

England and the Sea.

THE maritime supremacy of England among European nations has been conceded, even by her bitterest foe—France. Voltaire, the facile princeps among literary conjurors of the last century, attempts to account for the superior hardihood of English seamen, by the fact that they are accustomed to boisterous seas and dark tempestuous scenes of danger, while farther South the waters are smoother and the climate more serene. Continually accustomed to danger he loses all fear, and imagines that every thing he sees must do him homage. Besides this is the confidence arising from continued success, which is in turn the mightiest compeller of success. He relates two stories to illustrate: “There,” said the master of a frigate, when the captain did not choose to engage a superior French force, because he had a Convoy in charge, “There,” said he, with a groan, “there’s seven hundred pounds lost to me forever.” “Fear,” says Voltaire, “is not in their nature.” An English sailor went to see a juggler perform his tricks. There chanced to be a quantity of gunpowder stored away in the vaults beneath, which by accident blew up. The sailor was hurled into an adjacent garden, happily without harm. He arose—stretched himself, rubbed his eyes and cried out: “Well, I wonder what the fellow intends to do next!” As to the authenticity of this latter, we are unable to speak. It is a tribute to hardihood at the expense of the intellect, but it illustrates that total indifference to danger which characterized the British sailor for centuries. Certainly there is reason in what Voltaire urges, but the philosophy of the thing is to be looked for, as Chambers observes, in the original constitution of the race. The Celts were never distinguished for their naval exploits. The races who came over sea from their misty homes by the Baltic, were akin to the Norse adventurer, who made the ocean his home, and levied tribute from the Hebrides to the pillar of Hercules. As the same author notices, the Celtic population of the Highlands, though their country borders on the sea, stormy and tempestuous enough, have never displayed any taste for maritime pursuits, nay, are eminently patriarchal in their habits. Take for

example, Spain. In the days of Charles V. and Philip II., the Spanish army was the most terrible of Europe. The finest soldiers of France and Germany were swept from before it. The best English authorities agree in their judgment as to the impossibility of effectual resistance, had the Armada once landed an army on British shores. Yet those were the days when British seamen, under Drake, Frobisher, Hawkins and such like men, won their most remarkable triumphs. Not to mention the Armada, we give one exploit related by Froude in his essay on “England’s forgotten worthies.” A fleet of six line-of-battle ships, under Lord Thomas Howard, lying at anchor under the isle of Florez, was surprised by fifty-three Spanish men-of-war. As the ships were in a bad condition, the Admiral ordered them to cut their cables and escape. They all obeyed but one—the *Revenge*, commanded by Sir Richard Grenville, well known in Spanish seas. Of the crew, 190 were sick on shore; yet with only an hundred men, Grenville refused to turn from the enemy, and so he offered battle. The fight began at three o’clock P. M. and lasted through the night fifteen hours. Fifteen Armadas had assailed the *Revenge* in vain, several of them having sunk at her side. When the morning dawned, the Spanish fleet lay around, far more willing to make compensation than to make more attacks.

Such an achievement may well rank with that of Thermopylae, nor can any other nation show so marvellous a deed of courage, outrivalling the legends of Scandinavia, and going beyond the most unlicensed fiction of romance.

England then must be allowed pre-eminence, not only in the extent of her navy, but in the qualities of her seamen. Whatever the United States has achieved on the sea, the blood of Briton has accomplished. Not in the Frenchman; not in the Scotch, however heroic in the field; nor yet in the German did the heroism of the naval wars of independence lie! Paul Jones and the hero of Erie were men of the stamp who ruled the Spanish seas when Philip II. ruled the destinies of Europe.

It is idle to speculate on what England could do in the event of a war under present conditions of ocean warfare. We suppose Britons are Bri-