

National defence and physical education.

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Brunton, Thomas Lauder, Sir, 1844-1916.
Royal College of Surgeons of England

Publication/Creation

[London] : Harrison and Sons, printers, 1903.

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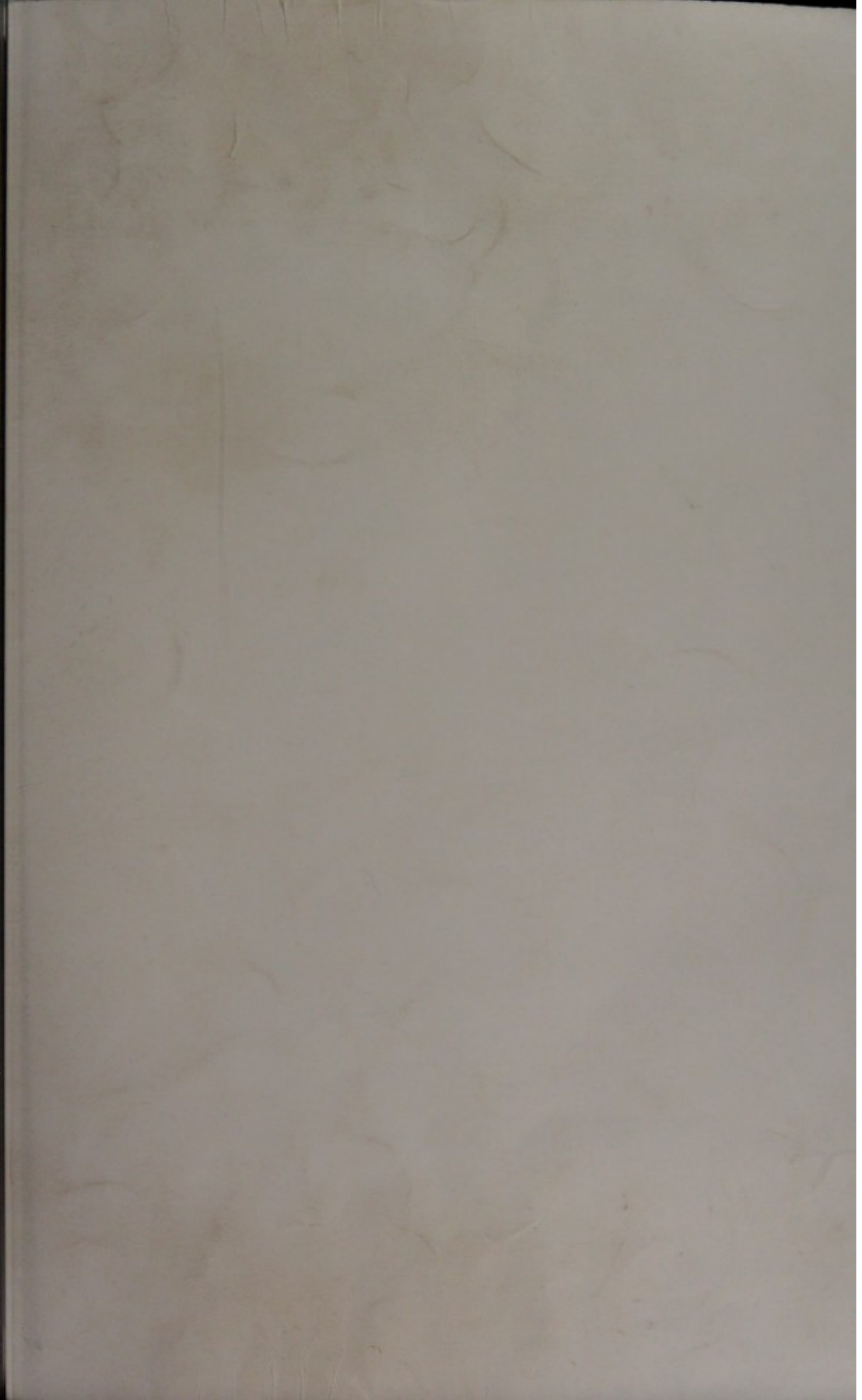
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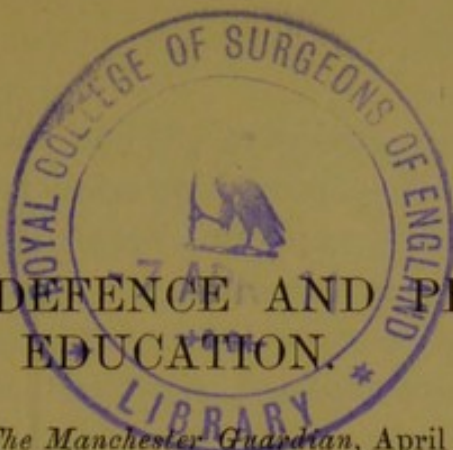
NATIONAL

(Reprinted from

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NATIONAL DEFENCE AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION.

(Reprinted from *The Manchester Guardian*, April 2nd, 1903.)

TO THE EDITOR OF *The Manchester Guardian*.

SIR,—This nation is awakening to the necessity of an increase in our national defences to secure us against invasion and the necessity to physically educate our children and youth, in order to counteract the deterioration in our population which has attained such an extent as to constitute a national danger. I fear, however, there are very many in this country who do not appreciate its dangerous position, and I may therefore be pardoned for pointing out the risks to which we are exposed in a way so plain as to appear to some almost objectionable, for although we are beginning to recognise the unwelcome truth that the British are not beloved abroad we do so very unwillingly and reluctantly. We are conscious that, whatever a small minority may feel or say, the great bulk of the British people regard other nations with positive good-will or at least without animosity. We feel such a strong desire to live at peace with them that we can hardly conceive that they might wish to attack us. We do not realise that our liberty and freedom which we prize so highly, our riches, our commercial success, our command of the seas, and our extensive colonies are each and all a source of offence to those who do not possess them in the same measure as ourselves, and cause them to regard us with envy and dislike.

Moreover, rightly or wrongly, there is a wide-spread feeling abroad that our advantages have rendered us proud and disposed to look down on those who are less highly favoured than ourselves. The arrogance and contempt which they attribute to us they repay with hate, and nothing would give many of them greater pleasure than to destroy England's power and humble England's pride. In addition to this, our riches are a constant

temptation to their cupidity. What scheme could be more attractive to a nation, possessing a large army but in want of more money, than to seize an opportunity when a great part of our fleet has been lured away to some distant part of the world, declare war on some pretext which could easily be found, descend on our shores, seize London and our other seaports so as to gain possession of all the foodstuffs which had escaped capture by their cruisers, and thus quickly starve the country into submission? They might then demand as the price of its evacuation the complete surrender of our fleet, transports, and colonies, in addition to such an enormous sum of money as would impoverish Britain for many years to come and correspondingly enrich her conqueror.

What is to prevent such a programme as this from being carried out? There is undoubtedly the mutual jealousy of Continental Powers to whose disadvantage it might be that a neighbour should be so greatly enriched and strengthened as it would be by the conquest of Britain. But in the not impossible event of a coalition of France, Russia, and Germany against isolated Britain, the programme which none might carry out singly might be carried out by the combination. We sincerely trust that such a coalition may never take place, but nevertheless we must look the possibility of such an occurrence in the face and consider what the result of it would be. In such a crisis our colonies would almost certainly declare themselves independent. Canada would join the United States, and would be safe under the ægis of the Stars and Stripes; India would fall to Russia, Gibraltar and Egypt to France; whilst Germany might take South Africa, and by its huge armies, with the aid of the fleet and transports taken from us, might soon reduce it to subjection. Australia and New Zealand might share the same fate.

Should such a coalition occur, what defences have we to prevent all these evils from coming upon us? There is first our fleet, and there is a general consensus of opinion throughout the country that we must make it as strong as we can. But at the present time, when the comparative power of ironclads, torpedoes and submarines are still an unknown quantity, it would be madness to depend on our fleet alone, for a few torpedo accidents to

our ironclads or even some defects in their boilers might so seriously reduce our fleet as to render it insufficient for complete defence. Besides, ironclads take long to build, our risks are imminent, and in order to ward them off we must have men sufficient to meet and repulse any invaders who may land on our shores. As a correspondent to the *Times* has pointed out in an able article on "The Problem of the Army," we must rely on our auxiliary forces for the defence of the country, and surely every effort should be made to augment their strength and efficiency without delay. Every inducement should be given to enter the volunteers, and every facility should be provided for them to learn how to use their rifles. How much can be done by men who can shoot, though totally destitute of military training, was shown to our shame at Nicholson's Nek, where, according to De Wet's account, during an engagement lasting five hours, 200 Boers, fresh from their farms, overcame 1,000 trained English soldiers, killing or wounding 203 and taking 817 prisoners. They also seized two Maxims, two mountain guns, 1,000 rifles, and 20 cases of cartridges. Their own losses only amounted to four killed and five wounded.

In pleading for training in the use of the rifle in schools I am very far indeed from wishing anything like militarism in this country. I am certain that a very large proportion of peace-loving citizens like myself are very far indeed from desiring the growth of such a spirit, and are anxious that we should remain a nation of shopkeepers or farmers rather than become one of soldiers. At the same time we know that at school the small boy is liable to be attacked, however inoffensive he may be, while the boy who is able to thrash any of the others is left alone and may live in peace as much as he likes. His strength does not necessarily render him a bully, and a condition of being perfectly prepared to defend ourselves would not render us aggressive. And surely it is as much every citizen's duty to be able, in case of need, to defend himself, his family, and his country as that he should know the "Three R's." As someone has said, a fourth R should be added for "rifle," and a knowledge of how to use it should be as much a compulsory part of every boy's education at school as a knowledge of the three R's. The

readiest way of securing a sufficient number of men to defend our country would be to establish universal conscription, but so strong and widely spread throughout the country is the dislike to such a proceeding that even the perilous position in which we now are will hardly induce the nation to submit to it. Nor is it absolutely necessary, for probably all its advantages, without its disadvantages, may be gained in another way. If every boy in every school in the country began to receive a little drill at the age of seven, simple sticks or toy guns being used for rifles, and if more complete instruction with ample opportunities for shooting were given as the children grew older, all boys at the age of fourteen might be able to use a rifle much better than some of our present soldiers, and in case of need might prove, like some of the Boer youths in the late war, perfectly able to fight against trained soldiers. If such training had been universal in schools twenty or even ten years ago we should not have had to read with shame De Wet's recital of the defeat of our troops at Nicholson's Nek and elsewhere. In every village in the country the elder boys and youths should have instructors to show them how to take advantage of all the cover in their neighbourhood, and they might divide themselves into two bodies, one to represent the attacking force and the other the defenders of the village. By playing these parts alternately they would not only learn thoroughly how to utilise every advantage which the neighbourhood offered for defence, but would learn also the weak points most liable to attack, and therefore requiring extra care to guard. Neighbouring villages should be instructed how to co-operate, and these should be united into larger districts, so that in the event of an invasion our defenders would not form an undisciplined mob, but a body of trained marksmen each one of whom would know what to do as thoroughly as a sailor on board an Atlantic liner knows his place and duties at fire drill.

Such training would not foster an aggressive spirit or spoil men for peaceful pursuits any more than our present system of volunteering, and it would have the further advantage that, being begun at an early age, the physical exercises which should form part of the drill would assist the development of the

children's bodies; whilst the habits of prompt obedience and of decision which they would learn would be a most useful preparation for the duties of civil life. But training and exercise are not all. We must attend to the health of the children and youths. Sir Frederick Maurice recently pointed out that out of every five recruits only two proved themselves fit for service after two years. This estimate of unfitness, appalling as it is, appears to include all recruits, from the country as well as from town, and is far too low for towns or urban districts, for in a speech at Lancaster, on February 11th, Sir John Gorst stated that out of 11,000 men offering themselves yearly in Lancashire for enlistment only 1,000 were fit.

Under such circumstances there is urgent need of a Royal Commission to inquire into the causes of this unfitness and to recommend measures for its removal. Possibly, amongst other things, it may be necessary not only to give the children regular physical exercises, but to give some of them one free meal daily in order to fit them for these exercises, as well as for learning the three R's. All these things will cost money, and most of us already grudge the heavy taxes we now pay; but we must regard the additional taxation required for efficient national defence as an insurance premium against invasion and against the enormous taxes which we should begrudge a thousand-fold more and yet be forced to pay in the event of a foreign army invading our country and starving us into submission.—I am,
&c.,

LAUDER BRUNTON.

March 31st.

