

## THE LESSONS OF THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR.

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It is not long ago since a very able lecture was given from this place by a very clever man, Mr. Vernon Harcourt, who rather laughed at military men for suggesting the extraordinary developments which should place this country in a situation to be invaded. But does not the history of those 100 days show that the military men were not so far wrong, and that the past, from which alone we can judge the future, points to the military rather than the civilian conclusion. It would be quite foreign to the scope of these remarks to do more than generally indicate how such an event could happen. But any one who looks at a map of the world, and sees the vast extent of country shaded red, or British territory, and thinks that the whole of that great empire has to be defended, may easily conceive how the absence of the English regular Army may throw the defence of the country on her Militia and Volunteers. We are told this is "impossible," but this would have been exactly the answer all Frenchmen would have made if, at the beginning of July, 1870, they had been told in fourteen weeks France must trust her honour, her safety, her position, and her wealth, to her untrained Mobile. I therefore say that such a contingency cannot be ignored, and that every Volunteer, every Militia officer, must remember that some day he may be called on to command his men in presence of veteran troops; and let him remember that the greatest glory, the most noble devotion, will not then compensate for lack of knowledge.

I have already said that there is a strong tendency, in every profession, to run in grooves—despite outside opinions, to consider that wisdom can be found nowhere but in a magic circle of a few experts. We all know how this feeling acts in producing trades unions, and we know how naturally this feeling is fostered by those unions. Now, in Prussia, I believe such feelings exist quite as much as they do in this country. But, in the Army, they are not to be found, because the fundamental principle of universal military service bends all the talent of the country to one object, directs all the intellect of the country to one aim. There can be no jealousy of a profession where all meet together on the one common standing ground of universal military service. And this is the great value of that institution.

In every profession there are a vast number of questions which can be best decided not by a knowledge of technicalities, but by a knowledge of details, but by common sense, guided by extensive general information, and a clear appreciation of what the object in view really is.

In many cases a man so endowed will give you a better opinion on the general bearings of a question than the mere expert. As an instance, I may quote the opinion expressed by Stephenson about the Suez Canal. Stephenson and all his family were railway engineers; they had succeeded the race of canal engineers, who, headed by Brindley, had made most of our inland navigation, and had impressed on the workman who excavates earth the name he now bears, "navy," from navigator. Stephenson's mind ran in a railway groove; all his life he had maintained the railway against the canal, and he could not appreciate the value of any other mode of communication. He failed to appreciate—great man, great engineer, as he most undoubtedly was—he failed to appreciate the value and feasibility of the Suez

Canal. A worse engineer, a man who knew less of railways, more of general questions, would have taken a different view. Such is very often the position of men who are experts.

In Europe there were many armies with great traditions and histories, great schools and colleges, where war, and all the sciences embraced in that word, were worthily taught and carefully studied. But, gentlemen, who first adopted the breech-loader? Was it the Austrian, the Russian, the Frenchman, or the mechanical Englishman? No; it was the Prussian, and he would have never done so were it not, as I have already said, that the Prussian Army contained all the talent of the country, was above prejudice, above tradition, above that precedent which does a wrong thing because it has been done before, but refuses to do right things because it has not been done before. Now here see one of the great advantages of the non-professional, irregular soldier. Look at what the military state of this country was fifteen years ago; look at it now. How many minds have been devoted to military subjects during those fifteen years, minds free from previous bias, minds, in short, which have brought general knowledge and information to bear on military subjects, have started theories and ideas, many absurd I grant you, but many containing valuable and useful matter, and the arguments, disputes, and conversations, that have followed the consideration of these theories, have compelled the people of this country to turn their attention to military matters. This is the great boon, the priceless boon that we owe to the Volunteer movement. And it is one that all military men acknowledge.

I have referred to Mr. Vernon Harcourt's lecture in this Institution; it is a good instance of what I mean. Would he have ever undertaken the task of proving invasion impossible if the Volunteers had not proved that the feeling of the country, with that common sense which usually distinguishes Englishmen, had not declared such a thing to be possible?

We must follow the lead of other Powers. All nations adopted rifled field artillery, because they largely helped France to conquer Austria. All nations adopted breech loaders, because they helped Prussia to conquer Denmark and Austria. And, eventually, we must come to universal military service, because other Powers have adopted that most formidable of all weapons.

When a future historian writes, he will say, that if Jena forced universal service on Prussia; if Sidowa compelled Austria to relax her barriers, arm, and trust her people; if Sedan, Metz, Paris, the loss of two Provinces, and 200 millions sterling, compelled France to place all her youth in the ranks of her Army, it was the Volunteer movement that gradually paved the way for a similar result in this country. Now, somebody may say to me, you are advocating what you have just deprecated, you are proposing to copy Prussia, and adopt her institutions which will not suit this country. But I am doing no such thing. Universal military service is neither Prussian, French, or Austrian, it is the first bond that links men together in societies, and what is more, universal, compulsory service for home defence, is the statute law of this country.

There is another point of view from which we learn much from the recent war. It has demonstrated the necessity of many auxiliary services in an army, services of the greatest value, yet those for which the fighting men must not be diminished.

These auxiliary services of the greatest importance; they are often overlooked. People are far too apt to suppose that war consists in a series of fights, but really for one day's fighting there are many of marching, when the safety of the Army may be compromised, not for want of courage, want of skill in fighting, but for want of information, want of food.

We all know the old fable of the lion going to war, accompanied by the camel, the ass, and the hare. Why take all these to war? said the fox. Because I want the camel to carry the plunder, the ass to trumpet, and the hare to run messages. Now the lion was not only a brave soldier, but he was a good organizer—he himself, as best qualified, did the fighting, while the others, each, according to his gifts, helped him.

Now we had a most excellent lecture in this Institution from my friend Colonel Wood, on the subject of Mounted Riflemen, which is precisely one of the auxiliary services I alluded to. I should be sorry to see one single regiment of mounted riflemen in our regular Army; for this reason. We have a House of Commons that give so much each year for the Army. If a regiment of mounted rifles be raised, it will be raised only by a reduction of the infantry or cavalry. The amount of money annually voted will only give a certain number of men. You can't get the money increased, and you can only get such a useful auxiliary as mounted riflemen by a reduction of other arms. And this system has been going on for some time. Special services and special corps have been added to the Army, but as they are expensive, too often the addition is made at the cost of the infantry and cavalry—the main stay of the whole machine.

These services are undoubtedly valuable. But we must be careful that the Army does not entirely dissolve itself into an army of special services. And I was very glad to hear Colonel Wood's proposal to convert yeomanry into mounted rifles, which would give a most valuable force, without touching our back-bone—the infantry.

When we remember that the recent war proves that 90 per cent. of the killed and wounded, are killed or wounded, not by artillery, not by bayonets or swords, but by rifle bullets, and that this same infantry loses 17 per cent. of its numbers in killed and wounded, the other branches, artillery, cavalry, and engineers, losing but 6 per cent. it makes one very chary of reducing the infantry by one man for any auxiliary service. Yet these services must exist, and forming them without reducing the regular army—which would be the case if Parliament were applied to—appears to offer an immense field to the valuable exertions of Volunteers and Yeomanry. Let us see how in the two countries, Prussia and France, these services were provided. All these services, such as telegraphs, post offices, *etappen*, railways, bearers of the sick, &c., are in Prussia provided for by volunteers from the Landwehr. In France, they were provided only by robbing the battalions of men, and reducing the number of men who could pull a trigger. Thus the French army corps never showed on parade anything like their proper strength; the Prussians invariably did. This is no trifling matter, but one of great and vital importance. Nothing is more curious than to look at the returns which show the employment of a large body of soldiers—the number on parade seems so small compared with the total force, yet go one by one through the employed men and the casualties, and