

**ARMY  
LETTERS, 1897-98**

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Army Letters, 1897-98 by H. O. Arnold -Forster

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**H. O. ARNOLD -FORSTER**

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# ARMY LETTERS

1897-98

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*Hugh Dakely* BY  
H. O. ARNOLD-FORSTER, M.P.  
AUTHOR OF 'OUR HOME ARMY'

~~CANCELLED~~

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37 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND  
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## PREFACE.

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IN publishing the following series of letters it is a matter of regret to the Author not to be able to include in the volume the whole of the correspondence to which the letters here printed has given rise. It would have been most satisfactory to the Author to have included not only the trenchant and well-informed letters signed 'Reform,' the letters of Lord Chelmsford and many other officers, all advocating a change in our Army organization, but to have added the letters of Sir Arthur Haliburton, General Bulwer, and of one or two anonymous writers who were selected to do battle for the War Office as it is, and for the British Army as the War Office has made it. Unluckily, this opportunity has not been afforded, and the Author is therefore compelled to limit the present publication to his own letters, losing

thereby the great reinforcement furnished by the letters of his friends, and the still greater support which is supplied by those of his opponents. For, indeed, if the case against the War Office rested solely upon the letters which have been written in its defence, it would be a most formidable indictment.

In introducing the following letters a few general remarks are permissible. In the first place it may be said, without undue assurance, that, generally speaking, the letters represent the views of at least nine-tenths of the officers and men actually serving or on the Retired List. This is no idle boast: it is a statement founded upon the ample and convincing testimony of a correspondence extending over several months, of innumerable interviews and conversations, and of the collation of opinions expressed in many quarters. The War Office may be quite right, but the conviction that they are entirely wrong is so deeply rooted and widely extended throughout the whole of the British Army, that a civilian is not only justified in noting the fact, but is bound as a reasonable man to do so.



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There are always many persons who, in approaching the consideration of military matters, exhibit a humility which does not invariably characterize them in forming their opinion about other matters. They are wont to say that the matters under consideration are purely technical, and that therefore it is only reasonable to accept, without inquiry and without criticism, the views of half a dozen officials with regard to all the points at issue. But in the present instance such humility is altogether out of place. The issues involved are not technical at all: they are such that any man with common-sense and ordinary business capacity can form a sound opinion about them; nor need members of the public be overwhelmed and disheartened by finding the prestige of the War Office thrown into the scale against them. The story of the War Office and its prestige is like the old story of the Emperor and his new clothes. As a matter of fact, the War Office has no prestige, and the sooner that fact is made perfectly apparent the better. The record of the Civil branch of the War Office has been a long story of failure, and on those occasions on which

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success has been achieved, it has been despite the War Office and not because of it. Therefore, let every man who has a mind to consider Army questions look at facts as they are, and forget if he can that a particular view with regard to them has commended itself to the occupants of a particularly ineffective office.

Since the letters included in this book were written, the Secretary of State for War has published his Memorandum accompanying the Army Estimates. An official *communiqué* has hastily been issued to inform the public that this Memorandum does not exhaust the good things in store for the country. It is devoutly to be hoped that it does not, for a more disappointing, a more hopelessly inadequate statement than that contained in the document referred to can hardly be imagined. Save in the matter of the abolition of deferred pay, no change whatever is to be made in the methods of War Office procedure. The system which has so disastrously failed in the past is to be patched up so that it may fail again in the future; the scandal of the new Cavalry organization is to be maintained; an utterly

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inadequate addition is to be made to the Artillery, and, worst of all, the country is to be committed to the meaningless waste of money and waste of energy involved in raising six new battalions, in the hope of resuscitating the battalion-depot system. It is characteristic of the War Office that on their own showing the number of battalions to be raised will not restore the precious equality between units abroad and at home, which is supposed to be so essential. Like everything else in the Memorandum, it is a compromise based on no principle, and adopted in a hurry to meet an emergency. In 1897 Parliament voted an addition of 9,000 men to the Army. The net result is that in 1898 the Army is 3,000 men weaker than it was at the beginning of 1897. And now with our existing Infantry battalions in a state of chaos, with the ranks full of boys, with the Mediterranean garrisons officially declared to be unfit to fight, and of the 9,000 men voted last year not one-tenth part yet raised—the country is asked to sanction the farcical extravagance of adding six more Infantry battalions to the Army, to be swallowed up and demoralized by the system