

FROM THE MORROW OF INKERMAN
TO THE FALL OF CANROBERT.

CHAPTER I.

THE SIEGE OF SEBASTOPOL FROM THE 6TH OF NOVEMBER
1854, TO THE MIDDLE OF THE ENSUING FEBRUARY.

I.

By following the course they approved on the morrow of ‘Inkerman,’ the Allies did more than make waste of that onward momentum which victory is wont to confer;* for they even, as we saw, gave their adversary the priceless respite he needed for his Flagstaff Bastion;† and not judging the Sebastopol front to be anywhere else in a state that could warrant assault, they now found their armies committed to what—unless roughly cut short by recurrence to bold resolves, or by some grave disaster befalling them—seemed destined to prove a long siege.

C H A P.
I.
The Allies
now com-
mitted to
what
might
prove a
long siege.

* See *ante*, vol. v. p. 480 *et seq.*, and also note to chap. i. vol. vi.
† See *ante*, vol. v. pp. 34, 35, and 480.

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C H A P.

I.

The predicament in which they had placed themselves.

Yet, to any such task as that of putting stress on Sebastopol by what men in general mean when they speak of a 'siege,' the Allies were then wholly unequal. They had been guided into their troubles by accomplished, highly skilled engineers, but of those there were none who at first saw whither their counsels were tending;* and thus it resulted — anomalously — that by great scientific advisers they had been not only led by degrees into what was an ugly predicament, but also into open rebellion against the first precepts of Science. Instead of approaching their object with that huge preponderance of numbers—before Vauban's time ten to one—which Science had declared to be needed for the reduction of a fortress, they were themselves on the contrary outnumbered by tens of thousands;(1) and far from having the power to fold their coils round the place after the manner of normal besiegers, they had confessed themselves unable to invest it at all on the north, whilst even too on the south—their own chosen side of the Roadstead—they were leaving the enemy free to come in and go out as he chose.

The duress they suffered.

And whilst thus altogether unable to beleague Sebastopol, the Allies were in some sort beleaguered. Confronting them—and this at close quarters—with the garrison part of his forces now strongly entrenched, the Russian commander there leant upon the resources of a vast naval arsenal, and a fleet

* See vol. iii. chap. xi. Men thought they could use battering-guns, and even give those guns cover, without sliding into a 'siege.'

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THE BESIEGERS.

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broken up for land-service, whilst—left free, as he was, to communicate with Simpheropol, Odessa, St Petersburg—he could always be drawing new strength from the Muscovite empire at large, and moreover could wield at his pleasure the army he always kept imminent in the open field.

By a part of that Russian field-army on their flank, and the garrison of Sebastopol entrenched along their whole front, the Allies, as we saw, had allowed themselves to be completely hemmed in on the land side; and how they thus became hampered in the task of supplying their armies, we already have painfully learnt;* but the bearing that this duress had upon their powers as combatants must not the less be remembered.

The bearing of this duress upon their power as combatants.

So long as they had been able to promise themselves that within a few days they would break their way into Sebastopol, the duress they suffered could of course be regarded as only a brief restraint to be followed by a dazzling conquest well fitted to end all their troubles; but the moment they had resolved that the crisis of their enterprise should be indefinitely put off, this Chersonese on which they had lighted, as though it were simply their stepping-stone, seemed thenceforth rather their prison. With their 'parallels' 'first,' 'second,' and 'third,' and all their siege apparatus, they still had the air of assailants, yet were not in reality minded to risk striking any prompt blow; and on the other hand now, they lived subject to whatever might be

The task of defence now weighing upon their energies;

* *Ante*, vol. vi., chaps. i. v. vi. vii. and viii.

4 CONDITIONS AFFECTING THE BESIEGERS.

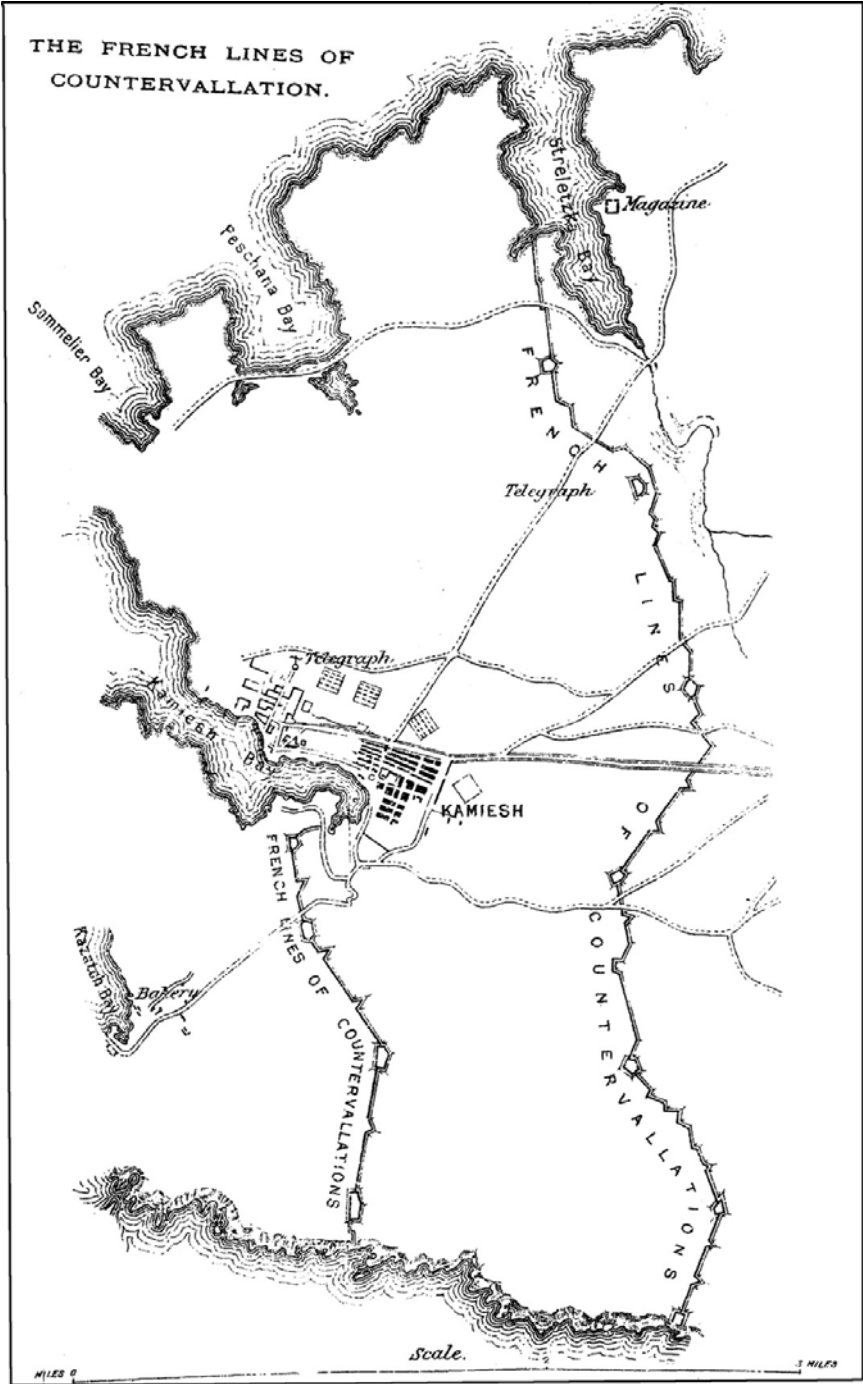
C H A P. I. adventured against them by a closely hovering army which they could not shake off, and besides—
and de- at still closer quarters—by the garrison of a fortress
fence under which they had not even tried to invest. They
hard con- indeed might still be preparing the means of some
ditions. future attack, but meanwhile, they found themselves
thrown upon the defensive, and this too, under condi-
tions of a perilous kind ; for whilst closely cooped in
as we saw, on the land side, they stood with their
backs to a shore overhung by precipitous cliffs ; and
tacticians all know that to have to accept battle from
a powerful enemy without enjoying due freedom of
movement towards the rear, is to be in a sort of
predicament which is adverse to the hope of a vic-
tory, and makes defeat utter ruin.

No idea of raising the siege could be well or even prudently harboured.
Pride alone would perhaps have sufficed to prevent the thus hampered Allies from indulging any thought of retreat ; but it is certain that motives deriving from a warlike sense of honour and courage were reinforced by the dictates of prudence ; for, whatever the peril and difficulty of forcibly reducing Sebastopol, an undertaking to withdraw the Allied armies, and to cover their embarkation, would have been one of a kind still more formidable, and—except upon condition of abandoning siege-guns to the enemy—must have proved a task utterly desperate.*

* Under stress of an imprudent question exacting a categorical answer, Lord Raglan confidentially informed Lord Panmure that any such withdrawal was ‘impossible.’ He added—‘We have no ‘retreat.’ Letter marked ‘Confidential,’ 3d March 1855.

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Map N^o 2 to face page 4



A. RITCHEY & SON, LONDON

THE NOW DOUBLE TASK IMPOSED ON THE ALLIES.

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C H A P.
I.


II.

So, because the Allies were now minded to defer their assault of Sebastopol, it did not at all therefore follow that, by coming to such a resolve, they had purchased the bliss of repose ; for their now doubly aiming exertions were not only henceforth addressed to the object of an ulterior attack, but also—and this with great diligence—to the more instant task of defence.

The double task now pressing upon the Allies.

Imagining that the enemy might some day renew his great enterprise of the 5th of November, they constructed, they armed, they maintained defensive works on Mount Inkerman ; they threw up works of countervallation on their left ; they perfected the eastern and north-eastern defences of Balaclava, and even strengthened yet further the hardly assailable lines which crested the Sapounè Heights on General Bosquet's front.(2) They still indeed aimed a great proportion of their labours at the capital object of some day reducing Sebastopol ; but even where so applied, their efforts tended also to guard them against apprehended attacks, because the maintenance of their attitude as apparently determined assailants helped largely to keep unimpaired the moral strength and weight of their armies, whilst moreover their long chain of siege-works, though of course designed for attack, was also a formidable barrier in the way of any armed force coming out from the place to assail them, and therefore formed part of the means

Their defensive works.

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C H A P. by which they were able to hope that any new Russian onslaught directed against their ‘approaches’ might be either averted or baffled. Thus—even more largely than observers might judge at first sight—self-defence entered into the motives which impelled the now harassed Allies to toil day and night at their works.

I.

The designs of the French, though postponed, still pointing to the Flagstaff Bastion.

Checked in carrying forward their approaches,

they resort to mining.

III.

It was still by the Flagstaff Bastion that the French at this time were hoping they might, some day, break into Sebastopol. Because baffled by conditions which made it seem unduly hazardous to attempt such a step, they did not indeed try to lessen the distance of some 180 yards which still parted their most advanced trench from the counter-scarp of the opposite Bastion, and on the contrary, resigned themselves to the plan of constructing their foremost batteries on the line they had reached (at night) between the 2d and the 3d of November; but they did their full utmost to perfect the third parallel then opened, to give it due extension at the flanks, and prepare to break down by over-dominant metal the fire that threatened to rage against any column advancing to storm and capture the Work.

As is usual with besiegers when stayed in their task of pushing forward ‘approaches’ by trench-work, the French with great diligence resorted to the expedient of mining.

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PART TAKEN BY THE ENGLISH.

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The besiegers by this time had learnt, yet were day by day learning more thoroughly, that—because each opposite bastion was so placed and so armed for duty towards its neighbour as to be effectively subserving the principle of ‘mutual support’—they must choose a wider ‘front for attack’ than at first appeared to be necessary; and the French by degrees got to see that their own special task (as distinguished from that of our people) must be made to include a great extension of siege-work towards their left. They therefore not only made ready to deal with the ‘Central’ as well as the ‘Flagstaff’ Bastion, but became step by step the besiegers of all the Sebastopol front from the line of the Woronzoff Road to the edge of the Quarantine Bay.

C H A P.
I.
Extension
towards
their left
of siege-
work car-
ried on
by the
French.

The French also very well understood that, because the Flagstaff Bastion drew support from the Barrack Battery and the Great Redan, they would need once again some such aid on their right as Lord Raglan had been able to give them on the day of the first bombardment; but for the siege-like co-operation thus wanted they looked, as before, to the English, and our people, with small and decreasing resources, and difficult ground before them, were unable to execute earth-works upon any scale matching the greatness of Todleben’s new creations. To maintain, to improve, and a little advance their approaches, to confront now and then with new batteries an enemy ever restless and aggressive in his use of the pick-axe and spade, and finally to prepare for the object of supporting the French on their right, if ever, in

The part
taken at
this time
by the
English in
the work
of the
siege.

The great strain put on their fortitude.

Only those who have formed some conception of the hardships undergone by our army at the time of the 'Winter Troubles' will fully imagine the strain that was put on its fortitude by the exigencies of siege-work and continuous strife with the enemy, superadded to the bare task of living or painfully trying to live;* yet sometimes it happened that the nature, though not the extent, of the struggle maintained, and the imperious domination of military exigencies over other dire needs, could almost be learnt at a glance. In the midst of its most grievous straits for want of other means of land-transport, one might too often count several hundreds of our weary soldiery—every man of them heavily laden—painfully employed in carrying up the supplies over miles and miles of deep quagmire, whilst also, and at the very same time, might be seen on the track by Karani a team reckoning no less than from thirty

* See *ante*, vol. vi. chap. viii.

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EFFECT OF GIVING TIME.

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to forty of our few surviving horses, engaged in dragging up to the front by ploughing and ploughing and ploughing through depths and depths of clay some mighty gun, judged to be wanted for the all-demanding siege.* There were Frenchmen at this cruel time who complacently spoke of their efforts to 'galvanise' into activity the English sloth;† yet Canrobert himself frankly owned that the whole of the army thus taunted for not doing more heavy siege-work in addition to its other huge tasks, was scarcely greater in numbers than one of his strongest divisions.‡

C H A P.
I.

IV.

When determining once more to take time, the Allies of course could not but know they were giving time to the enemy; but, though making him, and knowingly making him, this dangerous concession, they did not apprehend its full import.

One of the advantages conferred on the enemy by giving him time.

In words hardly varied from those that were used once before, it seems fitting here to repeat that, besides their other artillery, the garrison had not only all the ship's guns—some 1900 in number—not only the ammunition, the iron, the timbers, the cordage, the spars, the tanks, the canvas—all, in short, that a great fleet could need, with vast quantities of stone, already detached from the

Todleben's means of drawing advantage from time;

* Journal Royal Engineers, vol. i. p. 69.

† Bizot to Marshal Vaillant, quoted by Rousset, vol. ii. p. 32.

‡ Ibid., p. 14.