

# **THE ARMY ON ITSELF**

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The army on itself by H. A. Gwynne

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**H. A. GWYNNE**

**THE ARMY  
ON ITSELF**



THE  
ARMY ON ITSELF

*Administrative*

BY

H. A. GWYNNE

REUTER'S CHIEF WAR CORRESPONDENT  
(BOER WAR 1899-1902)

*If England was what England seems,  
An' not the England of our dreams,  
But only putty, brass and paint,  
'Ow quick we'd drop 'er! But she ain't!*

RUDYARD KIPLING

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FREDERICK WARNE AND CO  
AND NEW YORK

1904

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HARDING

DEDICATED TO  
THE REGIMENTAL OFFICER  
AND TO THE  
MEN HE HAS TRAINED

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*The day's lay-out—the mornin' sun  
Beneath your 'at-brim as you sight;  
The dinner—'ush from noon till one,  
An' the full roar that lasts till night;  
An' the pore dead that look so old  
An' was so young an hour ago,  
An' legs tied down before they're cold—  
These are the things which make you know.*

**RUDYARD KIPLING**



## PREFACE

THE Boer War came as a very rude shock to the British public. Perhaps its greatest and most important results were the acknowledgment that "something was wrong somewhere" and the desire to find out the defects and remedy them. The nation, alarmed at the discovery of a lack of organisation, seriously set itself the task of making a thorough examination into the state of the Army, and heartily approved of the War Commission and the appointment of Lord Esher's Committee to carry into effect its recommendations. Within a very brief period of time the office of Commander-in-Chief was abolished, the government of the Army placed in the hands of an Army Council, and steps were taken to institute a General Staff. In all of these reforms the nation has acquiesced with satisfaction, if not with enthusiasm, and we have to-day the extreme comfort of knowing that something has really been done to secure "the best article for the money."

That there remains much to do is no reflection on the reformers. They have rightly directed all their attention towards perfecting the administration of the

Army. But the machine itself remains as it was, to a great extent. We have done all that is possible to render those who are to direct its energy along proper lines capable of doing so with full knowledge. But to secure perfection the machine itself has to be thoroughly overhauled, so that it will work easily and smoothly. This task yet remains to be done, and I hope that the following pages will help the public to understand the needs, and will be of some use to those who will have to try to satisfy them.

From a somewhat varied experience of the British Army in the field, I have come to the conclusion that its real reform must come from within. While it is obvious that no army can, of itself, cast off its system of government, it is equally clear that there are very few persons outside the Army with sufficient knowledge of its internal and delicate mechanism to put forward practical schemes of reform. A thorough experience of regimental life seems to me to be the first thing necessary to a would-be reformer, and this experience is lacking in the majority of civilians. Recognising this, I thought that it would be an excellent thing to obtain from the Army itself some idea of what is required to make it thoroughly efficient. The late war being the most valuable asset the British Army possesses, I have attempted in the following pages to develop it to the utmost extent. We have learned lessons during that long struggle which should, if properly applied, raise our Army far above the continental standard of military

efficiency. But before arriving at this happy state, it is above all things necessary to know exactly what are the lessons of the war. There is an apparent divergence of views which, at first blush, seems to render unanimity impossible. But on inquiry, the difference will chiefly be found in the point of view from which a question is regarded and not in the treatment of the question itself. A cavalry officer will tell you that the Mounted Infantry is a much overpraised arm, while the Mounted Infantry officer will express profound dissatisfaction with the work of the cavalry. The infantryman will tell you that neither did particularly well, and that the real work of the campaign was done by him. And so on.

The task I have attempted to perform was to gather together in a concise form the views of the Army on the various problems of practical soldiering which have been solved, or partly solved, by our experiences in the late war and thus to place on permanent record the lessons we have learned. A successful war is apt to bring about forgetfulness, and there is a distinct tendency on the part of many soldiers to regard the Boer War as abnormal and to revert to the old systems. It is forgotten that, although we wore down the enemy and forced out of him the submission of Vereeniging, we cannot congratulate ourselves on having brought the war to a conclusion by steady persistent military superiority. It was sheer doggedness rather than brilliant strategy or tactics that ended the war. This is so often forgotten that there is every excuse for frequent