

Lions Led by Asses

THE REASON WHY, by Cecil Woodham-Smith; Constable and Company.
English price 15/-.

(Reviewed by A.M.)

CONCEIVED with originality and admirably written with the help of family documents, this is a study of the personal and collective forces that produced the Charge of the Light Brigade. It is also a picture of the Army that, in two senses, died in the Crimea, and of the social class that led it. As depicted here, that age seems in some respects as far away as the Plantagenets. The careers of two men form the backbone of the story: the Earl of Lucan, who commanded the cavalry in the Crimea, and the Earl of Cardigan, who, under him, commanded the Light Brigade. These wealthy and exceptionally handsome aristocrats thirsted for military glory, which to them meant charges by glittering cavalry drilled to the nines. Abusing the custom of purchase of commissions, which Governments defended on the ground that only an army officered by men with a large stake in the country could be trusted not to emulate Cromwell, Lord Lucan (at 26) bought the command of the 17th Lancers for £25,000, and Lord

Cardigan (at 35) that of the 15th Hussars for nearly £40,000 — of course, over the heads of veterans. Also, they were brothers-in-law, and hated each other.

Lucan had some ability, but serious faults of temper. No novelist would dare to present Cardigan's character and career. He was arrogant and over-bearing, selfish and callous (in the Crimea he lived in his luxurious yacht), impregnably conceited, and brainless—a complete ass. Though his peacetime methods cost him his regimental command and made him an object of public detestation and execration, he was given another regiment and the Crimean promotion. The notoriously bad relations between the two men did not prevent one being placed immediately over the other in the field. Cardigan went his own way, and Raglan, the commander-in-chief, was too weak to support Lucan.



THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE

"If Lucan and Cardigan had conferred . . . the blunder might have been averted"

Miss Woodham-Smith takes us skillfully through the earlier stages of a campaign redeemed only by the courage and endurance of the British soldier to the fatal charge. If Captain Nolan, an able soldier, who carried Raglan's vague and misunderstood order, had been less contemptuous of Lucan; if Lucan and Cardigan had conferred; if officers had been properly trained in staff work—the blunder might have been averted. The charge is vividly described. Cardigan rode in front with the courage that was his one virtue, passed

right through the Russian guns and back, almost unscathed, but made no effort to collect the remnants of his command or ascertain its condition. His half-crazy mind was ablaze with wrath because Nolan had ridden across his front, quite probably to try to countermand the movement.

Back in England, Cardigan was hero-worshipped and made Inspector-General of Cavalry, but some of the truth soon came out. Probably as much as we shall ever get about the whole affair is

(continued on next page)

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