

## THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF CAPE BRETON ISLAND.

(With Especial Reference to the Coal Fields.)

By F. W. Gray.

When the French monarchs of the old regime selected Louisburg as the site of an impregnable fortress, proudly named the "Dunkirk of America," they had a proper conception of the strategic importance of the ISLE ROYALE, that outpost of Canada since known as Cape Breton Island.

Who holds the Island of Cape Breton commands the Cabot Straits and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and if that same power holds also the Island of Newfoundland, the Gulf of St. Lawrence can be made a closed sea.

While the main ideas of naval strategy are the same in all times, yet to-day we think in terms of modern inventions. The advantages given to Cape Breton Island by its geographical position are at this date enhanced by the presence of large bodies of coal developed to a producing stage, by the existence of large iron and steel works and chemical plants, and by the existence in connection with these industries of commodious harbors, equipped with facilities for loading and discharging cargoes, and by rail connection with the mainland.

It may be laid down as an axiom that no modern nation can retain economic independence unless it possesses within its frontiers a supply of bituminous coal. Bituminous coal is the motive power of modern civilization. It has been truly said—and by a German military leader—that victory in the present war will go to the nation that can mine and carbonize the largest quantity of bituminous coal. No form of deep mining can be prosecuted without coal, and the absence of coal will effectually limit the mining of all metals and minerals.

Coal moreover is the source of the base of the most destructive modern explosives. Briefly, without coal the national armament would be limited to the weapons of the mediaeval knight.

As this war and its preliminaries have abundantly demonstrated, economic dependence spells sooner or later political subservience.

The importance of Cape Breton Island is chiefly this: With the exception of a strictly limited deposit of bituminous coal on the mainland of Nova Scotia, the Island of Cape Breton and the submarine territory adjacent, contains the only supply of bituminous coal in Canada east of the region of Weyburn and Estevan.

The national future of Canada, its maintenance of national integrity and political independence, is bound up with retention of possession of the coalfields of Cape Breton Island. This may seem a sweeping statement, originating in the mind of one who attaches undue importance to coal, but a little consideration of the present position of France, Italy, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Spain, Greece, and—to come nearer home—of Central Canada, will show that the statement is made advisedly. France and Italy would be impotent and defeated if it were not for the coalfields of Britain and the British Navy.

The position of the European neutrals to-day is dictated by the source of their coal supply. The safety of the United States lies not so much in vast territory and population as in the possession of the richest coalfields of the world, so situated as to be far removed from the

danger of foreign invasion. If Russia were not the possessor of coalfields she would be more helpless than Holland, more dependent than Denmark, because, and here is where the analogy interests Canadians, extent of territory, density of population and agricultural wealth are a menace only, if coal is absent.

In these times coal spells power. It is a necessity of nationhood.

Is it therefore too much to say that if Canada wishes to fulfil the glorious promise of her future she must guard as a precious jewel that remote Island which saw the dawning of British power and British ideals on this Continent, and stands not only as a sentinel over the broad and ancient commercial highway of the St. Lawrence, but is Canada's chief treasure house and depository of coal, a substance greater in potentialities than all the silver of Cobalt, or all the gold of Poreupine and Yukon.

As the principal British naval base in North Atlantic waters, Halifax will always retain its pre-eminence, and it only needed the actual stress of warfare to restore to by a long period of peace. It is an ice-free port, lend this Canadian port the lustre that had become dimmed in itself admirably to fortification and submarine defences, and its railway connections would be difficult for a hostile landing force to interfere with so far as the immediate hinterland is concerned. But of the two lines of railway that connect Halifax with Quebec and Montreal, one parallels the St. Lawrence river so closely as to be quite open to attack from the river and the lower gulf. The capture of Halifax by hostile forces would not so seriously impair our national defences as would the hostile occupation of Cape Breton Island. Those who have followed the course of events at Zeebrugge, on the Belgian coast, will realize what the Bras d'Or Lakes could be made as a submarine base if they fell into the hands of an enemy, and the analogy between the Dardanelles and the Straits of Canso must have struck every military observer who has ever passed through the narrow channel dominated by the imposing bulk of Cape Poreupine.

Imagine a geographical position which combines the strategic value of the Dardanelles and Gibraltar with the industrial importance of Pittsburg or Sheffield, and one has a fair and not exaggerated conception of what Cape Breton Island means to Canada, and conversely, one may deduce what nature the menace would assume were this island in enemy hands.

The potentialities of Cape Breton Island for defence, or for offense in the hands of a resourceful foe, are less or greater according to the smaller or larger concentration of industrial activities in the island, and the time seems to have arrived when the Government of Canada must take this matter under consideration in all that bears on the future of industrial expansion in Cape Breton.

Take for example the suitability of Sydney Harbor for a shipbuilding plant. The advantages of this site are too obvious to necessitate their being set out in detail; the thing is self evident. But a large shipbuilding industry in Sydney, with the provision of the dry-dock that would be a natural and necessary accompaniment, connotes at once adequate military and naval protection. Otherwise it will be foolish to multiply and concentrate still additional facilities in Cape Breton Island that would advantage an enemy in control of the island.