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Oscar Wilde
Scrapbook

Vol. 4

and they had seen the creation of a Territorial Force in this country. Its established strength and deficiency in training—upon which the Government solely relied for the purposes of home defence. Considering these facts he thought it would be admitted that the situation was indeed a grave one, and the gravity of the situation had been added to by the immense superiority of foreign countries, particularly Germany, in the matter of non-rigid air-craft and dirigibles. The latter, though possessing certain disadvantages, would prove of immense service at sea, and he should like to know what steps the Government proposed to take to remedy our deficiencies in this respect. The dice were being more loaded day by day against our one line of defence, the Navy.—(Opposition cheers.) He protested against such statements as were made by Colonel Seely about the Territorials, as they were made with the object of bamboozling the country. He did not confuse their lordships' House, as they knew the true state of affairs.—(Hear, hear.) They considered that the situation was getting worse from day to day, and he appealed to the Government to give them something to justify the faith that was in them.—(Hear, hear.) This conspiracy of silence was certainly striking.

Lord ST. AUDRIES protested against the National Reserve being counted as part of the Territorial Army, and said it was only done to cover Colonel Seely's failure.—(Hear, hear.) The Territorials were deficient in numbers and training, and nobody could say that they were fit to meet trained European troops. To send them to meet such troops would be mere butchery.—(Hear, hear.) With regard to the mounted branch of the Territorials, the noble lord said their horses looked as if they were in the habit of taking the butcher round, while some showed signs of the London omnibus.—(Laughter.) More training of the Territorials was absolutely essential. If they could not get the number of men which was necessary, then they must have some sort of compulsion.—(Hear, hear.) He advocated sound recruit drill in all our secondary and elementary schools.—(Hear, hear.)

Lord BIBBLESDALE, referring to the horses of the Territorials, said he had watched riders and horses in his part of the country, and he must confess that they did not inspire him with very great confidence. The riders seemed to enjoy themselves a great deal more than the horses.—(Laughter.)

THE MARQUIS OF CREWE'S REPLY.

The Marquis of CREWE said he could not understand how Lord Lovat could assert that the inquiry being made by the sub-committee of the Imperial Defence Committee was limited to the single issue of invasion. He was not aware of any publication which could have given the noble lord that idea. All military and naval problems were likely in turn to come within the purview of the Defence Committee, but it must be remembered that the questions which were considered by that committee were strategic, and were in no sense political. As regarded the presence of Mr. Balfour on the sub-committee, it was due to the fact that he was invited to join it by the Prime Minister. On the general question of invasion, he did not complain that critics like the noble lord took the most untoward possible combination of circumstances as the foundation of their case. He thought, however, they ought to guard against the assumption that there was existing a complete novelty of position, that our liability to possible invasion was something which in its essence was altogether new, and also that the circumstances in which we might desire to send a large force away from this country were also new. Of course changes took place in the methods of defence and offence, but the processes of human nature and human passions remained the same as they had remained throughout history. We had always had an expeditionary force, and it was in no sense a term used to express a new policy or a new series of inventions on the part of the Government. But it was said that a new condition of things had arisen, and that whereas we were formerly able to act with deliberation, we had now to send our expeditionary force abroad at a moment's notice. But had conditions changed? Could anyone conceive a state of things in Europe which could make the sending abroad of our Regular troops more imperative than the state of things in 1815, when Napoleon escaped from Elba, and was acclaimed once more by the French? Could anyone imagine a state of things in any part of the world which would cause us to send troops from this country more promptly than in 1857 on the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny? There was nothing new under the sun in this respect, and all he asked was that the House should not be misled into considering remote contingencies of the kind alluded to as something like the normal state of things. People often at last became slaves of phrases which they used, and there was a tendency to speak of the expeditionary force as one which was always on the eve of starting on an expedition. The expeditionary force was that portion of the regular troops normally in this country which was capable of being sent abroad, at short notice it was true, but only in very special and abnormal circumstances. It could not be disputed that the shortage in the Territorial Force was a grave matter, but some of the advocates of a general compulsory service had succeeded in inflicting no small measure of discouragement upon the Territorial Force by saying that the force was useless for the purposes of defence. That was not the right way to go to work to get people to join it. The path of national defence was a narrow one, on which it was necessary to walk with some delicacy. It stood to reason that those people who thought that compulsory service was a thoroughly good thing would welcome what they chose to consider the breakdown of the voluntary system, but in saying that he desired to distinguish between the more extreme advocates of compulsory service and those who, whilst sympathising with compulsion, had worked unselfishly and efficiently on behalf of the Territorial Force. So far as the immediate recruiting of that force was concerned, he understood there was a slight tendency towards improvement, but the failure to reach the standard of establishment aimed at was of course a grave matter. Even assuming that the margin of safety had been considerably reduced, did the reduction so endanger the safety of this country as to require an immediate and heroic remedy? He did not think that question could be answered in the affirmative. The figure of 70,000 men was named in 1905 as the lowest figure with which an enemy would think it worth while to invade this country, possibly with conquest in view, and the Admiralty had never admitted that the transportation of such a number of men with a proper complement and artillery could not be intercepted. The question of raids by smaller numbers raised different considerations, and the General Staff were of opinion that in the worst circumstances, and even in the complete absence from this country of the expeditionary force, that kind of attack by way of raids could be satisfactorily dealt with by the forces left in this country as they existed at the present moment.

COMPULSORY SERVICE.

With regard to the maintenance of the Territorial Army on a proper voluntary basis, the Secretary of State would do his best to carry on the work started by Lord Haldane. Lord St. Audries had recognised a number of difficulties in the way of a general scheme of compulsion, and it was apparent that from our present social system we must be against any form of compulsion. The introduction of some system of compulsory home service would have been an easier matter years ago than at the present day. Apart from the general objection which would be advanced from different quarters against compulsory service, the House would have to consider what the consequences would be of such a change. We were not confronted by any present necessity to drive up the number of our forces to any higher figure than it was at present. As to the shortage of the establishment originally laid down for the Territorial Force, he thought the country would regard it as reasonable to wait until such proposals were made as were thought wise with regard to a possible improvement or enlargement of the force, before embarking upon an altogether unknown sea and a voyage of which it was not easy to see the end.—(Ministerial cheers.)

The Marquis of LANSDOWNE said the uneasiness which generally prevailed as to the insufficiency of the force provided for the defence of the country was partly due to the knowledge of facts which were notorious and indisputable, and partly to the perplexing character of Ministerial utterances, which did not show quite sufficient appreciation of the gravity of the case, and which had not always been as precise as could be wished, or consistent one with another. Some of the most ardent friends and supporters of the Government were equally puzzled. The Opposition believed there had been a failure on the part of the War Office to provide a force which in 1907 was regarded, if not as vitally necessary, as at any rate desirable in order to secure the safety of the country, and that that failure had taken place in spite of the fact that conditions on the Continent had altered greatly to our disadvantage. It was recognised that this country was above all a maritime Power, and that our first defence must be the defence by the sea. But it was important that we should bear in mind what our liabilities were with regard to service abroad. They had it from the Government that it might be necessary to send an expeditionary force of 160,000 men out of the country and leave an army inadequate for home defence. That would consist of the Territorial Force, a handful of regulars—more than half of them re-

"Dear Boy:—After long and painful deliberation I determined to write to you myself as much for you as for mine, but through two long years of imprisonment without ever having received a single line from you, or any news or message even, except such as give me pain. Our most lamentable friendship has ended in ruin and public infamy for me, yet the memory of our ancient affection is often with me, and the thought that loathing, bitterness, and contempt should for ever take that place in my heart once held by love is very sad to me. And you yourself will, I think, feel in your heart that to write to me as I lie in the loneliness of prison life is better than to publish my letters without my permission, or to dedicate poems to me, unasked, though the world will know nothing of whatever words of grief or passion of remorse or indifference you may choose to send as your answer or my appeal.

"In the very heart of our friendship while you were with me, you were the absolute ruin of my heart. I should have forbidden you my house and chambers, except when I specially invited you. . . I blame myself for having allowed you to bring me into utter discreditable financial ruin. . . When I tell you that between the autumn of 1892 and the date of my imprisonment I spent with you and on you a sum of 5,000*l.* in actual money, irrespective of the bills I incurred, you will have some sort of idea of the life in which you existed. . . My expenses for an ordinary day in London—luncheon, dinner, supper, amusements, and the rest of it—ranged from 12*l.* to 20*l.*, and the week's expenses were naturally in proportion, ranging from 80*l.* to 130*l.*

"Step by step with the bankruptcy receiver I had to go over every item of my life. It was horrible. Plain living and high-thinking was an ideal that you could not at that time appreciate. . . but of the reckless dinners with you nothing remains but the memory that too much was eaten and too much was drunk. I frankly admit that the folly of throwing away all this money on you and letting you squander my fortune for your own hurt as well as mine, give me, in my eyes, a note of common profligacy to my bankruptcy that makes me doubly ashamed of it. I was made for other things, but, most of all, I blame myself for the entire degradation I allowed you to bring me. . . My will power became absolutely subject to yours. It is a grotesque thing to say, but it is none the less true."

RESULT OF A "CHARMING LETTER."

Mr. M' Cardie was proceeding, when

Mr. Justice Darling interposed: "I have read pages and pages of it. It seems to be the same all the way along. It is impossible to go through all this."

Mr. Hayes.—The object of my having this read is to show that Wilde was such a man of moods, and one moment was angry and the next moment in another mood. It will show that what Wilde said cannot be relied on. He was an exotic creature, and would write these things one day, and the next be found sharing the "momentary magnificence" and taking his friend's money.

Mr. Justice Darling.—That might be. If you want any more read, you must read it yourself. It all seems to me to be extremely monotonous. I do not wonder that the plaintiff asked to sit down.—(Laughter).

The Witness.—I wish I had asked before.—(Laughter).

Mr. Justice Darling read one passage:—"Your appetite for luxurious living was never so keen. My expenses for eight days in Paris for myself, you, and your Italian servant, was nearly 150*l.*, Paillard alone absorbing 85*l.*"

Another part read by the judge was:—

"Our friendship really begins with your begging me, in a most pathetic and charming letter, to assist you in a position appalling to anyone, doubly so to a young man at Oxford. I do so, and ultimately, through your using my name as your friend with Sir George Lewis, I begin to lose his esteem and friendship, a friendship of fifteen years' standing. When I was deprived of his advice and help and regard, I was deprived of the one great safeguard of my life. You send me a very nice poem of the undergraduate school of verse for my approval. I reply by a letter of fantastic literary conceits; I compare you to Hylas or Hyacinth, Jonquil or Narcissi, or someone whom the great God of Poetry favoured and honoured with his love. The letter is like a passage from one of Shakespeare's sonnets, transposed to a minor key. . . I produce the original letter myself in court to show what it really is; it is denounced by your father's counsel as a revolting and insidious attempt to corrupt innocence, ultimately it forms part of a criminal charge; the Crown takes it up; the judge sums up on it with his little learning and much morality.—(laughter)—I go to prison for it at last. That is the result of writing a charming letter."

Another portion read was:—

"The sins of another were being placed to my account. Had I so chosen I could, on either trial, have saved myself at his expense—not from shame indeed, but from imprisonment. Had I cared to show that the Crown witnesses—the three most important—had been carefully coached by your father and his solicitors, not in reticences merely, but in assertions—in the absolute transference, deliberate, plotted, and rehearsed, of the actions and doings of someone else to me, I could have had each one of them dismissed from the box by the judge more summarily than even wretched perjured — was. I could have walked out of court with my tongue in my cheek and my hands in my pockets, a free man. The strongest pressure was put on me to do so. I was earnestly advised, begged, entreated to do so by people whose sole interest was my welfare and the welfare of my house. But I refused. I did not choose to do so. I have never regretted my decision for a single moment, even in the most bitter periods of my imprisonment. Such a course of action would have been beneath me. Sins of the flesh are nothing. They are maladies for physicians to cure, if they should be cured. Sins of the soul alone are shameful. To have secured my acquittal by such means would have been a life-long torture to me. But do you really think that you were worthy of the love I was showing you then, or that for a single moment I thought you were? . . . You were my enemy, such an enemy as no man ever had. I have given you my life, and to gratify the lowest and most contemptible of all human passions, hatred and vanity and greed. In less than three years you had entirely ruined me from every point of view."

JUDGE'S QUESTIONS.

Mr. Campbell said the manuscript stated:—

"I cannot allow you to go through life bearing the burden of having ruined a man like me. . . Does it ever occur to you what an awful position I would have been in in the last years during my appalling sentence if I had been dependent upon you as a friend? I thank God every day he gave me friends other than you. I owe everything to them. The very books in my cell are paid for by Robbie out of his pocket money."

There was, said counsel, a reference to the plaintiff's mother:—

"I know she puts the blame on me. I hear of it, not from people who know you, but from people who don't know you, and don't desire to know you. I hear of it often—of the influence of the elder over the younger man. It is one of the favourite attitudes towards this question, and it is always a successful appeal to popular prejudice and ignorance. I need not ask you what influence I had. You know I had none. It was one of your boasts I had none. What was there in you that I could influence? Your brain?—it was undeveloped; your imagination?—it was dead; your heart?—it was not yet born. Of all people who ever crossed my life you were the one I was unable in any way to influence in one direction."

Mr. Justice Darling (to the witness).—Did you see a copy of this?

Witness.—No, I did not.

Mr. Justice Darling.—What is "De Profundis"?

Mr. Campbell.—"De Profundis," as published, was only a portion of a document written by Oscar Wilde when he was in prison.

Mr. Justice Darling.—Did he write it for publication?

Mr. Campbell.—Yes, a portion of it was published in a book called "De Profundis." It had a great deal of circulation. It was to be published after his death. The balance is the balance now before you. It was suppressed by his executor, Mr. Ross, because it reflected upon Lord Alfred Douglas.

Mr. Justice Darling.—He wrote the whole of it for publication?

Mr. Campbell.—Yes.

Mr. Justice Darling.—That is what I thought; it reads like such a thing.

Mr. Campbell.—He left directions that it was to be published when it was thought fit.

Mr. Hayes said that in the book there was no reference whatever to this part of unpublished "De Profundis." He disputed this was part of "De Profundis."

Mr. Justice Darling.—You don't suggest a solicitor wrote it?

Mr. Hayes.—Certainly not.

Mr. Justice Darling.—He could not write it.—(Laughter.)

Witness.—It is supposed to be a letter addressed to me, but I have not got it.

Mr. Campbell said that a copy of the unpublished portion was sent to the plaintiff.

Witness.—I deny I got it.

Mr. Campbell.—He said he put it in the fire.

Witness.—I deny I got it.