

GREAT BRITAIN AND THE NEXT WAR

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Great Britain and the next war by A. Conan Doyle

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A. CONAN DOYLE

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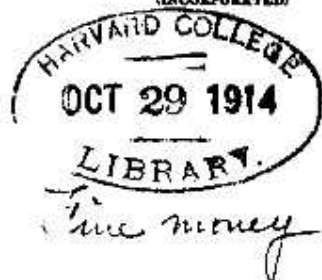
BY
A. CONAN DOYLE



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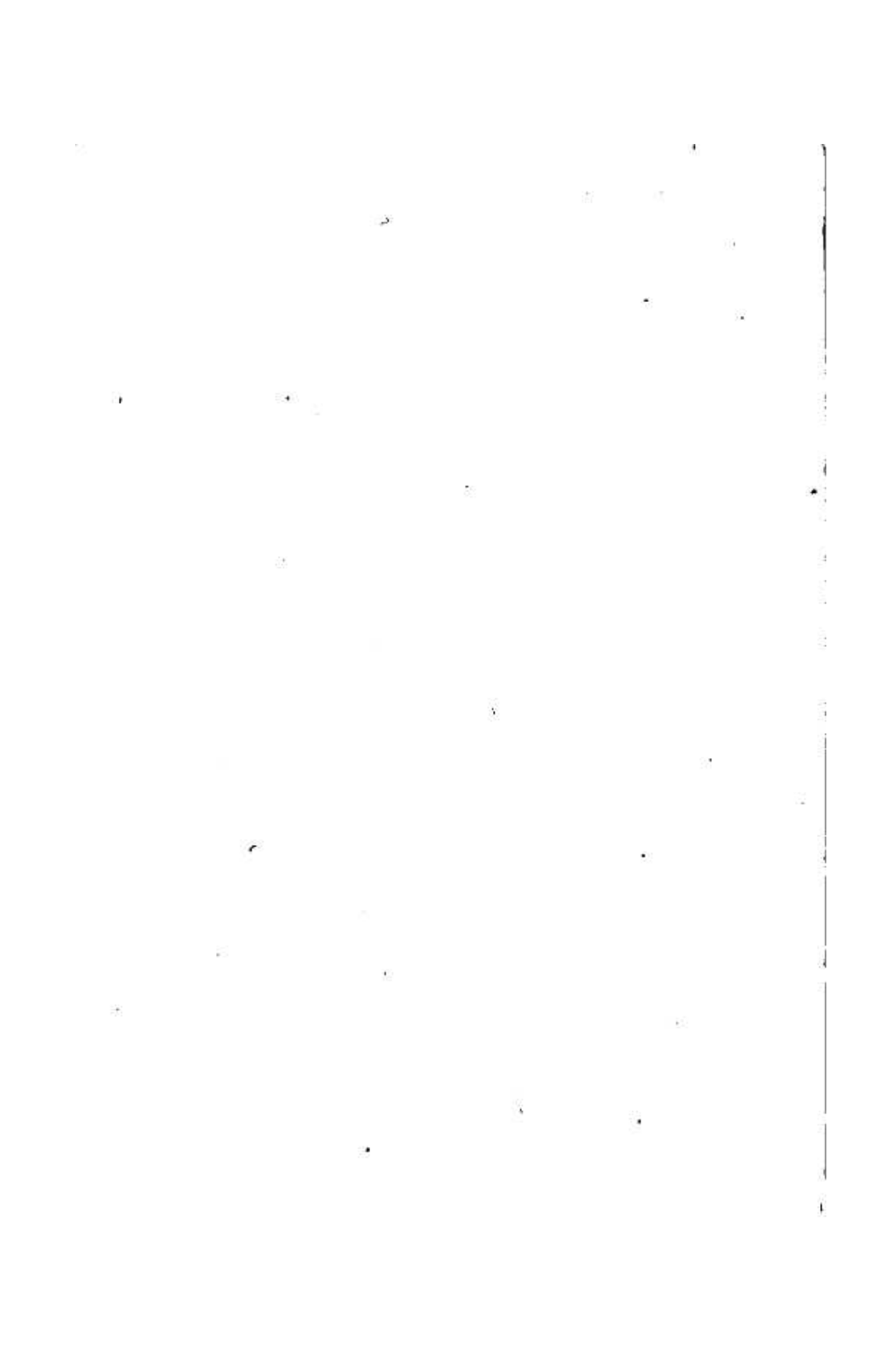
First printed in the Fortnightly Review in 1913

NOTE

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is the historian of the Boer War as well as the creator of *Sherlock Holmes*, the skilled student of military operations as well as the ingenious deviser of plots; he is no less an intense patriot than a clear and logical thinker.

Writing early in 1913 to call to the attention of his fellow-countrymen the warning so openly given them by General von Bernhardt in his *Germany and the Next War*, Sir Arthur took occasion to analyze the German general's "case" against England and to answer his contentions in the light of history and reason. His summing up of German motives and German plans is particularly valuable to Americans in the light of after events, and incidentally the gentle raillery with which he punctures some of Bernhardt's statements is a delight to every one who has been entertained by *Brigadier Gerard*. His novel plan for national defence is of peculiar interest to every American who has ever crossed the English Channel, while his advice to his Irish fellow-countrymen seems prophetic.

And it is impressive to find a member of the Anglo-German Society, who has never been a serious believer in the so-called German menace, feeling so deeply the possibilities of the "philosophy" of Bernhardt as to write, "Every one of his propositions I dispute. But that is all beside the question. We have not to do with his argument, but with its results. These results are that he, a man whose opinion is of weight and a member of the ruling class in Germany, tells us frankly that Germany will attack us the moment she sees a favorable opportunity. I repeat that we should be mad if we did not take very serious notice of the warning."



Great Britain and the Next War

I am a member of the Anglo-German Society for the improvement of the relations between the two countries, and I have never seriously believed in the German menace. Frequently I have found myself alone in a company of educated Englishmen in my opinion that it was non-existent—or at worst greatly exaggerated. This conclusion was formed upon two grounds. The first was, that I knew it to be impossible that we could attack Germany save in the face of monstrous provocation. By the conditions of our government, even if those in high places desired to do such a thing, it was utterly impracticable, for a foreign war could not be successfully carried on by Great Britain unless the overwhelming majority of the people approved of it. Our foreign, like our home, politics are governed by the vote of the proletariat. It would be impossible to wage an aggressive war against any Power if the public were not convinced of

GREAT BRITAIN AND THE NEXT WAR

its justice and necessity. For this reason we could not attack Germany. On the other hand, it seemed to be equally unthinkable that Germany should attack us. One fails to see what she could possibly hope to gain by such a proceeding. She had enemies already upon her eastern and western frontiers, and it was surely unlikely that she would go out of her way to pick a quarrel with the powerful British Empire. If she made war and lost it, her commerce would be set back and her rising colonial empire destroyed. If she won it, it was difficult to see where she could hope for the spoils. We could not give her greater facilities for trade than she has already. We could not give her habitable white colonies, for she would find it impossible to take possession of them in the face of the opposition of the inhabitants. An indemnity she could never force from us. Some coaling stations and possibly some tropical colonies, of which latter she already possesses abundance, were the most that she could hope for. Would such a prize as that be worth the risk attending such a war? To me it seemed that there could be only one answer to such a question.

GREAT BRITAIN AND THE NEXT WAR

It still seems to me that this reasoning is sound. I still think that it would be an insane action for Germany deliberately to plan an attack upon Great Britain. But unfortunately an attack delivered from mistaken motives is as damaging as any other attack, and the mischief is done before the insanity of it is realized. If I now believe such an attack to be possible, and it may be imminent, it is because I have been studying "Germany and the Next War," by General von Bernhardi.

A book written by such a man cannot be set aside as the mere ravings of a Pan-Germanic Anglophobe. So far as appears, he is not a Pan-German at all. There is no allusion to that *Germania irredente* which is the dream of the party. He is a man of note, and the first living authority in Germany upon some matters of military science. Does he carry the same weight when he writes of international politics and the actual use of those mighty forces which he has helped to form? We will hope not. But when a man speaks with the highest authority upon one subject, his voice cannot be entirely disregarded upon a kindred one. Besides, he continually labors, and with suc-