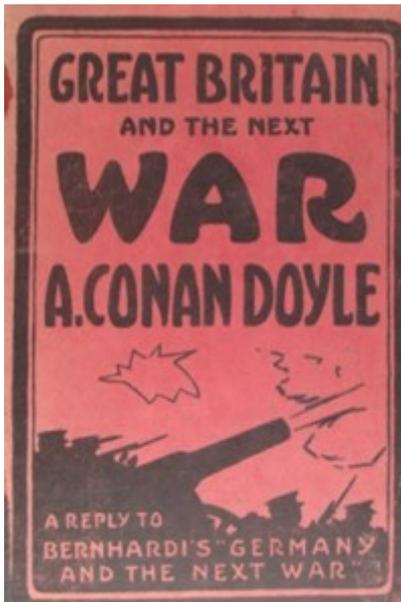


Conan Doyle, A. (1913) Great Britain and the Next War

**Arthur Conan Doyle (1913) *Great Britain and the Next War*** - published in *Fortnightly Review*, February 1913.



Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was one of the few major authors of the time who clearly foresaw the impending dangers. Now known mainly for his Sherlock Holmes stories, he was also an expert in military affairs, bluff, and outspoken in his criticism of the government. Ever since the Boer War he had been warning his countrymen about the inadequacies of the armed services. In 1912, he wrote an article called "Great Britain and the Next War," a response to General Friedrich von Bernhardi's book *Germany and the Next War*. Among other things he advocated the immediate building of a channel tunnel in order to supply an expeditionary force from a Britain blockaded by enemy submarines and the creation of a territorial army. In a story called "Danger" (1914), Conan Doyle made more explicit his fear of the submarine menace. In his scenario, Britain is brought to her knees in a few months by a blockade. The seven experts who replied to Conan Doyle's idea in the same issue of *The Strand Magazine* all poured scorn on the story. Some of them even doubted whether a civilized nation would use such a barbarous weapon as unrestricted submarine warfare. [Peter Buitenhuis (1987) *The Great War of Words: British, American and Canadian Propaganda and Fiction, 1914-1933*] Text from Project Gutenberg Australia :

#### NOTE

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is the historian of the Boer War as well as the creator of Sherlock Holmes, the skilled student of military operations as well as the ingenious deviser of plots; he is no less an intense patriot than a clear and logical thinker.

Writing early in 1913 to call to the attention of his fellow- countrymen the warning so openly given them by General von Bernhardi in his *Germany And The Next War*, Sir Arthur took occasion to analyze the German general's "case" against England and to answer his contentions in the light of history and reason. His summing up of German motives and German plans is particularly valuable to Americans in the light of after events, and incidentally the gentle raillery with which he punctures some of Bernhardi's statements is a delight to every one who has been entertained by Brigadier Gerard. His novel plan for national defence is of peculiar interest to every American who has ever crossed the English Channel, while his advice to his Irish fellow-countrymen seems prophetic.

And it is impressive to find a member of the Anglo-German Society, who has never been a serious believer in the so-called German menace, feeling so deeply the possibilities of the "philosophy" of Bernhardi as to write, "Every one of his propositions I dispute. But that is all beside the question. We have not to do with his argument, but with its results. These results are that he, a man whose opinion is of weight and a member of the ruling class in Germany, tells us frankly that Germany will attack us the moment she sees a favorable opportunity. I repeat that we should be mad if we did not take very serious notice of the warning."

#### GREAT BRITAIN AND THE NEXT WAR

I am a member of the Anglo-German Society for the improvement of the relations between the two countries, and I have never seriously believed in the German menace. Frequently I have found myself alone in a company of educated Englishmen in my opinion that it was non-existent—or at worst greatly exaggerated.

This conclusion was formed upon two grounds. The first was, that I knew it to be impossible that we could attack Germany save in the face of monstrous provocation. By the conditions

of our government, even if those in high places desired to do such a thing, it was utterly impracticable, for a foreign war could not be successfully carried on by Great Britain unless the overwhelming majority of the people approved of it. Our foreign, like our home, politics are governed by the vote of the proletariat. It would be impossible to wage an aggressive war against any Power if the public were not convinced of its justice and necessity. For this reason we could not attack Germany.

On the other hand, it seemed to be equally unthinkable that Germany should attack us. One fails to see what she could possibly hope to gain by such a proceeding. She had enemies already upon her eastern and western frontiers, and it was surely unlikely that she would go out of her way to pick a quarrel with the powerful British Empire. If she made war and lost it, her commerce would be set back and her rising colonial empire would be destroyed. If she won it, it was difficult to see when she could hope for the spoils. We could not give her greater facilities for trade than she has already. We could not give her habitable white colonies, for she would find it impossible to take possession of them in the face of the opposition of the inhabitants. An indemnity she could never force from us. Some coaling stations and possibly some tropical colonies, of which latter she already possesses abundance were the most that she could hope for. Would such a prize as that be worth the risk attending such a war? To me it seemed that there could be only one answer to such a question.

It still seems to me that this reasoning is solid I still think that it would be an insane action for Germany deliberately to plan an attack upon Great Britain. But unfortunately an attack delivered from mistaken motives is as damaging as any other attack, and the mischief is done before the insanity of it is realized. If I now believe such an attack to be possible, and it may be imminent, it is because I have been studying "Germany And The Next War," by General von Bernhardt.

A book written by such a man cannot be set aside as the mere ravings of a Pan-Germanic Anglophobe. So far as appears, he is not a Pan-German at all. There is no allusion to that Germania irredente which is the dream of the party. He is a man of note, and the first living authority in Germany upon some matters of military science. Does he carry the same weight when he writes of international politics and the actual use of those mighty forces which he has helped to form? We will hope not. But when a man speaks with the highest authority upon one subject, his voice cannot be entirely disregarded upon a kindred one. Besides, he continually labors, and with success, to make the reader understand that he is the direct modern disciple of that main German line of thought which traces from Frederic through Bismarck to the present day. He moves in circles which actually control the actions of their country in a manner to which we have no equivalent For all these reasons, his views cannot be lightly set aside, and should be most carefully studied by Britons. We know that we have no wish for war, and desire only to be left alone. Unfortunately, it takes two to make peace, even as it takes two to make a quarrel. There is a very clear statement here that the quarrel is imminent, and that we must think of the means, military, naval, and financial, by which we may meet it Since von Bernhardt's book may not be accessible to every reader of this article, I will begin by giving some idea of the situation as it appears to him, and of the course of action which he foreshadows and recommends.

He begins his argument by the uncompromising statement that war is a good thing in itself. All advance is founded upon struggle. Each nation has a right, and indeed a duty, to use violence where its interests are concerned and there is a tolerable hope of success. As to the obvious objection that such a doctrine bears no possible relation to Christianity, he is not prepared to admit the validity of the Christian ethics in international practice. In an ingenious passage he even attempts to bring the sanction of Christianity to support his bellicose views. He says:—

"Again, from the Christian standpoint, we arrive at the same conclusion. Christian morality is based, indeed, on the law of love. 'Love God above all things, and thy neighbor as thyself.'

This law can claim no significance for the relations of one country to another, since its application to politics would lead to a conflict of duties. The love which a man showed to another country as such would imply a want of love for his own countrymen. Such a system of politics must inevitably lead men astray. Christian morality is personal and social, and in its nature cannot be political. Its object is to promote morality of the individual, in order to strengthen him to work unselfishly in the interests of the community. It tells us to love our individual enemies, but does not remove the conception of enmity."

Having thus established the general thesis that a nation should not hesitate to declare war where a material advantage may be the reward, he sets out very clearly what are some of the causes for war which Germany can see before her. The following passages throw a light upon them:—

"Strong, healthy and flourishing nations increase in numbers. From a given moment they require a continual expansion of their frontiers, they require new territory for the accommodation of their surplus population. Since almost every part of the globe is inhabited, new territory must, as a rule, be obtained at the cost of its possessors—that is to say, by

conquest, which thus becomes a law of necessity."

Again:—

"Lastly, in all times the right of conquest by war has been admitted. It may be that a growing people cannot win colonies from uncivilized races, and yet the State wishes to retain the surplus population which the mother country can no longer feed. Then the only course left is to acquire the necessary territory by war. Thus the instinct of self-preservation leads inevitably to war, and the conquest of foreign soil. It is not the possessor, but the victor, who then has the right"

And he concludes:—

"Arbitration must be peculiarly detrimental to an aspiring people, which has not yet reached its political and national zenith, and is bent on expanding its power in order to play its part honorably in the civilized world."

And adds:—

"It must be borne in mind that a peaceful decision by an arbitration court can never replace in its effects and consequences a warlike decision, even as regards the State in whose favor it is pronounced."

To many of us it would seem a legitimate extension of the author's argument if we said that it would have a virile and bracing effect upon our characters if, when we had a grievance against our neighbor, we refrained from taking it into the law courts, but contented ourselves with breaking his head with a club. However, we are concerned here not so much with the validity of the German general's arguments as with their practical application so far as they affect ourselves.

Brushing aside the peace advocates, the writer continues: "To such views, the offspring of a false humanity, the clear and definite answer must be made that, under certain circumstances, it is not only the rights but the moral and political duty of the statesman to bring about a war. The acts of the State cannot be judged by the standard of individual morality." He quotes Treitschke: "The Christian duty of sacrifice for something higher does not exist for the State, for there is nothing higher than it in the world's history—consequently it cannot sacrifice itself to something higher." One would have hoped that a noble ideal and a moral purpose were something higher but it would be vain to claim that any country, ourselves included, has ever yet lived fully up to the doctrine. And yet some conscious striving, however imperfect, is surely better than such a deliberate negation.

Having laid down these general propositions of the value of war, and of the non-existence of international moral obligations. General von Bernhardt then proceeds to consider very fully the general position of Germany and the practical application of those doctrines. Within the limits of this article I can only give a general survey of the situation as seen by him. War is necessary for Germany, it should be waged as soon as is feasible, as certain factors in the situation tell in favor of her enemies. The chief of these factors are the reconstruction of the Russian fleet, which will be accomplished within a few years, and the preparation of a French native colonial force, which would be available for European hostilities. This also, though already undertaken, will take some years to perfect. Therefore, the immediate future is Germany's best opportunity.

In this war Germany places small confidence in Italy as an ally, since her interests are largely divergent, but she assumes complete solidarity with Austria. Austria and Germany have to reckon with France and Russia. Russia is slow in her movements, and Germany with her rapid mobilization, should be able to throw herself upon France without fear of her rear. Should she win a brilliant victory at the outset, Russia might refuse to compromise herself at all, especially if the quarrel could be so arranged that it would seem as if France had been the aggressor. Before the slow Slavonic mind had quite understood the situation and set her unwieldy strength in motion, her ally might be struck down, and she face to face with the two Germanic Powers, which would be more than a match for her.

Of the German army, which is to be the instrument of this world-drama. General von Bernhardt expresses the highest opinion: "The spirit which animates the troops, the ardor of attack, the heroism, the loyalty which prevail among them, justify the highest expectations. I am certain that if they are soon to be summoned to arms their exploits will astonish the world, provided only that they are led with skill and determination." How their "ardor of attack" has been tested it is difficult to see, but the world will probably agree that the German army is a most formidable force. When he goes on, however, to express the opinion that they would certainly overcome the French, the two armies being approximately of the same strength, it is not so easy to follow his argument. It is possible that even so high an authority as General von Bernhardt has not entirely appreciated how Germany has been the teacher of the world in military matters and how thoroughly her pupils have responded to that teaching. That attention to detail, perfection of arrangement for mobilization and careful preparation which have won German victories in the past may now be turned against her, and she may find that others can equal her in her own virtues.

Poor France, once conquered, is to be very harshly treated. Here is the passage which describes her fate:—

"In one way or another we must square our account with France if we wish for a free hand in our international policy. This is the first and foremost condition of a sound German policy, and since the hostility of France once for all cannot be removed by peaceful overtures, the matter must be settled by force of arms. France must be so completely crushed that she can never again come across our path."

It is not said how Germany could permanently extinguish France, and it is difficult to think it out. An indemnity, however large, would eventually be paid and France recover herself. Germany has found the half-German border provinces which she annexed so indigestible that she could hardly incorporate Champagne or any other purely French district. Italy might absorb some of Savoy and the French Riviera. If the country were artificially separated the various parts would fly together again at the first opportunity. Altogether the permanent sterilization of France would be no easy matter to effect. It would probably be attempted by imposing the condition that in future no army, save for police duties, would be allowed. The history of Prussia itself, however, shows that even so stringent a prohibition as this can be evaded by a conquered but indomitable people.

Let us now turn to General von Bernhardt's views upon ourselves, and, first of all, it is of interest to many of us to know what are those historical episodes which have caused him and many of his fellow-countrymen to take bitter exception to our national record. From our point of view we have repeatedly helped Germany in the past, and have asked for and received no other reward than the consciousness of having co-operated in some common cause. So it was in Marlborough's days. So in the days of Frederic. So also in those of Napoleon. To all these ties, which had seemed to us to be of importance, there is not a single allusion in this volume. On the other hand, there are very bitter references to some other historical events which must seem to us strangely inadequate as a cause for international hatred.

We may, indeed, congratulate ourselves as a nation, if no stronger indictment can be made against us than is contained in the book of the German general. The first episode upon which he animadverts is the ancient German grievance of the abandonment of Frederic the Great by England in the year 1761. One would have thought that there was some statute of limitations in such matters, but apparently there is none in the German mind. Let us grant that the premature cessation of a campaign is an injustice to one's associates, and let us admit also that a British Government under its party system can never be an absolutely stable ally. Having said so much, one may point out that there were several mitigating circumstances in this affair. We had fought for five years, granting considerable subsidies to Frederic during that time, and despatching British armies into the heart of Germany. The strain was very great, in a quarrel which did not vitally affect ourselves. The British nation had taken the view, not wholly unreasonably, that the war was being waged in the interests of Hanover, and upon a German rather than a British quarrel. When we stood out France did the same, so that the balance of power between the combatants was not greatly affected. Also, it may be pointed out as a curious historical fact that this treatment which he so much resented was exactly that which Frederic had himself accorded to his allies some years before at the close of the Silesian campaign. On that occasion he made an isolated peace with Maria Theresa, and left his associates, France and Bavaria, to meet the full force of the Austrian attack.

Finally, the whole episode has to be judged by the words of a modern writer: "Conditions may arise which are more powerful than the most honorable intentions. The country's own interests—considered, of course, in the highest ethical sense—must then turn the scale."

These sentences are not from the work of a British apologist, but from this very book of von Bernhardt's which scolds England for her supposed adherence to such principles. He also quotes, with approval, Treitschke's words: "Frederic the Great was all his life long charged with treachery because no treaty or alliance could ever induce him to renounce the right of free self-determination."

Setting aside this ancient grievance of the Seven Years' War, it is of interest to endeavor to find out whether there are any other solid grounds in the past for Germany's reprobation. Two more historical instances are held up as examples of our perfidy. The first is the bombardment of Copenhagen in 1807, when the British took forcible possession in time of peace of the Danish fleet. It must be admitted that the step was an extreme one, and only to be justified upon the plea of absolute necessity for vital national reasons. The British Government of the day believed that Napoleon was about to possess himself of the Danish fleet and would use it against themselves. Fouché has admitted in his Memoirs that the right was indeed given by a secret clause in the Treaty of Tilsit. It was a desperate time, when the strongest measures were continually being used against us, and it may be urged that similar measures were necessary in self-defence. Having once embarked upon the enterprise, and our demand being refused, there was no alternative but a bombardment of the city with its attendant loss of civilian life. It is not an exploit of which we need be proud, and at the best can only be described as a most painful and unfortunate necessity, but I should be surprised if the Danes, on looking back to it, judge it more harshly than some more recent experiences which they have had at the hands of General von Bernhardt's own fellow-countrymen. That

he is himself prepared to launch upon a similar enterprise in a much larger and more questionable shape is shown by his declaration that if Holland will not take sides against England in the next war it should be overrun by the German troops. General von Bernhardt's next historical charge is the bombardment of Alexandria in 1882, which he describes as having been effected upon hypocritical pretences in a season of peace. To those who have a recollection of that event and can recall the anti-European movement of Arabia and the massacre which preceded the bombardment, the charge will appear grotesque. But it is with a patchwork quilt of this sort that this German publicist endeavors to cover the unreasoning, but none the less formidable, jealousy and prejudice which inflame him against this country. The foolish fiction that the British Government declared war against the Boers in order to gain possession of their gold mines is again brought forward, though one would have imagined that even the gutter-Press who exploited it twelve years ago had abandoned it by now. If General von Bernhardt can explain how the British Government is the richer for these mines, or whether a single foreign shareholder has been dispossessed of his stock in them, he will be the first who has ever given a solid fact in favor of this ridiculous charge. In a previous paragraph of his book he declares that it was President Kruger who made the war, and that he was praiseworthy for so doing. Both statements cannot be true. If it was President Kruger who made the war, then it was not forced on by Great Britain in order to possess herself of the gold fields.

So much for the specific allegations against Great Britain. One can hardly regard them as being so serious as to wipe out the various claims, racial, religious and historical, which unite the two countries. However, we are only concerned with General von Bernhardt's conclusions, since he declares that his country is prepared to act upon them. There remain two general grounds upon which he considers that Germany should make war upon the British Empire. The first is to act as the champion of the human race in winning what he calls the freedom of the seas. The second is to further German expansion as a world Power, which is cramped by our opposition.

The first of these reasons is difficult to appreciate. British maritime power has been used to insure, not to destroy, the freedom of the seas. What smallest Power has ever been hindered in her legitimate business? It is only the pirate, the slaver and the gun-runner who can justly utter such a reproach. If the mere fact of having predominant latent strength upon the water is an encroachment upon the freedom of the sea, then some nation must always be guilty of it. After our mild supremacy we may well say to Germany, as Charles said to James: "No one will assassinate me in order to put you upon the throne." Her mandate is unendorsed by those whom she claims to represent.

But the second indictment is more formidable. We lie athwart Germany's world ambitions, even as, geographically, we lie across her outlets. But when closely looked at, what is it of which we deprive her, and is its attainment really a matter of such vital importances. Do we hamper her trade? On the contrary, we exhibit a generosity which meets with no acknowledgment, and which many of us have long held to be altogether excessive. Her manufactured goods are welcomed in without a tax, while ours are held out from Germany by a twenty per cent tariff. In India, Egypt and every colony which does not directly control its own financial policy, German goods come in upon the same footing as our own. No successful war can improve her position in this respect. There is, however, the question of colonial expansion. General von Bernhardt foresees that Germany is increasing her population at such a pace that emigration will be needed soon in order to relieve it. It is a perfectly natural national ambition that this emigration should be to some place where the settlers need not lose their flag or nationality. But if Great Britain were out of the way, where would they find such a place? Not in Canada, Australia, South Africa, or New Zealand. These States could not be conquered if the 'Motherland had ceased to exist. General von Bernhardt talks of the high lands of Africa, but already Germany possesses high lands in Africa, and their colonization has not been a success. Can anyone name one single place upon the earth's surface suitable for white habitation from which Germany is excluded by the existence of Great Britain? It is true that the huge continent of South America is only sparsely inhabited, its whole population being about equal to that of Prussia. But that is an affair in which the United States, and not we, are primarily interested, and one which it is not our interest either to oppose or to support.

But, however inadequate all these reasons for war may seem to a Briton, one has still to remember that we have to reckon with the conclusions exactly as if they were drawn from the most logical premises. These conclusions appear in such sentences as follows:—

"What we now wish to attain must be fought for and won against a superior force of hostile interests and Powers."

"Since the struggle is necessary and inevitable, we must fight it out, cost what it may."

"A pacific agreement with England is a will-o'-the-wisp, which no serious German statesman would trouble to follow. We must always keep the possibility of war with England before our eyes and arrange our political and military plans accordingly. We need not concern ourselves with any pacific protestations of English politicians, publicists and Utopians, which cannot

alter the real basis of affairs.”

“The situation in the world generally shows there can only be a short respite before we once more face the question whether we will draw the sword for our position in the world or renounce such position once for all. We must not in any case wait until our opponents have completed their arming and decide that the hour of attack has come.”

“Even English attempts at a rapprochement must not blind us to the real situation. We may at most use them to delay the necessary and inevitable war until we may fairly imagine we have some prospect of success.”

This last sentence must come home to some of us who have worked in the past for a better feeling between the two countries.

And this is the man who dares to accuse us of national perfidy.

These extracts are but a few from a long series which show beyond all manner of doubt that Germany, so far as General von Bernhardt is an exponent of her intentions, will undoubtedly attack us suddenly should she see an opportunity. The first intimation of such an attack would, as he indicates, be a torpedo descent upon our Fleet, and a wireless message to German liners which would bring up their concealed guns, and turn each of them into a fast cruiser ready to prey upon our commerce. That is the situation as he depicts it. It may be that he mistakes it. But for what it is worth, that is his opinion and advice.

He sketches out the general lines of a war between England and Germany. If France is involved, she is to be annihilated, as already described. But suppose the two rivals are left face to face. Holland and Denmark are to be bound over to the German side under pain of conquest. The German Fleet is to be held back under the protection of the land forts. Meanwhile, torpedoes, submarines and airships are to be used for the gradual whittling down of the blockading squadrons. When they have been sufficiently weakened, the Fleet is to sally out and the day has arrived. As to the chances of success, he is of opinion that in material and personnel the two fleets may be taken as being equal — when once the numbers have been equalized. In quality of guns, he considers that the Germans have the advantage. Of gunnery he does not speak, but he believes that in torpedo work his countrymen are ahead of any others. In airships, which for reconnaissance, if not for actual fighting power, will be of supreme importance, he considers also that his country will have a considerable advantage. Such, in condensed form, is the general thesis and forecast of this famous German officer. If it be true, there are evil days coming both for his country and for ours. One may find some consolation in the discovery that wherever he attempts to fathom our feelings he makes the most lamentable blunders. He lays it down as an axiom, for example, that if we were hard-pressed the Colonies would take the opportunity of abandoning us. We know, on the other hand, that it is just such a situation which would bring about the federation of the Empire. He is under the delusion also that there is deep commercial and political jealousy of the United States in this country, and that this might very well culminate in war. We are aware that there is no such feeling, and that next to holding the trident ourselves we should wish to see it in the hands of our American cousins. One thing he says, however, which is supremely true, which all of us would endorse, and which every German should ponder: it is that the idea of a war between Germany and ourselves never entered into the thoughts of anyone in this country until the year 1902. Why this particular year? Had the feeling risen from commercial jealousy upon the part of Great Britain it must have shown itself far earlier than that — as early as the “Made in Germany” enactment. It appeared in 1902 because that was the close of the Boer War, and because the bitter hostility shown by the Germans in that war opened our eyes to the fact that they would do us a mischief if they could. When the German Navy Act of 1900 gave promise that they would soon have the means of doing so, the first thoughts of danger arose, and German policy drove us more and more into the ranks of their opponents. Here, then, General von Bernhardt is right; but in nearly every other reference to our feelings and views he is wrong; so that it is to be hoped that in those matters in which we are unable to check him, such as the course of German thought and of German action in the future, he is equally mistaken. But I repeat that he is a man of standing and reputation, and that we should be mad if we did not take most serious notice of the opinions which he has laid down.

I have headed this article “Great Britain and the Next War” since it looks at the arguments and problems which General von Bernhardt has raised in his “Germany and the Next War” from the British point of view. May it prove that the title is an absurdity and the war an imaginative hypothesis. But I should wish, before I close, to devote a few pages to my view upon the defensive measures of our country. I am well aware that I speak with no expert authority, which makes it the more embarrassing that my opinions do not coincide with those of anyone whom I have encountered in this controversy. Still, it is better to be a voice, however small, than an echo.

It would simplify the argument if we began by eliminating certain factors which, in my opinion, simply darken counsel, as they are continually brought out into the front of the question to the exclusion of the real issues which lie behind them. One of them is the supposed possibility of an invasion—either on a large scale or in the form of a raid. The

former has been pronounced by our highest naval authorities of the time as being impossible, and I do not think anyone can read the Wilson Memorandum without being convinced by its condensed logic Von Bernhardt, in his chapter upon the possible methods of injuring Great Britain, though he treats the whole subject with the greatest frankness, dismisses the idea either of raid or invasion in a few short sentences. The raid seems to me the less tenable hypothesis of the two. An invasion would, at least, play for a final stake, though at a deadly risk. A raid would be a certain loss of a body of troops, which would necessarily be the flower of the army; it could hope to bring about no possible permanent effect upon the war, and it would upset the balance of military power between Germany and her neighbors. If Germany were an island, like ourselves, she might risk such a venture. Sandwiched in between two armed nations as strong as herself, I do not believe that there is the slightest possibility of it. But if, as von Bernhardt says, such plans are visionary, what is the exact object of a Territorial Army, and, even more, what would be the object of a National Service Army upon compulsory lines for home defence? Is it not a waste of money and energy which might be more profitably employed in some other form? Everyone has such an affection and esteem for Lord Roberts—especially if one has the honor of his personal acquaintance—that one shrinks from expressing a view which might be unwelcome to him. And yet he would be the first to admit that it is one's duty to add one's opinion to the debate, if that opinion has been conscientiously formed, and if one honestly believes that it recommends the best course of action for one's country. So far as his argument for universal service is based upon national health and physique, I think he is on ground which no one could attack. But I cannot bring myself to believe that a case has been made out for the substitution of an enforced soldier in the place of the volunteer who has always done so splendidly in the past. Great as is Lord Roberts' experience, he is talking here of a thing which is outside it, for he has never seen an enforced British soldier, and has, therefore, no data by which he can tell how such a man would compare with the present article. There were enforced British sailors once, and I have seen figures quoted to show that of 29,000 who were impressed 27,000 escaped from the Fleet by desertion. It is not such men as these who win our battles. The argument for enforced service is based upon the plea that the Territorial Army is below strength in numbers and deficient in quality. But if invasion is excluded from our calculations this is of less importance. The force becomes a nursery for the Army, which has other reserves to draw upon before it reaches it. Experience has shown that under warlike excitement in a virile nation like ours, the ranks soon fill up, and as the force becomes embodied from the outbreak of hostilities, it would rapidly improve in quality. It is idle to assert that because Bulgaria can, in a day, flood her troops into Turkey, therefore we should always stand to arms. The Turko-Bulgarian frontier is a line of posts—the Anglo-German is a hundred leagues of salt water. But I am such an optimist as to say that there is no danger of a German war? On the contrary, I consider that there is a vast danger, that it is one which we ignore, and against which we could at a small cost effect a complete insurance. Let me try to define both the danger and the remedy. In order to do this we must consider the two different forms which such a war might take. It might be a single duel, or it might be with France as our ally. If Germany attacked Great Britain alone, it may safely be prophesied that the war would be long, tedious, and possibly inconclusive, but our role would be a comparatively passive one. If she attacked France, however, that role would be much more active, since we could not let France go down, and to give her effective help we must land an expeditionary force upon the Continent. This force has to be supplied with munitions of war and kept up to strength, and so the whole problem becomes a more complex one. The element of danger, which is serious in either form of war, but more serious in the latter, is the existence of new forms of naval warfare which have never been tested in the hands of competent men, and which may completely revolutionize the conditions. These new factors are the submarine and the airship. The latter, save as a means of acquiring information, does not seem to be formidable—or not sufficiently formidable to alter the whole conditions of a campaign. But it is different with the submarines. No blockade, so far as I can see, can hold these vessels in harbor, and no skill or bravery can counteract their attack when once they are within striking distance. One could imagine a state of things when it might be found impossible for the greater ships on either side to keep the seas on account of these poisonous craft. No one can say beyond question that such a contingency is impossible. Let us see, then, how it would affect us if it should ever come to pass. In the first place, it would not affect us at all as regards invasion or raids. If the German submarines can dominate our own large ships, our submarine can do the same for theirs. We should still hold the seas with our small craft. Therefore, if Great Britain alone be at war with Germany, such a naval revolution would merely affect our commerce and food supply. What exact effect a swarm of submarines, lying off the mouth of the Channel and the Irish Sea, would produce upon the victualling of these islands is a problem which is beyond my conjecture. Other ships besides the British would be likely to be destroyed, and international complications would probably follow. I cannot imagine that such a fleet would entirely, or even to a very large extent, cut off our supplies. But it is certain that they would have the

effect of considerably raising the price of whatever did reach us. Therefore, we should suffer privation, though not necessarily such privation as would compel us to make terms. From the beginning of the war, every home source would naturally be encouraged, and it is possible that before our external supplies were seriously decreased, our internal ones might be well on the way to make up the deficiency. Both of the two great protagonists—Lord Haldane and Lord Roberts— have declared that if we lost the command of the seas we should have to make peace. Their reference, however, was to complete naval defeat and not to such a condition of stalemate as seems to be the more possible alternative. As to complete naval defeat, our estimates, and the grand loyalty of the Overseas Dominions, seem to be amply adequate to guard against that. It is useless to try to alarm us by counting in the whole force of the Triple Alliance as our possible foes, for if they came into the war, the forces of our own allies would also be available. We need think only of Germany. A predominance of the submarine would, then, merely involve a period of hard times in this country, if we were fighting Germany single-handed. But if we were in alliance with France, it becomes an infinitely more important matter. I presume that I need not argue the point that it is our vital interest that France be not dismembered and sterilized. Such a tragedy would turn the western half of Europe into a gigantic Germany with a few insignificant States crouching about her feet. The period of her world dominance would then indeed have arrived. Therefore, if France be wantonly attacked, we must strain every nerve to prevent her going down, and among the measures to that end will be the sending of a British expeditionary force to cover the left or Belgian wing of the French defenses. Such a force would be conveyed across the Channel in perhaps a hundred troopships, and would entail a constant service of transports afterwards to carry its requirements.

Here lies, as it seems to me, the possible material for a great national disaster. Such a fleet of transports cannot be rushed suddenly across. Its preparation and port of departure are known. A single submarine amid such a fleet would be like a fox in a poultry yard, destroying victim after victim. The possibilities are appalling, for it might be not one submarine, but a squadron. The terrified transports would scatter over the ocean to find safety in any port. Their convoy could do little to help them. It would be a débâcle—an inversion of the Spanish Armada.

If the crossing were direct from the eastern ports to Antwerp, the danger would become greater. It is less if it should be from Portsmouth to Havre. But this a transit of seven hours, and the railways from Havre to the Belgian frontier would be insufficient for such a force. No doubt the Straits of Dover would be strongly patrolled by our own torpedo craft, and the crossing would, so far as possible, be made at night, when submarines have their minimum of efficiency; but, none the less, it seems to me that the risk would be a very real and pressing one. What possible patrol could make sure of heading off a squadron of submarines? I should imagine it to be as difficult as to bar the Straits to a school of whales.

But supposing such a wholesale tragedy were avoided, and that in spite of the predominance of submarines the army got safely to France or to Belgium, how are we to ensure the safe passage of the long stream of ships which, for many months, would be employed in carrying the needful supplies? We could not do it. The army might very well find itself utterly isolated, with its line of communications completely broken down, at a time when the demand upon the resources of all Continental countries was so great that there was no surplus for our use. Such a state of affairs seems to me to be a perfectly possible one, and to form, with the chance of a disaster to the transports, the greatest danger to which we should be exposed in a German war. But these dangers and the food question, which has already been treated, can all be absolutely provided against in a manner which is not only effective, but which will be of equal value in peace and in war. The Channel Tunnel is essential to Great Britain's safety.

I will not dwell here upon the commercial or financial advantages of such a tunnel. Where the trade of two great nations concentrates upon one narrow tube, it is obvious that whatever corporation controls that tube has a valuable investment if the costs of construction have not been prohibitive. These costs have been placed as low as five million pounds by Mr. Rose Smith, who represents a practical company engaged in such work. If it were twice, thrice, or four times that sum it should be an undertaking which should promise great profits, and for that reason should be constructed by the nation, or nations, for their common national advantage. It is too vital a thing for any private company to control.

But consider its bearings upon a German war. All the dangers which I have depicted are eliminated. We tap (via Marseilles and the tunnel) the whole food supply of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Our expeditionary force makes its transit, and has its supplies independent of weather or naval chances. Should anything so unlikely as a raid occur, and the forces in the country seem unable to cope with it, a Franco-British reinforcement can be rushed through from the Continent. The Germans have made great works like the Kiel Canal in anticipation of war. Our answer must be the Channel Tunnel, linking us closer to our ally.

Though this scheme was discarded (under very different naval and political conditions) some twenty years ago, no time has, as a matter of fact, been lost by the delay; as I am informed

that machinery for boring purposes has so enormously improved that what would have taken thirty years to accomplish can now be done in three. If this estimate be correct, there may still be time to effect this essential insurance before the war with which General von Bernhardt threatens us breaks upon us.

Let us, before leaving the subject, glance briefly at the objections which have formerly been urged against the tunnel. Such as they are, they are as valid now as ever, although the advantages have increased to such an extent as to throw the whole weight of the argument upon the side of those who favor its construction. The main (indeed, the only) objection was the fear that the tunnel would fall into wrong hands and be used for purposes of invasion. By this was meant not a direct invasion through the tunnel itself—to invade a nation of forty-five million people through a hole in the ground twenty-five miles long would stagger the boldest mind—but that the tunnel might be seized at each end by some foreign nation, which would then use it for aggressive military purposes.

At the time of the discussion our relations with France were by no means so friendly as they are now, and it was naturally to France only that we alluded, since they would already hold one end of the tunnel. We need not now discuss any other nation, since any other would have to seize both ends by surprise, and afterwards retain them, which is surely inconceivable. We are now bound in close ties of friendship and mutual interest to France. We have no right to assume that we shall always remain on as close a footing, but as our common peril seems likely to be a permanent one, it is improbable that there will be any speedy or sudden change in our relations. At the same time, in a matter so vital as our hold upon the Dover end of the tunnel, we could not be too stringent in our precautions. The tunnel should open out a point where guns command it, the mouth of it should be within the lines of an entrenched camp, and a considerable garrison should be kept permanently within call. The latter condition already exists in Dover, but the numbers ' might well be increased. As an additional precaution, a passage should be driven alongside the tunnel, from which it could, if necessary, be destroyed. This passage should have an independent opening within the circle of a separate fort, so that the capture of the end of the tunnel would not prevent its destruction. 'With such precautions as these, the most nervous might feel that our insular position had not really been interfered with. The strong fortress of Sie Middle Ages had a passage under the moat as part of the defence. This is our passage.

Could an enemy in any way destroy it in time of war?

It would, as I conceive it, be sunk to a depth of not less than two hundred feet below the bed of the ocean. This ceiling would be composed of chalk and clay. No explosive form above could drive it in. If it were designed on a large scale—and, personally, I think it should be a four-line tunnel, even if the cost were doubled thereby—no internal explosion, such as might be brought about by secreting explosive packets upon the trains, would be likely to do more than temporarily obstruct it. If the very worst happened, and it were actually destroyed, we should be no worse off than we are now. As to the expense, if we are driven into a war of this magnitude, a few millions one way or the other will not be worth considering.

Incidentally, it may be noted that General von Bernhardt has a poor opinion of our troops. This need not trouble us. We are what we are, and words will not alter it. From very early days our soldiers have left their mark upon Continental warfare, and we have no reason to think that we have declined from the manhood of our forefathers. He further calls them "mercenaries," which is a misuse of terms. A mercenary is a man who is paid to fight in a quarrel which is not his own. As every British soldier must by law be a British citizen, the term is absurd. What he really means is that they are not conscripts in the sense of being forced to fight, but that they are sufficiently well paid to enable the army as a profession to attract a sufficient number of our young men to the colors.

Our military and naval preparations are, as it seems to me, adequate for the threatened crisis. With the Channel Tunnel added our position should be secure. But there are other preparations which should be made for such a contest, should it unhappily be forced upon us. One is financial. Again, as so often before in the history of British wars, it may prove that the last guinea wins. Everything possible should be done to strengthen British credit. This crisis cannot last indefinitely. The cloud will dissolve or burst. Therefore, for a time we should husband our resources for the supreme need. At such a time all national expenditure upon objects which only mature in the future becomes unjustifiable. Such a tax as the undeveloped land tax, which may bring in a gain some day, but at present costs ten times what it produces, is the type of expenditure I mean. I say nothing of its justice or injustice, but only of its inopportuneness at a moment when we sorely need our present resources.

Another preparation lies in our national understanding of the possibility of such a danger and the determination to face the facts. Both Unionists and Liberals have shown their appreciation of the situation, and so have two of the most famous Socialist leaders. No audible acquiescence has come from the ranks of the Labor Party. I would venture to say one word here to my Irish fellow- countrymen of all political persuasions. If they imagine that they can stand politically or economically while Britain falls, they are woefully mistaken. The British Fleet is their one shield. If it be broken, Ireland will go down. They may well throw

themselves heartily into the common defence, for no sword can transfix England without the point reaching Ireland behind her.

Let me say in conclusion, most emphatically, that I do not myself accept any of those axioms of General von Bernhardt which are the foundation-stones of his argument I do not think that war is in itself a good thing, though a dishonorable peace may be a worse one. I do not believe that an Anglo-German war is necessary. I am convinced that we should never, of our own accord, attack Germany, nor would we assist France if she made an unprovoked attack upon that Power. I do not think that as the result of such a war, Germany could in any way extend her flag so as to cover a larger white population. Every one of his propositions I dispute. But that is all beside the question. We have not to do with his argument, but with its results. Those results are that he, a man whose opinion is of weight and a member of the ruling class in Germany, tells us frankly that Germany will attack us the moment she sees a favorable opportunity. I repeat that we should be mad if we did not take very serious notice of the warning.

THE END

**Other posts of possible interest:**

Rupert, G.G. (1911) The Yellow Peril