

close of the nineteenth century, just as in the times far past when every man that comprised the hard-hitting hordes of ATTILA and GENSERIC bore and used a weapon of some kind. The days of the ill-armed and unorganised rabbles were succeeded by the feudal army—iron-clad knights and men-at-arms who formed the nucleus of the fighting force and were followed by a nondescript collection of serfs and slaves who were not armour-plated, who fought anyhow, and who went down before the onset of the mailed warriors like wooden hulks before the broadsides of modern men-of-war. The period of ill-organised tangles of ill-armed mobs disappeared with that of the standing armies of comparatively few but highly trained professional soldiers. In England standing armies date from CHARLES II.'s body of 'gentlemen of quality and veteran soldiers, excellently clad, mounted, and ordered'; and they gradually ushered in the days of tactics and scientific soldiering. The days of the professional and life-long soldier passed in France in the wars of the great Revolution. Conscription or compulsory service then became and has remained practically ever since the law of the land. It is, in effect, a return to the old period of savage warfare when every adult male had to arm and fight for the defence of his village, his hunting-grounds, or his tribe; but with this important difference, that the modern national, or, so to speak, tribal army, does not depend for its terrors on mere brute force of numbers and courage, but on acquired skill in the use of the latest scientific inventions for converting human fighting animals into so much dead meat. A military authority rightly says that 'no nation ever did or ever will accept conscription except by compulsion.' All the great European States have long since of necessity adopted conscription as a means of keeping up their military strength. As matters stand, their very existence depends upon it, and the grumbling and hard-used taxpayer and the young recruit have come to resign themselves, though with a mighty bad grace, to the fearful burden of heavy taxation and long personal service on the plea that conscription is, after all, but a form of insurance of national property and independence against the inroads of watchful and jealous neighbours.

It is not so generally known that a form of conscription has been provided for by an Act of Parliament which has been upon the British statute-book, unrepealed, for the last forty years. We refer to the Ballot Act of 1860. It provides that all males over 5ft 2in in height and between the ages of eighteen and thirty years shall serve in the militia. A merciful Act of Parliament, passed with monotonous regularity every year, suspends the operation of the Ballot Act of 1860. Fewer still are aware that the press-gang is still a legal, though obsolete, resort for the manning of the 'Queen's navy,' and that to this hour sailors, river-watermen, and even rank land-lubbers may be legally dragged out of their homes to help Britannia to rule the waves. An Act of Parliament passed in 1835, and regarded at the time as a great boon, limits the term of service of impressed men to five years 'save in urgent national necessity.' This method of recruiting has happily gone out of vogue. Voluntary enlistment has long been the rule. 'When volunteers fail,' says an authority before us, 'a system of bounties has been resorted to. But the laws sanctioning impressment slumber, without being repealed.' For some years past there have been uneasy indications which go to show that the time is approaching when conscription, more or less on the Continental plan, will become a live and lively political question in Great Britain. Thus far the average Britisher has preferred to do his fighting as MARK TWAIN did his mountain-climbing—by proxy. He pays a youth named TOMMY ATKINS to go forth and convince the enemy with hypodermic arguments of lead, but himself stays at home and sees that the hum of business never slackens in office or factory. And when the Ballot Act of 1860 comes up annually to disturb his tranquillity he promptly administers to it a dose of parliamentary morphia that keeps it reasonably quiet for twelve months more. But the spectre of a coming conscription has been haunting him none the less. Lord ROBERTS and the advanced party in the War Office are known to be in its favour. Some time ago the Secretary of War presented a Bill in the House of Lords which went far beyond the Ballot Act of 1860. As in the Continental compulsory service, Lord LANDSDOWNE'S Bill allowed no substitutes, and provided that any

person who, after being chosen by ballot, refused to don the uniform, might be arrested and compelled to serve for a period of five years. This Bill was regarded at the time as a step towards conscription. The events now passing in South Africa might easily precipitate compulsory military service in the British Isles. There is undoubtedly an abundance of good fighting material within the boundaries of the Empire. But a soldier is not trained in a day. And half-trained recruits, whatever their personal bravery, are but frail reeds for a world-wide Empire to lean her bulky form upon in the day when the nations go up to war. Recent events have proved that the standing army of Great Britain must be doubled if an emergency is to be adequately met. In times of prosperity recruiting will fail and has failed, because employment for the class who enlist will then be plentiful and the Queen's shilling and the scarlet tunic will in consequence lose much of their glamour and customary charm. But we opine that a decade of conscription would have a marked effect on the colonial policy of Great Britain. The 'Little Englander' (as he is contemptuously called) would then probably have his innings; and the policy of indefinite expansion—which, if persevered in, must inevitably lead to conscription—would probably find itself docked all round under the intolerable stress of personal and financial military burdens such as are breaking the hearts of the nations that are committed to it, not as a matter of choice, but, in the present circumstances of Europe, as a necessary preservative of their mere existence.

It reads like the instance of poetic justice that the countries which originated and perfected this return to the old tribal principle of army-raising should themselves feel most deeply its wear and grind and cumbrous weight. Modern conscription is one of the unpleasant legacies of the French Revolution. The levy *en masse* ordered by the Directory drew to the revolutionary standard in three years 1,200,000 men, repelled the allied invaders from France, and formed the fierce armies which HOCHÉ and MOREAU, and afterwards NAPOLEON BONAPARTE, 'the little Corsican,' led to the victories that culminated in 1797. Conscription was established by law in France in 1798. Other continental countries were gradually compelled, in self-defence, to adopt it. The system was perfected by Prussia. It took the shape of the 'short service with reserve' system, which has been described as 'the greatest revolution ever effected in this branch of military art.' There was a spice of patriotic romance about the inauguration of the new system which turns practically every adult male citizen into a trained soldier. It came into existence after the Peace of Tilsit, which was concluded between the First NAPOLEON and Prussia in 1807. Prussia was defeated, crippled with a war indemnity, partially dismembered, and her standing army reduced by express stipulation to 42,000 men. The last-mentioned condition was evaded in a curious way. The trained soldiers were sent to their homes, to be called to the colours again when needed. Their places were immediately filled by recruits. These were in turn trained to the use of arms, sent home, and again replaced by young recruits. And so on, *ad infinitum*. The 'short service and reserve' system was thus for the first time established. The operation was carried out with what was, in the circumstances, an altogether phenomenal degree of secrecy. Prussia closed its mouth and held its tongue, and slowly and grimly prepared for the stern *revanche* which came at Waterloo.

Ever since then Prussia has been perfecting her fighting machine, till her army has come to be regarded as the model of all scientific man-slaying organisations. Full 1800 years ago the Roman historian, TACITUS, in his *Germania*, described the Germans of his day as the greatest fighting race on earth. A nineteenth century strategist said of the modern German army that it is 'the sternest man-slaying system since the days of Sparta.' The Prussian system of 'short service and reserve' was at first slowly and partially taken up by other countries, chiefly because of the old and deep-set feeling in favour of armies of professional soldiers. But the hard-hitting campaign that ended so swiftly at Sadowa was a knock-down argument which not merely convinced, but stunned, the critics and the waverers. The lesson of 1866 was clinched by the Franco-German campaign of 1870-71. And now every Continental great Power has its army reorganised on the Prussian model. Considerably