

The British Empire as a Military Power.

BY A STAFF OFFICER.—From Illustrated Naval and Military Magazine.

THE article by Mr. Arnold Forster in the September number of the *Nineteenth Century* on "Our Superstition about Constantinople," has aroused considerable interest, not only on account of the views it enunciates with regard to the Eastern Question, but also, more especially, because it suggests the necessity, at the present juncture, when our colonies are beginning to assert their right to a voice in Imperial affairs, of devoting some time to the review of our policy with regard to the other great nations of the world. Upon the result of such a review many important issues depend, one of which I propose to consider here.

With the main contention of Mr. Arnold Forster, that we have no vital interest in the final solution of the Eastern Question, and that our traditional policy with regard to it is a serious bar to the closer union of Great Britain with her colonies, I have no immediate concern. Whatever may be thought of the views of the writer, every patriotic Englishman will sympathize with his aims, and will receive with all due respect opinions advanced under the authority of a name which has contributed so much to the Federal union of the British Empire. In the course, however, of his arguments, Mr. Arnold Forster asserts one thing and assumes another, which involve matters of so great moment to the empire, that they cannot be accepted without examining the grounds upon which they stand. He asserts that Great Britain is no longer a military power, and he goes on to assume that, once we cease to meddle with European politics, we shall be free from the obligation of maintaining a considerable military force. Such and similar statements have been made from time to time, and are so readily accepted, without question, by the public, that it is very desirable to consider how far they are justified by facts and political conditions. I propose, therefore, to seek for an answer to the two following questions:—

1st. Are we a military power at the present time; and 2nd, supposing that we cease to meddle with European politics—except, of course, in so far as our interests are most directly concerned—is there any necessity that we should be a military power?

Commencing, for convenience sake, with the second question, I shall consider first how far we, as a power possessing colonies and dependencies in every quarter of the globe, are liable to be brought into hostile contact with the other great nations of the world.

So long as national morality remains at the same level as it stands at to-day, war is a contingency which two nations must always be prepared to meet, (1) when they have a common frontier, (2) when they have strong interests in the same localities, (3) when they have naval or commercial ports, or insular positions in the same waters, (4) when one nation is striving to gain a footing in a locality where the power of the other has hitherto been paramount, (5) and, generally, when one nation has some possession which is coveted by the other. By applying these conditions to ourselves it will be seen that we are liable to be drawn into war with the following powers:—

(1.) With *France*, on account of divergence of interests (a) in Egypt, (b) in China, where we both have possessions and commercial interests, (c) in Lower India, (d) in the Red Sea, (e) in the Mediterranean, where the interests of both nations are very important, (f) in the South Pacific, where both have possessions, (g) in West Africa, where our possessions on the Gambia and at Sierra Leone have many interests conflicting with those of the French on the Senegal and Upper Niger, (h) in East Africa, where both have possessions and interests, (i) in the West Indies, where both have possessions, (k) in South America, where the territories of British and French Guiana are in close proximity to each other, (l) in Canada, where the French have sentimental interests.

(2.) With *Germany*, on account of differences (a) in South Africa, where the territories protected by both nations are contiguous, and where the actual possessions will probably soon join, (b) in East Africa (Zanzibar), where both countries have interests, (c) in West Africa, where we have interests in the German possessions, and protectorates in close proximity, (d) in New Guinea, where our protectorates join, (e) in the South Pacific, where we both have possessions and interests, and where spheres of action have been agreed upon, (f) in China, where the Germans are developing strong interests, (g) in Europe, concerning Heligoland, which occupies a very important position at the mouth of two great water-ways.

(3.) With *Italy*, concerning questions (a) in the Mediterranean, (b) in the Red Sea, East Soudan and Abyssinia, (c) in Malta, (d) in Egypt.

(4.) With *Russia*, on account of questions affecting (a) India, (b) Persia, (c) China and the North Pacific. No stress is laid here upon our mutual interests in Asia Minor and East Europe, as these are due entirely to the superstition about Constantinople, which we are invited to cast off.

(5.) With *Turkey*, on account of (a) Egypt and the Soudan, (b) Cyprus, (c) questions affecting the Mussulman power.

(6.) With *Spain*, on account of (a) Gibraltar, (b) the West Indies, (c) the North Pacific.

(7.) With *Portugal*, about (a) Madeira, where we have interests, (b) South-east Africa, where our frontiers will probably eventually join, (c) South America, where British Guiana joins Brazil.

(8.) With *Holland*, on account of differences (a) in New Guinea, where our protectorates join, (b) in Borneo where our protectorate joins Dutch possessions, and in the Eastern Archipelago, where we both have interests and possessions, (c) in South America, where we have a common frontier joining British and Dutch Guiana, (d) in the West Indies.

We are liable also to wars with the following non-European countries:

(1.) *The United States of America*, about (a) Canada and Canadian matters, (b) questions concerning the Panama Canal, (c) affairs in the South Pacific, where we have common interests, (d) West Indian questions.

(2.) With *Mexico*, about matters affecting British Honduras.

(3.) With the Republic of *Guatemala*, about the same dependency.

(4.) With *Venezuela*, about (a) questions concerning Trinidad, (b) British Guiana.

(5.) With *Brazil*, about British Guiana.

(6.) With the *Transvaal* and *Orange Free State*, about South African questions.

(7.) With *China*, where we have possessions and commercial interests, and with whom we have common frontiers.

(8.) With *Persia*, where we have important interests.

It is not to be pretended, of course, that there is a reasonable probability of our becoming involved with each of these countries in the near future, or even that it is essential for us to be prepared to undertake hostilities with them all. With several of them, however, there is more than a reasonable probability of our having serious diplomatic differences, and it will most likely be found that, if we are prepared to meet probable contingencies, we shall be in a position to deal with those questions also which may possibly come up for settlement. The cases mentioned, however, by no means exhaust the list of our liabilities. To a nation having great interests in every part of the world it is impossible to foresee the direction in which difficulties may next arise, or the questions which may give occasion to them. Our commercial interests, for example, are so strong, and anything affecting them gives rise to so much excitement in this country, that it is quite possible that we may find ourselves involved in war in quarters where we have no actual possessions. Lastly may be mentioned the question of an occupation of Holland or Belgium by a great power. Such an eventuality would almost necessarily drive us from our attitude of neutrality with regard to European affairs, not only on account of our treaty engagements, but also in the interests of our own security.

Withdrawal, therefore, from questions of European policy, it is abundantly clear, will not relieve us from political connections and complications with foreign nations, nor will a policy of promoting the interests and furthering the wishes of the different parts of the empire usher in for us a reign of universal peace. On the contrary, the stronger the voice of the Colonies in our foreign policy, the greater will be the chance of differences with those powers (and they are not few) whose interests are opposed to ours. As evidence of this it is hardly necessary to quote such recent cases as those of Angra Pequena, Port Durnford and Zululand, in South Africa; New Guinea, the Samoa Islands and the New Hebrides, in the South Pacific; and the Canadian fisheries in the West. It will probably be found, indeed, when the colonies have a voice in foreign affairs, that the pigeon-holes of the foreign and colonial offices are full of similar questions, which have hitherto been kept carefully out of sight of the English public.

But if our liability to become involved in war with European and non-European powers be admitted, we have yet to consider whether in case of necessity our interests can be upheld by naval forces only. To do this it is necessary to examine briefly the ends which a nation proposes to itself in undertaking a war, and the means which it adopts in order to secure these ends.

War between civilized nations is resorted to when one nation or both have some object to gain, which the other will not concede willingly. The side which commences the war does so because it believes itself able to take by force what it cannot gain by diplomacy. When war is declared, the object of each belligerent is to make its opponent yield to the terms which it seeks to impose. This applies just as much to a non-aggressive as to an aggressive power; for when a nation is forced into war against its will, it must endeavor to wrest from its opponent such advantages as will guarantee it from being molested in the future.

To procure the submission of its adversary a belligerent power attempts to destroy his moral force by defeating his troops, and by occupying his capital or some part of his territory, and administering the government; or it seeks so to injure his trade by living upon the country and throwing into confusion all commercial affairs, that a continuance of war becomes intolerable. In the latter part of the question a most important factor is the enormous loss which modern war entails upon civilized nations, both on account of the large number of combatants employed, and the extraordinary costliness of war material, and also because of the injury which the commerce of both combatants necessarily suffer. A nation which acts by naval means only can bring these to bear upon an enemy in the following ways: it can destroy his fleet; it can sever his water communications with the distant parts of his empire; it can stop his maritime trade; it can blockade his coasts, bombard, or extort indemnities from undefended ports, and attack and capture his coast defences.

As a naval power, therefore, we could deal with an enemy (1) by destroying his fleet, supposing ours to be decidedly superior. But a necessary preliminary condition is that the enemy should consent to meet us at sea, a most unlikely thing, if our superiority was undoubted. (2) We could sever his water communication with the outlying parts of his empire. To do this, however, we must not only be superior at sea generally, but superior in every quarter of the globe, which argues an enormous total preponderance of naval power, and, at the same time, a great dispersion of ships. (3) We could destroy his maritime trade. But whatever enemy we might be engaged with it is certain that we should have five or six times as many trading vessels exposed to attack as he had; and in whatever proportion our armed cruisers outnumbered his, our unprotected ships would outnumber his in a still far greater proportion. (4) We could