

Dominions and the Navy

(London Times, Feb. 7.)

THE King inspected on Wednesday the great battle-cruiser provided for the Empire by the New Zealand Government. She is the first to be commissioned among Dominion ships of the Dreadnought type, and the voyage on which she has set out round the Cape of Good Hope to the people who gave her is in many ways the symbol of a new era in Imperial defence. When her visit to New Zealand is completed, she will return to take up her station in home waters; but the Australia, her sister-ship, which is to be commissioned in the spring, will remain in the Pacific as flagship of the new Australian fleet. The Australian people are making rapid headway with the naval organization to which they set their hands three years ago. They already have one small cruiser of the most modern type and three destroyers in commission; another cruiser is completing in this country and one is building in Australian yards. They are, moreover, recruiting both officers and seamen at a very satisfactory rate, and they have established a naval college on the Osborne model in order to train their officers as well as their men at home. The course adopted by Australia is undoubtedly recommending itself to an increasing body of opinion elsewhere. Colonel Allen, the New Zealand Minister of Defence, who visited the New Zealand on Monday, expressed the hope that "the various parts of the Empire upon the Pacific Seas would put their heads together and make the necessary provision" for Pacific defence. He would never be satisfied, he said, nor would New Zealand, until they had more ships and New Zealanders to man them.

Few who look at the naval problem of the Empire with a broad understanding of the political as well as strategical factors which it involves will doubt the value of this widespread desire. The Empire should not rest forever upon naval establishments confined to the British Isles. It is obvious that much might be gained, from a purely strategic standpoint, if ships could be built, equipped, and manned in several different centres of Imperial naval strength. It is equally obvious that such a line of development would call into play both the full resources and the full instinctive patriotism of the five self-governing peoples beneath the flag. An individual development of naval strength in each Dominion would plant the naval spirit everywhere. But other factors cannot be overlooked. We have to realize that separate fleets will ultimately mean separate policies, unless we take steps to keep our policy one; and that even if policy is collectively inspired, separate fleets will commit us to an enormous sacrifice of efficiency and funds, unless they can be co-ordinated and trained together in peace as well as war. These considerations, though not of immediate moment, cannot be long ignored; and there are others of an urgent and pressing kind. Chief of these is the fact that local development can only be extremely slow, while the progress of our naval competitors is extremely fast. For the moment our manning problem is an extremely serious one, not from any difficulty in recruiting men, but from the time they take to train. Battleships can be built in two years. Seamen can only be trained in four, skilled ratings in six or seven, officers in from seven to ten. It is already straining the Admiralty severely to keep its engagement with the Australian Government; and it cannot afford any more officers or men at the present moment for any ships which would not be immediately effective in the critical theatre at the outbreak of war.

These facts have naturally a close and important bearing upon the naval policy of the Dominions. Two things are clear. In the first place, there can be no practical development of local fleets, unless provision is made for the training of officers and men in considerable advance of the construction of ships. In the second place, naval development on those lines can add nothing to the effective strength of the Empire for some years to come. It is no doubt with a clear regard to these considerations that Mr. Borden's naval proposals have taken their present form.



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