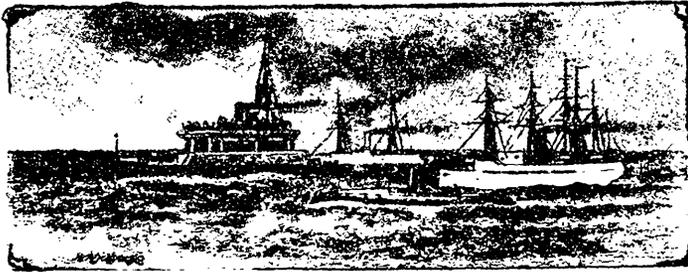


cliffs are not steep enough to serve as barriers against an invader.

If it be open to doubt whether night or day is the best time to make our first acquaintance with Malta, there can be none as to the season of the year when it may be most advantageously visited. If the tourist comes to Malta in spring, he will find the country bright with flowers, and green with fields of wheat and barley, and cumin and clover, of cotton, and even of sugar-cane, tobacco, and the fresh foliage of vineyards enclosed by hedges of prickly pears ready to burst into gorgeous blossom. Figs and pomegranates, peaches, pears, apricots, and med-

Alpine regions. The highest elevation is but 750 feet above the sea, while it is seldom that the sea cliffs reach half that height. Most of the picturesqueness of Malta is due to the works of man, and all of its romance to the great names and mighty events with which its historic shores are associated.

In Valletta everything betokens the capital of a dependency which, if not itself wealthy, is held by a wealthy nation, and a fortress upon which money has been lavished by a succession of military masters without any regard to the commercial aspects of the outlay. Malta has never ceased to be primarily a place of arms, a strong-



BRITISH IRONCLADS, MALTA.

lars are in blossom, orange and lemon trees are gay with flowers of which the fragrance scents the evening air. But in autumn, the land has been burnt into barrenness by the summer sun and the scorching sirocco. The soil, thin, but amazingly fertile, looks white and parched as it basks in the hot sunshine; and even the gardens, enclosed by high stone walls to shelter them from the torrid winds from Africa, or the wild "gregale" from the north, or the Levanter which sweeps damp and depressing towards the Straits of Gibraltar, fail to relieve the dusty, chalk-like aspect of the landscape. Hills there are, but they are mere hillocks to the scoffer from more

hold to the defensive strength of which every other interest must give way.

Though the ninety-five square miles of Maltese islands are about the most densely peopled portions of the earth—the population is about 165,000—the soil is fertile, and the sources of employment, especially since the construction of the Suez Canal, so plentiful, that extreme penury is almost unknown, while the rural population seem in the happy mean of being neither rich nor poor.

The tourist who for the first time surveys Valletta from the deck of a Peninsular and Oriental liner as she anchors in the quarantine harbour, beholds a picturesque sight.