

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WHILE THE SHATTERED REMNANTS of the Light Brigade trailed back, Lord Raglan with his staff and his little crowd of onlookers descended from the heights, and he was now in the plain at the end of the valley. As soon as the roll call was over, Lord Cardigan rode up to him. For once Lord Raglan had lost control of himself; he was quivering with anger, and William Howard Russell noticed how his head shook and how he gesticulated, waving the stump of his amputated arm. He challenged Lord Cardigan furiously. "What did you mean, sir, by attacking a battery in front, contrary to all the usages of war and the customs of service?" Lord Cardigan's demeanour was noticeably serene; indeed, neither now, or ever did any part of his conduct on the day of Balaclava cause him a moment's concern, convinced as he was that he had done his duty in accordance with the best precedents. "My lord," he replied, "I hope you will not blame me, for I received the order to attack from my superior officer in front of the troops." A few minutes later he was seen to canter off, bearing himself proudly and in no way depressed.

Both divisions of infantry were now in the plain and ready

for action. The British infantry force was strong enough to make an attempt on the redoubts and the Causeway Heights, and the order to attack was expected every minute. The Russians brought up reinforcements; the Heavy Brigade impatiently awaited the order to advance. "When are we going to begin? Surely we're not going to let those fellows stay there," said a subaltern.

The British troops, in spite of the disaster of the Light Brigade—indeed, even on account of it—felt they had a moral ascendancy. Bodies of Russian cavalry had been put to flight by handfuls of British horsemen at odds of twenty, fifty, even a hundred to one; a battery had been attacked in front by cavalry and silenced—a most extraordinary feat—above all, the charge of the Heavy Brigade had shown what British cavalry could do when they had the opportunity. After the war was over the Russians admitted that the British cavalry had inspired awe—"those terrible horsemen," one officer called them. Lord Raglan, divining the temper of his troops, wished to attack, but the inevitable difficulty arose: he was lamentably short of men. If Sebastopol were to be assaulted, troops could not be spared to occupy the redoubts on the Causeway Heights; on this ground General Canrobert, the French Commander-in-Chief, strongly opposed an attack. Neither commander appreciated the enormous importance of the Woronzoff Road.

No attack was made. The Russians were allowed to remain in possession of the three important redoubts to the east, and therefore of the Woronzoff Road; Turks were once more placed in the three redoubts to the west. The British army was thus left with no means of communication between its base and its camp but rough precipitous tracks, and the suffering and starvation of the coming winter became inevitable.

At four o'clock firing ceased, and the Russians in triumph carried to Sebastopol seven British naval guns which they had taken from the redoubts. As to the result—the battle was thought to be a draw. The Russians had captured the redoubts, but had not captured Balaclava; the British had lost the redoubts, but had not lost Balaclava. No one discerned that the fatal outcome of the battle was the loss of the Woronzoff Road.

About half-past five the survivors of the Light Brigade were allowed to return to their camp. The shattered regiments had been

re-formed and kept on the ground for five hours less than half a mile from their camp. Many of the men and horses had had nothing to eat since the evening before. Hungry, miserable, utterly depressed, they had spent the five hours in silence—there was not a man, wrote a survivor, who had the heart to talk—and in silence the remnants returned to their camp. Meanwhile, General Liprandi, the Russian commander, was examining the prisoners, among them Private Wightman of the 17th Lancers, who had charged into the battery behind Lord Cardigan, received wounds in four places, including a shattered knee, and been captured when his horse was shot dead under him. "Come now, men," said General Liprandi genially, and in excellent English. "What did they give you to drink? Did they not prime you with spirits to come down and attack us in such a mad manner?" "You think we were drunk?" said a wounded trooper. "By God, I tell you that if we had so much as smelt the barrel we would have taken half Russia by this time." Liprandi smiled good-humouredly, and a private of the 4th Light Dragoons, lying mortally wounded in a corner, raised himself with difficulty on his elbow. "On my honour, sir, except for the vodka your men have given to some of us, there is not a man who has tasted food or drink this day. We left camp before daylight and were continuously in the field until we became prisoners of war. Our uncooked rations are still in our haversacks. Our daily issue of a mouthful of rum is made in the afternoon and, believe me, sir, we don't hoard it." Liprandi was moved. "You are noble fellows," he said, "and I am sincerely sorry for you. I will order you some vodka."

Meanwhile Lord Cardigan rode back to his yacht, had a bath and a bottle of champagne with his dinner, and went to bed.

Late that evening Lord Lucan went to see Lord Raglan. There were no conventional courtesies. As he entered, Lord Raglan flung at him a single sentence of searing bitterness: "You have lost the Light Brigade," he said.

It was precisely what Lord Lucan had anticipated: he was to be blamed for the disaster; he was to be made the scapegoat for Lord Raglan's mistake, for General Airey's mistake. He furiously denied that he had lost the Light Brigade. All he had done

was to carry out the orders conveyed to him by Captain Nolan, pressed on him by Captain Nolan, indeed absolutely forced on him in such a manner that he could not refuse. Lord Raglan now advanced a most extraordinary argument. Lord Lucan had unquestionably made grave errors, and those errors, in Lord Raglan's opinion, had largely caused the disaster. Three days later, in a private letter to the Duke of Newcastle, he pointed out that Lord Lucan had not taken any steps to ascertain the Russian dispositions, had not asked the assistance of the French cavalry, had not brought up his Horse Artillery, or made use of the Heavy Brigade. But now, on the evening of the battle, Lord Raglan said, "Lord Lucan, you were a lieutenant-general and should therefore have exercised your discretion, and, not approving of the charge, should not have caused it to be made." It was too much. A great rage seized Lord Lucan. What had he not endured from Lord Raglan? What neglects, what restraints, what misrepresentations? Had he not complained that he was given orders and told to execute them like a subaltern? Had he not begged again and again to be allowed a little latitude? He fiercely defended himself. What! Disobey an order sent from the Commander-in-Chief! Did not the Queen's Regulations lay down that all orders brought by aides-de-camp were to be obeyed with the same readiness as if brought personally by the general officers to whom those aides-de-camp were attached? Had not the Duke of Wellington, that great man, laid this down himself? What would be the fate of a general who took it upon himself to disobey such an order? He would risk the loss of his commission, and do better to put a bullet through his head. Lord Raglan had been in a superior position—he had been up on the heights, able to survey the battlefield as no one could survey it from the plain below. He, Lord Lucan, had been able to see nothing, and Lord Raglan had known he could see nothing because, in his order, he had informed him that French cavalry were on his left. Etiquette and respect were finally forgotten as Lord Lucan furiously adjured Lord Raglan to mind what he did. He would accept no blame in this Light Cavalry affair; be careful none was placed on him—he would not bear it. And so they parted.

Night fell on the camp—a miserable night. An order had been

issued that no fires were to be lit and no noise made, since a further attack by the Russians was feared. The survivors of the Light Brigade stood about in groups talking of their dead comrades and the disasters of the day. The men were exhausted and over-wrought, the night was bitterly cold. Without fires nothing could be cooked, and most of them had still had nothing to eat beyond the dry biscuit in their haversacks and the afternoon dram of rum. They especially mourned their horses. Sergeant-Major Loy Smith of the 11th Hussars was "moved to tears when I thought of my beautiful horse; she was a light bay, nearly thoroughbred, I became her master nearly three years before."

Lord Lucan sat in his tent. Mud seeped through the floor boards, the Crimean wind, presage of winter hastening on, moaned outside, and deep depression weighed him down. Troublesome, unpopular, and out of date, he nevertheless had a genuine passion for the Army. He had worked, he had striven to let no detail escape his eye; he had spared himself nothing—and a mile away the ground was littered with the corpses of the men and horses of the Light Brigade, "the finest brigade that ever left the shores of England"; and his own regiment, the 17th Lancers—"Bingham's Dandies"—had been wiped out. What had he not hoped, what dreams of glory had not whirled in his brain as he embarked on this war? His belief in his capacities had been complete, his faith in himself enormous; but beneath the agony of disappointment and grief burned white-hot anger. "I do not intend," he wrote, "to bear the smallest particle of responsibility. I gave the order to charge under what I considered a most imperious necessity, and I will not bear one particle of the blame."

Who indeed was to blame? Many of the causes of the disaster lay far far back, in the old hatred between Lord Cardigan and Lord Lucan, in events nearly ten years old in Ireland, in Lord Raglan's character, that extraordinary blend of suavity, charm, aristocratic prejudice, and marble indifference. Above all the disaster was the fruit of the system under which the British Army was commanded. Untrained, untried officers were in charge of divisions and brigades in the field, the staff were ignorant of their duties and quite unable to translate the Commander-in-Chief's wishes into clear language, the Commander-in-Chief himself, Lord Rag-

lan, unpractised and inexperienced in active command, was fatally ambiguous. To the trained staff officer of today the famous four orders of Balaclava are vague, obscure, the work of an amateur, and an invitation to disaster.

Meanwhile at headquarters Lord Lucan had left considerable uneasiness behind him. If Lord Lucan was determined to make trouble—and he was well known to stop at nothing—enormous unpleasantness and awkwardness would result. The situation which must always at all costs be avoided would inevitably arise: there would be publicity, questions in the House, articles in the press, Army affairs would be discussed by outsiders, and something closely resembling military dirty linen would be washed in public.

It began to be felt that Lord Lucan was behaving in an unprofessional and unsoldier-like manner. War, after all, was war; the rough must be taken with the smooth; but civilians did not understand the facts of war, and to drag the details of an unfortunate occurrence like the Light Brigade charge into the open was detrimental to the good of the service.

Though Lord Lucan was to blame, Lord Raglan had no wish to pillory him. In his confidential account written privately to the Duke of Newcastle on October 25 Raglan stated plainly that: "Lord Lucan had made a fatal mistake. . . . The written order sent to him by the Quartermaster General did not exact that he should attack at all hazards, and contained no expression which could bear that construction."

In his official dispatch, however, Lord Raglan let Lucan off more lightly, merely remarking that "from some misconception of the order to advance, the Lieutenant-General [Lord Lucan] considered that he was bound to attack at all hazards." He could hardly, in his opinion, say less.

Lord Raglan had recovered his "marble calm," and with it the conviction that the best course was to persuade Lord Lucan to put the Light Brigade affair behind him and go on as usual. When a disaster occurred, the only thing to be done was to make the best of it. Disasters, after all, did quite frequently occur. Only five years ago there had been a frightful cavalry disaster in India, during a battle fought against the Sikhs at a place called Chillian-

wallah. No one knew precisely what had happened or where the blame lay, but when the cavalry were committed to a charge, the front ranks suddenly thought they had been ordered to retreat. They turned, collided with the men behind them, utter confusion was succeeded by wild panic, and a division of British cavalry stampeded to the rear, upsetting their own guns. The troops could not be rallied, and a rout of British by native troops took place, and three regiments lost their colours. At least the Light Brigade disaster had not been shameful: Lord Raglan in his official dispatch was able to write of "the brilliancy of the attack, and the gallantry, order and discipline which distinguished it." It was, he wrote, "the finest thing ever done."

Let Lord Lucan, for his own sake and for the good of the service, restrain himself and try to see the affair in proportion. He had made a mistake—very regrettably—but such mistakes did and would occur in war; other men had made similar blunders, and would make them again. Indeed, many worse mistakes had been made than the error which sent the Light Brigade down the North Valley to the guns. Lord Lucan should console himself with that reflection and keep quiet.

On the evening of October 27 General Airey came down from the heights to see Lord Lucan and found him sitting in his tent. It was part of Lucan's conscientiousness and his stiff-necked pride to share the hardships of his troops. Lord Cardigan might live in luxury, sleeping late in his yacht; but Lord Lucan stayed on the spot, rising at dawn and sharing the mud, the cold, the icy winds, and the lice. "Hullo, Russell," he had called out to William Howard Russell. "Are you lousy? Bingham and I are."

General Airey had come on a mission: he was deputed to talk Lord Lucan round, to make the glowering, furious, miserable man before him see reason and behave sensibly. It was a kind of undertaking in which General Airey particularly excelled. On this occasion, however, he was not to succeed. But his method of approach cast an extraordinary illumination on the minds of the men who commanded the British Army. The scene was long, but Airey's first words disclosed the nature of the reflections which were thought likely to console Lord Lucan. As he came into the tent Lucan said to him, "General Airey, this is a most serious matter."

With remarkable light-heartedness Airey replied: "These sort of things will happen in war," and then he pronounced what might well serve as the official epitaph on the Charge of the Light Brigade. "It is nothing," he said, "to Chillianwallah."