

## CHAPTER SEVEN

**I**N THE OPINION OF Kinglake, the historian of the Crimean campaign, it was Lord Lucan's conduct in Ireland, his ruthlessness, energy, disregard for sentiment, and contempt for public opinion which decided the Government to select him for a command in the Crimea. He had, however, also developed other qualities less desirable in a commander.

During his years in Ireland, detested, execrated, and, according to his genuine conviction, criminally misunderstood, he had become combative to an extraordinary degree. He came to every discussion in an antagonistic frame of mind, took it for granted that he would be opposed and unappreciated, resorted to brow-beating when no brow-beating was necessary. His impatience had increased, and his irritable temper, sharpened by a sense of injustice, expressed itself in habitual discourtesy. Officials in Ireland complained bitterly. "It is not often," wrote the secretary to the Poor Law Commission in 1849, "that the Commissioners receive from any individual, however humble his station in life, letters so unofficial and so offensive as your Lordship has deemed it becoming to address to them." His Lordship was requested in future

“to adhere to the ordinary rules of courtesy by which official correspondence in this country is usually conducted.”

His temper affected the success of his farming operations, for he quarrelled with his tenants, and lawsuits between the Earl of Lucan and the occupants of his farms became frequent. Some of the most capable tenants left, and it was not easy in any case to let farms cleared during the famine. At Ballinrobe, where evictions on the largest scale had taken place, the land lay vacant and was turned into a race course.

And life ran no more smoothly at Laleham. Soon after Lord Lucan succeeded, he fell out with the rector over the family sittings in Laleham Church. In Lord Lucan's opinion these were inadequate, and in 1843 he brought down an architect from London, who got out plans to alter the church to suit his convenience. It was proposed that it should be rebuilt entirely, “since the building is so old, having a Norman character. A clean sweep can then be made and the view of the church will not be obstructed by Norman pillars.” However, the rector would not agree, in spite of the fact that Lord Lucan was prepared to sweep away the Norman features at his own expense. Whereupon Lord Lucan flew into a passion, consulted ecclesiastical authorities, and came forward with an assertion of his absolute right to do what he pleased with what he called the “Manorial Chancel.” The chancel of the church had in mediæval times been the private chapel of the Lord of the Manor, and Lord Lucan stated that since it was “still kept up out of the Lord of the Manor's private funds,” he had as Lord of the Manor an absolute right to do what he pleased in it.

I consider [he wrote] I have exclusive and entire control over the Manorial Chancel, may exclude even the minister from passing through and may occupy it in any way I prefer. . . . I cannot be debarred from so arranging the Manorial Chancel, my own private property, as would allow it to accommodate us. . . . I claim exclusive power and control over the Manorial Chancel, and consequently a right to close up the door when or how I may think right. What course I shall adopt on the subject I have not yet had time to consider and decide.

Year after year, even during the famine, whenever Lord Lucan paid one of his flying visits to Laleham he found time to harry the

rector on the subject of the "Manorial Chancel." Nor was the rector his only problem: there were trespassers, there were unpunctual farm hands, above all, at Laleham there were swans. Swans in an open and common river belong to the Crown: they are royal fowls, marked as royal property by the Royal Swanmaster; but they are also truculent, destructive, and untidy, possessing an extraordinary aptitude for fouling fields; and the Queen's Swans had a special fondness for the water meadows of the Earl of Lucan at Laleham. On December 8, 1853, he wrote furiously to the Lord Chamberlain:

Sir, I have within the last hour seen more than, if not quite, 70 swans on my fields. I can and will submit no longer to so intolerable a nuisance. I therefore and hereby give you notice that unless the swans are removed on or before Friday 16th instant, I shall myself shoot 6, leaving them on the ground, and shall cause 6 to be shot every following Friday, until they are reduced to the number of 6. I have too patiently suffered this nuisance to be inflicted on me and I will rid myself of it.

The result of this protest is not known, but time has brought the swans victory over the Earl. Today the traveller crossing the Thames by ferry from Laleham will almost certainly see to his left a concourse of swans, more swans, in all probability, than he has ever seen together in his life before. Waddling on the grass, tearing it up, preening their plumage, dropping their feathers, sleeping peacefully in the sun, the swans are in undisputed possession of what were once the meadows of the Earl of Lucan.

Having regard to Lord Lucan's character, his irascibility, fidgetiness, restless energy, his domestic life could not be expected to run smoothly. He was, however, singularly fortunate in his children. His heir, George, Lord Bingham, leaving Rugby in 1847, brought away glowing testimonials to his amiability, good conduct, and sweet temper when corrected—only one point needed attention: he was sadly ignorant of Old Testament history, which he seemed "unaccountably to have neglected." His daughter Lavinia united the good looks of Brudenells and Bingham, and was described as "the most beautiful girl in fashionable life." His Countess, however, the sister of Lord Cardigan, though described as a tyrant herself, found Lord Lucan too tyrannical to live with. She came

very seldom to Ireland, it was said that she detested Castlebar, and while Lord Lucan was struggling with his farms, her name was to be found in "fashionable intelligence" as a guest at London parties. In 1847, in the midst of the famine, a second son was born, but by 1854 the Earl and Countess of Lucan had parted. There were, it was admitted, faults on both sides.

Perhaps as a result of this separation, the enmity between the two brothers-in-law, the Earl of Cardigan and the Earl of Lucan, became generally known. According to *The Times* it was common gossip in the clubs, and a contemporary memoir states that the Duke of Wellington was called in to try to smooth matters out.

It is said that Lord Cardigan considered his sister to have been disgracefully treated, sacrificed to Lord Lucan's farming mania, kept short of money, and deprived of suitable enjoyments. In 1824 he had challenged and fought a young man who, in his estimation, had treated one of his sisters badly; but, perhaps thanks to the intervention of the Duke, no duel was fought with Lord Lucan and no public recriminations took place. After the parting Lady Lucan spent a great deal of time at Ryde, in the Isle of Wight; as a family the Brudenells were fond of the sea, and Lord Cardigan kept a yacht at Cowes.

For the next few years the lives of the two men divided. At Deene Park, or Portman Square, or in his magnificent yacht *Dryad*, or in Paris, Lord Cardigan was living in princely splendour, spending very little time with the 11th Hussars. He remained parted from his wife and had acquired an inseparable companion in Mr. Hubert de Burgh, a celebrated man about town, who had married one of his wife's sisters. Mr. de Burgh, described by William Howard Russell as an "unlovely gentleman," had a whim for wearing country clothes in London and was nicknamed by the world of clubs, race courses, and gambling halls "the Squire." Lord Cardigan depended on him, and in negotiations of delicacy "the Squire" frequently acted on his behalf.

Meanwhile, Lord Lucan, indifferent to splendour, was living austere in a few rooms in Castlebar House, hurrying between Ireland and Laleham, absorbed and relentless, always with a dozen disputes on his hands, still clearing his estates in Mayo amid the

lamentations of the tenantry, and still doing battle with the rector the trespassers, the farm hands, and the swans of Laleham.

Both were now elderly men, and the course of their lives seemed set for the rest of their days. Then suddenly fate intervened. Russia, the ally of Britain during the Napoleonic wars, abruptly transformed herself into a menace to the peace of Europe, and overnight, it seemed, Europe was on the verge of war.

Russia, desiring naval power and access to the Mediterranean, had long cast envious eyes on Turkey in Europe; and the Turkish Empire, sprawling helplessly on her very doorstep, unwieldy, corrupt, and decaying, invited attack. In a famous phrase the Czar Nicholas christened Turkey "the sick man of Europe," and remarked to the British ambassador that it would be a great misfortune if one of these days he should slip away before all necessary arrangements were made. For his part, the Czar made the necessary arrangements by building a great naval base at Sebastopol, from which Constantinople was menaced by the guns of the Russian fleet. British statesmen began to have nightmares of Constantinople in Russian hands and Russian warships dominating the Mediterranean. There was nothing for it but an alliance with the French.

The British detested Napoleon III, who had just seized the throne by means of a bloody *coup d'état*. They were horrified by the spectacle of the French nation once more intoxicated with imperialism and joyfully submitting to a despot. Only a menace to their sea power could have induced them to enter into an alliance with France.

Meanwhile Nicholas was looking out for an excuse to attack Turkey, and in the summer of 1853 he found his excuse at Bethlehem. The Church of the Nativity there, traditionally built over the stable where Christ was born, was the scene of violent clashes between monks of the Orthodox Church, supported by Russia, and monks of the Roman Catholic Church, supported by France; and since Palestine was in the Turkish Empire, the police in the church were Turkish Mohammedans. The Orthodox denied the right of

the Roman Catholics to place a silver star over the manger and to possess a golden key to the church door, and this summer of 1853 a serious riot took place; the Roman Catholics succeeded after a prolonged struggle in placing their star over the manger, but not before several Orthodox monks had been killed. The Czar instantly asserted that the Turkish police had deliberately allowed the Orthodox monks to be murdered, and marched into the Danubian provinces of Turkey, proclaiming himself the protector of the Orthodox Christian subjects of the Sultan from Turkish persecution. By October, 1853, Turkey and Russia were at war.

England remained neutral. But when on November 30, the Russian fleet sailed out of Sebastopol, took the Turkish fleet by surprise at Sinope, and wiped it out, the English were transported with rage, and angry mobs paraded the London streets. By the end of January, 1854, war was plainly inevitable.

For the Earl of Cardigan and the Earl of Lucan, now fifty-seven and fifty-four years of age, it was an extraordinary moment. The opportunity they had longed for all their lives had arrived at last; dreams forty years old were coming true, trumpets were shrilling, squadrons gathering, courtyards ringing to the tramp of armed men. Military glory beckoned them at last.

If, rather surprisingly, they had no doubts as to their suitability for command in the field, no qualms, no inertia held them back. In February Lord Lucan wrote to Lord Hardinge, Commander-in-Chief since the death of the Duke of Wellington in 1852, and offered his services. He did not ask for a senior command, since he supposed no considerable force of cavalry would be employed, but he suggested that he might usefully take out a brigade of infantry; having campaigned in the Balkans, he was accustomed to foreign armies and to living with foreign officers.

At the same time Lord Cardigan applied to Lord Raglan, the former Lord FitzRoy Somerset, who had just been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Army to the East. They were old family friends; indeed, earlier *The Times* had accused Lord Raglan of using his official influence to shield the Earl of Cardigan. Certainly during the period of disturbances in the 11th Hussars, Lord Raglan, then Military Secretary at the Horse Guards, had intervened on Lord Cardigan's behalf. For the mo-

ment, however, Lord Cardigan did not receive a favourable answer to his application.

On January 28, 1854, *The Times* commented on the elderliness of the generals of the British Army. There was not a single lieutenant-general, it was asserted, who did not secretly feel himself unfitted by age to undergo the exertions and hardships of active service. Lord Hardinge, Commander-in-Chief, was sixty-nine, Lord Raglan sixty-five; of the major-generals, Lord Lucan, at fifty-four, was one of the two youngest. Yet the Duke of Wellington when he finished his active military career at Waterloo was only forty-five. *The Times* quoted Chatham's comment on the officers appointed to command in the American war: "I do not know what effect these names have on the enemy, but I confess they make *me* tremble."

In February it was announced that, should war be declared, a cavalry force would accompany an expeditionary army; and on the 21st Lord Lucan was appointed to command the cavalry division.

Meanwhile an extraordinary bellicosity had seized on the nation. Grave doubts were entertained in well-informed quarters on the wisdom and the probable outcome of the war—the Prime Minister, Lord Aberdeen, was against it, *The Times* was against it, the Queen and the Prince Consort were uncertain. But the people were intoxicated. Memories of past victories went to their heads, the names of Waterloo and Trafalgar were on every lip, crowds paraded the streets delirious with excitement, inflated with national pride. "When people are inflamed in that way they are no better than mad dogs," wrote Cobbett; and so in March, 1854, shouting, cheering, singing, the nation swept into war.

On March 27 the Queen's message of war was read in the Commons, and next day war was declared. The precise causes and objects of the war remained obscure. It was puzzling to find the British nation fighting on the side of Mohammedans against Christians, even if Palmerston was right when he said that that had nothing to do with the question. Mr. Disraeli's explanation did not seem much more satisfactory: he remarked that he thought we were going to war to prevent the Emperor of all the Russias from protecting the Christian subjects of the Sultan of Turkey. And

John Bright told the House of Commons that he could see no adequate reason for the conflict. The voice of the people, however, found expression in a less distinguished member, a Mr. John Ball, who assured the House that the real justification of the war was vast, high, and noble: "the maintenance in civilised society of the principles of right and justice."

On the somewhat sinister date of April 1, Lieutenant-Colonel the Earl of Cardigan was gazetted brigadier-general in command of the Light Brigade of Cavalry, and the cavalry appointments were completed by giving the Heavy Brigade to Col. James Scarlett of the 5th Dragoon Guards, who at fifty-five had been on the point of retirement. With the exception of Lord Lucan, whose Balkan experience had occurred twenty-six years previously, not one of the three cavalry generals had any experience of active service. Yet England, in spite of forty years' peace in Europe, was fortunate enough to have a superb list of cavalry officers who had done brilliant service in the field and were in the prime of life—but their services had been in India. The caste system which kept "Indian" officers down was so powerful that not one man from that list was given a cavalry command.

Lord Cardigan received his appointment as brigadier-general with chagrin—he wished to command, not to obey. Above all, not to obey Lord Lucan. In London clubs the news of the two appointments was received with "cynical amusement." It was "notorious in every circle acquainted with them both that the state of feeling which had long existed between them was likely to lead to unpleasant results."

At this point Lord Cardigan was allowed to get a fatal idea into his head. He was, he said, given to understand by Lord Raglan that the cavalry command was to be, in practice, divided. He would be junior in rank to Lord Lucan, certainly, but he would operate separately and on his own account: there would be no question of carrying out Lord Lucan's instructions or of obeying Lord Lucan's orders. He, Cardigan, would give the orders and instructions to the Light Brigade, which would be a separate command. Soothed and animated by this belief, he plunged enthusiastically into preparations for war.

Bulletins began to appear in the newspapers issued from the



headquarters of the 11th Hussars. One announced that Mr. Lamprey, "an eminent Irish cutler from Limerick," had been hired to sharpen the swords of the 11th; another that the officers of the 11th were having pieces of black leather sewn to the seats of their cherry-coloured trousers the better to withstand the additional friction incidental to active service.

*The Times* commented on the style of these announcements, which were exclusive to the 11th Hussars, and on April 22 ridiculed the uniform of the 11th. "The splendour of these magnificent light horsemen, the shortness of their jackets, the tightness of their cherry-coloured pants" were "as utterly unfit for war service as the garb of the female hussars in the ballet of Gustavus, which they so nearly resemble." The Earl of Cardigan rushed into print. "In the 11th the men's jackets are longer and their overalls [trousers] looser than almost any other cavalry regiment in the service." An acrimonious correspondence followed in which Lord Cardigan accused *The Times* of "petty and paltry slander," and in this way the cherry-coloured pants of the 11th became famous. The Duke of Newcastle, Secretary for War, writing to Lord Raglan on April 28 on clothing for the troops, assured him, "I am not going to write to you about the colour and tightness of Cardigan's cherry-coloured pants."

The first orders of the cavalry were for the Balkans: the British and French armies were to relieve Silistria, in Roumania, then a Turkish province, which was besieged by the invading Russians. Varna in Bulgaria was to be the port of disembarkation, and Scutari, a large village opposite Constantinople on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus, the British base.

By the end of April, when Lord Cardigan left England, Lord Lucan had already reached Scutari, taking with him as his aide-de-camp his son, Lord Bingham.