

THE TAKING OF DOVER

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649263189

The Taking of Dover by H. F. Lester

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H. F. LESTER

**THE TAKING OF
DOVER**

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Taking of Dover.

Original BY
Frank H. F. LESTER,

AUTHOR OF

"UNDER TWO FIG TREES," "DEN D'YMION,"
AND OTHER NOVELETTES.

BRISTOL:

J. W. ARROWSMITH, 11 QUAY STREET.

LONDON:

SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, & Co., 4 STATIONERS' HALL COURT.

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"The thing Governments most think about is, how to cut down the expenditure, which is the greatest blunder that can be made in the interests of the country. It is simply the question of the existence of the Empire, or the non-existence of it."

The Duke of Cambridge, Commander-in-Chief.

"In times like the present, it behoves the people of England to know the whole truth in regard to their army and navy. All the great nations of Europe are armed to the teeth. On all sides the horizon foretells storms. That being so, we have continually to ask ourselves, 'Is the army as strong as it ought to be?' Few of those who know the facts will maintain that it is so."—*Lord Wolseley.*

"In the ports of France at this moment, and every day of the year, there is enough shipping to carry over 100,000 men to England without any preparation at all."—*Lord Wolseley.*

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THE TAKING OF DOVER.

(TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.)

LONDON, *June*, 1898.

MY BELOVED SON,

Your last welcome letter informed me of the pleasant fact that you are making progress in your military studies. You tell me that the authorities at St. Cyr have chosen for the subject of the annual Essay on some military topic a discussion, to be carried on between two or more interlocutors, on "The best means to gain possession of a strongly fortified position in a neighbouring country." You will readily understand that I shall take the greatest interest in your efforts to gain the prize, and shall rejoice if you succeed in obtaining that high distinction.

My own labours in this country, so recently occupied, continue to be immense and unceasing. Believe me, I feel the burden of the administration exceedingly heavy, and but for the sense of duty in serving His

Gracious Majesty the Emperor to the best of my ability, even this renowned and responsible office might cease to tempt me for any length of time.

Yet I feel bound to find the opportunity, my beloved child, to write to you an account of that great and celebrated exploit in which I took a part—the surprise and capture of the town and castle of Dover, although I must have narrated parts of the tale to you already by word of mouth. Since you request it, I will willingly give you a more exact and detailed description of the event. Your pen, more skilful than mine, will be able to shape my words into the form required by so able and exacting a tribunal as the Committee of Examination at the Academy of St. Cyr.

You know well, my dear son,—I have often told you,—that in many ways I retain an admiration for the people of this country, although now a conquered people. They have genius, courage, patriotism. But they are slow, lazy, credulous, and confiding to a ridiculous extent. I ask you, as a young officer trained in the science of warfare, whether any other European or barbarous Power would have permitted foreign nations to become acquainted with almost every detail of the defensive capabilities of such a port as Dover? Supposing that we had been fools enough to practically throw open to the world the armaments, the construction, and the extent of the garrisons of the Fort de Querqueville,

or the Fort des Flamands at Cherbourg; or that we had permitted foreigners, after a few formalities had been gone through, to wander at will over our dockyards at Toulon, to inspect the defences of Boulogne, or had invited them to visit La Malgue or Valérien;—should we not have been taken for lunatics? Yet this nation was guilty of that incredible folly. Nor need I mention Dover alone. Was not the same the case with Chatham, Woolwich, Portsmouth and Plymouth, and all the dépôts of artillery and garrison towns and forts throughout the whole province? They were harmless as doves, these English, then, but they were by no means “wise as serpents.”

Yet once more, at the risk of wearying you, and before I enter on the account which I have promised you, I will tell you to what I attribute the fall of this once great and powerful nation. Five years ago, if you walked through the streets of this capital, you would have seen in many shop windows belonging to “papetiers” (what they call “stationers”) a sight of much interest. What was that? A map of the world, with the portions held by Great Britain, her colonies and dependencies, coloured in red. Ah, my son, half the world, I assure you, looked red then! The colour was that of blood when it is dry. Perhaps it expressed their thought. They fancied themselves secure—that never again would they be obliged to shed blood in