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THE BRITISH ARMY AND A CONTINENTAL WAR.

By A. DE TARLÉ, Capitaine d'Artillerie, Breveté d'Etat Major.

[Translated by Colonel H. Wylly, C.B., and published by kind permission of the author, and of the editor of the *Revue de Paris*.¹]

THE cavalry operations and the Army manœuvres which, within the last few days, have come to a close in England, mark one more stage in the training of the British Army. Never before have such large numbers been brought together—four divisions of infantry and one of cavalry, that is to say, two-thirds of the Expeditionary Force, in addition to Territorial troops. The King evinced the personal interest he takes in the work of reorganization initiated some few years ago and pursued with such method and zeal, by honouring these operations for the first time with his presence. Possibly, also, he wished to appeal to popular sentiment, which, up to the present, has been somewhat indifferent to things military. The military representatives² sent by each of the Powers tended further to increase the *éclat* and augment the importance of these manœuvres.

It was with a natural pride that Englishmen enumerated to their guests all the improvements which have been effected in their military organization. The Air Corps already possesses three dirigibles, and will shortly be in possession of 131 aeroplanes. Despite the cruel accidents attending the opening of the manœuvres, this service did its work to the satisfaction of both sides.³

¹ From *Revue de Paris*, 1st October, 1912.

² France and Russia were represented by Generals of Division.

³ Attention may be called to the absurd character of the information published by certain newspapers, according to which the Director of the manœuvres brought them to an end a day earlier than had been intended, because each commander had been so well informed by the aeroplanes of the movements of his opponent that further operations were impossible. The truth is that at the close of the 18th September, the forces on either side had become so intermingled that they would have had to be "sorted out" again if operations were to be recommenced, but a similar mixing up of troops constantly occurs both in France and Germany; it is the inevitable result of the operations of large bodies, in which the umpire staff, no matter how perfectly organized it may be, cannot always cause proper weight to be given to the effect of fire. As the action was still in progress at 6 p.m., troops could only have been retired after dark, and the directing staff preferred to cut short the manœuvres by a few hours rather than to impose this extra fatigue on troops who had been marching and fighting for three days without rest, and who, unlike our own troops, are not sheltered in billets.

Communication between the command and the different units is better maintained than with us, or in any other European Army, thanks to the existence of special communication companies employing the electric telegraph, "wireless," telephones, heliographs and flag signalling. Mechanical transport was used for the supply of rations and munitions, the recent improvements made in this service having permitted of the reduction of a hundred vehicles and twelve hundred horses in each division. Every unit possesses a field kitchen, formed of an ordinary cooking range carried on a wagon.

The progress in training is no less noticeable. In 1909 this was brought to notice by General Langlois, who, after the South African War, unhesitatingly denounced the weaknesses of the English Army. But during the last three years this army has effected a great deal, in the opinion of those soldiers who know it best. The infantry has just been given a new "Manual," in which the connection between fire and movement is emphasized; its lessons are admirably applied. In the use of ground, the careful methods of employing fire, fighting spirit, and in endurance, the British soldier, in the opinion of all who have seen him at work, is unequalled. We do not speak of his tenacity and traditional courage, as to which our ancestors of the *Grande Armée*—no mean judges—have rendered a striking tribute.

The cavalry is excellent; in a close country the squadrons are not stopped by any obstacles; the men are well mounted, and know how to take care of their horses, which were in good condition even after a fortnight's manœuvres and bivouacking in the rain. In spite of its anxiety to charge whenever it can find opportunity, the cavalry makes a thoroughly common-sense use of its rifle; it has, so to speak, the instinct for dismounted combat in its blood, and one can frequently see one or two squadrons leap to the ground and deploy along a hedge, in order to dislodge by fire a sheltered enemy against whom a charge would be ineffective. As to the horse and field artillery batteries, it was a pleasure to see them manœuvring at a rare pace; their magnificent teams recalling the memory of those splendid batteries which, by their behaviour and dash at the Alma and at Inkerman, called forth the admiration of our soldiers. They were on nearly all occasions so well placed that it was impossible to locate them. The British are now making efforts to apply the methods of fire in use with us, and here, too, the progress is remarkable.

The officers of all the different arms are working hard to make up for lost time. Younger than our officers and more wedded to sport, all they need is to familiarize themselves with the practical study of the higher branches of the military art wherein we have had the good fortune, during the past 20 years, of finding such leaders and masters as Maillard, Bonnal and Cherfils. They will effect this all the more quickly from

the fact that the majority of them have had war experience in Afghanistan, in Egypt, or in South Africa.

Assuredly all is not yet perfect in the British Regular Army; but the appearance it presented during the manœuvres is most cheering for those who believe that it will have a part to play in the event of a European War. Every occasion upon which Lord Haldane has been asked about his Territorial Army, he has declared that it is intended to "set free the Expeditionary Force"—that is to say, to enable it to be used for action beyond the seas—a burning question, and one which for long has been of the first importance. In the famous debate of the 21st November, 1911, in the House of Lords, it served as an introduction to a great discussion on the exact situation of the Territorial Army. To a suggestion by Lord Portsmouth as to possible military intervention in Belgium, Lord Haldane made answer that such intervention was too hypothetical to be worth discussion. Whereupon Lord Portsmouth and Lord Roberts—the latter in a letter to the *Times*—declared that this was anything but hypothetical, and that certain conditions might arise which would make it absolutely necessary to disembark the whole Expeditionary Force on the Continent in order "to preserve the balance of power in Europe and to secure the rights of this country."

The Expeditionary Force, the organization of which was the work of Lord Haldane, comprises about 156,000 men, contained in six strong divisions of infantry and one cavalry division, equivalent to four French or German army corps. For war purposes it is thus very far from being of no account. We rule out as unlikely the suggestion of a British disembarkation in the Danish peninsula, although the Germans sometimes discuss it, as also the idea of a diversion upon German territory; this has already formed the subject of a study in the *Revue de Paris*.¹

These intentions, ascribed to the British because they were in accordance with their former military conceptions, are impossible to carry out under the conditions of modern war. Such expeditions against an enemy's country, while capable of giving results a hundred years ago—although the famous expedition against Flushing in 1809 was a complete failure²—would meet

¹ *Revue de Paris*, 1st December, 1909. The last phases of the German naval manœuvres (May-June, 1912,) took place in Danish waters, and included an attempted disembarkation at Borkum.

² The object of this expedition was to destroy the French fleet and docks at Antwerp, and thus to strike a direct blow at the Imperial power. Disembarking 45,000 men in the island of Walcheren at the end of July, 1809, they took 17 days to capture Flushing. Decimated by a dreadful epidemic of fever, they re-embarked at the end of a month without having been able to attempt anything against Antwerp, whither Admiral Missiessy's fleet had retired.

to-day with almost insurmountable difficulties, by reason of the existence of railways which allow of the rapid concentration of troops on the points threatened.

The idea of a disembarkation in Belgium must be taken more seriously. The British have always held that the establishment of a foreign Power in the Low Countries would be the greatest possible danger to the national security. As they are not unaware that Germany covets the mouths of the Meuse and of the Scheldt, the English might be tempted to forestall Germany by themselves occupying Belgium; the plains of Brabant and Flanders were always the favourite theatre of war for their armies on the Continent.

In this case the action of the British might take the form of furnishing the Belgians with the field troops they lack. Without any intention of going into the details of the defensive organization of Belgium, we may remember that General Brialmont created a very solid system of permanent works, but disproportioned to the number of men which the country can set in line. There are three great fortresses on the Meuse—Liège, Huy and Namur, and a great national *réduit* at Antwerp. The perimeter of these fortresses is very large—32 miles at Liège and 29 at Namur—and they need 90,000 men for their defence. The Belgian Army, on mobilization, would number about 160,000, thus leaving no more than 70,000 men to take the field, distributed in four divisions (each of two brigades), two cavalry divisions of 16 squadrons, *plus* a general artillery reserve. These troops are not sufficient in number to oppose the violation of Belgian territory by a German army. None the less, this eventuality is one which may be considered as very probable; the need for the Germans to utilize the constant increase in their population, and the idea, in vogue with them, of strategic envelopment, leads one to believe that they will extend their front far beyond the limits set by Moltke in 1870. This extension may be either to right or left, but it is not likely to be to the left, where they would find a difficult country and the stout army of Switzerland, which, in spite of its numerical weakness, is formidable by reason of its training and patriotism.

Their intentions are, it may be remembered, engraved on the soil by the lines of their strategic railways, and by the disposition of their detaining sidings. For one thing, there are three important lines of rail parallel to the Belgian and Luxemburg frontiers, which are provided with important detaining sidings. For another, between the great lines of penetration, Düsseldorf—Roermond—Antwerp and Coblenz—Trèves, there are five other distinct lines, connecting on the Rhine with those from Northern and Central Germany. Since these have absolutely no economic *raison d'être*, there can be no doubt as to their strategic object. Finally, everybody realizes the importance acquired within recent years by the camp of Elsenborn, only a few miles from the Belgian frontier.

The Belgian military authorities, among others, General Ducarue, admit the possibility of the violation of their territory; the most authoritative German military writers, for their part, speak of this operation as a certainty. But of all the numerous witnesses we will only mention Generals Falkenhausen and Bernhardt. They have traced the route of the army of the right German wing, composed of five or seven army corps. It starts from the base at Saint Vith—Trèves, and, covered in the direction of Malmédy by a strong flank guard, will arrive on the French frontier on the front Sedan—Carignan—Stenay on or about the sixteenth day after mobilization.

In spite of all that has been said upon the matter, we do not believe in an attempted *coup de main* against Antwerp at the commencement of war; the morsel would be rather difficult to swallow, and the Germans would hardly commit the gross blunder of risking a check which would weaken them both morally and materially, and which would necessitate the immobilization of at least two army corps before the fortress.

Neither do we believe that they would cross to the left bank of the Meuse, in spite of the facilities they would thus enjoy, as it seems, for entering Liège without firing a shot.¹ The country on the right bank—Condroz, Famenne, Ardennes—though more difficult, offers no really serious obstacle; it is traversed, coming from the north-east, by ten good roads. In the absence of mechanical traction the troops making use of them would be supplied by five lines of rail.

The march to the south of the Meuse, respecting the fortresses of Belgium and confining itself to making use of only a part of its territory, would offer the advantage of reducing to a minimum the breach of its neutrality, and of inciting the Belgians to adopt an attitude of observation. Not being themselves attacked, why should they attack? Nevertheless, should the Germans thus take the risk of moving across the front of an army whose intervention would be assisted by the existence of such bridge-heads as those of Liège and Namur, it follows that they must either look upon the Belgian Army as absolutely negligible, or they are certain beforehand that it will be indifferent to any violation of the national territory.

Is there any real foundation for these presumptions? It is a secret of the Courts and of the Chancellories.² But for some months past this idea of remaining passive or indifferent has been more than once put forward by the Belgians them-

¹ See article by "Landrecies" in *Questions Diplomatiques et Coloniales*, of the 1st May, 1912, and the revelations made in the Belgian Parliament as to the absence of ordnance and munitions in that fortress.

² After the death of Leopold II., the newspapers wrote of a formal understanding between him and the Emperor William as the price of the support given by Germany to Belgium on the occasion when the latter was being troubled by England about the Congo.

selves. In the spring of 1911, during the course of a tour made in France and Belgium by the Military Correspondent of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, to study on the spot the conditions under which the British forces could co-operate with ours, he was greeted in Belgium with confessions of a most disconcerting frankness.¹

"If England had a sufficiently powerful army to support her guarantee, and ready to fulfil its duty, then we would do our best to play our part pending the arrival on the scene of the British troops. . . . We would make a declaration of our neutrality in a circular note to the Powers, but we would do no more than this. . . . We shall not fire a shot in defence of our neutrality; that would not do us any good. We shall wait upon events, and when we can see clearly which is the stronger side, that we shall join. Mere sentiment may make us lean to one side or the other, but we must think of Belgium and Belgium only; our safety is more to us than anything else."

Still more recently, a General in the Belgian cavalry published, under a transparent pseudonym, a pamphlet which aroused a very real interest in Belgium as well as in France.² The following is the gist of his remarks. He commences by drawing an unflattering picture of Belgian Parliamentaryism, hopelessly incompetent and quite indifferent to all questions of national defence. Further he affirms that the perpetual neutrality, which was imposed upon Belgium in 1831 by reason of the requirements of the European balance of power, and in no way for Belgium's own advantage, is now no more than a mark of servitude, the removal of which should now be demanded. The more so that this neutrality is always at the mercy of a possible violation. The military organization of the Belgians ought now to aim at placing them in a state to resist any aggression directed against their independence. For this purpose Belgium needs a field army, powerfully organized, methodically trained, capable of manœuvring, and animated by the spirit of the offensive. Such an army would derive no small advantage from the special conditions in which it would be called upon to act, favoured by an exceptionally close network of railways and roads, and supported in its operations by solid fortified bases. Moreover, fortresses are made for the benefit of the field army, and any which, whether by their defective site or from any other cause, cannot be self-supporting, should be razed as soon as possible.

Having made this statement, the author, and it is here that the discussion becomes of interest for us, examines the case of

¹ *Pall Mall Gazette* of the 15th March, 1911. These words, brought up before the Belgian Senate, caused lively protestations; but the personality of Lieut.-Colonel A. Pollock, editor of one of the most important of the British military magazines, is a guarantee of their authenticity. He has also reproduced them in an article in the *Nineteenth Century*.

² *Situation de la Belgique en prévision d'un conflit Franco-Germain*, by O. Dax. Brussels, 1912.

the violation of Belgian territory by one of the belligerents, and forcibly protests against the solution which has been offered, and under which Belgium shall declare herself against whomsoever shall first invade her.

Her fortunes would thus be bound up with those of the opposing party, and in the event of this turning out to be the weaker of the two, the country would share all the rigours of defeat. The question, then, for Belgium, is to range herself on the side of the stronger party, she would not then be *guided* by events, but would *direct* them. Then, since all hostile concentrations on her frontiers would be equally menacing—whether they are about Lille, Naubeuge, Mezières, or about Aix-la-Chapelle, Malmedy, Saint-Vith, she can turn to which she pleases prior to any violation of her territory.

The point which remains for decision is which of the two adversaries offers the best guarantee of ultimate success; the author of this pamphlet writes that up to recently he would not have hesitated to give the preference to the

“mighty German Empire rather than to the French Republic, divided and torn and delivered over to a home policy of hatred and discord. Will this be the case now? Possibly. But, all the same, the correct and patriotic attitude of France during the negotiations connected with the Morocco question gives one occasion to pause and reflect on this matter.”

Let us make a note of this eulogy upon our national revival—an eulogy all the more valuable because he who makes it is by no means an indulgent judge. He has seen clearly the weak point of our military organization—the contradiction existing between the omnipotence of the people and the hierarchy. Let us also profit by the advice which he offers us not to be under any illusions about a peace at any price.

The author of the pamphlet goes on to say that in order to form an opinion as to the respective importance of these two neighbours, Belgium ought to maintain military attachés at her Legations, and should send officers to attend alternately the French and the German army manœuvres. The remainder of the pamphlet is given up to a consideration of strategical questions which is inspired by the soundest doctrines; it concludes by advocating the suppression of the fortress of Liège, as being useless, and the maintenance of Namur, which should serve as the *point d'appui* for the field army.

In remarking on these views, the *Journal de Bruxelles*, a leading Catholic paper, observes that

“Belgium would lose all the means for the free exercise of her sovereignty from the very commencement of a conflict, if she were rigidly bound to make her neutrality respected by force against all and sundry. ‘What would she do,’ it is asked, ‘if England, France or Germany, were to demand the right of occupying her country under the pretence of keeping their engagements, and in order to defend her threatened neutrality?’”

Lastly, we find a characteristic remark in an article from the pen of Major Girard, published in the *Tribune Nationale*, a military and colonial organ. The title, "La Belgique contre la Triplice et la Triple Entente," sufficiently indicates the subject. It is there stated that the best policy which Belgium could adopt would be definitely to conclude an offensive and defensive alliance with one or other of the two groups of States into which Europe is divided, after having, be it well understood, carefully weighed their respective chances of success.

Certainly these opinions do not find general acceptance in Belgium; they have raised remonstrances; and the King himself, speaking on the 23rd June last, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the raising of the Grenadiers, affirmed that it was the duty of the country to make its neutrality respected. But the fact that such opinions are discussed is a sign to which we must attach a certain importance, because it proves the existence of a party which is prepared to accept this solution. At any rate, it prevents one from sharing the optimism of certain French military writers, who bring the Belgian Army into all their calculations. But even if it had the will, it is for the moment too weak to play any real part.

In these circumstances, the arrival of the British in Belgium is incomprehensible, unless it were to force the Belgians to forsake their passive attitude and take sides against the Germans. Also it would have the inconvenience of supplying these latter with an excuse and a pretext for violating Belgian neutrality. Further, it may be asked whether, even in this case, a threat against the enemy's left flank would be as important strategically as some people think. There is no doubt that the Germans would not seek for decisive results on this side, and would be content to protect themselves by a flank guard, commensurate with the number and value of their adversary; to contain him they would make use of all the resources to be found in rearguard tactics, in such a manner as to leave to the main body of the right wing its freedom of march and manœuvre, and allow it to take part in the main battle. The German Army would certainly be weakened, but insufficiently so, and if it obtained a success in France, the British forces, even combined with those of Belgium, would not count heavily enough, and would hesitate to play the part of *hostage* on the Continent—a rôle the British dread above all others.

The main thing for them is rather to co-operate in the decisive battles than to attempt a diversion, the results of which would be uncertain. In that way they would conform to the principle that the whole forces disposable should act together. One may also believe that their value would be enhanced by the mere fact that they would be fighting by our side.

The place of the British is then indicated as being on our (French) left flank. Even if they could bring us no more than a *part* of their Expeditionary Force, or of their 156,000 men,

this addition of two, three or four army corps would be a very precious one for us, as making up for the weakness caused by our numerical inferiority. It is not the case that victory always sides with the big battalions; to accept that idea would be to deny any value to other elements of success in war—the genius of the commander, the training of the troops, quality of the armament, moral superiority, power of manœuvre—but, if history does show us that the most brilliant victories have been gained by armies inferior in numbers, but better commanded, and animated by that warlike spirit which is irresistible, it also reminds us that often the very bravest troops have been crushed by the mere weight of the masses of the enemy, and have been vanquished by the arrival of hostile reinforcements which completed their overthrow.

A very simple calculation establishes the fact that, as compared with the Germans, we are the weaker by several army corps; the law recently passed by the *Reichstag* gives the Germans several new units, which will add to their superiority. It does not matter whether it is two, three or more corps; the discussions entered upon to decide upon the actual number may be of use to soldiers as helping them to find a basis for study; they have only a limited interest for the general public, since they depend upon unknown elements, which give them something of a fictitious character—I may instance the secret of our own concentration, that of the Russians, and the possible attitude of the Italians. The studies recently made by Colonel Boucher and General Maitrot have presented the subject under different aspects. We shall not return to this; but we can state that the presence of the British on our left flank would provide for us a very valuable help. From the moment when they have set foot upon our soil, nothing is easier to imagine than their appearance at the front. All that is wanted is to move quickly, and, to this end, to make as much use as possible of the railways leading from the shores of the English Channel to the Belgian frontier, or to the Meuse; the disembarkation would be effected in all our ports, from Havre to Dunkirk. A simple glance at the map shows which are the lines of rail which will take them to the scene of action.

It is necessary that they should be in a position to take part in the battle in which the bulk of the opposing armies will be engaged. If we admit the correctness of the calculations worked out in the studies already mentioned, this battle may take place after the sixteenth day of mobilization. It is, therefore, by that date that the British must come up into line with us.

We have reason to believe that they will be able to do this. Lord Haldane gave to the perfecting of the Expeditionary Force the same amount of effort that he devoted to the Territorial Army, and the British Staff has now made such advances

towards the preparation of a speedy mobilization, such as has never before been attempted, the Expeditionary Force having previously been intended rather for a Colonial war than for military intervention on the Continent. We know that a serious defect has been made good by the measure now taken for obtaining on requisition, and in the shortest possible time, the 50,000 horses which are required.¹

There is, however, this difficulty—the large proportion of reservists reckoned in the composition of the infantry battalions, who would require a fairly long period of training to give them that homogeneous character without which a unit is incapable of doing itself justice. The war establishment of a battalion, excluding the men remaining at the *dépôt*, is 979 men, of which 470 are serving soldiers and 529 are reservists.² This proportion of reserve men is not much higher than with us in those corps which are not included in our *troupes de couverture*; but the majority of these men have left the active army four years and more, which constitutes a serious inferiority. Finally, instead of rejoining the company in which they formerly served and where they would again find the officers and non-commissioned officers who had originally trained them, they are incorporated in units of which they know neither the officers nor the men, thus losing the moral and material value of *encadrement*, the main factor in the value of a force composed of active and reserve elements. The factor does not rise to its full height until the commingling of these elements is completed, and under such conditions as these an appreciable time is needed—the British say six weeks.

In an article in the *Nineteenth Century* of October, 1911—an article which attracted a great deal of attention—Lieut.-Colonel Pollock affirmed that the presence of reservists in the units could only tend to weaken them, until they are thoroughly amalgamated, and that he would prefer to accept in their stead soldiers of less than 20 years of age. The regulations require that these should be left at home in the event of the departure of the Expeditionary Force; but this is not because they are not equally good soldiers with the others, but because they are considered too young to support the fatigues of foreign service.

¹ Let us mention the publication at the end of December, 1911, of an order regulating "requisitions", in a hostile and civilized country—up to now wholly wanting. These are indications that the eventuality of a Continental war is not lost sight of.

² This is how the *Times* Military Correspondent arrives at the figure 470: the peace establishment, 777 men, is never reached, and only 560 are of the age of 20 and considered fit for field service; out of these again, 15 must be deducted as having less than six months' service. Each battalion gives 50 men to the mounted infantry units, thus reducing the total to 495. Finally, five per cent. are reckoned as unavailable at the last moment, which does not appear to be an exaggerated estimate.

This reason would not hold good in the case of a campaign in France. Colonel Pollock considers that it would be better to embark the Aldershot division at once, just as it stands, rather than run the risk of arriving in France too late. Its presence beside our *troupes de couverture* would produce a tremendous moral effect in France. So far as the remaining divisions are concerned, they would come up as quickly as possible, and nothing would be lost by their not being up in line with us for the first battle of the campaign. Despite the anxiety of the Germans to strike a decisive blow at the very outset, the result of the next war will not be decided by the initial blow; others will follow in which the fortune of war may turn and victory will fall to the side which can "stay" the longest. It is impossible to belittle the value of a reinforcement which will bring us three or four army corps of fresh troops, of a courage equal to any trial.

To the British military writer the situation presents itself very clearly; he would have no hesitation on the part of his country to come to our aid in a Continental war since, he says,¹ "the defence of England is the defence of France; our very existence depends upon our at once sending to the Continent all our available men to assist France, for if we do not make up our minds to defend London on Continental fields, we shall soon have to do it on the Surrey hills, and on the plains of the Eastern counties." But all Colonel Pollock's fellow citizens are not equally convinced of the necessity, and the idea is still vigorously contested.

There is, first of all, one party which will not listen to any talk about intervention; this is the one which protested quite recently against all idea of an alliance "which was incapable of adding anything to the strength either of France or England." The principal objection raised by the Radicals to an alliance is concerned as much with home as with foreign politics; they believe that it will give a new argument to the partisans of conscription; others say that the powerful army thus formed would prove a constant temptation for the diplomatists to intervene in European matters.² We will not discuss this point, having no wish to make incursions either into political or diplomatic territory.

But some even of those who recognize it is the duty of England to give France the support of her soldiers, believe that this could not be given at the outset of the war. "The Territorial Force," they say, "is incapable of fulfilling its duty without several months of training; and the departure of the

¹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, March, 1911. *Outlook*, 10th February, 25th May, and 15th June, 1912. The *Morning Post* and *Observer* expressed themselves equally categorically.

² *Daily Chronicle*, 26th May, 1912.

Expeditionary Force would leave the country exposed, without means of defence, to the dangers of invasion. It is, therefore, impossible even to think¹ of sending away the Regular Army until the country has no need to fear the risk of invasion, and for this the fleet must have established supremacy at sea."

The statement that the Territorial Army² would be incapable of repelling invasion proves that the work done by Lord Haldane does not inspire any great confidence among Englishmen. The article which appeared here a few months ago³ shows that the goodwill and the patriotism by which the Territorials are inspired, are not by themselves enough to repair the inherent weaknesses of the Force.

We must take care not to conclude from this that the security of the British Isles could be compromised, for so long as the English fleet has not been destroyed, they are secure from invasion. In France we can scarcely realize to what extent this uncertainty occupies the English mind, which has always, as it would seem, remained under the "Great Terror" of 1804. This dread, encouraged by the Press, causes questions in Parliament to be addressed to the Ministers, who reply as well as they can.

The opinion of the Government has varied. Mr. Balfour declared in 1905 that the possibility of a hostile invasion might be absolutely rejected. Since then, Mr. Asquith and Lord Haldane have agreed,⁴ after consultation with the Committee of Imperial Defence, that the disembarkation of a corps of 70,000 men could be successfully conducted. The question is one of those to which it is very difficult to make a definite reply, the experience of past wars showing that an operation of this kind has in it a considerable degree of hazard and of chance.

Those who declare that it would be a simple matter for the Germans to put ashore on British soil the equivalent of two army corps, point out how this operation would be facilitated by modern steamships, combining large size with great speed. It is true that the eastern shores of England are within 12 or 15 hours' steam of the German coast, and Lord Charles Beresford—a pessimist—has said that the security of England is at the mercy of a day's fog; but it must not be forgotten that the advance of science and industry favours the defence equally

¹ Some go so far as to say "even to think of doing so could only be done by a madman or a criminal."

² 270,000 men, to whom must be added 56,000 serving soldiers under 20 years of age, or having less than six months' service; 35,000 Regulars and 55,000 special reservists.

³ *Revue de Paris*, 1st March, 1912.

⁴ Particularly on the 29th June, 1909. This statement has frequently since been repeated.

with the attack; "wireless," for signalling the approach of an enemy's transports, submarines to sink them, all these amply make up for any advantages to be derived from the steamers of Hamburg and Bremen. Neither can one disregard the coast batteries and the mobile defences; the British estuaries and ports are fortified, and one can hardly imagine a disembarkation of troops in an enemy's country taking place except at an important harbour. The British have not failed to draw comforting conclusions from what happened in Tripoli at the time of the landing by the Italians;¹ the Turks made no effort to interfere with the operations, either the passage or the disembarkation; the African coast was far more favourable than the English shores upon which it is supposed that the Germans will descend; none the less, the Italians required three weeks to embark, transport and disembark 35,000 men. Under such conditions what chance of success would this imaginary force of 70,000 men of which mention is made, have, even if the bulk of the fleet were out of the way. The torpedo-boats and submarines of the coast defence would be enough of themselves to prevent it. In spite of all the minute precautions taken by the Japanese to prepare the way for the disembarkation of the Second Army in Korea, the landing operations took exactly nine days. This army was composed of three divisions and a brigade of artillery, altogether 64,000 men, that is to say, a considerably smaller force than that which would be required to attempt an invasion of England with reasonable hope of success.

It was in reliance upon these arguments that Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson, First Sea Lord, denied the possibility of invasion. His report, published as an appendix to General Sir Ian Hamilton's book against compulsory service, was made use of to prove the uselessness of conscription. It was the cause of a vigorous reply by the Military Correspondent of the *Times*, who assumed for this occasion the pen of an imaginary colonel of the German Staff—one "von Donner und Blitzen." He made out that the German transports would get through by running the gauntlet of the submarines and torpedo-boats, while the German ironclads drew upon themselves the fire of the British fleet. All the same, Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson's paper must be taken seriously. One must admit that a "raid," if not quite impossible—Bonaparte twice crossed the Mediterranean, avoiding Nelson—presents at any rate a very feeble chance of success in face of the British defensive organization.

NOTE.—The author then quotes the text of Admiral Sir A. Wilson's memorandum, from pages 210–212 of the second edition of "Compulsory Service," ending with the conclusion: "that an invasion on even the moderate scale of 70,000 men is practically impossible."

¹ *Contemporary Review*, January, 1912. "The invasion of Tripoli; a reassuring lesson for Great Britain."

To sum up—this reasoning is clearly expressed, but the mistake the Admiral made was wishing to generalize in order to prove the impossibility of passing the Expeditionary Force over to France. When, in the month of September last, the question was gone into by the Admiralty and the General Staff, Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson, in the quality of First Sea Lord, refused to accept responsibility for the immediate crossing, repeating the doctrine always accepted by British sailors: an operation of this kind cannot be carried through until the Navy has given the Army a safe-conduct—that is to say, has gained absolute command of the sea by destroying or blockading the enemy's squadrons.

This theory, admissible in full in the case of a considerable sea-voyage—if for instance it was a question of sending troops to Denmark or Russia, is not applicable to the passage of a narrow strait like that of Dover, only 21 miles in breadth and easy to defend. Hostile ships could always be signalled a sufficiently long time in advance to permit of the transports seeking shelter in a French or English port. But this question of "the command of the sea" has stirred British opinion to such a degree that it merits our dwelling upon it here.¹

First of all it is necessary accurately to define this frequently employed expression—"The Command of the Sea."

The Naval Correspondent of the *Times* says that it is no more than a purely strategic expression implying a state of war, and that of itself it has no significance whatever in time of peace. Even in war time no Power either possesses the command of the sea nor can use it effectively until either after a victory, or thanks to certain strategic dispositions which have obliged the enemy, alarmed at the deployment of superior force, to retire. One does not occupy the sea in the same sense that one occupies a territory; it remains a domain common to all nations and over which lines of communication cross. Since an enemy can deny the use of the sea to merchant ships or to transports by occupying certain important points on these lines—like places where several streets meet—the only way to secure the passage is either to dislodge or to defeat the enemy.

The command of the sea represents, strictly speaking, "the complete and effective control of maritime communications;" so long as it is in dispute, the operations of either side are limited by the condition that neither of the two can exercise complete control over the communications of the other. "I consider that I possess the command of the sea," said Admiral Sir Geoffrey Hornby, "when I can inform my Government that it can send an expedition whithersoever it wishes without having to fear any intervention by a hostile fleet."

¹ The *Times* of 4th January, 1912. *United Service Magazine* of January, February, and March, 1912.

It may, however, happen that the Power to which its naval superiority has given the command of the sea, may lose it again by faulty strategy; thus, during the War of American Independence, the British Government retained the fleet in territorial waters, instead of sending it to attack the French transports crossing the Atlantic. During the Crimean War the Russian Black Sea fleet did nothing, although it was quite powerful enough seriously to have impeded the disembarkation of the Allies in the Crimea.

These examples expose the weak point of the definition given above. But, putting aside the hypothesis of a strategic blunder by either side, the Admiralty requires a decisive victory as the indispensable condition for the safe transport of the Army. The reply has naturally been made that, on this reasoning, any movement of troops outside the British Isles would be impossible, so long as a single German torpedo-boat remains afloat! Is one to be alarmed at the blustering of the Germans who, undertaking to obstruct the crossing, say that "rather than be forced to oppose the Expeditionary Force on land by a body of equal strength, it would try to prevent its disembarkation."

This attitude of the Admiralty in September, 1911, is in singular contrast to the magnificent confidence which the people still have in England's naval superiority, in spite of the progress of German armaments. To the "Man in the Street," the British "Dreadnoughts" would make but one mouthful of the enemy's squadrons; moreover, the latter would not dare to risk a battle, and the British ships would merely have the bother of blockading the Germans in their ports!

The refusal of the Admiralty to undertake the duty asked of it was equally based, so it was said, upon the fact that the departure of the whole of the Regular Army, by diminishing the security of the country, would so greatly increase the difficulties of defending the shores as seriously to disturb the strategic combinations of the fleets.

The error of doctrine is here fundamental. It was Admiral Mahan who formerly was responsible for the idea that the true objective of a fleet was always the fleet of the enemy; but, in trying to apply this rule strictly, there is a risk of taking for the *end* what is really only the *means*. The Americans did not make the Spanish fleet their main objective, and the Japanese sent their transports to sea under increased risks—before even their fleet had reconnoitred Port Arthur. In reality, the mission of the fleet is subordinate to the general strategic objective. In the case we are considering, the Expeditionary Force must first of all be taken over to the Continent. The main objective of the fleet is then to assure the success of this operation by, preventing the enemy from approaching the zone wherein it

is being effected; it has to co-operate with the Army in the execution of the plan of campaign which the Government should have elaborated during peace; it can never be a question of its trying to gain a victory quite apart from the plan of campaign.

This is exactly what was *not* done in England, since, at the moment of the last crisis, the members of the Cabinet found themselves in disagreement as to the manner of employing the naval and military forces. This warning had the good effect of calling attention to a serious blot in organization. The Government did not hesitate to take the necessary steps to put matters to rights. On the 26th October, on the eve of the re-opening of Parliament, Mr. Winston Churchill replaced Mr. McKenna as First Lord of the Admiralty, the latter becoming Home Secretary.

One of the first acts of the new Minister was to modify the composition, and consequently the spirit, of the Board of Admiralty. The new Council could thus work in complete accord at the study of questions, connected with organization, which might appear to them to be of an urgent character.

The truth seems to be that the necessity had been recognized of having new men to carry out new ideas. These set at once to work and began by the creation of a Naval War Staff. The reform had long been called for in naval circles; it had been the main subject of a series of six letters which appeared in the *Times* in February and March, 1910. Admiral Lord Charles Beresford had again and again spoken of the need of it, and only quite recently, speaking at Portsmouth, he had taken recent events as a text for demanding the realization of his proposals.

He got what he wanted, and on the 8th January the order organizing the Naval War Staff was published. It is composed of three sections: the intelligence section (already in existence); the operations section, charged with the preparation of plans of campaign for every case which might occur; and lastly a third section for mobilization, whose business it should be to examine in detail all the different measures to be taken for conducting to the best advantage the plan of campaign drawn up by the second section.

This creation should give to the Navy the brain which shall co-ordinate the efforts of all in the preparation for war; it is to secure that co-operation which is indispensable between the Navy and the Army. Separated by watertight compartments, it had been impossible hitherto for them to work together; hence the differences of ideas which Mr. Balfour mentioned and deplored in 1905, and which had now again been shown by irresistible evidence. Henceforth the two Staffs will work out together the solution of the great problems of national defence, and if they should be unable to agree, there is the

Committee of Imperial Defence, which Lord Haldane looked upon as furnishing a link between the fleet and the Army.¹

But this Committee of Imperial Defence, a real Cabinet Council, to which are admitted consulting members on technical matters, and which is presided over by the Prime Minister, contains in itself an element of weakness; that is ministerial instability. The ideas of the Cabinet of to-day are not those of the Cabinet of to-morrow. Continuity of ideas is safeguarded solely through the existence of the permanent secretariat; despite its numerical weakness this organization is more like an Imperial General Staff than is the body actually called by that name. The British military writers have all suggested that its development should be secured upon larger bases, so that it could ally with its present functions the general direction, under the authority of the Cabinet, of the naval and military forces acting in combination. The chief of this Imperial General Staff, as thus constituted, should be alternately a sailor and a soldier.

But while we await this reform, the progress already made is enough, practically, to ensure that there shall be no repetition of the regrettable differences of views which came to light last autumn. The intervention on the Continent of the British Army is a diplomatic and military act too serious for its execution to be left to an eleventh hour inspiration. If the Government should thus decide, in agreement with the Committee of Imperial Defence, then the duty of the Navy and of the Army must be worked out in all its details. In the words of Pitt, they should be employed like a single weapon, the one being the blade and the other the hilt.

As to the principle of co-operation, we say, with the *Observer*, that if Great Britain is to confine herself in the event of war to the proposal that she shall defend our shores, that for us would be an absurd offer. Let us here add that an exaggerated importance is given to the rôle she might play by starving Germany through the capture of her merchantmen. "However unpleasant this statement may be," writes Count Reventlow, in the *Deutsche Tages Zeitung*,² "the French ought to realize that the German population can, in case of need, draw its food supplies from its own territories." This assertion is contradicted by Herr Arthur von Gwinner, director of the *Deutsche Bank*,

¹ The Committee of Imperial Defence was created in 1904. It has as regular members, seven Ministers, two being representatives of the Admiralty, and two of the War Office; in addition, members are selected from among eminent soldiers and sailors; finally there is a permanent secretariat, composed of naval and military officers of the rank of captain, and also of colonial officials.

² "British participation on the Continent in a Franco-German War," *Deutsche Tages Zeitung*, 29th February and 1st March, 1912.

according to whom,¹ Germany annually imports cereals for a seventh of the population—say, nine million inhabitants; but it would have the resources of the Italian ports and of the Ottoman railways, while the projected connection between the Rhine and the Danube will further facilitate the solution of the supply question by way of the Balkan States.

The latter author concludes thus: "Nothing but the effective participation of the British Army in Continental battles can give the smallest value to the Entente Cordiale."

If British public opinion has not yet definitely adopted this idea, one may believe that it will be led to do so by one of those sudden changes to which it is accustomed. Profoundly contemptuous of any mere abstract idea or principle, England will once more show us that, when her greatness and her safety are at stake, she always knows how to adopt the interests of the moment as her supreme rule of conduct.

¹ *Nord und Süd*, July, 1912.

