

The Channel Tunnel : Royal United Service Institution : important discussion.

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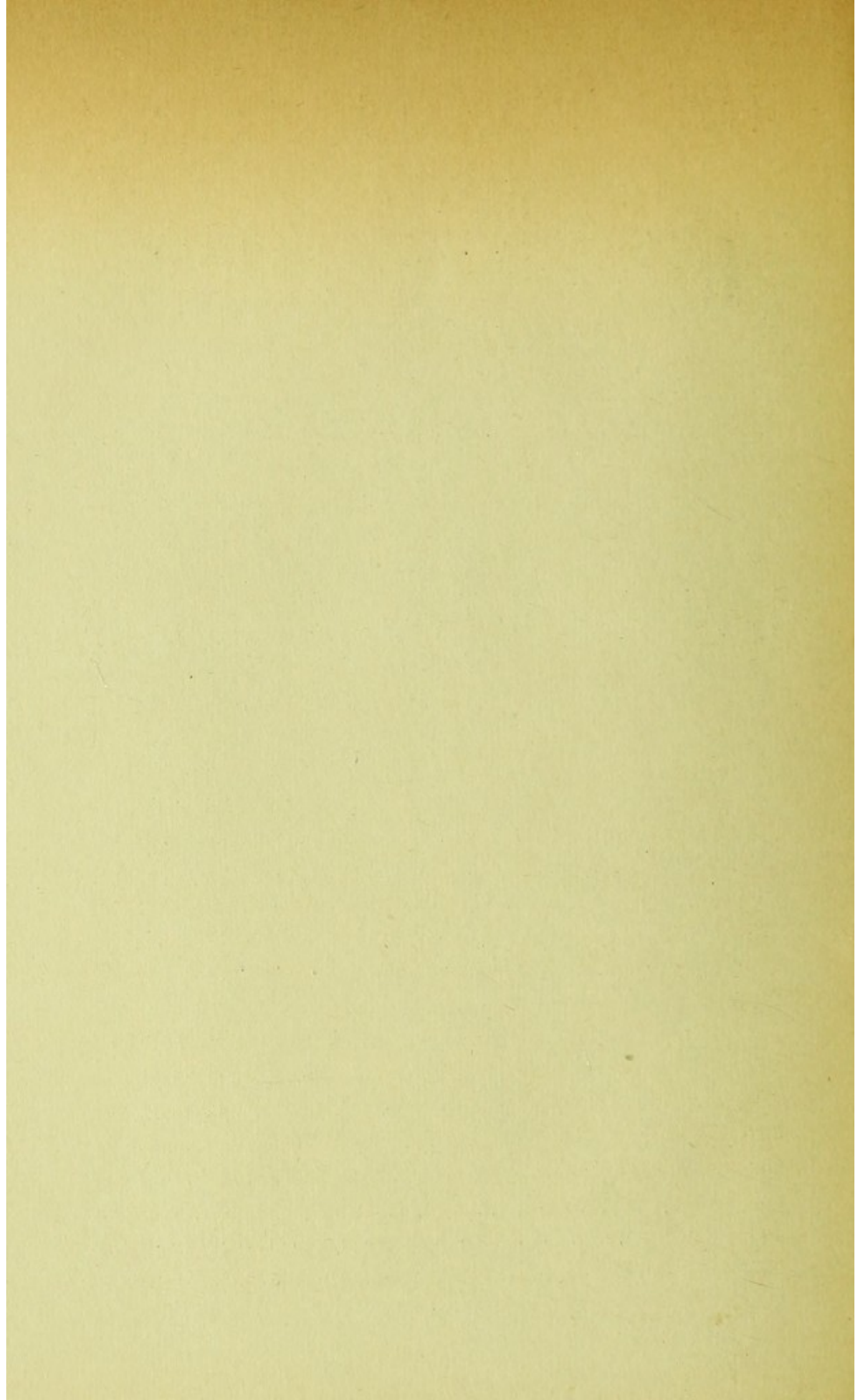
CHANNEL TUNNEL

Royal United Service Institution.



IMPORTANT DISCUSSION.

FEBRUARY 13th, 1907.





THE CHANNEL TUNNEL.

ROYAL UNITED SERVICE INSTITUTION.

IMPORTANT DISCUSSION.

At the Royal United Service Institution, Whitehall, on Wednesday, February 13th, VICE-ADMIRAL SIR CHARLES CAMPBELL, K.C.M.G., read a paper on "The Strategical Position in the North Sea as strengthened by the Forth and Clyde Battleship Canal and the Dover and Sangatte Tube Railway." The Chair was occupied by the RIGHT HON. SIR J. R. COLOMB, K.C.M.G.

VICE-ADMIRAL SIR CHARLES CAMPBELL strongly recommended the construction of the Channel Tunnel and the Forth and Clyde Battleship Canal, neither of which projects, he maintained, affected our insularity in the slightest degree.

In the course of the discussion which followed

MR. FRANCIS FOX, M.Inst. C.E., said: Perhaps you will allow me to say a few words on this Paper from an engineering point of view. Having spent something like thirty years of my life underground, I have naturally studied the question of the Channel Tunnel in its various aspects. In connection with the mode of locomotion, I do not think I can do better than refer to an incident that occurred some twenty years ago at Liverpool, when our present King, who was then the Prince of Wales, was coming to open the Mersey Tunnel. The ventilation in that tunnel is effected by fans, and orders were given that the fans were to be set running several days in advance of the Prince's arrival. Unfortunately, as invariably happens, delay occurred, and the fans were not started for, say, a

week before his arrival. A locomotive with steam up happened to go down into the tunnel, the driver thinking that the fans had been started, and within half an hour every soul in the tunnel had to clear out. The smoke was so thick that you could not see your hand before your face, even with a lamp, and the atmosphere got into such a state of asphyxiation that anybody who remained in the tunnel would have been suffocated. One poor fellow fell on the rails and was killed by the locomotive. Fortunately, we got everything right in time, so that His Royal Highness did not suffer any inconvenience ; but that just shows you how easily a tunnel of this kind can be rendered absolutely impassable. You have only to stop the ventilating apparatus, and no living soul can go through.

Another point with regard to the Channel Tunnel is, as the Admiral has pointed out, that the traffic to the middle of the Tunnel and back again would be worked by a generating station on the English shore ; and if that generating station is in the hands of the people on this side, and we do not desire to despatch any trains, none could ever be sent through the Tunnel, if the French or anybody else wished. I have too strong a confidence in our military officers and our men ever to believe in such a thing as treachery existing in a fort, and certainly not in three forts simultaneously. Therefore, I think we may dismiss that entirely from our minds.

I should like to say one word about the commercial question. In connection with my work in the Simplon Tunnel I had very frequently to go abroad, and I was anxious to get some good orders for England for the pumping machinery required on the Continent ; but owing to our insularity and isolation, stuck in the corner of Europe as we are, out in the Atlantic, they would not be bothered with the orders, which unfortunately went to the local manufacturers. I believe if this Tunnel be constructed, it will give such an incentive to our commercial relations

that we can really have no conception of the enormous development of commerce that will result. I have been in France lately, and have come in contact with one or more French naval officers ; and they said to me that if only the Tunnel were made, it would mean that England would recover her trans-Atlantic passenger traffic, because no one would think of embarking at Hamburg, Antwerp, Cherbourg and other places if they could go by land to Liverpool, and so get the shortest cut across the ocean.

The people of France have such an inherent dislike to the English Channel, that nothing will induce them to go upon it, if they can avoid it. These French naval officers went further, and said the first thing that would happen, as soon as the Channel Tunnel was completed, would be the creation of a large and an important port at Dover, or, if Dover does not like it, at Folkestone, which would become the distributing centre for goods over all the northern portion of Europe; and I believe that would be the case. The construction of a tunnel would give the necessary fillip to our trade, which anybody, looking at the statistics, knows that we badly need. We used to lead in the manufacture of iron, steel and other things, but we are now taking a back seat, and unless something is done, we are bound to go down. I believe this Tunnel will be the solution to a very great extent of the difficulty that arises at the present time. The fear expressed by some people, that if the Tunnel is created, we shall be no longer an island, is, as the Admiral says, a "bogies." We do not call an island less an island because it has a bridge on it. With the Channel Tunnel, we shall remain an island, but with the advantage of not being isolated. We can cut the link which would connect us with the Continent whenever we like ; but the creation of the link would, I believe, enormously develop the commercial and passenger traffic between the two countries. So far as engineering questions are concerned, the facilities for blocking, and, if necessary, destroying, the

Tunnel are innumerable, and I do not think the slightest importance need be attached to that subject. (Hear, hear).

COMMANDER CABORNE, CAPTAIN CHARLES SLACK, ADMIRAL THE HON. SIR EDMUND R. FREMANTLE, MR. R. J. B. HOWARD, and LORD KINGSBURGH having spoken in opposition to the scheme of a tunnel between England and France,

COL. MAUDE said: Let us go into the question on logical grounds, and look at it under conditions. It seems to me that since 1883, when an enormous amount of literature was published in the *Nineteenth Century* and elsewhere on the Channel Tunnel, the introduction of electrical traction has completely changed the whole of the circumstances. I have been studying the invasion question for the last twenty-five years at least. For twenty years or more I held a very strong opinion against the Channel Tunnel scheme, but the introduction of electricity has completely converted me. The danger of such a tunnel is so absolutely insignificant, compared with the dangers which already exist, that it is quite immaterial whether we have it or not. You can invade England wherever you please. Thanks to our Free Trade, which allows goods of all sorts of descriptions to come to this country under false vouchers, without any kind of inspection—which allows people, we will say, to consign cartridges and other things in piano cases, as they did in the Boer War—you can plant all the ammunition and almost all the provisions you require for such an invasion wherever you like in England with perfect impunity. That being so, I do not know that we need trouble ourselves much about the Tunnel. The essence of the thing is to keep our sea power; that is the final decisive question at stake. If, as seems likely, the trade of the Atlantic tends towards the French and German ports, as it does now, if big liners are coming round to Southampton, where they are much more likely to get trade than at Liverpool—if that sort of gradual movement southward takes place, then before long the merchant

fleet will shrink up, and when the merchant fleet shrinks up the Navy will shrink up. The end of it will be that our sea-power will be gone, and the Channel Tunnel will be no safeguard.

I think we ought to put the big trade routes on a map on the wall. If you think of the enormous pull that Liverpool has always had, because it has been practically the last convenient jumping-off stage to the continent of America, the more we can work to improve that advantage, the more we can facilitate through traffic from Europe across the Channel up to Chester and Liverpool and the Clyde, the better it will be for us. That is by far the most important strategical point we have to look to at present. The Clyde Canal seems to me to be the combined goods station of the whole thing. I suggest, if I may, very respectfully, that if you combine the two, one as the goods station to the other, you have an almost unanswerable case strategically. It seems to me that, if we look at it from the point of view of the maintenance of sea power—and the Tunnel makes it worth while to have a Navy to protect it—then we shall be wise in encouraging communication which will keep that sea power in our hands, and not let it drift southward or northward as it is doing at present.

MR. ARTHUR DIÓSY: I would like first of all to take up a point made by the gallant Colonel who has just sat down, when he spoke of the great ease with which a nation that proposed to invade us could introduce ammunition and provisions surreptitiously into this country. If the gallant Colonel will arrange with a friend abroad to send him a bundle declared as "cotton goods," and will ask him to put a hundred cigars and a small flask of cognac in the centre, he will soon be persuaded it is not quite so easy to bring goods into this country under false descriptions as he seems to think. I am sorry that Admiral Sir Edmund Fremantle has left, because I would have liked to join issue with him about the importance he seems to attach to

the "silver streak" as a means of convincing the British nation of the necessity of sea-power. I have crossed the Channel hundreds of times, chiefly in bad weather, and I have never noticed a single Briton on board who, at the moment, seemed to be very much impressed with the sense of the importance of sea-power for the existence of this nation. No! If you want Britons to have a sense of the all-in-all that sea-power is to us, you must teach them in the schools. You must let them see our navy, not hiding it away. You must, for instance, let the people of the capital of the Empire occasionally see some bluejackets and marines under arms—a sight on which some of them never feast their eyes in their lifetime. You must have a naval guard at the Admiralty buildings, like every other naval nation in the world has to-day, and you must not line the railings of your naval parade-grounds with corrugated iron, for fear that the population might see the seamen at work. That is of more importance than fifty minutes of sea-sickness for convincing the nation that the Navy is all-important to us. (Hear, hear.)

As for the Tunnel, I have been delighted to hear so many eminent authorities say to-day that it is going to be a great risk, a great danger, and a great source of anxiety to the nation. If that is so, I shall be doubly thankful if the Channel Tunnel is made. What this nation requires is a good, healthy sense of insecurity. This nation is living in a fool's paradise. Not one man out of fifty thousand in this country devotes an hour's reading a week to the conditions of this country as regards its state of defence. Now, it is an axiom, and a very good one, that the chief necessity for prosperous trade and industry and navigation is a sense of absolute security. But that means a sense of *real* security—a sense founded on the accurate knowledge that your system of defence is complete, is rational, is in good working order, is sufficient, and ready at any moment. Our sense of security is based on nothing of the kind. It is

based on an assumption ; it is based on the principle that it is everybody's business except our own—that you pay your Income Tax, mighty unwillingly, and that then you have done with it. (Laughter and hear, hear.)

If we could only have a real feeling permeating the whole nation, which would lead every Briton to think as he rises in the morning that it is not perhaps quite so well with us as he had been thinking—that there was a possibility something might at that moment be crawling through the Tunnel which would mean war, red war within our borders—then perchance that Briton before he goes to his daily business, to the getting of the pounds, shillings and pence which are the chief aim of his existence, would pause to think a little, and to ask himself the question whether the most important thing in the world, our safety, was entrusted to the proper people and was being managed in the right way. When the Briton in his millions begins to ask himself that question, perhaps we shall begin to see the end of “footling” ; we shall begin to see things managed in this country, as they are in the land to the study of which I have devoted my life—a land where they have no “piffle,” but deeds, where they have no talk, but actions ; a land where they really are safe, and a land in which the proposal to make a tunnel from the shores of Korea, let us say, to the shores of the land I mean, that is, Japan, would not be the cause of a moment's nervousness to anybody in the nation, because they are a nation of fifty millions of people who know they are strong, who have made themselves strong, and who take the very greatest care to keep themselves strong. (Loud cheers.)

ADMIRAL F. A. CLOSE : I am not going to make a speech ; I only desire to allude to two points, one in favour of the Tunnel, and one against it. The point in favour of the Tunnel, which probably you have seen in my letter in the *Morning Post*, is that this Tunnel will, to a

certain extent, solve the question of food supply in time of war, and prevent panic on the corn market. The other point, which is against the Tunnel, is, how is it we have never been invaded? Is it because invasion is impossible? No. They all wish to invade us; they know twenty ways of invading this country, but not one of getting out of it. If the Tunnel is made, they will have a way of getting out of it.

The CHAIRMAN: I am sure we are all greatly indebted indeed to the gallant Admiral who has given us so much interesting matter to discuss and to think over. It has been a great pleasure to most of us to hear the various views that have been put forward by the different speakers. I am in the Chair to-day at the request of my gallant friend, and I have greatly benefitted by the discussion I have heard. I am not a partisan of the Tunnel; I have not absolutely taken either side, and on this broad ground. I think the question of a Tunnel is simply an economic question and a commercial question; primarily, it is really a question of what is good in the economic interests of the country.

I have taken a part in opposing what I call the hysterical military school, who have said, I think, very wild things against a tunnel at all. My view of that matter is a broad one. It is that if the great magnates and great commercial centres of the country, whose interests are concerned, and who have the means of gauging the probable consequences commercially and economically, are prepared to plank down their money, and to put it into this Tunnel (because not only will they reap commercial benefit, but also the country must incidentally reap great economic and commercial advantages) if so, the Tunnel will be made. I think it is the business and the duty of military authorities—I speak in the widest sense, embracing the Navy too—to provide the means for the protection of the material interests in this country as they find them, and if they find to-morrow that a Tunnel is made by the demands of commerce and international trade it is no use their objecting.

What they have to give their minds to is the proper preparations necessary to deal with that state of things so that the danger shall not be great. Lord Kingsburgh is a great and eminent lawyer—he is eminent in a great many things—but when he got up to speak I was in hopes that we should hear him upon one point which is a purely legal one. It is proposed that the Tunnel shall be constructed twenty-four miles under the sea. Taking the three miles maritime limit on one side and the three miles on the other, we come to this position, that three-quarters of the land in which the Tunnel is constructed is no man's land. I think a very nice point will arise in that connection—What courts are to have the jurisdiction? Of course you may say that a plummet line will be dropped down, and the Tunnel will be divided between the two nations; but surely great complications will arise in the case, for instance, of murders or outrages, as to exactly which side of the centre, in no man's land, the thing happens. Might that not lead to international disputes between international lawyers, and might not that be a source of friction? I would not have mentioned this point if it had not been for Lord Kingsburgh, and I wonder if he could answer it.

LORD KINGSBURGH : Anybody who commits a crime on board a ship on the high seas, which are no man's water, can be tried at any port of the country that the ship belongs to when the ship arrives. In the same way, in this case probably you would have some international arrangement. (Hear, hear.) A fellow on a French train would be nobbled for doing it on the French train, and a fellow on an English train would be nobbled for doing it on the English train. That is the only way I can suggest; but I think a very small amount of international arrangement would meet that point. (Hear, hear).

The CHAIRMAN : It is a very small point. I merely wanted to point out the peculiarity of the situation. It does not settle in my mind whether the application of law on

the surface of the sea would apply to land below the surface of the sea.

Passing to a more serious aspect of the question, I think the discussion to-day will have done good. I do think that the appreciation of the duty and the obligations of military authority is never improved by the military authorities committing themselves to extreme opinions. (Hear, hear.) I think the discussion has done good in this way, that it asks people to look at the matter fairly and squarely in the face, and to logically discuss the question. If it is found that the economic conditions and commercial interests of the situation are such that the Tunnel would be an immense advantage commercially to the country, and you have the guarantee of men planking down their money to make it, then I think the question will only arise as to the necessary military precautions to be taken in its support. (Hear, hear.)

There are one or two other points I would like to have made, but I will not detain you now. I am sure, however, I may take it from you that you are all deeply grateful to the gallant Admiral, who has devoted so much time and attention to this subject, and who has put the case before us in such an excellent manner. I am sure, whatever our views are, if we are true patriots, we are all anxious to get at the truth, and do what is really best for the country, without being called "blue funkens" or "dreadnaughts," or anything else. We want to get at the truth, and act fearlessly for the welfare of the country. It is a great pleasure to propose a hearty vote of thanks to Admiral Campbell for the excellent paper he has given us.

The resolution of thanks was carried by acclamation; and, on the motion of **LIEUTENANT MALTBY**, a vote of thanks having been accorded to the Chairman for presiding, the meeting terminated.