

STRENGTH OF THE FLEET

BATTLESHIPS AND ARMOURD CRUISERS.

(By Our Naval Correspondent.)

This year the British Fleet is at its maximum strength. We are reaping the advantage of the active constructive policy of the Boards of Admiralty presided over by Lord Selborne and Lord Cawdor, and of the large sums which the House of Commons provided year after year with hardly a murmur of disapproval, either within St. Stephen's or from the public. Indeed, Lord Selborne was frequently reproached for not spending more money on the Fleet, but he refused to go beyond the demands of the experts. Lord Cawdor was similarly attacked for the moderation of his shipbuilding programmes in face of foreign shipbuilding; but he, again, would not be driven from the proposals deliberately adopted on the advice of the Sea Lords after full consideration of the future requirements of the Fleet. It is now evident that the official view was sound; we always followed, and never led, in the rivalry of armaments, and we obtained better-gunned and swifter ships than rivals.

The Navy was particularly weak in large armoured ships when Lord Selborne went to the Admiralty, because we had built a number with unarmoured ends. This design had been shown to be faulty, and consequently for some years past attention has been devoted to the construction of battleships and very powerful armoured cruisers. It has been said that this year the British Fleet is at its maximum strength. This is directly due to the Dreadnought. When she appeared on the stocks, nearly three years ago, the building of armoured ships abroad ceased for a whole year, while we continued busily at work. Foreign construction received a set-back; we pursued our course, while rivals remained idle, planning ships on the new all-big-gun principle. The outcome of this is that in modern battleships and in armoured cruisers we have a lead at this moment, and are well up in the two-power standard, as this graphic diagram shows:—

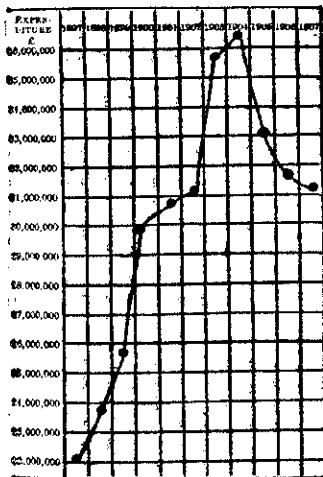
twelve annually—the British Admiralty cannot hold its hand.

At the same time, the improvements in the social conditions of the men of the Fleet, and higher pay, and the necessary augmentation in the number of the most skilled ratings, most lead to an increase in the naval votes, other than those concerned with material. An upward tendency in naval expenditure once more is unavoidable. The taxpayer, in anticipating the future, has reason for gratification in the fact that for years past the line of expenditure has been downward, as indicated below:—

The thick line indicates, approximately, the total tonnage of the battleships (less than twenty years old) in the several fleets, and the thin line the aggregate tonnage of the modern armoured cruisers. The complete figures of the navies on January 1 last, showing ships completed and at sea, of less age than twenty years, are as follows:—

	Battle-ships.		Armoured Cruisers.	
	No.	Tons.	No.	Tons.
England	52	772,200	23	385,000
United States	25	358,200	11	131,700
Germany	22	261,600	8	80,000
France	21	233,200	19	167,000
Japan	13	184,100	11	111,000
Russia	9	107,700	4	50,500
Italy	7	79,000	5	40,000

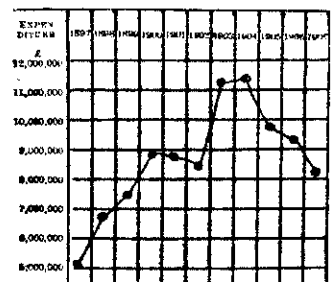
Now, however, rival Powers have recovered from the disorganisation which was caused by the appearance in 1905 of the Dreadnought and the three Dreadnought cruisers. For a year past they have been hard at work. France has four large battleships under construction, and two more on order; the United States has four building; Germany has five in hand; and Italy, Austria, and Japan are busy with new ships, or projects for new ships. Italy alone proposing to commence at an early date no fewer than four Dreadnoughts. Consequently the British authorities cannot remain inactive, and they have all the more claim to confidence, because they gave the taxpayer full value for the success of the Dreadnought in economies on shipbuilding in the immediate past, as may be seen from the following chart:



In this period of eleven years the expenditure on new construction has been as follows:—

1897	£5,051,000
1898	6,733,000
1899	7,518,000
1900	8,957,000
1901	8,865,000
1902	8,535,000
1903	11,116,000
1904	11,263,000
1905	9,688,000
1906	8,300,000
1907	8,112,000

The line of expenditure must now inevitably trend upwards. The struggle in the race of Dreadnoughts is becoming severe, and we need more cruisers and torpedo craft. In the past four years we have built no protected cruisers for scouting work with the Fleet, and since torpedo craft are being built in such large numbers—Germany is laying down



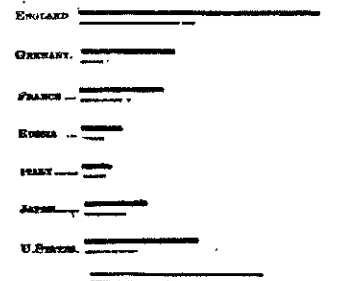
The above chart indicates the variation in the aggregate expenditure on the Fleet, including the maintenance of the squadrons at sea, new ships, stores, etc., in the past eleven years, the figures being as under:

1897	£2,170,000
1898	23,811,000
1899	25,741,000
1900	29,999,000
1901	30,981,000
1902	31,004,000
1903	35,709,000
1904	36,869,000
1905	33,152,000
1906	31,869,000
1907	21,419,000

It should be explained that down to last year the Navy Estimates did not include the outlay on naval works—dockyard extensions, etc. Consequently, to arrive at a correct view of the real fall in expenditure, the sums laid out in these permanent undertakings, and paid for out of loans, should be taken into account. In the eleven years we spent approximately £27,000,000 for these pur-

poses, or an average of about two millions annually. Last year the Government decided to raise no more loans. Thus, while the previous expenditure provided for in the successive Estimates down to 1907 was about £2,000,000 less each year than was actually expended, last year the sum provided by vote, apart from a small loan balance, was every penny which was available for all the various channels of naval activity, including pensions, which do not appear in the German appropriations, and the Royal Marines, which in the case of the French Navy are provided for out of the Army Votes.

We have now reached the end of the years of falling expenditure. Whatever opinions may be held by those who object to the size of our armaments, the country has no alternative. Our standard of naval power is virtually regulated by our rivals, because we have a two-power standard. This automatically fixes our Estimates from year to year; we are the financial victims of the ambitions of neighbours who may become enemies, and if we cease to play the role we have adopted for years past we may be their victims in a far more serious sense; the Empire may be given asunder, these islands overrun by foreign troops, our food snatched from our mouths. The sums we spend on the navy are the premiums we pay by way of insurance against the perils which would threaten us immediately we lost command of the sea. Peace at a cost of even forty millions a year—less than £1 per head of the population—is cheaper than war and an eventual victory. A Two-Power Standard ensures peace, and anything less may tempt some rivalry to try conclusions, with the result that we should probably win—but at a cost.



Coroner's Advice to a Husband.

TELLS HIM TO THRASH HIS WIFE.

Mr. S. Brighthouse, the coroner for South-West Lancashire, gave some extraordinary advice to the husband of a woman who, it was stated, had neglected her children.

The enquiry related to the death of the six-weeks-old child of Arthur and Mary Glover, of 3, Backley-street, Warrington, and had been adjourned in order that a post mortem examination might be held.

Dr. Smith now stated that the child weighed six pounds, that it was in a well-nourished condition, and the organs of the body were in a healthy state, except the brain and the lungs, which were slightly congested, a condition which was present after convulsions. In his opinion the child died from natural causes.

In returning a verdict of "Natural causes," the jury requested the Coroner to censure the mother who had been warned and sent to prison for neglecting her children.

The Coroner advised the husband that, unless his wife improved, the best course for him would be to apply to the magistrate for a separation on the grounds of her being a habitual drunkard and the magistrates then had power to order her removal to an inebriates' home.

To the mother, Mr. Brighthouse said: This is your last chance. My advice to you is to give up drink. I know what I should do if I were your husband. I would deal with you in a different way than he does. I would cure you before this week was out. (To the husband) You give her a good hammering. Never mind the magistrates convicting you of assault.

The Husband: She will give me one. The Coroner: If you cannot do it, send for me. I will straighten her up. Kind words are absolutely wasted on her.

May be obtained of Messrs. A. J. Nutcrack and Co., Auckland.