

# A DEFENCE OF THE BASHI-BAZOUKS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—Your able and fearless correspondent, in his letter from Constantinople dated the 19th of November, has at length ventured to let in the light of fact upon the case of General Beatson and the Bashi-Bazouks. Truth begins to prevail; tardy justice will now be done to a good soldier smarting under undeserved official censure.

You will not, perhaps, consider the following remarks unworthy of a place in your columns. I am answerable for these statements, and only desire your publicity:—Already upwards of 250,000*l.* has been expended upon the Bashi-Bazouks. A body of nearly 4,000 men and horses, admirable light troops and the best of Oriental Cosacks, is not at the present conjuncture, when the want of cavalry is severely felt in Eastern Crimea, to be despised, and ought not to be marched over the Balkan snows without a General to command them in the month of November for the purpose of lying idle through the winter, should they ever reach Shumla.

Regard for the "*tacenda*," political as well as military, prevents my entering fully into General Beatson's case; but even a sketch of his career with the Bashi-Bazouks will contain matter which may possibly surprise your readers.

General Beatson, an officer well known in India,—he was mentioned six times in orders and despatches for successful actions in which he commanded,—volunteered in the beginning of 1853 for service at the seat of war upon the Danube. There he commanded the Bashi-Bazouks of Ouzar Pasha's army, and, in spite of their delinquencies and shortcomings, of their bad antecedents, and their worse name, although neither the Generalissimo nor General Yusuf, the organizer of the "*Indigènes*," could discipline or conduct them, he conceived the happy idea that English energy and justice would draw out all the really valuable qualities of these wild troops, and render them serviceable to the nation in its present struggle.

At first all was obstacle. Lord Raglan could not endure the idea of commanding men who hadnapped Bulgarians and roasted Russians. General Yusuf's failure had impressed our Government with the impossibility of success. Monetary arrangements were made with even unusual dilatoriness; officers were sent out by the slowest degrees, and the incapables were not, as your correspondent has heard, selected by the General, but by the War-office. Briefly, nine months elapsed before the future commander could repair to the town of Dardanelles, his head-quarters, and begin the work of organization.

The first detachment was marched into camp on the 9th of June, 1855, one-third of the campaigning season having been wasted in the mere preliminaries.

Work began earnestly and well. Presently the aspect of circumstances changed. Party animosities burst into a flame. The French supplied the press with tales of horror. The Turkish authorities, civil and military, joyfully pitted Christian against Christian in their fanatic resolve that Moslems should not be commanded by Infidels. The wily Greeks, the Jews, and the other sects followed the example of their rulers. Had the English held together, all might have been well; but in an evil hour Her Britannic Majesty's Ambassador, whose powerful arm had upheld the establishment, was induced to assemble at the Dardanelles a court of inquiry, consisting of a Brigadier-General from the Turkish Contingent, two Consuls, and three Turkish officials. This "*mixed commission*," by a series of measures most injudicious and uncalled for, succeeded in strengthening the party opposed to General Beatson, introduced divisions among his officers, kept his men in a state of perpetual excitement, embroiled him with the Porte, and finally carried away his best and strongest support—the Ambassador. An angry correspondence ensued; no allowance was made for the plain speaking and the warm words of a man beset by petty annoyances and irritated by groundless calumnies. Briefly, from that time General Beatson's resignation became necessary.

The *ex parte* reports of a clique and the clamours of the local press prevailed against truth and justice. Every stranger who visited the Dardanelles, indeed (and many will give testimony to this), departed, wondering at the difference between what he saw and what he had heard. Yet the worst view was taken by the authorities.

In September, 1855, the Minister-at-War attached Beatson's Horse to the Turkish Contingent, thus degrading it from an independent to a secondary command. General Beatson resigned, professing, however, his willingness to conduct the men to head-quarters. A rumour arose that the force was to be ordered on service—the schemers saw that "*now or never*" was the time. Seizing the first opportunity of a quarrel between an Albanian and the police, they persuaded the Military Pasha of the Dardanelles to draw out all his forces, and, under pretence of defending a town which was not attacked, to offer us battle. Without delay they despatched the steamer Redpole to Constantinople, reported the frightful state of affairs (in common courtesy General Beatson's letters should have been allowed to accompany their statements), begged for a strong reinforcement, and urged the necessity of instantly removing the cause and front of these disorders. The result was the triumph of diplomacy. With all speed a strong body of Turkish regulars was sent down to the Dardanelles, three war steamers were placed to command the road from camp to town, 300 French soldiers were landed at the Nagara-Hospital, to take us in rear, and General Smith appeared to assume command.

Meanwhile the Bashi-Bazouks had, by the personal exertions of their General and officers, been kept quietly in their camp. At 4 p.m. on the day of the demonstration the Military Pasha, ashamed of the farce, marched back his men to barracks, and the Civil Governor sent a conciliatory message, stating that he had been urged on by others to the absurd and insulting measure. But the *coup* had succeeded. General Beatson was ordered by General Vivian to make over his command and to repair to Bujukdéré without delay. Though suffering from a severe accident, he at once obeyed the latter part of the order. Fearing, however, that the men might resent his too sudden removal, and compromise themselves and him by some act of violence, he placed as temporary second in command an officer of his own force, and on the 1st of October proceeded to head-quarters.

I cannot enter into the history of what occurred at Bujukdéré without giving vent to an indignation which as a soldier it is my duty to suppress. However, General Beatson's resignation was accepted by the War-office. On the 12th of September he had again reported officially that his men were ready for service, that drill and discipline were progressing, that the different branches of the force, the artillery and transport, wanted nothing but the aid of the authorities, and that with permission from home he would take upon himself the responsibility of immediately contracting with transport and steam tugs at Smyrna and Constantinople for Eupatoria, Yenikale, Batoum, or Balaklava, as ordered. The only answer was a telegraphic message, "*Tell General Beatson to make no contracts*" . . . . . To return to the Bashi-Bazouks. General Smith is too good a soldier and too honourable a man to appropriate the eulogy which belongs to another. Shortly after assuming command he reported, it is said, favourably of the drill and efficiency of a force that was universally asserted and believed to be in a state of brigandage. Public opinion began to waver; the clique, now all-powerful, changed its tactics; General Beatson, the evil spirit, had been removed; in a few days the devils had repented, and became angelic Bashi-Bazouks.

In July, 1855, I first joined General Beatson's force, and can speak of these events with authority. After considerable experience of Bashi-Bazouks in Egypt and Arabia, my wonder was excited by the orderly conduct of our men. I attribute it to their affection for their General, and still believe that the hope of his return even now holds them together. I saw none of the scenes which struck the spectator with horror at Varna and Gallipoli in 1853. No such *émeute* ever occurred as that between the French occupants of Constantinople and the hapless Tunisians. On no occasion did the Bashi-Bazouks disgrace themselves as has the Turkish Contingent—men trained to military discipline, amply officered, and in presence of the enemy—by their late plundering, grave-snatching, and mutiny at Kertch. This body, but 8,000 strong, had, when I left Turkey, lost 1,000 by desertion; of our 3,000 at most 300 left us. Not a citizen of the Dardanelles was ever murdered by the Bashi-Bazouks. Not an English officer was ever struck or insulted by them. So small was the amount of crime that only one rape was ever alleged against them. These, Sir, are facts which I defy any man to contradict.

With General Beatson's departure all, I have said, changed. He had established a riding school, a school of arms, and a guard of the gallant and docile Arabian negroes, to act as reserve in time of urgent danger. These, I hear, have been done away with. The English Horse Artillery, without whose support Bashi-Bazouks could not be depended upon in severe actions, lies prostrated by cholera at Scutari; and nearly 4,000 men, many of them mounted upon the valuable blood of Arabia and Syria, are being marched, in the midst of winter, up and down the inclement Balkan Hills!

The old and tried General who would see service, who was resolved at all hazards not to be shelved at Shumla or Magnesia, has lost his command. After the deadly campaigns on the Danube; after the bloody fields of Inkermann and Balaklava; after the weary labour of organizing and disciplining a force which Ibrahim Pasha, Omar Pasha, and General Yusuf found intractable, General Beatson has returned home unnoticed and unknown; and but for the candour of your correspondent his laurels would have been placed upon another's head; the public would have believed, with the War-office, that the order and the discipline of the Bashi-Bazouks are attributable solely to General Smith's command of a single fortnight.

Such, Sir, are the blighting effects of the present military system. Upheld by a hundred interests, bolstered up by influential names, the Turkish Contingent still thrives, *per fas et nefas*, and is to thrive. "*Beatson's Horse*" is numbered with the things that were.

Excuse, Sir, this trespass upon your valuable space, and allow me to subscribe myself,

Your obedient servant,

RICHARD F. BURTON,

Late Chief of the Staff, Bashi-Bazouks.

Club, 14, St. James's-square, Dec. 3.