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978-1-108-04466-0 - The Great War with Russia: The Invasion of the Crimea; A Personal Retrospect of the Battles of the Alma, Balaclava, and Inkerman, and of the Winter of 1854-55  
William Howard Russell

Excerpt

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THE  
GREAT WAR WITH RUSSIA  
1854-1855

CHAPTER I

*CONCERNING MYSELF*

BEFORE I relate what I saw on the day of the battle of the Alma, which preceded the memorable Siege of Sebastopol and determined the course of the great war, the outcome of which was formulated in the Treaty of Paris in 1856, it is necessary to say a few words about myself. I was a barrister engaged on the staff of the *Times*. I was getting into Parliamentary business and was engaged in several good cases—election petitions, railways, &c.,\* but though I had always been fond of military matters I knew nothing of what is called by soldiers “soldiering.”

\* I need not say I never had any briefs, or scarcely any, afterwards. “*Qui va à la chasse perd sa place.*”

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[More information](#)2      *THE INVASION OF THE CRIMEA*

My early ambition to wear a uniform could not be gratified. I tried to get into the Spanish Legion, but I was too young. When I became an ensign in the Enfield Militia I was too old, and I had little taste and less leisure for “trainings,” so Colonel Mark Wood cut short my inglorious career on account of absence and neglect of duty; but I had seen actual fighting in that Schleswig-Holstein insurrection from which welled out the elements of the discord that set the Western world in flames, beginning with the decree of Federal Execution against Denmark, in 1864, which killed the Diet, led to the overthrow of Austria and her allies in 1866, to the war of 1870-71, to the demolition of the Napoleonic dynasty, to the reconstruction of the German Empire and ended in Europe as we see it to-day under arms preparing for Armageddon. I had followed the events of 1853 as most people did. I read the papers and the debates, and I watched, as many others did, the swelling of the tide which was bearing England to the battle-field, and that was all. When the year of grace 1854 opened on me I had no more idea of being what is now—absurdly, I think—called “a war correspondent” than I had of becoming Lord Chancellor—nay,

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## AN AGREEABLE EXCURSION

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far less ; for I confess I had, at times, visions of the Woolsack, such as, I suppose, float in the air before the mind's eye of many sanguine barristers like myself—no more idea, I will say, than the Government had of war, when they began to take a languid interest in the dispute between the Emperor Napoleon III. and the Czar Nicholas concerning the Holy Places at Jerusalem, which was enlivened anon by the destruction of the Turkish fleet at Sinope and quickened into active intervention by the occupation of the Principalities.

As I was sitting at my desk in the *Times* office one evening in February 1854, I was informed that the editor, Mr. Delane, wished to see me, and on entering his sanctum I was taken aback by the announcement that he had arranged a very agreeable excursion for me to go to Malta with the Guards. The Government had resolved to show Russia that England was in earnest in supporting the Sultan against aggression, and that she would, if necessary, send an expedition to the East. It was decided, he said, that I was the best man to represent the paper on the occasion. Lord Hardinge had given an order for my passage with the Guards from Southampton, and everything would be

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done to make my task agreeable: the authorities would look after me—my wife and family could join me—handsome pay and allowances would be given—in fact, everything was painted *couleur de rose*. When I made some objection on the score of losing my practice at the Bar, Mr. Delane said, “There is not the least chance of it; you’ll be back by Easter, depend on it, and you will have a pleasant trip for a few weeks only.” The Guards left London on 22nd February. I landed at Valetta on March the 2nd and put up at Durnford’s Hotel in the Strada Reale. The Brigadier of the Guards, to whom I had been commended by Lord Hardinge—a high-shouldered, neatly-dressed, narrow-minded little man, a perfect gentleman in manner—was a very imperfect soldier, without a ray of military light or power of leading; he had a very pleasant staff, and Byng, his youthful aide-de-camp, came now and then to give me news. Colin Campbell, the chief of the Highland Brigade—agile, expert, experienced, a man of very different calibre—was the backbone of the 1st Division. I wrote gossiping letters to London, and passed my time pleasantly enough.

But one morning there came a letter from the

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[More information](#)*DRIFTING EASTWARDS—“SOMETHING UP”* 5

*Times* office which considerably agitated me. The editor informed me that “the Government of England had determined, in conjunction with the Emperor of France, to send a strong force to Turkey, and that an expeditionary army of the two allies would advance to aid the Turks on the Danube unless the Czar retired from the Principalities. The Cabinet of St. Petersburg would assuredly give way when France and England put forth their power in defence of the Sultan. The editor “was much gratified with what I had done, and hoped I would take such a delightful opportunity of spending a few weeks more in the East.” I started forth at once to learn the news at Headquarters. Brigadier Bentinck told me he knew nothing of any forward movement. The Governor knew nothing either. The Admiral only knew that the baking-ovens in the arsenal were busy night and day, and that “something was up.”

Soon afterwards British steamers and transports arrived and departed like flights of ducks. Then we heard that Lord Raglan was on his way to take charge of the army in the field, that the Duke of Cambridge was to command the Guards and High-

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landers, and that a move eastwards might be made at any moment. But when I left London one thing was considered quite certain by the best authorities—that at the news of the Guards having actually arrived at Malta, the Czar would retire his army from the Principalities.

How was I to move? I had no *locus standi* (or sitting); the ships were under Government orders and charters. But I had a friend in the dock-yard in high place, and one evening, as I was telling him of my difficulties, he said: “I’ll manage a passage for you all right! But you must be ready to start at a moment’s notice, for I can’t tell myself when the first transport will go to the Dardanelles.” I packed up my kit, engaged a Maltese body-servant, and rode at single anchor.

Presently transports full of troops began to drop in. French men-of-war, towing sailing-vessels full of Zouaves and Turcos from Algiers and infantry from Marseilles, came into port, and Valetta was crowded with red-breeched infantry and bearded and turbaned Zouaves.

“I wouldn’t trust these fellows an inch,” growled Waddy, of the 50th—an old school-fellow of mine—

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## A SUDDEN MOVE

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as we looked down on the harbour full of ships flying the tricolour. “By Jove! they’re quite capable of a surprise! It’s a shame to let them go about the place in this way!” “But they are our allies,” said I. “That does not signify,” quoth he. There is nothing as strong as a good old British prejudice.

One night, 30th March, as I was at the Lodge of St. Peter and St. Paul, getting ready for initiation, an orderly thundered at the door and handed in a slip of paper to the tiler. “The *Golden Fleecce* will be off at midnight. Your berth is all right. Get your things on board at once.” It was sudden! I left my fellow-sufferers, A. Hardinge, A. Anson, &c., at the Masonic gathering. In an hour I was on board the huge steamer, which was crowded with the Rifle Brigade, and I was inducted into my cabin after some little trouble. With the Headquarters of the Light Division were embarked a wing of the Brigade and a detachment of Sappers and Miners under R.E. officers. I had had no time to look after my baggage. My Maltese looked after it—and himself. The “Smitch” had made a piteous appeal for a small advance of wages to leave “with his wife and tree little children.”

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I gave it to him—he went on shore; I never saw him afterwards. So I started on the morning of March 31 (a Friday), without servant or horse, and a very light kit, for Gallipoli. But I had then a heart to match my kit. General Sir George Brown, in command of the Light Division, and his staff, were on board, and my presence was very trying to him and to them. At first they could not make it out. The Captain could only say that I had an order for a passage from the proper authority. Sir George was an exceedingly handsome man, in perpetual uniform fitting like a skin, with sharp well-cut features, closely shaven and tightly stocked. He had always a cleanly look, like a piece of washed china—a shrewd but not unkindly look, a hot temper and a Scotch accent. People who knew said that, in mind, manner and person, he resembled his gallant countryman, Sir John Moore. Of his staff I have most pleasant recollections. Sullivan, bland and gingerly; Hallewell, burly and bluff; Whitmore, full of fun.

I knew no one on board the *Golden Fleece* when I embarked. When a week later I landed at Gallipoli, I had a bowing acquaintance with Sir George

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## TROUBLES ON SHORE

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Brown, I was on admirable terms with the Riflemen (some of whom, I am glad to say, are still extant), and I was indebted for much help and service to them—one lent me a servant, another gave me books, and a third shared his stationery, &c., and all were civil, most kindly. Thinking of them all now, I am inclined to doubt if the same battalion of the same famous brigade, despite cramming, special classes and exams., could turn out a set of officers more fit for work, better educated or instructed in their business than those of 1854. On 5th April I landed on Turkish territory.

Out of the ship, my troubles began; I was nobody's child on shore. The Rifles marched off far away to Bulair. I was forced to stay behind. I had no quarters, no rations at Gallipoli. I had money, but there was nothing to buy! The French, who were before us, had, of course, grabbed up the best (and that was bad) of the wretched town. I spoke no Turkish and no Greek. Fortunately I came, by mere accident, across a guide, philosopher, and friend—a very present help in that time of trouble—to whom Turkish

“.....was no more difficile  
Than to a pig it is to whistle,”

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who spoke many languages, and in all of them was quaint and kindly—Major Collingwood Dickson, R.A., who was awaiting the arrival of Lord Raglan. We were installed in two bare rooms with yawning floors in the house of the Widow Pappadoulos, and there we passed several weeks, till there was another move onward. The *Restaurant de l'Armée Alliée*, miserable as it was, was a special providence to us. I bought a Turkish pony from a peasant, and a dreadful “Bucephalus” from a captain of Chasseurs d’Afrique, the history of whose doings (I mean the horse’s) would fill a chapter. I made excursions about the place, and life in Gallipoli was at first novel and exciting. A stream of ships, great and little—continual salutes!—landings and departures of Generals, French and English!—“*Partant pour la Syrie!*”—“God save the Queen!”—strange uniforms, *Turcos*, *Chasseurs*, *Spahis*—and news ever interesting every day. And there was a most hospitable Consul and his charming wife—Mr. and Mrs. Calvert—whose doors were open to me.

But all the time the tide of war was flowing steadily northward through the Dardanelles, and one day I