

The U. S. Navy 1874-5.

Imagine any army whose artillery consists of culverins or leather cannon—whose infantry is equipped with match locks or arquebuses in place of needle-guns or Remingtons: then compare the fighting power of a body of men so armed, with a modern European army equipped, as it is in every detail, with the results of great mechanical skill introduced after scientific and thorough scrutiny by great masters in the art of war. The two pictures will scarcely be more striking in contrast, than a sketch of our Navy compared with that of any one of the several powers, or compared with what our Navy ought to be if the money its material has cost had been intelligently applied.

The report of the Secretary of the Navy for 1874, contains the usual information respecting the distribution of squadrons, and gives a very sanguine view of our naval efficiency, based chiefly on the results of the naval assemblage in the Bay of Florida; but we regret to see that it contains no hint of any definite policy of naval construction. The present state of naval science requires that we should have some policy if we are to expend the naval appropriation to any advantage. The conditions brought about by steam, armor, and the heavy ordnance of late years, and it is safe to add by torpedo, have made this imperative. Doubtless the power of the torpedo, in the present state of the art of submarine attack, exists largely in the imagination; but the promise and potency of this mode of defence are so great that there is only required the appreciation of our present defenceless state, on the part of Congress, and common sense on the part of the Navy, to make it a practical and certain system. One effect of this will be to place it in the power of weak nations to defend their harbors and coasts from naval attack, and to enable any country to keep off a maritime foe by far more effective means than maintaining a vast and costly armada.

The Navy Department asks for nineteen millions, about one half to be devoted to constructive purposes, the other to be personnel of the service. This distinction draws a sharp line: the Department may be organized with eight Bureaus, or little Navy Departments, as it now is, or with a greater number, their functions must come under one of these divisions, *i. e.*, the construction and maintenance of naval vessels, on the one hand; and the other the personnel and service afloat. We propose to review the former division of the service systematically, giving a brief outline of the type and condition of each vessel, beginning with the first borne on the Naval Register for 1874. If in thus surveying our naval force, as will presently be seen, there is nothing to commend, we cannot fairly be charged with a want of proper national feeling in exposing our weakness. The "Grand Naval Drill," as it is popularly called, which took place in the Florida Gulf about one year since, placed before the world far more conspicuously than it is in the power of any public journal to do, our real naval strength, or to be more exact, our naval weakness. Agreeing as we do with the opinion of officers of wide information and discernment, sorrowfully but emphatically expressed it is with in bounds to characterize this squadron, gathered together as it was by great exertion and for a warlike purpose, as a collection of naval trash, unworthy the Navy and the Nation, without a ship in it (with perhaps one exception) capable of meeting

other than at a disadvantage such vessels as are possessed by the feeblest navies in Europe, to say nothing of the iron clads of some of the South American powers.

One experienced officer present at this review said, "When he entered the service as a midshipman, wherever he went he found that the American frigate was a little better than the frigates of any other nation, that the American sloop of war was a little better; and in his travels he found that, vessel for vessel to the extent that we possessed war vessels, the United States was in advance. Foreigners copied our style." Admiral Dahlgren stated, not long before his death, in an official report: "The policy of the country always has been, and should be adhered to, that however small our naval force in peace, every vessel of it shall combine in itself the highest known qualities of a ship of war in armament, speed, and personnel."

Now, owing in a large measure to the confusion brought about by our system of naval administration established by law, we can no longer point to the individual excellence of our vessels. So far from combining the "highest known qualities" of ships of war; they scarcely possess a single feature of excellence. A war vessel has long since ceased to be the product of a ship carpenter's adze, carrying the long rows of cast iron smooth bores, with which we once won naval renown. The highest efforts of engineering and mechanical skill have been and will continue to be brought to bear on every detail which enters into the composition of the naval fighting machines, as such vessels actually are, that now constitute the real strength of a navy.

The Fleet Engineer, speaking of the Florida Gulf naval review, said, "It is probable that under favorable circumstances two or more of the vessels might have been driven up to ten knots; but for the great majority six knots was the maximum steaming capacity against a moderate head wind and over a smooth sea." The fleet was armed with antediluvian cast iron smooth bore shell guns; with perhaps the exception of three or four 15 inch, these would be absolutely harmless, for example, against the Spanish ironclad *Arapiles*, while her projectiles could perforate any iron clad, except one, in the squadron. As Commodore Parker shows in his able criticism of the review which we publish this week, one iron clad—any one selected from a long list we have before us—could sink or disperse such a collection of slow, vulnerable and gunless vessels as made up our fleet. It may be affirmed that this wolf running among these sheep might have a pole poked under his bottom with a pot of powder on the end of it; but when it is remembered that "our attacking ships" (at the great naval drill) were limited to a speed of four miles an hour in approaching the supposed antagonist, and that in place of the non-resisting floating target, an enemy's ship in rapid motion would be encountered, which, instead of waiting until the assailant, creeping at the rate of four miles an hour, had come near enough to be able to thrust his powder bag under the hull, would fire a broadside of grape, at short range, against the boom with its ropes and tackle—not to mention the crew handling the complex gear—what would happen? Among other disastrous effects would not the *sans froid* of the telegraphic operator manipulating the "electric key" be so disturbed that the "circuit" would not be made at the precise second of time necessary to make this contrivance in any degree effective?

From June 30, 1869, up to June 30, 1874, there had been appropriated by Congress in round numbers \$50,000,000, (not including \$3,200,000 which was appropriated for eight sloops of war), which has been spent in tinkering the old vessels of the Navy—*i. e.*, on ships, and things entering into their maintenance of officers and men or any expenditures connected with either the Bureau of Provisions and Clothing, or of Medicine and Surgery, of the Marine Corps, nor for coal nor for any expenses belonging to the Bureau of Equipment and Recruiting, except about \$1,000,000, properly chargeable to maintenance of vessels, in 1869. During this period not a new vessel has been built, except the feeble torpedo boats *Intrepid* and *Alarm*. This money has been spent in "repairing" old vessels, not one of which, as all competent judges must admit, has the qualities essential to a modern vessel of war. In several instances, particularly in the case of certain iron clads, large amounts have been very unwisely spent; the result will be, (as will be shown presently), vessels, which in the chief requisite are no better than they were before these expensive alterations were begun.

We will now go through the list of our Navy, taken from the Naval Register, giving a brief outline of each vessel, to confirm all we have said respecting the condition of the service concerning its vessels:

WOODEN STEAM VESSELS.

1ST RATES.—*Colorado, Wabash* and *Minnesota*, frigates with auxiliary power, built in 1854, can steam under favorable circumstances about 7 knots; against a head wind, force say 5, will just about hold their own: their steam machinery (Martin boilers included) was behind the age even when it was built some 18 years ago. They carry batteries of 9 inch cast iron smooth bores, and, in a word, are a type of vessel long since obsolete.

Franklin, same class as above, with about a knot more speed, completed some two years after the war, long after the type was a naval curiosity.

Niagara, a huge sloop, built in 1854, so deteriorated she cannot be rebuilt. Steam machinery condemned and broken up.

2ND RATES.—*Nevada—Wampanoag* class, known as Isherwood engine carriers—hull of white oak, not even copper fastened: never at sea, but board reported "she exhibits a marked cant or twist of hull"—"she presents even a worse case than the *Wampanoag*"—"she is utterly unworthy of repairs and ought to be sold immediately"—"not a single gun can be used on her gun deck in giving chase to an enemy ahead." We believe she has been condemned and will be broken up.

Connecticut same as above, on the stocks at Boston, will probably never be completed—frame of white oak.

Florida—late *Wampanoag*—has never been to sea, except for a deceptive trial trip down the coast "with a fresh breeze abaft the beam."

The following figures, relating to *Wampanoag*, will give some idea of the nature of these vessels: Total weight of vessel, 4,339 tons, made up as follows: engine and boilers, 1,260 tons; coal, 750 tons (2,010); battery and objects of ordnance, 111 tons; spars and rigging, 100 tons; anchors and chains, 60 tons; boats, 29 tons; 376 men and stores, 53 tons; bare hull, 1,975 tons; cubic feet occupied by engines and Martin's patent boilers, 17,437!

Tennessee, same as above except engines, the entire steam machinery has been taken out, and is being replaced by new; we have