

THE IMPACT OF FICTION ON PUBLIC DEBATE IN LATE VICTORIAN BRITAIN: *THE BATTLE OF DORKING* AND THE “LOST CAREER” OF SIR GEORGE TOMKYNES CHESNEY

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This article re-examines the impact of The Battle of Dorking (1871)—a seminal work of British “speculative fiction”—on print and political debates throughout the 1870s and beyond. In doing so, it also re-examines the military, educational and political career of Dorking’s author, Sir George Tomkynes Chesney, and finds him to be a more substantial figure than most previous scholarship suggests.

On the early morning of 16 September 1871, Prince George, the Duke of Cambridge, veteran Commander-of-the-Forces and first cousin of Queen Victoria, sat on horseback near Surrey’s Hog’s Back ridge, reviewing the climax of a series of military maneuvers.² The maneuvers took place over several days along the North Downs, between the historic market towns of Reigate and Farnham, southwest of London. These were not small-scale military drills. Instead, before the Duke was an attacking force in excess of 18,000, including some 3,000 cavalry. They faced a defending force of just under 10,000, including no fewer than 2,000 cavalry.³ A total Army Corps of almost 33,000 was deployed, including unused reserves and noncombatant auxiliaries.⁴ As the sun rose, the attacking infantry moved forward in advanced “company columns with large intervening bodies of skirmishers,” a distinctively Prussian tactic.⁵ Considering the proximity of the Franco-Prussian War and its ongoing convulsions—such as The Fall of the Second Empire, The Siege of Paris, and The Commune—the scene described above may appear unremarkable. It is striking, however, that the genesis for these maneuvers lay in a fictional story from the pages of *Blackwood’s Magazine* of May that same year.⁶

The Battle of Dorking, by the initially anonymous George Tomkynes Chesney, was published just four months prior to the maneuvers. It opened with a charged and memorable salvo:

You ask me to tell you, my grandchildren, something about my own share in the great events that happened fifty years ago. ‘Tis sad work turning back to that bitter

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² House of Commons, “Reports on Military Manoeuvres by Commander-in-Chief and Consultative Com., September 1871,” *Sessional Papers*, 1872, *Command Papers; Accounts and Papers*, 23 February, “1872,” vol. XXXVII.625, 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 17, 19, 33.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 15, 17, 19, 20-21.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶ *Blackwood’s [Edinburgh] Magazine*, although now somewhat overlooked, was a British publication sold nationwide, regularly republished in the United States, and was extremely popular amongst those serving in the British Colonial Service throughout the Empire. It was considered the main mouthpiece of Scotland’s (minority) Tory political elite, and its views were commonly diametrically opposed to those of the Liberal *Edinburgh Review*. *Blackwood’s* had a long tradition of publicizing fictitious tales designed to mobilize public opinion against perceived threats to national security or public morality. A more famous example of this is *Blackwood’s* coup in being the first publication to serialize Joseph Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness” in 1899.

page in our history, but you may perhaps take profit in your new homes from the lesson it teaches. For us in England it came too late. And yet we had plenty of warnings, if we had only made use of them.⁷

Describing what is clearly a German invasion, the narrative unfolds with a thinly veiled Liberal government overseeing a period of military retrenchment, and leaving the country defended largely by volunteer units. Following a brief naval battle and the successful German landing on the Sussex Coast,⁸ the story's two armies ultimately decide the outcome of the war at the market town and railroad junction of Dorking, deep in the Surrey stockbroker-belt. Despite the natural advantage of the British position on the North Downs and the heroic efforts of the regulars, the superior Prussian troops break through the line and stream on to London, thereby ending the war.⁹ In the ensuing peace, the British Empire is dismantled, with some territories kept by the Germans (Malta and Gibraltar), some ceded to other powers (Canada and the West Indies to the United States) and some granted their independence (Australia, India, and Ireland). Likely reflecting Chesney's military, class, and Anglo-Irish background, Ireland proves wholly incapable of governing itself, and promptly descends into civil war. Great Britain is effectively reduced to the status of a semi-dependent "tax farm" for the now completely dominant German Empire.¹⁰ Chesney concludes the story by emphasizing what he regards as the twin necessities of increased military expenditure and reform:

A little firmness and self-denial, or political courage and foresight, might have averted this disaster, I feel that the judgment must have really been deserved. A nation too selfish to defend its liberty, could not have been fit to retain it. To you, my grandchildren, who are now going to seek a new home in a more prosperous land, let not this bitter lesson be lost upon you in the country of your adoption.¹¹

After seven reprints of the May issue of *Blackwood's*, *The Battle of Dorking* was printed as a stand-alone booklet in June 1871. It sold over 80,000 copies at sixpence each in that month alone, and a further 30,000 in July.¹² Other works of invasion literature published in the same year, such as Henry William Pullen's *The Fight at Dame Europa's School*, were equally didactic, but did not carry the same impact.¹³ By the end of the year, *Dorking* had been reprinted,

⁷ George Tomkyns Chesney, "The Battle of Dorking," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* DCLXVII, Vol. CIX (May 1871): 539. This opening was subsequently parodied by many respondents to Dorking, such as the anonymous British author ("Maximilian Moltruhn") of *The Other Side at the Battle of Dorking* (London, 1871): "You ask me, *mein lieber Fritz*, to tell you something about my share in that great event of fifty years ago, the 'Invasion of England.' 'Tis sad work turning back to that bitter page in Deutschland's history."

⁸ Chesney, "The Battle of Dorking," 549.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 559-560, 561.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 570-571.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 572.

¹² I.F. Clarke, "The Battle of Dorking, 1871-1914," *Victorian Studies* 8, no. 4 (June 1965): 320; I.F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War, 1763-1984* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 40; I.F. Clarke (ed.), *The Tale of the Next Great War, 1871-1914* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 14-15; and A. Michael Matin, "Scrutinizing *The Battle of Dorking*: The Royal United Service Institution and the Mid-Victorian Invasion Controversy," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 39 (2011): 389.

¹³ Henry William Pullen, *The Fight at Dame Europa's School: showing how the German boy thrashed the French boy and how the English boy looked on* (New York: Francis B. Felt and co, 1871). See also, for the British-German [Anglo-Prussian] relationship Michael Pratt, "A Fallen Idol: The Impact of the Franco-Prussian War on the Perception of Germany by British Intellectuals," *The International History Review* 7, no. 4 (November 1985): 543-575.

parodied and re-written across the English-speaking world and beyond, with translations into French, German, Danish, Dutch, Italian and Portuguese.¹⁴ It had considerable impact across many areas of British public life, spawned an entire genre of "invasion literature," and presaged science fiction tales of alien invasion, such as H.G. Wells' 1898 classic *The War of the Worlds*.¹⁵

Chesney was both a military officer and an educational reformer, and freely stated that he intended the piece as "propaganda for improved defence." It was attacked for that very reason by Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone, who feared its possible repercussions.¹⁶ Gladstone's First Ministry (1868-1874) oversaw a period of fiscal retrenchment and reform alongside a comparatively "dovish" foreign policy, and emphasized the particular need for greater efficiency in the civil service and military. The Prime Minister reserved his harshest and most telling criticism of *Dorking* for a speech given at the Whitby Working Men's Liberal Association:

In *Blackwood's Magazine* there has lately been a famous article, called "The Battle of Dorking." I should not mind this "Battle of Dorking," if we could keep it to ourselves, if we could take care that nobody belonging to any other country should know that such follies could find currency or even favour with portions of the British public, but unfortunately these things go abroad, and they make us ridiculous in the eyes of the whole world. I do not say that the writers of them are not sincere — that is another matter — but I do say that the result of these things is practically the spending of more and more of your money. Be on your guard against alarmism.¹⁷

Gladstone's suggestion that "such follies" as *Dorking* could result in a diminishment of Britain's international reputation reveals the degree to which it was treated as a real threat to government policy by the Liberals in both Houses of Parliament.¹⁸

In "Scrutinizing *The Battle of Dorking*," literary scholar A. Michael Matin focuses on the debate within the Royal United Services Institution (RUSI) that resulted from the *Dorking* controversy.¹⁹ Similarly, the work of historian D.P. O'Connor investigates the role of the RUSI in stimulating and prolonging the controversy.²⁰ The majority of exploration into *Dorking's*

¹⁴ I.F. Clarke, "Introduction" in *The Battle of Dorking and When William Came*, George Tomkynes Chesney and "Saki" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), ix. The piece had been republished in English in New York, Philadelphia, Toronto (2 editions), Melbourne and Dunedin by the end of the year. Further, a Portuguese language edition, published in Rio de Janeiro, incorrectly claimed that then leader of the opposition, Benjamin Disraeli, was the author. I.F. Clarke, "The Battle of Dorking 1871-1914," 328.

¹⁵ The Martian's prime invasion sight in H.G. Wells *War of the Worlds* (1898) is Woking, another Surrey market town, located at the very center of a geographical triangle, the three points being: 1) Chesney's 1870s workplace at the Royal Indian Civil Engineering College at Cooper's Hill, Staines; 2) his choice of the field of battle, the potentially crucial rail junction at Dorking; and 3) the Hog's Back ridge between Guildford and Farnham, where The Duke of Cambridge oversaw the climax of the subsequent military maneuvers in September 1871.

¹⁶ Charles E. Gannon, *Rumours of War and Infernal Machines: Technomilitary Agenda-setting in American and British Speculative Fiction* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2005), 9, 11.

¹⁷ William Ewart Gladstone, "Speech at Whitby" in "Part I: English History, Chapter IV: Mr. Gladstone," *The Annual Register: A Review of Public Events at Home and Abroad for the Year 1871* (London: Rivingtons, 1872), 108.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ See A. Michael Matin, "Scrutinizing *The Battle of Dorking*: The Royal United Service Institution and the Mid-Victorian Invasion Controversy," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 39 (2011): 385-407.

²⁰ The RUSI was founded in 1831 by the Duke of Wellington and remains a forum for the discussion of defense and security matters in the U.K. See D.P. O'Connor, "The RUSI, Imperial Defence and the Expansion of Empire, 1829-90." http://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/OConnor_The_Influence_of_the_RUSI.pdf [consulted 6 January 2012].

impact, however, has been undertaken by literary scholars who primarily approach the work as a diverting piece of speculative fiction.²¹ In this article, I contend that such an approach overlooks the story's wider political and cultural significance, and that historians have not yet given *Dorking* its full due. The unique impact of this seminal tale, in terms of the public controversies it generated among political and military elites and, to a lesser degree among the wider reading public, is due to its status as a partially-shrouded but frequently cited "policy-document." Using the work of Matin and O'Connor as a springboard, I examine the public debates the *Dorking* controversy prompted in Parliament and the press. I cast the often overlooked Chesney in a fresh light depicting him as a serious-minded imperial administrator, educational reformer, and unusually independent actor in the highly factious officer corps of the British and Indian Armies.

Uncovering Chesney's forgotten career serves to demonstrate that his work was unlike that of many other writers of "invasion literature" who followed the success of *Dorking*. A classic example of this latter type is the rather frivolous, but incredibly prolific, Anglo-French journalist William Le Queux, whose efforts came to dominate the genre.²² Although a military professional, in literary terms Chesney was a concerned amateur rather than a career writer.²³ He was not dependent on patronage, as Le Queux was on Alfred Harmsworth and his *Daily Mail*, nor was he given to melodrama. This is demonstrated by his later break with his original military patron, Lord Roberts, and the "Indian ring" in the upper echelons of the British military. As early as 1878 Chesney defied military convention—going so far as to describe the prospect of a Russian attack on India as "alarmist,"—and thereby demonstrated his reluctance to act in an overtly sensationalist manner.²⁴ By re-examining Chesney's career as a whole, we can extricate him from the long shadow of his 1871 creation, which has been described by Roger T. Stearn as the "brilliant skit" for which he is remembered.²⁵

Little is known of Chesney's early years. He was born in 1830 to a distinguished but impoverished Anglo-Irish family. At 17, he earned a cadetship at the East India Company's Addiscombe College in Croydon. He graduated third in his class and was commissioned as a Second-Lieutenant to the Bengal Engineers. By the time of the so-called "Indian Mutiny" of 1857 he had risen to full Lieutenant. He was severely wounded during the assault on Delhi of 14 September and while recovering from his wounds, the newly promoted and decorated Chesney became principal of the Civil Engineering School at Fort William, Calcutta.²⁶ There, his

²¹ See, for example, the work of Ignatius F. Clarke and Bernard Bergonzi amongst others: I.F. Clarke, "The Battle of Dorking, 1871-1914," *Victorian Studies* 8, no. 4 (June 1965): 309-328; I.F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War, 1763-1984*; I.F. Clarke (ed.), *The Tale of the Next Great War, 1871-1914*; and Bernard Bergonzi, "The Battle of Dorking," *Notes and Queries* 8, no. 9 (1961): 346-347.

²² See for example: William Le Queux, *The Great War in England in 1897* (1894) and *The Invasion of 1910* (1906), the latter coauthored with Herbert Wrigley Wilson.

²³ D.P. O'Connor, "The RUSI, Imperial Defence and the Expansion of Empire, 1829-90," 3.

²⁴ George Tomkyns Chesney, "Russia and India," *Nineteenth Century Review* 8 (April 1878): 611, 616. See also, "The Value of India to England," *Nineteenth Century Review* 3 (February 1878): 227-238.

²⁵ Roger T. Stearn, "Chesney, Sir George Tomkyns (1830-1895)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/> [consulted 22 September 2010].

²⁶ The terminology surrounding the violent uprising against the East India Company in 1857 is laden with political meaning. While historically referred to as the "Indian Mutiny" or "Sepoy Mutiny," the implications of the term "mutiny" are troubling in that it assumes the legitimacy of British authority over the subcontinent. Similarly, while many now use the term "First War of Indian Independence" or "War of Independence of 1857" to describe the rising, this is equally problematic and politically-loaded terminology, as: there was no united "India," the rising was put down in large part by "loyal" Indian sepoys, and a significant minority of those who rebelled are thought to have been Muslim, raising questions as to the strength of any links to the modern Indian state. In an attempt to avoid such problems, I will hereafter refer to the "Mutiny" of 1857 as the "Indian Rebellion of 1857."

contributions to Indian-based journals first attracted public attention. Later, while on furlough in Britain, he wrote *Indian Polity* (1868), which included several radical proposals for reform of the Indian administration, notably the abolition of the separate armies and regional presidencies.²⁷ Many of the changes he advocated were implemented incrementally over the next several decades.²⁸ Indeed, the influence of *Indian Polity* was such that within a year of its publication, George Campbell, the serving Liberal Secretary of State for India, was publicly accused of having plagiarized the piece in a speech to the House of Lords.²⁹

In 1871 Chesney continued his career as an educational reformer, becoming the first Principal of the Royal Indian Civil Engineering College at Cooper’s Hill, Staines. He served in this post from 1871 to 1880. Although the college was a civilian establishment founded by the Indian Government, Chesney was pivotal in its creation. He chose its site, staff and curriculum, and instilled in it a martial spirit reflected in his hiring a number of former colleagues from the Royal Engineers.³⁰ In his first year at the college Chesney penned and published *Dorking*, triggering a great deal of discussion in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

Debates over the merits and deficiencies of the short story ranged across the political divide, demonstrating that this was not a simple partisan matter. Alongside Liberal condemnation and Tory delight, the contributions made to such debates also reflected individual members’ thoughts on Empire, Ireland, and Britain’s role within the increasingly unstable European balance of power.³¹ The Conservative Marquess of Hertford’s speech on his return from having observed Prussian maneuvers on the continent was typical of one strain of thought:

It required a Battle of Jena to bring about compulsory enlistment in Prussia. It required a Battle of Sadowa [Königgrätz] before Austria put her house in order. It required the Battle of Sedan and Metz to make the French resort, as he understood they were resorting, to compulsory enlistment. God grant that we might not require a Battle of Dorking to bring us to our senses.³²

Similarly, throughout 1872, some of the most insightful contributions mentioning the impact of *Dorking* came from the Liberal MP for Birmingham, Philip Muntz, who claimed, “last year there

²⁷ George Tomkynes Chesney, *Indian Polity: A view of the system of Administration in India* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1870), 107, 133, 339.

²⁸ House of Commons, “Civil Service of India. The selection and training of candidates for the Indian Civil Service,” *Sessional Papers*, 1876, *Command Papers; Accounts and Papers*, “1876,” vol. LV.277, 124; and House of Commons, “Indian Expenditure Commission. Vol. III. Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the Administration of the Expenditure of India,” *Sessional Papers*, 1900, *Command Papers; Reports of Commissioners*, “1900,” vol. XXIX.1, 217, 225-226, 398.

²⁹ “Plagiarism in High Places,” Letter, *The Pall Mall Gazette* 1441, 24 September, 1869: 1171.

³⁰ Stearn, “Chesney, Sir George Tomkynes (1830-1895).”

³¹ Donald M. Schurman, *Imperial Defence, 1868-1887* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2000), 22, 23-24; and Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 38-39, 97-98. For specific examples, see: Lord Dunsany (Anglo-Irish Conservative Peer) on the fate of HMS Captain on 16 June, 1871 “he should not be surprised to hear of a ‘Battle of Dorking’ any day,” and the Earl of Denbigh, Rudolph Fielding Edward Plunkett, 16th Baron of Dunsany, three days later on the 1856 Declaration of Paris [Respecting Maritime Law], claiming that British merchant men and sailors would be drawn to serving under neutral flags, “The enemy [either ‘Prussia’ or Russia] would be able, therefore, to undertake some such scheme as that described in the ‘Battle of Dorking’.” *Hansard Parliamentary Debates* 3rd ser., vol. 207 [16 June 1871], col. 127; and *Hansard Parliamentary Debates* 3rd ser., vol. 207 [19 June 1871], col. 200.

³² *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., vol. 208 [1 August 1871], col. 636-639.

was a panic in the public and the Press, stimulated, as one Government official has said, by publications like ‘The Battle of Dorking.’” Muntz noted that “there was a belief, out-of-doors—not, perhaps, altogether unfounded—that our Army was in an inefficient state.”³³ It is significant, and reflective of the importance of public opinion, that a work of fiction could elicit from a government MP such concerns regarding the readiness of the country for war.

The contributions of two naval officers, the retired Sir William Edmonstone, Tory MP for Stirling, and Lord Charles Beresford, an Anglo-Irish Tory representing County Waterford, are also particularly revealing. Beresford’s 1877 comment regarding the increased threat from torpedoes demonstrates the degree to which this fictional text remained a key reference point in parliamentary and public debate six years after its original publication:

They had all heard, and no doubt most hon. Members had read, the pamphlet called *The Battle of Dorking*, the writer of which began by assuming the whole or a great part of our Fleet [that had not been “decoyed away”] had in the first place been disabled and diminished by infernal machines or torpedoes. He was not himself an alarmist; but he thought such an event, although not very probable, was at all events possible.³⁴

Edmonstone had two years earlier defended the maintenance of a single central arms depot at Woolwich, noting that he, “did not like these discussions on the weak points of our defence — these battles of Dorking.”³⁵ This was a direct reference to Chesney’s tale, in which the narrator, after highlighting the necessity of creating a second branch arsenal in strategically-secure Birmingham, recounts, “Whence it came, I know not; but a whisper went down the ranks that Woolwich had been captured. We all knew this was our only arsenal, and understood the significance of the blow. No hope, if this were true, of saving the country.”³⁶

Parliamentary references to *Dorking* stagnated during the 1870s, becoming largely restricted to disputes between the Anglo-Tory establishment in Ireland and Irish “Nationalists,” with the latter, such as the future first Governor General of the Irish Free State Timothy Healy, often using it disparagingly.³⁷ The parliamentary record shows a resurgence in legislative action influenced in part by *Dorking* in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Debates from the 1890s reveal a cross-party consensus on the necessity of the ongoing fortification of the North Downs along the “Guildford-Dorking-Reigate” line of hills—described by Chesney as a battlefield some twenty-five years earlier.³⁸ This project would eventually become the London Defence Positions, a series of thirteen forts completed by 1903. Three forts directly overlooked the fictional battlefield of Dorking, with two others guarding the site of the maneuvers overseen by the Duke of

³³ *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., vol. 209 [4 March 1872], col. 1337-1341. See also: W. Vernon Harcourt refuting such claims: *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., vol. 209 [11 March 1872], col. 1817-1826.

³⁴ *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., vol. 233 [19 March 1877], col. 128-130.

³⁵ *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., vol. 223 [30 April 1875], col. 1927-1941.

³⁶ Chesney, “The Battle of Dorking,” 555- 566.

³⁷ Timothy Healy, Irish Nationalist MP for Longford South, in November of 1888, sought to discredit two previous Unionist speakers in the debate on the Third Reading of the Land Purchase (Ireland) Bill, by referring to his opponents as providing “the House a new edition of the Battle of Dorking.” *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., vol. 331 [29 November 1888], cols. 558-583. The vast majority of references made by (non-Irish) Members of the Commons and Lords were not so dismissive.

³⁸ For example: James Dalziel, Liberal MP for Kirkcaldy, questioning Conservative Under Secretary of State William Brodrick in April and July of 1896. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4th ser., vol. 39 [17 April 1896], cols. 1171-1172; and *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4th ser., vol. 43 [28 July 1896], cols. 813.

Cambridge.³⁹ In order to ease pressure on Woolwich, two additional munitions and goods depots were constructed at the rail stations of Nine Elms and Bishopsgate in London. While one cannot draw a direct line of causation between a fictional tale of invasion and defensive positions completed twenty-five years later, the fortification of the North Downs, the incorporation of railway-based military planning, and the extraordinary bipartisan backing secured for such developments is striking. This demonstrates the great shift in attitudes to defense that had taken place in British politics in the intervening years, especially within the Liberal Party.⁴⁰

Outside the comparatively staid world of parliamentary politics, debate also raged in the popular and elite press.⁴¹ Many published responses were patriotic in tone, and sponsored by major publications. "The Second Armada," for instance, appeared in *The Times* on 22 June 1871 following an editorial hostile to *Blackwood's* publication of Chesney's "alarmist" piece the month before.⁴² While similar controversies can be found in the pages of other major London and provincial newspapers,⁴³ I focus on an exchange of letters in *The Times* that occurred between January and June 1872. The debate captured by these letters is significant, for *The Times* was an especially symbolic and controversial paper within Britain. Contributors to the debate ranged from future Liberal Chancellor and Leader of the Opposition, William Vernon Harcourt, MP,⁴⁴ to numerous serving and retired members of the military forces, including George Chesney's elder brother Charles.⁴⁵ The debate in which these men participated unfolded in two major spurts, each initiated by Harcourt. The first ran from mid-January to early February, and the second from mid-May to early June 1872.

The first exchange was prompted by a letter from Harcourt published on 16 January, headlined "England in 1802 and 1872." In this short missive he contended that "panics" such as the *Dorking* phenomenon were cyclical occurrences in British history. He went so far as to state that an invasion of Great Britain by any great power, or combination of great powers, was "impossible," citing the case of Napoleon's unrealized ambitions.⁴⁶ Lest anyone carelessly miss the link to Chesney's *Dorking*, Harcourt dismissed the ability of a foreign power "to slip over and fight the Battle of Dorking."⁴⁷ His letter was met by a flurry of responses from military men, most of whom preferred to remain anonymous. The most forceful of these letters was initialed

³⁹ Alec Beane and Roger Gill, *The London Mobilisation Centres* (Victorian Forts and Artillery Series, 2011); and *The London Mobilisation Centres: Gazeteer*, <http://www.victorianforts.co.uk/redan/mobil.htm> [consulted 8 January 2012].

⁴⁰ The incorporation of railways into plans for the defense of the capital is particularly striking to anyone who has read Chesney's description of the chaos that reigned on the rails during the fictional Prussian invasion.

⁴¹ A comprehensive overview of published responses to Chesney can be found in Bergonzi, "The Battle of Dorking," and Clarke, "The Battle of Dorking, 1871-1914."

⁴² "The Second Armada," *The Times*, 22 June, 1871. See also: Editorial, *The Times*, 8 May, 1871.

⁴³ A huge number of publications including but not limited to the below list featured multiple news articles and/or long-running letters page debates on the possibility of invasion in which Chesney's fictitious tale featured prominently, for example: *The Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*; *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*; *Hampshire Advertiser*; *The Star* (St. Peter Port); *Western Mail* (Cardiff, Wales); *The Aberdeen Journal*; *The Pall Mall Gazette*; *Birmingham Daily Post*; *The Bradford Observer*; *The Glasgow Herald*; and *The Leeds Mercury*.

⁴⁴ Even at this early stage in his career Harcourt was widely admired for his contributions to *The Times* letters pages during the American Civil War, urging strict neutrality, under the pen name "Historicus." Peter Stansky, "Harcourt, Sir William George Granville Venables Vernon (1827-1904)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/> [consulted 1 November 2010].

⁴⁵ Stanley Lane-Poole (rev. James Falkner), "Chesney, Charles Cornwallis (1826-1876)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/> [consulted 22 September 2010].

⁴⁶ W. Vernon Harcourt, Letter, "England in 1802 and 1872," *The Times*, 16 January, 1872.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* He further dismisses the possibility of the "decoying away" of the majority of the fleet to the Bosphorus, as in Chesney's fictional tale. Chesney, "The Battle of Dorking," 543.

“J.S.L.” and reminded the MP that in 1805 Admiral Villeneuve had in fact decoyed a fleet under Nelson, “to the mouths of the Orinoco,” leaving the English Channel in “the undisputed control” of the French for a period of nearly three weeks.⁴⁸

Harcourt replied to his critics in two letters. The first was an extraordinary attack on another contributor self-described as “A Student of the Art of War.” Harcourt suggested his opponent’s asserted expertise amounted to little more than an ability to quote the dispatches of the Duke of Wellington. He characterized the decoying theory as “the first favourite of the panic-mongers” and twin to “the ‘slipping-over’ theory of the alarmist,” and highlighted the statement “a coward dies a hundred deaths.”⁴⁹ Days later, his claims were answered by two more contributors. The first asserted that the great weakness in Harcourt’s argument was that he “make[s] no allowance for the unforeseen, which as Mr. Disraeli has characteristically observed, is what always *happens*.”⁵⁰ The second was a detailed response by the anonymous “Student”: “Sir, — I shall not write of Mr. Harcourt as he has written of me...but certainly his singular account of those events is at variance with...every history worthy of the name which I ever read.”⁵¹ The respondent then noted that he and the Member could argue fruitlessly over many pages:

But, Sir, these are the antiquities of the subject. Mr. Harcourt announces ex cathedra [as though with Papal Infallibility] that the invasion of England is an “impossibility”. Napoleon, however, thought it no “impossibility”; the Duke of Wellington thought it no “impossibility”; if reports speak true, the Prussian Staff think it no “impossibility”. Where are Mr. Harcourt’s credentials to prove that these great authorities must all be wrong?⁵²

Harcourt’s prompt reply was typical of his later, more conciliatory contributions. He noted he had already “trespassed far too much on your space and your reader’s patience,” and attempted to end the exchange amicably. Nevertheless, he was unable to restrain himself from one last jab:

Permit me, in taking leave of [the] subject...to part with your correspondent “A Student of the Art of War” in the same good temper which he displays...[Yet] I confess I am much more afraid of being run over by a hansom [cab] than I am of being slaughtered by a German.⁵³

At this juncture, both sides appeared willing to set the dispute aside for the time being. Harcourt, however, reignited the debate a few months later, this time unintentionally. In a letter dated 18 May, and titled “The Danger of Invasion,” a Captain Robert Horne of the Royal Engineers claimed he was compelled to write to *The Times* because of mistakes made by Harcourt in his 15 May lecture to the RUSI regarding the Crimean campaign of 1854:

The lecturer stated that it took 400 transports to convey the English army from Varna to the Old Fort, and 280 to carry the French army...I forward, therefore, a statement of the actual number of vessels employed, taken from the official report

⁴⁸ “J.S.L.,” Letter, “An Invasion of England,” *The Times*, 18 January, 1872.

⁴⁹ W. Vernon Harcourt, Letter, “Invasion Panics,” *The Times*, 30 January, 1872.

⁵⁰ “The Writer of the Article,” Letter, “Invasion Panics,” *The Times*, 2 February, 1872. Emphasis in original.

⁵¹ “A Student of the Art of War,” Letter, “Invasion Panics,” *The Times*, 2 February, 1872.

⁵² Ibid. See also: “An Old Prussian Artilleryman,” Letters, “To the Editor of *The Times*,” *The Times*, 3 February 1872.

⁵³ W. Vernon Harcourt, Letter, “Invasion Panics,” *The Times*, 3 February, 1872.

of Captain Mends, R.N., who arranged the details of the flotilla. It appears that the number is less than one-fourth of what Mr. Vernon Harcourt stated were used.⁵⁴

From a close reading of the subsequent RUSI journal article, and also of Matin's recent analysis, we know that Harcourt put a number of his charges directly to Chesney's elder brother Charles, who immediately refuted them.⁵⁵ Such was the failure of Harcourt's lecture to RUSI that on 17 May *The Times* broke from its previously supportive editorial line and publicly rebuked Harcourt for "dismissing the contingency of...a second line of defense."⁵⁶ Harcourt replied to both the Editorial and to Captain Horne shifting the focus of the debate back to the larger question at hand by examining the problems that would be faced by an invading force. In so doing, he invited a contribution from Charles Chesney: "What I should like Colonel Chesney to do would be to give us not a popular but a scientific [professional] version of the campaign of Dorking."⁵⁷

Letters taking a similar line, including another from the Staff College, flanked Charles Chesney's letter to *The Times*, published on 27 May.⁵⁸ The tone adopted by Chesney's elder brother in his rebuke to Harcourt was excoriating and Matin strongly implies that the second *Times* clash (in May and June) was really a continuation of the RUSI lecture debate (of 15 May). Charles Chesney had been severely constrained by rules during the debate which centered the argument only on areas Harcourt, as the lecturer, wished to discuss.⁵⁹ His letter opened by praising Captain Horne for exposing the weakness of Harcourt's statistics, which he described as "the errors of detail into which any unprofessional critic may fall from consulting indifferent authorities."⁶⁰ Charles then systematically destroyed much of Harcourt's remaining argument, noting further inaccuracies in relation to troop numbers. Finally, he successfully reversed the claim made by the Liberal MP for Oxford that *The Battle of Dorking* was an instance of the logical fallacy *petitio principii* ["begging the question"].⁶¹

⁵⁴ Captain Robert Horne (*Royal Engineers*), Letter, "The Danger of Invasion," *The Times*, 18 May, 1872. It seems that the Captain Mends referred to was indeed considered the preeminent authority on the transportation of troops by sea, following his role as head of transport in the Black Sea during the Crimean War, as is reflected by the prominence given to his article: Capt. Sir W. Mends, "On the Disembarkation of Troops" in the RUSI Journal of 1863, which Harcourt would later cite. Harcourt's speech was later published by RUSI in its journal, widely considered the most important military publication in Victorian Britain. See: W. Vernon Harcourt, "Our Naval and Military Establishments Regarded with Reference to the Dangers of Invasion," *RUSI Journal* 16, no. 3 (September 1872). See also: D.P. O'Connor, "The RUSI, Imperial Defence and the Expansion of Empire, 1829-90."

⁵⁵ Matin, "Scrutinizing The Battle of Dorking," 394-5, 396.

⁵⁶ Editorial, "The 'difficulties of an invader' as described," *The Times*, 17 May, 1872.

⁵⁷ W. Vernon Harcourt, Letter, "The Difficulties of Invasion," *The Times*, 24 May, 1872. This letter echoes statements he made in Parliament during the same period, for example: *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., vol. 209 [11 March 1872], col. 1817-1825. Charles Chesney died within four years of this exchange of letters. After a prominent military career, he was appointed Professor of Military History, first at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst and then at the Staff College at Camberley. He was widely admired as one of the best military critics of his day. He also served as an official British observer to both the American Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War, and published a number of well-received popular books as a result of his postings. Stanley Lane-Poole, "Chesney, Charles Cornwallis (1826-1876)." See also: Charles C. Chesney, *A Military View of Recent Campaigns in Virginia and Maryland* (London: Smith, Elder and co., 1863); Charles C. Chesney and Henry Reeve, *The Military Resources of Prussia and France and Changes in the Art of War* (London: Longmans, Green, and co., 1870) which had previously been serialized in *The Edinburgh Review* between 1864 and 1867; and Charles C. Chesney, *Essays in Military Biography* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1874).

⁵⁸ Charles Adams, Letter, "Difficulties of Invasion," *The Times*, 27 May, 1872.

⁵⁹ Matin, "Scrutinizing The Battle of Dorking," 396.

⁶⁰ Charles C. Chesney, Letter, "Difficulties of Invasion," *The Times*, 27 May, 1872.

⁶¹ Harcourt, Letter, "The Difficulties of Invasion," *The Times*, 24 May, 1872.

on Mr. Vernon Harcourt's theory our fleet is not only to exist, but to be manned; not only to be manned, but to be all together; not only to be all together, but to be always in the right place; not only to be always in the right place, but to be backed by an army which is certain to be on the spot *en masse* down to or rather beyond its last man, should the invader slip through the naval line of defence.⁶²

Harcourt never responded publicly to Charles, although he did invoke the privileges of a lecturer at the RUSI when the meeting was reconvened in June in order to ensure that the substance of *The Times* debate—in which he had clearly been defeated—was not discussed.⁶³ Matin notes that Harcourt's unwillingness to write up his previous lecture, standard practice and a courtesy to RUSI members whilst contributing extensively to *The Times*, provoked umbrage among the society's members.⁶⁴

Although the debate in *The Times* trickled on into July, the principal contributors were largely absent. Charles Chesney had struck the decisive blow in his letter of 27 May. This is reflected in Harcourt's 5 June reply to a "Colonel Baker" in which he not only cites the troop numbers put forward by Charles, but also "Sir W. Mends piece 'On the Disembarkation of Troops'." This is the very same "Captain Mends" whose work had been used to deflate Harcourt's own figures regarding the Crimean campaign in May.⁶⁵ Such was Harcourt's defeat in the arena of public debate, that he used the opportunity of his reply to Baker to withdraw entirely from the issue, casting himself in the position of an inexperienced but necessary cross-examiner:

So long as I can get matters of this vital importance fairly discussed by those competent to handle them, I care very little how much I reveal an ignorance I do not care to deny. No one has more reason than I have to acknowledge with gratitude the courtesy and indulgence with which, both in public and in private, I have been allowed by the members of two great professions to exercise the privilege of counsel in eliciting by examination and cross-examination from skilled witnesses a knowledge in which their examiner is himself deficient.⁶⁶

Remarkably, despite *Dorking* creating such public controversy and having earned its creator the enmity of much of the government front bench, George Tomkyns Chesney continued to be promoted through the ranks. This experience stands in stark contrast to that of others who sought to "raise the alarm" about the unpreparedness of the nation for war. Charles Metcalfe Macgregor, for example, was "exiled" to the Punjab frontier and lost his job as head of British military intelligence for India following his publication of *The Defence of India* (1884), which criticized Britain's supposed lack of preparedness in the face of Russian encroachment from Central Asia.⁶⁷ One can explain this divergence in part due to Macgregor's exposed position, but also

⁶² C. Chesney, Letter, "Difficulties of Invasion," *The Times*, 27 May, 1872.

⁶³ Matin, "Scrutinizing The Battle of Dorking," 396.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 403.

⁶⁵ W. Vernon Harcourt, Letter, "Mr. Vernon Harcourt and Colonel Baker," *The Times*, 5 June, 1872. Thereafter when discussing the possibility of invasion, Harcourt would stray only very modestly from the figures provided by Charles Chesney in his response of 27 May.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Charles Metcalfe Macgregor, *The Defence of India: a Strategical Study* (Simla, India: Government Central Branch Publishing, 1884). See also: S.P. Oliver (rev. T.R. Moreman), "Macgregor, Sir Charles Metcalfe (1840-1887)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/> [consulted 22 September 2010]; and

Chesney's choice to shroud his purpose through fiction. Although his story effectively influenced public and elite (military and political) debates, he could claim he was not guilty of unduly swaying civilian decision-making.

In order to understand the late Victorian army through which Chesney progressed, it is necessary to introduce a number of the competing groups that dominated the upper echelons of the officer corps. The factions can be broadly split into traditionalist and reformist. The main traditionalist group was led by the Duke of Cambridge, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army from 1856 to 1895.⁶⁸ A second traditionalist group was closely allied to the Prince of Wales. While the latter operated largely in co-operation with the Duke, it occasionally broke with him over particular issues. The Prince was, for example, notably less anti-Prussian than the Hanoverian-born Duke. The reformists can similarly be broadly broken into two factions. These two groupings were defined by their leading figures: Sir Garnet Joseph Wolseley, and Earl Frederick Sleigh Roberts. While competition between these two rings could be intense, there is little evidence of a personal grudge or animosity between the two Anglo-Irishmen. A third, indeterminate group calling themselves "the Continentalists" were also influential and believed in following the continental model of large, professionalized, standing armies.⁶⁹

At the heart of this system lay the understanding that one of the two reformist factions would eventually succeed Cambridge. Wolseley's powerbase was located largely in London, and in the colonial army in Africa. His belief in the need for reform was due to his own rapid rise, without buying commissions, following his father's early death. Indeed, only an appeal by Wolseley's mother to the elderly Wellington had secured his entry as an "Ensign" (reformed, as of 1871, status of Second-Lieutenant) via nomination in 1852.⁷⁰ The Red River (1870) and the Third Anglo-Ashanti (1873-4) campaigns, commanded by Wolseley in Manitoba, Canada and modern-day Ghana respectively, are commonly cited as the beginnings of the "Wolseley ring." The group included such notable officers as the future leader of British forces during the South African War, Redvers Henry Buller,⁷¹ and the future commander of the British Expeditionary Force in the First World War, John French.

In contrast, Roberts' power base was in India, and Chesney was initially very much a part of his "Indian" grouping. Roberts' belief in the need for reform, like Chesney's, was rooted in his experiences during the Indian Rebellion of 1857. He is perhaps best known for his belief in the need to exploit the so-called "scientific frontiers" of India, such as the Hindu Kush mountain range, which extended well into nominally-independent Afghanistan. Similarly, his backing of the "martial races" of the northern portion of the subcontinent for service in the Indian Armies against southern ethnic groups became a defining policy of the British Raj.⁷² Both of these

Adrian Preston, "Sir Charles MacGregor and the Defence of India, 1857-1887," *The Historical Journal* XII, no. 1 (1969): 58-77.

⁶⁸ Frank Holl, "Prince George, Duke of Cambridge (1819-1904)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/> [consulted 18 October 2010]; and Howard Bailes, "Patterns of Thought in the Late Victorian Army," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 4, no. 1 (March 1981): 34, 37.

⁶⁹ Peter Burroughs, "Imperial Defence and the Victorian Army," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 15, no. 1 (October 1986): 71.

⁷⁰ Ian F.W. Beckett, "Wolseley, Garnet Joseph (1833-1913)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/> [consulted 21 October 2010].

⁷¹ Halik Kochanski, "Wolseley ring (act. 1873-1890)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; and Beckett, "Wolseley, Garnet Joseph (1833-1913)." <http://www.oxforddnb.com/> [both consulted 21 October 2010].

⁷² Frederick Sleigh Roberts, *Is an Invasion of India Possible? Confidential Report*. (Madras, India: 1883), in R.A. Johnson, "'Russians at the Gates of India?' Planning the Defence of India, 1885-1900," *The Journal of Military*

beliefs were tenets that Chesney upheld, preferring only to term the favoured races of India “manly.”⁷³ Roberts’ long-term position as Commander-in-Chief of Madras and of India, predisposed him to institutional reform, but not reform in the Cardwell mode.⁷⁴ In particular, he was opposed to the concept of short service, limiting recruits’ time among the regulars and transitioning them into the reserves, an idea to which Chesney was more open-minded.⁷⁵ Roberts was distrusted by Cambridge, who in turn enjoyed a love-hate relationship with Wolseley. This was despite Roberts’ opposition to most of Secretary of State for War Edward Cardwell’s reforms of 1868 to 1874, while Wolseley took a much more constructive approach—seemingly more at odds with the Duke in principle.⁷⁶ Roberts’ influence can be seen in Chesney’s belief that India was a special case and must not suffer a withdrawal of troops, a move justified in other “lesser” colonies. This factionalism reached its logical conclusion after Chesney’s death when Buller, one of Wolseley’s hand-picked men, was replaced in the field by Roberts as commander of British forces in South Africa (December 1899). This marked the beginning of the shift in command from Wolseley, to his own successor and rival, Roberts, who was formally appointed Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in November 1900.⁷⁷

Chesney’s later works suggest he was not wholly in thrall to the military establishment from which he was drawn, and certainly not to the “Roberts ring” in whose company he spent much of his career. This independence was likely due to his career being split between the Indian Subcontinent and his time in London as founder of the Royal Indian Civil Engineering College. Despite this distance, Chesney enjoyed an excellent professional relationship with Roberts during his service in India throughout the 1880s and early 1890s.⁷⁸ His detached status is evident in “Russia and India” (1878), in which he argued that whilst preparedness must be maintained in case of hostile Russian action, India was at the time secure.⁷⁹ Crucially, while disagreeing with the assessment of Roberts and his acolytes, Chesney based his assertions on the perceived Russian inability to project power over the “scientific frontier” of the Hindu Kush and the Balochi desert.

Chesney’s analysis of the Russian threat directly contradicted all contemporaneous predictions of doom for the Raj, which he publicly dismissed as “alarmist” and little more than “political hobgoblins.”⁸⁰ This is a remarkable statement from an individual who only seven years earlier had faced similar allegations in relation to *The Battle of Dorking*. The widespread belief in the reality of the Russian threat to India rested on the assumption that a second Indian Rebellion would immediately follow any Russian invasion of the Northwest Frontier. This view was propagated by the so-called “forward school” of thought among the British officers in India.

History 67, no. 3 (July 2003): 713-4, 718; and Burroughs, “Imperial Defence and the Victorian Army,” 58, 63, 65. Roberts arrives at very similar conclusions to Macgregor’s subsequent *Defence of India*, but expresses his finding in less alarmist terms.

⁷³ Chesney, “The Value of India to England,” 231.

⁷⁴ Edward Cardwell himself was a former soldier, and Liberal (former Peelite) Secretary of State for War between 1868 and 1874. Brian Bond, “Cardwell, Edward, first Viscount Cardwell (1813-1886).”

⁷⁵ Chesney, “The Value of India to England,” 229-230; and Chesney, “Russia and India,” 616.

⁷⁶ Burroughs, “Imperial Defence and the Victorian Army,” 69; and Bailes, “Patterns of Thought in the Late Victorian Army,” 30, 35.

⁷⁷ Brian Robson, “Roberts, Frederick Sleigh, first Earl Roberts (1832-1914),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/> [both consulted 21 October 2010].

⁷⁸ Stearn, “Chesney, Sir George Tomkyns (1830-1895).”

⁷⁹ Chesney, “Russia and India,” 605-6, 612, 616.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 611, 616.

Instead of waiting for a supposedly "inevitable" Russian attack, they advocated an invasion of Afghanistan, and possibly Russian Central Asia.⁸¹ Chesney's experience of the Rebellion of 1857 lead him to dismiss the idea of an accompanying Indian rising, for his previous expectations had been confounded in 1857 when the majority of Indian Princes and the "native upper classes" did not rebel against British rule.⁸²

This split from Roberts reflects Chesney's wider imperial outlook in contrast to the relatively limited strategic thought of men like Charles Macgregor. It also serves to highlight his surprising belief in certain tenets of the Cardwell Reforms, such as the creation of an Empire-wide "strategic reserve," to be held in Britain and deployed to trouble spots as they arose.⁸³ This outlook was consistent with his contributions to *The Nineteenth Century* and *Blackwood's Magazine* as it stressed the need to secure the British "home islands" and keep India stable under British rule while relegating other demands for troops to secondary status to be filled by the imperial reserve.⁸⁴ This same viewpoint is present in embryonic form in *The Battle of Dorking*, and very closely matches the priorities set out in the influential Stanhope Memorandum of 1888, authored by Edward Stanhope, the Conservative Secretary of State for War.⁸⁵ The only significant distinction between Stanhope and Chesney was the "sop"—which Chesney would not have sanctioned—to the "Continental School" on the possibility of future British deployment on the European mainland.⁸⁶

Chesney's vision of basic military priorities, unlike those of both Wolseley and Roberts, remained largely unchanged throughout the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s. Indeed, elements of it are apparent within the text of *Dorking* itself, primarily the weakening of the metropole by systematically over-committing to too many distant theaters.⁸⁷ This is also seen in the remarkable similarities between his assessments of the invasion threats in 1871 and 1891, as he urged institutional reform at the War Office.⁸⁸ Chesney was distinct enough from his contemporaries, that in his 1981 examination of "Patterns of Thought in the Late Victorian Army" Howard Bailes singled him out as,

one of the earliest and most explicit proponents of an "English" [i.e. non-"Continental"] school of military thought, envisaging a small, highly professional army which should be excellent on its own terms and not in direct competition with its foreign counterparts.⁸⁹

⁸¹ Charles Metcalfe Macgregor, *The Defence of India: a Strategic Study*, 122, 124; G.J. Wolseley, "Our Coming Guest," *Blackwood's Magazine* 103 (June 1873): 712-713, 720 (originally published anonymously); Johnson, "Russians at the Gates of India?," 697-698; and Adrian Preston, "Frustrated Great Gamesmanship: Sir Garnet Wolseley's plans for war against Russia, 1873-80," *International History Review* 2, no. 2 (April 1980): 240.

⁸² Chesney, "Russia and India," 613.

⁸³ Johnson, "Russians at the Gates of India?," 729, 732; Burroughs, "Imperial Defence and the Victorian Army," 60; and Chesney, "The Value of India to England," 229.

⁸⁴ Bailes, "Patterns of Thought in the Late Victorian Army," 37.

⁸⁵ George Tomkynes Chesney, "The Army as a Public Department," *Nineteenth Century* 173 (July 1891): 21.

⁸⁶ Bailes, "Patterns of Thought in the Late Victorian Army," 39; and Ian F.W. Beckett, "The Stanhope Memorandum of 1888: A Reinterpretation," *Historical Research* 57, no. 136 (October 2007): 240.

⁸⁷ Chesney, "The Battle of Dorking," 3. Among the events which enabled the Prussian invasion in Chesney's tale of 1871 are Russian maneuverings around the Bosphorus (drawing away the bulk of the Navy), a second "Mutiny" pulling additional British troops to India, and increased border tensions with the United States in North America.

⁸⁸ George Tomkynes Chesney, "The 'Confusion Worse Confounded' at the War Office," *Nineteenth Century* 30 (August 1891): 257.

⁸⁹ Bailes, "Patterns of Thought in the Late Victorian Army," 38.

Chesney's independence is further established when one considers his backing of Stanhope, who was deeply unpopular within his own party,⁹⁰ over Lord Randolph Churchill, with whom Roberts had cultivated very close relations.⁹¹ Chesney correctly identified Stanhope as a fellow reformer, and credited him for the rebuilding of many of the decrepit army barracks in the British Isles. He further noted the value of publicity in driving such reform, paralleling his justification for sparking the *Dorking* controversy: "The case furnishes a striking illustration at once of the advantage of giving publicity to the opinions of officials [experts], who should be the responsible advisors of both the Government and Parliament."⁹²

Chesney's "pro-expert" position is especially illustrated in his later publications on army and educational reform,⁹³ as well as his public speech given to the RUSI in March 1874 with the Duke of Cambridge presiding.⁹⁴ The speech was inspired by Chesney's "A True Reformer," first serialized in *Blackwood's Magazine* during the second half of 1872, immediately following the *Times* letters debate.⁹⁵ Another manifesto cleverly cloaked as fiction, "A True Reformer" can be considered semi-autobiographical. While it was another two decades before Chesney was elected to Parliament as a Conservative MP for Oxford, his story's protagonist, Captain Charles West, is a former Indian Army officer who successfully entered the world of Westminster politics to forward the need for technocratic and front-line military reform.⁹⁶

In December 1880, Chesney left the College at Cooper's Hill, Staines, and was appointed Secretary to the Military Department of the Government of India in Calcutta, a role roughly equivalent to that of a Permanent Secretary at the War Office in London. With Lord Roberts he oversaw reform of the Indian army, which would later serve as a template for wider restructuring of Britain's armed forces.⁹⁷ By January 1884 he was a full Colonel. He was promoted again to Major-General in March 1886, and was awarded the honorary title Companion of the Order of the Star of India (CIE) that same year. In June 1886 Chesney was appointed to the Viceroy's Governing Council, as the lead military member, a role in which he would serve until he left the army to contest Harcourt's old seat of Oxford for the Conservatives.⁹⁸ By the time he faced the British public at the ballot box he had been knighted in the New Year's Honours list of 1890 and promoted to the rank of General on his retirement.⁹⁹ He further raised his profile with a number of articles on India and foreign affairs in *The Nineteenth Century* and other major journals.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁰ H.C.G. Matthew, "Stanhope, Edward (1840-1893)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/> [consulted 1 November 2010]. This was partly due to his active membership of the Imperial Federation League with his cousin the prominent "Liberal Imperialist" Lord Rosebery.

⁹¹ George Tomkyns Chesney, "The Army as a Public Department," 7, 9, 12-14.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁹³ Chesney, "The 'Confusion Worse Confounded' at the War Office," 237-257.

⁹⁴ George Tomkyns Chesney, "The English Genius and Army Organisation," *Royal United Services Institute Journal* 44, no. 263-267 (1900): 53- [a posthumous republication]; and "Editors Portfolio," *Colburn's United Service Magazine, and Naval and Military Journal* (1874, Part II), 105.

⁹⁵ George Tomkyns Chesney, *A True Reformer: In Three Volumes, Volume III* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1873).

⁹⁶ John Sutherland, *The Stanford Companion to Victorian Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 119.

⁹⁷ Stearn, "Chesney, Sir George Tomkyns (1830-1895)."

⁹⁸ He first rejected the opportunity to run in North Kensington: "Election Intelligence," *The Morning Post*, 10 August, 1891, 5. Harcourt then represented Derby, having been defeated in the then necessary by-election, following his 1880 appointment by Gladstone to the Cabinet as Home Secretary.

⁹⁹ Supplement to *The London Gazette*, No. 26008, 1 January 1890, 1; and "New Year Honours," *The Standard*, 1 January, 1890, 5.

¹⁰⁰ For example: Chesney, "The Army as a Public Department"; and Chesney, "The 'Confusion Worse Confounded' at the War Office." Further, his views were so well known in the 1890s that there was a great controversy over the

Following his successful election to the House of Commons, Chesney swiftly became Chairman of the Committee of Service Members of the House of Commons. He also maintained an interest in Indian Affairs, often speaking out to preserve and extend the autonomy of the Indian Government, especially in financial matters.¹⁰¹

Chesney died from heart failure on 31 March 1895 at his London home. He was buried at Englefield Green, near the College he had founded at Cooper’s Hill.¹⁰² A number of his military and geopolitical works—including *Dorking*—were republished after his death, prompted in part by the initially disastrous South African War (1899-1902).¹⁰³ “The ‘Confusion Worse Confounded’ at the War Office,” which was originally published in August 1891, and reprinted in *The Nineteenth Century* in February 1900, is a particularly high profile example.¹⁰⁴ It boasted two laudatory introductions, the first by James Knowles, the long-time Editor of *The Nineteenth Century*, and the second by Spenser Wilkinson, a convinced pro-reform military expert. Wilkinson wrote—somewhat hyperbolically—that, “Sir George Chesney was one of the best judges in matters of military administration whom Great Britain has ever possessed.” *The Battle of Dorking*, he felt, “would surely have brought about the reform it was written to promote,” had the country not been numbed by commercial prosperity.¹⁰⁵

While Wilkinson’s claims were clearly embellished, such was Chesney’s posthumous fame that in 1898 the Royal United Services Institution established the “Chesney Gold Medal.” The prize was designed to recognize authors of any “especially eminent work calculated to advance the military sciences and knowledge,” and it remains the highest honour of the RUSI to this day.¹⁰⁶ The first award was made in 1900 to U.S. Naval Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan.¹⁰⁷ Mahan was one of only two non-Britons, both American, to receive the award, which was granted to him in recognition of his three major works: *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (1890); its sequel, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812* (1892); and *The Life of Nelson: The Embodiment of the Sea Power of Great Britain* (1897). The committee praised Mahan for his contribution to “the welfare of the British Empire, the strength of which is so essential to the cause of our English-speaking race,

true identity of a contributor to *The Times* named “Vetus” from 1891, which many suspected to be Chesney, but was in fact George Sydenham Clarke, a prominent defence expert and colonial administrator, who later became Baron Sydenham of Combe, and had been one of Chesney’s first appoints at the College at Cooper’s Hill as a geometry teacher. See: Jason Tames, “Clarke, George Sydenham, Baron Sydenham of Combe (1848-1933),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/> [consulted 14 January, 2011]; “Our London Correspondent,” *Glasgow Herald*, 5 December 1891; “Politics and Society,” *The Leeds Mercury*, 5 December 1891.

¹⁰¹ For example: *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4th ser., vol. 13 [2 June 1893], col. 117; and *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4th ser., vol. 22 [13 March 1894], col. 208-213.

¹⁰² Stearn, “Chesney, Sir George Tomkyns (1830-1895).” Following his retirement from the army in 1892 George Tomkyns Chesney’s status as an establishment figure in the British-Indian elite was further confirmed by his roles as a director in both the East India Railway Company and the Agra Bank.

¹⁰³ For example: George Tomkyns Chesney, “The English Genius and Army Organization,” *Royal United Services Institute Journal* 44, no. 263-267 (1900) [a posthumous republication].

¹⁰⁴ George Tomkyns Chesney, “The ‘Confusion Worse Confounded’ at the War Office,” *Nineteenth Century Review* 47 (February 1900): 173-207 [a posthumous republication].

¹⁰⁵ Spenser Wilkinson, “The General Management of the Army,” *Nineteenth Century Review* 47 (February 1900): 174.

¹⁰⁶ “Chesney Gold Medal — First Award,” *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* XLIV, no. 272 (October 1900): 1097.

¹⁰⁷ Bailes, “Patterns of Thought in the Late Victorian Army,” 39; and “Chesney Gold Medal — First Award,” 1097.

and of mankind in general.”¹⁰⁸ Other notable recipients of the award include Winston Churchill (1950) and Margaret Thatcher (2000), as well as other established academic and military figures.

The Battle of Dorking (1871) was central to the parliamentary, military and public “invasion” controversies of the 1870s. Subsequent developments, ranging from recurring print and parliamentary debates, to military maneuvers and the eventual building of a series of forts along the North Downs support this position. Viewed in its proper historical context, distinct from the now dominant academic discussion driven by many literary scholars, *The Battle of Dorking* was equal parts fantasy “invasion literature” and policy-document. Its frequent citation by Members of both Houses of Parliament, and by military men engaged in public and private debates, serves to back this claim, as does Chesney’s rapid integration into the pro-military reform wing of the Conservative Parliamentary Party of the 1890s. In re-examining the career of its creator, Sir George Tomkyns Chesney, we find him to be a rather more substantial figure than is often noted. He was a highly competent and decorated military officer, an educational and military reformer of significant standing in both India and Great Britain, a colonial administrator of some ability, an unusually-independent actor in the factious Victorian British and Indian Armies, and a successful politician. These are no small achievements, and should not be so obscured by the literary fame of the “brilliant skit” for which he is remembered.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Gerald Jordan, “Mahan’s *Life of Nelson*,” *The Northern Mariner* 8, no. 2 (April 1998): 43; and Mahan to Duke of Cambridge, 10 July 1900, in Robert Seager II and Doris D. Maguire (eds.), *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan II* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1975), 691.

¹⁰⁹ Stearn, “Chesney, Sir George Tomkyns (1830-1895).” Several promising avenues for future research regarding *Dorking* and the wider phenomenon of invasion literature remain unexplored, two of which are highlighted below. First, work examining the impact of pieces such as *Dorking*, and expert military critics such as both Chesneys, on the formation of the more internationally assertive Liberal Imperialist faction in the Liberal Party of the 1880s and 1890s is badly needed. Finally, the opportunity remains for a more structuralist investigation of the whole *Dorking* controversy, through the lens of either side attempting to assert *professional* (governmental and/or military) authority, and examining the visceral nature of the disagreements that arose when such claims to expertize were contested: as in *The Times*, RUSI and other debates.