

Second Issue.

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Child Conscription.

OUR COUNTRY'S SHAME.



“Were the Commonwealth, instead of working in the tail of European militarism, to break out into a complete system of outdoor physical culture of its own, and to devote to it the money, time, and energy at present put into the cadet system, it would produce, as the boys became young men, thousands of good soldiers in embryo—nay, rather, soldiers more than three-quarters made—lacking merely the tags and technicalities of parade-ground drill, and the knowledge of the use of specifically military weapons, such as the bayonet. Even without a knowledge of these, the lad skilled with his rifle and able to “rough it,” will be a thousand times more useful amid the probable conditions of Australian warfare than one who has been put through the cadet mangle and flattened out.” (Pages 12 and 13.)

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J. Logan

DEFENDERS of militarism keep repeating the assertion that military training, at any rate ensures a spirit of obedience and discipline. But is this so? That the training, if efficiently conducted, ensures a SKIN-DEEP obedience, and disciplines the character in a superficial way, few will deny. The real test, however, of the worth of it all is this: Is there implanted in the boy's mind a self-supporting readiness to obey, and a genuine self-control, or are obedience and self-control present only so long as the trainee is a cog-wheel in the military machine? If the latter be true, then all that those boasted acquisitions are "good" for is the killing of men!

We have all heard of the Spartans of Ancient Greece. Military men must not object to my referring to them, and demur that their State had its day too many hundreds of years ago. It is the world's stock illustration of the perfectly "disciplined" State—disciplined, that is, in the sense our military folk apply to the term. If military training produces a real inward willingness to obey and a genuine self-control, how did it come about, as readers of Grote's history must frequently notice, that the Spartan soldier, when he broke loose from his officers' control and got out of

hand, painted things red in a way which shocked even a cruel and pagan age. A Spartan out of hand was a byword in old Greece for carnage and lust. We have remembered Thermopylæ; we conveniently forget the other side of the shield. I respectfully recommend to the militarising section of our fellow-citizens the study of the Spartan State. We are not yet asked to expose the bodies of our weaker new-born children, to perish that the race may be "fitter;" we are asked, nevertheless, to expose the SOULS of our lads at the beginning of their teens to an influence more blasting than any wind that ever swept Mt. Taygetus.

2. Forsooth, our present system imparts manliness. More of that anon. At first let us take something closely allied in thought. Many of my fellow-citizens believe it is a part of a man's duty, a part of manliness, to defend the country by killing its enemies, and by preparing oneself to become a high-grade killing machine. Granted, for argument sake, that this view is true, that this ugly killing business is a reality to be confronted—a "stern necessity," as its apologists would say—does it not strike you, my manly fellow-men, that there is something particularly unmanly, nay, cowardly, in familiarising the tender minds of the young with the idea of knowing how to be a good slaughterer? You fine, strapping area officer, looking into the eyes of that bright, tender youth whom you are instructing in the way to thrust a bayonet into a poor human body, does it ever occur to you what mental anguish you inflict on the finest young souls, and how you imperil weak ones by overwhelming them with that worst atheism, a crushing disbelief in human nature? Mrs. Browning's factory children felt in their despair that the world was, somehow, wrongly built. Will you have our boys, as they are brought face to face with this killing-question, WHILE THEIR CHARACTERS ARE UNFORMED, feel so, too? I appeal to your manliness; pause and think how it strikes the boy. Business

life and life in general are full of hard, jagged things that cut into the quick, even of the adults. As human progress goes on, as the spirit of that Nazareth Working-man soaks into the world, we do all we can to screen from the eyes of the young and tender the hard cruel things that Providence mysteriously allows yet to exist in the framework of the universe, the awful forms that pain and evil take. We do not take the boy of twelve to the operating chamber that he may be the better doctor when he grows up; the moral shock were a greater loss than the extra morsel of "experience" were a gain. In rearing our young we temper the wind to the shorn lamb. Our militarists, without realising it, are driving the lamb out into a soul-blasting east wind; for AT THE MOST CRITICAL AGE, when his views of life are being formed, they place the boy, parents willy-nilly, in surroundings where all energy and stir are upon preparation for killing, where slaughter is lightly spoken of, and where physical bravery is regarded as the highest earthly virtue.

The specific military training of boys MUST brutalise them; for there is constantly present the thought, "I am going through all this prodigious preparation for the purpose of being able to kill my fellows." The training, too, presents war in its most attractive light. All that the alluring glamour of marshalling in arms and rousing clamours of military music can do to deck with a coat of sentimental whitewash the sepulchre full of dead men's bones—all this is, or will be, done, and most impressively. War is set before the boy as the crown of manhood; he is led to think that there is no glory like the glory of battle. Abstract right, justice, and moral courage become "poor mean trash," with no influence on the march of mankind. He gets the idea that might alone settles things. He learns, too, to be boastful, vain-glorious, and fond of display; for "show-off" is the life-blood of parade.

3. Reader, perhaps you pride yourself in being more moved by reason and common sense than by any plea that appeals to higher emotional or to religious things. If such be the case with you, the writer is to you merely a harmless fanatic, unworthy of hearing. Hear instead what a former officer in the British Army has to say; he is one of your "good, hard citizens" and no fanatic; he is known to the boy world that loves him as "B.P." Well, this man says in his "Scouting for Boys" these words:—"DRILL MAKES BOYS WOODEN." He is referring, I take it, to the loss of individuality and initiative that ordinary military training brings about. He infers that it makes boys dull and un-resourceful. If Gallio will not listen to the "fanatic" proclaiming the wickedness of boy-conscription, perhaps he will listen to the distinguished defender of Mafeking maintaining the folly and stupidity, perhaps not of military training, but certainly of that wooden drill and worship of technicalities over which it is built as a brick arch over its supporting frame.

4. It is persistently claimed that the training of our cadets is of the kind to make them MANLY. I challenge any upholder of the system to prove this, taking as his illustration the one thing available, namely, the training experienced by our senior cadets during the past eight months. There is as yet an almost entire absence of strenuous manly things. There are the stock occupations of the parade-ground in great evidence; a few of them useful, the greater part picturesque tomfooleries; but if there is real strenuous and useful training it is to come. It has not yet arrived.

5. Introducers of our present compulsory system spoke loudly of the good effects it would have upon the physical development of our youth. Loafing on football ovals and racecourses was to die out. I understand, however, 1911 has been a year of unprecedented "gates." When our

militarising gentlemen bestir themselves to exclude all able-bodied youths of cadet age from spectating at ovals, where they graduate in gambling and swearing, and say to them: "EITHER come to our training OR PLAY a manly game," then shall I believe in the earnestness of their talk about manliness and physical development, even if the alternatives they offer be not what I would regard as ideal.

6. Not the least of the wrongs that the Defence Act inflicts on the community will be the degradation of great numbers, especially of the finer and more delicately nurtured young minds, that inevitably results FROM ENFORCED COMPANIONSHIP WITH THE WORST ELEMENTS OF SOCIETY. A decent lad during the training must stand and listen to the blasphemies and obscenities, NOT MERELY OF THE LOOSE LADS OF THE DISTRICT, BUT OF THE LARRIKIN AND CRIMINALLY-INCLINED ONES. Apologists for the system retort in the correspondence columns of the press that a lad must be a muff and a weakling to allow himself to be so easily influenced by bad example. This answer proves too much, if it proves anything at all. If it were true we should do away with all the guarded upbringing of our children, lest we make muffs of them. Thoughtful parents and educationists would all be wrong, since they try to screen the unformed character of the boy from that soul-crushing moral shock that comes from the sudden dawning upon him in the language of vicious companions of the world's worst evils, or the sapping influence of frequent intercourse with the bad.

The truth of the matter is this. That to remain unaffected and uninfluenced is not only impossible for the weakling—who, by the way, has his claim for consideration—but also for the person of ordinary "grit;" nay furthermore, for the toughest and most fixed amongst us; for herein it is a case of being compelled to be regularly and frequently at close quarters with a flow of dehumanising

ghoulish language of the larrikin in his brazen, shameless moods. The drop wears away even the stone by its perpetual dropping. Evil communication corrupts, in time, all minds, except a few of the saintliest. Let one be ever so determined, there is a subtle blunting of the moral sense; the inertia of familiarity with evil overwhelms.

Respectable fathers, cannot I get through your comfortable hides with the point of my argument? You pride yourselves in being educated, decent men. Let me ask you: How would you like to be shut up for a fortnight in an English workhouse in a ward with larrikin "tramps?" "Not at all," you say. Well, do you realise that in sending your young lad to a military camp you are making him liable to undergo a mental torture equally great and a moral risk a thousand times greater? Manly men! if you believe that there must be soldiers, I beg you to go yourselves to these camps and parade-grounds; shoulder yourselves the burden, not shove it on the helpless boys. Your South African brother has more manliness; he knows something of camps and war; his Defence Act* begins at 17 years, and puts the burden somewhat more fairly, for at 17 a lad is stronger and his character is somewhat more fixed and grounded. But you? Are you not ashamed of it? You shirk the burden and put it on the mere child. You manly men!!

Picture a minute, I beg you, the helplessness of that modest lad called in his early teens to associate regularly and frequently with (say) hulking youths nearing their twenties, fellows who have spent their teens "knocking about" the streets in "pushes" or lurking in purlieus of wickedness, graduating in vice, lawlessness, and, it may be,

* Since the first issue of "Child Conscription" South Africa has taken a decided step towards washing its hands entirely of boy-soldiering; the Parliamentary Select Committee recommends that the commencing age be raised from 17 to 21. This will exclude all compulsory training of minors.

criminality, till they have become walking cyclopædias of iniquity. Our civilisation is producing tens of thousands of such. Do you not think, then, that they will be in good evidence in a muster where all able-bodied men of a certain age must appear? Your boy, respectable father, cannot pick his mates, as at school; he must stand where ranked. Fortunately at school the in-school influence of the bad is reduced to a minimum, as discipline in its best sense is present, and very much present, while in play-hours the better sort of boy can join his own set and associate as little as possible with the bad. But not so in this military machine for **levelling down**. Those whose company your son has to share are chosen for him. He is placed, generally speaking, where military requirements require that he shall be. He may have to stand at every drill between lads whose language reveals a familiarity with all forms of vice and crime, and listen to their undertone exclamations during the actual drilling item in progress; also to their conversations during the frequent "spells" of rest, or whenever else talking is allowed. He may be —**nay, probably will be**— tent-mate with at least one such; chance may decide with a number of such. The "non-com." having control of the tent may himself be a larrikin that has hidden, perhaps, his more repulsive traits, and whose domineering and driving power has recommended him to the officers as a useful man. International competition for the most efficient battle-winning machine prevents even a conscientious commander from giving much heed to character, except in a very limited sense. Be he himself a General Gordon or a Hedley Vickers, he **cannot afford** to refuse to make use of the services of those who are best at drilling and commanding, but bad morally. "An army's business is to drill to win battles." the officer will say. "We must promote the most efficient: we can only consider character in a very limited way, namely, in **its bearing on battle-winning**." So, considerate father,

your boy during camptime—and there must be plenty of camps if our military system is to hold its own against others—may be at the mercy of what an anti-militarist justly refers to in the press as “swanky young bullies;” he may even be at the mercy of worse. Do you realise what this means?

Forsooth, the decent lads will influence and quieten the larrikins. Foolish thought! The characteristic of that genus is his utter disregard for others. He will not (to use a schoolboy phrase) “shut up” when asked. If he sees he pains, he increases the paining. He is thick-skinned and callous, and, given the presence of a few of like nature, the feelings and wishes of the majority go for little, those of the one clean-minded lad for nothing.

Let me again repeat that **if this military training is to achieve its aims, camps and countryside training must be much more frequent** than at present suggested by the authorities. Greater still will then become the wrong of herding together innocence of fourteen with the bold, brazen bad. I thank God that our militarists are in the following crux. If they prescribe no more field training than at present contemplated their system will be the laughing-stock of the generals of the world; if a normal amount of this necessity is added, the degradation that this system entails upon the youth of the land will be so colossal and apparent that an angry public will send the whole thing packing, and decide that if it must have a fighting-machine, the latter shall be composed of men and men alone.*

[* The existence of a proviso in the Act, which allows certain colleges to drill their own lads of senior cadet age at the school, and make the training a part of the ordinary daily curriculum, does not affect the arguments on pages 5—8, as the favoured lads—mainly of the well-to-do classes—number less than 5 per cent. of the whole number of senior cadets.]

7. Thoughtful folk may urge that our educational systems have broken down so far as they concern other lore than book-learning, that our boys have no useful leisure occupations, that they are out of control, and must be brought under by the short-cuts and rough methods of the military man. Without spending space in discussing whether or no the disease is as bad as they say, I reply that their remedy is as bad as the disease. If we must have a universal compulsory training of any kind I would recommend, to the study of those who urge it, one on the following lines as infinitely better than a military one. Let there be a universal obligation with respect to **physical training**, (1) **controlled**, not by soldiers, but by civil commissioners with the fullest powers, (2) **conducted** by persons specially fitted for it by their personality, discipline, and specialised training. (3) **Aiming** at physical efficiency and character development rather than battle-winning, but including all that is per se useful in ordinary military training. (4) **Embracing** but little parade work, but **very much training in camp under typical bush conditions**. (5) Having amongst its details a plan for a series of graded segregation camps for such as prove themselves radically insubordinate, or whose larrikin instincts make them undesirable comrades for the other boys. (Undesirables will thus train apart.) (6) Giving promotion based on efficiency, but efficiency not to count unless accompanied by good character.

The atmosphere of such camps would be educational, not military. I do not altogether subscribe to such a scheme, but I place it before the attention of those who say our parents cannot control the rising generation, and I tell them that the present solution—i.e., handing the boy over to the military man—shows a pitiful bankruptcy of ideas in the field of education and civics.

8 Supposing that it be true that the State's safety depends on all its able-bodied men being taught the art of war, how can our present system, which on its present showing is one of **boy-conscription** and **man-exemption**, be justified? **It is quite untrue that the military training of boys in their early teens is unavoidable if we are to "protect our country from its enemies."** How much cadet training, or anything like it, did those heroic citizens possess who successfully defended their native land of Holland from the hosts that Phillip II. sent against it when his Empire was the mightiest in the world, and his soldiers the best-trained men in an age of great generals and monster military development? Or, to come down to our own times: how much preparation of the sort dear to our area officers' souls had that handful of brave (if misguided) Boer youths, men, and grey-beards received, who for nearly three years withstood the combined might of Britain and the Dominions? Those Boers had not as boys been schooled in scientific slaughter; but they had stout hearts and tough bodies, and in following their life avocations and in other ways had acquired great control of the rifle and that best of all discipline—the control of one's self.

If war comes to Australia it will probably be, after the first few weeks, a war of the guerilla kind that the Boers waged before the eyes of an astonished world. It will be a war of gigantic size, and waged over colossal areas under novel conditions, entirely in favour of the Australian, if he has stamina and resource. In such warfare bushcraft, iron constitution, and resourcefulness will count as determining factors; those wretched drill-ground technicalities—to teach which we herd up our boys in droves on the Saturday afternoons and in their evenings, larrikin and decent lad cheek by jowl—will not weigh as dust in the balance. Should the awful calamity of an invasion come upon our land, our generals will find of greatest use, not the sleek, wooden pro-

duct of the military-instructor's art, but the unspoiled youth of hardy habits, steady nerve, and ability to use to the full the natural advantages of the Australian bush. Let us get the young people to go **bushwards** (not townwards) in their leisure. Our present system is centralising, where it should be de-centralising. Our military training is soaking the boy in the slime of Jingoism without even accomplishing the purpose at which it is aiming. It is also unwittingly assisting those degenerating forces that draw our youths together in frenzied thousands to watch their "fancy" on the race-course or football oval, when they should be exercising their bodies and building up their physique.

9. And now, before concluding, may I be allowed to offer some constructive details on the burning question how the Commonwealth might give its boys all the essential pre-requisites to becoming able "defenders of the country," without subjecting them to a distinctively military training. It simply amazes me that no one has called attention to the size of **THAT LARGE COMMON FACTOR** shared (1) by a training needful for laying the foundation of a hardy, self-reliant manhood, and (2) by a training needful for producing a fine soldier. This common factor includes, I maintain, all great essentials to produce future soldiers. **For the teaching of the more technical qualifications the military octopus could seize the boy at the end of his teens (instead of at the beginning), and inculcate them, doing it at that period with much less injury to human nature.**

10. Now, with regard to this common factor, is it beyond the wit of man to embody it in a carefully thought-out *schema of outdoor erudition*, compulsory or otherwise, of *citizen physical training*. The course should be one that is intrinsically good for rearing the finest manhood viewed from the out-doors standpoint, just as our class-room education in the special sense aims at producing the best manhood

intellectually. Such a course of preparation would naturally include such stock items as erect bearing, correct gait, and proper deportment, but would give main heed to the development of self-reliance, resolution, soundness, vigour of constitution, resourcefulness, and, to sum up, AN OUT-OF-DOOR MANY-SIDEDNESS. Under such a system, by carefully graded exercises and tentative steps, a boy should be taught *as many as possible of the following things*:—To walk long distances without getting sore feet; to sleep under canvas and even in the open without contracting chills; to bear cheerfully both fatigue and physical pain that often accompanies it; to live on rough and unappetising food, preferably of his own cooking; to mend in a rough way his clothes and shoes; to use a rifle skilfully; to shoe and ride a horse; to understand how to read a map and make a rough map for himself; to find his way in difficult country; to know well the contour and other peculiarities of the countryside round his home; to swim, dive, and rescue; to use signalling-codes; to climb branchless tree-stems; to keep in touch while exploring over larger or smaller areas; to do, in fact, A THOUSAND THINGS USEFUL IN THEMSELVES, and not merely antecedents to a successful slaughtering of one's fellows.

11. Were the Commonwealth, instead of working in the tail of European militarism, to break out into a complete system of outdoor physical culture of its own, and to devote to it the money, time, and energy at present put into the cadet system, it would produce, as the boys became young men, thousands of good soldiers in embryo—nay, rather, soldiers more than three-quarters made—lacking merely the tags and technicalities of parade-ground drill, and the knowledge of the use of specifically military weapons, such as the bayonet. Even without a knowledge of these, the lad skilled,

with his rifle and able to “rough it,” will be a thousand times more useful amid the probable conditions of Australian warfare than one who has been put through the cadet mangle and flattened out. I do not see how any solid fault can be found with a training on the lines roughly sketched above; it would give the military authorities all they have any right to claim from boyhood and youth; moreover, if made compulsory, it would hurt no tender consciences.

12. In conclusion, I urge again, if our country MUST train for war, cannot it train its MEN, and leave the boys to be perfected in a broad physical course. Let it ensure the latter getting a solid foundation of all that spells manliness and resourcefulness, but let it spare their susceptible souls the APPRENTICESHIP IN PROSPECTIVE SLAUGHTER, which given at their age cannot fail to brutalise.

In the above paragraphs the writer has discussed the question with but little reference to the religious aspect; so he would add that in his own estimation the greatest objection to the cadet system lies, not in what he has set forth herein, but in the fact of its being a warlike preparation, and all war, in his opinion, being contrary to Christianity. Few, possibly, of his fellow-Christians share this latter view, but many, on the other grounds, will unite with him in this condemnation of the monstrous folly and wickedness of the course into which our Government is entering.

Had the MEN of our land been asked to undergo what is now being put upon helpless BOYS, their votes would have long ago driven the Government from office. Hence it is said: “Boy-compulsory military training must be; we cannot save our country without it.” The voteless boy bears the brunt of the burden; the politician peacefully remains in office; the manly man looks on!

It is a brave thing to face the world; but not if, in order to be a little taller in battle, you are standing with your hobnail boots upon a helpless child. Alas, for our country!

"How long, O cruel nation, will you stand
To face the world on a child's heart?"

* * * * *

An Afterword on Freedom of Conscience.

IN penning this pamphlet it was the aim of the writer to attack this iniquitous Defence Act in what he regards as its weakest—because its most palpably wicked—spot, namely, its pernicious effect on those who are not yet citizens, but are still, in the eyes of the law, but "infants."

There are, however, not a few opponents of militarism who whether as citizens of a free commonwealth or as followers of the Prince of Peace, by whom they believe all warlike preparation to be forbidden, feel that the FORCING OF CONSCIENCE involved in this universal obligation is in itself such a stain on the history of the British race, as to claim the chief attention of anyone speaking or writing against the Act.

While devoting himself to the effect of the law on the cadet himself, the author, at the outset, would make it clear that he does not wish to belittle the fundamental objections to all distinctively military training, whether of boys or adults. For he is in unity with its root-and-branch opponents.

We have reached an acute crisis. A conscience-forcing law of great magnitude has been enacted. Militarism has driven its wedge into the living flesh of free institutions.

Opposed to the Act there is a body of opinion, at present but little organised. This consists partly of those who think it unfair that a man's burden should be put upon the boys; partly of those who like the early Christians, regard the training as forbidden them; partly of those who, on ethical grounds, refuse to share in what is degrading; partly of those who as citizens of a free land demand that all consciences shall be free.

In matters of conscience a majority, however large, has no right to trample on a minority, however small. Tyranny is none the less tyranny when it is exercised by the many than by one; it is a thousand times more dangerous, because, since the many enforce the wrong, there is present in it an appearance of right, but absent from it all sense of accountability, here or in the hereafter.

By a self-imposed restriction on the absoluteness of his power and other attributes, the Almighty has left free the human soul prayerfully to decide what is right for it to do in the course of its earthly life. SHALL MAN STRIVE TO SHACKLE WHAT THE MAKER HAS FORMED FREE?



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