

# The Wars of Archibald Forbes

To the Bell Family, Louisa, Peter, Seonaid and Ruaridh for the joy they bring

# The Wars of Archibald Forbes

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# Contents

1. A Son of the Manse	1
2. The Fledgling Journalist	20
3. The Special Correspondent	30
4. The Siege of Paris	46
5. The Paris Commune	54
6. On the Home Front	61
7. India	78
8. Spain and Ireland	90
9. Passage through India	95
10. A Balkan War	103
11. The Russo-Turkish War	117
12. A Cyprus Interlude	144
13. Afghanistan and Burma	151
14. The Zulu War	163
15. Lecturer and Polemicist	182
16. Australasia	201
17. Last Battles	209
Publications of Archibald Forbes	234
Bibliography	242
Index	248

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# 1 A Son of the Manse

*He was a 'wild' youth, in the good-natured sense of the word, that is more fond of open-air freedom than of the restraints of musty classrooms, a healthy, natural youth, of irrepressible animal spirits, brimful of good humour, and always ready for a 'lark'.*

‘Archibald Forbes. A Memoir’, *Daily News* 31 March 1901

The doyen of the BBC’s foreign correspondents and now its world affairs’ editor, John Simpson, writes of ‘an obsessive, slightly dodgy quality’ around the occasional glamour of a foreign correspondent’s life: ‘I am always trying to get to places where I’m not wanted and convincing people to do things they do not want to do. It’s like selling double-glazing’.<sup>1</sup> Another BBC correspondent, Nic Gowing, gave his views on war correspondents to an interviewer in 1999. He suggested that there was ‘something in our background, in our childhood, in our upbringing, which makes us feel slightly deficient somewhere, and makes us want to do something where we get noticed’. This, he suggested requires one ‘to be tenacious, tenacious, tenacious to the point of being insufferable, being obsequious, being an absolute bastard’ in order to get the story ahead of the competition.<sup>2</sup> Tenacity and a determination to beat the competition at all costs were certainly characteristics of the subject of this biography and some did, indeed, find Archibald Forbes an ‘absolute bastard’. Covering wars with their destructiveness, their brutality and their complexity is in many ways the ultimate journalistic challenge and there is little doubt that the successful war correspondent requires a rare combination of skills even with the support mechanisms of the present era. The nineteenth century correspondent, often operating alone, required such skills multi-fold.

There is still the need to have a nose for a story, to know where the action is to be. Archibald Forbes himself, assessing the qualities necessary for a war correspondent, wrote that ‘He must have a real instinct for the place and day

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<sup>1</sup> John Simpson, *Strange Places, Questionable People* (London, 1999), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Greg McLaughlin, *The War Correspondent* (London, 2002), 6.

of an impending combat: he must be able to scent the coming battle from afar and allow nothing to hinder him from getting forward in time to be a spectator at it'.<sup>3</sup> But in pre-film days the correspondent had also to have the language to convey to the mind's eye of the reader the picture of the scene. To do this, the good writer had to be at the heart of the action and could not depend on the second-hand accounts delivered to headquarters. As Forbes said, the easiest way to be in good standing with the military was 'to manifest a serene indifference to the possible consequences of hostile fire'.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, he had to be able to coax information out of the senior officers and live alongside them often for many weeks. Most senior officers no doubt would have preferred not to have journalists commenting on their action. The future commander-in-chief of the British army, then *Colonel* Garnet Wolseley, writing in Montreal in 1869, described war correspondents as a 'newly invented curse to armies'. His *Soldier's Pocket Book* of 1871 talked of them as 'a race of drones, who are an encumbrance, who eat the rations of fighting men and *do no work at all*'. At the same time, he could see how they could be utilised to spread false news to deceive the enemy.<sup>5</sup> But, by the time he was writing there was no escaping them entirely, although the army continued to try to put obstacles in their way. But Wolseley, and many others after him, also began to see that cultivating pet correspondents could be used to enhance their own reputations.

But a good descriptive style was not enough if the correspondent was not able to get the account out faster than his rivals: 'In this branch of his art Forbes has never perhaps been equalled'.<sup>6</sup> A profile of him in 1879 in *The World* outlined the skills necessary.

It is perhaps hardly so well known to the public as it deserves to be that it is one thing to be present at a battle, yet another thing to choose the best spot for forming an accurate idea of what is going on; yet a third requisite to possess the nimble brain to comprehend, and the rapid hand necessary to record it as it develops; and yet another quite distinct gift to

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<sup>3</sup> Forbes, *Memories and Studies of War and Peace* (London, 1895).

<sup>4</sup> Forbes, *Barracks, Bivouacs and Battles* (London, 1891), 152.

<sup>5</sup> *Soldier's Pocket Book* (1871), 82, 86, 225 quoted in John Augustus O'Shea, *Leaves from the Life of a Special Correspondent* (London, 1885), Vol. 2, 242.

<sup>6</sup> F.M. Thomas, *Fifty Years of Fleet Street. Being the Life and Recollections of Sir John R. Robinson* (London, 1904), 171.



organise the communications for getting the information swiftly from the battlefield to London.<sup>7</sup>

The future Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, speaking at a Press Fund dinner in 1878, spoke of the qualities he perceived in the 'special correspondent', as they tended to be called: 'He seems to combine in himself the power of a first-class steeple chaser with the power of the most brilliant writer – the most wonderful physical endurance with the most remarkable mental vigour'. One such special correspondent wrote that

The war correspondent, like the poet, is born, not made. He must have his aptitudes, the two first of which are good temper and good digestion; he must be able to ride bare-backed and write with a fish-bone, be a good linguist and a light sleeper, have a practical knowledge of soldiery and be content, on occasion, to make a meal off the sole of his boots.<sup>8</sup>

War correspondents take huge risks in order to be where the action is and in all wars there have always been many who were killed. No one ever doubted the courage of the subject of this biography. He believed that only if the correspondent showed courage could he ingratiate himself with the troops. Those who were concerned with their safety were quickly despised and obstacles put in their way.<sup>9</sup>

Equally, for some war correspondents reporting is about getting behind the official justification, explanation and account of a war and getting to some kind of truth about the real agenda. Exposing the misdemeanours of government and military authorities was the pattern set by William Howard Russell from the Crimea, with at least a measure of impartiality and honesty. But for others it is about recounting the experience of people on the ground, and in more recent wars a measure of detachment, what has been called 'bystander's journalism', has given way to the 'journalism of attachment', identifying victims whose case has to be put.<sup>10</sup> The Danish Christian pacifist,

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Joseph Hatton, *Journalistic London. Being a Series of Sketches of Famous Pens and Papers of the Day* (London, 1882; 1998), 60.

<sup>8</sup> O'Shea, *Leaves from the Life of a Special Correspondent*, 239.

<sup>9</sup> W. Rideing, *Many Celebrities and a Few Others* (Garden City, 1912), 269.

<sup>10</sup> Mick Hume, *Whose War is it Anyway? The Dangers of the Journalism of Attachment* (London, 1997), 5–6.

Wilhelm Carlsen, who regarded the reporting of war as stemming from the same ‘blood thirsty curiosity which drew so wide a circle of spectators in the days of ancient Rome’, believed that the honest war correspondent could

free himself from administering to this curiosity and speculation, and even from headquarters; and if he has so great a desire to keep an eye on the battle-field – a firm living eye, capable of seeing through the false glare – he may expose the way in which art and poetry and news-vendors veil the infamous reality of war; their romantic phrases inducing even wives and mothers and daughters to sacrifice at its altar, without so much as admitting that it is something that ought to be protested against.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, at the same time, war correspondents have to depend on the authorities to get to the front, to get the information on tactics and to get contact with the troops. This can mean a difficult tightrope walk. To be embedded with an army inevitably means an element of identifying with that army. As the BBC found during the Falklands War of 1982 a decision had to be made on whether correspondents referred to ‘British troops’ or ‘our troops’. After pressure it became the latter. But too close an identification can undermine the reputation of the reporter and his or her newspaper. As a model of how to walk that tightrope between professional distance from the military and necessary proximity to the tacticians, Archibald Forbes remains among the best.

Correspondents also face the difficulty of when to report defeats, setbacks, cowardice, brutality and all the other aspects that are features of warfare. Archibald Forbes was fortunate in that almost all his wars involved countries other than Britain. There was no problem in reporting the defeat of the French, the slaughter of Russians, the looting of Bulgars or the brutality of Turks. It was much more problematic when he was writing of the incompetence of the British army in India or South Africa. Later correspondents found it much more difficult, but there is always the dilemma of whether truth must out at all times or whether, by omission, incidents can be skated over. There are numerous examples of the latter to set against the heroic examples of the former. But what if the public only wants to read of victories? Is the correspondent answerable to his public and his paper or is there

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<sup>11</sup> Wilhelm Carlsen, *War as it is* (London, 1892), 11–14.

some higher duty always to paint it as it is? Rudyard Kipling, a reporter himself, recognised that the public 'at breakfast should be amused and thrilled and interested' but, at the same time there was a need 'to minister to the blind brutal British public's bestial thirst for blood'.<sup>12</sup> The ethical problems of the war correspondent have not diminished over the years.

At the same time, journalists are story-tellers. They are creating the first narrative of events and are conscious of the impact that their accounts have. There is the inevitable self-censorship, but at other times there is the temptation to exaggerate for effect. These things become doubly apparent when the same stories are told and re-told in books, lectures and articles. Details get altered and embellished. One of the challenges in recounting the life of Archibald Forbes is that it has not been possible to discover any significant personal papers. This account has been dependent on his reports for a decade in the pages of the *Daily News* and on the articles he wrote and the lectures he gave for another twenty years recounting his adventures. But crucially there are the comments of his contemporaries, since war correspondents became heroes of their own stories and newsworthy in themselves.

When Archibald Forbes died on 29 March 1900, his death was noted across the English-speaking world and throughout Europe. He was, after all, the most decorated journalist in the world. In the decade of the 1870s he had covered six wars. He had been presented with medals by Germany, Russia, Spain, Serbia and Romania. Only the British state had failed – indeed refused – to honour him.

Although William Howard Russell is usually credited as the founder of the profession of British war correspondent with his letters from the Crimean War, Forbes is the one who brought it into the modern age. Russell exposed the incompetence of admirals and generals, challenged the lack of foresight of ministers and revealed the atrocious medical conditions at the military hospital at Scutari. By doing so Russell raised the issue of whether the job of war correspondent was a vital service to the public or whether the exposure of inadequacies was likely to give comfort to the enemy. If Russell was the trail-blazer Forbes could justifiably claim to have been the modern developer. Russell's reports were hand-written, despatched across land and sea, and read three or four weeks after the event in the pages of the *Times*. The conditions were also much less hazardous when battles could be observed without getting within the range of fire. The coming of rifles and

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<sup>12</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *The Light that Failed* (New York, 1891), 19–20.

artillery that could attain distances of anything from two miles to six miles changed all that. Also, the American Civil War had seen the extensive use of the telegraph for immediate reports and Russell, who covered that war, had failed to adjust to the new technology.

In the United States there had long been a popular press and by the start of the Civil War there were some 2500 titles. From at least the 1830s newspapers there had something akin to the approach of modern mass circulation journalism. Reports on the Mexican-American War of 1846–48 by full-time journalists had shown that war stories sold newspapers. Competition between papers had brought out the need for speed of delivery to the newsroom. The result had not always been creditable to the profession of journalism. The reporting of the Civil War in the United States was accompanied by ‘sensationalism and exaggeration, outright lies, puffery, slander, and faked eye-witness accounts’,<sup>13</sup> but demand for papers grew. It was in the decade after the Civil War that the British press began to adjust. In Forbes’s world the telegraph spanned Europe and the Atlantic Ocean and Forbes showed how effectively this could be used to get the reports into the press as quickly as possible. Speed was of the essence and Forbes was the first in Europe to utilise the telegraph properly and extensively to transmit war news. He made a virtue of getting the news out first and of out-galloping rivals. As a result he became an internationally-known figure so that even twenty years after he had ceased to be a war correspondent he was still regularly cited as ‘the prince of war correspondents’, the model that the younger reporters had to aspire to. He left memorable accounts of many of the wars of the 1870s, turned the *Daily News* into the most important Liberal daily newspaper and predicted many of the military developments of the twentieth century. However, with new generations of writers emerging from the wars of the twentieth century, while Russell is remembered as the pioneer, Forbes as the perfecter is largely forgotten.

Archibald Young Leslie Forbes was born on April 17, 1838<sup>14</sup> at the Church of Scotland manse of Boharm on the border between Banffshire and Morayshire. Both counties claimed him as a native son, since the stream marking the boundary between the two counties flowed through the glebe

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<sup>13</sup> Michael S. Sweeney, *The Military and the Press. An Uneasy Truce* (Evanston, Ill., 2006), 22.

<sup>14</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 25 April 1838.

land and just below the rambling manse, which was on the Moray side.<sup>15</sup> His father, Lewis William Forbes, originally from Banff, the son of a lawyer, had been Church of Scotland minister in Boharm since 1816, when he was not quite twenty-three years old. He spent all his ministry in that rural parish, but Lewis was one of those erudite country ministers, typical of the time, stimulated by the intellectual excitement of the later days of the Scottish Enlightenment. His reading would have been wide and cosmopolitan and his erudition was, towards the end of his life, recognised by Marischal College, Aberdeen, in the award of a Doctorate of Divinity. He wrote the account of his parish for the *Second Statistical Account of Scotland* and did much to spread both Sunday and day schools in the area. Although a firm supporter of church patronage, in the great Disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843 Forbes was active in a search for compromise, but he remained in the Established Church.

Archibald later described his father as ‘a handsome, reverend-looking man, with a high bald forehead and long white hair’.<sup>16</sup> Lewis’s first wife was Penelope Cowie from Gamrie on the coast of the Moray Firth with whom he had four sons and a daughter, James, who was to die in Ceylon in 1845 aged 28, George, who died in San Francisco in 1850, and Lewis Alexander, a lieutenant in the 40th Regiment who died of dysentery in Geelong, Australia in 1852,<sup>17</sup> Alexander who died in infancy and Margaret, who married William Robertson Pirie, a theologian and future principal of Aberdeen University.

Eight years after his first wife’s death in 1827, Lewis Forbes married Elizabeth Mary Young, the daughter of Archibald Young, a Banff solicitor, who then lived at Kininvie House, near Dufftown. Young had added the surname Leslie to his name, linking his family to the original owners of Kininvie House, the Leslie earls of Rothes, and Archibald Forbes liked to emphasise his mother’s family links to the Leslies.<sup>18</sup> In quick succession after the marriage to Elizabeth there were eight more children, three boys and five girls. Archibald was the second child, coming after Jane, followed by William, Penelope,<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Mary (who died in infancy), Patrick Stewart, Jamesina and Isabella.

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<sup>15</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 15 October 1929.

<sup>16</sup> *London Scotsman*, 8 February 1868.

<sup>17</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 6 October 1852.

<sup>18</sup> *Graphic*, 11 February 1871.

<sup>19</sup> Penelope Forbes married Rev. William Macvicar, minister of Ordiquhill in

The parish within which his father ministered was bounded by the River Spey in the West and by the parish of Keith in the east. It was an entirely rural parish, with not even a village of any significant size within it. It was an area devoted to arable farming, in small farms rented mainly from the earl of Seafield, specialising in the breeding of shorthorn or black polled Angus cattle. Keith, six miles away, was the main market town from where ‘prime Scotch beef’ was shipped by train, to the London markets, while the larger town of Elgin was 13 miles to the West. Forbes remembered his home as tucked away among brown moors and sullen pinewoods. It was not in the Highlands and never was a Gaelic-speaking area, but sat on the edge of the north-east lowlands that ran along the edge of the Moray Firth. On the Banffshire side of the parish there were mainly very small farms, often carved out of wet, peaty and infertile bogs, with an entrenched myth of lands that had been cleared of stones by generations of hard, grinding labour. On the Moray side, the easier, sandier soils allowed for bigger farms, with rich, fat, well-cultivated fields and a slightly more polished existence. One can detect in Forbes characteristics shaped by the environments of both sides of the border.

The manse where Forbes was brought up was relatively new, built in 1811, and, although like most manses it seemed large, Lewis Forbes complained in his contribution to the *Statistical Account* that it was ‘very far from commodious’ and built in a damp position. His concerns probably arose from the problems of finding space for a rapidly growing family, and the heritors were eventually persuaded to enlarge it. By the standards of the area, the family was comfortably off, according to the 1851 census return, with two nurses, a cook and a housemaid to help and three farm servants to work the glebe land.

Lewis Forbes capped a long pastoral career in Boharm by becoming Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1852, having always played an active role in its annual proceedings. His sermon to the Assembly was well received and he originated an endowment scheme within the church. In January 1854 he took ill and died during a Sunday service, perhaps as a result of a chill brought on by one of the worst of winters, when the north-east was cut off from the south for more than two weeks by severe snowstorms.<sup>20</sup> His last weeks were also overshadowed by the death of

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Banffshire, and died in March 1911, *Aberdeen Journal*, 14 March 1911.

<sup>20</sup> Archibald Forbes later described his father’s sudden death but mis-dated

his daughter, Isabella Anne, in November, at the age of 4. His will asked that his burial be as simple as possible without wasting money on show and that the money saved should be passed to the church elders to distribute among the needy.

There was not great wealth among the three hundred families in the parish of Boharm when Archibald Forbes was born. 'Its crofters and farmers lived out their lives and were laid in the old graveyard up on the hillock – hardly a soul of them having been twenty miles outside the parish bounds'. But social divisions were beginning to widen. In the better land in the valley of the River Isla small farms were being merged into larger units with smaller holdings being pushed to the higher marginal land. Small farmers' sons had to flee to the larger farms. Daughters were having to go into service, as the wives of 'big farmers' sought to emulate their urban counterparts. Many families were feeling the effects of the decline in demand for flax-spinning and stocking knitting, both occupations that had once provided work for women. With fewer opportunities for getting a tenancy, emigration, mainly to Canada and the United States, was on the increase. The minister on a stipend of £168, as well as payment in kind of oatmeal and barley and 28 acres of glebe land was among the better off of the parish. Like many sons of the clergy, Archibald Forbes was in an anomalous social position between the few gentry and a handful of big farmers and the mass of small tenants. He would quickly have had to learn to move between the educated language of the manse and the everyday Doric language of Banffshire, where the family name would have been pronounced For-biss. It is clear that he never entirely lost from his speech the broad vowels and rolling Rs of Banffshire. With hindsight it seemed to Forbes to be 'a curiously primitive region'.<sup>21</sup> While it *was* a deeply conservative area, clinging to old traditions and customs, it was changing fast with the coming of the railway, which gave links to Elgin and Keith and to the larger towns of Aberdeen and Inverness. Aberdeen and Inverness newspapers were available in the area and in the politically turbulent years of the later 1840s and early 1850s there was a sharp division between protectionists and free traders. Forbes remembered getting a black eye and bloody nose, probably in Keith, for wearing a Tory rosette on his bonnet.

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it – no doubt for dramatic effect – to the last Sunday of the year. *London Scotsman*, 8 February 1868.

<sup>21</sup> Forbes, *Barracks, Bivouacs and Battles* (London, 1891), 56.

Archibald Forbes went to the local parish school, close to the church, ‘a plain barn-like building with four staring windows knocked out of its walls, and a cock-nosed portico projecting over the doorway’. The wind apparently whirled through it and pupils were each expected to bring in a peat to keep the school fire going. It was democratic to the extent that the laird’s son and the minister’s sons sat alongside farmers’, cottars’ and ditchers’ sons and daughters. But it was a democracy ‘tempered chiefly by vigour of bicep muscles’ and ‘the cock of the school and the playground was the youngster who was smartest with his fists’. The sons of the manse were ‘seldom free from a black eye or two, and exceptionally frequent victims of the ‘dominie’s tawse’.<sup>22</sup> Attendance for many others was fairly erratic, shaped by the needs of farming, although from time to time older men and women would take time away from work and return to school.<sup>23</sup> There were few in the parish who could not read and write and a committee managed a parochial or ploughmen’s library.<sup>24</sup>

The schoolmaster from 1843 was a young minister, the Rev. John Clarke. One of the jewels of Moray and Banffshire was the quality of the parish schools. Thanks to the bequest in 1828 of James Dick, a Forres-born West India merchant, schools in the area were able to secure the services of graduate teachers. Clark had an arts degree from King’s College, Aberdeen and had been to Divinity Hall to gain a licence to preach as a probationer. The parish schools were able to provide the necessary background for admission to a university, which was principally some knowledge of Latin. Anything beyond that in history or literature was fairly limited and in maths, according to Forbes, even the best were doing no more than ‘looking over the hedge’ at differential calculus. The Forbes family was, however, an intellectual one, with one daughter married to the professor of theology at Marischal College, Aberdeen, and a niece, Catherine Melvin, who was employed as a governess in the household in the early 1850s.

As a child Forbes learned the skills of outdoor life. The quality of the roads, which were only gradually being improved in the 1840s, meant that horses were essential. His horsemanship was developed by having to ride the mile or so to collect the family mail from the post office. It is clear from later

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<sup>22</sup> Forbes, *Memories*, 325.

<sup>23</sup> *London Scotsman*, 28 December 1867.

<sup>24</sup> *Statistical Account of Scotland, Vol. 13: Boharm, County of Banff*, 377; *Aberdeen Journal*, 30 December 1844.



reminiscences that he also became an accomplished fisherman, learning the best pools in the River Spey, between ‘the pellucid Avon at Ballindalloch to the bridge at Fochabers’.<sup>25</sup> There were also skills with a gun and he approved of the moves in the Highlands away from sheep farming to grouse moors.<sup>26</sup> For long he prided himself on his fitness, claiming in 1870 at the age of thirty-two,

I have a great advantage over other correspondents. After a battle there is often much confusion, and one’s horse is often missing, but, if need be, I can walk thirty or forty miles at a stretch, and I can get off my message while other men are searching for a conveyance<sup>27</sup>

Boharm was an area that provided many recruits to the army and he would have been familiar with many ex-soldiers. The bell-ringer and Kirk officer had been a sergeant in ‘the gallant Ninety-Second’, with Moore at Corunna and then with Wellington in his advance through Spain and France to Waterloo. Yet other parishioners regaled him with stories of their time in India in the Sikh Wars. In one of his later essays he recalls the ‘old sergeant’, the bell-ringer at the Church door, reading out the news of the desertion of his son from the army in Montreal.<sup>28</sup> In another, there is a tale of a local murder where a former soldier with the army in India wreaks revenge on his former sergeant major.<sup>29</sup>

In 1851 Forbes had his first introduction to London when he and his parents, along with millions of others, visited the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park.<sup>30</sup> There he would have had a chance to see the fascinating and the exotic from around the world. There was a short spell at Keith Parish School to ensure the necessary standard for University and, in October 1853, at the age of 15, Archibald went up to King’s College in Aberdeen. By far the largest city in the north, with a population of around 72,000, Aberdeen supported two universities, King’s College in Old Aberdeen that dated its foundation

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<sup>25</sup> Forbes, ‘My Native Salmon River’ in *Camps, Quarters and Casual Places* (London, 1896).

<sup>26</sup> Forbes, ‘Grouse Shooting’ in *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 13 (Sept 1874), 305–14.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas, *Fifty Years of Fleet Street*, 170.

<sup>28</sup> Forbes, *Barracks, Bivouacs and Battles*, 59–61

<sup>29</sup> Forbes, *Memories*, 172–83.

<sup>30</sup> *Poverty Bay Herald*, 2 February 1883.

from 1495 and Marischal College in the new town. There had long been talk of the need to unite the two institutions, but rivalry was intense and there was a local pride in being able to claim to have two universities, when the whole of England had long had only two. King's College generally attracted students from rural areas of the Highlands and North-East, while Marischal got the sons of the rising bourgeoisie of the new town. Many of the small parish schools of the north prided themselves on their ability to prepare pupils with enough Latin to compete successfully in the annual bursary competition. While Forbes was not among the main bursars he did come first in a presentation for the Redhyth bursary which was specifically for the children of Banffshire residents or those linked to Seafield estates.<sup>31</sup> The quality of the professors was not great. Some, appointed through influence rather than for intellectual merit, had been around for decades. Some paid assistants to read their out-dated notes. The first year consisted largely of elementary Greek and yet more Latin.

Student life does seem to have been quite lively, as depicted in Neil N. Maclean's *Life in a Northern University*, first published in 1874 and covering the period when Forbes was at the College. Most students were in often far from healthy lodgings, crowded into the nearby street of College Bounds where visiting one another until the early hours of the morning was common. Sleeping three or four to a bed was not unusual and Forbes reckoned that £14 was an almost extravagant expenditure for lodgings, provisions and books for five months.<sup>32</sup> Despite the age of the Bajeants, Semis, Tertians and Magistrands (the label given to students in their successive years) drinking loomed large, although the resources for many must have been limited. It was easy to ignore the first regulation of Scottish public houses, the Forbes Mackenzie Act passed in 1853. As one of Forbes's contemporaries noted,

Most of the students attending our college were then as now, from the country, chiefly from the northern and western counties, including, of course, the western isles. It was not to be expected that young men,

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<sup>31</sup> Aberdeen University Special Collections. King's College, Minutes of the Senatus Academicus, 4 November 1853.

<sup>32</sup> W. Keith Leask, *Interamna Borealis being Memories and Portraits from an Old University Town between the Don and the Dee* (Aberdeen, 1917), 55; *London Scotsman* 24 August 1867, 'College Days at the "Auld Toun" University'.

accustomed all their lives to freedom of movement in every way and at every time, would tamely submit to a restraint as they found when they came to college. At first, the awe inspired by academic dignitaries, which we all, as Bageants, have experienced, operated as a check, but when the 'freshness' had worn off and the control had become irksome, many attempts were made to break the rules, and to get beyond the precincts of the college after hours. Of course, there were the usual captures and the usual punishments, followed again and again by other derelictions of duty, until, as usual, the professors and certain of the students were at open war.

The minutes of the Senatus Academicus of 1854 are full of reports of misbehaviour by students in the professors' gardens 'committing acts of injury as well as creating disturbances', while under the influence of alcohol. There also seemed to be persistent cheating in the examinations at the start and end of session with copying and cribbing practised wholesale and regarded as perfectly pardonable offences. Efforts were being taken to eradicate both with the appointment of constables to guard the gardens and invigilators to watch the examinees and to separate the 'more idle' students from the conscientious.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the fact that in later years Forbes claimed that he would rather face a bullet than make a speech, during his two years at the University he participated in the lively debating society on a Friday evening. In his first year he narrowly lost out defending Mary Queen of Scots from the accusation that she had abetted the murder of her husband, Darnley. This was followed by a support for teetotalism and arguing the case that phrenology should be regarded as a science.<sup>34</sup> In second year, he was even more active, defending the banishment of Napoleon and the actions of Julius Caesar against Pompey, as well as participating in debates on Polish independence and on Monarchy versus republicanism. There is a hint of some kind of prank at the

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<sup>33</sup> Minutes of the Senatus Academicus of King's College, Aberdeen 25 February, 15, 20, 30 March 1854 (Aberdeen University, Special Collections); W. Leslie Low, *David Thomson, M.A. Professor of Natural Philosophy in the University of Aberdeen* (Aberdeen, 1894), 51.

<sup>34</sup> Neil N. Mclean, *Life in a Northern University* (Aberdeen, 1917), xxxv–xxvi; Aberdeen University. Special Collections, Minutes of the King's College Debating Society.

debating society by Forbes and his younger brother William, who had come up to Marischal College in 1854, which led to William being censured by the meeting with only Archibald dissenting.

Forbes remained at College only for two years and was remembered as 'a high-spirited and wildish student'.<sup>35</sup> According to one account he was rusticated for showing disrespect to the professors and he would have been expelled but for the influence of some friends of his father. There is, however, no evidence of rustication in the University records. Intriguingly, his brother William, whom Archibald recognised was 'by far the more brilliant' was apparently sent down at the same time 'having been guilty of repeated contempt for the authority and discipline of the college in spite of repeated warning'. According to Archibald, the reason was either snowballing or lampooning a professor.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps, like nearly half the students at King's College, Forbes had gone up with the intention of becoming a minister like his father and had then lost his faith. It does not seem to have been lack of resources. His father had left a detailed will, which allowed his wife to enjoy a life rental from property in Banff. Since the sons of his first marriage were all dead before their father, most of the remaining estate went to his daughter, Margaret. There was, however, provision for the education of his younger children and a legacy when they reached the age of twenty-one. Archibald Forbes's own brief statement was that 'follies and extravagance abruptly terminated my university career'.<sup>37</sup>

He reputedly idled away his time for a few months and then got a job in the audit office of the Aberdeen railway. He showed a facility with figures and was promoted to the ticket office at Aberdeen station. This was a station that in summer was used by royalty and gentry to make their way to and from Deeside and the Highlands. According to one account, at the height of the season Forbes went off with a few friends and failed to return on time to open the ticket office. As a result, he was moved to a smaller station. There he had a great deal of leisure time and he began to learn French among other things. Mischief, however, once again intervened when one day he climbed on board an unattended locomotive and drove it for about three miles before

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<sup>35</sup> William Carnie, *Reporting Reminiscences*, Vol. I (Aberdeen, 1902), 107.

<sup>36</sup> *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Forbes, 'A Poet Waif' in *Souvenirs of Some Continents* (London, 1885), 295.

<sup>37</sup> Forbes, *Souvenirs of Some Continents*, 48.

it crashed into a gravel train. Fortunately no one was killed, but that ended his railway career.<sup>38</sup>

He moved to Edinburgh, where his mother had gone after leaving the Boharm manse, and entered Edinburgh University, with the intention of studying law. But that did not last long. It was in Edinburgh in the winter of 1857 that he heard the famous war correspondent, William Howard Russell speaking on the Crimean War in the Music Hall and his accounts of the charge at Balaclava 'kindled in me a great ardour for the mounted arm'.<sup>39</sup> In 1858, still a minor with a trust fund, Forbes was a lawyer's clerk in Edinburgh. He seems to have built up some debts for tobacco and cigars. At any rate, someone tried to sue him for these 30 years later.<sup>40</sup> A planned elopement with a young lady in 1858 led to his being caught by the irate father and tossed into a ditch.

Soon after, having inherited some £500 under his father's will, he sailed for Canada with the intention of joining a cousin who had a holding near Lake Huron. However, in Quebec on the way, the strikingly tall good-looking young man got caught in another romantic entanglement and had to get out of town quickly. The inheritance was quickly spent and with only a few shillings in his pocket he signed on as crew in a timber ship bound for England, the *Eliza Robertson*, the last ship to leave before the ice set in on the St Lawrence River. Yet another version of the story that he gave is more prosaic. In this version he was travelling around Canada in the summer of 1859 with every intention of being home for Christmas, and, rather than being in the crew, he was a paying passenger. The ship's name also varied; in this version the *Emma Morrison*.<sup>41</sup> Whatever the exact details, there was agreement that it was a ship 'in the last stage of decrepitude, ill-found, ill-mannered and her skipper a hopeless drunkard'. Caught in an Atlantic storm the timber broke loose and the crew had to take refuge in the ship's rigging. Some fell into the sea and drowned, but Forbes was rescued by a passing cotton-carrying ship, the *Moses Taylor*, on board which, according to the anodyne version, he tucked into

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<sup>38</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 8 July 1878, quoting the *Canadian Railway Age*.

<sup>39</sup> Forbes, *Souvenirs of Some Continents*, 47.

<sup>40</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 25 April 1878.

<sup>41</sup> Forbes, 'A Christmas Dinner De Profundis', in *Barracks, Bivouacs and Battles*, 242–50. The more colourful version was first given in an interview with Kate Field, 'An English War Correspondent', published in *Scribner's Monthly*, Vol. 21, 2 (December 1880), 297–8.

Christmas dinner. The more dramatic version has him arriving in Liverpool penniless and selling a pair of field glasses for eight shillings and with that making his way to London.

With no resources, he and another friend from Aberdeen decided to join the army. Thanks to the introduction of limited enlistment since 1847 the period he was committed to was 12 years. In the end, Forbes spent five years in the First Royal Dragoons from 1859 until 1864. Some time was spent in Ireland at the Curragh Barracks near Dublin, but two years were in the 'New Barracks' in the west-end of Sheffield. He never rose above the rank of acting quarter-master sergeant. The only action he saw was during a political riot in Ireland when he was knocked off his horse with a brick. However some of the early high-spiritedness had not been dispelled. Fifteen years later he met a major in Malta whom Forbes said he knew and, indeed, could recollect their last conversation exactly. The major asked for a clue – 'Seven days cells, twenty-one drill, you scamp!'<sup>42</sup> On another occasion he recalled,

Young, full of spirit, not destitute of money, and having no experience of discipline, it must be said that not in every respect was I a model soldier. For offences of light-heartedness I was somewhat scandalously often in trouble. At length, for an escapade on the line of march from Liverpool to Sheffield, I was tried by a regimental court martial, and underwent twenty-eight days imprisonment, on the most strictly farinaceous food, in the Sheffield 'garrison provost', emerging from confinement, with a head shorn so bare it resembled a turnip.

The cause was drunkenness on parade and he was warned by the commanding officer that the next time he would be flogged.<sup>43</sup>

Thirty years later he recounted what the food was like in the Royal Barracks in Dublin. The Government ration for a soldier was three-quarters of a pound of meat, uncooked, with bone and a pound of bread. Three pence halfpenny a day, 'messing money' was taken from his pay to purchase 'groceries' to supplement the ration. The meat was generally of the poorest kind, cooked in turn by the soldiers in cookhouses that were inadequately equipped.

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<sup>42</sup> *Northern Echo*, 20 October 1877.

<sup>43</sup> *Staffordshire Sentinel* 30 September 1879; Forbes, 'In a Military Prison', in *Soldiering and Scribbling*, 53–61.

The married women used to hang about the cook-house, with offers, not often refused, to buy from the cook slices off the ration meat, potatoes from the troop-nets, and modicums of tea and sugar from the troop's already scanty pittance. When the cooked meat came up into the barrack-rooms in the baking tins, or was fished from out the soup pails, what one saw was great bare bones, to which in places clung some casual attachments of flesh, gristle, and sinew, repulsive to the eye and difficult to masticate. The potatoes served with this offal were wet, waxy and measly; supplied by some petty greengrocer in the neighbourhood of the barracks, between whom and the troop sergeant-major there mostly existed a private understanding. ... The barrack canteens of those bad old days were foul holes, wherein greedy civilian lessees charged the highest prices for the worst imaginable commodities, and prospered mightily at the soldier's expense.

There were often other 'cruel stoppages' from pay and he recalled trying to survive on a penny a day for four months in Dublin, which left no margin for additional food.<sup>44</sup>

Despite his experience, he seems to have revelled in the life of the army and in the *bonhomie* that it engendered. He was always full of admiration for the resilience and bravery of the private soldier, although he was more than aware that the army also harboured more than its fair share of misfits, drunkards and criminals. In his later novel, which, as the title suggests was *Drawn from Life*, there is a strong sense of authenticity in his descriptions of army life. His hero enlists in one of the pubs at the corner of Charles Street and King Street in Westminster, where recruiting sergeants hung out ready to offer the Queen's shilling to anyone who hesitated in the passing. There were the pubs, the 'Hampshire Hog' and the 'Cheshire Cheese', ready to lubricate the transaction.

In many a British household has Charles Street been cursed with bitter curses; and yet has it not been, so to speak, the cradle of heroes? Has it not been to Charles Street that Britain owed the presence in the ranks of the men who went up the slope of the Alma at the double? - the men who galloped up the valley of Balaclava in the teeth of the whirlwind of shot and shell? Fathers may curse, and mothers' tears may break, but

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<sup>44</sup> Forbes, 'Soldiers' Rations', *Nineteenth Century* (December 1888), 322–5.

the Millennium has not yet come, and Charles Street is still an important institution in our land.<sup>45</sup>

Once enrolled the next stop was the rendezvous to await instructions, a 'miserable den' behind the 'Hampshire Hog'.

The room was long and low. Its walls might at one time have rejoiced in a coating of whitewash, but it must have been beyond the memory of man. By the light of the two miserable candles which stood on the dirty table, he saw the sides of the room were lined with narrow pallets, so close together as almost to touch each other ... A stand-up fight was being briskly carried on at the upper end of the room, the combatants bleeding profusely, and swearing the most horrible oaths, a language in which their respective backers and the spectators were also extremely proficient. Half-way up the room a vocal concert of a hilarious character was in full swing, the leading performer being a young cockney, in a ragged shirt and no boots to speak of ... A few beds further on, a batch of practical jokers were playfully experimenting on the countenance of a young fellow who lay in a heavy drunken sleep ... decorating his hair with a mixture of tallow and dirt, in which they inserted straws and feathers with much skill and a highly novel effect. In a corner a maudlin bumpkin, who had taken the shilling and afterwards 'the rue', sat blubbering most piteously, interspersing his paroxysms of tears with sundry reminiscences of 'feyther and mother' and a certain woman of the name of "Bet".

If the new recruit did fall asleep the chances were that, on waking, he would find himself stripped of everything of value. Forbes quickly felt that he had a natural affinity to soldiering: 'I took to its drudgery with as much zeal as if I had never learned to conjugate Greek irregular verbs or make Latin verse'.<sup>46</sup> Certainly he enjoyed the company of soldiers and an awareness of this gave his future life direction and reversed the rather aimless course of his early years. He turned to writing on soldiers and soldiering.

His first payment for writing came while he was based in Weedon in Buckinghamshire and won a prize of 15 guineas for an essay in a competition

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<sup>45</sup> Forbes, *Drawn from Life*, Vol. I (London 1870), 145–6.

<sup>46</sup> Forbes, *Souvenirs of Some Continents*, 48.



for working men on 'the advantage the Mother Country derives from her Colonies'.<sup>47</sup> He began to write articles on military subjects, working at a table in the barrack room while around him his fellow soldiers pipe-clayed their belts and burnished their sword scabbards, and drank his beer, with the occasional need to clear the table to make way for a fight.<sup>48</sup> It is likely that 'Life in a Barrack' published anonymously in the relatively new monthly *Cornhill Magazine* in April 1863 was by Forbes. The *Wellesley Index* also attributes to Forbes a piece of writing on 'The Limited Enlistment Act' published in, the *Cornhill Magazine*, in August 1864. Certainly the piece, 'By One who has served in the Ranks' reads like Forbes and, in later years, he thanked Frederick Greenwood, the editor of the *Cornhill*, for giving him a start. On the other hand, the writer of the article claimed to have heard soldiers advocating improvements in their condition 'on picket fire on the plain of Balaclava, on the forecastle of the good ship *Himalaya* [used as a troopship to the Crimea], under a bell-tent on the green Curragh'. Forbes was only in the last of these. Also, the article, among other demands for reform, called for the cat-o'-nine tails to be given up, but, certainly in later life, Forbes supported the occasional use of the lash. With the licence allowed writers striving for effect, none of this necessarily invalidates the assertion that the piece was by Forbes.

In May 1863 the Dragoons moved to Aldershot and there he apparently became batman to Captain Richard Molesworth. Molesworth's wife was Mary Louisa Molesworth, soon to become one of the best-known of Victorian writers of children's books, and she gave some lessons in French and German to Forbes.<sup>49</sup> He was hit by some unidentified illness and hospitalised for eighteen months before being moved to London where after about six weeks he revived,<sup>50</sup> but he received his discharge from the army at the end of 1864 and had to find a means of earning a living. Writing was his solution.

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<sup>47</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 1 November 1890.

<sup>48</sup> Forbes, 'How I Became a War Correspondent', *English Illustrated Magazine*, April 1884; Thomas, *Fifty Years of Fleet Street*, 167.

<sup>49</sup> Roger Lancelyn Green, *Mrs Molesworth* (London, 1961), 30–1, Jane Cooper, *Mrs Molesworth. A Biography* (Crowborough, 2002). Both these biographies recount this story and the former claims that Forbes reports this in his memoirs. I have not been able to trace the source.

<sup>50</sup> Kate Field, 'An English War Correspondent', 298.

## 2 The Fledgling Journalist

*I received one day a visit from a perfect stranger to me, who told me he thought he could write some sketches of barrack-room life which would be likely to interest our readers. He had been a soldier, and had seen some service in different parts of the world; his name was then unknown to me; it has since become famous wherever English literature is known – his name is Archibald Forbes.*

Justin McCarthy, *Reminiscences*, Vol. 1 (1899), 170

Immediately on leaving the army Forbes married, on 6 October 1864, Helen White, four years his junior, in St James's Church, Curtain Road in Shoreditch. Forbes's mother or his sister placed an announcement in the *Aberdeen Journal*.<sup>1</sup> Little is known of Helen, other than that her father was dead, and Forbes never refers to her in any of his writings. They were living in Shoreditch in London's east end and it was here that their first child, Florence Helen was born on 14 June 1867. It must have been difficult with Forbes's erratic earnings, but they were able to move to a better address a terraced house at 334 City Road, Islington, where a second daughter, Frances Alice Forbes was born in March 1869. The announcement of her birth in the *London Scotsman* added 'Mr Forbes requests the prayers of his friends and acquaintances in this his sore affliction', a statement that at least some must have taken as indicating the death of his wife in childbirth. In fact, it seems to have been intended as a joke about the birth of a daughter, perhaps echoing the great Scottish preacher Dr Thomas Chalmers who, some years before, had commented on the birth of his daughter, 'We must be thankful for sma mercies'. Forbes's wife died in the summer of 1872, and one of the mysteries of Forbes's life, that it has not been possible to solve, is who, considering his long and frequent absences, actually brought up these two girls once his wife died.

Forbes was able to scrape a living with some casual work provided by James Grant, formerly of the *Elgin Courant* and now editor of the *Morning Advertiser*. This included some dramatic and music criticism, the latter a role

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<sup>1</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 12 October 1864

hardly suited to the largely tone deaf Forbes. It was some time in 1866 that Forbes made contact with Justin McCarthy, who had just taken over the editorship of the Liberal Radical newspaper, the *Morning Star*. This had been established in 1856 by Richard Cobden and John Bright, together with other critics of the Crimean War. Forbes offered McCarthy some sketches of barrack-room life, which McCarthy recognised as having both ‘vigour and originality’.<sup>2</sup> He eventually found a niche for his writing in the ‘Readings by Starlight’ column in the evening version of the paper. Here the emphasis was on publishing good and attractive writing rather than on specific topics. It was an important entrée into the world of London journalism. His links with the *Star* brought Forbes into contact with some of the journalists who were picking up American ideas and styles. The *Star* was a penny paper aiming at mass circulation and hiring journalists, such as Edmund Yates and William Black, who saw the need for a more immediate and popular approach to writing than was typical in the British press. It must have been a precarious living, but Archibald Forbes was beginning to learn his craft and to make important contacts. In 1869 the *Star* was absorbed by the *Daily News*.

Despite these commitments and having a family to keep, Forbes, in 1867, became involved in a risky venture with the *London Scotsman*, a weekly journal of Anglo-Scottish news. The newspaper’s office was first in 45 Essex Street, off the Strand, and then at 7 Whitefriars Street, off Fleet Street, the office of the *Railway News*. Someone who met Forbes at that time found him working in a tiny back parlour through the main office of Frederick McDermott, the proprietor of the *Railway News* and a major shareholder in the *London Scotsman*. Forbes’s office consisted only of a table and chair and a nest of pigeon-holes stuffed full of paragraphs on every county in Scotland.<sup>3</sup> The first publisher was a Robert Smiles, but, a week after the launch, Smiles’s daughter, Margaret, died, at the age of 25 and a new publisher, James Hicks Stacey took over. The first issue of 24 pages, priced 4d, appeared on 13 July 1867, just as the agitation for parliamentary reform was reaching its peak. The need for a Scottish bill was one of the first causes that it took up. The early issues also covered the Scottish peerage, matters of public health in Scotland, and the Breadalbane case, where there was a disputed claim to the title. It was not averse to occasional trivia, such as the first man to climb Mont Blanc in a kilt. Nor was sensationalism avoided with pieces on baby-farming (copying

<sup>2</sup> Justin McCarthy, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I (London, 1899), 170.

<sup>3</sup> Aberdeen University Special Collections, R.J.W., *Archibald Forbes. Some Personal Recollections*.

the *Pall Mall Gazette*) and on the whipping of young women in Scotland. More serious concern was the poor management of Scottish business in Parliament and it floated the idea of a secretary of state for Scotland, naming Edward Baxter, MP for Dundee, as the likely candidate.

The journal was not, perhaps, the wisest of projects since there were fewer than 40,000 people of Scottish birth in the capital. It is not clear the extent of Forbes's financial and journalistic input in the early stages. A piece with his initials 'College Days at the "Auld Toun" University' on King's College, Aberdeen, appeared on 26 August 1867 and another on 'My Auld Scotch Schule' on 16 November. However, an unsigned serialised story 'The Light Brigade; or Leaves from the Diary of John Aberdeen' was probably Forbes's first foray into fiction. There are signs of Forbes's hand in a piece called 'Eppie Ingram at the Derby' and in various accounts of rambles in the Highlands and on Speyside. What was certainly his was a serialised novel 'Hector Macdonald, a Tale of Military Life', which eventually came out in book form as *Drawn from Life* in 1871.

The novel is worth looking at since it does bring out some of Forbes's later skills as a writer. It follows a particular genre in Scottish writing that eventually became known as 'kailyaird'. There was a fairly clichéd opening in which the hero, a laird's son, Hector Macdonald, falls in love with the minister's daughter, Mary Home. There is a villain, Fitzloom, son of a Manchester plutocrat who has purchased an estate in the Highlands. The son 'was a young exquisite of the very first water externally, but with the heart of a "cad" below the lacquer exterior'. Fitzloom's advances towards Mary Home are spurned and he is thrashed by Hector after attempting to assault a country girl.

The setting in Glenfiloh is a conglomerate of places in Forbes's childhood home area. The county town was Engil (a thinly disguised Elgin). Forbes must have relished his writing descriptions of the local elite attending the Academy Ball: two Established Church ministers 'who vied with each other in ponderous fatness, the token of easy lives, good living, and no doubt good consciences'; a Free Church minister, 'a man brimful of intellect and venom'. There was the local bank agent 'an empty-headed but plausible man ... given to long-sounding speeches at meetings of the 'Town Council', the self-made lawyer, 'a bantam-cock of a man' who had raised himself by sheer force of energy and who 'never took a cause in hand into which he did not throw himself as if it were his own'. There was the 'curry powder' aristocracy, the Brigadier-General home from decades in India in a 'mummified state of

preservation', and the Ceylon planter 'whom heat and ease had bloated into an oleaginous rotundity instead of parching into leather'. Lastly there were the rival newspaper editors: the decent, gentle, literary one for whom the most difficult task in the world was 'when reporting a cattle show or a flower show, how to praise the first prize-taker duly without deprecating the second, and delicately to insinuate to the second that he ought to have been first, without wounding the *amour propre* of the latter and giving offence to the judges'; then there was his rival for whom 'war was the breath of his nostrils' and who was 'never happier except when pulverising an antagonist' and who always had a couple of libel actions at hand.<sup>4</sup> The characterisations are sharp and mischievously witty.

Thanks to the villainous actions of Fitzloom, Mary and her father have to leave the manse of Glenfiloh, and travel to India. Thanks to his dissipation Fitzloom too has no alternative but to leave the country and find a place in the army, also in India, while the hero, Hector, also enlists and in time he makes it to India. All are there from 1856. Most of the two remaining volumes of the triple-decker that the serialised novel became, are taken up with detailed and convincing accounts of army life in India, leading to the Spring of 1857 when mutiny spread amongst the native troops. It then becomes largely an account of the relief of Cawnpore and the attempts to relieve Lucknow by General Havelock and Colonel Neill.

This was an event in which Forbes was steeped and fascinated, partly from his own reading, but also from endless conversations with veterans when he was in the army. The novel increasingly incorporates historical detail. In the story, Mary Home and her father were in Cawnpore and Mary was the friend of Mrs John Moore, a posthumous heroine of the Mutiny. They are charmed, but not fooled, by Nana Sahib, the Maratha Prince who is soon to turn on them and seize Cawnpore with the rebellious sepoys. The death of Mary's father is built into the notorious massacre of women and children trying to escape from Cawnpore by the river in the belief that this had been agreed with Nana.

Meanwhile, in the novel, Hector Macdonald, joins the 1st Madras fusiliers, under the command of Lt-Colonel James Neill. The regiment, the "Lambs" was just back from service in Persia and were now ordered to Calcutta. According to Forbes, Neill was 'an Ayrshire man, with a leaven of old Cameronian iron in his composition'. According to an historian of

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<sup>4</sup> Forbes, *Drawn from Life*, Vol. I, 113–16.

the Mutiny he was ‘a religious zealot who believed himself destined for great things’.<sup>5</sup> Forbes recounts the story of Neill preventing a train leaving Calcutta station without some of his men by threatening to shoot the driver and stoker of the train. He also recounts the brutal recrimination taken by Neill against captured mutineers in Benares and then in Allahabad. Brigadier-General Henry Havelock arrived to take over command from Neill and, in the story, Hector now joins with the 78th Highlanders as they head for Cawnpore, from where news of the massacres had come through. Forbes had his say on Havelock, whose biography he was eventually to write.

To tell the truth, the Highlanders were not so partial to the general. A good many of the dry hard-hearted Scots, while they respected and believed in him as an officer, thought him a little bit of a humbug as a man. This was not on account of his religious views. Scotsmen, even if they happen to be soldiers, have the old Presbyterian leaven too strong in them to jibe at any man who is plainly and evidently a sincerely pious man – even if he obtrudes his piety into greater prominence than they care for. Nor was the coolness of feeling generated by Havelock’s strictness of discipline, although the highlanders in Persia had more than once felt the brunt of his unswerving rigidity. Soldiers, as a general rule, may be said, if not exactly to like, at least to honour, the stern disciplinarian, provided he is always to be relied on for justice, and is not a worrying martinet over insignificant trifles. But the reason why the Highlanders were not exactly enthusiastic admirers of Havelock was this, that the gallant general was just a little windy.<sup>6</sup>

The road to Cawnpore was filled with skirmishes and battles, vividly described by Forbes. The hero joins the volunteer cavalry and charges the enemy sowars, one of whom is the villain Fitzloom whom Hector slays. Arriving at Nana’s palace near Cawnpore they find the evidence of the slaughter of some 179 women and children, some of whom had been thrown into a well. Hector, with Havelock’s force, pushed on towards Lucknow, but, having been wounded, returns to Cawnpore where Neill was now exacting horrific revenge against any suspected of rebellion. It was one of the most controversial aspects of the ‘Mutiny’. In Forbes’s account,

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<sup>5</sup> Saul David, *The Indian Mutiny* (London, 2003), 231.

<sup>6</sup> Forbes, *Drawn from Life*, Vol. II, 270–1.

The other sergeant told Hector what he had seen done in the way of retribution in that room in which the two were standing – how Neill poured water on the bloody floor, and under threats of the lash, and at times its infliction, made high-class Brahmins lick it up with their tongues, and then brought them and hanged them on the gallows over the well, finally burying their carcasses in the public road. How, to enhance the burden of their punishment, he had made the provost-marshal rub their black hides over with the hated pork, and had forced lard between their teeth, amid the shrinking terror and the horror of the native population.

Forbes clearly felt that he had to enter the debate on Neill's actions. Hector is appalled by Neill's actions and 'wondered mightily how it could have been that Neill whom he knew at heart to be a humane man and a sincere Christian, could have been so far left to himself as to perpetrate what seemed the wantonness of barbarity'. But Neill's defence is,

Have you not read in your Bible of one who promised that he should not bear the sword in vain as the minister of God to execute wrath upon those who have done evil? -- the foulest, blackest evil that the heart of devil in human shape could invent? But think not I acted as the minister of wrath only. I had to strike terror with a great example. I had to terrify – to cow – to tell all India, through that quick bruit which mysteriously rushes from village to village, that for him who hurt a hair of a European there was no mercy this side of the grave ... think not, Macdonald, of the half-hundred dogs whom I sent to the gallows, and to hell after it, in their esteem and that of their fellows; think on the effect of the example; think that by it Madras and Bombay may have been preserved from insurrection; think of this, that it may have preserved the lives of many of your countrymen and countrywomen.<sup>7</sup>

The account continues to the relief of Lucknow by the army of Sir Colin Campbell, another of the soldiers whose biography Forbes was eventually to write.

Of course the story all ends happily. The final chapters move to London in the autumn of 1858, where Hector finds in the *Times*, a solicitor's advertisement seeking information on Hector Macdonald, whose father has

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<sup>7</sup> Forbes, *Drawn from Life*, Vol. I, 135–9.

recently died. As he makes his way from the solicitors' office he comes upon a pleasure-van carrying children from a day's outing in Epping Forest. Its axle broken as it lurched to the side. Hector went to the rescue and the teacher 'a young woman in a sand-coloured dress and a straw bonnet', of course, turned out to be Mary Home, whom Hector had long-assumed dead in the Cawnpore massacre. In fact, she had been rescued by an Indian whom her father had befriended and Hector was able to whisk her off to Glenfiloch where he was now laird.

Amid the sentimentality and melodrama there are some wonderful accounts of battles, with an immediacy and excitement that was to become the hallmark of Forbes's later writings. There is a keen eye for character portrayal with the use of illuminating, pithy descriptive phrases and caustic comments and there is a readiness to take up the controversial, all of which were to be a cornerstone of Forbes's soon-to-be famed journalism. Many assumed that the novel was by someone who had been through the Mutiny. In fact the descriptions of the events of the Mutiny were largely based on the reminiscences of a former army colleague, James Hollowell of the Ross-shire Buffs who had been with General Havelock at Cawnpore and Lucknow. Known as 'Hollowell of the deadly rifle', a winner of the Victoria Cross during the Indian Mutiny, who was then a commissionaire at Moses & Sons ready-made clothes shop in London's Oxford Street. Forbes paid him 5s a week for a two-hour session of reminiscences.<sup>8</sup>

Increasingly almost all the burden of preparing the *London Scotsman* fell on Forbes himself. He claimed to have produced everything from the births and deaths column to the serialised novels, as well as editing and sub-editing. He was, however, able to draw on contributions from some of the coterie of Scottish journalists around Fleet Street. John Menzies, the editor of the *South London Chronicle* was one as was Alexander Mackenzie, the future author of the *History of the Highland Clearances*, who became a close friend, but there were many penny-a-line Scottish journalists from whom he could get material.<sup>9</sup> There was the occasional piece written in Scots, possibly by the prolific writer George Macdonald.

The politics of the paper tended to be conservative, at any rate with a small c., with substantial dashes of moderate nationalism. This was a time

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<sup>8</sup> Roger T. Stearn, 'Archibald Forbes and the British Army', in *Soldiers of the Queen. The Journal of the Victorian Military History Society*, No. 61 (June 1990), 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Evening Telegraph* 19 January 1895; *Dundee Courier*, 24 January 1898.



when the *Saturday Review*, not unfairly dubbed the *Saturday Reviler*, 'took a savage delight in throwing contempt on Scotland and anything Scottish'. Forbes responded by publishing examples of its paragraphs under the heading 'rubbish may be shot here'. There was good coverage of military matters, which reflected Forbes's interests and increased involvement. The revelations of outrages against the non-trade unionists in Sheffield, called Broadheadism after one of the main perpetrators, led to a number of denunciations of trade unionism and support for the so-called free labour movement,

Trades-unionism is as much opposed to the free spirit of the present age as the kindred despotism of Rome, to which, it bears a striking resemblance, in its demoralising secrecy, and its deadly antagonism of individual freedom.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, the paper was fairly critical of the Scottish aristocracy. An article in April 1868 consisted of a denunciation of the Duke of Hamilton, who had succeeded to the title in 1866 after a three-year minority. It was claimed that he had proceeded to dissipate the family fortune 'trailing his noble titles and historic memories in the mire' and squandering 'his possessions on grooms, stable boys, jockeys, and blacklegs'. The Duke threatened legal action and the paper apologised.<sup>11</sup> The Duke of Buccleuch came in for criticism for his handling of the National Association of the Social Sciences conference in Dundee. At the same time, a regular item was 'The Moor, the Loch and the Forest', listing those of the gentry who were renting shooting rights and fishing beats in Scotland.

There are signs of the paper hitting difficulties once the excitement of the first election of the reformed franchise had waned, with the price halved to 2d from August 1868. At the beginning of 1869 it moved to a larger format and with only 16 pages. While more political content tended to give way to fiction and to accounts of rambles in the Cairngorms or through Fife, it did take up the campaign against the appointment of a Major James Haggerty as American consul in Glasgow. The *London Scotsman* exposed his reputed Irish Fenian links and, as a result, his letters of accreditation from the American government were declined.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *London Scotsman*, 7 September 1867.

<sup>11</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, *London Scotsman*, 18 April 1868.

<sup>12</sup> *Western Mail*, 20 August 1869.

Despite the demands of the paper, Forbes also began publishing articles based on his army experience in *St Paul's Magazine*, a new monthly, edited by Anthony Trollope, started in 1867 by the printer James Sprent Virtue. It was a time when there was a considerable discussion on the need to reform military conditions. The army was failing to attract a sufficient number of recruits and a Royal Commission (the Peel Commission) had recently been looking at ways in which the appeal of the army might be strengthened, but was meeting considerable resistance from military diehards to its ideas for changes in administration and organisation. 'The Private soldier as he is; by a Dragoon on Furlough' appeared in April 1868. It sought to highlight the conditions under which the rank and file had to live and the grievances that they had, such as restrictions on when they could marry and the appalling accommodation for wives. 'Christmas in a cavalry Regiment' came out in December, with another sympathetic portrayal of the ordinary soldier, although recognising the high levels of drunkenness amongst troops. Another piece in *St Paul's* was on 'Soldiers' Wives'. It is a measure of how unknown Forbes still was that Trollope's financial accounts list payment to an Archibald Wood, but this is almost certainly Forbes.<sup>13</sup>

A more polemical piece on 'Army Reform, by a Private Dragoon' appeared in April 1869. This challenged the arguments put forward by Sir Charles Trevelyan in his recently-published *The British Army in 1868* that the army needed to be opened up to a better quality of recruit from the ranks of the middle class, not into the officer corps, but into the non-commissioned ranks.<sup>14</sup> Forbes defended the *status quo*, claiming that 'the dregs' made better soldiers than the middle class ever would. Trevelyan responded the following month with a rather condescending piece.

It was in November 1869 that Forbes became sole proprietor and editor of the *London Scotsman* but the prolific output elsewhere continued. In January 1870 he had an article entitled 'A Costermongers' Club' published in the new illustrated shilling monthly journal, *Belgravia*, edited by the novelist Mary Braddon. The *Examiner* pronounced that it appeared to be a genuine account 'but might have been made a bit more picturesque by a practised littérateur'.<sup>15</sup> In the summer of 1870 he was visiting family in the north-east of Scotland and touted his services first to Alexander Ramsay of the *Banffshire Journal* and then more successfully to James Black's *Elgin Courier* to

<sup>13</sup> W. Houghton *et al.*, *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals*, I, Vol. 3.

<sup>14</sup> *St Paul's Magazine*, April 1869.

<sup>15</sup> *Examiner*, 8 January 1870.

which he contributed racy 'London Letters' from time to time over the next few years.

Perhaps as a recognition of financial problems, a group of friends, many from Clerkenwell and Islington, where he had lived, but including supporters of the *London Scotsman* from places as far afield as Northampton, Birmingham, Brighton, Hull, Ipswich and Canterbury, contributed to a testimonial for Forbes which resulted in a gold watch and chain, valued at 30 guineas and a cheque for £51. The presentation in the George Hotel, Aldermanbury in the heart of the city, was made on 19 July just as Forbes was on his way to Germany.<sup>16</sup> He had clearly entered the crowded world of hack journalism, but was still relatively unknown.

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<sup>16</sup> *London Scotsman*, 23 July 1870.

### 3 The Special Correspondent

*Forbes's letters were a totally new experience to the reading public. They began a new era in journalism. They took the world by surprise.*

*Daily News* 31 March 1901

The chance to escape in 1870 from what Forbes, now thirty-two years old, increasingly saw as drudgery came with the opportunity presented by the Prussian war with France. The rapid victory of Prussia over Austria in 1866 had humbled Austria, but also alienated France. Prussia gained huge strength by absorbing into the North German Confederation the small states that lay between the two parts of her territory, Prussia and the Rhineland, that had existed since 1815. French military dominance was now challenged by a new power and hopes of gaining what for centuries had been regarded as France's 'natural frontier' on the left bank of the Rhine were set back. Blocked from advance between the Moselle and the Rhine there were many in France who looked to Luxembourg as possible territorial compensation.

Despite the tensions, at the end of June 1870 all looked peaceable. King Wilhelm of Prussia had gone, as usual, to Bad Ems in the Palatinate to take the waters. Otto von Bismarck and the leading generals had headed for their estates. The moderate French prime minister, Emile Ollivier was confident that 'At no time was peace more assured than now; in no direction could a question be detected that was at all dangerous'. Within a fortnight, France and Prussia were at war. The trigger was the possible selection of Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern to the vacant throne of Spain.

To the French, of course, a Prussian prince on the throne of Spain was not just another diplomatic humiliation but a potential danger. The ambitious Duc de Gramont, recently appointed Foreign Secretary, hinted to the Assembly on 6 July that war was a possibility. Sections of the French press took it up with enthusiasm. The *Marseillaise*, which had been banned under Napoleon III, began to be heard again with its call *aux armes citoyens*. Meanwhile, the French ambassador, Vincent, Count Benedetti, sought out King Wilhelm at Ems. Encouraged by the King, Prince Leopold withdrew his candidacy, much to the delight of Ollivier, who presented it as a French victory. Gramont, on the

other hand, demanded an assurance from Prussia that the candidacy would never be reactivated. This King Wilhelm heatedly refused. Bismarck's diplomatic telegram relating events at Ems was intended to stir Prussian anger and irritate the French. It succeeded. By the evening of 14 July orders for French mobilisation were sent out and on 17 July war was declared.

With war imminent, at the suggestion of James Grant of the *Morning Advertiser*, Forbes handed the running of the declining *London Scotsman* to a friend and headed for the frontier between the two belligerents. Hitherto a paper like the *Morning Advertiser* had relied largely on the telegraphed reports from the news agency established by Isaac Reuter in 1849. But with an increasingly competitive press identical reports were no longer adequate; papers were now turning to their own 'special correspondent' for unique reports. Forbes was ready to travel in three hours with a knapsack containing a couple of changes of underwear, a pound of British shag tobacco, a flask of whisky, a good map of the frontier and a copy of M. T. Lavallée's *Military Topography of Continental Europe* (published in 1850), together with a waterproof coat and a good field glass.<sup>1</sup> A reading of Lavallée pointed to an area between the Moselle and the Vosges as the most likely place of invasion. He crossed to Ostend in a ferry full of Germans heading home to volunteer for the army. On 19 July he was in Cologne where he remained for a day or two observing the rapid German mobilisation.

Most in Britain, including the secretary for war, Edward Cardwell, seem to have believed that the French would be in Berlin in six weeks.<sup>2</sup> But Forbes did not believe in the superiority of the French military, despite their much-admired modern rifle, the 'chassepot', which could easily out-range the German needle-gun, and he determined to view the war from the Prussian side. Without getting the proper authorising documents from Berlin he presented himself in Frankfurt-on-Main and persuaded General van Goeben of the VIII army corps of the first of the Prussians' three armies to provide him with a permit. He was able to get on board one of the military trains heading for Saarbrücken. It got stuck at Bad Kreuznach, from where princesses, duchesses and others who had been taking the waters at the spa were frantically trying to escape before a possible French attack. He set out to walk the fifty miles to Kaiserlautern from where he was able to catch another train to Saarbrücken. He briefly crossed the nearby frontier

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<sup>1</sup> *Fife Herald*, 23 November 1871.

<sup>2</sup> Justin McCarthy, *Reminiscences*, Vol. I, 308; John Augustus O'Shea, *Leaves from the Life of a Special Correspondent*, Vol. I, 232.

with a reconnoitring patrol only to be shot at by the French, but for a day or two there was a marking time on both sides as the armies mobilised.

Forbes was conscious of being a novice and recalled seeing some of the lions of the profession, such as Hilary Skinner of the *Daily News*, through the windows of the Hôtel Hagen, while he cooked a camp meal outside. He soon found company with a young half-German, half-Dutchman, Jacob de Liefde<sup>3</sup> of the *Glasgow Herald*, whose fluency in several languages must have been a great help. It is sometimes suggested that Forbes had a knowledge of German, but it is difficult to see at what stage he could have acquired much beyond a smattering from Mrs Molesworth. Someone who met him at this time confirmed that Forbes was dependent on a translator and Forbes himself later admitted that he was a poor linguist.<sup>4</sup> De Liefde and he had a relaxed few days supping Niersteiner Riesling with Prussian officers in a comfortable pension, the Rheinischer Hof. According to a later embellished account they were attending the wedding of a young German soldier and his bride on 2 August only for the jollification to be abruptly curtailed by the sound of the French streaming down from the heights of Spicheren towards the hotel. In his initial account he was behind a tree when the shooting began and a German fusilier fell at this feet with a bullet that broke his back. The Prussians and the journalists had to retreat rapidly and Forbes and an Austrian companion soon found themselves falling behind: 'We ran – I own it. I think I ran faster than I ever did in my life'.<sup>5</sup> Also present was a British Major Battye, who took the gun of a fallen German soldier and opened fire on the French. He was shot in the ribs and Forbes picked him up and carried him to a place of safety where he patched him up temporarily with brown paper and paste.<sup>6</sup> It was the first of many occasions when Forbes

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<sup>3</sup> 'An Englishman by adoption, a Frenchman by temperament', according to Forbes, de Liefde died suddenly of acute pneumonia in February 1878 aged 31. *Standard*, 8 February 1878.

<sup>4</sup> J.L. Seton, *Notes on the Operations of the North German Troops in Lorraine and Picardy* (London, 1872), 27: 'I was also accosted and pumped by the correspondent of a London paper, who has since acquired celebrity by sleeping in the odour of imperialism shortly after the convention of Sedan, and who was then picking up information through the medium of a German confrere, himself knowing nothing about the language'; Forbes, *Memories*, 269.

<sup>5</sup> A. Forbes, *My Experience of the War between France and Germany*, Vol. I (Leipzig, 1871), 55.

<sup>6</sup> Kate Field, 'An English War Correspondent', 298.

had to assist the wounded. For a day or two Forbes and his companions took refuge in the Hôtel Til in Duttweiler.

The French did not press home their advance and two days later Forbes re-entered Saarbrücken, met with the few French who were still there and visited the wounded in hospital. On 6 August the Germans hit back and on the fourth attempt captured the heights above the town. Although Forbes did not observe the battle of Spichenen, he included an eye-witness account in his report. The following day he visited the battlefield and, as always, there is a wonderful immediacy in his accounts and he was learning one of the central techniques of what was to become the 'new journalism', to focus on the personal.

The corpse of a man slain in battle does not lie for three days exposed to the air and sun without lapsing into decomposition, and some of the bodies were horrible sights. Some could hardly have been known for human – so black and turgid were the features. The deaths had chiefly been from rifle bullets. Most of the Germans bore their death-wounds in their faces and heads, received as they stormed the terrible ascent; the Frenchmen – those who had not perished by the bayonet – were for the most part shot through the body, or had their legs shattered. One scene I never can forget. By the foot of a tree lay two dead German soldiers. It seemed as if they had been removed thither either during or after the fight, while as yet only wounded. Beside them were two pannikins half full of water, and a piece of bread. One, quite a lad, lay in a crouching attitude, his head bent toward the tree. He had been shot through the head, and the blood had streamed on to his handkerchief and the open pocket-book in front of him. One hand grasped that of his dead comrade, in the other was an envelope. The letter it contained may have blown away, or the lad, in his last agony, may have thrust it in his breast; but the envelope itself was eloquent enough. It was addressed in female handwriting, and bore the postmark of a little village away near the shore of the Baltic. The writer – mother or sweetheart, I know not – evidently had been the last thought of the lad. Will she come to weep over his grave among the clay-stone crags of the Spicheen? Will he, indeed, have a grave at all? The place was a lonely one, and the straggling cowherd may, months after, have chanced upon a couple of skeletons with arms and belts on the bones.

It was an example of the kind of writing that was to turn Forbes into a great war journalist, but, as yet, it was still hidden in the limited circulation of the *Morning Advertiser*.

He was now well-behind the fast-advancing first German army and from the battlefield he made his way south to Forbach, sustained only by a glass of liqueur and half a cigar. There he found French people with little love for Napoleon III and openly calling for a republic. The following day, 11 August, there was a ten-mile walk in the rain to St Avold. He now began to see the disadvantages of not being attached to a particular headquarters. In such a fast-moving war it was difficult to get a clear picture of what was happening. At St Avold he saw King Wilhelm, together with Moltke and Bismarck, taking the salute. He decided to head towards Metz, where there was a French garrison holding out under Marshal Bazaine. However, Forbes missed the battle of Courcelles-Borny on 14 August, when Marshal Bazaine unnecessarily tried to pull out from Metz and join up with the other French army at Verdun. Forbes and de Liefde had misjudged where the main focus of the battle would be. None the less, Forbes was still able to provide a detailed analysis of the Prussian tactics. There was nothing deceptive in this. War correspondents in such a new, fast-moving war had to learn to garner news where they could and try to shape it. Forbes' insights were built on an instinctive passion for his work and an uncanny ability to piece together scraps of information from others.

By 12 August 1870 the German armies had completed a great wheel to the right on a front stretching for sixty miles from the German River Neid to the Upper Saar and Forbes knew by now that a Prussian army was heading up the River Moselle. He set off in pursuit. However at Thiaucourt he was arrested because his papers were not in order and locked up with some French prisoners in the Salle de Justice. After being detained for most of the day he was released and ordered to return to Pont-à-Mousson, from where he had just come, to get the necessary documentation. He was delayed but not deterred.

On 16 August he was with the German second army at the indecisive battle of Vionville-Mars-La-Tour. It was a bloody affair with 4,421 Germans and 1,367 French killed and both sides with more than 10,000 wounded.<sup>7</sup> He observed one of the last great cavalry charges of modern warfare when Von Bredow at the head of six squadrons, 804 strong, led a charge across

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<sup>7</sup> David Ascoli, *A Day of Battle. Mar-La-Tour 16 August 1870* (London, 1987), 210.



some 1000 yards of open ground against a new, disordered French line to the north of the Verdun road. They rode through two lines of French infantry, through a line of cannon and a further half mile into the heart of the French army. Once there, they were surrounded and fewer than 400 of the cavalrymen returned, although they had bought time for the German infantry to regroup and bring up fresh supplies.<sup>8</sup> On the night of the battle he again found himself apprehended by the field police. On his release he was scrambling through a wood to get a better view of the battlefield when he came across a field hospital on a farm in Mariaville. Both Herbert and Wilhelm, the two sons of Bismarck were there, and Forbes was able to pass on the news to Bismarck soon afterwards.<sup>9</sup>

The crucial battle at Gravelotte-St Privat came two days later. It was in many ways a continuation of the one at Mars-La-Tour, but this time two German armies, the first and the second, faced an unconfident and inept Marshal Bazaine. It was another casualty-filled day, probably the bloodiest of the war, with more than 20,000 Germans and more than 12,000 French killed or wounded. With hindsight the battle was critical. Bazaine pulled his remaining forces back into Metz where he was besieged.

This was the first European battle to be reported at some length by telegram, when a half-column account by Joseph Hands of the *New York Tribune* was published two days after the battle. He had sent it to George Smalley, the manager of the *Tribune* office in London, who cabled it to New York.<sup>10</sup> At this stage Forbes still worked in the traditional manner by despatching letters giving accounts of the battles by means of the field post. His letter describing the battle of Gravelotte miscarried completely, although he produced powerful later descriptions of that battle as, again and again, German soldiers ‘torn by the shell-fire of the French batteries, writhing under the strings of the mitrailleuse, bewildered between inevitable death in front and no less inevitable disgrace behind’ tried to make their way from the ravine of the River Mance to the plateau where the French

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<sup>8</sup> Ascoli, *A Day of Battle*, 168–71; Forbes, ‘Bismarck Before and During the Franco-German War’, in *Camps, Quarters and Casual Places*.

<sup>9</sup> Forbes, ‘Bismarck Before and During the Franco-German War’.

<sup>10</sup> Joel H. Wiener, *The Americanization of the British Press 1830s–1914* (Basingstoke, 2011), 94. Forbes believed that Moncure Conway’s account in the *Daily News* was the first telegraphic account of the battle, but this was disputed by Murat Halstead who claimed that Conway’s account was written in London and that he, Halstead had sent the telegraphed account.

were.<sup>11</sup> He also tried to get himself a horse, something that proved very difficult since the armies had requisitioned most of them. A half-blind one purchased from a horse-dealer was not a success, bumping into walls and carriages. A second proved impossible to get moving. A third was eventually found, which saw him to Gravelotte, but the night after the battle it disappeared. Fortunately, however, his companion from the *Glasgow Herald* appeared with a cart and they were able to continue, turning away from the besieged Metz on 22 August to try to catch up with army of the Crown Prince on its way to Paris. Forbes and de Liefde headed towards Chalons, facing considerable risks that they would be treated as spies by one side or the other. On reaching Chalons they discovered that most of the Germans had been pulled north to stop Marshal MacMahon<sup>12</sup> making his way to relieve Metz. They spent a frustrating few days from 27th until 30th August going back and forth looking for action.

By 30 August Napoleon and Marshal MacMahon had fallen back on the fortress of Sedan, but MacMahon was ordered to try to relieve Metz. On the morning of 1 September, as he attempted to break out, MacMahon was wounded and command passed to General de Wimpffen, who had been summoned from North Africa. By now Napoleon was ready to raise the flag of truce, but Wimpffen was still hopeful that a breakout was possible. By the afternoon it was clear that the French were routed and Sedan was being bombarded and much of it was in flames. Forbes and de Liefde made their way towards the town. They had missed the early stages of the battle but they were able to view the last vain cavalry charge of the French *Chasseurs d'Afrique* and some further skirmishes before the guns went silent.

It was the *Pall Mall Gazette* that first carried the news in England of Napoleon's surrender. Its report came from Holt White, correspondent of the *New York Tribune*, who was with the Prussian command when Napoleon's letter of surrender arrived. White galloped across the battlefield and into Belgium. He rushed to Brussels but the telegraph office refused to transmit his telegram, either fearing that it was a bluff to disrupt the markets or because White did not have the cash to pay for it. Instead, he had to journey to London by train and ferry, but his account reached New York three

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<sup>11</sup> Forbes, *Memories*, 6.

<sup>12</sup> Marie Edmé Patrice Maurice de MacMahon (1808-93) was a veteran of Napoleon III's wars in the Crimea and Italy. He commanded the French army in Alsace. From 1873 to 1879 he was President of France.

days after the battle.<sup>13</sup> White's reports fed a public demand for immediacy and there is no doubt that Forbes noted and learned from what had happened, becoming aware of a world of journalism that was changing rapidly and where speed of delivery was of the essence. His own closely written twenty-seven page letter written on the evening of 1st September and beginning, 'One of the most decisive battles of the world has just been fought', never reached the *Morning Advertiser*. The letter was entrusted to a German field-postman who fell into the hands of some disbanded French soldiers. It turned up in Paris in 1874.<sup>14</sup>

On the evening after the battle Forbes was in the Hôtel de Commerce in the village of Donchery in the company of a large number of German officers. He and de Liefde were able to ingratiate themselves with the soldiers by providing some sardines, while the wine and champagne flowed freely. Later in the evening Bismarck arrived, looking for food, and they offered a ham from their stores. Forbes's story was that between kitchen and dining room the ham was filched and someone had to go in search elsewhere for a steak for the Iron Chancellor. Despite the violence and horror, the camaraderie with soldiers and other correspondents, while on the fringes of great events and leaders, was something that Forbes relished and must have been very powerful in creating an addiction to what was to be his life for the next decade.

Negotiations between French and Prussian emissaries went on late into the night because the French were unwilling to accept the harsh terms for surrender being demanded by General Moltke. They were given until 9am on 2 September to accept, or the bombardment of Sedan would recommence. On the morning of the 2nd, Forbes followed Bismarck towards Sedan and about two kilometres along the road they met with a carriage carrying the Emperor, 'that grey face of his as passive and sphinx-like as ever'. The party moved to a small weaver's cottage between Frenois and Donchery. Bismarck and Napoleon conversed for a short time, in German according to Forbes, although Bismarck later denied this. Bismarck then departed and Napoleon was left sitting in the garden, the house being too foul for him to remain inside. As Forbes wrote,

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<sup>13</sup> Forbes, *Memories*, 220–1; T. H. S. Escott, *Masters of English Journalism. A Study of Personal Forces* (London, 1911), 249.

<sup>14</sup> *Daily News*, 28 August 1874; W. H. Russell's first report on the battle suffered a similar fate. Alan Hankinson, *Man of Wars, William Howard Russell of the Times* (London, 1982), 216.

He, the Emperor of the French, the proudest monarch in Europe, kicked his heels by the roadside by a weaver's cottage while a Prussian count galloped to a Prussian King for instructions. If he were not too stunned to think at all, he must have thought at times as he lay there that surely the morning's doings were one ghastly dream.<sup>15</sup>

After some time a detachment of cuirassiers arrived and, much to his dismay, surrounded Napoleon, with swords drawn. Then Bismarck and Moltke appeared in full uniform and Napoleon was led away to the Château Bellevue to meet with the King, once General de Wimpffen had signed the articles of capitulation.

The German, tall, upright, bluff, square-shouldered, with the flash of victory from the keen blue eyes under the helmet and the flush of triumph on the fresh cheek. The Frenchman bent with weary stoop of the shoulders, leaden-faced, his eye drooping, his lip quivering, bareheaded and dishevelled.

Napoleon was allowed to spend the night in Château Bellevue and then the following morning was sent into captivity at Wilhelmshöhe. Forbes and de Liefde were the only British correspondents to have witnessed the humiliation of Napoleon, and Forbes was to re-use the scene in lectures and writing again and again.

Having seen the Emperor depart, Forbes and de Liefde made their way into Sedan by climbing into a waggon carrying wounded. They found bodies everywhere being trampled on by those still living and the many wounded including Marshal MacMahon, with whom Forbes spoke. On the actual battlefield there were 'men disembowelled, trunks shattered into gory fragments, legs and arms blown away; as well as a terrible carnage of the Arab stallions used by the *Chasseurs d'Afrique* in their lethal final charge'.<sup>16</sup> That night the two journalists sneaked into the now empty Château Bellevue, where Forbes spent the night in what had been the Emperor's bed; here he found a copy of Bulwer-Lytton's *Last of the Barons* by the bedside. Forbes claimed that de Liefde accidentally overturned a bottle of ink on the dining table where the capitulation had been signed. When he revisited the place in 1880 he

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<sup>15</sup> F. M. Thomas, *Fifty Years of Fleet Street*, 173.

<sup>16</sup> Forbes, *Memories of War and Peace*, 91–2

found that this was being displayed as evidence of how nervous and agitated Wimpffen had been.<sup>17</sup>

However, Forbes's description of Napoleon's surrender made his reputation, enhanced a few months later by Thomas Jones Barker's popular painting of the surrender, largely based on Forbes' account.<sup>18</sup> Up until this time, only snippets of his writing had caught public attention. After Sedan he began to be noticed and a few weeks later the talk in press circles was of his success. What seemed to strike people was that this 'rough Scotch tyke' somehow was in touch with those in the midst of battle, while most other correspondents seemed to mix only with generals and princes.<sup>19</sup>

On 8 September he was in Dormans on the River Marne and the following day started out for Château Thierry. He found time to visit some of the battlefields of the first Napoleon in 1814–15. From there it was on towards Paris through the valley of the Marne. On 17 September, however, he was ordered by his paper to abandon the advance on Paris and he left Meaux and headed back towards Metz, but he was then called back to London by Grant. There was crisis at the *Morning Advertiser*. Grant was in conflict with the paper's management committee. Although a strict Presbyterian, under Grant the *Morning Advertiser* had got the nickname, 'Gin and Gospel' as a result of its backing by the drink trade and Grant was about to resign the editorship. At first Forbes refused to return, claiming that he had been engaged for the entire campaign. However, his payments were stopped and he arrived back in London on 26 September. It was at this point that he found that many of his reports had not reached the *Morning Advertiser*.<sup>20</sup>

It looked as if his new career was to end abruptly and the needs of both the *London Scotsman* and his family pointed to his remaining at home. Forbes' own oft-told account of what then transpired had one or two variations. He tried the *Times*, offering to spell out the disposition of the German army now besieging Metz, but his approach was greeted with some indifference. He then tried one or two other papers to no avail, before trying the *Daily News*

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<sup>17</sup> Forbes, 'Napoleon the Third at Sedan', *Nineteenth Century*, March 1892, 419–32.

<sup>18</sup> Russell's account of the meeting between the King of Prussia and Napoleon, based on a report from the Crown Prince of Prussia, became mired in controversy when Bismarck declared it 'mere invention'; see Hankinson, *Man of Wars*, 218.

<sup>19</sup> *Dundee Advertiser*, 12 November 1870.

<sup>20</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 23 November 1870.

in Bouverie Street. The *Daily News* had been launched in 1846 with Charles Dickens, very briefly, as its first editor. With the abolition of paper duties in 1861 the *News*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Standard* had all begun to challenge the dominance of the *Times*. The *News* struggled to compete with its high-priced rivals and, in 1868, it was bought over by a syndicate including the Liberal politicians Samuel Morley and Charles Reed and the journalist Henry Labouchère. The price was reduced to a penny but it was still struggling to get the loyal, middle-class readership it was aiming for. It seemed to lack the necessary boldness and clarity of views.

In September 1870 it was presided over by the manager John R. Robinson and the acting editor Edward Pigott. Here there was more enthusiasm for Forbes. According to Robinson's recollections, he knew of Forbes and immediately exclaimed 'The Lord hath delivered thee into my hands'. In appearance Forbes was 'a strongly knit, well-built man, firm of step, rather shabby and travel-stained, with something of a look of defiance on his fine handsome face'. Robinson asked him to sit down and write on his recent experiences and some of these were published, dated as if coming from the various places that he had passed through on his travels. Forbes found that the faster he wrote the better he wrote.<sup>21</sup> Robinson liked the strength and clarity of his work and 'the avoidance of anything like writing for effect'.<sup>22</sup> Forbes returned the following morning offering to write letters defending the Germans against the charges of brutality being made by the French. In Forbes's account when these were rejected he marched out of the office in anger, 'flinging over his shoulder a retort of three words which had Robinson heeded, it would, as he laughingly declared afterward, have relieved that gentleman the necessity of ordering coal for the rest of his days'.<sup>23</sup> Robinson ran after him and persuaded him to return. According to Robinson, Forbes actually remained seated and angry until it was suggested that he return to Metz, which was under siege, as the 'special war correspondent' of the *News* on the lavish salary of £20 a week plus expenses. Although Forbes had some concern about abandoning the *London Scotsman*, the salary persuaded him.

Forbes agreed to head off at once and Robinson provided him with £100 of French five-franc pieces as expenses.<sup>24</sup> Robinson had, for some time, been encouraging his correspondents to make more extensive use of the

<sup>21</sup> Rideing, *Many Celebrities*, 274.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas, *Fifty Years of Fleet Street*, 169.

<sup>23</sup> Rideing, *Many Celebrities*, 275.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas, *Fifty Years of Fleet Street*, 169–70.

telegraph. Although the electric telegraph and Samuel Morse's alphabet had been around since the 1840s, a Dover-Calais marine cable completed in 1851 and cable and wire links as far as Varna on the Black Sea by 1855, it was very expensive and little used by journalists. Papers still largely relied on the often meagre reports from Reuter's Agency.<sup>25</sup> But in July 1866, after a decade of failure, an effective Atlantic cable between Foilhommerum Bay in Ireland and Heart's Content in Newfoundland, laid by I. K. Brunel, came into operation. It was to transform the world of journalism and the opportunities for rapid news delivery were seized on by American reporters, and Europeans had to follow. Speed at getting reports back to London soon became Forbes's trademark.

Once back in France Forbes succeeded in getting himself embedded again with the Prussian army and he began to send back regular reports. He left Saarbrücken by train in 29 September and on 3rd and 4th October he was observing the siege of the outlying fortresses around Metz. Conditions were far from good. It was the wettest autumn on record, with typhus and dysentery rampant even among the besieging officers. Forbes camped outside in an orchard rather than take any risk of disease. On 7 October Bazaine attempted, with half of his now malnourished force, to push through the German lines to the north of the city and, at the very least, to obtain provisions. Initial success was soon halted by the German artillery. On the 10th, at the battle of Maizières-lès-Metz, Forbes received a flesh wound which turned gangrenous and had to be burned out with acid. There was a danger that his leg might have to be amputated and he was invalided to the Prussian hospital in Saarbrücken.

A week later he was, once again, in the thick of it, although the wound remained open for months, getting a lift on a wagon belonging to the English Ambulance Corps and linking up with the fourth regiment at Retonfof. He found accommodation at Château Gras about 7 miles from the fortress of Metz. His extensive report, dated 25 October and published on 29 October predicted capitulation of Metz within a week. In fact, Bazaine and his 173,000 troops the city had surrendered on the 27th before that report was published. Forbes wrote up his report of capitulation during the night, but did not hurry the 45 miles to the telegraph office at Saarbrücken. As a result, the first striking telegraphed report came from

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<sup>25</sup> Simon J. Potter, *News and the British World* (London, 2003), 65–7; Thomas, *Fifty Years of Fleet Street*, 169–70.



a young American, Gustav Müller, who had ridden some forty miles into Luxemburg to telegraph his account.

Müller's account of the fallen city in the *Daily News* was so striking that the *Times* reprinted it, with the comments, 'we might envy him, if such a feeling were possible with so honourable a competitor'. There certainly was a powerful immediacy about some of it.

At 4 yesterday Bazaine passed through Ars on his way to Wilhelmshöle, in a closed carriage, marked with his name, and escorted by several officers of his staff on horseback. The women of the village had heard of his arrival, and awaited him with exclamations of 'Traitor!', 'Coward!', 'Sneak!', 'Thief! &c'. Where are our husbands whom you have betrayed? Give us back our children whom you have sold! They then attacked the carriage, and broke the windows with their fists, and would have lynched him but for the intervention of the Prussian gendarmes. . . . There are still many people who cannot believe what has occurred. They were convinced that Metz must absolutely have provisions for ten, 15, nay 20 years.<sup>26</sup>

The account was widely attributed to Forbes, who was getting known as the *Daily News's* 'special correspondent'. Forbes later wrote that he had felt physically sick at his own failure when he read the report in the paper, but he learned the lesson that he would never again be beaten to the wires.<sup>27</sup> 'This brilliant Müller-flash', recalled Forbes, 'stirred in us all a new conception of our reason for existing'.<sup>28</sup> Forbes consistently denied that the report was his, but the accusation that he had taken the credit for someone else's report persisted.

Despite the pain of his wound, Forbes worked with the volunteers to remove the two thousand sick and wounded, keeping going by constantly smoking and never removing his boots. But he also found time to dine at the Hôtel de Europa with a nephew of the first Napoleon's Marshal Ney. He left Metz on 30 October catching a train at Courcelles in Belgium and headed back to England. His accounts of the siege and capitulation of Metz

<sup>26</sup> *Daily News*, 30 October 1870; *Times*, 1 November 1870. According to Forbes, Müller was never heard of again.

<sup>27</sup> Forbes, *Memories*, 223; See, for example, *Glasgow Herald*, 17 June 1871; F. Lauriston Bullard, *Famous War Correspondents* (Boston, 1914), 80–1.

<sup>28</sup> Forbes, *Memories*, 225.



turned him into a celebrity. The *Spectator* drew attention to his reports 'as the ablest letters the war had produced' while others described his accounts as 'Cobbett-like'.<sup>29</sup> Although the reports in the *Daily News* merely had the by-line 'From Our Special Correspondent', Forbes' identity was out in the open and his reports were reaching London substantially earlier than those of anyone else. Thanks to the under sea cable they were also crossing the Atlantic to the *Tribune* in New York, with which the *News* had a sharing agreement, almost as speedily. Other American papers, like the *New York Herald* received 'skeletonised' versions of the *News* reports that were then padded out in their publications.<sup>30</sup> As a result of the reports on the war, circulation of the *Daily News* trebled to 150,000.

Forbes, although not the first to use it, was, once he was employed by the *Daily News*, the first to fully utilise the telegraph for the transmission of news of the war. It was, for the paper, an expensive business with long despatches costing many hundreds and indeed even a thousand pounds or more, at not short of a pound a word. It would have required much more than 150,000 extra copies of a penny paper to cover the costs of such telegrams, but owners and editors alike from then on had to accept that the costs had to be incurred if their newspaper was to maintain its reputation. A reading public was now demanding speedy news and the *Daily News* 'sprang at a bound into the front rank of the newspaper world'.<sup>31</sup> Forbes's success in getting his stories out quickly had caused consternation to rival newspapers, particularly to the *Times*. William Howard Russell had never ventured far from headquarters and from the company of the Crown Prince of Prussia. As a result his reports had none of Forbes's flair. But he was also reticent about using the telegraph and his letters sometimes took as long as ten days to reach Printing House Square. Mowbray Morris, the manager of the *Times* wrote, 'I beg you to use the telegraph *freely*. After any important event, go yourself with all speed to the nearest telegraph station that has communication with London, and send by the wires not a scrap of a few lines but a whole letter. This is what the correspondents of the *Daily News* have been doing frequently'.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 23 November 1870.

<sup>30</sup> H. Findlater Bussey, *Sixty Years of Journalism. Anecdotes and Reminiscences* (Bristol, 1906), 202.

<sup>31</sup> Charles Pebody, *English Journalism and the Men who have made it* (London, 1882), 139.

<sup>32</sup> Mowbray Morris to W. H. Russell, 28 September 1870, quoted in J. B. Atkins, *The Life of Sir William Howard Russell*, Vol. 2 (London, 1911), 201; Hankinson,

But Russell was unwilling to adjust and could not compete with Forbes's energy. Forbes had developed the art of writing fast and his writing had at its best a brilliancy and immediacy to it. He could bring the spirit and feeling of battles to life, while also being able to set them in the context of the wider campaign. The manager of the *Times* had to concede, 'The *Daily News* has beaten us hollow and continues to do so'.

At the end of 1870 his three-volume novel *Drawn from Life*, the work that had originally been serialised in the *London Scotsman*, came out, published by Hurst and Blackett, with Forbes identified as 'a Special Military Correspondent'. The *Morning Post* devoted a column and a half to a review of it and declared, 'It is evident that the writer was a personal witness of most of the scenes and circumstances which he describes' and the myth long persisted that Forbes had actually participated in some of the events of the Mutiny. A laudatory review in the *Athenaeum* had no doubt that he must have been an officer in the army and described him as *Major Forbes*. Shorter pieces too began to flow from his pen. A sentimental piece on a German soldier bidding farewell to his sweetheart appeared in the November issue of *Belgravia*, and yet another, 'Disinherited by a Kilt', in the Christmas annual version.

In a rather desperate effort to save the paper, from November 1870 the masthead of the *London Scotsman* now included 'Edited by Archibald Forbes, A Scottish War Correspondent', and long extracts from his war reports in the *Daily News* were reprinted or paraphrased. But, without Forbes's attention there was little chance for the paper and, in February 1871, it folded after facing an action for damages by the Minister of Auchtergaven in Perthshire whom it had accused of indecent conduct with one of his servants.<sup>33</sup>

However, Forbes, in the space of a few months, had acquired a formidable reputation all the more reminiscent of what is common in today's global networks. He had learned fast. His writing was sharp, colourful and produced a clear sense of having come straight from the battlefield. The public welcomed the immediacy of it all. He presumably was remunerated accordingly. A hitherto more established journalist than himself, Edmund Yates, was on £1200 a year as European Correspondent of the *New York Herald* and reputedly G. A. Sala, who could write with flair on almost any topic, was earning even more from the *Daily Telegraph*.<sup>34</sup> Forbes had also come away from these few months of war with a deep admiration for the German army,

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*Man of Wars*, 220.

<sup>33</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 17 January 1871.

<sup>34</sup> P. D. Edwards, *Dickens's Young Men* (Aldershot, 1997), 126.

an admiration that he was never to lose. He liked the way that alongside stern discipline there were mechanisms whereby the rank and file could make their views known to the officers, unlike in the British army. All Prussian officers had to spend time in the ranks before they obtained a commission and there were in the army gentlemen-volunteers who did the duties of private soldiers, but were admitted to the society of officers. He was impressed by the levels of education among the soldiers and the lack of drunkenness: 'Rheims is a city that may be called one huge wine-bottle, yet I did not see two drunken Prussian soldiers in its streets. Everywhere he saw signs of the quality of German generalship, all in mark contrast to that of the French whose reputed military supremacy had been a myth for years perpetuated by trading on the reputation of Napoleon I. Forbes was to spend the rest of his life trying to convince the military authorities in Britain that they should learn from the Germans.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Forbes, 'The Victorious Prussians', *St Paul's Magazine*, December 1870, 282–93.

## 4 The Siege of Paris

*Strike up the martial music, ring the joy bells; fire the salutes! Let the cities illuminate, and the mob roar itself hoarse at the news of victories! God knows all those counterdins are needed to drown the groans from hearts wrung by war.*

Forbes, *The Experience of War between France and Germany*, Vol. 2 (Liepzig, 1871), 251–2

Forbes returned to England a few days after leaving Metz but was ordered to head for Paris, a city that had been under siege since 21 September 1870. He went first to Sedan and then, in the company of a Prussian courier, set off on horseback on 13 November. Since the courier was not in uniform they faced various difficulties in getting through roadblocks. He went to Versailles but there he found ‘a dead stagnation with princes, correspondents, military bands, representatives of the demi-monde, and the errant wanderers of every country in Europe bobbing lazily on the surface’.<sup>1</sup> Versailles was not his *milieu* and so he headed north, once again joining up with the army of the Crown Prince of Saxony in Margency, a village due north of Paris, about two kilometres behind Montmorency. There had initially been an expectation that Paris would soon fall, but the Germans misjudged the extent of provisions in the city and Forbes was able to witness some of the hardest fighting of the siege.

As the weeks passed in November and into December Forbes spent his time visiting the various deployments to the north of Paris. At the end of November, he looked down on the attempted break out by some 30,000 French troops under General Ducrot. After initial success against only 9,500 Saxons and Württembergers the attempt was repulsed and stalemate ensued.<sup>2</sup> With a lack of action Forbes was happy to write of his own activities. On one such occasion, outside Argeneuil, he was accosted by a peasant, who asked for help for his wife, who had been wounded in the arm by a stray bullet. Using his pen-knife, Forbes cut out the bullet lodged in her shoulder-blade and, borrowing whale-bone and steel ‘busks’ from women who had come

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<sup>1</sup> Forbes, *Experiences*, Vol. II, 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Daily News*, 3, 9 December 1870.

to help, he created a splint for the wounded woman's arm.<sup>3</sup> With Forbes's encouragement Robinson started the French Peasant Relief Fund to help villages damaged by the German advance. Some £22,000 was raised through the *Daily News*.<sup>4</sup>

Forbes always showed a great deal of interest in the medical arrangements associated with warfare. He met up with representatives of what was called the British Ambulance, visited various lazarettos of wounded and the hospital trains. He had much praise for the efforts of the British medical aid, although he felt that a great deal of the money contributed had been wasted. It was better, he argued to provide medical supplies rather than surgeons. What was learned in this war, he argued, would be found useful in the next. He was also impressed by the experimental cold-water treatment for typhus being tried in the hospital where patients were wrapped in wet sheets. He argued that the British army had much to learn from the Germans.

When shall we learn that efficiency in the field does not crucially depend on trimness on parade; and when shall the adjutant of a British regiment understand that for a private to go on night guard with a comforter instead of a stock is not a fearful portent of the end of the world?<sup>5</sup>

All of December was spent with the German troops riding around the north and east of Paris. He was firmly embedded with the besieging army. He knew and was trusted by the officers and men from the Crown Prince of Saxony downwards and he tended to talk of 'our side', meaning the Germans. There were regular rumours that Paris was about to fall or that new fighting was about to break out. Towards Christmas he saw the deputation from the Reichstag of the North German Confederation on its way back from Versailles where they had offered King Wilhelm the title of emperor of the new united Germany. Christmas day was spent with officers of the 103 Saxon regiment at a château in Clichy, where his attempt at singing 'Bonnie Dundee' 'failed ignominiously'.<sup>6</sup>

Forbes's rivals, particularly W. H. Russell, who clung to the comforts of Versailles, still found it difficult to conceive of how Forbes was able to get his reports out so quickly. Russell suggested to Mowbray Morris that Forbes

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<sup>3</sup> *Fife Herald*, 8 December 1870.

<sup>4</sup> F. M. Thomas, *Fifty Years of Fleet Street*, 179.

<sup>5</sup> Forbes, *Experiences*, 154.

<sup>6</sup> Forbes, *Experiences*, 199.

must make use of ambulance men and even nuns as despatch carriers.<sup>7</sup> He was equally astonished to hear that Forbes had once offered his services to the *Times* and been turned down. He now said, 'If he offers himself to you, snap him up quick and send him wherever you please'. As Forbes's reports continued to outpace Russell's Russell defended himself by blackening Forbes, 'a bad character . . . a low trooper, full of go but a drunken fellow and an audacious liar'. He had to admit, however, that he was 'a good but risky correspondent'.<sup>8</sup>

On 27 December Forbes witnessed the opening bombardment of Mount Avron, followed soon afterwards by the bombardment of St Denis, where he saw sights of a ghastliness beyond anything he had ever seen in what had already been a particularly brutal war.

Remember how they had been slain. Not with the nimble bullet of the needle-gun, that drills a minute hole through a man and leaves him undisfigured, unless it has chanced to strike his face; not with the trenchant sabre-cut of the dragoon, not the sharp stab of the bayonet, but slaughtered with missiles of terrible weight, shattered into fragments by explosions of many pounds of powder, mangled and torn by massive fragments of iron.

This was one of Forbes's greatest scoops, because the news of the opening of the bombardment was in the *Daily News* on the day that it started. Towards the very end of his life Forbes explained what had been done in a letter to Russell.

Our headquarters was not so formal as that of the III Army and the Crown Prince of Saxony, as well as his brothers and their staffs were very frank and open about details, both of the present and the future, if they believed in one's honesty. Thus I went about with the staff officers, taking up the positions for the siege batteries first in front of Avron and afterwards over against St Denis. It was arranged that I might send him in advance of both bombardments full details of the number of guns, their calibre and positions, making the editor bound not to print these details until I should give the word. When the first gun was fired

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<sup>7</sup> Atkins, *Life of Russell*, 216.

<sup>8</sup> Russell to Mowbray Morris, 31 January, 7 March 1871, quoted in Hankinson, *Man of Wars*, 222.

against Avron, I galloped twenty miles to Mayence and promptly wired 'Go ahead!' in accordance with prearrangement. On the morning of the commencement of the St Denis bombardment, as to the arrangements for which all particulars had gone to England in advance, the Crown Prince stood on the steps of the Château, I within sight of him at the door of the house in the grounds used as a telegraph office. At the report of the first gun the Prince raised his hand above his head. I responded and shouted to the operator inside, Go ahead!' and the two words sped. Full details of the position of the batteries and complements of the artillery appeared in the noon edition of the *Daily News* the same morning, the matter being already in type, but carefully guarded until the moment came.<sup>9</sup>

The New Year brought snow and the Seine froze over, but not enough to support troops or artillery. He visited St Germain, still outside the city, and then a little English colony in the village of Napoléon St Lou, near Margency, where Lady Ashburton, of the Baring banking family, had a château. Lady Ashburton had long departed but Forbes went to check on the comfort of the servants who still remained.

Some of Forbes's reports in the *Daily News* had been reprinted in the German press and he began to get letters from the parents and wives of German soldiers seeking information about their husbands and their sons. He wrote movingly, 'Strike up the martial music, ring the joy bells; fire the salutes! Let the cities illuminate, and the mob roar itself hoarse at the news of victories! God knows all those counterdins are needed to drown the groans from hearts rung by war'.

There were growing problems in the besieging army as the days passed, with signs of increasing drunkenness among the soldiery, and Forbes did begin to have some doubts that the Germans could finally subjugate France. On 18 January 1871 Wilhelm was proclaimed Emperor of Germany in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, a date chosen to coincide with the anniversary of the first Hohenzollern king in 1701. Six days later a cease-fire was declared while Jules Favre for the Republican government negotiated at Versailles. Forbes tried to get into Paris, but was warned off and headed for Versailles instead. On 28 January an armistice was agreed between Bismarck and Favre. The following day Forbes went with the Crown Prince of Saxony and the

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<sup>9</sup> Forbes to W. H. Russell, 13 July 1899, quoted in Atkins, *Russell*, 220.

Maas army to St Denis that had suffered five days of bombardment. They encountered considerable hostility from a threatening populace, many of whom were still armed. Forbes got to the gate of La Chapelle, but without a passport and had to return to Margency.

On the 30th he made a second visit to St Denis, where he had his first taste of horse-flesh to which the besieged inhabitants had had to become accustomed over the previous four months. He wrote powerful descriptions of the appalling conditions which women and children in St Denis had had to suffer and who were still getting no help. Although the door of Notre Dame had been daubed with *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, he found that the cathedral had been well-protected by sandbags and had sustained only a little damage. On the first of February he determined to try to enter the city. Two German cuirassier officers accompanied him across the neutral stretch between the two sides, but no further, and clearly regarded his desire to enter the city at this stage as quixotic. He found the Porte de la Chapelle still closed with a large crowd waiting to enter. They looked at him suspiciously, assuming that he was a Prussian and eyed his plump horse. He was told to go to the Porte de St Ouen through which he was able to ride into the city, down the Boulevard Ornano. At various points drunken members of the national guard took him for a Prussian and showed their hostility. Avoiding these, he headed down the Boulevard de Magenta to the American Legation in the Champs Elysées and then to the Hôtel de St Honoré, where he met with a compatriot from North-East Scotland, Dr Gordon, who, according to Forbes, had avoided eating horse-meat and had lived out the siege largely on porridge and whisky. He stabled his horse for the night and only with great difficulty succeeded in getting a visa. Later in the Café Guillot in rue Neuve St Augustine he met with the group of press correspondents from the *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily News*, who had been trapped in Paris throughout the siege and who had learned to eat ostrich and elephant from the zoo, together with cat, dog, rats and mice.<sup>10</sup>

Forbes's claim to be the first correspondent to enter the city after the siege was later challenged. In his own account of the war he recognised that Coningsby from the *Echo* had entered the city on the 29th, but he continued to insist that he himself had been the first to reach the American Legation and the British Embassy. Forbes was certainly the first to get his reports out. He left Paris and made for the railhead at Lagny and caught a train to

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<sup>10</sup> Forbes, *Experiences*, 320.



Carlsruhe where he arrived at 2 o'clock in the morning. He spent a few hours getting telegrams off to the *Daily News*, before returning to Paris, which he reached on 5 February, and he rode round to Margency. The *Daily News's* 'Besieged Resident' in Paris, Henry Labouchère, wrote up the affair,

The only outsider who has penetrated through the double cordon of Prussians and French is your Correspondent at the headquarters of the Crown Prince of Saxony. He startled us as much as Friday did Robinson Crusoe. He was enthusiastically welcomed for he had an English newspaper in his pocket and some slices of ham in the other.<sup>11</sup>

Editorials in the *Daily News* and elsewhere lavished praise on Forbes for his 'energy and enterprise' and for his courage 'that has placed the whole reading world once more under obligation to him'. The *News* had no doubt that he was the first foreigner to enter the city and certainly the first to get the information to the outside world.<sup>12</sup> Once again Forbes had attained a national reputation and his letters from outside Paris together with Labouchère's from within the besieged city had yet further enhanced the standing of the *Daily News* amongst the educated middle class. Reporters, like Forbes, were now becoming personalities themselves almost as important as their papers.

Returning to Paris, where some of the correspondents who had been trapped in the city thought he was just arriving, his main concern was the plight of many of the inhabitants. He accompanied a friend who was with the English Ambulance. He spoke with those who were distributing the Charitable Fund that had been set up to help the 1200 poverty-stricken, starving British subjects in the city. Yet another fund was for British women who were married to Frenchmen, to which the extremely wealthy Richard Wallace, illegitimate son of the Marquess of Hertford, and a resident in Paris, had provided money to set up an ambulance brigade and a hospital. Forbes, fascinated as he was by the military aspects, as always showed real concern for the victims of war.

The surrender of Paris was followed on 8 February 1871 by elections throughout France. Throughout most of France monarchist candidates were returned. It was fear of an imminent monarchist restoration that caused elements of the national guard, backed by large sections of both middle class

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<sup>11</sup> *Graphic*, 11 February 1871.

<sup>12</sup> *Daily News*, 6 February 1871.

and working class to consider armed resistance. Forbes meanwhile, after a brief return to London, took a journey through the German occupied area of Eastern France, by a combination of train and carriage. He found widespread evidence of the destruction of war, with bridges that had been destroyed by the retreating French and towns that had been devastated by the advancing Germans. Food was scarce and roads were badly churned up by military transport. However, he still found time to complain about the quality of champagne – to which, reputedly, he became quite partial – that was available for purchase in Epernay: ‘We were forced to be content with an inferior and cheaper vintage’.<sup>13</sup>

The formal entry of German troops into the Paris took place on 1 March. After a review by the Kaiser on the Longchamps the troops marched down the Champs Élysées to the Place de la Concorde and the Tuileries. Forbes, there with his notebook, was attacked as a spy by a French crowd, who threatened to drown him in a fountain. He was dragged along the gutter on his back until he was rescued by a detachment of the national guard. But he had his overcoat torn and lost his notebook. The guard took him to a police station where someone arrived with his notebook, which was taken as proof that he was indeed a spy. He was brought before a magistrate, but thanks to the help of the magistrate’s sister, who could read English and confirmed his identity, he was released and, with her assistance, was led through the still angry crowds.<sup>14</sup> On this occasion, the *Times*, determined to be first, had commissioned a special train to carry Russell’s account to Calais and on to London. Despite this, the *Daily News* had Forbes account of the entry into Paris almost as quickly as the *Times*. The myth grew that Forbes had somehow managed to get on Russell’s special train dressed as the locomotive’s fireman. One writer suggested that Forbes’s experience as a railway clerk had given him an ‘intimate acquaintance with railway matters [that] has helped him in getting letters sent through, when other correspondents had to wait for days’.<sup>15</sup>

A week later Forbes watched a review of the Maas army by the Emperor and the Crown Prince of Saxony on a plateau between Champigny and Brie. Then it was back to England. He had signed a contract some months before with the publishers Hurst and Blackett for a two volume account of the war for which he received £400 plus the promise of ‘a further liberal allowance’

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<sup>13</sup> *Daily News*, 23 February 1871.

<sup>14</sup> Forbes, *Memories and Studies of War and Peace* (London, 1895), 9.

<sup>15</sup> A. Arthur Reade, *Literary Success: Being a Guide to Practical Journalism* (London, 1885), 4.

should it make a second edition.<sup>16</sup> With others ready to give their version speed was again of the essence. He was determined to get it finished and out before any rival. *My Experiences of the War between France and Germany* was published in April 1871.

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16 *Manchester Evening News*, 21 November 1870.

## 5 The Paris Commune

*You may measure the dead not in numbers but by the rod.*

*Daily News*, 1 June 1871

Forbes was pressed by the *Daily News* to return to Paris and cover events in France, but he resisted for two months and worked frantically to complete his two-volume *My Experiences of the War between France and Germany* for Hurst & Blackett and it was published in Leipzig at the same time by Bernard Tauchnitz. Meanwhile sections of the national guard took control in Paris and established the Commune. They embarked on a revolutionary socialist programme. On 18 May the French National Assembly ratified the Treaty of Frankfurt by which France surrendered Alsace and Lorraine to Germany and committed itself to heavy reparations. It was only a matter of time before the crumbling Commune in Paris was challenged by the forces of the National Assembly based in Versailles.

On the evening of 19 May 1871, at half a day's notice, Forbes once again set off for Paris by the mail train, arriving at St Denis at mid-day on the 20th. He was stopped by gendarmes, who told him that no more foreigners were being allowed into Paris, because the Commune was being kept going largely by foreigners. He was told to return to Boulogne, but instead went to the delightful spa town of Enghien-les-Bains, where the Crown Prince of Saxony was still based. From there he took a train to Versailles. Although he observed a large body of troops camped there, he was convinced that Thiers, the President of the Republic, did not intend an all-out onslaught on the city.<sup>1</sup> The following day he was able to travel towards Paris on board the 'cocette train', which each afternoon carried young women on visits to the German officers still based outside the city. He journeyed into the city between two young ladies 'of gay and affable manners', who promised, if necessary to hide him under their ample skirts.<sup>2</sup> However, he was once again spotted by gendarmes and forced to alight. He had to find a bed in a hayloft.

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<sup>1</sup> *Daily News*, 23 May 1871.

<sup>2</sup> Forbes, *Memories*, 128–9.

On the 21st, when the Versailles armies were breaching the walls for a final assault on the city, he was able to walk into the city.

His first stop was the house in Paris where he had stabled his horse after the armistice only to find that it was guarded and would not be released. From there he went south of the river to the Commune's war ministry, where he got a permit to observe the operations being led by General Dombrowski (Dąbrowski) from his headquarters in the Château de la Muette. He persuaded a cab driver to take him to the grande rue de Passy and on to the Pont de Jéna. Shells from the communist battery on the Trocodéro hit a lamp-post nearby and the driver refused to go any further. Forbes set off on foot up the grande rue to the Château where he was able to have a conversation in German with the diminutive General Dombrowski. His report of the 21st, which made the *Daily News* on the 23rd was datelined 'written at the elbow of General Dombrowski'. He could not hide a sneaking admiration for Dombrowski, 'a man you take to instinctively', who seemed remarkably cool as shells from the encroaching Versailles' forces fell around.<sup>3</sup> Dombrowski was killed soon afterwards and was later accused of treachery to the cause of the Commune, but Forbes's conclusion was that 'he bore himself as a true man and a gallant soldier'.<sup>4</sup>

Still with no horse, Forbes again set off on foot along the Quai d'Auteuil and then to the Commune's HQ in the Institution de Ste Périne. With Versailles troops coming from different directions he was, for a time, carried by a wave of fugitives along the Quai de Passy. Managing to break away from the fleeing crowds, he made his way to the Trocodéro, but, observing troops advancing on it, he headed off towards the Champs Elysées. He came out by the rue des Chaillots, midway between the Arc de Triomphe and Rond Point and found Versailles troops already there. Dodging these he proceeded along Avenue Hoche towards the Palais Royal. Near there he was forced at bayonet point by communards to help throw up barricades of furniture, cabs and omnibuses in the rue St Honoré and the rue de Rivoli. Outside the furniture warehouse of Somnier Tucker he found a barricade of the mattresses that they manufactured.

Hunger drove him to take the risk of dashing across the Boulevard Haussmann towards a hotel. He was fired on and got a bullet hole in his coat-tail and in his tobacco pouch. However, at a hotel in Cité d'Antin near the

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<sup>3</sup> *Daily News*, 23 May 1871.

<sup>4</sup> Forbes, *Memories*, 141.

foot of rue Lafayette he got breakfast, after which he saw a fight over a barricade at the junction of rue Tronchet. While sheltering behind a lamp-post a bullet hit it. He wrote up his account for a couple of hours and then headed for the Gare du Nord to try to get it despatched. There he was told that the Germans were stopping all trains at St Denis. He got a railway worker to take his despatch and to promise that he would go through the tunnel to St Denis and get it sent; but it was never seen again.

On his way back from the Gare du Nord he heard firing from near the Church of Notre Dame de Lorette and he found himself in a triangle of barricades across the rue St Lazare, the rue Lorette and the rue Châteaudun. While he was standing watching from behind the pillars in the church's neo-classical portico he was ordered to pick up the rifle of a dead communard and help man the barricades. When he refused, saying that he was a neutral observer, he was seized and propped against a wall to be shot. Only the sudden arrival of a force of Versailles' troops leaping across the barricade in rue St Lazare saved him. He joined the communards who were now fleeing for their lives, but was seized by the Versaillists and accused of being a communist sympathiser. Once again he faced the possibility of a firing squad, only to be rescued by an officer, who asked him to show his hands. When there was no sign of gunpowder stains his story was believed.

He followed the action as it moved on to Montmartre until in the late evening of Monday 22 May, finding a sofa to sleep on in the Hôtel de la Chaussée d'Antin, from where he could hear the battles still continuing in the Boulevard Hausmann. At the crack of dawn the following morning he cautiously ventured into the Boulevard.

I saw before me a weird spectacle of desolation and slaughter. Corpses strewn the broad roadway and lay huddled in the recesses of doorways. Some of the bodies were partially shrouded by the foliage of the branches of trees which had been torn off by the storm of shot and shell. Lamp-posts, kiosks and tree-stems were shattered or upset in all directions.<sup>5</sup>

In the Boulevard Capucines he had a coffee with a group of men and women of the national guard many of whom were drunk. He then set off towards La Madeleine before heading back to his hotel. From there he saw the heroic last

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<sup>5</sup> Forbes, *Memories*, 150.

stand of many of the communards as they pulled back towards the Opera House. He wanted to get to the British Embassy in the rue du Faubourg St Honoré to get a despatch out, but found it impossible to enter the street which was 'a great tube of shells'. He tried again in the dark but the shooting continued throughout a night of horror.

His reports on the next day have a special and dramatic immediacy since they are given with times attached to them

*Paris, Tuesday 23 May, Five o'clock.* The firing is furious and confusing all round. At the Opera House it is especially strong. I see troops and man after man skulking along the parapet of its roof. They have packs on, so I think they are Versaillists; but I cannot see their breeches and so cannot be certain. . . .

*Twenty minutes past five.* They were Versaillists that I saw on the parapet of the New Opera. There is a cheer; the people rush out into the fire and clap their hands. The tricolor is waving on the hither end of the Opera House. I saw the man stick it up. The red flag still waves at the other end. . . .

*Twenty-five minutes to six.* The scene is intensely dramatic. A Versaillist has got a ladder and is mounting the statue of Apollo on the front elevation of the new Opera House. He tears down the *drapeau rouge* just as the Versailles troops stream out of the Chaussée d'Antin. The people rush from their houses with bottles of wine, money was showered into the streets. The women fell on the necks of the sweaty, dusty men in red breeches, and hug them amid shouts of *Vive la Ligne*.

On the morning of the 24th he awoke to see flames from the Tuileries Palace and it looked as if the Louvre was doomed.

The flames from the Palace of the Tuileries kindled by damnable petroleum, insulted the soft light of the morning and cast lurid rays on the grimy recreant Frenchmen who skulked from their dastardly incendi- arism to pot at countrymen from behind a barricade. How the place burned! The flames revelled in the historical palace, whipped up the rich furniture, burst out of the plate-glass windows, brought down the fantastic roof.

He observed everywhere active communards being denounced by their neighbours and in some cases being beaten to death. It was now Wednesday and no despatches had been got out of Paris since Monday.

Here I was, on tenterhooks, witnessing, indeed, a momentous and memorable struggle; but the spectacle was only useful professionally in order that I might with all speed transfer the pictures which had formed themselves on my mental retina to the columns of my newspaper, and thus make the world an early sharer with me in a knowledge of events on the phases and issues of which the world was hanging. This aim, this burning aspiration, must ever absorb the zealous correspondent to the exclusion of all other consideration whatsoever. It is for the accomplishment of this purpose that he lives.

Forbes eventually got to the British Embassy where Edward Malet, the second secretary, told him that the Embassy too had been unable to send out despatches. Forbes volunteered to have another try and placed the despatches in a large official envelope addressed to 'H. M. Queen of England'. He got his half-starved horse from the stable where it had been since February and set off. However, on the Quai de Passy the poor horse soon collapsed dislocating Forbes' ankle. He was helped free by some Versailles' troops and, for the price of half a dozen bottles of wine, they lifted him into the saddle. At the small Point du Jour gate he was told that a permit from Marshal MacMahon was required before he could leave the city. However, after charming a major whom he had noticed sported a British Crimean medal, he got through to Sèvres, from where he was able to get a carriage to Versailles. He handed the despatches to Sackville-West, the first secretary of the embassy who was there, and then rushed to St Denis and the railway terminus. He reached London on the 27th, writing all the way, and was back in Paris the following day. His account of a Paris in flames caused great excitement.

His report was in time for the Monday edition of 29 May.<sup>6</sup> It had what he had become very good at, an immediacy coupled with a personalisation of great events. He had no doubt that 'nothing could exceed the wickedness of the Commune', after some 63 hostages held by the Commune were executed in La Roquette. But, at the same time, he was appalled by the retribution

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<sup>6</sup> *Daily News*, 29 May 1871.



being taken against communards by troops and the mob. He sees a man being clubbed to death.

A certain British impulse, stronger than considerations for self, prompted me to run forward. But it is useless. They are firing into the flaccid carcass now, thronging about it like blowflies on a piece of meat. His brains spurt on my foot and splash into the gutter, whither the carrion is bodily chucked, presently to be trodden on and rolled on by the feet of multitudes and the wheels of gun carriages.<sup>7</sup>

He saw the Versaillist troops going into the slums in search of communards.

They came out with the two men I have mentioned – one old, the other half his age. Whether from real feeling, or from a desire to ingratiate themselves with the soldiery, the people began to hoot at the prisoners and to strike them with canes. The prisoners of course turned round, and in all their helplessness showed signs of fight. The soldiers and the mob took them up against a shattered shop window in the rue St Honoré, and battered them down with sticks and with the butt of their muskets. In fact they beat them to death, after the style in which cruel boys smash frogs and toads to death. To make sure of their prey, they then fired several shots into them as they lay on the pavement; and then again – a superfluous joy – they kicked them and beat them after they had finished.

By now the resistance was on its last gasp with only tiny groups holding out in Château d'Eau, Buttes de Chaumont and in the cemetery of Père-Lachaise. Some twenty thousand Parisians were killed as suspected communards, and the executions continued long after the journalists had departed. When he visited the Père-Lachaise cemetery on 29 May the pools of blood were still lying there and one could 'measure the dead not in numbers but by the rod'.<sup>8</sup>

Disapproving as he was of what the Commune stood for, he was fairly contemptuous of the well-to-do Parisians now wreaking vengeance on the working class, but who until now had done nothing and dared nothing to help their city, but stood 'idle and terror stricken'.

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<sup>7</sup> *Daily News*, 29 May 1871.

<sup>8</sup> *Daily News*, 1 June 1871.

They will submit to any rule which can assert its supremacy over them. If the Red Flag is to fly they will salute the Red Flag; if the Tricolor, they will take the Tricolor; and if the Napoleonic Eagle spreads its wings over Paris, Paris will not object.<sup>9</sup>

After a brief stay in London, Forbes was in Berlin for the victory parades of the triumphant German troops in mid-June. While admiring of the troops he had reservations about the affair.

Her triumph would have been none the smaller if Berlin had not hoisted a flag or erected a statue; it is none the greater because the streets of Berlin have resonated to the tread and cheers of a victorious army bearing the eagles and banners of the vanquished.

He detected an enthusiasm for war amongst the civilian population and worried that a country that had been unified through war would readily turn to war in the future should things go wrong.<sup>10</sup> Once again Forbes was able to deliver a small coup for his paper. John Robinson, the manager, had sent him a young assistant. Forbes kept the young man hidden from rivals until he had written his report and then sent him off by train to London via Brussels and Calais, outdistancing the mail service via Ostend that the other correspondents had relied upon.<sup>11</sup> It was then back to London to cover the visit of the Crown Prince of Germany and his wife.

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<sup>9</sup> *Daily News*, 30 May 1871.

<sup>10</sup> *Daily News*, 26 June 1871.

<sup>11</sup> Forbes, *Memories*, 233.

## 6 On the Home Front

*A man full of exultant and irrepressible animal spirits, joking, laughing, chaffing, telling stories with or without foundation, and leaving his innocent auditors frequently uncertain whether he has been in earnest or in badinage.*

*Sheffield Independent* on Forbes, 27 October 1877

During most of the rest of 1871 Forbes continued with lecturing and publishing and was fêted as a major public figure. His *My Experience of the War between France and Germany* came out in June, initially to considerable acclaim. It was quickly followed by a visit to Marlborough House for dinner with the Prince of Wales. A number of papers suggested that the Prince, now recovered from a severe illness, was trying to cultivate the press as a preliminary to seeking a rise in his Parliamentary allowance. They had little doubt, however, that Forbes' invitation was because of his renown and the Prince's interest in the war and in all things military.

The unveiling of Jones Barker's painting of Napoleon's surrender at Sedan, based largely on Forbes's account, gave valuable publicity for the book. However, a review in the *London Standard* at the end of August, as well as criticising the lack of maps, condemned the style 'which is occasionally disfigured by slang and imitations of Carlyle, while throughout there is want of grace, ease, and smoothness, which detracts greatly from the pleasure with which the work is read'.<sup>1</sup> For someone who prided himself on his readability such a comment must have hurt. Even more damning was the *Times*' correspondent, William Howard Russell's account in the *Army & Navy Gazette* of his time during the siege of Paris at the headquarters of the Crown Prince of Prussia.

During the last war one of the daily papers was the envy and despair of its greatest contemporary because it contained a full and particular account of the very remarkable event in the war from an able and daring gentleman who acted as its correspondent; but a little research has

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<sup>1</sup> *London Standard*, 31 August 1871.

now established the fact, not indeed denied by those concerned, that the despatch which made such an immense sensation was a ‘work of art’ – fiction that ‘might have been’ founded on fact.<sup>2</sup>

It did nothing to enhance Russell’s reputation. The *Manchester Evening News* put the comments down to pure envy on Russell’s part at the ‘signal ability and enterprise’ of Forbes, and suggested that, since the *Times* had published Forbes’s account originally published in the *Daily News*, it would have been wiser if Russell had remained silent.

In early August Forbes was in Edinburgh covering the annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. It also gave him the chance to report on the centenary celebrations to mark the birth of Sir Walter Scott. His three-column report on the meagre event in the Great Hall of the Corn Exchange in Edinburgh’s Grassmarket, where the fare was little more than wine and a few nibbles, was far from flattering.

With the best intentions in the world, no doubt, the committee have scarcely succeeded in fulfilling their mission of making the centenary celebration an event worthy of Scott, of the country, or of Edinburgh. A boat freighted with such a cargo as a centenary celebration, instead of being whirled continually forward on the crest of a wave of enthusiasm, has to be pulled laboriously through dead seas of stagnant indifference. Wise men, understanding the tendency of the times in which we live, know what kind of studding sails to boom out that the craft may forge ahead merrily over the stagnant water, and even stir the stagnation by the wholesome ripple of the wash. It may consider that ‘a dessert of fruit, wine &c’, is scarcely the sort of thing to quicken latent enthusiasm, or even to feed adequately enthusiasm fully developed.

He contrasted the affair unfavourably with the proper banquets being laid on for the occasion in Glasgow and London. Despite this – or perhaps because of this – he joined the auxiliary committee to carry forward the completion of Edinburgh’s Scott Monument.<sup>3</sup>

From Edinburgh there was a trip to Argyll to witness the return of the Marquis of Lorne, son of the Duke of Argyll, with his bride, Queen

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<sup>2</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, 10 October 1871.

<sup>3</sup> *Daily News*, 10 August 1871.

Victoria's daughter, Princess Louise, to the family seat at Inverary Castle.<sup>4</sup> In September and October Forbes did an extended tour of a number of Scottish towns, recounting his wartime experiences 'With the Germans in France'. In Glasgow he was full of praise for his war-time companion Jacob de Liefde, the correspondent of the *Glasgow Herald*.

More challenging for a journalist were the events of the Spring of 1872. 1871 and 1872 were years of economic boom conditions in Britain when many groups of formerly unorganised workers began to form trade unions. Among these were agricultural labourers, a group that had gained little from improved economic conditions. The movement had its roots in Warwickshire in February 1872 and it quickly gathered momentum through the villages of the county. A union was formed and notices were served on the farmers asking, for sixteen shillings a week as opposed to the twelve shillings to date. When this was refused there was a strike. The movement spread into Oxfordshire, Herefordshire, Leicestershire, Norfolk, Northampton, Essex, Worcestershire and into the West Country. With the time for Spring sowing looming the tensions increased. Extra piquancy was added by the fact that the most vigorous response to the strike came from Sir Charles Mordaunt, whose divorce case involving the Prince of Wales was going through the courts at the time, and who evicted the strikers' families from his estate at Walton Manor.

Forbes's first report on the movement appeared in the *Daily News* on 27 March 1872. He began with a description of the beauties of Warwickshire and the, apparently, idyllic nature of rural life with flower bedecked cottages. He then contrasted this with the realities, describing the formation and early growth of unionism amongst the workers. It was a history that Joseph Arch largely incorporated in his own *Autobiography* twenty-six years later. It was Forbes's report that turned Joseph Arch, the Barford labourer and Methodist preacher, who had addressed some of the early meetings, into a national figure.

In Barford there dwells a man who is at once a day labourer and a Methodist preacher, a man superior in every respect to his class; not greatly enlightened by culture, but with a keen, restless, enquiring mind, a boldness of thought, an independence of character, a reputation commending wide respect, and a rough, fervent, natural eloquence, that

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<sup>4</sup> *Daily News*, 25 August 1871.

marked him out as especially fitted by nature for galvanising into vigorous action a movement that seemed half frightened to assert itself, yet for which the time was ripe.<sup>5</sup>

Forbes, accompanied by Arch, went round several of the farming villages of Warwickshire and reported on the appalling conditions that existed. Staying overnight with a family of seven, he described a breakfast of 'dry bread and a fluid in which a lively imagination might recognise the distant flavour of tea'. Dinner consisted of some scraps of bacon rind, left over from half a pound costing threepence, which formed the previous day's meal.<sup>6</sup> As Forbes said to Arch, 'Now you won't want for money' and, certainly, financial support for the striking workers began to flow in.<sup>7</sup> He also brought out perceptively that the spreading strikes were now less about money, since a number of farmers seemed to be prepared to make some increase in wages, but about the right of labourers to be members of unions.

Disraeli in a well-publicised speech in Manchester's Free Trade Hall setting out his views of Conservatism and remembered afterwards for his aphorism *sanitas, sanitatum omnia sanitas*, sneered at Forbes' accounts of the farm labourers' strikes, which, according to Disraeli, were largely the work of urban agitators. Not only could farmers not afford to pay higher wages, but agricultural labourers had in recent years made as much progress as workers in manufacturing. He accepted that there were local variations, but, citing his own area of the South Midlands, he claimed 'progressive and remarkable' improvement.<sup>8</sup> What seems to have particularly irked Forbes was Disraeli's sneers about the 'gentlemen of the press going down to dine with an agricultural labourer with seven children as a red herring' and the implication that Forbes had not paid for his board. With all the *amour-propre* of an offended Scotsman, Forbes vigorously asserted that he had paid his way and declared with an anti-semitic swipe,

Once upon a time some representatives of an ancient Eastern nation went north to Aberdeen, there to push trade; but in six months they had become bankrupt, and had levanted. The nationality whose business

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<sup>5</sup> *Daily News*, 27 March 1872.

<sup>6</sup> *Daily News*, 28 March 1872.

<sup>7</sup> *The Autobiography of Joseph Arch* (London, 1966), 48.

<sup>8</sup> *Times*, 4 April 1872.

faculties were so keen that these gentlemen could by no means thrive among it, is nevertheless credited justly with the reputation of being honest, if not spendthrift.

He headed for Buckinghamshire, where Disraeli had his country house at Hughenden, and produced a piece on life there, describing appalling housing conditions and polluted water supplies. On Disraeli's own estate labourers' cottages were controlled by tenant farmers who were capable of being 'instruments of oppression' to keep a work force in servitude. He concluded that 'as far as Buckinghamshire is concerned, the climax of badness is attained at Hughenden'.<sup>9</sup> This was particularly pointed since Disraeli regarded himself as a model landowner and his claim that the cottages Forbes had described belonged to a consistent Liberal did little to deflect Forbes's powerful criticism.

Forbes had a certain sympathy for farm labourers. It was a world that he knew from his childhood and over the years he made many comments on the unenviable position of many of the poorest in British society. A fellow journalist who knew him at that time later wrote that Forbes 'was the only man among the "outsiders" who understood Hodge'.<sup>10</sup> His empathy with the peasantry overcame his antipathy towards trade unionism. At the same time he clearly was relishing the power that his writing was giving him and he later cynically talked of himself as the man who 'invented' Joseph Arch. That inveterate gossip and sometime editor of the *Daily News*, Henry Lucy, noted that he was not averse to describing the farm labourers as 'clods'.<sup>11</sup> He had, however, created the news. Soon other 'specials' were rushed to Warwickshire, followed belatedly by politicians, philanthropists and radicals.

In August 1872 Forbes's wife, Helen died, at the age of 30. We know next to nothing about her. At this stage they are living at 32 Eden Grove, Holloway, with two servants, a woman aged 39 and a 13 year-old. The only notice of her death seemed to be in the *John O'Groat Journal*. He was left with the responsibility for two little girls, one now six and the other three. A search of census records has not unearthed who looked after them and two weeks after his wife's death, Forbes was in Brighton reporting, once again, on the annual meeting of the British Association.

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<sup>9</sup> *Daily News*, 8 April, 16 April 1872.

<sup>10</sup> *Border Watch*, 16 September 1882.

<sup>11</sup> H. Lucy, *Diary of a Journalist. Later Entries* (London, 1920), 69.

The star attraction at this meeting was Henry Morton Stanley of the *New York Herald*, a war correspondent after Forbes's own heart, who as a very young reporter had first brought news of the fall of Magdala in the British Abyssinian expedition of 1867. Stanley had just returned from meeting with David Livingstone who had been reported missing for the past two years. Livingstone's travels and 'disappearance' had been well-covered in the pages of the *London Scotsman*. Livingstone and Stanley had met up near Lake Tanganyika in November 1871 and the 'Dr Livingstone I presume', reported in the *New York Herald*, was already seen as laughingly pompous. There were suggestions that some of the letters that Livingstone had written for the *New York Herald* were Stanley's creation and, indeed, some papers went further and insinuated that the whole story of meeting Livingstone was an invention by Stanley and that the geographical information he had brought was merely a rehash of Livingstone's earlier despatches. There were also those in the Geographical Society who resented the fact that an Americanised journalist, albeit of Welsh descent, should have succeeded where scientific explorers had failed. Stanley's journey had forestalled a relief expedition organised by the Royal Geographical Society.<sup>12</sup>

Stanley's talk was attended by the ex-emperor and empress of France, now living in Chislehurst, and their son the Prince Imperial. It was followed by some negative questioning by those at the meeting who challenged Stanley's presentation of Livingstone's notes on the source of the Nile. At the meeting of the Geographical Section of the Association, Francis Galton had talked of 'sensational stories' being told, another expressed regret that Livingstone should have entrusted his papers and letters to 'an American agent', while Sir Henry Rowlinson, the president of the Geographical Society, had declared that 'so far from Stanley succouring Livingstone, it was Livingstone who had succoured Stanley'.

On the Saturday, the two journalists, Forbes and Stanley, went riding alone on the Sussex Downs. The two had much in common. Both felt themselves outsiders alongside some of the smoother English press corps. Stanley, of Welsh origin, but now based in the United States, had found himself the subject of patronising banter when he covered the war in Abyssinia in 1868. Forbes's Scottish burr was a recurring source of comment. Stanley had been left embittered by the refusal of War Office to grant him a war medal, although he had provided assistance to the army, and although Russell had

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<sup>12</sup> Tim Jeal, *Livingstone* (London, 1973), 348–53.



received both a Crimean War and a Mutiny medal.<sup>13</sup> Forbes was later to experience a similar snub and remained equally embittered.

Forbes account of their ride included a long eulogistic piece emphasising Stanley's admiration for Livingstone. He reiterated Stanley's picture of Livingstone as 'self-denying, brave and single-minded' with an 'unfailing sweetness of temper and meek kindliness'. In the evening there was a dinner attended by Stanley and when he started again to recount some of his African adventures there was some 'incredulous laughter'. A hyper-sensitive Stanley walked out and was only with difficulty persuaded to come back two days later for another dinner given by the Mayor.<sup>14</sup>

At the end of August Forbes covered, as he loved to do, the annual autumn manoeuvres of the army. He stayed with the veteran war correspondent of the *London Standard* and prolific author, George Alfred Henty, at his house in Dorset and together they wrote on the mock 'Battle of Wyley' that raged from Wiltshire to Dorset. His continued interest in social issues came out with a series of articles in the *Daily News* on Northumbrian miners, 'The Northern Pitmen at Home'.<sup>15</sup> His picture of the miner is an affectionate one.

The husband is the 'house god'. He never does a turn of household work; it would be a disgrace to the wife if her 'master' were to hew wood or draw water. He earns the bread, stalking off to his shift of work in his grimy flannels, with his lamp hanging at his belt, and returns when it is over to strip, wash, eat, unbend then from his grim taciturnity, and smoke the pipe of well-earned ease. His store of energy is inexhaustible; whatever he sets his hand to he does with all his might. If he is 'religious,' he is a glowing coal of Primitive Methodist fervour; he preaches at the street corner with as much vehemence as he wields the pick in the pitch.

He admired the efforts made by the miners to cultivate their minds with reading and the study of geology and botany, all the more remarkable given the appalling housing conditions in which they had to live. He suggested that the members of the Social Science Association would learn a great deal by

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Wilkinson-Latham, *From Our Special Correspondent. Victorian War Correspondents and Their Campaigns* (London, 1979), 99–100.

<sup>14</sup> *Daily News*, 17, 19, 20, 22 August 1872.

<sup>15</sup> *Daily News*, 3 October 1872.

dropping in, yet ‘amid the dingy squalor of their habitations – I will not use the word home – they bear themselves with a courageous self-respect which is very touching’. He publicised the political ambitions of Thomas Burt, the secretary of the Northumberland Miners’ Association and soon to be MP for Morpeth, ‘a clear shrewd thinker, a born orator, a man of studied moderation, but of indomitable resolution’, comparing him to Joseph Arch.<sup>16</sup> He then covered sympathetically the proceedings of the ‘Pitmen’s Parliament’, the conference of the Amalgamated Miners’ Association in Walsall.<sup>17</sup>

By chance his next assignment was a mine accident. He reported on the colliery disaster at Pelsall Hall, two or three miles from Walsall, where nineteen men and three boys were trapped by an inrush of water. Forbes’s reports caught the sense both of anxiety and feverish activity around the pithead, as efforts were made to get to the trapped men. After three days it became clear that there was no chance of survivors.<sup>18</sup> Forbes shared a room for a few days with another young journalist, and former dragoon, David Christie Murray, from the *Birmingham Morning News*, who helped Forbes understand the Black Country accents. Each seemed to have separately rented the one reasonable room in the village for half a crown a night. Murray’s account of their initial meeting gives a sense of Forbes’s aggressiveness. Unbeknown to Forbes, Murray had got to the room first and spent the night there. Forbes, on the other hand, had got wind of a possible rescue attempt and had stayed up all night. According to Murray.

When I left next morning I saw striding towards me through the mud a very begrimed and unprepossessing-looking figure. It was after all a man with two-days’ beard, a very dirty face, a collarless, grimy shirt, who wore heavy ankle jack-boots, and had his trousers rolled above the ankles.

They discovered that both had paid for the same room.

The stranger claimed precedence, and was good enough to tell me that if he found me attempting to infringe upon his privileges he would take the liberty of throwing me out of the window.

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<sup>16</sup> *Daily News*, 30 September, 2, 3 October 1873.

<sup>17</sup> *Daily News*, 7 October 1873.

<sup>18</sup> *Daily News*, 18, 19 November 1872.

According to a later version by Murray, they shared the room relatively amiably, taking turns of who got the bed and who got the sofa. One version has Forbes determined not to miss the moment of rescue and sitting up all night so that he go down with the first rescuers. Another has Forbes missing the rescue and Murray getting down first. When Murray showed Forbes the report he had sent to the *Birmingham Morning News* Forbes, reputedly made no comment. However, when they met up some time later in London, Forbes was full of praise for Murray's enterprise.<sup>19</sup>

Forbes's writing continued at a feverish pace. In November his collection of essays, *Soldiering and Scribbling*, came out, again published in both London and Leipzig. It consisted of reprints of pieces originally published in the *Evening Star*, the *London Scotsman*, the *Daily News*, *St Paul's* and *Belgravia*. Despite his new standing, as was apparent in his dealings with Murray, there was still a prickliness about Forbes. When covering the visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales to Derby in mid-December 1872 on their way to Chatsworth, Forbes had adopted a rather flippant tone, predicting overly long and sonorous loyal addresses and reminding the locals that the last visit to the town of anyone of comparable standing had been Prince Charles Edward Stuart in 1745. Accosted later in the smoking room of the St James's Hotel by one of the local municipal worthies who accused him of being a 'penny-a-liner', Forbes floored him with a punch.<sup>20</sup>

An impending political crisis in France brought him back to Paris in December. Adolphe Thiers, the president of the nascent Third Republic, faced a National Assembly with a Monarchist majority. The Monarchists were, however, deeply divided between Legitimist supporters of the Bourbon Comte de Chambord, Orleanist supports of the Comte de Paris, grandson of Louis Philippe and Bonapartists. At the end of November the Monarchists had tried to drive through a report condemning the left and demanding that Thiers follow more conservative policies. Thiers won a vote of confidence only by the smallest of majorities and there was talk, once again, of a possible *coup d'état*. Thiers could not carry on for much longer with a minority in the Assembly, but he had no powers to dissolve the Assembly and to call new elections. With possible excitement looming Forbes rushed back to

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<sup>19</sup> David Christie Murray, *The Making of a Novelist. An Experiment in Autobiography* (London, 1894), 23; *Recollections* (London, 1908), 92–3. The two accounts of the affair vary slightly.

<sup>20</sup> *Daily News*, 17 December 1872; *Falkirk Herald*, 7 March 1878.

Paris, only to be disappointed by the atmosphere of normality that he found there. His piece on the situation in France on 6 December showed that he had a good grasp of the political situation at Versailles, and an awareness of changing German attitudes towards a figure such as Louis Gambetta.<sup>21</sup> He was fairly scathing on the working practices of the French deputies, whose 'day may be said to consist, not of working periods divided by short intervals set apart for meals, but of eating and gossiping periods in the interstices between which are fragments of time available for working purposes'.<sup>22</sup>

The death of Napoleon at Chislehurst on 9 January 1873 once again drew attention to his surrender at Sedan and to Forbes's descriptions of it. Forbes covered the funeral in the *Daily News*, with the faded remnants of the Second Empire in attendance, describing the internment in St Mary's chapel and competing in detail with G. A. Sala's account in the *Daily Telegraph*.<sup>23</sup>

No doubt on the look out for something more exciting, Forbes headed for Madrid, where the First Spanish Republic, had been declared on 12 February 1873. Revolution in 1868 had led to the ousting of Isabella II, and the search for an alternative constitutional monarch who would be acceptable to the great powers. The suggestion of a Hohenzollern Prince as monarch played a major part in the background to the Franco-Prussian war. In the end, in October 1870, the younger son of Victor Emmanuel of Italy, Amadeo, Duke of Aosta, was chosen, by only one vote in the Cortes. There was little enthusiasm for him and he was effectively cold-shouldered by the aristocratic elite. With little experience of either politics or Spain he proved incapable of coping with the complexities of Spanish politics and in February 1873 he abdicated and left Spain. After the abdication the new Republic faced an armed rebellion by the supporters of the pretender, Don Carlos Maria, who called himself the Duke of Madrid and claimed the throne. Forbes made a short visit to Madrid to contact some of the new Republican government. Although he always claimed that politics was not his *forte* he showed in his reports on the situation in Madrid that he could very rapidly comprehend the complexities of the varieties of Spanish republicanism. He showed sympathy for the moderate group trying to form a new government, but he saw some members of the first International in Madrid who had been in Paris during

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<sup>21</sup> *Daily News*, 6 December, 1872.

<sup>22</sup> *Daily News*, 14 December 1872.

<sup>23</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 18 January 1873.

the Commune. He was concerned that 'Republicanism may degenerate into Socialism and its freedoms into licence'.

Civil war broke out quickly and he headed for Valencia to catch up with General Contreras, who had been appointed by the Federalist government as the new Captain-General of Catalonia with the task of crushing the Carlist rebellion.<sup>24</sup> Forbes and Contreras found Barcelona awash with all shades of revolutionary fervour. The dominant cry was 'Viva La Republica Federal', but there seemed little interest in challenging the Carlists. The pursuit of the war on both sides was half-hearted and there seemed to be a considerable amount of military fraternization across the opposing sides. Forbes and an unnamed companion, 'a harum scarum young Englishman', set off in search of action, taking the train and then mules across the mountains to the town of Vich that was besieged by the Carlists, reputedly because the townspeople had refused to pay the levy demanded. Stopped by Carlists speaking Catalan, which neither Forbes nor his companion could understand, the companion resorted to a rendering of 'Rule Britannia'. This seemed to calm any fears that they were Republicans and they were allowed to enter the besieged city, 'the most stinking, squalid, dingy, rickety place' into which they had ever set foot.<sup>25</sup> Coming away from Vich they were arrested by the Republicans, but were soon let loose with a safe conduct. The Carlists had laid siege to Bilbao and Forbes reported on the Republican attempt to capture the road to Bilbao in the battle of Abanto where some 300 were killed. He gave accounts of some other bloody skirmishes in the north, emphasising the numbers of wounded.<sup>26</sup>

Back in Barcelona he was able to direct some help through the Royal Literary fund and the Newspaper Press Fund to the near destitute family of the journalist James McDowall Hannay, formerly the editor of the *Edinburgh Courant*, but who in the last five years of his life had been British Consul in Barcelona.<sup>27</sup> Forbes's sojourn in Spain was relatively brief and by the end of April he was back on the lecture circuit giving Liverpool the benefit of the, by now, well-honed 'In France with the Germans'.

May 1873 saw the opening of the Vienna World Exposition. The Prince of Wales was visiting and Robinson of the *Daily News* suggested that Forbes

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<sup>24</sup> *Daily News*, 7 March 1873.

<sup>25</sup> *Daily News*, 13 March 1873.

<sup>26</sup> *Daily News*, 12 April 1873.

<sup>27</sup> British Library, Loan 96 RLF 1/1911/7-9

accompany the Prince, sharing lodgings with Edmund Yates. Yates was a founder of society journalism, the creator of the press gossip column and a friend of Charles Dickens, who was acting as foreign correspondent of the *New York Herald*. Yates in his *Recollections* expressed gratitude to Robinson ‘for bringing about a friendship which is to me most valuable and most cherished’. They shared a rather bare couple of rooms at the top of house, ‘poorly furnished and devoid of anything like comfort’, but the company was good. According to Forbes they found themselves ‘excellently suited to each other’, although very different in character. By all accounts, Yates was a wonderful companion, an inveterate talker, but a good listener, someone to whom people liked to impart their troubles and tell their secrets.<sup>28</sup> It was a jolly time. Yates wrote of ‘a very happy English and American colony of government officials and journalists’, including W. H. Russell, who was reporting for the *New York Times*, Edward Dicey editor of *The Observer* and William Beatty Kingston of the *Daily Telegraph*, ‘all working hard in utmost harmony together during the day, most of us generally dining and passing the evening in company’, usually in the Hôtel Taube or the Hôtel Métropole.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, George Smalley recalled that the journalistic rivalry between Forbes, Yates, W. H. Russell and John Russell Young of the *New York Herald* at the Exposition was as intense as their war-time rivalry, with each trying to get their reports in as fast as possible. Yates’s close friend, George Augustus Sala, the *Daily Telegraph*’s all-purpose correspondent, whom illness had kept away, made some caustic remarks to his friend. Sala, writing from St Leonards, said,

Write us a letter, and tell us, not about the Xhibition (*sic*) but about the faites and gestes of the press-gang in the Kasierstadt. How many times did Forbes get tight, and beat the kellner? How many lies did he tell per diem, and how many times did he wash himself per week? Not many, as regards the last, I guess.<sup>30</sup>

It was a tone that Sala never entirely lost when discussing Forbes.

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<sup>28</sup> J. R. Young, *Men and Memories. Personal Reminiscences* (New York, 1901), 264.

<sup>29</sup> P. D. Edwards, *Dickens’s Young Men* (Aldershot, 1997), 126.

<sup>30</sup> Judith McKenzie (ed.), *Letters of George Augustus Sala to Edmund Yates* (Victorian Fiction Research Guides, University of Queensland, 1993), 152–6.

Forbes's reports, however, managed to bring an element of excitement to even the most mundane events such as the Prince's switching on of the steam power in the British pavilion.

Suddenly there jarred through the silence the first note of the din that heralded the awakening from slumber. With a heave, a groan, and a throb, the steam engines that supply the motive power began to move. As they moved the broad belting that connected their working with the main shafting, from whose revolutions all the machines to the right and to the left borrowed their ability to move, began slowly, but with growing speed, to revolve. The long trance was over, the dry bones were stirring. The almost plaintive dumbness of the iron lips and tongues were giving place to a purposeful eloquence. The spirit of life breathed through the whole of the machines. Beltings broad and narrow began to gyrate; pistons, cranks and shafts to move up and down, and to and fro; cog wheels and driving wheels, plain wheels, toothed wheels, and notched wheels, to spin around; massive punches to fall gently but restlessly; and engines to pick up great ribbons of steel, and bend them into tyres for railway wheels as easily as a twig is bent by human hands.<sup>31</sup>

Forbes and Yates then followed the Prince and the Duke of Connaught to Budapest where they had a jolly time at the regatta and the races and where Forbes met up with his old colleague from the early days of the Franco-German war, Jacob de Liefde.<sup>32</sup>

From Vienna there was a brief trip to Germany and to Belgium to cover the tour there of Nasir Ud-Din, the Shah of Persia en route for a visit to London in search of a loan. He caught up with the Shah's entourage resting at Wiesbaden after its rather fraught visit to Berlin. The Shah's refusal to conform exactly with the suffocating etiquette of the Prussian court had not been well received by the emperor. An unannounced visit to Potsdam to call on the Crown Prince had finally soured relationships there. Forbes was later to declare that the Shah was 'the shoddiest miscreant who ever imposed on a civilized people' and 'the gauziest fraud in this age of frauds'.<sup>33</sup> Forbes followed the progress to an underwhelmed Brussels and on to an equally

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<sup>31</sup> *Daily News*, 18 May 1873.

<sup>32</sup> Edmund Yates, *His Recollections and Experiences*, Vol. I (London, 1884), 280–5.

<sup>33</sup> *New York Times*, 14 October 1880.

unexcited Dover.<sup>34</sup> On his way from Ostend to Dover, Forbes made his first acquaintance with Mark Twain, who was initially refused admission to the ship, being mistaken for a tramp, 'bearing an odd looking bag and looking a little seedy with early rising'.<sup>35</sup>

He returned to Spain early in August crossing the French border to Irun and then making various outings to the Carlist areas along the northern coast towards San Sebastian. He found the Carlist troops much more to his liking. As he said, 'They had little fighting capacity, but died like gentlemen'.<sup>36</sup> He saw very little military action and confined his reports largely to descriptions of the area with some minor escapades. He did hear of an English steamer landing supplies of arms for the Carlists further along the coast and wondered, 'How is it that our countrymen are always doing this sort of thing whenever there is any quarrel going on anywhere?'<sup>37</sup> Intriguingly, his experiences in Spain never feature in any of Forbes's writings or lectures, perhaps because he missed some of the more exciting aspects, such as the siege of Cartagena. He found the battles in Spain 'merely amusing'.<sup>38</sup>

In September he was back in France for a brief visit to witness the handing over of the last French town, St Meuse in Lorraine, that was held by the Germans as surety until the French had paid up the reparations that had been imposed upon them in the 1871 settlement. There were fears that the evacuation might occasion some anti-German disturbances in the town that might lead to reprisals. Forbes, at this stage, still sported a large yellow beard, and it was suggested by the Maire that he looked rather too much like a German and might be attacked. The beard was shaved off, no disturbances took place, and France was 'saved', according to Forbes's account.<sup>39</sup> He also wrote in defence of Marshal Bazaine whose court-martial took place in October 1873. He rejected the accusations of treachery against Bazaine and declared that he was merely an incapable general, 'heavy, sluggish, unoriginate, morally timid' and he did not believe that there was any way that he could have fought his way out of Metz.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Daily News*, 13, 17, 19 June 1873.

<sup>35</sup> Yates, *Recollections*, 286.

<sup>36</sup> Kate Field, 'An English War Correspondent', 301.

<sup>37</sup> *Daily News*, 18 August 1873.

<sup>38</sup> J. McCarthy & J. Robinson, *The Daily News Jubilee* (London, 1896), 90

<sup>39</sup> Forbes, 'How I saved France', in *Camps, Quarters and Casual Places*.

<sup>40</sup> Forbes, 'Bazaine' in *Gentleman's Magazine*, 12 (January 1874), 76–83.



While in Paris he interviewed Sir Samuel Baker just back from four years in the southern Sudan, where, in the employ of the Khedive of Egypt, he had the task of trying to eradicate the slave trade. There was already growing unrest in that area and, at one stage, Baker and his wife were reported to have been killed. His successor in the post was General Gordon.<sup>41</sup>

November 1873 saw Forbes in Glasgow covering the long-delayed and boisterous installation of Disraeli as Lord Rector of Glasgow University, to which he had been elected in 1871. Because the University's new buildings were still incomplete the ceremony was held in the 'Kibble Palace', a glass confection in the Botanic Gardens. Forbes must have relished pricking at his old adversary, Disraeli. His speech, according to Forbes was 'eloquent but fallacious', calling for students to resist the spirit of the age that was driving towards social equality: 'It may be the moral duty of man to resist the spirit of the age'. The address, thought Forbes, sounded like a chapter of Disraeli's novel, *Lothair*, read allowed, with its declarations that the 'supremacy of rank' was the key to history. There was the added glee that it rained and the Kibble 'Palace' was not watertight and Principal Caird had failed to bring an umbrella for the great man.<sup>42</sup>

It was perhaps a desire for something a bit more lively that encouraged Forbes to press for war against the Asante in West Africa. In a letter published in the *Daily News* he urged the government to use force to quell the Asante's frequent attacks on their southern neighbours, the Fante people, which in turn threatened the trading posts on the Gold Coast (Ghana). The Asante were damned as steeped in human sacrificing and slavery, from which they needed to be rescued and, in what seemed to reflect a remarkable knowledge of the geography of the region he proposed an expedition of about a thousand troops up river to seize the capital of Kumasi. He even proposed that such an expedition should be led by Colonel Sir Garnet Wolseley, who had led a successful expedition in 1870 to crush the Red River Rebellion in Canada.<sup>43</sup> His letter apparently 'created a sensation in military circles'. He was invited for lunch with the Commander-in-Chief, the Duke of Cambridge, who declared that Forbes's views echoed his own.<sup>44</sup> The letter seems to have

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<sup>41</sup> *Daily News*, 8 October 1873.

<sup>42</sup> *Daily News*, 20 November 1873.

<sup>43</sup> *Daily News*, 19 July 1873. The rebels under Louis Riel had in fact dispersed before a blow was struck.

<sup>44</sup> F. Villiers, *Peaceful Personalities and Warriors Bold* (London, 1907), 251.

played a part in persuading the government to act, and the expedition that was sent at the end of the year under Wolseley more or less followed Forbes' plan of attack. Wolseley no doubt appreciated how Forbes's intervention helped his career. Forbes seems to have been keen and ready to head for Africa. Indeed some newspapers in September reported that he was already on his way. It is not clear why Robinson at the *Daily News* decided on someone else, but there were rumours of a 'misunderstanding' between Forbes and the *Daily News*.<sup>45</sup>

The main regiment with Wolseley was the 42nd Highlanders, the Black Watch, and Forbes had to be content with seeing the regiment off from Portsmouth with a moving two columns on 'The Outmarching Church Parade', where he recounted the history of the regiment, from Hanau and Fontenoy in the early eighteenth century, through the landing at Aboukir Bay in Egypt in 1798, 'dashing through the surf stung into spray by bullets, forming on the beach, and clearing the French from the sandhills by a charge at the point of a bayonet', with Moore at Corunna and on to Quatre Bas and Waterloo in 1815. The exploits of the Crimea and in India were recounted, concluding that 'on the soil of three quarters of the world the Black Watch had shed its blood in Britain's quarrels' and now it was on its way to the fourth quarter.<sup>46</sup> He was later to write a history of the regiment.

The publications continued to flow from his pen, now to *The Gentleman's Magazine*, which was encouraging more diverse articles. His defence of Marshall Bazaine, was followed by one of his Christmas pieces, an account of Forbes having taken on the job on Christmas day of the driver of a four-wheel cab, commonly known as a 'growler'.<sup>47</sup> In February he recounted in *St Paul's Magazine* the strange affair of the poet, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, who had married in her thirties George Maclean, the governor of Cape Coast Castle in the Gold Coast [Ghana]. Two months after her arrival in the Gold Coast she had been found dead with a phial of prussic acid in her hand. Maclean suffered from malicious rumours, but Forbes accepted that the death had been accidental.<sup>48</sup> In March he reverted to his childhood home for his inspiration and one of his best non-military pieces with an

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<sup>45</sup> *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 18 October 1873.

<sup>46</sup> *Daily News*, 1 December 1873.

<sup>47</sup> 'Life in London. Christmas Day on a "Growler",' *Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. 12 (February 1874), 169–76.

<sup>48</sup> Forbes, 'A Gold Coast Tragedy', *St Paul's Magazine* (February 1874), 159–65.

account of Inverness Character Fair.<sup>49</sup> In this he wrote of a visit to the great sheep market in Inverness that attracted buyers and sellers from across the country. It was a lively affair where Thursday saw ‘gathering, hand-shaking, brandy and soda and drams’; Friday meant ‘drinking, dandering and feeling the way’; Saturday brought ‘bargaining and drink’ while Sunday saw ‘bargains and drink’ before the kirk. By the time these appeared in print Forbes was on his way to India.

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<sup>49</sup> ‘Inverness “Character” Fair’, *Gentleman’s Magazine*, Vol. 12 (March 1874), 317–26.

## 7 India

*Imagine, you people at home, you folks with fair incomes and balances at your bankers, you whose custom is craved by bakers and butchers and purveyors, as so forth – imagine it come to this with you that your money is mere dross or encumbrance, because sovereigns and half-crowns are not edible in any system of cookery.*

*Daily News* 14 May 1874

It had been planned that Forbes and Edmund Yates, who was now also with the *Daily News*, would go to St Petersburg for the marriage in January 1874 of the Duke of Edinburgh to Maria Alexandrova, daughter of the Tsar Alexander II. Instead Forbes was despatched to the East. News of growing famine in Bengal had begun to filter through to Britain in October 1873, although it was the end of November before the first official despatch on the issue arrived. The monsoon had failed and the lack of rain meant disaster for the rice crop. By December it looked as if a major disaster might be pending, comparable to the famine of 1866, and the *Daily News* sent Forbes to report

Forbes made his way to India as fast as possible, crossing Europe by train and then ferry to Egypt and catching a P&O liner, the *Hindoostan*, from Suez to Bombay (Mumbai). India was new to him, despite his earlier imagined descriptions, and he immediately experienced ‘mazed wonderment at minding all the surroundings, animate and inanimate, so different from anything hitherto familiar’.<sup>1</sup> Even the train journey from Bombay to Calcutta (Kolkata) gave him material for an article.

Each carriage is divided into two compartments, the lavatories, of which there is one for each compartment, being in the centre. On what may be called the ground floor of each compartment, there are three comfortable sofas in leather work, the backs of which are made to be pulled out and raised, giving three more berths in what may be called the first-floor, or second tier ... there is a double roof to intercept the heat; over the windows there is a projecting hood or verandah for the sake of shade,

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<sup>1</sup> *Daily News*, 27 February 1874.

and each window, in addition to its clouded glass sash, has a latticed sash of woodwork. In the hot weather an additional contribution to coolness is found in Mr Sander's patent, whereby the matting under the perforated false floor, and through which the air has to rise from below, is kept continually irrigated from a cistern in the roof.<sup>2</sup>

He arrived in Calcutta on 28 January 1874 and he found very divided attitudes amongst the British authorities. The monsoon had failed to arrive north of the Ganges and crops had failed. Nonetheless there were some who tended to pooh-pooh the alarm about impending famine. There were others who were calling for an end to the exporting of rice and predicting calamity in Behar and in Bengal, but little seemed to be being done other than collecting money. Forbes on 6 February set off from Calcutta for the famine areas in the company of Mr Schalch, the president of Bengal's Executive Council.

Communication with London was not easy. There was an India-European Telegraph Co., that carried messages to London via Teheran, but this was very expensive and most of Forbes' extended despatches, frequently running to five or even six columns, came by surface mail and took a month to arrive in London.

Forbes travelled along the south bank of the Ganges to Bhagapur heading towards Darbhanga, the main supply depot. He found that the main problem with rice distribution was the difficulty of getting it from the railway head to the areas of need. Roads were poor and there were dangers of robberies. He reported on the widespread rumours that activities there represented preparation for a British invasion of Nepal. On 14 February he was in Muzaffapur, the centre of the Tirhoot region where the monsoon failure had been the worst. Writing from there, he expressed surprise at the lack of organisation of transport and distribution, while, at the same time, making clear his concern that supplies of government grain would disrupt what private trade there was. Tirhoot was an indigo-growing area with European-controlled factories and most of the famine relief work was being carried out by the planters. What other organisation there was was 'happy-go-lucky and unsystematic'. The distribution points were too far apart and nothing was being done about hospitals and doctors in the distressed areas. It was not lack of concern, and the Europeans had abandoned their usual badminton parties and croquet gatherings, but 'the muddle is terrible':

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<sup>2</sup> *Daily News*, 17 February 1874.

I feel that I do not know enough of India and of the system under which it is locally governed to advance with any confidence an opinion why this bewildering chaos should prevail in the face of so much ability and zeal. It appears to me, if I may speak on the subject, that the system is excellent for ordinary times of prosperity, but it lacks elasticity to cope with exceptional conditions.

While initially wary of too much direct criticism of the authorities he highlighted the lack of cordial relations between the government of British India and the government of Bengal. Like Sir George Campbell, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Forbes had been surprised to find rice being loaded for export on to ships moored on the Hooghly River in Calcutta. Lord Northbrook, the Viceroy, and a member of the Baring banking family, however, had refused to place a ban on exports, although he had quietly purchased £3million worth of rice from Burma. Forbes very much welcomed the decision of the Viceroy to send in Sir Richard Temple, financial secretary on the Viceroy's Council, to take charge of famine relief and to supersede the authority of Sir George Campbell, who left India in April 1874.

Temple began to organise the 'famine wallahs', the civil servants now being sent from all corners of India, but who frequently did not know what to do.<sup>3</sup> Forbes found that at some of the relief works' orders were being countermanded; telegraph wires being put up one day were being taken down the next to go somewhere else. Forbes commented, 'I can imagine nothing more humiliating to a Government that has known for so long of the impending famine than this frank confession that it has been taken unawares this late in regard to such rudimentary preparation as the construction and improvement of roads'.<sup>4</sup> He believed it would have been more effective to have called in army officers to organise the relief works.

All around he found 'wretched anatomies of leanness'. From Muzaffapur he travelled 35 miles east to Dharbanga, responsible for the area north of the Ganges as far as the Nepalese border. There he found that the local magistrate, a Mr Macdonald, had succeeded in avoiding the chaos that existed elsewhere, with public works estblished, road building for men and spinning for women; but, as a result, beggars were flooding into the town. His accounts from Dharbanga were to date the most harrowing. As he sat in his tent

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<sup>3</sup> *Daily News*, 16 March 1874.

<sup>4</sup> *Daily News*, 17 March 1874.

writing, starving women came and laid their near-dead children in front of him. Old women 'shrivelled and starving almost out of human resemblance' collapsed in front of him and begged for relief. He argued that there had to be some poorhouse where such could go. There were relief works in the area where a 'labour test' could be applied, by which those in need of relief would work for wages, but he argued that at three halfpence a day, this was semi-starvation. But, he quickly recognised the impossibility of using a labour test when he passed hundreds who were too weak to work, or who had worked a little and then collapsed. On top of that, he was informed that there was no money to pay the labourers. The picture he produced was of a people being neglected, defrauded and irregularly paid. A telegram to the Viceroy revealing the situation and calling for more supervision by Europeans, brought a swift response, questioning his figures and assuring him that resources would arrive. His accounts were seen as a considerable indictment of the Viceroy who had been wary of costs, who had clung to 'petty economies', who had delayed the improvement of supplies and then when action was taken it was poorly organised.

He remained in Dharbhanga for nearly three weeks, taking the opportunity to meet with Sir Richard Temple, who arrived on 23 February. Forbes was immensely impressed by Temple's stupendous energy. A few days later he headed out with Macdonald to investigate the eastern districts, where the main rice-growing areas were, but he found that 'not a single green blade comforts the eye and relieves the dull monotony'. Once again he wrote harrowing descriptions of the starving.

In a straw shed we found the unfortunates squatted on the ground, all save the man of whom I have spoken, who had sunk down and seemed *in extremis*, while the native doctor calmly stood outside the door, enjoying the evening air. "Has anything been done to get food to them?" I asked. By order of my companion, the police inspector handed a rupee to the native doctor and bade him at once to send into the bazaar for food. The native doctor calmly did so, and then, strolling up to the living skeleton, gave him a push and told him it would be all right by-and-by. The food came at once, a species of parched pulse that required to be cooked. This was distributed, and among the recipients was the living skeleton. That is to say, as he lay moaning, a couple of handfuls were emptied out on the corner of his ragged clothes, and general satisfaction appeared to reign at his achievement. Why they might as well have put

a reaping hook in his hand, and bade him go find his food in the fields. He painfully raised himself on his elbow, looked with glassy eyes at the stuff, tried in vain to masticate a pinch of it, and then sunk back with a groan of despair. Native functionaries looked calmly on.

Forbes eventually got some more food and helped feed him, but raged against the indifference of the doctor.<sup>5</sup> It was a theme to which he returned again and again.

He found that the caste system was a huge barrier to action. Brahmins in some villages would refuse to work even though they were starving. Elsewhere some would not eat the food provided lest it undermine their caste status. He found that native landowners, zemindars, were refusing 'to move a muscle or expend a piece toward the instigation of the pressure of the famine' and were ready to let people starve around them. 'It is the greatest mistake in the world,' he wrote, 'to imagine that the better classes of rural India have any compassion for their poorer co-villagers, or the slightest inclination to alleviate them'. 'Over and over again sleek scoundrels, with facile lie and smiling face, denied the want that we afterwards detected in their midst'.<sup>6</sup>

He began to doubt that any better organisation could have coped and averted the levels of mortality. At the same time, Scottish Victorian that he was, Forbes believed vehemently in the importance of a labour test to check that the need was real. In other words, it was vital that all those seeking a food hand out should be put to work on relief works, such as roadbuilding or telegraph line erecting. But he soon saw what the labour test could mean in practice at a road building site.

We rode on in silence up the avenue of torture – if I may judge by myself, not daring to look at each other for very shame's sake. But we halted with a simultaneous exclamation before a spectacle more terribly ghastly than any horror begotten of the butcheries of war. There feebly tottered before us the living skeleton of a naked old man. The fleshless lips had receded from the yellow teeth and the sun-wizened gums. The hollow eyes had grown dim, and the cavities were half drifted up with dust. On the whole frame there was not an ounce of flesh. The skin of the abdomen had fallen in around the shrunken intestines; the miserable

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<sup>5</sup> *Daily News*, 31 March 1874.

<sup>6</sup> *Daily News*, 1 April 1874.



wretch had no thighs – only thigh bones. I could not have believed that the lamp of life could flicker in a frame so emaciated. But the old man was going through the pretence of labour. As he staggered on drearily, he carried on his head a little basket with about half a spadeful of earth in it; by one hand he half led, half dragged, a boy as emaciated as himself.

Before the old man collapsed at their feet they found that he had not been paid for four days and had not eaten for three.

These harrowing accounts were in marked contrast to the rather bland assurances coming from the Viceroy's office, but Northbrook was forced to admit there were cases where workers had not been paid and where the organisation was chaotic. A report of Forbes's in mid-February asserting that in some areas he had seen high-caste women working on relief schemes alongside common labourers, caused something of a sensation in London. His old adversary, Disraeli referred to it in a speech. The press in India denied that such a thing was happening. However, eventually his accusation was vindicated in an official report.<sup>7</sup> Forbes's conclusion was that Northbrook's 'petty economy' first delayed the transport service to the famine areas and then caused it to be poorly organised, with the result that the people suffered severely and unnecessarily.

As he admitted himself, Forbes was quite unprepared for the evidence of starvation: 'Paris, after the capitulation, was only an elementary school for it'. Although he had seen emaciated wretches at Dharbhanga, he now found even worse conditions in the east, especially amongst children, where one baby weighed less than 4lbs at six months. The horrors around him were far beyond what he was prepared for, particularly when he reached Bukhara on 2 March.

When I saw the emaciated wretches on the relief work at Durbungah [sic] their aspect filled me with horror, and that sense of horror I tried that your readers should share in. I honestly believed that I had seen the worse horror that famine could show me until it would give its victims the last wrench, and strew the roadside with their corpses. But I was mistaken ... I can find no words to describe the horror of the spectacle (here), nor have I heart to try. One's blood turned at the sight; one's

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<sup>7</sup> *Daily News*, 14 May 1874.

heart sickened as one looked at the terrible babies, with their shrivelled, meagre forms, instead of the plumpness of infancy, and with weird, shrunken faces, like the faces of old men.<sup>8</sup>

From Madhubani, Forbes, accompanied by two 'famine wallahs' district officers, Arthur and Frederick Forbes, headed south to Supaul carried overnight by bearers in a palkee to an area where there were no other Europeans. A few days earlier he had experienced his first elephant ride, clinging on desperately, he admitted. After the Forbes brothers left him he headed north and went a few hundred yards into Nepal. He spent a few days in the village of Nahara where again the apparent lack of concern on the part of the better-off shocked him. But nature was also conspiring. After a trip to Bhagalpur, on his return to Nahara he found that a huge hailstorm had wiped out the rubbee crop and destroyed the blossom of the mango trees.

Heading back to the frontier area with Nepal at Parihar and Kamtaul he found villages that had suffered equally badly in the great famine of 1866. However, there he found a Mr Coffin, who was trying to find work for the 'kuncks', the weakest of the poor, and a Mr Tripe, an indigo planter, who was organising house-to-house checks to find the starving who were too weak to come out. After a hectic schedule of visits, which he described as working in the sun all day, writing at meal times and travelling at night, Forbes collapsed, experiencing first deep depression and then hallucination, before sinking into unconsciousness. However, he quickly revived and set off on another 30 mile journey, this time in a palkee. Heading for Ramnagar and Motihari, and on towards Bettiah.

From a sweltering hot, dust-laden, wind-blown Bettiah he returned to his criticism of poor organisation and distribution.

Imagine, you people at home, you folks with fair income and balances at your bankers, you whose custom is craved by bakers, and butchers and purveyors, and so forth – imagine it come to this with you, that your money is mere dross or encumbrance, because sovereigns and half-crowns are not edible in any system of cookery. Picture to yourselves that, in the heart of the starving city, Government, having brought in some store of food from foreign parts, should have opened a single retail shop for the sale.

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<sup>8</sup> *Daily News*, 1 April 1874.

The result was that the wives of even the well-to-do were having to battle for food.<sup>9</sup>

By the time he got to Bettiah he had fully recovered and set off on a thirteen-mile horse ride to Shikarpur and then back to Bettiah. At this stage, after two months of almost continuous and arduous travel he had exhausted his resources and his clothes were wearing out. He decided to head back to Calcutta to refresh and catch-up with the news. He seems to have travelled, largely by pulkee, over three days to get there. There he found that some of his reports had caused scandal. The *Spectator* had talked of his reports having 'half-maddened the nation', while Lord Salisbury had questioned the truth of some of his accounts. The *Bombay Times* and, in London, the *Morning Post* rushed to the defence of Lord Northbrook, whom, they claimed had protected the Indian taxpayer (described as 'the real victims of the famine') and had applied careful good-sense to the distribution of funds.

Forbes had time for a quick visit to Government House for a few words with Captain Baring, the Viceroy's cousin and private secretary, but then on the night of 20 April 1874 set off north again to Rangpur, in what is now Bangladesh, with vague plans of heading to Katmandu. He was able to get a train to Muladi and then a trolley, worked by two men along the line to Azingunge. From there it was a boat, a 'dhingie', along the River Hooghly passing Murshidabad, once the capital of the Nawab of Bengal. In the cemetery there he found the graves of Elizabeth, daughter of Bengal's first Governor-General (1772–85) Warren Hasting, who had died at the age of two, and of Hastings's first wife, Mary. There was also the grave of Mrs Mattock, a granddaughter of the great Civil War Parliamentarian, John Hampden. Inevitably he felt the need to take a twenty-mile ride to the site of the battlefield of Plassey, Robert Clive's famous victory in 1757 against Suraja Dowla, the Nawab. Eventually, he crossed the Ganges and after another two days and nights of journey by palkee arrived at Rangpur. From there, he headed west for about 70 miles to Dinajpur and then back across the Ganges to Mungar, from where Sir Richard Temple was still co-ordinating the famine relief. In ten days he had travelled some 300 miles from Calcutta and of these had passed only one night in bed.<sup>10</sup>

By now the signs are that Forbes was wearying of his assignment and was losing faith in the solutions.

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<sup>9</sup> *Daily News*, 14 May 1874.

<sup>10</sup> *Daily News*, 2 June 1874.

Distress, no doubt, there will be of a kind and individual punches here and there; but to attempt to avert all suffering would be tantamount to an effort to prematurely install the millennium. Now it may be prejudice on my part, but it seems to me that if we try this anywhere, we may as well begin at least at home. I own to feeling more keenly for my honest neighbour in the next street, who is struggling under the burden of a large family, heavy house-rent, dear bread, dearer coals, and the high prices generally of a period of national prosperity, and a creditable disinclination to apply to the parish, than for a 'mild Hindoo', who is laziness incarnate, who requires to be coaxed to earn the money which is to keep him from starvation, and whose life has been a series of philosophically-borne 'pinches'. Let us keep him from starving by all means, but it is not wise to treat him so as to engender the wish in his bosom that 'famine' were the normal state of things.

Apparently, in the area in which he now was he saw evidence of the last happening.

In the middle of May he was back in Darbhanga, where he was full of praise for some of the lesser officials whom he had met in his travels, the famine wallahs, who had done so much. With that he left the famine areas, heading for Lucknow and the site of the key heroics of the Mutiny of which he had read so much. His three-day visit there and then to Cawnpore was to provide useful material for future writing. One such story was published later as 'The Double Coup de Grâce'. In this two brothers were in the Indian army in the 1850s. One wanted to get out and a common way was to strike a superior officer, which would lead to transportation to Australia and eventually to the prospect of a new life. However, so common had this become that the death penalty was introduced for the offence, although rarely used. One of the brothers was duly sentenced to death, while the other, unknowingly was put in charge of the firing squad. The firing squad deliberately missed and it was left to the sergeant to administer the coup de grâce with his pistol. Only as he was doing so did he discover that it was his brother. The shot was fired and then the sergeant took his own life. By Forbes's account both were from his own county of Banffshire.<sup>11</sup>

He was back in London on 25 June 1874. There was little doubt that particularly his early accounts of the starvation, which were picked up by

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<sup>11</sup> Forbes, 'The Double Coup de Grâce' in *Barracks, Bivouacs and Battles*, 112–28.

many of the provincial papers, had acted as a counter-weight to the rather complacent accounts emerging from the Viceroy's court. They prodded the authorities to action and stimulated charitable giving. On the other hand, papers such as the *Morning Post* were still claiming that the famine was largely imaginary and the cost of government famine relief would merely add to the burden on poor Indians.<sup>12</sup>

There was talk that Forbes would soon return to India to take up the editorship of the Calcutta paper, *The Englishman*. But, he had made enemies in government circles by his earlier criticism of the inefficiencies. Also, given how little time Forbes had actually spent in Calcutta it is difficult to see that there could have been much basis to this story and at the end of August the story was vigorously denied in *The Englishman*.<sup>13</sup> By now Forbes had got new terms from the *Daily News* with a long-term commitment and a cheque for £1000.<sup>14</sup>

Over the next few months Forbes concentrated on producing anonymous articles for the new weekly journal, *The World. A Journal for Men and Women*, that E. C. Grenville Murray and Edmund Yates had launched in July 1874. It was, according to the prospectus, to be 'an amusing chronicle of current history', would 'recognise women as a reasonable class in the community', would publish 'candid reviews' and 'entertaining fictions'. More importantly probably from Forbes's point of view, contributors could 'expect to get ample remuneration for their work'.<sup>15</sup> It was a journal that, with a substantial dose of gossip, quickly gained some notoriety, condemned by some as importing 'the worst principles of American journalism into the country'. Such a well-known figure as Forbes was an important catch for it, but it also brought him into a circle of well-known literati, Henry Labouchère, George Birkbeck Hill, a regular contributor to the *Saturday Review*, the pioneering woman journalist Eliza Lynn Linton, the art critic J. Comyns Carr, a fellow Scottish journalist Eneas Sweetland Dallas, and the French republican exile, Camille Barrère.

Early in November, however, it was reported that Forbes was seriously ill. The nature of the illness is not clear. It may have been something that he picked up in India. On the other hand, he clearly had had health problems

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<sup>12</sup> *Morning Post*, 26 May 1874.

<sup>13</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, 26 June 1874, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 29 June 1874, *Morning Post*, 31, August 1874.

<sup>14</sup> *Exeter Flying Post*, 5 August 1874.

<sup>15</sup> Edmund Yates, *His Recollections and Experiences*, Vol. 2 (London, 1884), 319.

of some kind since his army days. A month later, it was reported that he had fully recovered and that he was once again writing extensively for *The World*. This included a piece for the *World's* popular item 'Celebrities at Home' on the Prince of Wales at Sandringham, the estate in Norfolk, that the Prince had recently purchased and refurbished from his income from the duchy of Cornwall. He painted a picture of blissful domestic life with the Prince and his wife: 'In fine, there is no comelier or wholesomer domestic life than that enjoyed by the Prince and Princess of Wales when under their own rural roof-tree at Sandringham'.<sup>16</sup>

Something rather more exciting came his way at the end of the year, when news filtered through of a disaster to a ship, *The Cospatrick*, in the South Atlantic. The ship was carrying iron rails and iron blocks together with 429 emigrants, mainly farm labourers and their families from the Midlands, from Gravesend to Auckland in New Zealand. On the night of 17–18 November 1874 fire had broken out when the ship was some 200 miles south-west of the Cape of Good Hope. There was a rush for some of the lifeboats and the davits had bent under the weight of too many, tipping the occupants into the sea. In the end only two lifeboats with 30 in each succeeded in getting away. Bad weather separated the two boats and one was never heard of again. On the remaining lifeboat some of the survivors began to die for want of food and water; others were driven to madness by drinking sea water. By the time a ship, the *British Sceptre*, travelling from Calcutta to Dundee came across them, there were only five survivors and two of these died soon after they were landed on St Helena. The three who remained, led by Henry Macdonald, the second mate, were taken on board the *Nyanza*, which was sailing to Southampton.

Although there were some reports telegraphed from Madeira the details of what had happened were still sketchy. Journalists flocked to Plymouth to await the arrival of the *Nyanza*. The *Daily News's* correspondent in Plymouth contacted John Robinson to say that he could not see any way that he could get ahead of the competition and Robinson suggested that Forbes should go. Forbes put up in a small inn in the suburbs and kept out of sight, leaving his colleague to mix with the other journalists. In the afternoon of 31 December he got information that the *Nyanza* had passed the Lizard light, about 25 miles from Plymouth. He first went to the railway

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<sup>16</sup> Forbes, 'The Prince of Wales at Home', in Parton (ed.), *Some Noted, Princes, Authors, and Statesmen of our Time* (New York, 1885), 100–6. This is a reprint of the piece in E. Yates, *Celebrities at Home*, First Series, 1878.

station and engaged a whole first-class compartment on a train to leave at midnight. He had already hired a tug, the *Volunteer*, at the cost of some £100 and, together with an artist from the *Graphic*, in a stormy Channel off Plymouth, he waited for the *Nyanza*. The idea was to get to the ship before the mail tug went out carrying other journalists. In fact, some others had hired a tug and called out for Forbes, but he made no reply. When the *Nyanza* came close Forbes made a courageous leap just catching the bottom of the mizzen chains on the ship's side. He fell into the water and had to be hauled on board. Macdonald was, at first, wary of speaking to him, but appeals to a fellow Scot, claims to know Macdonald's home town of Montrose and perhaps Forbes even suggesting according to Macdonald, that he himself was a native of Montrose, all coupled with payment of £50 got Forbes his exclusive.

Meanwhile, the skipper of the *Volunteer* blocked the other tugs. By the time the mail tender hove to and some forty or fifty journalists leapt on board the *Nyanza* Forbes had had an hour of Macdonald's story. There was a *contretemps* when it was clear that the survivors had been bound to silence by Forbes and at least one rival reporter was threatened with violence. Once ashore Forbes took his catches to the nearby Duke of Cornwall Hotel and with the generous application of drink got from Macdonald the story of cannibalism. Forbes could not prevent a horde of journalists squeezing into his reserved carriage, but, none the less on 1 January it was the *Daily News* that had the scoop.<sup>17</sup> For some of Forbes's rivals this was not as journalism ought to be. The editor of the local *Western Morning News* accused Forbes of acting unfairly and warned that he would be denounced by fifty fellow-journalists. Forbes replied that he did not care and would fight the lot of them.<sup>18</sup> For Forbes, getting the scoop and beating the competition was precisely what it was about. Despite his standing it was clear that he had lost little of his acerbity and general pugnacity.

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<sup>17</sup> A. Arthur Reade, *Literary Success* (London, 1885), 78–9.

<sup>18</sup> *Western Morning News*, 9 January 1930.

## 8 Spain and Ireland

*The correspondent must be most things to all men; he must have the sweet, angelic temper of a woman, be as affable as if he were running for office, and at the same time be big and ugly enough to impress the conviction that it would be extremely unwise to take liberties with him.*

Archibald Forbes in *The Idler*, 3 February 1893

From Plymouth Forbes was off to Paris on his way to Spain to cover the return of King Alfonso XII. The First Republic had encountered huge problems. Although the plan was to create a federal republic of relatively autonomous provinces, very quickly there was rebellion with smaller cantons declaring their independence from Madrid. In a few months the new Republic went through four presidents with none capable of welding the different factions. In the North, Carlist supporters seized the moment to try to take control of the areas north of the River Ebro in the Basque Country and Navarre. With civil war spreading there was a search for an alternative to the Republic and the seventeen-year old Alfonso, who had had some training at Sandhurst, was identified by sections of the military. The end of the Republic was announced on 29 December 1874 after a *coup d'état* led by General Martinez Campos. Alfonso was summoned to the throne.

Forbes left for Paris on 2 January 1875 and two days later was in Marsailles from where Alfonso was to sail to Spain. Eventually four ships arrived and Alfonso, set off, together with accompanying journalists. The original plan had been for Alfonso to join the army of the north to mop up the remaining Carlist resistance before going to Madrid. However, in the event, Alfonso landed first at Barcelona and then at Valencia. From Valencia a special train took the king and a huge entourage, including Forbes, to Madrid, where there was what appeared to be a rapturous reception; 'the brilliancy of the gathering exceeded anything I have ever seen', according to Forbes.

While in Madrid Forbes had an interview with Emilio Castelar, the last president of the Republic. Forbes had first met him in February 1873 when he was still foreign minister. Castelar, although the most conservative of republicans, was about to go into exile in Switzerland. Forbes thought him



‘a dreamer whose aspirations are too good for this work-a-day world’.<sup>1</sup> In a sympathetic report, Forbes quoted Castelar’s view that the arrival of Alfonso would mark, ‘the dominance of priestcraft, the perpetuation of superstition, the wilful maintenance of ignorance, the suppression of the liberty of the press, freedom of thought, of instruction, and of culture in our academies and universities, general darkness over the face of all the land’.<sup>2</sup>

Two days later the King was heading north to Saragossa. This time Forbes decided to go by ordinary train to try to get a different perspective from the one that the royal clique had sought to impose on the train from Valencia. The journey proved more difficult than he had anticipated. About forty miles north of Madrid there was panic over news that Carlists were nearby and shooting railway officials. In the journey from Valencia Forbes had noticed that station after station had been burned down. The train crew refused to go further and the train was taken back to Guadalajara. Once a couple of royalist troop trains had gone through, Forbes’s train followed slowly. Due to arrive at Saragossa at 7am, it eventually arrived at five in the afternoon. Saragossa was a republican city and the welcome for the King was restrained and largely confined to the army and the clergy.

The intention of the royal journey was eventually to meet up with the army of the north so that the King could be seen to be leading the army to the relief of Pamplona, a town besieged by the Carlists for the previous six months. Forbes, desperate for action, had travelled north in the hope of seeing a battle through the Carascal Pass to Pamplona. When he reached Tafalla about four miles from the Carlist front line he was appalled by the lack of enterprise shown by the royalist army, who seemed in no hurry to attack. It did, however, give him a chance to reminisce about Wellington’s battles against Marshal Soult in the Peninsular War.

In the end, Forbes missed what action there was, the relief of Pamplona at the end of January and the Carlist counter-attack, because he was summoned back to London as a witness in a libel case brought by two money lenders against *The World*. Henry Beyfus and Alfred Boss sued Henry Freeman, the printer, over an anonymous piece (certainly by Labouchère) on ‘West-End Usurers’. The article, with barely suppressed anti-semitism, attacked money lenders who were lending to the middle classes at high rates of interest. It listed the names of some of these money-lenders including Beyfus and

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Field, ‘An English War Correspondent’, 301.

<sup>2</sup> *Daily News*, 30 January 1875.

Boss. What the complainants particularly objected to was the suggestion that people like themselves tended to be former bankrupts and were now trading under false names. The initial appearance before a magistrate was to try to ascertain the authorship of the article. Freeman refused to produce the manuscript. Edmund Yates and Henry Labouchère, who were partners in the enterprise, refused to divulge the author and claimed that the manuscript had been destroyed. Forbes said that he had not seen the original piece and generally refused to divulge much information, refusing even to admit to being the special correspondent of the *Daily News* in Madrid. In the end the magistrate ruled that evidence of the charge of malice had not been shown and, on the other side, there was evidence that the publication of the piece had been in the public interest.<sup>3</sup>

A week later Forbes, now created a Knight of the Order of Charles III of Spain, was on his way to Ireland to cover the Tipperary by-election. The election was caused by the death of C.W.White, a Liberal turned Home Ruler. The excitement was caused by the fact that John Mitchel was returning to stand as a candidate, if necessary against a Home Rule League candidate. Mitchel had been a leading figure in the Young Ireland movement and then in the Irish Confederation of 1847–48, a Fenian. Charged with sedition he had been sentenced to fourteen years transportation. After a spell in the notorious penal colony of Bermuda he was sent to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). In 1853, while released on parole, he made a dramatic escape helped by the future Irish MP, P.J.Smyth. He settled in America where he established a radically nationalist press and pro-independence movement. He had lost much of his standing in the United States because of his support for the Confederacy during the Civil War but had then quarrelled with the Confederate leader, Jefferson Davis. However, in Ireland his standing revived after the publication of his *Jail Journal* in 1868. It was a powerful indictment of his treatment in prison and of his trial and sentence, blamed on a packed jury. At the same time he firmly implanted the view that the Irish famine of 1845 was the creation of the British government.

Forbes arrived in Clonmel in county Tipperary on 16 February 1875 where he found that Mitchel had not yet landed from the United States and so he decided to head for Cork to see his arrival. By the time a slow train had got him there, Mitchel had settled into the Victoria Hotel. Forbes met him there, although there is no evidence of an interview. He found a sick man:

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<sup>3</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 February 1875.

'He was physically a wreck; pale and feeble and emaciated. So weak that he had to be supported by two friends from the hotel omnibus into the railway carriage on his departure this forenoon'.<sup>4</sup> Always keen to remind his readers of his own past Forbes compared him to the sick Napoleon III surrendering to Bismarck.

Forbes travelled with the ailing Mitchel to Clonmel and to Tipperary, where, although not a strongly republican area, there was a huge nationalist crowd. In a recurring theme of his pieces from Ireland he wrote,

I do not desire to malign any city, but I feel compelled to avow that for an hour before his departure [from Tipperary] I did not see a totally sober person of the male sex.

Clonmel with, according to Forbes, no fewer than ninety whisky shops, was no better.

At the nomination it was found that no one had dared offer themselves as a candidate against Mitchel and the returning officer had no alternative but to declare him elected. However, two days later, on a motion of the Prime Minister, Disraeli, Mitchel was declared ineligible being a convicted felon, and a writ for a fresh election was issued. Forbes's racy letters from Tipperary, with the tone of fun-poking at the Irish, did not endear him to the local nationalists and the landlord of the hotel asked him to leave lest the windows of the hotel be smashed. The Chief Constable added his voice and Forbes departed.

On his return to Dublin on 25 February Forbes found the veracity of one of his accounts once again being questioned. In his first report on arrival in Dublin he had given a slightly amusing account of conversation with the cab driver, reproducing something similar to a caricature Irish brogue. He then went on to say that when he had arrived at Jury's Hotel and asked about Mitchel and also about the station for the train to Clonmel, whoever he spoke to claimed no knowledge of either. Henry Jury of the hotel had written to the *Irish Times* denying that Forbes had spoken to anyone in the hotel. Forbes now published a vigorous reply identifying the waiter and 'boot' as the people to whom he had spoken and seeking an apology from Jury. He also ensured that his letter was published in the *Daily News*.<sup>5</sup> Forbes did not

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<sup>4</sup> *Daily News*, 18 February 1875.

<sup>5</sup> *Daily News*, 25 February 1875.

remain in Ireland for the second election on 13 March when Mitchel was again returned with a large majority against a Conservative, Stephen Moore. A week later, however, Mitchel died and Parliament declared, ignoring the ghost of John Wilkes, that since the voters of Tipperary had knowingly voted for someone who was ineligible then his opponent should be seated.

In April it was reported that Forbes was preparing to go to India, accompanying the Prince of Wales on his tour. All the well-known 'specials' were to be there; Russell of the *Times*, Sala of the *Telegraph*, Henty of the *Standard*, Sidney Hall of the *Graphic*, Edward Legge of the *Morning Post* and William Simpson of the *Illustrated London News*. However, Forbes, who was listed to go for the *Daily News* again took ill. He was very unwell, so much so that it was only with difficulty, and against the advice of his doctor, that he was able to attend the Queen's levy in June to be presented to the Prince of Wales, by the Marquis of Huntly. Towards the end of June he was well enough to attend a gathering of journalists at the country house of the flamboyant watchmaker and London local politician, Sir John Bennett, 'laughing, chaffing, talking as fast as tongue can go, paying extravagant and amusing compliments to the ladies'.<sup>6</sup> However, a month later it was reported that he had to undergo an operation and would not be going to India. He did, however, manage north with a party in early September for the Braemar Highland Gathering and in November he was, after all, on his way to India with the Prince.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ipswich Journal*, 29 June 1875.

## 9 Passage through India

*I begin somewhat reluctantly to own to myself that the task of describing in detail the episodes of the tour of His Royal Highness is scarcely compatible with an aspiration which has not indeed been 'the dream of my life', but which nevertheless I nourished with considerable fervour.*

*Daily News*, 14 December 1875

Early in October 1875 the Prince of Wales, much against the wishes of his mother, embarked on his long-discussed trip to India. It was seen as potentially dangerous: the Mutiny was only eighteen years before, parts of India were just out of famine and the Gaekwar of Baroda had recently been deposed for trying to poison the British resident. The Prince's journey took him to Paris, where he met Marshal MacMahon, to Bologna, Ancona and on to Brindisi where he boarded the yacht *Serapis* on 11 October. As well as a large entourage, including the Duke of Sutherland and Sir Bartle Frere, some fifteen journalists were approved to report on the trip. Forbes was one of these, although, perhaps a little to Forbes's chagrin, W. H. Russell was allowed to travel with the Prince in the Royal yacht as an honorary private secretary. Forbes made his way across Europe, stopping off briefly in Milan to report the visit of the Emperor Wilhelm to Italy. He reached Alexandria on 21 October, a couple of days before the Royal yacht was due from Brindisi and he followed the royal progress to Ismalia and Cairo, where the Prince was met by the Khedive. After a brief stop in Aden, where Forbes found 'some little amusement' from the civilians 'appearing in high black hats of obsolete shape, resuscitated in some instances from half-forgotten hat boxes', the royal flotilla reached Bombay (Mumbai) on 8 November.

Forbes's early brief accounts were sent initially by telegram, but these were followed by lengthy reports arriving about a month later. The reports devoted considerable length to accounts of the lavish formal welcomes that the Prince received, often with a wry amusement at the jockeying for position by the native princes. He found some of the show 'splendid, but somewhat grotesque'. But he was full of praise for the urbanity and dignity of the Prince, in contrast to the attitudes of the British officials.

The native princes and chiefs on whose brows sat frowns at fanciful slights and chill punctilious courtesy at the hands of the Viceroy, thawed into enthusiastic satisfaction under the influences of the genial yet dignified treatment by the Prince. They recognised with appreciated candour his solicitude to comply with their ceremonial etiquette, his punctuality, a virtue so rare in the East, his inexhaustible energy, and his never-failing fund of high-bred courtesy.<sup>1</sup>

Forbes admired Edward's readiness to endure, often in full-dress uniform, ceremony after ceremony, often lasting several hours, in temperatures of over 30 degrees in the shade. As befitted someone very conscious of his own dignity, the Prince showed a remarkable ability to know just how far forward on the carpet in front of the throne to go to greet a local dignitary. Some were required to come to him, but for the greatest of Indian rulers the welcome was on the edge of the carpet.

The reporting of ceremonial events and of the Prince's regular hunting forays, Forbes clearly soon found tedious. As he said himself, he longed to be able to 'describe varied phases of Indian life, opinions, characters and peculiarities' but was finding it difficult to get behind the 'swept, garnished and decorated' India that the royal visit occasioned.

It is trying to one's temper to find oneself in a country the aspect and conditions of which present so much novelty, and to find oneself compelled to mere glimpses where one would fain have detailed inspections, – and forced to mere cursory sketches where one would give much, having given time and study to the subject, to write full and accurate descriptions.<sup>2</sup>

His report of a trip to Baroda by the Prince caused some controversy. The new teenage Gaekwar of Baroda had laid on entertainments for the Prince that to Forbes were reminiscent of the circuses of ancient Rome. The cruelty of the spectacle clearly appalled him. There were elephant fights and rhinoceros fights and tiger baiting.

Buffaloes succeeded behemoth; genuine wild buffaloes of the swampy jungle – brutes that among their native bulrushes will fearlessly face the

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<sup>1</sup> *Daily News*, 15 November 1875.

<sup>2</sup> *Daily News*, 3 January 1876.

tiger himself. One is black and sleek, the other dun and rough. There is no question about their ardour for the battle; with straining sinew they rush to the encounter. At the first crash the dun loses a horn close to the scalp. The agony must be horrible; the blood streams from the raw pith on to the sand, but the fighting demon is rampant in the dun, and he battles madly on. But he cannot sustain the unequal contest long, and it is a relief from the sickening spectacle when he wheels, dashes blindly against the barricade, half staggers, half crouches under it, and is lost sight of as, mad with pain and terror, he rushes out into the open and the scared populace flying wildly from his infuriated track.<sup>3</sup>

His own paper and others were mildly critical of the Prince's involvement with such cruelty.<sup>4</sup>

From Bombay it was on to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), with a brief halt in the Portuguese enclave of Goa, where Forbes was fascinated by the then largely-abandoned relics of Old Goa. The royal yacht arrived in Colombo on 1 December and, after a brief overnight stay, Forbes made his way, on the engine of a local train, to Kandy, the official capital. He was full of admiration for the beautiful countryside through which the train passed. Ahead of the arrival of the Prince he was able to devote space to an account of the *rodiyas*, the pariah, lowest caste who had no rights, could not draw water from the same well as others, could not use ferries, till land or learn a trade. They were even forbidden to beg and had to warn the higher castes if they were likely to come near. Much as he loved the pomp and ceremony, Forbes always had this ability to look behind the arras and see aspects of the reality.

The plan for the Prince's visit to Kandy had involved the ceremony of Parahera with the displaying of the tooth of the Buddha, the Dalada. Torrential rain meant that much of the ceremony had to be curtailed and Forbes was not impressed by what he described as 'shabby and dilapidated' temples. Nor did he accept the authenticity of the tooth, which, he asserted, had been destroyed by the Portuguese in Goa in 1560.

Because of news of cholera outbreaks in South India there had been some doubt about the Prince's planned visit to Madras (Chennai). However, the concerns seem to have passed and the *Serapis* departed for Madras on 10 December. The fifteen journalists, however, had to find their own transport

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<sup>3</sup> *Daily News*, 13 December 1875.

<sup>4</sup> *Daily News*, 15 December 1875; *Athenaeum*, 18 December 1875.

and all that was available was a small steamer, provided by the Governor, 'like a Thames penny steamer that had been lying rusting for some years'. At first the skipper declared that he had to wait for port clearance, but was eventually browbeaten by the journalists to sail without permission. The ship then hit a severe storm and it looked at times as if it would founder. It was forty hours before they eventually made land at Tuticorin by which time the Prince was on his way to Trichinopoly (Tiruchirappalli). The journalists were there able to hitch a lift in a luggage truck. They tried to get to Madras ahead of the Prince, but the train was shunted into a siding in order to allow the royal train to pass and Forbes failed to see the Prince's arrival in the city.

He was, however, impressed by the spread of Madras, a city he said, of palatial houses and no bungalows. Houses had great gardens with space between them and he did wonder at the practicalities of dealing with such distances. People talked, he said, of *rus in urbe* (the country in the town), but here was 'all rus and no urbs'. He relished the fox hunt – or rather jackal hunt – laid on for the prince, but to the eye of the ex-dragoon the military parade of native troops was a 'shambling, shoddy, self-shaming' affair.

With the arrival in Calcutta (Kolkata) on Christmas Eve Forbes was back in the area that he knew from his visit of the previous year. The reception for the Prince was 'far short of the meanest provincial place so far visited', but it gave Forbes the chance to digress to his favourite topic of history. Here was 'the brightest gem in the crown of England, [and] it was placed in that diadem at the cost of the blood and the lives of countless devoted subjects'. There were visits to the French enclave of Chandernagore, thirty kilometres north of Calcutta and polo matches laid on by the Rajah of the mountain state of Munipoor.

From Calcutta the journey was into the areas where the Mutiny of only nineteen years before had been at its fiercest. In a place like Patna there were still signs of disaffection, and as W.H. Russell wrote, 'it has been found necessary, I believe, to lock up a good many people whose pronounced opinions, or previous history, were of a nature to attract the attention of the authorities'.<sup>5</sup> But such places allowed Forbes to indulge his knowledge and enthusiasm for the events of 1857. Lucknow, which he had visited the year before, was a name that 'stirs the pulses of a Briton as the trumpet blast thrills the blood of a war-horse'. He was particularly excited about meeting with Mrs Kavanagh, the widow of T. Henry Kavanagh, the first civilian to be

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<sup>5</sup> W.H. Russell, *The Prince of Wales' Tour* (London, 1877), 382.



awarded the Victoria Cross for having carried a despatch through the rebel lines from the besieged in Lucknow to Sir Colin Campbell's relieving force.

The Prince laid the foundation stone of a monument to those native troops who had remained loyal and who fell defending the Residency in Lucknow – 'the faithful among the faithless – only they'. Once again, however, Forbes turned a critical eye on the regime.

We owe these men an incalculable debt; it was questionable whether, as one looked on the miserable condition of some of them, and saw with what tremulous eagerness they presented to the Prince petitions for the amelioration of their condition, we are fulfilling our obligation with a thoroughness which is incumbent upon us.

The native population he found indifferent to the Prince's visit 'with an ostentatious sullenness that was eloquent of disaffection'. He had no doubt that, if chance offered, Lucknow 'would be at our throats again, with a cruel, prompt alacrity'. Despite the fact that large numbers of the 'most avowedly turbulent and dangerous inhabitants' had been locked up before the visit, everywhere Forbes wandered in the native city he came across hostile looks. It was a similar story across the river in Cawnpore (Kanpur) where the Prince made a brief stop.<sup>6</sup>

Once again Forbes had to admit that he missed the royal arrival in Delhi because his train had been shunted into a siding to let the Prince through. He was, however, in time for the military review of both native and European troops. It was organised by the veteran of so many India wars, Napier of Magdala, who had his collar-bone broken on the first day when his charger went from under him. For once Forbes was impressed by both Indian and British troops. It caused him to pose the question why was it that the British soldiers, although small in number, had been able to beat off the revolting Sepoys, when the native army was so impressive and, indeed the Sikhs and Pathans who made it up were generally two or three inches taller than the average 'Tommy Atkins'.

After Delhi it was on to Lahore, Amritsar and Agra, where the architecture of the Golden Temple failed to impress and which the Prince declined to enter. There was, however, a trip to Gwalior, about 70 miles from Agra to visit Rajah Skindia whose troops had mutinied, but who, himself, had fled to

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<sup>6</sup> *Daily News*, 8 February 1876.

take refuge with the British. In the aftermath, the Rajah had been allowed to keep an army of 10,000, albeit one clad in 'weary old British army uniforms'. It was a mere façade of independence since the guns of the British state were trained on the Rajah's palace. Forbes wondered if the Rajah 'with the seemingly jovial face that sets every now and then into a pain-struck earnestness, really loves us or no'.<sup>7</sup>

This was the end of the Royal Tour. The prince took a few days on a private hunting expedition in the Terai jungle of southern Nepal, bagging his first tiger, followed by some dallying in the harem of the first minister, Prince Jung Bahadur, before making for Bombay and home. Forbes remained a few more days, but penned a final letter to the editor from India, headed 'Our Tenure of India'. He began by saying how lucky the British had been in 1857 to have clung on. There was the luck that it had been possible to divert to India forces destined for China; there were exceptional leaders, like Lawrence and Nicholson to hand; there was the fact of the Sikhs staying loyal and of the Nizam of Hyderabad ensuring that south India did not rebel. Since then, Forbes argued, the British had relied on keeping the rulers contented, but there was no way that the mass of the native population was ever going to like us. All except traders hated the British and even they were only friendly through self-interest. The hold over the Indians was by force: 'we don't as the dominant race give the subject race much chance to like us'. But it was wrong to rely on the native rulers, because 'it is very certain that they, for the most part, like us worse than do the common people'. After all, despite the veneer of authority given to them, 'they are sat upon by agents, dragooned with more or less superficially courteous sternness by residents, brought up all standing by politicals'.

It was difficult, he argued, to see what purpose maintaining native rule served. Under direct rule there was the possibility of introducing reforms, bringing some justice and doing what could be done to bring prosperity. Native rule fostered and perpetuated many evils. In a telling phrase he described India as 'our Oriental Ireland' and home rulers were not courted in Ireland. What seems to have particularly concerned Forbes was the practice of allowing native rulers the right to maintain their armies and, although, as in the case of Gwalior, size was restricted to a mere 10,000, rulers had learned to adopt Prussian methods of having short service so that as many as 100,000 might have received some training. Reflecting the growing

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<sup>7</sup> *Daily News*, 28 February 1876.

fears that in time Britain could face an invasion of India from the north-west by Russia, Forbes had little confidence that the native armies would not be turned against the British.<sup>8</sup> These views challenged what was the core of British imperial policy since the events of 1857 and was to remain central to the British approach until the last days of empire. Forbes showed no sign of believing that the people of India were capable of running their own affairs, but he did recognise that the only justification for empire was the possibility of bringing reform that could, in time, lead on to self-determination.

Forbes seems to have taken a relatively leisurely journey home and was back in London at the beginning of May, looking bronzed and fit. His reputation had further grown as a result of his Indian reports and he joined various literary lions – J. A. Froude, Robert Browning, Matthew Arnold – as well as his journalist colleagues and rivals, Edmund Yates and G. A. Sala, at a banquet given by the Lord Mayor. Two weeks later he was toasting the army, the navy and the reserved forces at the Newspaper Press Fund dinner. His, for once, powerful speech warned of the danger of impending war and went on to argue that the best war correspondents were those who had some experience of the arts of war, carefully exempting W. H. Russell, who had been with him in India, from the comments. He also singled out his ‘dear and dauntless friend’ George Henty who had reported on many wars since the Crimea. It was a speech that led to some hostile comment. The *Nottinghamshire Guardian* disliked the way in which journalists had become public figures. Anonymity was the safeguard of press purity. It disliked Forbes identifying himself as a former soldier and, therefore, as a good war correspondent. Forbes, it felt, rather revelled in war.<sup>9</sup>

Apparently the intention of the *Daily News* was to send Forbes, on his return from India, to Philadelphia to cover the centenary celebrations of the American colonies’ Declaration of Independence. But there were signs of growing tension in the Ottoman Empire and Forbes was kept back. This gave him time to take a trip north for some fishing near Braemar. On the way north, he visited Middlesbrough to give a first-hand account of the growing problems of the iron industry. Cleveland was one of the newest areas of iron production, with the first iron-stone in useable quantities having been discovered there only in 1850. By now, however, the way between Stockton and Middlesbrough was studded thickly with ironworks, but many were standing

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<sup>8</sup> *Daily News*, 18 March 1876.

<sup>9</sup> *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 26 May 1876.

idle. His intervention was triggered by a piece in the *Daily News* of 19 June which largely blamed the problems of the industry on the higher wages and shorter hours that the iron workers had been able to gain in the boom years of the early 1870s. Forbes's pieces were more nuanced. He recognised that the switch from iron rails, that had been the staple of the Cleveland industry, to steel rails played its part and that Cleveland iron ore with its high phosphoric content could not as yet be made into good steel. There was also a collapse of railway construction in Europe, while the United States were producing their own rails. It was true that wages were higher and hours shorter than those of competitors on the continent, but there had also been over-production in the boom years with financiers ready to lend to anyone who asked for a loan, while in these more difficult times financiers were not lending.<sup>10</sup>

This last, once again, illustrates how Forbes, even in a field quite unfamiliar to him, had the ability to grasp and sum up a situation. He clearly had been able in a day to get information from people in the area, read enough to understand the situation and quickly to form an opinion, always with the concern to find something original to say.

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<sup>10</sup> *Daily News* 26, 28 June 1876.

## 10 A Balkan War

*Amidst the noise and din of battle, and in close proximity to bursting shells, whose dust would sometimes fall on the paper, I have seen him calmly writing his description of the battle, not taking notes to be worked up afterwards, but actually writing the vivid account that was to be transmitted to the wire, and the work was always good.*

Frederic Villiers on Forbes in *Peaceful Personalities and Warriors Bold*  
(London, 1907), 243

Tension in the Ottoman Government's Balkan territories had been growing for some time and this was producing stress between the great powers of Austria, Russia and Germany, all of whom had ambitions to fill the vacuum of a fading Turkish Empire. An insurrection in Herzegovina in July 1875 had Serbian support and aroused fears of Russian involvement since the events had stirred a latent Pan-Slav movement in Russia. At the end of the year Gyula Andrássy, the prime minister of the Hungarian part of the Habsburg Empire, published a note to all the signatories of the 1856 Treaty of Paris that had ended the Crimean War. It called for complete religious freedom in Bosnia and Herzegovina, an end to tax-farming, the use of locally-raised taxes to meet local needs, and the right of Christians to acquire land, with a joint Christian-Moslem commission to oversee the reforms. The Turks largely accepted these proposals and the great powers to all intents approved, but they did not go far enough for the insurgents and soon volunteers from Serbia and Montenegro, having already gained their freedom from Turkish control, began to pour into the rebelling provinces. In May 1876, Moslems in Salonika murdered the French and German consuls. The German Chancellor, Bismarck brokered a meeting between Austria-Hungary and Russia that issued the Berlin Memorandum. This agreement largely restated the demands of the Andrássy Note, with some additional reforms, such as the concentration of Turkish troops in only a few localities. While France and Italy were prepared to go along with these proposals, Britain rejected them, partly because of slighted *amour propre* at not having

been consulted and partly as a result of a gradually hardening British policy that meant propping up the Ottoman Empire for fear of Russian advance.

Inevitably all of this led to stresses between reformers and resisters within the Sublime Porte, the Ottoman government. In May 1876 a group of reformist politicians led by Midhat Pasha, deposed Sultan Abdul Aziz and replaced him with his nephew, Murad. Murad V turned out to be insane and at the end of August he too was deposed and replaced by Abdul Hamid. Meanwhile, on top of continuing unrest in Bosnia Herzegovina an insurrection broke out in Bulgaria. The romantic, revolutionary poet, Hristo Botev, and some 200 supporters, seized one of the Danube steamers, the *Radetsky* and landed on Bulgarian soil and declared insurrection. Botev fell in the first skirmish and the main insurrection petered out, but discontent, largely against the heavy taxes being imposed by the Turks, rumbled on with occasional violent outbursts.

At the end of June, Serbia, led by Milan Obrenović, formally declared war on Turkey, confident of Russian support and hopeful of acquiring control over Bosnia and Hertzegovina. Urged on by the Belgrade intelligentsia and encouraged by the arrival of the Pan-slavic Russian general, M. G. Cherniaev [Tcherniaeff], who saw Serbia as the Piedmont of the South Slavs, the focus of a new Balkan state, the Serbs went to war. Meanwhile, the Bulgarian insurrection was being brutally crushed by a force of Turkish irregulars. There was growing public indignation in Britain at what quickly became labelled Bulgarian atrocities. It was another perfect arena for Forbes's skills.

Forbes reached Pest on 5 July 1876, but had to hang around waiting for a steamboat to take him down river towards Belgrade. He arrived there on 8 July, by which time two Serbian armies were heading south-east towards Niš, while a third was heading due south. The Austrians had made clear that they would oppose Serbian seizure of Bosnia and so the tactic was to head towards Bulgaria, anticipating meeting up with Bulgarian insurgents. He found a Belgrade gripped by war fever, full of stories of Serbian victories and deeply suspicious of all foreigners as possible spies. He was also struck by the emptiness of Belgrade with almost all men of military age in the army. With no knowledge of Serbian, there was a need to find a translator for the road. Various Austrians and Serbs with German language and some French offered themselves, but most of the Austrians were not sober and most Serbs were liable to be conscripted into the reserve. Forbes eventually persuaded the head-waiter of the Serbischo Krone Hotel to become his servant. Andreas proved to have a knowledge of some half-dozen languages.

He was wonderfully able to forage supplies and proved to have cousins 'chiefly of the female variety' all over Serbia!<sup>1</sup> Initially reporters were being forbidden to proceed to the battle-front, but Forbes and some others were able, with the help of Andreas, to persuade the war minister and the minister of the interior to grant them credentials and to telegraph Prince Milan and get them invited to his headquarters in Aleksinac.

Forbes was joined by a young artist fresh from the Royal Academy school who had been sent from the *Graphic* to produce illustrations of the war. This was Frederic Villiers, himself to become one of the best known of war artists. He came carrying a letter of introduction to Forbes and he caught up with him in Paraćin and noted his first impression.

The most remarkable figure in the whole busy scene, sauntering quietly along, elbowing his way through the motley crowd, was a tall, well-built man in knickers and jacket of homespun, with tam o' shanter bonnet cocked over his handsome, sunburned face, a short cherry-wood pipe below his tawny moustache.<sup>2</sup>

They seem to have taken to each other at once and Villiers never lost his admiration for Forbes, describing him as 'the most remarkable personality' he had ever come across and, on more than one occasion, testifying to the fact that he owed much of his success in his profession to Forbes's tutelage.<sup>3</sup> Forbes and Villiers set off in a hired carriage. Aleksinac was about 130 miles from Belgrade, a journey that normally took three days, but with eight changes of horses, they made it in twenty hours in what must have been a brutal journey in a 'stout, springless vehicle of preternatural jolting powers'. Good roads were rare:

There are ruts occasionally of fathomless depth; and after a journey in a Servian road one has much the same feeling as he might expect after about half-a-dozen free fights, in which he got the worst of it, and was then knocked down and danced upon by a lively crowd wearing exceptionally heavy boots'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Forbes, *Memories*, 269.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Villiers, *Pictures of Many Lands* (London, 1902), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Villiers, *Peaceful Personalities and Warriors Bold* (London, 1907), 243.

<sup>4</sup> *Daily News*, 19 July 1876.

By the time they got to their destination the Serbians were facing setbacks and Prince Milan had pulled back to Paraćin. There the talk was of numerous Turkish atrocities against peasants in villages, with women and children raped and murdered and the noses of wounded soldiers being slit.

The Serbs had launched their aggressive onslaught with inadequate forces, a single brigade of regular soldiers, most of whom perished in the early encounters, and levies of militia and volunteers. Forbes saw them as victims of Russian intrigue, buoyed up by stories that the Russian army was enthusiastic for the Serbian cause and delusional in believing that Russia would actively intervene. By the end of July feelers were being put out for British intervention and Forbes added his voice, calling for British aid for the many wounded. Cherniaiev's tactics were direct attacks, in typical Russian manner, on Turkish fortified positions with scant regard for the cost in lives. But such tactics were devastating on the numbers and morale of such a small country.

Forbes's reports from Serbia once again attracted attention. He was not in the best position to get the facts of the conflict, but as the *Examiner* commented, 'he seems somehow to get at them. His is still without an equal as a war correspondent'.<sup>5</sup> However, it was Januarius MacGahan's reports on atrocities against the Christian Bulgarians that were capturing public attention and dividing the nation, although more than one paper assumed at first that the special correspondent was in fact Forbes.<sup>6</sup> MacGahan was an American working for the *New York Herald* and had been reporting the war from the Turkish side. Reports of massacres of Christians in the Bulgarian provinces had been filtering through since May, mainly from refugees and eye-witnesses who had made it to Constantinople. The first rumours of atrocities had reached Constantinople in early June and Edward Pears, the resident correspondent of the *Daily News* in the city reported these. There was talk of hundreds of villages being destroyed and of massacres of anything from 18,000 to 30,000.<sup>7</sup> They received short shrift from the British government whose declared policy was the defence of Turkey. Disraeli talked of 'coffee-house babble' and tried a joke about how Turks generally dealt with offenders. Lord Derby, the Foreign Secretary, bemoaned the failure of the Turkish government to snuff out the insurrection quickly. Under pressure from the Liberal opposition for an inquiry into the rumours, Disraeli,

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<sup>5</sup> *Examiner*, 29 July 1876.

<sup>6</sup> See for example *Dundee Courier*, 16 August 1876 and *Derbyshire Times*, 2 September 1876.

<sup>7</sup> *Daily News*, 8, 23, 30 June 1876.



the prime minister, rather reluctantly agreed to send Walter Baring, a fourth secretary at the Constantinople embassy to investigate. At the same time, he did not hide his scepticism about the claims of tens of thousands of deaths and torture. It was, in response to this that the *Daily News* encouraged MacGahan to get some facts. In July he and a fellow American, Eugene Schuyler, the United States Consul in Constantinople, ventured into Bulgaria and began producing reports that more than confirmed the earlier stories of Turkish atrocities against Christians. His report from one village, Tatar Bazardjik, was particularly powerful.

On approaching the town on a hill yesterday there were some dogs. They ran away, and we found on this spot a number of skulls scattered about, and one ghastly heap of skeletons with clothing. I counted from the saddle a hundred skulls, picked and licked clean; all of women and children. We entered the town. On every side were skulls and skeletons charred among the ruins, or lying entire where they fell in their clothing. There were skeletons of girls and women with long brown hair hanging to the skulls. We approached the church. There these remains were more frequent, until the ground was literally covered with skeletons, skulls and putrified bodies in clothes. Between the church and the school there were heaps. The stench was fearful. We entered the churchyard. The sight was more dreadful. The whole churchyard for three feet deep was festering with dead bodies, partly covered – hands, legs, arms and heads projected in ghastly confusion.<sup>8</sup>

In this one area, MacGahan and Schuyler calculated some three thousand bodies and the pattern was confirmed over the next few weeks in village after village. They blamed not only the irregular Bashi-Bazouks, but local Turks who had turned on their Bulgar neighbours.

MacGahan's reports were collated into a pamphlet, *The Turkish Atrocities in Bulgaria* and its impact was immediate; according to Forbes, 'men travelling in railway carriages were to be noticed with flushed faces and moistened eyes as they read them'.<sup>9</sup> Groups around the country called for condemnation and action and William Gladstone, who at this stage had given up the leadership of the Liberal party, took up the cause. He published on 6 September 1876

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<sup>8</sup> *Daily News*, 7 August 1876.

<sup>9</sup> Dale L. Walker, *Januarinus MacGahan. The Life and Campaigns of an American War Correspondent* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 2006), 188.

a powerful pamphlet entitled *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*. It called for the removal of the Turks from European soil that they had 'soaked in blood' and in a memorable peroration declared, 'Let the Turks now carry away their abuses in the only possible manner, namely by carrying off themselves. Their Zaptiehs and their Mudirs, their Bimbashis and their Yuzbachis, their Kaimakams and their Pashas, one and all, bag and baggage, shall, I hope, clear out from the province they have desolated and profaned.' The Conservative government in contrast was more concerned with the possible advance of Russia towards Constantinople than with the massacre of Balkan peasants. They disliked the very idea of insurrection against authority and blamed the Russians for having fomented the Bulgarian uprising. Conservative foreign policy further hardened into a defence of the Ottoman Empire and the country was deeply divided. It was the most emotional issue of foreign policy since the Crimean war twenty years before.

Forbes got to Prince Milan's headquarters in Paraćin on 14 July and was able to get a meeting with the Prince. Until then, because of the prevailing attitudes of the British government, only two British correspondents had been allowed at the headquarters. Forbes wanted to get to the battle front at Zaječar as soon as possible, but permission was refused for a week and he had to content himself with accounts of life at the Serbian headquarters. He eventually got permission to make his way south of Aleksinac. For some reason he had to make a short visit to Belgrade, which involved a journey from Aleksinac to Paraćin by a post-omnibus, a journey of some eight miles that took 30 hours. By the time he returned on 1 August Turkish troops had crossed the frontier and the roads were crowded with tens of thousands of refugees fleeing their advance.

Forbes managed to make his way to Zaječar which was being bombarded by the Turks. He had company with a couple of French correspondents who were very reluctant to go forward, but seemed to have been shamed by the presence of a young Austrian Red Cross nurse. There was little to eat apart from bread and wine and the city was no longer defensible. After two days in the place he joined the headlong retreat in a dreadful journey through the mountains.

It was a horrible nightmare, that march from Saitchar (Zaječar). Cannons roaring, flames lighting up the valley, gusts of thick smoke driven athwart the hill faces, the heavens lightning flashing against the lightning of man, a narrow steep road crammed with fugitives fleeing

from the cannon thunder, blazing smoke, women clamouring wildly that the Turk is close behind them, children shrieking and sobbing, animals, oxen, sheep, goats, swine, poultry in an extricable entanglement on the Via Dolorosa. Ask these miserable panic-stricken fugitives, crushing forwards as if plague chased them, how they like war. No. Ask this man with knitted brow and quivering lips, who, musket on one shoulder, child on the other, strides through the mud, thinking of the crops on his acres that he leaves behind, already golden with the harvest hues. Ask the two soldiers each with a bullet-hole through the right hand, how they relish war now, as they tramp homewards, certainly not to glory. Is it not time to interfere in a struggle which is not war breast to breast, man to man, weapon to weapon, but agony unspeakable to fugitive women and children?<sup>10</sup>

Having been the only outside witness to the fall of Zaječar, Forbes was desperate to get back to Belgrade. He had got out on 4 August and arrived on the afternoon of the 8th by way of walking and waggons and after only two hours sleep in Paraćin. He had not had a real meal since he arrived in Zaječar on the 2nd and had been wet and dry umpteen times on this way through the mountains. Having despatched a telegram his intention had been to follow it up with a fuller report, but he collapsed into an exhausted sleep and it was not until 17 August that his detailed account of the fall of the city was published over four and half columns.

At this stage Forbes seems to have had little faith that the Serbs were capable of resisting the Turkish advance. On arriving in Serbia he had declared that 'to know the Servian people is to love them', but he quickly lost faith in the ability of the mainly part-time army. He condemned the incapacity of the Serbian officers and the worthlessness of the troops and had little doubt that 'a proud and sanguine people' had to face the bitter truth of defeat. He believed that the high incidence of wounds on the hand were self-inflicted. Even the non-combatant hospital assistants he found half-hearted in their efforts and he had to use his revolver to persuade them to carry the wounded inside. He more or less concluded that the Serbs were beaten and the best that could be hoped for was outside intervention to mediate.

The Serbs, under the leadership of the Russian General Cherniaiev had heavily fortified Aleksinac in the valley of the River Morava. From there

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<sup>10</sup> *Daily News*, 9 August 1876.

Forbes and Villiers made sorties into Turkish territory. On one of these excursions he was working with surgeons sent out from St Thomas's Hospital in London when he noticed that the Serbs around them had disappeared and they were facing an onslaught of Turks. They had to gallop for their lives, presumably leaving the most wounded behind.<sup>11</sup> Forbes and Villiers were in the nearby fortress of Aleksinac when they faced another Turkish bombardment.

At a night of horrors! Cannon roaring through the darkness—shells whistling thought the air, and crashing into the houses of the town—the rumbling waggons carrying the wounded—the groans of the miserable wretches, torn by bullets and shattered by shells! I spent most of the night in the hospital; for the demands of common humanity had converted Mr Villiers, of the *Graphic*, and myself into nurses, and, in company with a courageous Russian woman, we did our best to assist the surgeons.<sup>12</sup>

The battle around the town lasted for five days, but the Turkish advance was slowed and the Serbs dug in along one side of the valley. In Aleksinac there was a camaraderie amongst the small group of correspondents, sleeping in the 'Crown Hotel', but drinking their coffee in the nearby 'King of Greece' Hotel, charmed by the pretty Serbian waitress whom the *Figaro* correspondent had christened *La Belle Hélène*.<sup>13</sup>

However, Cherniaiev, for some reason decided to abandon Aleksinac and to pull back a little further to the village of Deligrad. According to Villiers, a rival correspondent keen to be first with the news when Forbes was in Deligrad, rushed to Belgrade to report that Aleksinac had fallen to the Turks. This added to the general panic amongst the Serbs, but, after meeting with his servant Andreas, whom Villiers had ordered to leave, Forbes, discovered that Villiers was still in Aleksinac and hurried back to find an almost empty town, where he and Villiers lived for two and half days on grapes and black bread. He was able to counter the earlier report that the town had been taken by the Turks. He was also able to get an interview with Cherniaiev as he retreated, and optimism from this quarter seems to have persuaded Forbes to change his views. He declared that he had come to realise that his talk of

<sup>11</sup> Forbes, *Barracks and Bivouacs*, 157–9.

<sup>12</sup> *Daily News*, 28 August 1876.

<sup>13</sup> Forbes, 'La Belle Hélène of Alexinatz' in *Barracks, Bivouacs and Battles*, 151–74.

inevitable defeat had been doing the Serbs an injustice. They had, after all, managed to resist the Turkish advance for six weeks.

Servia then has the chance of success single-handed, or success with the assistance of Russia. She has suffered, she is suffering – a noble cause. She has but to steel her heart to endure yet a little more, and regard will come to her for all time the credit of having emancipated her fellow-Christians from the barbarous tyranny of Moslem heathens.<sup>14</sup>

For some reason, perhaps pressed by Cherniaiev, who not long before had been urging Prince Milan to accept mediation, but who now wanted him to continue the war, Forbes decided to publish a letter to this effect in the main Belgrade newspaper, the *Istok*. Having just returned from the front, he declared that he was surprised at all the talk of peace that he was hearing in Belgrade, ‘why having put her hand to the plough should she (Serbia) look back?’ The Turks had been held and the political prospects were good.

I hope to see Servia single-handed, work out her own salvation, and that of her fellow Christians of Bulgaria, Bosnia, Montenegro and Hertzegovina. But if Servia, in the worst event, should sustain heavy reverses, there would be the signal for an intervention before which Turkey must succumb. Probably Russia would have intervened before now but for the attitude of the English government. The *Daily News*’s exposure of the Bulgarian atrocities has tied the hands of the English government. With one unanimous voice England would rebel against an effort on the part of Lord Beaconsfield and Lord Derby to support Turkey now against such intervention either actively or morally; rather with one unanimous voice would England hail the interposition of Russia.<sup>15</sup>

There seemed to be a certain glee in the Conservative press that Forbes had been overshadowed by MacGahan and had been wrong-footed by the *Times*. Mischievously, Austin the *Times*’s correspondent in Belgrade, reported this as Forbes telling the Serbian people that he had made serious errors in his earlier reporting.

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<sup>14</sup> *Daily News*, 12 September 1876.

<sup>15</sup> *Times*, 18 September and 2 October 1876.

Arriving in Deligrad, where Cherniaiev and most of the Russian volunteers were now based, Forbes came across a fellow Scot ensconced in the army headquarters and reputedly passing himself as a member of the House of Lords, sympathetic to the Serbian cause. This was John Stuart Glennie, a lawyer by training, and whose time at Aberdeen University may well have overlapped part of Forbes's time there. Glennie had an interest in folklore and the development of the new study of ethnography. Forbes was, however, convinced that he was a correspondent for the Tory London *Standard* and basically hostile to the Serbs. He confronted Glennie for having deliberately deceived his Serbian hosts in order to get information. It led to a punch-up with Forbes landing on the floor, and to Forbes challenging Glennie to a duel with either sword or pistols. According to Glennie, Forbes then failed to turn up.<sup>16</sup>

Forbes also controversially criticised the actions of the British National Society for Aid to the Sick and Wounded. The International Red Cross had been founded at Geneva in 1863 thanks to the work of Henry Dunant. Soon there were Red Cross Societies formed in almost every European country except Britain. A British National Aid Society was eventually formed in 1870. Forbes suggested that the management of the British Society compared badly with that of the Russians who had surgeons and nurses in place right at the start of the war. The Society of the Knights of St John had sent out six young surgeons, although with inadequate funding, while the British National Society was just getting around to it now. What seems to have triggered this was the arrival in Belgrade of Colonel Loyd-Lindsay and some others from the British Society. Loyd-Lindsay, as well as being chair of the British Society, was the Tory MP for Berkshire and so no friend of the rebellious Bulgarians not to mention the Serbs. He believed that the war was unpopular in Serbia, as evidenced by the number of soldiers who had shot off a finger to avoid fighting, and was 'being carried on by cunning rascals who have caught hold of the reins of government in Belgrade' and were involved in what was largely a Russian plot.<sup>17</sup> Forbes claimed that the British Society had provided some ambulance wagons for the Serbs, but had failed to ensure that there was money to buy horses

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<sup>16</sup> J.S. Stewart-Glennie, *Traveller and Correspondents. A Letter to the Editor of the Daily News exposing certain slanders by his Special Correspondent, Mr Archibald Forbes* (London, 1877).

<sup>17</sup> H.S.L. Lindsay, *Lord Wantage, VC, KCB. A Memoir by His Wife* (London, 1907), 222–7.

to pull them. Instead the British representative on the spot was given the power to requisition horses and wagons. Loyd-Lindsay had also been highly critical of the St John surgeons whom he found wearing Serbian uniforms. Although work was beginning to provide a hospital funded by the British Society this was being done in Belgrade, a hundred miles from the war front. Forbes condemned in particular the fact that loads of supplies had been delivered by the Society to Belgrade, but were then being transmitted to Vidin for use by the Turks.<sup>18</sup> Forbes returned to the attack later, when, on his return home, Loyd-Lindsay defended his policy and declared that in Serbia 'a disposition had been shown to cast upon the English Aid Society duties which might perfectly well have been performed by the Government had they not been solicitous to economise their financial resources to carry on the war'.<sup>19</sup>

By mid-September the Turks were bogged down in the Morava Valley because of the rain and the effectiveness of the Serbian earthworks. Indeed, Forbes believed that all countries could learn from this about the efficacy of trench warfare when raw troops met a stronger army. Hitherto there had always been the suspicion that trench warfare would discourage boldness on the part of troops, but according to Forbes the lessons of the American Civil War and now of this was that they could prove very effective in halting an advance.<sup>20</sup> The two sides agreed to a ten-day armistice, during which Cherniaiev declared Prince Milan Obrenović as King.

Meanwhile hundreds of Russian volunteers were pouring into Serbia and Forbes even met one, Protopopov, a soldier of fortune whom he had first come across during the Carlist War in Spain. Protopopov had been leading a company of Serbs in Zaječar when most of them had fled. He himself had gone forward, come across six Turks in a hut, whom he killed and then cut off their ears as evidence. Forbes had met up with him in Deligrad where he was under arrest for reputedly having embezzled 200 ducats. However most of the Russians were not mercenaries, but committed Pan-Slavs and Forbes was generally admiring of their commitment and courage. He was quick to deny stories in the Tory press of Russian disorderliness and licence and reported that as many as fifty per cent of Russian volunteers had been killed or wounded.

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<sup>18</sup> *Daily News*, 13, 18, 30 September 1876.

<sup>19</sup> *Daily News*, 3 November 1876.

<sup>20</sup> *Daily News*, 12 October 1876, 'The Military Lessons of the Turco-Serbian War'.

Desultory fighting was renewed even before the ten-day truce had come to an end. With the days getting colder Forbes wrote frequently on the plight of refugees and wounded. By the third week in October the fighting around Deligrad had become heavy again and the Turks began pounding the Serb positions across the river. In his ride around the outposts he and Villiers came under fire and had to dive for cover as splinters sailed over their heads. They also helped with the many wounded. Writing fifteen years later Mijatovich, who became Serbian Minister in London, declared 'no Englishman inspired us with so warm an admiration as did Mr Archibald Forbes who, at the risk of his own life, carried in his arms our wounded soldiers from the first line of battle as if they were his own brothers'.<sup>21</sup>

The crucial battle of the war took place at Djunis on 29 October. Cherniaiev's tactics left much to be desired. He showed poor leadership, failed adequately to deploy what troops he had and panicked. He ordered the Russian volunteers to pull out and the demoralized Serbian army disintegrated.<sup>22</sup> Forbes had a narrow escape. While looking for a spot from which to view the battle he was caught by a scouting party of Turks and hauled from his saddle. Only with the arrival of Andreas, wearing a fez and shouting 'Effendi' were the Turks persuaded to let him go. While recognising the catastrophe of defeat, Forbes, who was the only foreign correspondent at the battle, was able to admire the opposition.

Say of the Turk what we may he can fight. Starving, gaunt as greyhounds, their scanty rags pierced through by the bitter sleet and wind, these men fought on and on, with a dogged pertinacity, and occasionally with a brilliant dash, which claims the highest admiration.<sup>23</sup>

The experience of a defeated and disintegrating Serbian army was a hard one for Forbes. The army had

fallen to pieces as if by an electric shock; amid a chaos of wretched peasant-fugitives, the men in sullen despair, the women and children chilled to their very marrows by the steadily falling snow, amid liquid mud a foot deep through which splash sturdy Russian volunteers, reckless

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<sup>21</sup> *Times*, 6 August 1891.

<sup>22</sup> David MacKenzie, 'Panslavism in Practice: Cherniaiev in Serbia (1876)', *Journal of Modern History*, 36:3 (September 1964), 284.

<sup>23</sup> *Daily News*, 1 November 1876.



of everything saving the means of getting away; amid wretchedness, squalor, hunger, panic, angry passions finding vent in retorts, or nursed in lowering silence, and uncared for wounded, sick who may die in the nearest ditch for all the help and care there is for them'.<sup>24</sup>

Forbes himself had to endure the conditions of the army. This on the day after the great defeat:

It is a rainy day, a desperately, uncomparingly, drenchingly, blindingly rainy day. The rain comes scudding on the wings of a fierce wind that searches everywhere and everything. Outside, all is a mire half a foot thick. Inside, in the barrack which is my home there is a steady drip, drip of water through the thatch; our blankets and bedplaces are moist, and the circular ring round the fire in the centre, which we call a floor, is oozy, and threatens to become muddy. One has to wade to go to see General Dochtouroff; one has to be careful lest his boots are sucked off on the gluey path on the way for a morning tumbler of tea in the headquarters chateau. There is nothing for it, but to sit on one's blankets to keep them as dry as possible, with a waterproof over one's shoulders to ward off the drip, and try to write a few disconnected camp notes.<sup>25</sup>

In the end, Forbes and Dochtouroff had to ride through a belt of Turkish skirmishers to avoid being cut off. To get the news of the rout out Forbes, with even more than his usual tenacity, rode 100 miles throughout the night in 14 hours to Semendria and then hired a carriage to Belgrade and then to the telegraph office at Semlin, on the Hungarian side of the River Sava from Belgrade. He changed horses every 15 miles on the last stretch, having set up a system of horse hire, well in advance and once having sent his four-column despatch slept for nearly 20 hours.<sup>26</sup>

Faced with a Russian ultimatum Turkey, on 31 October, agreed to a six-week armistice. Russia seemed to be making preparations for intervention while Disraeli was making more and more bellicose signs to deter the Russians. On 7 November Forbes received the award gold cross of Takoa from the Serbian government and he left for home.

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<sup>24</sup> *Daily News*, 14 November 1876.

<sup>25</sup> *Daily News*, 3 November 1876.

<sup>26</sup> Forbes, *Memories*, 12–13

The dispute with Stuart-Glennie, however, lingered on. Forbes was accused of having circulated a denunciation of Glennie. Glennie, in response, published a 22 page pamphlet, *Travellers and Correspondents. A Letter to the Editor of the Daily News exposing certain slanders by his Special Correspondent, Mr Archibald Forbes*. Forbes comments in the *Daily News* had been about an unnamed person passing himself off as a Member of Parliament, when he was in fact a newspaper correspondent in disguise. But, in the following month Glennie's identity had come out when he had criticised accounts of two other Balkan travellers, the Rev. Malcolm MacColl, and Canon Lidden. These had claimed that they had visited a Turkish military camp on the border with Bosnia and there had seen stakes, which a Turk had said were used to impale the bodies of Christians. This had been confirmed by some other witnesses and they themselves had seen a head on one of the stakes. This then led to a huge controversy about the truth of such an assertion. Glennie claimed not only that he had never heard of such atrocities, but he queried whether MacColl and Lidden had actually been in Serbia at all. MacColl asserted that he knew as much, if not more, than Glennie. The stories about Glennie and Forbes's fight became more widespread and Glennie clearly felt that he had to defend his reputation with a pamphlet. The *Daily News* declined to publish a letter from him in which he accused Forbes of having reneged on two challenges.<sup>27</sup> Forbes does not seem to have risen to the bait and Glennie continued to insist that he had merely been an independent traveller in the Balkans. G. A. Sala, for one, regretted that the duel had not taken place: 'it would have been rare sport to hear of the ancient trooper Archibald Forbes cleaving his adversary from nave to chops'.<sup>28</sup>

There is no doubt that the Serbian war was one that Forbes relished. It was, as he wrote, a war that 'fairly bristled with adventure and with opportunities for enterprise' and there were few days when he could not 'find a fight in which to enjoy himself'.<sup>29</sup> This 'relish' was matched by the tenacity he displayed in getting his messages out and by the depth of empathy he clearly felt with the victims of the war.

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<sup>27</sup> John S. Stuart-Glennie, *Travellers and Correspondents*.

<sup>28</sup> Sala to Yates, 11 October 1876 in McKenzie, *Letters of George Augustus Sala*, 193.

<sup>29</sup> Forbes, *Barracks, Bivouacs and Battles*, 152–3.

## 11 The Russo-Turkish War

*He combines all the qualities of a good war correspondent – pluck and dash, tempered with discretion, the knack of writing in a graphic style under any circumstances, and not too much modesty.*

*Western Mail, 27 April 1877*

In the aftermath of defeat the Serbs felt betrayed by Russia, but it was a Russian ultimatum that brought about the armistice that saved Serbia from further Turkish incursion. In November 1876 Russia seemed to be ready to embark on open war against the Ottoman Empire, but it faced growing threats from Disraeli's government who were determined to bolster the Ottomans and ensure that Russia did not reach the Mediterranean. A conference in Constantinople, convened largely at the behest of the British, resulted in a temporary settlement by which Serbia retained its existing boundaries, Montenegro retained the parts of Hertzegovina and Albania that it had liberated, and Bulgaria was to be divided into two provinces, run by governors-general chosen by the great powers and with a remit to carry out reforms, but with the approval of the Turks. The Turks, now with a new, more liberal constitution, rejected most of these recommendations and Russia and Austria effectively agreed to carve the Balkans into their own spheres of influence.

Within Russia there was still huge pressure from the influential Pan-Slavic movement and on 24 April 1877 Russia declared war on Turkey and made preparations for invasion. Romania had had a semi-independent status for a decade, but Russian troops rapidly took control of its province of Moldavia. In the summer Disraeli's government came very close to intervening on the side of the Turks.

Forbes had spent the end of 1876 and the early months of 1877 writing and giving a few lectures on the Turkish-Serbian War. In November the *World* revealed the preparations being made at the War Office to hold the line of Constantinople should Russia move into Turkey and it was generally assumed that the source of this information was Forbes 'who always

occupies a favourable position for obtaining military information'.<sup>1</sup> With tensions in the Balkans mounting there was talk in January 1877 of the war correspondents getting ready to depart and, indeed, G.A.Sala of the *Telegraph* had already set off for Russia. The Russians were making it clear that correspondents would not be able to accompany the army, although it was believed that they were likely to make an exception in the case of Forbes and Villiers, his associate from the *Graphic*, because of their earlier services to the Serbian cause.<sup>2</sup> In February Cherniaiev, who had been forbidden by the Tsar to return to Russia, was in London to visit Forbes, who wrote a profile of him in a new weekly called *The Portrait*. Still being fêted, Forbes attended the Royal levée at St James's Palace run by the Prince of Wales.

Forbes must have left London just before the declaration of war by Russia together with Hale, a clever young artist from the *Illustrated London News*. His departure was accompanied by glowing testimonials in the provincial press. According to the *Western Mail*,

Perhaps there are none of its developments of which modern journalism has a better right to be proud than the wielder of the pen in war-time. The combination of intellectual and physical abilities, the union of the general and special attainments, the devotion, the nerve, the readiness of mind and limb, which are required for the war correspondent, and which in a writer such as Mr Archibald Forbes are forthcoming with almost unique completeness make up a thoroughly admirable group of qualities.

This was followed immediately by another piece specifically on Forbes:

He combines all the qualities of a good war correspondent – pluck and dash, tempered with discretion, the knack of writing in a graphic style under any circumstances, and not too much modesty. Yet, with all his “pushing” qualities, Mr Forbes is by no means a “cheeky” man, like some of his colleagues. He is a Scotchman, and, I need hardly add does not understand being “put down” or “snuffed out”. Of late years, he has acquired the trick of conciliating ambassadors and other distinguished

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<sup>1</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 25 November 1876.

<sup>2</sup> *York Herald*, 10 January 1877.

persons, and has thus been enabled to obtain some valuable items of information in advance of other journals.

In many ways this was typical of people's reaction to Forbes. No one doubted his courage, but he had the reputation of having a short fuse and, for English tastes, being too self-assertive. Yet, he clearly could charm. The same piece perpetuated the myth that Forbes had acquired military training in the Crimea 'where he was one of the heavy brigade'<sup>3</sup>

The first reports from the war front came from Januarius MacGahan who had headed for Russia. In April and May 1877 MacGahan was with the Russian headquarters in Kishenev and it is near here that Forbes and he met for the first time. That it had taken this long is surprising, since MacGahan had been in Paris at the time of the Commune and in Spain during the Carlist Wars, reporting from the Carlist side. MacGahan was now also working for the *Daily News* and John Robinson, the manager of the paper, was slightly anxious about putting two star war correspondents together. But they seem to have immediately taken to each other, with the slightly older MacGahan showing some deference towards Forbes, while Forbes must have found MacGahan's fluency in Russian immensely valuable. They were an ideal combination. MacGahan was the more reflective of the two and more aware of the political implications of events. Forbes had an eye for the details of battles, the experience of the army and the tough physique that MacGahan lacked. They were quite different in style. MacGahan was an easy-going American, open in manner, full of charm and indifferent to authority. Forbes was brittle and formal. None the less, Forbes's admiration for MacGahan from then on and for long after MacGahan's premature death was unstinting, declaring him as 'the most brilliant' of correspondents. Forbes went so far as to assert, 'I do not believe that any two men loved each other more than MacGahan did me and I did MacGahan'. When they were together at the beginning of the campaign in Bulgaria Forbes reported that MacGahan was treated as a national hero by the Bulgarians: 'People thronged about him, fondly treating him as a liberator, and kissing his hands with a devotion that was thoroughly sincere'.<sup>4</sup>

Forbes's first report from Galatz (Galati) near the mouth of the Danube was on 27 April, where he had arrived from Bucharest. He found a largely

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<sup>3</sup> *Western Mail*, 26, 27 April 1877.

<sup>4</sup> Forbes, 'MacGahan, the American War Correspondent' in *Souvenirs of Some Continents*, 125, 131.

British merchant community there in some consternation having been asked to clear their ships out of the river within a few hours, whether loaded or not. The Russians were planning to construct a bridge across the Danube and its tributary, the Prut. He was able to meet with the Russian commander, Prince Shahofshoy, one of whose aides, Count Keller, a German had been on Cherniaiev's staff in the Serbian war. He was impressed by the appearance of the Russian troops that were pouring into Romania: 'I never saw soldiers in better condition and better heart for the varied phases of a campaign – marching, campaigning, and fighting'.<sup>5</sup>

He was particularly impressed by the Don Cossacks who formed the vanguard.

Friend Cossack is a little chap, about five feet five even on his high heels, but at once sturdy and wiry. His weather-beaten face is shrewd, knowing and merry. His eyes are small but keen; his mouth is large and between it and his pug nose –rather redder than the rest of his face – is a tuft or wisp of straw-coloured moustache. His long, thick, straight hair matches his moustache in colour, and is cut sheer round the nape of his neck. He wears a round, oilskin peakless shako with a knowing cock to the right, to maintain which angle there is a strap round his chubby chin . . . He is more armed than any man of his inches in Europe, is our little Cossack friend, and could afford to lose a weapon or two and yet still be a dangerous customer. Weapon number one is the long black flagless lance with its venomous head which seems itching to make daylight through somebody. He carries a carbine, slung in an oilcloth cover, on his back, the stock downwards. In his belt is a long and well-made revolver in a leather case, and from the belt hangs a curved sword with no guard over its hilt.<sup>6</sup>

It was understandable that the Cossacks with their superb horsemanship, their swagger and their courage would appeal of Forbes, who had many of those same qualities.

Initial confrontations with the Turks were largely confined to the rivers. A Turkish turret ship, the *Lutfi Djelil*, was sunk by Russian shore batteries with the loss of nearly 200 lives. A few days later MacGahan, now in Ploiesti

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<sup>5</sup> *War Correspondence*, 47.

<sup>6</sup> *War Correspondence*, 48.

with the Russian HQ, was able to report on the destruction of a Turkish monitor by what were called torpedoes. The torpedoes were detachable on the end of long spars, with light chains that could be attached to any projection of the ship being attacked. There was an electrical wire about one hundred yards long which detonated the charge.<sup>7</sup> This was, apparently, the first time that a vessel had been destroyed by torpedoes in time of war. In the third week of May there were reports that the Russians had crossed the Danube at Braila (an event all the reporters were waiting for), but Forbes was able to contradict this and report that they had merely taken possession of one of the islands in the river.

As always, Forbes had clearly steeped himself in the history of previous Russo-Turkish conflicts and there are frequent references to the war of 1828, when Wittgenstein had led a Russian army across the Prut and the Danube. The Russians had learned from that experience. In 1828 the army had been decimated by fever from the marshes at the mouth of the Danube. Now, fifty years later, potentially sick Russians had been weeded out in advance and the army was accompanied by excellent medical services. He was, however, critical of the lack of logistical preparation by the Russians, who seemed to have paid little attention to the absence of adequate roads in the area or to have been unprepared for the heavy rain they experienced.

Thanks to contacts with a Serbian acquaintance, Forbes and Villiers were able to get invitations to join as unofficial members of a tour of the Romanian army stationed on the Danube frontier in Wallachia. The tour was being carried out by Prince Karl, the Hohenzollern Prince, who in 1866 had been made Prince Carol I of the two principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia. Carol had steadily built up the army and he wanted Romanians to be treated as allies of the Russians, although the Russians were resistant to this. They would have preferred if the Romanian army had been split up and spread among the Russian forces. The Romanian railways had been the relatively recent creation of the German 'railway king' Henry Bethel Strousberg and Forbes was not impressed. After Craiova where the railway ended the Prince's entourage had to travel in wagons.

Everything awaited the crossing of the Danube by the Russians, but well into June the river proved too high. Forbes used his time getting to know well

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<sup>7</sup> Forbes, *Czar and Sultan; The Adventures of a British Lad in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78*, 8.

the Russian high command. Forbes had only a handful of words of Russian, but he found among the aristocratic Russian officer corps many who spoke English or French and, some indeed, who knew England well. He renewed his acquaintance with General Dochtouroff, with whom he had on more than one occasion shared a bivouac in Serbia and 'stood together while men were falling and dying around us'. Also there was Prince Tzeretelev, the former private secretary to the Russian foreign minister Ignatiev, who had recently visited England. Tzeretelev had joined the Cossacks as a private soldier, as had many aristocratic members of the diplomatic corps when the Tsar had made clear that he disapproved of frivolous diplomatic entertainments continuing at a time of war.<sup>8</sup> MacGahan had developed a close friendship with the English-speaking General Skobelev when he had followed the Russian army in its advance to Khiva in what is now Uzbekistan. Someone as sparing in his praise of other generals as Bernard Montgomery was later to describe Skobelev as the 'ablest single commander' in the forty years before 1914. As they lingered in Bucharest, MacGahan, Forbes and Skobelev struck it off, although Forbes's first reaction to him was that he was 'a genial, brilliant, dashing – lunatic'.<sup>9</sup>

While Forbes felt the waiting weary-making, he had a comfortable existence with a cluster of other journalists and Russian officers in the Hotel Brofft where they could enjoy the delights of Bucharest, 'the Paris of the East', while trying to prise out information on where the Russian assault across the Danube would take place. It was, he later wrote, a place

throbbing in a delirium of wild pleasure, accentuated by the clank of martial accoutrements, the clatter of sword scabbards on the parquet floors of restaurants, and the steady tramp of the cohorts which poured through her seething streets. Bucharest was a ballroom wherein Mars, Venus and Bacchus were dancing the cancan in a frantic orgy.

Forbes could understand the Russian concern to leave nothing to chance and to await the fall in the level of the Danube. At the same time, he argued that this gave time to the Turks to strengthen their defences and, as he knew from his Serbian experience, winter was not a time to be caught in the Balkans. Bored with Bucharest, Forbes ruminated on the dilemma of the war

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<sup>8</sup> Frederick Boyle, *The Narrative of an Expelled Correspondent* (London, 1877), 284.

<sup>9</sup> Forbes, *Memories*, 363.



correspondent. There was an obvious attraction in being with the planners at headquarters.

It has been my invariable experience that a person belonging to or accompanying any part of an army, save its principal headquarters, knows rather less of the doings of that army as a whole, and has less information concerning the general progress of events, than is at the disposal of any community in Europe who care to read.

On the other hand, to be with an active section of the army provides

first-hand knowledge – often the knowledge that eyesight brings – of what is going on, whereas the rest of the world can have at best but second-hand knowledge. But while your division or army corps is doing nothing of importance, and when what of importance in reference to the future it may be engaged in the correspondent is prohibited from writing about, there is open to him only the role of vegetating, if he joins himself to it thus prematurely.

Forbes was now confident that action was imminent and he was invited to visit the headquarters of General Radetsky a few miles south-west of Bucharest and then on towards Giurgiu, to the headquarters of General Dragomirov on the banks of the Danube and where there were reports of a Turkish offensive. This proved to be little more than a few bullets that had landed in Giurgiu, where Forbes had booked rooms in the Hotel Bellevue from where he could look across the river to the Turkish fires. As always, he was fascinated by the details of the rapidly growing Russian army.

Forbes grew ever more anxious lest he miss the crossing of the Danube. He was particularly irritated at the delay caused by the issuing of new insignia to war correspondents. Initially they were given a huge brass brassard, nicknamed the 'soup-plate', 'which was supremely ugly' and seemed to have offended in particular the French correspondents' sense of taste. It produced some complaints that this made them look like railway porters and they demanded a change. An angry Forbes thought it served well-enough and declared, 'if I miss the crossing what will it avail me that my arm be girt by a badge of gold lace with silver letters on it'. Eventually it was replaced by a band of silk in the Russian colours with identification on it. Forbes liked the way in which the Russians operated their censorship, although Russian

officials occupied the post and telegraph bureaux in Bucharest. There was no field censorship and correspondents were on their honour not to reveal details of impending movements. In time a Russian officer read all the newspaper reports and those who transgressed were expelled.<sup>10</sup>

On 21 June he finally cut adrift from Bucharest accompanied by Villiers and their servant, Andreas, from the previous Serbian-Turkish war. Forbes had once again rescued him from his head-waiter job in Belgrade and, as ever, he seemed 'to speak a little of every known language, and has a wonderful faculty for finding fellow-countrymen in the most unlikely places'. They were in a specially fitted-out waggon.

I have found a carriage which, when covered with leather and fitted with sundry wells, makes a sufficient habitation for two men who can pack tight and can give and take one with the other. By a simple arrangement the floor of this vehicle becomes at night a bedplace, the cushions doing duty for a mattress. In case of rain, there is a projection from the tilt of the wagon that enables us to sleep perfectly dry; when the weather is fine our moveable bed-chamber is open to the front.

Attached to the roof was a canvas roll, which could be opened out and with poles make an awning.

In the wells is an assortment of provisions – tea, coffee, tinned meats, &c, with cooking appliances of extreme simplicity, for no inns are to be expected on the other side of the Danube, and it is not wise to trust wholly to hospitality, however generous you know it to be. With a covered receptacle for luggage behind, the wagon is complete. It is drawn by two sturdy grey horses, one of which is blind – a characteristic which his vendor cited as an important merit since it made him steadier in a crowd. I have a riding-horse besides; a big rather violent bay who has a will of his own, which yields only to *force majeure*.<sup>11</sup>

There was in the same report yet another snatch of the casual anti-semitism that was so common in British discourse. Since most ordinary soldiers spoke only Russian Forbes was usually dependent on German-speaking Poles in the

<sup>10</sup> *War Correspondence*, 153; Forbes, *Memories*, 14; Boyle, *Narrative of an Expelled Correspondent*, xviii-xx.

<sup>11</sup> *War Correspondence*, 157.

Russian army to translate. In many cases these were Jewish and, according to Forbes, 'the Russians would have done better to leave behind the Hebrews in their ranks. There has been much trouble with them in Roumania, for two reasons – their propensity to desert and their addiction to theft'.

Forbes and Villiers got on very well and Villiers in his various memoirs is full of admiration for Forbes. Forbes main complaint against him was that he would insist on sleeping with his spurs on, believing, according to Forbes, that this gave him a more military aspect. However, sharing the narrow space on the floor of the wagon with someone wearing spurs caused problems. It did not help, of course, that Andreas also kept fowls in the wagon, pinioned by the legs!<sup>12</sup> They set off to find General Mikhail Dragomirov whose 4th division was to spearhead the Danube crossing. They found him at Zimnitza. By now the weather was terribly hot and the troops who had been stuck there for weeks were short of provisions. In the event, Forbes got his scoop. He was the first to report the successful although difficult crossing under fire from Zimnitza to Sistova (Svishtov) on the Bulgarian side of the Danube on 27 June. As always, he had shown his uncanny ability to be in the right place at the right time, although secrecy about the actual crossing place had been absolute and there had been a number of options. Most other reporters were further up river. The story quickly spread in Britain that Forbes had managed to be on the first boat across and had faced as many dangers 'as the most reckless and daring of young Russian officers'.<sup>13</sup>

The Russian troops crossed by means of a flotilla of pontoon boats capable of holding between fifteen and forty soldiers. They rowed across under fire from the Turkish side. When sufficient had landed, bayonets were fixed and the Russians charged at the Turks who quickly scattered, but Forbes was very conscious of how risky the operation had been. A larger Turkish force could have pinned down the landing and, indeed, a large number of Russians perished in the exercise. By the 29th success was so assured that the Tsar and his entourage arrived and crossed the river. As on other occasions, Forbes was impressed by the efficiency and effectiveness of the Russian ambulance services. He also took the chance of plugging a favourite theme that the red-coats of the British army were ridiculously conspicuous as were the white and the blue coats of the Russians: 'the true fighting colour is the dingy khaki of our Indian irregulars'.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Forbes, *Memoirs*, 21.

<sup>13</sup> See for example *Sheffield Independent*, 28 July 1877.

<sup>14</sup> *War Correspondence*, 197.

The *Daily News* had four correspondents in all covering the Russian advance co-ordinated by Forbes. MacGahan was given a roving commission and he went with General Gourko on his dash across the Balkans. He was badly hurt when his horse fell on him and he was never able to walk or ride again without great pain, but he remained in the field. Jackson was on the right, watching the Romanians and F.D. Millet was in the east of Romania. Forbes himself stuck with the advancing Cossack cavalry in Bulgaria, although he had to frequently re-cross the Danube to Zimnitza in order to get access to a telegraph office. It was hazardous and, for the first time, he carried a revolver with him because of the danger from marauding Turkish irregulars, the Bashi-Bazouks. In fact the Russian army met very little resistance and Forbes was not impressed by the rate of their advance. There seemed little effort to find out where the main Turkish forces were and, although admiring of the men, the equipment and the morale, he was appalled by a general slackness in the Russian army. By 9 July the Russians had only moved to about fifty miles south of Sistova.

When Forbes himself crossed to Sistova, he found a town where the houses of Turkish inhabitants had been looted and wrecked, while the many mosques were desecrated. This was not, he emphasised, by the invading Russians, but by the Christian Bulgarians, although Wallachs and gypsies from the poorer parts of the town were blamed. Contrary to the prevailing view, he found little evidence that the Bulgarians had been oppressed. Their houses were large and handsome and their women-folk were familiar with the fashions of Paris. Sistova, he declared, flowed with milk and honey compared with Zimnitza on the Romanian side, 'where the people in the hotel are living on dry bread and bad water, and where a Mrs Seacole<sup>15</sup> is very badly wanted'.

On the 25th Forbes left off from some skirmishes with Turkish irregulars and from following the general staff around, and decided to make his own way into the town of Bjela, on the River Jantra about twenty miles south of the Danube. He was greeted as a liberator. Mistaken for a Russian officer at first, when that misapprehension was cleared up with the help of a French-speaking Bulgar, the fact that he was a correspondent of the *Daily News* apparently made his welcome even more effusive and he was shown to the best house in town. To get such reports through he had to ride the thirty or so miles back to Zimnitza.

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<sup>15</sup> Mary Seacole was a nursing heroine of the Crimean War.

There were accusations in a rival paper that only correspondents willing to sacrifice their independence were allowed to travel with the Russian army. Forbes denied this, saying there had never been any suggestion of this. Indeed, he claimed that it was definitely stated when he was given permission,

that correspondents were free to speak well or speak ill of the Russians as might seem to them their duty, the only stipulation being that stipulation which does not require to be inculcated on a war correspondent who realizes his responsibilities, that pending events should not be prematurely written of. During some experience as a war correspondent, I have never submitted to the sacrifice of my independence, nor have I found that the maintenance on my part of an honest independence has injured me in the eyes of persons whose regard is worth having.<sup>16</sup>

The accusations were occasioned by Forbes's account of what he found after one of his journeys back to Zimnitza. He returned to Bjela where he found that Villiers of the *Graphic*, who had remained in the town, had had a difficult night with looters at the tail end of a Russian force. They were largely searching for drink, but a number of Bulgar women had to take refuge with Villiers. Some of the rioters mistakenly took bottles of vitriol for alcohol and tried to force the Serbian servant, Andreas, to drink some. Villiers they accused of being a Turkish spy. Forbes returned to find that Villiers had survived the night but their meat, coffee, sugar, cigarette paper, writing paper, underclothes and boots had all been plundered.

Once into Bulgaria the Russians divided their forces, with one army heading east towards Nicopolis (Nikopol) and on towards the Black Sea; a second heading west towards the main Turkish fortress at Widdin (Vidin), held by a force under Osman Pasha, and the third heading directly south. Forbes was not impressed. The third army led by General Gourko captured Tirnova on 8 July, but Forbes pointed out that this was only fifty miles south of the crossing point of the Danube eleven days before, and the army had met little opposition. Although the Russians blamed the delay on the need to build up supplies, Forbes felt that much of it had to do with rearranging commands 'in order that young gentlemen of the blood imperial may gain military fame and St George's Crosses'. A visit to Tirnova on 13th July confirmed his view that there was a lack of energy in the advance. However, his view changed

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<sup>16</sup> *War Correspondence*, 228.

when Guorko's forces made a quick dash across the Balkan mountains and secured four of the main passes.

Both MacGahan and Forbes were attracted by the idea of accompanying Gourko on what was intended as a rapid assault towards Adrianople. In the end, it was MacGahan who went. According to Forbes, he recognised that MacGahan was 'head and shoulders above me in descriptive powers', while Forbes's strength lay in organisation and in 'that faculty which I have never been sure whether to define as prognosis or presentiment'. In the event, Forbes was initially the gainer since few reports from MacGahan when he was in the south were able to get through.<sup>17</sup>

Forbes was with the Grand-Duke Nicholas's headquarters in Bjela (Byala), but he was able to report on Guorko's advance on the basis of reports coming to the headquarters. Guorko's advance towards Adrianople (Edime) was halted by the arrival of Suleiman Pasha with reinforcements pulled from the west. With other Russian armies bogged down and no hope of reinforcements Guorko had no alternative but to pull back to Shipka Pass and prepare to defend that against a Turkish counter-attack. Forbes meanwhile was essentially acting as courier for the reports from the Balkan mountains' front. On 22 July he reported that he had just returned from six days away from the headquarters during which he had ridden three hundred miles, had been to Bucharest twice to telegraph reports, each time for only a few hours, had never managed to change his clothes and had wrecked his best horse. He was with the army heading towards Rustchuk (Ruse), a fortress on the right bank of the Danube that the Turks still held. Ruse, the scene of nationalist insurrections in 1875 and 1876, was a vivacious, cosmopolitan city with elegant merchants' houses, spacious parks and echoes of Vienna in its architecture. Here he heard stories of Turkish reprisals against the Bulgarians, with slaughtered men, women, and children lying among the ashes of their houses. He heard from witnesses of the inhabitants of one village where about a hundred people, sheltering in a church, had been massacred.

There can be no doubt that the Turks, having behaved very well during their retreat so far from Sistova, and throughout this portion of Bulgaria generally, have at length given rein to their fury against the Bulgarian inhabitants of the Lom Valley. The evidence

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<sup>17</sup> Forbes, 'MacGahan', 136.

is overwhelming that this is so. I am not fond of accepting hearsay evidence in such matters, and habitually allow a good deal of margin for exaggeration. But when villages are entered with slaughtered men, women, and children lying about among the ashes of their houses when Bulgarian husbandmen are found dead in the fields, shot apparently when labouring at their daily toil; when at the well, close to which I am writing, a Bulgarian was found desperately wounded, with the cross scored by transverse sword-cuts on his forehead; when eye witnesses tell me all this, I am bound to believe them. There is a village called Kaceljevo, some distance up the Lom. In this village was lying Colonel Bilderling, commanding a regiment of dragoons of Arnoldi's brigade. He left the village on a reconnaissance down the river, and there were then in it about a hundred live Bulgarian villagers, men, women and children. During his absence a detachment of Turks, whom the Bulgarians who escaped reported to have been under the command of a superior officer, entered the village. Most of the helpless inhabitants fled for refuge into the church, which is a large and handsome edifice. The door of it was broken open by order of the officer commanding the Turks, who entered and slew and spared not one of the unfortunate inmates. Not a soul who had taken refuge in the church escaped. Bilderling came back at night to find Kaceljevo empty and desolated, and its church a shamble. Then a few people who had not gone into the church, but had sought hiding-places in the gardens round the village, came in scared and trembling, and told him what had happened as far as they knew. For the rest, the spectacle in the church told its own story.<sup>18</sup>

Forbes had some narrow escapes. On one occasion when he ventured out to what he thought were Russian cavalry engaged in an encircling movement, he found that they were Turks. His skilled horsemanship paid off and he galloped to the Russian lines with the Turks in hot pursuit. There, however, he found himself seized at bayonet point 'by angry, vociferating and unintelligible persons of Slavonic [sic] extraction'.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile the third army, under General Baron Krüdener had been repulsed at what turned out to be the first of three battles for Plevna, where

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<sup>18</sup> *War Correspondence*, 286.

<sup>19</sup> Forbes, *Barracks*, 188.

Russian tardiness had given Osman Nuri Pasha, a highly-experienced and capable soldier, the opportunity to take forces from Widdin and fortify Plevna (Pleven). Plevna was crucial since it dominated the key routes into the heart of Bulgaria. The Russians completely misjudged the strength of Osman's entrenchments and, attacking without reconnaissance, sent far too few men against them. The Russians actually reached the town and were settling in when the Turks counter-attacked, firing from windows and balconies on the Russians as they straggled and sang their way through the streets. The Russians were thrown back with the loss of some 2900 men. When news of this came through, Forbes and Villiers headed for Plevna in their wagon. The problem was that the maps that they had were quite inadequate and some of the roads had not seen wheeled vehicles. With difficulty they made it to the head quarters of Prince Schahofskoy. Soon they were joined by Skobelev, 'the stormy petrel of the Russian army', who liked to be in the thick of every battle, and, whom Forbes thought perhaps a little mad. As he said, one needed the occasional Skobelev but 'it would be embarrassing if every general were a Skoboleff [*sic*]'.<sup>20</sup>

The second assault on Plevna took place on 31 July. By now it was reckoned that there were as many as 40,000 Turkish troops in the place. Krüdener kept delaying the attack until more forces arrived, but giving the Turks yet more time to entrench themselves. The decision was made to attack with two columns, Krüdener on the left and Schahofskoy on the right. As Forbes pointed out in his report, there was an immediate problem since the columns were too far apart to effectively communicate with each other. Villiers and Forbes watched with the general staff from the ridge above Radisovo. Most of the morning was taken up with an exchange of artillery fire and Krüdener as yet gave no order for an infantry assault. Schahofskoy lost patience and decided to act on his own initiative. Two brigades of infantry were ordered to advance, but the nearly obsolete Russian rifles were ineffective against the Turks' American-supplied Remingtons. Although the Russians broke through there were not enough of them to hold and soon they were in full retreat. This second defeat cost about a thousand dead and 4500 wounded. By evening, with Turkish shells whistling over them, Forbes and the commanders climbed down from the ridge. They bivouacked in a field only to be awakened with the alarm that a force of Bashi-Bazouks was approaching.

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<sup>20</sup> *War Correspondence*, 298.



When daylight came he headed off to Sistova, some forty miles away. His horse collapsed under him and he walked into Sistova carrying his saddle on his head. From there he made it to Giurgevo where he caught the train to Bucharest and then on to Ploesti on the 2nd of August. Using the relay of ponies that MacGahan and he had organised he got the news of the defeat out via Kronstadt (now Braşov) in Hungarian Transylvania thus avoiding the delay of the Russian censors, who required all despatches to be translated into French. After ten hours on horseback, often under fire, he had travelled one hundred and fifty miles by horse and by waggon. He was without sleep for three days and at a telegraph office was writing his 6200 words while it was being transmitted.<sup>21</sup> As he said himself, the first thing he did in any new place was to find the telegraph office, make friends with the postmaster and tell him the kind of thing that he might want to send off, thus ensuring that he was first on the wire.<sup>22</sup> Forbes's long report of the battle was published in the *Daily News* on 3 August. The whole many-columned piece had been telegraphed and was quickly recognised as one of the great pieces of war reporting, where all Forbes's skills of understanding the strategy, setting the scene and capturing the excitement of the moment all came into play. Here was the account of the charge of the two brigades of infantry.

Presently all along the face of the advancing infantrymen burst forth flaring volleys of musketry fire. The jagged line springs onward through the maize-fields, gradually assuming a concave shape. The Turkish position is neared. The roll of rifle fire is incessant, yet dominated by the fiercer and louder turmoil of the artillery above. The ammunition wagons gallop up to the cannon with fresh fuel for the fire. The guns redouble the energy of their cannonade. The crackle of the musketry fire rises into a sharp continuous peal. The clamour of the hurrahs of the fighting men comes back to us on the breeze, making the blood tingle with the excitement of the fray. A village is blazing on the left. The fell fury of the battle has entered on its maddest paroxysm. The supports that had remained behind lying just under the crest of the slope are pushed forward over the brow of the hill. The wounded begin to trickle back over the ridge. We can see the dead and the more severely wounded lying where they fall

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<sup>21</sup> *Graphic*, 25 August 1877; Thomas, *Fifty Years of Fleet Street*, 171–2.

<sup>22</sup> *Exeter Flying Post*, 8 August 1877.

on the stubbles and amid the maize. The living wave of fighting men is pouring over them ever on and on. The gallant gunners to the right and to the left of us stand to their work with a will on the shell-swept ridge. The Turkish cannon-fire begins to waver in that earthwork over against us. More supports stream down with a louder cheer into the Russian fighting line. Suddenly the disconnected men are drawing together. We can discern the officers signalling for the concentration by the waving of their swords. The distance is about a hundred yards. There is a wild rush, headed by the colonel of one of the regiments of the 32nd Division. The Turks in the shelter trench hold their ground, and fire steadily, and with terrible effect, into the advancing forces. The colonel's horse goes down, but the colonel is on his feet in a second, and, waving his sword, leads his men forward on foot. But only for a few paces. He staggers and falls. I heard afterwards he was killed.

We can hear the tempest-gust of wrath, half howl, half yell, with which his men, bayonets at the charge, rush on to avenge him. They are over the parapet and shelter trench, and in among the Turks like an avalanche. Not many Turks get a chance to run away from the gleaming bayonets swayed by muscular Russian arms. The outer edge of the first position is won. The Russians are bad skirmishers. They despise cover, and give and take fire out in the open. They disdained to utilize against the main position the cover afforded by the parapet of this shelter trench, but pushed on in broken order up the bare slope. In places they hung a little, for the infantry fire from the Turks was very deadly, and the slope was strewn with the fallen dead and wounded; but for the most part they advanced nimbly enough . . . The First Brigade of the 30th Division had early inclined to the left, in the direction where the towers and houses of Plevna were visible. It was rash, for the brigade was exposing its right flank to the Turkish cannon astride of the central ridge, but the goal of Plevna was a keen temptation. There was no thoroughfare, however. They would not give up, and they could not succeed. They charged again and again; and when they could charge no more from sheer fatigue, they stood and died, for they would not retire. The reserves came up, but only to swell the slaughter. And then the ammunition failed, for the carts had been left far behind, and all hope failed the most sanguine, as the sun sank in lurid glory behind the smoke-mantled field.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *War Correspondence*, 304–12.

Once again Forbes had outwritten and outdistanced all his contemporaries. Some papers, such as the *Morning Post* unashamedly copied Forbes's report with only the slightest acknowledgement of the source. Only the *Times* refused, and gossip had it that,

The Managers of the *Times* are said to be biting their fingers' ends with chagrin at the way in which they have been eclipsed. This is all the more vexatious, of course, because the day Forbes' letter appeared in the *Daily News*, the *Times* came out with a leader pooh-pooing the idea that a trifling repulse at Plevna could turn the Russians from their march on Constantinople or imperil the position of General Gourko in the Shipka Pass. The letter contradicted the leader point blank on many points, and the contradictions were so glaring that all the Clubs and all the newspaper men in London were laughing at the *Times*.<sup>24</sup>

In such a battle Forbes had to face personal danger, but he also had to cope with anxiety about Villiers from whom he had got separated as they descended from the ridge overlooking Plevna. The anxiety worsened when there were reports of marauding Bashi-Bazouks massacring the wounded. In Bucharest he broke the news of Villiers' disappearance to the small English community in the capital. However, that evening Villiers appeared unharmed having also made his way to Sistova after the battle.<sup>25</sup>

The failure to take Plevna left the Russian strategy in chaos. There could be no advance until it was secured and yet there was now no certainty that the Russians were capable of securing it. Forbes, although anxious lest Plevna should fall in his absence, took a day or two in Bucharest to overcome his exhaustion and to find a replacement for his broken horse. He turned to a theme to which he was to return, namely the condition of the Bulgarians. He and the Russians had been surprised to find that the Bulgarians with whom they had come into contact proved not to be 'oppressed, impoverished, impeded in the exercise of their religion, sure not for an hour of their lives, of the honour of their women, of their property'. Rather they had a level of comfort that the English peasantry might have envied.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Exeter Flying Post*, 8 August 1877.

<sup>25</sup> *War Correspondence*, 304–22. Walker, *Januarius MacGahan*, 236–7, says he rode himself to Transylvania, but, given the distances involved this seems unlikely.

<sup>26</sup> *War Correspondence*, 326–7.

On 9 August Forbes moved back to Sistova where for the next six days he was trapped by torrential rain, which made travel impossible and brought military operations to a standstill. Forbes had enough knowledge to empathise with the plight of the soldiers caught in the open in such weather. Having spent a few days in Sistova in the hope of seeing reinforcements cross the Danube, Forbes, for the want of anything interesting, set off around the Russian-held territory. He found Poradim, some 20 kilometres from Plevna, crammed with correspondents waiting in expectation of a further assault. Forbes was confident it would be some days before it came and he and Villiers rode on to Gobrova. They passed a huge number of refugees from the fighting, not a few casual fugitives, but 'the general exodus of the inhabitants of a whole province'. Their plight was made even more poignant for Forbes in that many of them were 'families whose women were dressed, not in dingy Bulgarian clouts or in Turkish trousers, but as the Englishwoman of the period attired herself'.<sup>27</sup> By now rain had given way to searing heat such as Forbes had not experienced even in India. When it cleared he moved to join the Tsar and the Grand Duke Nicholas at their headquarters in Gorny Studen. He found that his report on the battle at Plevna had been accepted as accurate by the Russian authorities and had been sent from the headquarters to the official newspapers in Russia.

On 22 August he set out for the Shipka Pass where he observed a Turkish assault, as Suleiman Pasha, who commended the Ottoman forces in the south, tried with 30,000 troops to break through the Russian defences of about 7000 troops. The battle had already been going on for some days with the Turks making advances. Reinforcements were being sent in as quickly as possible and one regiment he overtook had not cooked or slept for two days and nights. The Shipka Pass was not some narrow defile, but a broad valley that was, in fact, difficult to defend.

Once again, his descriptions of the battle excelled, with himself in the heart of it.

The fire rages still. The mad clamour of the battle still surges up around into the serene blue heavens. Wounded men come staggering out from among the swarthy trunks and sit down in a heap, or crawl to the ambulance men. I leave the edge of the ridge soon after eleven, and pick my way up towards the peak, on the slope of which the generals and staff

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<sup>27</sup> Forbes, *Memories*, 29.

are surveying the scene. The bullets here are singing like a nest of angry wasps.

He saw General Dragomirov being shot in the knee and helped carry him to safety. For a whole day he was under fire and he wrote his despatches in full on the spot to take his mind off the danger.<sup>28</sup> By the evening the Turkish surge had been driven back and Forbes was confident that the Russians would hold it. He therefore headed back to the headquarters at Gorny Studen, riding for a night and a day to get there. On his way to Shipka he had dropped off a man and a horse at three staging posts every twenty miles. The horses were rested and ready when he made his way back.

He arrived at Gorny Studen long before any official communication from the battlefield, and, in an event that he was to recount again and again in his lectures, was taken to give his account directly to the Tsar. Forbes was wearing dust-covered clothes that he had not changed, night or day, for a fortnight, black from his saddle and still splashed with the blood of the wounded General Dragomirov. He found the Tsar gaunt, worn and haggard with his nerves shattered. There were a couple of days of anxiety when rumours of defeat filtered through, but, in the end, Forbes's analysis had proved accurate. Much to his frustration, since it delayed his getting to the telegraph office, he was also asked to go and give a report to the Grand Duke Nicholas, who was the Russian commander-in-chief. Although the Turkish attack was renewed Forbes was confident that the Russians under Radestsky would hold it and, in a carriage provided for him by Alexander of Battenburg, the future Prince Alexander of Bulgaria, he continued to Bucharest to file his report, while MacGahan arrived at Shipka to continue reporting the battle. Some other reports reaching London suggested that the Turks were gaining the upper hand, but when he returned to Shipka on 31 August he found it all quiet. Soon afterwards he was awarded the Order of the Stanislaus with 'crossed swords', by the Tsar, an award for personal bravery.

Meanwhile tension was again mounting at Plevna. At the end of the month the Turks made a surprise sortie, but were repulsed. On 4 September the Russians advanced and seized one of the surrounding villages. On 7 September the bombardment presaging the third Battle of Plevna began and both Forbes and MacGahan were there to report. After four days of

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<sup>28</sup> Rideing, *Many Celebrities and a Few Others*, 270.

bombardment the infantry moved in. At first the section that Forbes was observing was thrown back and he had to beat a retreat along the ridge. There were three major assaults on the Turkish lines and each time the Russians were repulsed with huge losses of as many as 20,000. Forbes doubted then that Russians could ever succeed.

A number of war correspondents, including the representative of the *Scotsman*, were wounded in this battle, while others were suffering from what was described as 'Danube fever', which involved extreme gastro-enteritis and dysentery. At least half a dozen were struck down by it. One of these was Forbes. There had been early reports on his appearance, suffering from extreme loss of weight and with his face peeling because of the excessive heat. MacGahan too was ill with fever and with the effects of the damaged ankle he had broken on his way to the war front. He was in considerable pain and often had to dictate his dispatches to someone else. Forbes was back in Bucharest in 14 September and sent his last report from the war on 17 September. The hotel would not admit someone who was ill, but Andreas found lodgings for him and nursed Forbes through seven days of delirium. Apparently thinking that Forbes would not survive, Andreas eventually made off with his watch, his supply of money and his horse, but MacGahan and Frank Millet, another correspondent, came to his aid and saw him fit enough to return to London.

Forbes returned from the front with his reputation greater than ever: 'this prince of correspondents' declared the *Aberdeen Journal*. W. T. Stead's *Northern Echo* had him 'first and foremost among war correspondents, towering head and shoulders above all his fellows'. The *Exeter Flying Post* had no doubt that 'W. H. Russell in his best days, was never equal to Archibald Forbes in vividness and vigour'. Forbes's great strength, it claimed, was that he was a soldier, who knew strategy from experience unlike most of the other specials who knew war only from books and, at the front and in camps, were like a fish out of water.

But Forbes is quite at home there, can rough it as well as a Hudson's Bay Trapper, can live without sleep if necessary, and after riding 100 miles in a broiling sun can sit down and throw off a couple of columns of picturesque description as full of life and freshness as if he had only taken a turn round his garden with a cigar after breakfast.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Exeter Flying Post*, 15 September 1877.

Once again, the *Daily News* was in the front rank for its war correspondence and although there was talk of differences of opinion between Forbes and the editor, Frank Hill, Forbes's employers presented him with a cheque for 2000 guineas in addition to his regular salary that was at least £1200 per year. Despite the fact that he had been entrenched with the Russians, his reports had been seen as impartial, recognising the weaknesses of the Russians. His accounts were contrasted with those of the *Times*, whose correspondent tended to underplay the strength and courage of the Turkish forces.<sup>30</sup>

Forbes made a relatively rapid recovery once he was back in England, although Mrs Sala saw him at the time 'looking fearfully old and ill'.<sup>31</sup> After a brief stay at home, he headed to Scotland to further recuperate, staying for a short time with his mother in Aberdeen, before being summoned to Balmoral to give an account of his adventures to the Queen. On his way there he met the Prince of Wales at Ballater station and had a few words with him. After Balmoral he went further north into Ross-shire for autumn sport. By the end of October he seemed to have fully recovered, and there was talk of his going back to Bulgaria. He was elected a member of the United Services Institution, the forum for war and defence discussion, where he was invited to lecture on 'The Russian Operations in Europe'. The Duke of Cambridge offered to take the chair for the lecture, but Forbes asked for his old commanding officer, General Wardlaw.

At the beginning of November a piece by him on the war appeared in the new monthly journal, *The Nineteenth Century* on 'The Russians, the Turks and the Bulgarians'. He praised the courage of the rank-and-file Russians: 'We saw him with sore heart at Plevna, on the 30th of July, standing up to be killed in piteously noble stubbornness of ignorance, rather than retreat without orders'. They were the finest soldier material that he knew. But among the officer class he found corruption, favouritism and a 'general deficiency of a sense of responsibility'. In accounts reminiscent of those of W. H. Russell from the Crimea a quarter of a century earlier, he wrote of false invoices coming from contractors, of stores lying abandoned and going to waste and of a sense among the general staff of nobody really caring about what went on at the front. 'I tremble to think how high corruption reaches in the Russian army,' he wrote. 'I shudder to reflect how low it descends'. He

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<sup>30</sup> *Western Daily Mail*, 27 September 1877.

<sup>31</sup> Sala to Yates, 5 October 1877 in McKenzie, *Letters of George Augustus Sala*, 109.

rejected the stories of Russian atrocities emanating from Turkey and picked up in sections of the British press.

More controversially he made some defence of the Turks. It is true, he declared, that they were barbarians: 'They have neither part nor lot in civilisation; their religion and its injunctions, their origin, the area of their empire, their conservatism, bar them out from membership of the European family circle'. But they had not devastated the land and although the Bulgars had been excluded from various jobs and offices their lot was not a bad one.

It seems to have been a lot for which the practical philanthropist would gladly see a considerable section of his fellow countrymen exchange their own wretched, sodden, hopeless plight. The life of the Bulgarian was eminently preferable to that of the miserable victims of the 'sweater' who exist rather than live in Whitechapel garrets.

In all his journeying through Bulgaria, he claimed, he neither heard of nor saw anyone who had suffered at the hands of the Turks in the previous year. For every mosque there were three churches untouched by the Turks. In contrast the Bulgarians had looted the houses of retreating Turks, endlessly talked of 'four hundred years of repression' and the only evidence of Christianity amongst them was the pious crossing of themselves. All the signs were that the Bulgarians were much better off and better treated than the typical Russian peasant.<sup>32</sup>

This was controversial stuff in a Liberal England firmly aroused with indignation by the tales of the 'Bulgarian atrocities'. It appeared to contradict what MacGahan had said and continued to say, although Forbes, again and again, emphasised that his remarks referred only to northern Bulgaria where he had been, not to the parts further south that MacGahan had visited.<sup>33</sup> Such distinctions were wasted on a partisan press. Forbes's comments were seized on by the Turcophile Conservatives. There was talk of 'MacGahan and his merry men' who were sent to find atrocities and found them. The *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Morning Post* declared that Forbes's article exposed the lies spread by Russophiles.<sup>34</sup> The *Times* saw it as sympathetic to the Turks

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<sup>32</sup> Forbes, 'The Russians, the Turks and the Bulgarians', *Nineteenth Century*, 2 (November 1877), 561 ff.

<sup>33</sup> Walker, *Jannarius MacGahan*, 223–4.

<sup>34</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 2 November 1877, *Pall Mall Gazette*, *Morning Post*, 1



and people found it hard to understand how an employee of the *Daily News* that had been at the forefront in exposing the atrocities in Bulgaria could be writing such things. There were suggestions that since his view had not come out in his earlier articles in the press (which, of course, was not entirely true) then the *Daily News* must have edited his reports. This was something that Forbes immediately rushed to deny, saying that his reports were largely published *verbatim*. Some suggested that it was all about attacking MacGahan and reflected professional jealousy. A sympathetic correspondent who had spoken with Forbes at various times between the Serbian war and the Russo-Turkish war said that he had been full of the highest praise for MacGahan's letters from the East, but that he had 'expressed his disapproval of that gentleman's persistency in describing and re-describing the "atrocities" without sufficient regard, as he thought, for the proportions of the occurrences to other aspects of the Eastern question'.

In the semi-fictionalised account of the war, published in 1894, *Czar and Sultan; The Adventures of a British Lad in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78* Forbes was unstinting in his praise for a 'brilliant colleague', MacGahan: 'MacGahan, with his bright sunny face, his quaint humour, his constant good temper, and his coolness which nothing could disturb, was a singularly attractive man. I loved him from the first'. But Forbes believed in the importance of accurate and balanced accounts and he perhaps recognised that MacGahan in some of his reports had lost that necessary detachment. Indeed, MacGahan himself had admitted to his employers, 'I fear I am no longer impartial, and I am certainly no longer cool. There are certain things that cannot be investigated in a judicial frame of mind . . . There are things too horrible to allow anything like calm inquiry.'<sup>35</sup>

Forbes's article was a much more balanced assessment than the press accounts allowed. Certainly, it reflected a political naivety, that he always recognised in himself, and he can hardly have been prepared for the storm that his article unleashed. The *Times's* military correspondent devoted four columns discussing it. He disagreed little with Forbes's arguments on the corruption and venality of the Russian officers and on the bravery of the rank and file. He even agreed with him that the Bulgarians 'were a most uninviting race', but this, he claimed, was not surprising after 400 years of subjugation. Gladstone devoted a two-hour lecture in the school at Hawarden to reply

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November 1877

<sup>35</sup> Walker, *Januarius MacGahan*, 175.

to Forbes. He was careful not to attack Forbes with too much vehemence, accepting what he had said against Russian atrocities and on Turkish barbarism, but rejecting his indictment of the Bulgarians. He praised Forbes's ability as a witness of events, but queried his skills as an analyst and historian and suggested that he had not seen the central and southern part of Bulgaria where the real atrocities had occurred.<sup>36</sup> A similar line was taken by the historian E.A. Freeman, writing in the *Times*, in an intensely patronising tone. He declared that the piece, while having little that was new in it, was 'fallacious and mischievous'. It was fine when Forbes stuck to the facts, but although he had 'every qualification for the somewhat hasty, impulsive, superficial work of a Correspondent' he had none of the necessary skills or understanding of the historian. It roused Forbes to a stinging reply condemning those who 'loll in their easy chairs, peruse the blue books and then profess themselves masters of the Eastern Question'. It was aimed particularly at Freeman who had written from the spa of Aix-les-Bains and at the Rev. Malcolm MacColl, who even during the earlier Serbian War had been seeking to expose Turkish atrocities.<sup>37</sup>

In spite of the controversy – or, indeed, perhaps because of it – Forbes was given a dinner by many of his fellow journalists on 1 December. There was a suggestion in the hostile *Manchester Evening News* that Forbes's 'lofty opinion of Archibald Forbes' did not make him a very popular person amongst London journalists, but the organising committee contained some of the best-known: the doyen, William Howard Russell, close associates like Edmund Yates from the *World* and Henry Labouchère of *Truth*, editors such as Frederick Greenwood of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and Algernon Borthwick of the *Morning Post*, his *Daily News* associates, Robinson, the general manager, Frank Hill, the editor, Justin McCarthy and J.C. Parkinson leader writers. There was a fellow war correspondent, George Henty of the *Standard*, Max Schlesinger the London correspondent of the *Cologne Gazette*, and from the American press, G.W. Smalley, the London agent of the *New York Tribune*, and J. Russell Young of the *New York Herald*. Amid the newspaper people, which the *Ipswich Times* regarded as the best meeting of journalists and the most widely representative ever held in London, were leading figures from the army as well as the Duke of Sutherland, bedecked in his orders including that of the Bath, which was usually worn only at Court, and Richard

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<sup>36</sup> *Daily News*, 20 November 1877; *Times*, 24 November 1877.

<sup>37</sup> *Times*, 3 December 1877.

Monckton Milnes, Lord Houghton. the wealthy patron of many literary figures. George Augustus Sala, friend and collaborator of Charles Dickens, special correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, presided at the dinner for 150 in the radical meeting place of Willis's Rooms in St James's.<sup>38</sup>

Sala had always found Forbes a bit unbearable but their paths crossed frequently. Writing from Madrid to his friend Yates in 1875, he declared, 'Forbes was here, bragging his head off. Clever men are, I take it, mainly unbearable; but he is the most intolerable celebrity (except Stanley) I ever met'.<sup>39</sup> However, on this occasion, he gave a sparkling toast that seemed to reflect genuine admiration. Seven years ago, Sala declared, Forbes was unknown, but since then he had become the 'Prince of newspaper correspondents', 'by his wonderful power of word-painting, by his minute faculty of composition, his rare and racy humour, by the strict honour and integrity by which he had performed his laborious work, and more than all, by the personal courage, pluck and endurance which he had shown'.<sup>40</sup>

How does he pen his despatches? In a comfortable library, well-stored with books of reference, so that he can know the date of or tell how many men fell at the battle of Marathon? Does he write them in a comfortable club smoking room, with obedient waiters to bring him the odiferous Mocha or the fragrant Havanna? No; he writes them too often in some squalid hovel, in the worst inns, on a sloppy table, with a chance pen, chance ink, and chance paper, surrounded by a howling gang of Turks, Jews, heretics, gipsies[sic], and special correspondents, while the special artists of the *Illustrated London News* and *Graphic* are making some symmetrical lines, with a meal-tub or a hen-coop for an easel! Or perhaps not even the shelter of a thatched roof. Most likely the three columns he writes are written upon a saddle, or a drum, or a portmanteau, with rags on his back, ague and dysentery in his limbs, with fever in his brain, and famine in his belly. That is how he writes the letters which are admired in the clubs and at dinner tables; but little do his admirers know what he has gone through.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Ipswich Times*, 4 December 1877.

<sup>39</sup> Sala to Yates, 3 February 1875 in McKenzie, *Letters of George Augustus Sala*, 123.

<sup>40</sup> A. Arthur Reade, *Literary Success*, 83.

<sup>41</sup> *Examiner*, 8 December 1877.

He is, declared Sala, 'a prince of the pen'. Forbes gave a brief and rather jumbled reply. He admitted that he hated public speaking, declaring that he would rather be shot at for half an hour than have to speak for that length of time; but he seems to have been genuinely moved by the occasion.<sup>42</sup> After dinner a large group repaired to the Arts Club in Hanover Square, rapidly becoming one of Forbes's favourite haunts. Meanwhile, Forbes's prestige grew further with the appearance of his portrait in a kind of military uniform by 'Ape', Carlo Pellegrini in *Vanity Fair*, a portrait based on a photograph using the latest flash photography.<sup>43</sup>

Against medical advice Forbes headed back to the front five days after the dinner, but events overtook him. He arrived in St Petersburg only to hear that Plevna had eventually been starved into submission and Osman Pasha surrendered on 10 December. Frank Millet of the *New York Herald* entering the town, found it a 'charnel house', with people dying in the streets of starvation and want of water, a horror beyond imagination.<sup>44</sup> Two days later the Turks appealed for mediation by the great powers, but Bismarck declined to intervene. Forbes found that there were those in Russian army circles who were not enthusiastic about his being allowed to join the troops in the light of his denunciation of the corruption within the Russian army elite and the criticism of the Grand Duke Nicholas. Forbes had no alternative but to remain in St Petersburg for some weeks. While there he wrote about the sheer weight of numbers that the Russian army could draw upon from its peasantry. He could only report on the jubilations in Russia when the news of the fall of Plevna came through. He did, however, get challenged to a number of duels by Russian officers, all of which he declined. He eventually received permission to proceed and made it as far as Bucharest before his Danube fever returned. He accompanied the Tsar on his return to St Petersburg and witnessed the fervid reception that he received. Fourteen months later the Tsar, whom Forbes had come to admire as essentially honest, was assassinated.

Forbes's reports from the Russo-Turkish war were those of a correspondent at the peak of his profession. A reviewer of the collection of *Daily News*' reports from the war by the papers various special correspondents, the future Lieutenant-General W. F. Butler had no doubt.

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<sup>42</sup> *New York Times*, 17 December 1877.

<sup>43</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 19 January 1878.

<sup>44</sup> Walker, *Januarius MacGaban*, 280.

It is not too much to say, however, that Mr Forbes has succeeded in eclipsing in Roumania and Bulgaria all his previous successes in Alsace and Lorraine, and has placed the whole fabric of war correspondence upon even a higher pedestal than had yet been given to it.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> W. F. Butler, 'The War Campaign and the War Correspondent', *Macmillan's Magazine* (March 1878), 398.

## 12 A Cyprus Interlude

*If we were to make it our aim and end to undertake a wholesale crusade of civilisation, a considerable quantity of this sort of philanthropic enterprise lies nearer and closer to us than a casual island in a dead angle of the Mediterranean.*

Archibald Forbes, 'The Fiasco of Cyprus',  
*Nineteenth Century*, October 1878, 610.

It may be that Forbes felt that his career as a war correspondent had come to an end. He had told other correspondent in the Balkans that this was his last assignment. The cheque for 2000 guineas from the *Daily News* may have been the parting of the ways. His piece in *Nineteenth Century* was extensively used by Conservative speakers to undermine the stance that had been taken by the paper. With the country more deeply divided on a foreign policy issue than it had been for many decades, Forbes's views seemed to put him on the opposite side from his employers and to undermine one of their greatest scoops, MacGahan's exposé of the Bulgarian atrocities. Perhaps it was no more than Forbes taking the opportunity to recuperate from his illness. Whatever the reason, the first six months of 1878 were spent on the most extraordinary and rigorous lecture tour.

Once again he was a celebrity; in this case more than ever. He moved into a new house, 34 Lanark Villas, Clifton Road in wealthy Maida Vale, and his friends in the *World* presented a profile of him in his new home. Forbes himself had done some of the earlier pieces on celebrities in the *World*. It was to become the source of much of what has been written about Forbes: the earlier steps into writing, the appointment to the *Daily News*, the Commune, the war adventures. Commenting on this piece in the *World*, a correspondent in the *Sheffield Independent* described Forbes as 'man full of exultant and irrepressible animal spirits, joking, laughing, chafing, telling stories with or without foundation, and leaving his innocent auditors frequently uncertain whether he has been in earnest or in badinage'. There were, in the house, few relics of his wars other than some photographs and a collection of *laissez passer* from various generals. What it did have were a few weapons and ornaments from his India travels. There was a library 'extending from Klausewitz

*On War* to Von Scherff's *Tactics of Infantry* and embracing all the most recent works on the art military'.

The *Daily News's* collection of the war correspondence of Forbes, MacGahan and various other correspondents was published in mid-December 1877 and war fever against Russia was gaining ground once again. There was a business opportunity for the impresario, Richard D'Oyly Carte, who organised the lecture tour for Forbes. It started in Brighton and was followed by three lectures in London. With a five-shilling admission charge, numbers in London were rather thin, but in the provinces Forbes, bedecked in medals from Germany, Spain, Serbia and Russia, packed them in. It was the same format everywhere. Forbes would stand alone on the platform, hands behind his back and read a lecture for an hour to an hour on a half. The delivery, apparently, was fairly monotonous, but the content seemed to excite the listeners. There was an account of the Russian crossing of the Danube, the battle of Shipka Pass and the second battle of Plevna. From London the tour took him to Colchester and to the officers' club at Aldershot and then on the Portsmouth, Exeter, Bristol, Aberdare and Manchester. Arriving in Manchester he discovered that the chairman of his lecture was Dr Richard Pankhurst. It is not clear which of Pankhurst's views Forbes would have disliked most – his anti-monarchism, his secularism or just his deep hostility to British policy on the Turkish Empire in the Balkans. Whatever the reason, much to Pankhurst's anger, Forbes refused to have him as chairman. Afterwards, Forbes tried to mollify him with a letter in the *Manchester Guardian* saying that he was concerned that his lectures should be non-political and Pankhurst had too high a radical profile.<sup>1</sup> Then it was on to Scotland and to lectures in Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen.

In Edinburgh, relics of a mis-spent youth came back to haunt him. A local tobacconist raised an action against him in the sheriff court for an unpaid bill of £17.15s.9d. for tobacco and cigars incurred when Forbes was a clerk in a lawyer's office in the city twenty years before in 1858. After about a month the sheriff threw out the case, claiming that he had no jurisdiction on the matter and granted Forbes his expenses.

Meanwhile, the lecture tour continued at an even more frantic pace, with sometimes seven lectures per week. In early March most of the main Yorkshire towns were covered, together with Leicester, Nottingham and Derby. In Liverpool he was given dinner by the local journalists and predicted

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<sup>1</sup> *City Jackdam*, 15 February 1878.

that war with Russia could break out within a fortnight. It was here that he declared that he would probably not again be a war correspondent, but he had written to the *Times* a few weeks earlier suggesting that what the army needed was 'A Reconnaissance Corps' of qualified, experienced men who could reconnoitre areas where conflict was likely. He suggested that retired army people, himself included, would be ideal to form this body of scouts.<sup>2</sup>

After Newcastle on 1 April 1878, he was in Durham on the 2nd. In Durham he received a threatening postcard, accusing him of being a 'paid Russian newspaper hireling' and warning that he would receive rough treatment were he to appear. 'Come if you have the audacity, and spout for your Russian pay. Loyal subjects of England and the Queen's government await you.'<sup>3</sup> In fact, his lecture passed off without incident and after Sunderland on 3 April he was back in Edinburgh and then north, taking in small towns such as Banff and as far north as Tain. On the way south from there he gave a talk, without charge, in Grantown-on-Spey. In the audience that evening was W.H. Russell, who was on his way to stay with M. T. Bass, the brewer, at Tulchan Lodge on the River Spey nearby. No doubt because his head was firmly in his notes, as usual, he did not seem to have noticed Russell and a friend coming late into the hall. But his talk included 'a panegyric of the virtues and powers of the founder of the military correspondent's art', Russell. Only at the end of the talk was he astonished to see Russell in the audience.<sup>4</sup> After Scotland it was the Midlands: West Hartlepool, Wolverhampton, Worksop, Birmingham, Leamington, then Norwich, and three lectures in the Pottery towns. In Rugby the lecture was on behalf of the local Typographical Society's superannuation fund. This was followed by another intensive series in Lancashire and Yorkshire and then to Wales and Belfast.

There was a further boost to his standing with the publication in early March of a review article by W.F. Butler on the *Daily News's War Correspondence* in *Macmillan's Magazine*. Forbes was the hero of the piece as a 'writer of vivid and powerful narrative', with letters that 'possess almost a sense of sound, of the noise, movement and roar of battle which no picture can ever realise'.<sup>5</sup> At the Press Fund dinner in May, the Foreign Secretary, Lord Salisbury, showed praise on the 'special correspondent' who 'seems to combine in himself

<sup>2</sup> Hove Public Library, Wolseley Papers, Forbes to Wolseley, 9 March 1878.

<sup>3</sup> *Evening Telegraph*, 4 April 1878.

<sup>4</sup> Atkins, *Russell*, Vol. 2, 221.

<sup>5</sup> W.F. Butler, 'The War Campaign and the War Correspondent', *Macmillan's Magazine* (March 1879), 398–405.



the power of a first class steeple chaser with the power of the most brilliant writer – the most wonderful physical endurance with the most remarkable mental vigour’. Forbes toasting the army and navy reputedly reflected the ‘sentiment of the hour, that there is a worse calamity than war, namely, national dishonour’.<sup>6</sup>

It was on his way back from Wales that Forbes heard of the death from typhoid of Januarius MacGahan in Constantinople. He wrote a powerful tribute to him in the *Daily News* recalling his courage and his good humour and concluding, ‘Our profession has lost one of its brightest ornaments, one of the most notable of men; the world, in MacGahan’s death, suffers the loss of a fearless and brilliant truth teller’. After Forbes’s departure from Bulgaria and the fall of Plevna on 10 December, MacGahan had been the main *Daily News* ‘special’ with the Russians. Despite the snow, the Russians advanced and on 9 January 1878 the major stronghold of Sofia was captured. The Turks now appealed for an armistice as a Russian army approached Adrianopolis. To the British this was perilously close to Constantinople and at the request of the Turks the British sent a fleet to the Dardanelles, although it was soon withdrawn, only to be sent again a month later, with renewed talk of a possible war between Britain and Russia. MacGahan and the triumphant Russians arrived in Adrianopolis in the middle of January and an armistice was reached with the Russians forces camped within sight of Constantinople.

While Forbes was on his lecture tour in February war fever was raging in Britain, the ‘Great MacDermott’s’ musical-hall song, ‘We don’t want to fight, but by Jingo if we do,/We’ve got the men, we’ve got the ships, we’ve got the money too’ generating precisely the kind of xenophobia that the Conservative government wanted. Jingoism was rampant and everywhere there was talk of war. Yet, apart from the occasional statement at various times that war seemed likely, the numerous reports of his lectures show no sign that he engaged with the immediate issues or that he answered questions from his audiences. He seems to have studiously avoided politics.

Eventually in March 1878 peace was signed between Russia and Turkey at San Stefano. Serbia, Romania and an enlarged Montenegro were recognised as fully independent states. Bulgaria, after two years of Russian occupation, was to become an autonomous state with an elected prince. All of this had

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Hatton, *Journalistic London. Being a Series of Sketches of Famous Pens and Papers of the Day* (London 1998; 1882), 177.

implications for other powers and Count Andr ssy, the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister, called an international congress in Berlin, where Bismarck was to act as ‘honest broker’. The British were deeply suspicious and reserves were called up and troops called back from India to strengthen the British presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. The mustering of the reserves, a creation of the previous Liberal government, was a move of which Forbes approved.

After much talk of war and threats of war, secret agreements gave the British some of what they wanted. Bulgaria was pushed back from the Aegean and divided. The British agreed to defend Turkey from any further encroachment on the Ottoman Empire in Asia, in return for which the British were ceded the right to base a force on the island of Cyprus. The Congress of Berlin ratified most of the early decisions and French objections to the British occupation of Cyprus were overcome by promising them a free hand in Tunis.

By the end of June, it is not surprising that Forbes’s lectures were getting a bit stale and had been overly reported in the press. He himself must have been getting bored with them. But they were, of course, lucrative. Reputedly he was taking in £100 a week from them and he seems to have been planning to repeat them on an American tour. However, he seized the chance to get back in harness and set off for Cyprus with the new British high commissioner, Sir Garnet Wolseley. Once again he was the *Daily News’s* ‘special correspondent’. To Wolseley war correspondents were still ‘those newly invented curses to armies, who eat the rations of fighting men and do not work at all’ and who were pandering to an unhealthy public taste for news.<sup>7</sup>

The news of the ‘annexation’ of Cyprus came as a huge surprise to most people and little was known of the island. Disraeli, now Lord Beaconsfield, tried to present it as part of his ‘triumph’ at the Congress of Berlin. Both he and Lord Salisbury enthused about the beauty of the island, on its health-giving atmosphere and on the political and military advantages that it gave Britain. Initially, their line was quite well-received. As Forbes himself admitted, when the news came through in July he ‘threw up his hat and crowed as be-seemed an honest and docile jingo’. The Convention by which the British were given the administration of the island was vague on how far this was a substitute for Turkish sovereignty. Travelling via Brindisi and Malta, Forbes and the usual cluster of war correspondents, Henty, Sala, Villiers and Bell,

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Wilkinson-Latham, *From Our Special Correspondent*, 101.

arrived at Larnaca on 25 July. It was soon clear that Forbes deeply disliked the place – the heat, the insects, the people, the prices. Larnaca, Nicosia and other towns he regarded as ‘so many congeries of cesspools’. Nicosia he found a place without drains, with cesspools rarely emptied and almost invariably close to wells: ‘no offal, refuse, garbage, or manure is ever removed’. Even the women failed to charm him: ‘Cyprus may confidently be backed against the world for ugly women. I have seen two pretty ones. I think I could count on the fingers of one hand the merely comely ones’.<sup>8</sup>

Very quickly his reports produced controversy when he exposed the high levels of sickness amongst the troops. He claimed that out of 157 Indian sappers 57 were in hospital. A quarter of the troops were ill and two-thirds of the medical staff. The Secretary for War, Colonel Stanley, denied the reports, saying that there was no serious illness amongst the troops and citing a telegram from Wolseley that disingenuously claimed that only six per cent of the troops were hospitalised. It was probably true, but only because that was all the hospitals could accommodate. Forbes, never one to have his statements contradicted without retort, immediately responded with details of his sources and further confirmation of the conditions: ‘I saw tentful after tentful of sick men in utter prostration; many with their heads and temples shaved, and blisters applied; some delirious.’<sup>9</sup> But by the time he got this out, parliament had risen and so no minister could be asked to justify Stanley’s statement.<sup>10</sup>

By now Forbes himself had succumbed to some kind of fever and was heading for home. At least one paper suggested that it was not illness had driven him home, but that he had offended the military authorities with his comments and they had made life in Cyprus too hot for him. It was evident, however, that he had been bored by the lack of action. Once home he rattled off a piece to the *Nineteenth Century*, ‘The “fiasco” of Cyprus’.<sup>11</sup> Although Beaconsfield declared that the island had been occupied after careful consideration and with adequate information, Forbes suggested that Wolseley had been despatched with nothing better at his command than ‘a *précis* of consular reports compiled in the Intelligence Department, fragmentary, irrelevant, and obsolete, even beyond the average for such documents’. As in his despatches to the *Daily News*, he claimed that only Turkey gained from the

<sup>8</sup> *Daily News*, 10 August 1878.

<sup>9</sup> *Daily News*, 27 August 1878.

<sup>10</sup> Forbes, ‘My Campaign in Pall Mall’, *Universal Review* (March 1889), 375–6.

<sup>11</sup> *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 4 (October 1878), 609–26.

Convention. ‘We, claiming to be the greatest Power in Western Europe, have, *quoad*, this wretched Asiatic island, constituted ourselves vassals, the tributaries of a battered and broken barbarian power.’ It was not at all clear, he said, why the British had occupied Cyprus. It was nonsense to suggest that it had anything to do with protecting India from a Russian threat via Persia. It was also not about reforming the place since the Turks were still the sovereign power and were due to get any excess of taxes over expenditure. The troops, he again asserted, in particular the Gurkhas, had been decimated by a ‘treacherous climate of sun and swamp’. Soon afterwards Stanley, the Secretary for War, and W.H. Smith, the First Lord of the Admiralty, and reputedly the model for Sir Joseph Porter, ‘the Ruler of the Queen’s Navee’ in Gilbert and Sullivan’s new comic opera, *H.M.S. Pinafore*, were despatched to Cyprus to report on the situation, but they were unable to seriously contradict Forbes’s assessment.

Forbes’s article ended by claiming that if India needed to be defended then it had to be elsewhere.

Our safety then, equally from danger real and fancied, in our front, and from possible chaos in our rear, lies in the military occupation of Afghanistan. It is from Kabul and Herat that the words, “Thus far and no further” will resound with effect alike to St Petersburg and through the bazaars of Hindustan, not from a miserable island in a dead angle of the Mediterranean.<sup>12</sup>

It was a timely comment. In November British troops invaded Afghanistan.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 626.

## 13 Afghanistan and Burma

*Brilliance was indeed Forbes's special quality. His work had a fine flash and go, the power of instant observation, the gift of easy, adroit expression, the spirit and feeling both of the battle and of the larger task of campaigning, which made the ideal correspondent.*

H.W. Massingham in *The Leisure Hour* June 1900, 724

Afghanistan was a country caught between the two expansionist empires of Britain and Russia. By the 1840s British control over northern India had extended to the Khyber Pass. By the 1860s Russian expansion in Central Asia had reached Tashkent and Samarkand and was pushing towards Persia and Afghanistan. The British had long nourished a fear of an advance into India by Russia and their response was to steadily bite into territory that had once been part of an Afghan kingdom, thus adding to Russian concerns. In 1838 a British Indian force had invaded and placed a puppet ruler on the throne in Kandahar. The Afghans rebelled and in June 1842 the 4500 troops stationed in Kabul, together with nearly 12,000 camp followers, were forced to pull out and in a disastrous retreat to the Khyber Pass nearly all were slaughtered.

The aim of the British was to keep Afghanistan as a friendly and independent buffer state against Russian expansion, but this gave the Afghans considerable bargaining strength. In 1863 the long-term Amir of Afghanistan, Dost Mohammed, died and a decade of civil war followed before his son, Sher Ali, was able to fight off the challenge of his brothers. Sher Ali was less capable of maintaining the delicate balance between the two competing powers and rather over-played his hand. The arrival of the poet diplomat, Edward Bulwer Lytton, as viceroy of India in 1876 added to the problems. Lytton was not content to let matters drift and he demanded that a permanent British Resident should be allowed in Kabul. On the example of Indian states, the Afghans were aware that this was the usual precursor of ever tighter British control. Sher Ali declined to accept a British envoy and Lytton claimed that this was further evidence that the Amir was intriguing with the Russian authorities in Tashkent.

The Treaty of Berlin had seen the British extend their activities in the eastern Mediterranean and take over Cyprus. The Russian tit-for-tat was to

become more active on the North-West frontier. General Stolietov, one of the defenders of the Shipka Pass was sent to Kabul and received by Sher Ali. Lytton now demanded that the British envoy, Sir Neville Chamberlain, be received, but the Amir prevaricated. Lytton was ready to invade, but, with the tensions in the Balkans and elsewhere, Disraeli's government restrained him and instead sought an apology and the admission of the envoy. Major Louis Cavagnani, of Italian and Irish extraction, who was a strong advocate of a 'forward' policy on the Indian frontier, was sent to prepare the ground, but he and his escort were halted by the Afghans at the Khyber Pass. An ultimatum was sent by the Viceroy with a deadline of 20 November 1878. The decision was made to invade.

The attack was a three-pronged one, with one force of 10,000 men, led by Sir Sam Browne, going through the Khyber Pass, a second, numbering 5,500, under Major-General Roberts, through the Kuram valley, south of the Khyber, to reach to the Peiwar Pass and a third under Major-General Donald Stewart from Quetta into the Pisheen Valley to Kandahar.

Forbes was in Simla, the summer capital of British India, by the end of September 1878, having travelled out to India in the company of another North-East Scot, Major-General Stewart. He was at the Khyber Pass in time for the first advance into Afghanistan. Having learned from his friend Henty during the Prince of Wales's visit the importance of having a reliable servant, Forbes found himself one in the Goa Club in Bombay, the splendidly-named John Assisis de Compostella de Crucis, who remained with him for some years, although he was beaten by Forbes at an early stage when he turned up drunk at the railway station. Forbes went with the Peshawar Force through the Khyber Pass. The force had orders to capture the Afghan fort of Ali Musjid in the first twenty-four hours. Resistance was stronger than expected, but Browne's force occupied the fortress on 22 November after the Afghans pulled out during the night. Forbes rode the ten miles back to Jumrod and at 10am on the 22nd was able to telegraph the first news of the capture by field telegraph. It was classic Forbes, vibrant, descriptive battle-reporting.

Soon after two o'clock the infantry advanced briskly. The Fourth Brigade took the left slope of the valley, pressing on through rocks to Ali Musjid, while the Third Brigade took the right side. When the last rocky ridge on the left slope was crossed, a rocky plateau plain followed nearly up to the foot of the Ali Musjid rock, and the skirmishers pushed on steadily, firing briskly and evoking a sharp reply from the enemy, who

were studding the rick-strewn slopes. Meanwhile Manderson's battery moving along the bed of the stream had come into action. Four guns, previously silent, came again into action and the enemy developed guns in new places.<sup>1</sup>

Thanks to the time differences, the report appeared on the streets of London in a special edition of the *Daily News* at 9am that same day, made its way across the Atlantic and was being read in San Francisco at 6am, still on 22 November. Extracts from his report were reprinted in hundreds of papers throughout the world.

However, it soon proved to be a frustrating war for Forbes. The military were determined to keep control of the reporting and, indeed, most of the *Times's* reports were from their 'special correspondent' who was General Roberts's private secretary. At other times the telegraph from Peshawar was cut and Forbes had to go to Lahore to get his messages out. Also, with a telegram from India costing 4/6d a word the number of long descriptive pieces that he could afford was no doubt limited. For once he was in the wrong place since there was little further action to report on his front. The lively action was further south with Roberts. He too crossed the frontier on 21 November and battled through high passes to nearly 50 miles from Kabul. The Russians quickly pulled out of Kabul and Sher Ali fled, declaring his son Yakoub Khan as regent. The Russians would not let Sher Ali cross the frontier and he died at the end of February 1879. His son, Yakoub Khan, agreed to meet with the British envoy Cavagnani at Gundamark and on 21 May a treaty was signed, by which Afghanistan was no longer regarded as an independent buffer state, but as subordinate to the British Crown.

Forbes arrived in Jellalabad on 27 December where the troops settled in for the winter and remained with them until early January 1879. The one compensation he had was that he was able to renew contacts with some of the Indian army officers that he had met in Cyprus. He was fairly appalled by the inadequacy of the forces being sent and the poor quality of transport, but his public criticism of something that might have aided the enemy was muted. However, he did not restrain his criticism of the tactics and practices. He condemned the practice by which Indian troops were kept on sentry duty perpetually, two hours in every six while British troops

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<sup>1</sup> *Daily News*, 22 November 1878.

were excused what he regarded as killing work that was ‘cruel and suicidal’. He was critical of the fact that there were too few British officers and of the fact that military aid was being sought from the native states, harking back to the comments on his previous visit to India when he had warned that some of the independent forces were dangerously large. Everywhere he saw signs of efforts to keep down the costs to something near the £1 million that the government had estimated although, as he pointed out, it was India that was having to bear the cost of the war.<sup>2</sup> He believed that the advance had been started too early before the forces were fully ready and the army ‘was so badly equipped and organised that it was fortunate indeed it encountered no serious opposition’. He wrote of a ‘bewildering confusion between the commissariat and transport department’, of divisions between different military commanders and of strained relations between the military and political departments. As always, he was also concerned about the plight of the ordinary – in this case Indian – soldiers. Fever, exposure and insufficient clothing were having a devastating effect on the native regiments. The 14th Sikhs had had to be withdrawn from the field, 64 were dead, and scarcely half of them could walk.

He was scathing about Disraeli’s talk of a ‘scientific frontier’ which seemed to mean one that could be defended by a garrison of 5,000 troops rather than the 100,000 now required. To Forbes this was ‘sheer nonsense’. There was a debate over where a new frontier with India should be and there was a talk of a line running from Kandahar to Jellalabad. Forbes had no doubt that any new frontier had to include Kabul and basically argued for one running along what is now a main road from Kandahar to Kabul.<sup>3</sup>

After a time in Lahore, he made it back to Jellalabad for Christmas, accompanied part of the way by Lord William Beresford and a Scottish friend, Major (later General) Alexander Kinloch. There were just the three of them with four or five Indian servants and they had to face the occasional sniper’s bullet. There were moments of excitement on the way.

As I finished my cheroot outside the long empty sepoys’ tent in a hospital dhooly [a stretcher or palanquin] inside which my man had made my bed, no sound broke the stillness save the occasional neigh of a cavalry horse down among the gardens and the contented grunt emitted by one

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<sup>2</sup> *Daily News*, 13 January 1879.

<sup>3</sup> *Daily News*, 13 February 1879.



of the artillery elephants chained in a row right in my front. Two hours later there raged a din as if the fiends were having a 'night out'. A bicker of marketry fire rattled down the valley, intermingled with the wild yells and defiances of the hill men, who were making a *chapao* or night attack on the camp. Mules were braying, horses squealing, bullocks lowing; and the elephants in front of me were rattling their chains as they trumpeted uneasily. For my own part I had grown callous of these pestilent *chapaos*... So I lay still in the dhooly, and, indeed, being weary had begun to doze off again. Suddenly there was a crash, the tent caved in, and the canvas came tumbling down on my dhooly. There was a resounding sound, and the dhooly splintered into fragments before me as I lay. I was quite unhurt, but the occurrence seemed peculiar, and deserved investigation; so I extricated myself from the wreckage, and began to take observations. These gave me the impression that I had had rather a narrow escape. A chance bullet had gone through the ear of one of the artillery elephants chained just in front of the tent. In a paroxysm of pain and scare, she had broken loose, wheeled about, and in her frantic stampede had blundered right over the tent, and either trodden or fallen over the dhooly in which I had been lying.<sup>4</sup>

After Peshawar Beresford left to find some action with General Roberts, and, with a pause to watch some camel racing, Forbes continued through the Pass. Catching up with a force that was taking retribution against one of the nearby Afghan clans, he saw some action and helped tend two of the wounded, 'with the bullets splashing on the stones all about us'. He was later mentioned in despatches for this, gazetted almost a year later.<sup>5</sup>

Forbes clearly loved being in the company of people like Sir Sam Browne who had lost his arm during the Mutiny, Hector Macpherson who had won the VC with Havelock at Lucknow in 1857 and 'Jenkins of the Guides' who was 'a terror in every glen of that turbulent frontier-land in which he had been fighting off and on for the past twenty years'. On New Year's Day 1879 he had one of these experiences in which he delighted, a walk around Jellalabad with Major Bayley, who as Corporal Bayley had been in the first Afghan War, had helped defend Jelallabad until a relief force arrived and who

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<sup>4</sup> Forbes, 'A Christmastide in the Khyber Pass', *English Illustrated Magazine* (December 1884), 146–7.

<sup>5</sup> *London Gazette*, 7 November 1879.

in 1842 had seen Dr Bryden emerge as the sole survivor of the massacre of the withdrawing British force from Kabul.<sup>6</sup>

With the advance into Afghanistan halted until the Spring, Forbes took the chance of exploring a relatively new area of British interest, Burma (Myanmar), which was becoming important to British commercial interests keen to increase trade with Western China. There had been tensions and open conflict with the Burmese since the 1820s and, in the 1850s, a substantial province of the Burmese kingdom had been annexed. The area of Upper Burma outside British control was still relatively little known to the British, but a treaty with the Burmese had opened up the Irawaddy River as a trade route to China. The King since the 1850s, Mindon Min, had tried to play a careful game of maintaining good relations with the British, but he found his authority constantly undermined by commercial interests dealing with some of those ethnic groups within Upper Burma who challenged his authority. The situation had changed for the worse in October 1878 when King Mindon died. With forty-eight sons there was an inevitable conflict over the succession and after a palace struggle the rather weak Thibaw Min had emerged as ruler. Thibaw began to put obstacles in the way of British trade and began to cultivate French interests from neighbouring Indo-China. There were mutterings of a possible war.

Forbes now headed across country to Calcutta, a journey from Peshawar that, thanks to railway development, now only took four days, where not so long before it would have taken three months. On 18 January 1879 the steamer of the British India Steam Navigation Company took him down the Hooghly, passed the recently developed jute mills, and across to the mouth of the Rangoon River. The journey took nearly five days and he arrived in Rangoon in temperatures above 38 degrees Celsius. In Rangoon Forbes found a British community enjoying gymkhanas, tennis, cricket matches and boating, despite the blistering temperatures and the endless flies and mosquitos.

From Rangoon he set off on 27 January to travel the 800 miles to Mandalay, the Burmese capital. The first 160 miles was by the metre gauge railway that ran from Rangoon to Prome and avoided a slow navigation up the lower reaches of the Irrawaddy River. He was enchanted by the profusion of the country through which he passed and charmed by the ethnic mix of the population. He noted in particular the growing presence of the Chinese,

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<sup>6</sup> See page 220.

who controlled much of the trade. From Prome there was then a 420 mile journey in a Clyde-built ship of the Irawaddy Flotilla Company, which had the monopoly of shipping between Upper Burma and the seaports. The firm of Dennys in Dumbarton on the Clyde produced the parts which were shipped out and assembled at their yard in Rangoon.

In Pagan, one of the stops on the way, he was charmed by the temples, many in ruins, that spread from some eight miles along the bank of the river. Here in February 1826 the Burmese had made a futile last stand against the British invasion led by Sir Archibald Campbell. As always, Forbes had immersed himself in the history of the place and had clearly been reading Henry Havelock's account of the First Burmese War. Havelock had seen nothing worth recording in his description of Prome, but, as Forbes pointed out, Havelock 'had an eye, in an architectural sense, only for a barrack and a Baptist chapel' – an allusion to Havelock's conversion after marrying the daughter of a Baptist missionary in India and to his proselytising.

On the second day he left the territory dubbed British Burma and moved into what remained independent and controlled by the King. Forbes claimed to see an immediate difference both in the environment and in the populace. Although the quality of the soil along the river banks looked much the same he noted much less cultivation in independent Burma.

The fat, alluvial loam that has only to be tickled with a hoe to laugh with a harvest is equally deep; but beyond the British confines the patches of tillage are few and far between. The villages become rarer; jungle closes in on each side down to the water's edge for miles; at the halting places there are few signs of commercial or agricultural activity. The people are swarthier, less vivacious, less plump. Their houses are more squalid, and their circumstances to the most cursory observer palpably worse. The text of misgovernment is writ large over the face of the whole country when once the British frontier is passed, and the frank independence of the native inhabitants – to me the most pleasing feature of British Burmah – gives place to a sullenness broken by fitful starts of forced merriment.<sup>7</sup>

The purpose of the trip to Mandalay was to try to get access to King Thibaw, who had been on the throne for just four months. The British Resident, a

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<sup>7</sup> *Daily News*, 20 March 1879.

Mr Shaw, was not confident that an audience could be arranged speedily. Relations with the British were extremely formal because of the 'great shoe question'. Burmese protocol demanded that shoes should be removed in the palace and British officials had at first gone along with this, but on a visit to the Indian Viceroy in 1875 the Burmese delegation had removed neither their shoes nor their hats and the issue of whose protocol would be superior blew up into a diplomatic incident. Since the Resident now declined to remove his shoes he could no longer enter the Palace. Forbes, who had scheduled only four days for his visit to Mandalay tried a different tack, making use of the good offices of a Dr Clement Williams, a former army surgeon, who had been in Burma since the 1860s and who had immersed himself in Burmese culture, spoke the language and had dealings with some of the royal ministers. Williams introduced him to the senior Minister, the Kinwun Mingyi, who had headed a Burmese mission to Europe some years before. This had included a trip to the Duke of Sutherland's residence at Dunrobin Castle, which gave a useful hook for conversation. The minister was also familiar with the *Daily News*, exclaiming 'Ah! Ah! Gladstone, Bright' when Forbes was introduced.<sup>8</sup>

On the following day Forbes was granted his visit to the King, 'reverencing the golden face', as it was called. As a gift, Forbes could only offer an opera glass, a few boxes of chocolate and a work-box. In return he received a satin robe, lined with fur, a couple of silver boxes and a ruby ring. The last, large as it was, apparently proved to be worth only thirty shillings.<sup>9</sup> Apart from the exchange of gifts and a few questions asking where Forbes had come from there was little to the audience.

Forbes was, however, left with a very good impression of the Burmese, who had recently had fairly negative coverage in the British press, with accusations of arrogance and incivility, no doubt encouraged by commercial interests in London and Glasgow that were pressing for British control of Upper Burma. Forbes's message was not what some in British government circles wanted to hear.

That the Burmese are an independent people there can be no doubt;... and their backbones are not supple with profuse salaams to sahibs. But are salaams the breath of our nostrils? We are a free people, priding

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<sup>8</sup> Forbes, *Camp, Quarters and Casual Places*, 17.

<sup>9</sup> Forbes, *Memories*, 39.

ourselves on our freedom; and methinks we ought to regard with the reverse of distaste the free bearing of a people in whose independence is not discernible any infusions of arrogant self-assertion.<sup>10</sup>

Despite this, with heavy irony, he went on to suggest to Lord Beaconsfield, as his old sparring partner Disraeli had become, that the time was ripe for the annexation of Burma. The existing frontier between British Burma and independent Burma was haphazard; a more 'scientific' one would include the rest of Burma. But there were also economic arguments.

There is no meat on the bones of Afghanistan, but Burmah is as fat as butter. British Burmah now yields to the Indian Exchequer a clear annual revenue of nearly a million; were native Burmah absorbed the produce of one year would go far to pay the expenses of annexation. The defence of the Burmese would be feeble, and there would result the *éclat* of a fine successful war. It is true that the people are fairly happy and content as they are, and that the Government is inoffensive; but these are matters of trivial consequence. A *casus belli* will be found or made. The crime of the Ameer was heinous in refusing to accept Sir Neville Chamberlain's mission; but it may be questionable whether it equalled in turpitude the atrocity of the Burmese monarch, in prohibiting Mr Shaw from coming to Court with his shoes on.

Soon after Forbes left Burma, news filtered through that King Thibaw had slaughtered some 90 of his relatives together with their families, anyone who might challenge his power. The traditional pattern, so as not to shed royal blood, was to have them strangled, the bodies thrown into a large trench and the earth trampled down by elephants.<sup>11</sup> Forbes saw it as a not uncommon practice in Burmese royal history, but he also saw it as an assertion of power by the King at a time when the British had just suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Zulus. He warned that Thibaw might well attack British Burma and called for preventative action. Some of the Indian press actually accused Forbes of having precipitated the massacre.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Daily News*, 25 March 1879.

<sup>11</sup> A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Pagoda War. Lord Dufferin and the Fall of the Kingdom of Ava 1885–86* (Newton Abbot, 1974), 61.

<sup>12</sup> *Illustrated Sydney Times*, 10 June 1882.

While Forbes was in Mandalay his article 'Plain Words About the Afghan Question' was published as the opening article in the first issue of Edmund Yates's new publishing venture the monthly, *Time*. He recalled his first acquaintance with Yates 'in a Vienna attic years ago' and declared 'my love for him and his has ever since been part of my life'. It was well-trailed as a sensational piece and to a large extent it was. It contained a biting indictment of British policy towards Afghanistan since the 1850s. He was particularly critical of Sir John Lawrence, who first as administrator of the Punjab, which the British had annexed in 1849, and then from 1864 to 1869 as Viceroy, had pursued a policy of cutting all intercourse with the Afghans, one that Forbes dubbed 'don't know, won't know and musn't know'. At the same time, Lawrence had deliberately antagonised Sher Ali by encouraging rebels against his rule. His successor Lord Northbrook had done nothing to undo this policy and had set his face against expansion into another Islamic and xenophobic country. Forbes himself had experienced the official attitude when, on his way back from the Bengal famine in 1873, he had suggested that he return through Afghanistan. He was explicitly forbidden to enter the country. When he declared that he would go without permission, he was told that in that case he would be pursued and brought back.<sup>13</sup> Only with the arrival of Lord Salisbury at the Foreign Office in 1874, according to Forbes, had the growing problem of Afghanistan been recognised.<sup>14</sup>

As a number of Conservative newspapers and politicians pointed out, such criticism of the policies of previous Liberal governments was somewhat out of line with the stance of the *Daily News*. He had, however, no good to say of Northbrook's Conservative successor, Edward Bulwer Lytton.

Aiming seemingly at the proud role of *petit maître* [ordinary writer], Lord Lytton only succeeds in being a *petit crevé* [a fool of fashion], with a dash of the satyr and a mild infusion of the second-hand Jesuit. In his public capacity he is frequently ridiculous; he is crude, rash and impulsive; but he is laudably under discipline to the orders of his superior, and has the faculty of writing extremely able despatches.

Forbes was particularly critical of the way that Lytton had talked a forward policy, but had done little to prepare properly for war. Almost no knowledge

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<sup>13</sup> *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 11 April 1879.

<sup>14</sup> Forbes, 'Plain Word about the Afghan War', *Time*, April 1879, 1–10.

of the resources, the roads and the nature of the region much beyond ten miles of Peshawar had been gathered. If Lytton's demands for an immediate attack on Afghanistan had not been blocked by Salisbury there would have been a potentially disastrous invasion with inadequate forces. But, in the next year, almost nothing was done to either improve relations or to prepare for war and a Russian mission arrived in Kabul. Only at that point did Lytton move to action and demand that the army seize the fort at Ali Musjid in the Khyber Pass only to discover that there were not the troops available easily to accomplish this. Decades later Forbes's views on Lytton were endorsed by the future military correspondent of the *Times*, Charles À Court Repington, who was also with the Peshawar Valley Field Force. He wrote of the 'blank ignorance of the country immediately in front of us . . . our miserable transport, wretched hospital equipment, and shortage of numbers in all units'.<sup>15</sup> Repington suggests that Forbes did not speak up at the time, but this is clearly untrue.

As an editorial in the *Graphic* pointed out, Forbes's article on the Afghan war was perhaps 'too ferocious to be consistent with good taste' as well as not very welcome to Liberal associates. But what did attract huge attention was a statement that Lytton had communicated directly with the Queen, after Lytton had been instructed to give Sher Ali a month's grace by means of an ultimatum. Lytton pressed the Foreign Office for permission to move right away, but he also telegraphed the Queen directly. It led to questions in Parliament from the radical wing of the Liberal Party.

It came at a time when discontent with the Queen for her failure to carry out Royal duties had not disappeared. The early 1870s had seen the emergence of the strongest – albeit short-lived – republican movement in modern British history. But, on top of that there was the Liberal suspicion that Disraeli was quite consciously seeking to enhance Royal power and pull the Queen directly into a political role. The transformation of the Queen into Empress of India in 1877 was seen by many as a move away from a constitutional monarchy into a potentially 'despotic' empire. The visit of the Prince of Wales to India and the appointment of a Royal son-in-law, the Marquis of Lorne as Viceroy of Canada (rather than the previous Governor-General) were all seen as evidence of an attempt to enhance personal government. The response of Stafford-Northcote, Conservative leader in the Commons to the row over Lytton's despatch, was a bland assertion that any correspondence

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<sup>15</sup> Charles À Court Repington, *Vestigia* (London, 1919), 51.

had been private not official. The effect of all this was once again to make Forbes a controversial public figure.

By the time all this blew up Forbes was on his way to South Africa where a war with the Zulus had led to one of the greatest military defeats at Isandlwana in January 1879. It seemed much more interesting than returning to Afghanistan where it looked as if the war was more or less over. In fact there were more disasters to come. By the Treaty of Gundamak in May 1879, the Afghans had agreed to a British Resident and Cavagnani, a most insensitive choice since he cared little for Afghan feelings, moved into the Residency in Kabul. However, on 3 September the Residency was attacked by Afghan troops demanding their pay, and all those in it, including Cavagnani, slaughtered. Roberts was ordered to advance on Kabul and exact revenge.



## 14 The Zulu War

*If newspaper people are not proud of Archibald Forbes they ought to be. As hardy in body as an old Berseker, as facile of pen as a trained author, as keen of glance and clear of judgement in military matters as a born strategist, quick of decision and resolute of will, he is the beau-ideal of a chronicler of wars, and future historians will not have to complain of lack of suitable and reliable material for their works whilst his graphic and contemporary record of events are at their command.*

*Sunderland Daily Echo, 22 August 1879*

In the Autumn of 1878 Afghanistan seemed to be the place for special correspondents to be, but in fact the early stages of the war brought little excitement. The real action proved to be in southern Africa where a war against the Zulus broke out with few British correspondents around. Only Charles Norris-Newman of the *Standard* was there initially to report the disaster of the early stages.

The Zulu nation had expanded with astonishing rapidity between the 1820s and the 1840s with the creation of a militarised state by its great leader, Shaka. This expansion had led to conflict with Boer settlers pushing northwards from the Cape of Good Hope to escape British control. The period from 1840, when the Boers held off a Zulu onslaught at the Battle of Blood River, brought in a period of relative peace and stability, with the frontiers of the Zulu lands largely delineated as between the Tugela and the Pongola Rivers. Things began to change at the end of the 1860s. Diamonds were discovered at Kimberley and the diamond rush that came in their wake led to a demand for more black labour; the Zulus, organised in military regiments and able to sustain themselves, resisted recruitment as labourers. The Boers, now entrenched in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, continued to impinge on Zulu land as they searched for additional farmland for their large families. There were numerous destabilising frontier incidents.

Meanwhile, British settlers had been moving into Natal, annexed to the British Empire in 1843, and this brought them into direct contact with the

Zulus. The senior administrator in Natal, Theophilus Shepstone, had initially pursued a policy of working with local native leaders, including Cetshwayo, who by the 1860s had established himself as the main Zulu leader. In 1874, Carnarvon, the Colonial Secretary in Disraeli's government, began to push the idea of a federation of the various parts of southern Africa, including the Boer areas, and in 1877 Shepstone moved into Pretoria and declared the Transvaal annexed. Meanwhile Sir Bartle Frere, an old India hand, had been appointed as Governor General of the Cape and High Commissioner to Natal, also with the task of speeding up the process of Federation. With the Transvaal as well as Natal in British hands the opportunities for tension between British and Zulus increased and Shepstone sent back increasingly hysterical messages warning of the dire threat of a Zulu assault on Natal, coinciding with a Boer uprising. Frere's pronouncements began to echo those of Shepstone, with talk of Cetshwayo's kingdom as a place of 'atrocious barbarity' where an 'irresponsible, bloodthirsty and treacherous despot' was threatening the peace.

Frere now pressed strongly for war to break the Zulu kingdom. With crisis in Europe and pending war in Afghanistan, the Government in London pulled back and urged restraint, but it was too late. On 11 December 1878 an ultimatum was presented to Zulu envoys demanding that within twenty days the Zulu army be disbanded and that British suzerainty be accepted. It was to ask the impossible since the whole structure of the Zulu state focussed upon the army. Cetshwayo sought an extension of time, which was peremptorily rejected, and a British force of some 18,000 was sent to the frontier. The commander-in-chief in South Africa was Frederick Augustus Thesiger, who had just become Lord Chelmsford following his father's death, and who, like most of the British, despite a recognition that much of the army he commanded was of poor quality, assumed that there would be little problem in a well-armed force destroying a Zulu army armed mainly with assegais.

On 11 January 1879 Zululand was invaded by three different forces. Chelmsford himself led the middle column, setting out from the mission station of Rorke's Drift while columns under Colonel Pearson and Colonel Wood came in from east and west. By 20 January, after only a few minor skirmishes, Chelmsford's force had reached the hill of Isandlwana. On 22 January Chelmsford took nearly half of his force away from the camp to reconnoitre some miles ahead, oblivious of the fact that a large Zulu *impi* was closing in on Isandlwana. Although informed of this, Chelmsford remained confident that the camp could defend itself. By the time he returned, some

1300 of his troops were dead. It was a crushing and humiliating defeat that had implications across the Empire. Forbes believed, for example, that it was news of the defeat that gave King Thibaw in Burma the confidence to slaughter his familial rivals and consider challenging the British. In Britain the enormity of the defeat was diluted by the news that, later on the day of the 22nd, survivors of Isandlwana, together with wounded in the field hospital at Rorke's Drift, held off a force of three to four thousand Zulus.

Forbes had been in Burma when news of the Zulu War came through. He headed rapidly back across India, from Calcutta to Lahore and then down the River Indus to Karachi. From there he went by boat to Aden and from Aden to Zanzibar, where he had time to meet up with his old friend, H. M. Stanley. He arrived at Delagoa Bay in Portuguese East Africa and made his way to Durban on 18 April. For a large part of the journey from India he was accompanied by Captain Lord William Beresford, who had given up his post as ADC to the Viceroy in India in order to get some military action in Zululand. Beresford was precisely the kind of heroic figure that appealed to Forbes, but he also had the added attraction that his mother was a Leslie and Forbes liked to claim Leslie ancestry for himself. Beresford was appointed to the brigade of Col. Evelyn Wood stationed in the Transvaal. It included a group of irregular volunteer cavalry commanded by Col. Redvers Buller, consisting 'of broken gentlemen, of runagate sailors, of fugitives from justice, of the scum of the South African towns, of solid Africanders[sic], of Boers whom the Zulus had driven from their farms'. Forbes briefly accompanied them.

Forbes quickly courted controversy by criticising the response to the events of Isandlwana. He made a dramatic declaration that the whole of Natal was at the mercy of the Zulus unless some drastic action were taken to protect it. There was, he declared, an urgent need for reinforcements, something for which Chelmsford had been pressing but which the government had refused. In order to economise, the government had not sent out veteran NCOs or soldiers who had less than eighteen months of their 21 years' service to run. Chelmsford was presented with mainly raw recruits.<sup>1</sup> Forbes also pinpointed what was to be a recurring problem, the lack of transport. It was not just a scarcity of oxen and carts, but of drivers, since many of the black drivers preferred to flee rather than venture into Zululand. He also criticised the strategy that Chelmsford was adopting. He proposed to attack Zululand

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<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Wood, *From Midshipman to Field Marshal*, Vol. II (London, 1906), 2.

from two directions and to Forbes this was 'radically and irretrievably bad' and 'gravely and dangerously erroneous' and would leave a frontier of some 150 miles largely undefended.<sup>2</sup>

There was, as yet, no direct telegraphic link between the Cape and London and telegrams usually took sixteen days to arrive via ship to Madeira, where there was a telegraph terminal. Forbes quickly set off for the frontier firstly by train and then on horseback accompanied by a servant and a pack-horse. At Pietermaritzburg he had a conversation with the Liberal Bishop Colenso, who much impressed him. Colenso was a defender of the Zulus who argued that Ceshwayo's army was about defending his territory against Boers, who wanted to seize Zulu lands so that they could get an access to the sea, and against the increasingly aggressive Swazi to the north. It is not clear if Forbes's criticism altered views, but by the middle of May Chelmsford made the decision to advance in a single line.

It was not yet certain if the war would be renewed, since peace feelers had been put out by Ceshwayo; approaches that were treated with deep suspicion. But Forbes became increasingly vocal in his criticism of the build up. He travelled hundreds of miles over the veldt to visit the different groups of forces and he clearly revelled in military life. In the village of Dundee, tucked into a valley in the Biggarsberg mountains where a Scot, Peter Smith, was developing a coal industry, he came across, to his delight, an old sweat who had been with the horse artillery through the Kaffir War of 1850–53.

Most of us have a Bedouin streak in our nature, and if for a permanency a bell tent is scarcely comparable with a good club, yet there is some makeshift in the cheerful camp life; the free pure air, the gossiping chat round the rough morsels of ration, and the appreciation as the acme of luxury of chance additions to ration fare that in a more civilised place of existence would not be considered luxuries at all. More genuine friendships are formed in a camp in a fortnight than would grow in a year of conventional life.<sup>3</sup>

Writing from Landsman's Drift on 23 May he launched his most direct attack on Chelmsford.

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<sup>2</sup> *Daily News*, 13, 16 May 1879.

<sup>3</sup> *Daily News*, 14 July 1879.

I understand that Lord Chelmsford informed the War Secretary by last mail that in a military sense he was ready, and was delayed only by transport and supplies. This is quite inaccurate. The condition of unreadiness at the present moment is utterly flagrant regarding rudimentary military details, irrespective altogether of transport and supplies. The regiments of the second division, it is stated, are unformed into brigades, nor have brigadiers been named or fixed ... there are no appliances to carry the regimental reserve ammunition on the march. The routs[*si*] of invasion are still undecided. The weakness of will and the strange feebleness of grasp in important matters, and the stranger disregard of arrangements in details which mark the chief direction of affairs, go far to paralyse the efforts of subordinates towards energetic action. The whole affair is almost grotesque, but it drives practical purposeful soldiers almost mad. The march from here may begin next week if Lord Chelmsford can finally make up his mind upon the scheme of invasion.<sup>4</sup>

There were brief incursions into Zulu territory and, in the middle of May, Forbes and a group of cavalry reached Isandlwana, where the bodies of the fallen still lay, 'mere bones with toughened, discoloured skin like leather covering them', most disembowelled and many scalped, but 'strange to relate, the vultures of Zululand that will reduce a dead ox to a skeleton in a few hours, had apparently never touched the corpses of our ill-fated countrymen'. He did not shrink from recounting some of the reality.

Here lay a corpse with a bayonet jammed into the mouth up to the socket, transfixing the head and mouth a foot into the ground. There lay a form that seemed cosily curled in calm sleep, turned almost on its face; but seven assegai stabs had pierced the back.<sup>5</sup>

In a ravine that blocked their flight,

Dead men lay thick, mere bones, with toughened, discoloured skin like leather covering them, and clinging tight to them, the flesh all wasted away. Some were almost wholly dismembered, heaps of yellow clammy bones. I forbear to describe the faces, with their blackened features

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<sup>4</sup> *Daily News*, 16 June 1879.

<sup>5</sup> Forbes, *Memoirs*, 71–2.

and beards bleached by rain and sun. Every man had been disembowelled. Some were scalped. And others had been subject to yet ghastlier mutilations.<sup>6</sup>

Once again he did not restrain his criticism.

Had the world searched for a position offering the easiest facilities for being surprised, none could have been well found to surpass it. The position seems to offer a premium of disaster, and asks to be attacked... the camp was more defenceless than an English village.<sup>7</sup>

Chelmsford wrote to Colonel Stanley, the Secretary for War, defending himself against the 'many false impressions [that] may be circulated and sent home regarding our present operations either intentionally or ignorantly' by journalists who were 'always ready without sufficient data for their guidance to express opinions on every conceivable military subject *ex cathedra*'.<sup>8</sup>

Forbes was nearby when news came through that Prince Louis Napoleon, the only son of Napoleon III, had been killed on 1 June. The Prince had joined as a volunteer and an aide to Chelmsford, but had been keen for action. Forbes had first met him in London in 1877 at the annual dinner of the Newspaper Press Fund. During the long wait before the invasion, he had had a number of conversations with the Prince and even got him to reminisce about the days before Sedan. The Prince had accompanied a small reconnaissance sortie on the boundary between the Transvaal and Zululand mapping the route for the advance. The group, consisting of six white irregulars, was attacked by a Zulu force. He had been unable to mount his unsettled horse and eventually lost his grip and fell. The group of special correspondents in the nearby camp was desperate to get out and find the body. As well as Forbes, there was Francis Francis from the *Times*, Mackenzie from the *Standard*, Charles Fripp from the *Graphic*, Melton Prior for the *Illustrated London News* and Delage, French correspondent from *Figaro*. They went out the following day and recovered the body. Melton Prior recalled that even in

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Ian Knight, *Zulu Rising. The Epic Story of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift* (Basingstoke, 2010), 670–1. Knight mistakenly identifies Forbes as correspondent of the *Standard*.

<sup>7</sup> *Daily News*, 20 June 1879.

<sup>8</sup> John Laband and Ian Knight, *The War Correspondents. The Anglo-Zulu War* (Stroud, Gloucestershire, 1996), v.

these circumstances Forbes was determined to be first. One of the troopers with the party, having indicated that he had found something, Forbes immediately turned to Prior and shouted, 'There it is, Prior, ride for it', and was off at a gallop. Since Forbes was, by all accounts, a magnificent horseman, he was on the spot first. They found the body of the Prince stripped naked except for a locket containing a picture of his father. The body had some twenty-one stab wounds and an eye gouged out. The bodies of two troopers and an interpreter were nearby. Forbes examined the leather strap crossing the pommel of the saddle and found that it had not been made of good leather but 'of a wretched substance that seemed brown paper'. He concluded that what contributed to the Prince's death was 'the shoddy rascality of a firm of Woolwich saddlers'.<sup>9</sup>

The death of the Prince Imperial, as he was known, caused a sensation throughout Europe and there was a search for scapegoats. Blame was pinned on Lieutenant Jaheel Carey who had led the sortie, although the Prince outranked him, and he was charged with having 'galloped away, not having attempted to rally the escort or in other ways defend the Prince'. Forbes attended the court martial that held Carey responsible and Forbes agreed with the conclusion. He had interviewed the four surviving troopers who had accompanied the Prince and he suspected that they were colluding in their account of the affair. All, however, agreed that Carey had led the panic-flight. He believed that the Prince could have been saved if Carey had turned and made a stand. Instead Carey 'was flying *ventre à terre* with panic in his heart, and words of abjectness on his lips'. Although Carey had claimed that the Zulus had fired on the party Forbes and his colleagues found no evidence of any gunshots. At the same time, Forbes had no doubt that some of the blame had to fall on Chelmsford who had allowed the Prince to take part in sorties. It was, said Forbes, typical of the 'fatal looseness that pervades arrangements in his lordship's headquarters'.<sup>10</sup> Carey was sent home under arrest, but Chelmsford had the decency not to ratify the decision of the court martial and the Queen, encouraged by the Empress Eugenie and also, no doubt, conscious of the wave of public sympathy for Carey eventually waived the sentence.

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<sup>9</sup> Melton Prior, *Campaigns of a War Correspondent* (London, 1912), 106; Forbes, 'The End of Prince Louis Napoleon' in James Parton (ed.), *Some noted princes, authors and statesmen of our time* (New York, 1885), 131–7.

<sup>10</sup> *Daily News*, 11 July 1879.

News of Chelmsford's inadequacies as a commander had percolated to London and the decision was made to send Garnet Wolseley, still stuck in Cyprus, as supreme commander. Wolseley's imminent arrival at the Cape occasioned what surely must rank as one of the most devastating journalistic critiques of a serving general, Chelmsford, ever published. Forbes pulled no punches.

I desire to speak with all respect of a man whose loyal anxiety is to spend or be spent in the service of his country; but I have been forced to recognise from the very commencement of my South African experience that the burden of responsibility devolving on him has been and is greater than he can bear. It has daily been more apparent that the sense of being overweighted has been affecting his capacity to form cool, firm and deliberate judgments and has been sapping the strength of his mental fibre. A nervous petulance, and a melancholy obstinacy on petty trifles, has warped the place of calm control and settled firmness of purpose in regard to important matters ... I regard the order book of this force as one of the most melancholy curiosities of modern warfare. One might almost pray for another Isandhlwana to insure its destruction and avert from a British General the contemptuous laughter of European military critics.<sup>11</sup>

The deeply ambitious Wolseley agreed with Forbes. As he wrote to his wife privately, 'He [Chelmsford] has violated every principle of war in his plan of campaign, and has in fact courted disaster'.<sup>12</sup>

Wolseley was desperate for action but the imminence of his arrival finally galvanised Chelmsford into movement and, with great caution two columns, advanced into Zulu territory, deliberately avoiding the site of Isandhlwana. On 3 July, they were a day's journey from Ceshwayo's kraal at Ulundi (oNdini to the Zulus), where reports said that the Zulu forces were congregating. Colonel Redvers Buller, who had already won a VC for an earlier action against a force of Zulu, scouted ahead across the White Umfoozi River with his cavalry to find the best site for a confrontation. Forbes accompanied Buller's force on 3 July on this reconnaissance. Many of the irregulars were keen to make it all the way to Ulundi as quickly as

<sup>11</sup> *Daily News*, 16 July 1879.

<sup>12</sup> Wolseley to Lady Wolseley, 4 July 1879 in Arthur (ed.), *The Letters of Lord and Lady Wolseley* (London, 1922), 41.



possible. However, they were suddenly confronted by some 3000 Zulus and had to beat a retreat. Forbes, on this occasion, was able to give an account of Lord William Beresford's rescue of a wounded man, an action for which, together with a South African, Sergeant Edmund O'Toole, Beresford was awarded the Victoria Cross. Beresford acknowledged that without Forbes's account he would never have got his VC.<sup>13</sup> It was on this same occasion that the *Graphic's* artist, Charles Fripp, later known for the famous painting of Isandlwana, was seen blithely continuing to sketch on the wrong side of the river. Buller yelled an order to him to get back across the river or face arrest. Fripp indignantly asked to know who had shouted at him, declaring that he was a journalist and not subject to military orders. Beresford, still with blood on his uniform, threatened to thrash him, whereupon Fripp put up his fists and kicked Beresford on the leg. Forbes and Melton Prior hastily dragged the still-struggling Fripp away.

Early on 4 July Chelmsford moved the infantry forward to a pre-selected spot on the Mahlabathani plain, and awaited the Zulu attack. Forbes left one of his powerful descriptions of the event, one that was to be quoted in many newspapers.

There was a big hollow square, and men in red, rifles in hand. For half an hour this square stood doggedly pouring the sleet of death from every face. Outside this square, mostly at a respectful distance, surged a furious throng of savages, brandishing shields and assegais, and firing heavily but fitfully from their jagged front. Presently these black men wavered; then bolted, sent in flight by the steady administration of canister. The square, still grimly firm, gave one ringing cheer that was heard in the laager behind; the bayonets wavered in the air for a moment; then the business recommenced. The infantry betook themselves for a few minutes and long shots. A centrifugal whirlwind of horsemen sped from the square as the lightening bursts from the thundercloud, and dashed hot and fierce after the flying foe. Before the cavalry had concluded their innings the infantry were placidly lunching, and the corks were popping off long hoarded champagne bottles.<sup>14</sup>

He was full of admiration for the 20,000 Zulus as they flung themselves

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<sup>13</sup> Villiers, *Peaceful Personalities*, 176; Menzies, *Lord William Beresford V.C.*, 87.

<sup>14</sup> *Daily News*, 24 July 1879.

against two Gatling gun, 12 artillery guns, a rocket battery and 5000 new, and highly-effective, Martini-Henry rifles.<sup>15</sup>

But those Zulus could die – aye, they could dare and die with a valour and devotion unsurpassed by the soldiery of any age or any nationality. They went down in numbers; but numbers stood up and pressed swiftly and steadily on. The sharper din of our musketry fire filled the intervals between the hoarse roar of the cannon and the scream of the speeding shells. Still the Zulus would not stay the whirlwind of their converging attack. They fired and rushed on, halting to fire again, then rushing on time after time.

In a later report, he said that the Zulus were ‘the bravest idiots I ever saw or heard of’. If, as well as their valour, they had had the tactical shrewdness of the Afghans, then Chelmsford would never have got near Ulundi.

With the Zulu *impis* scattered and Ceshwayo fled from the scene, Chelmsford and his troops entered Ulundi and burned most of it. The way in which Forbes revelled in the excitement of it all, once again, comes across in Prior’s account. Seeing the battle was over, Forbes spurred his horse and, with a shout, ‘Come on, Prior, for Ulundi. Ride for it, old chap!’ was off. When they got to the Kraal they found that Beresford was there before them.

The battle and the capture of Ulundi were largely over by the afternoon of the 4th and Forbes, Prior and Francis of the *Times*, who was with them, were keen to get their dispatches off as quickly as possible. The battle was on a Friday, the mail steamer from the Cape left on a Tuesday. They approached Chelmsford only to discover that he was in no hurry to send news of the victory, although Guy Dawney had arrived with dispatches the night before and was ready to return to the frontier. Chelmsford’s excuse for delay was that he wanted to get reasonably accurate casualty numbers. Forbes angrily declared that in that case he would set off himself. Reluctantly, Chelmsford and other officers gave him some papers to carry.

Forbes set out for Landsmann’s Drift, a distance of 110 miles, at around 5 o’clock in the afternoon of the 4th, just as darkness was coming down.<sup>16</sup> The first 14 miles to take him to the reserve camp at Etonganeni was through thick bush and broken ground, close to still burning kraals, with

<sup>15</sup> Rodney Ashwood, *For Queen and Country. The Zulu War Diary of Lieutenant Wilfred Heaton, 24th Regiment of Foot, 1879* (Darlington, 2005), 96.

<sup>16</sup> The *Daily News*, editorial of 25 July, estimated 80 miles.

always the danger of coming across some of the scattered Zulus. The camp provided him with a new horse and an escort to one of the temporary forts, Fort Evelyn, where, again he was able to change horses and move to Fort Marshall. The only roads were the tracks of the support wagons and in the darkness and later fog he lost his way. In places he had to get down and feel for the ruts. At Fort Marshall at daylight on 5 July, with fifty miles still to go, he was observed by Lieutenant Henry Curling, one of the few survivors of Isandlwana, and no lover of 'specials' 'who expect to be welcomed everywhere' and who were 'obliged to be pushing, unsnubbable men'. Forbes fitted the pattern: 'He is a great, strong, coarse looking man able to put up with any amount of snubbing'.<sup>17</sup> He reached Landsman's Drift between 2 and 3 in the afternoon of 5 July. He had spent nearly twenty hours without sleep on horseback, using six horses. Landsmann's Drift gave him access to the telegraph and he set a telegram to Sievright, the General Manager of Cape telegrams, whom he knew to be in Pietermaritzburg.

Please acquaint Clifford, make public, and forward to Wolseley the following: – Archibald Forbes to Sir Garnet Wolseley. Landsman's Drift, 5 July. – Brilliant success yesterday. While both columns were marching on Ulundi in hollow square were attacked nine am on all four sides, by 12,000 Zulus. Affair lasted half-hour. All troops behaved admirably. The Zulus came within sixty yards of square when they began to break. The cavalry slipped at them. Lancers cut fugitives into mincemeat. Shell-fire rained on Zulus till last man disappeared. Our loss ten killed and sixty wounded. I calculate dead Zulus about 800. After short rest columns moving on Ulundi, cavalry preceding, fired it and all military kraals surrounding it. Force returned to laager before night. Lord Chelmsford today fell back on standing camp, and means to retire to Kwamagawasa. Has fifteen days' rations to good, but grass failed utterly, most burnt, everywhere bare. No further comment from Ketshwayo[sic] who left Ulundi on the 3rd.

The extent of Forbes' feat can be judged by the fact that Chelmsford, predictably, changed his mind about sending his own account and sent off

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<sup>17</sup> Letter of Henry T. Curling to his mother, 5 July 1879 in Adrian Greaves and Brian Best, *The Curling Letters of the Zulu War* (Barnsley, 2001).

Dawnay an hour after Forbes had left, but he did not arrive at Landsman's Drift until some seven hours after Forbes.

Forbes's telegram reached Wolseley, who was already heading towards the action, at Fort Pearson and reached Bartle Frere at the Cape. Frere immediately passed the message on to London quoting Forbes's news. It was this that the Secretary for War, Michael Hicks Beach read to the House of Commons on 24 July. For Forbes the ordeal was not yet over. He had been hit on the leg by a spent bullet at Ulundi and although the skin was not broken his leg was becoming inflamed. None the less, General Marshall at Landsman's Drift encouraged him to press on as quickly as possible to Port Durnford, to pass on personally to Wolseley what information he had; so after some six hours sleep, he left on the afternoon of the 6th to travel the 170 miles to Pietermaritzburg. At Ladysmith at three in the morning he got some meat and drink and an escort. By this time it was pouring rain and he ploughed on another sixty miles. By now, however, his leg had swelled so much that he could not use a horse and he had to borrow a pony and a high wheeled trap, known in South Africa as a 'spider'. He had to promise to pay £100 if he damaged either horse or buggy. The road was over a mountain and in parts had mud a foot deep. The cart capsized a few times and Forbes had to walk about 14 miles. Arriving at two in the morning of the 8th, he was such a mess in appearance that he was not allowed into the Maritzburg Hotel, but he crawled into the officer's mess where W. H. Russell was staying. Russell, who had come out to South Africa with Wolseley to report this time for the *Daily Telegraph* and whom Forbes described as 'one of the oldest friends I have in the world', got him a bath and gave him some champagne. Forbes had been on the road for some 94 hours with only six hours sleep. The next morning he set off for Durban and the day after sailed for Port Durnford in the company of George Colley and Baker Russell, both distinguished and favoured officers in what was known as the 'Wolseley Ring'. They were stuck for two days outside Port Durnford because of the height of the surf. When they did land they found that there had still been no communication from Chelmsford.<sup>18</sup>

Once again Forbes's heroics became news throughout the country and his reputation as the greatest of war correspondents was confirmed. A famous drawing of him riding across the veldt appeared on the front cover of the

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<sup>18</sup> Forbes's account of his ride from Ulundi was published in the *Daily News*, 21 August 1879.

*Illustrated London News* of 9 August, ‘the bold, unwearied, dauntless, solitary horseman, “bloody with spurring, fiery red with haste”.’ There was talk that he would receive some mark of recognition from the government for his feat.<sup>19</sup> The *Illustrated London News* had no doubt.

Lord Chelmsford was glad to avail himself of so good a messenger for the conveyance of the official despatch . . . He performed this valuable public service with such intrepid courage and so much personal address that we trust he will receive from Her Majesty the Queen as suitable honorary distinction, at the request of the Secretary of State for War. If he cannot have the Victoria Cross, being a noncombatant, let him have the order of St Michael and St George, which is usually bestowed on civilians for services rendered in any of the British colonies or foreign possessions.<sup>20</sup>

An editorial in the *Sunderland Daily Echo* was typical of many.

If newspaper people are not proud of Archibald Forbes they ought to be. As hardy a body as an old Berseker, as facile of pen as a trained author, as keen of glance and clear of judgement in military matters as a born strategist, quick of decisions and resolute of will, he is the *beau-ideal* of a chronicler of war, and future historians will not have to complain of lack of suitable and reliable material for their work whilst his graphic and contemporary record of events are at their command.<sup>21</sup>

Forbes meanwhile was on his way home on the S.S. *Dublin Castle* and quite ill. When it arrived at Plymouth he and his friend Beresford, about to be awarded the Victoria Cross, were invited on to the Royal Yacht, *Osborne*, by the Prince of Wales, but Forbes was too ill to accept.

On 15 August, Sir Henry Havelock, son of the general, raised Forbes’s achievement in the House of Commons with Sir Stafford Northcote, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House. He asked that some consideration be given to conferring ‘some mark of favour’ on Forbes ‘in recognition of the public services performed by him in being the bearer of despatches of the successful action at Ulundi’. Northcote seems to have

<sup>19</sup> E.g. *Newcastle Courant*, 25 July 1879, *Sunderland Echo*, 26 July 1879.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Laland and Knight, *War Correspondents*, xii.

<sup>21</sup> *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 22 August 1879.

deliberately misunderstood and asked if the suggestion was that Forbes should be recognised 'for performing services in connection with his duties as correspondent of the *Daily News*'. At any rate, he declared, it was a matter for the secretary for war. When Havelock tried to clarify it by saying that it was about performing 'a public service in the conveyance of a despatch' Northcote made no reply.<sup>22</sup>

Forbes was clearly embarrassed by Havelock's action, particularly since he and Havelock had quarrelled in 1877 when they were both in Bulgaria. Havelock, who had been there on behalf of the National Society for the Aid of the Sick and Wounded, seems to have passed himself off to the Russians as an important general and went around accompanied by a group of Cossacks. Forbes wrote to Havelock asking him not to raise the issue again. In a letter to Garnet Wolseley he describes Havelock as 'that pernicious busybody'. At the same time, he wrote to Northcote dissociating himself from Havelock's question, but, none the less, making the point to Northcote that,

It would have been no discredit to act in the interests of the Daily News in riding away from Ulundi in the evening of the engagement. I am a journalist only by accident; a soldier by instinct and with every attribute of my nature. Sir Garnet Wolseley is my general; I can have no higher military aspiration than to advantage him and to please him. These were my aims in making haste to give him the intelligence of Ulundi. He benefitted thereby not the Daily News.<sup>23</sup>

The press continued to discuss the issue of recognition of Forbes and there was even talk of a possible Victoria Cross, since, as the *United Services' Gazette* pointed out there had been at least two cases in the aftermath of the Indian Mutiny of civilians who had done service for the military receiving the VC. Others suggested that a CB would be suitable and that a seat in the House of Commons should be found for him.<sup>24</sup>

Quite how remarkable Forbes's feat was can be debated. It appeared almost as if it had been accomplished unaided. Long afterwards, Melton Prior noted that it was really only in the first ten miles or so that there was some danger of a Zulu attack and Chelmsford had provided an escort of six

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<sup>22</sup> *Daily News*, 16 August 1879.

<sup>23</sup> Hove Public Library, Wolseley Papers. Forbes to Wolseley Aug 1879; British Library, Add Ms 50040, f.183 Iddesleigh Papers.

<sup>24</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 14 August 1879.

lancers to that first stage. Also there were military posts every eight or ten miles, where Forbes was able to get a fresh horse and some food. None the less, the endurance and speed over such a distance at night was remarkable.<sup>25</sup>

By the time he arrived back in London there were signs of a changed mood. The odd criticism appeared in some papers, suggesting that on his ride he had used the horses intended for the official messengers, leaving his exhausted horses behind. The fact that he had had an escort for parts of the journey came out. According to the *Derby Daily Telegraph*,

When he assumes the pen of military critic he becomes arrogant and unpalatable. The fact that he was a University Student one day and a private soldier in the British army another, to say nothing of a host of stranger vicissitudes in his career, does not make him a general.<sup>26</sup>

It was the criticisms of Chelmsford, Crealock and others that particularly rankled. Chelmsford, who returned from South Africa soon after Forbes, was now the hero of the hour, created a KCB and invited to Balmoral. The Lt Carey court martial still rumbled on with elements in the army determined to keep the blame for the Prince Imperial's death firmly away from Chelmsford. And there was that deep dislike of reporters with the army that dripped down from Wolseley.

In his parting speech at Cape Town, after having been lauded on his journey to the coast, Chelmsford poured out his bitterness at the criticisms that he had faced in the press. He denied the accusation of hesitation and lack of strategy and accused some war correspondents of having deliberately undermined him in the eyes of his army.

Gentlemen, if party feelings and political bias are to be allowed in future to colour the writings and warp the judgment of those newspaper correspondents accompanying our armies when in the field, and if, while active operations are actually going on, persistent attempts to lower the General in the estimation of those he is commanding, are to be considered as not exceeding the licence granted to the Press, I foresee the gravest consequence to our arms must ensue, and I fear that the proper conduct of a campaign will become almost impossible.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Melton Prior, *Campaigns of a War Correspondent* (London, 1912), 123.

<sup>26</sup> *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 13 August 1879.

<sup>27</sup> *Daily News*, 28 August 1879.

Forbes immediately penned a furious response in the form of a letter in the *Daily News*. In the absence of the doyen of special correspondents, W.H. Russell, in Africa, Forbes felt he had to speak for the profession, but he also appreciated that Chelmsford's comments were aimed largely at himself. He cited comments from the *Times*, the *Standard* and the *Daily Telegraph* on Chelmsford all of which chimed with his own. He resented the accusation of political bias and the suggestion that correspondents wrote to reflect the views of their paper. He declared that there were not a few, like himself, whose politics did not necessarily concur with the views of their paper. And as for undermining authority, he jibed,

If a force worried by constantly contradictory orders, harassed by nervous fidgetiness, fretted by spasmodic vacillation, has formed an unfavourable opinion of its leader, it laughs to scorn the journalist who would have it believe its commander is a capable chief . . . I recognise a serious danger, under certain circumstances in the full freedom of expression by war correspondent; but the intelligence bureau of the Zulus was not supplied with English newspapers.<sup>28</sup>

It was a necessary defence at a time when Parliament was debating the Army Discipline and Regulation Bill. Clause 38 related to 'injurious disclosures' that might threaten the safety of troops and covered the case of newspaper correspondents. The government wanted to strengthen it by adding the words 'or incurred the risk of producing' a threat.<sup>29</sup>

What particularly rankled with Forbes was Chelmsford's suggestion that the criticism of him had been dictated by political bias. It might have been allowed to pass, but in speeches in December Chelmsford returned to the issue in the rather querulous tone of one who still felt himself unfairly judged. Forbes rushed into print with a piece in the *Nineteenth Century*, accusing Chelmsford of 'swaggering about success'. He examined the four stages of the campaign: (a) from the inception up the catastrophe of Isandlwana; (b) from Isandlwana until the relief of the mission station at Etshowe where a force under Colonel Pearson was surrounded; (c) from the relief of Etshowe to the Capture of Ulundi; and, finally, (d) from Ulundi until Chelmsford's resignation.

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<sup>28</sup> *Daily News*, 28 August 1879.

<sup>29</sup> *Hansard House of Commons Debates*, 15 May 1879.



He pointed to the fundamental mistake of beginning the campaign at the wrong time when many of the rivers that had to be crossed were still in spate. Once Chelmsford did invade Zululand he weakened his forces by dividing them. When on 20 January Chelmsford reached Isandlwana he ignored the advice of other officers who wanted the camp to be more in the open rather than backed on to Isandlwana hill.

The camp was pitched on a long frontage, with the wagons in line behind the tents, as if the business in hand were perchance a race-meeting, and the space in front of the tents the run in. Not so much as a sod was set on end in the way of entrenchment, and the deployment of the wagons proved the absence of even a rudimentary idea in favour of a laager formation.<sup>30</sup>

A perfunctory Court of Inquiry had tried to pin the blame on junior officers.

The second stage began at the end of March when Chelmsford moved at the head of 3,300 European troops. He relieved Etshowe, but then abandoned it, in favour of a site at Gingihhlovo, where he did repulse some 12,000 Zulus. On the third stage, he returned to the criticisms of Chelmsford's vacillation that he had made earlier in the *Daily News*: 'To those who were on the spot, this period must now be like a bad dream'. When Chelmsford did eventually move against Ulundi he did so by an unnecessarily circuitous route. But Forbes also broadened his criticism to include Chelmsford's staff: a military secretary [Crealock] who was 'a man of proved capacity in originating, stimulating, and perpetuating friction', an Adjutant-General who was not on speaking terms with the military secretary and an intelligence officer who knew nothing about the region.

After Ulundi, instead of advancing and capturing Ceshwayo, Chelmsford chose to withdraw, claiming that these were the orders from Garnet Wolseley, although, Forbes pointed out, no documents had been made available to the public that showed such an order. Indeed, according to Forbes, as soon as Wolseley got Forbes's telegram reporting the victory of Ulundi he ordered Chelmsford 'to maintain an advanced position in the heart of the country'. Instead, Chelmsford undertook a 'needless and precipitate retreat' that necessitated another campaign to finish the business. While Chelmsford's earlier

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<sup>30</sup> Forbes, 'Lord Chelmsford and the Zulu War', *Nineteenth Century* (February 1880), 221.

conduct could be regarded as 'erroneous, weak, and, capricious', his failure to follow up the victory at Ulundi 'involves him in a yet graver culpability – a culpability that threw to the wind the results of the victory of Ulundi, devolved on another the work of finishing the campaign, and involved the country in a needless expenditure'.

Such attacks on the 'hero of the hour' were bound to be resented by powerful elements in society. Both the Queen and the Duke of Cambridge had backed Chelmsford and had a dislike of Wolseley. More hostile comments on Forbes began to appear in the press. Chelmsford was 'not anxious to earn notoriety by blowing his own trumpet', unlike Forbes, according to the *Derby Daily Telegraph*. Forbes was 'that exceedingly able and also exceedingly bumptious Special Correspondent' in the eyes of the *Hull Packet*.<sup>31</sup> Yet few rushed to Chelmsford's defence. W.L. Walford, a former instructor, at the United Services College, did produce a pamphlet on Forbes and the Zulu War, defending Chelmsford, but there was little analysis and as the *Examiner* commented from the tone it was clear that 'he considers that civilians have no right to sit in judgement on military men'.<sup>32</sup> More pungent, reasoned criticism came from Arthur Harness, a colonel who had commanded a battery of artillery in the war. He defended Chelmsford's caution and, as a member of the court of inquiry into Isandlwana that Forbes had denounced as 'a solemn mockery', rejected the argument that the disaster was due to the positioning of the camp. More generally, however, he resented the tone of Forbes's pieces as revealing 'personal animus' and an unacceptable level of indiscriminate abuse.<sup>33</sup> There were also later hints of professional rivalry. Russell suggested that Forbes must have been drunk at the time of his ride, while Melton Prior, long after, suggested that the first eight or ten miles were dangerous, but 'after that it was comparatively easy going'.<sup>34</sup>

The Natal press who resented the suggestions by Forbes that the colonists had taken the opportunity to fleece the military with inflated prices added to the attack, suggesting that it must have been difficult to lose sight of a track over which 600 ox-wagons and 12,000 soldiers had recently passed

<sup>31</sup> *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 9 February 1880; *Hull Packet*, 13 February 1880.

<sup>32</sup> *Examiner*, 14 April 1880.

<sup>33</sup> Arthur Harness, 'The Zulu Campaign from a Military Point of View', *Fraser's Magazine* (April 1880), 477–88.

<sup>34</sup> Melton Prior, *Campaigns of a War Correspondent*, 118–20; Hankinson, *Man of Wars*, 246.

and with forts at easy stages along the way.<sup>35</sup> None, however, seriously questioned Forbes's courage or endurance.

This was his last war. As he had said himself, his nerve and his physique had been broken. But in this, as in all the other wars, he had lived up to his own image of the war correspondent. He summed it up in later lectures and essays.

There is an undoubted fascination in the picturesque and adventurous life of the war correspondent. One must, of course, have a distinct bent for the avocation, and if he is to succeed he must possess certain salient attributes. He must expose himself to rather greater risks than fall to the lot of the average fighting man, without enjoying any of the happiness of retaliation which stirs the blood of the latter; the correspondent must sit quietly on his horse in the fire, and, while watching every turn in the battle, must wear the aspect as if he rather enjoyed the storm of missiles than otherwise. When the fighting is over, the soldier, if not killed, generally can eat and sleep; ere the echoes of it are silent, the correspondent of energy—and if he has not energy he is not worth his salt—must already be galloping his hardest towards the nearest telegraph wire, which, as like as not, is a hundred miles distant. He must “get there,” by hook or by crook, in a minimum of time; and as soon as his message is on the wires, he must be hurrying back to the army, else he may chance to miss the great battle of the war. The correspondent must be most things to all men; he must have the sweet, angelic temper of a woman, be as affable as if he were running for office, and at the same time be big and ugly enough to impress the conviction that it would be extremely unwise to take any liberties with him.<sup>36</sup>

Like many other correspondents who came after him, Forbes was suffering from the emotional and physical exhaustion that exposure for too long to the brutalities of war can generate.

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<sup>35</sup> *Natal Mercury*, 1 October 1879: quoted in Laband and Knight, *War Correspondents*, xii.

<sup>36</sup> Forbes, ‘My Servant Andreas’, *The Idler*, 3 February 1893.

## 15 Lecturer and Polemicist

*The future war correspondent. . . will be a mere transmitter by strictly defined channels of carefully revised intelligence liable to be altered, falsified, cancelled, or detained at the direction of the official set in authority over him'.*

Forbes, *Memories and Studies of War and Peace* (1895)

Once back from South Africa Forbes quickly recovered. He was now living in a flat at 34 Lanark Villas, Maida Vale with an elderly female housekeeper and his Goan servant, John, who had come from India to South Africa with him and then accompanied Forbes back to England. There is no mention of either of his daughters. Soon afterwards he seems to have moved to the even smarter address of 7 Mandeville Place, Manchester Square, Marylebone.

Forbes was able to give a humorous speech at a dinner organised for William Simpson and Melton Prior two of the *Illustrated London News's* correspondents who had covered the Zulu War. He was also back on the hectic lecture circuit. His first outing in Brighton in the middle of September seems to have gone well, but a week later he was addressing the Barbican Literary Association in Shoreditch Town Hall. The lecture was applauded throughout until he made a comment that he would say nothing of Lieutenant Carey, who had been accompanying the Prince Imperial when he was killed, since he would 'speak that night of brave men only'. This led to uproar in the hall and calls for three cheers for Carey, demands that Forbes withdraw what he had said and shouts of 'Why did you spare Chelmsford?'.<sup>1</sup> Carey, on his return to England, had gone to great lengths to exonerate himself for the Prince Imperial's death and had become something of a popular hero. Forbes was careful to avoid future references to him.

After London he headed north to the circuit of Lancashire and Yorkshire and then to Sunderland and Newcastle. From there it was along the east coast of Scotland as far as Aberdeen and back to Glasgow at the end of October. Another talk followed in London St James's Hall and a repeat performance in Brighton before moving to the West Country. There was something obsessive

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<sup>1</sup> *City Jackdam*, 26 September 1879.

about the amount of lecturing that Forbes undertook in the next few years, particularly since he was never entirely comfortable as a lecturer. Clearly the monetary return was attractive to him, but there was also a desire to relive the events of the past. Frustrated by his physical inability to get the almost addictive 'kick' from danger and adventure that many of those journalists who cover wars talk about, he could only regularly revisit and recall former excitements.<sup>2</sup>

Towards the end of November 1879 he was due to give a lecture in Newport. He had been invited to the very fashionable London wedding of Effie Grey Millais, the daughter of the painter, John Everett Millais, to Lieutenant W. Christopher James of the Royal Scots Greys, the son of the Lord Chief Justice, and one of the heroes of Ulundi. Forbes claimed, probably with some exaggeration, to have known the groom since boyhood and Forbes suggested to the organiser of the Newport meeting that in order to catch a 9.30 train he would curtail his lecture by ten minutes or so and he asked for his payment up front. This was refused and, therefore, Forbes refused to lecture, although offering to return at a later date. By this time the hall was full and when the lecture was cancelled Forbes was followed to the station and hooted and perhaps even pelted by a hostile crowd. The outcome was that Jackson, the organiser, sued Forbes for breach of contract. However, when the case came to the assizes in February the jury quickly decided in Forbes's favour.

The style of the lectures was very similar to his previous tours. He confined his lecture to an account of what he had seen in South Africa and his heroic gallop. As one paper commented, his 'elocutionary powers are not remarkable, though it is only fair to say that he is rapidly improving'.<sup>3</sup> An American correspondent declared that the general effect was 'that of hearing the secretary of a public institution reading the annual reports at the annual meeting'.<sup>4</sup> The going rate for his lectures was, apparently, £50 plus a share of any additional profit. The lectures were extensively reported in the local papers of the places that he visited, although editors were written to asking them not to publish verbatim reports of his talk. His earlier comments on Lieutenant Carey continued to attract attention and in South Shields he received a threatening letter warning him against making any aspersion of

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony Feinstein, *Journalists Under Fire. The Psychological Hazards of Covering War* (Baltimore, 2006), 5–6.

<sup>3</sup> *Morpeth Herald*, 11 October 1879.

<sup>4</sup> *New York Times*, 7 October 1879.

cowardice against Carey. His critical views on the 'unpatriotic greediness and miserable selfishness of the colonists' in Natal produced angry ripostes in the South African press and there were further attempts to undermine the achievement of his ride from Ulundi.

From Romania came news that Forbes had been made a Commander of the Order of the Star of Romania for his reporting of the Russo-Turkish War and that he would be the first civilian to receive the 'Cross of the Passage of the Danube'. Back in May 1877 Forbes, in the company of Prince Carol, had participated with Romanian troops under fire at the batteries opposite the Turkish fort of Widdin. But talk of a medal for his work in South Africa died even before he denounced Chelmsford's leadership in the *Nineteenth Century* and niggling criticism persisted. The *Western Gazette* ironically suggested that he had been offered a role in Lord George Sanger's circus in a piece called 'The Ride to Landsman's Drift', which would allow him to show 'how he conducted the Zulu War and caused the battles to be won'. The *Burnley Advertiser* recognised that he was a good descriptive writer but one 'who always manages one way or another to glorify himself'.<sup>5</sup> The *Cheltenham Chronicle* complained that there was little in the lectures with which the audience was not well acquainted from Forbes's own writings and those of others, and 'the transparent egotism' detracted greatly from what merit there was in them.<sup>6</sup> In Cork, Forbes's reports on the John Mitchel election of 1875 when he had described Mitchel's nationalist supporters as 'a drunken tatterdemalionism', were not forgotten and, at his lecture there in December he was shouted down by placard-carrying nationalists for a quarter of an hour before the lecture was abandoned.

His literary output did not flag amongst all this travelling. He produced regular pieces for the *World* and another, rather extraordinary, piece for the *Nineteenth Century* on the new Army Discipline and Regulation Bill. The bill proposed to get rid of corporal punishment in the military except at times of active service. Forbes rushed to the defence of flogging as the punishment of last resort and claimed that the British soldier—unlike those in the armies of other countries—was 'ungovernable without the cat'. Prisons were expensive and inefficient, fining was of little value and shooting malcontents was a waste. Only the lash was an effective and inexpensive deterrent.

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<sup>5</sup> *Western Gazette*, 24 October 1879; *Burnley Advertiser*, 8 November 1879.

<sup>6</sup> *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 6 December 1879.

But the article was prefaced and interspersed with angry and politically naive comments on politics and politicians. Parliament, he claimed, was torn apart by factionalism and with haggling over petty issues. The weakness of the government had allowed the Army Discipline and Regulation Bill to be mangled by 'obstructionists, humanitarians, claptrapists, and what not'. It had listened to the views of MPs, 'publicists political and sentimental, humanitarians, offers of position ... stump orators, and gushers of all sorts' and had failed to do what was necessary to maintain an effective army, as a result 'our nation could not, with the remotest prospect of success, conduct an European war'. All of this made him despair of Parliament and 'sigh for a strong concentrated autocracy that can decline to be cross-examined, that can smile at efforts to force its hand, that can make war in the manner of Moltke, and be diplomatic after the manner of Gortschakoff'.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile fresh conflict had broken out in Afghanistan. A peace treaty with the young Amir had been signed in May and the Afghans had agreed to receive a British envoy. The now *Sir* Louis Cavagnani was sent, and he rode into Kabul on 24 July 1879. On 3 September Afghan troops, with an intense hatred of the British and demanding back pay, turned on the Residency and massacred the occupants. Major-General Frederick Roberts, 'little Bobs', was given the task of avenging the slaughter and on 8 October he entered Kabul. By now the Amir had fled. Roberts's revenge was brutal and widespread.

With news of the Afghan events there was talk of the possibility of Forbes returning to Afghanistan. But the military were taking no chances of a repetition of criticism such as they had experienced in South Africa and had no desire, presumably, to have the severity of the retribution made public. The Indian government announced that no newspaper correspondents would be allowed to accompany the army to Kabul and reports would be sent out by a military officer. Hector Macpherson, the correspondent of the *Standard*, who had been with Roberts's force, was ordered to leave.<sup>8</sup> There was some relaxation after the capture of Kabul but correspondents were only to be allowed to work within the limits of tight regulation. It was a policy that had some support from sections of the press. The *Saturday Review* had fancifully claimed that the Russians were supplying the Afghans with information gleaned from the British press. At a dinner in honour of G.A.Sala, Forbes declared that he would never again accompany a British

<sup>7</sup> Forbes, 'Flogging in the Army', *Nineteenth Century* (October 1879), 604–14.

<sup>8</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, 10 September 1879.

army in the field so long as the new regulations were in force.<sup>9</sup> He enlarged on his objections in a powerful piece in the January 1880 issue of *Nineteenth Century* on 'War Correspondents and the Authorities'. There, he declared, that in both India and in Britain the first reaction had been to regard the regulations as 'a grim hoax'.

The new regulations required all correspondents to be licensed and approved of by the authorities: 'Retired officers will be preferred'. Permission would be required to move from one part of the area of operation to another and permission would rarely be granted to go to the outposts. Forbes accepted that there was a need for some regulation and he rejected over-simplistic arguments about the 'liberty of the press'. He recognised that that had been cases where information of possible value to an enemy had been divulged. The good war correspondent knew that there had to be some constraint: 'By consuetude [sic], he accompanies armies, but always on conditions implied or expressed, mostly the latter. He is there on privilege, and on his honest behaviour as a good citizen and truth-telling man.' As for the argument that criticism of the leadership might produce discontent and loss of morale in an army, he saw that as a product of Chelmsford's complaints, but, he declared, 'an army in the field does its own criticism' and what a journalist says will not alter that. He contrasted the British regulations with the open way in which correspondents had been treated by the Russians.

But, he argued, there is a need to know the truth about what is being done in the nation's name and 'to elect to live in a fool's paradise is worse than folly; it is imbecility'. The nation has a right to know.

Not for the mere gratification of *quidnunc* curiosity; but that it may, if need there should seem, take its fortunes into its own hands, and urge, full-throated, on its servants – not its masters – the authorities of the hour, that their care be not wholly for their own petty prospects, but for the broad national weal.

The doyen of war correspondents, W.H. Russell had saved the army in the Crimea 'from the direst of all maladies, red tape in a state of collapse'. Others had followed in his wake, often bringing their experience of foreign armies to the attention of the military authorities. He was anxious to distance himself from radical hostility to the army and there was the odd gruesomely

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<sup>9</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 17 November 1879.



purple passage about the national manhood 'who joyously expend their lives for Queen and fatherland'. Indeed, he argued that the reports of war correspondents could, in fact, 'stimulate the martial ardour of a nation'. In a sweeping peroration he asked,

Is this craft of ours [the War Correspondent], not less noble than that of the clergyman himself, not less patriotic than that of him who gladly dies for his country, not less tender than that of the poet in that our theme throb and glow, and dares and dies, under our very hand, not less reciprocative to the beating heart of the nation than is the devotion of the sister of mercy in the field-hospital, to be stamped out on the pretext of a narrow utilitarianism that is as fictitious as it is short-sighted.

What Forbes rebelled against was the appointment of a staff officer as censor who had the power not only to block despatches, but to alter them. Also, there would be no repetition of Forbes's ride to Landsmans Drift. It was to be illegal for any correspondent 'to organise any special means of communication under their own control and management, or to employ telegraphic or post offices beyond the radius of military jurisdiction'. This was to deprive Forbes of what had been the hallmark of his reporting, getting the message out quickly even from the most remote of battlefields. Those who broke such regulations were not only liable to be expelled but could be charged under military law. There were suggestions that the rules were intended for show and were not likely to be systematically enforced, but, as Forbes said, 'If this be so, the insult is only the more gratuitous'. The rules he declared were 'degrading and intolerable'.<sup>10</sup>

The article produced a response from Lord Melgund, heir to the earldom of Minto, who had been with Roberts in Afghanistan. Melgund objected in particular to journalists making judgement on military officers: 'Why should the fact of a man being a war correspondent enable him to form more just opinions than any other civilian?'. The problem was that the *hoi polloi* accept these assessments of individual generals. It was clear that the criticism of Chelmsford, in particular, was behind the comments. Forbes's assertion that his advice on a landing on the Zulu coast had been ignored by the military was seen as a usurpation of authority. The same went for Forbes's sugges-

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<sup>10</sup> Forbes, 'War Correspondents and the Authorities', *Nineteenth Century* (January 1880), 185–96.

tion that 'an army in the field does its own criticism'. Melgund accepted that this might sometimes be so, but it was something to be discouraged, particularly if an army was facing reverses in the field. There were dangers also in reporting on 'the necessary horrors of war'. Sensational writing on these was 'destined to excite the humanitarian mind at home, and raise doubts at the civilisation of our soldiery'.<sup>11</sup>

In the early months of 1880 Forbes was in Scotland, lecturing on the Zulu War in Edinburgh and in some smaller towns. But he again cultivated controversy. A lecture in Edinburgh by Mr Gloekner from the Berlin Mission to South Africa, had made use of a bogus description of Isandlwana by another missionary, De Witt. Gloekner had then proceeded to attack Bishop Colenso, accusing him of allowing polygamy, the selling of wives, and (worst of all) the purchase of brandy by the black Africans around him. Forbes, who had met Colenso, rushed out a letter to the *Scotsman* in Colenso's defence: 'I have been to Bishoptown, and it was in the only place in South Africa where I found Kaffirs living in decency'. He then widened the attack to missionary work in general.

Missionary enterprise is a gross impertinence, and did he chance to be a straightforward, self-respecting heathen he would kick any interloping missionary who came canting round him, and seeking to pervert the faith of his fathers. His experience of missionaries was that they were mostly liars, some because of a mixture of simplicity and unctuousness and others out of sheer reckless unscrupulousness.

These were courageous views to expound in Scotland of 1880. They were very much out of tune with those of the Scottish Presbyterian Churches into which Forbes was born and which, thanks to the effect of David Livingstone, were increasingly committed to missionary effort in Africa.

Despite his abhorrence of politics, he attended an election meeting in Kirkcaldy Corn Exchange to hear the Conservative candidate Captain Oswald. Much to the delight of the audience he discomfited Captain Oswald by asking if he 'would vote for a measure to send Lord Beaconsfield to penal servitude for life for the great evil he had done the country'.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Lord Melgund, 'Newspaper Correspondents in the Field', *Nineteenth Century* (March 1880), 434–42.

<sup>12</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 22 March 1880.

The failure to receive any recognition from the British authorities for his service in both Afghanistan and South Africa clearly still rankled with him. He compiled a four-page collection of testimonials seeking an Afghan medal. The basis of his claim was that in a skirmish in the Khyber Pass in December 1878 he had stopped and bandaged two wounded men while under fire and waited with them until the medical orderlies arrived. For this Brigadier-General Tyler had mentioned him in despatches. Tyler was, however, unfortunately now dead, killed in action. With a Liberal Government now back in power, Forbes sent the testimonials to Gladstone and sought an interview. Gladstone declined to meet him, but forwarded the material to the War Office. His request was turned down, reputedly at the behest of the Duke of Cambridge, noted for his hatred of journalists and of war correspondents in particular. It was left to Lord Hartington to explain to Parliament that, as a civilian, Forbes was not eligible for a military medal. The problem with this was that his rival for the claim to be the 'the prince of war correspondents', W. H. Russell, had been awarded a Crimean War medal. Forbes's request was rejected on the ground that 'the service on the performance of which that claim is based was not of a character which would entitle you to a medal'.<sup>13</sup>

This then left the matter of a Zulu War medal for his ride to Landsman's Drift. Hugh Childers, the secretary of state for war, had turned down his request on the grounds that 'no application was made for your services'. Forbes wrote, pointing out that he had carried despatches from Chelmsford to General Marshall at Landsman's Drift and Marshall, in his turn, had encouraged him to go on to Pietermaritzburg. The reply, two months later, was that Chelmsford had denied that he had made use of Forbes's services, while Marshall denied that he had received any despatches. Childers declined to alter his decision. It seems that their denials were strictly true and Forbes had to amend his claim. In a further communication with the War Office he asserted that the despatch that he carried had come from Colonel J.N. Crealock, Chelmsford's military secretary, but Crealock claimed that this was merely a private message to his wife and contained 'no document of a public character'. Forbes knew this to be untrue, since the telegraph office at Landsman's drift had taken several hours to transmit Crealock's message. This was later confirmed in writing by the Royal Engineer officer who had been in charge of the telegraph office. When this was forwarded to the War Office

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<sup>13</sup> Forbes, 'My Campaign in Pall Mall', *Universal Review* (March 1889), 380.

there was no response.<sup>14</sup> The War Office refused to act, pointing out that the VCs awarded to civilians caught up in the Indian Mutiny were approved by a special statute and that any parallels with Forbes's case did not apply.<sup>15</sup>

In July Routledge and Sons published Forbes's *Glimpses Through the Cannon Smoke. A Series of Sketches*. Despite the title, and as he pointed out in the preface, there was little on warfare in the collection. Rather the pieces, he claimed, were those written between battles. Most, if not all, had been published elsewhere. There were a number of pieces set in northern Scotland, some of which, such as 'The Inverness "Character" Fair' undoubtedly had a literary quality to them. Others covered incidents from the Franco-German War, and from his trips to India and Burma. It was fairly coolly received by reviewers, talking of a lack of imagination, and with so many of his lectures being reported there must have been a sense that Forbes was over-exposed.<sup>16</sup>

The post-mortems on the Zulu war continued and an article in *Fraser's Magazine* in April made a partial defence of Chelmsford, but mainly criticised Forbes for being too swift to find fault. Forbes does not seem to have risen to the bait and he was busy with Richard D'Oyly Carte signing him up for a lecture tour of the United States. In September 1880, he sailed from Liverpool for New York.

His first appearance on the rostrum in New York was not a great success. Chickering Hall, on Fifth Avenue, which could hold 1450 was only 'fairly well filled'. It started twenty minutes late and Forbes appeared in full evening dress, complete with medals, to speak on 'Emperors, Kings and other Royal personages that I have met'. The *New York Herald* and the *New York Tribune* both reported the lecture neutrally, but, much to the delight of many in the British press, at least one American paper made fun of the pomposity.

I am Archibald Forbes. I have been everywhere. I have done everything. I am a very smart fellow. I am not to be outdone. I know the emperor of China; I know the king of the Cannibal Isles. I am intimately connected with the Grand Lama. I have lived with the Shah of Persia. I am the dearest friend of the Emperor of Russia.

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<sup>14</sup> Forbes, 'My Campaign in Pall Mall', 381–4.

<sup>15</sup> British Library, Add Ms 44464 f. 67, f147–9, Gladstone Papers, Forbes to W. E. Gladstone 6 May 1880.

<sup>16</sup> *Examiner*, 3 July 1880.

After some more in this vein the piece ended 'Here our store of I's gave out'.

Forbes does seem to have taken the lesson and changed to a lecture on the role of war correspondents. The style did gradually improve, although the *New York Times* was still complaining that he largely read his lectures and talked 'as he rides – like a trooper on the charge'.<sup>17</sup> He had plenty opportunities, however, for recounting some of his heroics. And he had numerous press interviews, an American habit that most in the British press still found amusing. A longish piece by Kate Field, the American journalist and friend of Anthony Trollope, in *Scribner's Monthly* gave details of his early life that were to form the basis of most later accounts of Forbes. The tour continued and included a lecture at Toronto University where he was the guest of Professor Goldwin Smith, whom he would have known since his days with the *Star*. He did manage to pack in the crowds. In Cincinnati he filled a hall of 1800 seats to more than capacity, with ladies sitting on the platform around him. In December 1880 he was given a reception in Washington attended by correspondents of most of the leading journals as well as by the local press.<sup>18</sup>

Forbes grew to love America. He was particularly attracted by the lack of snobbery in the place and the openness of society, both with a small and capital 'S'. He noted the growing wealth amongst certain sectors, but admired how families of the new rich adapted to a new social status and to new surroundings without losing 'a composed serenity'. He admired the commitment to hard work and the lack of an idle rich. As always, he was able to analyse the environment in which he was operating. An article on his return, on 'Some Aspects of American Society', is extremely perceptive, contrasting the characteristics of the social elites of different cities. New York 'scintillates with dazzling brightness and sparkle [and] is full of curious transient fads that can scarcely be called fashions'. Boston, on the other hand, 'sets its handsome, composed face resolutely against ostentation'. In Washington, the fashion is to be 'well-informed as well as well educated'. Even Cincinnati, on which the East Coast might look down, had the biggest music festival in the world: 'if Cincinnati lives by pork alone, it cannot be said to live for pork alone'. In contrast, he found in Charleston in the defeated South, an old aristocracy living in a dead past where 'the

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<sup>17</sup> *New York Times*, 14 October 1880.

<sup>18</sup> *New York Times*, 10 December 1880.

melancholy cud of the great Rebellion' was constantly chewed over and a false gentility was maintained amid real poverty.<sup>19</sup>

It is clear that he found the lecture circuit highly lucrative. In a letter to G. A. Sala, he envisaged repeating the exercise. 'The career of a lecturer here is this,' he wrote, 'the first year he is making his reputation; the second year he is making his pile; the third year he is "fizzling out".'<sup>20</sup> There was little demand for lectures in the summer months and Forbes planned to proceed to Australia in May and return to the United States in the autumn. Instead, he was once again too ill, and returned to England.

While in the United States, Forbes had gone to the defence of Russell from an attack on him by the historian of the Crimean War, A. W. Kinglake, who in the most recent volume of his multi-volume history, suggested that the *Times's* use of Russell's reports had aided the Russians. In a piece to the *New York Herald* Forbes wrote,

By a strain of imagination it may be held that Dr Russell's letters did tell the Russians something which otherwise they would not have known. But if Dr Russell had not written those letters it would in a very short time have come to pass that the whole British army would have died off the face of that wretched peninsula when there would have been no army to give an enemy intelligence about.<sup>21</sup>

Forbes gave his last lecture in the United States just before Christmas 1880, back in Chickering Hall. Here he heaped praise on American colleagues. According to Forbes, Moncure Conway was the real founder of war correspondence by telegraph, with his report from the battle of Gravelotte. It was a claim challenged by the Cincinnati journalist, Murat Halstead, who had travelled with Forbes in France and had, indeed, once been rescued from drowning by Forbes.<sup>22</sup>

Soon after his return to London he was invited to the Lord Mayor's banquet for the representatives of literature. Although there were numerous distinguished writers in the company it was Lord Lytton, now returned from his time as Viceroy in India, who gave the main speech. Forbes was asked to respond to the toast to war correspondents. He had already returned in

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<sup>19</sup> Forbes, 'Some Aspects of American Society' in *Souvenirs*, 229–30.

<sup>20</sup> *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 16 March 1881.

<sup>21</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, 21 December 1880.

<sup>22</sup> *New York Times*, 23 December 1880.

an article in Edmund Yates's new magazine, *Time*, to the criticism of Lytton that he had made when he was reporting the Afghan war: that he had committed the army to war without adequate preparation and that there had to be an initial truce before Kabul was captured because the forces were not adequate. Although his remarks were seen as pointedly referring to Lytton, Forbes spoke of an official mind-set that always denied or criticised the reports of special correspondents, and cited examples from his own experience when reporting from Paris in 1871, from Cyprus, from India and from South Africa. Most papers ignored what he said, but the *York Herald* found it a 'notable instance of bad taste'.

Despite this he was, soon after, at a dinner for the Prince and Princess of Wales given by the Mayor of Derby. He managed to attend the celebration of Edmund Yates's fiftieth birthday and the seventh anniversary of the launch of *The World*. Almost immediately afterwards, in early July 1881, he was operated on by the distinguished surgeon, Sir Henry Thompson, a specialist in bladder and urinary tract problems. He took a few weeks in Nairn to recover and then, once again headed off for New York, finally severing his connection with the *Daily News*, and announcing that he was giving up journalism. Before he left, his portrait in oils by Sir Hubert von Herkomer was shown at the Royal Academy. It was a striking image of the tall Forbes wearing a khaki jerkin, very much the working war correspondent. The likeness was well thought of and over the next few years the portrait was frequently displayed at exhibitions in Britain and on the continent.

He was the only distinguished Briton at the celebration of the centennial of the surrender of the British army at Yorktown. It was marked by the fact that President Arthur, who had just succeeded the assassinated President Garfield, insisted that the troops who were present salute the Union flag. Forbes publicly regretted that there was no official British presence or even a representative of the family of the defeated Cornwallis.

In November his lecture in Hartford Connecticut was introduced with an amusing speech by none other than Mark Twain. Twain, perhaps ironically, went over the top in his introduction;

My office here is only to make you acquainted with a man whom you already know perfectly well – a man who has heard the roar and thunder of battle in many and widely separated lands around and about the globe; a man whose record is filled with brilliant achievements in war and with the pen; a man who fairly earned, not merely once, but

several times, that rarely granted badge of supreme daring, the coveted Victorian Cross; a man who smelt the breath of dissolution on many a field.<sup>23</sup>

The lecture seems to have gone well and he was back in Hartford in January 1882.

There was an extensive tour of Canada, from Quebec in the east to the new, flourishing settlement of Manitoba in the west. Despite snow on the ground people flocked from considerable distances on sleighs and on snow shoes to hear him. Many of them were fellow Scots, who, he suggested, were more receptive to lectures than the English or the Irish.

In January 1882 D'Oyly Carte brought a new lecturer to the American circuit, the poet and aesthete, Oscar Wilde. The aestheticism of Wilde and his associates had been parodied by Gilbert and Sullivan in their opera *Patience*, which was embarking on tour in America. Presumably the idea was that Wilde's arrival would give a boost to ticket sales. In fact, the American press showed a huge interest, initially at any rate, in this exotic arrival. Forbes attended Wilde's first lecture in New York, where Wilde appeared wearing knee breeches. Forbes and Wilde, of course, were as different as chalk and cheese, but there may have been a touch of jealousy on Forbes's part at what appeared to be Wilde's instant success. They found themselves in the same hotel in Philadelphia, the Aldine, and Forbes's distaste and/or envy was apparent in a letter to a Miss Flossie.

Oscar Wilde is here ... He wears knee breeches, but alas no lily. He lectures here tonight. He can't lecture worth a cent, but he draws the crowds wonderfully, and he fools them all to the top of their bent, which is quite clever.

He sarcastically talks of Wilde having received an offer of £200 a week from T. P. Barnum to lead an elephant holding a lily round the circus ring and recounts a story of Wilde having a tantrum when the barber, called to cut his hair, had failed to bring a curling tongs.<sup>24</sup> They were both due to appear in Baltimore, with Wilde attending Forbes's lecture and then going together to a reception.

<sup>23</sup> *Hartford Daily Courant*, 18 November 1881.

<sup>24</sup> Forbes to Miss Flossie, 15 January 1882, William Andrews Clark Library, University of California, quoted in Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York, 1987), 166.



By the time the train reached Baltimore the two had irrevocably quarrelled. Reading between the lines, it may be that Forbes made some laboured joke on aestheticism selling its soul to commerce, which Wilde, still very anxious about his lecture tour, took badly. Or it may be that Wilde suggested that he, unlike Forbes, had a higher aim than mere money-making. Perhaps Wilde even suggested that he had been invited to attend Forbes's lecture in Baltimore to swell the audience. Whatever, the reason, such was the offence taken by Wilde that he refused to get off the train at Baltimore and continued to Washington, leaving an offended group in Baltimore high society.

That evening, during his lecture on his exploits in the Russo-Turkish war, Forbes said something to the effect that, 'Now I wish it to be understood that I am a follower, an humble follower, of the aesthetic ecstasy, but I did not much look like an art object then. ... Neither was the wild, barren waste of Bulgaria congenial to the growth of sunflowers and lilies'. What was clearly a gently barbed joke was badly taken by Wilde, when it was published in the Baltimore papers.<sup>25</sup> On 20 January Wilde wrote to Forbes:

Dear Mr Forbes

I feel quite sure that your remarks to me have been mis-represented. I must say however that your remarks about me *in your lecture* may be regarded as giving *some* natural ground for the report. I feel bound to say quite frankly that I do not consider them to be either in good taste or appropriate to your subject.

I have something to say to the American people, something I know will be the beginning of a great movement here, and all foolish ridicule does a great deal of harm to the cause of art and refinement of civilisation here.

I do not think that your lecture will lose its brilliancy or interest by expunging the passage, which is, as you say yourself, poor fooling enough.

You have to speak of the life of action, I of the life of art. Our subjects are quite distinct and should be kept so.

Believe me,

Yours truly,

Oscar Wilde<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 31 January 1882.

<sup>26</sup> Merlin Holland & Rupert Hart-Davis (eds), *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London, 2000), 129.

The suggestion that Wilde's tour was for something more superior than money seems to have enraged Forbes, who sent off an angry letter. This was intercepted by Colonel Morse, who was D'Oyly Carte's representative in the United States, and instead of showing it to Wilde he sent it off to D'Oyly Carte, giving Wilde only the slightest gist of it.

On the following day Wilde was interviewed by the *Washington Post* and declared that he had never intended to go to Forbes's lecture.

Our views are wide apart. If it answers him to caricature me in the manner which he did last night, well and good. It may serve a purpose and judging from the fact, as stated, that his audience came to see me, it is answering one very good purpose. It is advertising Mr Forbes at my expense.<sup>27</sup>

But, he followed this up with a mollifying letter to Forbes.

In any case let me assure you that I have neither spoken of you to anyone except as I would speak of a man whose chivalry, whose personal bravery, and whose pluck has won him the respect and admiration of all honest men in Europe and America, and who has given English journalism the new lustre of action, of adventure and of courage. I do not believe what I read in the papers about you, that you have spoken about me in a sneering way behind my back. I in fact denied it to a reporter who came with the story on *Thursday* night [19th January] late. I do not think that you should have believed it of me.<sup>28</sup>

Unfortunately, by this time other papers had produced garbled versions of what each side had said and Forbes was not mollified. Writing from New York on 26 January, he began by suggesting that Wilde should read his own letters and not depend on a summary. He then reiterated his grievances.

What that letter protested against was

*First:* the claim set up by you in your letter of Friday last, that I should trim a lecture of mine to suit your sensitiveness to an inoffensive effort at humour; and

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<sup>27</sup> Ellmann, *Wilde*, 167.

<sup>28</sup> Oscar Wilde to Archibald Forbes, 23 January 1882 in Holland and Hart Davis, *Complete Letters*, 130.

*Secondly and chiefly* – with the knowledge I have, and which you know I have, of the utterly mercenary aim of your visit to America, the possibility of my accepting your pretensions put forward in the same letter as follows: ‘I have something to say to the American people, something I know will be the beginning of a great movement; and all foolish ridicule does a great deal of harm to the cause of art, refinement and civilisation here.’

It is no affair of mine to whom else you may chose to advance these pretensions; but I must utterly decline to allow you to address them to me, for the reasons given at length in my letter which you had not thought proper to read.

The ‘irrelevant expressions of cordiality’ of Wilde’s most recent letter were rejected and the complete withdrawal in writing of his first letter ‘by Sunday next’ was demanded or the whole correspondence would be published in a New York paper.<sup>29</sup>

Wilde tried again with a letter retracting anything that Forbes regarded as discourteous. He admitted that he did hope that ‘the dreadfully hard work of lecturing’ would earn him enough money to give him ‘an autumn in Venice, a winter in Rome and a Spring in Athens’, but, at the same time, he would be very disappointed if he ‘had not influenced in however slight a way the growing spirit of art in this country...and made one person love beautiful things a little more’.<sup>30</sup>

The day before this letter was sent Forbes had a cable from the kenspeckle Society solicitor, George Lewis: ‘Like a good fellow don’t attack Wilde. I ask this personal favour to me.’ The public quarrel ended, but behind the scenes it raged on, as Wilde believed that Forbes was the source of telegrams in the *Daily News* deriding and ridiculing Wilde’s lectures. One declared that in Boston people started walking out after 15 minutes and they had only come to see some sixty Harvard students who attended ‘wearing dress coats, knee breeches, flowing wigs, and green neck scarfs, having lilies in their buttonholes and sunflowers in their hand’. The audience ‘while respectable...contained no prominent persons’.<sup>31</sup> Another claimed that many members of the Century Club in New York had refused

<sup>29</sup> Forbes to Wilde, 26 January 1882 from 46 West St, New York in Holland and Hart Davis, *Complete Letters*, 133.

<sup>30</sup> Wilde to Forbes c. 29 January 1882.

<sup>31</sup> *Daily News*, 2 February 1882.

to be presented to Wilde and made unsubtle allusions to his sexuality.<sup>32</sup> A third quoted a hostile account in the *Washington Post* that juxtaposed a drawing of Oscar holding a lily with a half-naked citizen of Borneo, 'Mr Wild', holding a coconut.<sup>33</sup> Wilde had no doubt that the source was Forbes and in letters to friends he put it down to jealousy, claiming that Forbes's lectures were a failure and that he resented Wilde's greater attraction. Certainly the tone of the reporting in the *Daily News* changed after the row in January and the antagonism never died. In 1885 when Wilde quarrelled with his erstwhile friend, the painter McNeill Whistler, Forbes introduced Whistler to Mrs D'Oyly Carte and soon Whistler was on a lecture tour where he attacked Wilde. Forbes also told an American paper that although he and Wilde met frequently in London Society and he sometimes took Mrs Wilde down to dinner, he and Wilde never spoke.<sup>34</sup>

In April 1882, just before he left for his delayed tour of Australia and New Zealand, his engagement to Miss Lulu (Louisa) Meigs, the 'extremely handsome and accomplished daughter' of Montgomery C. Meigs, the Quartermaster-General of the United States' Army, was announced. She was sixteen years his junior. According to the *New York World* it was not a complete surprise 'as he had paid marked attention to her during his frequent visits to Washington'. This was a Washington that had changed rapidly in the years since the end of the Civil War, developing into a handsome Federal capital, with many fine new buildings and splendid boulevards. Forbes recognised that around a small exclusive inner circle 'there surges and rages a turbulent, discoloured and often unsavoury sea...a sea in whose vexed, dingy waters splash, swim, drift, or drown senators, congressmen, logrollers, pension agents, lobbyists, so-called agents, office-seekers, appropriation cormorants, intriguers, panderers, news-purveyors and news-inventors, sharks, gamblers, and indiscriminate scum'. None the less, he found in the inner circle, of which Miss Meigs was a part, a knowledge of Europe and European politics that was lacking elsewhere. He also found there 'a tone of refinement incompatible with the echo of the chink of dollars'.

One can only guess at Forbes's relationships with women. He clearly revelled in the world of military men. Nevertheless, there are enough references to suggest that he had a social charm in the company of woman,

<sup>32</sup> *Daily News*, 2 March 1882.

<sup>33</sup> Ellmann, *Wilde*, 167–8.

<sup>34</sup> *Shields Daily Gazette*, 16 August 1888.

enjoyed dancing and, as a good storyteller, could become the centre of attention at social gatherings. He admired beautiful women and whether it was in America or Australia or Bulgaria or Cyprus commented not just on their appearance, but on their style and intellect. He found a marked contrast in the position and treatment of young women between Britain and America. 'A girl in America can travel from New York to San Francisco without any thought of violated etiquette. She can cross the Atlantic alone, and not have the consciousness of a solecism until a fresh light comes to her with surprise when she would put up at a British hotel'. Once acclimatised to it, Forbes clearly admired the personality and independence of American women, with comments that may have reflected his own experience.

The frankness of the American young woman has in it, on the threshold, a certain bewilderment and even embarrassment for the British male person, especially if his collars are stiffly starched. She has so utter an apparent absence of self-consciousness; her mental equipoise is so serenely stable; her good fellowship, if one may use the term, is so natural that he cannot see his way easily to resolve the problem. She flirts, he finds; she is adept at flirtation, but it is flirtation 'from the teeth outwards', to use Carlyle's phrase; and he is fain to own to himself, like the fox-hunting farmer who tried to get drunk on claret, that he seems to "Get no forrander'. But although the citadel of the fortress seems to him strangely impregnable because of the cool alert self-possession of the garrison, I have been told by heroic persons who have ventured on the escalade, that if the beleaguer be he whom fortune favours, it will terminate an honourable siege by graceful capitulation.<sup>35</sup>

Presumably, Forbes and Louisa met on his first visit to Washington. In January 1882, she had tried to smooth over the quarrel between Wilde and Forbes, by speaking to Wilde and blaming it on garbled reporting.<sup>36</sup> Miss Meigs seems to have been something of a catch and well-known in the society of Washington's diplomatic circle. On the other hand, Forbes was also a catch, tall, striking, famous and extremely well-off as a result of his lecture earnings. Her father asked for references to be reassured that Forbes had no wife in Britain. Astonishingly, but presumably to impress General Meigs,

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<sup>35</sup> Forbes, 'Some Aspects of American Society', 262–3.

<sup>36</sup> Wilde to Forbes, 23 January 1882.

Forbes asked Garnet Wolseley, for a testimonial.<sup>37</sup> As far as one can judge, it proved eventually to be a love match. Certainly Louisa was to remain devoted to him in his last years and devoted to his memory.

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<sup>37</sup> Hove Public Library, Wolseley Papers, Forbes to Wolseley, 12 July 1882.

## 16 Australasia

*I reckon it now among the disgraces of Britain that the great mother knows so little of her lusty offspring under the Southern Cross*

Archibald Forbes in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 July 1883

For most people in Britain, Australia was relatively unknown. It is true that since the gold discoveries of the 1850s in Ballarat and Bendigo emigration to Australia had gone up and the population had increased from fewer than half a million in 1851 to nearly two and quarter million in 1880. But it was a long way from Britain and had none of the regular migrant traffic of Canada or the United States. In many people's minds it was still associated with convict transportation which had only finally ceased in 1868. Touring British visitors were not common and Australians had reason to be suspicious. Anthony Trollope had made two trips there in 1871 and 1875, to visit his son, but had left an ill-feeling with his later criticisms of the place which included the accusation that Australians were braggarts, full of what he referred to as Australian 'blow'. Forbes, by committing himself to a lecture tour organised for him by R. S. Smythe, was in many ways acting as a pioneer. He had the advantage that he was already well-known since many of the Australian papers had reported his exploits over the previous decades and his accounts from the Russo-Turkish war had been regularly syndicated to the Melbourne *Argus*.

He arrived in Sydney from San Francisco on 6 May 1882. He had, of course, been expected the previous year, but had had to call off at the last minute because of his poor health. Since news of that cancellation came only in a letter on the ship on which he had been expected, there was some concern that he might call off again. All Australia, claimed one paper, was 'on the tiptoe of expectation' for his arrival and, according to Sydney's *Evening News* 'never has more interest been manifested on anybody'.<sup>1</sup> The start was not entirely propitious since he slipped and sprained his ankle on his way into Government House to meet the governor of New South Wales, Lord Loftus,

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<sup>1</sup> *Gippsland Times*, 26 April 1882; *Evening News*, 6 May 1882.

and he had to give his first lecture sitting on a chair. He was, however, immediately given a banquet by the Highland Society of New South Wales, where he ladled on the praise of Scotsmen and their qualities that had spread throughout the world. His lectures went down well and when he moved to Melbourne at the end of May he had the largest audiences ever assembled in the Opera House. He gave two lectures in quick succession on the 'Inner life of a War Correspondent' and then was asked to give a special lecture on 'Kings and Princes I have met' in celebration of the Queen's Birthday.<sup>2</sup> After a successful tour of other towns in Victoria he moved to Adelaide in South Australia at the end of July. In all three colonies he was entertained by the Governors, had picnics with other social leaders and attended balls. Journalists who had known him in the past in Europe reminisced on his exploits. Within four months of his arrival it was claimed that he had cleared £12,000. By November the claim had risen to £20,000, with Forbes often reputedly, making £200 per night.

In August the first visit to Australian waters from a Russian naval squadron caused anxiety and allowed Forbes to pontificate on the best defence measures, suggesting three additional coastal forts and improved telegraphic communication. The death of the Russian General Skobelev, who had not so long before come to London in the hope of meeting Forbes once again, gave him the opportunity to re-live some of his Balkan adventures. With great speed he was able to produce a four column biography of Skobelev for the *Sydney Daily Herald*.

In July 1882 the British moved to crush a nationalist rising in Egypt. Alexandria was bombarded from the sea and then Garnet Wolseley led a landing. It seems that Forbes was tempted to go to Egypt, but Smythe dissuaded him. From afar, Forbes, in articles in the Australian press, was critical of the slowness with which the government had responded to the threat of Arabi Pasha. Germany, he suggested, would have had troops ready to move in three days. However, Wolseley's victory came at Tel el Kebir in September and Cairo was occupied.

Illness prevented Forbes attending the Melbourne Cup on the first Tuesday of November, but he was soon able to head off for two weeks in Tasmania. In late November he was in New Zealand beginning a tour at Invercargill, deep in the South Island. Here was a place where Scotsmen proliferated and, according to the *Southland Press*, Forbes met people who had been to school with himself or his brothers or who knew him at Aberdeen

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<sup>2</sup> *Melbourne Argus*, 23 May 1882.



University.<sup>3</sup> With his lectures surely now perfected, Forbes had an enthusiastic reception. The following evening, a banquet was given in his honour by the Mayor, with the local Gaelic and Caledonian Societies well represented.

Further north at Timaru he addressed an audience of around 400, followed once again by a banquet. Here he was toasted by James Scott who had been a school-fellow thirty years before, 'birched with the same rod and tormented with the same syntax'.<sup>4</sup> In January he moved to the North Island, going as far north as Gisborne, where he gave four lectures. The last, comparing the armies of the European powers, gave support to the idea of universal conscription. He visited smaller towns, in what was still a very sparsely populated country, but his manager, Smythe generally sought a guarantee of payment before agreeing to such visits.<sup>5</sup> Returning to Christchurch in the South island, he later recalled a hazardous journey by coach across the beautiful Southern Alps to 'moist, quiet, sleepy Hokitika' on the west coast. This was gold-mining country and he was invited to give a talk to an even newer settlement, Doughtown, still largely under canvas. Declining the collection of some sovereigns, half sovereigns and 'a number of little nuggets', he was presented with 200 shares in the 'Doughtown United Gold Mining Co. Ltd, which alas never brought him riches'.<sup>6</sup>

Not everyone was enamoured by him. There were still those who found him rather too arrogant. That, at any rate, was the view of the New Zealand correspondent of the *South Australian Register*.

As a man we don't like him a bit. We offer him hospitality and he snubs us. We meet him at steamers and make him an honorary member of our clubs, but he accepts our kindly attentions as a matter of course or a matter of right.<sup>7</sup>

None the less, the press reports indicate a highly successful tour.

He returned to Australia in early March 1883, gave a few more lectures in Victoria and spent some time at Rupertwood as the guest of the well-known cattle breeder and philanthropist, Sir William J. Clarke. In May he headed for Queensland and hit the lecture circuit once more. The *Sydney*

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<sup>3</sup> *Southland Times*, 29 November 1882.

<sup>4</sup> *Timaru Herald*, 15 December 1882.

<sup>5</sup> *Hawara & Normanby Star*, 17 February 1883.

<sup>6</sup> Forbes, 'Doughtown Script' in *Souvenirs of Some Continents*, 270–89.

<sup>7</sup> *South Australian Register*, 22 February 1883.

*Bulletin* dug out the fact that Forbes had a 'long lost brother' in Australia, William. William Anderson Forbes, as he had been baptised, although younger than Archibald, had gone up to Marischal College in 1854 the year after his older brother had matriculated at King's College. He seems to have been the more academically gifted of the two, winning prizes for Latin translations.<sup>8</sup> However, he had been expelled from Marischal College, Aberdeen in 1855, the same year that Archibald dropped out, 'having been guilty of repeated contempt of the authority and discipline of the college in spite of repeated warning'. He had come to Australia about 1862 and wandered the outback of Queensland doing menial jobs. He ended up a doorkeeper at the Rockhampton theatre, but he published in 1869 a collection of poems, *Voices from the Bush*, eulogizing life in the bush, under the name 'Alick the Poet'.<sup>9</sup> Rum and tobacco seem to have featured in William/Alick's life and he had died in 1879. Archibald never seems to have had contact with him after the 1850s but he claimed to have made enquiries when he got to Queensland and, indeed, it may have been the reason for his visit to the thinly populated colony. He received bits of information of William having worked in the gold fields and on various sheep stations. It was only when someone presented him with a copy of *Voices from the Bush* that the link was made.

He published a moving piece entitled 'Two Brothers' in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and reprinted in various other papers.<sup>10</sup> Here he paid homage 'to a poor gifted, shipwrecked brother, who with happier fortune might have taken some rank among the sweet singers of our language and have been not without honour among us'. He found his brother's verse, at least in parts, had an authenticity and a sense of a life really experienced, 'quaint, picturesque, half-merry, half-melancholy, all reckless', a way of life that was fast disappearing in 'the process of reduction to conventionality'. He picked out for mention the dreams of the gold prospector in 'No 2 Reef, Before Crushing'

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<sup>8</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 4 April 1855.

<sup>9</sup> The poems are good enough to get a mention in the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* although the date of his birth is wrong. It is not clear why he would have taken the name Alexander Forbes, the name of a deceased half-brother, in his writing. More detail can be found in his entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

<sup>10</sup> This was later re-published as 'A Poet Waif' in *Souvenirs of Some Continents*, 290–305.

Now, if this claim turns out an ounce,  
 Right joyful I shall be;  
 I'll walk into the Mornish  
 And have a jolly spree.

And if two ounces it should run,  
 By Jove that would be glorious;  
 Rockhampton, I'd turn upside down,  
 And spend a month uproarious.

And if three ounces we should get,  
 That just would suit my kidney;  
 I'd take my passage in the boat,  
 And have a trip to Sydney.

If we four ounces should obtain,  
 No longer here I'd tarry;  
 The steamer which takes home the mails,  
 This male would also carry.

And, if a duffer it should prove –  
 But, Lord! I'll say no more now;  
 I have a guardian angel,  
 And he's stuck to me before now.

In contrast there was 'After Crushing':

D-nation, vexation, tribulation, starvation, consternation.  
 Too bad, poor lad, very sad, close up mad, grog not to be had.  
 Sanguinary rot, queer lot, soon must trot, gone to pot, quite forgot.  
 Limited tick, publicans sick, blocked quick, dirty trick, no longer a brick.  
 No cash, frightful smash, too rash, can't be flash, final crash.  
 Up a tree, here with me, plain to see, soon must flee, little glee.  
 Seven weights, cruel fates, all the slates, made up to dates, horrid straits.  
 Hard luck, everywhere stuck, no more truck, below zero pluck.  
 Credit stopped, curtain dropped, heavy debts, no assets.  
 Number 2, adieu.

Whatever the literary qualities, the poems have something of the same kind of sense of lived experience, borne with resignation, that Robert Service's poems from the Yukon had a decade later.

During his time in Australia Archibald Forbes wrote a number of pieces for the Australian press. There were six lengthy articles on the United States entitled 'From the Pacific to the Missouri' in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. He also sent occasional reports of his travels within Australia. Nor did he eschew controversy. In South Australia he contributed a piece on land debates between farmers and squatters.<sup>11</sup> In Queensland, he even more boldly, entered the debate on what was called the Transcontinental Railway, but was in fact a planned railway from Brisbane to the Gulf of Carpentaria. The idea being pushed by the Queensland government was to give land along the thousand-mile route to a railway syndicate, who would sell it off to settlers. In a strongly-worded piece in the *Herald* he warned of the dangers of involving syndicates, citing as examples not to follow, George Stephen's Canadian Pacific and Jay Gould's control of the South-Western Railways in the United States.<sup>12</sup> Forbes liked Queensland and, in an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, he enthused about the bountifulness of its farming and heaped praise on the treatment of the Polynesian labourers who were imported on three-year contracts to work in the sugar plantations. He compared their lot very favourably with that of the farm labourers of England. He also came out strongly in favour of the creation of an Australian federation and regretted the rivalry that existed between the colonies, particularly between Victoria and New South Wales. His parting piece, published a day or two after he left, was entitled 'Australian Characteristics'. He heaped praise on the literate nature of the Australian population and on their commitment to self-improvement. He rejected the Trollopian accusation of mindless boasting and declared that what Australians had was an attachment to their country, to its physical characteristics. They wanted visitors to share in their love of places like Sydney Harbour, the Blue Mountains, the Clarence River. He liked the lack of ostentation amongst the wealthy with 'no gorgeous equipages, with plated harness, wigged coachmen and powdered flunkys'. What criticism he had was reserved for the country's politics, which rarely rose above the level of a parish vestry. Politicians were concerned only with the interest of their immediate, often very small locality and few sought to speak for the

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<sup>11</sup> *Wagga Wagga Advertiser*, 14 October 1882.

<sup>12</sup> *The Queenslander*, 2 June 1883.

whole country or, indeed, for a colony. As a result he was very doubtful of a federation coming about in the foreseeable future; the localism and inter-colony rivalry were too powerful.<sup>13</sup>

He caught the mail boat back to San Francisco with Sir Henry Parkes for company, the recently-defeated premier of New South Wales and advocate of federation. Sometime about now Forbes seems to have lost a considerable part of what he had earned in a rash speculation of some kind. It is not clear what happened and he himself never seems to have referred to it, but there were reports in the Australian press that he had invested in gold alluvial mining in the Creswick Basin, near Ballarat and also in tin mines in north east Queensland.<sup>14</sup> It is possible that he had money in the New Australasian Mine at Creswick, which was wiped out by a flooding disaster costing the lives of twenty-six men in December 1882. Forbes was in New Zealand at the time. Whatever the cause of his financial crisis, he briefly visited his fiancée, Lulu Meigs, in Washington, and broke off the engagement because of his lack of money.

He was back in London by the end of August 1883, after nearly two years away from Britain, working furiously. He sent regular 'London Jottings' to the *South Australian Weekly Chronicle* and articles on the disasters in the Sudan to the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Dining with George Augustus Sala, he persuaded him to go to Australia on a lecture tour.<sup>15</sup> He claimed also to have advised the Prince of Wales ('the other day') to pay a visit to the colonies.<sup>16</sup> In October he published pieces on 'The Present and Future of the Australian Colonies' in the *Nineteenth Century* and on 'The Social Characteristics of Australia' in the *Contemporary Review*. In the former he wrote of the sentimental attachment to the Queen and to 'old England' that he had found, a loyalty that had forced the Irish nationalist, John Redmond and his brother, who were in Australia for some of the time that Forbes was there, 'to change their tone from the one they normally used at home'. At the same time, he argued that the Australians were a hard-headed bunch who gave no favoured-nation treatment to Britain when it came to trade. The core of his argument was that Australian loyalty was likely to remain 'as long as England does not aggregate her present sour coldness by wanton slights or by offensive assertion of dominance'. All of

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<sup>13</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 July 1883.

<sup>14</sup> *Sydney Evening News*, 21 October 1882, *South Australian Advertiser*, 11 December 1882.

<sup>15</sup> Forbes to Sala 13 October 1883 in *Melbourne Argus*, 28 January 1884.

<sup>16</sup> *South Australian Weekly Chronicle*, 26 January 1884.

this could change, however, if Britain got involved in a major European war. She would not be able to defend the coast of Australia and the calls for independence would grow louder. Indeed, such a war would likely be the thing that precipitated the rival colonies into a federation comparable to the Dominion of Canada.<sup>17</sup> He wrote admiringly of the way in which people in Australia were judged on their merit, and wealth contributed little to their social standing, unlike in America and England. He was full of praise for the commitment to hard work and to the outdoor life that he had observed.

In the more open societies of Australia and the United States, Forbes received the kind of treatment that he must sometimes have felt that he lacked in class-ridden Britain. He was fêted, interviewed, quoted and consulted. He had the entrée into the highest reaches of society in contrast to a Britain which he clearly felt had grudged him due recognition. Here was someone who needed the acclaim that he felt he deserved, but was never entirely comfortable in the confines of fashionable London.

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<sup>17</sup> Forbes, 'The present and future of the Australian colonies', *Nineteenth Century* (October 1883), 720–32.

## 17 The Last Battles

*His mortal life two equal passions swayed.  
Gifts of the sword and pen his hand combined.  
Upon his brow a double wreath be laid,  
The soldier's and the scholar's close entwined.*

Poem 'To Archibald Forbes' in *Daily News* 3 April 1900

Back in London, in the limited moments between writing, he seems to have spent his time at the Arts Club or at the Savage Club. The apartment in Manchester Square seems to have been abandoned for smaller accommodation in Henrietta Place nearby and soon afterwards there was a further move down market to 12 Fulham Park Road in South-West London. His elder daughter, Florence, left school to become his housekeeper. Judging from letters to the recently appointed editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, T.H.S. Escott, there was a search for work at the quite lucrative £1 a page that the *Fortnightly* offered. He had a piece, published in November, vindicating Bazaine as 'a staunch soldier and honest patriot' who 'merited much better of France than the men who condemned him' and another in December on 'Fire Discipline' in the army. But he abandoned a plan, reminiscent of his investigation of housing on Disraeli's estate in 1872, to investigate living conditions on Lord Salisbury's estate at Hatfield. Salisbury had been presenting Toryism as the friend of the working man and Escott was keen to get the background, but Forbes eventually wrote to say that he had not the necessary energy to undertake the task.<sup>1</sup>

There were anonymous pieces in the *World* including a review of George Sims' and Henry Pettitt's very successful play *In the Ranks* at the Adelphi theatre over the signature 'Private John Bridoon, 30th Dragoons'. The play painted a rather bleak picture of army life, with one of the characters contrasting the soldier who does the fighting and gets no thanks, and the general who looks on at a distance through a spy-glass, and gets a title. This was taken

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<sup>1</sup> British Library, Add Ms 58779, Escott Papers, ff. 76–90.

as a swipe at Wolseley, who had just been raised to the peerage. The review defended the army, ending,

I'd have Messrs Sims and Pettitt to know that her Majesty's service, whose uniform we are proud to live in, and please God, could be proud to die in, is far other than the devilish tyranny which they have set themselves to prejudice a British audience by depicting.

The review attracted much comment with Forbes quickly named as the author. He clearly still identified with the army, disliked criticism of it by lay people and he believed that the effect of the play would be to harm recruiting.<sup>2</sup>

The annihilation of the Egyptian army under Hicks Pasha by the Mahdi at El Obeid in the Sudan in November 1883 led to a long account and analysis in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. He was able to fill in background details of the Mahdi life and he had no doubt that the Mahdi was a good strategist who would eventually go to Khartoum. As always he was able to add some personal detail. Forbes had met Hicks in India during the Prince of Wales's visit and had visited him in Brighton before Hicks had taken up his role with the Egyptian army. He also knew Edmond O'Donovan, a war correspondent, who was killed in the battle.<sup>3</sup>

In March 1884 he was honoured by his alma mater, Aberdeen University, with the degree of doctor of letters. Even in Aberdeen this did not meet with universal approval. A letter in the local paper claimed that, according to the regulations, only in exceptional circumstances could such an honorary degree be conferred on someone who was not a graduate of the University and Forbes, of course, had dropped out before completing his degree. The writer also challenged his exceptionalism:

No one will seriously maintain that his contributions to literature are other than ephemeral. If the degree be designed as an honour to the journalistic profession, the University might easily have found a person among the large number of its sons who are doing good service as journalists, and of whom many completed their university career with honour.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hove Public Library, cutting in Wolseley Papers.

<sup>3</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 January 1884.

<sup>4</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 14 March 1884.



Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the honour was something that gave him great pleasure, especially since W.H. Russell had received a similar degree from Trinity College, Dublin and was almost always referred to as Dr Russell. Most English papers seem to have found it impossible to give Forbes the same courtesy.

His always difficult relationship with the Irish was exacerbated again by comments he made on the Irish Nationalist politician, John Redmond, who had been in Australia at the same time as Forbes. Forbes claimed that on one occasion Redmond had tried to propitiate a hostile Australian audience by calling for three cheers for the Queen. This Redmond hastened to deny, and claimed that Forbes's reminiscences as recounted by himself were comparable to the tall tales of Baron Muchhausen, 'they are as probable and probably as true'.<sup>5</sup>

April 1884 brought a timely life of General Gordon, *Chinese Gordon*, who in January had been dispatched to the Sudan to evacuate British and Egyptian forces faced with the increasingly powerful movement led by the Mahdi against Egyptian rule in the Sudan. The book leaned heavily on some earlier works on Gordon, which Forbes duly acknowledged. It largely eulogized Gordon as a great leader with 'an innate genius for war'. However, it ended with hints of foreboding.

What has occurred since General Gordon arrived in Khartoum is yet clouded and misty. Shadows have fallen across the brightness of the early landscape, and his buoyant anticipations are not finding realization. It may be that this task which he has undertaken shall prove impossible for him to accomplish.

And so it proved, with the fall of Khartoum to the Mahdi's forces in January 1885.

A Christmas poll in the *Pall Mall* on who were the greatest journalists of the age gave G. A. Sala the overwhelming victory with eight times the votes of the next, John Morley. But Forbes came third, ahead of Labouchère. Perhaps it was a comfort that Sala's lecture tour of Australia had proved not to be a great success and was compared unfavourably to Forbes's. The hectic lecture circuit in Britain was renewed, organized now by the American impresario, G.W. Appleton of the Lecture and Entertainment Bureau, and consisted

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<sup>5</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 11 March 1884.

mainly of small halls, local debating or literary societies and mechanics' institutes in often quite small towns. The themes were the familiar ones of 'Ten Years a War Correspondent' and 'Warriors I have known'. His lecturing style seems to have improved markedly, but when his notes and illustrations for 'Warriors I have known' were stolen on a visit to Elgin he could not lecture without them.

Although still not 50 years old, Forbes was prematurely grey and continued to have frequent bouts of serious illness, the nature of which is not clear. None the less he continued to produce perceptive pieces on the growing crisis in the Sudan. The Arabs were learning from past experience and were avoiding direct conflict. It was, he suggested, a warning of things to come. The defeat of 'savages' by a modern army had hitherto been easy, but now it was no longer so. If Khartoum were to be relieved then double the number of troops made available was required.<sup>6</sup> The deaths of two leading war correspondents, John Alexander Cameron of the *Standard* and St Leger Herbert of the *Morning Post* once again highlighted the dangers that war journalists faced.

He also spoke against those who were calling for extending British sovereignty into Herat province in Afghanistan and who talked of an annexed Afghanistan as a buffer state against Russian advance in Central Asia. Such a policy would lead to endless conflict with the Afghans who had always shown 'persistent, inveterate, rancorous hostility' towards foreign invaders and who would in the end wear down any invading force.<sup>7</sup> India could be defended on the existing frontier and any advance by Russia into Afghanistan would be hindered very effectively by the Afghans. Prophetic insights indeed!

Forbes continued to interest himself in all aspects of the army. In response to a paper by the victor of the 1882 battle of Tel-el-Kebir against Egyptian nationalists, Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Hamley, Forbes penned a paper on 'In Case of Invasion'. Hamley was arguing for preparations in case of invasion on the south coast of England. He argued that there needed to be careful reconnoitering of all the routes to London and careful planning of the use of railways to transport troops. Forbes took objection to the rather condescending manner in which Hamley referred to the Corps of Engineer and Railway Transport Volunteers who would have to carry out the necessary survey. Hamley seemed to think that most work had been and would

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<sup>6</sup> *Daily News*, 23 February 1885.

<sup>7</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, 22 April 1885.

be done by the Staff College, of which he had, until recently, been director. Forbes pointed out that much work had already been done by volunteers in the Corps who were among the leading contractors and civil engineers in the country. He outlined planning exercises that had been carried out in past years. These involved a planned retreat from Brighton and Hastings to the heights above Reigate where entrenchments would be thrown up by some 2000 navvies supplied by the contractors. But Forbes was critical of Hamley's assumption that the only likely place for a landing was on the south coast. He pointed out that there had recently been an exercise by the Engineer and Railway Volunteer Staff Corps that assumed an invasion by 150,000 between Shoeburyness and Southend on the Essex coast. In that case a defensive stand would be made at Basildon. Forbes emphasised how vital was the support and collaboration of the railway companies and their staff with the military authorities, citing the example of the early stage of the American Civil war where obstructiveness by railway companies had hindered the preparations of the Northern forces.<sup>8</sup>

He had earlier published in the *Northern American Review* a perceptive comparison of the armies of the United States and Britain, the only two major armies dependent on volunteers rather than on conscription. He contrasted the well-paid, well-fed American soldier with the genteel pauperism of even the British officer class, the five-year enlistment which was the norm in America, the possibility of meritocratic advance from the ranks and the adequate pensions, so different from the British army. He liked also the readiness of the American army to weed out incompetent generals: 'Merit and success are synonymous; failure spells incompetence'. The victor of the battle of Gettysburg, 'the most momentous battle of modern times', died a mere major-general. In contrast there was Chelmsford with his GCB for Ulundi and Wolseley, honoured for the Ashanti expedition, 'a creditable affair, doubtless, but *pace* the British Lion, scarcely comparable with Gettysburg', and Napier with his peerage and public grant for the Abyssinian expedition, which involved almost no fighting. In the American army there was none of that obsession with 'smartness' on which so much emphasis was laid in the British army. A detachment of the American cavalry on the march might 'bear a suspicious resemblance to banditti', but it was well-equipped

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<sup>8</sup> Forbes, 'In Case of Invasion', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 17 (April 1885), 633–43.

and adaptable for its purpose, marching light and unencumbered by what was unnecessary.<sup>9</sup>

The treadmill of the lecture circuit continued with little let-up during the Spring of 1885 and in the following winter. Nonetheless, he organized a dinner and champagne reception for some 200 guests at the Criterion Hotel to celebrate the release of his friend Edmund Yates from prison. Yates had been found guilty of criminal libel against the earl of Lonsdale in the *World*. One of Yates's contributors had accused the earl of eloping with a young lady when his wife was ill. Yates had refused to disclose the author of the piece and in January 1885 had been incarcerated for four months.<sup>10</sup> Judging from Yates's recollections it was a fairly comfortable four months in Holloway, but there clearly was indignation about the sentence within the ranks of journalists.

With Henry Lucy replacing Frederick Hill as editor of the declining *Daily News* in January 1886 there was only occasional work there for Forbes, although he covered the volunteer review at Dover for the paper in April 1886. Also his account of the opening of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition by the Queen in May attracted notice.

In June he was off to the United States again and, to the surprise of almost all, a Reuter's telegram announced to the world his marriage to Miss Meigs on 19 June 1886. Miss Meigs had apparently declined to break off the engagement despite his earlier monetary losses. The story – perhaps apocryphal – was quickly spread that as a gift to his bride he had turned his various medals into a necklace. One says perhaps apocryphal because two years earlier there was a story that he had done the same thing for his eldest daughter when she became his housekeeper.<sup>11</sup> Louisa and Forbes married in the fashionable St John's Episcopal Church in Washington. The first week of the honeymoon was spent at the country estate of the mining tycoon Jesse Tyson near Baltimore and then on to New York, where they were entertained by Mrs Fred Whitridge, the daughter of Matthew Arnold. The newly-weds arrived in London in early July, living in the house in Fulham, and then visiting Forbes's mother and sisters in North-East Scotland.<sup>12</sup> By October Forbes was back on the lecture circuit, although Miss Meigs reputedly brought with her an income of £30,000 per year.

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<sup>9</sup> Forbes, 'The United States Army', *North American Review*, 135 (1 August 1882), 129–45.

<sup>10</sup> E. H. Yates, *His Recollections and Experiences* (London, 1884), 479–81.

<sup>11</sup> *Bucks Herald*, 12 April 1884, *Sheffield Independent*, 26 August 1886.

<sup>12</sup> *New York Times*, 20 June 1886.

With a new, attractive and socially-aware wife he was even more part of fashionable Society, attending the Lord Mayor's luncheon when H. M. Stanley received the freedom of the City of London. His wife seems to have re-stimulated Forbes's interest in the theatre and they became prominent first-nighters. Plans for a visit to the United States in the summer of 1887 had to be abandoned when Forbes's 'painful and exhausting malady' returned. He was to have covered the Queen's Golden Jubilee pageant at Westminster on 22 June for the *Daily News*. Illness prevented his attendance, but the *Pall Mall Gazette* mischievously suggested that this had not prevented his writing the report. The illness persisted and talk of another lecture tour of the States ended. Instead, after a brief visit to his wife's family in Washington, he and Louisa decided to winter in Florida. A reporter on the *Shields Daily Gazette* saw a transformed man on his departure from Liverpool.

Mr Forbes, who in his prime was a fine, tall fellow, with a military bearing, was bent like an old man, his hair and moustache nearly white, and could not even walk across a room without the aid of a walking stick. He is suffering from an affection of the kidneys, contracted in his campaigning days.

There seem to have been critical moments in his illness while in Florida and, in February 1888, he was still being reported as ill back in Washington. In early July, however, they were again in London and soon moved from Fulham to the very up-market address of 1 Clarence Terrace, Regent's Park. At the time of the 1891 census the two daughters, Florence and Alice, were both living there, together with three servants.

On 31 August 1888 the body of Mary Anne Nichols was found in Buck's Row, Whitechapel. Eight days later there was another, Annie Chapman, and there were two more at the end of the month and yet another in early November. The dead were prostitutes and their bodies were badly mutilated. By the end of September the phrase 'Jack the Ripper' had come into the journalistic lexicon, after a blood-stained note to the Central News Agency had been signed by the phrase. Speculation on motivation was rife, with Richard von Krafft-Ebing recently published case studies of sexual deviance in *Psychopathia Sexualis* providing ample tinder for amateur psychologists. Forbes clearly could not resist having his say with a piece in the *Daily News*. He rejected the view that the aim was the extermination of 'loose women'. If that was the case, why confine the area of activities to Whitechapel and

to poor women. He suggested that the most likely perpetrator was a medical man and one possibly affected by 'a specific contagion' that had left him angry. The image of a 'mad syphilitic doctor' gained ground.<sup>13</sup>

Despite recurrent illness, writings continued to flow from his pen. 1888 was the year of the three German emperors. Wilhelm I died in March 1888. His successor Frederick III, married to Queen Victoria's eldest daughter, also Victoria, survived for only 88 days on the throne. Kaiser Wilhelm II succeeded his father. Forbes was able in a matter of weeks to rush out a life of Wilhelm I, *William of Germany*, commissioned by Cassell & Co. and allowing him to re-work much of his material from the Franco-German war. It was readable, but it brought no new insights into the character of the Emperor. In both the book and in an article in November, assessing the authenticity of the Emperor Frederick's war diary that had been published, Forbes argued that it was Wilhelm, not Bismarck, who was the real creator of the German Empire. The imperial idea was his and Bismarck had merely to push him to a decision. The biography did, however, give Forbes the opportunity to express his views on military issues, reiterating his belief that the British army needed to learn from the Prussian/German model. Since 1870 he had admired the logistic efficiency of the German army and the quality of their armaments. The creation of an army based on conscription also remained a recurring theme in his writing.

He managed to cover the annual autumn manoeuvres of the army and, good reporter that he was, he took the opportunity to visit Aldershot and produce a piece on 'Soldiers' Rations'. He was happy to discover that although government rations remained unchanged, there had been a considerable improvement in the feeding of soldiers. A school of army cooking now existed and army kitchens were fitted with modern equipment. The worst abuses of canteens had been eradicated and an inspection system existed. None the less, he found substantial variations between different regiments and plenty room for improvement in some. He made a plea for the proper treatment of the rank-and-file soldier: 'no public servant can have a more valid claim on the consideration of a self-respecting nation than the soldier who offers his life in the defence of its honour and its position'.<sup>14</sup> Although now mixing with the most senior officer corps and with the upper levels of social London, Forbes never lost his awareness of the rank and file.

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<sup>13</sup> L. Perry Curtis, *Jack the Ripper and the London Press* (New Haven, 2001), 176.

<sup>14</sup> Forbes, 'Soldiers' Rations', *Nineteenth Century* (December 1888), 322–38.

At the end of 1888 Louisa and Forbes were in Florida again, but Forbes returned in February for a long and serious operation carried out by the distinguished surgeon, Reginald Harrison who had recently moved from Liverpool to London. Harrison was a specialist in stones in the kidney which would explain many of Forbes's painful conditions. The Forbeses now found a new place for recuperation in fashionable Sidmouth in Devon, where the Empress Eugenie and her suite frequently visited. He later claimed that spells in the Knowle Hotel in the sunshine of Sidmouth restored his health and it continued to be a favourite resort for the Forbeses.

His time in Florida had not been idle and March and April 1889 saw the publication of a whole series of pieces that must have been written during the winter. It was clear that the refusal of both a Zulu War and an Afghan War medal still rankled. In a piece entitled 'My Campaign in Pall Mall' – Pall Mall being the site of the War Office – he began with a defence of war correspondents, citing MacGahan and Russell who, in the past, had been denounced as liars by those in authority, MacGahan for reporting mere 'coffee-house babel' on the Bulgarian atrocities and Russell for exposing British troops on the rampage against Boers with house-breaking, robbery and assault. Wolseley had declared Russell's statements as 'utterly destitute of foundation'. Forbes cited his own experiences in Cyprus when his accounts of the great amount of sickness among troops had been vigorously denied. It was not just the authorities who did not like the truth. The British public did not like to be told that British troops sometimes panicked and fled, but as Forbes said, 'I never was in a battle, with the single exception of Ulundi, in the course of which I did not witness a stampede'.

He then turned to his own experience over medals. The Afghan medal refused on the ground that, despite being mentioned in despatches, his service had not been such as to entitle him to a medal; the Zulu medal refused on the grounds that he had not been asked to carry official reports from Ulundi. Essentially he accused Chelmsford and Crealock of lying.<sup>15</sup>

The most powerful assault on the war office was a critique of the writings of Wolseley and Col. J. F. Maurice. He applied heavy sarcasm to the re-issue of Wolseley's *The Soldier's Pocket Book*, first published in 1871 and now, to an extent, updated in 1886. Clearly, Wolseley had never been forgiven for his labelling of war correspondents as 'that race of drones', still repeated in the

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<sup>15</sup> Forbes, 'My Campaign in Pall Mall', *The Universal Review* (March 1889), 373–85.



updated version. Forbes finds an unconscious humour in such statements as 'The better you dress the soldier, the more highly will he be thought of by women, and consequently by himself'. Elsewhere Wolseley, writing of the dangers of a surprise attack on troops harassed and fatigued by an ill-executed march, declared 'nothing but the individual superiority of the Briton over all other nations can save the honour of her Majesty's army'. Such comments may be fun, but most of the book, says Forbes, is 'as obsolete as the dodo'. The critique of Maurice focused on page after page of historical inaccuracies, dates of battles, size of forces, details of tactics. Maurice was the professor of military art and history at the army Staff College at Camberley and had first come to wider notice when he had won the Duke of Wellington prize at Sandhurst in 1872 for an essay on how the British army should prepare to meet a continental enemy. He was a protégé of Wolseley and, given the notoriously argumentative nature of both of Maurice and Forbes, they may have previously clashed during Forbes's occasional visits to lecture at the Staff College. Forbes cites example after example of historical inaccuracies in Maurice's article, about the American Civil War, Franco-Prussian War, the Russo-Turkish War. Accuracy mattered because both Wolseley and Maurice had asserted that there never was anyone born with innate powers of generalship. It is only 'by the deep study of military history, of military arts and sciences in all their phases, that the heaven-born genius can be converted into the successful commander'. Forbes prided himself on his encyclopaedic knowledge of military history and, he argued, such errors of fact did not go unnoticed by military experts abroad and 'it is unpleasant to listen in fancy to the strident laugh and the guttural sneer of the Kaiserplatz, over the errors that stud the pages of the Adjutant-General of the British Army and of the author of the Wellington Prize Essay'.<sup>16</sup>

His treatment over the medals was no doubt a factor in occasioning this onslaught on the two military men, but it was also an historically-minded journalist's irritation at the shoddiness of their writing. Certainly, only a few years before, he had heaped praise on Wolseley as a brave 'heaven-born soldier'.<sup>17</sup> But he was soon to return to his attacks on Wolseley with an article in the *Contemporary Review* in January 1892 on 'The Failure of the Nile Campaign'. It was partly a review of the *Official History of the Egyptian Campaign*, largely written by Maurice, and the review contained a highly critical indictment of

<sup>16</sup> Forbes, 'Errors of the Experts', *Contemporary Review* (March 1889), 341–53.

<sup>17</sup> Forbes, 'Lord Wolseley', *English Illustrated Magazine* (May 1885).



Wolseley, now the commander-in-chief of the army. The official account tried to hide from the public how 'profound and utter' a failure the attempt to rescue Gordon had been.

The whole business was one of amazing ineptitudes, of strange miscalculations, of abortive fads, of waste of valuable time, of attempted combinations which, devised in ignorance of conditions, were never within measurable proximity of consummation, of orders issued only to be changed and dispositions indicated only to be altered, of lost opportunities, wrecked transport, and squandered supplies.<sup>18</sup>

He believed that Wolseley's determination to await the arrival of the household cavalry to ride the camels across the desert to Khartoum showed the contempt that he had expressed in the past for 'the average Tommy Atkins from Whitechapel'. To Forbes Tommy Atkins was 'a useful blackguard who mostly has an infinity of fight in him'. Wolseley throughout, Forbes argued, had shown an inability to adapt and improvise in a situation that demanded resource and ingenuity. The comments were welcomed by the radical *Reynolds's News* as a timely exposure of 'that wretched but well-paid humbug, Viscount Wolseley'. Forbes's articles almost certainly contributed to undermining Wolseley's reputation. He returned to criticism of Wolseley in his *Memories and Studies of War and Peace* suggesting that there was a certain inconsistency in criticising war correspondents while at the same time 'making assiduous endeavor to be well-spoken of by that profession'.<sup>19</sup>

Illness almost certainly played a part in making 1890 a relatively unproductive year for Forbes. However, his *Life of Havelock* came out in March in Macmillan's 'English Men of Action' series. Havelock had been a fairly controversial figure. He had not had a particularly dramatic career, but when he led a force from Allahabad to Lucknow in November 1857 a public, desperate for good news amid the horrors of the Indian Mutiny, hailed it as a great military achievement. His death in action soon afterwards and the fact that he was noted for his religious evangelicalism meant that the religious press built him up as one of the great commanders of his day and a Christian hero; hence the statue of him in Trafalgar Square unveiled in 1861. In time criticism of his achievements began to appear. There was not much analysis in Forbes's

<sup>18</sup> Forbes, 'The Failure of the Nile Campaign', *Contemporary Review* (January 1892), 39.

<sup>19</sup> *The World*, 10 October 1883.

book, but it is wrong to see it as entirely derivative. Forbes had long been interested in the Mutiny and took the opportunity of visits to India, Burma and Afghanistan to gather information with visits to Cawnpore and Lucknow and the sites of the struggles of 1857. At Christmas 1873 he had been given a tour of Jellalabad by Major Bayley who had been a sergeant in Havelock's regiment when they withstood a five-month siege and he had even spoken with Dr Bryden, who had struggled into Jellalabad as the sole survivor of the retreat from Kabul by the army in 1842. Bryden, after also surviving the Indian Mutiny, had retired to a sheep-farm in Ross-shire where Forbes had met him. Forbes also knew well Havelock's son, who as MP for Sunderland, had taken up Forbes's case for a medal. He had also continued to have correspondence with survivors from India of 1857. Forbes admired the way that General Havelock had steadily worked his advancement in the army through hard-work and courage and without the advantage of a purchased promotion. Also, although Forbes was in no sense priggish or prudish, Havelock's sternness and moral rectitude – 'sour as if he had swallowed a pint of vinegar, except when he was being shot at, and then he was blithe as a schoolboy out for a holiday' – may have appealed to a son of the manse. He certainly had no sympathy with those historians of the Mutiny who had praised Brigadier-General James Neill at Havelock's expense. He was, however, prepared to be critical of Havelock for 'a serious error of judgement' in recommending his own son for a Victoria Cross.<sup>20</sup>

The biography led to another *contretemps* with Wolseley. In his account of the advance to Lucknow he wrote of the raising of the flag over the Mess House amid a hail of bullets by Lieutenant Roberts (who had since become General Roberts). He added the footnote: 'The credit for this exploit ... has been accepted by another officer who has since risen to distinction'. The reference was to Wolseley who demanded a retraction in a letter to the *Times*. Forbes did retract it, but made clear that the source of his information was a life of Wolseley written by C. R. Low which, it was claimed, had been checked and its veracity agreed upon by Wolseley. His letter of retraction ended with the barbed comment that it was strange in the circumstances that Wolseley was not aware of Low's statements. Wolseley, not surprisingly, regarded this as a 'reinsinuation' and wrote bitterly complaining to W. H. Russell about 'our mutual friend!!' The exclamation marks were Wolseley's.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Forbes, *Havelock*, 171.

<sup>21</sup> *Times*, 19 May 1890; Hove Public Library, Wolseley Papers, RUS 1/121–8,

In March 1891 he took up further criticism of Wolseley and the army when he tackled the age-old issue of 'The Recruiting Problem'. The army was no longer recruiting Scottish highlanders, Irish peasants and English farm labourers that had been its cannon-fodder in the past, who had brought some brawn with them; instead it was 'your narrow-chested, "herring-bodied", undersized gutter-weed'. In this he was anticipating issues that were to be exposed most clearly a decade later in the second Boer War, when something like one in five potential recruits in industrial areas had to be rejected because of their lack of fitness. Like so many, he saw these years of the early 1890s as an 'era of agitation, upheaval, restlessness, strikes, caprice' with an 'insidious spirit of demagoguery which is being so sedulously instilled into the lower classes of the people'. It is a measure that he had travelled some way from the opinions of the *Daily News* that Campbell-Bannerman, the Liberal Shadow Minister for War and others 'who permit themselves to enunciate a weak, sentimental philanthropy' came in for strong criticism. At the same time, he swiped at Conservatives, who, like Disraeli, praised their long-term servants, but left them to spend their last days in the workhouse. Short-term enlistment, that Wolseley claimed to support, aggravated the problems. Only compulsory military service like all other European nations would save the situation. 'It is a doubtful question whether it would not be cheaper that the manhood of Britain should sacrifice a short period of life to military service, than that the country should continue to pay all those annual millions for results so disappointing and a guarantee of national safety so weak and so treacherous.'<sup>22</sup>

This was quickly followed up by a piece in May on 'The Warfare of the Future'. Here he went out of his way to display his extensive knowledge of battles, stratagems and tactics by European armies throughout the nineteenth century accompanied by some perceptive observations. With new armaments much had changed in recent decades and, he argued, offensive wars were not likely to be successful in the future. Instead what was likely to occur was 'an exaggerated phase of stalemate', which, in the long run, would be to the advantage of the defender, who could wait until the invader tired. He was aware that many were arguing that the build up of armaments by different powers would inevitably lead to conflict. The armaments would have to be used or the expenditure would be wasted. Not so, he argued; in the end,

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Wolseley to W. H. Russell, 19 May 1890.

<sup>22</sup> Forbes, 'The Recruiting Problem', *Nineteenth Century* (March 1891), 308–404.

‘War is infinitely more costly than the costliest preparations’ and government would always seek to avoid it.<sup>23</sup>

In 1891 he got caught up in the aftermath of the notorious Tranby Croft scandal. William Gordon-Cumming, a lieutenant-colonel in the Scots Guards, whose estates were in Morayshire, had attended a house-party in September 1890 at Tranby Croft in Yorkshire, a house owned by the wealthy Hull ship-owning family of Wilson. The party included the Prince of Wales and various members of the Prince’s so-called Marlborough set, of which Gordon-Cumming was one. They had taken up the invitation so as to be able to attend the St Leger week meeting at Doncaster racecourse. Gordon-Cumming was accused of cheating at baccarat, a card game rather like pontoon or *vingt-et-un* where the aim was to get cards as near as possible to the value of nine in one’s hand. The excitement lay in the betting to outbid the dealer and, as a gambling game, was probably illegal. Gordon-Cumming was accused of upping his bet after the cards were dealt. Although he denied the accusation, and was probably innocent, he was pressured into signing a document that he would never again play cards, in return for everyone being sworn to silence. However, soon gossip about the incident began to spread and Gordon-Cumming sued some of those present at Tranby Croft for defamation. At the subsequent trial, where the Prince was called as a witness, and where the judge did nothing to hide his prejudice against Gordon-Cumming, the jury took only 13 minutes to decide against Gordon-Cumming. He was promptly dismissed from the army and socially ostracized. Forbes knew Gordon-Cumming not only as a fellow north-easterner, but as a soldier whom he would probably have come across in Spain during the Carlist Wars and certainly met on the way to Ulundi, during which Gordon-Cumming had fought with some distinction. They became close friends. In February Forbes wrote an account of the Tranby Croft affair in *The World*, based on briefs supplied by Gordon-Cumming. This was in reply to a piece in the *Pall Mall* by a member of the Prince’s Marlborough House set. Forbes also helped Gordon-Cumming prepare his statement of defence and explanation at the trial. Gordon-Cumming’s case was that he had signed the declaration to desist from cards in order to protect the Prince, an action that the judge declared to be ‘beyond his comprehension’.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Forbes, ‘The Warfare of the Future’, *Nineteenth Century* (May 1891), 795.

<sup>24</sup> M. Havers, E. Grayson and P. Shankland, *The Royal Baccarat Scandal* (London, 1977).

On 10 June, the day after the verdict against him, Gordon-Cumming married his fiancée, the wealthy American, Florence Garner, and they returned to the family estate at Altyre near Forres. On the couple's arrival in Forres they were greeted by the provost and a welcoming crowd. This produced a scornful report from Harold Frederic, the London correspondent of the *New York Times*, claiming that the only public expression of support for Gordon-Cumming came from his tenants and retainers 'in one of the most feudal, not to say medieval districts of the Scottish Highlands'. Such an insult to his native heath was too much for Forbes who rattled off a letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, defending the people of Forres and suggesting that they wisely looked for proof of wrong-doing, not just assertion.<sup>25</sup>

The publication of Rudyard Kipling's *The Light that Failed* brought the role of war correspondents to the fore again, with many people assuming that the character known only as the Nilghai was based on Forbes. 'He was the chiefest, as he was the youngest of the war correspondents, and his experiences date from the birth of the needle-gun. Save only his ally, Keneu the Great War Eagle, there was no man higher in the craft as he, and he always opened his conversation with the news that there would be trouble in the Balkans in the Spring.'

Louisa Forbes's father, General Montgomery Meigs, had died at the end of 1891 and, in February 1892, Forbes and Louisa went off to the USA again, returning in March. But he found the double voyage did him no good and he had to take to bed on his return. However, at the invitation of the *North American Review*, he began planning two papers on Abraham Lincoln as a strategist,<sup>26</sup> a topic that he had no doubt discussed at some time with General Meigs, who had played a crucial part in organizing the logistics of the northern armies during the Civil War.<sup>27</sup>

There was a trip to the annexed provinces of Alsace and Lorraine in August 1892 when he re-visited the scenes at Sedan and elsewhere that had made his reputation. He found little evidence that the Germans had succeeded in assimilating the inhabitants into the Empire, despite all that had been done to improve their material conditions; much more, he noted, than British rule in India had ever done to ameliorate the condition of the

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<sup>25</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, 15 June 1891.

<sup>26</sup> Forbes to W. H. Rideing, 22 March 1892 in Rideing, *Many Celebrities and a Few Others*, 270.

<sup>27</sup> Forbes, 'Abraham Lincoln as a Strategist', *North American Review*, 155 (July 1892), 54–68, 156 (August 1892), 160–70.

native peoples. Despite that, there was no integration, largely because 'the harsh, dictatorial, suspicious Prussian gendarme dominates every scene' and military bands blasting out 'Ich bin ein Preusse' and 'Die Wacht am Rhein' did nothing to help. Sedan he found attracted few visitors and the weaver's cottage on the Donchery Road where he had famously described the meeting of Bismarck and Napoleon was derelict. The visit led to some rehashing of old reminiscences and old themes: Napoleon at Sedan; the Empress Eugenie's role in the background to the war; the Paris Commune; recollections of Bismarck. He revised the translation of von Moltke's account of the Franco-German War and there was talk of his working on an autobiography. In 1893 financial difficulties hit again when the City of Melbourne Bank, of which he was a shareholder, failed. Nearer home, in October, his elder daughter, Florence Helen, married Frederick Brown, a doctor from Pirbright in Surrey.

The improved relations between Russia and France, culminating in a military convention, led to concerns about the possibility of war between Russia and Germany. Forbes was confident that nothing would happen immediately until Russia had modernized the equipment of her army and this meant 1896 at the earliest. He contributed from January 1891 to a collection of articles in the journal *Black and White* that Heinemann brought out in book form in 1893 as *The Great War of 189–. A Forecast*. It began a new publishing fad of accounts of expected future wars that was to continue until the real war broke out in 1914.<sup>28</sup> There were some uncanny predictions, not least that an assassination in the Balkans would be the trigger for a European War: 'it is on the Danube and not on the Rhine that the torch of war will first be kindled'.<sup>29</sup> In this case, the imagined victim was Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria.

Let us suppose, for example, that as a consequence of this most alarming incident at Samakoff [the assassination], hostilities should ensue between Russia and Austria, the former being the aggressor. In that case Germany – in virtue of her published Treaty with the Hapsburg Monarchy – would almost immediately have to take to the field. Now, in such a contingency, is there not a grave danger that France, seizing the golden opportunity for which she has so long been waiting, would

<sup>28</sup> I. F. Clarke, *The Great War with Germany, 1890–1914: Fiction and Fantasies of the War-to-come* (Liverpool, 1997), 29.

<sup>29</sup> P. H. Colomb *et al.*, *The Great War of 189–* (London, 1893), 3.

at once mobilise her army, and march the greater part of it towards the Rhine.<sup>30</sup>

In the book Britain initially remains neutral, but when it supports a landing of Turkish troops at Trebizond on the Black Sea Russia and France declare war on Britain. The war quickly becomes a world war, but, thanks to the British navy's control of the sea, the Russian advance is repulsed, France is defeated and Germany longs for peace. It is all over by Christmas. Alas there is no great hope that the country will learn from the weaknesses that the war exposed.

Germany has already set to work to put right any weak points in her harness. In England the successes which have attended our arms have glossed over not a few weak points which have been detected in our organization. The army, it is obvious, will be allowed to lapse again into a condition adapted to mere peace parading, despite the vigorous protests that were addressed by Lord Wolseley at the end of the war to the Government, against the dangers which must attend such a result. The country will continue in the belief that everything is for the best in the best of all possible armies. Prompt reductions in the fleet and army have been insisted on.<sup>31</sup>

It is not clear what exactly was Forbes's contribution to the collection, but there are dramatic descriptions of imaginary battles from 'Our special correspondent with the German army' that are redolent of Forbes's style and the arguments about the need to learn from German efficiency are very much in line with his thinking.

1894 was another prolific year of publications. The Franco-German War was re-visited with pieces on Marshal MacMahon, on Bazaine, on Prince Frederick Charles, the 'Red Prince', a nephew of Kaiser Wilhelm I, and on 'The Mystery of M. Regnier'. In September there was a semi-fictionalised book, *Czar and Sultan; The Adventures of a British Lad in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78*. It was presented as the memoirs of John Carnegie who at the age of sixteen was supposed to have been caught up in the war. He accompanies the war correspondents MacGahan, Millet, and Villiers in their various

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 297-8.



adventures across the Balkans, at the battles for Plevna, the defence of the Schipka Pass and on to Adrianople. MacGahan, 'wise, genial and high-souled' is lavished with praise. Forbes also continued his criticism of aspects of army reform. In a devastating review he denounced *The Army Book of the British Empire* by two Lieutenant-Colonels, Goodenough and Dalton. It was intended to let the general public know about the army. To Forbes it was 'coloured by an optimism which approaches the heroic'. Its defence of the voluntary system of recruitment as a 'higher development' of the universal service of Continental powers because it meant that recruits had 'a vocation' was ludicrous, since voluntarism was largely fictional. Poverty and economic depression were what drove men into the army. As always, Forbes believed that people should have a realistic picture of army life. In a powerful section he declared that he could only assume that the authors were joking when they wrote of 'the good order and abstention from pillage or oppression so dear to the best traditions of the British army'.

Where are to be exhumed these 'best traditions'? From the brutal rapine, the maniacal intoxication, the wanton bloodshed of Badajos? The mad lust, the sacrilegious plunder, the devilish slaughter of San Sebastian? The riot, the drunkenness, and the indiscipline of Torquemada? The human tassels with which Wellington's provost-marshal festooned the oak trees of the forest of Tamenes? The killing of children at Ghuzni? The 'No Quarter!' in the garden of the Secunderagh, in the courts of the Begum Kothi, and in the halls and passages of the Kaiserbagh?<sup>32</sup>

Numerous other failures were listed: the half-hearted introduction of a territorial system of regiments; the inadequacy and unpreparedness of the reserves; the decline in the militia. Yet again the message was that the army had to learn from the experience of Germany.<sup>33</sup>

Although in his earlier article on the future of warfare he played down the role that cavalry would have, as an ex-dragoon he had retained a particular interest in cavalry. In an article on 'The Cavalry Arm of the British Service' in *Blackwood's Magazine* he now argued that the evidence, particularly from the Franco-German War, was that there was still a role for cavalry and, compared

<sup>32</sup> The early incidents cited were in the Peninsular War, the later ones in Afghanistan in 1842 and at Lucknow in 1857.

<sup>33</sup> Forbes, 'The Bogus Apotheosis of the British Army', *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 65 (April 1894), 521–31; Forbes, *Memories*, 354.



with the German army, British cavalry was revealing itself to be pretty ineffective, 'owing to a faulty organization, a want of competent leaders, and the utter absence of a uniform, rigorous, and energetic system of training and instruction'. Wolseley again came in for criticism for a lack of focus on the needs of cavalry, but there was a wider failure by cavalry officers to make their voices heard at senior levels.<sup>34</sup> The piece may have been triggered by Bernard's Shaw's *Arms and the Man* that had been staged in April. In this play, set amid the Bulgarian-Serbian War of 1885, Sergius Saranoff has become a Bulgarian hero after charging the Serbians, but only because the Serbians had the wrong ammunition for their machine guns. 'Is it professional', asks the Swiss Bluntschli, 'to throw a regiment of cavalry on a battery of machine guns, with the dead certainty that if the guns go off not a horse or man will ever get within fifty yards of the fire?' The cavalry hero, according to Shaw, was like Don Quixote tilting at windmills. Such views were not uncommon amongst civilians.

Another collection of his articles came out from Macmillan, *Camps, Quarters and Casual Places*, but not only had these already been published in various journals, but more than half of the nineteen pieces had been included in his 1880 volume, *Glimpses through the Cannon Smoke*. The nearest he came to autobiography was his *Memories and Studies of War and Peace* that was published in September 1895. It was dedicated to the memory of his father-in-law, General Meigs and, once again, went over his most important battles. He was also involved in a monthly series of pieces on famous battles, but illness struck again and the recuperating air of Sidmouth called. This time, however, there was no sudden cure and neither did a visit to take the waters at Baden-Baden help. At the end of 1895 Forbes, 'before his time grown gaunt and grey and grizzled' was described as gravely ill. He was able to rouse himself to write a short article on the Russo-Turkish war for the volume to mark the jubilee of the *Daily News*, but in March 1896 he was not able to attend a dinner of the Sheffield Press Club to which he had been invited.

From 1896 he began producing a life of Napoleon III in serial form for the pages of Jerome K. Jerome's magazine, *The Idler* and Cassell & Co. published his history of *The Black Watch* in September. With Henty and others he contributed to Cassell & Co's series on *Battles of the Nineteenth Century*. He

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<sup>34</sup> Forbes, 'The Cavalry Arm of the British Service', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Col 66 (August 1894), 169–81.

was able to display the range of his military interests. There were pieces on the American Civil War that he had researched with General Meigs and with other veterans in the United States: 'Sherman's March to the Sea, and his Campaign of the Carolinas 1864–65' and 'The collapse of the Confederacy, April 1865'. There were his Indian interests with 'The Conquest of Scinde, September 1842 – March 1843' and 'The Second Sikh War 1848–49' and his more recent interest in the campaigns against the first Napoleon, 'The Battle of Barosa March 5 1811' and 'The Battle of Ligny June 16 1815' and the third Napoleon with 'Worth, August 6, 1870'.<sup>35</sup> The pace slackened, but his *Life of Napoleon III* came out in book form from Chatto and Windus in September 1898. It got a cool reception from the critics. The *Pall Mall* thought it 'a half-hearted piece of work' since Forbes's style was ill-suited to analysis.<sup>36</sup>

Yet another war with the Boers broke out in 1899. Years before Forbes had declared that there could never be peace in South Africa until the Boers were totally defeated; indeed, 'exterminated' was the word he used.

It is all nonsense to suggest that they will lay down their arms. They are so stubborn that they would not know how to do such a thing, and it would be a mercy to them and to the world at large if a sort of Red-Sea-and-Pharaoh arrangement could be fixed up for their benefit'.<sup>37</sup>

With Redvers Buller initially in command of the British forces, Forbes's descriptions of the often brutal actions of Buller's cavalry during the Zulu War were extensively regurgitated in some newspapers. But Forbes could contribute little, although a piece by him on 'The Boer War of 1881' was published posthumously before the war in South Africa ended. Once again he had not restrained in his criticism of some of the generalship. Wolseley's successor as High Commissioner for South-Eastern Africa, Colonel Sir George Colley came in for particular censure: 'Considering the weakness of the forces at Colley's immediate disposition, he would have been wise to wait until he had been reinforced; but he had a great contempt for the Boers, and was eager to distinguish himself before he should be superseded

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<sup>35</sup> *Battles of the Nineteenth Century described by Archibald Forbes, G. A. Henty, Major Arthur Griffiths and others* (London, 1897)

<sup>36</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1 February 1898.

<sup>37</sup> *New York Times*, 17 December 1899.

by officers of higher rank'. The result was the defeat and death of Colley at Majuba Hill.<sup>38</sup>

There were denials that Forbes was dangerously ill, although he and Louisa had another long sojourn in Devon towards the end of 1899. A further operation failed to relieve him of pain. John Robinson from the *Daily News*, who had been knighted in 1893, visited him a few days before the end. Forbes always recognized Robinson as the man who made his career possible but also kept him going with encouragement. He wrote to Robinson in 1888, 'Whenever the old days come back to me you are the foremost figure in the memory, for that you ever bepraised me with word that fed my ardour, and were kind, generous and full of wise advice'.<sup>39</sup> Robinson, in his turn, had reason to be grateful to Forbes. To him, Forbes was 'that wonderful man' who had helped him transform the *Daily News*. In addition, according to the journalist D. Christie Murray, Forbes had helped Robinson in 'a private and confidential manner' with 'an act of large-handed generosity performed in a fashion altogether characteristic of the man'.<sup>40</sup> Forbes was delirious when Robinson called, but sitting up in bed, eyes wide open, he called out, 'those guns, man; don't you see those guns? I tell you the brave fellows will be mowed down like grass'.<sup>41</sup> His death was announced on 29 March 1900, the cause of death given as fever as a result of an internal abscess, with a complication of other maladies, including rheumatism and paralysis. Robinson wrote of a 'stealthy internal disease which more than one painful operation proved incapable of curing'.

Tributes poured in from around the world and papers in Vienna and Berlin, across the United States and throughout the Empire reported his demise and recounted his career. The now *Sir* William Howard Russell, all rivalry forgotten (but, like Forbes, not omitting to self-reference), wrote of 'that incomparable Archibald' who

has left no one to equal him. I most sincerely regret him. Never was there a man more free from jealousy or bitterness. Perhaps he felt secure in his pride of place. The last time I saw him, he told me, as if he knew

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Welsh (ed), *Famous Battles of the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1905), 115–45.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas, *Fifty Years of Fleet Street*, 297.

<sup>40</sup> Murray, *The Making of a Novelist*.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas, *Fifty Years of Fleet Street*, 172.

it would please me, that he always had my letters (from the Crimea) on his bed table and read them over and over again.<sup>42</sup>

Although his mind was wandering toward the end he had asked that he be buried in Aberdeen by the grave of his mother. His wife, together with Frances Alice his younger daughter, and Frederick Brown, his son-in-law accompanied the body by train to Aberdeen where his sister and a nephew, Professor Pirie, met the train. The coffin was taken to Ferryhill Parish Church and the following day he was buried in Allenvale cemetery. He left to Louisa £10,908 in his will, a sum of nearly £700,000 at today's values, so his exhausting literary efforts in the last fifteen years of his life had restored a comfortable life-style for himself and a guarantee of his wife's continued comfort.

A year later a gravestone was erected with the German cross and a laurel in bronze at the top. It was at the suggestion of the *Aberdeen Journal* that there was a call for a national monument and Charles Williams, a veteran war correspondent with the *Standard*, John Nicoll Dunn editor of the *Morning Post* and an Aberdonian, and Arthur Beckett of *Punch*, a former president of the Institute of Journalists, took up the cause. Arthur Borthwick, Lord Glenesk, the owner of the *Morning Post*, chaired the fund-raising committee and it was quickly agreed that a space could be found on a wall in the crypt of St Paul's. Funds were to be raised for the tablet and any surplus was to be handed over towards a bursary at King's College, Aberdeen. There was little difficulty in raising the necessary funds, with the King of Saxony coming up with £50. Meanwhile, a separate fund was raised by the *Aberdeen Journal* towards a plaque in King's College Chapel of the University.

The plaster cast for the bust in St Paul's had depicted him complete with medals but the sculptor was asked to remove them. According to Henry Lucy, on some occasion in the past Forbes had worn his German iron cross at a gathering attended by the Prince of Wales. Edward, a stickler on such matters, had called him aside and told him quietly that it was a breach of etiquette to wear a foreign decoration without the express permission of the sovereign. He went on to say that if the Prince had been representing the Queen he would have had to ask Forbes to withdraw. As it was, he would overlook the *faux pas* on that occasion.<sup>43</sup> One can only imagine Forbes's

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>43</sup> H. Lucy, *Diary of a Journalist. Later Entries* (London, 1922), 159.

excruciating embarrassment. The plaque identified him as a war correspondent and a military historian.

Ironically it was Wolseley who was asked to unveil the memorial in St Paul's in June 1902. He commented, as others had before, on Forbes's shortness of temper: 'He was the first man to resent not only a slight to himself, but also an injury to his friends', but otherwise it was a short and gracious speech. The King's College memorial was unveiled in June 1903 by Alexander Ramsay, for half a century owner and editor of the *Banffshire Journal*. Six months later, Mrs Forbes presented a memorial to the Parish Church at Boharm where Forbes's father had been a minister. A surplus of £100 from the St Paul's fund, together with £100 from Mrs Forbes, went towards the Forbes Medal in the University of Aberdeen 'for the most proficient in the compulsory history classes', a medal still presented annually. Mrs Forbes seems to have remained in Aberdeen, but also had a house in Switzerland. She was active in organizing a fete on behalf of the Bulgarians in 1912 and died in a nursing home in Aberdeen in November 1922. His younger daughter, Frances Alice converted to Catholicism after her father's death and became a sister of the Sacred Heart in Edinburgh and the author of numerous books on the lives of the Saints. When war broke out in August 1914, Forbes's predictions of some thirty years before that a new German assault on France was almost inevitable and that it would certainly end in 'an exaggerated phase of stalemate' were remembered. 'The fortress of the future will be in the nature of an entrenched camp. The interior of the position will provide casement accommodation for an army of considerable size'.<sup>44</sup>

Writing in 1921 of the friend and colleague that he had first met 45 years before, Frederic Villiers, said,

He was a man of great physique and grand courage. Moreover, he was by nature an ideal war correspondent, for he could do more work, both mentally and physically, on a smaller amount of food than any man I ever met. Amid the noise of battle and in close proximity to bursting shells, whose dust would sometimes fall upon the paper, I have seen him calmly writing his description of the fight – not taking notes to be worked up afterwards, but actually writing a vivid account that was to be transmitted by wire. His one great aim was to get off

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<sup>44</sup> *Luton Times & Advertiser*, 18 December 1914.

the first and best news of the fighting; and he never spared himself till that was done.<sup>45</sup>

He was not the easiest of people. There was a brusqueness of manner and a competitiveness that could hurt the sensitive and antagonize rivals. Villiers remembered 'the looks on the faces of his confreres whenever he turned up in the vicinity. They seemed to feel the master spirit of the man at once and to know that all their own plans for being first off with the news would be made in vain'. H.W. Massingham recalled 'his dragoon's swagger, his big moustache, his rather fierce grey eyes alight with anger and impatience'.<sup>46</sup> A fellow journalist recounted that even in his last years in Clarence Terrace name-hunting American tourists would be met with 'a command of language so startling that the busybodies fled'.<sup>47</sup> There was always a readiness for a fight. But many comment on his loyalty once friendship was made.

There must have been some regrets as he saw Russell get his knighthood in 1895, but, as someone who knew them both wrote, Russell, by this stage, was very smooth, 'faultlessly fashionable ... so socially circumspect, so assured of his footing in high places ... so conscious of his class' and with 'the easy grace and blandness, the complaisance and the ductility' that made him acceptable. Forbes had always been too outspoken, too opinionated and too openly competitive not to have made powerful enemies.<sup>48</sup>

The fact that he suffered illness so often and, indeed, that he seems to have been in almost constant pain for the last decade or more of his life, must have been difficult for someone who had been so active and who prided himself on his physical stamina. But, as he said himself, there was the recompense that war correspondents have had throughout the decades.

To have lived ten lives in as many short years; to have held once and again in the hollow of my hand the exclusive power to thrill the nations; to have looked into the very heart of the turning points of nations and dynasties! What joy equal to the thrilling sense of personal force, as obstacle after obstacle fell behind one conquered, as one galloped

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<sup>45</sup> Villiers, *Villiers*, 185.

<sup>46</sup> H. W. Massingham, 'Archibald Forbes', *The Leisure Hour* (June 1900), 724–6.

<sup>47</sup> *Auckland Star*, 12 May 1900.

<sup>48</sup> Rideing, *Many Celebrities*, 276.

from the battlefield with tidings which people awaited hungrily and tremblingly.<sup>49</sup>

It would be difficult to think of a better obituary for any war correspondent.

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<sup>49</sup> Lauriston Bullard, *Famous War Correspondents*, 73.

## 18 Publications of Archibald Forbes

This cannot claim to be a list of all Forbes's publications since many of his writings such as those in *The World* were unsigned. Nor has it been possible to undertake a search of all his Australian and American publications. The list is, however, as comprehensive as it has been possible to make it and gives a clear sense of the range of his publications.

### 1863

'Life in a Barrack', *Cornhill Magazine*, April 1863

### 1864

'The Limited Enlistment Act', *Cornhill Magazine*, August 1864

### 1867

'College Days at the "Auld Toun" University'. *London Scotsman*, 24 August 1867

'At a Cattle Roup', *London Scotsman*, 28 September 1867

'Travelling Sketches in Scotland', *London Scotsman*, 28 September 1867

'My Auld Scotch Schule', *London Scotsman*, 16 November, 28 December 1867

### 1868

'A Tale of an Old Manse', *London Scotsman*, 8 February 1868

'The Private Soldier as he is; by a dragoon on furlough', *St Paul's*, Vol. 2, April 1868, 92–103

'Christmas in a Cavalry Regiment', *St Paul's*, Vol. 3 (Dec. 1868), 478–85

### 1869

'Army Reform', *St Paul's*, Vol. 4 (April 1869), 95–101

### 1870

'A Costermongers' Club', *Belgravia. A London Magazine*, 10, January 1870, 355–61

'Soldiers' Wives', *St Paul's*, Vol. 6 (April 1870), 78–87



- ‘On officering in the British Army’ *St Paul’s*, Vol. 7 (Oct. 1870), 25–39  
 ‘The Victorious Prussians’, *St Paul’s*, Vol. 7 (Dec. 1870), 282–93

**1871**

- ‘Furs’, *Belgravia. A London Magazine*, 4 (March 1871), 60–67  
*Drawn from Life* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1871)  
*My Experiences of the War between France and Germany*, 2 Vols (1871)  
 ‘German War Prayers’, *Sunday Magazine*, July 1871

**1872**

- ‘An Irish Gretna Green’, *Cassell’s Magazine*, September 1872  
*Soldiering and Scribbling* (Leipzig: Bernard Tauchnitz), November 1872

**1873**

- ‘The Special Staff’ *Chamber’s Journal*, February 1873  
 ‘Life of a Pitman’, *Cassell’s Magazine*, March 1873

**1874**

- ‘Bazaine’, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, Vol. 12 (Jan. 1874), 76–83  
 ‘How I “saved France” ’ *St Paul’s*, Vol. 14 (Jan. 1874), 282–93  
 ‘A Gold Coast Tragedy’, *St Paul’s*, Vol. 14 (Feb. 1874), 159–65  
 ‘Life in London’. Christmas Day on a “Growler”, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, Vol. 12 (February 1874), 169–176  
 ‘Inverness Character Fair’, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, Vol. 12 (March 1874), 317–26  
 ‘Grouse Shooting’, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, Vol. 13 (Sept. 1874), 305–14

**1875**

- ‘The Lucknow of Today’, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, Vol. 14 (Jan. 1875), 89–107

**1877**

- Memoir of General Tcherniaieff, *The Portrait*, February 1877  
 ‘The Russians, the Turks and the Bulgarians: at the Theatre of War’  
*Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 2 (Nov. 1877), 561–82

**1878**

- ‘The “Fiasco” of Cyprus, *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 4 (Oct. 1878), 609–26

## 1879

- 'Plain Words About the Afghan Question', *Time*, No. 1 (March 1879)
- 'The political situation in Burmah', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 5 (April 1879), 740–54
- 'Anglo-Indian Marriage Customs', *Time*, 1 (May 1879), 159–65.
- 'Flogging in the army', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 6 (Oct. 1879), 604–14.

## 1880

- 'War Correspondents and the Authorities', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 7 (January 1880), 185–96
- 'Lord Chelmsford and the Zulu War', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 7 (Feb. 1880), 216–34
- Glimpses through the Cannon Smoke. A Series of Sketches* (George Routledge & Sons, July, 1880)

## 1882

- 'Lecturing in Two Hemispheres', *Century Illustrated*, May 1882
- 'The United States Army', *North American Review*, August 1882, 127–45

## 1883

- 'Where was Villiers?', *St Nicholas Magazine*, March 1883
- 'The Present and Future of the Australian Colonies', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 14 (Oct. 1883), 720–32
- 'Social Characteristics of Australia', *Contemporary Review*, October 1883
- 'Bazaine's Vindication', *Fortnightly Review* OS Vol. 40, NS Vol. 34 (Nov. 1883), 659–73
- 'Fire Discipline (military conduct in battle)', *Fortnightly Review* OS Vol. 40, NS Vol. 34 (Dec. 1883), 833–54
- 'The American Gentleman with the Moist Eye', *Belgravia*, 52 (Dec. 1883), 355–61

## 1884

- 'The Emperor and the Marshal', *English Illustrated Magazine*, January 1884
- 'How I became a War Correspondent', *English Illustrated Magazine*, April 1884
- Chinese Gordon* (London: George Routledge and Sons), April 1884
- 'Yarn of the *President* frigate', *Belgravia*, June 1884
- 'Doughtown Scrip', *English Illustrated Magazine*, August 1884

- 'An American Criticism of the Egyptian Campaign', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 16 (Aug. 1884), 228–37  
 'Whisky Smugglers in the Scottish Highlands', *Belgravia* November 1884

## 1885

- 'In case of Invasion', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 17 (April 1885), 633–43  
 'Interviewed by an Emperor', *English Illustrated Magazine*, April 1885  
 'Lord Wolseley', *English Illustrated Magazine*, May 1885  
*Souvenirs of Some Continents* (London: Macmillan & Co), August 1885  
 'The Prince of Wales at Home', 'The End of Prince Louis Napoleon', 'The Czar, Alexander II, in the Field, 1877', in James Parton (ed), *Some Noted Princes, Authors, and Statesmen of our Time* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1885)

## 1886

- 'Christmas-tide with the Germans before Paris', *Harper's Magazine*, January 1886

## 1887

- 'Lecturing as a relaxation and otherwise', *The Hour Glass*, June 1887  
 'War Correspondents and War Correspondence' in *Sell's Dictionary of the World's Press*, July 1887  
 'The Caledonian Asylum' in *The Book of the Aberdeen Volunteer Bazaar*, December 1887

## 1888

- William of Germany. A Succinct Biography of William I, German Emperor and King of Prussia*, (London: Cassell & Co), March 1888  
 'Emperor Frederick's Diary', *Contemporary Review*, Nov. 1888  
 'Soldiers' Rations', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 24 (Dec. 1888), 822–38  
 'A Good Word for the Bayonet', *The Pall Mall Budget*, 1888

## 1889

- 'The Old Sergeant', *English Illustrated Magazine*, Vol. 64 (Jan. 1889), 298–302  
 'Facts and Fictions about Bazaine', *Pall Mall Gazette*, January 1889  
 'An Outpost Adventure', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, March 1889, 209–17  
 'Errors of the Experts', *Contemporary Review*, March 1889

'How the "Crayture" got its strength', *English Illustrated Magazine*, Vol. 67 (April 1889), 525–33

'My campaign in Pall Mall', *Universal Review*, April 1889

*Camps and Quarters*, Ward & Lock, April 1889 [with G.A. Henty and Charles Williams]

'A Forgotten Rebellion', *Gentlemen's Magazine*, May 1889

'Bill Beresford and the Victoria Cross', *English Illustrated Magazine*, Vol. 67 (July 1889)

## 1890

*Havelock* (London: Macmillan & Co), April, 1890

## 1891

'The Recruiting Problem', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 29 (March 1891), 398–404

'Battle of Balaclava', *Contemporary Review*, March 1891

'The Warfare of the Future', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 29 (April 1891), 782–95

'The Coup de Grace', *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, May 1891

'Nana Sahib's Englishman', *English Illustrated Magazine*, June 1891

'A War Correspondent's Reminiscences, Pt. 1', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 30 (Aug. 1891), 185–96

'A War Correspondent's Reminiscences, Pt.2', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 30 (Sept. 1891), 414–29

*Barracks, Bivouacs and Battles* (London: Macmillan & Co.), November 1891

'Moltke and Moltkism', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 30 (Dec. 1891), 1018–35

'Ambush against Ambush', *Graphic Christmas Number*, December 1891

## 1892

'Failure of the Nile Campaign', *Contemporary Review*, Jan. 1892

'Peppered by Afghans', *The Cosmopolitan*, February 1892

'Napoleon III at Sedan', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 31 (March 1892), 419–32

'Lord Roberts of Kandahar', *English Illustrated Magazine*, April 1892

'The Kanaka in Queensland', *New Review*, Vol. 6 (June 1892), 641–51

'Abraham Lincoln as a Strategist', *North American Review*, Part I, 155, July 1892, 54–68; Part 2, 156, August 1892, 160–70

'The French Empress and the German War', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 32, 1892, 285–97

'On the Old Warpath', *The Graphic*, August 1892

- ‘What I saw of the Paris Commune’, *The Century Magazine*, August 1892  
 ‘War Correspondence as a Fine Art’, *The Century Magazine*, November 1892  
 ‘Personal Recollections of Prince Bismarck’, *Phil May’s Winter Annual*,  
 October 1893  
 ‘Historic Moments: The Triumphal Entry into Berlin’, *Scribner’s Magazine*,  
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# Index

- Aberdeen, 9–11, 14, 16, 64, 137, 145,  
 182, 230  
*Aberdeen Journal*, 230  
 Aberdeen University, 11–14, 112, 202,  
 210–11  
 Aden, 95, 165  
 Afghanistan, 150–4, 156, 160–1, 163,  
 185, 187, 189, 193, 212  
 Agricultural labourers, 63–5,  
 Aldershot, 19, 145  
 Alfonso XII of Spain (1857–85), 90–1  
 Alick the Poet [see Forbes, William  
 Anderson]  
 Alsace-Lorraine, 54, 74, 223  
 Ambulance Corps, 41, 47, 51, 125  
 American army, 213–4  
 American Civil War, 6, 92, 113, 198,  
 213, 218, 223, 228  
 Anti-semitism, 64–5, 91, 125  
 Arch, Joseph (1826–1919), 63–5  
 Army Discipline and Regulation Bill,  
 178–9, 184–5  
 Army life, 16–19, 28, 209–10, 216  
 Army recruitment, 210, 221, 226  
 Arnold, Matthew, 101, 214  
 Ashanti War, 75–6, 213  
 Australia, 86, 192, 198, 201–8, 211  
 Australian Federation, 206–8  
 Austria, 103, 117, 224  
  
 Baker, Sir Samuel (1821–93), 75  
 Banffshire, 6, 8, 10, 12, 86  
*Banffshire Journal*, 28, 231  
 Barcelona, 71, 90–1  
 Barker, Thomas Jones (1815–82), 39, 61  
*Battles of the Nineteenth Century*, 227–8  
 Bazaine, Marshall F. A. (1811–88),  
 34–5, 41–2, 74, 76, 209, 225  
 Belgrade, 104–5, 108–13, 115  
*Belgravia*, 28, 44, 69  
  
 Bennett, Sir John (1814–97), 94  
 Beresford, Lord William (1847–1900),  
 154–5, 165, 171, 175  
 Berlin, 31, 60, 229  
 Berlin, Congress of, 148  
 Bismarck, Otto von (1815–98), 30,  
 34–5, 37–8, 49, 103, 142, 216, 224  
 Black Watch Regiment, 76, 227  
 Black, William (1841–98), 21  
 Boers, 163–4, 166, 217, 221, 228  
 Boharm, 6, 9, 11, 15  
 Bombay, 78–9, 85, 95–7, 100  
 Borthwick, Algernon, 140  
 Bosnia-Herzegovina, 103–4, 111, 117  
 Brighton, 65, 145, 182, 210, 213  
 British army, 4, 16–7, 44–5, 47, 184–5,  
 213–14, 216–19, 221, 225–7  
 British Association for the  
 Advancement of Science, 62–5  
 British National Aid Society, 112–13  
 Brown, Frederick, 224, 230  
 Browne, General Sir Samuel (1824–  
 1901), 152, 155  
 Browning, Robert, 101  
 Bryden, Dr William (1811–73), 156,  
 220  
 Bucharest, 119, 122, 124, 128  
 Bulgaria, 104, 107, 119, 125–7, 130,  
 133–4, 137–8, 147–8, 176, 199  
 Bulgarian Atrocities, 106–8, 111, 138,  
 144, 217  
 Buller, Colonel Redvers (1839–1908),  
 165, 170–1, 228  
 Bulwer-Lytton, Edward, Lord Lytton  
 (1831–91), 151–2, 160–1  
 Burma, 156–60, 165  
 Burt, Thomas (1837–1922), 68  
  
 Calcutta, 78–9, 85–8, 98, 156, 165  
 Cambridge, Duke of (1819–1904), 75,

- 137, 180  
 Campbell-Bannerman, Sir Henry (1836–1908), 221  
 Campbell, Sir Colin (1792–1863), 25, 99  
 Campbell, Sir George (1824–92), 80  
*Camps, Quarters and Casual Places*, 227  
 Canada, 9, 15, 75, 161, 194, 200, 208  
 Cape of Good Hope, 163, 166, 170, 172, 174, 177  
 Cardwell, Edward (1813–96), 31  
 Carey, Lieutenant Jaheel (1847–83), 169, 177, 182  
 Carlist Wars, 70–1, 74, 90–1, 113, 119, 222  
 Carlsen, Wilhelm, 3–4  
 Carol I of Rumania (1839–1914), 184  
 Castelar, Emilio (1832–99), 90–1  
 Caste system, 82–84  
 Cavagnani, Sir Louis (1841–79), 152–3, 162, 185  
 Cawnpore, 24, 26, 86, 99  
*Celebrities at Home*, 88, 144  
 Central Asia, 151, 212  
 Ceshwayo, 164, 170, 172, 179  
 Ceylon (Sri Lanka), 9, 97  
 Chamberlain, Sir Neville (1820–1902), 152  
 Chelmsford, Lord (1827–1905), 164–82, 186–7, 189–90, 213, 217  
 Cherniaiev, General Mikhail Grigorevich (1828–98), 104, 106, 109–10, 112, 114, 118–19  
 Childers, Hugh (1827–96)  
 Colenso, Bishop John (1814–83), 166, 188  
 Colley, Sir George (1835–81), 174, 228–9  
 Commune, 54–60, 144, 119, 224  
 Conscription, 203, 216  
 Conservative foreign policy, 103–4, 106–8, 111, 117, 139, 144, 147–8, 152, 160  
*Contemporary Review*, 207, 218–9  
 Contreras, General Juan (1807–81), 71  
 Conway, Moncure (1832–1907), 35, 192  
*Cornhill Magazine*, 19  
*Cospatrick*, 88–9  
 Cossacks, 120  
 Courcelles-Borny, battle of, 34  
 Crealock, Lt.Col. John North, 177, 189, 217  
 Crimean War, 3, 5, 19, 21, 58, 76, 101, 103, 137, 138, 189, 192, 230  
 Cyprus, 148–51, 153, 170, 193, 217  
*Czar and Sultan*, 139  
 D'Oyly Carte, Richard (1844–1901), 145, 190, 194, 196  
*Daily News*, 1, 5–6, 21, 32, 39–43, 47–8, 50–1, 54–5, 62, 656, 69–70, 75, 87–8, 92, 101, 106, 111, 119, 126, 131, 137, 139, 143–4, 148, 160, 176, 178, 193, 197–8, 214, 221, 227, 229  
*Daily Telegraph*, 40, 44, 50, 69, 94, 118, 149, 174  
 Dallas, Eneas Sweetland (1828–79), 87  
 de Liefde, Jacob (1847–78), 32, 34, 37–8, 63, 73  
 de Wimpffen, General Emmanuel (1811–84), 36–8  
 Delhi, 99  
 Deligrad, 110–13  
 Derby, 69, 145  
 Derby, Lord (1826–93), 106–111  
 Dicey, Edward (1832–1911), 72  
 Dick bequest, 10  
 Dickens, Charles (1812–70), 40, 72, 141  
 Disraeli, Benjamin, Lord Beaconsfield (1804–81), 64–5, 75, 83, 93, 106–7, 111, 117, 148–9, 152, 154, 159, 161, 188, 221  
 Djunis, battle of, 114  
 Dombrowski, General Jaroslav (1836–71), 55  
 Dragomirov, General Mikhail (1830–1905), 135  
 Dragoons, 16–17, 19  
*Drawn from Life*, 17, 22–6  
 Dublin, 16, 93  
 Dundee, 27, 88, 145, 166  
 Edinburgh, 15, 62, 145, 231



*Edinburgh Courant*, 20, 71

Egypt, 95, 202, 210–12, 218–19

Elgin, 9, 22, 212

*Elgin Courant*, 20–1, 28–9

Ems telegram, 30–1

Escott, T.H.S. (1844–1924), 209

*Examiner*, 28, 106, 180

Famine, 79–87, 95, 160

Famine relief, 79–81, 83–5

Favre, Jules (1809–80), 49

Field, Kate (1838–96), 15, 191

Forbes, Archibald (1838–1900), on war correspondents 1–3; parentage 6–8; siblings 1–9; schooling 10–11; university career 11–14; enlistment 16–18; first publications 18–19; early illness 19; first marriage 20; first journalism 20–1, 28–9; in *London Scotsman* 21–9; on Indian Mutiny 23–6; on army reform 28; in Franco-German War 31–45; with *Morning Advertiser* 31–9; first battles 32–3; at Sedan 35–7; surrender of Napoleon II, 37–9; joins *Daily News* 39–40; at siege of Metz 41–2; wounded 41; using the telegraph 43–4; *Drawn from Life* 22–6, 44; on German army 44–5, 47; at siege of Paris 46–53; rivalry with Russell 47–9; at bombardment of St Denis 48–9; enters Paris 50; at fall of the Commune 54–60; at Berlin victory parade 60; *My Experience of the War between France and Germany* 53–4, 61; at Scott Centennial 62; at Inverary 62–3; on farm labourers' strikes 63–5; critical of Disraeli 66; with H.M. Stanley 66–7; on Northumbrian miner 67–8; at Pelsall Hall colliery disaster 68–9; *Soldiering and Scribbling* 69; at funeral of Napoleon III 70; in Spain 70–1; at Vienna World Exposition 71–4; on Shah of Persia 73–4; at Glasgow rectorial installation 75; on Ashanti 75–6; on Indian famine 78–87; and *The World* 87–8; illness 87–8;

on the *Cospatrick* 88–9; with Alfonso XII 90–1; and Carlists 90–2; at Tipperary by-election 92–3; on Prince of Wales' tour of India 95–100; on British rule in India 100–02; on Cleveland steel 101–2; in Serbia 103–16; relations with MacGahan 107–8, 119; criticism of National Aid Society 112–13; dispute with Stuart-Glennie 112, 116; on Don Cossacks 120; and General Skobelev 122; crossing the Danube 121–3, 125, 145; and Villiers 125; in Bulgaria 126–7; at Plevna 129–33, 145; at Schipka Pass 134–6, 145; meets Tsar 135; reputation of 136–7; new illness 136–7; at Balmoral 137; on Turks and Bulgarians 137–9; Gladstone on 140; dinner in honour of 140–2; in *Vanity Fair* 142; in new house 144; on first lecture tour 144–7; Edinburgh court case 145; in Cyprus 148–50; to Afghanistan 150–4; on Indian frontier 152–5; on Burma 156–60; on Lord Lytton 160–62; to Natal 166; on Lord Chelmsford 165; and Bishop Colenso 166; at Isandlwana 167–8; on death of Prince Imperial 168–9; at Ulundi 169–71; ride from Ulundi 172–3; responses to the ride 173–7; critique of war tactics 178–80; moves house 182; on Lieut. Carey 169, 182–4; lecture tour 182–3, 212; lecturing style 183–4; medals 184, 189–90; defends flogging 184; on regulation of war correspondents 184–5; attacks missionaries 188; *Glimpses through the Cannon Smoke* 190; in the United States 190–1; love of America 191–2; portrait 193; and Oscar Wilde 194–8; engagement 198; attitudes to women 198–9; in Australia 201–8; in New Zealand 202–3; on his brother 204–6; on Australians 206–7; financial loss 207; in *Fortnightly Review* 209; gets honorary degree 210–11; on General Gordon 211; more illness



- 212; on Afghanistan 212; on defence against invasion 212–13; on American army 213–14; at dinner for Yates 214; second marriage 214–15; renewed illness 215; house move 215; on 'Jack the Ripper' 216–17; on army food 216; at Sidmouth 217; criticism of army command 217–19; *Memories and Studies of War and Peace* 219; *Life of Havelock* 219–20; criticism of Wolseley 220–1; on recruiting problem 221; in defence of Gordon-Cumming 222–3; in USA 223; on Germans in Alsace 223–4; *The Great War of 189–*, 224–5; *Czar and Sultan* 225; on army 226–7; on cavalry 226–7; *Camps, Quarters and Casual Places* 227; *Life of Napoleon III* 227–8; on Boers 228–9; death 5, 229–30; memorials 230–1.
- Forbes, Florence Helen, 20, 209, 224
- Forbes, Frances Alice, 20, 230–1
- Forbes, Helen (née White) (1842–72), 20, 65
- Forbes, Mrs Louisa (née Meigs) (1854–1922), 198–200, 207, 214–15, 229, 231
- Forbes, Rev. Lewis W., 7–8, 14, 65
- Forbes, William Anderson (1839–79), 7, 14, 204–6
- Fortnightly Review*, 209
- France, 11, 30, 41, 69, 74, 224–5, 231
- Franco-Prussian War 30–53, 216, 218, 225–6
- Freeman, Edward Augustus (1823–92), 140
- Frere, Sir Bartle (1815–84), 95, 164
- French army, 31–2, 45
- Fripp, Charles (1854–1906), 171
- Froude, James Anthony (1818–94), 101
- Galton, Francis (1822–1911), 66
- Gentleman's Magazine*, 76
- German army, 31, 33–4, 44–5, 52–3, 100–1, 216, 224–225, 227, 231
- Germany, 5, 29, 73, 103, 224–5
- Gladstone, William Ewart (1809–98), 107–8, 189
- Glasgow, 63, 158, 182
- Glasgow Herald*, 32, 36, 63
- Glasgow University, 75
- Glennie, John Stuart, 112–3, 116
- Goldwin Smith, Professor (1823–1910), 191
- Gordon-Cumming, William (1848–1930), 222–3
- Gordon, General George (1833–85), 75, 211, 219
- Gourko, General Josif V. (1828–1901), 126–8, 133
- Grant, James (1802–79), 20, 31, 39
- Grantown-on Spey, 146
- Graphic*, 7, 89, 94, 105, 110, 118, 127, 141, 161, 168, 171
- Gravelotte-St Privat, battle of, 35, 192
- Greenwood, Frederick (1830–1909), 19, 140
- Haggerty, Major James (1834–87), 27
- Hall, Sidney (1842–1922), 94
- Halstead, Murat (1829–1908), 35, 192
- Hamley, General Sir Edward (1824–93), 212–3
- Hannay, James McDowall, 71
- Harness, Major-General Arthur (1838–1927), 180
- Havelock, General Sir Henry (1795–1857), 24–6, 155, 157, 219–20
- Havelock, Sir Henry, MP (1830–97), 175–6, 220
- Herat, 150, 212
- Henty, George Alfred (1832–1902), 67, 94, 101, 140, 148
- Herkomer, Sir Hubert von (1849–1914), 193
- Hill, Frank (1830–1910), 140, 214
- Hill, George Birkbeck (1835–1903), 87
- Hollowell, James (1823–76), 26
- Hurst & Blackett, publishers, 44, 52–3
- Idler*, 227–8
- Illustrated London News*, 94, 118, 168, 175, 214, 182
- In the Ranks*, 209–10

- India, 4, 11, 23–6, 77, 94–102, 150, 157, 193, 210, 223, 228
- Indian Mutiny, 23–6, 86, 98–9, 155, 190, 212, 219–20
- Indian troops, 98–101, 149, 151, 153–4
- Irish Nationalism, 27, 92–4, 184, 207, 211
- Isandlwana 162, 164–5, 167–8, 170, 173, 178–80, 188
- Jack the Ripper, 216–17
- Jelallabad, 153–4
- Jingoism, 147
- Kabul, 150–2, 154, 156, 161–2, 185, 193
- Keith, 8–9, 11
- Khyber Pass, 151–2, 161, 189
- King's College, Aberdeen 10, 11, 14, 204, 230
- Kinglake, Alexander William (1809–91), 192
- Kipling, Rudyard (1865–1936), 5, 223
- Labouchère, Henry (1831–1912), 40, 51, 87, 91, 140, 211
- Lahore, 99, 154, 165
- Landsman's Drift, 166, 172–4, 187, 189
- Legge, Edward (1834–1900), 94
- Lewis, Sir George (1833–1911), 197
- Liberal foreign policy, 107–8, 138–9, 160
- Lidden, Canon, 166
- Life of Havelock* 219–20
- Life of Napoleon III*, 227–8
- Linton, Eliza Lynn (1822–98), 87
- Livingstone, David (1817–73), 67, 188
- London, 11, 19, 40–1, 60, 118, 145, 158, 170, 182, 192, 208, 214
- London Scotsman*, 21–9, 31, 39, 44, 66, 69
- London Standard*, 40, 61, 67, 94, 112, 163, 185, 212, 230
- Loyd-Lindsay, Robert, Lord Wantage (1832–1901), 112–13
- Lucknow, 23, 25, 86, 98–9, 155, 219
- Lucy, Henry (1842–1924), 65, 214, 230
- MacColl, Rev. Malcolm (1831–1907), 116, 140
- MacGahan, Januarius (1844–78), 106–08, 119–21, 126, 128, 131, 136, 138–9, 144–5, 147, 217, 225–6
- Mackenzie, Alexander (1838–98), 26
- MacMahon, Marshal Patrice de (1808–93), 36, 58, 95, 225
- Madras, 25, 97–8
- Madrid, 70, 90, 141
- Maizières-lès-Metz, battle of, 41
- Malet, Edward (1837–1908), 58
- Manchester, 64, 145
- Manchester Evening News*, 62, 140
- Marischal College, Aberdeen, 7, 10–12, 204
- Massingham, Henry William (1860–1924), 151, 232
- Maurice, Col. John Frederick (1841–1912), 217–18
- McCarthy, Justin (1830–1912), 20–1, 140
- Medals, 5, 66–7, 92, 115–16, 135, 145, 175–6, 184, 189–90, 217–18
- Meigs, General Montgomery C. (1816–92), 198–200, 223, 227–8
- Melbourne, 201–12, 224
- Melgund, Lord (1845–1914), 187–18
- Memories and Studies of War and Peace*, 219
- Metz, 34–6, 39–40, 42–3, 46
- Millet, Francis Davis (1848–1912), 126, 142, 225
- Miners, 67–8
- Mitchel, John (1815–75), 93–4, 184
- Molesworth, Mary Louisa (1839–1921), 19, 32
- Moltke General Helmut von (1800–91), 34, 37–8, 185, 224
- Montenegro, 117, 147
- Montreal, 2, 11
- Morayshire, 6, 10
- Morley, Samuel (1809–86), 40
- Morning Advertiser*, 20, 31, 34, 37, 39
- Morning Post*, 44, 87, 94, 133, 139, 212, 230
- Morning Star*, 21

- Morris, Mowbray (1819–74), 43–4, 47–8
- Murray, David Christie (1847–1907), 68–9, 229
- Murray, E.C. Grenville (1824–81), 87
- Napier, General Lord Robert (1810–90), 99
- Napoleon I, 39, 42, 45
- Napoleon III, 30–1, 34, 37, 66, 70, 93, 224, 228
- Natal, 163–4, 180
- National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, 27, 68
- Neill, Lt.-Col. James (1810–57), 23–4, 220
- Nepal, 79, 84, 100
- New journalism, 6, 21, 30, 33, 87, 89
- New York, 36–7, 190.193–4
- New York Herald*, 43–4, 66, 72, 106, 141–2, 190, 192
- New York Times*, 72, 191, 223
- New York Tribune*, 35–6, 43, 190
- New Zealand, 88, 202–3, 207
- Newport, 183
- Newspaper Press Fund, 3, 101, 146, 168
- Nineteenth Century*, 137, 144, 149, 178, 184, 186, 207, 221
- North American Review*, 213, 223
- Northbrook, Lord (1826–1904), 81, 83, 85, 87, 160
- Northcote, Sir Stafford (1818–87), 161–2
- Obrenović, Milan (1854–1901), 104–6, 111, 113
- Observer*, 72
- Osman Nuri Pasha (1832–1900), 128, 130, 142
- Ottoman Empire [see also Turks], 101, 103–4, 108, 145
- Pall Mall Gazette*, 22, 36, 139, 211, 215, 222–3, 228
- Pan-Slav Movement, 103–4, 113–14, 117
- Pankhurst, Dr Richard (1834–98), 145
- Paris, 36, 39, 46–7, 50–2, 54–60, 90, 95, 193
- Peasant Relief Fund, 47
- Pelsall Hall Colliery disaster, 68–9
- Peshawar, 155, 161
- Pettit, Henry (1848–93), 209–10
- Pirie, Margaret (née Forbes), 7, 14
- Plevna, 129–34, 137, 142, 147, 226
- Prince Imperial, Louis Napoleon, 66, 168–9, 177, 182
- Prince of Wales, 61, 63, 69, 71–2, 88, 94–100, 118, 138, 161, 175, 207, 210, 222, 230
- Prior, Melton (1845–1910), 168–9, 171–2, 176, 180, 182
- Prussia[see also Germany], 30–1
- Prussian army [see German army]
- Quebec, 15, 194
- Queensland, 203–6
- Radetsky, General Fyodor (1820–90), 123
- Red Cross [see also British National Aid Society], 112
- Redmond, John (1856–1918), 207, 211
- Repington, Charles À Court (1858–1925), 161
- Reuters, 31, 41
- Roberts, General Frederick (1832–1914), 152–3, 162, 185, 220
- Robinson, Sir John R. (1828–1903), 40, 47, 60, 71–2, 76, 88, 119, 140, 229
- Romanov, Grand Duke Nicholas (1831–91), 128, 134–5, 142
- Rorke's Drift, 164–5
- Royal Dragoons, 16–19
- Royal Geographical Society, 66–7
- Romania, 5, 120, 126, 147, 184
- Russell, Sir William Howard (1820–1907), 3.5.43.47–9, 52, 61–2, 66–7, 72, 94, 96, 98, 101, 138, 140, 146, 174, 180, 186, 189, 192, 211, 217, 229, 232
- Russia, 5, 103, 117, 119, 151, 202, 212, 224

- Russian army, 106, 120, 123–5, 127, 132–3, 137–8, 142, 147, 224
- Russo-Turkish War, 117–43, 184, 195, 201, 218, 225, 227
- Saarbrücken, 331, 33, 41
- Sala, George Augustus (1828–95), 44, 70, 72, 94, 101, 116, 118, 137, 141, 148, 185, 192, 207, 211
- Salisbury, Lord (1830–1903), 3, 85, 146–7, 160, 209
- San Stefano, treaty of, 147–8
- Saturday Review*, 27, 97, 185
- Schuyler, Eugene (1840–90), 107
- Scotsman*, 136, 188
- Sedan, 36–9, 46, 70, 224
- Serbian army, 104, 106, 109, 114–15
- Serbian-Turkish War, 103–16
- Shah of Persia, Nasir al-Din Shah (1831–96), 73–4
- Shaw, George Bernard (1856–1950), 227
- Sheffield, 16, 27, 61
- Shepstone, Sir Theophilus (1817–1893), 164
- Sher Ali (1825–79), 151, 153, 160–1
- Shipka Pass, 133–4, 152, 226
- Simpson, William (1823–99), 94, 182
- Sims, George (1847–1922), 209–10
- Skinner, Hilary (1839–94), 32
- Skobelev, General Mikhail Dimitrievich (1843–82), 122, 130, 202
- Smalley, George W. (1833–1904), 35, 72, 140
- Smith, W. H. (1825–91), 150
- Smythe, Robert Sparrow (1833–1917), 201–3
- Socialism, 54, 71
- Soldier's Pocket Book*, 2, 217
- Soldiering and Scribbling*, 69
- South Africa, 4, 162–183, 185, 193, 228–9
- Spain, 5, 11, 30, 70–1, 74, 90–1, 113, 119, 222
- Spectator* 43, 85
- Spicheren, battle of, 33
- St Denis, 48–50, 54, 56, 58
- St Paul's Cathedral, 230–1
- St Paul's Magazine*, 28, 69, 76
- St Petersburg, 78, 142
- Stanley, Frederick A., earl of Derby (1841–1908), 149–50, 168
- Stanley, Henry Morton (1841–1904), 66–7, 165, 215
- Stead, William Thomas (1849–1912)
- Stewart, General Sir Donald (1824–1900), 152
- Sudan, 75, 207, 210–11
- Sutherland, Duke of (1828–92), 95, 141, 15
- Sydney Morning Herald*, 201–2, 204, 206–7, 210
- Telegraph, 6, 35, 40–4, 79, 95–6, 131, 152, 166, 172
- Temple, Sir Richard (1826–1902), 81, 85
- The Great War of 189–*, 224–5
- Time*, 160, 193
- Times*, 5, 25, 40, 42–4, 48, 50, 52, 61, 94, 111, 133, 139–40, 146, 168, 172
- Tipperary by-election, 92–4
- Trade unionism, 27, 63–5, 69
- Tranby Croft scandal, 222–3
- Trollope, Anthony (1815–82), 28, 191, 201, 206
- Tsar Alexander II (1818–81), 78, 125, 134–5, 142–3
- Tuileries Palais, 54, 57–8
- Turks, 103–5, 110–11, 113, 115–17, 138–42, 147, 149–50
- Twain, Mark (1835–1910), 74, 193–4
- Ulundi, battle of, 170–5, 178, 180, 183–4, 217, 222
- United Services Institution, 137, 180
- United States of America, 6, 9, 92, 101, 190, 192, 201, 201, 206, 208, 214–5, 223, 228–9
- Vanity Fair*, 142
- Versailles, 46–7, 49, 54–7, 70
- Victoria, R. I., 161–2, 180, 214–15, 211,

- 216, 230
- Vienna World Exposition, 71–2
- Villiers, Frederic (1851–1922), 103,  
105, 110, 114, 118, 121, 127, 130,  
133–4, 148, 225, 231
- Vionville-Mars-La-Tour, battle of, 34
- War Correspondents, 1–5, 40, 101, 148,  
177–8, 181, 185–7, 191, 193, 212,  
217–19, 231–2
- War Office, 66, 189–90, 217–18
- Washington DC, 191, 199, 204, 214–15
- Washington Post*, 196–8
- Wellington, Lord, 11, 91, 218
- Whistler, J. A. McNeill (1834–1903),  
198
- White, Holt, 36
- Wilde, Oscar (1854–1900), 194–9
- Wilhelm I of Prussia (1797–1888), 30,  
34, 47, 49, 52, 95, 216, 225
- Wilhelm II, Kaiser (1859–1941), 216
- Wolseley, Garnet, 1st Viscount (1833–  
1913), 2, 75–6, 148, 170, 173–4,  
179, 200, 202, 210, 213, 217–21, 225,  
228, 231
- World*, 2–3, 87–8, 91–2, 117, 140, 144,  
193, 209, 214, 222
- Yates Edmund (1831–94), 21, 44, 72–3,  
78, 87, 92, 101, 140, 160, 193, 214
- Young, J. Russell (1840–99), 72, 141
- Zulus 159, 162, 173
- Zulu War, 163–182, 184, 188, 190, 217,  
228