

THE ANGLO-SAXON

Vol. XIII., No. 2.

OTTAWA, NOVEMBER, 1899.

\$1.00 per year.

The Protection of Commerce During War. ❀❀

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This essay won for Capt. Winter the special silver medal of the "Royal United Service Institution," of England, and a cash prize of thirty guineas, in 1897.

"He who commands the sea controls trade and commerce; he who controls trade and commerce commands the wealth and riches of the world; and he who controls wealth controls the world."

These words of Sir Walter Raleigh, one of the most celebrated of British soldier-discoverers and colonizers, may very aptly be taken as a text for an essay upon a subject of such momentous importance as the protection of commerce during a time of hostile operations and conflict. For if Sir Walter's practical experience at the very birth, if one may so term it, of our Imperial greatness, taught him the value of sea-power, the experiences of the intervening three hundred years, with their rich stories of heroic effort, hardy perseverance, disasters successfully retrieved, and adventures gloriously concluded, ought fully to suffice to impress upon his countrymen of the present the concrete wisdom of his statements.

From very small beginnings the trade and commerce of England and the British Isles have grown steadily to the gigantic proportions of that of the Empire of the present day; the amount carried annually over the sea alone is computed to be of the value of over £1,100,460,000, or if the estimated value of the shipping of the British Empire be added (10,512,272 tons at an average value of £12 10s.) £1,231,713,400, and is rising steadily. To the ordinary mind these figures convey little or no impression—one is unable to grasp without serious reflection the actual meaning of such an array of counters; but when one considers that the total valuation of property in England subject to local taxation is

returned as under £160,000,000, whereas the British seaborne trade and shipping is fully eight times as great, one begins to realize the enormous interests of our people yearly entrusted to the wide expanses of the oceans.

But this phenomenal growth of trade and commerce, adding constantly to the material well-being and comfort of our people, as it has, has also, by that very fact, imposed upon us a responsibility, vast and all important to the future of our race. By the increase in our carrying trade, and the keen competition among shippers, the cost of necessities and commodities of all kinds has been cheapened to the masses of the people, and this through the kindred agency of free and open ports has now become such an established feature in Imperial economics that any interruption in, or interference with, the unhampered flow of the Empire's commerce would be followed, more or less, by sufferings and privations, on the part of some great section of the British peoples. To keep open the routes of commerce and to provide means for removing even the fear of disastrous consequences to our shipping, and the consequent abnormal rise in the prices of food products, is the great task entrusted to the Royal Navy, with its auxiliary fleets of chosen merchant-cruisers, etc. Napoleon said "An army moves upon its belly," and it is conceded by the best of experts that it is true, for without an adequate and regular food supply the best of Armies soon become useless. If true with an Army, how much more pertinent is it when applied to a nation, unable of itself under present day conditions, to feed its vast multitude of mouths from month to month, if its over-sea supplies are cut off or withheld! To a nation facing such an alternative, the defence of its trade routes and the protection of its commerce must always be of the most vital importance. To the United Kingdom commerce has become indispensable; and, if absolutely necessary to the comfort and welfare of her people, it is equally indispensable that it continue in the established routes with its accustomed regularity, its wonted short cuts, and increasing frequency. Britain in her