

men, and, in view of the small crews carried by cruisers, this proceeding would be extremely dangerous in face of armed and organized resistance. It is inconceivable that any Australasian town would consent to pay blackmail, which the British race have not submitted to for upwards of a thousand years. Moreover, in view of the difficulty of obtaining fresh supplies of ammunition, and the fact that the expenditure of the whole of the shell carried by a squadron of cruisers would fail to work serious destruction upon any large town, and that such a proceeding would inevitably provoke severe reprisals, it is in the last degree improbable that a bombardment would be attempted.

As regards liability to cruiser raids, the primary factors are the distance of the bases and the relative naval strength of possible enemies to that of the British squadron in Australasian waters strengthened by the aid of the funds provided by all the colonies except Queensland.

The nearest French port is Nouméa, distant about 780 miles from Brisbane, 1,100 miles from Sydney, and 1,100 miles from Auckland. The next in point of distance is Saigon, 3,700 miles from Brisbane and 4,800 miles from Auckland. The other bases of France, Réunion and Diego Suarez, are distant respectively 3,400 and 4,300 miles from Perth.

Nouméa does not, however, possess the qualifications of a base, and the position of the French in New Caledonia in the event of war would be necessarily precarious. Defence rather than aggression would be their probable object. Saigon falls within the scope of the British China Squadron, and could not be made use of as a base till that squadron had been defeated. Réunion and Diego Suarez are too far away to serve as bases without intermediate links which do not exist.

Vladivostok, the only possible base of any other great Power, 4,900 miles from Brisbane, is closed by ice during from three to four months in the year, and the line of action therefrom passes through waters defended by the British China Squadron.

Finally, although raids are not absolutely barred by the presence in the waters of a superior force, the risks they entail are thus greatly increased, and the temptation to undertake them is definitely lessened. The naval force of Great Britain is far superior in Australasian waters to that of any other Power or combination of Powers, and its strength can, if it were necessary, be increased more rapidly than that of any other Power.

The above conditions appear to the Colonial Defence Committee to supply a solid basis upon which the standard of the armaments of the Australasian Colonies may safely rest; but, although they have been set forth at various times, there has been an evident tendency to ignore them, as was pointed out in the Colonial Defence Committee's remarks on Major-General Schaw's Report on the Defences of New South Wales. It is unfortunate that these principles have not been more widely grasped, since their realisation would unquestionably have prevented the great exaggeration of danger and the erroneous conception of what is really to be apprehended, which have from time to time been manifested.

Unobstructed routes for the transport of their products are of vital importance to the Australasian Colonies, and the most probable danger lies neither in territorial aggression nor, so long as efficient land forces are maintained, in raids upon colonial ports, but in the loss of mercantile ships in the neighbourhood of the ports. One of the principal results of the large supersession of sailing-vessels by steamers for the purposes of the mercantile marine is that ordinary peace routes need not be adhered to in ocean passages, so that the capture of vessels on the high seas becomes largely a matter of chance, and the performance of the "Alabama" could not now be repeated. On the other hand, this new condition increases the danger to trade at points of necessary convergence, and in the vicinity of ports.

Defence against dangers of this nature can only be provided by naval means.

With these considerations before them, the Colonial Defence Committee are unable to concur with Major-General Edwards in his expression of opinion that it is necessary to contemplate the concentration of a force of "30,000 or 40,000 men" for defence against territorial aggression. This appears to be a contingency so excessively improbable that it need not be taken into account as one of the requirements of Australasian defence.

The military preparations of these colonies should, in the opinion of the Committee, be based on other grounds. Australia and New Zealand possess an enormous coast-line, with numerous points against which such raids as have been referred to might possibly be directed. In the absence of any organized force on shore, even a small number of men landed for a short time would be able to inflict grave damage. To meet these requirements, it appears to be essential to provide an adequate force well organized and capable of being rapidly mobilised, since it is at the outset of war that the probability of a raid is greatest. So soon as the command of the sea in this quarter of the world has been fought for, or conceded without fighting by an enemy, the probability will diminish.

In the event of a great war, the military resources of the Empire will be heavily taxed, and the responsibility for land defence must necessarily rest with the colonies which have willingly accepted it. As it would be of great importance to dislocate the industrial machinery as little as possible, reliefs of garrisons and posts would doubtless be required, entailing the maintenance of a higher total strength than would be necessary in the case of a standing army.

In carrying out the military defence of the coast-line, occasions may evidently arise where a transference of troops from one colony to another may be desirable. The Committee, therefore, consider that assimilation of organization, as urged by the Royal Commission in 1882, is of great importance. The defence of Continental Australia, including Tasmania, cannot be satisfactorily dealt with in piecemeal fashion; and by adopting a common system, and providing for the easy transference of troops from one colony to another, a definite gain of strength would be obtained. From this point of view, as well as in a commercial aspect, the assimilation of railway-gauge, which Major-General Edwards has urged, appears highly desirable.

Finally, the Colonial Defence Committee desire to point out that the rôle which the Australian Colonies will probably play in the event of war is not likely to be limited to the passive defence of