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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

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The journalist William Howard Russell (1820–1907) is sometimes regarded as being the first war correspondent, and his reports from the conflict in the Crimea are also credited with being a cause of reforms in the British military system. This account of his time there, first published in 1858 and expanded in this 1895 edition, explains how Russell was sent by *The Times* of London in 1854 to join British troops stationed in Malta. He spent the next two years witnessing some of the key moments of the war, including the battle of Balaclava and the ill-fated Charge of the Light Brigade. His newspaper reports of the fighting and of the living conditions for the troops were widely read and very influential. In this retrospective work, Russell gives a more personal narrative of his experiences, making this an important account of one of the most brutal wars of the nineteenth century.

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THE  
**BRITISH EXPEDITION to the CRIMEA.**

By WILLIAM HOWARD RUSSELL, LL.D.,

*Special Correspondent of "The Times."*

REVISED EDITION, WITH MAPS AND PLANS.

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GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS, LIMITED,  
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BY

WILLIAM HOWARD RUSSELL, LL.D.

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## PREFACE

WHEN a series of articles, under the title of “A Personal Retrospect of the Alma, Balaclava, and Inkerman,” appeared from my pen in *The Army and Navy Gazette* some years ago, I was gratified to learn that these reminiscences of what I had seen of the three battles in which the Allied armies were engaged in 1854 were perused with pleasure and interest by the survivors of the campaign, and by readers of a later generation among the general public. I had indeed been often asked by soldiers and civilians how I fared whilst I was with the army to which I was attached by the slender but vital thread of life—the permission to draw rations when there were any—without which I could not have remained in the field. It was difficult to answer the question in a few words. Therefore I resolved to give some account of what I may term my “private life” as “a camp follower” engaged in describing, as far as I understood them, the military operations at which I

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“assisted” in the then novel capacity of a newspaper correspondent.

Forty years have elapsed since our early victories in the Crimea renewed the best traditions of the British Army. The heart of the nation beat high for a time with pride, exultation, and confidence. All the more acute was the pain caused by the suffering and failure which followed our triumphs. Our exultation was abruptly changed to anxiety and indignation. Confidence was replaced by doubt. Our pride was suddenly subjected to a heavy fall before all the world. The press stormed and the public raged! The Ministry was overthrown! Nothing was thought of but “our Army in the Crimea,” and when at last the south side of Sebastopol fell, our rejoicings were not by any means so enthusiastic as they would have been had the participation of our soldiers in the assault of September 8th, which led to that great result, been crowned with success.

The Commissions of Inquiry and Committees of Investigation which were appointed, in consequence of the popular outcry, led at the time to no important changes. The Generals were absolved

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from blame, were honoured and promoted—most of them marked out for high employ—and when the fiery blast of anger that had swept over the land died out there was a general agreement among all parties that it was advisable to let the Crimean war and its horrors sink into oblivion. “The sufferings were exaggerated! The stories of these newspaper correspondents were over-coloured! Everything perhaps was not of the best and for the best out there, but there are always hardships in warfare, you know!” The public conscience was lulled to rest, and a reaction soon set in which carried the correspondents clean away out of sight and hearing. No attempt was made to contradict their statements; but literary mice, under the auspices of the Court and “Society,” nibbled away assiduously at their work, and the great officials regarded them with a feeling stronger than dislike.

Had it not been for the sudden shock and alarm created by the swift destruction of the Austrian army at Königgrätz by the Prussians in 1866, it is probable that Governments and Parliaments would have gone on in the good old way down the stream of time till they came to their Niagara. But

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there was a wholesome and a well-grounded panic in the land; the overthrow of the French Empire four years later intensified the alarm, and the reformers had the ball at their feet, and kicked it to good purpose. I trust it will not be accounted to me as vain boasting if I say that I feel pride in my own work in this connection; and although I do not accept in all its fulness the praise of having “saved the British Army in the Crimea,” which has been accorded to me by some of those who were there and who ought to know, I claim the credit of having made known to their countrymen the wants and sufferings of our soldiers, and of obtaining for them the succour without which their state would have been desperate indeed.

The country has now its army fashioned on new lines, and regards it with some modest satisfaction. Officering, recruiting, training—administrative and regimental organisation have been modified, probably improved. I do not desire to see this new army tested, as the old army of 1854 was, by a great war, and it is not probable that I shall live to read of the doings of British soldiers in another campaign on the Continent; but, should it come, I hope and pray

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that officers and men will prove themselves worthy of the name they bear in the hour of trial, and show that they possess a full share of the courage, the endurance, and the patience which illustrated the annals of our army on the plateau of Sebastopol. Officers of the highest rank have recently described for the public their experiences before Sebastopol,\* and have denounced the cruel neglect and incapacity that wasted our army, in language of uncompromising severity. I leave those who think that “black was not so black” in those days to compare the criticisms to which I refer in the reminiscences of these eminent soldiers with the strongest passages in my letters, and say which they would prefer to adopt for the benefit of their friends.

WILLIAM HOWARD RUSSELL.

*Nov. 1, 1894.*

\* Field-Marshal Viscount Wolseley of Cairo, and the Quartermaster General, Sir Evelyn Wood, V.C.

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