

## EDITORIAL COMMENT.

## The Toll of the Air.

As might be expected it is an onerous price that is being paid for the conquest of the air. Nevertheless up to the present our British airmen have been singularly fortunate, for until the sad happenings of the past few days the total death-roll among pilots was fifteen, exclusive of two passengers who have lost their lives, as compared with some two hundred who have sacrificed themselves on the altar of what they deemed their duty in other countries than our own. Even including the four officers of the Royal Flying Corps who have within the past week given their lives in the service of the country, the British death-roll amounts to under twenty which, without the very slightest wish to appear in the least degree callous is not an extravagant price to pay for aerial supremacy. We say this with the profoundest sympathy for those who have gone from among us and for the sorrowing relatives whom they have left to mourn their loss, but in the midst of our grief for the loss of some who were personal friends, we must not forget that it is inevitable that the price of conquest must be paid. And it is in the full knowledge of this, that the magnificent *personnel* of the Royal Flying Corps goes about its business—with this knowledge in the fullest view, indeed, that the officers who compose this *corps d'élite* volunteer to serve in it and we have at least this comfort in our sorrow for the lost lives, that the men who have sacrificed them have died as they would, as soldiers, have desired—in serving their King and country.

We fully anticipate that the two accidents which have marred the opening days of the army manoeuvres will lead to something of an outcry from the "humanitarians," and that there will be a call to have done with flying altogether. That always happens in these cases. It was so when the first crude submarine vessels were first introduced into the navies of the world and drowned their crews with depressing frequency. There is a marked analogy between the aeroplane and the submarine in the scheme of national defence. Both, to the average layman, are uncanny craft and both have had to develop through a process of trial and error. Each has had its own element to conquer and the conquest has entailed the laying down of precious lives. In the one case we have done with the sacrifice in the cause of development, because the craft has passed through the dangerous stage of its evolution and is now, save for the accidents of the sea, practically as safe as any other type of sea-going vessel. In the other case—that of the aeroplane—the position is different. It would be idle to argue that the aircraft of to-day is an absolutely safe vehicle of locomotion, but it is not, on the other hand, as dangerous as the un instructed man in the street believes it to be when he reads of the fatalities which, it must be admitted, recur with distressing frequency. It is going through the same process of evolution as the submarine of a couple of decades ago and—the fact must be faced—its development is taking the same toll of human life and, we fear, must do so until it arrives at the state of relative perfection that has been reached by the under-water craft. One thing is certain, that we cannot arrest the wheels of progress. For good or ill—we ourselves believe for good—the era of aircraft is with us now and no matter at what cost of human life its necessities must be met and grappled with in a spirit of calm and considered courage. No considerations of panic must be allowed to weigh in the formulation of our national policy in its

relation to aerial navigation. Not that we think there is any danger of their being allowed to do so as far as the authorities are concerned and it is not they to whom we appeal to regard the whole question from the standpoint of the wider interests, but to the great mass of public opinion which in these matters is too apt to be swayed by false issues.

That the *personnel* of the Army is to be relied on is assured, and Major Burke's simple remark, "We fly when it is our duty to fly," may be taken as typical of the spirit there existing.

That the right feeling prevails with the public we have never a doubt, this being strongly reflected in the riders—messages which should go down to posterity—of both the juries which have had the sad task of enquiring into the two recent calamities.

## "Britain's Handicap."

With the above as a subsidiary title, there appeared in the *Daily Mail* of last Tuesday an exceedingly well-written and excellently balanced article from the pen of Mr. Claude Grahame-White which should help considerably to bring about that understanding in the public mind of the problems and necessities of aerial defence for which we have endeavoured to plead in the article which precedes this. He takes as his text the fact that France is spending a round million sterling this year on military aeroplanes and that according to her programme she will, at the end of 1914, possess no less than 1,000 effective warplanes. He makes several very valuable points, but of them all the principal one is that above all things it is essential that we should, if we desire to keep abreast of our rivals—and that we *must* do so admits of no argument—spend much more money than we do on the training of pilots. As in our view it would be impossible to put the case better than Mr. Grahame-White himself puts it, it is worth while quoting him in his own words.

"We can buy warplanes," he says, "without difficulty, to make up our deficiency; but what we cannot buy are the expert airmen, without whom our fleet of machines would be useless.

"Of adequately trained pilots and observers we still possess only an insignificant handful. Even with the naval and military schools now in existence we shall not have produced, by the end of the year, more than about sixty skilled men. These will make a lamentably poor showing against the several hundred absolutely dependable pilots and observers whom France will possess—to say nothing of the elaborate aerial organisation which she and Germany have now built up, and of which we have scarcely a beginning.

"The problem, really, is not difficult. More money must be spent upon the training of the men who are to handle our warplanes. Grudgingly, and only when literally forced to do so, has our Treasury voted sums for aviation. The matter now rests in the hands of the ordinary, non-fighting citizen. He has only to insist, not individually, but in his millions, and the purse-strings will be opened."

Beyond all doubt this is the absolute *crux* of the position as it stands to-day. The military authorities themselves are, we feel certain, fully alive to all the necessities of the case, and they are doing all they can with the funds at their disposal. But unless the pressure of public opinion is brought to bear upon the Treasury the hands of the War Office and the Admiralty will be tied for want of money. We have had some earnest during the past ten days of the possible wastage of trained pilots that serious war would entail and that of itself has shown us how absolutely right Mr. Grahame-White is in his appeal for more trained pilots to build up a reserve equal to every contingency.