat. As I turned to go a man without legs caught hold of me from his mattress, begging me to carry him to the train bivouac, that he might follow the army. Happily an attendant turned up, and I wrenched myself away."

[Pg 273]

Herbert was returning by a narrow dark lane when someone sprang upon him and tore the paste-pot away from him. He had doubtless seen it by the light of the Lieutenant's lantern, and thought the vessel contained food.

He belaboured the fellow's face with his brush, making it ghastly white, and setting him off to splutter and croak and swear, and finally he rammed the bristles hard down his throat. At this moment two other Bulgarians came up; but, taking time by the forelock, Herbert pasted their mouths and eyes before they could speak, then shouted out, "Good-night, gentlemen, and I wish you a very hearty appetite." He then turned and ran for all he was worth to the officers' mess-room. It was about ten o'clock p.m. when Osman Pasha and his staff rode up, preceded by a mounted torch-bearer, and escorted by a body of Saloniki cavalry.

When he came out again, the light from the torch fell full upon his face. His features were drawn and care-worn, the cheeks hollow; there were deep lines on the forehead, and blue rings under his eyes. Their expression was one of angry determination. He responded to the salute with that peculiar nod which was more a frown than a greeting. They all rose and went after him into the street to see him mount his fine Arab horse. He and his staff spent that last night in one of the farm-houses on the western outskirts of Plevna.

After a supper of gruel and bread, Herbert and the others walked in a body to the train bivouac. The night was intensely dark; a few snowflakes were flying about; it was freezing a little. They did not talk, for each was saying to himself, "It is all over with us now." Hardly any expected to see the next nightfall.

[Pg 274]

Herbert and two other Lieutenants slept in a hut by the river's brink; they could hear the water murmuring, and every now and then a lump of ice made music against the piles. A little after five in the morning he moved on, crossed with the first division the shaky pontoon bridge, and rejoined his company. Twenty-four crack battalions of the First Division were marching on to face the ring of Russian guns; the dark hoods of the great-coats drawn over the fez and pointing upwards gave an element of grotesqueness to the men. They were marching to certain death, with hope in their hearts.

In front the Russian entrenchments rose out of the vapours and fog in threatening silence; once beyond them, and they were free! The country and military honour called for this supreme sacrifice, and they offered it full willingly.

At 9.30 a.m. the bugles sounded "Advance," and the whole line, two miles long, began to move in

one grand column. The Turks went at the quick, hurling a hail of lead before them. The troops kept repeating the Arabic phrase, "Bismillah rahmin!" (In the name of the merciful God!), but the fire became so deadly that they came to a dead-stop. The men in the front line lay down on their stomachs. After an interval of ten minutes, the bugles of the First Division sounded "Storm."

The men jumped to their feet and rushed at the nearest trench. A murderous discharge of rifle fire greeted them; many bit the dust.

But very soon the Turks had the first trench in their possession, then a second and third; and before they knew what they were about, they were in the midst of the Russian guns, hacking, clubbing, stabbing, shooting, whilst overhead flew countless shells, hissing and leaving a white trail in their track.

[Pg 275]

Then they waited for the support of the second line, which never came; but at noon the Russians came down upon them in force. Herbert was ordered to ride and report that they could not hold out longer without reinforcements. He says:

"As I rode towards the centre, I was drawn into the vortex of a most awful panic—a wild flight for safety to the right bank of the river.

"I had never been in a general retreat. It is far more terrible than the most desperate encounter. I was simply drawn along in a mad stream of men, horses, and carts. Officers, their faces streaming with perspiration in spite of the cold, were trying to restore order; the train got mixed with the infantry and the batteries, and the confusion baffles description. My horse slipped into a ditch, and I continued on foot. I heard that Osman had been wounded and carted across the river; the pitiless shells followed us even to the other side of the river. The screams of the women in the carts unnerved many a sturdy man. I came to a sort of barn, where two Saloniki horsemen stood sentry. Being dead-beat and hungry to starving-point, I sat down on a stone. Whilst I crunched a biscuit a cart drove up, and a man badly wounded in the leg was assisted into the building. So sallow and pain-drawn was his face that at first I failed to recognize Osman. There were tears in his eyes—tears of grief and rage rather than of physical pain—and in their expression lay that awful thought, 'The game is up, the end is come,' which we see in Meissonier's picture of Napoleon in the retreat from Waterloo."

The last sortie from Plevna was witnessed by Skobelev from the heights above. The Turkish infantry were deploying with great smartness, taking advantage of the cover afforded by the ground. The skirmishers were already out in the open, driving before them the Russian outposts.

[Pg 276]

Skobelev was very excited.

"Were there ever more skilful tactics?" he said. "They are born soldiers, those Turks—already half-way to Ganetzky's front, hidden first by the darkness and now by the long bank under which they are forming in perfect safety. Beautiful indeed! Never was a sortie more skilfully prepared. How I should like to be in command of it!"

Skobelev then turned his glass on the Russian defence line. He seldom swore, but now a torrent of oaths burst from his lips.

"Oh, that ass—that consummate ass—Ganetzky!" he shouted, striking his thigh with his clenched fist. "What fool's work! He had his orders; he was warned of the intended sortie; he might have had any number of reinforcements. And what preparation has he made? None. He is confronting Osman's army with six battalions when he might have had twenty-four. Mark my words: the Turks will carry our first line with a rush. We shall retrieve it, but to have lost it for ever so short a time will be our disgrace for ever." Then Skobelev spat angrily and rode off at a gallop. How true those words were we have seen already.

At 2 p.m. Osman had been obliged to surrender, and shortly after he met the Russian Grand Duke Nicholas—Osman in a carriage, Nicholas on horseback. They looked one another long in the face, then Nicholas offered his hand heartily, and said:

"General, I honour you for your noble defence of Plevna. It has been among the most splendid examples of skill and heroism in modern history!"

Osman's face winced a little—perhaps a twitch of pain crossed it—as, in spite of his wound, he struggled to his feet and uttered a few broken words in a low tone. The Russian officers saluted with great demonstration of respect, and shouts of "Bravo!" rang out again and again.

[Pg 277]

Poor victorious Osman! conquered at last by King Famine. He had lived in a common green tent during the whole period of the investment; his last night at Plevna was the first he spent under a roof.

Lieutenant Herbert says concerning the surrender: "As the Roumanian soldiers seized our weapons I became possessed of an uncontrollable fury. I broke my sword, thrust carbine, revolvers, and ammunition into the waggon. A private with Semitic features perceived my Circassian dagger, but I managed to spoil it by breaking the point before handing it over. Another man annexed my field-glass. I never saw my valise again, which had been stored on one of the battalion's carts. I had saved a portion of my notes and manuscripts by carrying them like a breast cuirass between uniform and vest. Having given vent to rage, I fell into the opposite mood, and, sitting down on a stone, I hid my face in my hands, and abandoned myself to the bitterest half-hour of reflection I have ever endured."

Luckily Herbert fell in with a Roumanian Lieutenant whom he knew, who took him to the Russian camp, and gave him hot grog, bread, and cold meat. "How we devoured the food!" he says. "We actually licked the mugs out."

As they walked away in the dark to their night quarters, they happened to pass the spot where Herbert's battalion was encamped, without fires or tents, in an open, snow-covered field, exposed to the north wind. Cries of distress and rage greeted them, and they found that the drunken Russian soldiers were robbing their Turkish prisoners, not only of watches, money, etc., but also of their biscuits—their only food.

[Pg 278]

Herbert stopped for a minute, and gave away all he had left; but some Russians jumped upon him and rifled his pockets, before he could recall his companions to his aid. Everybody in camp seemed to be drunk. Herbert went to sleep in a mud hut, and slept for twelve hours without awaking, being very kindly treated by a Russian Major.

But the Turks suffered terribly. They spent the night of the 10th on the same cold spot. Their arms had been taken from them, also their money, biscuits, and even their great-coats. It froze and snowed, and they were allowed no fires.

It was a fortnight before all the prisoners had left the neighbourhood; during this time from 3,000 to 4,000 men had succumbed to their privations. The defence of Plevna had lasted 143 days. As the Grand Duke Nicholas told Osman, it was one of the finest things done in military history. But it cost the Russians 55,000 men, the Roumanians 10,000, and the Turks 30,000.

There is a Turkish proverb, "Though your enemy be as small as an ant, yet act as if he were as big as an elephant." Had the Russians been guided by this, they might have saved many losses.

"One bitterly cold morning, with two feet of snow on the ground, I joined a detachment of prisoners, escorted by Roumanians. We travelled viâ Sistoon to Bukarest, crossing the Danube by the Russian pontoon bridge. This journey, which lasted eight days, was the most dreadful part of my experience, lying as it did through snow-clad country, with storms and bitter winds. I and fifty others had seats on carts; the bulk of the prisoners had to tramp. I saw at least 400 men drop, to be taken as little notice of as if they were so much offal, to die of starvation, or be devoured by the wolves which prowled around our column.

[Pg 279]

"Over each man who fell a hideous crowd of crows, ravens, vultures, hovered until he was exhausted enough to be attacked with impunity.

"Some of the soldiers of the escort were extremely brutal; others displayed a touching kindness; most were as stolid and apathetic as their captives. Of Osman's army of 48,000 men, only 15,000 reached Russian soil; only 12,000 returned to their homes.

"In Bukarest our sufferings were at an end. In the streets ladies distributed coffee, broth, bread, tobacco, cigarettes, spirit. Our quarters in the barracks appeared to us like Paradise."

Then by train to Kharkoff, where Herbert got a cheque from his father, and was allowed much freedom on parole; he made many friends, was lionized and feasted and fattened "like a show beast." "I was treated," he says, "with all the chivalrous kindness and open-handed hospitality which are the characteristics of the educated Russians. The effects of the brutal propensities developed in warfare wore off speedily, and I am now a mild and inoffensive being, whose conscience does not allow the killing of a flea or the plucking of a flower!"

From "The Defence of Plevna," by W. V. Herbert, 1895, by kind permission of Messrs. Longmans, Green and Co.

CHAPTER XXI

SIEGE OF KHARTOUM (1884)

[Pg 280]

Gordon invited to the Soudan—The Mahdi—Chinese Gordon—His religious feeling—Not supported by England—Arabs attack—Blacks as cowards—Pashas shot—The *Abbas* sent down with Stewart—Her fate—Relief coming—Provisions fail—A sick steamer—*Bordein* sent down to Shendy—Alone on the house-top—Sir Charles Wilson and Beresford steam up—The rapids and sand-bank—"Do you see the flag?"—"Turn and fly"—Gordon's fate.

In January, 1884, Charles Gordon was asked by the British Government to go to Egypt and withdraw from the Soudan the garrisons, the civil officials, and any of the inhabitants who might wish to be taken away. It was a dangerous duty he had to perform, as the Mahdi, a religious pretender in whom many believed, had just annihilated an Egyptian army led by an Englishman, Hicks Pasha, and, supported by the Arab slave-dealers, had revolted against Egyptian rule.

Gordon had some years before been Governor-General of the Soudan for the Khedive Ismail. He had been then offered £10,000 a year, but would not take more than £2,000, for he knew it would be "blood money wrung from the wretches under his rule." When previously "Chinese Gordon," as he was called, had put down the Taiping rebels for the Chinese Government, he refused the enormous treasure which was offered him, in order to mark his resentment at the treachery of the Emperor for having executed the rebel chiefs after Gordon had promised them their lives.

[Pg 281]

Gordon was a man of simple piety. "God dwells in us"—this was the doctrine he most valued. After the Bible, the "Imitation of Christ," the writings of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, seem to have been his favourites. He once wrote: "Amongst troubles and worries no one can have peace till he stays his soul upon his God. It gives a man superhuman strength.... The quiet, peaceful life of our Lord was solely due to His submission to God's will."

Such was the man whom England sent out too late to face the rising storm of Arab rebellion. Gordon reached Khartoum on the 18th of February, taking up his quarters in the palace which had been his home in years before. He had come, he said, without troops, nor would he fight with any weapons but justice. The chains were struck off from the limbs of the prisoners in the dungeons.

"I shall make them love me," he said; and the black people came in their thousands to kiss his feet, calling him "the Sultan of the Soudan."

But time went by, and Gordon could not get the Government at home to second his schemes, so that the natives began to lose confidence in him, and sided with the Mahdi.

The Arabs began to attack Khartoum on the 12th of March, and from that date until his death Gordon was engaged in defending the city. Khartoum is situated on the western bank of the Blue Nile, on a spit of sand between the junction of that river with the White Nile. Nearly all the records of this period have been lost, but it is proved that wire entanglements were stretched in front of the earthworks, mines were laid down, the Yarrow-built steamers were made bullet-proof and furnished with towers, guns were mounted on the public buildings, and expeditions in search of food were sent out.

[Pg 282]

It was Gordon's habit to go up on the roof at sunrise and scan the country around.

"I am not alone," he would say, "for He is ever with me."

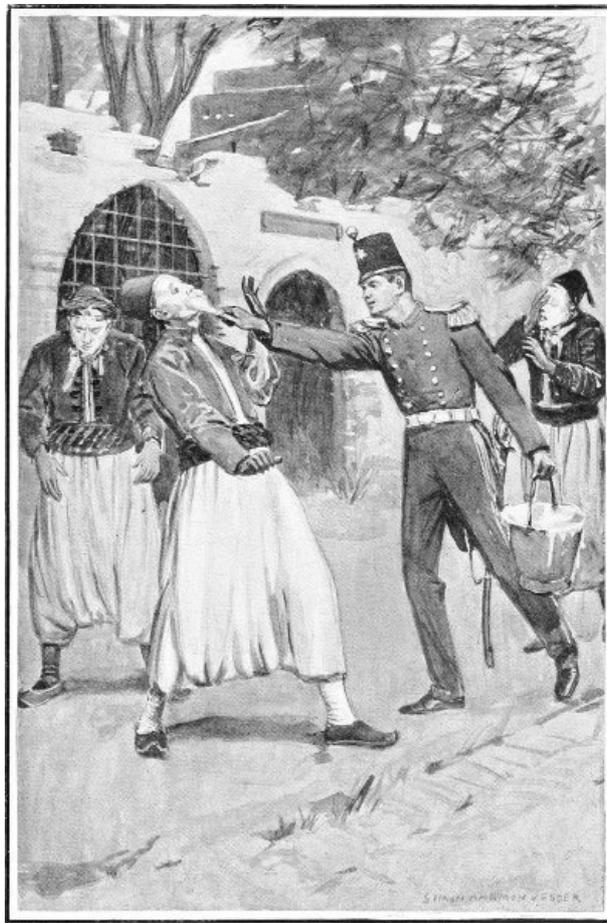
On the 16th of March he had to look upon his native troops retiring before the rebel horsemen. He writes:

"Our gun with the regulars opened fire. Very soon a body of about sixty rebel horsemen charged down upon my Bashi-Bazouks, who fired a volley, then turned and fled. The horsemen galloped towards my square of regulars, which they immediately broke. The whole force then retreated slowly towards the fort with their rifles shouldered. The men made no effort to stand, and the gun was abandoned. Pursuit ceased about a mile from stockade, and there the men rallied. We brought in the wounded. Nothing could be more dismal than seeing these horsemen, and some men even on camels, pursuing close to troops, who with arms shouldered plodded their way back."

But Gordon was no weak humanitarian. Two Pashas were tried, and found guilty of cowardice, and were promptly shot—*pour encourager les autres*. After that he tried to train his men to face the enemy by little skirmishes, and he made frequent sallies with his river steamers.

"You see," he wrote, "when you have steam on the men can't run away."

Then began a long and weary waiting for the relief which came not until it was too late. The Arabs kept on making attacks, which they never pressed home, expecting to effect a surrender from scarcity of food.



A STRANGE WEAPON OF OFFENCE

Lieut. Herbert was ordered to paste some labels at the ambulance doors in Plevna. In passing a dark lane someone sprang at him and seized his paste-pot, no doubt taking it for food. To defend himself he belaboured and plastered his opponents' face with the paste-brush, and later on those of two others. He then turned and ran.

In September only three months' food remained. No news came from England; they knew not if England even thought of them. The population of Khartoum was at first about 60,000 souls; nearly 20,000 of these were sent away as the siege went on as being friends of the Mahdi. [Pg 283]

On the 9th of September Gordon sent down the Nile, in a small paddle-boat named the *Abbas*, Colonel Stewart, Mr. Power, M. Herbin, the French Consul, some Greeks, and about fifty soldiers. They took with them letters, journals, dispatches which were to be sent from Dongola. The *Abbas* drew little water, the river was in full flood, and they seemed likely to be able to get over the rapids with safety. Henceforth Gordon was alone with his black and Egyptian troops. One might have thought that his heart would have sunk within him at the loneliness of his situation, at the feeling of desertion by England, and of treachery in his own garrison. He had no friend to speak to, no sympathetic companion left at Khartoum. Yes, he had one Friend left, and in his journal he tells us that he was happier and more peaceful now than in the earlier months of the siege.

"He is always with me. May our Lord not visit us as a nation for our sins, but may His wrath fall on me, hid in Christ. This is my frequent prayer, and may He spare these people and bring them to peace."

The ill-fated *Abbas* was wrecked, her passengers and crew were murdered, her papers were taken to the Mahdi, who now knew exactly how long Khartoum could hold out against famine.

On the 21st of September Gordon first heard the news of a relief expedition being sent from England, and three days later he resolved to dispatch armed steamers to Metemma down the Nile to await the arrival of our troops. They started on the 30th, taking with them many of Gordon's best men; but Gordon went on, drilling, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, writing hopefully, and sometimes merrily, in his journals. For instance, writing of an official who had telegraphed, "I should like to be informed exactly when Gordon expects to be in difficulties as to provisions and ammunition," Gordon remarks:

"This man must be preparing a great statistical work. If he will only turn to his archives he will see we have been in difficulties for provisions for some months. It is as if a man on the bank, having seen his friend in a river already bobbed down two or three times, hails, 'I say, old fellow, let us know when we are to throw you the life-buoy. I know you have bobbed down two or three times, but it is a pity to throw you the life-buoy until you are *in extremis*, and I want to know exactly.'" [Pg 284]

On the 21st of October the Mahdi arrived before Khartoum, and Gordon was informed of the loss of the *Abbas* and the death of his friends. To this Gordon replied:

"Tell the Mahdi that it is all one to me whether he has captured 20,000 steamers like the *Abbas*—I am here like iron."

On the 2nd of November there were left provisions for six weeks, and he could not put the troops on half rations, lest they should desert.

On the 12th an attack was made upon Omdurman, a little way down the river, and on Gordon's steamers *Ismailia* and *Hussineyeh*. The latter was struck by shells, and had to be run aground. In the journal we read:

"From the roof of the palace I saw that poor little beast *Hussineyeh* fall back, stern foremost, under a terrific fire of breechloaders. I saw a shell strike the water at her bows; I saw her stop and puff off steam, and then I gave the glass to my boy, *sickened unto death*. My boy (he is thirty) said, '*Hussineyeh* is sick.' I knew it, but said quietly, 'Go down and telegraph to Mogrim, "Is *Hussineyeh* sick?"'"

On the 22nd of November Gordon summed up his losses. He had lost nearly 1,900 men, and 242 had been wounded. And where were the English boats that were to hurry up the Nile to his rescue?

[Pg 285]

On the 30th of November only one boat had passed the third cataract, the remaining 600 were creaking and groaning under the huge strain that was hauling them painfully through the "Womb of Rocks."

In December the desertions from the garrison increased, as the food-supply decreased. There was not fifteen days' food left now in Khartoum. So the steamer *Bordein* was sent down to Shendy with letters and his journal. In a letter to his sister he writes:

"I am quite happy, thank God! and, like Lawrence, I have *tried* to do my duty."

The last entry in his journal runs as follows:

"I have done the best for the honour of our country. Good-bye. You send me no information, though you have lots of money."

Evidently this high-souled man was cut to the heart by what he thought was the ingratitude and neglect of England. He could not know that thousands of Englishmen and Canadians were toiling up the Nile flood to save him, if it were possible. But alas! they all started too late, since valuable time had been wasted in long arguments held in London as to which might be the best route to Khartoum.

Meanwhile, starvation was beginning: strange things were eaten by those who still remained faithful to the last. Only 14,000 now were left in the city. But Omdurman had been taken, the Arabs were pressing closer and fiercer, and Egyptian officers came to Gordon clamouring for surrender. Then he would go up upon the roof, his face set, his teeth clenched. He would strain his eyes in looking to the north for some sign, some tiny sign of help coming. He cared not for his own life—"The Almighty God will help me," he wrote—but he did care for the honour of England, and that honour seemed to him to be sullied by our leaving him here at bay—and all alone!

[Pg 286]

Meanwhile, the English had fought their way to Gubat, where they found the steamers which Gordon had sent to meet them. So tired were the men that, after a drink of river-water, they fell down like logs. Four of Gordon's steamers, with Sir Charles Wilson and Captain C. Beresford, started from Gubat on the 24th of January with twenty English soldiers and some undisciplined blacks. They were like the London penny steamers, that one shell would have sent to the bottom. They were heavily laden with Indian corn, fuel, and dura for the Khartoum garrison. Each steamer flew two Egyptian flags, one at the foremast and one at the stern. Every day they had to stop for wood to supply the engines, when the men would be off after loot or fresh meat.

When they reached the cataract and rapids the *Bordein* struck on a rock, and could not be moved for many hours, the Nile water running like a mill-race under her keel. Arabs on the bank were taking pot-shots at her, and the blacks on board grinned good-humouredly, and replied with a wasteful fusillade. After shifting the guns and stores, the crew got the *Bordein* to move on the 26th of January, but only to get fast upon a sand-bank. Precious time was thus lost, and on the 27th of January a camel man shouted from the bank that Khartoum was taken and Gordon killed. No one believed this news.

Near Halfiyeh a heavy fire was opened upon them at 600 yards from four guns and many rifles. The gunners on the steamers were naked, and looked like demons in the smoke.

"One huge giant was the very incarnation of savagery drunk with war," writes Sir Charles Wilson.

When the steamers had passed the batteries the Soudanese crews screamed with delight, lifting up their rifles and shaking them above their heads.

[Pg 287]

Soon they saw the Government House at Khartoum above the trees, and excitement stirred every heart. The Soudanese commander, Khashm el Mus, kept on saying, "Do you see the flag?"

No one could see the flag.

"Then something has happened!" he muttered.

However, there was no help for it; they had to go on past Tuti Island and Omdurman, spattered and flogged with thousands of bullets.

"It is all over—all over!" groaned Khashm, as to the sound of the Nordenfeldt was added the deeper note of the Krupp guns from Khartoum itself.

As they reached the "Elephant's Trunk"—so the sand-spit was called below Khartoum—they saw hundreds of Dervishes ranged under their banners in order to resist a landing; so the order was given with a heavy heart: "Turn her, and run full speed down." Then the Soudanese on board, who till now had been fighting enthusiastically, collapsed and sank wearily on the deck. The poor fellows had lost their all—wives, families, houses!

"What is the use of firing? I have lost all," said Khashm, burying his face in his mantle.

But they got him upon his legs, and the moment of sorrowful despair changed again to desperate revenge. After all the steamers got safely back.

And General Gordon—we left him alone in command of a hungry garrison—what of him? From examinations of Gordon's officers taken later it seems that before daylight on the 26th of January the Arabs attacked one of the gates, and met with little or no resistance. There was reason to fear treachery. For some three hours the Arabs went through the city killing every one they met. Some of them went to the palace, and there met Gordon walking in front of a small party of men. He was probably going to the church, where the ammunition was stored, to make his last stand. The rebels fired a volley, and Gordon fell dead. It is reported that his head was cut off and exposed above the gate at Omdurman. We may be glad that it was a sudden death—called away by the God in whom he trusted so simply. Thus died one of England's greatest heroes, one of the world's most holy men.

[Pg 288]

The siege had lasted 317 days, nine days less than the siege of Sebastopol, and the Mahdi ascribed the result to his God. In a letter sent to the British officers on the steamers he says:

"God has destroyed Khartoum and other places by our hands. Nothing can withstand His power and might, and by the bounty of God all has come into our hands. There is no God but God.

"MUHAMMED, THE SON OF ABDULLAH."

CHAPTER XXII

KUMASSI (1900)

[Pg 289]

The Governor's visit—Pageant of Kings—Evil omens—The Fetish Grove—The fort—Loyal natives locked out—A fight—King Aguna's triumph—Relief at last—Their perils—Saved by a dog—Second relief—Governor retires—Wait for Colonel Willcocks—The flag still flying—Lady Hodgson's adventures.

In 1874 Sir Garnet Wolseley captured Kumassi, the capital of the Ashantis, whose country lies in the interior of the Gold Coast, in West Africa. In March, 1900, Sir Frederick Hodgson, Governor of the Gold Coast, set out with Lady Hodgson and a large party of carriers and attendants to visit Ashantiland. They had no anticipation of any trouble arising, and on their march held several palavers with friendly Kings and chiefs.

On Sunday, the 25th of March, they entered Kumassi in state. At the brow of a steep hill the European officials met the Governor's party, and escorted them into the town. At the base of the hill they had to cross a swamp on a high causeway, and then ascend a shorter hill to the fort. Some children under the Basel missionaries sang "God Save the Queen!" at a spot where only a few years before human sacrifices and every species of horrible torture used to be enacted.

Soon they passed under a triumphal arch, decorated with palms, having "Welcome" worked upon it in flowers. Near the fort were assembled in a gorgeous pageant native Kings and chiefs, with their followers, who all rose up to salute the Governor, while the royal umbrellas of state were rapidly whirled round and round to signify the general applause. Everything seemed to promise order and contentment. But that night Lady Hodgson was informed by her native servants that very bad fetishes, or portents, had been passed on the road through the forest. One of these was a fowl split open while still alive, and laid upon a fetish stone; another was a string of eggs twined about a fetish house; a third was the presence of little mounds of earth to represent graves—a token that the white man would find burial in Ashanti.

[Pg 290]

The next day Lady Hodgson went to see the once famous Fetish Grove—the place into which the bodies of those slain for human sacrifices were thrown. Most of its trees had been blown up with dynamite in 1896, when our troops had marched in to restore order, and the bones and skulls had been buried. The executioners—a hereditary office—used to have a busy time in the old days, for every offence was punished by mutilation or death; for, as the King of the Quia country once told the boys at Harrow School, "We have no prisons, and we have to chop off ear or nose or hand, and let the rascal go."

But the Ashanti victim had the right of appealing to the King against his sentence. This right had

become a dead-letter, because, as soon as the sentence of execution had been pronounced, the victim was surrounded by a clamorous crowd, and a sharp knife was run through one cheek, through the tongue, and so out through the other cheek, which somewhat impeded his power of appeal. One would have thought that English rule and white justice would have been a pleasant change after the severity of the native law.

The fort is a good square building, with rounded bastions at the four corners. On each of these bastions is a platform on which can be worked a Maxim gun, each gun being protected by a roof above and by iron shutters at the sides. The only entrance to the fort lies on the south, where are heavy iron bullet-proof gates, which can be secured by heavy beams resting in slots in the wall. The walls of the fort are loopholed, and inside are platforms for those who are defending to shoot from. There is a well of good water in one corner of the square. The ground all round the fort was cleared, and it would be very difficult for an enemy to cross the open in any assault.

[Pg 291]

As soon as the Governor of the Gold Coast knew that the Ashanti Kings were bent on war, he telegraphed for help from the coast and from the north, where most of the Hausa troops were employed. They were 150 miles away from help, with a climate hot and unhealthy, the rainy season being near at hand; and they were surrounded by warlike and savage tribes. Fortunately, some of the native Kings, with their followers, were loyal to the English Queen; these tried to persuade the rebels to desist from revolt, and lay their grievances before the Governor in palaver. But the more they tried to pacify them, the more insolent were their demands. The first detachment of Hausa troops arrived on the 18th of April, to the great joy of the little garrison; but soon after their arrival the market began to fail: the natives dare not come with food-stuffs, and the roads were now closed. On the 25th a Maxim gun was run out of the fort to check the advance of the Ashantis; but they possessed themselves of the town, and loopholed the huts near the fort. The loyal inhabitants of Kumassi had left their homes, and were crowded outside the walls of the fort, bringing with them their portable goods, being upwards of 3,000 men, women, and children. The gates of the fort had hitherto remained open, but it was evident that the small English force would be compelled to concentrate in the fort; and as the refugees seemed to be bent on rushing the gates for safer shelter, the order was given to close the gates.

[Pg 292]

"Gradually the gate guard was removed one by one, and then came the work of shutting the gates and barricading them. Never shall I forget the sight. My heart stood still, for I knew that were this panic-stricken crowd to get in, the fort would fall an easy prey to the rebels, and we should be lost. It was an anxious moment. Could the guards close the gates in face of that rushing multitude? A moment later, and the suspense was over. There was a desperate struggle, a cry, a bang, and the refugees fell back." Then they tried to climb up by the posts of the veranda. So sentries had to be posted on the veranda to force them down again. "I felt very much for these poor folk," writes Lady Hodgson; "but, besides the fact that the fort would not have accommodated a third of them, the whole space was wanted for our troops."

The hours of that day went on, with sniping from all sides. Sometimes the rebels would come out into the open to challenge a fight, but the machine guns made them aware that boldness was not the best policy.

At night, when our men flung themselves down to rest, the whole sky was lit up with the fire of the Hausa cantonments and of the town. Tongues of fire were leaping up to the skies on all sides, lighting up the horrors of the scene around, affrighting the women and children, and adding to the anxiety of all.

Night at Kumassi was not a time of quiet repose; the incessant chatter of the men and women just outside the walls, the yelling and squealing of children, all made sleep difficult. And there was ever the thought underlying all that to-morrow might be the end, that the fort might be rushed by numbers.

[Pg 293]

But, as it turned out, the 26th dawned quietly. So, later in the day, a strong escort of Hausas was sent to the hospital to recover, if possible, the drugs and medical stores which had been abandoned through lack of carriers when the sick were brought into the fort. Fortunately, the rebels had left the drugs and stores untouched, and they were brought in with thankful alacrity.

The next night there was a hurricane of wind rushing through the forest trees and drenching the poor refugees, who tried to light fires to keep themselves warm.

"There was a dear old Hausa sentry on the veranda near my bedroom, who regarded me as his special charge. On this occasion, and on others, when my curiosity prompted me to go on the veranda to see what was happening, this old man would push me back, saying in very broken English, 'Go to room—Ashanti man come—very bad. You no come out, miss.'"

It had been hoped that by the 29th of April the Lagos Hausas would have arrived to rescue them, but they did not come, and the rebels fired the hospital. Not liking our shells bursting amongst them, the Ashantis, instead of retiring, swarmed out into the open, and advanced upon the fort. The refugees were cowering down close to the walls, and around them were the Hausa outposts ready with their rifles. In the fort were the gunners standing to their guns. As the rebels came on, jumping and shouting, and dancing and firing, the Maxims opened upon them; still they came on, and now the Hausa outposts took up the fire. At last the fight became a hand-to-hand struggle, and the guns in the fort had to cease firing, lest they should hit friend and foe alike. Then some 200 loyal natives, led by Captain Armitage, sallied out to the fight. "At their head were their chiefs, prominent amongst whom was the young King of Aguna, dressed in his fetish war-coat, in

[Pg 294]

the form of a 'jumper,' and hung back and front with fetish charms made from snake and other skins. He also wore a pair of thick leather boots, and where these ended his black legs began, and continued until they met well above the knee a short trouser of coloured cotton. He also wore a fierce-looking head-dress, and carried war charms made of elephant tails. Proudly and well did he bear himself; and at last, to our joy, a great cheer rose in the distance, and proclaimed that the enemy were retiring. Soon King Aguna came back, triumphantly carried on the shoulders of two of his warriors to the gate of the fort, where he met with a great ovation from his 'ladies,' who flocked round him, pressing forward to shake his hand and congratulate him upon the victory." So the day was won, and with the loss of only one man killed and three wounded, as the rebels fired over our heads.

Captain Middlemist had been too ill to take the command, and it devolved upon Captain G. Marshall, Royal West Kent Regiment, who, after his severe exertions, suddenly succumbed, and was brought into quarters half delirious. The heat of the sun, the excitement, and the work had been too much for him; fortunately, he was well again the next day.

By this victory the rebels had been driven out of Kumassi and across the swamps; they had left behind large supplies of food and war stores, which the garrison secured; even the refugees outside the walls began to smile and sing. It is astonishing how these children of Nature suddenly change from the depth of woe to an ecstasy and delirium of delight.

But where were the Lagos Hausas all this time?

Four o'clock came, five o'clock came, and still no sign of their arriving. Anxious faces scanned the Cape Coast road. Something must have happened to them; they had been met, checked, repulsed.

[Pg 295]

But at half-past five firing was heard in the forest. "There they are," said each to his neighbour, and a feverish excitement made numbers run to the veranda posts, and climb up to get a better view. A force also was sent down the road to meet them. How slow the time went with the watchers in the fort!

Just before six o'clock there was a yell from the loyal natives, and shouts announced that the Hausas were coming round the bend of the road. The relief came in through two long lines of natives, who wanted to see the brave fellows who had fought their way up to Kumassi from the coast. But, poor fellows! they had had a terrible time: their officers were all wounded; they had had nothing to eat or drink since early morning, and they were fearfully exhausted.

However, after they had slept a few hours and drunk some tea, they were able to tell their tale. Captain Aplin, who led them, said:

"We got on all right till we came to a village called Esiago, when we were attacked on both sides by a large force concealed among the trees. I formed the men up two deep, kneeling, and facing the bush on either side. By Jove! it was a perfect hail of slugs; and we could not see a soul, as the black chaps slid down the trunks of the trees into the jungle. Captain Cochrane, who was with the Maxim, was hit in the shoulder, but would not leave his post, and Dr. Macfarlane was wounded while tending him. Then the machine-guns became overheated and jammed, and had to cease firing. Four times the enemy returned to the attack. I got this graze on my cheek from a bullet which passed through my orderly's leg.

"Next day, after crossing the Ordah River, we were attacked at eleven a.m., and the fight lasted till five in the evening. A sudden turn in the track, and we saw a strongly-built stockade, horseshoe shape. Some Ashantis were looking over the top and peering between the logs. The track was so narrow that we had no front for firing, and the whole path was swept by their guns. I told off Captain Cochrane to outflank the stockade. He, with thirty Hausas, crept away into the bush to do so. Meanwhile, we ran short of ammunition, and had to load with gravel and stones. When I told the men to fix bayonets ready for a charge, I found they were so done up they could hardly stand. Our hour seemed to have struck, and the guns had again jammed. Just then three volleys sounded near the stockade. Cochrane was enfilading them. Hurrah! Instantly the Ashanti fire began to slacken. One charge, and it was ours."

[Pg 296]

Amongst those who had come in with the Hausas was Mr. Branch, an officer in the telegraph department. In reply to Lady Hodgson as to how he was so lame, he replied:

"I and my men were busy putting the line right to Kumassi. We were peacefully going through the forest when—bang! one of my hammock-men went down, shot, and the rest, carriers and all, threw down their loads, and bolted into the tangle of trees and undergrowth. By good luck, I had taken off my helmet and placed it at the foot of my hammock. The rebels thought it was my head, and every gun was blazing away at my poor helmet. It was fairly riddled, I can tell you. I jumped out of the hammock, and made for the bush; but it was so thick and thorny, the brutes caught me and beat me with sticks about the legs and feet, so that I can scarcely walk, as you see. Well, it was my poor terrier dog that saved me; for he came nosing after me, but somehow took a wrong turn, was fired on and wounded, and went off whimpering into the bush in a different direction. The Ashantis followed my doggie, thinking he was with me; so I got away from them that night. I wandered about, trying to find the village, where a Kokofu chief was friendly to me. As daylight came I heard natives talking, and threw myself down under some leaves, thinking it would be rather unpleasant to be taken and tortured. Well, they came up, saw the grass had been disturbed, stopped, examined, found me! I was done for! No, I was not. I saw by their grinning and other signs that they were friendly. In fact, my carriers had told the friendly chief about me,

[Pg 297]

and he had sent these men to bring me back; they had been looking for me all night. They carried me back to Esumeja, where I stayed until the Lagos Hausas came up on the 27th of April."

Next day the garrison of Kumassi found that their rescuers had been compelled to abandon their rice, and to fire away most of their ammunition on the road. Now there were 250 more mouths to feed, and food was running short. Rations were served out every morning, and it was a very delicate operation, for the loyal natives thought it a clever thing to steal a tin of beef or biscuits. The biscuits and tinned meat had been stored four years in a tropical climate; the meat-tins were covered inside by a coating of green mould, and the biscuits were either too hard to bite or were half-eaten already by weevils. Captain Middleton died on the 6th of May, and when he was buried, his "boy" Mouchi lay down on his master's grave like a faithful dog and sobbed bitterly. That boy became a famous nurse; they called him the "Rough Diamond." The poor refugees had now left the walls of the fort and had gone to their huts; they looked so wan and piteous.

Night after night there came a fearful noise of drumming from the rebel camps. The loyal chiefs said the drums were beating out defiance and challenge to fight.

"Why not send for more white men?" Ah! why did they not come?

[Pg 298]

Every day news came of a rescue column; every night the rumour was proved false.

On the 15th of May, about 3.30 p.m., there was a terrific hubbub all round the fort. Officers rushed on to the veranda to see what was the matter. Hundreds of friendly natives were streaming along the north road.

"What is it, chief?"

"Heavy loads of food coming in. Much eat! much eat—very good for belly!"

In a few minutes the garrison saw a joyful sight: Major Morris leading in his troops from the northern territories—such a fine body of men, all wearing the picturesque many-coloured straw hats of the north. Some of the officers were on ponies. Oh, what shaking of hands! what delightful chatter! But they, too, had had to fight their way through several stockades, and some were wounded.

"The arrival of Major Morris," writes Lady Hodgson, "seemed to take a load off our minds. He was so cheery, confident, and resourceful, and seemed always able to raise the spirits of the faint-hearted.... But the large loads of food did not in reality exist: they had only brought enough to last a week; they had, however, brought plenty of ammunition."

Major Morris was now in command of 750 of all ranks, and he resolved to make a reconnaissance in force. They went after the rebels far from the fort, and whilst they were away fighting, the wives of the refugees were doing a slow funeral dance up and down the road, chanting a mournful dirge, their faces and bodies daubed with white paint. In spite of this appeal to their gods, many wounded were carried back to the fort.

Many a weary day came and went; no strong relief came—no news. The natives were dying of starvation: some went mad and shrieked; others sat still and picked their cloth to pieces. It was bad enough for all. A rat cost ten shillings; all pets had been eaten long ago.

[Pg 299]

Then it was determined that the Governor and Lady Hodgson and most of the garrison should try to force their way to the coast, as there were only three days' supply of rations left. The 23rd of June was to be the day of departure.

The Governor's last words to the men left behind in the fort were: "Well, you have a supply of food for twenty-three days, and are safe for that period; but we are going to die to-day." Captain Bishop was left in command of the fort, with a small force.

From Captain Bishop's report we learn that Major Morris had scarcely left Kumassi when he saw a band of Ashantis coming towards the fort from their stockade. They thought, no doubt, that the fort had been deserted, but the fire from two Maxims soon convinced them to the contrary. The refugees, who had built shelters round the walls, had all, with the exception of 150, gone away with the Governor's column; but their empty shelters formed a pestilential area: over them hovered vultures—a sure proof of what some of them contained—and one of the first duties of the little garrison was to burn them up, after examining their contents.

The day after the column left three men died of starvation, and almost daily one or more succumbed. When no relief came, as promised—though they had been told it was only sixteen miles off—their hopes fell, and after ten days they gave up all hope of surviving.

"But," he says, "we kept up an appearance of cheerfulness for the sake of our men. I regard the conduct of the native troops as marvellous; they maintained perfect discipline, and never complained. Some were too weak even to stand at the table to receive their rations, and lay about on the ground. All were worn to skin and bone, but there were a few who, to relieve their hunger, had been eating poisonous herbs, which caused great swellings of the body. Sometimes native women would come outside the fort and offer to sell food. A penny piece of cocoa realized fifteen shillings; bananas were eighteen-pence each; half a biscuit could be bought for three shillings. This may give some idea of the scarcity of food.

[Pg 300]

"On the 14th of July we heard terrific firing at 4.30 p.m. Hopes jumped up again, but most of the men were too weak to care for anything. It was very pathetic that now, when relief was at hand,

some of the men were just at the point of death.

"At 4.45, amid the din of the ever-approaching firing, we heard ringing British cheers, and a shell passed over the top of the fort. We soon saw shells bursting in all directions about 400 yards off, and we fired a Maxim to show that we were alive. Then, to our intense relief, we heard a distant bugle sound the 'Halt!' and at six o'clock on this Sunday evening, the 15th of July, we saw the heads of the advance guard emerge from the bush, with a fox-terrier trotting gaily in front.

"Instantly the two buglers on the veranda sounded the 'Welcome,' blowing it over and over again in their excitement. A few minutes later a group of white helmets told us of the arrival of the staff, and we rushed out of the fort, cheering to the best of our ability. The meeting with our rescuers was of a most affecting character.

"Colonel Willcocks and his officers plainly showed what they had gone through. The whole of the force was halted in front of the fort, and three cheers for the Queen and the waving of caps and helmets formed an evening scene that none of us will ever forget." So they won through by pluck and patience—33 Europeans and some 720 Hausas opposing many thousands of savage and cruel natives.

[Pg 301]

And what about the Governor's party?

They stole away on the morning of the 23rd of June in a blue-white mist, through the swamp and the clinging bush, till they came to a stockade. Then they were seen by the Ashantis, who began to beat their tom-toms and drums, signalling for help from other camps. But they took the stockade, and found beyond it a nice little camp; before every hut a fire was burning and food cooking, and no one to look after it. Many a square meal was hurriedly snatched and eaten, but some who were too greedy and stayed behind to eat fell victims to the returning foe.

Then came a terrible wrestling with bad roads and sniping blacks and a deluge of rain, and most of their boxes were thrown away or lost.

Of course there were many cases of theft. On the third night two men were brought into the village in a dying state. One of them was clasping in his hand a label taken from a bottle of Scrubb's ammonia. They had broken open a box, and finished the two bottles which they found there: one was whisky, the other ammonia!

Lady Hodgson writes: "One stream I remember well; it was some 30 feet wide, and flowing swiftly. Across it was a tree-trunk, very slippery. How was I to get over? The difficulty was solved by my cook carrying me over in his arms. He was a tall man, and managed to take me over safely; but more than once he stumbled, and I thought I should be dropped into the torrent. Often the road led through high reeds and long grass, and many a time I thought we had lost our way, and might suddenly emerge into some unfriendly village, to be taken prisoners or cut down.

"At last N'kwanta came in sight, perched on a hill. We could see the Union Jack flying on a flagstaff in the centre of the town, and the King's people drawn up to receive the Governor. We were at last among friends.

[Pg 302]

"Fires were burning everywhere, and the cooking of food was the sole pursuit. Our poor starved Hausas had now before them the diet in which their hearts delighted. It was a pleasant sight to see the joy with which they welcomed their altered prospects, and the dispersal of the gloom which had so long rested upon all of us like a pall."

From Lady Hodgson's "Kumassi," by kind permission of Messrs. C. Arthur Pearson, Ltd.

CHAPTER XXIII

MAFEKING (1899-1900)

[Pg 303]

Snyman begins to fire—A flag of truce—Midnight sortie—The dynamite trolley—Kaffirs careless—A cattle raid—Eloff nearly takes Mafeking—Is taken himself instead—The relief dribble in—At 2 a.m. come cannon with Mahon and Plumer.

On the 7th of October, 1899, Colonel Baden-Powell issued a notice to the people of Mafeking, in which he told them that "forces of armed Boers are now massed upon the Natal and Bechuanaland borders. Their orders are not to cross the border until the British fire a shot. As this is not likely to occur, at least for some time, no immediate danger is to be apprehended.... It is possible they might attempt to shell the town, and although every endeavour will be made to provide shelter for the women and children, yet arrangements could be made to move them to a place of safety if they desire to go away from Mafeking...."

Mafeking is situated upon a rise about 300 yards north of the Matopo River. The railway, which runs north to Buluwayo, is to the west of the town, and crosses the river by an iron bridge. To the west of the railway is the native stadt, which consists of Kaffir huts, being called in Kaffir language "The Place Among the Rocks."

The centre of the town is the market-square, from which bungalows built of mud-bricks, with

roofs of corrugated iron, extend regularly into the veldt. The streets were barricaded, and the houses protected by sand-bags. An armour-plated train, fitted with quick-firing guns, patrolled the railway at times. The population during the siege included 1,500 whites and 8,000 natives. The town was garrisoned by the Cape Police and by the Protectorate Regiment, under Colonel Hore, by the Town Guard, and volunteers.

[Pg 304]

Great was the excitement of the inhabitants as the day of bombardment drew near. They had been very busy constructing earthworks and gun-emplacements, piling up tiers of sand-bags and banks of earth to face them; some had dug deep pits to sit in, but at first such makeshifts were derided by the inexperienced.

It had been notified that a red flag would fly from headquarters if an attack were threatening, together with an alarm bell rung in the centre of the town. Mines had been placed outside the town, and a telephone attached.

Commandant Snyman had prophesied that when he did begin to bombard Mafeking English heads would roll on the veldt like marbles. Mafeking had no artillery to speak of, so no wonder that many hearts felt uneasy tremors as the fatal Monday drew near. Yet curiosity oftentimes overcame fear, and many coigns of vantage were chosen by those who wished to climb up and see the gory sport. The bombardment began at 9.15 a.m., and the first shell sank in a sand-heap, and forgot to explode. The second and third fell short, but not very short. Then came shell after shell, falling into street or backyard, and exploding with a bang. Numbers rushed to find out what damage had been done. Then grins stole across surprised faces: the area of damage was about 3 square feet. Three shells fell into the hospital, luckily doing no harm to anyone. After some hours of terrible, thundering cannon-fire, it suddenly ceased. The garrison counted up their casualties. Three buildings had been struck—the hospital, the monastery, and Riesle's Hotel; one life had been taken—it was a pullet that had never yet laid an egg!

[Pg 305]



THE BOERS, TAKEN BY SURPRISE, WERE UNSTEADY AND PANIC-STRUCK

An incident during the siege of Mafeking, when the British had sapped their way to within eighty yards of the Boer position.

Shortly after this bill of butchery had been presented the Boer General sent an emissary to Colonel Baden-Powell.

“Commandant Snyman presents his compliments, and desires to know if, to save further bloodshed, the English would now surrender.”

Baden-Powell is a great actor; he never smiled as he replied:

“Tell the Commandant, with my compliments, that we have not yet begun.”

But a few days later the Boers were seen to be very active on the veldt about three miles from the town, and the rumour spread that they had sent to Pretoria for siege guns. The townsfolk stood in groups and discussed the new peril.

About noon next day the red flag flew from head-quarters. Presently a great cloud of smoke rose on the skyline; then came a rush of air, a roar as of some great bird flying, a terrific concussion, and then flying fragments of steel buried themselves in distant buildings, creating a sense of terror throughout the town.

“Mafeking is doomed!” was the general cry that afternoon; those alone who had dug themselves deep pits were fairly comfortable in their minds. The second shot of the big Creusot gun wrecked the rear of the Mafeking Hotel, and the force of the explosion hurled the war correspondent of

the *Chronicle* upon a pile of wood. Next day more than 200 shells were thrown into Mafeking, which was saved by its mud walls; where bricks would have been shattered and shaken, these walls only threw out a cloud of dust.

As the Boers began to construct trenches round the city, Captain Fitzclarence was ordered to make a midnight sortie. Shortly after eleven o'clock the little party started on their perilous expedition; they crept on over the veldt in extended order, noiseless as possible, nearer and nearer to the Boer entrenchments. Those who watched them felt the weirdness of the scene—the deep silence, the mysterious noises of the veldt, the shadows caused by the bush. Now they were within a few yards; as they fixed bayonets they rushed forward with a cheer. Then figures showed in the Boer position; shots rang out, horses neighed and stampeded in fright. The Boers, taken by surprise, were unsteady and panic-struck; not many in the first trenches resisted long and stubbornly. Captain Fitzclarence, a splendid swordsman, laid four Boers who faced him on the ground; his men pursued with the bayonet.

[Pg 306]

Botha said next day that they thought a thousand men had been hurled against them, and the Boers in the other trenches fired as fast as they could at anything they could see or not see, many of the bullets going as far as the town.

This useless firing went on for a long time. When the attacking party arrived at the town again, they found they had lost only six men, eleven wounded, and two taken prisoners. Next day the Boers fired no gun until evening, and had plenty to do in collecting their wounded.

Several such night attacks were made in order to check the Boers' advance. After six weeks of siege, Colonel Baden-Powell said in a published order: "Provisions are not yet scarce, danger is purely incidental, and everything in the garden is lovely." He was always trying to cheer up his little garrison with humorous speeches and funny doings, with concerts and dances and theatrical entertainments. It was the knowledge of what he had done to keep up the spirits of his men and the spirits of Englishmen at home which caused such a frenzy of delight when Mafeking was finally relieved. What seemed a madness of joy was a sure instinct in the nation. It is true that Mafeking, through the foresight of Julius Weil, the contractor, possessed immense stocks of food; but as to its defences, dummy camps and dummy earthworks built to affright the Boers would not have availed unless the loyalty and bravery of the colonists had been equal to the severest strain. There was a wild desire to spike "Big Ben," but the Creusot was hedged round by barbed wire, guarded by mines, and flanked by Nordenfeldt guns. It seemed wearisome work, week after week, to find the Boers standing away four or five miles, while from their places of safety they launched their shells. Sometimes in the night Baden-Powell would go forth alone, and creep or stand and examine and ferret out the plans of the enemy. Often, as he returned, he would startle some dozing sentry, even as the great Napoleon, who once found a sentry asleep, and shouldered his musket until the fellow awoke with a start. "I will not tell, but don't do it again!"

[Pg 307]

Seven weary weeks have passed, and Mafeking still endures the straits of a siege and the terrors of a bombardment. The Boers have summoned to their aid the finest guns from their arsenal in Pretoria to breach and pound the earthworks; they pour shot and shell into the little town: but everybody is living below ground now.

But they have bethought them of a new engine of terror and death. All was dark outside, the good folk in Mafeking were going to bed in peace, when a deafening roar shook the town to its foundation of rock; a lurid glow of blood-red fire lit up square and street and veldt, while pattering down on roofs of corrugated iron dropped a hailstorm of sand and stones, and twigs broken from many trees. The frightened folk ran out to see what had happened, and they saw a huge column of fire and smoke rising from the ground to the north of Mafeking. After the great roar of explosion came a weird silence and then the rattle of falling fragments on roof after roof; and then the cry of terror, the shriek of those who had been aroused from sleep to face the great trumpet-call of the Day of Judgment: for this they imagined that awful phenomenon to portend.

[Pg 308]

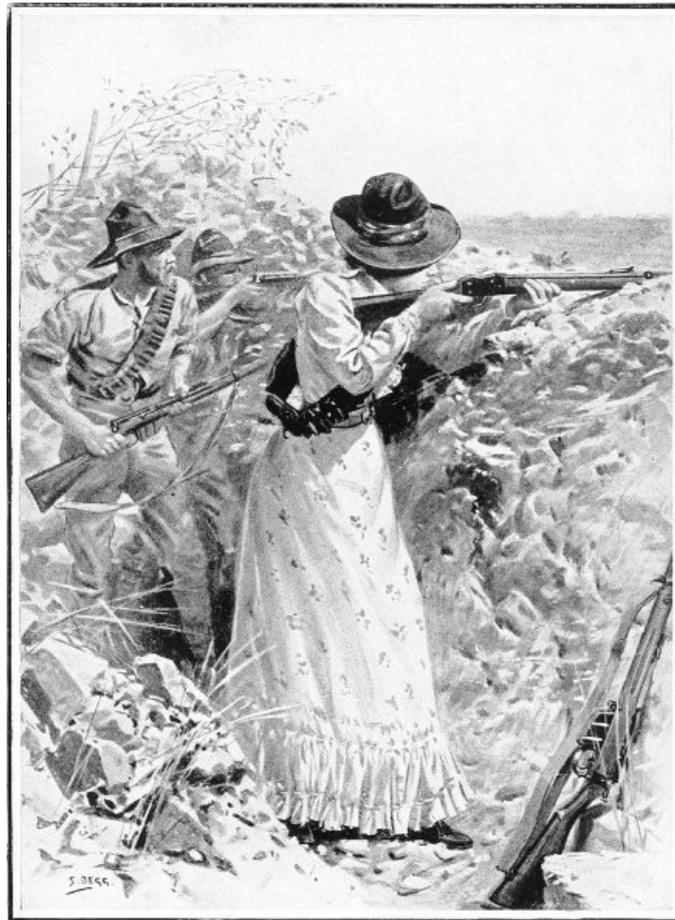
It was not until the morning that they knew what had caused the alarm. About half a mile up the line the ground was rent and torn; the rails were bent and scattered and flung about as by an earthquake.

On inquiry, they found that the Boers had filled a trolley with dynamite, and were to impel it forwards towards Mafeking. They lit the time-fuse, and proceeded to push the trolley up a slight incline. A few yards further, and it would reach the down incline, and would run merrily into town without need of further aid from muscle of man.

But they gave over pushing a little too soon; the trolley began to run back, and it was so dark they did not realize it until it had gathered way; then they called to one another, and some pushed, but others remembered the time-fuse, and stood aloof with their mouths open.

Very soon the time-fuse met the charge, and the dynamite hastened to work all the evil it could, regardless of friend or foe.

Piet Cronje was in command of the Boers now; he was vexed by this unlucky accident, but threatened to send to Pretoria for dynamite guns, just to make this absurd veldt-city jump and squeal. Cronje was willing to ride up and storm Mafeking, but the idle braggarts who formed the greater part of his army dared not face the steel; yet there was more than one lady in the trenches able and ready to use her rifle. The natives had suffered more from shell-fire than the whites. It is not easy to impress the Kaffir mind with the peril of a bursting shell; though the



AN AMAZON AT MAFEKING

Mrs. Davies, the lady sharpshooter, in the British trenches.

One such victim was heard to murmur feebly as they put him on the stretcher, "Boss, boss, me hurt very." They bear pain very stoically, and turn their brown pathetic eyes on those who come to help them, much as a faithful hound will look in his master's face for sympathy when in the agony of death. There were so many shells that missed human life that the people grew careless and ventured out too often.

Late in November a local wheelwright thought he would extract the charge from a Boer shell which had not exploded. The good man used a steel drill. For a time all went well, and his two companions bent over to watch the operation; then came a hideous row, a smell, a smoke, and the wheelwright, with both his comrades, was hurled into space.

The Boers had not spared the hospital or the convent. The poor Sisters had had a fearful time; the children's dormitory was in ruins, and their home riddled with holes. Still the brave Sisters stuck to their post, comforted the dying, nursed the sick, and set an example of holy heroism. Here is an extract from a letter describing a scene with the Kaffirs:

"It is amusing to take a walk into the stadt, the place of rocks, and watch the humours of the Kaffirs, some 8,000 in number. Now and then they hold a meeting, when their attire is a funny mixture of savagery and semi-civilization. You come upon a man wearing a fine pair of check trousers, and nothing else, but mighty proud of his check; another will wear nothing but a coat, with the sleeves tied round his neck; some wear hats adorned with an ostrich feather, and a small loin-cloth. My black friend was such a swell among them that he wore one of my waistcoats, a loin-cloth, and a pair of tennis shoes. He wore the waistcoat in order to disport a silver chain, to which was attached an old watch that refused to go. But it was a very valuable ornament to Setsedi, and won him great influence in the kraal. Yet when my friend Setsedi wanted to know the time of day, if he was alone, he just glanced at the shadow of a tree; or if in company, he lugged out his non-ticker, and made believe to consult it in conjunction with the sun. The sun might be wrong—that was the impression he wished to create—and it was perhaps more prudent to correct solar time by this relic of Ludgate Circus. Thus Setsedi, like other prominent politicians, did not disdain to play upon the credulity of his compatriots.

"Sometimes on a Sunday afternoon, when the Boers were keeping the Sabbath and no shells were flying around, the children of the veldt would begin a dance. They formed into groups of forty or fifty, and began with hand-clapping, jumping, and stamping of bare feet. The old crones came capering round, grinning and shrieking delight in high voices apt to crack for age. From

stamping the young girls passed on to swaying bodies, every limb vibrating with rising emotion, as they flung out sinewy arms with languorous movement; then more wild grew the dance, more loud the cries of the dancers, as they threw themselves into striking postures, glided, shifted, retreated, laughed, or cried.

"I had been watching them for some time when Setsedi came up to me and said:

"'Baas, I go now to mark some cows for to-night; will you come?'

"'What! has the big white chief given you leave to make a raid?' I asked.

"'Yes, Maremma—yes; we are to go out to-night, and bring in a herd from beyond the brickfields yonder—if we can.'

 [Pg 311]

"'And you go now, this afternoon, to mark them down, and spy out the ground?'

"He smiled, showing a set of splendid teeth, pulled out his watch, hit it back and front with his knuckles till it rattled to the very centre of the works, spat carefully, and replied with some pride:

"'We brought in twenty oxen last week; the chief very pleased with us, and gave us a nice share, Maremma.'

"Setsedi addressed me thus when he was pleased with himself and the universe: Maremma means sir.

"'Well, Setsedi,' said I, 'if I can get leave, I would like to go out with you to-night. May I bring my boy, Malasata?'

"The idea of my asking his permission gave Setsedi such a lift up in his own opinion of himself that he actually reflected with his chin in the air before he finally gave his royal assent to my proposition.

"Time and place were settled, and I went back to the club for a wash. These black chaps, if they don't help us much in fighting, have proved themselves very useful in providing us now and then with rich, juicy beef from the Boer herds that stray about the veldt. When I went home and told Malasata he was to accompany me to-night on a cattle-raiding foray, like a true Kaffir, he concealed his delight, and only said, 'Á-hã, Á-hã, Unkos!' but he could not prevent his great brown eyes from sparkling with pleasure. When it was pitch-dark we started—about a score of us—and crept along silently past the outposts, word having been passed that the raiders were to go and come with a Kaffir password or countersign.

"Most of the Kaffirs were stark naked, the better to evade the grasp of any Boer who might clutch at them. A sergeant had been told off to accompany them; he and I were the only white men out that night. After an hour's careful climbing and crawling, stopping to listen and feel the wind, the better to gauge our direction, Setsedi came close to my ear and whispered:

 [Pg 312]

"'We can smell them, Baas; plenty good smell. You and sergeant stay here; sit down, wait a bit; boots too much hullabaloo; too loud talkee!'

"It was disappointing, but we quite saw the need of this caution, and we neither of us saw the necessity of walking barefoot upon a stony veldt; so we sat down in the black silence, and waited. Yet it was not so silent as it seemed: we could hear the bull-frogs croaking a mile away in the river-bed, and sometimes a distant tinkle of a cow-bell came to us on the soft breeze, or a meercat rustled in the grass after a partridge. In about half an hour we heard something; was it a reed-buck? Then came the falling of a stone, the crackling of a stick as it broke under their tread; then we rose and walked towards our black friends.

"Three or four Kaffirs were shepherding each ox, 'getting a move' on him by persuasion or fist-law. Sometimes one ox would be restive and 'moo' to his mates, or gallop wildly hither and thither; but always the persistent, ubiquitous Kaffir kept in touch with his beast, talking to him softly like a man and a brother, and guiding him the way he should go. And all this time the Boers were snoring not 300 yards off, sentry and all, very probably. But it would not do to count upon their negligence; any indiscreet noise might awake a trenchful of Mauser-armed men, and bring upon us a volley of death.

"When we had got the cattle well out of earshot of the Boer lines, the Kaffirs urged on the oxen by running up and pinching them, but without uttering a sound. As we drew near to the native stadt, a great number of natives who had been lying concealed in the veldt rose up to help their friends drive the raided cattle into the enclosure, and the sergeant went to head-quarters with the report of twenty-four head of cattle safely housed."

 [Pg 313]

The besieged had persevered in their "dug-outs" until May, 1900, being weary and sometimes sick, faint with poor food, and hopes blighted. They had been asked by Lord Roberts to endure a little longer; Kimberley had been relieved, and their turn would come soon.

Meanwhile, President Kruger's nephew, Commandant Eloff, had come into the Boer camp with men who had once served as troopers at Mafeking, and who knew much about the fortifications. Eloff made a skilful attack upon the town on the 12th of May, and was successful in capturing a fort, Colonel Hore, and twenty-three men. This attack had been urgent, because news had reached the Boers that the British relief column had reached Vryburg on the 10th of May, and Vryburg is only ninety-six miles south of Mafeking. During the fight Mr. J. A. Hamilton, not

knowing that the fort had been taken, thought that he would ride across to see Colonel Hore. It was a short ride from where he was—only a few hundred yards. The bullets whistled near his head, and he scampered across the open to reach cover. It was a bad light, and smoke was drifting about, but he saw men standing about the head-quarters or sitting on the stoep facing the town. As he rode his horse was struck, and swerved violently; some one seized his bridle and shouted "Surrender!" They were Boers, and amongst them were Germans, Italians, and Frenchmen. Many speaking at once, they ordered him to hold up his hands, give up his revolver, get off his horse.

"We had better all take cover, I think," said Hamilton, as English bullets were falling rather near them.

Then they took him within the walls. But he had not yet obeyed any of their orders.

"Will you hold your hands up?" said one Boer, thrusting a rifle into his ribs with a grin.

[Pg 314]

"With pleasure, under the circumstances," he replied, trying to smile.

"Will you kindly hand over that revolver?" said another.

"What! and hold my hands up at the same time?"

They were dull; they did not see the joke, but shouted, "Get off!"

Some one unstrapped the girths, and Mr. Hamilton rolled to the ground. It was only then that he saw his horse had been shot in the shoulder, and he asked them to put the poor beast out of his pain.

"No, no! Your men will do that soon enough," said they.

The poor animal stood quietly looking at him, as he says, with a sad, pathetic, inquiring look in his eyes, as if he were asking, "What can you do for me? I assure you my shoulder gives me awful pain."

Hamilton was taken inside the fort and made prisoner. When, later in the day, he came out, he found his poor horse lying with his throat cut and seven bullet-wounds in his body.

There were thirty-three prisoners crowded in a small, ill-ventilated store-room, and they grew very hungry. As dusk settled down they began to hear echoes of desperate fighting outside. Bullets came through the wall and roofing, splintering window and door; through the grating of the windows they could see limping figures scurry and scramble; they heard voices cursing them and urging Eloff to handcuff and march the prisoners across the line of fire as a screen for them in their retreat. Then the firing died down, and the Boers seemed to have rallied; then came a fresh outburst of heavy firing, and then a sudden silence. Eloff rushed to the door.

"Where is Colonel Hore?"

[Pg 315]

"Here!"

"Sir, if you can induce the town to cease fire, we will surrender."

It was quite unexpected, this turn of events. No one spoke. Then Eloff said:

"I give myself up as a hostage. Get them to cease fire."

The prisoners went out, waved handkerchiefs, shouted, "Surrender! Cease fire, boys."

When this was done sixty-seven Boers laid down their rifles, and the prisoners stacked them up in their late prison.

Commandant Eloff was now a prisoner instead of being master of Mafeking; his partial success he owed to his own dash and gallantry, his failure to the half-hearted support of General Snyman. He dined at head-quarters, and a bottle of champagne was opened to console him and distinguish this day of surprises.

On the 16th of May there was great excitement in the town; the great activity in the Boer laagers, the clouds of dust rising in the south, all showed that something new and strange was coming. News had come of General Mahon having joined Colonel Plumer a few miles up the river. "When will they come?" everybody was asking. About half-past two General Mahon's guns were heard, and the smoke of the bursting shells could be seen in the north-west.

In the town people were taking things very calmly. Had they not enjoyed this siege now for seven months, when it had been expected to last three weeks at the most? They were playing off the final match in the billiard tournament at the club. Then came a hubbub, and Major Pansera galloped by with the guns to get a parting shot at the retiring Boers.

Then fell the dusk, and the guns came back. Everybody went to dinner very elated and happy.

[Pg 316]

"By noon to-morrow we shall be relieved," they said.

It was now about seven o'clock; the moon was shining brightly in the square.

"Hello! what's this? Who are you, then?"

There were eight mounted men sitting on horseback outside the head-quarters office.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" asked a man in the crowd.

"We are under Major Karie Davis with a despatch from General Mahon."

"Oh!"

"Yes, we've come to relieve you fellows; but you don't seem to care much whether you are relieved or not."

Then the news travelled round the town; a great crowd gathered, and round after round of cheers broke out. The troopers were surrounded by enthusiastic citizens, cross-questioned, congratulated, slapped on the back, shaken by the hand, and offered—coffee!

Major Davis came out and called for cheers for the garrison; then all fell to hallooing of such anthems as "Rule Britannia" and "God save the Queen."

Then the troopers of the Imperial Light Horse were taken in to supper.

About two in the morning the troops entered Mafeking—not quite 2,000 men; but when the townsfolk, hearing the noise, ran out into the starry, moonlit night, they saw such a host of horses, mules, and bullocks, such a line of waggons and camp-followers, and such a beautiful battery of bright Royal Horse and Canadian Artillery and Maxims that life seemed worth living at last. Those who did not laugh quietly went home and cried for joy. They had earned their day of delight.

Mafeking had endured 1,498 shells from the 100-pound Creusot; besides this, they had had to dodge 21,000 odd shells of smaller calibre. Men who saw Ladysmith said that the ruin at Mafeking was far greater.

[Pg 317]

Lord Roberts had, with his wonted generosity, sent a mob of prime bullocks and a convoy of other luxuries. So when the Queen's birthday came, as it soon did, the town made merry and were very thankful.

England was thankful too, for although it was only a little town on the veldt, every eye at home had been upon the brave defenders who, out of so little material, had produced so grand a defence.

It is not too much to say that Colonel Baden-Powell and his gallant company had not only kept the flag flying; they had done far more: they had kept up the spirits of a nation beginning to be humiliated by defeat after defeat, when most of the nations of Europe were jeering at her, and wishing for her downfall. But God gave us victory in the end.

In part from J. A. Hamilton's "Siege of Mafeking," by kind permission of Messrs. Methuen and Co.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SIEGE OF KIMBERLEY (1899-1900)

[Pg 318]

The diamond-mines—Cecil Rhodes comes in—Streets barricaded—Colonel Kekewich sends out the armoured train—Water got from the De Beers Company's mines—A job lot of shells—De Beers can make shells too—Milner's message—Beef or horse?—Long Cecil—Labram killed—Shelter down the mines—A capture of dainties—Major Rodger's adventures—General French comes to the rescue—Outposts astonished to see Lancers and New Zealanders.

Kimberley is the second largest town in Cape Colony, and is the great diamond-mining district, having a population of about 25,000 whites. Mr. Cecil Rhodes was the Chairman of the De Beers Mines Company, which pays over a million a year in wages.

Kimberley could not at first believe war to be possible between the Dutch and English, though they saw the regular troops putting up earthworks and loopholed forts all round the town. Next a Town Guard was formed to man the forts, while the 600 regulars and artillery were to be camped in a central position ready for emergencies. Cecil Rhodes arrived the last day the railway was open, and began at once to raise a regiment at his own expense—the Kimberley Light Horse. All the streets were blocked with barricades and barbed wires to prevent the Boers rushing in. The main streets had a narrow opening left in the centre guarded by volunteers, who had orders to let none pass without a signed permit. Rhodes used to ride far out on the veldt, dressed in white flannel trousers, though the Boers hated him, and would dearly have liked to pot him at a safe distance.

[Pg 319]

Colonel Kekewich was in command—a man of Devon, and very popular with his men. On the 24th of October they had their first taste of fighting, when a patrol came across a force of Boers who were out with the object of raiding the De Beers' cattle. Kekewich, from his conning-tower, could see his men in difficulties, and sent out the armoured train, and the Boers were speedily dispersed. There were many wounded on both sides, and the Mauser bullet was found to be able to drill a neat hole through bone and muscle, in some cases without doing so much damage as the old bullets of lower velocity in earlier wars.

At the beginning of the siege it was feared that water might fail, but in three weeks the De Beers

Company had contrived to supply the town with water from an underground stream in one of their mines.

The bombardment began on the 7th of November, and, as at Mafeking, did not do much damage, for the shells, being fired from Spytfontein, four miles away, and being a "job lot" supplied to the Transvaal Government, did not often reach the houses, and often forgot to burst. So that, it is said, an Irish policeman, hearing a shell explode in the street near him, remarked calmly to himself: "The blazes! and what will they be playing at next?"

But by the 11th the Boers had brought their guns nearer, had found the range, and were becoming a positive nuisance to quiet citizens.

Sunday was a day of rest and no shelling took place, but on other days it began at daylight, and, with pauses for meals and a siesta, continued till nine or ten o'clock at night. As usual, there were extraordinary escapes. One shell just missed the dining-room of the Queen's Hotel, where a large company were at dinner, and, choosing the pantry close beside it, killed two cats. Luckily there was time between the sound of the gun and the arrival of the shell to get into cover.

[Pg 320]

The De Beers Company, having many clever engineers and artisans, soon began to make their own shells, which had "With C. J. R.'s Compts." stamped upon them—rather a grim jest when they did arrive.

On the 28th November Colonel Scott Turner, who commanded the mounted men, was killed in a sortie. He was a very brave, but rather reckless, officer, and was shot dead close to the Boer fort.

Sometimes our own men would go out alone, spying and sniping, and in many cases they were shot by their own comrades by mistake.

By December the milk-farms outside the town had been looted, and fresh milk began to be very scarce; even tinned milk could not be bought without a doctor's order, countersigned by the military officer who was in charge of the stores. The result was that many young children died.

At Christmas Sir Alfred Milner sent a message to Kimberley, wishing them a *lucky* Christmas. This gave the garrison matter for thought, and the townsfolk wondered if England had forgotten their existence.

Those who could spent some time and care on their gardens, for they tried to find a nice change from wurzels to beet, and even beans and lettuce. For scurvy, the consequence of eating too much meat without green stuff, had already threatened the town. Those who wanted food had to go to the market hall and fetch it, showing a ticket which mentioned how many persons were to be supplied. When horse-flesh first began to be used by the officers, Colonel Peakman, presiding at mess, said cheerfully: "Gentlemen, very sorry we can't supply you all with beef to-day. Beef this end, very nice joint of horse the other end. Please try it." But the officers all applied for beef, as the Colonel had feared they would.

[Pg 321]

Then suddenly, when all had finished, he banged his hand on the table, and said: "By Jove! I see I have made a mistake in the joints. This is the capital joint of horse which I am carving! Dear! dear! I wanted so to taste the horse, but—what! not so bad after all? Then you will forgive me, I am sure, for being so stupid."

All the same, some of them thought that the Colonel had made the mistake on purpose, just to get them past the barrier of prejudice.

Towards the end of January the bombardment grew more severe; the shells came from many quarters, and some were shrapnel, which caused many wounds. The new gun made by the De Beers Company did its best to reply, but it was only one against eight or nine. The Boers confessed that they directed their fire to the centre of the town, where there were mostly only women and children, for the men were away from home in the forts or behind the earthworks. The townsfolk tried to improve their shell-proof places, but most of them were deadly holes, hot and stuffy beyond description, but that made by Mr. Rhodes around the Public Gardens was far superior to the rest. The De Beers gun was named "Long Cecil," after Mr. Rhodes, and was about 10 feet long; it threw a shell weighing 28 pounds. When it was first fired, the great question was, "Will it burst?"

But the Boers were surprised, when they sat at breakfast in a safe spot, to hear shells dropping around like ripe apples. That breakfast was left unfinished, as an intercepted letter informed the garrison.

However, the Boers soon placed a bigger gun near Kimberley, and shells began to fall in the market-place very freely.

[Pg 322]

In February the garrison had a great loss. The last shell of that day fell into the Grand Hotel and killed George Labram, the De Beers chief engineer. It was Labram who had arranged for the new water-supply, who had made the new shells, and planned "Long Cecil." He was to Kimberley what Kondrachenko was to the Russians at Port Arthur—a man of many inventions, an American, ready at all points. He had just gone upstairs to wash before dinner, when a shell entered and cut him to ribbons, so that he died instantly. A servant of the hotel was in his room at the time, and was not touched.

Towards the middle of February notices signed by Cecil Rhodes were posted up all over the town

to the effect that women and children should take shelter in the two big mines. So very soon the streets were full of people running to the mines with babies, blankets, bread, and bedding. The crowd was so great that it took from 5.30 p.m. to midnight to lower them all down the shafts. Kimberley mine took more than 1,000, the De Beers mine 1,500, and all were lowered without a single accident.

One day some natives came in with a story that the Boers had deserted the fort Alexandersfontein. Spies were sent out to investigate, and reported it to be a fact, so some of the Town Guard, with help from the Lancashires, sallied out and took possession of the fort. A few Boers who had been left there were wounded or taken prisoners.

"We will wait a bit in this fort, boys, to see what will turn up," said the Captain; and in a short time they saw four waggons coming up, which were driven unsuspectingly right into his hands. Other waggons followed, all full of most delicious dainties for Boer stomachs, but likely to be received in starving Kimberley with greater enthusiasm—such things as poultry, grain, butter, fresh vegetables, and bacon. The waggons were drawn by fat bullocks—a sight for mirth and jollity.

[Pg 323]

In the afternoon the poor Boers knew what they had missed, and some very spiteful bullets were sent across for several hours.

Major Rodger had sent some men to spy out the country, and was waiting for their return. Presently he saw two men advancing towards him, and thinking they were his own men he rode up to them. On drawing near he saw they were Boers. His main body of men were far behind, and he realized that if he galloped away he would be shot, so he quietly walked his horse up to them. One of the Boers said: "Who are you?" "Only one of the fighting-men from Kimberley," the Major replied. They did not draw their revolvers, they did not cry "Hands up!" and seize him by the collar—no, all they did was to utter a brief swear, turn their horses' heads, and scamper over the veldt as fast as they could, stooping over the pommel to avoid the Major's fire. But half a mile away they hit upon some of their own comrades, fired a few volleys, broke the Major's arm, and retired.

Major Rodger, however, had not done his day's work, and never told his men he had been shot until they returned to Kimberley in the evening. So much for a Kimberley volunteer!

Meanwhile, the little folks and the women deep down in the mine—some 1,500 feet—were busy devouring sandwiches of corned-beef and horse, and buckets of tea and coffee, with condensed milk, were lowered down too. The large chamber cut out of the rock was lit with electric light, and was not very hot, though it was crammed with children, many of whom were lying on rugs or blankets; they lay so thick on the floor that walking amongst them was the feat of an acrobat. But they were safe down there! No ghastly sights of mangled limbs met their gaze, no whizz of deadly shell, no scream of pain reached them there. It was worth something to have escaped the horrors of a siege, and to feel no nervous tremors, no cowardly panic, no dull despair.

[Pg 324]

Meanwhile Lord Roberts had not forgotten Kimberley. A force of some 5,000 sabres, led by General French, with two batteries of Horse Artillery, had galloped in the dead of night to the Modder River. Here a small Boer force fled from before them, and ever on through the quivering heat rode Hussars, Dragoons, and Lancers, until both men and horses fell out exhausted on the veldt. On the third day they came close to some kopjes, or hills, on which Boers were posted, who stared in amazement at the sight of the 9th Lancers sweeping in open order round the base of the hills. A hundred miles they had ridden with scant food and scant water, so that the Boers might have been still more surprised to see many a trooper walking by his tired steed, and even carrying the saddle.

Dr. Conan Doyle tells us that "a skirmish was in progress on the 15th of February between a party of the Kimberley Light Horse and some Boers, when a new body of horsemen, unrecognized by either side, appeared upon the plain, and opened fire upon the enemy. One of the strangers rode up to the Kimberley patrol, and said:

"What the dickens does K.L.H. mean on your shoulder-strap?"

"It means Kimberley Light Horse. Who are you?"

"I am one of the New Zealanders."

How puzzled that member of the Kimberley force must have been—a New Zealander out on the African veldt!

Soon the little clouds of dust on the horizon drew hundreds of townfolk to the earthworks, and as the glint of spear-head and scabbard flashed out of the cloud, and the besieged garrison knew their troubles were over, men waved their hats and shouted, and tearful, laughing ladies flocked round the first men who rode in, and nearly pulled them out of the saddle. Then they set to and hauled the rest out of the mines, finishing that job well by midnight.

[Pg 325]

For 124 days Kimberley had been besieged. The Boers had never once attacked the town, though not more than 550 mounted men were latterly available for offensive work; these, with the Town Guard, Lancashires, and Kimberley Rifles, made a total of 3,764. Colonel Kekewich might well look radiantly happy; he had administered everything with strict justice, and had earned the respect and admiration of all, while Cecil Rhodes and the De Beers officials had magnificently met and countered every difficulty with generous skill and unflagging energy.

CHAPTER XXV

THE SIEGE OF LADYSMITH (1899-1900)

[Pg 326]

Ladysmith—Humours of the shell—The *Lyre* tries to be funny—Attack on Long Tom—A brave bugler—Practical jokes—The black postman—A big trek—Last shots—Some one comes—Saved at last.

Ladysmith, where Sir George White and his men detained the Boers so long, is a scattered town lying on a lake-like plain, and surrounded by an amphitheatre of rocky hills. To the north-west was Pepworth Hill, where the Boer Long Tom was placed; north-east of the town, and four miles away, was Unbulwana: here the Boers had dragged a large siege-gun.

South of the town the Klip River runs close under the hills, and here many caves were dug as hiding-places for the residents. There were many women and children there all day long. On the 3rd of November the wires were cut; Ladysmith was isolated and besieged. On the next day it was discussed whether General Joubert's proposal should be accepted—that the civilians, women, and children should go out and form a camp five miles off under the white flag. Archdeacon Barker got up, and said: "Our women and children shall stay with the men under the Union Jack, and those who would do them harm may come to them at their peril."

The meeting cheered the tall, white-haired priest, and agreed thereto.

The townsfolk soon got used to shell-fire, but they spent most of the day by the river in their cool caves. There was a Dr. Starke, a visitor from Torquay, who used to go about with a fishing-rod, and spend hours by the river—a kindly man, who one day found a cat mewing piteously at a deserted house, and, making friends with it, used to carry it about with him. This gentleman, having the cat in his arms, was standing near the door of the Royal Hotel talking to Mr. McHugh, when a shell came through the roof, passed through two bedrooms, and whizzed out at the front-door, catching the poor doctor just above the knees. His friend escaped without a scratch. Dr. Starke had always tried to avoid the peril of shells, and they used to banter him on his over-anxiety. It is strange how many hits and how many misses are in the nature of a surprise.

[Pg 327]

Late in November a shell entered a room in which a little child was sleeping, and knocked one of the walls of the bedroom clean out. In the cloud of dust and smoke the parents heard the cry of the little babe, rushed in, and found her absolutely untouched, while 20 yards away a splinter of the same shell killed a man of the Natal Police. At the same house later in the evening two friends called to congratulate the mother; they were being shown two pet rabbits, when a splinter of a shell came in and cut in two one of the rabbits.

One day a Natal Mounted Rifleman was lying in his tent, stretched himself, yawned, and turned over. At that instant a shell struck the spot where he had just been lying, made a hole in the ground, and burst. The tent was blown away from its ropes, his pillow and clothes were tossed into the air. Poor fellow! his comrades ran towards him, and found him sitting up, pale, but unharmed. They could hardly believe their senses. "Why, man, you ought to have been blown to smithereens!" Another day a trooper of the 18th Hussars was rolled over, horse and all, yet neither of them suffered any severe injury.

[Pg 328]

December came, and by then the poor women were looking harassed and worn: so many grievous sights, so many perils to try and avoid, so many losses to weep over.

Some of the correspondents brought out a local paper, the *Ladysmith Lyre*, to enliven the spirits of the dull and timid and sick. The news may be sampled by the following extracts:

"*November 14.*—General French has twice been seen in Ladysmith disguised as a Kaffir. His force is entrenched behind Bulwen. Hurrah!

"*November 20.*—H.M.S. *Powerful* ran aground in attempting to come up Klip River; feared total loss. [Klip River is 2 feet deep in parts.]

"*November 21.*—We hear on good authority that the gunner of Long Tom is Dreyfus.

"*November 26.*—Boers broke Sabbath firing on our bathing parties. Believed so infuriated by sight of people washing that they quite forgot it was Sunday."

The *Ladysmith Lyre* had come out three times before December.

On the 7th of December, at 10 p.m., 400 men, who had volunteered for the task, were ordered to turn out, carrying rifles and revolvers only, and to make no noise. A small party of Engineers were to be with them. Their object was to destroy Long Tom, which was now removed from Pepworth to Lombard's Kop, on the north-east. They started when the moon went down on a fine starlight night. By a quarter to two a.m. they were close to the foot of Lombard's Kop, but the Boer pickets had not been alarmed. General Hunter, who led them, explained how 100 of the Imperial Light Horse and 100 of the Carbineers would steal up the mountain and take the Boer guns, while 200 of the Border Mounted (on foot) would go round the hill to protect their comrades from a flank attack. The Engineers, carrying gun-cotton and tools, followed close after the storming party. As our men were creeping quietly up the hill on hands and knees, amazed that there were no outposts, a sudden challenge rang out behind them: "Wis kom dar?"

[Pg 329]

Had the Boer sentry been dreaming in the drowsy night?

“Wis (pronounced ve) kom dar? Wis kom dar?” he impatiently shouted. Our men sat down on the slope above him, grinning to themselves, and made no answer.

“Wis kom dar?” He was getting angry and frightened this time, by the tone of it.

“Take that fellow in the wind with the butt of a rifle, and stop his mouth.”

Then the Boer knew who they were, and yelled to his comrades for help; then they heard him say to his after-rider: “Bring my peart—my horse!” and he was safely off!

Further up the hill a shrill voice shouted: “Martinus, Carl Joubert, der Rovinek!” (the Red-neck). At this our men clambered up like goats, while a volley was fired, and bullets whizzed over their heads.

“Stick to me, guides!” shouted General Hunter.

As they neared the top Colonel Edwards, of the volunteers, shouted: “Now then, boys, fix bayonets, and give them a taste of the steel.” This was meant for the Dutchmen to hear, for there was not a bayonet amongst the assaulting party.

The Boers do not like cold steel, and they were heard slithering and stumbling down the other side of the mountain. Now they were up on the top. There stood Long Tom pointing at high heaven, loaded ready, and laid to a range of 8,000 yards, or over four miles. Not a Boer was to be seen or heard anywhere.

[Pg 330]

Quickly the Engineers got to work. Some removed the breech-block, others filled the barrel with gun-cotton, plugged both muzzle and breech, and ran a pretty necklace of gun-cotton round the dainty ribs of the barrel. Long Tom was looking quite unconscious of their attentions, and shone in the starlight.

He had been set on solid masonry, was mounted on high iron wheels, and a short railway line had been laid down for purposes of locomotion. A thick bomb-proof arch was built over him, and huge pyramids of shells were piled up round about him. A Howitzer and a field-gun, which stood close by, were then destroyed, and a Maxim was reserved to be brought away.

In about twenty minutes the Engineers announced that they were ready.

Like goats they had swarmed about him, and now it was Long Tom’s turn to say “Baa!”

The firing fuse was attached. “Keep back! keep back!”

There was heard a dull roar from the monster, and the whole mountain flared out with a flash as if of lightning.

“Had the gun-cotton done its work?” They ran back to inspect.

“Barrel rent, sir; part of the muzzle torn away.” Long Tom has fired his last shot. The ladies of Ladysmith will be very thankful for this small favour. The men came back, most of them carrying small trophies.

Down they scrambled; no barbed wire, no impediments. Who would have thought that these English would stir out o’ night? Had they no desire to sleep and rest? But when they got down they found some had been wounded. Major Henderson had been twice hit—thumb almost torn away, and a couple of slugs in his thigh. Yet he had never halted, and was the first to tackle the gun. A few privates were also hit, but only one so seriously as to be left behind in care of a surgeon.

[Pg 331]

Great rejoicing at breakfast, and congratulations from Sir George White.

But the time wore on, and sickness came—far worse and more fatal than shell-fire. There were hundreds of fever patients in the hospital outside at Intombi Spruit.

Fever—typhoid, enteric—and no stimulants, no jellies, no beef-tea!

The only luxury was a small ration of tinned milk. Scores of convalescents died of sheer starvation. The doctors were overworked, and they, too, broke down.

No wonder that many in the garrison chafed at inaction, found fault with their superiors, and asked bitterly: “Are we to stay here till we rot?”

By New Year’s Eve Ladysmith had endured some 8,000 rounds of shell; many buildings had been hit half a dozen times. On New Year’s Day an officer of the Lancers was sleeping in his house, when a shell exploded and buried him in a heap of timber. When they pulled the mess off him, he sat up, rubbed the dust out of his eyes, and asked, “What o’clock is it?” He was unhurt.

There was a small bugler of the 5th Lancers who was the envy of every boy in the town. This boy was in the battle at Elands Laagte, and when a regiment seemed wavering he sounded the call, the advance, the charge. The result was that that regiment faced the music, and did valiantly. A General rode up to the bugler after the fight, and took his name, saying: “You are a plucky boy. I shall report you!”

For this boy, after sounding the charge, had drawn his revolver, rode into the thick of the fight on

his Colonel's flank, and shot three Boers one after the other.

Scores of officers gave the boy a sovereign for his pluck, and he wore his cap all through the siege in a very swagger fashion. [Pg 332]

Some of the regiments had their pet dogs in Ladysmith.

When the King's Royals went into action their regimental dog went with them. He had never been out of the fighting line, and had never had a scratch, but seemed to enjoy the fun of barking and looking back, saying, "Come on—faster!"

There was another, a little red mongrel, who insisted on seeing every phase of warfare; he had lost a leg in India—it was so smashed up that the doctor had to cut it off. There he was, pottering about on three legs, full of inquisitive ardour, and when not engaged on sanitary inspection work, always to the front when the guns were at it. This was the Hussars' dog.

The Boers were fond of playing practical jokes. On Christmas Day they had fired a shell containing a plum-pudding into the artillery camp. On the hundred and first day of the siege one of the Boers on Bulwana Hill called up the signallers at Cæsar's Camp, and flashed the message, "A hundred and one, not out."

The Manchesters flashed back: "Ladysmith still batting."

"What is the use of shelling these Britishers?" once said a Boer artilleryman. "They just go on playing cricket. Look yonder!"

Ah! but that was in the early days of the siege, when they had some strength in them. Later, after having short rations of horse-flesh, they could hardly creep from hill to hill.

Another day a heliograph message came: "How do you like horse-meat?"

"Fine," was the answer, "When the horses are finished we shall eat baked Boer!"

It became very difficult to get letters through the Boer pickets; they had so many ways of trapping the native runners. The Kaffir paths were watched; bell-wires were doubled—one placed close to the ground, the other at the height of a man's head. When the Kaffir touched one of these an electric bell rang on one of the kopjes, or hills, and swarms of guards swooped down to intercept him. But the Kaffir, being paid £15 a journey, did his best too. [Pg 333]

He left the outer line of our pickets at dusk, and flitted away silently to the nearest native kraal; he handed in the letters to the black chief, and wandered on empty-handed towards General Buller's camp. Meanwhile a simple Kaffir girl would pass the Boer camp, calabash on head, going to fetch water from the spring in the early morning. The letters were in the empty water-vessel!

She put them under a stone by the spring, and another maiden would come from the other side, and take them on in her calabash or mealie-jar.

At last the native runner would call for them and carry the letters to the English lines.

On the 6th of January a determined attack was made by the pick of the Boers upon Cæsar's Camp. Our pickets in Buller's relieving army could hear the sound of the guns, muffled by distance; officers and men gathered in groups on the hill-sides and listened intently to the long low growl of the rifle. Then came a helio message from Sir George White to General Clery: "Attacked on every side." The nervous strain on these men, condemned to inaction after each new failure to cross the Tugela and fight their way into Ladysmith, became almost insupportable. They sat outside the big camp, gazing on Bulwana with telescopes and field-glasses, hardly daring to utter their thoughts. A second helio was flashed across: "Enemy everywhere repulsed; fighting continues." Then tongues were once more loosened, and hope arose as the distant firing sank to a sullen minute-gun. But half an hour later the booming of big guns on Bulwana was renewed, and away to the west arose a fierce rifle fire. "Attack renewed; enemy reinforced," winked the helio from the top of Convent Hill, and again a dumb despair fell on the watchers. "Very hard pressed," came the third message, firing our soldiers with indignant rage, as they thought of the poor part they had hitherto taken in relieving Ladysmith. But at length the heroism of the Devons, the Imperial Light Horse, and others of the Ladysmith garrison beat back the Boers' desperate assault. [Pg 334]

The Devons had climbed up the hill late in the afternoon to avenge their fallen comrades. They had charged straight up the hill in a line, but a deadly fire at short range brought down dozens of them as they rushed the top. However, there was no wavering in the Devons, but they pressed forward at the double with the steel advanced, and only a few Boers waited for that disagreeable operation in war. There was a terrific hailstorm going on as Colonel Park halted his men just below the crest: it was a moment to try the nerves of the strongest. Once over that lip of hillside and a fiercer storm than hail would meet them in the face, and call many of them to their last account. No wonder many a hand went for the water-bottle, and little nervous tricks of foot and hand betrayed the tension of the moment.

"Now then, Devons, get ready!" The men gripped their rifles in the old way of drill, quick and altogether, brows were knit, teeth set, and away they went into the jaws of death.

"Steady, Devons, steady!" No need to bid them be steady. They bore down upon the Boers with dogged and irresistible force, and the Boers turned and ran. Many an English officer fell that day, [Pg 335]

and several doctors were wounded while doing their duty.

The Boers who fought most fiercely were the old Dopper Boers, who nursed a bitter hatred for all Englishmen. These men would refuse all kind help even when lying hurt. They were suspected sometimes of cruelty to our wounded; for more than one of our men was found covered with bruises, as though he had been kicked or beaten to death. But these things were exceptional, and such conduct was confined to the most ignorant and uncivilized of the old Boers.

Many of the wounded lay where they fell for twenty-four hours and more. The Kaffir boys as they dug the long shallow graves would hum a low refrain; above wheeled the vultures, looking down upon the slain. The Boers confessed that it was the worst day they had ever had, and five days after the battle they were still searching for their dead. Our dead numbered about 150.

The Imperial Light Horse, containing many young Englishmen in their ranks, greatly distinguished themselves. The Brigadier commanding in the fight wrote to their chief officer: "No one realizes more clearly than I do that your men were the backbone of the defence during that day's long fighting." But sickness carried off far more than rifle or cannon. The Imperial Light Horse, who came to Ladysmith 475 strong, were now reduced to 150; the Devons, from 984 had gone down to 480.

As Majuba Day was coming near the messages brought by the runners became more hopeful: "All going well," "Cronje is surrounded."

But time after time came the news of Buller's failure on the Tugela, and with every piece of ill news came reduced rations at Ladysmith. The artillery horses were nearly all eaten, the cavalry horses too; those that remained were too weak even to raise a trot. Would Buller ever cut his way through? The garrison were beginning to despond. If they had to fight a fierce battle again like that at Cæsar's Camp a few weeks ago, when the pick of the Boer forces tried to take it by storm, would they not reel and faint for very want of food? Then, when all looked dark, and the far-off sound of Buller's guns seemed to be dying away in another failure, something happened.

[Pg 336]

Men on outpost duty upon the hills round Ladysmith saw what seemed to them to be a long white snake crawling over the veldt. Officers seized their glasses, and started with an ejaculation of surprise, for what they saw was a long sinuous line of white-tilted waggons. "It's the Boers coming away from the Tugela! By Jove! it's a great trek!" Yes, the enemy were in full retreat at last; Buller had hammered them in so many places, and now at last he had succeeded.

There they came, waggon after waggon, in endless succession, as it seemed. Verily, it was a retreat of an army, for there were thousands of horsemen too, riding at a hand gallop, singly or in clusters, a continuous stream of moving figures coming round the corner of End Hill and then riding north behind Telegraph Hill. They were seeking their railway base.

But, though they rode fast in retreat, there was no confusion; the Boers know how to trek, and they do it well.

Oh! that we had had some horses, good strong horses, to gallop our guns in their direction. But the horses were all either eaten or too weak to trot. Those who looked to Bulwana Hill saw a strange black tripod being erected above the big Boer gun: they were going to take the gun away. The gunners of the *Powerful* saw the tripod too. They set to work to try and prevent that work from being accomplished; both the 4-7's were in action, and made the red earth fly near the Boer redoubt.

[Pg 337]

The third shell burst upon the summit of the hill. The many clusters of men who were watching waited breathlessly for the white smoke to clear away, and when it cleared there was no tripod to be seen! Then an exultant shout rose up from hill-side and from spruit; some in their excitement danced and sang and shook hands and laughed. They were weak for want of food, and had not the usual English restraint. Then a great hailstorm came drifting by, and there was a rush into the town to tell the glad news.

What a Babel of talk there was at dinner that evening! Why, some officers were so hopeful now that they ventured to predict that by to-morrow some of Buller's men would be in Ladysmith.

The dinner of horse-flesh was progressing merrily when all at once a strange clattering of shoes outside awoke attention. They listened in the mess-room, and heard eager voices, cries of men and boys as they hurried past. One went to the window and shouted: "What's the row?"

"Buller's troopers are in sight; they have been seen riding across the flats!"

What! Then they all jumped up, and the youngest and strongest fared forth with the hurrying crowd towards the nearest river-drift.

On reaching this they saw across the river and the flat ground beyond, riding down a little ridge, a column of horsemen trotting towards them. Horsemen at full trot! Then they could not be any of their men, for their horses could not trot to save their lives.

The evening sun shone upon their full kit, and no one could doubt that it was the relief column at last! God be thanked!

[Pg 338]

Now they had pulled up, and were welcomed by some officers of Sir George White's staff. Meanwhile the motley crowd grew, at first too dazed to cheer or shout, but rather moist about the eyes. Malays were there in their red fezes, coolies in many-coloured turbans, and white-clad

Indians, dhoolie-bearers, grinning a silent welcome. But the most excited and the noisiest in all that throng were the Kaffir boys and Zulus, the Basutos and Bechuanas. They felt no cold reserve strangle their expressions of delight, but danced and shouted and leapt like madmen, showing gleaming white teeth and sparkling eyes.

As they drew near the town they met many of the sick and wounded who had hobbled out, in their great joy, to receive the relievers, and who tried to wave their caps and say Hurrah! with the rest—a piteous sight of wan faces and poor shrunk shanks!

And the men of the Relief Column—so brown and well they looked—were feeling in their pockets for tobacco to distribute round, for the spectacle they saw of white-faced, feeble-kneed invalids smote them to the heart. They had never realized until at this moment all that the defenders of Ladysmith had suffered for England.

They rode in slowly, two by two, Dundonald and Gough and Mackenzie of Natal at the head of the column. All through the main street they rode, nodding to a friend here and a friend there, for the Imperial Light Horse had many friends in Ladysmith.

There were wild cheers half choked by emotion, and the little ones were hoisted on shoulder to be able to see the strong men who had come to save them. Then in the twilight came Sir George White and his staff to welcome the rescue party. As the leaders shook hands the excitement and joy of relief broke forth again. Men bit their lips as if nothing was happening, but women and children cried and laughed and cried again. All in their heart, many in their voices, were thanking God for this timely deliverance. And then they fell to and cheered Sir George White: just then his patient heroism and kindly grip of power appealed to them. And some who had not wept before cried now when they looked on the old soldier, sitting so erect and proud in his saddle, with all the heavy cloud of care suddenly removed from his brow and the light of joy and gratitude shining through wet eyes. Twice—aye, thrice—he tried to speak, but the tears were in his throat and he could not utter his thoughts. Then the cheers came again, and gave him time to pull himself together.

[Pg 339]

He lifted his bowed head and thanked them for all their loyal help, soldiers and civilians alike, and then finished by one solemn phrase that touched all hearts: “Thank God, we kept the old flag flying!”

Why, the very Zulus caught the enthusiasm and leapt high into the air, waving bare arms aloft and shouting the old war-cry of Cetewayo and his savage *impis*. That night there were long stories to be told in the camp of the Relief Column.

Mr. Winston Spencer Churchill, M.P., wrote his story down of how they rode into Ladysmith: “Never shall I forget that ride. The evening was deliciously cool. My horse was strong and fresh, for I had changed him at midday. The ground was rough with many stones, but we cared little for that—onward, wildly, recklessly, up and down hill, over the boulders, through the scrub. We turned the shoulder of a hill, and there before us lay the tin houses and dark trees we had come so far to see and save. The British guns on Cæsar’s Camp were firing steadily in spite of the twilight. What was happening? Never mind, we were nearly through the dangerous ground. Now we were all on the flat. Brigadier, staff, and troops let their horses go. We raced through the thorn-bushes by Intombi Spruit. Suddenly there was a challenge: ‘Halt! Who goes there?’ ‘The Ladysmith Relief Column.’ And thereat, from out of trenches and rifle-pits artfully concealed in the scrub a score of tattered men came running, cheering feebly, and some were crying. In the half-light they looked ghastly pale and thin, but the tall, strong colonial horsemen, standing up in their stirrups, raised a loud resounding cheer, for then we knew we had reached the Ladysmith picket-line.”

[Pg 340]

One word more on Sir Ian Hamilton, one of the greatest of our soldiers. It was he who held command on Cæsar’s Hill during those desperate seventeen hours of fighting. Spare, tall, quiet, smiling, he had the masterful manner of the born soldier, who fights and makes no fuss about it, and draws the soldiers after him in the forlornest of hopes by the magic of his sympathy and valour. Valour without sympathy, ability without the devotion of your men, can do little; but when both are united, steel and lead cannot prevail against them.

CHAPTER XXVI

SIEGE OF PORT ARTHUR (1904)

[Pg 341]

Port Arthur—Its hotel life—Stoessel not popular—Fleet surprised—Shelled at twelve miles—Japanese pickets make a mistake—Wounded cannot be brought in—Polite even under the knife—The etiquette of the bath—The unknown death—Kondrachenko, the real hero—The white flag at last—Nogi the modest—“Banzai”—Effect of good news on the wounded—The fleet sink with alacrity.

Port Arthur consists of a small land-locked harbour surrounded by hills. As you sail into the harbour you have on your right the Admiralty depots, dock-basin, and dockyard, sheltered by Golden Hill; next the waterfront, or commercial quarter; on the left the Tiger’s Tail, a sand spit which narrows the entrance, behind which the torpedo-boats lie moored. The new town lies south of Signal Hill, on a plateau rising to the west. All round the town were hill-forts elaborately

fortified.

The hotels were, like the houses, very primitive: the best was a one-storied building containing about twenty rooms, each room being furnished with a camp bedstead and no bedding, one deal table, and one chair. Sometimes, if you swore hard at the Chinese coolie, you could get a small basin of water and a jug. There was a permanent circus, a Chinese theatre, music-halls, and grog-shops; a band played on summer evenings.

General Stoessel, the military commander, was not loved by soldier or citizen: he was very strict, and, during the war became despotic. They say he once struck a civilian across the face with his riding-whip because the man had not noticed and saluted him as he passed. His soldiers dreaded him, and would slink away at his appearing. Some such words as these would come from him on seeing a sentry:

[Pg 342]

"Who are you? Where do you come from? When did you join? Why are you so dirty? Take off your boots and let me inspect your foot-rags? Oh, got an extra pair in your kit? Show them at once. Go and wash your face."

Though it was known that war between Russia and Japan was imminent, the officers and men of both navy and army took little heed, but relied on the strength of their fortress, its fleet, and batteries. What could the little yellow monkeys do against Russia? Well, on the 7th of February invitations were sent out for a great reception at the residence of the Port Admiral, for it was the name-day of his wife and daughter. Officers of all grades flocked thither from the forts and the ships. After the reception followed a dance, very enjoyable, gay, and delightful.

It was midnight, and many were down by the water's edge waiting for gig and pinnace. A dull sound echoed through the streets that night.

"Dear me! what is that, I wonder?"

"Oh! only naval manoeuvres, sir. We sailors must be practising a bit, you know, in case the Japs come."

Then there was a laugh: "They won't dare to come under our guns!"

But they had come! In their torpedo-boats the brave sailors of the "Rising Sun" were quietly steaming round the harbour, launching a deadly torpedo at battleship and cruiser.

Next morning, when the Russians went down to see what was going on, they found the *Retvisan* nose down and heeling over, the *Tsarevich* settling down by the stern and with a pretty list to starboard, other vessels looking very uncomfortable, and a long way off, near the horizon, some black specks that actually "had the cheek" to bombard Port Arthur.

[Pg 343]

Why, yes, as the curious citizen came to the Bund, he was so astonished that he forgot to run. Crates and sacks had been hurled about, double glass windows all smashed; and what was that big hole on the quay, big enough to hold an omnibus and four horses? "Good gracious! you don't mean to say that those specks twelve miles away have done all this! Come, sir, let us seek shelter in the stone-quarries."

And the Russian batteries on Golden Hill? They were returning the fire from 10-inch guns; but the Japanese possessed 13-inch guns and were outside striking distance.

A party of ladies and gentlemen had gone to the terrace before the Mayor's house to see the pretty sight—it is not often you can see such a sight. A shell fell just below them! They scattered and went to bed.

"What was it like? Oh, my dear, a noise like a big rocket, a blaze, a bang, an awful clatter all round, as the glass breaks and falls. You are dazed, you see yellow smoke, you smell something nasty, you shake—you run—run!"

Yes, they all ran away from Port Arthur, all who could—merchants, tradesmen, coolies—all went by train or boat. Then there were no bakers or butchers, no servants, until the Russian troops were ordered to take the vacant places.

If the Japanese had only known they might have taken Port Arthur that night of the torpedo attack; but they left the Russians sixteen days of quiet to recover from their panic and to repair their ships. Then it was more difficult.

[Pg 344]

The hole in the *Retvisan* was 40 feet long and 20 feet in depth. Seven compartments were full of water, and many dead bodies floated in them. But, beached and water-logged as she was, she used her guns with effect many times during the siege, so difficult is it to destroy a battleship unless you can sink her in deep water.

It was not long before all foreigners, newspaper correspondents, or candid friends were ordered out of Port Arthur, so we have to rely on the evidence of those who witnessed the siege from the Japanese side. Even they did not at first find their freedom to see and pass from one hill to another very secure. One night two of them tried to get to the front under cover of the darkness. They soon met a Japanese officer, who reined in and asked where they were going. One of them could speak Japanese, and replied that they were looking for their camp. So he let them go. But what if they stumbled upon the Japanese outposts and were shot at as Russians? They must be very wary. In the starlight they saw a small hill in front of them, which they made for, hoping to

see or hear more of the great fight which sounded louder as they walked—a roar of rifles broken by the rattle of machine-guns. As they climbed one of them said he saw a trench near the top of the hill and men sitting near it. They hesitated, but finally made up their minds to risk it, and advanced boldly, whistling carelessly as they went. The Japanese were all looking out in front, and did not at first notice the new-comers, who approached from behind. Then suddenly the thought came, "We are being taken in flank by the Russians." The entire picket started to their feet. Many of them had been fast asleep, and, being aroused to hear the noise of heavy firing, they called out "Ruskies!" One Englishman tried to seize a Japanese by the hand to show he was a friend, but his intention failed, for both of them rolled into the trench. The other threw himself flat on the ground and called out in Japanese, "English friends!"

[Pg 345]



A RUSSIAN TORPEDO-BOAT DESTROYER ELUDING THE JAPANESE FLEET

During the siege of Port Arthur the *Rastoropny*, with despatches, ran safely through the Japanese men-of-war in the teeth of a tremendous storm. She was pursued, but reached Chifu harbour, and her crew, having achieved their object, blew her up.

When at last the Japanese discovered their mistake they were all smiles and apologies, and "Please go to the front, sir."

The Japanese made great mistakes at first: they lost many thousands by attacking in front hills and forts scientifically fortified. They were trying to do what was impossible. Some years before they had captured Port Arthur from the Chinese speedily and easily by a fierce assault. They had then been compelled by Russia, France, and Germany to give up their fair prize of victory. Afterwards Russia had seized Port Arthur and Manchuria. So honour and revenge both spurred on the Japanese to retake it from the Russians. The war became most cruel and sanguinary.

After one night attack the Japanese left 7,000 dead and wounded on the hill-side. They could not fetch them in, though they were within call. Some few crawled back to their friends at night; many lay out for days, being fed by biscuits and balls of rice thrown from the Japanese trenches—the Japanese were fed almost entirely on rice.

A naval surgeon tells a story which explains the conduct of the Japanese when suffering intense pain. He says:

"When the battleship *Hatsure* was sunk in May, a sailor was laid on the operating-table who had a piece of shell 2½ inches long bedded in his right thigh. I offered him a cigar as he came in, which he eagerly took, but the surgeon told him not to smoke it just then. His smaller injuries were first attended to, and then the surgeon turned to the severe wound in the man's thigh.

[Pg 346]

"In order to pull out the piece of steel still embedded in the limb, he was obliged to pass his hand into the wound, which was deep enough to hide it as far as the wrist. During this painful operation the sailor never spoke or winced, but kept trying to reach the breast-pocket of his coat. At length the surgeon, irritated by his fidgety manner, asked: 'What are you doing? Why can't you keep quiet?'

"The sailor replied: 'I want to give that English gentleman a cigarette in exchange for the cigar he kindly gave me.' Even in the throes of that agony the Japanese sailor could not forget his politeness and gratitude."

They are a curious mixture of opposites, these Japanese—one day facing machine-guns like fiends incarnate, or giving their bodies to be used as a human ladder in attempt to escalate a fort, the next day sucking sweetmeats like little boys. You come upon some groups by a creek: they are laughing and playing practical jokes as they sharpen up their bayonets with busy, innocent faces,

making ready for the great assault at dawn to-morrow. A few yards further on you find them in all states of undress, their underwear fluttering to the breeze, some of them sitting on the stones and tubbing with real soap. You ask them, Why so busy this afternoon? They smile and nod their heads towards Port Arthur, and one who speaks English explains that they had been taught at school this proverb: "Japanese fight like gentlemen, and if they are found dead on the field, they will be found like gentlemen, clean and comely."

There were so many forms of death in this siege—*plurima mortis imago*, as Virgil says—from the speedy bullet to the common shell, shrapnel, and pom-pom. But besides these common inventions there were mines that exploded under their feet as they walked, hand-grenades thrown in their faces as they approached the forts; there were pits filled with petroleum ready to be lit by an electric wire, and poisonous gases to be flung from wide-mouthed mortars. But the one which spread terror even amongst the bravest was what they called "the unknown death." It was said that during the early attacks in August, one whole line of infantry which was rushing to the assault had fallen dead side by side, and that no wounds had been found on them. At last it was discovered the Russian chief electrician had ordered a "live" wire to be placed among the ordinary wire entanglements, furnished with a current strong enough to kill anyone who touched it.

[Pg 347]

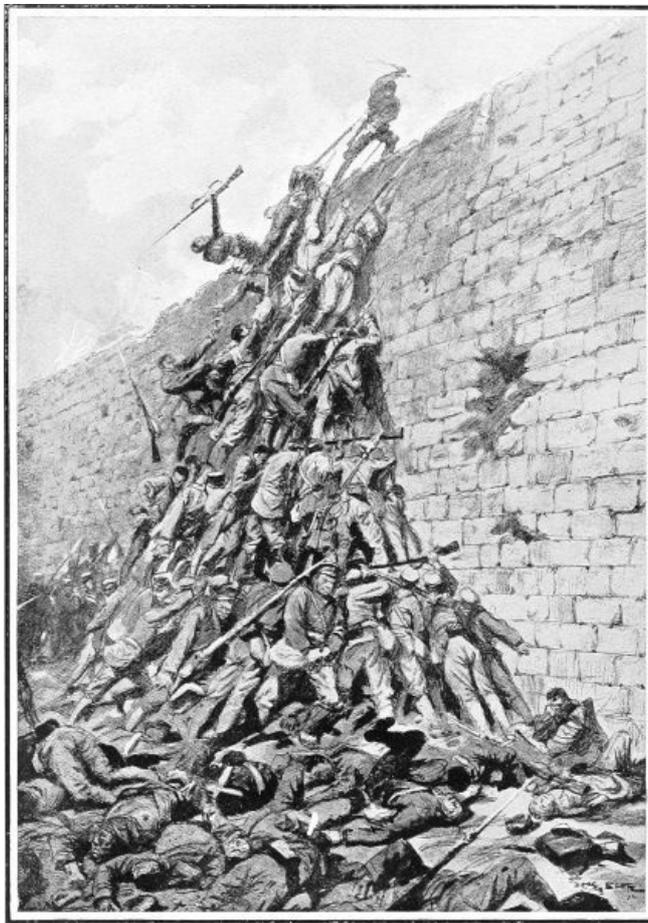
Of course, it was liable to be destroyed by shell or cannon fire, but in many cases it proved fatal, and always made the attackers nervous. The Russians had such steel-wire entanglements placed at the foot of all their positions, and where success depended on the dash and speed of the infantry, they succeeded in stopping them and exposing them to a heavy fire. As a rule, volunteers went out at night with strong wire-nippers and cut the strands, or they set fire to the wooden posts and let them come to the ground together. Sometimes in a fierce charge the sappers used to lie down beneath the wires, pretending to be dead, and choose a moment for using their nippers; some even, in their desperate efforts to get through, would seize the wire between their teeth and try and bite it through.

The man among the Russians who was the mainspring of the defence was General Kondrachenko. He was an eminent engineer, very popular with the men, one of the bravest and most scientific of the Russian officers. On the 15th of December the General and his staff were sitting inside North Keikwansan Fort, in the concrete barrack just underneath the spot where a shell had made a hole in the roof. This had been repaired, and they had come to see if it had been well done. As luck would have it, a second 28-centimetre shell came through the same place and burst inside the barrack, killing the gallant Kondrachenko and eight other officers who were with him. This was the gravest blow that Port Arthur could have suffered, for this man was the spirit of resistance personified.

[Pg 348]

After his death Stoessel began to seek for excuses to surrender. He called a council of war, and proposed that, as the Japanese had taken so many forts and sunk their warships, terms of surrender should be proposed. Almost every one was opposed to it, and some officers were so disgusted that they privately suggested kidnapping Stoessel and locking him up.

The Japanese policy of mining and firing mines under the redoubts had succeeded so often that the Russians had got into a nervous state. On the 1st of January the fort of Wantai was rushed and captured; mountain-guns and quick-firers were sent up to help in holding the ground, ammunition was sent forward, everything made ready to rush the whole of the eastern defences, when, to the astonishment of all, from General to private, a white flag was seen fluttering over the valley. The news spread like wild-fire that Stoessel wished to capitulate. Could it be possible?



A HUMAN LADDER

The Japanese soldiers made their bodies practically into a ladder, and thus enabled their comrades to escalate a fort.

At 9 a.m. on the following morning, the 2nd of January, a little group of foreign pressmen assembled as usual in the small room provided for them at head-quarters. They discussed the white flag incident; but they remembered that Stoessel had said that he would die in the last ditch, so it did not seem probable. Captain Zasuhara, whose duty it was to inform them of what was going on, was late in appearing, and when the door opened, it was not the Captain, but an orderly, who entered, carrying a tray on which was a bottle of liqueur brandy and several glasses. Something strange must be going to happen when a Japanese officer begins drinking liqueur so early!

[Pg 349]

A few moments later Captain Zasuhara came in.

"Gentlemen, General Stoessel has capitulated; Port Arthur has surrendered. Banzai!"

They all joined in the shout "Banzai!" which means "Live for ever!" and then gave three lusty Saxon cheers, which brought out General Nogi, the Commander-in-Chief. He who for so many months had borne the grave responsibility of sending so many thousands to their death, he who had lost both his sons before Port Arthur, and tried so hard to conceal his grief, now beamed with joy at the sudden relief, and the lines that used to seam his forehead were smoothed out and almost invisible. A grand gentleman was Nogi, gentle and polite and kind to all. Who could have grudged him this triumph after so much sorrow and disappointment?

He offered his hand, received their congratulations with dignity, and said with an under-current of sadness and a voice as soft as a woman's: "I thank you all for staying with me through the dark days of disappointment and all the sorrowful hours of this terrible siege."

The proud spirit of the Samurai soldier seemed blended with the gentle feeling of the Buddhist. It was a touching sight to have seen.

And how the news stirred the troops! Men broke into snatches of song, then shouted and yelled "Banzai!" until they choked. In the field-hospitals the wounded, trying to rise from their canvas stretchers, joined in the cheering with thin, weak voices. At night wood fires were lit all round the hills, and many of the Russian garrison left their dismal forts and came down to sip *saké* (rice wine), and after spending a night of carousal with their late enemies, the big, burly foemen of the North were glad to be helped homewards by their polite hosts, who bowed on leaving them and hoped they would not suffer from the after-effects of Japanese hospitality.

[Pg 350]

Astonishing, too, was the effect of the good news on the wounded. Desperately wounded men crawled over the stony hills and walked to the hospitals without aid. If you said to one such, "You are badly hurt; let me give you an arm," he smiled proudly, and said with a salute, "No, no; Port

Arthur has fallen!"

One man who had been shot in the head, and whose right arm had been smashed to pieces by a shell, walked to the dressing-station, had his arm amputated and his head dressed, and then walked two miles further to the field-hospital. The news was too good for him to think of his own pain. Another man had a bullet through his chest. He walked two miles to the hospital; there he coolly asked the surgeon if he thought he might live. The surgeon, though he knew the man's case was hopeless, said, "Oh yes; but" (after a pause) "if you have any letter you wish written, do it at once." The soldier replied, "All I desire is that a letter should be written to my mother." No sooner had he uttered these words than he fell dead on the spot. It reminds one of a young Lieutenant in Browning's poem, who had ridden with dispatches to Napoleon. "Why, my boy, you are wounded!" "Nay, sire; I am killed."

In the harbour at Port Arthur there were riding at anchor five battleships and two cruisers. On the 10th of August they had gone out to meet Admiral Togo, and had returned next day badly damaged.

By the 1st of September they had been repaired. But on November the 27th began a tremendous battle for the possession of 203 Metre Hill. On the 5th of December that hill was taken at a fearful cost of lives, and a Japanese naval Lieutenant wormed his way into the shallow trench and by help of his nautical instruments was able to take observations and give the correct direction and distance to the artillery commander, who at once trained Howitzers on the fleet. All the ships were sunk by the 6th of December, with the exception of the *Sevastopol*, which steamed out under Captain von Essen and anchored under the batteries of Tiger's Tail.

[Pg 351]

This brave officer tried to protect his ship by a wooden boom and by torpedo-nets. For three nights he was attacked by Japanese boats and torpedoes, and inflicted great damage on them. At last the boom was pierced and the ship's steering-gear ruined by a torpedo. The *Sevastopol* showed signs of settling down, so that night steam was got up for the last time, and the gallant commander with a few picked men took her out into deep water, opened the sluice-cocks, and then, taking to his launch, pulled away a bit and watched the great battleship settle down stern first in the dim and misty moonlight.

It is only right that the pluck of this Russian Captain should be remembered when we think of the poor defence made by the Russian Navy.

As for the rest of the fleet, the battleships and cruisers were huddled together with a strong list and their upper works destroyed. They have since been raised and repaired, and belong to the Mikado.

The siege of Port Arthur cost General Nogi's army 89,000 men in killed, wounded, and sick; of these 10,000 were officers.

The Japanese have read a great lesson in patriotism and sense of duty to the whole world. To the courtly and feudal chivalry of their old-world Samurai, or Noble, they have added the foresight and inventive genius of the European. They have suddenly sprung into the front rank of civilized nations, and no one can forecast the greatness of their future.

[Pg 352]

From "The Siege of Port Arthur," by E. Ashmead Bartlet, by kind permission of Messrs. W. Blackwood and Sons.

THE END

BILLING AND SONS, LTD., PRINTERS, GUILDFORD

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ROMANCE OF MODERN SIEGES ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE
THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1

through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER

THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these

requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.