

Mr. Balfour on Naval Requirements



PEAKING in the British House of Commons, during the debate on the naval estimates, Mr. Balfour said:

The right hon. gentleman who represents the Admiralty has told us the Home Fleet consists of three divisions; there is the fleet at the North, which is fully manned and ready for sea; there is the fleet at Portsmouth and elsewhere, with nucleus crews; and there is the Reserve squadron. The right hon. gentleman claims that this fleet at Portsmouth and at other ports can be ready for sea in 24 hours, or not much more. Then there ought not to be counted in that ships which have come home from foreign stations and must be under repair for some months. If a ship is under repair you cannot count it as ready for sea in 24 hours.

Mr. E. Robertson.—I expressly said that all ships under repair must be counted out. Of course being under repair disqualifies them for readiness for war. But a ship which has a nucleus crew has a real crew; it is not like a skeleton crew, and such a ship must be under a commission, must have a captain, and must belong to some fleet. If, therefore, for the purpose of convenience a ship under repair has a nucleus crew that determines her as belonging to the home fleet, but such ships are not to be counted as ready until their repairs are completed. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. Balfour.—The right hon. gentleman has on occasion dealt with ships with nucleus crews as an effective part of the home fleet ready for action. Now he admits that although they have nucleus crews they are not ready for war.

Home Fleet Unready

This is one of the inner mysteries of the Admiralty that a ship with a nucleus crew shall be counted as being in commission although she is not fit to go to sea. By that method all the ships which have come home from foreign stations for repairs may be in this category. The result is that amongst the home fleet there is a very much larger number of ships in commission which cannot go to sea than in any other. I am informed that two out of every three battleships at Portsmouth at this moment, which count as part of the home fleet and have nucleus crews, are not fit to go to sea. (Hear, hear.) They ought not to be counted, therefore, as part of our immediately ready fleet. (Cheers.) If it be true that two out of every three battleships at Portsmouth are under important repairs, does not that fact require us to somewhat modify the sanguine statements for which the right hon. gentleman has been in part responsible? I am not charging that it is a reflection upon Admiralty administration, but it does reflect upon the Admiralty exposition of facts. We come to a question of greater importance when we deal with the general amount of the estimates for this year taken in relation to the general liabilities of this country in naval matters not only in this year but in the years to come. What is the magnitude of our naval responsibilities? They fall broadly into two classes—the construction of new works and the construction of new ships. The construction of new works is in the main the construction of new docks required for the accommodation of the Dreadnought type of battleship, and the more important work of the fitting out of Rosyth to be a naval base in the North Sea.

Urgency of Rosyth

The government have done very little since they came into office in dealing with Rosyth. The necessity for Rosyth increases year by year. (Hear, hear.) Added to the fact of the magnitude and the strategic importance of floating mines is the fact that foreign governments have refused to forbid the use of these mines, and these are naval circumstances which add immensely to the importance of ports like Rosyth, which cannot be blockaded with the same facility as the Channel or Spithead. Then the immense naval construction which has gone on in other parts of the North Sea is also a new and pressing reason why we should not hesitate to spend large sums upon Rosyth so as to make it adequate for the naval necessities of the country. I not only regret that the government have lost time in dealing with this great problem, but it seems to me that the importance of the problem, its imminence and insistence, have greatly increased during the recent years in which the present government have held office. That would have been a reason why the First Lord of the Admiralty and his colleagues should have asked the government why they could not in this present year's estimates have put down a large sum for dealing with Rosyth. To which the reply might have been, "Fresh naval construction is so great and so pressing at the present moment that you had better put off Rosyth for a year and press on with your naval programme." But that is not what the government have done. The government find themselves, rightly or wrongly, relieved in this year from indulging in any very ambitious building of new ships. They think, rightly or wrongly, that the possible peril from foreign nations does not require expenditure upon the new construction of ships this year, whatever may be required next year or the year after. (Hear, hear.)

If this is the case, and for the moment I do not dispute it, I ask was it not the part of wise and prudent men to take the opportunity this year, in which you have a slackness in new construction which will not be repeated (cheers)—which nobody thinks can ever be re-

peated in the official lifetime of this chancellor of the exchequer, or of his immediate successors—to take this opportunity of getting on with those permanent works for which it will be very difficult to get the House to vote the necessary money if they are met with a gigantic shipbuilding programme in 1909-10, 1910-11, and succeeding years? The government have refused to follow this plainly prudent course, and they have done so, I cannot doubt, for political reasons. (Cheers.) That is not, I think, an unkind suggestion to make after the debate we had this day week. They find themselves face to face with a very formidable body of their own friends who are apparently content with the statement of the government that we were safe for the present as far as shipbuilding is concerned, and they have reduced the naval estimates this year by a million and a quarter. I think it was, compared with two years ago, although the chancellor of the exchequer forgot to say what I think he must have known, that the million and a quarter was going to be swallowed up by automatic increases next year, and that, in addition to the automatic increases it will be absolutely necessary for this government—I do not care what their financial position will be—to lay down new ships and new construction on the largest scale if foreign nations carry out the programmes which they have announced. That is my first complaint, that the government, having both the prospect of naval construction and of works construction to deal with in this and immediately succeeding years, in spite of the fact that they think themselves justified in being slack about construction in 1908-9, have refused to take that fortunate opportunity for meeting some of their obligations in permanent works.

New Construction

I pass to the other branch of the programme—namely, the necessities for new construction with which the taxpayers of this country are most unhappily faced in future. That new construction is partly required, and has partly been recognized in the present building programme of the Admiralty, in order to meet what I cannot help regarding as our present deficiencies in the matter of fast vessels, fast cruisers and torpedo-boat destroyers. I need not dwell on this branch of the subject,

which is very complicated; but I will ask the right hon. gentleman whether he was not using an argument very perilous in its general character when he contented himself with a mere enumeration of the torpedo-boat destroyers of which we are possessed which are less than 11 years old. It is quite true that the Admiralty have laid down the life of a torpedo-boat destroyer as 11 years or thereabouts, and it is quite legitimate, therefore, for them to take credit for the possession of torpedo-boat destroyers which are less than that critical age. But when you compare the number of torpedo-boat destroyers which we possess with those possessed by other Powers, you must not simply content yourself with enumerating the destroyers which are less than 11 years, you must ask how the age of our destroyers compares with the age of the destroyers of those countries with whom there might be some possibility, we hope infinitely remote, of conflict. The torpedo-boat destroyer resembles a living organism in this, that while its life may be only 11 years, its efficiency does not go on unimpaired until the clock strikes at the eleventh year; it is a rapidly diminishing quantity, and every year brings it nearer to the fatal term, makes it more necessary to send it for longer periods into dock for repair, makes it more costly to repair, and gives the country a fewer number of months out of the 12 in which to count on its efficient use. I believe the Admiralty are perfectly aware that, no mere enumeration of the number of torpedo-boat destroyers under 11 years which we have, as compared with that of other Powers, gives us any sense of the relative strength of the parties. If we with old destroyers have got to contend against a Power with new destroyers you cannot count them as being equal; you must get a great margin of superiority over the bare numerical strength of that Power which has been fortunate enough to begin its construction late and has therefore the largest number of the most recent and powerful types. I will not go into the question, dealt with by conspicuous ability by the hon. and gallant member for King's Lynn, of whether we have got to operate at a great distance from our base ought to content ourselves with anything comparable with mere numerical equality in dealing with a Power which, in counter

efforts would not be required to use its torpedo craft at any very great distance from its base. I am not sure that the Committee of this House is a very good arena in which to discuss these delicate tactical problems; but the point is one which I am sure the Admiralty must have considered, but on which they have not so far given us any information.

Dreadnoughts and Invincibles

I come to the more anxious question, or at all events that on which the majority of this Committee are likely to be more anxious—namely, the balance of battleships of the newest, most powerful, and effective types. The hon. and gallant member for King's Lynn quoted some statement which he thinks I made, or which I did make, in 1906, regarding the construction of the Dreadnought. I do not remember the statement. I fully accept the responsibility of having been a member of the government which was responsible for the Dreadnought type, and from that responsibility I in no way shrink or recede. But the Naval Lords, when they advised this type, told us, and I am sure they told our successors, that the Dreadnought type was one which made it very difficult to compare the strength of two fleets one of which possessed Dreadnoughts and the other did not. We were told, in fact, that the country which possessed Dreadnoughts and the allied type of armored cruisers might almost ignore the country which did not. Well, let us eliminate from our calculations for the future all battleships which are not of the Dreadnought and the allied armored cruiser type, and consider how we are going to stand in regard to these, the most powerful but unfortunately the most costly instruments of war ever devised by man. The government seem to be quite serene as to the number of ships which will be available when the programme of the coming year is completed, both in this country and in Germany. But have they reason for that certainty? I entirely agree with them when they say that at the present moment our strength in battleships is amply adequate to any conceivable strain that may be put upon it. But let us cast our eyes forward from the year 1908-9, when new ships are due to be laid down, to the year 1911, when those ships will be completed. As I understand the matter, we shall have, when the present pro-

gramme of the Admiralty is completed, 12 ships of this superior type in existence in January, 1911.

Mr. E. Robertson said the right hon. gentleman was not including the Lord Nelson and Agamemnon types.

Mr. Balfour.—I do not include them. On what principle am I to include them? I am surely justified, by everything we said on the advice of our naval experts when we were in office, and by everything the right hon. gentleman has said up to this year on the same advice, in considering the Dreadnought and the Invincible type as on one side of a dividing line, and even the best of every previous type of battleship as on the other side.

Mr. Bellairs said the right hon. gentleman was including two for this year, but they were not certain of that. As far as they knew it was only one.

Mr. Balfour.—I think the hon. and gallant gentleman on that point did less than justice to the Admiralty. I certainly have understood from rumor, and I think, from some previous utterances of the right hon. gentleman opposite, that these two ships are to be of this new and finest type. At all events, I will assume that we are to have two of this type laid down this year, or, as I think more probable, one Dreadnought and one Invincible.

A Comparison With Germany

We shall have in January, 1911, 12 ships altogether of this new type—eight Dreadnoughts and four Invincibles. The Germans, on the same date, January, 1911, at the same rate of construction, will have nine. But now carry your thoughts a few months later, and you will find that by the autumn of the same year, 1911, the Germans will have four additional ships of the new type; in other words, they will have 13, while we shall only have 12. That difference arises from the fact that we begin our construction in December of each year and the Germans begin their construction in June. Therefore, if the Germans build at the same rate as we do, there is evidently a dangerous margin in the last six months of each year, which you will have very carefully to weigh to compare the results of the building programmes of the two nations. It may be said that the Germans do not build as fast; and I earnestly hope it is true, for a reason which will meet with the sympathy of the hon. gentleman who spoke last, and of everybody who desires to see, as we all must, the navy estimates kept as low as is consistent with safety. If we find that we can build as fast as our neighbors, of course, we could wait until we see the sort of ships our neighbors start before we start any of our own. But if by organization and industrial improvement—in which some foreign nations are showing as great an aptitude as ourselves—they begin to have a power of turning out ships as fast as we can turn them out, then the immense advantage we have had—an advantage which has made for economy and peace—vanishes; and we have to face the fact that other great naval Powers build ships as fast as we do, and build apparently with the consistent determination rapidly to augment the number of first-class ships which they have at their command. The Germans have announced that they mean to build four big ships—three Dreadnoughts and one Invincible—every year. We propose only to lay down two such ships. Manifestly, unless this programme of ours is rapidly augmented, is changed immensely and immediately, the Germans would be building twice as many ships of this capital type as we are; and consequently the time is not only not far distant, but imminent, when in regard to that particular type of vessel they will be, not our equal, but our superior. (Hear, hear.) I should like to put this plain question to the right hon. gentleman; and it is a question easy to answer. If the Germans can build as fast as we can, will they not have, in the autumn of 1911, 13 ships of the Dreadnought and Invincible type; and can the right hon. gentleman show us any possible means by which we, in the autumn of 1911, should also have 13 Dreadnoughts and Invincibles. I understand that we cannot have more than 12 in January, 1911, and that we cannot have another—unless we alter the date at which we begin our shipbuilding programme—until the January of the following year. I can assure the right hon. gentleman, and I think he will admit it—that the last thing I want to do is to embarrass him or the Board of Admiralty. I have no wish to treat either of the great departments of the army or the navy in a party spirit; and I do not think I have ever said a word in this House which would lead any one to hold a contrary view. (Hear, hear.) But I think the right hon. gentleman will see from the statement I have made that I feel the government are open to criticism upon one point, and that there is real ground for anxiety upon another. The point upon which they are open to criticism is that in this year, when they have elected not to construct on a large scale, they are not spending money on necessary works; and my ground for alarm, which I honestly say has not been removed by anything I have heard in this debate, is that if German shipbuilding is now, or is going to be in the immediate future, as fast as our shipbuilding, whatever we may do next year, Germany will be superior to us during the later months of 1911 in ships of capital importance. I may say that if the government can reassure us on this plain issue of policy they will not only have few difficulties in Committee on the Navy Estimates, but they will have set the mind of the country at rest in regard to the most vital interest of national security. (Cheers.)

Quebec Tercentenary Programme

THE following, which includes the official programme in connection with the Tercentenary celebration, has been given out by the executive committee:

The National Battlefields Commission, appointed to administer the funds voted by parliament in connection with the tercentenary of the foundation of Quebec by Samuel de Champlain and the creation of a National Battlefields Park, met in Quebec on Saturday, March 21, in the Mayor's Chambers at the City Hall. All the commissioners were present: Sir George E. Drummond, the Hon. A. Turgeon, Colonel G. T. Denison, Byron E. Walker and J. Geo. Garneau, chairman. There were also present the two interim secretaries of the commission, Mr. H. J. B. Chouinard and Dr. Doughty, F.R.S.C., and Col. Hanbury-Williams, military secretary to His Excellency the Governor-General.

Mr. J. M. Courtenay, ex-Deputy Minister of Finance, who has been selected as interim treasurer for the commission, was unavoidably detained in Ottawa.

The commission considered some few matters connected with the Battlefields Park, but the greater part of the meeting was devoted to the preparations of the Tercentenary celebration.

The several local committees had prepared many reports and estimates for the consideration of the commission which entailed a considerable amount of work to be accomplished in one day's sitting.

One of the first questions brought before the commission was the programme, and although it cannot be fully given out at present, owing to certain details in connection with the engagement for H.R.H. the Prince of Wales having to be cabled for approval, we may state, however, that the principal features of the programme will be as follows:

Monday, July 20—First appearance of mounted heralds and watchmen, costumed as in the period of de Champlain, who will be entrusted with the official announcements as to the arrival of guests, programme, etc.

Tuesday, July 21—It is expected that the greater part of the day will be taken up by the arrival of the several fleets, English, French and American, and of many official guests. In the evening the first of the concerts organized by the committee will take place.

Wednesday, July 22—H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, with the escorting squadron, will arrive and will be received and welcomed on landing in the name of the Dominion of Canada.

Thursday, July 23—Being the principal day of the celebration, will be specially devoted to the commemoration of the founding of Quebec by Samuel de Champlain. The details of the official ceremony are being worked out, and it is projected amongst other things that it will comprise the arrival of Champlain, in his ship "Le Don de Dieu," and his landing,

followed by the professional pageant through the streets of Quebec in which will be seen the leading characters connected with Canadian history from Champlain to the time of Confederation. In the evening there will be an illumination of the surrounding country, the fleets, and a grand display of fireworks from the heights of Levis overlooking the St. Lawrence.

Friday, July 24—Is to be mainly reserved for the great naval and military reviews and the dedication of the National Battlefields Park. It is the intention of the military authorities to concentrate in Quebec from twenty to twenty-five thousand troops of all arms. In the evening the second and principal concert will be given.

Saturday, July 25—Will see the grand representation of the historical pageant, comprising about six principal scenes taken from Canadian history, some of which will include several tableaux.

Sunday, July 26—A solemn open-air mass will be said on the Plains of Abraham, at which part of Dumont's famous Royal Mass will be sung by powerful choirs, as well as the Domine Salvum fac regem, and possibly a solemn Te Deum. It is to be hoped that all the churches of Quebec will set this day aside for Thanksgiving.

Monday, July 27—In the morning it is hoped that it may be possible to arrange for a great naval display by the landing parties from the fleets. In the afternoon a grand regatta for the boats of the fleets, etc., will be held in front of the city.

Tuesday, July 28—The morning will be devoted to the children, and an entertainment will be provided for them on the Plains. In the afternoon athletic sports and gymkhana for the men of the fleets and local amateurs. In the evening of the same day an official ball will be given by the Government of the Province of Quebec at the Parliament Buildings.

Wednesday, July 29—Will probably be the day appointed for the departure of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales. In the afternoon the historical pageant on the Plains of Abraham will be repeated. The evening will comprise the third of the concerts at the Drill Hall and a display of fireworks near Victoria Park.

Thursday, July 30—Will be given over to the grand parade and review of all the national societies and independent, military or national guards, Canadian or foreign, which will be followed in the evening by a civic reception in the City Hall.

Friday, July 31—Final representation of the historical pageant on the Plains of Abraham. It is quite likely that a review of the fleets in the harbor will be held in the course of their stay here, and room has been left on the programme to permit of many items which are not properly speaking, official.

It should be added that this programme is, at all intents and purposes, the one prepared

and submitted by the executive committee of the Quebec Tercentenary.

The following official invitations were decided upon and have been forwarded through the proper channels: From the United Kingdom, H.R.H. the Prince of Wales and the Secretary of State for the Colonies; representatives of the governments of France and the United States, and also of the self-governing dominions beyond the seas—Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and Newfoundland. The French Government will also be invited to send a representative of Brouage (the birthplace of Champlain).

Invitations will be extended likewise to the immediate living representatives of Wolfe, Montcalm, Murray, de Levis, Guy Carleton and Simon Fraser. The lieutenant-governors of the different provinces of the Dominion will also be requested to attend.

SIDELIGHTS ON CHINESE LIFE

Since Wingrove Cooke wrote his memorable letters, many men have tried to explain to the West the subtleties and perplexities of Chinese character, says the London Times. Perhaps success was most nearly attained in Smith's "Characteristics," but the Rev. J. Macgowan's Sidelights on Chinese Life (Kegan Paul, 15s. net) will not suffer by comparison with its numerous predecessors. Mr. Macgowan seems to know and understand the Chinese as well as a European can hope to do. He writes with vivacity and insight, and above all with considerable sympathy, without which it is impossible to attain real knowledge of any Oriental race. Some of his chapters contain a good deal that is of value, particularly the one which deals with "The Farmer." He seems to think that the land system is good. Where land is let, the landlord takes half the crop after it has been gathered; and Mr. Macgowan declares that the result is that the farmers are never in debt to their landlord. The passage would have been more instructive if something had been added about the incidence of taxation. Moreover, as he points out elsewhere, most agriculturists in China farm their own land; and the other side of the picture is contained in the statement that "seven-tenths of the whole nation are in hopeless debt." The farming population, in particular, is absolutely at the mercy of the money-lenders. These statements may be commended to the attention of those Indian economists who declare that the heavy indebtedness of the Indian peasantry is due to British land revenue assessments, and the inflexible operation of British-made laws. Mr. Macgowan denies that the Chinese are highly educated, as is so often suggested. He insists that not more than fifteen millions can read, and thinks even that a liberal estimate. He admits, however, that recently there has been "a tremendous awakening." The statement that opium was first brought into the country by the East India Company cannot command acceptance.