Victorian Literature and Culture (2011), **39**, 385–407.

doi:10.1017/S1060150311000052

SCRUTINIZING *THE BATTLE OF DORKING*: THE ROYAL UNITED SERVICE INSTITUTION AND THE MID-VICTORIAN INVASION CONTROVERSY

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> Then the whole story came out – how our sailors, gallant as ever, had tried to close with the enemy; how the latter evaded the conflict at close quarters, and, sheering off, left behind them the fatal engines which sent our ships, one after the other, to the bottom. . . . The Government, it appears, had received warnings of this invention; but to the nation this stunning blow was utterly unexpected.
>
> —Lieutenant-Colonel (later General Sir) George Chesney, *The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer* (1871)

> Mr. HARCOURT: . . . It is said mechanical appliances have increased the powers of attack. Every one admits that; but has it not increased the power of defence? because that is the point that Colonel Chesney did not deal with. Take torpedoes, for instance. Have these increased the power of defence or attack most? (Colonel CHESNEY: Both.) That is a question for scientific Officers to answer. My impression would be that they had increased the power of defence first. I should have thought the Thames more defensible since torpedoes have been invented than it was before.
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> —Transcript of the Proceedings of the Royal United Service Institution on "Our Naval and Military Establishments Regarded with Reference to the Dangers of Invasion" (May 15, 1872)

THE FIRST MAJOR EXAMPLE in what would become a long line of popular pre-1914 British invasion-scare narratives was the inflammatory 1871 tale *The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer*. Through its vivid depiction of a German invasion and conquest of Britain, this story was designed to serve as a warning to Britons about the necessity of securing the nation's defenses. The dramatic impact of this work on the Victorian reading public and the political culture of the era has been treated by a number of scholars, most notably I. F. Clarke.[1] Yet little attention has been accorded to the reaction it elicited from the professional peers of its author, Lieutenant-Colonel George Chesney. This interdisciplinary

essay – which joins the study of literature with military history and politics – seeks to shed new light on the circumstances surrounding this extraordinarily influential tale, as well as on the genre it popularized, in large part by examining its reception by British officers. It begins by describing the tale's prehistory and emergence into widespread popularity and then evaluates the work's reception within armed forces circles. Some of the most trenchant assessments of this literary text, it turns out, were delivered within the austere confines of the Royal United Service Institution, a body whose meetings functioned as the crucible in which British military and naval judgments were forged.

* * *

In 1862, Liberal Member of Parliament Richard Cobden, the most renowned antimilitarist British statesman of the mid-nineteenth century, published the book *The Three Panics: An Historical Episode*. A critical review of the invasion alarms from the previous fifteen years, Cobden's work is the principal Victorian counter-text to the innumerable invasion-scare tracts of this period, forerunners of the pre-1914 invasion-scare narrative. In it, one may trace the origins of the debates over military and naval spending that would flourish over the subsequent half-century. Cobden's central claims are that interested parties have manipulated public and governmental perceptions of potential threats to Britain and that elevations in armaments expenditures have been stimulated by such manipulations. He copiously supplies evidence in support of these contentions, primarily from the records of Parliamentary proceedings. He also describes the palpably illiberal political climate that accompanied these xenophobic episodes. During them, "To contend against the probability of invasion was to take the side of the enemy, to be called anti-English, or accused of being for peace at any price; nay, to require even proofs or arguments to show the reality of the danger, was to invite suspicion of want of patriotism" (648).

The first substantial invasion panic to occur in the four decades since the crisis brought on by amassed French forces on the Channel coast (before the 1805 Battle of Trafalgar set Perfidious Albion out of Napoleon's reach), Cobden observes, was precipitated in late 1847, and it continued into the following year. The cause was the unauthorized publication of a letter written by the Duke of Wellington to Major-General Sir John Burgoyne, the Inspector General of Fortifications. The letter expressed the concerns of the nation's foremost military authority over what was presumed to be the newly diminished state of the country's defenses, given "the alteration produced in maritime warfare and operations by the application of steam to the propelling of ships at sea."[2] The appearance of the letter "led to an immediate 'invasion panic,' and furnished a never-failing argument to successive Governments for increased warlike expenditure" (548).

What Cobden identifies as having provided "the occasion for the outburst of the second invasion panic" was the December 1851 *coup d'état* in France by Louis Napoleon, which was followed by "the usual eruption of pamphlets, written chiefly by military and naval officers, containing projects for every variety of defensive armament" (556–57). Under these circumstances, "The traditional terror connected with the name of Bonaparte was revived; people began again to talk of invasion, and before Christmas [of 1852] the alarmists had more complete possession of the field than at any previous time" (568). After this episode had run its course, several years of calm followed, to the point where in 1858 "the pamphlet literature scarcely takes note of the topic of a French invasion" (593–94). Following this state

of relative quiescence, the third panic erupted in 1859 in response to allegations of a radical modernization and augmentation of the French fleet, and it continued through 1861. Cobden identifies Lord Palmerston, the Prime Minister, as the primary instigator in this instance. During many debates in the House of Commons about national security, Palmerston had repeatedly opined, following the Duke of Wellington's lead, "that the application of steam to navigation has supplied greater facilities for offence than defence; that it has, in fact, deprived us of our great bulwark, by throwing . . . a 'steam bridge' over the Channel" (658). He subsequently became the principal advocate of a massively expensive project to fortify the Portsmouth area, the site of England's chief naval base. This endeavor was termed "the Palmerston follies" by the prime minister's detractors generally and a "panic-begotten scheme" by Cobden specifically (671).[3]

The common element to each of the three episodes Cobden chronicles is that they resulted, he suggests, in tremendous and unnecessary costs to the British taxpayer as well as to the prospects for peace. His exasperation is captured in a statement he cites as having been made in Parliament by the Earl of Derby in 1852, shortly before the latter's ascension to the role of prime minister:

> [I]t is perfect madness, at one and the same time to profess a belief in the hostile intentions of a foreign country, and to parade before the eyes of that very people the supposed inability of this country to defend itself; to magnify the resources of your supposed assailant, and to point out how easy would be the invasion if not the subjugation of this country (though, thank God! the most violent have not yet spoken of subjugation).[4]

Nineteen years after this pronouncement and nine years after the publication of *The Three Panics*, Lieutenant-Colonel (later General Sir and Member of Parliament) George Tomkyns Chesney of the Royal Engineers entered the public debate on the invasion question with his daring narrative *The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer*, and he *would* speak of subjugation. Chesney was one of the militaristically inclined armed forces professionals of the sort Cobden believed to pose a threat to British public discourse. Yet his contribution to the debate would not be at all in line with what Cobden had characterized as "the usual eruption of pamphlets, written chiefly by military and naval officers, containing projects for every variety of defensive armament."

Set fifty years after a successful German invasion of England, *The Battle of Dorking*, which was anonymously published, was designed to draw public attention to what its author viewed as a deplorable combination of foolishness and indifference, among British governmental officials and the public, toward defense matters. The text recounts a sordid tale of national defeat and disgrace by an English member of the Volunteers who has been wounded during the conflict. (The Volunteers consisted of a part-time, non-professional defense force that had been disbanded in 1814 and reconstituted in 1859.) The story he tells to his grandchildren, who are about to emigrate from their now impoverished homeland, details the sundry inadequacies of the "helpless mob" of poorly trained and ill-equipped English land forces against the "disciplined invaders," who have been in possession of both superior armaments and superior strategy (570). The vast spread of the Empire on Which the Sun Never Sets has thinned out the army and the navy alike: a second Mutiny in India, tensions with America over Canada, and incipient rebellion in Ireland have all drained the army while "the fleet was scattered abroad" in the West Indies, the China seas, and the

northern Pacific shore of America, "where . . . we continued to retain possessions we could not possibly defend" (541). The outcome has been a temporary occupation of England, the exacting of a crippling indemnity necessitating a rate of taxation "which keep[s] us paupers to this day" (570), and a dismembering of the British Empire.

Aside from the general goal of firming up the resolve of what he represents as an enervated British populace, Chesney had a number of specific aims in mind for *The Battle of Dorking*. Most of these aims pertain to what he took to be an over-confidence in the Royal Navy and a corresponding neglect of the nation's military forces. The narrator recalls that before the German invasion, "[t]he fleet and the Channel" had been regarded as "sufficient protection. So the army was kept down, and the militia and volunteers were left untrained" (541). As a career army officer himself, Chesney especially strove to demonstrate the limited utility of the Volunteers. During the hostilities, these amateur troops are led by "officers who did not know their work, without ammunition or equipment, or staff to superintend," and the result is that "[o]ur handful of regular troops was sacrificed almost to a man" (570). Thus does Chesney promote the conviction that training for the Volunteers must be enhanced and that the professional army must be bolstered. The story is also designed to make readers aware of a number of other problems associated with national defense. The need for multiple arsenals, for example, is illustrated with the reported capture of Woolwich ("our only arsenal") and the realization that there is consequently "[n]o hope . . . of saving the country" (566). Given the straightforwardness of these sorts of polemical intentions, texts such as *The Battle of Dorking* tend to be constructed of a limited number of stock components. Indeed, so structurally static was this genre that all of what would become its standard motifs were already in evidence in Chesney's story.[5] Further, while there had earlier been abortive forays into the invasion-scare genre,[6] the circumstances in 1871 proved conducive for its emergence as a sustained literary form. In fact, the tale was so widely read and discussed that the chief successor to the pacific legacy of Cobden, Liberal Prime Minister William Gladstone, was obliged to denounce it publicly.

One wonders how Cobden would have responded to the public row over *The Battle of Dorking* (he died six years before its publication), but what is certain is that when his followers updated his work they overlooked it entirely in assessing the period. *The Three Panics* would actually be updated twice, in 1905 and 1913. The first time, the project was written by a group terming itself "The Cobden Club" and consisting of nine men, including the Radical Member of Parliament Murray Macdonald, the editor of the peace-advocacy journal *Concord* G. H. Perris, and the antimilitarist journalist and editor F. W. Hirst. The product was the book *The Burden of Armaments: A Plea for Retrenchment*. In this study, the authors suggest that *The Three Panics* "produced a most powerful effect on public opinion. It reduced the panic-mongers to silence. It was mainly instrumental in bringing about the movement in favour of economy which began in 1863, and was maintained by successive Governments, irrespective of party, for more than twenty years" (6). Much the same account would be given of this period in the second updating of Cobden's study, the 1913 volume *The Six Panics and Other Essays*, which was written by one member of the committee that had authored the 1905 volume, F. W. Hirst: "to Cobden's scathing exposure of these senseless frights and of the fabrications accompanying them, we may trace the fact that from 1862 to 1884 there was no recurrence of panics, and no expansion of armaments" (38–39).

One should note the presupposition in both *The Burden of Armaments* and *The Six Panics* that invasion alarms, political controversy, and armaments expenditures generally overlap – an assumption Cobden himself had not made. Insofar as the barometer of Hirst and the other

Cobden Club members is specifically governmental expenditures, as distinct from public discussion (or the even less readily calculable quantity of public anxiety), they are correct. But this measure hardly tells the whole story. Nor is it the case that public debate stimulated by invasion-scare fiction was excluded from these accounts. Hirst, in fact, notes the influence of Major Guy du Maurier's popular 1909 invasion-scare play *An Englishman's Home*. (The play was observed in a London *Times* review of its opening performance to be the "sort of thing . . . familiar enough ever since 'The Battle of Dorking'" ["Wyndham's Theatre" 10], and its propagandistic aims were transparently demonstrated in a recruiting booth set up in the theater for those inspired to enlist in the new Territorial Army on the spot.) He complains that this drama "was patronized by the Court, and the Censor refused to allow it to be parodied" (67). He also goes so far as to assert sweepingly,

> The efficacy of Cobden's medicine is proved by the long respite [i.e., through 1884] which Cabinets, parliaments and all sections of the British public enjoyed from armament panics after the subsidence of the third French Invasion panic in 1861 and the publication of *The Three Panics* in the following year. . . . [T]he [1870–71] Franco-German war made a French invasion more than ever ridiculous without suggesting thoughts of a German peril. (41)

For someone who has complained about the influence of du Maurier's invasion-scare play, kept his finger on the pulse of public debate (as the editor of the prominent journal the *Economist*), and closely examined the previous half-century of British history, this last point is a curiously egregious error to make. Published in the immediate aftermath of the startling display of German military might in the Franco-Prussian War, *The Battle of Dorking* was conceived and written specifically in response to the lessons of this epochal conflict, the failure of which to heed is cited as the cause of the imagined German conquest of England. Further, the story was without a doubt one of the most heavily read and discussed works of the Victorian era. The May 1871 issue of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, in which it first appeared, was reprinted six times, after which the tale was reissued as a six-penny pamphlet, and by July 110,000 copies had been sold. The story also had a wide international readership in English-speaking areas (including the United States, New Zealand, and Canada) as well as elsewhere in the form of Danish, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Swedish translations (Clarke, *The Tale of the Next Great War, 1871–1914* 14–15).

In addition to the story's astonishing publication figures, another indication of its fame is the fact that a number of tales were written to debunk its contentions in the months following its initial appearance. The narrator of the short counter-text *After the Battle of Dorking; or, What Became of the Invaders!* claims, "Everybody has read it" (5), and the assertion is, indeed, corroborated by the historical evidence.[7] In several other such texts, the signal devices of *The Battle of Dorking* are adapted while its representation of the events is repudiated. In *The Siege of London: Reminiscences of "Another Volunteer,"* the narrator, as in Chesney's version, has been a member of the Volunteers who has fought against the invaders and is asked decades later by his grandchildren for an account of the events. In this rendering, however, Chesney's seemingly authoritative speaker is represented as cowardly and delusional: the reader is informed that "from the moment the actual narrator received that blow on his skull, whilst hiding himself in the shed, the detail of his history becomes a tissue of absurdity" (J. W. M. 3).[8] Similarly, *The Other Side at the Battle of Dorking; or, The Reminiscences of an Invader* – which purports to be a translation from the German of "Herr

Moltruhn, one of our late 'Prisoners of War'" – "is a close parallel to, and often almost a literal reproduction of the narration contained in the notorious 'Battle of Dorking,'" yet "it corrects or rejects the curious hallucinations" of the original version (Moltruhn 4).[9]

Given the extraordinary renown of *The Battle of Dorking*, the fact that it goes unmentioned in both *The Burden of Armaments* and *The Six Panics* is difficult to understand. Yet while the historical account of Cobden's successors is thus somewhat selective, and is apparently based on an inflated estimation of what Hirst terms "the efficacy of Cobden's medicine," it is important to bear in mind that although there seems to have been a fairly strong correlation between widespread fears and the content of invasion-scare narratives, that correlation was densely mediated by political and financial interests. Such texts did not mirror but rather were designed to manipulate British public opinion. Further, however the oversights in the historical record by Cobden's followers are to be explained, and however one generally assesses the relationship between popular texts and social history, what is clear is that whether one detects a "panic" to be occurring at any given moment in history is largely a function of where one takes one's readings. This fact has important implications for how one evaluates the role of invasion-scare fiction in public debate and governmental policy matters. In fact, insofar as immediate results in the form of expenditures and recruiting figures for the Volunteers are concerned, *The Battle of Dorking* appears to have had little discernible effect. As John Gooch has noted in *The Prospect of War: Studies in British Defence Policy 1847–1942*, the tale "was inventive and popular, but its importance has probably been over-emphasized. The public bought invasion stories but did not swallow their message unquestioningly: the years from 1868 to 1872 were disastrous for Volunteer recruiting, despite Chesney's efforts" (5).[10] As for the question of public controversy, irrespective of policy and public spending, whereas Cobden's successors overlook the effects of *The Battle of Dorking* and similarly inclined narratives from this era, I. F. Clarke assesses the public mood largely based on the story's publication figures and an evaluation of the *Blackwood's* archives. Based on this information, Clarke concludes that "By the end of September [1871] sales of *The Battle of Dorking* pamphlet editions had gone into a terminal decline. By April 1872, when Chesney received his last cheque from John Blackwood, the British had begun to forget the panic and the alarm of The Dorking Episode" ("Before and After *The Battle of Dorking*" 44).[11]

Yet while the public debate was subsiding, and although expenditures on the military remained generally moderate during this period (the price of the extensive army reforms overseen at this time by Secretary of State for War Edward Cardwell notwithstanding), the professional debate appears to have been just heating up. In fact, several weeks after the last payment for *The Battle of Dorking* was received by its author, one Lieutenant-Colonel Chesney of the Royal Engineers attended a lecture at the Royal United Service Institution, which, to judge from the fallout, constituted the professional equivalent of the public quarrel over the story. The address was delivered by a Liberal Member of Parliament, William Vernon Harcourt, on May 15, 1872, one year after the initial publication of *The Battle of Dorking* and eight months after Gladstone's denunciation of it. The following year, Harcourt would be appointed by Gladstone to be the country's solicitor general, and he would later serve in Gladstone's cabinet as home secretary and then as chancellor of the exchequer. Over a span of more than two decades, he would be the prime minister's chief ally in opposing armaments spending. Although in 1872 Harcourt was not as politically prominent as he would later become, he had already earned a reputation as one of the keenest legal minds of the era and

as one of the most skillful and tenacious debaters in the House of Commons. Having recently waged a public campaign against those who warned of the alleged designs on Britain of rival powers, he had been invited to speak on a topic of his own choosing associated with naval and military matters. He selected "Our Naval and Military Establishments Regarded with Reference to the Dangers of Invasion."

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THE ROYAL UNITED SERVICE INSTITUTION, where Harcourt delivered his talk, had been founded by the Duke of Wellington in 1831 as a forum for the most informed and qualified assessors of national and imperial defense subjects to share their thoughts with one another. From 1857 onward, the organization's proceedings were published in the *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* in the form of transcripts of the lectures and the ensuing discussions. The transcripts, like those published of Parliamentary proceedings in *Hansard*, were apparently edited for grammar but were otherwise printed verbatim. The meetings took place at Whitehall Yard, and during these events the most eminent army and navy officers of the era engaged in the competition for first premises and for lines of analysis and argumentation. Indeed, these proceedings likely had a longer-term effect on governmental policy than did the short-term spikes of public debate stimulated by such texts as *The Battle of Dorking*, which evidently did not immediately translate into policy changes. Although the essays, lectures, and discussions published in the RUSI journal tend to be arcane and highly detailed (on such matters as tonnage of warships and food supplies for troops), they are among the most edifying sources of primary material available.

This particular RUSI event, pitting a distinguished antimilitarist Liberal politician against the combined forces of the army and navy at the beginning of the mass popularity of the invasion-scare genre, serves to illuminate the contours of the debate and the fracture lines between groups that competed for public and governmental support. A renowned public speaker, Harcourt delivered a masterful rhetorical exercise in irony, beginning with his opening observations:

> I have been invited by the Council of the Institution to make some remarks upon a subject [i.e., warfare] about which I may be fairly assumed to know nothing. . . . I thought that though I could not come here to teach, I and many others who feel like me, might come here and learn a great deal by propounding to the scientific members of the military profession . . . certain questions about which we know nothing and about which they know a great deal. (Harcourt, "Our Naval and Military Establishments" 575–76)

His Socratic protestations notwithstanding, Harcourt did have a thesis: that claims lately made as to an alleged danger to Britain, and subsequent calls for an expansion of the army in particular, were without basis. He observed early in his address that "a question [that has] very much agitated public attention [has been that of] the invasion of this country" (577), and that "[t]here have been many popular publications which have agitated the public mind," most notably "the well-known publication called 'The Battle of Dorking'" (579). He then proceeded to contest the assumptions upon which the tale is based. This lecture, delivered to an audience of the country's foremost representatives of the armed forces, was thus specifically designed as a response to the controversy stirred up over the publication

of *The Battle of Dorking*. Indeed, in an extensive letter published four months earlier in the London *Times*, Harcourt had claimed that "You will never have an end to panics or a limit to expenditure till you have Governments courageous enough to tell the people that their fears are unfounded," and he went on to accuse "the ingenious author of *The Battle of Dorking*" of being one of "the apostles of panic" who had incited a "shameful and chronic state of public alarm" ("England in 1802 and 1872" 4).

While the guidelines of the RUSI meetings forbade political discussion (the chairman, General Sir William Codrington, reminded the participants of this rule at the outset of the lecture [575][12]), the bristly exchanges that ensued make clear that the armed forces members vehemently opposed Harcourt's presuppositions and analytical method – so much so that they required two full sessions in order to air their grievances. Moreover, the records of the organization's proceedings for the subsequent years illustrate that the resentments engendered within this forum by the Liberal politician were substantial and enduring. As Major-General T. B. Collinson would peevishly recall in his 1877 lecture titled "On the Present Facilities for the Invasion of England, and for the Defence Thereof," the "able lawyer" Harcourt had "turned the discussion into the form rather of a contest in a court of law, than a debate on the best mode of defending these islands" (6). And during the follow-up discussion, General Sir Percy Douglas, noting that he had been present five years earlier during Harcourt's lecture, would concur with this sentiment and pronounce himself "delighted on this occasion to find a lecture given in a totally opposite sense" (81).[13]

The collective ire of Britain's joint services against Harcourt would culminate twenty years after his 1872 presentation in the important, and in many respects prescient, novel *The Great War of 1892*, which depicts a world war ensuing from hostilities that break out in the Balkan states. Serialized in 1892 and published in revised form the following year under the title *The Great War of 189 – : A Forecast*, this text was written by a group of well-known authorities on warfare, including several military and naval officers, and the endeavor was led by the renowned figure Rear-Admiral Philip Colomb.[14] The relative importance of this novel among the many other future-war fictions published during this era is indicated in the fact that it was singled out for censure by peace advocates. While the story was being serialized, a letter about it written by the Austrian Baroness Bertha von Suttner – whose landmark antiwar novel *Die Waffen nieder* (1889) would be published in an English translation later that year under the title *Lay Down Your Arms* – was read at an Executive Committee of the London-based International Arbitration and Peace Association. In this letter, she characterized the tale as "calculated to inflame international passions" and inquired as to "whether anything could be done to stop its publication." The committee subsequently passed a resolution condemning the story as "adapted to incite and exaggerate international animosities" (*Concord* 58).[15]

Early in the fictitious war chronicled in *The Great War of 1892*, a German occupation of Belgian territory appears to be imminent, and apprehensions abound as to "the uncertain future of Antwerp," which will become a "menace to Britain . . . if it pass[es] into other hands than those of the Belgians" (Colomb *et al.* 67). In order to understand the momentousness of this state of affairs, one must be aware of the centrality to Britain's defense plans of the British-engineered international 1839 treaty guaranteeing the independence and neutrality of Belgium. France, Russia, Prussia, Austria, and Britain were signatories, and it was the German violation of the treaty's terms that would ultimately bring the politically ambivalent island-nation into World War One. As Frank McLynn observes in *Invasion: From the Armada to Hitler, 1588–1945*, "the persistent British obsession with Flanders" is captured in the slogan

"'He who holds Flanders holds a pistol at England'" (6–7). (A variant of this phrase appears, for example, in the 1876 tale *The Invasion of 1883: A Chapter from the Book of Fate*, in which an occupation of Belgium by German troops leads "England . . . [to recognize] that a 'pistol was pointed at her own head'" [9].) McLynn goes on to note, "The importance of Flanders lay in its superb and intricate inland waterway system of canals and rivers. An enemy in possession of the land of the Belgians could assemble a vast army inland and then convey it to Antwerp for immediate embarkation for England" (7).[16] It is consistent with these longstanding strategic assumptions that Harcourt, in his January 16, 1872, letter to the *Times* on British invasion scares, identified Antwerp as "the favourite bugbear of panic-mongers."

In *The Great War of 1892*, during a scene depicting a discussion in the House of Commons over how to respond to the emergency posed by the threat to Belgium, William Harcourt (the Liberal leader) is portrayed as evincing "complacency" in requesting a debate over the matter, he is made an object of laughter, and in the ensuing exchanges on the House floor with Arthur Balfour (the Conservative leader) he "display[s] a truculent aggressiveness which startled all listeners, so foreign was it to his previously disclosed nature" (68–69). Subsequently, Balfour reveals that there is, in fact, a contingency plan: the Conservative administration has prudently extracted from the Belgian authorities a secret agreement to permit British troops "to occupy and garrison the great fortress of Antwerp" under these circumstances (70). (In 1914 there would, of course, be no such definitive plan.) The Conservatives having thus dealt with the crisis with foresight, the scene concludes with cheering for Balfour while Harcourt retreats "with the best grace he could assume" (71).

The fact that Harcourt was singled out for lampooning in *The Great War of 1892* indicates the extent to which his political influence was recognized by armed forces members. Indeed, it had been widely anticipated that he would succeed Gladstone as prime minister when the latter resigned in 1894 over what were viewed by some as exorbitant navy estimates. He was at the time the chancellor of the exchequer, although he would be passed over for the top post in favor of the more congenial Lord Rosebery.[17] Like Harcourt, so too had Gladstone been excoriated in tendentious militaristic fiction, including several follow-up texts to *The Battle of Dorking*. In *The Suggested Invasion of England by the Germans*, Gladstone and his Secretary of State for War Cardwell, having "the look of highly respectable commercial clerks," are manifestly unfit to hold office (6). In *After the Battle of Dorking; or, What Became of the Invaders!* the events conclude with Gladstone and Cardwell imprisoned and awaiting trial and likely execution for their mismanagement of the nation's defenses (18). And in *The Commune in London; or, Thirty Years Hence: A Chapter of Anticipated History*, during a German invasion of Britain a London mob destroys a statue of Gladstone, the politician who has been "to blame for the misfortunes which have recently befallen our arms on our own soil" (Hemyng 9).[18] Indeed, when Gladstone, in September of 1871, condemned the "famous article called 'The Battle of Dorking'" with the claim that "such follies . . . make us ridiculous in the eyes of the whole world,"[19] the subtext of his remarks may well have been these other tales in which he is so humiliatingly featured.[20] It also bears noting that such portrayals were not limited to the immediate fallout from Chesney's story. In the 1885 novel *The Siege of London*, which depicts a French conquest of Britain, a London mob, yet again, destroys "every public statue of Mr. Gladstone" ("Posteritas" 32). The reader is pointedly informed that the names of such "sham patriots" and "place-seeking demagogues . . . would be remembered through all time, and sucking babes would be taught to curse them" (40).

Apropos of the activities of these exemplars of Victorian-era antimilitarism Gladstone and Harcourt, Alfred Vagts in *A History of Militarism* notes the paradox that, "Strange as it may seem, Great Britain originated the modern terror created by the dread of insecurity." For the first of the nineteenth century's "spasmodic war panics . . . with a military significance arose in [Britain,] the country which was *per se* the safest." The persistence of this disposition, Vagts observes, elicited the consternation of the members of Gladstone's administration generally, particularly Harcourt:

> Watching such advantage taken of useful insecurity, members of Gladstone's last Cabinet protested. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir William Harcourt, battling with the Admiralty in 1893 over the large program, declared that . . . "The principle of the alarmists is to pile up every conceivable contingency, probable or improbable, on one side and to admit no possible contingency on the other."[21] (363–64)

Long before Harcourt made this assertion, his reputation as a formidable opponent of vested armed forces interests had been established. Indeed, attitudes among army and navy officers had clearly hardened toward him already by the time he addressed the RUSI forum in 1872. The first meeting, on May 15, was adjourned in response to a motion from Captain Jasper Selwyn, who observed there had been insufficient time for the "great number of Naval Officers and others present who are quite ready to prove, to Mr. Harcourt's satisfaction, that many of his bases are utterly fallacious and ungrounded" (603). And, summing up the audience's posture toward Harcourt near the second discussion's end, on June 5, one Colonel Baker noted that the Liberal politician had entered into "a hot-bed of opposition" (622). Significantly, none of the officers present was more impassioned in his rebuttals than Colonel Chesney, who attended both sessions.

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THE ESSENCE OF HARCOURT'S argument resided in his suggestion that "the real question with reference to invasion is[:] . . . has the power of bringing men to England increased in the last 20 years relatively to the power of resisting their power of coming here, or has it diminished?" (578–79). Pointing out that *The Battle of Dorking* takes as a given the passage of the enemy troop transports, he asserted that "that is begging the whole question" (579) and, further, that such invasion-scare texts generally "have altogether passed by this consideration, and have declined to discuss it." In short, Harcourt contended, no matter how formidable the armies of other powers may have been, the Royal Navy was able to prevent their being transported to English shores, and the concerns over invasion were thus without foundation.[22]

In the meeting's transcript, "Lieut.-Colonel CHESNEY, R. E. [Royal Engineers]" is recorded as having been the third to speak in response to Harcourt's presentation, following two other officers, and he evidently rose to the bait. Claiming that technology has "infinitely increased the advantages of those who make war," he asserted, defending the presuppositions of the tale,

> I had not intended to refer to a certain well known story – but Mr. Harcourt spoke of ["]The Battle of Dorking,["] and what he has said compels me to do so, because he stated that the author supposes that there is no fleet. (Mr. [WILLIAM] VERNON HARCOURT: I said he had assumed the landing

> [i.e., of foreign troop transport vessels on England].) The author not only assumes but explains the landing. The English Fleet existed in its pride and strength in that story, but the English Fleet is supposed to be destroyed by some suddenly developed means of offensive fighting at sea. It seems to me a marvelous example of prescience, that at the time the author wrote he was not aware that in two different harbours of Germany there were constructing [*sic*] fleets of torpedo boats. (602–03)

It may strike one as curious that Chesney, while freely speaking of himself in the first person, refers to the author of *The Battle of Dorking* in the third person. One could account for his choice of words by supposing he was sustaining the pretense that he had not written the anonymously published narrative. In fact, however, his reason for having drawn this distinction was quite straightforward: there were at the time two Lieutenant-Colonels named Chesney in the Royal Engineers – George Tomkyns Chesney and his elder brother Charles Cornwallis Chesney – and, as one explores the evidence beyond the record of the May and June 1872 RUSI gatherings, one learns that it was actually Charles who spoke in defense of *The Battle of Dorking*.[23]

Although the transcript of the 1872 RUSI meetings identifies the officer in question as only "Lieut.-Colonel CHESNEY, R. E." (601), the text of Major-General Collinson's 1877 lecture on the invasion subject specifies that the speaker from five years earlier had been "Colonel C. Chesney" (12). The detailed knowledge of recent affairs in Germany – including of the new torpedo boat construction program – is also consistent with Charles Chesney's visit the previous year to Germany, where he had been sent by the British government to report on the circumstances surrounding the Franco-Prussian War. Among the trip's events that he recounted while responding to Harcourt's lecture was a conversation he had with a German who noted there had been "a great deal of talk in our newspapers frequently about the invasion of England" and who asked him for his "professional opinion as to the possibility of its being accomplished should such a thing be tried" (602).

Given Harcourt's earlier condemnation in the *Times* of the "author of *The Battle of Dorking*" as one of Britain's "apostles of panic," Charles Chesney had presumably arrived at the meeting on May 15 prepared to vindicate the family honor.[24] It is consistent with this proposition that his allusion to his brother's story took the form of an endorsement of what had been widely regarded as its least plausible aspect, as well as its enabling premise: the sudden destruction of that portion of the British fleet stationed in home waters. Positing the existence of "fatal engines [i.e., mines or torpedoes] which sent our ships, one after the other, to the bottom," the tale charges that "The Government, it appears, had received warnings of this invention; but to the nation this stunning blow was utterly unexpected" (544). While responding to Chesney's contentions, Harcourt took up this matter again:

> It is said mechanical appliances have increased the powers of attack. Every one admits that; but has it not increased the power of defence? because that is the point that Colonel Chesney did not deal with. Take torpedoes, for instance. Have these increased the power of defence or attack most? (Colonel CHESNEY: Both.) That is a question for scientific Officers to answer. My impression would be that they had increased the power of defence first. I should have thought the Thames more defensible since torpedoes have been invented than it was before.[25] (606)

Harcourt would expand on these points in a pair of letters published in the London *Times* between the two RUSI meetings dedicated to his account of the invasion question. (The first

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150311000052 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of these letters appeared on May 24, nine days after the first meeting, and the second appeared on June 5, the very day of the second meeting.[26]) When the forum was reconvened, the new chairman, Major-General Eardley Wilmot, ruled that "the discussion should be confined to the points brought forward in Mr. Harcourt's address, and not be extended to the letters which had appeared in the *Times* between the 15th May and that evening" (609). Chesney, however, irately observed of this technicality that "if we were, as suggested, to totally ignore all that has been said and written on this subject since we last met – not only in this country, for it has been largely discussed over in Germany – we shall be committing ourselves to a sham which might well send us all away ashamed of the unreality of such a proceeding" (625).[27]

It is understandable that Chesney was vexed by these procedural constraints. In the first of these two letters to the *Times*, Harcourt had specifically challenged the army officer's defense of the scenario sketched in his brother's tale: "What I should like Colonel Chesney to do," he goaded the military professional, "would be to give us not a popular but a scientific version of the campaign of Dorking," for "Nobody can be satisfied with the *petitio principii* [fallacious premise] of 'The Battle of Dorking.'" Among those who found the premise of the Royal Navy's sudden eradication implausible, it bears adding, were a number of armed forces professionals. For example, Major-General Collinson, in his 1877 RUSI lecture, would suggest, "It is not necessary to call in the aid of submarine volcanoes, as did the ingenious author of the 'Battle of Dorking', to get rid of the omnipresent British fleet" (23).[28] In the 1871 story *The Suggested Invasion of England by the Germans*, it is similarly asserted that the scenario of "the landing of a considerable army on the coasts of England . . . does not require the hypothesis of the clever author of the 'Battle of Dorking,' nor does it want his torpedoes to disable the English fleet" (16). George Chesney's sensitivity over this point may be inferred from the way in which he would return to it in his later future-set narrative *The New Ordeal* (1879): "It had come to be understood for some time back that it was impossible to foresee the future conditions of naval warfare. All that could be told with certainty seemed to be that, between torpedoes and ramming, all the ships on both sides would probably go to the bottom" (13).[29]

Harcourt's challenge to Charles Chesney in the *Times* was the sequel to the heated exchange between them over the impact of technological advancements on the country's defenses at the May 15 RUSI meeting. Harcourt had then responded to Chesney's defense of the premise of *The Battle of Dorking* by pointing out that if one believed the fleet could be "destroyed by one of those sudden developments which Colonel Chesney referred to" – that is, he quipped, if one granted that "a Vesuvius arose all round the British Islands and blew up all the British Fleet" – then one would have to conclude that the army would need to be preemptively enlarged beyond what even the most militaristic of Britons then regarded as conceivable proportions. He proceeded to explain his reasoning:

> [I]f you assume the entire destruction of the British Navy, it is no use having 100,000 men when France and Prussia together can easily send a million. Therefore, once assume the entire destruction of the fleet, and it is child's play to talk about 100,000 men. And that really is an answer to another gentleman who says I have not taken into account the unforeseen. That is a process I do not profess to understand. The hypothesis rather involves that a thing when it is *unforeseen*, is one that you *cannot foresee*, and to speculate upon the unforeseen [in this sense] is a thing that I confess is out of the province of my profession, though perhaps it may belong to the military profession.[30] (606)

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150311000052 Published online by Cambridge University Press

* * *

IT IS AT THIS POINT – with the leveling of the charge of sophistry against "the military profession" – that the disagreement aired between William Harcourt and Charles Chesney in 1872 at the Royal United Service Institution may be discerned to illustrate the central difference in outlook between the opposing factions that would provide the impetus for the invasion-scare genre over the subsequent decades. The controversy basically resolved down to one issue identified by Colonel Baker toward the end of the second meeting. (It had been a letter by Baker to the *Times* to which Harcourt's second letter had responded. In his previous letter, Harcourt had stipulated that his lecture had been based on a gauging of "the force which must be provided to undertake an invasion of [Britain] with a reasonable probability of success."[31]) While elucidating the contention of Commander W. Dawson that "The defeat of the British Fleet may at this moment be an improbable contingency, but looking forward to futurity, we have no reason to suppose it to be an impossibility" (611), Baker concluded,

> We and Mr. Harcourt have been at variance upon this one point. He assumes that invasion is improbable, and therefore we may effect reductions in our Army; we do not say that it is not improbable, we do not say that it is not difficult; . . . but what we do say is, that it is possible, and that therefore we ought to do everything in our power to make it so difficult that an enemy would not be likely to make it.[32] (624)

This claim was essentially a restatement of what George Chesney had written a year earlier in a letter published in the June 3, 1871, issue of the *Spectator*, as the public controversy about his story swirled. In this missive, which is headed "The Battle of Dorking" and teasingly signed "The Writer of the Tale in 'Blackwood' [*sic*]," he observed,

> The *Times* says that the overthrow of our Fleet is improbable; but the question is surely not one of probability, but of possibility. Unless an invasion is, under any circumstances[,] impossible, then clearly the Volunteers have no *raison d'être*, for they are not wanted for offensive warfare. And if it be possible, then is it not the height of infatuation [i.e., fatuousness] to grudge the trifling insurance of the national wealth needed for protecting London and creating a reserve arsenal in a central position, as well as the moderate trouble and self-denial requisite for properly organizing our defensive forces?[33]

This logic would be taken a step further by Colonel F. N. Maude in the novel *The New Battle of Dorking* (1900), an updating of Chesney's tale in which it is pointed out that the limits of possibility should not be gauged based on assumptions about the rationality of potential aggressors. Remarking that "it is just as impossible to convince a foreigner that a surprise raid [on Britain] is doomed to failure, as it is to shake the faith of our own naval authorities in their power to prevent it," Maude contends that "there exists in France a very strong party who believe emphatically that the stakes are well worth playing for; and we must always remember that the decision depends on what the French think, not on what we know" (x).[34] His novel, which like its predecessor was anonymously published, is designed to illustrate this allegation by depicting a failed but horribly destructive French invasion of Britain.

The general continuities of the invasion debate's parameters in the decades before 1914, as well as the fact that the two positions here staked out represent its basic antitheses, are illustrated in an essay titled "Invasion and the Laws of Probability" that appeared thirty-eight

years after *The Battle of Dorking*. In this essay, which was published in 1909 in *National Defence* (the short-lived journal of the National Defence Association), Colonel S. A. Einem Hickson would make much the same point as George Chesney while targeting civilian politicians such as Harcourt.[35] Hickson asserts that, because "other nations are prepared to pursue a policy of boldness and risk," Field-Marshal Lord Roberts (the president of the National Service League, which advocated for the creation of a million-man army) is correct to claim that, in declining to augment the army by adopting conscription, the people of Britain "are wilfully gambling with the safety of the country and Empire, and that invasion is not only possible, but far more easily possible than is usually supposed" (429, 431):

> Our lay Ministers, unaccustomed to take into consideration the chance incidents which, in the field, favour or prevent success, fail to appreciate the profound depth of the abyss which separates the improbable from the impossible. They cannot see anything more therein than a small undulation – a shallow dialectical difference. Yet of what use is it to the gambler to urge that one more throw cannot possibly ruin him? He as well as we know that it may. What is impossible is that which can never happen. What is only improbable is that which in war is certain to happen,[36] given three favourable events, namely, the man, the opportunity, and the great inducement or motive. (430)

Contending that "[c]hance can never be effectively counterbalanced except by predominating strength" (432), Hickson proceeds to reinforce his point by sketching the likely consequences of a successful invasion of Britain.

It is in similar terms that Lieutenant-General Robert Baden-Powell, in the opening passage of *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship* (1908), draws an analogy between the seven-month Siege of Mafeking by Boers in 1899–1900 (for service during which he became a national hero) and a potential siege of Britain. In what amounts to a flexibly adaptable script for Boy Scout leaders to convey to their young charges in Britain while they inculcate the message that "Every boy ought to learn how to shoot and to obey orders," he asserts,

> Nobody ever thought of [Mafeking] being attacked by an enemy any more than you would expect this town (or village) to be attacked – the thing was so improbable.
>
> But it just shows you how you must be prepared for what is *possible*, not only what is *probable* in war; and so, too, we ought to be prepared in Britain against being attacked by enemies; for though it may not be probable, it is quite as possible as it was at Mafeking; and every boy in Britain should be just as ready as those boys were in Mafeking to take their share in its defence.[37] (10–11)

The fundamental question that invariably arose in debates about national defense, in short, was that of the extent to which Britons ought to take precautionary measures against low-probability, high-impact military events. What those who were deemed "invasionists" typically claimed was that even highly unlikely eventualities must be thoroughly prepared for and in some cases actively forestalled, as the consequences of any given scenario coming to fruition are absolute – that is, unrelated to the degree of probability of its occurrence. In terms of war planning, and thus in terms of fiction based on such planning, this observation has important implications. Individuals charged with this anticipatory task often pointed out that it was not their role to prejudge the outcome of future diplomacy but rather to envision and prepare for all contingencies. As Jack Snyder assesses this outlook in *The Ideology of the*

Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914, while detailing the various "sources of bias" of war planners and specifically the cognitive effects of the "Hobbesian world" in which they are socialized, "The professional training and duties of soldiers force them to focus on threats to the state's security and on the conflictual side of international relations. Necessarily preoccupied with the prospect of armed conflict, they see war as a pervasive aspect of international life" (27–28). He goes on to note that, "Indeed, military officers often consider it their professional duty to assume the worst case" (203), a disposition that carries deeply self-fulfilling tendencies.[38]

Recognizing the conditioning power of this milieu is basic to making intelligible the utter irreconcilability of the disputants in the pre-1914 invasion debate as well as the specific approach adopted by George Chesney in *The Battle of Dorking* and by his imitators. Such narratives were essentially exercises in worst-case thinking that were designed to provide a vivid, concrete basis for establishing what their hawkish authors regarded to be sound thresholds of defensive preparation and anticipatory action. Accordingly, whereas Harcourt and his allies charged proponents of militarism with obscuring the distinction between the plausible and the fantastic, the Chesney brothers and their allies charged civilian lawmakers and the public generally with insufficient imagination for danger and hence a potentially catastrophic lack of vigilance. This would be the central point of difference in the contentious exchanges over the ensuing years, and the primary aim of the invasion-scare form was to advocate for the latter position. The May and June 1872 Royal United Service Institution meetings, during the first phase of the genre's mass popularity, thus provided the theme upon which the subsequent generations of controversy essentially comprised variations.

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NOTES

This essay and its sequel, "The Creativity of War Planners: Armed Forces Professionals and the Pre-1914 British Invasion-Scare Genre" (forthcoming in *ELH: English Literary History*), as well as "'The Benefit and the Handicap of Hindsight': Reassessing Future-War Fiction after the 9/11-Induced Shift to a U.S. National Security Strategy of Preemptive Attack and during Anticipations of an Emerging Era of Cyberwars" (under submission), are dedicated to the memory of I. F. Clarke. Some of the research for all three essays was conducted with the financial support of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Trust, the Appalachian College Association, and Warren Wilson College. They are based on portions of a book titled *Securing Britain: Invasion-Scare Literature before the Great War*, which is being completed with the support of a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship.

1. The preeminent studies of future-war fiction generally, of which pre-1914 British invasion-scare narratives constitute a subtype, are those of I. F. Clarke. His discussions of *The Battle of Dorking* are included in *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars 1763–3749* (1966; 1992) as well as several articles: "Trigger-Happy: An Evolutionary Study of the Origins and Development of Future-War Fiction, 1763–1914" (1997); "Before and After *The Battle of Dorking*" (1997); "Future-War Fiction: The First Main Phase, 1871–1900" (1997); and "*The Battle of Dorking*: Second Thoughts" (1999). He also published annotated editions of the story in *The Tale of the Next Great War, 1871–1914* (1995), *The Battle of Dorking and When William Came* (1997), and *British Future Fiction: 1700–1914* (vol. 6, 2001). Other scholarly treatments of *The Battle of Dorking* are taken up in subsequent endnotes.

2. The letter, which Wellington had intended to be private, was first discussed publicly in the London *Times* on 1 December 1847, and then it was liberally quoted in the *Morning Chronicle* in early January 1848 (Longmate, *Island Fortress* 310). Longford observes in *Wellington: Pillar of State* that the epistle, which was dated 9 January 1847, "became a delayed-action bomb" whose explosion prompted the Duke to complain, "I could not think it possible that a word that I should write would ever be read by the publick!" (376–77). For examples of how the letter was put to polemical use, see *The Invasion of England, Considered in a Letter and Postscript to 'The Times,' . . . Containing the Opinions of the Duke of Wellington, and of Other Officers of Distinction, on This Important Subject* (1852) and Head's *The Defenceless State of Great Britain* (1850, 252 ff.).
3. In *Before the Lamps Went Out*, Wingfield-Stratford recalls from his childhood that "the most conspicuous objects in the landscape were the forts that were erected at every conceivable point of vantage round the coast or inland." At the time, however, he was unaware "that all this imposing parade of defensive power was the result of one of the most celebrated political imbroglios of the nineteenth century," which had been instigated by that "embodiment of John Bullish patriotism" Lord Palmerston:

   > These forts were in fact, or at least in theory, part of the most elaborate system of coast defence in the world, protecting our main naval base at Portsmouth and the port of Southampton. And the whole of the district West of the Yar [Yarmouth, on the Isle of Wight] was in itself a fortress, or fortified camp, that was expected to be in a state of perpetual vigilance, and ready to repulse an attack at the shortest notice. (66–67)

4. *Hansard* cxix, 22; quoted in Cobden, *The Three Panics* 557.
5. In the sequel to the current essay, "The Creativity of War Planners: Armed Forces Professionals and the Pre-1914 British Invasion-Scare Genre," I distill ten standard motifs from more than one hundred invasion-scare narratives published in Britain between 1871 and 1914.
6. For example, the brief narrative *A History of the Sudden and Terrible Invasion of England by the French, in the Month of May, 1852* had been anonymously published in 1851. The assertion of Powell, in an introduction to a September 1914 reprint of *The Battle of Dorking*, that Chesney's tale was "the first of its kind" (vi) is thus incorrect.
7. Clarke observes that it was perhaps "the most talked-about and imitated short story in the history of printing" ("Before and After *The Battle of Dorking*" 43). Reiss identifies the tale as "perhaps the most influential short work of British fiction of the nineteenth century" ("Imagining the Worst: How a Literary Genre Anticipated the Modern World" 106).
8. This tale should not be confused with the 1885 narrative that is also titled *The Siege of London* and that is discussed later in the current essay.
9. *Battle of Dorking, A Myth; England Impregnable: Invasion Impossible* (1871) is a similarly disposed counter-text.
10. In contrast, however, the response in 1909 to *An Englishman's Home* was to bolster recruitment for the new Territorial Army. As the point was made in the London *Times*: "the fortunate increase in the number of recruits during the past week would not have been recorded had it not been for the production of [the] play" (15 Feb. 1909: 6). Newton, in *British Labour, European Socialism, and the Struggle for Peace, 1889–1914*, discusses the ways in which the pre-war "'boom' in invasion propaganda," including this play, was responded to by the Labour Party:

    > In early February [1909] the *Labour Leader* singled out for attack the London production of Guy du Maurier's invasion drama *An Englishman's Home*. [The Labour Party's future leader Ramsay] MacDonald heaped scorn on this "nonsensical" play in his public speeches at the time, and he promised that the Labour Party would not tolerate increased expenditure to secure the nation against the "imaginary" invasion plots dreamt up by Lord Roberts and his satellites. (203)

    The play's reception is also discussed in Hynes's *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* 47–48; Longmate's *Island Fortress* 418–19; and Andrew's *Her Majesty's Secret Service* 53.

11. In *Voices Prophesying War* Clarke also notes that "by April 1872 . . . the period of alarmism had ended" (1), and his remarks in *British Future Fiction* (6: 42) are in the same vein.
12. One finds gestures of political disinterestedness of this sort as well in the proceedings of other similarly oriented organizations. In the *Minutes of Proceedings at the Navy League Conference to Consider the Position of This Country If Involved in War* (1898), the chairman is recorded as having opened the event (which was held at the Royal United Service Institution) by noting that the Navy League "is a purely non-party organisation" (1). Nonetheless, while reflecting on the fact that "this island home of ours has not been menaced at sea for over eighty years," he went on to assert that it had been only because of "luck, or, perhaps, somewhat to the prestige of the deeds of the great men of the past, that the danger which an improvident and cheeseparing Administration has invited has not actually fallen upon us" (2).
13. Twenty-nine years after Harcourt's address, the Polish-Russian economist Jean de Bloch (also known as Ivan S. Bloch) was similarly received in the RUSI forum when he delivered a lecture titled "The Transvaal War: Its Lessons in Regard to Militarism and Army Re-Organisation." As I discuss in "The Creativity of War Planners," the civilian Bloch – who would be widely regarded in hindsight to have been the pre-1914 era's most discerning prognosticator of the impact of technological advancements on warfare – was sharply rebuked by armed forces professionals in the audience for what they characterized as his naïve amateurism.
14. Another of the co-authors was Captain (later Colonel) F. N. Maude, whose writings are taken up later in the current essay as well as in "The Creativity of War Planners."
15. In a demonstration of the organization's even-handedness, the text of this resolution was printed in *Concord* with a response written by C. N. Williamson, the editor of *Black and White*, in which *The Great War of 1892* was being serialized. He maintained "that the publication of this series of articles [i.e., the serialized novel], so far from tending, in my opinion, 'to incite and exaggerate international animosities,' is intended, on the contrary, to vividly portray the horrors of the next war, and it is thus calculated to postpone it as long as possible."
16. While recounting the circumstances surrounding the 1839 treaty, Tuchman also points out in *The Guns of August* that "Belgium's coast was England's frontier" (18).
17. Searle, in *A New England? Peace and War 1886–1918*, notes that "Gladstone had deliberately failed to groom a successor," and consequently it "was bitterly disputed between Harcourt and Rosebery" as to which of them would become prime minister upon the Liberal leader's resignation. Searle further points out that "Most Liberal MPs preferred Harcourt, but Rosebery, as well as being the Queen's favourite, also had the backing of the London press, the Scottish wing of the party, and, crucially, most members of the Cabinet, who had had more than enough of Harcourt's truculence" (165). Stansky observes in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* that "In theory Harcourt was in the best position to inherit the mantle," but his standing was weakened by "his personal unpopularity and overbearing manner" (141). In short, he "came close to the highest office in the land. It might have been his if he had been more tactful" (143).
18. In *What Happened After the Battle of Dorking*, Gladstone and Cardwell are not named but they are clearly implied. During the invasion, "A vote was passed of want of confidence in the Government, and a coalition gave us a National Party, which saved the nation. By the by, it had a Minister for War, who possessed some practical acquaintance with the matters to which he was to administer, which was not the case in the Cabinet just ejected" (12). *The Lull before Dorking* is a non-fiction pamphlet written in the same vein. The author, Sir Baldwyn Leighton, railing against "the paltry policy, and puerile proposals of the [Liberal] Government," remarks that these truths "*were better said out now than written in blood hereafter*" (5).
19. *Annual Register* (1871): 108; cited in Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War* 34.
20. *After the Battle of Dorking* had appeared in July of 1871. The British Museum copy of *The Suggested Invasion of England by the Germans* is date-stamped "4 J[UL]Y [18]71."

21. A fuller excerpt from the letter cited by Vagts is quoted and discussed in Gardiner's *The Life of Sir William Harcourt* 2: 247–48.
22. Harcourt specifically observed that "Prussia [is] a country from which invasion is considered formidable. Prussia has three ironclads [modern warships]. . . . [I]s it worth discussing the invasion of a country which has fifty ironclads by a country which has three ironclads?" (589). The editor diplomatically explains, in a footnote to the transcript of Harcourt's lecture, "The Prussian or North German army is mentioned throughout the argument only by way of illustration" (579).
23. Charles Cornwallis Chesney (1826–1876) had been promoted in 1868 to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, and George Tomkyns Chesney (1830–1895) had been promoted in 1869 to brevet Lieutenant-Colonel (Lane-Poole, Falkner, Stearn, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*). (When one is promoted by brevet, one receives an elevation in nominal rank but not in pay, and one's duties are limited.)
24. One wonders whether Harcourt knew that the Colonel Chesney who directed several pointed comments at him was the brother of the story's author. The tenor of some of their exchanges may be construed as indicating such a knowledge, but I am not aware of any clear evidence as to whether it was then known within military, naval, or political circles that George Chesney had authored the anonymously published tale. In any event, it certainly was not public knowledge at this point. As for how long it took for the fact to become public, the accounts are not specific. Stearn, in a biographical essay on Chesney in the *Journal of the Society for Army History Research*, asserts that "Although the tale was published anonymously [Chesney's] authorship was soon revealed" (113). Longmate, in *Island Fortress*, reports that Chesney's identity as the story's author "was soon an open secret" (351). And Finkelstein, in "From Textuality to Orality – The Reception of *The Battle of Dorking*," notes that "rumour had begun circulating as to its possible authorship within days of its issue, and Chesney had begun to feel threatened by the potential repercussions of exposure" (94). Vagts, in "Hopes and Fears of an American-German War, 1870–1915," however, observes that "the author, a Colonel Chesney, . . . remained anonymous for some time" (54). And George Bernard Shaw, in the 1914 pamphlet *Common Sense about the War*, would recall that "*The Battle of Dorking* had an enormous sale; and the wildest guesses were current as to its authorship" (14). In fact, among those rumored to have written it was the figure who had penned the important 1850 text *The Defenceless State of Great Britain*: the September 1871 issue of *The Bookbuyer's Guide* observes, "It is stated, on good authority, that the author of 'The Battle of Dorking' is Sir Francis Head, and on equally good authority that it is the lawful offspring of a dozen other persons." Chesney's identity continued, at least nominally, to be protected by his publisher long after 1871. When his story *The New Ordeal* was published by William Blackwood & Sons in 1879, its creator was cagily represented as only "the author of 'The Battle of Dorking'" on the title page.
25. The question of whether technological developments tended to benefit defenders or attackers more had been a longstanding point of debate. The matter is taken up, for example, in the 1852 pamphlet *The Peril of Portsmouth; or, French Fleets and English Forts*, in which Fergusson notes that "the invention of gunpowder ought to have told principally in favour of the defence," yet "[t]he result, however, was widely different" given the fact that "fortresses could [now] be quickly and inevitably destroyed"; thus "superiority [was given] to the art of attack which it has ever since retained – not, however, without protest on the part of many well qualified to judge the question" (17). In *The Use of Earthen Fortresses for the Defence of London and as a Preventive against Invasion* (1871), Major William Palliser takes up the question as well. He contends that the balance of the advantage is with the invader, although he has "been frequently asked why the introduction of steam as a motive power for ships has facilitated a descent upon the coasts of this country, inasmuch as the same power would be available for opposing the enterprise" (5). The matter was still being debated in the RUSI forum for years to come. For example, in 1886 Rear-Admiral W. Arthur pondered "whether the introduction of steam has lessened or increased the danger, and whether long-range guns are more favourable to the invader than to the invaded" ("The Defence of the Coasts of England, Ireland, and Scotland in the Event of War" 672–73).

26. "The Difficulties of Invasion" (24 May 1872): 8; "Mr. Vernon Harcourt and Colonel Baker" (5 June 1872): 6.
27. Harcourt annoyed his audience also by having bypassed the customary practice of writing up and making available the text of his lecture. He prefaced his remarks by saying, "I have to apologise to the members of this Institution that, in consequence of the press of business, I have not been able to write what I have got to say" (576). Both the form of his presentation and the appearance of his letters were noted with umbrage by RUSI members. As one Captain Hoseason observed, "Mr. Harcourt has not been satisfied to submit the subject to us in this form, but has subsequently, whilst we had the paper under consideration, published still longer articles in the *Times*" (614). He nonetheless begrudgingly granted that the organization's rules of engagement precluded their taking up anything but Harcourt's address.
28. Collinson was here recalling Harcourt's charge (discussed in the following paragraph of this essay) that Charles Chesney, in his defense of *The Battle of Dorking*, might as well have posited "a Vesuvius [that] arose all round the British Islands and blew up all the British Fleet."
29. *The New Ordeal* includes a prescient anticipation of the Cold War doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (M. A. D.). Because of technological advancements, "every nation was now in a position to destroy the armies of any other nation as surely as its own would also be liable to simultaneous destruction" (15), and this "prospect of mutual destruction which modern science opened up as a condition of war" (139) effectively ends traditional warfare.
30. A similar skepticism about the "scientific" pretenses of "the military profession" would be registered with an allusion to Chesney's story in the 1887 book *Under the Deep Deep Sea, The Story of the Channel Tunnel*. In this account, Griffiths, while objecting to arguments based on "'Battle of Dorking' romance" scenarios (90), suggests that if the Channel Tunnel project is to be vetoed "in obedience to the dictates of 'military science,' then the sooner we have a little less of the 'military' element and a good deal more of the 'science,' the better" (95).
31. Noting in this letter that "The limits of probability may be defined, but speculations which decline the test of reason or of figures are necessarily infinite," Harcourt went on to contend,

> We are told we must reckon with the unforeseen. That is true, but surely we must first ascertain the limits of the foreseen. Let us first discover what is probable and then add what margin you think prudent for the improbable. If the doctrine of "sudden developments" is to be adopted, where will you stop? If the British navy may suddenly go to the bottom by some undreamt-of process, why may not the British army likewise disappear by some unforeseen accident? For that matter, why should not the whole Prussian army be swallowed up by an earthquake? It is highly improbable, but it cannot be said to be impossible.

32. Similarly, in *England on the Defensive; or, The Problem of Invasion Critically Examined under the Aspect of a Series of Military Operations* (1881), Captain J. T. Barrington, while contemplating a potential "combination of all the great powers against us on the sea," notes that "[a]dmitting such a combination to be possible, no arguments showing its extreme improbability avail much" (13).
33. Chesney, "The Battle of Dorking," *Spectator* (3 June 1871): 671. Finkelstein, in "From Textuality to Orality – The Reception of *The Battle of Dorking*," astutely assesses Chesney's political motives for having written this letter (94–95).
34. Maude had made the same point six years earlier: "whether the fleet exists or not, and therefore with the knowledge we possess of 'sea power,' the idea [of a successful invasion of Britain] is feasible or not, does not affect the question as closely as our naval experts incline to believe, for though we may know any such attempt to be foredoomed to disaster, the other party to the quarrel may take a very different view of the matter" ("Notices of Books" 1022).
35. The journal *National Defence* was published by the National Defence Association, which had been established in 1906. Its agenda was largely identical to that of the better-known National Service League, which had been initiated four years earlier and by the summer of 1914 claimed to have 270,000 members (Adams and Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain, 1900–18* 17, 255). *National Defence* included a number of fictional narratives such as *Finis Britanniae* (March 1909:

482–90; discussed in my essay "'The Benefit and the Handicap of Hindsight'") and *The Passing of Jorkins* (1910: 596–605). In the former story, the British Empire collapses at the hands of the Germans as a result of "the incurable apathy of the [British] nation" (482). In the latter story, an antiwar socialist Member of Parliament becomes converted to militarism during a German invasion. (*The Passing of Jorkins* is evidently based on Major du Maurier's play *An Englishman's Home*, which had opened in the previous year. The protagonists in both cases are apathetic civilians who, having been roused to take up arms by the presence of foreign troops on British soil, are executed as combatants in civilian clothes.) The heady enthusiasm with which *National Defence* was launched apparently could not be sustained: it began in 1908 as a monthly publication, then became quarterly, then irregular, and finally it ceased in 1912.

36. Much the same counter-intuitive message about military eventualities had been conveyed in the succinct epigraph from Conservative Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli that appears on the title page of *The Invasion of 1883*, a story published in 1876 about a thwarted German attempt to conquer Britain: "The unexpected always happens."
37. Such contentions of armed forces professionals on the invasion question bear comparison with Taleb's *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*. In this study of the under-estimated potency of extremely unlikely events, Taleb observes that with routine matters the consequences of planning errors tend to be minor, whereas "[w]ith projects of great novelty, such as a military invasion, an all-out war, or something entirely new, errors explode upward" (157). He recounts his impressions of "a brainstorming session on risk" organized by a think tank that was sponsored by the U. S. Defense Department. A number of individuals representing various disciplines were invited to attend this symposium, and he recalls being "surprise[d] to discover that the military people there thought, behaved, and acted like philosophers." He came to conclude that military professionals are uniquely equipped "to understand the epistemology of risk" (125–26). Taleb's estimation of the risk-analysis models produced by military figures contrasts with the sources cited in the following endnote.
38. Snyder's *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* consists of case studies of the French, German, and Russian war plans, yet many of the points it makes illustrate the strategic assumptions and deliberative processes of all of the major combatants, including Britain. An example of the self-fulfilling logic described here, as it pertains to the preconditions for World War One, is offered in Playne's 1928 study *The Pre-War Mind in Britain*. Playne observes that the Anglo-French military discussions concerning the potential for German aggression began in 1905 as informal talks, yet they led

> to official conversations, annual conferences, detailed arrangements between English and French General Staffs, and consequently to increases of forces and of expenditure on both sides of the Channel[. This chain of events] is an extraordinary revelation of how the war-mind evolves. We see the infection of suspicion and fear spreading and the growth of ill-will, we notice the incitements of professional ambitions accompanied by wilful blindness to the reaction which ostentatious display of military power inevitably produces. Certain men whose thought and life centre round military preparations get overexcited at a critical political juncture. They see visions of setting their forces in action, they incite likeminded professionals in another land, the two groups scent enmity and danger and persuade one another of the direction where it is alleged to exist. They plot and plan against the alleged enemy, but they fail to apprehend that all this goes a long way to provoke the dangers which haunt them. (208–09)

As I take up in "'The Benefit and the Handicap of Hindsight,'" recent accounts of the enduring potency of this disposition include Barber's *Fear's Empire: War, Terrorism, and Democracy*, Bourke's *Fear: A Cultural History*, Suskind's *The One Percent Doctrine: Deep Inside America's Pursuit of Its Enemies Since 9/11*, Furedi's *Invitation to Terror: The Expanding Empire of the Unknown*, and Sunstein's *Worst-Case Scenarios*.

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