NEWS BY THE ENGLISH MAIL.

THE SIEGE OF SEBASTOPOL.

HEIGHTS OF SEBASTOPOL, Jan. 20.

The enemy's garrison in Sebastopol has, during the last two or three days, been showing forth in the lines in very considerable strength. Along the whole eastern and southern side of the defences, near the Round Tower, the Redan Fort, Redan Wall, Barrack Wall, Cemetery, and the open space near the Quarantine Battery, large bodies of troops were assembled during the greater part of the 17th and 18th. At first the demonstation excited some slight uneasiness, as being considered the prelude to a general sortie upon the whole of the allied position, and measures were accordingly taken to render it, like past attempts of a similar nature, utterly abortive and unsuccessful. The enemy, however, showed no disposition to quit their lines, and after remaining about the works I have mentioned some two or three hours, gradually dispersed into the town. On both the 17th and 18th, their dispersal was much accelerated by the fire from the French mortars, which managed to drop 10-inch and 13-inch shell wherever the enemy were thickest.

No reason can be assigned for such an unusual assemblage of the garrison. On the 18th inst. not less than 20,000 men could have been drawn up, and at that time the whole line of the Russian defences was fully manned, so that at the lowest computation, there are at least 35,000 effective men still in the beseiged town. For days past, there have been rumours of Liprandi having received reinforcements to the number of 40,000 men, and the sudden parade of the Sebastopol garrison certainly tends to corroborate a report which is firmly believed in "well-informed" circles, but to which I am obliged to admit I can give no credence. Liprandi *may* have have received some 5,000 or 6,000 fresh troops; but 40,000 is simply absurd. The manner in which this reinforcement is said to have arrived (in snow sledges) is, I think, conclusive as to the dependence which may be placed upon the rumour. It would puzzle all the Russians to provide snow sledges for the transit of 40,000 men with all their artillery, horses, baggage, and ammunition, while it would be quite possible to forward two or even three regiments, by such a conveyance, especially if no guns were taken. It is far more probable that the unusual force now in Sebastopol is owing to the return of the two or three corps under Liprandi, which quitted the Tchernaya some eight or ten days ago. Nothing is more likely than that this force, prevented by the severity of the weather from proceeding towards Eupatoria, should have retraced their steps and gone into quarters in Sebastopol, not less for the purpose of securing the, town than housing the troops against the terrible inclemency of the weather.

The French have considerably slackened in their fire upon the town since the date of my last letter. The reason alleged for this is, that such a comparatively trifling fire from 10 mortars, without producing any very important results, only leads the enemy to take measures to counteract the effects of a future bombardment. The English, it is said, are now in a position to support the fire of our allies, and only wait for favourable weather to commence the final attack. How far this may be true, I cannot venture to say, beyond that from many things which have come to my knowledge as to the state of our forces, I think it is, to say the very least, improbable. That a general assault may be atttempted much earlier than any one here expects is quite possible, but if so, it will only be done because the allied generals see they are losing men much faster from exposure and cold than ever they would do from an action with the enemy. At present, and I think for some weeks to come, we shall just remain as we are.

Since the last post and until the 16th, there has been an intense frost, which, while it lasted, surpassed for its severity anything we have yet felt. During the day the thermometer seldom rose above 18 deg., but with the night a keen wind swept over the snowy waste which froze the very blood of those exposed to it. No terms I can use, were I to write for ever, would give your readers even a faint idea of what the sufferings of our troops have been and still are. Hundreds are frost-bitten in the hands, feet, and face; the cholera is still among them, and scurvy and dysentery spread more and more each day. The men have no fires, the miserable stock of roots and shrubs which used to enable them to get a warm drink are now quite exhausted, and no materials for fires of any kind are to be found in camp. I am informed, that for two whole days throughout the great mass of our lines not a fire was lit, through the mercury then stood at nearly 20 deg, below freezing point. On each of these days, as if in mockery of their sufferings, the raw coffee beans were served out to the men as usual. No rations of firewood are served, or rations of tobacco, which the men would like almost as well. On the 18th a captain and fatigue party were sent down to Balaklava, with an application to the authorities there for 2,000 lb. of charcoal for the 4th Division, which was entirely without the means of making a fire, even for the sick in the regimental hospital tents. The thaw had set in during the night of the day on which this party started, so that after toiling through mud and water up to their knees, and reaching Balaklava in the middle of the day, they were coolly informed that there was not a single pound of charcoal to be had, or timber or fuel of any kind. So the party returned as they came—fatigued, wet, and miserable, to lay down in wet clothes in the mud of their tents, and most probably go on piquet, or into the trenches for the night. Perhaps it may modify the inveterate hostility with which the English public so unjustly pursue the gallant 46th, to lean that, as a regiment, it has almost ceased to exist. At the beginning of November last it landed at Balaklava with an effective strength of 1,100 bayonets. It now musters 117 serviceable men, and as things are going on it is not very improbable that at the end of a month even this small remnant will be reduced to the level of some of our other regiments here. For instance, there is a regiment which figures in the Army List as the 63d, but it is only in the Army List that it can be found, as nothing remains of it out here. The last time it was ordered for duty in the trenches only six men, I am informed, paraded for service, and of this small number two were unable to proceed even as far as the tent of the Brigadier-General. The whole six were, therefore, ordered to return to their quarters, and the force is now disregimented; including officers, serjeants, and officers' servants, the entire complement of 63d is said to be under 40 men. If the unanimous voice of the camp is to be believed, this deplorable result, is due more to the imprudence and mismanagement of Colonel Dalzell than even to short rations, hard work, and exposure. Every one who speaks of the 63d concludes with a fervent wish that the awful and unexampled mortality which has prevailed in the regiment may not be passed over unnoticed by the authorities, but that some inquiry will be made to ascertain if any undue severity exercised by the commanding officer has conduced, with other causes, to the destruction of what, two months ago, was one of the finest regiments in the Crimea. Such an inquiry is due not less to the memory of the unfortunate men, than to the reputation of Colonel Dalzell, whose imprudence is spoken of here in the harshest terms.

Major Macdonald, of the 89th, I am informed, was frozen to death in the trenches on the night of the 16th, and another gallant officer who fell into a deep snow drift, most narrowly escaped the same fate. Both in the nights of the 16th 17th, and 18th, many of the men on sentry and on fatigue parties were numbed by the cold in such a manner as to expire in a few hours afterwards. On the 17th, 14 men of the 46th were buried, the majority of the deaths being caused by the severity of the weather, and on the 18th, 10 more were interred from the same cause. On the latter occasion the thaw had commenced, and the bodies of 4 of the 10 were discovered among the tents, by the fact of their of their boots sticking out of the snow. I believe they were men who had been employed in fatigue parties, and who, becoming numbed and exhausted, sat down to rest on reaching their cantonments, and so perished miserable. During the continuence of this severe frost, all the men not actually on duty used to crowd into the tents, and by huddling together manage to keep themselves from actual frost bites. Of course the warmth of their bodies thawed the ground on which they sat into a mere puddle. The unfortunate men got saturated, and when on duty their clothes froze to their flesh in such a manner that on removing the stockings of some the flesh was stripped off the feet in large pieces. Yet in spite of these sufferings of the men of scurvy, dysentery, fever, cholera, of wet by day and frost by night, of hard work, short rations, and want of shelter, all the ministerial journals in England are filled with nauseous complaints on the conduct of the war and on the admirable manner in which the troops are now housed, fed and clothed. Than such statements nothing can be more utterly without foundation. At the time I write—and the remarks will stand good, I fear, for a month hence—the troops are not housed, are only indifferently fed, and miserably clothed. The huts which have been disembarked at Blaklava are being erected for hospital purposes around the village. I am informed that only one and part of another have gone up to the Third Division in the part which is the nearest to the place of disembarkation. When others are likely to come up no one can even surmise, but I think I shall not be found far wrong in stating that the great majority will never reach the heights of Sebastopol at all, and that until the severe weather is over our poor fellows will remain under canvas. The men are on full rations; but, in spite of the presence and spread of scurvy on salt rations, which they would be almost better without. About one-fourth of the troops have their warm grert-coats; the rest are clad pretty much as they landed. This is the actual state of affairs on the 20th of January, and to this miserable picture I may add that two-thirds of the regimental hospitals are insufficiently supplied with medicines, and none that I am aware of have any medical comforts, even of the simplest kind. I learn that on the 18th a message was sent in from the 77th Regiment, to the gentlemen at Balak'ava entrusted with the distribution of the Peel Fund for the relief of the soldiers, imploring medical comforts of any description, as the hospital was without even the most trifling stores. I know, also that for two or three days past, the medicine chest of the naval brigade has been almost entirely empty, though there are 80 patients among the seamen. Applications for medical stores have, I am told, been sent in to Balak'ava, and the answer returned was, there were none there. With such management and such exposure, the sickness among our troops augments each day. At the commencement of this week, 1,950 sick were sent in two days for passage to Scutari. On the following day, 900 more followed, and have been placed on board the Nubia, and on the 18th between 300 and 400 more came in, making a total of 3,000 men invalided in the course of eight days. Besides this frightful amount of sickness, the regimental hospital tents at camp are crowded; the hospital at Balaclava is crowded; and some 10 or 12 huts, which are being run up on the slope of the hill over the harbour, are filled as fast as they are finished. It is not enough to say that we are unfortunate in the mortality which prevails. Such a term is far too weak to stigmatize the cruel waste of life which takes place here every day. Our men are literally murdered—murdered by neglect, by incapacity, by the etiquette of military routine, and by every way in which our endless form of mismanagement can reach both officers and privates, old and young. Naval and military officers exclaim perpetually, "Oh, if we had only a coroner with an English jury here for one day, to inquire how and by what neglect our men die." This is an expression which, if I have heard once, I have heard 50 times during the last two or thre days. All seem appalled at the mismanagement and its deplorable results, but all deny the responsibility, and shift the blame from one department to another. According to one, it is the medical staff who are in fault, another lays it on the commissariat, another the engineers in not making proper roads, while all agree that to the want of the general *surveillance* of Lord Raglan over all, much, very much, is attributable. The two latter accusations are not wide of the truth, though, until lately, it has been a fiercely disputed point, whether the making of roads was in the department of the Quartermaster-General or that of the Engineers, and as a natural result of the controversy, the roads were not made at all. The road which some time ago the French completed for us comjointly with the Turks, was begun too late. The earth was so sodded with rain and cut up by incessant traffic that the stones thrown over the track have settled into ruts and holes, and the path is now almost worse than ever.

It is over this ragged route that the sick are transported on French mules to Balaklava. Until our allies can spare the animals, our invalids—no matter how urgent their cases—have to endure all the miseries of camp. When the mules are borrowed, no matter what the state of the weather—rain, hail, or snow—the sick are mounted on them, and sent in. Many, very many of the men die on the road during this painful transit. Our ambulances are of no use, because we have no horses; and, if there were horses, we have not enough ambulances to convey more than one-tenth of our present number of sick. These are plain truths, without colouring or exaggeration. They are truths to which every man out here—*not* at the head of a department will certify. I was informed to-day of the condition of a captain in the 90th Regiment (I believe), who is suffering from frost-bite, ague, and diarrhæa. When this illness was sufficiently severe, application was made for invaliding to Balaklava, and leave of absence was granted for a fortnight. Ten days of that fortnight have now elapsed, the officer is in the last stage of exhaustion, but still in his tent. The matter, I am told, has long since been represented in the proper quarters, but the answer was, that there was no means of carrying the officer into Balaklava, and that until the French mules could be obtained, he must remain and take his chance with the rest. The regimental surgeons call the cases "murder," and there are few in England who have lost relatives in the same manner but will agree with them. As another instance of our "system," no man sent to hospital ever brings his "kit" with him, though then, above all other times, he most requires a change of clean clothes; and no man ever yet entered hospital without the military authorities forwarding with him 60 rounds of ball cartridge and his Minie rifle, the latter in nine cases out of ten loaded. This rule, which seems almost too absurd to be true, has been persevered in, in spite of its notorious evils, for the last three months, and only now, when it is becoming unendurable at the hospital, Lord Raglan issues a general order, by which sick men are to be sent in with their clothes and their weapons left behind, and taken care of, until their owners are able to use them. Lord Raglan again took the Balaklavians by surprise, by entering the village on the 18th. Numberless were the jokes and comments in the town on this sudden visitation; and much ironical anxiety was expressed, lest his lordship should suffer from the excitement of leaving his comfortable quarters twice within 20 days. His lordship merely rode through the town, and only delayed a few minutes at his old residence near the church.

The Russian picquets round Balaklava have appeared unusually busy during the last few days, and the force on the left of the Tchernaya has been strengthened by the addition of some 3,000 or 4,000 men. These facts, coupled with the rumours of Liprandi's reinforcements, and the two visits of Lord Raglan, lead the general public here to imagine that something of importance is on the *tapis*. There is, however, but one answer to these conjectures—while the snow lasts, neither cavalry nor artillery can manœuvre, and during a thaw the whole ground is a mere marsh, and evolutions become more impossible than over snow.

The sanitary condition of Balaklava is beginning to excite serious apprehension. The filth of the town is now something beyond all description. Offal, dirt, waste stores, stagnant water, the refuse from English and Turkish hospitals, and some hundreds of half-decomposed horses, dogs, sheep, and oxen lie more or less in every little alley. Each house is over-crowded, and under each house are cellars, in which horses and Tartar families are stowed away. But the most serious evil of all arises from the immense number of interments which have lately taken place. We are now giving rations to 4,000 Turks; two months ago we were rationing 14,000, 8,000 of the missing 10,000 are dead and "buried" on the slope of the hill, over the harbour, though I think even a metropolitan sexton would hardly have the hardihood to call the last resting place of a Turk here a "grave." It is merely a little trough, about 18 inches deep, in which the bodies are laid on the bare rock, and the few handfuls of earth which have been removed in the process scattered over the corpse. Thousands have been thus interred. The late rains in many instances have washed the earth from these graves, leaving the bodies in every stage of corruption exposed to the eye and poisoning the air for miles around. I believe it was entirely owing to the hospital for Russian wounded being situated close at the foot of some of these plague spots, that none of the unfortunate Muscovites recovered of their wounds which almost without a single exception began to mortify and gangrene soon after the, men entered the place.

The necessity of taking immediate sanitary precautions has now been forced on the authorities of the town by the outbreak of a very virulent description of fever at Balaklava, and which is begining to spread. On the 17th a kind of council was held in Balaklava, over which Sir Colin Campbell presided, and promised that the work of cleansing the town and its neighbourhood should commence that very day. Though this was very properly the decision of the council, I believe the opinion of many was, that the evil had gone too far, and that with the return of hot weather nothing short of abandoning the town and camping on the summits of the hills would be found effectual. I have no doubt, your readers will recollect how repeatedly I have called attention to this important subject in my past letters, and pointed out the madness of the course we were pursuing, while in a part of the world, which is, and for ages past has been, the home of the plague. The subject has now excited attention, though not until a fever has broken out, as a natural consequence of its previous neglect. If any man can remedy the evil it is Sir Colin Campbell. Throughout the whole campaign he has shown himself the steadiest and most energetic of our generals, and since the death of Cathcart and the departure of Sir De Lacy Evans and Pennefather, is most certainly the only general in whom the whole force places entire confidence.

The most extravagant rumours are continually afloat in Balaklava; at one time a piece has been concluded, at another the Emperor of Russia is dead, at another the English are to abandon their trenches and retire on Balaklava in consequence of the awful sufferings and mortality among the troops in the front. The latter rumour was circulated everywhere, and believed by many for two whole days.

There is no improvement to notice in the general conduct of affairs at Balaklava, and to expect any now seems hopeless Guards have been mounted on the powder ships since the fire which lately occurred on board one, but the vessels themselves still remain indiscrimately mixed with othere. During the time the snow lay thick upon the ground, it was determined to make snow sledges for the conveyance of the provision to camp. The ships' carpenters were drawn from the vessels in harbour, and first sent to one authority to get the necessary stores, but the authority was not to be found, when they were sent to another, who was to be found, but who had no stores. The carpenters then, having wasted half a day, were sent back; and I believe, at one time, it was seriously intended to send to *England* for snow sledges, which could be made here in a day. So the idea was for a moment abandoned, until a rapid thaw set in, when everything being turned into mud, the importance of such a means of transit was at once admitted; and now, with every prospect of heavy rains, the sledges are rapidly advancing towards completion.

The Nubia left Balak'ava yesterday with sick and the Cleopatra and the Brandon have since been filled with the same miserable freigh