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INVASION OF THE CRIMEA.

CHAPTER I.

In the middle of this century the peninsula which divides the Euxine from the Sea of Azoff was an almost forgotten land, lying out of the chief paths of merchants and travellers, and far away from all the capital cities of Christendom. Rarely any one went thither from Paris, or Vienna, or Berlin: to reach it from London was a harder task than to cross the Atlantic; and a man of office receiving in this distant province his orders despatched from St Petersburg, was the servant of masters who governed him from a distance of a thousand miles.

Along the course of the little rivers which seamed the ground, there were villages and narrow belts of tilled land, with gardens, and fruitful vineyards; but for the most part the Chersonese was a wilderness of steppe or of mountain-range much clothed towards the west with tall stiff grasses, and the stems of a fragrant herb like southernwood. The bulk of the people were of Tartar descent, but they were no longer in

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CHAP. I.

the days when nations trembled at the coming of the Golden Horde; and though they were of the Moslem faith, their religion had lost its warlike fire. Blessed with a dispensation from military service, and far away from the accustomed battle-fields of Europe and Asia, they lived in quiet, knowing little of war except what tradition could faintly carry down from old times in low monotonous chants. In their husbandry they were more governed by the habits of their ancestors than by the nature of the land which had once fed the people of Athens, for they neglected tillage and clung to pastoral life. Watching flocks and herds, they used to remain on the knolls very still for long hours together, and when they moved, they strode over the hills in their slow-flowing robes with something of the forlorn majesty of peasants descended from warriors. They wished for no change, and they excused their content in their simple way by saying that for three generations their race had lived happy under the Czars.*

But afterwards, and for reasons unknown to the shepherds, the chief Powers of the earth began to break in upon these peaceful scenes. France, England, and Turkey were the invaders, and these at a later day were reinforced by Sardinia. With the whole might which she could put forth in a province far removed from her military centre, Russia stood her

* The villagers of Eskel (on the Katcha) declared this to me on the 23d of September 1854, and the date gives value to the acknowledgment, for these villagers had been witnessing the confusion and seeming ruin of the Czar's army.

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ground. The strife lasted a year and a half, and for twelve months it raged.

And with this invasion there came something more than what men saw upon the battle-fields of the contending armies. In one of the Allied States, the people, being free of speech and having power over the judgment of their rulers, were able to take upon themselves a great share of the business of the war. It was in vain that the whole breadth of Europe divided this people from the field of strife. By means unknown before, they gained fitful and vivid glimpses of the battle and the siege, of the sufferings of the camp and bivouac, and the last dismal scenes of the hospital tent; and being thus armed from day to day with fresh knowledge, and feeling conscious of a warlike strength exceeding by a thousandfold the strength expressed by the mere numbers of their army, they thronged in, and made their voice heard, and became partakers of the counsels of State. The scene of the conflict was mainly their choice. They enforced the invasion. They watched it hour by hour. Through good and evil days they sustained it, and when by the yielding of their adversary the strife was brought to an end, they seemed to pine for more fighting. Yet they had witnessed checkered scenes. They counted their army on the mainland. They watched it over the sea. They saw it land. They followed its march. They saw it in action. They tasted of the joy of victory. Then came the time when they had to bear to see their army dying upon a bleak hill from cold and want. In their

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CHAP. I. anguish this people strove to know their General. They had seen him in the hour of battle, and their hearts had bounded with pride. They saw him now commanding a small force of wan, feeble, dying men, yet holding a strong enemy at bay, and comporting himself as though he were the chief of a strong, besieging army. They hardly knew at the time that for forty days the fate of two armies and the lasting fame and relative strength of great nations were hanging upon the quality of one man's mind. Tormented with grief and anger for the cruel sufferings of their countrymen, they turned upon the Chief with questioning looks, and seeing him always holding his ground and always composed, they strove to break in upon the mystery of his calm. But there, their power fell short. Except by withstanding the enemy, he made them no sign; and when he was reinforced and clothed once more with power, he still seemed the same to them. At length they saw him die. Thenceforth they had to look upon the void which was left by his death. They grew more patient. They did not become less resolute. What they hoped and what they feared in all these trials, what they thought, what they felt, what they saw, what they heard, nay, even what they were planning against the enemy, they uttered aloud in the face of the world; and thence it happened that one of the chief features of the struggle was the demeanour of a free and impetuous people in time of war.

Again, the invasion of the Crimea so tried the strength, so measured the enduring power of the

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nations engaged, that, when the conflict was over, their relative stations in Europe were changed, and they had to be classed afresh.

Moreover, the strife yielded lessons in war and policy which are now of great worth.

Ground for tracing the causes of the war.

But this war was deadly. It brought, they say, to the grave full a million of workmen and soldiers. It consumed a pitiless share of the wealth which man's labour had stored up as the means of life. More than this, it shattered the framework of the European system, and made it hard for any nation to be thenceforth safe except by its sheer strength. It seems right that the causes of a havoc which went to such proportions should be traced and remembered.

Europe in 1859.

For thirty-five years there had been peace between the great Powers of Europe. The outbreaks of 1848 had been put down. The wars which they kindled had been kept within bounds, and had soon been brought to an end. Kings, emperors, and statesmen declared their love of peace. But always whilst they spoke, they went on levying men. Russia, Germany, and France were laden with standing armies.

Standing armies.

Personal government.

Comparison between this system and that of governing through a Council.

This was one root of danger. There was another. Between a sovereign who governs for himself, and one who reigns through a council of statesmen, there are points of difference which make it more likely that war will result from the will of the one man than from the blended judgments of several chosen advisers. In these days the exigencies of an army are vast and devouring. Also, modern society, growing more and more vulnerable by reason of the very beauty

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and complexity of its arrangements, is made to tremble by the mere rumour of an appeal to arms; and, upon the whole, the evils inflicted by war are so cruel, and the benefit which a Power may hope to derive from a scheme of aggression is commonly so obscure, so remote, and so uncertain, that when the world is in a state of equilibrium and repose it is generally very hard to see how it can be really for the interest of any one State to go and do a wrong, clearly tending to provoke a rupture. Here, then, there is something like a security for the maintaining of peace. But this security rests upon the supposition that a State will faithfully pursue its own welfare, and therefore it ceases to hold good in a country where the government happens to be in such hands that the interests of the nation at large fail to coincide with the interests of its ruler. This history will not dissemble—it will broadly lay open—the truth that a people no less than a prince may be under the sway of a warlike passion, and may wring obedience to its fierce command from the gentlest ministers of state; but upon the whole, the interests, the passions, and foibles which lead to war are more likely to be found in one man than in the band of public servants which is called a ministry. A ministry, indeed, will share in any sentiments of just national anger, and it may even entertain a great scheme of state ambition, but it can scarcely be under the sway of fanaticism, or vanity, or petulance, or bodily fear; for though any one member of the Government may have some of these defects, the danger of them will always be

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neutralised in council. Then, again, a man rightly called a minister of state is not a mere favourite of his sovereign, but the actual transactor of public business. He is in close intercourse with those labourers of high worth and ability who in all great States compose the permanent staff of the public office; and in this way, even though he be newly come to affairs, he is brought into acquaintance with the great traditions of the State, and comes to know and feel what the interests of his country are. Above all, a ministry really charged with affairs will be free from the personal and family motives which deflect the state policy of a prince who is his own minister, and will refuse to merge the interests of their country in the mere hopes and fears of one man.

On the other hand, a monarch governing for himself, and without responsible ministers, must always be under a set of motives which are laid upon him by his personal station as well as by his care for the people. Such a prince is either a hereditary sovereign or he is a man who has won the crown with his own hand. In the first case, the contingency of his turning out to be a man really qualified for the actual governance of an empire is almost, though not quite, excluded by the bare law of chances; and, on the other hand, it may be expected that a prince who has made his own way to the throne will not be wanting in such qualities of mind as fit a man for business of state. In some respects, perhaps, he will be abler than a council. He will be more daring, more resolute, more secret; but these are qualities

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conducive to war, and not to peace. Moreover, a prince who has won for himself a sovereignty claimed by others will almost always be under the pressure of motives very foreign to the real interests of the State. He knows that by many he is regarded as a mere usurper, and that his home enemies are carefully seeking the moment when they may depose him, and throw him into prison, and ill-use him, and take his life. He commands great armies, and has a crowd of hired courtiers at his side; but he knows that if his skill and his fortune should both chance to fail him in the same hour, he would become a prisoner or a corpse. He hears, from behind, the stealthy foot of the assassin; and before him he sees the dismal gates of a jail, and the slow, hateful forms of death by the hand of the law. Of course he must and he will use all the powers of the State as a defence against these dangers, and if it chance to seem likely—as in such circumstances it often does—that war may give him safety or respite, then to war he will surely go; and although he knows that this rough expedient is one which must be hurtful to the State, he will hardly be kept back by such a thought, for, being, as it were, a drowning man who sees a plank within his reach, he is forced by the law of nature to clutch it; and his country is then drawn into war, not because her interests require it, nor even because her interests are mistaken by her ruler, but because she has suffered herself to fall into the hands of a prince whose road to welfare is distinct from her own.

The power of All the Russias was centred in the

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Emperor, and it chanced that the qualities of Nicholas were of such a kind as to enable him to give a literal truth to the theory that he, and he alone, was the State.

Personal government in Russia.

In Austria the disasters of 1848 had broken the custom of government, and placed a kind of dictatorship in the hands of the youthful Emperor. And although before the summer of 1853 the traditions of the State had regained a great deal of their force, still for a time the recovery was not so plainly evidenced as to compel an unwilling man to see it; and the notion that the great empire of the Danube had merged in the mere wishes of Francis Joseph lingered always in the mind of the Czar and drew him on into danger.

In Austria.

Even in Prussia, though the country seemed to enjoy a constitutional form of government, the policy of the State was always liable to be deranged by the tremulous hand of the King; and the anticipation of finding weakness in this quarter was one of the causes which led the Czar to defy the judgment of Europe.

In Prussia.

In the Ottoman dominions Abdul Medjid was accustomed to leave the administration of foreign affairs to responsible ministers; and it will be seen that this wholesome method of reigning gave the Turkish Government a great advantage over the diplomacy of other Continental States.

Administration of foreign affairs under the Sultan.

In England there was no evil trace of that Oriental polity which yields up the power of the State into the hands of one human being. Happy in the love

Constitutional system of England in its

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bearing upon the conduct of Foreign Affairs.

of the people who surrounded her throne, and free from all motives clashing with the welfare of her realms, the Queen always intrusted the business of the monarchy to ministers of state enjoying the confidence of Parliament; and upon the whole, the polity of the English state was such that no Government could draw the country into a needless war unless its error came to be shared by the bulk of the people. Indeed, the power of the Crown in England is so far from being a source of disturbance, that it is one of the safeguards of peace. There are circumstances in which an ancient reigning House gains a view of foreign affairs more tranquil and in some respects more commanding than any obtained by a Cabinet; and although it is known that in these days ministerial responsibility can never be evaded by alleging the order of the Crown, the practice of the Constitution requires that the Foreign Secretary shall have the actual sanction of his Sovereign for every important step which he takes; and it requires also that, in order to the obtaining of this sanction, the explanations tendered to the Crown by the ministry shall be complete and frank.* The duty of rendering these explanations, and of asking for the Royal sanction, can scarcely be fulfilled without giving a minister the advantage of seeing a question from a new point of view. Therefore, although the responsible Secretary for Foreign Affairs can never find shelter by setting up the overruling will of his

* The existing practice of the Constitution in this respect is laid down in the debates which began the Session of 1852.

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