

Literature, &c.

From Charles O'Malley.

RETREAT BEYOND THE COA.

On the evening of the 21st of July, a strong body of French cavalry advanced into the plain, supported by some heavy guns; upon which Crawford retired upon the Coa, intending as we supposed, to place that river between himself and the enemy. Three days, however, passed over without any movement upon either side, and we still continued with a force of scarcely four thousand infantry, and a thousand dragoons, to stand opposite to an army of fifty thousand men; such was our position as the night of the 24th set in. I was sitting alone in my quarters; Mike, whose wound had been severer than at first was supposed, had been sent to Almeida, and I was musing in solitude upon the events of the campaign, when the noise and bustle without excited my attention; the roll of artillery wagons, the clash of musketry, and the distant sounds of marching, all proved that the troops were effecting some new movement, and I burned with anxiety to learn what it was. My brother officers, however, came not as usual to my quarters; and, although I waited with impatience while the hours rolled by, no one appeared.

Long, low, moaning gusts of wind swept along the earth, carrying the leaves as they tore them from the trees, and mingling their sad sounds with the noises of the retiring troops; for I could perceive that gradually the sounds grew more and more remote, and only now and then could I trace their position, as the roll of a distant drum swelled upon the breeze, or the more shrill cry of a pibroch broke upon my ear; a heavy downpour of rain followed soon after, and an exceeding splash drowned all other sounds.

As the little building shook beneath the peals of loud thunder, the lightning flashed in broad sheets upon the rapid river, which, swollen and foaming, dashed impetuously beside my window. By the uncertain, but vivid glare of the flashes I endeavored to ascertain where our force was posted; but in vain. Never did I witness such a night of storm; the deep booming of the thunder seeming never for a moment to cease, while the rush of the torrent grew gradually louder, till at length it swelled into one deep and sullen roar, like that of distant artillery.

Weak and nervous as I felt from the effects of my wound, feverish and exhausted by days of suffering and sleepless nights, I paced my room with tottering but impatient steps. The sense of my sad and imprisoned state impressed me deeply, and while from time to time, I replenished my fire, and hoped to hear some friendly step on the stair, my heart grew gradually heavier, and every gloomy and depressing thought suggested itself to my imagination. My most constant impression was, that the troops were retiring beyond the Coa, and that forgotten in the haste and confusion of a night march, I had been left behind to fall a prisoner to the enemy.

The sounds of the troops retiring gradually farther and farther favored the idea, in which I was still more strengthened on finding that the peasants who inhabited the little hut had departed, leaving me utterly alone. From the moment I ascertained this fact, my impatience knew no bounds, and, in proportion as I began to feel some exertion necessary on my part, so much more did my nervousness increase my debility, that at last I sank exhausted upon my bed, while a cold perspiration broke out upon my temples.

I have mentioned that the Coa was immediately beneath the house; I must also add, that the little building occupied the angle of a steep but narrow gorge, which descended from the plain to the bridge across the stream. This, as far as I know, was the only means we possessed of passing the river, so that, when the last retiring sounds of the troops were heard by me, I began to suspect that Crawford, in compliance with his orders, was making a backward movement, having the bridge open to the French, to draw them on to his line of march, while he should cross over at some more distant point.

As the night grew later, the storm increased; waves of the foaming river dashed against the frail walls of the hut, while its roof, rent by the blast, fell in fragments upon the stream, and all threatened a speedy and perfect ruin.

How I longed for morning! The doubt and uncertainty I suffered nearly drove me distracted. Of all the casualties my career as a soldier opened, none had

such terrors for me as imprisonment: the very thought of the long years of inaction and inglorious idleness, was worse than any death. My wounds and the state of fever I was in, increased the morbid dread upon me, and had the French captured me at the time, I know not that madness of which I was not capable. Day broke at last, but slowly and sullenly; the gray clouds hurried past upon the storm pouring down the torrents as they went, and the desolation and dreariness on all sides was scarcely preferable to the darkness and gloom of night. My eyes were turned over towards the plain, across which the winter wind bore the plashing rain in vast sheets of water; the thunder crashed louder and louder; but except the sounds of the storm, none others met my ear. Not a man, not a human figure could I see, as I strained my sight towards the distant horizon.

The morning crept over me, but the storm abated not, and the same unchanged aspect of dreary desolation prevailed without. At times I thought I could hear amidst the noises of the tempest something like the roll of distant artillery; but the thunder swelled in sullen roar above all, and left me uncertain as before.

At last, in the momentary pause of the storm, a tremendous peal of heavy guns caught my ear, followed by the rattling of small arms. My heart bounded with ecstasy. The thought of the battle field with all its changing fortunes, was better, a thousand times better, than the despairing sense of desertion I labored under. I listened now with eagerness, but the rain bore down in torrents, and the crumbling walls and fallen timbers left no other sounds to be heard. Far as my eye could reach, nothing could still be seen save the dreary monotony of the vast plain, undulating slightly here and there, but unmarked by a sign of man.

Far away towards the horizon, I had remarked for some time past that the clouds resting upon the earth look blacker and blacker, spreading out to either side in vast masses, and not broken or wafted along like the rest. As I watched the phenomenon with an anxious eye, I perceived the dense mass suddenly appear, as it were, rent assunder, while a volume of liquid flame rushed wildly out, throwing a lurid glare on every side. One terrific clap, louder than any thunder, shook the air at this moment, while the very earth trembled beneath the shock.

As I hesitated what it might be, the heavy din of great guns was heard, and from the midst of the black smoke rode forth a dark mass, which I soon recognized as the horse artillery at full gallop. They were directing their course towards the bridge.

As they mounted the little rising ground, they wheeled and unlimbered with the speed of lightning, just as a strong column of cavalry showed above the ridge. One tremendous discharge again shook the field, and, ere the smoke cleared away, they were again far in retreat.

So much was my attention occupied with this movement, that I had not perceived the line of infantry that came from the extreme left and were now advancing towards the bridge with a quick step; scattered bodies of cavalry came up from different parts, while from the little valley every now and then a rifleman would mount the rising ground, turning to fire as he retreated. All this boded a rapid and disorderly retreat, and, although as yet I could see nothing of the pursuing enemy, I knew to well the relative forces of each to have a doubt for the result.

At last the head of a French column appeared above the mist, and I could plainly distinguish the gestures of the officers as they hurried their men onwards. Meanwhile, a loud hurra attracted my attention, and I turned my eyes towards the road which led to the river. Here a small body of the 95th had hurriedly assembled; and, formed again, were standing to cover the retreat of the broken infantry as they passed on eagerly to the bridge; in a second after the French cuirassiers appeared. Little anticipating resistance from a flying and disordered mass, they rode headlong forward, and although the firm attitude and steady bearing of the Highlanders might have appalled them, they rode heedlessly down upon the square, sabering the very men in the front rank. 'Till now not a trigger had been pulled, when suddenly the word 'fire!' was given and a withering volley of balls sent the cavalry column into shivers. One hearty cheer broke from the infantry in the rear, and I could hear 'galant ninety-fifth' shouted on every side along the plain.

The whole vast space before me was now one animated battle ground. Our own troops retiring in haste before the overwhelming forces of the French, occupied every little vantage ground with their guns and light infantry; charges of cavalry coursing hither and thither, while, as the French pressed forward, the retreating columns again formed into squares to permit stragglers to come up. The rattle of small arms, the heavy peal of artillery, the earthquake crash of cavalry, rose on every side, while the cheers which alternately told of the vacillating fortune of the fight, rose amidst the wild pibroch of the Highlanders.

A tremendous noise took place on the floor beneath me; and looking down, I perceived that a sergeant and party of the sappers had taken possession of the little hut, and were busily engaged piercing the walls for musketry; and before many minutes had elapsed, a company of the rifles were thrown into the building, which, from its commanding position above the road, enfiladed the whole line of march. The officer in command briefly informed me that we had been attacked that morning by the French in force, and 'devilishly well thrashed;' that we were now in retreat beyond the Coa, where we ought to have been three days previously, and desired me to cross the bridge and get myself out of the way as soon as I possibly could.

A twenty four pounder from the French lines struck the angle of the house as he spoke, scattering the mortar and broken bricks about us on all sides. This was warning sufficient for me, wounded and disabled as I was, so taking the few things I could take in my haste, I hurried from the hut, and, descending the path, now slippery by the heavy rain, I took my way across the bridge and established myself on a little resting knoll of ground beyond, from which a clear view could be obtained of the whole field.

I had not been many minutes in my present position ere the pass which led down to the bridge became thronged with troops, wagons, ammunition carts and hospital stores, pressing thickly forward amid shouting and uproar; the hills on either side of the way were crowded with troops, who formed as they came up, the artillery taking up their position on every rising ground. The firing had already begun, and the heavy booming of the large guns was heard at intervals amid the rattling crash of musketry; except the narrow road before me, and the high bank of the stream, I could see nothing; but the tumult and din, which grew momentarily louder, told that the tide of battle waged nearer and nearer. Still the retreat continued; and at length the heavy artillery came thundering across the narrow bridge, followed by stragglers of all arms, and wounded hurrying to the rear; the sharp shooters and Highlanders held the heights above the stream, thus covering the retiring columns; but I could plainly perceive that their fire was gradually slackening, and that the guns which flanked their position were withdrawn, and everything bespoke a speedy retreat. A tremendous discharge of musketry at this moment, accompanied by a deafening cheer, announced the advance of the French, and soon the head of the Highland brigade was seen descending towards the bridge, followed by the rifles, and the 96th and 14th Light Dragoons were now formed in column of attack, and the infantry deployed into line; and, in an instant after, high above the din and crash of battle, I heard the word 'charge!' The rising crest of the hill hid them from my sight, but my heart bounded with ecstasy as I listened to the clanging sound of the cavalry advance. Meanwhile the infantry pressed on, and forming upon the bank, took up a strong position in front of the bridge; the heavy guns were also unlimbered; riflemen scattered through the low copse wood, and every precaution taken to defend the pass to the last; for a moment all my attention was riveted to the movements upon our side of stream, when suddenly the cavalry bugle sounded the recall, and the same moment the staff came galloping across the bridge. One officer, I could perceive, covered with orders and trappings; his head was bare, and his horse splashed with blood and foam, moved lamely and with difficulty; he turned in the middle of the bridge, as if irresolute whether to retreat farther; one glance at him showed me the bronzed, manly features of our leader. Whatever his resolve, the matter was soon decided for him; for the cavalry came swiftly galloping down the slope, and in an instant the bridge was blocked up by the retreating forces; while the French as suddenly appearing above the height, opened

a plunging fire upon their defenceless enemies; their cheer of triumph was answered by our fellows on the opposite bank, and a heavy cannonade thundered along the rocky valley, sending up a hundred echoes as it went.

The scene now became one of overwhelming interest; the French, posting their guns upon the height, replied to our fire, while their column, breaking into skirmishers, descended the banks to the river edge, and pouring in one sheet of galling musketry. The road to the bridge, swept by our artillery, presented not a single file, and although a movement among the French announced the threat of an attack, the deadly service of the artillery seemed to pronounce it hopeless.

A strong cavalry force stood inactive spectators of the combat on the French side, among whom I now remarked some bustle and preparation, and as I looked, an officer rode boldly to the river edge, and spurring his horse forward, plunged into the stream. The swollen and angry torrent, increased by the late rains, boiled like barm, and foamed around him as he advanced, when suddenly his horse appeared to have lost its footing, and the rapid current, circling around him, bore him along with it. He labored madly, but in vain, to retrace his steps; the rolling torrent rose above his saddle, and all that his gallant steed could do was barely sufficient to keep afloat; both man and horse were carried down between the contending armies. I could see him wave his hand to his comrades as if in adieu: one defending cheer of admiration arose from the French lines, and the next moment he was seen to fall from his seat, and his body, shattered with balls floated mournfully upon the stream.

This little incident, to which both armies were witnessd, seemed to have called forth all the fiercer passions of the contending forces; a loud yell of taunting triumph rose from the Highlanders, responded to by a cry of vengeance from the French, and the same moment the head of a column was seen descending the narrow causeway to the bridge; while an officer, with a whole blaze of decorations and crosses, sprung from his horse and took the lead. The little drummer, a child of scarcely ten years old, tripped gayly on, beating his little *pas de charge*, seeming rather like the play of infancy than the summons to death and carnage, as the heavy guns of the French opened a volume of fire and flame to cover the attacking column; for a moment all was hid from our eyes; the moment after the grape shot swept along the narrow causeway, and the hedge, which, till a second before was crowded with the life and courage of a noble column, was now one heap of dead and dying; the gallant fellow which led them on, fell among the first rank, and the little child, as if kneeling, was struck dead beside the parapet; his fair hair floated across his cold features, and seemed in its motion to lend a look of life, when the heart's throb had ceased for ever. The artillery re-opened upon us, and, when the smoke had cleared away, we discovered that the French had advanced to the middle of the bridge, they carried off the body of their general. Twice they essayed to cross, and twice the death dealing fire of our guns covered the narrow bridge with slain; while, by the wild pibroch of the forty second swelling madly into notes of exultation and triumph, the Highlander could scarcely be prevented from advancing hand to hand with the foe. Gradually the French slackened their fire, their great guns were one by one withdrawn from the heights, and a dropping, irregular musketry at intervals sustained the fight, which, ere sunset, ceased altogether; and thus terminated the battle of the Coa.

JERUSALEM.

VAST as is the period, and singular as are the changes of European history since the Christian era, Judea still continues to be the most interesting portion of the world. Among other purposes, it may be for the purpose of fixing the general eye upon the extraordinary land, that it has been periodically visited by a more striking succession of great public calamities than perhaps any other region. With less to attract an invader than any other conspicuous land of the East, it has been constantly exposed to invasion. Its ruin by the Romans in the first century did not prevent its being assailed by almost every barbarian, who, in turn, assumed the precarious sovereignty of the neighboring Asia. After ages of obscure misery a new terror came in the Saracen invasion, which under Amrou, on the conquest of Damascus, rolled on Palestine. A siege of four months, which we may well conceive to have abounded in horrors, gave Jerusalem into the