

**THE BRITON'S FIRST
DUTY: THE CASE
FOR CONSCRIPTION**

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The Briton's First Duty: The Case for Conscription by George F. Shee

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GEORGE F. SHEE

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The
Briton's First Duty

The Case for Conscription

Written BY
GEORGE F. SHEE, M.A.

WITH DIAGRAMS

'England expects that every man will do his duty'

London
Grant Richards
1901

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To
THE PATRIOTS
OF
GREAT AND GREATER BRITAIN
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

PREFACE

It is with great diffidence that I offer this book to the public, but at the same time with the clear consciousness that, in doing so, I am fulfilling a patriotic duty. I have been driven to do so by a profound sense of the danger in which I believe this country has been for many years past, and *still is*, in spite of ever-increasing wealth and constant growth of territory.

It is no technical question that I propose to place before the reader. To look upon it in that light would be utterly to misunderstand the scope and purpose of this book. For I deal with a question which is not even, directly, a military or naval one at all. It is simply and solely a question of *principle*; a question of plain *duty* to the Sovereign and the State; a question that affects, not the soldier and the sailor, but *every citizen of this great Empire*; it is, in the highest sense of the word, a civilian question.

The question whether every able-bodied white man throughout the United Kingdom—throughout the Empire—ought to, and shall in future, perform the most fundamental and sacred duty of citizenship or not is one which *he*, in his millions, will have to answer, and no one else.

At the present moment the air is full of Army Reform, as it always has been when the test of war has shown our military system to be inadequate to our needs. The same delusive phrase will be used which has so often lulled us into a false security—a security from which our next awakening would be a far more terrible one than we have ever known in the past. Even as it is, no one can have failed to notice a singular want of earnestness in the public utterances of Ministers on the question of Army Reform. ‘In spite of the lessons that this Empire should have learnt as to the futility of a policy of optimism, we fail to trace any serious effort on the part of either House of Parliament to add to the preparedness of Great Britain in view of possible dangers in the future.’* There can be no real and lasting Army Reform which does not start on the only possible sound basis for an Army, namely, a *national* one.

* *Morning Post*, August 9, 1900.

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On May 9, 1900, Lord Salisbury said to the Primrose League : ' Everywhere you see the powers of offence increasing. Armies become larger, Navies are founded, railways, telegraphs, all the apparatus which science has placed at the disposal of war, become more perfect and more effective. And all these things may, by one of those strange currents that sweep across the ocean of international politics, be united in one great wave and dash on your shores.' The Prime Minister went on to tell us plainly that ' the defence of the country is *not the business of the War Office or the Government, but the business of the people themselves.*' If such words are a strong tribute to the triumph of Democracy, it behoves Democracy to remember that such triumph brings with it a heavy burthen of responsibility, not to be shirked without grave danger to the Commonwealth.

It is, therefore, as a citizen of this Empire, speaking to my fellow-citizens, as one dearly loving his country to the millions who share that feeling, that I have written this book. Begun, as the result of many years' conviction, when we were at peace with all the world, having just established the Pax Britannica by the victory of Omdurman, I have written part