

merchantmen may have been, it was a right that had fallen into almost complete desuetude during the last century, so far as this country was concerned.

The revival of this ancient practice on the part of the British Admiralty was announced by Mr. Winston Churchill last year. The new policy was explained by him in the House of Commons, on the 17th of March last, in the following terms:—

“Forty ships have been armed so far with two 4.7 guns apiece, and by the end of 1914-15 70 ships will have been so armed. They are armed solely for defensive purposes. The guns are mounted in the stern and can only fire on a pursuer. Vessels so armed have nothing in common with merchant vessels taken over by the Admiralty and converted into commissioned auxiliary cruisers, nor are these vessels privateers or commerce destroyers in any sense. They are exclusively ships which carry food to this country. They are not allowed to fight with any ships of war. Enemies' ships of war will be dealt with by the Navy, and the instruction of these armed merchant vessels will direct them to surrender if overtaken by ships of war. They are, however, thoroughly capable of self-defence against an enemy's armed merchantman. The fact of their being so armed will probably prove an effective deterrent alone on the depredations of armed merchantmen and an effective protection for these ships and for the vital supplies that they carry.”

This new departure in British Naval Policy was received very differently in different quarters. Lord Charles Beresford declared his conviction that it was equivalent to an addition of 15 Dreadnoughts to our naval resources. Great shipping firms expressed their patriotic readiness and desire to fall in with any recommendations of the British Admiralty, but declined comment. Jurists and shipowners of neutral countries expressed themselves as unfavourable to the proposal—both as tending to enlarge the burdens and operations of naval warfare, and as contrary in spirit if not in letter to the terms of the Declaration of Paris. I have before me a bundle of letters from experts in