KARL HARTMANN.

A STORY OF THE CRIMEA.

IN FOUR CHAPTERS.—CHAP. III.

On the following afternoon, Hartmann and I, with of course the inevitable major, took up our abode at the Hotel of the Marshals, Sebastopol, in the same line of street as the church of St Vladimir Hartmann had luckily obtained—from Derjarvin, I supposed—the address of the surgeon-oculist with whom Mrs Dalzell was temporarily residing: and within an hour of our arrival I sent her, by the hotel garcon, the letters of which I was the bearer from America; one placed in my hands at the last moment by Hartmann—'from her husband,' he said; and a note, stating that I would myself wait upon her and my cousin Marian in about two hours from that time. This done, Hartmann and I went out for a stroll, closely watched within the place, we were quite sure; but egress from Sebastopol was wholly impossible without a guard at our heels.

Sebastopol is not a city: it is an immense fortress, and nothing else, of which the houses are troop-barracks, fortified with remarkable skill, and at an incredible cost.

'I quite agree with you, Mr Hartmann,' I remarked, 'that Sebastopol is not a place to be taken by the collar, even by an Anglo-French army; and yet, judging from the confusion and terror everywhere visible, the Rnssians themselves seem to despair of a successful defence.'

'The confusion is more apparent than real; and if what Kriloff reports is true—that a part of the fleet has been sunk, to block up the entrance of the harbour—a vigorous, systematic defence has, you may be sure, been organized.'

'You are of opinion, then, that the Allies will break their teeth upon this granite stronghold of the Czar?'

'Very likely. It is one thing to accept battle in the open field, and quite another to hold an enemy at bay from behind stone-batteries and covered ramparts. Worse troops than you and I saw beaten, hand over hand, the other day, ought to hold Sebastopol against any amount of force The successful defence of such places proves nothing. Napoleon broke his teeth, as you term it, upon Acre; Wellington, upon Bargos: but here we are at the Hotel des Marechaux again.'

'Remember,' said Hartmann half an hour subsequently, as I was about to proceed to my Aunt Viola's 'not a word of Karl Hartmann, nor of any *suspicion* you may entertain. Good-bye. I shall be anxious for your return.'

Ten minutes had not passed when my cousin Marian was in my arms—weeping, sobbing, lamenting; blessing, thanking Heaven all in a breath. Lamenting for her father's illness; blessing, thankful that her mother and herself would soon be near him—with him once again; it might be to aid in restoring him to life and health—to life and health in free, happy America—that far-off land of blessed promise, which she had so longed, yet dared hardly hope to behold! And now, to dwell there with dear Aunt Ga stone—a name that had ever been to her a holy household word; with Cousin Ruth, whom she knew as well from her letter as if they had been from childhood inseparate sisters! 'Too much! too much!' sobbed poor Marian—'a change too mighty, too blissful to be realized!'

It was too much for me, I know, who could say nothing, suggest nothing, do nothing, whilst that torrent of passionate utterance was pouring forth, but ejaculate unin elligible vocables in choking sympathy. We calmed down at last; got our eyes dry enough to see through them; and had I needed proof, that Hartmann was Arthur Dalzell, it would have been abundantly supplied by Marian's face, which was a refined copy of her father's. Neither could it be doubted that a man so beloved by his wife and child must possess many good, many admirable qualities—dwarfed, hidden, overgrown, as they might be by the poison-plants that spring up so plentifully in the sensuous and ardent natures that lack or spurn the purifying discipline of self-control.

'That is mamma's bell,' said Marian; 'she is becoming impatient Be very calm yourself, dear cousin,' she whispered, 'or you will renew her agitation, which, you may suppose, has been very great.'

Marian opened a door very gently: a lady habited in mourning sat near a window, her pale, finely chiselled face, from which a lustre seemed to breathe, through the eyes gave no light, turned expectingly towards us.

'My nephew Mark,' she said in Marian's silver accents, but more subdued, and sorrow-toned to the gentlest patience of expression—My nephew Mark!' I was on my knees before her, clasping her slender hands gazing up at her mild, seraph face, and marvelling no longer that my aunt Garstone held her still so freshly in remembrance, though divided from each other as they had been by more than thirty years of wearing and tearing life. I need hardly say that the mother's words of welcome, of present grief, of hopeful anticipation, were essentially the same as her daughter's, though more soberly tinted. She would have set out at once—for were there not oculists as skilful as Dr. Isomine to be found in America?—but that she must perforce wait to see Gabriel Derjarvin who was not expected in Sebastopol for some days to come Presently our conversation assumed a more cheerful tone: we talked of Aunt Martha, my father, Ruth—and were building castles in the air by the dozen, when Dr. Isomine came in to say that the *rappel* had beaten—at which signal every one, not on duty, must forthwith betake himself to his home. Of course I immediately took leave.

There was still, spite of the *rappel*, much clangour and confusion in the streets, caused it seemed, by the numbers of families of condition that were eager to escape, from the supposedly imminent assault by the Allies upon southern Sebastopol to the comparative safety of the northern side of the great naval arsenal; in furtherance of which natural desire, a bridge of boats had been moored across the main harbour.

I found Captain Dalzell, as I shall now call him, alone; and at his request, I related all that had passed in as nearly as I could remember the very words of the speakers. He listened with bowed head, and his face covered with his hands, in profound silence, marked, as much as broken, by a deep stifled groan which twice or thrice escaped him. He made no remark in answer, and after waiting a while, I said:

'It is absolutely necessary, Captain Dalzell'——There was a movement of surprise, but he controlled himself: 'It is absolutely necessary, Captain Dalzell, that immediately action should be taken in this most unhappy business.'

'That is true,' said he, raising his head and looking me sadly in the face; 'but what action—to what end?'

'I cannot say, ignorant as I am of the precise circumstances in which you are placed.'

'Let me plainly state them then: I *am* Arthur Dalzell, ci-devant captain in the Czar's service, and now under sentence of *mort infamante*, for horsewhipping one of his generals. This, Kriloff knows—knows, not suspects only, as Colonel Puhmpenuff supposed. He and Derjarvin have had a second interview, the result of which was, that the two worthies agreed to keep my secret, upon condition that they be permitted to keep and divide the five thousand pounds bequeathed to my wife.'

'Where could you learn all this?'

'From Major Kriloff's own lips, not half an hour since; uttered plainly, unblushingly, to my very face; but which of course would, if necessary, be as boldly, unblushingly denied. A legal acquittance, signed by Madam Dalzell, placed in his hands, the major was pleased to say in conclusion, and I might leave Sebastopol to-morrow.'

'That penalty, then, for your exceeding rashness, Captain Dalzell, must be paid.'

'Sir!' exclaimed Dalzell, springing fiercely up, as if about to strike me—'do you mean that, to save this worthless life of mine, I should beggar my wife and child; and, moreover, enrich Kriloff and his brother-scoundrel?'

'My Aunt Viola would not estimate the money at a feather's value in comparison with your safety.'

'Better and better! It is an additional motive, is it, that I should cast a wife—a wife stricken with blindness—penniless upon the world, because she is not only a long-suffering, gentle, but a loving, all-forgiving woman! Nay, nay, Master Henderson, bad as I may be, I am not capable of the infamy you counsel. When I prove so, Derjarvin will *know* me to be the dastard you have heard him call me. And herein,' he continued, for I, in fact, knew not what to say—'my will is its own lord; for if it happens that, by any means whatever, Mrs Dalzell is wrought upon to comply with Kriloff and Derjarvin's terms, I will that moment denounce myself to the authorities, and proclaim the treason to the Czar of the confederate villains. They fear this; and therefore it is that they shrink from working upon my wife's feelings except through me. This gives me time—perhaps a chance. Then Admiral Kornilof, whom I have called upon—the letter I placed in his hands was written by a niece of his, betrothed to poor Puhmpenuff—says he will gladly render me any service in his power.'

'Pray Heaven, these frail twigs may not fail you! But should they, it would be sheer insanity to sacrifice your life to a vain'——

'Be it so!' peremptorily replied the wilful man. 'We are all, as you have heard me say before, more or less insane. I, like Hamlet, am mad nor'-nor'-west; but when the wind is southerly —— You know the rest. Good-night!'

What to the purpose could be said or done, with so fearless and unreasoning a nature to deal with? I was at my wits' end—no very long journey, the reader may think; and fain to wait with what patience I could muster for the solution which Time would bring—the doleful Time, as it limped slowly past in a beleaguered city, wherein one seemed to breathe an atmosphere of peril, dismay, and death. Derjarvin failing to appear as he had appointed, my aunt and cousin urged immediate departure, the business of the legacy to be left in the hands of a respectable syndic; and I dared not hint at the reasons which forbade compliance with so sensible an arrangement. Next came the bombardment by sea and land, and amongst the victims of that fearful day was Admiral Kornilof killed by the bursting of a shell. That frail hope gone, I once more essayed to shake Dalzell's resolution. Vainly, as before. My eager reasoning was as water dashed against a rock. He was far, he said, from the end of his resources yet. What his plan was, if he had one, I knew not. In fact, I rarely saw him, except in the morning before he went out; but I knew his old vice of gaming had regained its ascendancy, by the frequent drafts he made on my purse; and I could refuse nothing to a dying man, as I firmly believed him to be. It was very likely, I thought, that the insanity of play had suggested the possibility of winning a sum sufficient to purchase the connivance of Kriloff and Derjarvin, without impinging upon his wife's fortune. Poor maniac!

And thus the weary days dragged on, bringing us to Saturday, the 4th November. The failure of the combined attack had inspired the Russians with new courage, which the constant arrival of reinforcements—the tidings that two Grand Dukes were on their way to Sebastopol—the lying bombast, widely placarded in French and Russ, pretendedly descriptive of the ever-memorable charge of the British light cavalry at Balaklava—increased to exultant confidence. On that day, November the 4th, dull and gloomy as the weather was, Sebastopol seemed drunk with pride, and anticipated victory. Triumphal music resounded on all sides; the church-bells rang out their merriest peals; the vociferous cheers of the soldiery gave savage chorus; and religion—simulated, unreal, assumed to order, like the other less solemn shams in progress, lent its aid to inflame the intoxication of the hour—processions of popes, as before the Alma, bearing holy pictures, and chanting Israel's psalms of triumph over the heathen, constantly passing and repassing along the lines of devout and drunken troops, which in countless numbers thronged the streets.

Elbowing my way with difficulty back to the hotel from my aunt's, about nine o'clock in the evening, I found Captain Dalzell impatiently awaiting me. He was greatly excited—not, however, by wine.

'I am come, Mark,' he said, 'to bid you farewell. I leave Sebastopol in about four hours hence.'

'Leave Sebastopol! You have arranged, then, with—with'——

'With Kriloff—yes. You start and blush, and I am glad you do; it is an involuntary justification of what you have termed my insanity. Reassure yourself. Your Aunt Viola's husband is not yet fallen so low as to esteem base life above brave death. Kriloff & Co. will call here to-morrow evening to receive the legal acquittance for the legacy, when you will be free to deal with them, for, as I have already said, I quit Sebastopol long before the dawn.'

'You speak parables.'

'A few words will make my meaning clear. A great blow is about to be attempted against the beleaguering forces—a blow admirably planned, and, if successfully carried out, the star of England's military greatness will suffer grievous eclipse. Its main features may be thus described:—An immense force in infantry and artillery, variously estimated at from fifty to seventy thousand men, will assail the British position above Inkermann before daybreak. Should Menschikoff or the two Grand Dukes—I don't know who commands in chief—so far succeed as to extend a victorious hand across to Liprandi at Balaklava, the Crimean campaign will have terminated, and all that remain of the allied forces must re-embark—if they can'

'But surely there is no danger of such a catastrophe?'

'Much danger. The British position on the side of Inkermann is easily assailable, and the odds in numbers will be overwhelming. Should the Russians, under cover of the darkness, succeed in creeping up the slopes and ravines, and with their cannon gain the ridge of the heights unperceived, nothing but a miracle of war can give Raglan the victory. The British will be taken in flank, and it will be a long time before their own divisions on their left can be brought into action: the French will be still later. Still, if they are not surprised, a few thousand only of that astonishing infantry may make a stubborn fight of it til help comes.'

'But how—I really don't understand ——

'What this has to do with my leaving Sebastopol? Just this: by the favour of Major Bovinski, a Pole by birth, whom you have heard me often speak of lately, I accompany his regiment as a volunteer, in the van of one of the divisions, attired as a Russian officer; and favoured, as Menschikoff hopes to be by the darkness, I shall have at least a chance of joining my countrymen, if not of rendering them a much more precious service.'

'I understand. It is a desperate cast, yet one that even I would not attempt to dissuade you from.'

'Thank you, my boy. Farewell! You will know what to say to my wife—to Marian. If I escape—well; if not, they will be sure I do not fill a coward's or a traitor's grave. Farewell again! God bless you, Mark, and yours!' He was gone.

Throughout that fateful night, Sebastopol remained in a state of tumultuous agitation. Exciting addresses were delivered in all the churches by the Greek clergy to crowded military audiences—addresses sealed, hallowed by the subsequent mystic celebration in midnight masses of the Last Supper and the Saviour's Passion—'Do this in remembrance of me!' Grosser, but much more pardonable stimulants, were plentifully distributed; and the Russian host poured forth to battle and assured victory, inflamed, drunken, alike with fanaticism and brandy.

About seven in the morning, Kriloff, who had been absent all night, came in. Even his earthly, wooden nature appeared to be moved by a sense if a dim one, of the greatness of the issues about to be submitted to the bloody arbitrament of battle.

'You are early up, Mr Henderson,' he said (I had not so much as thought of bed or sleep); 'for my part, I could not rest, if I tried. But where is your friend, Mr Hartmann?'

'I have not seen him this morning.'

'Ah, a soldier of service he, who could sleep, I doubt not during the pauses of a *bataille rangee* Every minute now,' added the major, 'is worth a hundred soldiers to holy Russia.'

He drew out his watch, placed it on the table, and eagerly noted the progress of the hands. I did the same, my eyes glued to the dial; and so nervous, fascinated did I quickly become, that it required a strong effort of will to wrench away my gaze, and jump up from the chair with the intention of taking refuge with my aunt and cousin.

Kriloff did the same at the same moment. 'What's that?' he exclaimed.

'Do you mean,' said I, 'the shaking of the window, that'——

'Window! *Tonnerre d'enfer*, that is no window! Hark again! it is volleyed musketry; and that muttering thunder is the roll of drums! The mask is dashed aside at last, and they are fairly at each other's throats! Well, God defend the right!'

'Amen!' The battle had indeed begun in furious earnest, as the swiftly deepening, widening thunder of artillery the as rapidly increasing flashes of musketry and cannon-flame, in the direction of Inkermann, soon terribly testified. The surprise had not, apparently, been so complete as had been anticipated. Still, the British troops would be fighting at a frightful disadvantage. And Arthur Dalzell! What part had he already played, or was he now playing, in that bloody drama?

I sought shelter from these thoughts at my aunt's; and found her and Marian weeping, praying. I could do neither, blessed as the relief would have been; and I regained the street. It being Sunday, the great majority of the civilian inhabitants of Sebastopol were in the churches, where religious services—proclaimed by the incessant tolling of funeral bells to be masses for the dead and dying falling by hundreds with every detonation of the tempest of fire raging over Inkermann—were celebrated by relays of popes, and did not cease for a moment. At about half-past nine o'clock, however, a thin stream of anxious people began to set in towards the entrance to the Inkermann Road; to reach which, in the most direct line, it was necessary to cross the Admiralty and Careening Harbours; the road itself running along the eastern margin of the Bay of Inkermann, as it is called; and which, in reality, is the inner portion of the great or main harbour. A considerable crowd was already there, watching with pale looks, the continuous and fast-swelling influx of wounded soldiers; but no doubt appeared to be as yet entertained of ultimate victory. Albeit, as the morning wore on, a feeling of anxiety and distrust gathered strength; and in a crowded *cafe*, where I took refuge from the jostling crowd, exclamations of savage rage greeted the tidings which began to pour in soon after eleven o'clock. Presently, an officer of rank, supporting himself upon the arm of an orderly, entered the place, and in reply to an acquaintance, said in a low voice:

'It is a massacre, *mon cher*. The resistance is desperate—devil-like Still, I think we must win at last.' The friend said something, of which I only caught the word 'surprise.'

'It would have been complete, so far as our division was concerned,' replied the new-comer, 'but for an unaccountable act of madness, or treason. We had crept up unperceived to within about two hundred yards of an English battery, on their near right. In ten minutes, the unsuspecting gunners would have been quietly bayoneted at their posts, when an officer, whom the darkness did not permit me, through very close to him, to make out distinctly, suddenly wrenched a musket from a soldier, ran forward, and fired it, shouting the while like a demon. A score of muskets were levelled at him, with what effect I cannot say; but the mischief was, of course, irreparable; and a shower of round and grape saluted us from the battery, which had else been ours without resistance.'

'Dalzell!' my heart whispered, as those words fell upon my ear. 'Dalzell, no question!' and so impressed was I with the truth of that instinctive conjecture, my mind was so filled, as it were, with the hopes, the fears, to which it gave birth, that for a considerable time I was unheedful of what was passing around me. Rousing myself at last from the trance of thought into which I had fallen, I heard a