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HISTORICAL SUMMARY

OF THE RUSSIAN WAR.

FROM ITS COMMENCEMENT TO THE PRESENT TIME.

SIEGE OF SILISTRIA.—(Continued.)

All this, in substance, was true; and our allusion to the incidents here will save us the necessity of recurring to them hereafter. Let us quote a few words more from the electric messages of the time. They are at present both interesting and elucidatory. "The wonderful garrison of Silistria is said to be now reduced nearly one-half. On the——they made another amazing sally, and routed the Russians at the south front. This cannot last much longer. The next mail will probably record the surrender of the fortress. The terms will be mild, it is thought; the garrison, at least, are certain to have the honours of war." (They were, indeed. Of those honours the heroes made sure.) "On the 24th, the Marechal de St. Arnaud, Lord Raglan, and Omer Pacha reviewed together the Turkish army at Schumla." (This was true.) "The troops were found to be in splendid condition." (True—an exact and just description.) "Next day, the 25th, the Russians succeeded at length *in interposing between Varna and Silistria.*" (True again—both the facts and the dates.) "The fortress must now hoist the white flag; the continuous bombardment is terrific; a combined assault by storming columns *thirty thousand strong* is to take place immediately. Of course, it will prove successful. The brave defenders are worn to skeletons. Nothing can exceed the efficiency of both the Anglo-French and the Turkish troops now lying respectively at Varna and at Schumla. Among them they muster, perhaps 80,000, or even 90,000. The half of such a host would soon give an account of the Russian force who are storming Silistria. Postcript. *A most incomprehensible rumour prevails, that the grand assault has failed.* N.B. This must naturally be received with caution." We think that our readers will feel obliged to us for this rapid retrospective sketch; and now we can finish the historical reasoning to which facts drove us, and drove us reluctantly. In three short sentences the whole case can be stated. Firstly, the conviction prevalent (and, at that time, a most rational conviction) was this, that Silistria would fall, unless a movement of the troops collected in Bulgaria was made for its relief; secondly, the conviction was prevalent (and it was equally just, equally rational) that if such a movement was made, it would most certainly raise the siege; thirdly, *no such movement was made.* Silistria could be saved by a given measure, which was perfectly practicable. Without that measure Silistria would be lost. That measure was avoided. Therefore, may we not fairly ask—was it the intention, was it the wish, that Silistria should in fact be lost? We fear that, if the reply was honestly given, it would be affirmative. But what motives could exist? They could not be strategical. No; but they might be political, or, rather, they might be diplomatic. The Emperor of Russia saw by this time, that his calculations, based upon expected dissensions between England and France, and on the weakness of "the sick man"—in short, that *all* his calculations were quite illusory. He was willing to accept the terms then offered. But his honour must be saved—he must not be degraded in the eyes of Europe, or desecrated in those of his own people. His pride must be humoured. Some great success must be achieved, and then he would proclaim that he was satisfied; and that, not from the stress of defeat, or compulsion, but under the influence of his "habitual moderation," he wanted to terminate this quarrel, and relieve the anxieties of the world. *Peace, it was thought, would immediately follow the capture of Silistria.*

If this vile deference to the vainglory and selfishness of the man who had inflicted so many injuries upon the community of nations was indulged at the cost of that community, if the feelings of the tyrant and the despoiler were honoured above the interests of his victims, above the interests, indeed, of the world at large, above the claims of the most righteous of causes, and (let us not forget it) above the blood of the faithful and valiant garrison of Silistria, doomed thus to destruction and to abandonment, we may at least console ourselves with two facts—first, the conduct of Omer Pacha; and, secondly, the conduct and the fate (combined) of the troops in Silistria. Whatever restraints may have been imposed upon Omer Pacha's movements by instructions, originating in some foreign Embassy at Constantinople, endorsed or adopted by the Divan, and then sent in authoritative form to Schumla, they but weakened and relaxed, they could not wholly prevent, the Turkish Generalissimo's operations. A grand and decisive movement ending in the annihilation of the whole Russian army, was, perhaps, averted; but the disgrace and the discomfiture which might have been deemed so impolitic, supervened all the same, in spite of the subtle precautions of an ignoble and ignominious diplomacy. Mussa Pacha's dull valour, and Omer's obstinate activity, defeated all these suppositious combinations of the closet—if they ever existed. Without suspecting them to have existed, the page we have now to write will remain one of the most mysterious in military history.

The operations which we have already described will have shown to a discerning reader, that the Russians had virtually evacuated Lesser Wallachia, in order to collect an irresistible force for the crowning exploit of the campaign. Political and warlike considerations coalesced in pronouncing this exploit the most important of all. The withdrawal of the right wing of their Army of Occupation, the amassing of troops between Bucharest and Slobodzie, the advance of Luders, with the Danube on his right, and their own main advance towards that river in front (as the river flows due east before it turns northwards,)—all betokened that the enemy was now making a great and last endeavour, in the most elaborate form of combination. But here we must note a curious circumstance, which soldiers will easily appreciate. Omer Pacha, in the face of this grand advance, did not recall his left wing. We have sufficiently explained his probable motives. He felt, so far as he himself was concerned, that he could deal with the Russians, and yet not bring another man to Schumla. Now, when such a large proportion of the invading force retired across the Aluta, this left wing of the Turks became at once an independent army, and, like Half-of-the-Wynd, could "fight on its own hand." All that Omer asked of them was to operate on the right flank of the enemy, to make as many diversions as possible, and perhaps, ultimately, to harass, or even to intercept, his retreat. We want this to be borne in mind.

General Luders was rather more forward, and rather readier, than the comrades whose movement he was destined to protect. It was not their fault; six days before his own check at Czernavoda, they had broken through the Danube, between Rassova and Silistria. On a misty day (the 19th of April), Omer Pacha encountered this enemy. It is related that, in the midst of the action, a body of Turks, whom he had ordered to make a considerable circuit to the east, and then to assail the left flank of the Russians, appeared as if marching straight from the coast, guided by the noise of cannon, and the uproar of combat. The English were known to have recently landed at Varna; perhaps some had landed at Baltschik; perhaps, even some not much below Kustendjeh. Who could these be, these columns from the east, except the English? While the doubt arose, and prevailed, a portentous sign seemed to afford the answer. A flag, not clearly distinguishable, but strikingly similar to the colours of England, waved at the head of the advancing body. Panic seized the columns of Russia. They wavered; they broke their ranks, a considerable loss was incurred, and the field remained in possession of the Turks.

But yet, the main movement throve. So early as the 14th, great batteries had been erected on the north bank of the Danube, opposite Silistria; and the town was bombarded from morning till night; and, undoubtedly, the Russians now began to show themselves in force on both banks of the Danube, near and around that fatal fortress. On the 28th of April, the Russians, being completely established on the south bank attacked the outworks of Silistria. On the same day, one hundred miles to the west, at Nicopolis, Sali Pacha had a battle with the Russians, who had neglected all the country lying to their right, because they were endeavouring to envelope Silistria in every direction, and they thought they had excluded the western or left wing of the Turkish army from the real business then in hand. Sali Pacha defeated the enemy, killing nearly 2000 of them. In conformity with their usual strategy, straggling and indecisive, the Russians, at the same time that they were thus endeavouring to force the Danube from Turna, tried also to exhibit themselves in apparent strength at Radowan, nearly sixty miles to the right. Suleiman Bey, whose rank was that of a Colonel, stormed Radowan, and had the glory of beating the invaders with almost as much slaughter in this place as Sali Pacha had inflicted on them at Nicopolis and Turna. But these reverses on the Russian right might have been expected, when they were weakening it, in order to strengthen the divisions destined by them to take Silistria. The assault on the outworks was so hotly received, that full three weeks elapsed before General Schilders had completed the investment. On the adverse shore he piled up batteries of heavy guns, which maintained a continual bombardment; and with those guns he left his portable hospitals (or ambulances) and his reserves. The forces which he transported over the Danube to form the actual leaguer were not less than 53,000 men, while the garrison mustered 8000 only. His artillery, which was numerous and heavy, has been variously computed. Probably the most effective batteries were those which he directed against the south-west fronts; and here, indeed, the fire was severe and terrible. On this side the ground rises in a series of platforms, which could not be surrendered to the enemy with safety to the town. They are occupied, therefore, by outworks which are all-important; for, on the day when they are taken, Silistria is virtually taken. The outworks are called respectively Arab Tabia and Illanli. They are of earth. The Turkish artillery protecting them was repeatedly silenced; the walls behind them were repeatedly breached; but, burrowing in the cavities of that redoubt, the indomitable defenders waited only till the thunder of the guns had ceased, and till the tramp of the storming columns made the ground about them tremble, when they appeared swarming out of the bowels of the earth, and—dagger in hand, rather than sword in hand—flung themselves upon the assailants. The Russians in these great assaults—which, as the siege progressed, were conducted in larger and larger force, committed one of the most incredible military blunders on record. They advanced in heavy costume, and even with their knapsacks on their shoulders. They met those, therefore, who soon neutralized and reversed the effects of General Schilders' artillery. The slaughter on these occasions (and from May the 11th to June the 29th they were numerous) is hardly to be believed. Always bearing in mind this species of inter-act, we may describe in one sentence nearly a month's operations before Silistria: to wit, it was alternately bombarded and assaulted. Armed only with their temperance and their fanaticism, the small Turkish garrison flinched not for a moment. As the earth-works were damaged, it was necessary to repair them and as the Russians mined (a last resource), it was indispensable to countermine. Enormous hardships and evident risks were to be encountered in these duties. For the most part, the patient Osmanli displayed the spirit of a true soldier. As he smoked, or rather sucked, a pipe in which there was no longer any tobacco (the facts have been witnessed), he lay at the bottom of a trench watching, with an eye, the better-supplied comrade whose turboosh rose above the level of the margin—because that comrade worked with the spade, and was therefore on his legs. A cannon-ball sweeps away the red cap and the head within it. The recumbent spectator arises, saying that "Allah is great! He takes the spade from the yet warm hand, disengages the nargilly from the clenched teeth, and fills the brief vacancy—his own turboosh now surmounting the clay embankment. Soon, the place is again vacant, and a successor equally intrepid and equally serene, continues the excavation; and in ten minutes, it has thus taken, as it were, three generations of valiant Osmanlis to fortify one soldier's post in a bombarded intrenchment, and, while doing so, to smoke one pipeful of Latakia tobacco. But when we say that these noble soldiers flinched not, we would confine our observation to that one month which we have mentioned. At length, they showed signs of flagging. The odds were great; the work was incessant; the fatigue was overpowering; the enemy was near, and seemed every day to increase in power; their friends were distant, and had apparently forgotten them. Four men met this natural depression with, in war, that priceless resource, that resource above all treasures in value—intellectual bravery and thoroughbred resistance. Of these four men one was a German, two were British officers (Lieutenants Nasmyth and Butler), and the last was the heroic Mussa Pacha. This man was destined to save Silistria, but not to know it; to triumph conclusively, completely, gloriously, and not to witness his own success; to win imperishable praise, and die without hearing the first cheer. Butler, Nasmyth, and the Prussian engineer told the Turks that they must not despond, because the besiegers were laying powder under the surrounding works. Against those mines other mines could be wrought, and all the enemy's labour would be more than lost; for before they approached near enough to do damage, they would themselves be blown into the air. The Turks took heart again, saying that Allah was indeed great.

On the 11th of May, Silistria itself was assaulted. The assailants were beaten, and lost more than two thousand men. Meanwhile, however, the works were incessantly advanced; and, so convergent were the movements with a view to storm or reduce this great fortress, that the right wing of the general Russian army of occupation was consigned to every mischance; whereas the Turkish left wing, as we have said, was transformed, virtually, into a powerful and dangerous army. On the 21st of May another general assault was repulsed. On the 26th of May the left wing, being now an isolated division of Omer Pacha's force, felt its way eastwards, to Turna, Semnitza, and Giurgevo—in all which places it found, and severely defeated, the enemy. Some such results Omer Pacha had foreseen, when (if we may use the phrase) he had abandoned this part of his forces to themselves. We must not confound these Turks with the Turks defending, originally, that part of the Danube which on the other shore, corresponded with the present position of the advancing victors. Quite otherwise; the conquerors had come from the west, not straight across the river; and their "*pivot*" was, properly speaking, Widdin. The Russians persisted in disregarding such casualties; and, on the 29th of May, only three days afterwards—a very fatal date to choose for a contest with the Mussulman—Prince Gortschakoff and General Schilders ordered a combined assault upon the south-east, the south, and the west fronts of Silistria. Hurled from the breaches, the enemy himself acknowledged that he lost that day, between one thousand and two thousand Grenadiers. We are convinced that the loss amounted to near five thousand men. They had used thirty thousand in the attack. It was the anniversary of the Turkish conquest of Constantinople. On the 29th of May, 1453, Mahomet II. took forcible possession of that European territory which his descendants were now defending with so much heroism. Two days after the assault just mentioned, the last day in the month (May 31st), the outflanking left wing of the Ottoman army had pushed to Slatina, and there had won another victory; and, indeed, on the previous day, which was the day immediately following the great assault upon Silistria, they had fought a battle at Karakal (through which Slatina is reached in that direction), had taken six field-pieces, and had slain *three thousand* Russians. Truly, the position was growing serious, but Silistria "must be taken."

At the beginning of June, when this unfair, this most cruel contest had lasted more than a month, Omer Pacha, whatever diplomatic arrangements might, or might not, have been made, could resist his own feelings no longer. He would have been no soldier—he would have had for his comrades no bowels of compassion, had he remained still impassive, while beholding so much suffering, so much patience, and so much valour. He was moved; and he moved. On the 4th of June he put 30,000 men in action, and ordered them, with his best wishes, to do something for Silistria. On that same day he commanded his garrison at Rustchuk to try their fortune against the Russian works on the island of Mokan; and the works were completely destroyed. A detachment of the column dispatched to the relief of Silistria, entered it on the 5th, partly stealing, partly breaking, through the Russian lines. Mehemet Pacha led this reinforcement. Some of the succouring force were repulsed, and shut out; but they remained near, watching for the next sally. It took place exactly three days afterwards, on the 8th of June. It was by night; and then, over a thousand Russian corpses, about a thousand more of the Turkish reinforcement entered Silistria. On the 13th, five days afterwards, a still more tremendous sortie was effected. Three Russian mines were sprung during the conflict: all their works were destroyed, and the carnage was enormous. At last an end was put to this desolating enterprise. A grand assault (through breaches rendered practicable by the artillery of General Schilders) was ordered for the 28th of June. The Russian soldiers had now been eleven months in the provinces of Turkey, and had never yet seen a Turk's back. They had known nothing but disaster, unvaried even by an episode of success; and, when ordered, on the 28th, to the breaches, stood doggedly in their ranks. Prince Gortschakoff, in alarm, adjourned the attack till the next day. He occupied his evening in the composition of a manifesto or proclamation which deserves to live for ever. The principal argument in it was that, if the troops of his Majesty the Czar did not take Silistria on the next day, *their rations should be stopped.* Next day came. It is very rare for general officers to be wounded in number. It is foolish, unmilitary, perhaps unmerciful, for them to expose themselves to personal danger, except where an army requires extraordinary encouragement. The Russians were thoroughly discouraged and demoralised. This fact is best shown by the number of general officers killed the next day. Silistria "must be taken," and when the storming columns on the 29th were mustered for the assault, the gloom in the countenances of the men gave a bad augury of the result. Repulsed twice from the defences, they hesitated to obey, when ordered once more to advance. Upon this Count Orloff, jun., General Schilders, General Gortschakoff, and General Luders placed themselves at the head of the men, crying to these to follow; while Prince Paskiewitsch rode up to the spot and addressed them partly with reproaches and partly with encouragements. The assault was unsuccessfully renewed, and a murderous carnage took place. General Schilders, not again destined to take a fortress, the capture of which twenty-five years before had been the commencement of his reputation, was struck by a cannon ball, which carried off his thighs. General Luders had his jaw struck away; Count Orloff was killed; General Gortschakoff was severely, and Prince Paskiewitch desperately, wounded. The Turks had not only repelled the assault, but had pursued the assailants up to their very batteries. Some of the relieving column outside had meanwhile alarmed and disordered the Russians in the rear. This practically terminated the siege; for the garrison was again succoured during the confusion of the engagement; and the Russian works were so damaged, that they would have all to be recommenced. Mussa Pacha, struck by a spent ball, died of the hurt in a few hours. Such was this memorable siege of Silistria, which might be compared with that of Saragossa for the bravery of the defence. We believe we shall not be guilty of exaggeration, in saying that, from first to last, the Russians lost, under or near the walls of Silistria, 30,000 men.

They now recrossed the river, so thoroughly demoralized, that, had there been a sufficient force to pursue them, they must have either laid down their arms, or been annihilated. They retreated from every point towards Fokshani and Birlat; evacuating not only Lesser, but Greater Wallachia. Skender Beg and some of the other Turkish chiefs who commanded in the south-west of the Principalities, pursued the enemy at leisure beyond the Aluta. It was only in the Upper Dobrudscha that the Czar now held any portion of the further bank of the Danube.

The Allies had meantime assembled, to the number of about 50,000, in Varna and the neighbouring camps; and, as the campaign was finished upon the Danube, they began to meditate some other expedition; and, after many councils of war, it was secretly decided to invade the Crimea, and to attack Sebastopol. Siege-trains were ordered from England and France, transports were prepared, and everything gradually provided. But the cholera attacked both the armies and the fleets, which for two months lay prostrate under this

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