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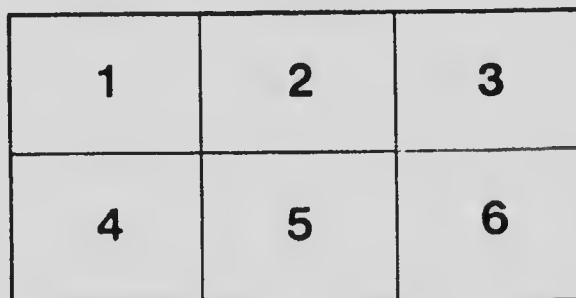
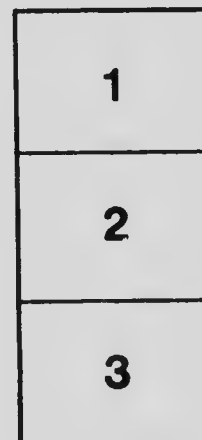
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BRITISH CAPACITY AND
GERMAN EFFICIENCY

By
GUSTAV BISSING

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University of Toronto.



BRITISH CAPACITY AND GERMAN EFFICIENCY

THERE is much present-day talk about efficiency. The newspapers are full of it. College professors lecture on it. Mr. Roosevelt, who is using all the influence of his towering personality for the right, while strongly condemning Germany's militarism and all that goes with it, wants us to acquire her efficiency. President Wilson injects into his speeches on preparedness admonitions for every one of us to become efficient, bodily, spiritually and in all other imaginable ways and in some which are unimaginable. The word is rapidly becoming as full of cloudy meaning as that term 'service' which, some years ago, was employed in endless iteration to make our ordinary actions appear either in the light of altruistic phenomena or else as against the higher public interest. Naturally we all wish to be efficient, both individually and collectively, both physically and mentally. If by efficiency we mean what the dictionaries say and what, until recently at least, the history of the language has connoted, it would be as unfortunate to be inefficient as to be ill, for to be efficient means to be effective, to have the power of producing the desired result. Who would be otherwise? And if this be true, why lay so much stress on what is obvious? Are such men, among others, as presidents and ex-presidents of the United States wasting our time and theirs, in these days of stress, by solemnly propounding platitudes? By no means. The fact is the word efficiency has recently become endowed with a new sense. It now primarily denotes that type of ability to accomplish objects which flows from administration, organisation, attention to detail and the strict coordination of all activities under unifying minds or authorities by a sort of mechanistic process. In fact, it implies even a little more than this, since all ability to attain ends premises a certain amount of these qualities. So we shall not go

far astray if we suggest that, in the public mind, the word efficiency, nowadays, implies such fairly complete devotion to these characteristics, in themselves not undesirable, as is practised in Germany, which has, in some way or other, grown to be looked upon as the land of efficiency when attained principally by these means. That this carries with it the implication that we are to avoid whatever may be the British counterpart of these attributes we need hardly add. It is the purpose of this paper to adduce some considerations which may indicate that this advice to cultivate the German type of efficiency, however well meant, contains substantial error.

The reason the German variety of efficiency is now quoted at a premium by educators and other leaders is not far to seek. Her military machinery has seemingly moved like clock-work. It was made long ago, has been carefully improved and held abreast of the times, has been kept in perfect repair, well oiled and free of rust, has been repeatedly tested and all provisions for its rapid enlargement were adopted well in advance of actual needs. Such break-downs as have undoubtedly occurred have been largely kept from our knowledge by censorship which long years of practice have made perfect. The apparatus of her civil life reveals the same state of apparent smooth running. All Germans, partly because of their national temperament, partly because of their two years' service under arms, have been impregnated with the need of submission to authority, especially in war times, in consequence of which unnecessary friction in the administrative mechanism has been reduced to low limits and such as takes place is not permitted to make a noise. Now it takes considerable ability to run a well-built piece of machinery when it is of the size of that represented by present German activities, even if you have millions of skilled servants trained in the habits of obedience to look after it. It implies the faculty to successfully carry on an existing business on previously determined lines. This in its relation to war, which is what we are here

considering, Germany clearly has. So far, so good. The point that so many of us seem to so frequently forget is that Great Britain has demonstrated her power to do precisely the same sort of thing, to successfully run the business of war along those lines for which she has previously made preparation, and this in the practically faultless conduct of her naval affairs. If then we are invited, by those who preach to us the acquisition of efficiency, to take Germany as a model because of her success in the conduct of the present war and that, in effect, is about what we are asked to do, it is clear we must find a support for our choice in something more than the ability to effectively carry on an established military enterprise. Germany and Great Britain are each doing this, the one in its Army, the other with its Navy.

But, we shall be told by many intelligent readers of American newspapers, when this is said, all has been said. Britain's efficiency begins and ends with her Navy. All else about her is bungle. There are a variety of reasons for this state of mind. First of all there are few who have the leisure to read the daily press in the only way possible to reach safe conclusions, and that is to believe no statement of any sort unless, after reflection, this seems to harmonise with antecedent probabilities. There is little attempt to edit the news in the United States and the journals become catch-alls for every fact and fancy and stray opinion. Then the English are forever finding fault with themselves. That seems to be a national characteristic for which we Americans make no proper allowance. Most important of all, we are constantly losing sight of this fundamental principle that a nation like an individual must have the defects of its qualities. We expect the British to hang on until the crack of doom but fail to realise that a people with such a temperament cannot be aroused very speedily. We honour them for representing, in a political sense, about the most free of all communities and at the same time ask them, as soon as war breaks out, to react as if their history were one

of a continuous training in unbroken obedience to higher authority. It is as logical to have expected the supine German Socialists on August 1st, 1914 to have inaugurated a revolution for peace as to have expected the intensely independent British workman to have suddenly become docile because war had been declared. Those of us who really believe in Mistress Democracy must do so in spite of what seem to be her faults, for she too has and must forever continue to have the defects of her qualities.

The average man is constantly ignoring all this. He reads of the tremendous efforts which Lloyd George seems constantly to be compelled to make to speed up his workmen to do what would seem to be their manifest duty, but he forgets that in 1896 we of the United States were compelled to make a fight quite as severe to get our people to vote to pay their debts in honest coin instead of debased metal. He peruses columns of daily reports which indicate that England is sharply divided on the subject of conscription but fails to realise that, by comparison with our own experience in the Civil War, her leaders have handled this matter in a manner that is masterly, going just slow enough to educate public opinion and yet rapidly enough to get the soldiers when needed. It is too early, be it said in passing, to render a complete verdict at the present time, but any one who has closely watched the career of Premier Asquith for the last three years, through all the Home Rule crises and the events of this war, will have grown convinced that in one respect, certainly, he equals our immortal Lincoln and that is in the possession of a patience which is infinite.

Those, then, who do not understand the English, their fondness for self-depreciation and the way they have of magnifying their various and inevitable differences because of long practice in the frank expression of opinion on all political subjects, and who expect a thoroughly free people, because they are living in war times, to behave as though they were all mere cogs in a well-oiled piece of machinery according to the accepted

Formula which obtains in autocratic countries, will naturally find much that looks like muddle in England's recent conduct of her affairs. But when we examine what England has done in the light of the necessary limitations which her form of government and the character of her citizens impose and of the kind of results she has accomplished in view of her preparation or lack of preparation for and the consequent difficulty in securing them, there is abundant room for the contention that Great Britain has shown a greater capacity to do things and a higher quality of mind in accomplishment than has Germany. For when we get to fundamentals, the fact is that Germany has recently been carrying on the activities of war according to long perfected plans and with long since acquired pieces of apparatus. She has been continuing to run an established business. Great Britain has not only been doing this, as in her Navy, but she has built up what is, in effect, a new business, namely a great Army and all that is needed for it and this, all things considered, in an incredibly short space of time.

Few of us yet realise the magnitude of the task which was originally in front of Great Britain and is now, we may feel confident, behind her. An American Army officer the other day testified before a Committee of Congress that rifles built according to European models, which were ordered over a year ago in American factories, were just beginning to be sent abroad. He was trying to show how long it takes even for factories with nothing else to do to equip themselves for making this one requisite of land warfare. Let us try to imagine what it means to transform, in eighteen months or less, the industries of a country into a state in which they can produce not merely this one article but all those countless things which are needed for an army of one or two millions of your own men, the mere enumeration of which objects would doubtless fill a book, and then add to that the extra plant called for to supply, in part at least, the requirements of your Allies, and we begin to dimly realise the sort of job this little Island had

essayed. Consider that the work was done without previous planning and it appears as a monster undertaking, which is without parallel in the history of mankind. Those will be best able to appreciate the gigantic magnitude of the task who have themselves been connected with the rapid up-building of great enterprises and yet no known quickly devised enterprise has ever approximated it in size. Our captains of industry or those who took leading parts in our Spanish-American war will be the first to marvel that the mistakes made were so few. If, then, the man who creates what is in effect a new industry deserves more credit and is considered to be endowed with a higher quality of mind than his successor who merely successfully continues or enlarges it, there seems no escape from the conclusion that England has already shown herself not less but more efficient than Germany in the matter not alone of the Navy, be it understood, but of that institution which is supposed to be Germany's specialty, the Army and, what bulks quite as large, all that it takes to supply it.

There is another point of view which emphasises this conclusion. All will agree that the ability to meet new situations is of a higher order than that which is implied in resolving what are in effect old problems. If we ask what new and effective instrumentality the Germans have devised since the war began, we are at loss for a reply. Shall we say the use of poisoned gas? Or shall we speak of those "substitutes" which she so badly needs, tries to tell us she has, but has not, using instead, as the *New York Evening Post* recently pointed out, the substitute of going without. But the answer in England's case instantly comes to mind. They have conquered the perils of the submarine. That was a new piece of work. The discussions in the *London Times* of June, 1914, are strongly persuasive that the appropriate defences against submarine attacks upon warships had not been invented and certainly not tested and they are convincing that the means to frustrate attacks upon merchantmen had not even

been considered. Had there been any pretence on Germany's part to abide by established rules of war, there would never have been a reason to consider them. Yet these means have now been found. Their crucial importance is manifest from this single consideration: had they not been discovered, the war would be over to-day and democracy would be under the heels of the Central Powers. It may be that the recently found means of squelching the submarine will turn out to be simple. Any jurist familiar with the law of patents will hold at once that this will only increase the merit of those who have invented them.

But surely, I hear it said, the English did blunder at Neuve Chappelle, at Loos and in the Dardanelles. Well, in the fall of 1914 a handful of British, who for millenniums will remain imperishable in memory, behind poorly constructed defences, held back or put out of action several, yes, many times their numbers of Germans. At Neuve Chappelle and Loos, the British were going against a substantially equal number of the enemy resting behind the best known type of well built trenches. The odds were tremendously against them. Now when one is engaged upon a venture in which the chances are strongly against success, it is easy, after the event, to point out the reason for failure, such as a shortness of ammunition here, a lack of reserves there. For all that, as the president of a great railway system once said, that man only wins great profit who takes long chances, who lays his plans to win not four times in five but three times in five. He would have sided with that wing of the Cabinet which voted for the expedition to the Dardanelles, which must now be put down as a military failure though, perhaps, the greatest political success of the war. For prior to its undertaking the one vital thing the friends of England and France had to fear was the possibility of Russia's secession. When British troops landed at the Gallipoli peninsula, that phantom was banished and the ultimate success of the Allies was thereby raised to a moral certainty. Russia could never be untrue to friends so

loyal. The Australians who yielded up their lives there did not die in vain. They clinched the ultimate victory.

That Great Britain will be found to have made her share of mistakes is unquestioned. The point is that most of the so-called great mistakes which she is assumed to have made are either the more or less inevitable concomitants of all newly evolved great enterprises or else what is to be generally expected when going against great odds in hitherto untried experiments.

Everything must have the defect of its qualities. Germany is, by common consent, the most governed nation. Can she, at the same time, be the best governed? She bends her every effort to advance her interests by an increasing extension and refinement of organisation and administration. Can she at the same time be doing the most for developing originality, initiative and personal enterprise among her citizens? During the last twenty years, by an expenditure of endless labour in mastering details and the direction of her activities by more or less competent but centralised authority, she has rapidly progressed. Will the training which the generation which has grown up in this environment has received be of a kind which is best adapted to develop a sufficiency of men with originality and genius to act as competent leaders of the next?

If these questions answer themselves, as I believe they do, we may well hesitate before we blindly follow Germany's lead in developing so-called efficiency by administrative process and we shall be wise if we study, a little more closely, the English people, who could never be accused of slavishly following system but are rather inclined to deal on its merits with each question as it arises, who by centuries of training are averse to becoming mere puppets in a general scheme and who have yet been able to accomplish the altogether remarkable results herein so briefly referred to. If we must have phrases to guide us, suppose we say that we will try to develop British capacity rather than German efficiency.

GUSTAV BISSING.

