

One

Badajos

1

*T*here was a place on the right bank of the Guadiana where hares ran strong. It was near a large rabbit-warren, quite a celebrated spot, which the officers of the army besieging Badajos had soon discovered. Sport had been out of the question during the first part of the siege, when the torrential rain had fallen day after day, flooding the river, sweeping away the pontoon-bridges that formed part of the communication-lines from Badajos to headquarters at Elvas, turning all the ground round the town into a clay swamp through which the blaspheming troops struggled from their sodden camp to the trenches.

Having broken ground on St Patrick's Day, the army, which boasted a large proportion of Irishmen in its ranks, was confident that this third siege of Badajos would be successful. But the drenching rain, which persisted for a week, threatened to upset all Lord Wellington's plans. From the moment of opening the first parallel, the most appalling weather had set in. Trenches became flooded; the mud in the gabions ran off in a yellow slime; and men worked in water that rose to their waists. It was harder to bear than the firing from the walls of the town, for it was disheartening work, and good infantrymen hated it. They called it grave-digging, labour for sappers, not for crack troops. There was, unfortunately, a dearth of sappers in the army. 'Ah, may the

divil fly away with old Hookey! Didn't we take Rodrigo, and is ut not the time for others to ingage on a thrifle of work?' demanded Rifleman O'Brien.

On the 24th March the rain stopped, and fine weather set in. The digging of the parallels went on quickly, in spite of the difficulty of working in heavy, saturated clay, and in spite of the vicious fire from Badajos. The Portuguese gunners, bombarding the bastions of Santa Maria and La Trinidad, fell into the way of posting a man on the look-out to declare the nature of each missile that was fired from the walls. '*Bomba!*' he would shout; or '*Balla!*' and the gunners would duck till the shot had passed. Sometimes the look-out man would see a discharge from all arms, and, according to Johnny Kincaid, fling himself down, screaming: '*Jesús, todos, todos!*'

With the better weather, thoughts turned to sport. A partridge or a hare made a welcome addition to any soup-kettle. It was Brigade-Major Harry Smith's boast that there was not an officers' mess in the 2nd brigade of the Light division which he did not keep supplied with hares. In infantry regiments, in the general way, it was only possible for Staff-officers, with a couple of good remounts, to indulge in hunting or coursing, nor was it by any means every Staff-officer who owned a string of greyhounds. But Brigade-Major Smith was sporting-mad, and wherever he went a stud of horses and a string of Spanish greyhounds went too. If he had a few hours off duty, he would come into camp from the trenches, shout for a bite of food, swallow it standing, and set off on a fresh horse, and with any friend who could be induced to forgo a much-needed rest for the sake of joining him in an arduous chase.

But however heavy the going the sport was good, hares being plentiful, and Harry's greyhounds, despised by those who obstinately upheld the superior speed and intelligence of English hounds, generally successful.

The Brigade-Major was a wiry young man, rising twenty-five, with a dark, mobile countenance, a body hardened by seven years' service in the 95th Rifles, a store of inexhaustible energy,

and a degree of luck in escaping death that was almost uncanny. If he had not been such an efficient officer, he would have been damned as a harum-scarum youth, and had indeed often been sworn at for a madman by his friends, and his various Brigadiers.

His restless energy made his friends groan. ‘Oh, to hell with you, Harry, can’t you be still?’ complained Charlie Eeles, hailed from his tent to the chase. ‘Oh, very well, I’ll come! Who goes with us?’

‘Stewart. Bustle about, man! I must be back by six o’clock at latest.’

Grumbling, cursing, Lieutenant Eeles turned out, for although he had been on duty for six hours in the trenches, and was tired and cold, it was always much more amusing to go with Harry than to stay in camp. By the time he was in the saddle, Captain the Honourable James Stewart had joined them, mounted on a blood-mare, and demanding to know what was keeping Harry.

The Light and 4th divisions being encamped on the southern side of Badajos, near the Albuera road, the three young men had not far to ride before crossing the Guadiana river. The weather, though dry, was dull, and the sky looked sullen. Badajos, crouching on rising ground in the middle of a grey plain, lay to their right, as they rode towards the river. A Castle, poised upon a hundred-foot rock, dominated the eastern side of the town, and overlooked the confluence of the Guadiana with the smaller Rivillas river. On this side of Badajos, Sir Thomas Picton’s Fighting 3rd division was encamped, and the parallels had been first cut. The French, defending the town, had built up the bridge that crossed the Rivillas near the San Roque gate, south of the Castle, and had strengthened the two weakest bastions of the town – those of San Pedro and La Trinidad – by damming the Rivillas into a broad pool, guarded by the San Roque lunette. This inundation stretched from the bastion of San Pedro to La Trinidad, its overflow seeping into cunettes dug immediately below the walls of the town. An attempt to blow up the dam had failed, on the 2nd April, and the inundation remained, blocking

the approach from the first and second parallels, and covering all the ground from the walls of Badajoz to the Seville road.

Beyond the inundation, an outwork, known as the Picurina fort, had been carried by a storming-party from the 3rd division, under Major-General Kempt, on the 26th March. West of La Picurina, and due south of the town, a strong out-fort, the Pardeleras, was still in French hands; and on the right bank of the river, north of the town, the San Cristobal fort, standing on a hill that overlooked the Castle, and the old Roman bridge that spanned the Guadiana, towered over all. In previous sieges, the attacks had been directed against San Cristobal, and had failed; but in this chill spring of 1812, Lord Wellington, fresh from the conquest of Ciudad Rodrigo, had marched his troops south through Portalegre and Elvas, on the Portuguese border, to invest Badajoz on the south and east sides. Everyone knew that the assault was to be made on the weaker bastions of Santa Maria and La Trinidad, for these, and the curtain between them, were being relentlessly bombarded; and everyone knew that time was a more than usually important factor in these operations. Marmont, his headquarters at Valladolid, might be contained by a covering force of Spaniards to the north; but there was news that Soult, with the French army of the South, had broken up from before Cadiz, and was moving to the relief of Badajoz.

The bad weather had delayed the siege-work; there had been the usual trouble over transports; and a hundred and one checks and annoyances. The Engineers' Park was stocked with cutting-tools sent up from Lisbon, but the senior Engineer, Colonel Fletcher, had had the misfortune to be wounded in the groin during the early days of the investment, and was compelled to direct the operations of his subordinates from a bed in his tent. Admiral Berkeley, in command of the squadron at Lisbon, sent, instead of the British guns he had been requested to lend to the army, twenty Russian guns which were of different calibre from the British 18-pounder, and would not take its shot; while a Portuguese artillery officer, anxious to be helpful, added to

Colonel Dickson's worries by unearthing from a store in Elvas some iron and brass guns of startling antiquity.

The siege-operations were under the general command of Sir Thomas Picton, whose division divided the trench-duty with the Light and 4th divisions.

The Light division, which was composed of the 95th Rifles, the 52nd and 43rd regiments, with the 1st and 3rd Portuguese Caçadores, was at present led by Colonel Andrew Barnard, who held the command until some senior officer should be appointed to relieve him of it. He was filling the place of that great, and rather terrible little man, General Craufurd, killed in the assault on Ciudad Rodrigo. Though the Light division had not suffered as severely as had the 3rd in that assault, it had sustained several serious losses. Craufurd was dead; Vandeleur, commanding the 2nd brigade, had been badly wounded; Colonel Colborne, of the 52nd, had a ball in his shoulder which would send him home to England; Major Napier had lost an arm; Captain Uniacke of the 95th had been killed by the explosion of a French mine at the great breach.

Death was too common an occurrence in the Peninsula for a man's friends to grieve long over his loss, nor was Brigade-Major Smith a young gentleman who indulged much in melancholy reflections; but Uniacke had been a close friend of his, and it would be a long time before he would be able to remember, without an uncomfortable tightening of the throat muscles, his last supper with Uniacke, immediately before the storm of Rodrigo. 'Harry, you'll be a Captain before morning!' Uniacke had prophesied. He had been in great spirits; he had not known that it would be his own death that would give Harry a company.

Harry had naturally volunteered for the forlorn hope, but General Craufurd had refused to let him lead it. 'You, a Major of Brigade, a senior lieutenant! No, I must give it to a younger man.'

He had given it to Gurwood, of the 52nd, no friend of Harry's: a sharp fellow, who had made the most of his own gallantry, Harry thought. However, Harry had managed to take a lively

part in the main attack, seizing one Captain Duffy's company, much to that gentleman's wrath, and leading the men in a rush upon the French flank behind the line of works, and enfilading it. With his usual luck, he had only been knocked over and scorched by the explosion of the mine which had killed Uniacke, and so many others. He had lost his cocked-hat, had borrowed a catskin-forage-cap from a Sergeant of the 52nd, and had ended an eventful night by being mistaken, on account of the fur-cap and his dark uniform, for a French soldier, by a gigantic private of the 88th Connaught Rangers, who had seized him by the throat, and had then made ready to thrust his bayonet through him. Fortunately, Harry had had breath enough left to enable him to damn the man's eyes, which had quite cleared up that little misunderstanding.

2

He had got his company in February, but because it had been Uniacke's he said very little about it (which was unlike him), and received the congratulations of his friends with less than his usual vivacity.

'Harry is the luckiest devil going,' Stewart said lazily. 'Except in his horses. Where did you get that clumsy brute, Harry?'

'I bought him from poor old Vandeleur.'

'I'll sell you a real horse,' offered Stewart coaxingly.

'You won't! I've got your Tiny already.'

'Well, don't go into action on that brute,' Stewart said. 'I don't wonder Vandeleur sold him.'

'Talking of going into action,' said Eeles, 'when is it to be? Speaking for myself, I've had enough of this siege.'

'God, so have I!' Harry replied. 'The men say it's the turn of some of the other divisions to do trench-work. Damn it, did we take Rodrigo, or did I dream it?'

'I seem to remember that we did,' said Stewart. 'I must own, though, that I did catch sight of some of Picton's fellows.'

‘Oh, damn Picton’s fellows!’ said Eeles, with all a Rifleman’s cheerful contempt for the rest of the army. ‘I hope his lordship leaves this business to us. Picton’s lot had all the honour and glory of the Picurina affair.’

‘Oh no, they didn’t!’ Harry retorted, his expressive eyes sparkling. ‘I told off one of our working-parties to fetch the scaling-ladders from the Engineers’ Park. When they brought ’em up, Kempt ordered them to be planted, and the boys of the 3rd told our fellows to stand out of the way while they went up. That didn’t suit our men’s notions at all! *They* said: “Damn your eyes, do you think we Light Bobs fetch ladders for such chaps as you to climb up? Follow us!”’

His companions shouted with joy at this story, but Stewart said: ‘Harry, you liar!’

‘No, upon my word! It’s true as death! One of the Sergeants told me – Brotherton.’

Eeles remarked that Brotherton was a good fellow, but Stewart only laughed. Harry was still defending the story when they reached the vicinity of the rabbit-warren, for his energy led him into vehement argument as easily as it led him into impetuous action. A hare, getting up suddenly, put an end to the discussion; sport drove sieges and assaults temporarily out of mind. An unusually strong hare was presently found; Harry, always agog to demonstrate the speed of his dogs, gave her twenty yards law before hallooing the hounds out of the slips. She twice gave them the go-by, and although the dogs fetched round a dozen times, she kept on working her way towards the warren.

‘By God, I’ll have to head her off!’ exclaimed Harry, seeing tomorrow’s dinner escaping from his clutches.

‘No, don’t!’ said Eeles, intent only upon the sport. ‘Damn it, you can’t do that!’

‘Oh, can’t I, by thunder!’ Harry flung over his shoulder.

‘You fool, ’ware rabbit-holes!’ shouted Stewart, seeing Harry clap spurs to his horse’s flanks, and career away at a gallop in the direction of the warren.

Harry, however, was off in his headlong way, trusting to his horse, his whole attention concentrated on the hare. Irish Paddy put a hoof in a rabbit-hole, and came down heavily, and rolled over Harry.

Stewart was up with him in a flash, and had leaped out of the saddle, all thought of the hare forgotten. 'Oh you fool, you damned fool!' he said, on his knees beside Harry's inanimate body.

'Is he dead?' Eeles asked anxiously.

'No - yes - I don't know!' replied Stewart, ripping open Harry's tight green jacket. 'No, I can feel his heart beating! Harry! Come on, old fellow, wake up! Open your eyes, now!'

It was soon seen that such adjurations were of no avail. When they raised him, Harry's head lolled alarmingly; and although Eeles, who boasted a rough knowledge of surgery, pronounced that no bones were broken, no amount of coaxing, of chafing of hands, of slapping of cheeks, produced any sign of returning consciousness.

'It's no use: we shall have to bleed him,' said Stewart.

'Try some brandy!' urged Eeles, pulling a flask out of his pocket.

The brandy ran out of the corners of Harry's mouth. 'Oh, Harry, why *will* you be such a careless devil?' Eeles said distractedly. 'It all comes of trying to head the hare! Damned unsportsmanlike! I told him not to!'

'Never mind talking! You hold him, while I bleed him!' said Stewart.

Eeles made a knee for Harry's slight, wiry frame, while Stewart pulled his jacket off. A whip-thong made a serviceable tourniquet about one limp arm, and Stewart had just opened a blunt-looking pocket-knife, and had made a slight incision with it in the flesh, when Harry's head, which was resting on Eeles's shoulder, moved, and Eeles, eyeing Stewart's preparations with some misgiving, cried: 'Stop! Wait a minute, he's coming round!'

A drop or two of blood welled up from the scratch on

Harry's arm; his eyes opened, blurred and dazed for a few instants, but regaining brightness and clarity in surprisingly little time. They blinked up into Stewart's anxious face, travelled to the knife in his hand, and widened. The next instant, Harry had leaped to his feet, rather shaky still, but in full possession of his faculties. 'Keep off, you villain!' he exclaimed, swaying on his feet. 'What the devil - ?' He became aware of the thong bound round his upper arm, and plucked at it, weakly laughing. 'God save me from my friends! Why, you old murderer! Oh, look! If I'm not bleeding to death! Where's Moro?'

In the agitation of the moment, his friends had forgotten both hare and hounds, but at this enquiry they looked round involuntarily, to find that the sagacious hound, Moro, had killed the hare without any assistance from his master. Relief made them scold, but Harry, dabbing at the scratch on his arm with his handkerchief, was quite unrepentant, and merely abused the clumsiness of his horse.

Paddy, having picked himself up, was quietly grazing a few yards away. While agreeing that he was the clumsiest brute alive, Stewart told Harry that he deserved to be dead. But Harry was making much of Moro, and paid no attention to him. It was evident that he had sustained no serious injury, for though dizzy at first, he soon declared himself to be well enough to mount, and ride back to camp.

'What made you buy a stupid brute like this?' demanded Stewart, leading Paddy up to him. 'What's wrong with Tiny? He'd not let you down like that!'

'Strained a tendon,' replied Harry, hoisting himself into the saddle.

Stewart cast his eyes up to heaven. 'Ridden him to death, I suppose!'

'Will you stop scolding?' retaliated Harry. 'There's no harm done, I tell you! What's the time? Oh, by God, I shall be late! Come on, Charlie!'

'The luckiest devil in the whole army!' said Stewart.

His fall seemed to have no ill-effect upon Harry; he was, in fact, not a penny the worse for it; and the hare which Moro had caught made an excellent soup. Stewart prophesied an aching head and bruised bones next day, but he was wrong. A little thing like a tumble from his horse could not hurt an old campaigner, boasted Harry, looking absurdly young as he said it.

The remark did not even make Stewart smile. Harry was a very old campaigner. At the age of nineteen, he had been at Monte Video; six months later he was with General Whitelocke on his ill-fated expedition to Buenos Ayres. He had been to Sweden with Sir John Moore; he had been at Corunna; at the Combat of the Coa, where he had got a ball lodged in his ankle-joint, and had had to be sent to Lisbon to recover from it. Not that he did recover from it at Lisbon. Oh dear, no! None of your Belemites was young Mr Smith, malingering in hospital while there was fighting going on somewhere in the interior. As soon as he could put his foot to the ground, nothing would do for him but to rejoin his regiment. He found it at Arruda.

‘You are a mad fool of a boy, coming here with a ball in your leg! Can you dance?’ demanded his Colonel.

‘No, I can hardly walk but with my toe turned out,’ had responded Harry coolly.

‘Well! Can you be my A.D.C.?’

‘Yes, I can ride and eat,’ had said Harry, grinning to conceal the excruciating pain in his ankle.

And ridden he had until he had gone back to Lisbon with his Colonel, and had had the ball cut out of his tendon.

As soon as he could walk, he had rejoined his regiment, in time to take part in the skirmish at Redinha. (‘Ah, now you can walk a little, you leave me!’ said Colonel Beckwith. ‘Go, and be damned to you; but I love you for it!’)

Since Redinha, he had been in upwards of half-a-dozen sharp skirmishes, and three major actions: Sabugal, Fuentes de Oñoro, and the assault of Ciudad Rodrigo. He had emerged from all

these affairs without a scratch. When half the army was down with the deadly Alemtejo fever, Brigade-Major Smith was enjoying some capital hunting on the Spanish border. Anguish? Devil a bit! He had never felt better in his life.

When his duties took him up to the trenches outside Badajos, he was often covered with mud from the bursting of shells in the soft ground, but no splinter, no charge of grape, lodged itself in his spare frame. Shot-proof and fever-proof, that was Harry Smith: a roaring boy, the broth of a boy! said Private O'Brien, admiring his Brigade-Major's flow of bad language when the explosion of a shell knocked him off his feet. A damned good duty-officer, said Colonel Barnard; crazy as a coot! complained Harry's exasperated friends.

Nothing was going to keep Harry from making one of the storming-party that would presently assail the breaches in the walls of Badajos. By 6th April there were three of these: one in the bastion of Santa Maria; one in the bastion of La Trinidad, farther to the west; and the last in the curtain-wall between the two. The main attack was to be launched at these points, and the troops chosen to carry it out were the Light and the 4th divisions. That was just as it should be, but there were some gloomy spirits who thought old Hookey was wasting his time with all this bombardment of the walls. George Simmons, rather a serious young man, said that the way General Phillipon's men were repairing the breaches was going to make them more formidable than any unbroken bastion. The French evidently meant to defend the town pretty desperately, for the British Engineers reported on the morning of the 6th that every sort of obstacle was being piled behind the breaches. The guns would batter away at them while the daylight lasted, and that would prevent much work being done to repair the gaps; but when the hour for the assault was changed from half-past seven in the evening to ten o'clock, the Engineers looked a little grave. With the inevitable slackening of gun-fire, as darkness fell, the French would get to work again, and they could work to some purpose, those grenadiers. It looked like being a bloody business, however well planned it might be.

It was not only well, but very extensively planned. Though the Light and the 4th divisions were expected to carry the town by storming the breaches, no less than five secondary attacks were to be made. The trench-guards were to try to rush the San Roque lunette; old Picton was to make an attempt to take the Castle by escalade (a very forlorn hope, this: not at all likely to succeed); Power's brigade of Portuguese was going to threaten the bridge-head beyond the Guadiana, on the opposite side of the town to the damaged bastions; the Portuguese troops belonging to Leith's 5th division were to make a false attack on the strong Pardeleras fort; and – a last-minute decision, this – the rest of Leith's division was to brave the mines which had been laid outside the eastern walls of the town, and try to force the river-bastion of San Vincente.

These five secondary attacks, timed to begin simultaneously with the main attack, were not expected to succeed, but to distract the defenders' attention from the breaches.

The approach to these, from the camping grounds of the Light and 4th divisions, lay between the Rivillas river, with its spreading inundation, on the right, and a quarry cut in rising ground to the left. It was preconcerted that the 4th division was to keep nearest to the water, and, upon reaching the ditch dug round Badajos, to swerve to the right, and to assail the breaches in the curtain-wall, and in La Trinidad. The Light division was to strike westwards, to attack the breach in the flank of the Santa Maria bastion. Each division was to provide an advance of five hundred men, accompanied by several parties carrying haybags and ladders. These were to facilitate not only the storming of the breaches, but the descent into the ditch, which was reported to be as much as fourteen feet deep.

There was no lack of volunteers for the forlorn hope: the only difficulty lay in selecting from the eager crowd of warriors clamouring each one to be the first to assail the walls, the fittest persons for the task. The British army, hating the trench-work it had been forced to do, irked by the fire from Badajos, and depressed by the soggy condition of the ground, desired nothing

better than to come to grips with the enemy. Nor had the army any objection to coming to grips with the Spanish residents, held within the walls. Since Talavera, when the Spanish General Cuesta had abandoned the British wounded left in his charge to the French (who, if the truth were but known, had treated them with far more consideration than their Spanish allies had done), Lord Wellington's soldiers had added loathing to the contempt they already felt for the Spanish. If Badajos fell at the end of this third siege, the inhabitants need not look for mercy at the hands of its conquerors. Not only had Lord Wellington's men a grudge against the Spaniards, but they were further incensed by the knowledge that the inhabitants of Badajos had yielded very tamely to the French. If a besieged city surrendered at discretion, it might look for clemency; God help it if it resisted to the end! for then, by all the rules of war, it belonged to the victors to sack and pillage as they chose.

The officers knew what kind of temper the men were in. 'They'll regret it, if they hold out,' said Cadoux, in his soft, finicking way, admiring a ring on his finger, anxiously smoothing a crease from his smart green pelisse. He flickered a glance, a whimsical, mocking glance, under his long lashes at Brigade-Major Smith. 'I'm afraid it will be a very bloody business,' he sighed: 'Do you think I should wear my new coat, Smith? It would be dreadful if it got spoiled. Isn't it a damned bore, this horrid assault?'

Harry could not bear Daniel Cadoux. There was just the suggestion of a lip in Cadoux's speech. Harry said that he assumed it. He said that Cadoux, with his dandified dress, and his pretty jewellery, made him feel sick. He could not imagine why Cadoux had ever joined the army, much less the Rifles; or how it was that he could induce his men to follow him. 'One of the Go-ons,' said Harry contemptuously.

'What's that?' enquired a very young subaltern quite a Johnny Raw.

'That, my boy,' said Harry, 'you'll very soon discover for yourself.' Relenting, he added: 'The men say there are only two kinds of officers: the Go-ons, and the *Come-ons!*'

‘Oh!’ said the very young subaltern, digesting it, and reflecting that there was no need to ask to which category the energetic, fiery young man before him belonged.

No need at all: Harry Smith, dining with some of his friends a few hours before the attack on the night of the 6th April, was in tearing spirits, his eyes keen and sparkling as they always were when there was dangerous work to be done. ‘Come on!’ would shout Brigade-Major Smith presently. ‘Come on, you devils!’

4

A double ration of grog was served out to the men before the attack, but it would not have appeared, to a casual observer, necessary to hearten the troops with rum. All was bustle and high spirits in the camp, old warriors giving a last look to their rifles, and Josh Hetherington enlivening the occasion with a ventriloquial display as popular as it was scandalous. ‘Man-killer’ Palmer was adjuring Tom Crawley, sober for once, to kill a Frenchman for himself: a Peninsular catchword that would never grow stale; while Burke, who had volunteered for more forlorn hopes than anyone else, was alternately boasting of his past exploits, and exchanging good-natured abuse with a friend from the 52nd regiment.

The army was not in Lord Wellington’s confidence, nor had his extensive plans for the capture of Badajos been communicated to the men, but in their usual inexplicable fashion they knew all about those plans, just as they had known a full day before most of their officers the date of the attack.

‘Queer, ain’t it?’ remarked Jack Molloy, refilling his glass from Harry’s bottle of wine. ‘Never known ’em wrong yet. I wish I knew where they get their information.’

‘Oh, orderlies and batmen!’ said Kincaid, who had just lounged in as though he had nothing to do and had not that instant returned from a perilous reconnaissance journey with his Colonel almost to the very edge of the glacis above the ditch

outside Badajos. 'They pick up the news, and pass it on. Hallo, Young Varmint! Where did you spring from?'

Mr William Havelock, of the 43rd regiment, who was the gentleman addressed, made room on Harry's portmanteau for Kincaid to sit down beside him. There was very little space in the tent, and what there was seemed to be full of legs. Kincaid picked his way over three pairs of these, accepted a cigarillo from his host, and lit it at the candle that was stuck into the neck of a bottle on the table.

'Well, and how is our acting Adjutant?' enquired Stewart. 'Dined, Johnny?'

'If he hasn't, he can't dine here,' said Harry. 'He can't even have any port, because – oh yes, he can! I've got a mug somewhere! Stretch out a hand and feel in that case behind you, Young Varmint! A beautiful mug from Lisbon – yes, that's it.'

'Port? You haven't got any port?' said Kincaid, hope battling with suspicion in his face. 'Don't think to fob me off with any Portuguese stuff! I've been dining with the Colonel.'

'Exalted, aren't you?' said Molloy. 'Don't waste the port on him, Harry!'

'By God, it is port!' exclaimed Kincaid. 'Where the devil did you get it, Harry? Old Cameron gave me black strap!'

'Elvas,' replied Harry. 'The Beau himself hasn't any better.'

'The Turk!' said Kincaid, raising the Lisbon mug in a toast to the army's most famous sutler. 'I thought you must have got it by wicked plunder.'

'He probably did,' said Molloy. 'You haven't got any money, have you, Harry? Not real *money*?'

No, Harry had no money, but he had borrowed three dollars from the Quartermaster, after the fashion of all hard-pressed officers who had several months' pay owing to them. But the two skinny fowls which had formed the major part of the dinner had been almost certainly dishonestly come by, since they had been provided by his servant, who was an experienced campaigner.

'That man of yours will be hanged one of these days,'

prophesied Stewart. 'What's the news, and where have you been, Johnny?'

'No news, except that Leith's fellows are going to try the river bastion.'

'We know *that!* Talk of forlorn hopes! The men say if the Light Bobs and the Enthusiastics can't take the town, there are no troops that can. I suppose the hour's been changed to suit the Pioneers. I thought all the ground in front of the river bastion was mined?'

'Captain Stewart will now move a vote of censure on his lordship's plans,' said Molloy, looking round for somewhere to throw the butt of his cigar. 'Unless I can stub this out on Young Varmint's boots, I shall have to get up and go.'

'Well, go, then,' said Havelock. 'I'll have you know these boots of mine are the only ones left to me. Besides, there'll be more room with you gone. Oh, by God, will there, though! Here's George!'

The officer peeping into the tent was a somewhat stout young man, with a serious face that matched a certain sobriety of outlook. He had entered the army in the expectation of being enabled to assist in the support of his numerous brothers, a prospect that might well have appalled a less earnest man, and did indeed prevent Mr George Simmons from sharing his friends' light-hearted spirits. He was a little prone to moralize, but he was a good officer, and a faithful friend, and the company assembled in Harry's tent greeted him with affectionate ribaldry.

'No, I mustn't stay,' he said, shaking his head. 'I just heard you fellows funning, and I thought I would look in on you. I've been talking to one of Beresford's Staff. Would you believe it? – one of Beresford's A.D.C.s had the abominable bad taste to remark at table just now that he wondered how many of those present would be alive tomorrow! You can imagine what a look the Marshal gave him!'

His shocked countenance made Harry's guests laugh, but Harry said quickly: 'Damned young fool! Who was it?'

'No, it wouldn't be right to tell you. I daresay he is sorry now. It's very strange, the inconsiderate things a man's tongue will betray him into saying.'

‘Not yours, George, not yours!’ said Kincaid, getting up.

‘Well, I do hope it does not, for such observations as *that* are bound to produce some gloomy reflections,’ said Simmons.

5

Dusk, and the consequent slackening of gun-fire in the distance, soon made Harry’s guests glance at their watches, and bethink them of their duties. The party began to disperse, the host being the first to leave. If the story told by George Simmons had produced gloomy reflections in the minds of his auditors, not one of them gave any outward sign of an inward discomposure. They wished one another luck; they cracked a parting joke or two; and very close friends exchanged hand-shakes that perhaps expressed something more than the light words they spoke.

The night was dark, but quite dry, though the sky was heavily clouded. The Light and 4th divisions had to march down the ravine that lay to the east of the Pardeleras hill, and as they approached the trenches the air grew vaporous with the unhealthy river-exhalations. The storming-parties, conducted by the Engineers, trod softly, all talking being hushed in the ranks, since it was vital to the success of Lord Wellington’s plans that every one of the five attacks should be launched simultaneously. Even the trench-guards were unusually quiet; there was nothing to be heard from the trenches but a low murmuring noise. It was difficult marching, when no one could see more than a couple of paces ahead, but Badajos could be located by the little bobbing lights that moved along the ramparts. Someone whispered that Lord Wellington had taken up a position on the top of the quarry, from where he could observe the progress of the main attack, but it was too dark for even the most eagerly straining eyes to pick out his well-known figure in the surrounding murk. The men liked, however, to know that he was watching their exploits. It put them on their mettle, and gave them an added confidence, for though he was a

cold, often a harsh, commander, he was one who knew his business, a man one could put one's trust in.

The river-mist was cold, and grew thicker as the storming-parties crept up the slope of the glacis. From the ramparts, the sound of an isolated voice, loud in the stillness, drifted to the besiegers' ears. It was only the usual, warning *Sentinel, gardez-vous!* that was quite familiar to troops who had all done trench-duty outside the walls, but in the darkness and the quiet it sounded unaccustomed, rather fateful.

Colonel Cameron, and Johnny Kincaid, his Adjutant, having reconnoitred the ground by daylight, the services of the Engineers were not much needed to conduct the storming-parties to their positions. The men stole up the glacis, through the haze, and lay down as soon as they got into line, the muzzles of their rifles projecting beyond the edge of the ditch, ready to open fire. The clouds were parting overhead, permitting a little faint moonlight to illumine the scene. The Light troops, staring up at the walls of Badajos, which seemed to rise sheer out of the river-fog, could see the heads of the Frenchmen lining the ramparts. A sharp *qui vive?* from one of the sentries was followed by the report of a musket, and the noise of drums beating to arms. Colonel Cameron, commanding the four companies of the 95th Rifles which were already extended along the counterscarp to draw the enemy's fire, stole up to Barnard. 'My men are ready now: shall I begin?'

Barnard was giving some low-voiced instructions. He had his watch in his hand, and a wary eye upon the men of the ladder-parties, who were gently lowering the ladders into the ditch, between the palisades. No fear that Barnard would strike before the hour. 'No, certainly not!' he said under his breath.

The storming-parties were still creeping up the long slope to the edge of the glacis, when in the distance, to the east, the sky was suddenly lit by a flaming carcass, shot into the air. This was followed almost immediately by the roar of cannon-fire, mingled with the sharp crack of musketry. The time was a quarter-to-ten only, a circumstance that made Barnard curse softly. It was evident that the approach of Picton's escalading parties must

have been seen from the Castle, since it was unthinkable that Picton could have wantonly opened the attack before the appointed hour. While the last of the storming-parties of the Light and 4th divisions were stealing up the glacis, the darkness away to the right was lit by lurid bursts of flame; and the cannon-fire momentarily increased, until it seemed to the men crouching above the ditch that every gun in Badajos must be trained on to the very forlorn hope assailing the precipitous Castle-hill. What accident had occurred to discover the 3rd division's stealthy advance to the French could only be a matter for conjecture, but that Picton, finding that his movements had been seen, had launched his attack a quarter-of-an-hour before time, was soon apparent.

O'Hare, commanding the 95th storming-party, was fretting to give the word to advance, but was too old a hand to betray his impatience to the men watching him so eagerly. Barnard was as cool as if upon a field-day; but Cameron, waiting beside him, could scarcely contain himself. His party, he was convinced, had been seen by the French on the ramparts, who were now silently watching them. He expected his men to be under fire at any moment, and could not bear to keep them inactive until it should please the enemy to open on them. But Barnard was watching the stealthy ladder-parties. Once he sent Harry Smith to hurry a party that was a little behind the others, but he gave his orders in a quiet unagitated voice, and seemed not to be paying any heed to the gunfire and the rockets on the eastern side of the town.

The last ladder was in place as suddenly, deep and melodious, and quite audible through the noise of the cannons, the Cathedral clock within the town began to strike the hour.

'Now, Cameron!' called Barnard.

The volley from the British troops was answered by the crash of such a fire as even the most hardened soldiers had never before experienced. A flame, darting upward, disclosed to the besiegers

the horrors that lay before them. The storming-parties were some of them swarming down the ladders, and some, too impatient to await their turns, leaping down on to the hay-bags dropped into the ditch to break their fall. There, fourteen feet below the lip of the glacis, every imaginable obstacle, from broken boats to overturned wheelbarrows, had been cast to impede the progress of the attackers. All amongst them, wicked little lights burnt and spluttered. George Simmons, trying to stamp out one of these was jerked away by a friend. 'Leave it, man! leave it! There's a live shell connected with it!'

The roar of an explosion drowned the words; somebody screamed, high and shrill above the uproar, a fire-ball was thrown from the ramparts, casting a red light on the scene. Men were pouring down the ladders into the inferno of bursting shells in the ditch; within a few minutes the ground was further encumbered by scores of dead and dying men; and the most horrible stench of burning flesh began to be mingled with the acrid smell of the gunpowder. Every kind of missile seemed to rain down upon the stormers. The air was thick with splinters, and loud with the roar of bursting shells, and the peculiar muffled sound of muskets fired downwards into the ditch. The Engineers, whose duty it was to lead the storming-parties, were shot down to a man. The troops, choked by the smoke, scorched by the flames, not knowing, without their guides, where to go, charged ahead to the one breach they could see, only to fall back before defences more dreadful than they had ever encountered.

The breach was covered from behind by a breastwork; the slope leading up to it was strewn with crowsfeet, and with beams, studded with nails, that were hung from the edge of the breach. The men struggled up, fast diminishing in number as man after man was shot down by the steady fire maintained by the defenders behind the breastwork. But when the obstacles on the slope had been passed, the breach was found to be guarded by a hideous chevaux-de-frise of sword-blades stuck at all angles into heavy timbers that were chained to the ground. Those behind tried to thrust their foremost comrades forward; someone flung himself

down on to the sword-blades in a lunatic endeavour to make of his own writhing body a bridge for the men behind him. It was in vain. While his brains were beaten out by the butts of French muskets, the storming-party was hurled back in confusion, into the indescribable hell below. Powder-barrels, rolling down upon them, exploded with deadly effect; from the breastwork the exultant French were shouting mockery and abuse, while they poured in their volleys.

The trench was crowded not only with the dead and the wounded, but with the troops which still poured down into it. Harry Smith, unscathed, was hurled against someone by the bursting of a shell, and found it to be an acquaintance from the 4th division. He shouted above the din: 'What the devil are you doing here?' for it had been decided that the 4th division was to wheel to the right, to attack the breach in the Trinidad bastion.

'We couldn't do it! The trench is flooded!' screamed the man in his ear. 'Half of us were drowned! There's a cunette, full of water!'

'My God, then the divisions are mingled!' gasped Harry, realizing now why the ditch was so packed with struggling redcoats.

He was thrust on to the foot of a ladder. Here, on the dead ground, a man lay crumpled up, with his hands pressed to his chest. The leaping flames in the ditch showed Harry a face he knew. It was livid, but the eyes were still intelligent.

'Smith! Help me up the ladder! I'm done for!'

'Colonel Macleod! Oh no, dear fellow!' Harry cried, flinging an arm round him.

'I am, I tell you! Be quick!'

Half-supporting, half-carrying him, Harry got him up the ladder. He was groaning, but managed to say: 'The 4th are mingled with ours!'

'I know it! It's that cursed inundation! There, my poor friend, God be with you! I must go back!'

He left the wounded man, and swarmed once more down the ladder. The 4th division, finding the trench below the Trinidad

bastion impassable, had instinctively swerved to the left, and were almost inextricably mixed with the men of the Light division. The most appalling confusion reigned; a lane of fire now separated the attackers from La Trinidad; little parties of troops, rallying round isolated officers, again and again charged up the slope of the breach, only to fall back before the ghastly chevaux-de-frise at the top. Mistaking an unfinished ravelin for the breach in the curtain wall, a heroic band charged up it, only to find a waste of earthworks lying still between them and the wall of the town.

Harry fought his way to where Barnard, by superhuman endeavour, was separating his own division from the 4th. The Light fell back to the ladders, overwhelmed by a fire no troops could withstand. Harry, almost swept off his feet, saw the face of little Frere of the 43rd regiment, ghastly in the glare of the fire-balls. They were forced on together to the ladders.

‘Let’s throw them down! The fellows shan’t get out!’ shouted Harry.

A wild-eyed tattered private behind him heard, and roared: ‘Damn your eyes, if you do, we’ll bayonet you!’

Harry’s sash was loose, and got caught in the ladder. An angry growl, and the gleam of the threatened bayonet set him insanely laughing. He tore his sash free, and went on up the ladder, thrust forward by the irresistible surge of men behind him.

At the top, the surviving officers were re-forming their men, who, indeed, wished only for a breathing-space before plunging again into the ditch below. A brigade of Portuguese of the 4th division came up at the double, and went down into the ditch with an intrepidity that put renewed courage into the Light division.

Again and again the troops struggled through the reeking ditch to the slope of the breach, and up it to the defences at the top. ‘Why don’t you come into Badajoz?’ mocked the French.

More than two hours passed in this dreadful slaughter. The dead lay thick by the breach, and were trodden underfoot amongst the burning debris in the ditch. Between the attacks,

which were launched now by dwindling bands of soldiers rallying round any officer who still survived, and could still lead his men, the troops stood immobile, enduring doggedly the fire from the ramparts. There was no thought of retreat; a sullen fury possessed the men; the horrors of the assault, which at first had shocked, now aroused only the most primitive instincts in even the mildest breasts. Humanity seemed to have deserted the eyes that glared up under the leathern peaks of shakos to the ramparts; the fire-balls and the rockets fitfully illumined faces that were rendered unrecognizable not so much by the smoke that had blackened them as by the rage that wiped out every other emotion, and transformed good-humoured countenances into strange masks of animal hatred.

When the hail of missiles drove the besiegers to the ladders, they went up them only to re-form, and come on again. The main columns of the two divisions had been pouring reinforcements into the ditch for over an hour; Harry Smith, scorched, filthy with mud and blood, but untouched either by musketry or shell-fire, thought that he and little Frere must be the only two officers of the original storming-party who were not dead or wounded. Of his own regiment, officer after officer had fallen, some dead, some mortally wounded, some able to drag themselves out of the ditch to the rear. At midnight, a Staff-officer had galloped up to Barnard with Lord Wellington's orders for the Light division to draw off, but neither Barnard nor the men who followed him would give way. Again they attacked, and again they were driven back, always in diminishing numbers. A little before daylight, when the exhausted troops had drawn back beyond the glacis, Lord Fitzroy Somerset, Wellington's Military Secretary, rode up, and encountering Harry, called out: 'Smith, where's Barnard?'

'I don't know,' Harry answered. 'He's alive, that's all I can tell you. By God, this is a hellish night's work!'

'I know, I know, everything has miscarried! Picton was too soon, and Leith was late. You are the only troops that kept to the right time.'

‘Well,’ said Harry, dog-weary, but still game, ‘what did you expect? We are *The Division*, aren’t we?’

Lord Fitzroy, a Guardsman, smiled, but only said: ‘His lordship desires the Light and 4th divisions to storm once again.’

‘The devil!’ Harry said. ‘Why, man, we’ve had enough! We’re all knocked to pieces!’

‘I daresay,’ Fitzroy answered in his quiet way, ‘but you must try again.’

‘If we couldn’t succeed with two whole, fresh divisions, we’re likely to make a poor show of it now!’ Harry snapped back, letting his quick temper ride him for a moment. It was soon over; before Fitzroy could speak, he had smiled, and added: ‘But, by Jupiter, we will try again, and with all our might! Yet one of our fellows was sent off not five minutes ago to inform his lordship we can make no progress.’

Fitzroy said nothing; officer after officer had come up to Lord Wellington, where he stood above the quarry, watching the waste and the failure of his main attack, always with the same report to make: that the divisions were suffering terrible losses; that there were not officers enough left to lead the men; that the rope-parties could not drag away the chevaux-de-frise of sword-blades, or the stormers penetrate beyond it.

When he received the last report of failure at the breaches, his lordship was standing with two only of his aides-de-camp: Lord March, and the young Prince of Orange. March was holding a flaming torch which cast its glare on to his lordship’s haggard face. It looked ghastly, the jaw a little fallen, yet the expression was as firm as ever. His lordship, aware of someone standing behind him, turned, and laid a hand on the man’s arm. ‘Go at once to Picton, and tell him he must try if he cannot succeed on the Castle!’ he said quickly.

There was a moment’s hesitation; the gentleman addressed said with a strong Scotch accent: ‘My lord, I have not my horse, but I will walk as fast as I can, and I think I can find the way. I know part of the road is swampy.’

Lord March shifted the torch; its glow showed Wellington the

face of Dr James McGrigor, Chief of the Medical Staff. He removed his hand. 'No, no, I beg your pardon! I thought it was De Lancey.'

'My lord, I am ready to go.'

'No. It is not your business to be running errands.'

A little commotion was heard; someone was urgently calling: 'Where is Lord Wellington?'

'Here! here!' shouted the group round his lordship.

A mounted Staff-officer pushed up to them through the surrounding gloom. 'My lord, the Castle is your own!'

The grim jaw seemed to shorten. Wellington shot a question at the officer, who answered exultantly: 'My lord, Sir Thomas Picton, and, I believe, the whole division are in possession!'

'Good God, is it possible?' exclaimed the Prince of Orange.

'Go back to Sir Thomas, and desire him to push down into the town!' said Wellington. 'The Light and 4th must assail the breaches once again. You, sir, get back to your division, and desire Colonel Barnard to make another attempt. Inform him that General Picton is in, and will go to his assistance through the town. Send for my horse, March, and for yours and the Prince's too!'

The officer from the Light division saluted and wheeled his horse: as he rode off, he was joined by a Quartermaster of the 95th regiment, who had been standing all the time quite close to Wellington. Together they made their way back to where the Light division, withdrawn from the glacis, were lying beside their arms, officers and men together, in bitter silence.

The news that the 3rd division had taken the Castle was received with sullen disbelief. It was some minutes before Quartermaster Surtees could convince the soldiers of the famous Light division that the 3rd had succeeded where they had failed. To men who had tried so long and so unavailingly to fight their way past impregnable breaches, it seemed impossible that any troops could have entered Badajos. But a bugle-call, sounding within the town, corroborated the incredible tidings. Receiving the order to re-form, and assail the breach again, the men, who had staggered exhausted down the glacis a short time before,

leaped to their feet again with their weariness and their hurts forgotten, got into formation, and went forward with a will. They trod over their own dead, and mounted the breach, under a slackened fire. There was now very little resistance from the defenders; sounds of fierce fighting within the walls could be heard; the weakened Light and 4th divisions passed the breach almost unopposed, and established themselves upon the deserted ramparts.

‘By the living God, we’re in!’ gasped Charlie Eeles, tattered, blood-stained, and reeling with fatigue.

7

It was soon discovered that the abandoning by the French of the breaches had been caused, not, as was at first supposed, by the advance of the 3rd division from the captured Castle, but by General Walker’s brigade of the 5th division. This scarcely-regarded force, whose assault upon the river-bastion of San Vincente had been planned, like an afterthought, at the last minute, had been an hour late in launching its attack, a mischance due to a mistake made by the officer detailed to bring up the scaling-ladders from the Park. But at midnight, after some very fierce fighting, the brigade had won the San Vincente bastion, and proceeding along the wall, had soon carried the San José as well. Penetrating to the next bastion, they had met with such a spirited resistance that they were swept back to the San Vincente, and seemed even in danger of being repulsed from the town. But a reserve force, left at the San Vincente, soon set matters to rights, and the brigade swept forward, the French, whose numbers were considerably depleted by the calling up of more and yet more reinforcements to repulse the attacks on the breaches, retreating before them. The western bastions fell, one after another; and while a part of the brigade occupied these, the rest went down into the town, and made their way through the deserted streets to where they could hear the pandemonium that raged at the breaches.

It was strange, after the racket and thunder of the struggle on the wall, to find the town so silent. Every fighting man seemed to have been drawn to the ramparts, or to the Castle, where Picton, finding every gate blocked but one small postern, was battling his way out of the fortress. The battle-noises could be heard, but seemed distant, no longer distinct, but merged into a kind of roar. No one was encountered in the streets, but lights glowed under door-sills, and between the chinks of shutters, and whispering sounds could be heard in the houses, so that the men who passed down the streets knew that they were being watched by unseen eyes.

They took the main defending-force in the rear. As the survivors of the Light and 4th divisions reached the top of the breach, the French, after a short, flurried skirmish with the 5th division, were throwing down their arms; while General Phillipon, with a few of his Staff-officers, was escaping to the protection of the San Cristobal fort, beyond Guadiana.

Only a little isolated fighting took place after this. Lord Wellington, entering the town through the Santa Maria breach, from which the chevaux-de-frise of sword-blades had at last been dragged, passed between great mounds of red and green coats, and was saluted by ghastly figures that could manage still, in spite of their wounds, to drag themselves clear of the encumbering dead, and raise themselves on their elbows to give a faint cheer for his lordship. Wellington saluted stiffly, but the dawn-light showed the tears glinting on his cheeks.

The first battalion of the Light division was detailed for picket-duty in the town. Harry Smith, bruised in every limb, limping from a contusion on one thigh, his uniform cut to ribbons, came upon Kincaid, posting a picket, and hailed him in a cracked, hoarse voice. 'Alive, Johnny?'

'Oh, untouched!' said Kincaid, whom nothing could shake from his lazy unconcern. 'You look as though you had had enough. Hurt?'

'Devil a bit!' said Harry. He had worn his voice out with cheering on his men; a little tremor shook it. 'But O'Hare – poor

Croudace – Charlie Gray – M’Leod – God, what a night! I tell you, Johnny, the men are ripe for murder.’

‘Well, if it stops at murder I shall be surprised,’ said Kincaid coolly. ‘Cameron has our lot well in hand, but he’ll let ’em fall out to amuse themselves presently.’

‘Yes! and the whole division will go to the devil!’ said Harry, with a kind of weary violence.

By ten o’clock in the morning, the garrison of Badajos was marched off under strong guard to Elvas, and the British troops were told to fall out. Lord Wellington had lost, he said, the flower of his army in the assault upon the town. The French had ignored the long-established rule of surrendering a town once practicable breaches had been made in its walls, just as they had done at Ciudad Rodrigo. ‘*I should have thought myself justified in putting both garrisons to the sword,*’ wrote Wellington to Lord Liverpool; ‘*and if I had done so at the first it is probable that I should have saved 5,000 men at the second.*’ So it was not to be supposed that his lordship had ever the least intention of denying his soldiers their immemorial right to sack a town that had resisted to the end.

The men swore that every Spaniard in Badajos was an Afrancesado, which was the term used for anyone in sympathy with the French. When the terrors of the night were done, and the French garrison made prisoners, and the order to fall out was given, men who had fought through the dark hours like demi-gods, rushed into the town like hyenas. By noon all semblance of order had disappeared; Badajos was a hell of misrule in which the horrors of the breaches were being fast surpassed.

Those who had censured the excesses committed by the troops after the fall of Ciudad Rodrigo were smitten to silence by the atrocities seen on all sides in Badajos. Murder, rapine, and rape were the orders of the day, and no efforts of the officers could quell the unleashed brutality of men who had shot their way into the wine-shops, and tapped the barrels in the streets.

Harry was amongst those who tried at first to curb the disorder. That he was not shot down by one of the privates of the 88th regiment was due not to any prudence on his own part, but

to the intervention of a reeling Rifleman who recognized his Brigade-Major, and called for a cheer for him.

A dishevelled woman was embracing Harry's knees; one or two soldiers fired their pieces in honour of the Brigade-Major; an individual, sitting astride a wine-barrel, and dressed in a priest's cassock, a woman's skirt, and a shako bearing the number-plate of the 95th regiment, drank a toast to him. The Brigade-Major swore at him, and was dragged off by one of his friends, before the humour of the men had had time to change.

'It's no good, Harry, it's no good, and there's work to be done at the breaches!' Charles Beckwith said urgently. 'None of us can stop this bloody sack! For God's sake, let's get out of the town!'

They were unable to get out, however, before drinking a cup from the barrel in the street. The motley creature astride it had a musket in his hand, and swore to shoot any man who refused to drink with him. Harry saw a nun being dragged, almost senseless, down the street, by a couple of redcoats, and tore himself out of Beckwith's hold to go to the rescue. The demented woman, still clinging to his knees, detained him for long enough to allow the nun's captors to drag her round the corner, and out of sight, and in so doing probably saved Harry's life, since the two soldiers were mad-drunk, and already quarrelling with one another over their prize.

As the day wore on, the carnage in the town grew worse. Though the inhabitants locked their doors, and shuttered their windows, the soldiers burst into the houses. The graceful, outward-curving iron bars to ground-floor windows were wrenched out of their sockets; locks were blown in by musketry-fire; doors were torn off their hinges; traders were either flung out of their shops into the streets, or, if they resisted, spitted on bayonets, while the troops installed themselves behind the counters, and carried on a roaring trade between themselves, until the inevitable quarrel broke out, and all ended in naked steel, or the hasty discharge of a musket. No religious house was safe from the mob of savages that marauded through the town; nuns were as easy to get as prostitutes, and could be as well

enjoyed, whether in the open market-place, or in the pillaged Churches, or in the reeking taprooms. From every house and shop soldiers issued, staggering under their loads of plunder. Nothing came amiss to men too drunk with wine and fighting to discriminate between the valuable and the worthless. A man would cherish a wicker bird-cage as jealously as a golden chalice from the Cathedral; and fight as bitterly for the possession of a copper cooking-pot as for the necklace torn from some woman's neck. Many of them, who had entered the town in singed and rent uniforms, were to be seen lurching about in the oddest of costumes: female dress, priestly vestments, or the grandeur of a hidalgo's wardrobe.

The camp-followers, women of almost every nationality, who had been amongst the first to enter the town at daybreak, were like a swarm of vultures. Indifferent to everything but plunder, they stripped the dead on the ramparts, rifled the pockets of men too badly wounded to do more than moan their ceaseless appeals for water, and even trod over the mounds of slain and wounded in their haste to get into the town. Once in, they drank as freely as their protectors, and showed an even more horrible rapacity. About two hundred of them took part in the sack; they were to be seen in all the streets, questing harpies who did not scruple to drag girls out of hiding-places for the soldiers to make merry with, while they, business-like even in drink, possessed themselves of the trinkets, and even the torn dresses of their victims.

Here and there, in the midst of this scene of unbridled license, an officer's cocked-hat was occasionally to be seen, its owner trying to escort parties of terrified women to safety. Sometimes he would succeed, quite a number of the men still retaining a hazy respect for their superiors, and responding to the voice of authority. But there was very little the officers could do when their men faced them with a red, brutish glow in their eyes, and swore they would shoot any man down who stood in their way. Most of them retired to the camp, outside the town, or busied themselves with collecting as many of their men as seemed the least drunk, kicking or dowsing them into comparative sobriety,

and forcing them to carry away the wounded from the breaches and the bastions.

A brilliant day had succeeded the clouded night; the sun beat down upon the old walls, and the plaster-coated houses; and from the ditch where the dead lay in heap upon heap, a faint, growing stench of putrefaction began to rise like an unhealthy miasma.

Quartermaster Surtees had got a party of decent men together, and had been at work dragging the wounded out from under the dead ever since dawn. Harry was there too, of course, with his brother Brigade-Major, Charles Beckwith; old Dr Burke, whom every man in the Light division loved, was there, heartening the worst cases by his loud, cheerful bullying, all the time the tears were pouring down his cheeks. Stretcher-parties, some sober, some too drunk to carry their burdens without stumbling over inequalities in the ground, were employed in carrying the wounded men to the rear. Some of these died before they reached the camp; some, their hurts roughly bound up in the ditch, were tipped off the stretchers by the clumsiness of the bearers, and started bleeding copiously again.

Now that the sunlight disclosed the results of the night's struggle at the breaches, men who had borne their part in it looked on the scene with horrified eyes. The carnage was more frightful even than they had known, the dead so numerous that they looked like wooden soldiers spilled out of a child's toy-chest – those of them who had not been stripped naked, and left in strange, sprawling attitudes to fester in the ditch.

George Simmons found Major O'Hare thus, upon the breach, shot through the chest by musket-balls that had torn great gashes in his flesh. He had volunteered to lead the storming-party, and had been almost the first to fall. He lay beside Sergeant Fleming, who had always been with him. They were both dead, and George, composing their twisted limbs, and drawing down the lids over their dreadfully glaring eyes, could not help shedding a few tears. 'A Lieutenant-Colonel or cold meat in a few hours!' O'Hare had said last night, shaking George's hand before he went off to lead the advance.

Well, he was cold meat, like Stokes, and Crampton, and Balvaired, and McDermid, like the hundreds of rank-and-file who lay piled up at the foot of the breach, in a fantastic, incredible mound. George brushed away the tear-drops, reflecting with the detachment of those who had fought in many engagements and had learned to look upon the loss in battle of friends as passing griefs, sharp yet soon over, that it was a bad soldier who mourned the dead overlong, as bad a soldier as the man who dwelt on the chances of his own death. A friend was killed, and one wept over him; but soon one would find another friend, not dead but miraculously alive, and a spring of gladness would make one forget the first sorrow.

Such a spring George felt when he saw Harry presently. His honest face grew lighter, its dejection vanished in a beaming smile. He grasped Harry's hand, ejaculating: 'Thank God! You're safe! Well done, old fellow!'

'If only we had carried it!' Harry said, casting a fierce, hungry look upwards at the breach.

'Never mind, they're all saying it was our attacks that made it possible for Leith's and Picton's fellows to break in. And Johnny's safe too, and dear old Charlie Beckwith! Oh, but, Harry, though there's no denying we are *The Division*, it makes one's heart swell, indeed it does, to think of those noble fellows of Picton's scaling the Castle-hill as they did! And the Pioneers, too, winning the river-bastion, with everyone ready to swear they must fail!'

'Yes!' Harry said, kindling with ready enthusiasm. 'Noble fellows, all of them, and the bloodiest, most glorious action, George! By God, I would fight every one of our battles again, but not this one!'

'Oh, no, not this one again!' George agreed, with a shudder.

'I hate sieges!' Harry said, viciously jerking the knot of his sash. 'The men behave like heroes, brave, drunken blackguards that they are! and then they go straight to the devil, as they're doing now!'

'Very true,' George said. 'It is melancholy, and upon more counts than one.'

'It plays the dickens with the brigade!' snapped Harry.