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The Conditions Governing the Efficiency of Armies of the Present Day

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ONE result of the advanced state of civilisation of the present day is that all nations become more or less fellow-sufferers by any disturbance of the peace. So the higher the aspirations of a nation, the more valuable its possessions, the more noble its aims, and the more full of promise its future, all the more imperative does it become its duty as it is also to its interest to intervene for the maintenance of peace.

The peaceful competition of nations and the due fulfilment of the duties cast upon them by civilisation can only be assured by political power; which, in its turn, can only be upheld by adequate military strength. And the sword, to be effective, must be able to make itself felt and ensure respect, even across the seas, and be sharp enough to enforce its will to prevent peace being disturbed. It is more difficult in these days of high civilisation than formerly to make good the ravages of war, and the victor has to suffer as well as the vanquished; for while a nation in arms is employing its whole strength to ensure victory, it is threatened by the danger that its industries will languishing, its trade suffering and passing into the hands of rivals, its civilising mission at a standstill, and, even in the event of a brilliant victory, a long period of depression will follow in all departments of its life.

It becomes, therefore, more than ever the duty of a belligerent Power, war once kindled, to bring it to an end in the shortest possible time. For it is only by a short war that the unchaining and intervention of dangerous human passions can be guarded against. The more powerful the sword and the more skilfully it is wielded, the more quickly will its work be completed, the less will be the sacrifice in blood and property on both sides, and the more easy to be borne the after effects of the war.

It is, therefore, a natural and immutable demand of our time that, as the commercial competition between nations becomes keener, there should also be a corresponding growth in their land and sea forces. A strong military Power can in all sincerity be considered as a guardian of the peace and promoter of the general well-being. The military strength of a nation is today in a certain measure a test of the value which it puts on its possessions, interests, and duties. But it is also true that a military Power is only strong if its moral development keeps equal pace with its growth. This is no new requirement, but it has assumed a greater importance with the destructive effect of modern
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weapons and the growth of Armies, while at the same time it has become more difficult to ensure it.

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The constantly increasing advance which technical knowledge has made in the present day has brought firearms to a high measure of perfection, as they can now be used with greater rapidity, greater precision, and at far longer ranges than formerly. The losses in future battles will not probably be heavier than in the past, for troops will only stand firm up to a certain point, and, their nerve once shaken, there will come a crisis; for the losses will be incurred in a much shorter time, and, as battle-fields will no longer be enveloped in clouds of smoke, they will occur in full view of the combatants, and this will naturally tend to have a demoralising effect upon them.

Detailed instructions for the training in the use of arms can be given, but this training demands more care and time if the full advantage is to be derived from modern weapons. It is more difficult than formerly to decide on the proper formations for battle tactics; for it will be necessary to advance on the enemy if decisive results are to be obtained; but as the attack in face of modern weapons must entail losses, it is impossible to lay down rules applicable to all cases. The instructions must allow greater latitude in the choice of methods than formerly, while greater demands will be made both on the leaders of all ranks and the soldiers. Officers and non-commissioned officers are always more exposed to fire than the men in carrying out their duties, hence they suffer a higher proportion of casualties, which have to be filled up from younger and presumably therefore less qualified sources. Moreover, conveying reports and orders, especially between the advanced fire-zones, will be much more difficult under a destructive fire than formerly. This all tends to make a picture of the battle-field less distinct than used to be the case, since the firing lines can no longer advance under cover of the smoke, and the lying down and the crawling forward of the fighting ranks has become much more important.

The commander, therefore, must possess greater foresight and a higher measure of the faculty of discrimination, both in his orders to his subordinates and the greater measure of independence he concedes them. These in their turn must be trained in a higher degree to think and act for themselves, must possess more strength of will, be able to assume a higher responsibility, and yet with their greater independence must understand the limits imposed upon them in carrying out the duty assigned to them. If the restraints of rigorous discipline are wanting, greater independence can only lead to greater losses and disorganisation.

A quick eye to notice everything passing before him, acumen to detect and utilise the weaknesses of the enemy, and the advantages which the nature of the country may offer to himself, influence over his subordinates—as also upon those acting in conjunction with him in the battle—these are the virtues which from time immemorial have made valuable soldiers; and they are the qualities which to-day must be developed in our junior and youngest officers and among the men if we are to remain victors in battle.

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The more wheels a piece of mechanism has, the greater are the chances of friction, which will prevent its working smoothly. The
larger the Army, the more numerous are its component parts, and there must be all the greater care taken to prevent any opportunities for misunderstandings or mishaps occurring.

The higher branches of Armies have increased both in number and strength, and especially the Artillery; for the corps, in spite of the destructive effect of modern weapons, have to be made capable of carrying out their duties independently. At the same time the supply columns and trains are larger in proportion to the fighting troops than formerly, and consequently the dead weight continually increases which is attached to them; the different kinds of quick-firing weapons require more ammunition, and the larger Armies, as they will no longer be able to subsist as much as they used to do upon the theatre of war, must be accompanied by greater quantities of supplies.

The employment of larger masses of men limits the dispersal over the country of single units, as the demands on the line of communications to be used must be kept as low as possible, nor will a general care to run the risk of finding himself weak at a decisive moment; the column of march will therefore be longer, the finding of shelter, as well as the providing of all that the Army requires, becomes more difficult, while the physical strain on the troops is also increased.

Long columns and restricted freedom of lateral movement (Arm- freiheit) make changes in the direction of masses once in motion more difficult, and do not as a rule admit of mistakes being repaired with impunity. A rapid change of front of an Army under these circumstances while keeping in touch with the supplies will always be difficult. If unwieldiness is to be reduced to a minimum, a high measure of foresight and skill on the part of the commanders is necessary, and their instructions to their subordinates must be quite clear. Foresight is a safeguard against being surprised, and makes it possible, on the other hand, to surprise the enemy. A surprise is a source of great danger when masses of men are concerned. Foresight must be supported by thorough information about the enemy and his intentions. The larger the bodies of men to be moved, the earlier must the determination to do so be arrived at, and the necessary orders communicated, to ensure the movement being carried out in time. It is therefore necessary to look well ahead from the first. But the best information and most practical orders are of no value if they do not reach the spot where they are required, so that the first can be used and the latter carried out. It is therefore of the greatest importance to have a rapid and trustworthy means of transmitting information and orders over wide distances from the point of the furthest advance to headquarters, between neighbouring bodies and widely separated divisions of the Army. The larger the Armies which stand opposed to each other, the more numerous the units whose manoeuvring has to be taken into consideration, the more difficult is a just estimate of the situation, and the more momentous the decision. Should the weapon fail, or should it be badly handled, then the larger the forces the worse the defeat will be. Naturally both sides will be well aware of this, so the struggle for the most complete victory will be all the more severe than formerly. Should either commander not feel equal to the task imposed upon him, all the greater will be the temptation to ward off as long as possible the decisive blow by drawing back, and in this way damaging the enemy, whose chief concern will be to end the war as speedily as possible.
Each opponent will endeavour to secure the superiority in numbers, but victory can only be hoped for if on the side of the superior numbers are also to be found higher moral and physical qualities in the troops and greater skill on the part of the leaders.

The weapon will not, however, fail, if its organisation, armament, and equipment of every kind, and its training, particularly that of its officers, have been brought up to the standard demanded by modern war.

The importance of the strictest discipline, as well as greater independence for modern fighting, makes it essential that the leaders of every rank should have learnt to thoroughly understand each other during peace and have an intimate knowledge of their troops. It will therefore be of the utmost value that the units brought into the field, whether large or small, should have been already trained to act together, and as far as the creation of new ones is concerned, that the large proportion of officers and non-commissioned officers required for these should be kept ready in peace-time as supernumeraries.

But in view of the increased complexity of modern armaments and the purpose to which they are applied, and of the large number of Reservists who, in case of mobilisation, have to be recalled from their work in order to bring the Army up to a war footing, most careful preparation in advance is requisite, even when the organisation of the peace Army approximates as nearly as possible to that of the Army for the field.

Since the duties and responsibilities of all ranks have become greater, an increased measure of professional training is demanded. A thorough knowledge of one's duty gives confidence and self-dependence, and enables the possessor to influence others. And such knowledge must especially be required of the leaders of all ranks, who are the soul of the Army. The higher the soldierly knowledge and skill to be found in it, the greater generally is the value of the Army. Example counts for much, and a highly capable body of officers is a guarantee for good troops.

The shortness of the period of service necessitates its being utilised to the fullest extent; but the bow must not be strained, hence, as far as possible, all work must be excluded which is of no military value, while the most approved means of instruction, suitable ranges, and extensive exercise grounds, must be provided. Above everything, whether exercises are on a small or large scale, they must be carried out as far as possible under what would be actual service conditions, so that the picture of warlike actuality, which impresses itself on both men and their leaders, may differ as little as possible from the reality, so that when the time comes they may not be taken by surprise by the unexpected, and their steadiness jeopardised. The greater mental and bodily strain which such a training entails must be met by increased care for the welfare of the troops, by better quarters, and better nourishment. The larger the masses of men who are to be led the more important is it that manoeuvres should be undertaken by large units brought as far as possible up to war strength. They bring, at least, in some measure before the eye, the difficulties of harmonising movement, time and space, and afford practical teaching not only for the higher commanders, but also for their mouthpieces, the officers of the general staff. It is only such manoeuvres which make it possible to practise, complete, and adopt a rapid and trustworthy method of communicating intelligence and orders which will stand the test of war.
Hand in hand with the practical professional training, and inseparable from it, must proceed the inculcation of the strictest discipline, and at the same time modest self-dependence, which, with an increase in volition, are pressingly demanded in the fighting of to-day. Everybody must be convinced that the most severe discipline is as necessary for the advantage and good of the individual as for the whole. The abler the leaders, the more will they avail themselves of every opportunity to enforce this requirement.

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Practical knowledge cannot dispense with scientific; and the higher the standard of the general education of a nation—and with it that of the bulk of the Army—the greater becomes the necessity that the leaders should combine the most perfect practical training with a high standard of military and general knowledge. And as long as this education keeps apart from mere book-learning, as long as it is based on practical experience, and confers on its possessor greater freedom and confidence in the execution of his duty, it tends directly to the improvement of his professional education.

Military history takes a high place among the subjects to be mastered to-day by officers. The conduct of war and leadership in battle are naturally subject to continual modification; but the changes brought about by modern weapons and the growth of armies are greater and more important than formerly; and we have no example as yet which will serve to guide us. All the more important and more difficult, therefore, is it to obtain a just estimate of their influence, as also of the demands which they will impose upon the military machine and its proper use in the future. Only a mind carefully trained in military lore will be able to adapt itself to these new conditions.

The men who have been in positions to become acquainted with war on a large scale, and who have acquired a really valuable and varied experience, are becoming fewer and fewer: consequently, therefore, the study of military history has increased in importance, in order to give to the rising generation a true picture of war and its requirements. If it is constantly kept in view that in war one has to reckon with the unexpected, with accidents and surprises of every kind, and that, as a rule, the time for observation, consideration, making up one's mind, and action, will be very short, and that all this has often to be done at a critical moment, when both mind and body are exhausted, and yet nevertheless the ways and means, and also the iron strength of will, must be found which will lead to the goal, we shall not be baffled by the difference which exists between the exemplification of knowledge and capacity founded upon war and peace, and we shall recognise that simplicity, both in the form of the military machine as well as in its use, is the most important factor. The longer peace lasts, the more readily will this be forgotten. If then, changes recognised as necessary are taken in hand when the opportunity serves, we shall be spared disappointments in war and not be compelled to seek remedies after dearly-bought experiences.

That besides military history, all study increasing the professional knowledge of officers, particularly that relating to the leading and employment of troops and the proper study of war in its different branches, has assumed increased importance, needs no proof. In addition, such studies deserve greater consideration, which develop judgment of men and matters, and increase a man's self-reliance and influence upon others. In this connection a knowledge of other
nations and countries must be considered, including as far as possible a thorough knowledge of foreign languages. Familiarity with a country and its people—of what may probably be a theatre of war, as well as a knowledge of the language—was in former days an advantage, but to-day such knowledge has much increased in importance; for it will lessen friction, permit of the duties in the enemy's country being simplified and more quickly and reliably carried out, besides tending to economy in time and labour—which are of the more importance the larger the size of the armies.

A personal knowledge, therefore, of a country and its people is particularly useful. Residence in a foreign country generally develops self-reliance, sharpens the gift of observation, enlarges the mental horizon, matures the power of discernment more rapidly, and makes a man more unprejudiced in dealing with what is new and strange. Knowledge of human nature is more readily acquired under these conditions than in the narrow circle of home-life with its many limitations. Thus it will be of special service to those officers who will be employed in high commands and in the more important posts, if they were given the opportunity to acquire this knowledge through travel, especially in civilised countries; and the ample means of communication in these days makes such travelling easy.

Technical science has from time immemorial played an important part in the service of the Army; but, however perfect the war material with which it supplies us, there remains always the more difficult art of turning this material to the best practical use in the field; hence technical science and education must on no account be allowed to supersede the tactical. There is nothing inconsistent, however in conceding a somewhat wider field nowadays to these matters than was formerly the case. The destructive effect of modern weapons, and the size of modern Armies, necessitate the calling in to our assistance of technical science wherever it can be utilised, but it is necessary to adapt it to the requirements of practical service in the field, and these are so unique from many points of view that, even when based on the general progress of mechanical industry, there will nevertheless always remain special branches applicable for war purposes in which further developments must take place. Simplicity in construction, arrangement and method of use, capacity to resist destroying influences of every kind and to stand reckless handling, are important requirements which must be complied with.

The numbers of the technical troops have, on the whole, kept pace with the growth of the Army, but not altogether in proportion to the increased number of technical problems which need solution in war to-day. Thus, all arms without exception must take upon themselves the execution of the many different forms of technical work, and as long as certain fixed limits are not overstepped, this can be done without more important interests suffering. The more the military forces of great States are drawn from the same classes, the more does it behove them to outvie the others in arming themselves with the latest improvements, and the better the weapons, the greater is the technical knowledge necessary to develop the full advantages these confer.

If successful operations are to be undertaken which require the sudden movement of a huge army of to-day, without regard to the
difficulties of the country and the communications, technical science must help in smoothing the road, in creating as rapidly as possible the means of communication freed from all obstacles, and also in destroying the same means of communication, should it be necessary to check the advance of the enemy.

New weapons lead continually to new means of protection, and these again to further improved arms, so that the proportion of one to the other remains in general much about the same. Permanent fortifications brought up to date can always do good service, if their use is rightly understood. Their value cannot be assessed on general principles; it depends on many factors, which may be changed by the military position and are not easily estimated, but in the main their value will depend on the skill of the leaders, on whom will lie the use to which they will be put, as also their attack or defence. The better armaments will, of themselves, give no ground for increasing the present permanent fortifications, the tendency of the present day being rather to restrict them, as they require the multiplication of special weapons and war material of all sorts, besides retaining troops as garrisons, which could be employed elsewhere. But new weapons will continually need adjustment and improvement, and this demands to-day not only more abundant material resources, but also a higher degree of technical knowledge and skill.

The possibility that in a future campaign a battle may be fought more frequently in the neighbourhood of fortified positions prepared beforehand and that, at close quarters at least, the erection of artificial cover will be of value, necessitates consideration in the equipment of modern Armies, and increases the demands on the training of the troops. The rôle which fortifications will play in a campaign cannot, however, be calculated in advance; it will be influenced by the moral of the troops and the character of their leading.

The means of communication of our generation afford indispensable technical aids for the carrying on of war. The Army in general can only increase with the development of the means of communication. First in importance is the railway system of the country, which must be adapted to the military interests. The rapid mobilisation and assemblage of a modern army, as well as military requirements during the time the war lasts, make such exceptionally heavy demands on both the railway and telegraph services of the country that they can only be met if everything in these departments is in complete order and fully organised for all emergencies, with a staff of experienced higher officials and trustworthy and perfectly trained juniors, and the military preparation for using them placed in the most skilful hands. The larger the numbers which are to be conveyed, all the more are disturbances in the traffic felt. Immediate removal of the causes of interruptions is a pressing necessity, if serious results are not to accrue. Therefore a body of troops, specially and fully trained for the work, and provided with the most serviceable material for the repair of bridges, etc., must be held in readiness in sufficient strength to carry out this duty.

The question of forwarding supplies securely for the Army, as well as striking out everything that is superfluous, becomes a more difficult and more important matter the larger the Army is. It is, therefore, a matter of great urgency to make it possible to resume traffic on destroyed railways in occupied hostile territory as rapidly as possible. Failing proper railways on a sufficiently extensive scale to meet the
needs, or should their repair require too long a time, the rapid construction of field railways becomes necessary. But both are only possible if a trained body of men, with no lack of material, is available. Moreover, for the completion of field railways the technical branch will have to provide mechanical means of transport, useful for war purposes, in order to meet the requirements of the mass of transport on the military lines of route.

A particularly important problem which calls for solution by military technical science at the present time is the provision for the use of the leaders of the Army, both superiors and subordinates, of a rapid and trustworthy method of conveying information and orders. Every system at present in use has its natural weak spots, while there is not one which fulfils all requirements. Wire telegraphy is liable to be affected by electrical disturbances, and, owing to the difficulty of protection in an enemy's country, is especially exposed to interruption; at the same time, getting it into working order often takes more time than is available. Optical telegraphy is easier to protect, its apparatus can be rapidly made available for use, and is suited for long distance signalling either by day or night; for secondary military purposes, at least during an action, where a few words or some signal previously agreed upon are sufficient, this method is of great value; but fog, rain, or snow are its enemies. Wireless telegraphy, uninfluenced by weather as it is, although still only in its infancy, must be considered for use in the field, but here there are difficulties also. Balloons must be favoured by chance and the direction of the wind, while captive ones require a clear atmosphere with comparative calm. Carrier pigeons can only be used in very rare circumstances. The fast automobile can be used for conveying information and verbal orders long distances, provided there are good roads. It comes to this: that all means of communication, which technical science provides, must be at command, with thoroughly trained staffs, and a sufficient supply, so that in any case one, and if possible several, of the different methods may be available. The difficulty will be in efficient training and in keeping them all in readiness for service.

A highly developed system of railway communication in their own country, with a body of railway troops carefully trained to the work, with home manufactories capably managed, are the important preliminary conditions for the employment of large armies. Mechanical methods of transport maintain the supplies required for food and warlike necessaries and make for greater freedom in the operations; while a proper method of communicating information helps to compensate for the difficulties created by the massing of men, makes it possible to work as widely-separated bodies of troops, saves waste of power, and even lessens losses.

The military service of to-day thus accepts unreservedly the claims of technical science, but that the latter should be used to the best advantage demands not only a liberal expenditure of money, but also calls for higher professional training of the soldiers, and above all of the officers. With the progress of technical knowledge the conduct of warlike operations will undergo further development, but technical science has its limitations, which require to be carefully watched, otherwise the danger exists that, with the increased complexity of material, the necessary simplicity of all action in face of the enemy may be lost sight of. It is therefore necessary that the numerous improvements
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which the highly-developed technical science of our time puts at the disposal of the Army should be subjected to the most severe tests under service conditions before being adopted for use in the field.

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The active period of service is almost universally too short for imparting all the qualities, tending to make up the strength of an army, which are demanded to-day. But as a preliminary to its work and hand in hand with it, go the education of the people and the school of life, which are shaped and influenced by the State. For the State has a paramount interest not only in demanding those qualities that are of use to the defenders of the Fatherland, but in ensuring them. For the majority of the Army in case of mobilisation is drawn from the Reserves, and in almost all cases in almost all countries the men are transferred from the regular and narrow restricted life of the factory, to the constantly changing, strenuous work of war, which claims the men's whole energies.

Bodily strength, mental and moral soundness, strong nerves, the best possible education, skill in his civil calling, the habit of working, are qualities which one can only wish should be possessed by everyone liable for service on his entrance into the Army, and which the men in the Reserve should strive to retain. These qualities are also the soil which fosters strength of will, the developing and strengthening of which is one of the most important problems of military education. Only healthy bodies and minds can develop the extraordinary powers called for at times of great stress, and withstand the greater mental strain induced by the fighting of the present day. Good school education awakens the understanding, opens the eyes, calls out the powers of observation, and makes for trustworthiness and self-dependence in thought and judgment. And the more perfect the man's knowledge, and the more practical experience he has had in his civil calling, all the more valuable will he be when he is called upon to use his knowledge and skill under the more difficult conditions of war; and it is only by an earnest, continuous military education, under the inculcation of the most stringent discipline, that he can adapt himself fully to meet these conditions.

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Only from a peace army, which in organisation, equipment, and training comes up fully to the demands of modern war can well-trained men be drawn for high command who will be equal to the more difficult duty imposed upon them, and understand how to use with success the implement to their hand. For it is the men of ripe and valuable practical experience, who consider well the feasibility and the consequences of what they propose to do, and who are accustomed to observe, and form their judgments from a higher standpoint, who are able to act with self-reliance, and show themselves leaders in the highest sense of the word. Such men's capacity for making up their minds will not detract from their higher discretion, while their strength of will, fearless of the friction their resolves encounter, will guarantee the attainment of the object of their desire.

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The moral duty of all to make and to keep themselves fit, in the highest sense of the word, to fight for his Fatherland may indeed deprive a nation of a certain amount of active power when engaged
in a peaceful competition with others; but on the other hand, no nation which dispenses with an ideal goal can be trained to the duties which its education lays upon it, and although it may be able to amass wealth, it will be scarcely strong enough to protect itself in times of danger. There is a very lively feeling that where a high standard of true culture is reached, the nation must be sound both morally and physically. Such a nation will also show itself capable of solving the problems which fall to it in war outside its scene of action; since a great war affects the whole nation and the country, whether the enemy is able to penetrate into it or not. For not only have arrangements to be made for a continual flow of reinforcements, to meet the drain of war, and of supplies of all kinds, but—so far as is attainable—for the carrying on of the peaceful struggle in the regions of trade and industry. Not only must the sources of industry be preserved from extinction, but they must flow more freely if possible, in order that the means may be available for sustaining a prolonged war, and successfully emerging from it without lasting damage to the general well-being of the country. It is self-evident that this becomes a matter of greater difficulty, the larger the number of the sons of the Fatherland who are re-called unexpectedly to the colours, the higher the civilisation of the country, and the more numerous the threads which war threatens to snap, and which must be taken up by substitutes, since they may not be permanently broken. This interchange between soldiers and civilians is only possible where a nation is morally and physically sound, and thoroughly skilled in every department of life, and where there is a high standard of capacity for work.

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The size of an army is limited by the possibility of organising, arming, equipping, training, and providing it with a sufficient number of capable leaders, so that it may be trusted to meet the demands which a war to-day will make upon it. This limit differs for different nations; the available source from which the personnel can be drawn is among other features of importance.

The Commander-in-Chief is the inspiring spirit of the Army. The larger it is and the shorter the period of service, the more will it bear the distinguishing characteristics of the nation. Both during the peace training and on active service every means must be adopted to advance the good and weed out the bad. Naturally, however, the methods to be adopted for bringing an Army up to the highest standard must vary. What is good in other Armies cannot be adopted at short notice, a grafting of foreign shoots upon the fighting force of a country is not easily effected. The power to put forth new branches must be derived, as in the case of an oak, always from its own roots.

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Thus it will be seen that the conditions on which the efficiency of a modern Army ultimately depend are both complex and difficult to analyse; but without their due comprehension the successful prosecution of a war is impossible. War is the final arbiter between nations, and it alone decides whether the conditions for survival are present in the race, and have been duly and intelligently appreciated. It is not only the touchstone of the Army but of the nation itself.
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If the Army is to deserve the nation's confidence, then it is necessary nowadays to spend money freely, and to make careful provision, not only for military but for national education. This throws upon the whole community both individual duties and also certain restrictions, but on the other hand it promises a thoroughly capable nation and an assured future.

What is won in the schools of the Army and Navy in bodily strength, in the steeling of the will and character and in the manly virtues of every kind remains with the people, and the soldier or sailor leaving the Service takes all those qualities with him as a valuable endowment for the battle of life. A strong war-force compensates for all that is expended on it; it is only expensive when it is insufficient and its moral worth has not been maintained at a high standard. For if it is no longer feared, if it no longer affords the necessary support to the political power of the State, it may be considered to have suffered defeat already in peace, and this is worth more to the adversary than a victory won at the cost of much bloodshed. And when time or history speaks of a permanent decline of a nation's military strength, it will generally be found that this coincides with the decline of the nation itself.