CHAPTER LXXXIX

MERELY COMMON SOLDIERS

THE realities of war began to come home:

March 5, 1856: . . . It is no wonder that this [French] government want to get their army home when typhus is raging there, and they have by their own account 22,000 men in hospital, while ours is quite healthy. We took all sorts of precautions, and strongly advised the French to do the same, and to adopt a sanitary plan we imparted to them; they held it cheap, did nothing, and here are the consequences.

There was "no news [August 29th] but dreadful accounts of the health of both armies and of the prevalence of cholera both abroad and at home."

The Grove, December 31, 1854: The last day of one of the most melancholy and disastrous years I ever recollect. Almost everybody is in mourning, and grief and despair overspread the land.

January 19, 1855: . . . The accounts from the army are as bad as possible; one third of it is in the hospitals, and the quays of Balaklava are loaded with enormous stores of every kind, which it was impossible to transport to the camp. Very intelligent people therefore entertain the greatest apprehension of some catastrophe occurring whenever the severity of the winter, which has hitherto been comparatively mild, sets in.

December 5, 1854: . . . I saw a letter from Stafford, who is at Constantinople tending the sick and wounded, writing for and reading to them, and doing all the good he can—a very wise and benevolent way of reëstablishing his reputation and making his misdeeds at the Admiralty forgotten. . . . He . . . found the very worst accounts exceeded by the reality, and that nothing could be more frightful and appalling than it all was. It had greatly improved, but still was bad enough.

After each victory, there was a "long interval of suspense to be succeeded by woe and mourning." It was "nervous work

for those who have friends in the army to hear of a desperate battle."

November 23, 1854: . . . My brother lost his youngest and favourite son in this battle—a boy of eighteen, who had only landed in the Crimea a few weeks before, and who was in a great battle for the first and last time. This is only one of innumerable instances of the same kind, and half England is in mourning. It is dreadful to see the misery and grief in which so many are already plunged, and the universal terror and agitation which beset all who have relations engaged in the war.

In July, 1853, Greville "read the pamphlet 'Whom shall we hang?'" It was all very well to accuse Raglan of "incompetence." But was all as it should be nearer home?

January 19, 1855: . . . All the subordinate Boards are miserably administered, and the various useless, inefficient, or worn-out officers have been suffered to remain at their posts, to the enormous detriment of the service. The genius of Lord Chatham or the energy and will of the Duke of Wellington would have failed with such a general staff here, and with such a Commander in Chief as Hardinge, and with the *fainéantise* of Raglan.

December 20, 1854: . . . The great complaint now is the want of organization and good arrangement in the Crimea and generally at and about the seat of war, the confusion that has taken place in forwarding and distributing supplies, and the want of all expedients for facilitating the service in its various branches.

The one lamp amid the gloom was borne by Miss Nightingale, "in her mission of benevolence and charity," in helping whom, Lady Stratford "has been very active and humane."

For efficiency, the Government had a high reputation. "Its principal merit (April 24, 1854) was supposed to be its great administrative capacity and the wonderful way in which the business of the country was to be done." And the Ministers were given every chance:

May 28, 1854: . . . On everything which relates to the war, and on all questions of supply, they can do whatever they please, and have no difficulty, and encounter no opposition. . . . I met Disraeli in the street the next day, when he said,

"Your government is very strong." I said, the war which was supposed to be their weakness turns out to be their strength. They can carry everything which appertains to that, and nothing else.

And yet:

April 24, 1854: . . . It has turned out just the reverse of what was expected, for they commit one blunder after another, and nothing can be more loose, careless, and ignorant than the way in which their business is conducted. All sorts of mistakes and embarrassments are continually occurring in the House of Commons.

In Parliament (December 17th) Ministers were "furiously reproached":

Panshanger, December 14, 1854: The debates on Tuesday night were on the whole satisfactory, and not bad for the Government. Derby made a slashing, effective philippic on the text of "Too late," asserting that the fault of the Government had been that they had done everything too late.

Delane, editor of the *Times*, visited the Crimea, his companion being Kinglake, afterward the historian of the struggle. And in conversation with Greville, he "made strong charges against the Government":

November 26, 1854: . . . When he returned from the East he went to Newcastle and urged him to make an immediate provision of wooden houses against the winter, which would in all probability be required, and he suggested that this should be done at Constantinople, where, all the houses being built of wood and the carpenters very skilful, it might easily be done at a comparatively small expense, and whence the conveyance was expeditious and cheap. His advice was not taken; nothing was done, and now that the winter is come, and the troops are already exposed to dreadful suffering and privation, the work is begun here, where it will cost four times as much and, when done, will require an enormous time to convey the houses to the Crimea, besides taking up the space that is urgently required for other purposes.

"A proof of the blundering way in which our affairs are conducted" was offered by Cowley, the British Ambassador at Paris:

The Grove, December 31, 1854: . . . Newcastle wrote to him lately to beg he would ask the French Government to give us a model of certain carts their army used in the Crimea, the like of which our people there had applied to him for. The French Minister replied that he could give drawings but had no model; but at the same time he advised us not to think of having similar ones, as these carts are so ill adapted for the purpose that they had discarded them, and had ordered others and better ones to be made, which were now in course of construction *at Malta.* So that we propose to get these machines without finding out whether they are suitable or not, while the French supply themselves with the proper article *in our own territory.*

Politics might be suspended, but red tape had still to be cut, and it was "amusing" that, amid these tragedies, the Court of Exchequer (November 14th) was gravely consulting "the Act of Richard II" in order to decide whether, at an Election of Sheriffs, "the puisne judges had a right to vote."

As victory was delayed, there arose a demand for man power:

Panshanger, December 14, 1854: . . . Sidney Herbert made a capital speech, and produced a very good case in a very complete and satisfactory manner. He proved that reinforcements had been sent out month after month, and that they had never folded their hands and stood still as Derby charged them with having done.

December 20, 1854: . . . Raglan wants trained men as soon as possible, and complains that they send nothing but boys, who are of little use at first, and who die in great numbers under the hardships and privations the climate and the operations inflict on them.

November 26, 1854: . . . The *Times,* as usual, has been thundering away about reinforcements, and urging the despatch of troops that do not exist and cannot be created in a moment. I had a great battle with Delane the other day about it, and asked why he did not appeal to the French Government, who have boundless military resources, instead of to ours who

have none at all, and accordingly yesterday there was a very strong article, entirely about French reinforcements.

In the course of our talk he did, I must confess, make some strong charges against the Government, and particularly Newcastle. He complained that after the expedition was sent to the Crimea they remained idle, and made no attempt to form an army of reserve or to send continual reinforcements to supply the casualties which everybody knew must occur, and this is true.

The expedition to the Crimea was still growing:

November 29, 1854: . . . Clarendon says there is no chance of taking Sebastopol this year, nor of taking it at all till we have an army strong enough to drive the Russians out of the Crimea. For this, 150,000 men would be required to make it a certainty; but with this force, no Russian army, however numerous, could resist the allies, and then the place would fall. This is a distant prospect. I expressed my wonder at the Russians being able to obtain supplies, and he said they got them from the Don and from Kertch.

To increase man power, there was a Foreign Enlistment Bill, authorizing the enrollment of 15,000 aliens in the British army. "Dislike" of the measure (December 18, 1854) was "very general." On the third reading, Bright delivered "a very fine speech," which was sure to "make *some* impression in the country," but it failed to "stem the torrent of public opinion, which still clamours for war."

December 20, 1854: . . . The best way of avoiding it (that is, the controversy) would have been to raise a regiment or two without applying to Parliament at all, mustered and arrayed them at Malta or at Heligoland, or wherever they pleased out of England, and sent them off as an experiment to the Crimea. Then, if they had done good service, and Raglan had expressed his satisfaction and asked for more, they might have raised any number and landed them here without cavil or objection; but to have adopted this course they must have seen the necessity of feeling their way, which not one of them did.

Under the Foreign Enlistment Act, many Germans fought for the British cause.

November 23, 1854: . . . The nation is not only as warlike as ever, but if possible more full of ardour and enthusiasm, and thinking of nothing but the most lavish expenditure of men and money to carry on the war; the blood that has been shed appears only to animate the people, and to urge them to fresh exertions. This is so far natural that I, hating the war, feel as strongly as anybody that, now we are in it, and our soldiers placed in great jeopardy and peril, it is indispensable to make every possible exertion to relieve them; and I am therefore anxious for ample reinforcements being sent out to them, that they may not be crushed by overwhelming force.

London, November 13, 1854: . . . We are now talking of sending every soldier we possess to the scene of action, and expending our military resources to the last drop, leaving everything else at home and abroad to take care of itself, a course which nothing but an extreme necessity can justify, while at the same time it cannot be denied that, having gone so far, we cannot stop halfway, and having committed so large a part of our gallant army in this unequal contest, we are bound to make the greatest exertions and sacrifices to prevent their being overwhelmed by any serious disaster.

At St. Petersburg, "the nobles [November 13, 1854] are getting very sick of it [the war] and are very discontented with the Emperor, not so much for having engaged in it as for the manner in which it has been carried on." But "an intense hostility" was aroused. There was no "yielding or any thought of it." The Russians "mean to redouble their efforts next year, and bring into the field far greater forces than they have yet done."

November 14, 1854: It is evidently the plan of the Russians to wear out the allied armies by incessant attacks and a prolonged defence, sacrificing enormous numbers of men which they can afford, but considering that they gain on the whole by the disproportionate, but still considerable, losses they inflict on us. It is quite on the cards, if they can keep up the spirit of their men, who show great bravery though they cannot stand against ours, that they may *cunctando restituere rem*, and compel us at last to raise the siege, and at St. Petersburg they are very confident of this result. Here, though people are

no longer so confident and elated as they were, no human being doubts of our ultimately taking the town [Sebastopol].

November 16, 1854: . . . We now see what sort of a fight the Russians can make; and though the superhuman valour and conduct of our troops still inspire confidence and forbid despair, it is evident that we have rashly embarked in a contest which from the nature of it must be an unequal one, and that we are placed in a position of enormous difficulty and danger.

March 11, 1855: . . . I was surprised to hear Clarendon say that he did not believe the resources of Prussia to carry on the contest to be in any sensible degree exhausted, that her commerce had not suffered at all, and as to her finances she could go on for a good while with her paper money and the gold which, in a certain quantity, she drew from the Ural Mountains.

"A vigorous defence" was now to be expected (October)—the place would be taken, but only after "a bloody struggle and great loss of life." The Russians—

London, November 13, 1854: . . . instead of despairing of being able to hold the place, are full of confidence that they will be able to protract their defence, till our losses, and still more the weather, will compel us to raise the siege, and then they expect to compel us to abandon the Crimea altogether, and to make our reëmbarkation a dangerous and disastrous operation.

November 16, 1854: . . . Menschikoff says that he is assembling all his forces, and preparing to take the offensive, that their numbers are very superior, and he confidently announces that he shall wear us out, and that our army *cannot escape him.* I do not see how the siege is to be continued by an army itself besieged by a superior force and placed between two fires. The reinforcements cannot possibly arrive in time, and even if they were all there now, they would not be sufficient to redress the balance. I dread some great disaster which would be besides a great disgrace.

January 20, 1855: . . . We must conclude either that their [the Russians'] condition is as bad as ours, and that they are unable to attack us, or that their policy is to let the winter do its work, and that they do not think it necessary for them to fight sanguinary battles with very doubtful results when disease is ravaging the allied army and producing effects as ad-

vantageous for them as the most complete victories could do, as surely, only more gradually.

Even the capture of the fortress would be only a step on a long path:

London, November 13, 1854: . . . Sebastopol is not invested, and when the Russian garrison finds itself no longer able to hold the place, there is nothing to prevent its evacuating it on the other side and effecting a junction with the main Russian army. We shall then have to reduce the forts on the northern side, to put the place in a state of defence, and commence a fresh campaign against Menschikoff in the centre of the Crimea. All this presents an endless succession of difficulties, demanding large supplies and resources of all sorts which it will be no easy matter to afford.