

**The Channel Tunnel : military aspect of the question : important address /
by Rt. Hon. Lord Sydenham of Combe.**

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THE CHANNEL TUNNEL

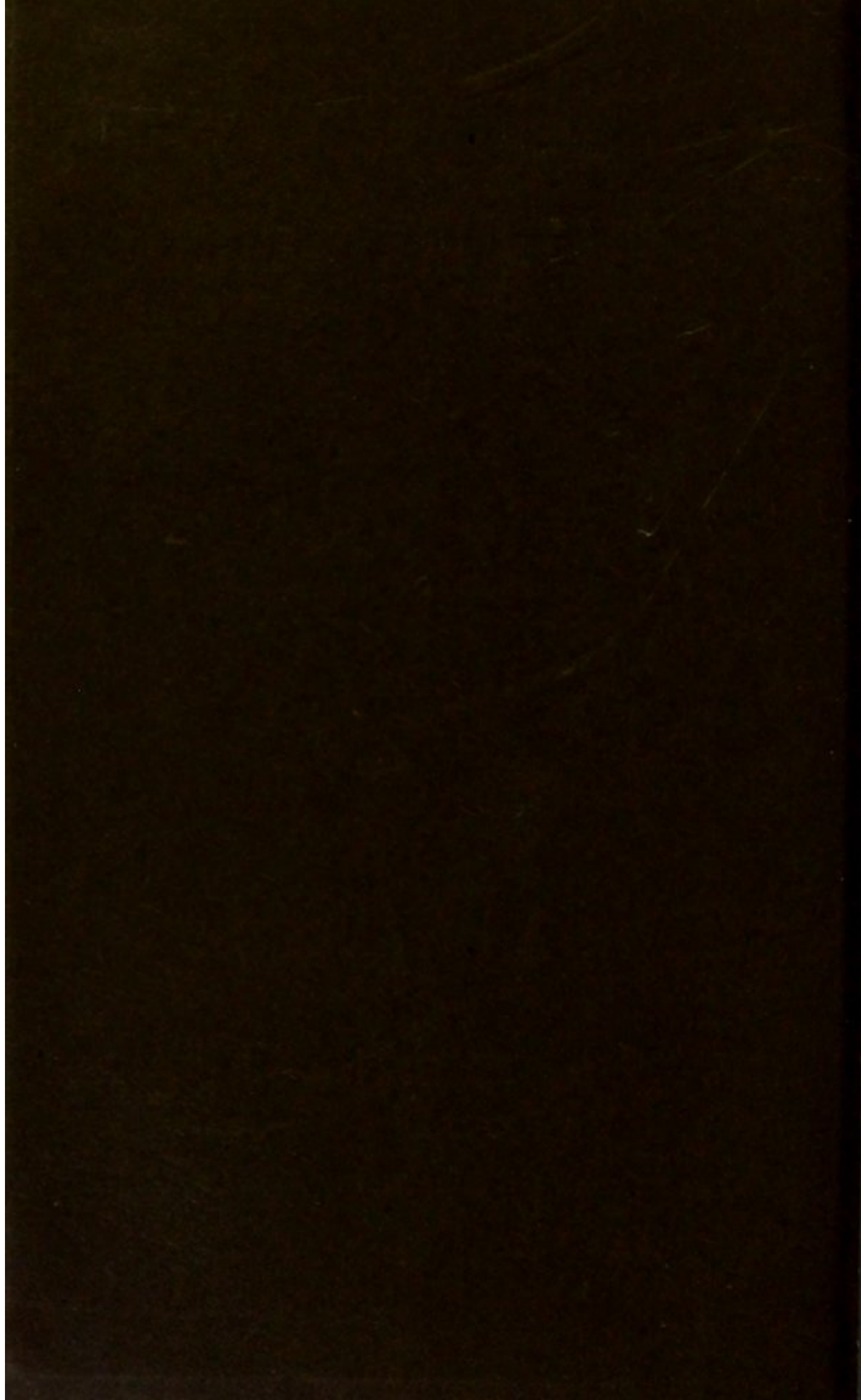
MILITARY ASPECT OF THE QUESTION

IMPORTANT ADDRESS

BY

Rt. Hon. LORD SYDENHAM OF COMBE,
G.C.S.I.

Formerly Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence.



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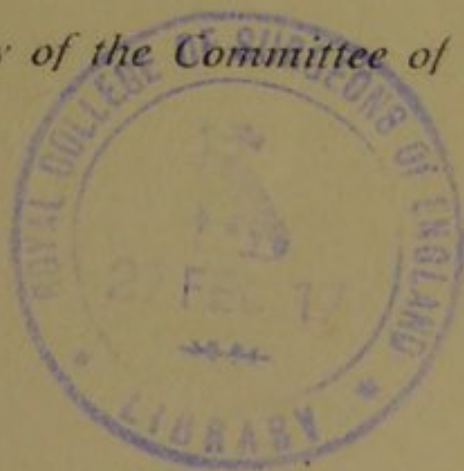
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HOUSE OF COMMONS: GRAND COMMITTEE ROOM No. 10

Monday, 29th June, 1914

THE CHANNEL TUNNEL

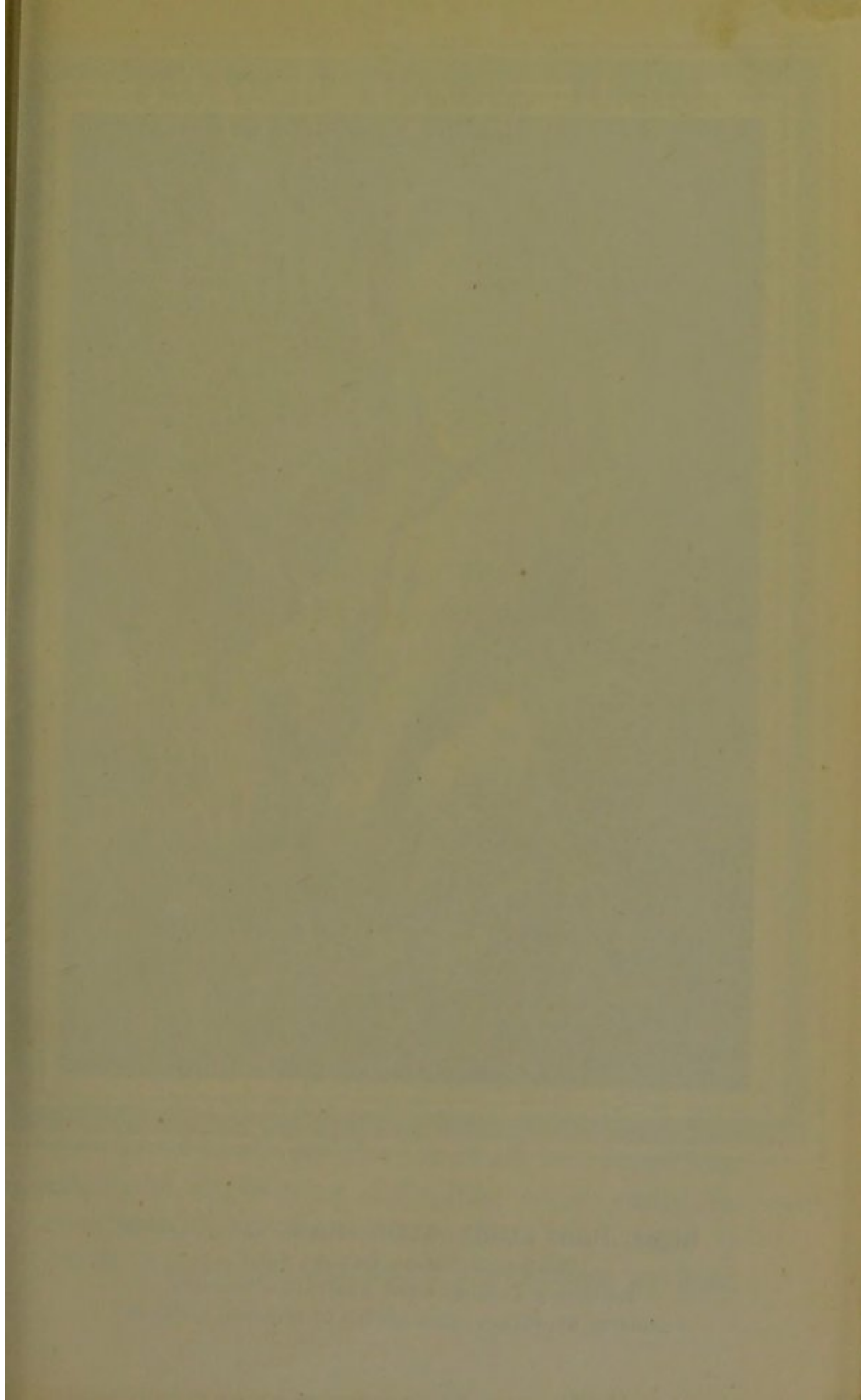
MILITARY ASPECT OF THE QUESTION

REPORTANT ADDRESS

BY THE LORD STURTEVANT OF COVING

HOUSE OF COMMONS: SELECT COMMITTEE ROOM No. 10

LONDON: W. & A. GILBERT, 1887



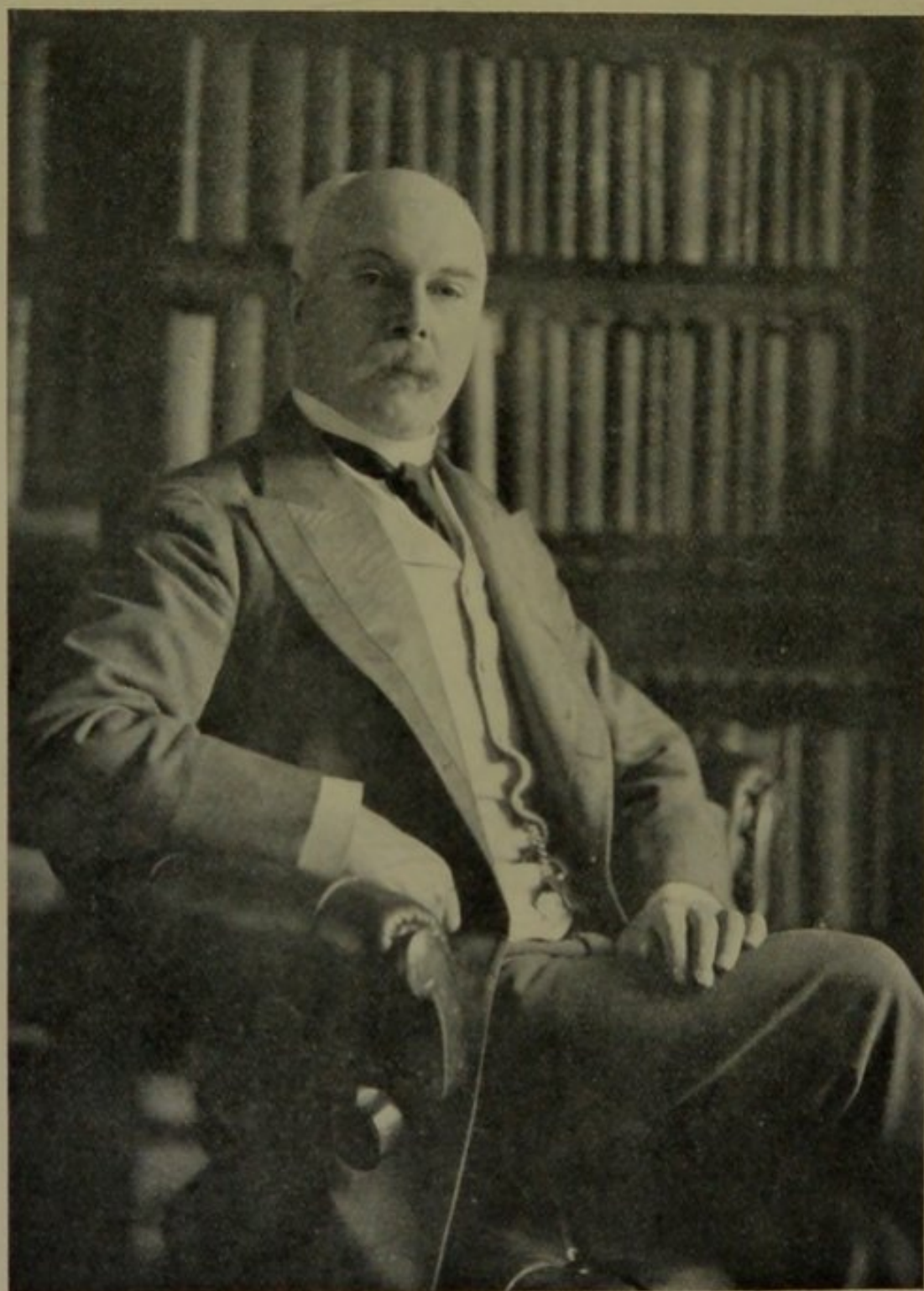


Photo:

Lafayette

Right Hon. LORD SYDENHAM OF COMBE,
G.C.S.I., G.C.M.G., G.C.I.E., F.R.S.,
Honorary Colonel 63rd Australian Infantry,
Formerly Secretary, Committee of Imperial Defence.

PROPOSED CHANNEL TUNNEL.

Military Aspect of the Question.

Address by

LORD SYDENHAM OF COMBE.

Speeches by Members of Parliament.

On Monday, June 29th, 1914, a meeting, convened by the House of Commons Channel Tunnel Committee, was held in Committee Room No. 10, House of Commons, for the purpose of hearing an address by Lord SYDENHAM OF COMBE on the proposed Channel Tunnel, with special reference to the military considerations involved. Mr. ARTHUR FELL, M.P., Chairman of the Committee, presided, and the attendance included a considerable proportion of military men who are members of the House.

The CHAIRMAN, in opening the proceedings, said : The last time we met here we heard an address by Sir Francis Fox on the engineering questions connected with the Channel Tunnel, and I think that he proved to the satisfaction of all who heard him that the engineering difficulties could easily be got over by modern science, that the Tunnel is quite practicable, and that if it were once put into

the hands of the engineers, they would see it through, and construct it properly. Following that meeting, we had hoped to have another relating to the economic aspects of the Tunnel, on which Baron E. B. d'Erlanger would have addressed us. Unfortunately he was not well at the time, and that meeting could not be arranged. Now we are having the third meeting which was arranged, the object being to discuss the military questions connected with the construction of the Tunnel. This is the most important meeting of the three, because it is the military question alone which has for upwards of thirty years prevented the carrying out of this great scheme—(Hear, hear). Things have, however, greatly changed to-day, and considerations formerly urged no longer apply.

I am glad to say that the Committee in calling this meeting has had the advantage of securing that we shall hear an address on this important question from Lord Sydenham, who of all men I believe is the most competent to discuss this subject from the military point of view—(applause). Lord Sydenham, after his varied career in the Royal Engineers, as you know, and after occupying other very high posts under different Governments, was Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence under, I think, three separate Prime Ministers—Mr. Balfour, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, and Mr. Asquith. As Secretary of that Committee, he obtained an unrivalled knowledge of this question. In addition, he has made it a matter of personal interest and study to become acquainted with all

the military questions which could arise in connection with the construction of the Tunnel. We shall, therefore, be all the more anxious to hear his views upon this important topic, as they must be a matter of interest to all who have given any consideration to this subject, whether they be in favour of the construction of the Tunnel or against it. I have now pleasure in calling on Lord Sydenham to address the meeting—(applause).

LORD SYDENHAM said: Mr. Fell has asked me to give you my views as to the Military objections to the Channel Tunnel. I comply with his wishes not without real diffidence, because I retired from the Army nearly thirteen years ago, and I may—quite naturally—be regarded as having passed into the ranks of the obsolete, or, at least, the obsolescent soldiers, whose opinions are of no more value. I should be glad to think that that is not quite the case; but I do admit that of late years, especially during the strenuous and anxious period that I passed in Bombay, I had not time to carry on the military studies which have really been the main interest of my life.

Before I attempt to deal with the Military question, may I very briefly allude to what may be called the historical aspect of the matter? In 1867 a project for constructing a Tunnel was drawn up by an Anglo-French Committee, and submitted to the Emperor of the French. In 1870 the French Government asked whether the British Government would support the project. In 1872 the Foreign Office, with the advice of the Board

of Trade, instructed Lord Lyons, our Ambassador, that, while opposed to any form of monopoly, Her Majesty's Government would be well satisfied to learn that the railway systems of the two countries were likely to be brought into connection by a Tunnel.

Again, in 1874, following on the report of a French Committee which advocated a concession, the British Government decided that there was no objection, and accepted generally the proposals of the French Committee. Bills dealing with the preliminary procedure passed both the French and British Parliaments in 1875 ; but there was some delay in forming a British Company, and the concession granted to the French promoters lapsed in 1880. This led to a demand for an extension of the period named in the concession. Meanwhile, in 1880, the South-Eastern Railway Company, under the auspices of the late Sir E. Watkin, evolved a scheme of its own, and began to sink a trial shaft between Dover and Folkestone.

The fact that the idea seemed to be passing out of the project stage, and that an actual hole in the ground was being made brought military opponents into the field. The shaft was completed, and a heading was run for some little distance when, in July, 1882, the work was ordered by the Government to be stopped. A good many years ago I went to the end of this heading, and was surprised to find how dry it was. The South-Eastern Railway works, of course, remain, and I understand that in more than 30 years the amount of water which has entered is surprisingly small.

The Committee stage of the Tunnel was now reached, and the difficulties began. The first Committee was an inter-departmental body, representing the Admiralty, War Office, and the Board of Trade. Sir Garnet Wolseley and Sir John Adye represented the War Office, and their views proved to be diametrically opposed.

Another Committee was, therefore, appointed by the Secretary of State for War in February, 1882. It contained six military officers and three civilians, but no naval officer. This Committee did not absolutely condemn the Tunnel project, and made various suggestions for protecting the Tunnel; but it summed up the matter by remarking that—

“ Even the most comprehensive and complete arrangements which can be devised could not be trusted in every imaginable contingency.”

That was a most remarkable verdict, and it is one with which we must all cordially agree. It has never been possible to set any bounds to the human imagination from the days of Dante to those of Jules Verne and Mr. H. G. Wells, and it is absolutely beyond the wit of man to devise the means of meeting “ every imaginable contingency.” Had that been made a condition of human activity, no great enterprise could have been carried out, and no large business could ever have been built up.

Practical people must heavily discount the imagination, and provide only against contingencies which are reasonably probable. That is the real crux of the Military question of the Channel

Tunnel, and it is discouraging to note that the verdict of the Committee of 1882 has undoubtedly influenced public opinion to this day, I suppose because many people do not pause to reflect on the comprehensive meaning of the word "imaginable."

The next step was the appointment, in April, 1883, of a Select Committee of both Houses of Parliament, which could not agree upon a Report, but showed a majority against the Tunnel. Since that time 11 Bills or Motions on the question have been defeated or withdrawn, and I think the last division was taken in June, 1890, resulting in a majority of 81 (234 votes to 153) against the project. Between 1880 and 1883 Lord Wolseley's opposition had markedly strengthened, and quite naturally the prestige arising from the rapid success of the operations in Egypt in 1882 materially enhanced the influence of his opinions. I am obliged for a moment to recall those opinions, because, though they have been widely spread and adopted, their precise import has been generally ignored.

Lord Wolseley does not appear to have had the smallest fear that we could not defend the mouth of the Tunnel. As he said in evidence—

"Fifty men at the entrance of the Tunnel can prevent an army of 100,000 men coming through it,"

which is obvious. His theory of danger was based simply and solely upon the hypothesis that the outlet of the Tunnel could be seized with perfect ease in a time of profound peace.

I must quote the actual words of his Memorandum, which makes this point absolutely clear :

“ The seizing of the Tunnel by a coup de main is in my opinion a very simple operation provided it be done without any previous warning or intimation whatever. . . . My contention is that, were a Tunnel made, England as a nation could be destroyed without any warning whatever, when Europe was in a condition of profound peace . . . The whole plan (Lord Wolseley’s plan) is based upon the assumption of its being carried out during a time of profound peace between the two nations (France and England), and whilst we were enjoying life in the security and unsuspicion of a fools’ paradise.”

I beg you to notice the precision of these words. They mean this only:—That every country must be prepared at every moment of every day against a sudden attack “ without any previous warning whatever ” and “ during a time of profound peace,” when there was not even a diplomatic difference on the horizon.

I cannot believe that Lord Wolseley considered what this theory implied, or that he realized that it involved far more than the question of the Tunnel. If this theory be true, there is nothing to prevent our fleets from being destroyed wherever they may be assembled. There is nothing to prevent London from being shelled from air vessels to-night. You will observe that this is not a military opinion, but a political forecast, the accuracy of which every student of history and of international affairs is able to judge.

Now, turning to the Tunnel, I cannot think that Lord Wolseley realized that what he called “ a

very simple operation," described by him as "seizing the Tunnel," meant capturing two strong Forts at some distance from the mouth of the Tunnel and from each other. And further, if a portion of the line where it issues from the sea were carried on an exposed viaduct, as has been proposed, the Tunnel would be useless as long as a British ship of war could live in the Channel.

The political theory was supported by a Memorandum entitled "Hostilities without Declaration of War," of which 100 cases during the 18th and 19th centuries were cited. Lord Wolseley selected three of those cases—(1) The seizure of the Danish Fleet at Copenhagen in 1807 ; (2) the capture of four Spanish frigates in 1804 ; and (3) the sudden outbreak of the Franco-German War in 1870, as specially fitted to demonstrate the truth of his theory. They were shown to be completely irrelevant, and Lord Lansdowne's Draft Report contains the following significant statement :—

"We do not take the view that the contingency of a coup de main struck by a Power with whom our relations had been friendly and unstrained is one which we have any right or which our experience would justify us in placing among the foremost of the probabilities with which we have to deal. It is our impression, on the contrary, that if such an attack were to be made it would have been preceded by circumstances which would have called for effectual precautions against a surprise. We observe with pleasure that this view is that apparently entertained by H.R.H. the Commander-in-Chief and by Sir Lintorn Simons."

It is perfectly true that, in modern conditions,

mobilisations are very swiftly carried out, and that hostilities may be begun far more quickly than was formerly possible. But the amazing development of means of communication has at the same time made it far more difficult to take any military steps without the knowledge of something unusual becoming known. The danger of to-day is not that we shall get no warning, but that rumours may be spread without foundation.

I ask you all to consider whether it is possible to accept Lord Wolseley's theory of a blow struck at a time of profound peace without the least "warning or intimation." If that theory be rejected, the whole of Lord Wolesley's objections vanish, and the question of the Tunnel can be approached in a fresh spirit. We can proceed on the basis of reasonable probabilities, not on that of "every imaginable contingency." But, if on full consideration you still accept the theory, I would ask you to reduce it to a simple issue.

I am the first to admit that any mechanical or electrical device might fail to act on the instant. The question then is this: Can reasonable time be counted upon to ensure that any methods of safeguarding the Tunnel can without the least doubt be made effective?

I ask you first to discard vague phrases such as "seizing the mouth of the Tunnel," which are purely misleading. What an enemy has to do is to capture two strong Forts, and to take possession of the Generating Station. That means three distinct operations. Unless all three operations are

successful, he will not be in a position to control the Tunnel so as to permit troops to pass. And they must not only be successful, but simultaneous; because, even in a time of profound peace, which is the hypothesis, the seizing of one Fort would provide a warning, and the other could not be taken except by siege involving a long time, and requiring the employment of heavy artillery and the power of defeating any force that we could bring to bear upon the besiegers. If we assume that the enemy was in a position to carry on the siege without interference, there would clearly be ample time to flood or permanently to destroy the Tunnel, even if all the apparatus were out of order and needed overhauling.

It has been frequently said, that owing to the heavy pecuniary loss, no Government would ever give orders for the destruction of the Tunnel. Surely, however, if one Fort at Dover had been captured by surprise, if the other was being besieged, and if the military position in England were such that no troops were available to deal with the besiegers, there could not be the slightest hesitation on the part of Government. But as the surprise of the one Fort would be possible only on Lord Wolseley's hypothesis of profound peace, there must apparently be an ample military force available to deal with the besiegers.

The surprise party must consist either—(1) of disguised persons previously resident at Dover, or (2) of a military force sent through the Tunnel itself. To be successful it must, as I have

said, simultaneously occupy two Forts, and take possession of the Generating Station, perhaps ten miles inland. The latter, of course, must be held and worked by the enemy for some time if a large force is to be conveyed through the Tunnel.

Remember that trains will have been running regularly, perhaps every twenty minutes; that half the electrical rolling-stock must be on the British side, and cannot be collected for the rapid passage of troops without interruption of the service; that the railway telegraph will be continuously working between Calais and Dover; that any massing of troops at Calais could not escape observation; and that the arrival of the first armed party at Dover Station, a long distance from its three objectives, would give the alarm.

Realize all these conditions, and then ask yourselves whether you can devise any plan which would give the enemy the slightest chance of success? I have tried hard to think out such a plan and I have failed absolutely. I do not say that a vivid imagination would not evolve something melodramatic; but that is not the point. It is for the soldier to judge whether a military operation is practicable or not, and I defy any soldier to propound a plan which could be accepted as feasible—(Hear, hear).

You will have noticed that all the military objections which have been raised are of the vaguest kind, dealing only with generalities, and we have the right to ask this of the objectors: If you accept Lord Wolseley's theory that in a

time of profound peace, when there was not the least cloud on the diplomatic horizon, we ought to expect what he vaguely described as "the seizing of the Tunnel," then it rests with you to explain how what he called "a very simple operation" can be carried out. And what you have to explain is, as I have said, how two Forts and the Generating Station at long distances apart can be simultaneously seized? Unless and until these three separate operations have been carried out, the control of the Tunnel must remain absolutely in our hands; and I am sure that my hearers will all see that the alleged failure of some mechanical contrivance suddenly brought into action is utterly irrelevant.

I have not alluded to the suggestion that the surprise would be effected by a body of armed men who had arrived at Dover as tourists, to await in scattered hotels and lodgings the signal for action, because I cannot regard this as a serious proposition. Nor do I think it necessary to deal with the other suggestion that these tourists, with rifles and ammunition concealed under their waterproofs, will arrive by steamer, and proceed to attack the Dover Forts. If the Tunnel be built, I believe there will be very little steamer passenger traffic between Calais and Dover, and in any case this suggestion seems plainly preposterous.

Now, suppose that we reject Lord Wolseley's hypothesis, as did Lord Lansdowne's Report, as did H.R.H. the late Duke of Cambridge, and the late Field-Marshal Sir Lintorn Simons, and as I

believe does every responsible statesman to-day. Suppose that we assume that warning of impending danger is forthcoming, as it always has been in the past, and, in my opinion, always must be. Suppose that the invariable course is followed—first, diplomatic tension; secondly, alarmist articles in all the papers; thirdly, rumours of preparations; fourthly, a declaration of war, accompanied or shortly preceded by an act of hostility. In other words, suppose that we have clear warning, whether of days or weeks. Those who regard the Tunnel as a military danger meet this hypothesis by saying that we are a purblind people, incapable of seeing danger even when it is imminent. Or, if they admit that, in these rather hysterical days, danger is more likely to be exaggerated than to be minimized, they fall back on the assertion that, even if Government and the people were fully alive to danger, no sort of precautions would ever be taken, because any precautions might tend to precipitate hostilities, or at least to create panic.

You will form your own judgment of these arguments. I will only say that, as far as the Tunnel is concerned, the only necessary precautions would be of the simplest character, of which the public would know nothing, while other precautions of a naval character would have to be taken—and as recent experience shows, would be taken—which could not be concealed.

But, as I have said, Lord Wolseley considered that if any warning were available, there would be no danger from the Tunnel; and I think we may

all cordially agree with this view. On a declaration of war, the Tunnel traffic would cease, as happens in all cases where railways cross the common frontiers of belligerents, though mutual arrangements might possibly be made to clear off tourists on both sides under special precautions. When the traffic had ceased, the dip in the British end of the Tunnel would be filled up, to give a popular sense of security, and the Tunnel would then be useless until the enemy had captured Dover and the Generating Station. This filling up would be strictly analogous to the blowing up of one span of the Rhine Bridge at Strasburg, which was one of the first acts of war in 1870 ; but it is a great advantage of the Tunnel that it can be absolutely blocked without causing any serious damage. Driven from one theory, the objector generally takes up another, and if again evicted will re-occupy his original position. That is the difficulty of this controversy.

I come to the last military consideration. In a recent letter, a distinguished retired Admiral asks :

"Has it never occurred to those responsible for the defence of this country that a descent of some considerable force may simultaneously take place at two or three or more parts of our shores, and by converging on Dover might by a coup de main obtain possession of our end of the Tunnel?"

This plan of campaign has, of course, often been suggested ; but that it should commend itself to an Admiral of our Navy is a saddening fact. If that Navy, with its enormous superiority over any other Power, with more than 240 destroyers and

with very nearly 100 submarines, of which all but 29 were completed in March last, cannot interfere with the simultaneous proceedings of these considerable forces, I really do not see what function it can discharge—(Hear, hear).

I say emphatically that until our Navy has been decisively beaten, and reduced in home waters to the position of the Russian Navy in the Far East after the battle of Tsushima, this plan cannot be carried out—(Hear, hear). That may be what the War Office Committee called an “imaginable contingency,” but I think you will agree with me that we have no right to contemplate it.

I ask you to note the following points in this connection :—

(1) If the Admiral's plan of campaign succeeded to the stage of “two, three, or more” simultaneous landings, which must include the landing of a heavy siege train, what would be the military position of the scattered columns converging upon Dover, and open to the attack of all the forces that our great railway systems could bring rapidly to bear upon them? The Admiral's plan postulates the previous destruction of our Army as well as of our Navy, and implies that the country has been successfully invaded.

(2) The Admiral uses the phrase “*coup de main*” in a totally different sense from that of Lord Wolseley, who restricted it to the case in which there was no “previous warning or

intimation whatever." On the Admiral's hypothesis, there would have been long warning, and the Tunnel would have been rendered safe many days before the siege of the Forts of Dover could be brought to a successful conclusion.

(3) I have proposed that means of blowing in the crown of the Tunnel should be held in readiness, not because I believe they are necessary; but to meet the views of those who, like the Admiral, have no faith either in our Navy or our Army. Such people reply "Oh, but you could never destroy the Tunnel because of the pecuniary loss," strangely forgetting that the loss would be the merest bagatelle compared with that involved in the successful invasion of this country. If we are to contemplate successful invasion, implying a great lodgment of hostile troops whom we are powerless to resist, followed by a successful siege of Dover, in order to obtain the use of the Tunnel for purposes of reinforcement, then it is logical to provide means for permanent destruction, and clearly there must be ample time to carry them out.

On the other hand, if the Tunnel Railway be fully exposed to the sea on a viaduct on both sides of the Channel, then so long as a British cruiser can remain for an hour a day in the Straits of Dover, the railway could not be used even if Dover were in the undisputed occupation of an enemy—(Hear, hear).

The measures of precaution which appear to meet every reasonable contingency are therefore :—

(1) Means of holding up every train for examination.

(2) Means of flooding a dip in the Tunnel, actuated from each of two independent Forts.

(3) The Forts to command the exit from the Tunnel with guns which cannot be silenced from the sea.

(4) Exposure of a portion of the line to fire from the sea.

To which may be added, if the old women of both sexes, who seem as numerous now as in Lord St. Vincent's days, so desire—

(a) Provision of mines, actuated from either of both Forts, for destroying the viaduct.

(b) Provision of mines actuated from either of both Forts for blowing in the crown of the Tunnel.

We must never forget that the Tunnel could be used against us only by France or by some Power which had successfully invaded France, and obtained control of her Northern Railway system. I am the last to believe in the absolute permanence of any happy relations which exist between *any* countries at the present time. We have seen so many changes in the European situation during the last 50 years that no such belief can be justified.

Looking forward, however, with such prescience as is possible, an attempt on the part of our friends the French seems peculiarly improbable, and in any other case a long warning is, of course, certain.

If, however, I have made the matter clear, I hope you will come to the conclusion that no danger that we cannot with reasonable certainty guard against can arise from the construction of the Channel Tunnel—(applause).

I will say only a few words as to the *military* advantages of this Tunnel, which have been explained by many writers and speakers. If ever we were compelled to send military forces to France, Belgium, or Holland, through railway connection would be of enormous importance. I need not remind you that, apart from any obligations towards France which may exist now or in the future, we have definite Treaty responsibilities as regards Belgium in certain contingencies.

It is from this point of view that doubt may arise as to the wisdom of exposing any portion of the Channel Railway to fire from the sea. Interruption of the railway in the circumstances I have referred to would be extremely inconvenient. Provided that both at Dover and at Calais there were a few guns able to prevent an enemy's ship from lying off the coast to shell the railway, and considering that this is just a case in which submarines, of which we have heard a good deal lately, might be expected to be effectively deterrent, I cannot see any danger from this source.

As regards our Food Supply, I believe firmly that we must depend wholly upon supremacy at sea, which we must maintain at all cost as the primary condition of our national existence. It is quite possible, however, that at the outset of naval

war some shortage might occur, due to the exaggeration of risks with which this country is no longer familiar, rather than to actual captures. In this case, the knowledge that foodstuffs could pass freely from France would have a steadying effect—(applause).

I hope I have not detained you too long. (“No, no,” and applause). I cannot claim to have exhausted the subject; but I trust that I have made clear the main military and naval considerations. If vague objections be discarded, and if clear and precise thinking be brought to bear upon the alleged dangers of the Tunnel project, I have no fear of the verdict.

In conclusion, I should like to say that from the beginning this great national question has been badly handled. For thirteen years after the project was first reduced to definite form, our Government not only raised no objection, but expressed their approval. I consider that the first official step should have been to make an exhaustive enquiry into the economic advantages. If such an enquiry had led—as it must have done—to a most favourable conclusion, the military aspects might then have been carefully considered. In national affairs, it may be, and often is, necessary to accept some small measure of risk to obtain a great economic advantage; and in this sense military considerations may have to be subordinated to national policy.

I hope that I have been able to show that there are no valid military objections; but there can be

no doubt that the mis-handling of the question, by giving official prominence to military fears, while providing no adequate estimate of the economic gain, has led to doubts and delays.

In the long controversy which has ranged almost continuously for 34 years, the pleasantest feature is the attitude of the French Government and people—(applause). From first to last they have respected the susceptibilities of our alarmists; they have never derided the fears of our publicists, and they have frankly offered to accept any conditions as to precautions which we may consider desirable—(applause). I earnestly trust that before long we may be able to meet them in the same spirit, and I am certain that the linking of the two railway systems will lead to mutual advantages, political as well as commercial—(applause).

Major-General Sir IVOR HERBERT, M.P.: In making a few remarks on this important topic, I do so not as claiming to possess any qualifications to express an opinion on the military aspects of the proposed Channel Tunnel after the authoritative views which you have heard expressed by Lord Sydenham, but simply because this is a subject in which I have for a long time taken a very great interest. I can carry my mind back to the time when the Committee sat in 1881. At that time I was a student in the Staff College, and, as you can imagine, there were few subjects which were more warmly discussed among all of us students than this question of, as it was then called, "doing away with the 'Silver Streak.'" It seems to me

that after all these years the arguments advanced against this project are the same as were urged then. We are merely told that we ought to be afraid to make this Tunnel because we are going to "do away with the 'Silver Streak.'" There has been no reasoned argument that I know of brought forward to reinforce that somewhat primitive suggestion—(applause).

I cannot help thinking, having had the honour of serving under Lord Wolseley, and knowing him pretty intimately, that had he been alive now his great mind would have soared far above any such argument as that to which he lent his authority at the time of the sittings of that Committee so many years ago. One thing on which I often think it would have been vastly interesting to hear him speak would have been the influence of aviation on military matters. Once aviation assumes the position of a science which has developed, as it certainly seems to have done, it is fraught with quite as much danger to our insular position as could possibly arise from the existence of a single line of railway connecting our shores with those of a friendly Power—(applause).

I have never understood how the existence of such a railway could be considered a source of danger. It has always seemed to me that to attempt to invade and to hold this island by means of a single line of railway was about the most hazardous enterprise in which any commander could engage—(Hear, hear). This is manifest if one just considers what such an operation means.

Suppose that the line were entirely in the hands of another Power, and that we had not got those arrangements of which Lord Sydenham told us with regard to the defence of the mouth of the Tunnel. Even then what an immense operation it would be to bring in an Army first of all by that single line of railway, and then to have the Army entirely dependent upon such a vulnerable line of communication as that! It is a thing which no general would think of doing, if he were conducting operations on land, and much less would he attempt it if he had to conduct his operations by a line constructed under the sea.

The fetish of the "Silver Streak" is valuable only if we develop it a little, and look upon it as the symbol and the emblem of sea power. Sea power is what this country must depend upon. That is to say that the command not only of the "Silver Streak," but of the whole ocean, will be just as necessary to this country from the point of view of our commercial position after the making of this Tunnel as it is to-day. Therefore, the fact that a Tunnel was made would not in any sense alter the incumbent duty which lies upon us of maintaining our superiority in the matter of sea power. For that very reason, it could not alter any fundamentals in the problem of defence with which we have to deal. As Lord Sydenham pointed out, in the problem of defence it is impossible to be safe at every spot. And nobody knows that better than he does, because, if I may be permitted to be personal in his presence,

he has done much to instruct the Army by his writings on the art of defence; and I know his great services to the Empire in the application of his maxims to Imperial Defence. Possibly many of his countrymen have not yet studied his technical works, which were written before he became a great Imperial administrator, and they are therefore unable to appreciate the influence which he has had upon the minds of officers in the Army by his work in that sphere—(applause).

I can speak of that from personal experience. When I first read his works I must confess that they came to me as an inspiration. We cannot be safe at every spot, and I must admit that this Tunnel would create such an infinitesimal danger in regard to all the great questions of Imperial Defence which we have to consider, that it really is negligible. The one argument which I have heard put forward with regard to the danger created by the existence of the Tunnel is that though it might be possible to make it so safe that no enemy would attempt to make use of the Tunnel against us, yet we might find ourselves involved in a war which might end disastrously for us, and that, following on a defeat suffered by us, perhaps in a distant part of the Empire, we might be called upon to surrender the Tunnel and its approaches into the hands of an International Commission or some other Power, and therefore practically make ourselves into a Continental Power, without that advantage which we should have in commanding the exit from the Tunnel. My answer to that

is this: If it were possible to conceive such a defeat, it would practically mean the end of everything—(Hear, hear). It would be as though we were called upon to submit to the annexation of a portion of this island, and we can hardly conceive that any circumstances would permit any Government to allow a portion of this island to pass into the hands of any foreign Power—(applause).

On the other hand, there is this argument in favour of the Tunnel which has always commended itself to me. I refer to the enormous value which we, as a great commercial nation, would derive from such direct and rapid communication with Europe. If we go back as far as Elizabethan times, we find the great Bacon in those days telling us of the importance of statesmen considering seriously the development of communications “as the necessity of a great Empire.” They are just as necessary to-day as they were then. And if it were realized in those days—when we were not merely threatened, but were actually attacked—that free intercourse between ourselves and other nations was a necessity, surely it is far more necessary to-day. We have seen in other countries all the resources of science turned to the military advantage of the various Powers, and we have seen in every country the development of railways taking place on a military, and not on a commercial basis. But what is the main effect to-day of those strategic railways which have been built all over Europe? They are the great adjuncts of commerce,

and for once that they may have been used in war, they have been now for nearly two generations constantly used in bringing people together, and in carrying on the peaceful communications of commerce. That is what I think we shall have to look to in the event of this new means of communication being established between this country and France. In conclusion, I can only say that I know of no better method of accentuating those one hundred years of peace between ourselves and France than for us to join with our friends across the Channel in carrying out this great work—(applause).

The CHAIRMAN: Colonel Yate was to have addressed us, but he has been unable to come to our meeting in time, as he is at present taking part in the debate in the House on the Foreign Office vote. Major Anstruther-Gray has written regretting that a bad cold prevents him from being with us, and adding: "I should have liked to speak in support of the scheme as an extra means of transporting food supplies and so on in time of war."

Colonel GREIG, M.P.: After the two military authorities whom we have just heard—although I have been connected with the Territorial Force for some time—I do not feel that my means of judging this question just now are exactly on a par with theirs. At the same time, I may mention that this particular question of the Forts at Dover was brought before me very prominently when I happened to be commander of a certain battalion.

It is not disclosing any secrets now, because this particular scheme of mobilisation and defence of the country has since been altered several times, but I may say in reference to the requirements which I had under consideration at the time, that my battalion was actually told off for the defence of one of those very Forts of which Lord Sydenham has been speaking, and I had to consider what steps should be taken for part of the defence of that particular Fort. The impression which I formed at the time has been confirmed by what has to-day fallen from Lord Sydenham, namely, that it would be extremely difficult for an enemy to attempt to come through the Tunnel. At the present time, without the existence of any Tunnel, there is always the danger of a surprise attack by the seizure upon our coast of a port of landing. I have not worked out how many troops you could send through the Tunnel. But suppose an enemy had seized the French end and the English end of the Tunnel, how many troops could he send through the Tunnel, say, in three hours? I do not think it could be shown that any very large number could be sent over, even if an enemy had complete control of the Tunnel for some hours; but it seems to me that the danger, when we consider the question of seizure and sudden invasion through a port of landing would be no greater after the construction of the Tunnel than it is at present—(Hear, hear).

There is one other point. There has been a

suggestion on our part that the French end of the Tunnel should be exposed to attack from the sea. From our point of view that would be unwise. It is far better that the French end of the Tunnel should not be exposed. If we were at war, and the question of the Tunnel were involved, then we must be at war either with France itself, or with some other country on the Continent. If we were not hostile to France, it would be better that the French end of the Tunnel should be quite safe. If we were at enmity with France, it would be quite within our means to take steps to defend our own end of the Tunnel—(Hear, hear). I can remember the discussion in the old days, as far back as can General Sir Ivor Herbert. Perhaps I was rather younger. In those days, though military opinion was for the most part against this project, I was strongly in favour of the Tunnel, as was Major-General Sir Alfred Turner. I have been confirmed in the view which I then held by everything that has happened since, and I am still a hearty supporter of the project—(applause).

Mr. JOHN O'CONNOR, M.P. : I was very gratified to hear Lord Sydenham state that the portion of the Tunnel which had been made was still dry. It is a great many years ago since I went down the Tunnel with our old friend Admiral Field. He was a supporter of the Tunnel project, and on accompanying us on that expedition he pointed out to us the absolute safety of the arrangements that could be made on shore for the protection of the

Tunnel. He also explained the machinery which has been referred to by the noble lord for blowing down the crown of the Tunnel. I have always preserved the recollection of that day as one of the most interesting of the many events that have happened during my long connection with Parliament, lasting now for over thirty years, and I was at the time thoroughly satisfied that, notwithstanding the very important opinion against us, the Channel Tunnel would be no danger to the integrity of this island of ours—(applause). It was quite clear that the Tunnel could be constructed without difficulty. The machinery that had been set up for the purpose of boring the Tunnel was then in perfect order. It was set to work in order to exhibit the operation to us on that occasion, and I suppose that it is still there. I was pleased to learn that there is no more water collected in the Tunnel now than there was then.

I wish to refer to only one other matter. The people of this country may appear to be short-sighted in the manner in which they have treated this subject in the past. But after all, they are not to blame when you have such a military authority as the late Lord Wolseley giving his opinion so emphatically as he did that it would be a danger, and would destroy the insularity of this country. You cannot be surprised at the English people accepting his opinion, and you cannot blame the Governments which acted upon that opinion. However, I

am pleased that the Committee have come to the conclusion at which I arrived many years ago from the visit to which I have referred, and from the demonstration then given to me by Admiral Field, and to find that the opinion of great authorities like Lord Sydenham is a growing opinion, and is likely to prevail. That being so, I believe we shall all live to see the auspicious day when we shall perform our first journey through the Channel Tunnel. I rise for the purpose of expressing personally my thanks to Lord Sydenham for coming here to-day, and giving us such a very interesting explanation of the safety of the Tunnel from the military point of view—(applause).

Sir JOHN ROLLESTON, M.P.: I am not an expert on the military matters which have been referred to. I can only say that since the days of Sir Edward Watkin—with whom I was associated in some of the great works which he carried out in this country—I always fully shared his view that the construction of this Tunnel was perfectly feasible and desirable. It has been disappointing to several of us who were supporters of the project since then to see the attacks that have been made upon this scheme by distinguished naval and military experts. Therefore, it is doubly satisfactory to me to hear what, to my mind, is the absolute confutation of those objections made this afternoon by so high an authority as Lord Sydenham. If the settled foreign policy of this country, as I believe it is—and as it is also the settled policy of France—is the preservation of the independence

of Belgium and of the Netherlands, surely the construction of a Tunnel of this kind would be the best possible means to make that policy effective—(applause).

Lord Sydenham mentioned the question of the food supply of this country, and he also spoke of the practice of drawing on the imagination in various matters of this kind. A modern writer, Sir Conan Doyle, has written a very interesting article in the *Strand Magazine* of this month. I cannot criticise it from the naval point of view—not being an expert in these matters—but I am sure that the idea of that article will have its effect on public opinion. He imagines the Channels in the possession of very efficient submarines, and the story he tells is how these submarines destroy the food vessels coming in to the ports of the country, and so he draws on his imagination in that respect. But his argument is directed almost solely, it seems to me, to the desirability of providing an alternative approach for food stuffs which is not dependent upon the sea. And a distinguished admiral, Sir Percy Scott, has started almost a panic about the possibility of our ships being destroyed by aircraft and submarines. I can only say that it must appeal to the ordinary mind that, with Marseilles as the port for the granaries of the East, the Channel Tunnel would be a most valuable safeguard to this country in the matter of enabling us to procure an abundant supply of food in time of war—(Hear, hear). That is my opinion, and I think it is the opinion which will

appeal to the public in this country. I wish to join in the thanks to Lord Sydenham for his very able address—(applause).

Sir WILLIAM BULL, M.P.: Several gentlemen have expressed their appreciation of Lord Sydenham's very able address, and I beg now to move formally that a cordial vote of thanks be accorded to him for coming here this afternoon to discuss this matter from the military point of view. He said that he thought that the matter had been very badly managed in the past. I agree with him, but I am glad to say that, since it has been in the hands of Mr. Fell it has been very well managed—(applause). The House of Commons Committee have had to attack the subject in various directions. We have had the financial position put before us, showing that there is not the slightest difficulty about getting the money. If necessary, our friends in France would practically find it all. But it is very desirable that England should take a half share at least in providing the means for carrying out this great work. But at any rate, there is no difficulty from the financial point of view—(applause).

I have always taken a deep interest in tunnels, ever since I was a small boy. I have been connected with a good many. I was chairman of the Blackwall Tunnel when it was being made. I saw all the difficulties which were overcome by means of the Greathead shield, and by the indomitable perseverance of Sir Alexander Binnie and Sir Weetman Pearson (the present Lord Cowdray), who was the

contractor. The difficulties in the case of the Channel Tunnel are not very serious from the engineering point of view.

The question of National Defence is, of course, the great crux in connection with the construction of the Tunnel. Lord Sydenham, in his able address, has met every one of the objections that have been raised on this score. Of course, you can always find objections against everything—(laughter). There is nothing ever proposed as to which you do not have criticisms on the other side. But I think that Lord Sydenham's address, if it is properly distributed, will go very far indeed to reassure the general public—(applause).

I mix a great deal with people, and as far as I can make out, public opinion is now decidedly in favour of the construction of the Channel Tunnel. It certainly was not so 20 or 30 years ago. Indeed, in those days more people were against the proposal. People talked of the "tight little island," the "Silver Streak," and all the rest of it. But circumstances are entirely altered, and there is now no reason why we should not have the Tunnel. We are merely waiting to hear from Mr. Asquith what the Committee of Imperial Defence think about the project. They are evidently giving it very thoughtful consideration. I know that they and others are very busy, and cannot arrive at a decision rapidly; but we hope that before this Session passes we may know what decision will be come to. We hope that it will be in our favour. I am perfectly certain, not only for the reasons which

have been given this afternoon, but for many others, into which I cannot now go owing to lack of time, that the construction of the Channel Tunnel would be one of the greatest blessings to the United Kingdom, and also to Europe. It will be a very great step forward, and it will, I believe, be the precursor of a great many other tunnels linking up various parts of the world. I have very much pleasure in proposing a cordial vote of thanks to Lord Sydenham for his very able address.

Colonel Sir HILDRED CARLILE, M.P.: I have great pleasure in seconding the proposal of Sir William Bull.

The CHAIRMAN: Before putting this motion, and in personally thanking Lord Sydenham for the extremely able address which he has delivered, I may point out that it is difficult to appreciate it properly merely from hearing it read. We shall, however, have it most carefully printed *verbatim* and circulated, so that you may study it at leisure, and see how completely the arguments advanced against the Tunnel have been refuted by Lord Sydenham. We shall see that it is circulated among all the members of this House and of the Upper House, and among the members of His Majesty's Government; and we hope that it will have the effect of very largely, if not entirely dissipating any fears which may still exist on the subject—(applause).

Lord SYDENHAM: I thank you all for the kind attention which you have given me. Referring to just one point, I may say that I agree entirely with

what has been said as to not exposing the railway on the French side. That was only suggested with the object of meeting the objections of certain people. It is not because it is thought to be necessary, but because of the desire to get this thing done—(applause). That is the only possible excuse for these two exposures of the line by viaducts, which are quite unnecessary—(Hear, hear). I hope that there will be as much unanimity elsewhere as we have had in this Committee room to-day—(applause).

A vote of thanks to the Chairman concluded the proceedings.