WHITE

OR, WHAT THE THRUSH SAID.

CHAPTER XV.-(Cont'd)

CHAPTER XV.—(Cont'd)

A few paces farther something wizzed by my ear. I thought I felt it touch me, like the wing of a gnat, and instinctively threw up my hand and looked round. "Steady, men; look to your front," came the captain's voice again, and then, "whiz, whiz," two more wasps went by, and I heard a low chuckle from Patsy Harrington, who marched in front of me, and Peter Hogan, answering a whispered inquiry from "Soft Joe," "did ye not know what that wasf Shure 'twas a bullet."

"Bight wheel. Forward: double!" same

"Right wheel. Forward; double!" sang out the captain's voice, and the next moment we were tumbling hurriedly into the trenches, behind a row of battered gabions, with the thunder of the Russian cannon close upon us, the "phit, phit" of the bullets striking the earth all round, the smoke drifting into our faces, and the whistling dicks plunging into the ground and scattering soil and atones in showers.

"Heads down; heads down," shouted the color-sergeant, as we crowded into our places, and then came a tremendous crash as a whiff of grape shot swept the gabion from before me and sent up a cloud of sand and twigs.

from before me and sent up a cloud of sand and twigs.

I got my head down pretty sharply, and was in no hurry to lift it up again, until I heard the color-sergeant yelling, "Now then, Davis, be alive. Stick up another gabion there"; and Pat Harington pushed by me with a long basket in his arms, which he pushed into the gap caused by the enemy's shot, bobbing down immediately, and only just in time, as a musket ball struck the wicker where his left hand had been, and knocked the tuft off his shako.

hand had been, and knocked the tuft off his shako.

"Let't files commence firing," said the captain, in a brisk, cheerful tone, as he hooked his sword, then added, "Here, Corporal Allan, hand me your rifle, and I'll try a shot."

Allan handed over his rifle, and the captain aimed round the side of a gabion and fired. Harrington fired at the same instant, and turning to the captain said. "Ye got him, sor; ye did, sor, begad; and I did; no, begad, he was too sharp for me, begad."

By this time I had somewhat recovered my presence of mind, and as I put on a cap and cocked my rifle I glanced about me.

Joyce stood close by my side, perfectly calm, in the act of reloading his riffe, which he has just fired. Corporal Allan, standing behind the captain, was peeping over his shoulder at the enemy. The color-sergeant, a grizzled veteran, was packing cartridges into his tunic between the buttons and speaking to the men in front of him.

ront of him.

"Steady, men, don't waste Government ammunition; come to the present, and when you see a head, bang at it, and down under cover. Mick Doyle, you'll be shot before dinner-call. They nearly had you that time. Man alive, keep your ugly phiz out of sight. We want to shoot 'em, not to frighten 'em. Leave me a space there, Tommy Dowling, while I pot one'; and the sergeant shouldered his way to the front, bobbed up, fired a shot and bobbed down again, while the other men got by degrees to work, myself amongst them.

It was hot work.

and the sergeant shouldered his way to the front bobbed down again, while the other men them. The bobbed down again, while the other men them. The species to work, myself amongst them. It was hot work. We were in the advanced parallel, not two hundred yards from the Russian batteries. A new angle both, and on made over-night, and on this new made over-night, and on the explosions followed each other at short intervals for hours. The gabions were him of the explosions followed each other at short intervals for hours. The gabions were him of the explosions followed each other at short intervals for hours. The gabions were him of the explosions followed each other at short intervals for hours. The gabions were him of the explosions followed each other at short intervals for hours, wheeldess of the enemy's sharpshocters, had to concentrate their fire upon the official structures against the Russian hatteries or inside the embrasures, hurling fragments of stone and splinters of iron in all direct against the Russian hatteries or inside the embrasures, hurling fragments of stone and splinters of iron in all direct against the Russian batteries or inside the embrasures, hurling fragments of stone and splinters of iron in all direct against the Russian batteries or inside the embrasures, hurling fragments of stone and splinters of iron in all direct against the Russian batteries or inside the embrasure oporate and biased and squealed about as a dose of our men went down in the first hour-Corporal Allan wounded in the left ground for a long time, begging some of use to put him out of his misery. Every large the proposal splinters of the structure and inspect of the s

and pitch dark. Joe and I had just come together when a fireball was pitched from the enemy's battery and fell close on our right. We immediately threw ourselves down and crawled away to our left, knowing from experience that a round shot would follow. The round shot came, and we sprang up to find a cloud of grey-coated Russian infantry close upon us. Bang went both our rifles together, and without a second thought we ran for the trenches, the Russians following, with hoarse yells, at our heels.

without a second thought we ran for the trenches, the Russians following, with hoarse yells, at our heels.

This was a common incident. Often we were attacked three or four times in one night, and our orders were to fire and fall back on the picquet, who in turn would fall back fighting on the trenches. So it was this time. The Russians seemed to be in force. Our picquet was driven in, and after a sharp tussle the enemy got possession of the first trench. But only for a minute. The supports rushed up, and the Russians were driven out again. They fell back in good order for a hundred yards, then halted, poured in a volley, and advanced at the charge.

Furious fighting; crash of muskery, clank of steel; grunts and growls and carres; clubbing of rifles, the heavy thud of falling men, the sharp, agonized cry of the wounded; a cloud of smoke, and diabolical flickering of fire-flashings, and once more we found ourselves falling back firing and swearing, the enemy in close pursuit.

It was at this moment that young

diabolical flickering of fire-flashings, and once more we found ourselves falling back firing and swearing, the enemy in close pursuit.

It was at this moment that young Simpson, waving his sword, and calling us to come on, ran out of our ranks towards the Russians, and fell about midway. Instantly Pat Harrington sprang towards him, as did two Russians. One of these fired at Pat, and missed. Pat fired and shot the Russian dead, then striding over to the officer, he bayoneted the other Russian, calling out, "Now thin, boys, this way for the spoorts."

It was a critical moment. The enemy were within a few yards of him. The officer was wounded. I should be no use if I returned. I saw the flerce, lowering looks of the enemy, their gleaming bayonets, and then the figure of the mad, handsome girl on the sea-wall at Portsmouth came into my mind, and I bounded to Pat's side, just as he pitched face forward into the snow.

Five minutes later we were back in our trenches, firing on the retreating Russians. Nor did they return that night. But they had done enough. Young Simpson was dead, and the brave Patsy was mortally wounded, not to speak of other losses.

I sought out poor Pat when I came off

I sought out poor Pat when I came off I sought out poor Pat when I came off sentry. He was lying on a great-coat apread on the snow, with his head on Joyce's knee. His face was very white, and his brows knitted, and hands clenched, as if in pain.

"He'll not last many minutes, poor fellow," said Phil. "Try if you can make him understand."

I knelt down beside him and put a drop of rum upon his lips, then asked him, in a clear and distinct tone, if he had any message.

message

message.

His eyes opened slowly. He knew me, and tried to speak, but his mouth was full of blood.

"Pat," said I. "the wife, the children—I will see them if I can."

A light came into the dull eyes. His lips quivered slightly. I pressed his hand—it was already cold—and put the clotted hair from his forehead. In a few minutes he was dead.

thrown till after four o'clock, when the right wing of our regiment came up and relieved us; and we doubled back out of fire and went to dinner.

The dinner consisted of thin soup and waxy potatoes; but we did not leave any of it. We were hungry enough to have eaten, as Pat said, "a washing of elothes."

CHAPTER XVI.

After this first experience of war came many days of heavy work and deadly firing in the trenches; many long nights on picquet duty round the camps or along the Woronzoff Road; many a desperate still manned by dense battalions of resolute and thought of the gaps in our roll.

The weather, too, became intensely cold, so cold that we could scarcely sleep, dog-tired as we were; and our olothing wors out, and we grew thin, and gaunt, and sickly. And so came Christmas.

On Christmas Eve we were on outpost duty, our company, near the left of our attack, by the Woronzoff Road. "Soft Joe" and I were companion sentries, moving on our short beat, and meeting one in two minutes. The air was bitterly cold, and the ground deep in snow. Joe had wrapped his ankles and arms with straw bands to prevent frost-bites, and I had thrust my chilled fingers under my cuffs and was trotting to keep my blood in circulation. It was near eleven o'clock

And then he would langh and go into long and fervent rhapsadies about "Amy." It was love that her he heart from failing. It was the thought of that sweet face and pure soul that shone above him like a star, so that his eyes never heeded the murky hell and mad devil's dance of murder that envisoned him. When I have been hipped and sore, ready to welcome death as a friend, weary of the hadeful present, and sick in the shadow of the hopeless future, I have looked at his radiant face and envied him the love of that English girl.

I got almost to love her myself from And then he would laugh and go into

dow of the hopeless future, I have looked at his radiant face and envied him the love of that English girl.

I got almost to love her myself from his enthusiasm; I did get to reverence her, and to think of her dimly as a guardian spirit, something brighter and better than mere flesh, yet warmer and nearer than the angels. And so strong was this semi-superstitious feeling that I would have gone single-handed into the Redan for her sake, would have died a hundred deaths to save my friend's life—for her. Not that dying meant much in the Crimea. Life was very cheap there, and many a man exposed himself to needless and desperate peril merely for the sake of excitement.

The winter passed away, and the grass grew green above our English graves, and the birds sang over the blood-soaked fields, and the cannon roared under the bright spring sky. And the Russians still held on, and the struggle grew fieroer and deadlier than ever.

It was an awful siege. Nearer the trenches reached towards the battered walls, deeper and longer stretched the curve of the investing batteries, louder and longer howled the iron throats of the slayers. Thousands of shells were hurled into the doomed fortress every day. Ceaseless fusilade went on, by which the devoted defenders fell. Heavier cannon, heavier mortars were mounted, the fleets of France and England poured in broadside after broadside, and still the dogged foe held on.

Five times in one night they drove us from the Sandbag battery, five times we recaptured it. The Mamelon was taken after fearful carnage; the White Works followed, and at last we held the Quarries, for which so many of both sides had died. And after each of these successes the bombardment grew more terrible. And still the Russians, cold and immovable, held on.

We took the Quarries on the 7th of June On the 18th our allied forces med

for duty again, and all that time the siege went on, and at the end of it the defences of Sebastopol were still intact, and the Russian courage and phlegm were still unshaken.

and the Russian courage and phlegm were still unshaken.

But directly afterwards came the fatal action of the Tchernaya River. It was the last attempt of the euemy to raise the siege. Down came the Russians, fifty thousand strong, upon the French and Sardinian positions, and for many hours a furious battle raged, the Russians charging again and again with sullen bravery, and the Frenchmen fighting in gala spirits, with cheers and even laughter; the end being once more the retreat of the assailants, with a loss of nearly seven thousand men this time, and many officers.

The very next day the word went forth, and all our batteries by land and sea began to pour in a ceaseless and murderous fire. For three days and three nights this storm of fire and iron rained upon Sebastopol, and, though the Russians bore up with their old steadiness, the hopes of our men rose as the hours went by.

The place could not long endure such

sians bore up with their old steadiness, the hopes of our men rose as the hours went by.

The place could not long endure such a murderous cannonade. No citadel could stand before it. Every day the British batteries alone threw some four thousand shells into the enemy's works; every day the walls were pounded by more than thirty thousand shot, and the musketry fire from the trenches became a perfect hail.

The Russians suffered fearful losses. I have heard it said that a thousand of them fell every twenty-four hours. Their cannon were dismounted, their gunners blown to atoms, or crushed beneath the carriages and masonry. As we peered between our gabions, or looked down on the fortress from the Catheart Hill, we saw the earth-works crumbling, the great masses of stone rolling down. We saw the roofs and chimneys of the houses melt and collapse, and ever and anon a stream of fame shot, up through a cloud of deband collapse, and ever and anon a stream of flame shot up through a cloud of debris with a sullen roar as some magazine exploded, sending scores of poor creatures to their last account. It was awful, horrible. The earth trembled, the batteries shook, the wind was hot with



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cesses the bombardment grew more terrible. And still the Russians, cold and immovable, held on.

We took the Quarries on the 7th of June. On the 18th our allied forces made a dash at the formidable walls, and were defeated, losing five thousand men. In this engagement I was knocked senseless by a spent ball before our army left the trenches, and Joyce, in rescuing a fallen officer under fire, was wounded in the neck.

It was two months before Phil was 4+ for duty again.

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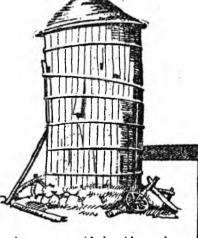
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