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CHAPTER XII

SWEEPING THE SEAS

IN spite of the absence of any very spectacular occurrence in the naval theatre after the fight off Heligoland, signs were not wanting that the British Fleet was playing its part in the crushing of Germany almost as effectively as though it had met and routed the German Battle Fleet in a general engagement. German shipping had practically disappeared from the face of the waters. The enemy's ports were idle, every wharf and every berth being crowded with great ocean ships which dared not leave. Although at the end of the first three months of war it was too early to speak of a food crisis or an economic collapse, there was ample evidence of the distress prevailing in Germany as a direct consequence of the British Navy's strangle hold.

To a much greater extent than Germany are we dependent on ocean-borne supplies. When, in spite of that fact, we found that food continued to be abundant in the United Kingdom and scarce in Germany, we began to realise the inner meaning of that much-abused term, the command of the sea. Never before had the British public understood the dominant part which the Navy plays in our daily life. Tennyson's phrase, "The