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Coulton, George Gordon
Our national Army

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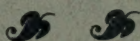


Our National Army.

A Question for the People.

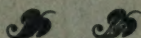
BY G. G. COULTON.

(Reprinted, with additional prefatory matter, from
the "NATIONAL REVIEW.")



"Perhaps the ordinary voter could not do better than consider the account of the Swiss Army given in the July Number of the 'National Review' by Mr. G. G. Coulton."—"MORNING POST" (July 18, 1900), in a Leading Article on Army Reform.

(For further Opinions see Back of Cover.)



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OUR NATIONAL ARMY.

A QUESTION FOR THE PEOPLE.

PREFACE.

THE following pamphlet, reprinted from *The National Review*, is issued with the object of bringing a question of vital importance to the notice of busy men, of working men, of Englishmen less slothful or cowardly than so many of our politicians seem to believe. In this preface, in which I attempt to sum up my main points in a few words, the references in brackets are to those pages of the pamphlet in which the matter is dealt with more fully.

The most formal Ministerial pronouncement as to the general military policy of Great Britain is probably that made by Lord Salisbury and Mr. Wyndham at the great Primrose League gathering of May 9th. Yet the main point of the Premier's long speech rested upon the assumption that our old English archers and the modern Swiss riflemen had been trained on a volunteer system, *an assumption which is directly contrary to the facts* (pp. 1, 10). Again, the final sentences of Mr. Wyndham's speech can only be construed as an appeal to the rich middle classes *to persuade other men to fight for them, lest they should be compelled to fight themselves* (p. 1). So false, and so utterly unworthy of a manly people, is the best advice which these Ministers can give to the nation at a moment of exceptional gravity!

Now, this is no matter of mere politics. Badly prepared as we were for this war, we were probably better prepared than under any previous Government of this generation. Neither political Party can throw the blame upon the other: the question stretches far beyond mere Party limits. It is of the deepest national importance, and every citizen bears his share of the responsibility.

Nor can we throw all the blame upon the War Office. It is full of able and hard-working men; and the nation itself is very much to blame in compelling these men to work under a bad system—a system which often numbs the energies of the capable official, and never allows us to fix upon the incapable the full responsibility for his failure. Yet these failures have been shameful and notorious during the past twelve months. Like all badly built machines

our Army system is expensive to work, and yet turns out a terrible amount of waste stuff. Gallant lives have been wasted by the hundred because somebody bungled over the artillery, and somebody else over the horses. If we ever came to a European War (which God forbid!) the waste of lives would be counted by the tens of thousands, perhaps; yet the nation would never be able to single out any special men and say, "These were the murderers!" After thirty years of so-called Army Reform, we have come no farther than this! Is it not time for the people of Great Britain to remember the old proverb, "If you want a thing well done, do it yourself"?

How, then, can we do it ourselves? Simply *by being ourselves the National Army*. Behind the Navy, behind the Regular Army, there ought to be a nation in arms, ready to repel any attempt at invasion, and taking an intelligent interest in military questions. Our Navy and our Regulars would then be free to do their real work, of protecting our commerce and our Colonies all over the world. At the present moment they have to fight with one eye on the enemy and one on us poor helpless lubbers at home.

Our Volunteers would turn out bravely: but they have not been taught to shoot; they have no proper organization; a real war would throw the whole system into hopeless confusion. Many of us can remember when schooling was voluntary, and a few children went to be taught, while the rest were in the gutter all day. We should never have had real National Education without compulsion: we shall never have a real National Army without it. We only need to *compel all able-bodied men to do what the Volunteers already do of their own free will*. Then, at last, we shall know exactly where we are, and be able to organize a real system of National Defence.

This is no mere fancy picture; it is a real accomplished fact, and has been so for generations, in Switzerland. The Swiss are one of the freest and best-governed nations in the world, and the Swiss are unanimous in favour of Compulsory Volunteering (pp. 4, 9). They know by experience how little it costs, and what value they get for their money

What would it cost us, and what value should we get for it?

I. COST.—(1) *In money*, less per man than our present Volunteers (p. 3). If you contract with an innkeeper to bring him a certain number of guests, he can give you a cheap and good dinner. If, on the other hand, the guests are free to come or not as they choose, then they must put up with what he happens to have ready, and pay dear for it (p. 11).

(2) *In time*, it would cost less than half a year, all told, out of a man's whole life (pp. 3, 4).

II. VALUE RECEIVED.—(1) Without counting the Navy and the Regulars, we should have *three millions* of men for home defence only. These men would be trained shots, and properly organized, district by district, with full transport and commissariat, ready to turn out at a moment's notice (pp. 6, 7): that is, *there would be no more talk of invasion.*

(2) The whole business capacity of the nation would be brought into contact with the Army. No more hole-and-corner management: the whole system would be open to inspection; weak spots would soon be detected, and the nation would know which official was responsible for any defect. No business concern in the world is conducted on sounder lines than the Swiss Army, for *all the business men in the country have a direct interest in it.* (p. 2.)

(3) The whole nation would be the healthier and stronger for it. The sons of our richer classes have more healthy outdoor exercise than the youth of any other nation; but there is probably less bodily training in our Board Schools than in any foreign schools. The poor of our great towns, for want of good food and fresh air, are growing more and more sickly. Out of 11,000 who lately wanted to join the Army at Manchester, 8,000 were too weakly to be accepted. The Swiss system encourages drill and gymnastics at school, and compels most men to take the occasional open-air holidays which our Volunteers find so healthy for mind and body. (pp. 6, 9, 10.)

(4) The whole nation would learn to work side by side. *Every-one must begin by serving in the ranks, and promotion goes by merit alone.* This promotes good fellowship between rich and poor. (pp. 4, 5, 10.)

(5) Every citizen knows that he shares the duty of protecting his native land, and this gives him a stronger feeling of independence and self-respect.

Let us not be deceived by the mere name "*conscription*" into thinking that the Swiss system resembles that of France or Germany. Because Great Britain is a *monarchy* it does not follow that we are under a tyrannical Government like some monarchies. On the contrary, we enjoy more freedom than the citizens of many *republics*. The French and Germans themselves know better than to confuse these different kinds of conscription: for they have always stigmatized as *revolutionary* the proposal to reorganize their armies on Swiss lines. And revolutionary it would be, as the following table of differences will show:—

FRENCH AND GERMAN.	SWISS.
Total service amounts to at least two and a half years (with few exceptions), and often to three and a half.	Total service amounts to less than half a year (pp. 3, 4).

FRENCH AND GERMAN.

Officers are a separate caste from the *privates*, and this separation is kept up by careful artificial barriers.

Therefore, there is great danger of "militarism" (*i.e.*, the officer may oppress the civilian, and the law of the land cannot prevent it).

Also fear of "Jingoism"—of the officer-caste using its great political influence to bring about a war for its own ends, and against the wishes of the nation.

Bitter complaints from the nation at large of the heavy burden entailed by the Army.

Almost impossible to emigrate, or remain long abroad, without losing citizenship by breaking regulations of military service.

The man whom the doctor declares unfit for service is generally *envied as a lucky man*.

SWISS.

Officers are citizens just as the *privates* are: they have merely worked their way up from the ranks by merit (pp. 4, 5).

No trace of this "militarism": the citizen officer is fully accountable to the citizen soldier before the ordinary law courts in cases of appeal (pp. 4, 5).

No "Jingoism" possible, since the voter is also a soldier, and knows very well what war would mean to himself personally, while the officers have practically no political power apart from the rest of the citizens.

Extraordinary lack of serious complaints: even Socialists accept the principle, and only try to cut down expenditure (pp. 7, note, and 8).

Carefully organized so as to be *no hindrance whatever* to emigration or business journeys. The Swiss is as free in these respects as we ourselves are.

The rejected recruit is *distressed* on his own account, and his relations are distressed for him (p. 4).

THE SWISS ARMY—ITS LESSONS FOR ENGLAND.

THE two great Primrose League speeches of last May seem to have been elaborate examples of the Socratic method of irony. When Mr. Wyndham closed his oration with a reminder that, "if every man and woman would take an interest in the recruiting question, there would be an end of the bugbear of compulsory enlistment having to be seriously considered," he evidently did not mean to say (what the literal sense of his words implies) that the wise Briton is he who shirks for himself all personal responsibilities of national defence, and shifts them upon somebody else's shoulders. On the contrary, he must have meant to point out, delicately and indirectly, what temptations to sloth, to selfishness, and even to downright cowardice, lurk in this modern English theory, that the boy who has once left the board-school is free thereafter from every form of personal compulsion, and that it suffices if one-tenth of our able-bodied males perform some sort, however perfunctory, of military service. When, again, Lord Salisbury found the solution of the military problem in Volunteer Rifle Clubs, and in the same breath bade us look for models to the archers of Crécy and the Swiss of to-day, his evident intention was that, by following up his references, we might learn for ourselves how the models he set before us owe their excellence to a system of compulsion as strict as that of modern Germany. In the days of Crécy, though the theory of universal military service obtained everywhere, yet France made no serious effort during those disastrous wars to organize and use her national militia; while the England of that time was the most strictly "conscripted" nation, and her Army probably the best organized, of the whole Middle Ages. The greatest special historian of those wars has devoted a whole chapter to the contrasted military systems of the two countries;* and there we may all see how utterly modern Britain has abandoned the military principles of Crécy, and how, on the other hand, almost every fault of our present system was committed long ago by that brave and chivalrous people who, to the amazement of all Europe

* Siméon Luce, *Bertrand du Guesclin*, chap. vi. (Hachette, 1896).

went down in fight before the rough uncultured Englishmen. It is painful reading for the present moment; but no doubt that is why Lord Salisbury directs our attention to the military history of Crécy, and to the one modern nation which still possesses such a Militia as we then had. For the Swiss system of compulsory service is simply the modern product, by uninterrupted natural evolution, of that to which we owed the greatest military superiority in our annals. Our own Army has had its alternate hot and cold fits, according to the variations of our foreign policy; but Switzerland has never felt so secure from powerful neighbours as to drop for one moment the old principle of universal service. Therefore, while our Militia has become a sort of Regulars-and-water, the Swiss Army has grown in conjunction with the State, and has never suffered from that unhappy divorce which so often exists between the business and the military elements of the British Empire. This divorce is all the more serious for us since the increasing complexity of military science makes success in war more and more dependent upon mere business organization, and we see nowadays that the best general, even in the field, is apt to be he who works on the most prosaically commercial lines. The Swiss Army system, in which every business man is directly and personally interested, is as perfectly organized, and works with as little waste of money, time, or energy, as the best managed bank or factory in Europe. It is this system which I propose to describe very briefly here, partly from books, official and unofficial, but to a great extent from personal observation, from indirect enquiries made on a special tour lately undertaken for that purpose, and, above all, from direct information kindly supplied by a number of well-informed Swiss citizens—politicians, officers of all ranks, Conservative and Radical editors, professors, clergymen, and men of business.

Ordinary English opinion suffers on this subject under two misapprehensions, natural enough, but serious. Firstly, the Swiss mountain peasants whom we all know best are on the whole very decidedly inferior, even physically, to the citizens of those thriving, healthy towns through which most of us do but hurry at full speed, but which supply more than their due numerical proportion to the Army. And, secondly, nobody can even begin to understand the Swiss Army until he has first dismissed from his mind the evil associations attaching to the word "conscription." In the evil sense, as I hope to show, the Swiss system is even less truly "conscription" than our Regulars are "mercenaries."

The Swiss Army, though entailing a heavy burden on a poor country, is probably by far the cheapest in the world, taking into consideration the three points of money, length of service, and

efficiency. In this year 1900 it will cost far less, man for man, than our Volunteers. Yet when we compare the two, we find that while our Volunteers have practically no central organization, no commissariat, no transport, the Swiss Army in this respect can hold its own with the best in the world. Our men are ill-trained in shooting, and often armed with defective or discarded weapons; the Swiss have thoroughly modern arms, and are probably the best shots in Europe. We should, admittedly, have the greatest possible difficulty in mobilizing our Volunteers on any sudden emergency.* The Swiss system of mobilization is, perhaps, the most perfect in the world.† And the means by which the Swiss have made their defensive forces so far superior to ours is the simplest possible, and the easiest of imitation by any state of business-men accustomed to self-government. Their system is simply what we should call "compulsory volunteering"—not the haphazard, go-as-you-please volunteering of England, from which thousands of energetic men hold aloof merely because they see no good in pouring water into so leaky a vessel, but a beautifully organized machine, carefully adapted to the needs of a practical people.

By law, every Swiss adult is liable to serve personally; but the physical test is so strict that nearly 50 per cent. are, in fact, rejected. These pay instead a yearly tax of five shillings per head, with an income tax of about fourpence in the pound. In practice, this tax is not exacted from the very poorest. The man who, in his twentieth year, passes the test is called out to do his "Recruit School" in barracks, for a period varying from six weeks (infantry) to three months (cavalry). By this short training he at once fulfils one quarter of the whole military duties to which he will ever be liable, except, of course, in case of actual invasion. For the first thirteen years of his service he belongs to the "Élite," and is called out every other year for a "course of repetition," varying according to the arm from fourteen to eighteen days. The cavalry alone are called out every year, but only for ten days. In his intermediate years the soldier shoots at his own time and place, but under strict Government conditions, forty rounds per annum at the range; failing which he will be called out at his own expense, and at the time and place fixed by the authorities, for a "shooting school" of three days. With the beginning of his thirty-third year the soldier passes for twelve years into the "Landwehr," or First Reserve. Here he is called out every fourth year only, for from eight to eleven days at a time; during the other years he shoots his forty yearly rounds as before. With his forty-fifth year he

* See Spenser Wilkinson, *The Volunteers and the National Defence*. 1896.

† Manceau, *Les Armées Étrangères*. Paris, 1900.

passes into the "Landsturm," or Second Reserve, which is composed of the whole body of citizens between seventeen and fifty (except, of course, the Élite, the Landwehr, and the actual halt and maimed). This body is partly armed, partly sorted into clerks, porters, &c.; it is never to be called out except in case of invasion or similar great emergencies. At fifty the citizen retires altogether. The enormous majority serve in the infantry, and have therefore, at this age, devoted a sum total of not quite half a year—less than the hundredth part, that is, of their lives—to the duty of contributing to that military security which alone could assure the freedom and prosperity of their country. And not a duty only, but, to most, a real pleasure also. It is the *rejected* candidate who is pitied in Switzerland, and who goes home with his tail between his legs. Typical of the sentiments which one may hear everywhere are those which were expressed to me by a banker, no military fanatic, but simply a public-spirited citizen. "Next to the pain I felt when one of my sons was rejected for the Army, one of the saddest moments of my life was when the time came for my own superannuation." This gentleman was, naturally, an officer; and this brings me to the point which, even more than the short time of service, differentiates the Swiss from other Continental armies.

We have lately heard a great deal in France of *L'Armée contre la Nation*; and the same grave difficulty, though less publicly discussed elsewhere, is by no means peculiar to France. But in Switzerland no such conflict does or can exist; for the Army *is* the nation, not only in name but in fact. When we hear of the French Army running counter to the nation, we do not understand by this word the *privates*, who yet form five-sixths of the Army in reality; for those privates are merely temporarily borrowed from civil life to serve with the colours, and it is among civilians, by civilian occupations, that they must earn their living. By the word *Army*, in this context, we mean *the officers alone*; that permanent military caste who gain their livelihood by commanding the privates, from whom they are sharply separated not only by a natural gulf, but also by carefully maintained artificial barriers; and who, by the recollection of past, or the anticipation of future, discipline, have a terrible hold over the whole of the nation, even outside the active Army. This caste it is whose interests are so liable to clash with those of the nation at large, and who by their strong *esprit de corps*, and their discipline even in disorder, do so often gain their own selfish ends at the expense of the national well-being. In Switzerland, on the other hand, where every officer has worked his way up from the ranks, not even by seniority, but strictly by merit, and where, even to the last, he remains primarily

a citizen,* earning his living like the rest—in Switzerland, Army and State work together in harmony. The officers, like the soldiers, represent all classes of the nation, swayed by every variety of conflicting interests in private life, and bound together mainly by the memory of so many months' service side by side, and by common devotion to the best interests of their country. Who, then, could find here even the elements of an anti-national militarism? On the contrary, no Swiss institution has worked more powerfully than the Army in the direction of union and good understanding among a people divided otherwise, to an extent which even in Great Britain we can hardly conceive, by differences of race and religion and language.

But what is this Army worth from a military point of view? First, as to quantity. In 1899 there were 148,000 men in the Élite and 136,000 in the armed Reserves; total, 284,000 fighting men. As to their quality, the latest military writer on this subject† holds that "this Army, in case of war upon its own territory, need not fear any Army which can be named." And these strong words are abundantly borne out by other expert foreign evidence quoted in the same chapter, by the words of an Austrian staff officer quoted at p. 60 of Bebel's *Nicht Stehendes Heer* (Stuttgart, 1898), and by those of an English General quoted in Adams and Cunningham's *Swiss Confederation*, pp. 160, 161. The *Times* expert, who followed the manoeuvres of 1897, wrote home:—"Of the Swiss Army as a war machine, it is impossible to write in terms other than those which, to anyone who has never witnessed its performance, must, I fear, appear too laudatory" (*Times*, September 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 1897). A few simple considerations will explain how it is that this citizen Militia can extort such high praise from professional soldiers.

The Swiss have always been a fighting nation, and this compulsory Militia system has always been kept up, from the days of their most glorious victories in the Middle Ages. Therefore the Army is, on the whole, extremely popular; and, when the compulsory minimum of service has already carried the recruit over his most wearisome difficulties, he himself is often glad afterwards to throw much of his spare energy into voluntary military work. Quite apart from those who are compelled to shoot year by year,

* Out of the 40,000 officers (com. and non-com.) in the Swiss Army only about 300 are professional soldiers with a fixed salary—200 instructors and 100 staff officers, heads of departments, &c. The rest are simply paid at certain daily rates for the actual time during which they are called out.

† Commandant Manceau, *Les Armées Étrangères* (Paris, 1900), p. 316. The account of the English Army in this book is palpably prejudiced and even incorrect in facts, but the Swiss chapter is, according to competent native testimony, "excellent."

the entirely volunteer members of the Swiss rifle clubs amount to nearly thrice as many (in proportion to the population) as the grand total of our English Volunteers. Again, the Swiss officers (who are practically volunteers for far harder work*) number nearly twice as many in proportion as that same grand total of our Volunteers. Thirdly, the military drill at schools (to a great extent voluntary) is on a scale which throws our Cadet Corps altogether in the shade. The authorities, then, have to deal with a healthy, manly, willing people; and the whole system is carefully organized to make the best of such material. The time is short, but a soldier can be worked at far higher pressure for six weeks or three months than for two or three years; and there is no idleness or loafing in Swiss barracks. Again, all mere outward parade is neglected, and energies concentrated on essentials. Clear-sighted military men have always known, though upon the world at large it comes with a fresh shock of surprise from every fresh experience of war, how much even of the best drill is quite useless in actual warfare—fit only to amuse the eye, and to fill up the soldier's too abundant leisure hours in times of peace. Companies are marched and counter-marched (as schoolboys are trotted backwards and forwards through the wilderness of formal grammar) simply to keep them occupied, and to enable their superiors, without the least expenditure of real brain power, to seem to be teaching something. The Swiss drill, on the contrary, is far more carefully adapted to the one practical object of defending their own fields against a possible invader; and Colonel Favre, author of the able articles on the Transvaal War which appear periodically in the *Journal de Genève*, laid special emphasis in a communication to the present writer on the remarkable intelligence shown by ordinary Swiss soldiers in grasping the main bearings of a map or other topographical indications. The high praise given by Manceau (p. 333) to the "manœuvres parfois incorrectes mais toujours intelligentes" of the Swiss Army coincides so strikingly with the points on which *The Times* has recently described the Boer soldier as superior to ours,† that the two authorities are worth a very careful study side by side. Again, the Swiss soldier takes his arms and kit home with him, and is bound to keep them always fit for inspection; and this is one of the reasons why the Army can be more quickly mobilized than any other in Europe. Furthermore, every contingency of war

* A fuller account of this and the other volunteer military energies of Switzerland may be found in the present writer's pamphlet, *A Strong Army in a Free State* (Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1900).

† Special Correspondent at the Cape on "British and Boer Military Systems," during the week ending March 30th (reprinted in *Times Weekly Edition* of that date).

is provided for in times of peace. The units of the Army are arranged on the strictest possible territorial system, so that their collection for mobilization may be managed with the least haste; that the men may be thoroughly familiar with their comrades and officers;* and that each may fight for the prestige of his district as well as for his country. Not only all the railway stock, but all the horses and carts are carefully registered, district by district; so that on the outbreak of war the Army would find a mathematically calculable and readily available abundance of transport. In short, Switzerland can turn nearly 300,000 peaceful citizens into a real Army on war footing as quietly as a well-managed railway company deals with the enormous increase of traffic on Bank Holidays.

Here, then, is a country able to put into the field at marvellously short notice a body of actives and reserves, which in English figures (making a liberal allowance for those we need to feed our Regulars and our Navy) would amount to more than three millions: all practised shots, and beyond comparison better trained than our average Volunteers. The advantage of this for home defence is obvious; but it may be asked, At what cost to the nation? The pecuniary cost, as we have seen, is less per man than that of our Volunteers, though including such heavy items as construction of fortifications, experiments with and adoption of the newest artillery, &c., &c. The cost in time is more serious; yet that too is borne most willingly by the nation at large; for it is a startling and instructive fact that the only voices raised in Switzerland against the *principle* of compulsory service are the voices of those few extreme Socialists who take their stand on the inherent unlawfulness of any kind of war.† The Leader of the Radical Party in the National Council, Herr Theodor Curti, writes:—"We are all supporters of the principle of compulsory service, but we do not all agree on the details of its application"; and the Labour Secretary, Herr Hermann Greulich, of Zürich, assured me that the sacrifice of time for the Army was in no sense a serious national difficulty. As a matter of fact, these trainings, managed on a real business system, are less burdensome to the

* Compare the bitter complaints from officers in South Africa of the harm done by our "emergency" system of forming brigades and divisions by pitchforking together the most heterogeneous units.

† This was clearly shown the other day, if proof had been needed, by the debates on the Budget. Two Socialists, MM. Wullschleger and Favon, while demanding a reduction of military expenses, expressly disclaimed any desire to strike at the Army itself. (See report of their speeches in the *Gazette de Lausanne* of March 28th.) The motion for reduction was in fact lost by a heavy majority, even in its most platonic form. Similar suggestions have also been made for an economy of time. It is argued that the State, by introducing a greater amount of *compulsory* drill into the schools, might afford to shorten the grown man's period of training.

nation (and of course beyond comparison more fruitful for the Army) than our own incoherent "emergency" measures.

But the sacrifice of money and time does not exhaust the possibilities of the case. We read warnings in England of the dangers to national morals and national liberties which lurk in even the most modified form of conscription. These are serious objections; and, convinced though I was that they rest upon an entirely unwarranted confusion between different national systems, which have practically nothing in common but the vague and inaccurate designation of "conscription," yet I determined to meet them by the most definite evidence which the nature of the case allows, by submitting them to the judgment of a number of thoroughly well-informed and competent gentlemen in the country itself.

My informants, as will be seen by the summary at the foot of the page, were of various occupations, and equally various political views.* Yet the following answers represent their *unanimous* opinions, expressed to me first by word of mouth or by letter, and in nearly every case since revised on a printed proof. Let the reader, after weighing these answers, ask himself how many English institutions could command an equal unanimity of support from Conservatives and Radicals, bankers and Social Democrats, the commander of an Army Division and the representative of the working classes!

1. It is sometimes feared lest even the most modified forms of compulsory service should contain dangerous germs of militarism; and some opponents of the great centralization scheme of 1874 seem in fact to have feared lest, by strengthening the Army, the new constitution might work in this direction. Has later experience shown any justification for these fears? None whatever. The misgivings expressed by those who opposed the constitution of 1874 were aroused, not by the principle of *compulsion*, which the nation has always accepted, but by a cantonal distrust of the proposed *centralization*. It is probable that such fears, even then, were rather assumed for Party purposes; but in any case the twenty-six years' experience of a more strongly organized Army has given them the direct lie.†

2. Is there the least fear lest an increase of Jingoism or

* They were four colonels (including two Commanders of Divisions—there is no higher rank than colonel in time of peace), the Leader of the Parliamentary Radical Party, the semi-official Labour Secretary, a Conservative and a Radical editor, four University professors, two parish clergymen, a major-instructor, two bankers, two other business men, and the head-master of a private school, formerly master at a great English public school.

† It may be noted that, similarly, our own old compulsory Militia always proved loyal, even in days when paid armies were a source of great danger to the country. (See Prof. Tout in the *English Historical Dictionary*, p. 730.)

Chauvinism might result from the training of the nation in arms? On the contrary, experience shows that a citizen army, officered by citizens, is the best safeguard against Jingoism.

3. What is the physical effect of the service on the people? So excellent that, if for any conceivable reason it should be abolished, some system would have to be organized to replace it as an instrument of physical education for the people.

4. What is the moral effect of the short course of barrack and camp life? On the whole, excellent also. The great majority of parents have no anxieties beyond those inseparable from the age of the recruits (twenty) and their first entrance into the world, while the discipline is universally recognized as an important factor in the formation of character.

5. Is there no fear lest this discipline should weaken the individual's independence of character, and tend to reduce him to a machine? On the contrary, with its practical experience of little difficulties, it tends to render the men more self-reliant and resourceful.

6. Has it any tendency to produce weariness and disgust of things military? Its general tendency is very strongly the other way; and there are few national institutions which, on the whole, command more enthusiasm and affection than the Army.

Question 4 was naturally the most delicate of all, and two of my clerical informants made reserves to which want of space prevents my doing full justice here,* but which amounted almost exactly to such as a careful English parent would feel bound to make about the liberty of University life. One of the two, when asked whether he would rather send his son at fourteen to a large boarding-school or at twenty to do his service, had no hesitation in voting for the Army; and the other ended his letter with the words, "I am one of the staunchest supporters of our military service." More than one parent assured me that, apart from all military considerations, he looked upon the Army as a healthy training-school; and all were agreed that, even if M. Urbain Gohier's accusations are true as to the French Army, they could not by any conceivable stretch be applied to the Swiss.†

I have just spoken of boarding-schools, and in fact the working of the Swiss Army system can hardly be better expressed than by saying that it spreads through the whole nation much of the same spirit which our Public Schools foster (and it is their unique glory) among our richer classes. It is the same sort of introduction,

* They are fully discussed in my pamphlet referred to above.

† M. Gohier's own words, in fact, definitely exclude such a comparison. "*Une année de service, à 20 ans, n'est pas malsaine.*" (*L'Armée contre la Nation*, p. 18.)

rough but healthy, to the realities of life. Here, as in schools, the man finds himself commanded by one who has risen from the ranks in which he still is—whom he himself has perhaps even known in those ranks—and hence there grows that highest and most living discipline which is compounded of familiarity and respect in due proportions. The rich learn that they must work to keep their start of the poor, while the poor see that rich men's sons have generally inherited much of the qualities which raised their fathers before them. The Army ensures hard, healthy, open-air work to thousands who would otherwise have missed it. It arouses the sluggard from his sloth, and focusses the super-abundant activities of the energetic man. Without overburdening the citizen, it never allows him absolutely to forget his responsibilities to the country which bred him; and, as the greatest of the Roman popular assemblies originated in a purely military organization, so the Swiss Army has proved itself one of the strongest factors in Swiss political and social education. The nation is confronted at every step by differences of race and religion as wide as any in these islands, and further complicated by differences of language. Yet in Switzerland there is nothing so bad as our Irish question—as indeed there is not in our own Army.

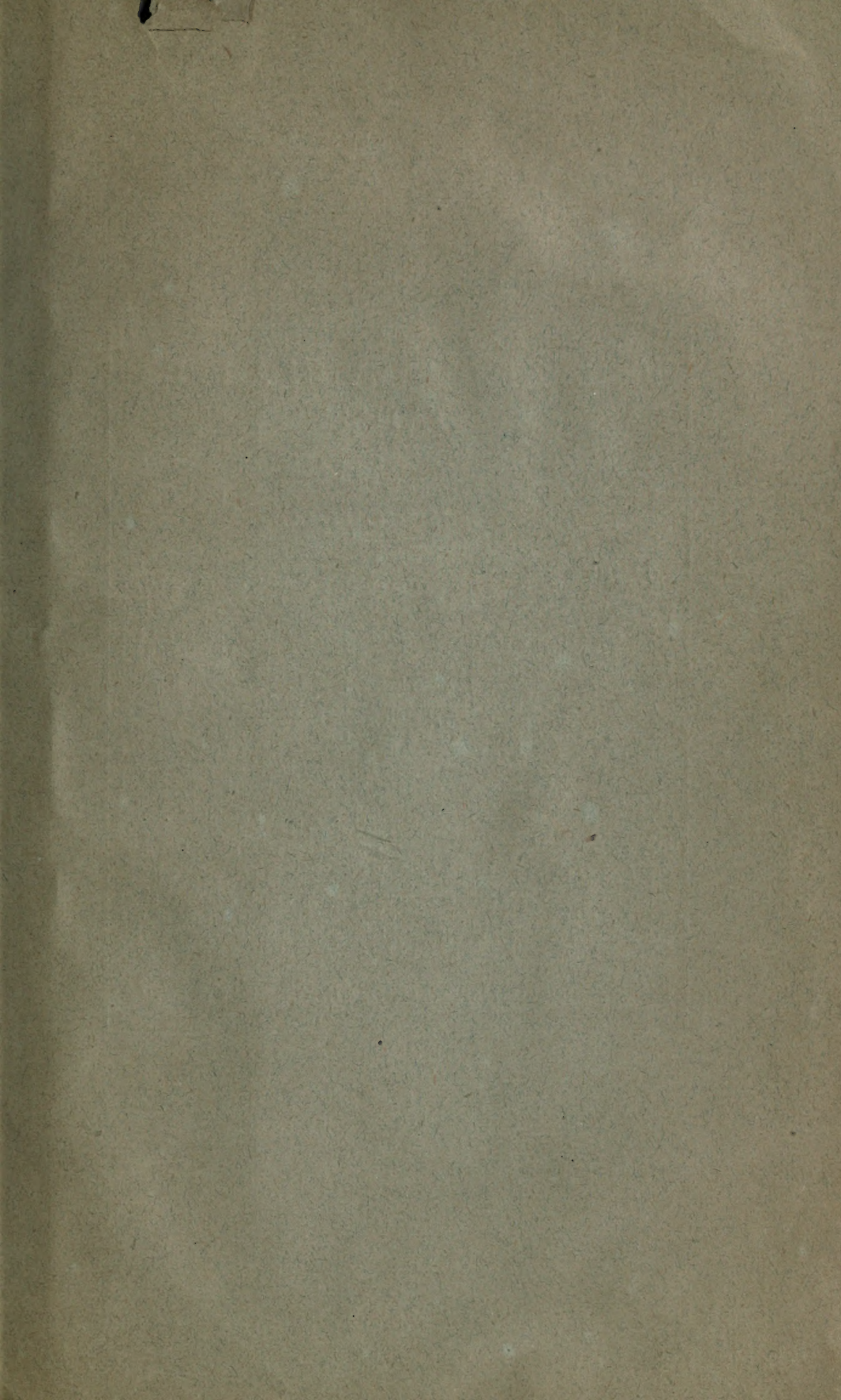
Such, then, is the working, among an exceptionally free people, of the most perfect existing system of national defence. We can now judge why Lord Salisbury, in the speech above referred to, was at some pains to point out that “the strength [of Switzerland] is shown, . . . *not in its military organization*, but in the spirit and the preparation of those who love their country and are prepared to die for it.” He meant us to look for ourselves, and to discover that, in proportion to her population, Switzerland has some eight fighting men to our one. This, then (so our thoughts must run), is a difference not of military organization, but of national spirit! The Swiss is eight times as patriotic as the Briton, and eight times more willing to risk death for his country. On that kindly soil, no doubt an efficient citizen army sprang up in a single night, from the chance seed sown by some great statesman who exhorted the people to form rifle-clubs, and never mind the nurse-maids! There, as in Erasmus Darwin's cosmic theory, the whole system created itself: casual privates, “in airy climb,” encountered casual arms and officers; then casual transport, commissariat, and artillery, a casual General Staff, and, to crown all, a casual War Office. To Englishmen, there is a vivid reality about all this, and yet . . .? We look up; there is a benevolent twinkle in the Premier's eye, and at last we understand him. With the skill of a veteran diplomatist, he has led us on to search out the truth for ourselves, and thus to make it far more truly our own than if we

had heard him say in plain words: "The real distinction is, not that the Swiss citizen is beyond comparison more patriotic by nature than ours, but that nation and rulers have worked patiently together to produce a system of national defence as perfect in its organization as ours is ridiculous in its incoherence."

No doubt the excellence of the Swiss system rests to a great extent on its compulsory character. No manufacturer can work well and economically unless he can count upon a fairly uniform supply of raw stuff, and is free to work upon it in his own way. To us, who have already forgotten that even Waterloo and Trafalgar were won to a great extent by "conscripted" men, compulsory service seems already an un-English thing. We treat as an amiable lunatic the man who advocates volunteer taxation, yet we are quite content to muddle on with spasmodic volunteer efforts for that home defence whose breakdown would be worse than any financial breakdown. At the present moment we are at our wits' end to raise the Regulars to their proper strength, while the supremacy of our Navy is deliberately threatened by a foreign competition with which we shall not long be able to keep pace for sheer lack of sailors to man so huge a fleet. Yet we have at hand the simplest possible means of greatly increasing the efficiency of both our Regular arms. At present, both Army and Navy are crippled for their proper work by the necessity of providing for home defence; and the raising of an effective defensive Militia at home would at once set the Empire on something like a business footing. If, then, we would seriously study how this can be done; if the men of England are ready to face a small personal sacrifice for the sake of an institution which would not only render idle all talk of invasion, but also brace the national energies, deepen the serious sense of corporate responsibility, and draw closer the national union of hearts, then we can hardly do better than study the Swiss Army system.

G. G. COULTON.





“A STRONG ARMY IN A FREE STATE.”

A STUDY OF THE OLD ENGLISH AND MODERN SWISS MILITIAS.

BY G. G. COULTON.

EXTRACTS. . . .

Lord Wemyss, in the House of Lords (July 2, 1900), quoted from “an excellent pamphlet, which had been sent to him, called ‘A Strong Army in a Free State.’”

The Times (July 2):—“No one who is in earnest in desiring to see our muddled and extravagant military system superseded by one which is based upon broad principles should neglect to read this remarkable pamphlet.”

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