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THE NAVY AND THE WAR

BY

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HON. FELLOW OF JESUS COLLEGE

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STRANGELY enough—I had almost written shamefully enough—a most unworthy note of vexation and disappointment is beginning to make itself heard in too many quarters concerning the Navy and its doings. 'What is the Navy doing,' people are asking, 'and why is it doing so little? There has been no big battle as yet, and there seems to be no prospect of one. We have been told that the primary function of the Navy is to seek out the armed forces of the enemy and destroy them. Well, if that is its business, why is it not doing it? Wherever we look abroad on the seas we see nothing but disappointment, disaster, and destruction. The Grand Fleet has disappeared from view, and makes no sign. Ship after ship goes down in the North Sea, the victim of mines or submarines. Three big cruisers go down in a batch, with a loss of hundreds of gallant lives, and we do not even know that their assailants suffered at all. The *Pegasus*, temporarily disabled, gets caught in an open anchorage at Zanzibar, and is battered to pieces by the *Königsberg*. The *Emden* sinks merchant-vessel after merchant-vessel in the Bay of Bengal, bombards the oil tanks at Madras, and then makes off unmolested to pursue her depredations elsewhere, adding more British ships to her bag a few days later. The enemy's cruisers are playing the same game in the Atlantic, and not one of them has yet been rounded up, although it is true a couple of armed merchantmen have been sunk. In the Mediterranean the *Goeben* and

Breslau have made good their escape in the very teeth of vastly superior British squadrons. Against all this we have next to nothing to set except the smart little action in the Heligoland Bight, which was forthwith heralded as a glorious victory. Of course we have captured many helpless German merchantmen, and seized some undefended or weakly defended German colonies, but there is nothing very glorious about that. Altogether, it is a sorry tale of inaction, disappointment, and frequent reverse.'

To all these crabbed and cross-grained critics I would reply, 'O ye of little faith, how little you know of the things which belong to your peace! You betray an equal ignorance of naval history and of the nature of naval warfare. Do you think that a fleet, however powerful and confident, can engage the enemy if he will not give it the opportunity? Do you think that any nation can ever go to war without suffering occasional disappointments and partial reverses? Do you not know that in the Great Revolutionary War, which began in 1793, it was more than a year before the first fleet action was fought by Lord Howe on "the glorious first of June", 1794? Do you forget that throughout that war, both before Trafalgar and after, British merchant-vessels were captured by the French by hundreds every year, scores of them being snapped up even in the Channel day by day, to the very end of the war? Do you not know that the Seven Years' War, the most successful that England ever fought, began with the loss of Minorca and the trial and death of Byng? The Navy has done nothing, forsooth! Why, it has done everything, literally everything; for without it nothing could have been done that has been done.'

To the student of naval history and of naval warfare all this is self-evident, and the only wonder is that any one should question it. To question it is to betray an ignorance so abysmal and a lack of insight so astounding, that one hardly knows how to begin to correct the ignorance and enlighten the darkened understanding of the questioner. Still I will make the attempt, and try to teach the alphabet of naval warfare to such of these cavillers as my pen can reach. It is true, of course, that the primary object of naval warfare, as indeed of all warfare, is to seek out the armed forces of the enemy and destroy them. On land this can always be done, or at least attempted. You have only to march your armies across the frontier and fight your enemy wherever you find him. If you fail to do this, he will assuredly march his armies across the frontier and fight you wherever he can find you. Battle after battle may succeed with varying fortune from time to time, the war may last for weeks or months or years, but sooner or later one side or the other will succeed, and the armed forces of the vanquished will be either subdued or destroyed. All this is because the armed forces of a belligerent on land cannot be withdrawn from the conflict. If they are, the game is up, for an army which will not fight cannot win. It may withdraw into a fortress, but no fortress is impregnable, and even if it is, it can be invested, and the army that it shelters can then be starved into submission. I shall perhaps be reminded of the lines of Torres Vedras, within which Wellington withdrew when he could not keep the field in Portugal, and which he held against all the assaults of the enemy. But the lines of Torres Vedras were never invested by the French, and never could be. They were always open to

the sea, over which food, reinforcements, and supplies could at all times be obtained without stint, for the sole and simple reason that the British fleet held the lines of communication across the seas in such strength that it was impossible for such naval forces as remained to France after Trafalgar to interrupt them. But Wellington could never have driven the French out of the Peninsula by holding on indefinitely to the lines of Torres Vedras. His action is no exception to the rule that the armed forces of one belligerent on land cannot be permanently withdrawn from the attack of the other without giving up the game, and sooner or later acknowledging defeat.

This rule, however, does not apply at sea, or, at least, it does not apply in anything like the same measure or degree. It is one of the essential characteristics of naval warfare that the capital ships of one belligerent —that is, his main offensive force—can always be withdrawn from the attack of the other. They have only to remain in one or more of their own ports, provided that such ports are so heavily fortified that they cannot be reduced from the sea alone. The case is here the reverse of the lines of Torres Vedras. Wellington was safe within those lines, because the enemy was never strong enough to assault them, and could not invest them so long as the sea was open. In like manner, but with the conditions reversed as regards sea and land, a hostile fleet in a fortified port is safe so long as the land communications of the port are open. Such a port cannot be assaulted from the sea, nor can it be invested on land by naval forces alone. That is why in the Crimean War we sent an army as well as a fleet to reduce Sebastopol, and why inasmuch as we did not send an army to the Baltic, we could not reduce

Kronstadt, and never attempted to assault it. I am old enough to remember the national impatience and even indignation at what was regarded as the inactivity, not to call it impotence, of the great fleet we sent to the Baltic ; and I am inclined to think that those who sent it there had during the long years of peace so lost touch with the realities of naval warfare, that they more than half expected that the fleet would be able to reduce Kronstadt. They were soon undeceived. Kronstadt was never assailed; and although the fleets sent to the Black Sea did attack the seaward forts of Sebastopol, they cut a very sorry figure there. Very little harm was done to the forts, and a great deal of harm was done to the ships.

It is indeed a common delusion among landsmen who have never studied 'the sea affair'—and there seem to be very few that ever have—that ships are intended and suited for the attack of forts. It is about the worst use that ships can be put to. Ships are intended to fight at sea. To set them to fight against forts armed with ordnance equal to their own, is to court defeat and to risk disaster. In the great wars of the eighteenth century we blockaded the ports in which the enemy's fleets lay—Nelson was nearly two years before Toulon, and Cornwallis was more than two years before Brest—but we never attempted to reduce them from the sea. Let Brest and Toulon, let Kronstadt and Sebastopol prove that all such attempts are vain. Alexandria is only an exception that proves the rule. Had the British fleet been required to fight an action at sea the day after its rather inglorious success at Alexandria, it would have been wofully short of ammunition, and yet the Egyptian gunnery was none of the best.

It follows that the Grand Fleet and its gallant Commander-in-Chief are open to no reproach whatever for not having brought the German fleet to an action. You cannot bring an enemy to action if he will not take the sea, nor are there any means at present available by which he can be made to take the sea. But I suppose some people will grumble, as they always have grumbled, at such a situation as this. At the very time when Hawke, after long weeks of weary waiting and watching, was at last shattering the fleet of Conflans in Quiberon Bay, he was being burnt in effigy in England for allowing the enemy to escape—'an outburst of popular anger', says Mr. David Hannay, bitterly enough, 'which gives the exact value of the most sweet voices of the mob'. Let us remember Hawke, and we shall not fail to do justice to Sir John Jellicoe.

Nor must we assume, since it is neither wise nor becoming to despise an enemy, that the German fleet is keeping its harbours, or at any rate avoiding the North Sea, out of poltroonery and not out of policy. For my part, I am convinced that it is acting out of policy, and I think further that its policy is a sound one, based on a clear-sighted appreciation of the whole strategic situation. Germany is conducting a war on two fronts, and a war in which the naval and military factors are very intimately associated—an amphibious war in fact. The naval forces of Russia in the Baltic are by no means negligible. They stand towards the German fleet very much in the same relation that the German fleet stands towards the British Grand Fleet in the North Sea—that is as a 'fleet in being' temporarily withdrawn into the unassailable shelter of its ports, but ready to take the offensive at once if Germany were to withdraw

her naval forces from the Baltic and place them in her North Sea ports, with intent to take the sea at her own time, and try conclusions with the British Grand Fleet in the open. In that case the whole of the Baltic coasts of Germany would be open to the landing of Russian troops in such force as might seriously affect the fortunes of the German arms on the eastern front of the war. Hence, so long as the Russian Baltic ports are free from ice—that is until towards the end of the year so far as Kronstadt is concerned, while Libau, which possesses a naval station, is practically free from ice all the winter—the German fleet, compelled to face the enemy on two fronts, is not likely to be able to appear in the North Sea with the whole of its capital ships. Even if it did, we need have no fear of the result. Sir John Jellicoe may say with Nelson, 'Every opportunity has been given to the enemy to put to sea, for it is there that we hope to realize the hopes and expectations of our country.' Those hopes and expectations would be all the higher, and would rise to nothing short of certainty, if the German fleet were to put to sea with less than its whole available force of capital ships.

Moreover, the situation thus established does not by any means reduce the German fleet to an ignoble impotence. That we know to our cost. The *Amphion*, the *Speedy*, the *Pathfinder*, the *Cressy*, the *Hogue*, the *Aboukir*, and the *Hawke* are the melancholy proofs. But these losses, deplorable as they are, are not to be taken too seriously. They are, so to speak, all in the day's work. We are engaged in the hazardous enterprise of war, and we must take the risks with equanimity, and bear the losses with fortitude. Our initial superiority to the enemy in all the elements of naval force is sub-

stantially unimpaired by such losses as we have sustained —they are not without some compensation in the losses we have inflicted on the enemy, and we are not going to take blows without returning them—nor would it be perilously reduced if our losses were twice as many, and even included a battleship or two. It is quite on the cards that such things may happen, and we must not be downhearted if they do. We shall give as good as we get in the long run, and when the day comes at last for the final decision, we shall still have enough and to spare, for when the enemy does come out, our torpedo craft will assuredly not be idle.

Meanwhile the situation approximates to what was known in former times as a blockade. The object of such a blockade was not so much to keep the enemy in—on the contrary, the blockader always hoped that he would come out and fight, and gave him every opportunity of doing so, as Nelson said—as to take care that if and when he did come out he should be observed, shadowed, and, as soon as might be, brought to action by the blockading fleet. For this purpose the blockading fleet was kept cruising as close to the blockaded port as was practicable, and a still closer watch was kept on the port by means of an inshore squadron of cruisers and small craft. A close blockade of this kind is no longer possible as far as the main fleet is concerned, owing to the development of the torpedo and of the vessels specially constructed for its offensive employment, especially submarines. It is true that a close watch on the enemy's ports can still be kept by means of torpedo craft and light cruisers, but however close this watch may be, it will always be possible, in certain conditions of weather and sea,

for some torpedo craft of the enemy, especially submarines, to elude the vigilance of the watchers and get clear away to sea. This contingent but never-ceasing menace is so serious—since a torpedo craft, when it gets its chance, is able to put even a battleship out of action—that it is expedient for the battle squadrons of the blockader to be far withdrawn from the observation and attack of such of the enemy's torpedo craft as manage to get to sea. That is why we hear little and see less of the battle squadrons of the Grand Fleet. We shall hear of them soon enough when the enemy's capital ships are at sea ; but so long as the latter remain in harbour, the less we hear of them the better. It is essential that their whereabouts should be unknown. Last year, in a little manual on *Naval Warfare*, I tried to forecast the probable course and character of a blockade or quasi-blockade of the kind indicated above, and I will quote that forecast here, because it seems to me to expound the true philosophy of the present situation.

'Thus, in the conditions established by the advent of the torpedo and its characteristic craft, there would seem to be only two alternatives open to a fleet of battleships engaged in blockade operations. Either it must be stationed in some sheltered anchorage outside the radius of action of the enemy's surface torpedo craft, and if within that radius adequately defended against torpedo attack—as Togo established a flying base for the use of his fleet, first at the Elliot Islands and afterwards at Dalny, for the purpose of blockading Port Arthur ; or it must cruise in the open outside the same limits, keeping in touch with its advanced cruisers and flotillas by means of wireless telegraphy, and thereby dispensing with anything like a fixed rendezvous. It is

not, perhaps, imperative that it should always cruise entirely outside the prescribed radius, because experience in modern naval manœuvres has frequently shown that it is a very difficult thing for torpedo craft, moving at random, to discover a fleet which is constantly shifting its position at high speed, especially when they are at any moment liable to attack from cruisers and torpedo craft of the other side.

'Thus a modern blockade will, so far as battle fleets are concerned, be of necessity rather a watching blockade than a masking or sealing-up blockade. If the two belligerents are unequal in naval strength it will probably take some such form as the following. The weaker belligerent will at the outset keep his battle fleet in his fortified ports. The stronger may do the same, but he will be under no such paramount inducement to do so. Both sides will, however, send out their torpedo craft and supporting cruisers with intent to do as much harm as they can to the armed forces of the enemy. If one belligerent can get his torpedo craft to sea before the enemy is ready, he will, if he is the stronger of the two, forthwith attempt to establish as close and sustained a watch of the ports of his adversary sheltering the enemy's armed forces as may be practicable; if he is the weaker, he will attempt sporadic attacks on the ports of his adversary and on such of his warships as may be found in the open. . . . Such attacks may be very effective, and may even go so far to redress the balance of naval strength as to encourage the originally weaker belligerent to seek a decision in the open. But the forces of the stronger belligerent must be very badly handled and disposed for anything of the kind to take place. The advantage of superior force is a tremendous one. If it is associated with energy, determination,

initiative, and skill of disposition no more than equal to those of the assailant, it is overwhelming. The sea-keeping capacity, or what has been called the enduring mobility, of torpedo craft, is comparatively small. Their coal-supply is limited, especially when they are steaming at full speed, and they carry no very large reserve of torpedoes. They must, therefore, very frequently return to a base to replenish their supplies. The superior enemy is, it is true, subject to the same disabilities, but being superior he has more torpedo craft to spare and more cruisers to attack the torpedo craft of the enemy and their own escort of cruisers. When the raiding torpedo craft return to their base he will make it very difficult for them to get in and just as difficult for them to get out again. He will suffer losses, of course, for there is no superiority of force that will confer immunity in that respect in war. But even between equal forces, equally well led and handled, there is no reason to suppose that the losses of one side will be more than equal to those of the other ; whereas if one side is appreciably superior to the other it is reasonable to suppose that it will inflict greater losses on the enemy than it suffers itself, while even if the losses are equal the residue of the stronger force will still be greater than that of the weaker.'

It will be objected, perhaps, that in all this I have taken little or no account of the submarine and its special menace. But the submarine, after all, is only a particular kind of torpedo craft—a very formidable kind, no doubt, but still a torpedo craft. Such guns as it can carry are almost as useless against the big ships—which are its special prey—as peashooters would be, and it cannot fire them without coming to the surface, when it becomes the most vulnerable of all

vessels that fight above water. It has, however, certain notable advantages over the surface torpedo craft. The latter can attack bigger ships only at night with any real prospect of success. If it is caught in the open in daylight, in waters occupied by superior hostile forces of any kinds, including its own, its only safety lies in flight. In these circumstances, its rate of fuel-consumption is very high indeed, and its effective range of offensive action is thereby very greatly reduced. That is perhaps why we have not so far heard much of the doings of the German torpedo craft in the North Sea during the present war. The submarine, on the other hand, is not subject to this limitation, though it has special limitations of its own. Its speed is much less than that of the surface torpedo craft; but it can keep the sea night and day within the limit of its fuel endurance—which in modern submarines may perhaps be put at 2,000 miles or more—and in the daytime it can sink beneath the surface whenever it is threatened with attack. It can also approach an enemy in the same submerged condition, and its advance in that condition to within striking distance is by no means easy to detect. On the other hand, when submerged, its range of vision is exceedingly limited—it is altogether blind when its periscope is submerged—and inasmuch as the majority of submarines fire their torpedoes only from the bows, they can only fire when their bows are bearing on the vessel attacked. Thus their best target is a stationary ship, and it is one that can hardly be missed if the submarine is well handled and remains long enough undetected. A rapidly moving ship is much more difficult to hit, just as every sportsman knows that a flying bird is much more difficult to hit than a sitting one. These conditions indicate the best

mode of defence against submarine attack. It is to keep moving at high speed, to ram the submarine if it is detected in time, or, if that is not practicable, to steam away from it, while frequently changing course. This is always practicable, because the speed of a submerged submarine rarely exceeds twelve knots, and very seldom attains it. Even if the submarine is not detected, though its presence may be suspected, the best defence against it is high speed and frequent changes of course.

We are now in a position to understand how and why it was that the *Aboukir*, the *Cressy*, and the *Hogue* all fell victims to a single attack of the enemy's submarines, and understanding this, we shall, I think, entertain a reasonable confidence that no such disaster is likely to befall us again. I do not mean that henceforth we have nothing to fear from German submarines. On the contrary, we have just as much to fear as ever, and the enemy has just as much to fear from our submarines, whenever he quits the shelter of his ports. But never again will our ships do what the *Hogue* and the *Cressy* did—nobly, but in vain. On this point I have nothing of my own to add to the impressive statement—all the more impressive because it is so admirably restrained in tone—which was issued by the Admiralty a few days after the disaster :

'The sinking of the *Aboukir* was of course an ordinary hazard of patrolling duty. The *Hogue* and *Cressy*, however, were sunk because they proceeded to the assistance of their consort and remained with engines stopped endeavouring to save life, thus presenting an easy and certain target to further submarine attacks. The natural promptings of humanity have in this case led to heavy losses which would have been avoided by a strict adher-

ence to military considerations. Modern naval war is presenting us with so many new and strange situations that an error of judgement of this character is pardonable. But it has been necessary to point out for the future guidance of His Majesty's ships, that the conditions which prevail when one vessel of a squadron is injured in a minefield or is exposed to submarine attack, are analogous to those which occur in an action, and that the rule of leaving disabled ships to their own resources is applicable so far at any rate as large vessels are concerned. No act of humanity, whether to friend or foe, should lead to a neglect of the proper precautions and dispositions of war, and no measures can be taken to save life which prejudice the military situation. Small craft of all kinds should, however, be directed by wireless to close on the damaged ship with all speed.

'The loss of nearly 60 officers and 1,400 men would not have been grudged if it had been brought about by gunfire in an open action, but it is peculiarly distressing under the conditions which prevailed. The absence of any of the ardour and excitement of an engagement did not, however, prevent the display of discipline, cheerful courage, and ready self-sacrifice among all ranks and ratings exposed to the ordeal.

'The duty on which these vessels were engaged was an essential part of the arrangements by which the control of the seas and the safety of the country are maintained, and the lives lost are as usefully, as necessarily, and as gloriously devoted to the requirements of His Majesty's service as if the loss had been incurred in a general action. In view of the certainty of a proportion of misfortunes of this character occurring from time to time, it is important that this point of view should be thoroughly appreciated.

'The loss of these three cruisers, apart from the loss of life, is of small naval significance. Although they were large and powerful ships, they belonged to a class of cruisers whose speeds have been surpassed by many of the enemy's battleships. Before the war it had been decided that no more money should be spent in repairing any more of this class, and that they should make their way to the sale list as soon as serious defects became manifest.'

I shall waste very few words over the fugitive depredations of the German cruisers at large in the outer seas, because when all told they amount to nothing more than a few vexatious pin-pricks. Why should I enumerate all the ships which the *Emden* has captured or sunk? They hardly amount, I think, to a baker's dozen as yet, and the *Emden* must by this time be nearing the end of her tether. Her speed must decrease as her hull grows foul, and when she needs coal she will only obtain it at ever-increasing risk. Two of her supply ships are gone. The total number of these cruisers as well as of such armed merchant-vessels as have not already been disposed of is well known to the Admiralty, and we may be quite sure that adequate measures are being taken to hunt them down and that, as the Prime Minister said at the Guildhall, they will very soon be disposed of. Of course 'very soon' is a relative term. It does not mean 'forthwith'. Regard must be had to conditions of time and space. The seas are wide and they take a great deal of sweeping to clear them of marauders few in number and cunning in evasion. But evasion cannot last for ever. The end is certain and probably not far distant. The worst that these cruisers can do is really very little. In spite of all their depredations war insurance remains low and steady, and the daily lists of sailings from British ports for all parts of

the world show how little our maritime commerce is really affected. We have driven the German flag from the seas at the cost of not a score of British merchant-ships captured by the enemy.

Nor shall I shed many tears over the escape of the *Goeben* and the *Breslau*, nor even, except for the loss of life, over the destruction of the *Pegasus* by the *Königsberg*. We know too little about either of these incidents to form a definite judgement about them. The former is the subject of inquiry by the Admiralty, and the latter will no doubt be fully investigated in due course. I have known too many instances in manœuvres of ships eluding the pursuit of their adversaries, and even escaping the latter's observation altogether on a dark night, to be greatly surprised or disturbed at anything of this kind that may happen in war. Or again, it may be that the *Goeben* and the *Breslau* were too fast for their pursuers. If that should prove to be the case, it may perhaps induce some naval critics to revise their views as to the value of speed in warships. Some high authorities have held that speed is only useful if you want to run away; but the proposition, if otherwise sound, seems to overlook the consideration that however useful speed may be in flight it must perforce be still more useful in pursuit. As to the *Pegasus*, many questions might be asked and must be asked before we can form any judgement, favourable or unfavourable, as to the circumstances in which she was destroyed. But I prefer to wait until we know the facts before asking a single question which might seem to impute any lack of judgement to her gallant commander.

I have now examined one by one the several counts in the preposterous indictment which I formulated from the mouths of the critics and grumblers at the beginning

of this pamphlet, and I think I have shown how preposterous they all are, ill founded for the most part and absurdly exaggerated even where there is any foundation for them. But there is a more general answer to this dolorous Jeremiad, and this I have reserved to the last. It consists in examining not what the Navy has not done, but what it has done, what it is doing, and what it will assuredly continue to do until 'the day' comes, if it ever does come, when by the blessing of Providence and the skill of a good admiral it will do all that is expected of it. Stated in this form my general answer will, I think, be found to be conclusive and overwhelming. It is quite true that the primary function of a navy is to seek out and destroy the armed forces of the enemy. By that means and by that means only will 'the command of the sea', as it is called, be finally secured. But the supreme function in question can only be fully discharged if the enemy is prepared, or can be forced, to come forth and destroy or be destroyed as the fortune of war may determine. If the enemy will not come out and cannot be forced out, then so far he leaves the command of the sea to his adversary. But it is only a *de facto* command and can never be made an absolute command of the sea until the armed forces of the enemy have been either destroyed or otherwise subdued. But a *de facto* command of the sea serves all the purposes of naval warfare so long as it is unchallenged. It is only the fact that it may be challenged at any moment that differentiates it from an absolute command. The phrase 'command of the sea' is a time-honoured one, but it is not free from ambiguity and it is often used very loosely in common parlance. Properly used, it signifies control of maritime communications. The sea is the common highway of all nations and, what

is more, it is all highway. No nation, even in time of war, seeks to reduce it into sovereignty. A nation at war merely seeks to secure freedom of transit for ships carrying its own flag and to deny such freedom to ships bearing the enemy's flag. When that is done all is done that naval warfare as such can do. If territorial conquest or occupation by naval agency is aimed at, then the Navy must carry the Army on its back until the shores of the territory to be occupied are reached. But the Army must do the rest, except in cases where naval co-operation is practicable. 'I consider', said the late Sir Geoffrey Hornby, one of the highest of modern naval authorities, 'that I have command of the sea when I am able to tell my Government that they can move an expedition to any point without fear of interference from an enemy's fleet.' This represents what may be called the military aspect of command of the sea as defined above. But there is also the mercantile aspect, and this for a maritime Power like England is immeasurably more important. We might not need to send an expeditionary force across the seas, but we must, as a matter of life and death, keep the seas open for that oversea commerce which is our life-blood. This aspect of the matter and the vital connexion between the two is best set forth in the words of another unimpeachable authority, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur Wilson, sometime First Sea Lord of the Admiralty. In that capacity this great master of naval strategy wrote as follows in a Memorandum which he prepared for the use of the Government in 1910. 'The really serious danger that this country has to guard against in war is not invasion but interruption of our trade and destruction of our merchant shipping. The strength of our Fleet is determined by what is necessary to protect our trade, and

if it is sufficient for that, it will almost necessarily be sufficient to prevent invasion, since the same disposition of ships to a great extent answers both purposes.'

Invasion is now hardly in question, and if it were, we should be quite ready for it so long as our *de facto* command of the sea is unchallenged. A raid might indeed be attempted, but it need not greatly alarm us. If it were not stopped at sea, as it almost certainly would be, it would very soon be swallowed up on shore. For the rest I cannot tell the story of what the command of the sea—established from the very outset and operating continuously in both the spheres of naval activity defined by the two great admirals quoted above—has done for us better than it has already been told at an earlier stage of the war in the *History of the War* now being published by *The Times*. From the second part of that valuable and interesting publication I have obtained permission to quote the following passage :

'From the moment when war became imminent the main British Fleet melted into space. Nothing was seen of any part of it, except of the flotillas patrolling our coasts. Nevertheless, although it was invisible, there was never in the world's history a more sudden, overwhelming, and all-pervading manifestation of the power of the sea than that given by the British Fleet, admirably seconded by that of France, in the first fortnight of the war. The rarity of properly called naval incidents might have left a different impression. It might well have seemed that the Fleets of France and England had done nothing. As a matter of fact, they had done all in their power, and that all was stupendous. Those weeks saw German maritime commerce paralysed ; British maritime commerce fast returning to normal conditions in all the outer seas of the world, and not even wholly

suspended in the area of immediate conflict. Nay, more, it was already seeking new realms to conquer—realms left derelict by the collapse of the maritime commerce of the enemy. That is, in a few words, the long and the short of it. Prize Court notices of German and Austrian merchantmen captured on the seas or seized in our ports appeared daily in increasing numbers in *The Times*. Side by side with them appeared the familiar notices of the regular sailings of our liners for nearly all the ports of the outer seas. *The Times* published daily accounts of the new avenues of trade, manufacture, and transport opened up by the collapse of our enemies' commerce, and of the energy and enterprise with which our merchants, manufacturers, and sea-carriers were preparing to exploit them. How it stood with Germany on the other hand we have unimpeachable German authority to show. On August 20 *The Times* published the following extract from the *Vorwärts*, the German Socialist organ :

'If the British blockade took place imports into Germany of roughly six thousand million marks (£300,000,000) and exports of about eight thousand million marks (£400,000,000) would be interrupted—together with an oversea trade of 14 milliards of marks (£700,000,000). This is assuming that Germany's trade relations with Austria-Hungary, Switzerland, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden remained entirely uninfluenced by the war—an assumption the optimism of which is self-evident. A glance at the figures of the imports shows the frightful seriousness of the situation. What is the position, for example, of the German textile industry if it must forgo the imports of oversea cotton, jute, and wool ? If it must forgo the 462 millions (£23,100,000) of cotton from the United States, the 73 millions (£3,650,000) of cotton from Egypt, the 58 millions (£2,900,000) of cotton from British India, the 100 millions (£5,000,000) of jute from the same countries, and further the 121 millions (£6,050,000) of merino wool from Australia, and the 23 millions (£1,150,000) of the same material from the Argentine ? What could she do in the event of a war of longer duration without

these raw materials which in one year amount in value to 830 millions (£41,500,000) ?

'It may also be mentioned,' said the *Vorwärts*, 'that Germany received in 1913 alone from the United States about 300 millions (£15,000,000) of copper, and further that the petroleum import would be as good as completely shut down. The German leather industry is largely dependent on imports of hides from oversea. The Argentine alone sent 71 millions (£3,550,000) worth of hides. Agriculture would be sensibly injured by the interruption of the exports of Chilean saltpetre from Chile, which in 1913 were of the value of not less than 131 millions (£6,550,000). The significance of an effective blockade of German foodstuffs is to be seen in the following few figures: The value in marks of wheat from the United States is 165 millions (£8,250,000), from Russia 81 millions (£4,050,000), from Canada 51 millions (£2,550,000), from the Argentine 75 millions (£3,750,000)—372 millions (£18,600,000) from these four countries. There will also be a discontinuance of the importation from Russia of the following foodstuffs: Eggs worth 80 millions (£4,000,000), milk and butter 63 millions (£3,150,000), hay 32 millions (£1,600,000), lard from the United States worth 112 millions (£5,600,000), rice from British India worth 46 millions (£2,300,000), and coffee from Brazil worth 151 millions (£7,550,000) should be added to the foregoing. No one who contemplates without prejudice,' said the *Vorwärts*, 'these few facts, to which many others could be added, will be able lightly to estimate the economic consequences of a war of long duration.'

'If the British blockade took place,' said the *Vorwärts*, and it dwelt on the consequences of a war of long duration. The British blockade was actually taking place at the moment these words were written, though it was not called by that name for reasons which need not here be examined. Acting together with the hostility of Russia, which closed the whole of the Russian frontier of Germany to the transit of merchandise either way, the control of sea communications established by the fleets of England and France had already secured the first-fruits of those consequences of a war of long duration on which the *Vorwärts* dwelt with such pathetic significance. Those consequences were bound to be

continuous and cumulative so long as the control of sea communications remained unrelaxed. The menace of the few German cruisers which were still at large was already abated. Already its bite had been found to be far less formidable than its bark. War premiums on British ships at sea were falling fast. German maritime commerce was uninsurable, and in fact there was none to insure. Its remains were stranded and derelict in many a neutral port. One of the greatest dangers, in the opinion of some eminent authorities the most serious danger, that this country had to guard against in war was already averted, and would remain so as long as the control England had established over her sea communications continued to be effective. This was the first result of our naval preparations, the first great manifestation of sea power.

'But there was a second result far more dramatic than the first, and not less significant in its implications, nor in its concrete manifestation of the overwhelming power of the sea. The whole of the Expeditionary Force, with all its manifold equipment for taking and keeping the field, had been silently, secretly, swiftly, and safely transported to the Continent without the loss of a single man, and without the slightest show of opposition from the Power which thought itself strong enough to challenge the unaggressive mistress of the seas. 'Germany,' says the Preamble to the Navy Law of 1900, 'must possess a battle fleet of such strength that even for the most powerful naval adversary a war would involve such risks as to make that Power's own supremacy doubtful.' Such a war had now been forced upon England, and one of its first accomplished results had been the entirely successful completion of an operation which, if the enemy had deemed our naval supremacy even so much as

doubtful, he might have been expected to put forth his uttermost efforts to impeach. That Germany declined the challenge was a proof even more striking of the power of superior force at sea than the action of the British Navy upon the trade routes of the world.'

This was published on September 1, and was no doubt written some days earlier. Although the outlying German cruisers have not yet been accounted for, and although the depredations of the *Emden* have sorely tried the nerves of the critics and the grumblers, yet if a similar survey of the situation were to be made again to-day, it would have to be still more encouraging and even astounding in spite of the deplorable loss of the three *Cressys*.

We know now not only that our Expeditionary Force crossed the seas in absolute safety, but that a continuous stream of reinforcements and supplies has reached them from day to day without the slightest interruption. We know that a command of the sea simultaneously established by the Allied Fleets in the Mediterranean not only has enabled the French troops in Africa to be transported in equal safety to the seat of war, but has also secured a like immunity for our own contingents coming from India. Think what all this means. Think of the transcendent advantage Germany might have gained had she felt herself strong enough to assail and compromise our command of the sea while our Expeditionary Force was in transit. It would have been a desperate enterprise no doubt, but still it was an opportunity never likely to recur. The British Fleet would have troubled her no more, for she must have defeated and shattered it before she could have got at the Expeditionary Force at all. If she could not face it then, when it was engaged and

in some measure preoccupied in the paramount task of safeguarding the Expeditionary Force from molestation in transit, will she ever dare to face it at all? Anyhow, if our command of the sea could have been overthrown at that juncture, the Expeditionary Force must have been destroyed in its turn, and sooner or later our maritime commerce must have shared its fate. The fortunes of war in Belgium and France, bad enough as they were at the outset, must have been gravely worsened in proportion to the strength and valour of the English contingent, and Germany by a single coup might perhaps have grasped the coveted sceptre of a world-wide dominion.

All this and much more the Allied Fleets have done, and yet there are smatterers and grumblers who insist that our own fleet has done nothing, except lose a few cruisers, and allow a few German cruisers to capture less than a score of British merchant-vessels in the outer seas. Away with such craven, vain, impatient, and ignorant imaginings! Let us lift our eyes above these really trivial happenings and survey the whole situation from the height of its true significance. Above all let all our sympathies and all our confidence go to the British fleets, squadrons, and flotillas which are keeping watch and ward on the seas in circumstances as trying as seamen have ever had to encounter and surmount. It may indeed be the deliberate policy of Germany to take full advantage of these trying circumstances in the hope of wearing our seamen down by the acute and almost agonizing tension of a prolonged period of suspense and comparative inactivity, combined with a vigilance never for a moment to be relaxed. Let no one underrate the force of this psychological calculation. No one will underrate it who has ever witnessed,

as I have, the effects of a similar tension, albeit infinitely less acute, during the mimic warfare of naval manœuvres. But the psychological calculation, astute though it be, is not irrefragable. It has its counterpoise for the harbour-sheltered fleet in the divorce of the latter from the real business of the sea—in the dull monotonous round of routine duties listlessly carried on, because they have none of the actuality even of peace-exercises at sea, and none of the uplifting of the spirit which the confident hope of conflict with the enemy engenders and sustains. The story of the old wars tells us that the sea-nurtured fleet was always in better fettle for fighting than the harbour-sheltered fleet, and though many things have changed since Nelson and his comrades bore the strain and weathered it—bore it and weathered it for months and even years at a stretch—there is no reason to think that the children of Nelson will prove less stout in endurance than their sires. The strain is undoubtedly far more intense in these days, but it is certain to be far less prolonged. Meanwhile, the British seaman's strength lies in the consciousness of his hold on the sea, and the conviction that its mastery is his.

This, then, is the proper point of view from which to regard the doings of the Allied Fleets during the present war. Μέγα γὰρ τὸ τῆς θαλάσσης κράτος, as Pericles told the Athenians. Great is the power of the sea. Nor has the moral of this pregnant saying ever been better pointed than by Admiral Mahan, many years ago, in those memorable words, which might well seem to have been written to suit the present occasion: 'They were dull, weary, eventless months, those months of waiting and watching of the big ships before the French arsenals. Purposeless they surely seemed to many, but they saved England. The world

has never seen a more impressive demonstration of the influence of sea power upon its history. Those far-distant, storm-beaten ships upon which the Grand Army never looked, stood between it and the dominion of the world.' The quotation is almost hackneyed now, but it is never stale, least of all at the present juncture.

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