

stress, take away the ships which may be on the Australian Station, and for which you have partly paid and on which you rely, in order to send them to some distant quarter. But I cannot conceive any case, unless we lost actually our sea power, when we should think it our duty not to defend so valuable a portion of our Empire as Australia, New Zealand, and Tasmania, for the safety of which we hold ourselves responsible in the same way as we hold ourselves responsible for the safety of the British Islands. I put this very strongly so that there may be no apprehension. In all our strategical combinations we have never conceived the possibility that we should expose such possessions as the Australian Colonies.

Let me say another word on the suggestion of which mention has been made that it was the desire of the Admiralty to have full control of the Australian Squadron in time of war, even so far as to send the ships paid for by the Australian Colonies thousands of miles away to attack the commerce of an enemy. This rumour has, probably, originated from our claiming freedom in the sense in which I have claimed it.

If it has been said that we want to have the full and free disposal of our ships, this certainly, as far as my own policy and that of the present Board is concerned, does not mean that we claim to withdraw the ships built under our agreement with the Australian Colonies and to send them to the Cape or to China, but that we desire freedom so to manage the ships as best to protect that zone and that sphere to which they belong, if we heard that an enemy were planning an expedition towards the coasts of Australia. In such a case we might possibly gather the whole of our ships together, and taking such other precautions as might be necessary, use them regardless—regardless is, perhaps, too strong a word—but use them as we should see best for the protection of the general interests of that part of the Queen's dominions.

I know that an erroneous impression has existed that, not only in the Colonies, but at home, we should station ships to defend particular ports. Take Liverpool for instance. We, the Navy, are under no guarantee to defend Liverpool. The defences of Liverpool are in the hands of the Army who practically manage the torpedoed and the mines, the shore defences in fact. It is the army ashore which is responsible, with such co-operation as might be necessary, if a comparatively large expedition were to threaten the place. This is the freedom which we claim.

The misunderstanding has arisen, I have been told, from the interpretation of a speech of the Duke of Devonshire. I know that speech well. It did not for one moment, to my mind, justify the fear that we should, in breach of our agreement with Australia, claim to withdraw the ships from thence which had been paid for by Colonial contributions. The principal point in that speech was a protest against the idea of what I call hugging the shore, against the idea that protection by the Navy superseded the necessity for shore defences. It laid down the principle that our policy must be aggressive, seeking out the enemy, a policy which, as regards Australia, might aim at attacking the possessions of other powers at war with us in the Australian zone, or at seeking out their ships within the Australian station wherever they might be. Hence our claim for freedom for the Navy. Hence the duty of the Colonies as well as the mother country to look after their shore defences. I do not say that we should not prefer contributions without any tie whatever, but I do not make such a demand, and so far as the policy of the present Board of Admiralty is concerned, I am prepared to stand by the existing agreement."