‘A Man for All Seasons’ or a Soldier of His Time? Kitchener of Khartoum.

The values of the past are seldom those of a modern age, as the recent controversy over statues of British heroes and public benefactors shows. Field Marshal Horatio Herbert Kitchener, Earl Kitchener of Khartoum, whose statue stands with those of other imperial heroes, Roberts and Wolseley, on Horse Guards Parade, was a man who enjoyed widespread public adulation in his lifetime and at his death. Since then critical controversy has clouded his reputation.

His appointment as Secretary of State for War in August, 1914, illustrates both aspects. The assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne and his wife in Sarajevo initially gained little attention in a Britain enjoying seasonally hot weather and fearing Irish civil war over Home Rule. The First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill and Kitchener, then British Agent and Consul General in Egypt (*de facto* ruler for the Khedive) meeting at a London club in late July agreed that British involvement in the unfolding European crisis was unlikely.[1] The Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, held the same view, telling both his girlfriend Venetia Stanley and the King that it was improbable.[2] Kitchener hoped to return to Egypt. Previous service, fluency in Arabic, and admiration for desert people made the Middle East his spiritual home. He had not passed a winter in England for many years.

The German ultimatum to Belgium to allow the passage of their armies and the Belgian King’s appeal to the British government altered everything. Both political parties, the public and the press swung behind intervention. If Britain went to war, who would be the minister responsible for the Army? In the wake of the so-called Curragh Mutiny, Jack Seely had resigned as Secretary of State for War and Asquith had temporarily taken on the post. In a war with Germany, Viscount Haldane, former War Secretary and organiser of the BEF, was suspect because of his German background and alleged sympathies. Lord Roberts, the Empire’s other great soldier, was too old. On the evening of 2 August a group of Conservatives including Bonar Law, party leader, agreed that Kitchener would be better placed at the War Office than Egypt. They contacted Arthur Balfour and a note was sent to Churchill to raise the question with Asquith. On the 3rd, Churchill did so. On that same morning the *Times*’s military correspondent, Charles a Court Repington urged the appointment. Kitchener had already left London and boarded the 12:55 steamer for Calais, urging the captain to sail. He had a hatred of the War Office based on its reputation for bureaucratic lethargy. Only after a telephone message from Asquith and with some difficulty could Kitchener be induced to disembark and return to London. The following day, 4 August, the British ultimatum to Germany not to invade Belgium expired at midnight, Berlin time, but the Prime Minister simply told Kitchener to stay in London. At 7 p.m., knowing what was afoot and urged by friends, he went to see Asquith and said if his services were required, he would need the full powers of Secretary of State for War.[3]

Appointing Kitchener was a most unusual step. The last soldier in the cabinet had been Wellington. There was strong anti-military prejudice among Liberals, and Sir Edward Grey’s

reluctance had to be overcome. On 5 August *The Times* again urged his appointment, and that evening the press was informed that he had entered the cabinet as War Secretary, aged sixty-four. Northcliffe, proprietor of the newspaper, claimed the credit, a doubtful assertion.

Asquith appeared to have pulled off a major coup as Britain faced European war for the first time since the Crimea. The public and press were ecstatic. Kitchener's prestige was immense. Only Churchill in his heroic leadership in 1940 has occupied a similar position in the eyes of the British people. Over six foot tall, bronzed from desert sun, with a moustache of equally heroic proportions, Kitchener looked the part of an imperial hero. G.W. Steevens' book, *With Kitchener to Khartoum*, portrayed him as the infallible 'Soudan machine'. In South Africa he had brought victory by wearing down the Boer commandos and by his skill as a negotiator. This had previously been demonstrated in averting a potential Anglo-French crisis at Fashoda. He had won a battle of wills with the imperious Viceroy, Curzon, in India, and had ruled Egypt successfully, instigating land reform intended to help the *fellaheen*, the Egyptian peasant cultivator. A fluent Arabic, German and French speaker, he had been shaped by service on the frontiers of empire.[4]

While his public standing remained high during the war, his cabinet colleagues, especially Lloyd George, were to discover serious faults, his inability to communicate or delegate, his secretiveness, his apparently poor strategy. He was blamed for the shells shortage of 1915 and in part for the failure of the British and French assault on the Dardanelles. His powers as Secretary of State would be progressively passed to others, Lloyd George as Minister for Munitions and Field Marshal Sir William Robertson as CIGS (Chief of the Imperial General Staff.) Later these weaknesses, better known, and with others more widely publicised, notably shooting of Mahdist wounded at Omdurman and the concentration camps of South Africa, would form an indictment of his reputation, beginning even before Philip Magnus's 1958 biography.[5] Those who served with him had mixed views. Loyal subordinates regarded him as 'a kind and delightful chief'; others found him a 'hard master' capable of 'boorish insults'. Lord Edward Cecil of the Grenadier Guards, an ADC in the Sudan, observed in his diary: 'K did not positively insult me more than six times [today] so the dawn of peace is beginning.'[6] With time and greater confidence, he would mellow. He could be generous and loyal, advancing the careers of men like Ian Hamilton, William Birdwood and Henry Rawlinson.[7]

Kitchener was born on 25 June, 1850 in County Kerry, the son of an English army officer who used the money from sale of his commission to buy an Irish estate. Although not of Irish descent like Roberts, French, Wolseley, Alexander, Alanbrooke or Montgomery, he spent his childhood in that nursery of British Empire soldiers. He appears to have been a sensitive and artistic child, strong in Christian faith and devoted to his mother. When she died in 1864 in Switzerland where the family had moved from Ireland for her health, the effects on his character were profound, but difficult to judge. They may have included shyness covered by rudeness, buttoned-up emotions and placing women on a pedestal, to be honoured as he had honoured her.[8]

Without the income to make his way in a smart regiment, he went to the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, 'the shop', and was commissioned into the Royal Engineers on 4 January, 1871. Further training in mapmaking, sketching, fortification, use of explosives at Chatham followed. Part of his early introduction to the Middle East was successfully mapping Palestine 'from Dan to Beersheba'. The time of his commissioning until 1914 coincided with the apogee of British Imperial power, based on the global reach of the Royal Navy, a wealth primarily from shipping, banking, insurance and trade, and the possession of India. The Levant, the Middle East and the tip of Africa controlled the routes from Britain to India and were of strategic importance to the imperial power. In his foreign service, Kitchener was both typical and unusual. For courageous young men of enterprise, the British Empire offered scope for advancement and adventure in distant parts of the world. Christian faith often strengthened and motivated. But Kitchener took his adventures further in the harsh environment of the Sudan, where his service began in 1884 in the attempt to rescue General Charles Gordon, another unconventional engineer officer.

Kitchener, serving as *bimbashi* or major with the Egyptian army, eagerly volunteered to communicate with Gordon besieged in Khartoum by the Mahdist army. At Aswan he tried to gather intelligence and organised 1,500 irregulars from the Ababdeh tribe into a disciplined body which he christened the Ababdeh Frontier Force. He was their blood brother, wore Arab clothing, and impressed the Sirdar (commander of the Egyptian army) Evelyn Wood with his 'tact, energy and great devotion' and his influence on the Ababdeh. The young Kitchener was unlike the man who strode into the War Office in August, 1914. He was attracted to Arab ways, fascinated by the Middle East, learnt Arabic, read the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam, collected *objets d'art*. Edward Gleichen of the Grenadier Guards described him as 'a tall spare man with a fair pointed beard and wonderfully piercing grey eyes'.[9] The rescue attempt failed and Gordon died fighting bravely in Khartoum, a Christian hero and martyr to many. British public opinion condemned Gladstone, who had failed to launch the rescue attempt in time, and longed for the avenging of Gordon's death. This came over a decade later, not because of public opinion but because of Lord Salisbury's shrewd appreciation of a threat to Britain's strategic position in Egypt with its canal and an appeal by the Italians following their defeat at Adowa by the Ethiopians (then Abyssians).[10] Kitchener by then was Sirdar. He took three years from 1896 to defeat the Mahdists using the techniques of industrial war – magazine fed rifles, artillery, maxim guns, steam-powered river gunboats and especially the desert railway. The 'Dervishes' or 'Fuzzy-Wuzzies' as the British called them used mainly primitive weapons. Three campaigns culminated in the destruction of their army at the Atbara and Omdurman. European opinion, not just in Britain, regarded Kitchener's victory as one for civilisation. Austrian diplomatic and military representatives in Egypt noted that in Dongola province 'misgovernment has produced a total collapse of what was once a flourishing area'. The Mahdist regime was 'more like a system of plunder than an administration'. The population of Berber reacted to Kitchener's triumphal entry with joy 'at being freed at last from the tyranny of the dervishes, and being able to go about their peaceful

occupations after so many years.' The collapse of the Mahdist empire was 'undoubtedly happy news for the whole civilised world.'[11]

In Britain the victory with its slogan 'Gordon avenged' was exceptionally popular. The radical Wilfred Scawen Blunt was in a small minority when he cursed Kitchener in his journal and tried to prevent his reward of £30,000.[12] In the spirit of his hero Gordon, who had fought against slavery, Kitchener's resolved to make good come from the war. He told reporters after the battle of Omdurman of his plan for a Gordon Memorial College for boys from north and south Sudan, and sought their help with an appeal for £65,000, raised to £100,000 at the suggestion of one of their number, Frank Scudamore.[13] The Gordon Memorial College, opened by Kitchener in October 1902, became in time a medical university. Sir Henry Wellcome, the founder of the Trust for the study of tropical illness, met the cost of fully-equipped laboratories to study hygiene and tropical diseases. Ridding Khartoum of malaria was an early achievement.[14].

Other measures followed. Khartoum was rebuilt after it had been laid waste by the Khalifa's orders, left a wilderness of crumbling walls and thorn bushes for twelve years. Wide avenues ran parallel to the Blue Nile. Broad boulevards were shaded by banyans and wild fig trees, lit by electricity, traversed by trams. Kitchener himself prepared the plan, for which he was made an honorary fellow of RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects).[15]

Some of Kitchener's actions gave ammunition to his critics. He ordered the blowing up of the tomb of the founder of the Mahdist movement, the Mahdi or 'chosen one', and his bones to be disposed of in the Nile. A story circulated that he wanted to make the skull an inkstand. He had to write apologetically to the Queen defending his actions. Winston Churchill reporting for the *Morning Post* and Ernest Bennett of the *Westminster Gazette* accused Kitchener of ordering the shooting of Mahdist wounded.[16] Horace Smith-Dorrien commanding a Sudanese battalion in Kitchener's army defended the action:

> As we moved amongst the bodies a sharp look-out had to be kept on the wounded, as from previous experience it was known that many would try to get a shot or spear-thrust in at us as we passed over them, whereas others not wounded at all, but wishing to die, would lie prone, ready to come with a fanatical rush and kill someone before they themselves were disposed of.[17]

Bennett Burleigh of the *Daily Telegraph* made a fierce reply to Bennett in his newspaper and in the postscript to his book *The Khartoum Campaign 1898*. He called Bennett's article 'untrue, stupid and wantonly mischievous.' The Mahdists who 'ruthlessly slaughtered their own prisoners, wounded or not, slew children and debauched women' were hardly entitled to humane laws, yet the British treated them as men and not wild beasts.[18] The pugnacious Major Ivor Maxse, later divisional and corps commander on the Western Front, wrote in his brother Leo's *National Review* that Churchill's *River War* was 'misleading as history and inaccurate in detail'. He added, 'It is not easy to realise that this book was written by an English gentleman who was once an officer.'[19]

The war in South Africa against the Boers was the Victorian army's sternest test. Kitchener served as chief of staff to Roberts, a role for which he was not suited by training; he acted rather as a trouble-shooting deputy to whom Roberts could delegate difficult missions or send round to hustle subordinates. Lady Violet Cecil (later Lady Milner) wrote of the two men:

> They are well made to work together…One thing struck me very much about the relation of the two soldiers: Lord Kitchener, who had always been cock of his own walk and received at home after his victorious campaigns as a conquering hero, fell quite naturally into the second place, becoming a Staff Officer, and leaving all the panache to Lord Roberts.[20]

Despite his victory at Omdurman, Kitchener was not 'a great battlefield commander'[21] lacking Roberts's tactical flair and experience. The first controversial episode of the war was his succession of ill-coordinated attacks against Piet Cronje's *laager* at Paardeberg, resulting in 1200 British casualties on a single day. Rising from a sick bed, Roberts after reconnaissance decided not to renew the attacks and sent Kitchener to secure the lines of communication. However the initiative of Sir John French with the cavalry division and Kitchener's 'hustling' forward the infantry divisions as reinforcements enabled the British to surround Cronje and bring about the surrender of 4000 fighting Boers, the second success of Roberts's campaign following the relief of Kimberley.

After turning the tide of war and capturing the Boer capitals, Roberts returned to celebrations in London, predicting the war would soon end. There ensued eighteen months of guerrilla warfare. Taking command, Kitchener faced the challenge of running down the mobile commandos operating on their own ground and with Boer farms as bases to provide fresh horses, supplies, sometimes weapons and ammunition.[22] His solution was to build lines of blockhouses linked with barbed wire to cut up the veldt and conduct 'drives' or sweeps to pin the commandos against these lines. Most controversially, extending methods begun by Roberts, he swept the country bare by burning an estimated 30,000 farms and forcing the families into internment camps, dubbed by English radicals *campos de reconcentrado* after their predecessors in Cuba. Some 160,000 Boers, mostly women and children but including young Boer men, evading service against the British, were in fifty camps along the railways where the British Army could feed and 'protect them from intimidation' by their warlike countrymen.[23] British staff work was not equal to the task. Kitchener's men should have been ready for 'enteric' (typhoid), endemic in South Africa, which had already ravaged British troops, but could not have foreseen measles, the major killer, which occurred only in isolated 'primitive' populations. The Boers on the farmsteads of the veldt were just that. Over 20,000 died. In Britain Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the Liberal leader, informed by the crusading Emily Hobhouse, led an outcry, against 'methods of barbarism'. [24] The camps were placed in charge of Alfred Milner's 'young men' including John Buchan, and the epidemic brought under control. In Boer memory they remained a burning issue, in contrast to the black camps where probably equal numbers died, ignored in the history of white South Africa.[25]

The camps remain a dark stain on Kitchener's career, but were surpassed by German atrocities against the Herreros in southern Africa and by the Americans in the Philippines.

Kitchener visited some of the Boer camps and was cheered by the inmates. 'Very weird noises,' wrote Captain Frank Maxwell, 'there is no doubt it, the Boer has an unqualified partiality for K. of K.' Young Boers were recruited for the National Scouts, to fight on the British side; by the war's end they numbered 5,464, roughly a quarter of the Boers then under arms.[26] In this 'White Man's War', Kitchener largely ignored racial assumptions and employed Africans widely, not just as wagon drivers and transporters of supplies, but also in combat roles, scouting ahead of the columns, manning the blockhouses, and most frightening to the Boers, helping to burn homesteads and rounding up cattle from farms. The Boers feared a widespread African rising and protested that their employment was 'against all civilized law of civilized nations', in Christiaan De Wet's words.[27] Boer commandos shot dead hundreds of unarmed black drivers, for example at De Wet's ambush of Broadwood's column at Sannah's Post.[28]

Kitchener's ruthless measures wore down the commandos. At Vereeniging south of Johannesburg in May, 1902 after two and three-quarter years of war he was able to negotiate peace. He offered the Boers considerable concessions, some at the expense of the black Africans' political rights, knowing that harsh terms might lead to a later Boer uprising and another war. Britain's recompense for the subsequent granting of self-government and the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 was Botha and Smuts's support in the First World War. Kitchener's success as a negotiator inspired E.T. Raymond to write in his 1928 comparison of Roberts and Kitchener: 'Kitchener had emphatically a talent for statesmanship and diplomacy, and that implies sympathy and a wide range of understanding.'[29]

War Office reformers hoped Kitchener would join Roberts at Whitehall. Instead he fulfilled his ambition to become commander-in-chief of the Indian Army. He arrived in India in late 1902 intent on Indian Army reform, encouraged in this by the ambitious Viceroy Lord Curzon. Their falling out over the abolition of the Military Member of the Viceroy's Council, his personal military adviser, has divided historians, most of Curzon's biographers taking his side. The Indian historian Gopal denies that it was a battle of principle, as Curzon claimed. It was 'a clash of seismic wills' – 'Two masterful men found that they could not function together.' Curzon was caught unawares by Kitchener's 'capacity for intrigue'.[30]

Kitchener's other reforms included completely re-arming the Indian Army with quick-firing guns, increasing ammunition stocks and numbers of transport wagons and horses and establishing. an Indian Staff College, its curriculum matching Camberley's. This made possible the sending of two infantry and two cavalry divisions to France in late 1914.[31]

Despite the clash with Curzon, Kitchener enjoyed excellent relations with the next Viceroy, Lord Minto, and his wife. That Kitchener had shed the austerity of his early life in the Sudanese

desert is shown by two entries in Mary, Lady Minto's Memoirs. At Kitchener's farewell ball at Snowdon, the commander-in-chief's residence, Lady Minto asked Kitchener if he would dance.

> He made an excuse of a damaged leg [from a riding accident] but at last said, 'All right, I'll try if you will take the risk,' so we joined the giddy throng. I shall never forget the look of amazement on the faces of his staff. Colonel Birdwood who had been with him nine years said he had never seen him dance before. [32]

Another entry describes how

> Lord Kitchener dined with the Staff at Squires Hall; they had a most rowdy evening. They all sang choruses, did acrobatic feats, which ended in bruised bodies and broken heads. The attempt to make Colonel Dunlop and Colonel Birdwood cock-fight was unsuccessful.[33]

Kitchener never married. His attraction to handsome young officers and his hobbies of flower arranging and collecting beautiful vases have brought the claim of homosexuality, although as a young officer he boasted in letters to his sister of dancing and flirting with attractive girls.[34] Frank Richard in his book *Mars without Venus* claims the hobbies were proof of his homosexuality and that he sported 'such a moustache as repressed homosexuals were said to cultivate'.[35] George Cassar argues that the most sensible conclusion is that of Magnus, that Kitchener was a natural celibate. His sexual instincts were sublimated and he found complete fulfilment in his work. He further argues that if Kitchener had been guilty of sexual misconduct his enemies would have dropped some hint of it in 1915 when they conspired so viciously to discredit him. But no such hint ever came to light.[36] Jeremy Paxman writes: 'The occasional remark from enemies that Kitchener's time in Egypt had enhanced his "taste for buggery" proves nothing.'[37]

There was one early and tragic engagement to Hermione Baker, the beautiful daughter of Valentine Baker, a cashiered British officer who commanded the Egyptian police. Hermione Baker died of typhoid aged eighteen.[38] However, in January, 1907, at a meeting with the Afghan Amir at Agra, Kitchener may have felt he had missed the perfect spouse. Amongst British guests Kitty Drummond (Lady Minto's cousin) made a deep impression on the Amir, as she was very beautiful and over six feet tall, married to General Laurence Drummond. Lady Minto takes up the story:

> Kitty has also had a great success with Lord K. who was overcome by her striking appearance, and so regrets that she can't become Lady Kitchener; he thinks they match so well in height and would have made an imposing couple. He intended to add: 'We should look so suitable' but substituted 'beautiful' which caused much laughter. The wife of a certain official who was standing near him asked who the tall lady was: 'Oh, that's Lady Kitchener,' he hastily answered, marching off to speak to Kitty. The poor lady was quite bewildered, wondering how he had contrived to conceal so conspicuous a wife, and turning to me with a puzzled look, said, 'What *does* Lord Kitchener mean?'[39]

Shortly before the outbreak of war, Osbert Sitwell saw him on leave from Egypt at ball given by the Household Cavalry at Knightsbridge Barracks. His description is in typical Sitwell fashion:

> … the colour of his face was tawny beyond sunburn, and pertained to the planet Mars. With an exceptional squareness and solidity, he sat there as if he were a god, slightly gone to seed perhaps, but waiting confidently for his earthly dominion to disclose itself…he plainly belonged to some different order of creation from those around him…. [40]

Kitchener's career via India and Egypt brings us to his appointment as War Secretary in August, 1914, facing his country's greatest challenge. The *Times* reflected the popular mood: 'We need hardly say with what profound satisfaction and relief we hear of Lord Kitchener's appointment.' He was the recipient of a fan mail akin to the adulation today given to entertainers or football stars. Photographs and souvenirs of Kitchener were soon found in homes both rich and humble, restaurants named their prize dishes after him, children wrote hoping that the great war lord would not press their ponies into service, or conversely with offers to serve as dispatch riders.[41] And soon there would be Alfred Leete's famous poster with the imperious, piercing eye and the pointing, accusatory finger.

Although he enjoyed widespread respect as a symbol of British resolution in the face of German aggression, in other ways he was not an obvious choice. He knew little about Anglo-French military discussions, was out of touch with War Office reforms, and in the cabinet proved himself incapable of clear communication, faced with two of the verbal wizards of British history, Lloyd George and Churchill. A centraliser by instinct, he tried to hold all the strings. The cabinet and the War Office were unready for total conflict on land. Everything had to be improvised. The burden of running the land war fell on his shoulders, too much for any one man. [42]

Kitchener perceived that a long struggle lay ahead and that he had to transform Britain into a military superpower. Churchill recorded his intense admiration listening in cabinet to Kitchener proclaiming prophetic truths: the war would be long, it could not be won by the traditional weapon of sea power but only after bloody battles on the European continent; Britain's contribution could not be limited to a small professional army. 'We must be prepared to put armies of millions into the field, and to maintain them for several years.' This doctrine was received, noted Churchill, 'in silent assent'.[43] Others were secretly incredulous: the war would be over long before a million men were raised.

In the cabinet Kitchener, Lloyd George and Churchill soon stood out as the men prepared for a fight to the finish. The Liberals were not suited to conduct a war. Asquith a skilled politician was not a natural war-leader. Ministers deferred to Kitchener who seemed to be the oracle of truth.

The German attack on France was held, due in part to Kitchener's hurried visit there in field marshal's uniform to put iron into Sir John French's soul and convince him not to withdraw the BEF from the battle. This action and his fluency in speaking French gave Kitchener great prestige in France. When F.E. Smith, head of the press bureau, submitted a communiqué in which the battle of the Marne was described as 'an important success', Kitchener struck that out and substituted the words, 'decisive victory'.

Smith: 'Is that correct?'

Kitchener: 'Quite. They are routed in what I think will be the decisive battle of the War.'[44]

At the War Office Kitchener set about his tasks with vigour. He settled in a natural routine, working from 9 in the morning until dusk five days a week and sometimes Saturday. For a man of sixty-four he was remarkably energetic. The arrival of his tall figure in the blue undress uniform of a field-marshal was a signal for 'Action this Day' as Churchill's was in a second war: terrified messengers, their coat-tails streaming, raced down the corridors when summoned to his office. He was unruffled in working under immense pressure and making decisions on which rested the fate of thousands. His failure was in not making use of the ablest and most intelligent senior staff officers, who longed for command and went to the front. He was poorly served by most War Office colleagues who dared not disagree with him: the CIGS Wolfe-Murray, although an intelligent man, gloried in the nickname 'Sheep'. Autocratic control suited Kitchener.[45]

The number of volunteers responding to his call was extraordinary, nearly 1.2 million by the end of 1914. During the last months of that year and most of 1915, despite his best efforts, the new divisions were an unarmed, untrained mass, with 'dug-out', Blimpish officers to train them. This reflected the insatiable demand of the Western Front for trained officers. That this raw assembly of men was in time to be turned into the mighty force that in 1918, with Canadian, Australian and expanding American divisions, defeated the most skilled and best equipped army in the world, is a tribute to their spirit and to Kitchener's vision. After his death, the *Times* said, 'The great armies that he called into being are his living monument...'

Men and munitions – two sides of a war effort. Kitchener told the Lords 'our chief difficulty is one of *materiel* rather than *personnel'.* No one had foreseen the vast quantity needed. In one battle the British Army fired almost as many rounds as expended in the entire Boer War. The Ordnance factories were not ready, explosives were loaded by hand at the Royal Arsenal, production was dependent on the German chemical industry. Gauges for fuses were imported from the United States. Kitchener used all his skill to overcome the difficulties. He worked with tact and diplomacy with the trades unions. Special trials were run to perfect a new high explosive shell. To overcome British dependence upon German chemicals, Kitchener appointed Lord Moutol, an eminent scientist and judge, to take charge of a new department. A factory in Rotterdam producing chemicals was acquired and transferred to England to supply materiel for armaments. Machineguns were ordered and Lewis guns adapted for trench use.[46]

Kitchener's efforts in production brought huge results. From December, 1914 to December, 1915, the supply of shells of all calibres grew from 871,700 to 23,663,186, a twenty-seven-fold increase; hand grenades from 2,152 to 12,202,182, a six-thousand-fold increase; small arms ammunition increased ten-fold. Machine gun production grew from 274 to 6,064 and light trench mortars 12 to 605. Although Lloyd George in his memoirs claimed obstruction from the War Office and credit for the newly established Ministry for Munitions, the latter's task initially was to distribute the results of Kitchener's contracts.[47]

With an eye to the future, Kitchener sent his former intelligence officer in South Africa David Henderson back from France to command and expand the Royal Flying Corps. This was far-sighted: air power would be a major innovation,

The scale of casualties in 1914 appalled everyone. Nearly all his old Indian Staff except Birdwood were killed. Kitchener had many friends among the admiring ladies of England's aristocracy, including Lady Desborough. Her two sons, Julian and Billy Grenfell, Kitchener's special young admirers whom he had known as boys, were both killed early in the war. Kitchener wrote an anguished letter of regret. Lady Desborough replied,

> My dear Lord K, my dear friend, you were always so good to Julian and Billy. I seem often to see them walking on each side of you when they were very young…I am writing to say that you must not grieve for us.

Kitchener, whose emotions had always been tightly controlled, revealed to those who knew him best a truly human side. 'We all wish that sometimes the trumpet would sound for us, but we have to stick it out and do our very best until the release comes…'[48]

In early 1915, the cabinet set about finding an alternative to 'chewing barbed wire on the western front', as Churchill put it. Could Britain use the mobility of sea power to attack at a point of her choosing? On the afternoon of 13 January the cabinet War Committee listened to a dramatic Churchillian announcement, that Admiral Carden of the Mediterranean Fleet thought a naval attack on the Dardanelles might succeed. Churchill convinced the Committee to approve this step. Kitchener agreed as no troops were needed.

The Dardanelles promised great rewards: drive Turkey out of the war, help Russia, convince Italy and Greece to join the Allies. The operation, however, would founder. When the great naval assault on the straits on 18 March failed with three of eighteen battleships sunk and three more disabled, the army had to take over. Churchill received the news in stunned disbelief. Both he and Kitchener felt the navy should carry on, but Asquith would not over-rule the admirals. In these circumstances Kitchener said the army would undertake the task. Churchill wrote:

> Lord Kitchener was always splendid when things went wrong. Confident, commanding, magnanimous, he made no reproaches. In a few brief sentences he assumed the burden and declared he would carry the operations through by military force.[49]

Troops had already been mustered, initially to occupy the peninsula after the navy had succeeded, but now to launch their assault. Kitchener had chosen Ian Hamilton, at sixty-two a little old for command and possibly over-promoted, but still fit and active. But surprise had been lost. The Turks were digging in. The peninsula was ideal for defence. There were allied attacks on 25 April, 6 May and 6 August. Each time success seemed tantalizingly close, but it eluded the attackers. By summer's end the cabinet, except Churchill, blamed Hamilton for failure. Churchill blamed Kitchener for not sending sufficient troops early enough; to this Kitchener replied, that there was truth in his words, but

'unfortunately we had to make war as we must, and not as we should like to.' He meant the necessity of co-operating with the French and keeping Russia in the war prevented his focusing on Gallipoli.

Kitchener came increasingly under attack from colleagues in the cabinet, particularly Lloyd George. His secretiveness, his inability to express himself in debate, and the apparent lack of success in a war which was dragging on much longer than expected (as Kitchener had warned) exacerbated cabinet tensions. In May, 1915, after the failure of the British at Aubers Ridge on the western front he was attacked in both the *Times* and the *Daily Mail* for a shortage of high explosive ammunition. The attack was inspired by Sir John French, who had told Kitchener before the battle that the ammunition would be all right; and by the press baron Lord Northcliffe whose nephew had been killed. The result of the attack showed Kitchener's immense public prestige: when the *Mail* ran the headline, 'The Shell Scandal: Lord Kitchener's Tragic Blunder', it and the *Times* (both owned by Northcliffe) were publicly burnt on the stock exchange and the brokers gave three cheers for Kitchener. The *Mail*'s circulation fell dramatically.[50]

By August Kitchener, however, could see no way to win at Gallipoli, but could not bring himself to order evacuation. His committing troops to an offensive at Loos, seeming to contradict his long-held aim of holding back the New Armies until ready, was motivated by his wish to support the French and keep Russia in the war.[51] When Loos proved a costly failure, Kitchener received part of the blame. He was unable to prevent Lloyd George persuading the Cabinet to send troops to Salonika. They did not save Serbia but remained there throughout the war, a wasting asset as Kitchener had foreseen. He could not match Lloyd George's oratory and assurance, which made it seem he was again at fault. The loss of Serbia completed his isolation from his cabinet colleagues.

Should Gallipoli be evacuated? The decision hung like an incubus over Kitchener, strained from overwork and worry. 'I pace my room at night,' he told Asquith, 'and see the boats fired at and capsizing, and the drowning men.' By the end of October, 1915, the cabinet was virtually unanimous that Kitchener ought to leave the War Office, but his hold on public opinion remained as strong as ever. Asquith took the ingenious course of sending him to the eastern Mediterranean on a fact-finding mission. Perhaps he might not return? Perhaps he could be reduced to a figurehead, shorn of his powers? Kitchener accepted with great dignity, bringing shame to his tormentor, Lloyd George, whose mistress Frances Stevenson recorded in her diary his account of Kitchener's departure, 'Not a word spoken! He might have been going out to lunch. He knew as well as anyone it was for good he was leaving, but not a sign of his countenance or demeanour gave evidence of this. D. [Lloyd George] says that he felt a lump in his throat...'[52]

When Kitchener reached the Dardanelles he was greeted by his old comrade Birdwood commanding the Anzacs: 'I can't tell you how glad I am to have you with me again, Birdie, and to be away from all those bloody politicians.' 'I always remember how he squeezed my arm and pressed it,' wrote Birdwood. 'He was normally so very undemonstrative.' Everywhere Kitchener was received with extraordinary enthusiasm, the men rising from the trenches and cheering him. He told them

repeatedly, 'You have done excellently. Better even than I expected. I am commanded by the King to tell you how splendidly he thinks you have done.'[53] On 22 November he grasped the nettle, telegraphing to Asquith that Anzac and Suvla should be evacuated and Cape Helles retained 'for the present'. For two nights he could not sleep, thinking of the men drowning or being killed. 'I have never felt so anxious, and I never felt so relieved.' [54] The two-stage evacuation was carried out with remarkable success and without loss.

He returned to London, went straight to 10 Downing Street and placed his resignation in the hands of Asquith, who refused to accept it. Asquith reminded him that he was the symbol of the nation's will to victory, that he would betray his duty to the army, to the public, and to the King, if he did not return to his post. Kitchener could not refuse.

His control over armaments production was given to Lloyd George as head of the New Ministry of Munitions. His powers over strategy were halved by the appointment of a new Chief of Imperial General Staff Sir William Robertson. The two men came to a good working relationship, although their time in harness together was short. Robertson said Kitchener was a 'fine character, lovable and straight'.[55]

Throughout 1915 Russia suffered a series of defeats, and her war effort seemed to be failing. Kitchener's great reputation and his concern for Russia made him a candidate for a Russian mission. On 13 May, 1916 the Tsar's government extended a formal invitation. A visit by the famous war lord would boost morale. The cabinet approved. For the journey to Russia, Kitchener embarked at Scapa Flow on the armoured cruiser *Hampshire* on the afternoon of 5 June. Admiral Sir John Jellicoe chose a route up the western coast of the Orkneys, confident there would be no minefield and the channel would offer lee protection from a gale. This proved mistaken. The U-75 commanded by Kurt Beitzen laid five groups of four mines two miles off the west coast of Orkney, each mine moored thirty feet below high water. Moreover, the winds had shifted, creating mountainous seas which forced escorting destroyers to return to base.

At 4.45 p.m. *Hampshire* slipped her mooring buoy and passed out of Scapa steaming west into the Pentland Firth. Her deck had been battened down. In the high seas, speed was reduced. At 7.30 p.m. *Hampshire* was rocked by a violent explosion, shaking her from stem to stern. A huge hole was torn between bows and bridge. The cruiser began settling quickly. The crew tried to launch the ship's boats, but they were smashed to matchwood by the fury of the waves. Captain Savill tried to get Kitchener on deck. 'Make a gangway for Lord Kitchener,' came the cry. Seconds later he and his secretary Colonel Fitzgerald dressed in greatcoats appeared. He was last seen alive by Leading Seaman Charles Rogerson, standing on deck with the faithful FitzGerald. 'He went down with the ship,' Rogerson recalled ten years later. 'Captain was calling to Lord K to go to a boat but Lord K apparently did not hear him or else took no notice. He had walked calmly from his cabin when the explosion occurred and waited equally calmly….'

Fifteen minutes after the mine exploded, *Hampshire* went down. Only twelve of a ship's company of 655 survived. [56]

In London there was panic and confusion when the announcement of the sinking was made at lunchtime on Tuesday, 6 June. Traffic came to a standstill and a large crowd began to form outside the War Office. The shock of Kitchener's death was so profound that years afterwards people remembered in exact detail what they were doing when it was announced. On the Western Front Lt-Gen Sir Herbert Plumer was visiting Birdwood at Anzac HQ when news of Kitchener's death arrived. Birdwood passed the wire to Plumer, neither man able to speak for emotion.[57] In Egypt and the Sudan the shock of his death was felt by both Englishmen and natives. The head Imam of the Omdurman Mosque told the legal expert Edgar Bonham-Carter, 'A great loss to England and a great loss to the Sudan.' In Egypt Ronald Storrs of the Arab Bureau overheard a grief-stricken Egyptian cry out in dismay on hearing the news: '*Al-Lurd, al-Lurd mat. Allah yir hamel!'* (The Lord is dead. May God be merciful to him.).[58]

His continued hold on the public imagination showed itself in the weird conspiracy theories about his death being brought about by an Irish, Bolshevik or German agent. Even stranger, it was said he was still alive in a cave in the Orkneys, like King Arthur or Barbarossa, waiting his country's call when most needed. To some, Kitchener had seemed a resurrected King Arthur, a chivalrous leader embodying Christian ideals. [59] The Admiralty conducted two separate investigations into the *Hampshire*'s loss, one in the aftermath of the disaster, the other ten years later. Both concluded that the ship hit a German mine.[60]

The loss of Kitchener may have deprived the allies of a priceless asset at Versailles in 1919, for he was determined that when victory came and peace was negotiated, Germany would receive generous terms, as had the Boers, thus preventing the bitterness that might lead to a second war. His great prestige would have carried weight with a British public and with the French.[61]

Is Kitchener a man whom we should continue to admire today? His life was played against the backdrop of a now-departed empire before an audience of intensely patriotic Englishmen and women who took their country's world position as ordained by God or designed by Darwinian competition. Neither of these ideas carries much weight today. If Kitchener with his 'oriental habits' and breadth of understanding had been born in 1950 instead of 1850 and lived through the iconoclastic 'sixties' and 'seventies', he might have sought a post in the United Nations or in an international company with links in many lands. Modern thinking is antipathetic to the ascetic discipline and stern Christian faith which motivated him. Nonetheless, even placing him in a vanished age, we can still see much to make him admirable: his courage, loyalty to those who served him well, understanding for people of the Middle East, rejecting contemporary racial assumptions. He endured adversity and accepted challenging commands for his country, winning both military and diplomatic success in the Sudan and in South Africa. The real Kitchener was more complex than 'the Sudan machine' or the recruiting poster.

We still honour Churchill for his leadership in 1940-1945. Although it is unlikely Britain will again confront a challenge like those of August, 1914 or September, 1939, we should likewise admire Kitchener for his stupendous work after the invasion of Belgium by a ruthless German militarism brought Britain into the Great War. The words of Field Marshal Sir William Robertson who as CIGS took much of Kitchener's strategic responsibility but worked with him for several months offer a fitting conclusion: 'the achievements and foresight of Lord Kitchener place him in a class entirely by himself; and they justify the conclusion that no man in any of the Entente countries accomplished more, if as much, to bring about the final defeat of the enemy.'[62]

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23. Dr Iain Smith 'The British Concentration Camps of the South African War, 1899-1902' talk at the Institute of Historical Research, 23rd April, 2007]. The research which Dr Smith outlined now forms the basis of a book, Elizabeth van Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps of the Anglo-Boer War: a Social History* (Johannesburg, 2013). See p. 140: 'Measles was the great killer in the camps.'
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37. Jeremy Paxman, 'The Strange Death of Lord Kitchener', *The Financial Times*, 7 November, 1914.

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