



THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE BRITISH ARMY.



THE WAR OFFICE: ITS WORK AND PERSONNEL.

BY A. HILLIARD ATTERIDGE.



THE British Army may be said to be in one very important respect like the British Constitution. It has been a thing of gradual growth, with not a little of practical make-shift and more or less successful compromise in its organisation and system of command. No one claims for it ideal perfection. On paper its organisation seems complicated and cumbrous beside the simpler and more symmetrical systems of the great armies of the Continent. So far as mere pounds, shillings and pence go in the calculation, it is more costly than they are in proportion to its numbers. But those who indulge in these rough and ready calculations forget that the men who organise and direct our Army have to deal with very different conditions from those which define the far lighter task of a Continental Minister of War. It is easy to sum up the alleged deficiencies of our Army by pointing to the fact that on a sudden emergency we could despatch only two, perhaps only one, *corps d'armée* to some distant land. But when this is asserted, and asserted with truth, how much is left out of sight that ought to modify the effect of such a statement. Is it not also true that the system of the great military powers makes it difficult for them to do even as much as this? that to provide for even small expeditions is a serious strain on their resources, which are only organised for home defence? that ours is the only army that is always engaged in active operations in some part of the world, ours the only administration that always keeps some 80,000 fighting men on the war footing thousands of miles away across the sea? We have become so familiar with the state of constant readiness for

Indian and Colonial wars, and the constant maintenance of our great military power in the East, that we have long ceased to wonder at the easy accomplishment of what to other European States would be an impossible task except at the cost of a complete revolution in their much-vaunted military systems.

The War Office is officially responsible for the successes and the failings of our Army, and, with the natural tendency of human nature to blame rather than to praise, it is held accountable for all defects and given scant credit for what it successfully accomplishes. A good many of those who are most ready to denounce the official centre of our Army administration in Pall Mall would be sorely puzzled to say what the "War Office" is and how it does its work. As it now exists it is a very modern institution. As for defects in its constitution, the only wonder is, not that they exist, but that there are not more of them, considering the utter chaos from which it has been evolved.

Without going into the niceties of modern constitutional history, let it be remembered that since the days when, after the Restoration, a British regular army came into being, there have been two forces at work developing the present state of things—forces at first in all but absolute rivalry, but gradually learning to work together. First, there was the power of the Sovereign claiming the control of the Army as something belonging to the Royal prerogative; and then there was Parliament, which at the outset viewed the very existence of a regular army as a danger to constitutional liberty, and by using the power of the purse asserted its right to a share in the control and direction of the forces that it paid for. Far into the eighteenth century the King, assisted by

a council of generals, was in direct command of the Army. It was while a queen was on the throne that Marlborough was appointed Commander-in-Chief, and he had no immediate successor. The finances of the Army were largely regulated by the Board of Ordnance and the Master-General of the Ordnance was a kind of war minister. There was, it is true, a Secretary-at-War, but he was for a long time only the King's private secretary for military matters, with ill-defined powers and duties. Then there were the Commissariat, a Board of Treasury officials who checked the charges for provisions and transport, and the Controllers of Army Accounts, later a branch of the Audit Office. These and other officials

In 1793, for the first time since the days of Queen Anne, a Commander-in-Chief was appointed in the person of the Duke of York, famous in the nursery rhyme for his strategy, remembered in history as the great trafficker in commissions and appointments, whose statue stands, high as Nelson's, on his pillar in Waterloo Place, usurping the eminence to which surely Wellington has better claims. The Commander-in-Chief of those days was practically independent of Secretaries - at - War and for War and the whole motley crowd of civilian clerks and officials. The system, or want of system, such as it was, survived the long war, and during the years of peace that followed the Secretary of State had more to



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working in semi-independence managed or mismanaged Army affairs between them.

Towards the close of the century the position of the Secretary-at-War became more important, but he was still regarded as a subordinate official, and what importance he possessed was sadly diminished by the introduction into the already complicated system of a new Secretary of State, a member of the Cabinet, who was known as "Secretary for the Colonies and War," so that the Secretary-at-War was very much in the position of a fifth wheel to the coach. If the multitude of officials could have secured efficiency, as the multitude of counsellors tends to safety, the British Army at the outbreak of the great war with France would have been a very formidable force.

do with the Colonies than the Army, and the administrative machinery of the latter naturally became somewhat rusty and time-worn. It was not till the pressure of the war with Russia was felt that the two offices were definitely separated, and the Secretary of War began to be what he now is, the officer of State responsible for all that concerns the Army.

The War Office will before long carry on its work in a building worthy of its importance on the splendid site assigned to it in Whitehall. Its present abode is familiar enough to the Londoner as a dingy-looking town house of the last century, fronting on Pall Mall. The old place has a history of its own which might be worth telling. It was the Schomberg House of a hundred and fifty years ago, where Gainsborough had his

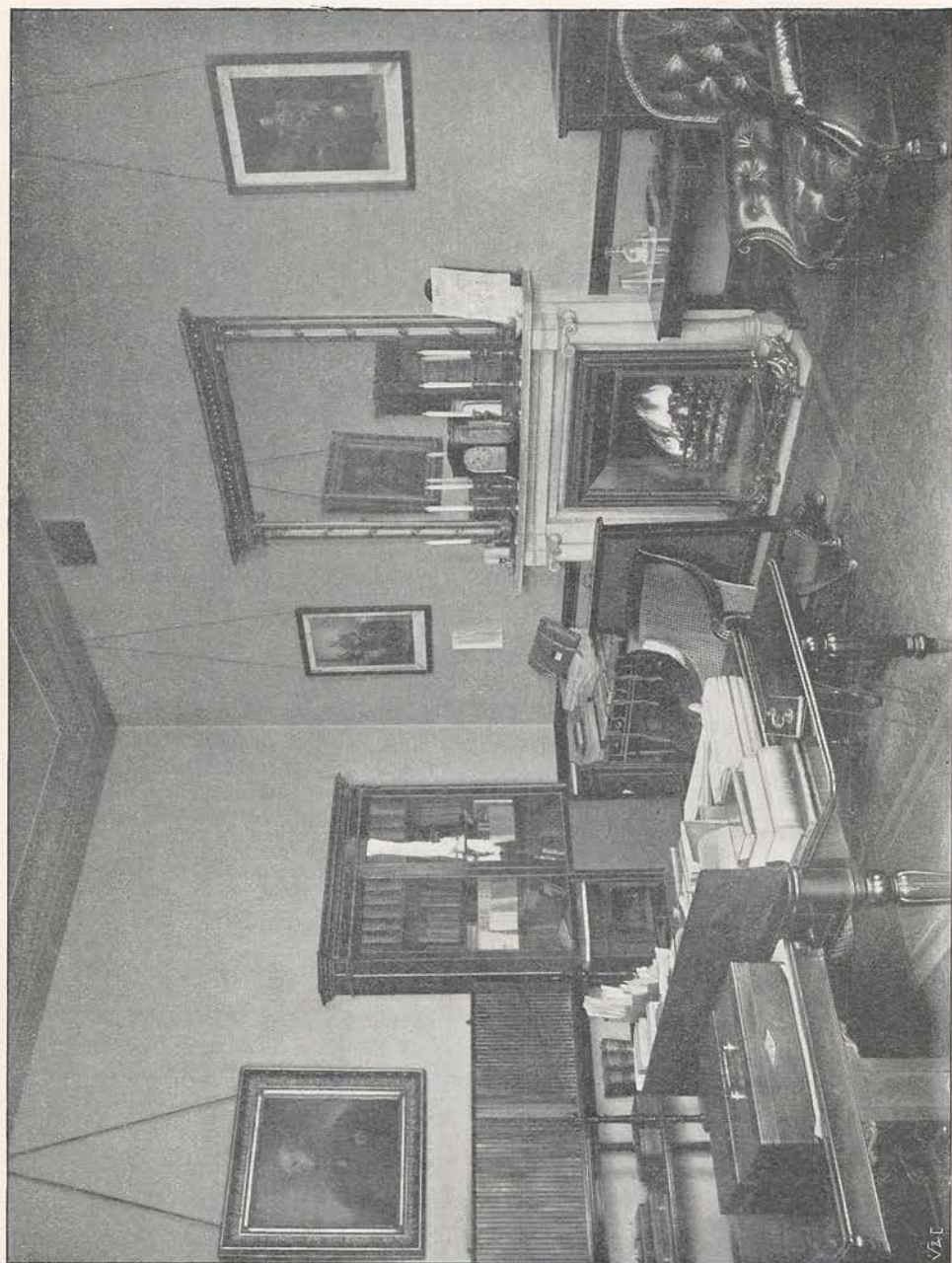
studio and immortalised the society belles of the day. But traditions of bygone art and beauty are but a poor consolation to those who have to work at ledgers and dockets, reports and returns, in the crowded, ill-lighted and ill-ventilated rooms where so much work has to be done, work that grows from year's end to year's end. The only things that give some dignity to the place are the bear-skinned, red-coated sentry who stands at the gate and the bronze statue before the entrance porch. It is the statue of Sidney Herbert, created Baron Herbert of Lea a few weeks before his death, but best commemorated by the name under which his life-work was done. The first Secretary of State for War under the new *régime*, it is a fitting place for such a memorial. We have a strange way of forgetting some of our greatest men, and this statue looking out on Pall Mall conveys no meaning and wakes no memories in the minds of nine-tenths of those who daily pass it by. Yet it is not forty years since Sidney Herbert passed away, worn out with ungrudging labour in the public service; and to him, more than to any other of our administrators, the Army owes the inauguration of the new period of business-like reorganisation and growing efficiency that began with the Crimean War. That war, with its grim tests of stern reality, had brought home to the public mind the hopeless confusion into which our military organisation had been allowed to drift during the long peace. Herbert was "Secretary-at-War" in the Aberdeen Cabinet when the conflict with Russia began. When men at home in England heard of the endless misery of the Army before Sebastopol, there was a disposition to make him the scapegoat. The feeling of the time was blindly unjust, for he had succeeded to the inheritance of a bad and cumbrous system, and to completely reorganise it in a day under the strain of war was impossible. It was not his fault that the machine which had been handed over to him in a condition of badly patched-up disrepair broke down under the first attempt to make it work at high speed.

Undismayed by the ill-informed obloquy of the crowd or the attacks of political adversaries, Herbert, as Secretary of State for War, in two successive administrations under Palmerston, set bravely to work at the task of reorganisation in the War Office and in the Army. We owe to his energy and zeal the first serious steps to improve the everyday conditions of the soldier's life. It was while he was at the War Office that the old

Indian Army was successfully amalgamated with the Royal Army after the suppression of the Bengal mutiny, and that at home a new army of defence was created by the inauguration of the Volunteer movement. But not his least work was that he swept away a large part of the cumbrous machinery of the War Office and placed the system on a more business-like basis. Its various departments were grouped under three heads—(1) the Commander-in-Chief, taking charge of all that concerned recruiting, appointments, promotion, and such purely military matters as the transport movements and distribution of troops; (2) the Financial Secretary, who was concerned with all that referred to estimates and expenditure; and (3) the Surveyor-General of the Ordnance, who had to do with the manufacture, purchase, and maintenance of arms, stores, and *matériel*. The leading features of the new system were the uniting of all the administrative work of the Army under one head and an attempt to define the personal responsibility of the chief of each department, leaving it to him to further subdivide the task assigned to him among his subordinates.

Sidney Herbert died in 1861 while still busy with schemes for further reform. In the years that followed there was a gradual realisation of the principle which he had enunciated, that in a constitutional country the Army must be completely under the control of the Minister appointed to the War Office, who is responsible to Parliament for its efficiency. According to his scheme of reform, the Commander-in-Chief himself was supposed to be the head of a department under the Secretary of State for War, the Minister representing the Sovereign and the nation. But the force of old tradition long stood in the way of this great change becoming an accomplished fact. There was still, for years, something of the old divided control of the Army, with the continual friction of what might be described as the military and the civil element in its administration. It is an open secret now that the Royal Duke who was till lately in command of the Army had no relish for the idea that the Horse Guards was to rank as a mere War Office department. His views naturally influenced those who surrounded him, and the passive resistance thus created was a powerful brake on the progress of the whole working of the new system.

The next stage in reorganisation was reached ten years ago, in 1888, when the



[Russell.]

LORD WOLSELEY'S ROOM AT THE WAR OFFICE.

From a photo by]

system was further simplified by abolishing the department of the Surveyor-General of Ordnance and dividing his work between the



Photo by] [Lon. Stereoscopic Co.
SIR EVELYN WOOD, V.C.
(Adjutant-General.)

two remaining chiefs. The War Office was thus made to consist of a Military Department under the Commander-in-Chief and a Finance Department under the Financial Secretary, both being responsible to the Secretary of State for War.

There was a further change in 1895, when the Duke of Cambridge retired, and it was decided that the Commander-in-Chief should henceforth be appointed by the Cabinet for a term of five years, instead of holding his post for an indefinite period. The subdivisions of both the Military and Finance Departments were more carefully defined, and steps were taken to secure a permanent advisory council, both for the Secretary for War and the Commander-in-Chief, on lines that had already worked successfully for many years in connection with the Navy at the Admiralty. The existing system may be outlined thus:—

Head of War Office:

Secretary of State for War.

Military Branch: Departments.

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| Commander-in-Chief. | { | 1. Adjutant-General. |
| | | 2. Quartermaster-General. |
| | | 3. Inspector-General of Fortifications. |
| | | 4. Inspector-General of Ordnance. |

Finance Branch: Departments.

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| Financial Secretary. | { | 1. Accountant-General. |
| | | 2. Director of Contracts. |
| | | 3. Director of Clothing and Clothing Factories. |
| | | 4. Director of Ordnance Factories. |

The Commander-in-Chief and the heads of departments are the regular advisers of the Secretary of State in all technical and official matters, but he is responsible for the decision taken. He has an advisory council to which he can refer questions for discussion. He himself presides, and the other members are the Under-Secretaries, the Financial Secretary, the Commander-in-Chief, the heads of departments, and such officers as may be summoned to attend on account of their special knowledge of the matter in hand.

In purely military affairs his principal adviser is, of course, the Commander-in-Chief. Such a question, for instance, as the possibilities and methods of military action in defence of one of our Colonies, where Imperial troops might be employed, would be decided on advice received from the military side of the office. Lord Wolseley at the Horse Guards presides over this, the more picturesque side of the War Office. A hard worker and a man of most methodical habits, with a readiness to trust his subordinates and let them do their work unhampered by interference, he is a most efficient chief of a great department, where method and business-like qualities are half the battle. His right-hand man, and the channel of most communications with the other side of the War Office, is the Adjutant-General, who would be called in

most countries the "chief of the staff." He is responsible specially for the enlistment and discharge of men, the training and discipline of the Army, and the preparation of returns and statistics, the collection of information, and the issue of orders. Sir Evelyn Wood now holds the post, and his predecessor, the first appointed under the new



Photo by] [Elliott & Fry.
RIGHT HON. SIR REDVERS H.
BULLER, V.C.
(Ex-Adjutant-General.)

system, was Sir Redvers Buller. Both are good organisers, and Buller possessed the special advantage of having, some years ago,



Photo by]

[Lon. Stereoscopic Co.

THE MARQUIS OF LANSDOWNE.

(Secretary for War.)

as a member of a committee on War Office re-organisation, obtained an intimate knowledge of official methods. In happy contrast to the old days of continual friction between the military and civil elements,

Sir Arthur Haliburton, the late Permanent Secretary of the War Office, was able to say on his recent retirement that for four years there had not been one single difficulty between the Military and the Financial Departments of the Office.

The other three heads of departments under the Commander-in-Chief, though dealing with very important matters, have not the same intimate relations with him as the Adjutant-General. The Quartermaster-General sees to supplies, transport and housing of troops, and is responsible for the Paymasters, Army Service Corps and Remount departments. Fortifications, lands, ranges, barracks, etc., are looked after by the Inspector-General of Fortifications, and the Inspector-General of Ordnance is responsible for questions of armaments, warlike stores, and designs, patterns, and inventions for arms and equipments. So much for the military department. Let us now take a glance at the financial side.

Though it deals with the Army, and its very name is suggestive of "the pomp and circumstance of glorious war," little of romance finds its way into the War Office. It is a dull, prosaic institution, and in plain matter of fact is like nothing so much as a big business establishment managing some

large commercial concern. The Secretary of State, now Lord Lansdowne, has to assist him, besides his private secretaries, a Parliamentary Under Secretary, Mr. St. John Brodrick, who takes his place in the House of Commons. Next comes the Permanent Under Secretary, Sir Ralph Knox, a most important wheel in the machine. As the fortunes of parties and governments change, Secretaries of State and Parliamentary Under Secretaries come and go, sometimes at very brief notice. The duty of the Permanent Secretary is to keep the machine running, to see that every official performs his part, that returns and accounts are complete at the proper time, that each day the papers the Secretary of State has to attend to are ready for him, and that his orders are duly carried out. But, besides all this, he carries on the tradition of the office from one ministry to another, and a newly appointed Secretary of State must necessarily look to him for guidance and information in many matters which are unfamiliar to the politician, but which are well known by years of experience to the permanent official, who has been all his life in the office, and has risen from the ranks to the post he holds by sheer hard work as a public servant. So, though nominally without any executive power, he is a very important man.

Next to the Secretary of State the most influential official is the Financial Secretary, who, like his chief, is a politician, and comes and goes with the change of ministry. Under him are the Accountant-General and the Director of Contracts, whose names explain their offices.

Both are permanent officials, as also are the general superintendents of the great manufacturing businesses carried on by the War



Photo by]

[Elliott & Fry.

RIGHT HON. W. F. ST. JOHN
BRODRICK, M.P.

(Under Secretary for War.)

Office, the Clothing Factories and the Ordnance Factories, which latter include Woolwich Arsenal and the arms and ammunition factories at Waltham, Enfield, and Birmingham. The management of the Army is a world-wide business, with an annual turnover of rather more than eighteen millions sterling, and it is no wonder that its accounts and correspondence occupy the energies of some six hundred clerks. But in one important respect it is different from any other business. The chairman of a public company has at most twice a year to face the shareholders and submit to be "heckled" as to how things are going on. But during several months of the year, while Parliament is sitting, the War Minister must, night after night, be ready to answer a string of questions. He must reply to one M.P. as to the reason why one of his constituents cannot be allowed a pension; he must answer another as to a question of a colour-sergeant's grievance at the Cape; he must tell a third about the readiness of big guns destined for a coaling station, and promise another a return as to the statistics of crime in a home garrison; defend cordite against an attack from a fifth, and satisfy a sixth as to the price offered for artillery horses and the safety of a Volunteer rifle range. Now he has to be "posted up" for this ordeal. Notice is given of all questions, but generally only a day's notice. His secretary sends the question to the department that can supply the information required, and often several officials are at work for hours on records, accounts, and returns, preparing the reply, frequently bringing cable and telegraph into action to save time. It is part of the business of the Office to provide such information for the public, but it means more time and money than most people imagine, and often the information is asked for not so much through zeal for the public service as through the anxiety of some fussy M.P. to keep his name before his constituents.

The most serious work that the Office has to do each year is the preparation of the Army Estimates and the Annual Statement that accompanies them. These contain in detail the Minister's plans for the year, what he proposes to do, and what it will cost to do it. He can only hope for a certain share of the revenue to be devoted to his department, and he is dependent in everything on the goodwill of his colleague of the Exchequer, who holds the purse strings. His military advisers tell him what ought to be done, the Cabinet generally decides on what its policy

will require, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has the last word on the matter of pounds and pence, and then he does his best to make the necessary compromise between needs and means. He never has anything like the free hand that his colleague of the Admiralty has so long enjoyed, because, unless in the face of imminent war, the public is never so ready to spend money on the Army as on the all-important first line of defence—the Navy. In forming the estimates for the coming year the accounts and estimates of past years are the chief guides, and greatly simplify the work. Thus, in the matter of transport the Quartermaster-General's department states what movements will have to be made, and then the cost is calculated and provided for. The expenditure on the Indian Army is a separate matter, the troops we provide for the East being, so to say, hired out to the Indian Exchequer. In case of an unforeseen war, supplementary estimates will have to be provided when the emergency arises, with the result of late hours and much hurried work for the clerical staff. In such a case the necessary preparations are set on foot at once, the Minister trusting to Parliament to give him the necessary funds for which he asks at the first opportunity.

It is an unfortunate fact that the desire to keep expenditure down is sometimes itself the source of much unnecessary expense. Unless there is something like a clear precedent for it, it is no easy matter for the War Office to get the Treasury officials to authorise even a small payment. Hence much correspondence backwards and forwards between the two great offices of State over mere trifles. "The Treasury," said a War Office official to me, "often give us more trouble over a few shillings than over thousands of pounds." But the tendency is to make even such discussions between departments shorter and simpler than they used to be in the days when the special delight of an official seemed to be to lengthen out a correspondence. Formerly the battle over economy used to rage fiercely between the military and civil side of the War Office. The soldiers were trying to get the most they could for their business, and the officials were looked on rather as miserly guardians of the public purse. In the last few years the tendency has been for the Adjutant-General and his subordinate to be as keen as men can be to get good value for the public money and make it go as far as possible. There is no doubt that much still could be done in the way of saving money for better purposes by getting rid of some portion of the tons'

weight of returns and statistics that accumulate every year and occupy a small army of clerks in filing and registering papers that no one ever consults again. But here again the M.P. who persistently asks for pages of figures and blue books by the ream has something to answer for. Some part of this useless labour is, however, due to the official tendency to refer everything to the central office, instead of enlarging the powers of those in charge of military districts and stations, and letting them settle on the spot many matters that are now the subject of long correspondence with Whitehall or Pall Mall.

As to the alleged undue cost of our Army, one point is worth noting. We are the only people who compete with the labour market by free enlistment. The conscript armies of the Continent, raised for home service, are paid, housed and fed at a rate that would stop all recruiting even in the most poverty-stricken district in the United Kingdom. What is more, the War Budget takes no account of the vast cost inflicted on a country by the conscription, a tax on the life of the people that represents millions. Those who point to our large non-effective expenditure also conveniently forget that a part of it represents the cost of the abolition of purchase, an item that will decrease as years go on, and that another portion is made up of what are really good service pensions to men

who have given their lives to the State, and who for the earlier portion at least of their service accepted a rate of pay that they had to supplement out of their own private means. There is undoubtedly room for economy, room for greater efficiency; but, considering the exceptional task that our Army and our Army administrators have to perform, the War Office need not fear comparison with foreign administrations.

It has sometimes been suggested that we ought to follow the example of most foreign nations and appoint a general as our War Minister. But what has been already explained as to the working of the War Office shows, I think, that a good business man is the best head for such an organisation, the soldiers finding their true place in the military department. Under our constitutional system the War Minister must be a politician, and we in England do not care for political soldiers. If the post were reserved for such men, an Army paymaster or commissariat officer who

had taken to politics would be the typical man to be Secretary for War; and surely we can do better as we are doing with a civilian administrator at the head of affairs, having on one side the picked soldiers of the Army to advise and guide him, and on the other men who have risen to the first rank in his special department of the civil service to help him in his administrative work.



(Photo by Johnson & Hoffman, Calcutta.)

SIR GEORGE S. WHITE, V.C.

(Quartermaster-General of the British Army.)

