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The Press in War

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THE PRESS IN WAR.

By H. A. GWYNNE, ESQ. (Editor *Morning Post*).

On Wednesday, November 5th, 1913.

R. H. BRADE, ESQ., C.B., in the Chair.

THE CHAIRMAN: Gentlemen, I think the editor of the *Morning Post* requires very little or no introduction anywhere, but perhaps he will bear with me if I briefly remind this audience of his many and varied experiences as a correspondent, mostly with armed forces in the field, in such different parts of the world as the Balkans; Ashanti, 1895; Egypt, 1896; the Turco-Greek War, 1897; Berber; Peking; and last, but not least, throughout the South African War. I will now ask Mr. Gwynne to be good enough to read his lecture.

LECTURE.

IT is all to the good that the Royal United Service Institution should encourage a discussion on this most important question. It is distinctly a matter which requires full ventilation in time of peace since the chances are that a system hastily devised just before or at the moment of an outbreak of hostilities, may do more harm than good. It would be idle to disguise the fact that there are very great difficulties to surmount in evolving a plan which would satisfy the requirements of the naval and military authorities, and at the same time not be too onerous to those who would have to submit to its regulations. The reasons are fairly obvious, for the business of the Press is to buy and sell news, and any arbitrary restriction of its business is likely to be unpopular and would come as a shock, at any rate in the first instance, to most of the profession. On the other hand, as good citizens we have to remember that war is the *ultima ratio*, and that *inter arma silent leges*.

It is necessary to insist on this fact because any interference with the everyday work of any portion of the inhabitants of Great Britain is and can only be justified by the fact that the nation is at war, or is likely to be at war, or, in other words, that the nation has deliberately made up its mind that for its own safety it must have recourse to brute force, pure and simple. This appeal to arms may in very many cases leave undisturbed a

great portion of our population. Our sailors and soldiers obviously are immediately affected. It may, or may not, affect our industrial life. That depends upon the nature of the war in which we might be engaged. But the subject that we have to discuss is in what respect it shall affect that great profession and that vast industry which we call the Press.

WAR. OPPORTUNITY TO THE JOURNALIST.

Remembering that this great organization exists for the purpose of purveying news to its customers, it is easy to see how a great war in which Great Britain might be engaged would be a matter of supreme importance, for it would provide material for nearly every kind of journalistic enterprise. It would at the same time be a matter in which every individual in the country would be intensely interested. Furthermore, to speak in terms of trade, an opportunity would be provided for selling its wares—news—such as no living journalist has experienced. It has to be remembered that we have not been engaged in warfare with a great Power since the Crimean War, and at that time the means of gathering and transmitting news were quite primitive compared with the facilities available to-day. Now every big newspaper in England is equipped with a staff and organization and apparatus which would enable it to cope successfully with almost any event of importance, and I imagine that the whole of the profession—as a profession—would regard a great war as providing a magnificent opportunity for demonstrating the perfection of its machine.

It is a profound mistake to think that newspapers welcome war in the ordinary way as a means of enabling them to increase their circulation and, consequently, their profits; for, as a matter of fact, there is hardly a single instance in recent years of a newspaper, however well it has been served in the field, having made up by increased prosperity the money it has expended in its war service. In the case of a war with a great European Power, where it would not be necessary to send correspondents great distances to gather news, and where, indeed, some of the news might be at one's door-step, so to speak, and in addition, when it is borne in mind that every man and woman in the country would be eagerly looking for the most trivial particulars of the great conflict, the Press would stand to gain enormously.

PUBLICITY v. SECRECY.

We, therefore, begin with this contrast: the nation has decided to appeal to arms, and its success in that appeal will depend to a very great extent upon the concealment of its plans and their operations. On the other hand, we have a great organization wielding enormous power, able to influence Governments and even to affect generals in the field, seeing before

it the greatest opportunity that journalism has ever had in England of collecting and conveying to its readers the news of an all-absorbing conflict. This picture, which I do not think is overdrawn, gives some idea of the difficulties of the problem of devising a system which would reconcile these apparently incompatible needs.

BEFORE THE OUTBREAK OF WAR.

As, however, everybody will concede that the needs of the nation must override the needs of any part of it, we would consider first of all the point of view of those who have charge of our naval and military operations, and try to find out as far as possible what their requirements are likely to be. Here we are at once confronted with difficulties. A Government that has made up its mind that war is likely to come, or that the only way out of a situation is an ultimate declaration of war, must obviously keep its views and its intentions to itself, for on the secrecy of its preparations may depend the success or failure in the initial—often the most important—stages of the war. On the other hand, the Press, if not taken into the confidence of those in authority, would go gaily on and, unconsciously perhaps, give away the most profound secrets and the most valuable information to our potential enemy, simply because it would not recognize the significance of the news it was giving.

What is the Government to do? It cannot take every newspaper editor into its confidence, for that ultimately would be giving away the whole secret; for though I claim on behalf of the Press that its members are the best keepers of secrets in England, yet a secret which is shared by two or three thousand men, all of whom may have strong views as to the utility or futility of the Government's policy, would no longer be a secret. The Government of the country could no doubt by an Order in Council prevent the Press giving any information of a naval or military character, or, indeed, any information likely to be of use to the enemy; but here again the difficulty would be by no means solved, for the issue of such an order would be taken by our potential enemy as an indication of the Government's intentions, and the remedy would probably be worse than the evil.

What then is the solution? Confidential communication with every editor in England is almost impossible; an Order in Council would do more harm than good; and yet in those critical weeks or months before a war was declared, information of the utmost value to the enemy would be freely though unconsciously circulated in the columns of the Press. The remedy, it seems to me, lies in the hands of our naval and military authorities. In the first place they should exercise a strict control over their own people of every rank, and render it very

difficult, if not impossible, for information, divulgence of which would endanger the State, to reach the newspapers. There are additional precautions which they should take, but their nature is such that I think they are best left undiscussed in public.

THE ACTUAL CONFLICT.

In the case of a conflict with a great Power it is generally conceded that the first few weeks of the campaign are the most important. Indeed, there is a general opinion that campaigns will be decided more rapidly to-day than they were in the past, and at any rate we can eliminate from the list of possibilities a war which might last for a year or so. It is well to bear in mind the fact that we have not been engaged in a European war for such a great number of years that the public is unaccustomed to restrictions on the news supplied to it by the Press. And in addition, too, the public has been accustomed to have it hot after the event. The wonderful progress in means of communication which have enabled newspapers to serve their public with such speed is also, it must be remembered, open to the spy when he wishes to communicate to his superiors. And for the same cause the precautions to be taken to prevent news of advantage to the enemy reaching him will have to be much greater and more careful and more rapid in their effect.

There can be little doubt that the public would readily acquiesce in almost any restrictions as regards news after, say, a month or six weeks of a campaign, for they would by that time have realized the enormous importance of keeping secret the operations of war; but the difficulty will be in the most important stages of the war, the beginning, for we shall have to deal with a public unused to limitations of news and uneasy because of them.

THE PRESS SUBORDINATE IN NATIONAL EMERGENCIES.

It is, therefore, necessary at this juncture to realize that a state of war means the abrogation of all the ordinary amenities of life, provided that abrogation is found necessary in the national interest, and I lay it down as a principle that the members of the Press must subordinate themselves to the needs of the national safety in the same way as other interests or individuals do. But there is no other section of the public which possesses power in such concentrated form and in a form so easily available to act as the Press, and while it would be comparatively easy to exercise restrictive jurisdiction over private enterprises, and to set a limit to their energies, where they might be in opposition to the national good, to do this with the Press requires careful thought and a good deal of tact. Every man, woman, and child in England, directly or indirectly, relies upon the Press for its daily news, and in the event of a war

this dependence upon and eagerness for news would be intensified one hundred-fold because of the war's universal appeal to the national interest.

CO-OPERATION SUGGESTED.

In order to satisfy the demands of the authorities for secrecy and the natural desire of the people for news, it seems to me that the best way would be, as it were, a half-way house. That newspapers would readily agree to omit all reference to movements of troops on the outbreak of war I have no doubt whatever. But that during the early stages and the most critical stages of the war, the Press and the public behind the Press would be content with an arbitrarily enforced blank silence, I doubt very much. It therefore remains to discuss how the necessary information should be given. I am not now dealing with the question of war correspondence, which subject, I think, is outside the purview of this paper, and besides, it is a subject with which, I believe, the authorities are now dealing. In addition, correspondents in the field will be under the orders of the officers commanding the military operations, and will, therefore, have to conform to their desires and wishes.

A COMMITTEE OF JOURNALISTS.

It seems to me that co-operation between the Press and the authorities is essential in order to satisfy the public demand for news and the military need for secrecy, and I would suggest that a small committee of not more than ten be formed, composed of eminent journalists, and elected by the profession, or selected by the Government, as the case may be. This committee should enjoy to the very fullest extent the absolute confidence of the newspapers of England, and not only that, they should be names which would carry respect with the general public. To this committee should be given a place in the Admiralty or War Office on the outbreak of war, and they should work in close co-operation with either one officer or a committee of officers appointed by the authorities. These Press representatives should be men of such a stamp that they could be told a good deal more than could be confided to the Press generally, and it would be their business to prepare every day an account of what is going on, or to refrain from saying anything at all, in conjunction with the naval and military authorities. Acting with a full knowledge of the issues at stake they would be less likely to do anything which would be harmful to the country's interests.

It seems to me that in this way two objects would be gained: First of all it is reasonable to suppose that the public would be content with no information at all if they were assured that the silence was approved by the representatives of the Press; and in the second place, all information that would be

given to them would have added value in coming through the representatives of the Press and would not be calculated to injure the operations of the Navy or Army inasmuch as it would have the approval of the authorities.

THE ADVANTAGES OF THE SUGGESTION.

There are other advantages in the proposal which are worthy of consideration. In the first place the War Office would no longer be harassed at a most critical period by Press importunities. Such matters being left to the committee, they could rest assured that whether information or no information was vouchsafed to the public, the Press would be satisfied and therefore, to a great extent, the public also; and they could go on with their plans without any pre-occupation regarding publicity. My own conviction is that there would be no trouble whatever in establishing such a system, although, of course, in times of peace the suggestion is bound to meet with a good deal of criticism; but I feel more and more assured that in case of a great national emergency such as a war with a great European Power, it would work smoothly, and the Press would carry out the arrangement loyally.

OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION.

It is well, however, to remember that the Press is not the only sinner in regard to the circulation of information which may be useful to the enemy. If the authorities are going to ask the Press to co-operate in the matter of restricting information, they must on their side see to it that information which it has been their custom hitherto to circulate, shall no longer be given. I refer to the casualty list. An astute enemy, on the principle of *ex pede Herculem*, knowing that Private Jones, No. 19130, of the 104th Lancers was killed or wounded, will reconstruct from that little item the fact that Private Jones belonged to the 104th Lancers, that the 104th Lancers belonged to the Third Cavalry Brigade, and that there was a scrap at Backstadt, in which there were one or two casualties among the British cavalry. This might give him some valuable information; and in cases where cavalry screens have come into serious conflict and heavier casualties have ensued, the whole plan of campaign might conceivably be given away in the most innocent way possible by immediate publication of casualties. Then there is the question of officers' and men's letters. A local paper may publish a letter which has been brought over by a wounded friend or a returning transport, and in all innocence may give away most important information. To meet this, I think that great care will have to be exercised by the authorities, and the public will have to be educated to possess their souls in patience during the operations. This would be all the more easy if my suggestion was adopted. Without such a committee

sitting I am afraid the public might get uneasy, and this uneasiness might have a serious effect upon those in charge of the operations of war.

THE NECESSARY DETAILS.

Such is a very brief outline of a scheme which in my opinion will help to meet the need of regulating information in time of war, and so keep the enemy in ignorance of what is going on; but, of course, it would have to be accompanied by regulations, the details of which need not be discussed in this paper. An Order in Council would have to be promulgated forbidding all newspapers to publish any information regarding the operations at all except those items which come from the authorities through the Committee of Journalists, and this prohibition should be rigorously enforced. Otherwise the whole system would break down.

PROBABLE CRITICISM.

In one respect the suggestion I have put before you will receive severe criticism at the hands of many of my colleagues on the Press. They will no doubt declare that the proposal will have the effect of destroying, for the time being, newspaper enterprise, and of reducing all journals to a dead level of dull official information. To such critics I would suggest that the alternative systems which have been suggested are mostly of a strong repressive character, which, of course, failing any other workable scheme, would be absolutely essential. And I would put it to those in authority that such alternative schemes of iron suppression of all news relating to the war, have the disadvantage of antagonizing at the beginning, and therefore at the most critical time of the operations, both the Press and the public. I submit that my suggested Committee of Journalists would not only tend to remove distrust and resentment on the part of the journalist or the public, but it would have the added advantage that all regulations would be carried out not only in the letter but in the spirit, and the Press would be on its honour, as it were, to play the game.

THE WAR CORRESPONDENT.

As regards newspaper enterprise, the measures I have suggested need not interfere in the slightest degree with it. Newspaper enterprise in time of war up to the present has generally been measured in terms of speed, *i.e.*, the correspondent who despatched the first news of a battle or of some big operation was considered to be doing the best service for his paper. When you come to think of it, this is the very thing that the conductors of modern warfare would least desire, for early information, even in the case of a successful battle, might rob a commander

of the fruits of his victory. Anybody who has seen modern warfare will realize how difficult it is to perceive the difference between an engagement which is part of a bigger scheme and the battle which is to definitely decide the day, and, perhaps, the campaign. There is a certain amount of relaxation among the sternest of press censors when the troops to which he is attached have gained a victory, and it is conceivable that news might be telegraphed home of an action, which, though a bloody and prolonged one, might yet only be a part of a bigger scheme; and the premature announcement might spoil altogether the plans of the British Commander-in-Chief.

I would therefore urge that Press correspondents in the future, if they are allowed on the field at all (which I presume is still a debatable question), should not be allowed to send off their despatches until the General commanding thinks that the time is ripe. And this brings me back to the question of newspaper enterprise. The man who is the finest observer, the readiest and most powerful writer, will altogether justify his newspaper by sending good, connected and brilliant descriptions of operations, which otherwise, under the old system, only came out in scraps and snippets. Speaking as a journalist myself, I certainly would be quite content with such a plan, and I hold most strongly that it would not in any way debar a newspaper from gaining as much, if not more, credit than the old system produced.

THE RELIEF TO THE SAILOR AND SOLDIER.

I would reiterate the fact that the British public are quite unaccustomed to any restrictions in their news, and that this is really the chief difficulty with which the authorities will have to contend. Hence trouble and time could not be better expended than in making arrangements which will permit the authorities on the outbreak of war, and possibly before it, to be freed from pre-occupation regarding the publication of war news.

Some objection may be made to the proposal by sailors and soldiers because I have not indicated what would happen were the naval and military authorities on the one hand and the Committee of Journalists on the other to disagree. The answer is very simple, and I have indicated it in my paper: in such a case the Government possessing the right, would override the decision of the journalists, and could by administrative order forbid the publication of any news whatever of any kind regarding the operations then proceeding.

I have purposely refrained from going into details of any of the schemes which are possible or probable in connection with this subject of the Press in War. It seems to me that such details, when once a principle is established, could be much better worked out by those in the Admiralty and at the

War Office whose duty it will be to deal with this matter. I am quite convinced that although many obstacles must present themselves to the smooth working of such diametrically opposed ideals as are presented by both the parties to the contract, yet a really sound, workable system can be evolved by the exercise of a little give-and-take on both sides.

To my fellow journalists I would suggest that they should bear in mind that this matter requires adjustment in time of peace because in the moment of a national emergency there would be one obvious way out of the difficulties which would confront those in charge of our naval and military operations, and that is absolute prohibition. They would, therefore, find it altogether to their advantage to ask for an early consideration and a quick disposal of the matter.

To the sailor and the soldier who will have to consider this question, I would like to say that they would do well to bear in mind that their deliberations concern an organization whose whole aim and object are to provide news, and in a time of emergency, and therefore a time of extraordinary public interest, they will be forced to ask this huge and powerful news-gathering organization to restrict its energies in the very direction to which its whole attention is turned and where it hopes to achieve most. It is therefore essential that a comprehension of each other's difficulties should form the best basis of any negotiations which I hope may speedily ensue.

DISCUSSION.

Captain Harold Fisher: It seems to me the first question that arises in connection with the lecturer's suggestion is: Is it practical? Is a committee of ten journalists, however carefully selected, really going to command the complete confidence of the entire Press of the United Kingdom? The lecturer tells us that it will, but it is rather hard for the outsider, at least, to believe that. I do not know enough about journalism to be able to give a definite opinion. Then, again, you must remember that for many years it has been held to be perfectly respectable for anyone dealing in fire-arms to sell fire-arms, which they know, in all human probability, will be used against their own countrymen; and how, if that is going on, can you justly prevent people from satisfying what they consider to be legitimate demands of their own country for news of their own country's war? It seems to me that is rather a difficult position to get round. Then, again, is doctored news—because under this suggestion it must be doctored news—better than blank silence? That, again, is a point which might be argued. Personally I should prefer blank silence, because there is always something suspicious about news which has been garbled or doctored by the Government. Then, again, I think one of the weak points in the lecture is that we are not given any cases in point where the dissemination of news by the Press has been proved to be of any material advantage to the enemy. It has often been said that such has been the case, but proof is rare; and do those rare examples in any way outweigh the advantages which have been brought about by the letters which have been published in the

papers from their correspondents at the Front? The lecturer himself has given us no instances, and I therefore should like to be allowed to choose one for myself. Take Russell, in the Crimean War; he undoubtedly made a very great error as a correspondent when he wrote home and said exactly where a powder magazine was. But it was not Russell who published it; it was Delane, his editor, who passed it for publication. According to Mr. Gwynne's suggestion Delane would most certainly have been on that committee of ten, and he and the other nine no doubt would have put their heads together and said: "We will not publish this about the powder magazine." But then, would they have published anything about the hospitals; and, if not, should we have had the Army Medical Service as it exists to-day, or should we only just be getting it into that position? So that I am not sure that the suggestion is practical, and I am almost sure that it is reactionary. And, again, is it necessary? I do not think so. The lecturer said that journalists would welcome this idea as demonstrating the perfect working of their machine. Would not the very best way of demonstrating that perfection be by showing their discretion in disseminating news, and not by having the bit put into their mouths by the State?

Major Stewart Murray: I am not a journalist, but it seems to me that the previous speaker did not seem to quite realize the gravity of the situation which would arise if we were involved in a great European War, which is the war we have to consider. The one war we have to bear in mind is a war between the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente. That is the present situation, and that would be a situation of gravity such as has never arisen in our history before. The previous speaker spoke of minor journalists not being content in such a case with the decisions of the proposed committee; but I think the country would peremptorily sweep all such discontented journalists aside, and would not take any notice of their objections. That suggestion is not to be thought of for a moment. I think in such a war drastic measures will be taken, and that it will rest between a total prohibition of all news and such a compromise as the lecturer has suggested. I think the compromise suggested is a most valuable one, and I hope it will be thoroughly considered, because it seems to me to be a compromise which meets the situation very well indeed. Otherwise there will be nothing but an absolute total prohibition. Then the previous speaker also said that he thought total silence would be better than what he called doctored news. I do not agree at all. I think that total silence would perhaps tend to produce panic. What we have to guard against if war breaks out is panic. We want to keep the people quiet at all costs. We want to prevent panic during the first two three, or four weeks of war; we want to instil confidence, and to get a breathing space in which we can look round and accustom ourselves to the new conditions. We shall not be able to get that breathing space and keep the people quiet if there is a total prohibition of news. The only way in which it can be done is by giving them such news as will tend to bring back confidence, and I think that could be very much better done by such a committee as the lecturer suggested than by a total prohibition of news, which is the only alternative. Then the previous speaker said that no instances had been proved of news which had been published having led to disaster in the field. I am very much astonished to hear that. There are a great many cases of that kind, and I have no doubt the lecturer in his reply will tell us a few. I can produce one myself, which

I happened to come across yesterday. I was looking through the 1901 "Lloyd's General Report," and there I came across this very interesting report by Sir Henry Hozier, which I will read as a case in point. He said: "An instance of this kind came under my personal notice in the war of 1866. I was with Prince Frederick Charles of Prussia, who had to advance on Vienna, and his great duty was to hold the Austrian Army on the Bistritz, in order to allow the development of the attack of the Crown Prince on its flank and rear. It was of the utmost importance to Prince Frederick to know what Austrian force was in front of him, since, unless the whole force was there, it would be imprudent to hazard a general attack. On the morning of the battle he could not find out what the force was, but about 10 a.m. a telegram reached him from London, announcing that that morning an official intimation had appeared in a Vienna newspaper, stating that the whole Austrian force was concentrated under Field-Marshal Benedek on the Bistritz. The telegram had been sent from Vienna to the German Embassy in London, was at once despatched from London to Prince Frederick Charles in Bohemia, and within half an hour his army attacked all along the line. The result of that telegram was the loss to Austria of the leadership of Germany, and the ultimate establishment of the present German Empire under a Prussian Emperor." That is one instance, and I have no doubt the lecturer in his reply will give us a great many more.

Mr. Charles Lowe, formerly Berlin correspondent of *The Times*: I simply want to say a few words with reference to the complaint of Captain Harold Fisher that the lecturer has offered us no concrete instances of the disastrous effect of giving uncensored news. In this respect I think that perhaps the most classical instance in modern times occurred during the Franco-German War, and I may say, incidentally, that the story was once personally confirmed to me by Field-Marshal Count Blumenthal, who was Chief of the Staff of the Crown Prince during the campaign. After the decisive defeat of MacMahon at Wörth and elsewhere, he gathered together his shattered forces and retreated westwards in the direction of Châlons, as it was thought, with the intention of falling further back on Paris. The Germans pursued on a frontage of 40 miles, but through the supineness or otherwise of their cavalry divisions, they lost touch with MacMahon, and, as a matter of fact, at last did not really know where he was. Thus, enveloped in the "fog of war," they continued their westward march under the assumption that he was retiring on Châlons and Paris, till one day Headquarters received a telegram from Berlin, which had been forwarded from London—a telegram had appeared in the *Daily News*, I think, or, at any rate, in one of our great dailies—from the French side, indicating that MacMahon had changed his line of route, and, instead of retiring on Paris, was doubling back on the Meuse with intent to relieve Bazaine at Metz. I may add that the intelligence had originally been published in the *Temps*. On receipt of this momentous news the Germans right half-wheeled their 40 miles of front, and in this way succeeded in overtaking and surrounding the French at Sedan, and in bringing about the fall of the French Empire.

I may also mention that, in a volume published not very long ago, entitled the "Bernstorff Papers," dealing among other things with the career of that Count Bernstorff who was Prussian Minister in London in 1870, the son relates that the whole staff of the Embassy, during the earlier course of the French campaign, were almost exclusively engaged

in collating and appraising news from the seat of war and despatching it to Berlin in order that it might then be re-transmitted to Headquarters at the front.

Brigadier-General J. Long: I do not think it needs many words from me to emphasize the importance of what many speakers have said of to some extent "muzzling" the Press during war, in spite of what one speaker said to the contrary. You only want to look at the last great campaign in the Far East to bear out that view. Japan never would have won that campaign—at least, many military students consider so—had it not been for the marvellous control she held over her Press. We all owe our thanks to the lecturer for bringing this subject forward. He mentioned one point of very great importance when he said that the Army and Navy must watch themselves that they do not publish information, because there is no doubt about it that they do publish very full information in the lists of wounded which are circulated. It would make very little difference to the unfortunate relatives of the men killed or wounded if these lists were only published periodically, the statement being made that: "The following casualties have occurred within the last fortnight." It would convey no information then. After all, it would cost the country very little, when it is pouring out millions during a great campaign, to notify individually the people concerned, and not publish these great lists in newspapers, which can do no possible good to a country's cause. Then there is one point that Mr. Gwynne unfortunately did not touch on—and I do not know how it is going to be dealt with—and that is how are you going to muzzle the House of Commons? We suffered badly in the last war from that. That you can never muzzle. There is not much doubt that the talking in the House of Commons prolonged the South African War by possibly eighteen months. If Mr. Gwynne could propose a plan for that also I think he would receive the country's gratitude.

Captain Chas. Slack: There are one or two points I would like to refer to in regard to Mr. Gwynne's suggested committee, and that is, how is he going to prevent foreigners giving information to the British Press in case of a war? You could not stop French or German correspondents from giving information. There is another point also, namely, that he has not made any reference to the dissemination of false news. That is a very important point, which requires only one instance to bring home to your minds, and that is in the Marengo Campaign, when Napoleon caused, I think it was, about 8,000 conscripts to be assembled at Dijon, and to be reviewed with the intention of diverting the public's attention from his crossing the Alps, which ultimately led to his successful campaign in Austria.

Dr. T. Miller Maguire: I fear that I say a great deal too much here, as the Secretary knows to his cost, but the spirit moves me just to throw out a few words for altercation if not for discussion, as it would be a pity for the proceedings to close so soon. I am afraid this Institution is becoming altogether too passive. This Institution lives more by the fighting element than by those pacific notions which were promulgated by Mr. Angell quite recently, and it was evident that his views do not seem to thrive very much in this assembly. It is a curious fact that the moment we hear about the "zittlichkeit" Anglo-Saxon race going into an era of universal peace promulgated by some wandering

sophist of a Cabinet Minister, we are assembled to find out how we best can prevent the circulation of war news in this same Anglo-Saxon community, falsely so-called to the disgust of its martial Keltic members. Two of the principal points in connection with war are secrecy and celerity. With regard to secrecy, in modern times I think it is perfectly clear from what one learns in this Institution that very much depends in these multitudinous armies, armed to the teeth, which are facing each other on the frontiers, on the operations during the first few days—that is on the initiative. After the first defeats, after the disasters of the first week, it does not make much difference whether a MacMahon goes back to Paris or round to Sedan. He will be defeated and taken prisoner anyhow. Nor will Gambetta in his balloon save Metz after the disasters of Rezonville and Gravelotte. Whether the English journalist was kind enough to inform the people in Paris first, or the people in Berlin first, at any rate the German cavalry did not find out where MacMahon was, either by their own studious scouting, or by their own staff's studious labours in the Press. They found it out by a perfectly neutral person like the learned lecturer, sitting in his own office, so we are told.

Mr. Charles Lowe: They found it out through their Intelligence Department.

Dr. Miller Maguire: But from whom did they get the news?

Mr. Charles Lowe: It does not matter where they got it from.

Dr. Miller Maguire: Certainly not to the commanders of the Third and Fourth Armies, but it makes all the difference from the point of view of this discussion to stop news coming from the people themselves. The extreme right of the Fourth Army dragoons must have collided with MacMahon's extreme left in 24 hours, anyway.

Mr. Charles Lowe: It was the other side, the French side, that sent the news.

Dr. Miller Maguire: Sent the news to the French?

Mr. Charles Lowe: No, the news came from the French.

Dr. Miller Maguire: The news came from a correspondent, I take it, in France to a certain journalist in London, a very distinguished man. The people in Berlin got it from the *Times* in London, and being satisfied that the English people on the paper in London had got accurate information they transmitted it, not to a Frenchman, but to a German in their Embassy in Germany, from which it was transmitted to the right flank cavalry officer of the German Army between the Belgian frontier and Paris. Is that not so?

Mr. Charles Lowe: Yes.

Dr. Miller Maguire: Quite right, absolutely so. I should like to know exceedingly how any suggestion of the lecturer would prevent such disasters occurring through neutral States giving the information in modern wars, when the movements are so rapid as they were between August 25th and September 1st, 1870, or more rapid with modern appliances?

Mr. Charles Lowe: Because if there had been a censorship in France it would have been impossible for that telegram to have been forwarded

from France to London. It was the forwarding of that uncensored telegram from Paris to London that resulted in this colossal disaster to the French Army.

Dr. Miller Maguire: Not at all! The disaster was due to the same causes as led to Wöerth and Spicheren, and I should be quite ready to prolong this agreeable conversation with my friend, but my minutes are ebbing out, as well as your time, Sir. Admitting that the tremendous disaster of Sedan occurred because of the extraordinary and all-pervading and triumphant Anglo-Franco energy of the late departed saint, Mr. Delane, I think the sooner the war was over the better, if a nation goes to war in that condition. There is very little doubt about it that a nation ought to be ready for war. The French could have been told in time by their own staff to get ready for war, and were warned in time as the fools in town here have been warned in time. The French were told in time by their own staff to get ready for war by journalists and soldiers. They were warned exactly of what would occur months before; they had the best possible information from Berlin, from attachés, and they did not get ready for war. If a committee was to edit the Press, our Press would follow or accompany the degenerate army. Parliamentary speeches are dangerous to the last degree, from every point of view. Cannot you suggest a Committee of Legislators to suppress them and exclude them. The sooner we know what kind of people we have to deal with and get rid of them in times of peace the better. We want men, free men, powerful men, able men, men with foresight. Muzzling the Press will not give us these things. I have just been reading the life of a distinguished lady, Miss Nightingale, who tells us the state of things that existed in the country at the time of the Crimean War. Why, Sir! But for my late friend, Dr. Russell, we would have suffered most horribly in the Crimea. Because we are badly governed by Departments as it is, are we now of our own accord—we who have had the honour, like I have had myself of writing for the Press since I was 15—am I to be told that if I am spared to old age I am to be edited? Nothing has arisen in the course of this debate that would convince me that if the Press had been edited by the cabal that surrounded Marshal Leboeuf and M. Olivier, France would have done a bit better in the war against Germany. Would it have done better? It would have done worse—or it could not have been worse. If our Cabinet had been guided by committees of the Press before the war of 1899—if it had edited and censored the Press as well as the Generals—would it have done a bit better? I listened to every word Mr. Gwynne said most attentively, because I know he has much more experience of these matters than I have, he has made admirable suggestions. Beware of bureaucratic tyranny; maintain the freedom of our race in *The Press*; keep your eyes open and staring on corruption and folly. Thus, and not by secrecy and obscurantism, will you promote efficient celerity, able initiative, and readiness and despatch and success. Meanwhile I thank Mr. Gwynne—whose journal is an honour to literature—for his lecture.

Mr. H. A. Gwynne, in reply, said: I only wanted to establish the principle of co-operation between the Press and the naval and military authorities on the outbreak of war—that such a principle should be established before the outbreak of war, and that a committee such as I suggested should be formed immediately, if possible. My critics know perfectly well that blank silence is impossible to-day. I am sorry

it is impossible, but it is, and it is no use talking. There are the facts, and with those facts I tried to deal. One of my critics talked about the impracticability of getting ten men to represent the Press, having the confidence of the Press, and controlling the Press to a certain extent. I admit there is a great deal in what he says, that it would be difficult. But at any rate the suggestion is an honest attempt to deal with this enormously difficult problem. It is quite possible that ten men may quarrel, or that there may be a tremendous split between the naval and military authorities and the ten men. At the same time I am sure that the principle of co-operation between the Press and the naval and military authorities in times of conflict is the only way out. Captain Fisher talked about doctored news as against blank silence, and said that he preferred blank silence. I think I prefer blank silence on the whole, but it must be remembered that it is not what we individually prefer, it is what the country will take. The country will not take blank silence, and there is an end of it. With regard to doctored news, I never suggested for one moment that doctored news should be circulated; in fact, I have studiously avoided going into details because I could not say what kind of news such a committee would give forth. They might merely confine themselves to details, or a summary of events of a few days before—I do not know; and therefore I think a discussion on what they would do or how they would do it is rather beside the question at the present moment. With regard to the question of secrets being given away by the Press I think it was beside the question. We have now got new organizations: we have got wireless; we have got quicker communication; we have airships; we have all kinds of things. We have had no European War for many years, and we have to take precautions. We have a Press totally unaccustomed to restrictions of its news. In the South African War any paper could send out practically as many correspondents as it liked. It praised this General and damned the other General. Of course, it made the great mistake of putting the blame on the wrong man in condemning the regimental officer, who did practically all the work in South Africa. There was the case of a big war where there was no restriction. There was a censor, of course, but I think a vast amount of information was given away to the Boers through Delagoa Bay. The whole question is one of great difficulty because of this absence of restriction. There will be a lot of things to think about on the outbreak of a war, and I wanted to eliminate this particular question, and I urged immediate action, so that when a war came, in that particular matter the naval and military authorities would be free of pre-occupation. They can say "We need not bother about the Press; that is already arranged for; that is all right now" That will be of enormous value to those in charge of operations in time of war, and I believe it would satisfy the Press.

The Chairman: Before closing the proceedings, perhaps I may be granted just two or three minutes to make a small contribution to the discussion, because by the accident of my position in the much-abused War Office I have been privileged to have a certain amount of special information in regard to this subject that Mr. Gwynne has so ably dealt with. The problem that has been discussed has, as a matter of fact, engaged the very closest attention of official and Press authorities for the last few years, and during the last two, at any rate, some considerable progress has been made towards arriving at a solution. In general, I

think we may say that those who have to look at the problem from the two opposed, or, perhaps, opposite sides, have at last succeeded in coming to a mutual understanding, based on the one hand on frankness of communication, on the other on a subordination of private to national interests, and, generally, on mutual confidence and trust. At any rate, a distinct understanding exists in regard to news in peace time, and having, as I say, some special knowledge of the matter, I am glad to pay my tribute here to the wonderful powers of organization and to the high spirit of patriotism by which the Press of the United Kingdom have brought these transactions to this stage. From this understanding in peace time I think the passage is assured to an equally serviceable agreement in war, with machinery very much on the lines of those that Mr. Gwynne has sketched. The fact is, that it is now common ground that in regard to operations of war some measure of silence is necessary in the interests of the State, and the Press are prepared to agree to a much larger measure of silence than was perhaps the case a few years ago. With the assurance that all disabilities that have to be imposed are imposed on all alike, Press interests are now, I think, contemplating quite a rigorous censorship in time of war. So far so good. But I venture to think that those who are responsible for the matter have a very difficult job in front of them. Those who have discussed the matter in the last few months, and we who are here this afternoon, are mostly either officials or Press men, but I think it would be extremely difficult to make absolutely certain that unaided we are competent to gauge the feeling of the public, that is, the man in the street, the relatives of the officer or man in the field, and the like, all of whom have less special interests in whatever may have to be done. I spoke in general terms just now of a measure of silence on the part of the Press. I think the lecturer's committee could readily come to an agreement which would satisfy *them* as to where that line is to be drawn, but are they not possibly in danger of mistaking the measure of what the public will stand? I think Mr. Gwynne is prepared to admit that there are difficulties in that. In other words, how far will the nerves of the public stand silence, and with how little news will they be content? I think in that direction a great deal of discussion and research are still necessary. I do not know whether the lecturer would be prepared to answer for the public at large but I think there are very great difficulties in the way. Take, for instance, the prohibition of all casualty returns—how long would the public stand that? And after all, is not the British public, as a fact, in the habit of being rather suspicious of reticence, whether official or otherwise? Is it not inclined to argue from reticence that things are at their very worst rather than that they are at their very best, or even good at all? I think the sketch the lecturer has given is of enormous advantage to those who have to deal with the matter, but I do hope that in some way or another some sort of discussion will be provoked which will enable those who have to settle the question to be in a position to have some reasonable idea as to how far they can go in controlling the news service. Finally, I have to close the proceedings by presenting, on behalf of everyone, our very best thanks to Mr. Gwynne for his extremely able paper.

Colonel Sir Lonsdale Hale: On behalf of the Council, I thank you, Sir, for so kindly taking the Chair to-day. We are always very anxious to get in the Chair somebody who knows a great deal about the subject dealt with, and we are extremely obliged to you for your presence.