

AVIATION AND DEFENCE

There can be no doubt that M. Guillaux has succeeded in arousing the intense interest of the people of Sydney in the art of aviation. This fact does not detract from the earlier pioneering efforts of Mr. Hart, or from the exploits of Mr. Hawker, who is to compete once more in England for valuable prizes, which he narrowly missed winning a few months ago. But the intrepid Frenchman has, by his public performances during the past three weeks, convinced most of us as to both the utility and facility of the art of which he is so accomplished a master. The ease with which the machines were manipulated, the perfect control with which they were made to go through the most difficult and daring evolutions, the apparent safety with which it was possible to travel through the air, with no less risk than a journey in a motor car, or a ship—in fact, the whole of the circumstances surrounding M. Guillaux's flights, have given the public a confidence in aviation which it was not possible to acquire by merely reading about aeronautical achievements in other countries. When flying has become the pastime of leisured men at an initial cost of little more than a first-class motor car, the art has passed from the arena of experiment into that of the normal organisation of society. It would be premature to prophesy to what uses the ability to fly may not be put during the next few years. Our whole method of transit may be affected, and the organisation of commerce may be revolutionised by it. It has scientific and other potentialities, of which at the present moment we have only a glimmer. In our cable news this morning, for instance, we record the invention of an invisible aeroplane. M. Guillaux has illumined for us the vista of possibilities which lies before the art of aviation, and Australians who are anxious to keep in the van of progress in all things are grateful to him for what he has done in this direction.

There is, however, one aspect of the flights which residents of Sydney have been able to witness during the last few days which is of vital immediate importance to the Commonwealth. We refer to the bearing of aviation on the problem of defence, in both its military and naval branches. So far the Commonwealth Government has done very little in this matter, and done it both slowly and badly. The machines which were obtained are said to be out of date, and they were ordered before the very necessary precaution of providing housing accommodation for them had been taken. Moreover,

no provision for them had been taken. Moreover, the officers whose services were obtained to advise the Government on aeronautical matters, and to organise a military flying corps, were, it is understood, not consulted with regard to the type of machine and other essential matters, for which they were to be subsequently responsible. M. Guillaux's assertion that he could, by throwing a bomb from his aeroplane at a single bridge or culvert, interrupt communication between Sydney and Melbourne, and thus seriously impede mobilisation, and the free movement of troops for military purposes, can readily be credited after his demonstrations, and the same possibility has to be contemplated with even greater disquietude with regard to the connection between the southern States and the northern portions of Australia. Possibilities such as these, together with the great distances to be found in Australia, make it imperative that a strong, well-equipped flying arm should be added to our military forces. But perhaps more important in connection with defence matters than aviation work on land is the use to which the seaplane may be put as an adjunct to the fleet. Machines such as that used with much dexterity by M. Guillaux on Saturday and Sunday are being built by the British Admiralty in large numbers. It is clear, as M. Guillaux has pointed out, that with an extensive coast-line such as Australia possesses this type of machine, which can not only fly, but move along the water at a great speed, must be a most valuable, and, indeed, an indispensable aid to an efficient navy. Again the public has a right to know what the Government proposes to do in the matter. Further neglect and delay are inexcusable, and we venture to say that the Minister for Defence can appeal to the imagination and patriotism of the people in no more practical way than by showing to them that he means to take advantage of this formidable engine of warfare, with which they have now become familiar, in no uncertain fashion for the defence of their shores, the protection of their trade, and the preservation of their heritage.