

INCIDENTS OF THE WAR.

SIEGE OF SEBASTOPOL.

THE SEA ATTACK.

River Katcha, Oct. 18.—The following is a copy of a few details of yesterday's cannonading of the Sebastopol forts by the fleet, which may be interesting:—

Yesterday the 17th, about half-past noon, the French fleet commenced the cannonade, leading in from the south along the south forts, exposed at the same time to a severe fire from the north as well as the south forts, which was not returned until their position was taken up. Admiral Dundas followed with most of his fleet, steering first southward and rounding up again taking position northward of the French, the Britannia and Napoleon being next ships, and placed towards the mouth of the harbour. The Terrible and Sampson began on the north side from the northward, the first interchanging a very heavy fire with the large fort on the north side (two tiers of guns and a third en barbette.—I think Fort Constantine). The Terrible kept at it with her engines stopped. The Sampson, disregarding the large fort, directed her fire on two very mischievous little forts on the parapet of the precipice which overlooks the sea fort northward of Fort Constantine.—The Wasp and Telegraph forts.—Occupied with these, she steamed right through the fire of the big fort, swept round in a beautiful manner, and again went straight at them. All the fire however, which was directed throughout the day at these two forts seemed to have but little effect. Silenced only at intervals, they continued a most galling fire. While the Britannia was rounding in from seaward, the Agamemnon proceeded along the north coast southward, to where the Sampson and Terrible were engaged. It was evident that this ship had a distinct mark in view. Cautiously closing with the land, she anchored within 900 yards of Fort Constantine, and she must have been quite close to very shoal water. This was the position of the day, and here the Agamemnon remained until near sunset, when she came out, but only owing to the closing darkness. She was closely supported by the Sanspareil astern, and latter in the day by the Bellerophon on her bow. Latterly the fort (Constantine, I think) which they were engaged with, was almost silenced, and the guns en barbette wholly so. The general impression is that very little damage has been inflicted on the enemy; but though all did their best, they can be little doubt that, had the other ships been able to close with a distinct object, and hammer at it as the Agamemnon did at hers, the result would have been very different. She lay close to her work, and would have breached it, but the fire at times would have to be withdrawn to silence the small forts on the hill, which were hulling her meantime. On resuming the fire on the large forts, of course the line of fire was altered, and more distributed.

The Albion and the London were engaged with Fort Constantine before the Agamemnon came up. They got a good deal cut up, and withdrew. The Albion had a number of men and her captain with the army, and was several times on fire while in action. He lay just outside, within fire, and not more than a mile from the Agamemnon, which was close in, and much nearer the others. The cannonade of the French appeared terrific and continuous. Enveloped in smoke, they kept up whole salvos, which looked awful, the smoke being lit up by the volleys of flashes and the roar of cannon continuous. The Turks followed the French in this, sometimes in whole broadsides, again their fire running continuously along the line.—There was less of this with the English ships, particularly with the Agamemnon. The smoke and roar were more awful, but the other was more business-like. Captain Christian, R. N. principal agent of transports, had his flag hoisted on board the Colombo.

Haring expended the number of rounds of powder which was limited to 50 each gun, at one time the Sanspareil withdrew, and the forts on the hill directed their full efforts at the Agamemnon. The Agamemnon fired 70 rounds, and her broadside is quite scorched the whole length. Sir Edmund Lyons, at the time occupied with the big fort, sent his flag lieutenant through a galling fire, to bring in the Bellerophon, and to get the Sanspareil back. He said, "tell them to come in; these forts will sink me, and I'm—if I leave this." He is of the truest stuff, fixes his mark, and sticks to it. The Britannia remained till after dark, steady also at her work, but she and the French were too far off.

Off the Katcha, Nov. 21.—The fleet has again relapsed into the state of repose from which it had been disturbed by the bombardment of Sebastopol on the 17th inst. It is busy in effacing the souvenirs of balls and shells, in making conjectures as to a future more serious combined attack, and in discussing the deeds and adventures of the different vessels engaged in the late affair.

I give you what I could collect of the latter, partly as an eye-witness, partly from the accounts of others who were so, for, as smoke formed decidedly the most prominent feature of the bombardment, it was only now and then possible to catch a glimpse of other vessels, which appeared and disappeared like so many

huge phantoms in the midst of the flashes and the thundering peals of artillery.

The most tragic was certainly the fate of the Albion and the Arethusa, the first forming part of the central, the second a part of the left division. Bold and undaunted, they entered close to the northernmost, or so called "Wasp" battery, and had scarcely time to open their fire when the cables with which they were lashed to the steamer were severed by shot, and they became unmanageable just at the moment when they were most exposed to the fire of the enemy. The Albion was set on fire in three places, and would certainly have gone on shore, as she was only in five fathoms of water, had not the Cambria, one of the steamers expressly kept ready for such an emergency, come up in time to rescue her from destruction, unfortunately not before she had lost 12 men killed and 70 wounded. To-day the Orinoco is going to tow her down to Constantinople. She is fearfully damaged, her mainmast much injured, and the mizen is tottering and bare, the Arethusa, although she suffered less in men, having only 4 killed and 14 wounded, suffered even more in her hull. It is, besides asserted that the dry-rot is in her wood. She went away yesterday evening, towed by the Emeu. Both these vessels, owing to this accident, quitted the scene of action after a short time.

If these two vessels have been the most unfortunate, the Rodney may certainly be said to have been the luckiest vessel of the fleet, except perhaps in the shot by which she carried away the mainmast of the Retribution. She entered during the latter part of the action close to the forts, and went ashore on the shoal running out from Cape Constantine. Fortunately it was already dusk and the Colombo at hand, which got her off without her having suffered great injury. Not so the Spiteful, which was lashed to her. She was so much damaged that she was brought in in a sinking state, and could only be kept afloat by the efforts of the crew at the pumps. She is still alongside the Rodney and undergoing the most necessary repairs to enable her to go away and be refitted.

Like the Albion and Arethusa the Trafalgar could not long keep her place, or rather, she never took it up properly, for the Rodney sent a Moorsom shell into the mainmast of the Retribution, to which the Trafalgar was lashed: it burst in it, the mast went down and both vessels were unfit for action.

The Bellerophon may likewise be numbered among the illused, together with the Sanspareil; the rest although not without loss escaped comparatively unharmed.

The old Britannia maintained her position, and was exposed to a hail of shot and shell. Both she and the Furious, to which she was lashed, kept up a good rocket practice at the batteries. I saw towards dusk some very well directed ones fly over. The Admiral himself narrowly escaped a shell, which burst on the poop. He was sitting on the poop railing when it fell.

The detached steamers on the left were decidedly the heroes of the day. To them was assigned the position north of the shoal running out from the Cape Fort. While the other vessels went down outside as far as Quarantine Bay and then veered round and opened their fire from their starboard broadside, the detached steamers steamed straight down inside, near the shore. The first were the Sampson, Terrible, and Tribune, who advanced like eclaireurs before the Agamemnon and the Sanspareil, which formed the main strength of this division.—These two, after having tried the range of their long pivot-guns at the Wasp Battery, steamed right down to the fort on Cape Constantine—the formidable casemated battery at the left of the entrance into Sebastopol, and engaged it.—There you could see them anchored, the Agamemnon at 800 yards, and the Sanspareil a little behind, enduring with unshaken firmness the heaviest fire of the enemy, and returning it with great vigour, while the steam frigates, who could approach closer in the shoal water, hovered around them, making the most of their independent position. The situation of two screw line-of-battle ships was the most critical possible, exposed as they were to a heavy cross fire, on one side from the northernmost batteries running along the shore, from the Star Fort side, and from the whole outward face of the fort on Cape Constantine. For two hours they had to encounter the whole fire of the enemy on that side alone, when the Queen, having left her first anchoring place, where the Turkish flag ship had come in her way, passed inside of the other sailing line-of-battle ships from the extreme right to the left, and came up alongside the two heavily-pressed screw steamers, and drew off part of the enemy's fire from them a movement which, as I told you, was acknowledged by Admiral Lyons hoisting the signal of "Well done Queen!" It was a marvellous sight to see such an immense vessel as the Queen passing the other liners inside; and both Captain Mitchell and Captain Powell, the commander of the Vesuvius, deserve the highest credit for the skill and enterprise with which they took the vessel in as well as out. Unfortunately, the respite which she brought was only momentary, for, being in but six fathoms of water, she was in danger of going on shore unless she anchored, while if she had anchored she would have had to leave her anchors behind, and perhaps something more, for she had caught fire from a red

hot shot; she was thus obliged to yield to the forza maggiore, and withdraw.

The Sanspareil, owing to her unwieldiness and the defects in her propelling force, which fails almost when most necessary, would have had a hard fate had not the Shark, a tiny little steam-tug, which attends the Sanspareil as a plannet does its sun, or the jackal its lion, gone in and towed her out. The skill and courage displayed by the commander of this little craft, Mr. Balls, second mate, excited general admiration. It was a striking practical illustration of the lion and the mouse, to see the little Shark help out the colossal Sanspareil, but at the same time it was a most gallant feat of seamanship.—It is reported that Admiral Lyons sent in the commander of the Shark with the words—"Go in; and you will find there a coffin or your promotion."

Both the Agamemnon and Sanspareil were obliged to leave buoys for their anchors but they left also some heavy marks of their presence on the face of the forts. Both ships did not quit their posts until nightfall for Admiral Lyons determined to be sunk rather than give in.

While I am relating to you the deeds done on the day of the bombardment I cannot refrain from telling you a happy note spoken the day after the action. The Turkish Admiral sent his excuses to Captain Mitchell, of the Queen, for having gone between his ship and the forts. The answer of Captain Mitchell was, "that he considered him to do his duty best, who was nearest the enemy."

The loss of the fleet in men amounts to 46 killed and 268 wounded.

Now you will wish to know what was gained by the bombardment. As I told you in my last letter, the batteries were never more than for a few moments silenced, so that it is difficult to say whether this took place in consequence of the injuries sustained, or only in order to let the guns cool. The day after the bombardment, the Sampson went down to see what injury had been done to the forts. Well, they look as if they were marked with the small-pox; but I am afraid it is not of a very dangerous character, except perhaps on the northern face of the Cape Fort, where at one of the angles two of the portholes have been thrown into one, but considerably larger one. There is indeed, a rumour current that they were obliged to steady a part of the Cape Fort by buttresses; but I have not heard of any one's having actually seen with his own eyes the buttresses.

Here you have, then, the palpable advantages and disadvantages of the bombardment before you, and you may judge whether the first are worth the second.

It is now established beyond doubt, that the greatest defence of the sea forts of Sebastopol is the shallow water, which does not allow a close enough approach to make ships' broadsides really formidable to them. The fact is very simple—a ship's broadside can produce a most formidable concentrated fire than any fort in the world; but ship's sides cannot resist fire so long. The closer, therefore, a ship comes to the battery the greater becomes its advantage; whereas its own danger decreases, from the forts not being able to depress their guns enough to hit the hull. An excellent proof of this latter fact—namely, that the danger of a vessel decreases by nearer approach, was furnished by the Agamemnon and the Sanspareil. Although not more than 200 yards from each other, the Agamemnon, which was closer in, suffered much less, vessel as well as crew; and then most of the shots fired into the Agamemnon damaged the rigging, while the Sanspareil suffered chiefly in her hull. The Russians have been perfectly aware of this. They sank therefore a number of vessels before the entrance of the harbour in a line from the shoal running out from Cape Constantine down to another shoal or reef, running out from the point opposite, on which Fort Alexander is built. They impede thus not only the entrance of the harbour out the approach to the forts themselves. The grand fort on Cape Constantine is, besides, protected on the north face by another shoal running out from the point on which the telegraph is erected.

The night before the bombardment a boat, with muffled oars, was sent to explore the two shoals; the crew went all round, and so close in that they could hear the people talk, and would have been able to understand what they said, had they known their language. Two small Russian steamers which were likewise outside of the sunken vessels when the action began, were lying off the entrance, but mistook the boat, as it seems, for a Russian. According to the observations made, the depth of water is so uncertain and variable, that large vessels could not enter beyond eight fathoms of water, which scarcely brings them within 1500 or 1600 yards.

From these and other previous observations to the same effect, it became apparent that with vessels alone nothing could be undertaken against the forts on the sea side. It was only in co-operation with the army that ships could be of great service, by creating a diversion in favour of the advancing land forces, and helping to reduce the place. The question was only to choose the right time, and at that time strike with the greatest energy.

THE LAND ATTACK.

Camp before Sebastopol, October 17, Ten p. m.—On the night of the 16th it was determined that our fire should be opened on the Russian lines the following morning, and it was evident the enemy was entrenching himself with much activity, and greatly strengthening his position. In spite of the efforts of our engineers our works were not completed, and most of the mortars could not be mounted on the batteries. Firing commenced, however, from the French and English batteries by signal at 6 30 a. m. on the 17th, but for 30 minutes previously the Russians fired furiously on all the batteries. The cannonade on both sides was most violent for nearly two hours.

Our left attack consisted of four batteries and 36 guns; our right attack 20 guns in battery. There were also two Lancaster batteries, a four gun battery of 68-pounders on our right. The French had about 46 guns. In all we were supposed to have 117 guns to subdue about 113 of the Russians.

At eight o'clock it was apparent that the French batteries in their extreme right attack, overpowered by the fire and inflamed by the guns of the Russians, were very much weakened, their fire slackened minute after minute.

At 8 30 the fire slackened on both sides for a few minutes, but re-commenced with immense energy, the whole town and the line of works enveloped in smoke.

At 8 40 the French magazine in the extreme right battery of twelve guns, blew up with a tremendous explosion, killing and wounding 100 men. The Russians cheered, fired with renewed vigour, and crushed the French fire completely, so that they were not able to fire a gun now and then at intervals, and at ten o'clock they were nearly silenced on that side.

At 10 30 the fire slackened on both sides, but the Allies and Russians re-opened vigorously at 10 45. Our practice was splendid, but our works were cut up by fire from the redan and from the works round a circular martello tower on our extreme right.

At 12 45 the French line-of-battle ships ran up in most magnificent style and engaged the batteries on the sea side. The scene was indelible, the Russians replying vigorously to the attacks by sea and land, though suffering greatly.

At 1 25 another magazine in the French batteries blew up. The cannonade was tremendous. Our guns demolished the round tower, but could not silence the works around it.

At 1 40 a great explosion took place in the centre of Sebastopol amid much cheering from our men, but the fire was not abated. The Lancaster guns made bad practice, and one burst. At 2 55 a terrific explosion of a powder magazine took place in the Russian redan fort. The Russians, however, returned to their guns, and still fired from the re-entering angle of their works: the cannonade was continuous from the ships and from the batteries, but the smoke did not permit us to see if the British fleet were engaged.

At 3 35 the magazine inside the works of the Round fort, was blown up by a shot.

At four the ships outside were ripping up the forts and stoneworks and town by tremendous broadsides. Only the French flag was visible, the English fleet being on the opposite side of the harbour. Orders were given to spare the town and buildings as much as possible.

From 4 to 5 30 the cannonade from our batteries was very warm, the Russians replying, though our fire had evidently established its superiority over theirs, the ships pouring the broadside after broadside on Forts Nicholas and Constantine at close ranges. Towards dusk the fire slackened greatly, and at night it ceased altogether, the Russians for the first time being silent. Up to this hour (ten p. m.) they have barely fired a gun. They are busy repairing damages, and we are doing the same, and are also mounting new guns and mortars for tomorrow.

The French have lost about 200 men, principally by the explosions, our loss is very small—under 100 killed and wounded since the siege began.

We have gained greatly on the works to-day and but for the melancholy disasters which befel our allies, should have crushed much of the Russian batteries. The French fleet avenged these misfortunes most amply.

The Grand Duke Constantine is supposed to have entered Sebastopol.

Much of the sea side of the town is in ruins. We re-open fire at daybreak.

October 18, three p. m.—the fire was resumed this morning soon after daybreak. The French were still unable to support us. Their extreme left is still silenced. They will not be ready till the 19th or 20th, so deranged are they by the Russian fire.

During the night the Russians remounted their guns and brought up fresh ones and established great superiority of fire and weight of metal.

At ten a. m. the alarm was given that the Russians were marching to attack our rear on the Balaklava road. Lord Raglan and staff, with large bodies of French troops, at once moved there, and found the Russian cavalry and two battalions of infantry, with one gun, endeavouring to creep up in a fog to the outposts. The Turks opened a fire from the redoubts and the Russians retired.