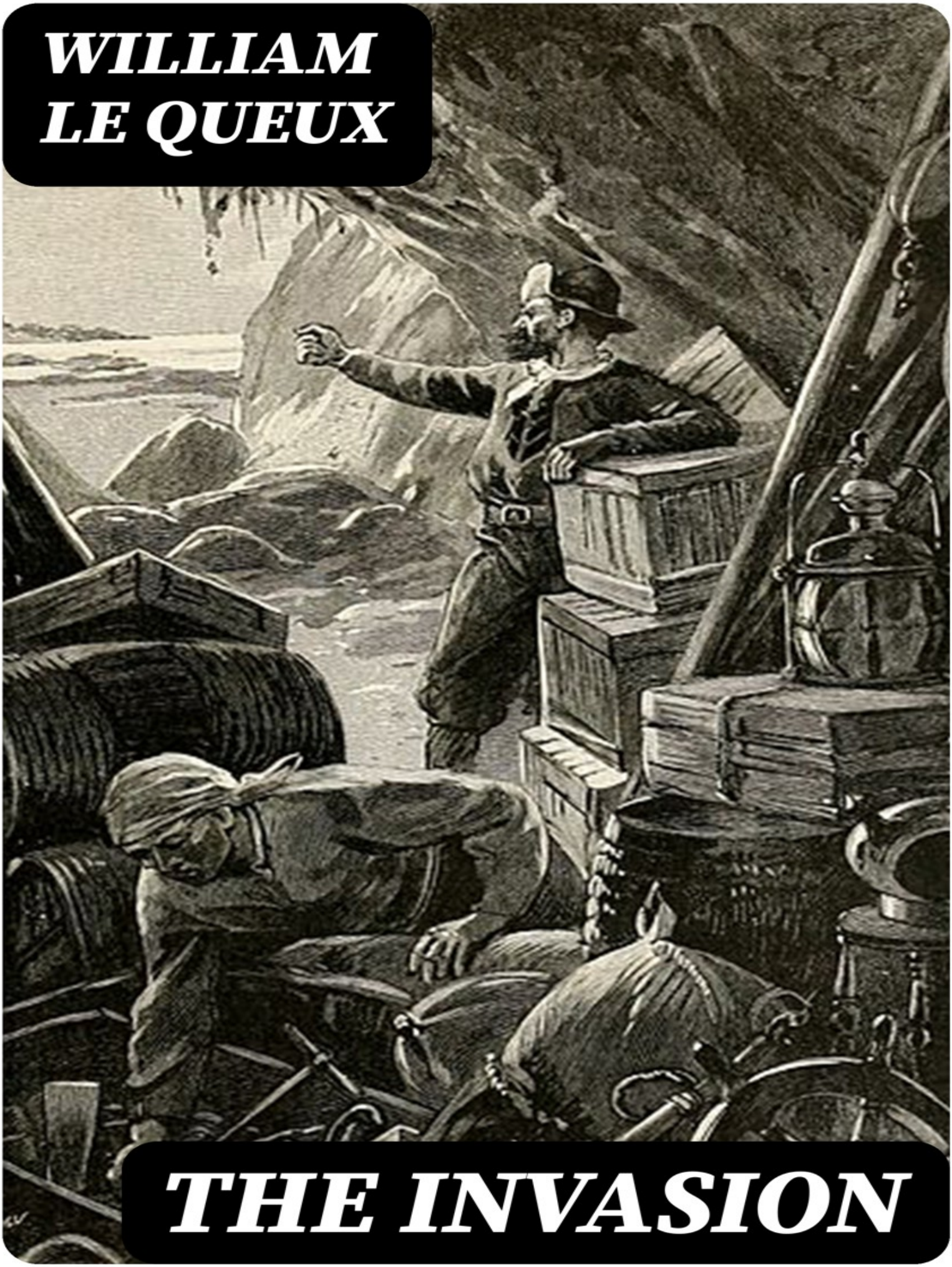
WILLIAM LE QUEUX



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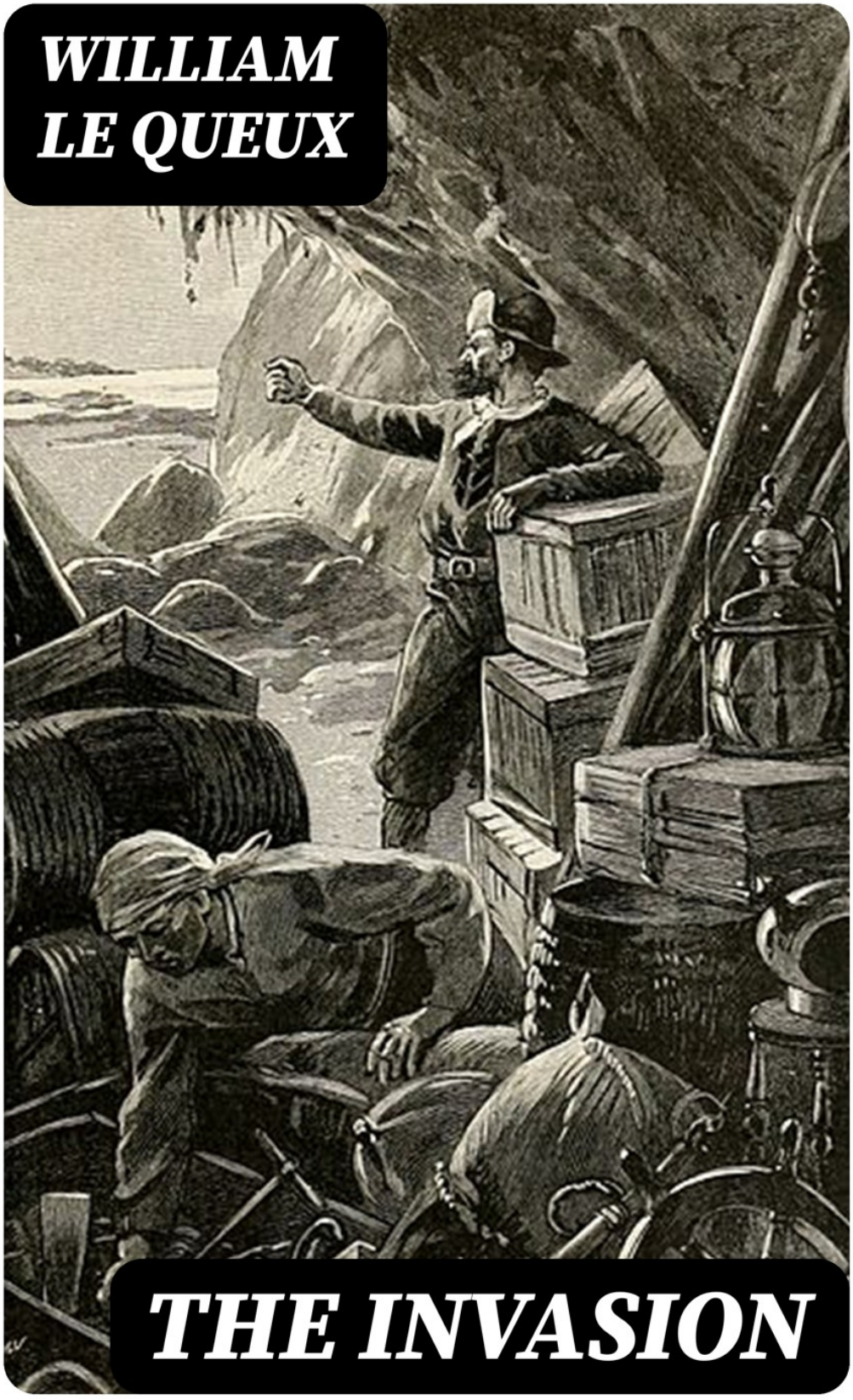
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EAN 8596547098638

DigiCat, 2022
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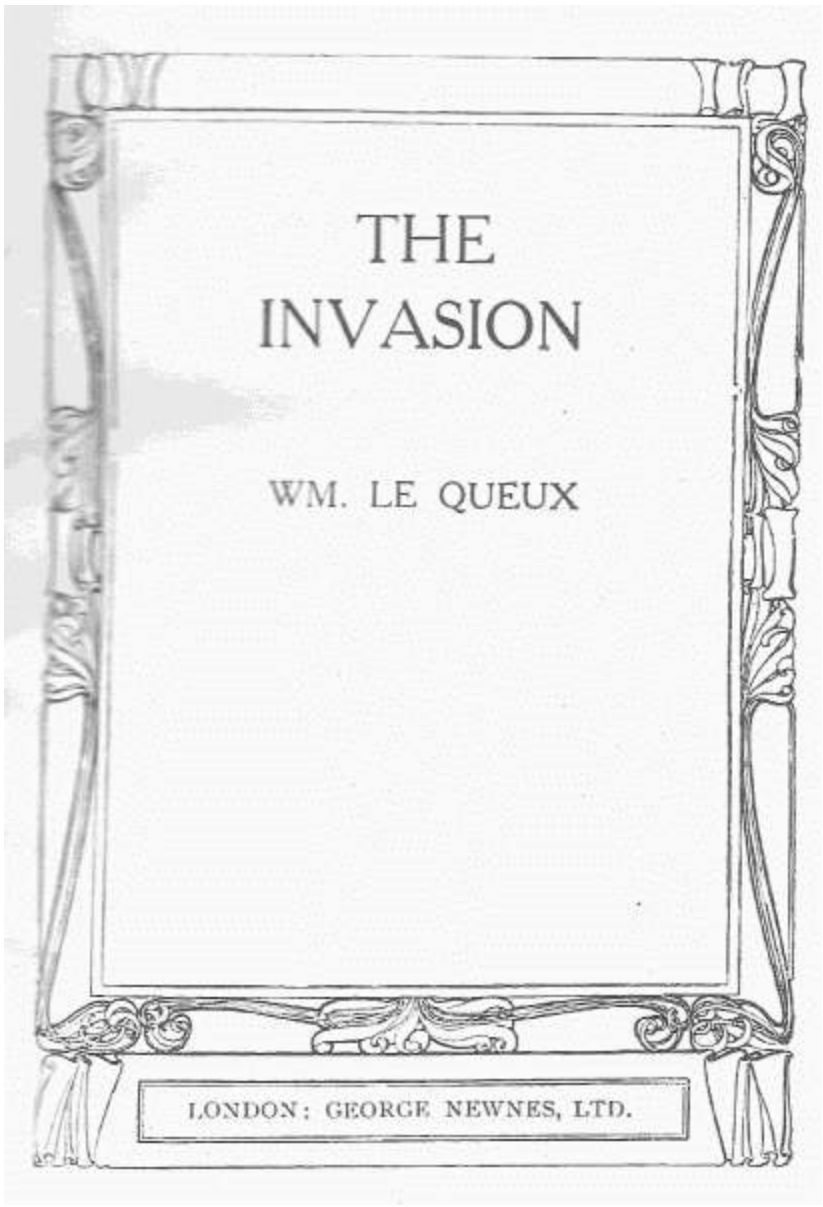

PREFACE.

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"I sometimes despair of the country ever becoming alive to the danger of the unpreparedness of our present position until too late to prevent some fatal catastrophe."

This was the keynote of a solemn warning made in the House of Lords by Earl Roberts. His lordship, whilst drawing

attention to our present inadequate forces, strongly urged that action should be taken in accordance with the recommendations of the Elgin Commission that "no military system could be considered satisfactory which did not contain powers of expansion outside the limit of the regular forces of the Crown."

"The lessons of the late war appear to have been forgotten. The one prevailing idea seems to be," said Earl Roberts, "to cut down our military expenditure without reference to our increased responsibilities and our largely augmented revenue. History tells us in the plainest terms that an Empire which cannot defend its own possessions must inevitably perish." And with this view both Lord Milner and the Marquis of Lansdowne concurred. But surely this is not enough. If we are to retain our position as the first nation of the world we must be prepared to defend any raid made upon our shores.

The object of this book is to illustrate our utter unpreparedness for war from a military standpoint; to show how, under certain conditions which may easily occur, England can be successfully invaded by Germany; and to present a picture of the ruin which must inevitably fall upon us on the evening of that not far-distant day.

Ever since Lord Roberts formulated his plans for the establishment of rifle-clubs I have been deeply interested in the movement: and after a conversation with that distinguished soldier the idea occurred to me to write a forecast, based upon all the available military knowledge—which would bring home to the British public vividly and forcibly what really would occur were an enemy suddenly to

appear in our midst. At the outset it was declared by the strategists I consulted to be impossible. No such book could ever be written, for, according to them, the mass of technical detail was far too great to digest and present in an intelligible manner to the public.

Lord Roberts, however, gave me encouragement. The skeleton scheme of the manner in which England could be invaded by Germany was submitted to a number of the highest authorities on strategy, whose names, however, I am not permitted to divulge, and after many consultations, much criticism, and considerable difference of opinion, the "general idea," with amendment after amendment, was finally adopted.

That, however, was only a mere preliminary. Upon questions of tactics each tactician consulted held a different view, and each criticised adversely the other's suggestions.

One way alone remained open—namely, to take the facts exactly as they stood, add the additional strength of the opposing nations as they at present are, and then draw logical conclusions. This, aided by experts, was done: and after many days of argument with the various authorities, we succeeded in getting them in accord as to the general practicability of an invasion.

Before putting pen to paper it was necessary to reconnoitre carefully the whole of England from the Thames to the Tyne. This I did by means of a motor-car, travelling 10,000 miles of all kinds of roads, and making a tour extending over four months. Each town, all the points of vantage, military positions, all the available landing places on the coast, all railway connections, and telephone and

telegraph communications, were carefully noted for future reference. With the assistance of certain well-known military experts, the battlefields were carefully gone over and the positions marked upon the Ordnance map. Thus, through four months we pushed on day by day collecting information and material, sometimes in the big cities, sometimes in the quietest and remotest hamlets, all of which was carefully tabulated for use.

Whatever critics may say, and however their opinions may differ, it can only be pointed out, first, that the "general idea" of the scheme is in accordance with the expressed and published opinions of the first strategists of to-day, and that, as far as the forecast of events is concerned, it has been written from a first-hand knowledge of the local colour of each of the scenes described. The enemy's Proclamations reproduced are practically copies of those issued by the Germans during the war of 1870.

That the experts and myself will probably be condemned as alarmists and denounced for revealing information likely to be of assistance to an enemy goes without saying. Indeed, an attempt was made in the House of Commons to suppress its publication altogether. Mr. R. C. Lehmann, who asked a question of the Prime Minister, declared that it was "calculated to prejudice our relations with the other Powers," while the late Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman, in a subsequent letter apologising to me for condemning in the House a work he had not read, repeated that it was likely to "produce irritation abroad and might conceivably alarm the more ignorant public at home."

Such a reflection, cast by the late Prime Minister upon the British nation was, to say the least, curious, yet it only confirmed the truth that the Government are strenuously seeking to conceal from our people the appalling military weakness and the consequent danger to which the country is constantly open.

To be weak is to invite war: to be strong is to prevent it.

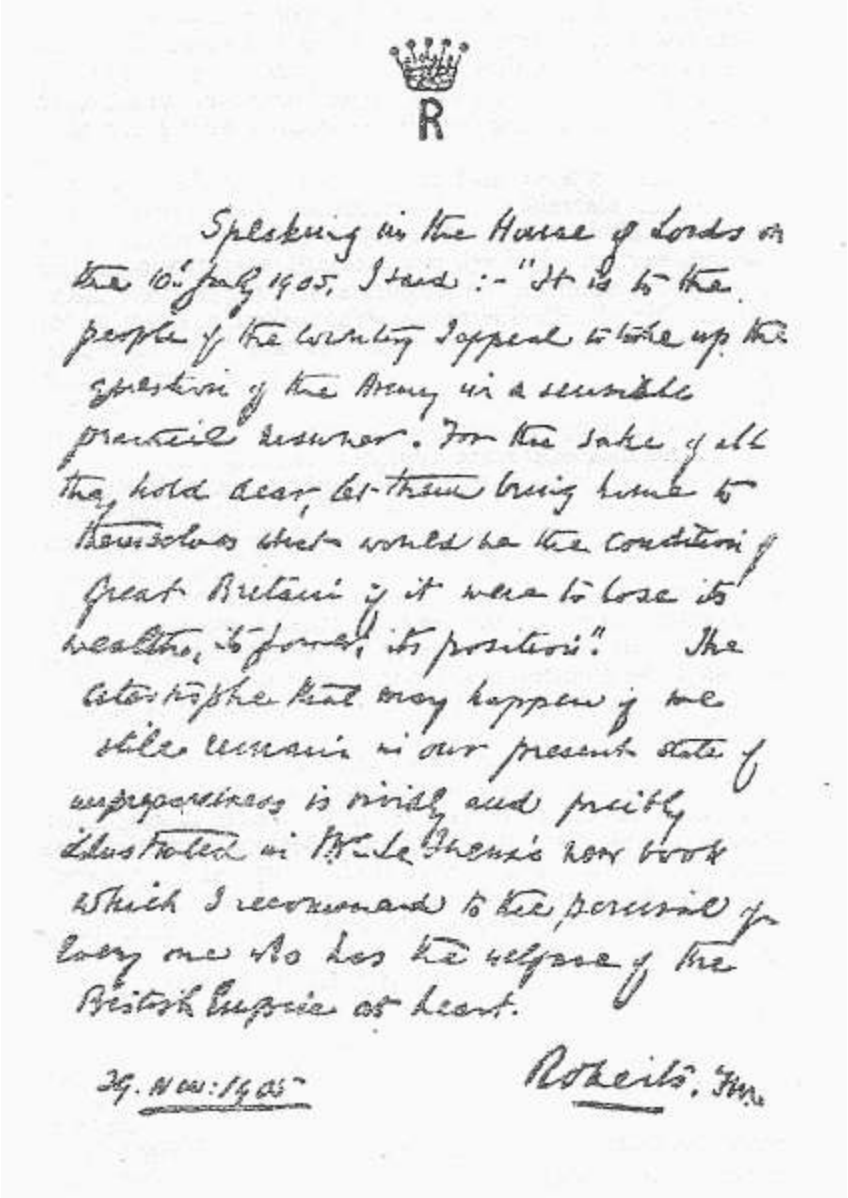
To arouse our country to a sense of its own lamentable insecurity is the object of this volume, which is somewhat compressed from the form in which it originally appeared, and that other nations besides ourselves are interested in England's grave peril is proved by the fact that it has already been published in the German, French, Spanish, Danish, Russian, Italian, and even Japanese languages.

WILLIAM LE QUEUX.

Speaking in the House of Lords on the 10th July 1905, I said:—"It is to the people of the country I appeal to take up the question of the Army in a sensible practical manner. For the sake of all they hold dear, let them bring home to themselves what would be the condition of Great Britain if it were to lose its wealth, its power, its position." The catastrophe that may happen if we still remain in our present state of unpreparedness is visibly and forcibly illustrated in Mr. Le Queux's new book which I recommend to the perusal of every one who has the welfare of the British Empire at heart.

Roberts, FM

29. Nov. 1905



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29. Nov: 1905

Rosebery. K.G.

THE INVASION.

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THE SURPRISE.

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Two of the myriad of London's nightworkers were walking down Fleet Street together soon after dawn on Sunday morning, 2nd September.

The sun had not yet risen. That main artery of London traffic, with its irregular rows of closed shops and newspaper offices, was quiet and pleasant in the calm, mystic light before the falling of the smoke-pall.

Only at early morning does the dear old City look its best; in that one quiet, sweet hour when the night's toil has ended and the day's has not yet begun. Only in that brief interval at the birth of day, when the rose tints of the sky glow slowly into gold, does the giant metropolis repose—at least, as far as its business streets are concerned—for at five o'clock the toiling millions begin to again pour in from all points of the compass, and the stress and storm of London at once recommences.

And in that hour of silent charm the two grey-bearded sub-editors, though engaged in offices of rival newspapers were making their way homeward to Dulwich to spend Sunday in a well-earned rest, and were chatting "shop," as Press men do.

"I suppose you had the same trouble to get that Yarmouth story through?" asked Fergusson, the news-editor

of the "Dispatch," as they crossed Whitefriars Street. "We got about half a column, and then the wire shut down."

"Telegraph or telephone?" inquired Baines, who was four or five years younger than his friend.

"We were using both—to make sure."

"So were we. It was a rattling good story—the robbery was mysterious, to say the least—but we didn't get more than half of it. Something's wrong with the line, evidently," Baines said. "If it were not such a perfect autumn morning, I should be inclined to think there'd been a storm somewhere."

"Yes—funny, wasn't it?" remarked the other. "A shame we haven't the whole story, for it was a first-class one, and we wanted something. Did you put it on the contents-bill?"

"No, because we couldn't get the finish. I tried in every way—rang up the Central News, P.A., Exchange Telegraph Company, tried to get through to Yarmouth on the trunk, and spent half an hour or so pottering about, but the reply from all the agencies, from everywhere, in fact, was the same—the line was interrupted."

"Just our case. I telephoned to the Post Office, but the reply came back that the lines were evidently down."

"Well, it certainly looks as though there'd been a storm, but——" and Baines glanced at the bright, clear sky overhead, just flushed by the bursting sun—"there are certainly no traces of it."

"There's often a storm on the coast when it's quite still in London, my dear fellow," remarked his friend wisely.

"That's all very well. But when all communication with a big place like Yarmouth is suddenly cut off, as it has been, I

can't help suspecting that something has happened which we ought to know."

"You're perhaps right, after all," Fergusson said. "I wonder if anything has happened. We don't want to be called back to the office, either of us. My assistant, Henderson, whom I've left in charge, rings me up over any mare's nest. The trunk telephones all come into the Post Office Exchange up in Carter Lane. Why not look in there before we go home? It won't take us a quarter of an hour, and we have several trains home from Ludgate Hill."

Baines looked at his watch. Like his companion, he had no desire to be called back to his office after getting out to Dulwich, and yet he was in no mood to go making reporter's inquiries.

"I don't think I'll go. It's sure to be nothing, my dear fellow," he said. "Besides, I have a beastly headache. I had a heavy night's work. One of my men is away ill."

"Well, at any rate, I think I'll go," Fergusson said. "Don't blame me if you get called back for a special edition with a terrible storm, great loss of life, and all that sort of thing. So long." And, smiling, he waved his hand and parted from his friend in the booking office of Ludgate Hill Station.

Quickening his pace, he hurried through the office, and, passing out by the back, ascended the steep, narrow street until he reached the Post Office Telephone Exchange in Carter Lane, where, presenting his card, he asked to see the superintendent-in-charge.

Without much delay he was shown upstairs into a small private office, into which came a short, dapper, fair-moustached man with the bustle of a man in a great hurry.

"I've called," the sub-editor explained, "to know whether you can tell me anything regarding the cause of the interruption of the line to Yarmouth a short time ago. We had some important news coming through, but were cut off just in the midst of it, and then we received information that all the telephone and telegraph lines to Yarmouth were interrupted."

"Well, that's just the very point which is puzzling us at this moment," was the night-superintendent's reply. "It is quite unaccountable. Our trunk going to Yarmouth seems to be down, as well as the telegraphs. Yarmouth, Lowestoft, and beyond Beccles seem all to have been suddenly cut off. About eighteen minutes to four the operators noticed something wrong, switched the trunks through to the testers, and the latter reported to me in due course."

"That's strange! Did they all break down together?"

"No. The first that failed was the one that runs through Chelmsford, Colchester, and Ipswich up to Lowestoft and Yarmouth. The operator found that he could get through to Ipswich and Beccles. Ipswich knew nothing, except that something was wrong. They could still ring up Beccles, but not beyond."

As they were speaking, there was a tap at the door, and the assistant night-superintendent entered, saying:

"The Norwich line through Scole and Long Stratton has now failed, sir. About half-past four Norwich reported a fault somewhere north, between there and Cromer. But the operator now says that the line is apparently broken, and so are all the telegraphs from there to Cromer, Sheringham, and Holt."

"Another line has gone, then!" exclaimed the superintendent-in-charge, utterly astounded. "Have you tried to get on to Cromer by the other routes—through Nottingham and King's Lynn, or through Cambridge?"

"The testers have tried every route, but there's no response."

"You could get through to some of the places—Yarmouth, for instance—by telegraphing to the Continent, I suppose?" asked Fergusson.

"We are already trying," responded the assistant superintendent.

"What cables run out from the east coast in that neighbourhood?" inquired the sub-editor quickly.

"There are five between Southwold and Cromer—three run to Germany, and two to Holland," replied the assistant. "There's the cable from Yarmouth to Barkum, in the Frisian Islands; from Happisburg, near Mundesley, to Barkum; from Yarmouth to Emden; from Lowestoft to Haarlem, and from Kessingland, near Southwold, to Zandyport."

"And you are trying all the routes?" asked his superior.

"I spoke to Paris myself an hour ago and asked them to cable by all five routes to Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Kessingland, and Happisburg," was the assistant's reply. "I also asked Liverpool Street Station and King's Cross to wire down to some of their stations on the coast, but the reply was that they were in the same predicament as ourselves—their lines were down north of Beccles, Wymondham, East Dereham, and also south of Lynn. I'll just run along and see if there's any reply from Paris. They ought to be through by this time,

as it's Sunday morning, and no traffic." And he went out hurriedly.

"There's certainly something very peculiar," remarked the superintendent-in-charge to the sub-editor. "If there's been an earthquake or an electrical disturbance, then it is a most extraordinary one. Every single line reaching to the coast seems interrupted."

"Yes. It's uncommonly funny," Fergusson remarked. "I wonder what could have happened. You've never had a complete breakdown like this before?"

"Never. But I think——"

The sentence remained unfinished, for his assistant returned with a slip of paper in his hand, saying:

"This message has just come in from Paris, I'll read it. 'Superintendent Telephones, Paris, to Superintendent Telephones, London.—Have obtained direct telegraphic communication with operators of all five cables to England. Haarlem, Zandyport, Barkum, and Emden all report that cables are interrupted. They can get no reply from England, and tests show that cables are damaged somewhere near English shore.'"

"Is that all?" asked Fergusson.

"That's all. Paris knows no more than we do," was the assistant's response.

"Then the Norfolk and Suffolk coasts are completely isolated—cut off from post office, railways, telephones, and cables!" exclaimed the superintendent. "It's mysterious—most mysterious!" And, taking up the instrument upon his table, he placed a plug in one of the holes down the front of the table itself, and a moment later was in conversation

with the official in charge of the traffic at Liverpool Street, repeating the report from Paris, and urging him to send light engines north from Wymondham or Beccles into the zone of the mystery.

The reply came back that he had already done so, but a telegram had reached him from Wymondham to the effect that the road-bridges between Kimberley and Hardingham had apparently fallen in, and the line was blocked by débris. Interruption was also reported beyond Swaffham, at a place called Little Dunham.

"Then even the railways themselves are broken!" cried Fergusson. "Is it possible that there has been a great earthquake?"

"An earthquake couldn't very well destroy all five cables from the Continent," remarked the superintendent gravely.

The latter had scarcely placed the receiver upon the hook when a third man entered—an operator who, addressing him, said:

"Will you please come to the switchboard, sir? There's a man in the Ipswich call office who has just told me a most extraordinary story. He says that he started in his motor-car alone from Lowestoft to London at half-past three this morning, and just as it was getting light he was passing along the edge of Henham Park, between Wangford village and Blythburgh, when he saw three men apparently repairing the telegraph wires. One was up the pole, and the other two were standing below. As he passed he saw a flash, for, to his surprise, one of the men fired point-blank at him with a revolver. Fortunately, the shot went wide, and he at once put on a move and got down into Blythburgh village,

even though one of his tyres went down. It had probably been pierced by the bullet fired at him, as the puncture was unlike any he had ever had before. At Blythburgh he informed the police of the outrage, and the constable, in turn, woke up the postmaster, who tried to telegraph back to the police at Wrentham, but found that the line was interrupted. Was it possible that the men were cutting the wires, instead of repairing them? He says that after repairing the puncture he took the village constable and three other men on his car and went back to the spot, where, although the trio had escaped, they saw that wholesale havoc had been wrought with the telegraphs. The lines had been severed in four or five places, and whole lengths tangled up into great masses. A number of poles had been sawn down, and were lying about the roadside. Seeing that nothing could be done, the gentleman remounted his car, came on to Ipswich, and reported the damage at our call office."

"And is he still there?" exclaimed the superintendent quickly, amazed at the motorist's statement.

"Yes. I asked him to wait for a few moments in order to speak to you, sir."

"Good. I'll go at once. Perhaps you'd like to come also, Mr. Fergusson?"

And all three ran up to the gallery, where the huge switchboards were ranged around, and where the night operators, with the receivers attached to one ear, were still at work.

In a moment the superintendent had taken the operator's seat, adjusted the ear-piece, and was in conversation with

Ipswich. A second later he was speaking with the man who had actually witnessed the cutting of the trunk line.

While he was thus engaged an operator at the farther end of the switchboard suddenly gave vent to a cry of surprise and disbelief.

"What do you say, Beccles? Repeat it," he asked excitedly.

Then a moment later he shouted aloud:

"Beccles says that German soldiers—hundreds of them—are pouring into the place! The Germans have landed at Lowestoft, they think."

All who heard those ominous words sprang up dumbfounded, staring at each other.

The assistant-superintendent dashed to the operator's side and seized his apparatus.

"Halloa—halloa, Beccles! Halloa—halloa—halloa!"

The response was some gruff words in German, and the sound of scuffling could distinctly be heard. Then all was silent.

Time after time he rang up the small Suffolk town, but in vain. Then he switched through to the testers, and quickly the truth was plain.

The second trunk line to Norwich, running from Ipswich by Harleston and Beccles, had been cut farther towards London.

But what held everyone breathless in the trunk telephone headquarters was that the Germans had actually effected the surprise landing that had so often in recent years been predicted by military critics; that England on that quiet

September Sunday morning had been attacked. England was actually invaded. It was incredible!

Yet London's millions in their Sunday morning lethargy were in utter ignorance of the grim disaster that had suddenly fallen upon the land.

Fergusson was for rushing at once back to the "Dispatch" office to get out an extraordinary edition, but the superintendent, who was still in conversation with the motorist, urged judicious forethought.

"For the present, let us wait. Don't let us alarm the public unnecessarily. We want corroboration. Let us have the motorist up here," he suggested.

"Yes," cried the sub-editor. "Let me speak to him."

Over the wire Fergusson begged the stranger to come at once to London and give his story, declaring that the military authorities would require it. Then, just as the man who had been shot at by German advance spies—for such they had undoubtedly been—in order to prevent the truth leaking out, gave his promise to come to town at once, there came over the line from the coastguard at Southwold a vague, incoherent telephone message regarding strange ships having been seen to the northward, and asking for connection with Harwich; while King's Cross and Liverpool Street Stations both rang up almost simultaneously, reporting the receipt of extraordinary messages from King's Lynn, Diss, Harleston, Halesworth, and other places. All declared that German soldiers were swarming over the north, that Lowestoft and Beccles had been seized, and that Yarmouth and Cromer were isolated.

Various stationmasters reported that the enemy had blown up bridges, taken up rails, and effectually blocked all communication with the coast. Certain important junctions were already held by the enemy's outposts.

Such was the amazing news received in that high-up room in Carter Lane, City, on that sweet, sunny morning when all the great world of London was at peace, either still slumbering or week-ending.

Fergusson remained for a full hour and a half at the Telephone Exchange, anxiously awaiting any further corroboration. Many wild stories came over the wires telling how panic-stricken people were fleeing inland away from the enemy's outposts. Then he took a hansom to the "Dispatch" office, and proceeded to prepare a special edition of his paper—an edition containing surely the most amazing news that had ever startled London.

Fearing to create undue panic, he decided not to go to press until the arrival of the motorist from Ipswich. He wanted the story of the man who had actually seen the cutting of the wires. He paced his room excitedly, wondering what effect the news would have upon the world. In the rival newspaper offices the report was, as yet, unknown. With journalistic forethought he had arranged that at present the bewildering truth should not leak out to his rivals, either from the railway termini or from the telephone exchange. His only fear was that some local correspondent might telegraph from some village or town nearer the metropolis which was still in communication with the central office.

Time passed very slowly. Each moment increased his anxiety. He had sent out the one reporter who remained on

duty to the house of Colonel Sir James Taylor, the Permanent Under-Secretary for War. Halting before the open window, he looked up and down the street for the arriving motor-car. But all was quiet.

Eight o'clock had just boomed from Big Ben, and London still remained in her Sunday morning peace. The street, bright in the warm sunshine, was quite empty, save for a couple of motor-omnibuses and a sprinkling of gaily dressed holiday-makers on their way to the day excursion trains.

In that centre of London—the hub of the world—all was comparatively silent, the welcome rest after the busy turmoil that through six days in the week is unceasing, that fevered throbbing of the heart of the world's great capital.

Of a sudden, however, came the whirr-r of an approaching car, as a thin-faced, travel-stained man tore along from the direction of the Strand and pulled up before the office. The fine car, a six-cylinder "Napier," was grey with the mud of country roads, while the motorist himself was smothered until his goggles had been almost entirely covered.

Fergusson rushed out to him, and a few moments later the pair were in the upstairs room, the sub-editor swiftly taking down the motorist's story, which differed very little from what he had already spoken over the telephone.

Then, just as Big Ben chimed the half-hour, the echoes of the half-deserted Strand were suddenly awakened by the loud, strident voices of the newsboys shouting:

"'Dispatch,' spe-shall! Invasion of England this morning! Germans in Suffolk! Terrible panic! Spe-shall! 'Dispatch,' Spe-shall!"

As soon as the paper had gone to press Fergusson urged the motorist—whose name was Horton, and who lived at Richmond—to go with him to the War Office and report. Therefore, both men entered the car, and as they did so a man jumped from a hansom in breathless haste. He was the reporter whom Fergusson had sent out to Sir James Taylor's house in Cleveland Square, Hyde Park.

"They thought Sir James spent the night with his brother up at Hampstead," he exclaimed. "I've been there, but find that he's away for the week-end at Chilham Hall, near Buckden."

"Buckden! That's on the Great North Road!" cried Horton, "We'll go at once and find him. Sixty miles from London. We can be there under two hours!"

And a few minutes later the pair were tearing due north, turning at last into the handsome lodge-gates of Chilham Park, and running up the great elm avenue, drew up before the main door of the ancient hall, a quaint many-gabled old place of grey stone.

A few moments later the breathless journalist faced the Permanent Under-Secretary with the news that England was invaded—that the Germans had actually effected a surprise landing on the east coast.

Sir James and his host stood speechless. Like others, they at first believed the pale-faced, bearded sub-editor to be a lunatic, but a few moments later, when Horton briefly repeated the story, they saw that, whatever might have occurred, the two men were at least in deadly earnest.

"Impossible!" cried Sir James. "We should surely have heard something of it if such were actually the case. The

coastguard would have telephoned the news instantly. Besides, where is our fleet?"

"The Germans evidently laid their plans with great cleverness. Their spies, already in England, cut the wires at a pre-arranged hour last night," declared Fergusson. "They sought to prevent this gentleman from giving the alarm by shooting him. All the railways to London are already either cut or held by the enemy. One thing, however, is clear—fleet or no fleet, the east coast is entirely at their mercy."

Host and guest exchanged dark glances.

"Well, if what you say is the actual truth," exclaimed Sir James, "to-day is surely the blackest day that England has ever known."

"Yes, they should have listened to Lord Roberts," snapped his lordship. "I suppose you'll go at once, Taylor, and make inquiries?"

"Of course," responded the Permanent Secretary. And a quarter of an hour later, accepting Horton's offer, he was sitting in the car as it headed back towards London.

Could the journalist's story be true? As he sat there, with his head bent against the wind and the mud splashing into his face, Sir James recollected too well the repeated warnings of the past five years, serious warnings by men who knew our shortcomings, but to which no attention had been paid. Both the Government and the public had remained apathetic, the idea of peril had been laughed to scorn, and the country had, ostrich-like, buried its head in the sand, and allowed Continental nations to supersede us in business, in armaments, in everything.

The danger of invasion had always been ridiculed as a mere alarmist's fiction; those responsible for the defence of the country had smiled, the Navy had been reduced, and the Army had remained in contented inefficiency.

If the blow had really been struck by Germany? If she had risked three or four, out of her twenty-three, army corps, and had aimed at the heart of the British Empire? What then? Ay! what then?

As the car glided down Regent Street into Pall Mall and towards Whitehall, Sir James saw on every side crowds discussing the vague but astounding reports now published in special editions of all the Sunday papers, and shouted wildly everywhere.

Boys bearing sheets fresh from the Fleet Street presses were seized, and bundles torn from them by excited Londoners eager to learn the latest intelligence.

Around both War Office and Admiralty great surging crowds were clamouring loudly for the truth. Was it the truth, or was it only a hoax? Half London disbelieved it. Yet from every quarter, from the north and from across the bridges, thousands were pouring in to ascertain what had really occurred, and the police had the greatest difficulty in keeping order.

In Trafalgar Square, where the fountains were plashing so calmly in the autumn sunlight, a shock-headed man mounted the back of one of the lions and harangued the crowd with much gesticulation, denouncing the Government in the most violent terms; but the orator was ruthlessly pulled down by the police in the midst of his fierce attack.

It was half-past two o'clock in the afternoon. The Germans had already been on English soil ten hours, yet London was in ignorance of where they had actually landed, and utterly helpless.