

## THE AMERICAN NAVY.

### ALLEGED SERIOUS DEFECTS.

Is the American Navy a Navy only on paper? asks Mr. A. Maurice Low in the *Morning Post*. Rather a curious question to ask, it would seem, in view of all that we have heard during the last few years of the size and strength of the American Navy and the avowed purposes of the rulers of the United States to make it the second naval Power in the world. And yet, if published statements are to be relied upon, although the American Navy may be great in ships and guns, it is far from great in the sense of being able to meet an enemy of equal strength and coming off victorious.

"It is inconceivable that the Japanese Government should be ignorant of the indisputable fact that our Atlantic Battle Fleet is no more fit to make an early appearance in battle trim on waters of the Pacific than was the ill-fated fleet commanded by Rojdestvensky. . . . Our boasted Atlantic Battle Fleet has neither coal, ammunition, fire control appliances, nor, in fact, any of the many things that are indispensable to the efficiency of a fleet in battle." This is the carefully formed opinion of the *Navy*, the official organ of the Navy League of the United States, and the reason the *Navy* takes this pessimistic view of the American Navy is based on the results of the manoeuvres of the Battleship Fleet at the end of August, which it thus describes:

"The first division of four ships spent three days, the 21st to the 23rd of August, in the simplest form of manoeuvres, such as 'ship right,' 'column left,' &c. In the week of August 26-31 the Fleet spent five days at sea, with eight ships in the first squadron and seven in the second. Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday were given up to battle tactics. The two squadrons separated, and when out of sight of each other approached each other in various formations. Fire opened at 8,000 yards and continued to less than 4,000—the range established for torpedoes. Observations were taken every five minutes, and the positions of the squadrons plotted to scale. The very things appeared that were expected. The range-finder crews were inadequately drilled. The range-finders are in tops which vibrate so that it was difficult to read the range at times with a less error than five hundred yards. They were exposed to the full force of the wind, which makes it very difficult to get readings. After the ranges are found there is no way of getting them to the guns except by very crude, hastily-provided means. In short, the Fleet is as ill-prepared to control fire today as it was in the Spanish-American War. There is no efficient means of communicating with the commanding officer. The conning towers were not used on any of the ships, since they are poorly designed and inadequately equipped. No captains have ever controlled their ships from the conning towers, and so are not prepared. These various defects are all emphasised by this battle practice, and officers are set to thinking of what the Fleet really should have for battle conditions. Another circumstance which deserves serious attention is the fact that the turret sights of the "Louisiana" were so seriously injured by vibrations of the turret machinery during the manoeuvres that she did not sail with the Fleet for the target practice in northern waters. Fourteen days will be required to make the necessary repairs at the Norfolk Yard. The "Vermont" remained behind for final speed trials at sea. This ship displayed in Hampton Roads two empty port holes on her broadside. Is this the kind of fleet it is wise to send into the Pacific? No one who took part in the exercise could have failed to ask himself: 'Why train in these battles admirals who have but a short time to serve?' If the Fleet starts for the Pacific on December 15 with the present officers the four rear-admirals will then have an average of but thirteen months before retirement, while the commander-in-chief will have but eight months; the captains will have an average of but three years ten months."

### VOYAGE TO THE PACIFIC OPPOSED.

These outspoken criticisms of the organ of the Navy League, of which the President of the United States and the Secretary of the Navy are honorary members, and General Horace Porter, formerly Ambassador in Paris, is the president, have attracted a great deal of attention from the Press, especially at the *Navy* has made public certain facts regarding the condition of the Navy and defects in the ships, of which the lay Press is in ignorance. In support of its arguments that the fleet is unprepared to cope with an opponent, the *Navy* continues:

"It seems to us undesirable that this great fleet should be sent to the Pacific Coast, at an extra cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars for coal, when, as a matter of fact, it is not fit for battle. The indisputable requirement of practical common sense demands that the fleet should be kept in the Atlantic until it is fully and efficiently prepared for business; and until the fleet is fully equipped with fire control apparatus, ammunition, and torpedoes it certainly ought to spend its time on

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this side in the assiduous practice of battle tactics. The more the Pacific cruise—under present conditions—is considered the more it appears to be an undertaking about equally compounded of ill-justified vain glory and cheap politics."

The conditions, the *Navy* admits, have improved over a year ago, when the President held a review of practically the entire American Navy in Oyster Bay. At that time "many of our new ships had but few of their guns aboard, had no torpedoes, no shells, and no smokeless powder, and some of them scarcely enough brown powder to fire the necessary salutes. It is a matter of common knowledge to all those who have any acquaintance with foreign naval attachés at Washington that the magnificent display, which served to deceive the people of the country, was to these foreign officers a most extraordinary and inexplicable display."

How much weight is to be attached to these criticisms? Manifestly enough to entitle them to be listened to with respect, because the *Navy* has demonstrated that it has a thorough knowledge of the American Navy, and it has forced the Navy Department to admit that its charges of defective construction are true. The *Navy* said that the ports of the turrets of the "Kearsarge" and "Kentucky" were so large that shots could penetrate the openings and disable the guns; that miscalculations had been made in the weight of the armour belts of some of the ships with the result that the water line mark was submerged; and that in some

of the vessels the armour was so badly distributed that they were "soft ended" and could be easily put out of action. Practically all the defects that the *Navy* alleged to exist were admitted by the Navy Department, but with an apology and an explanation that, considering the inexperience of American shipbuilders in warship construction it was not surprising that mistakes were made, and that the same mistakes were made in other navies. The comment of the *New York Evening Post*, which is typical of many other newspapers, is that "the United States has paid enormous prices for its battleships, and maintains a large number of designers, graduates of Annapolis, who are supposed to know their business, and it would seem to the lay mind as if this called for the ability to calculate what weights will be placed on a battleship when she is ready for sea. Nor will the American public, we think, be led off the scent by any red-herring attempt to make it overlook the defects of our vessels by contrasting them with the mistakes made elsewhere. The public has been far too frequently informed that ours is the 'finest Fleet of its size in the world' for this to be successful. The errors of the others offer no excuse. Indeed, the *Navy's* revelations, its repeated assertion that the same defects of the "Oregon" class are reappearing in the designs of our new 20,000-ton sea-monsters, ought to lead to Congressional inquiry, particularly in view of Rear-Admiral Brownson's admissions. Meanwhile, if Japan really has any desire to contest with us for the supremacy of the Pacific, her intelligence officers must be filing away the issues of the *Navy* and Rear-Admiral Brownson's remarks with unmitigated glee."

### CAUSE OF THE "GEORGIA" DISASTER.

When two officers and four seamen were killed and several others were badly wounded by an explosion in the turret of the "Georgia" the Navy Department absolved every one of blame and intimated that it was an "unavoidable accident." Not so the *Navy*. "The turrets and handling-rooms," it says, "of all our ships without exception are wrongly built—built in a way that is peculiar to the American Navy, a way that on its face is dangerous and unreasonable, and a way that has been the subject of attack by officers of the line for years past." The journal explains that what naval constructors in Nelson's time regarded as a danger the American constructor puts in the latest battleship, although officers who have to fight the ships have bitterly protested. In the American battleships the turrets and magazines are constructed on the principle of the lift shaft, the handling-room being directly below the turret. There is nothing to prevent fire falling from the turret into the magazines. "If the constructors of Nelson's days," the *Navy* says, "had followed our plan they would have passed powder up from deck to deck through hatches directly under each other, thus affording a straight and vertical passage from the upper gun hatch down to the magazines. As a matter of fact they were altogether too wise to commit such a blunder. The hatch in the deck below the upper deck was not directly below the uppermost hatch, but was to one side of the upper hatch, and if burning powder or burning anything else fell from the topmost hatch it was separated from the hatch below by a screen of woollen cloth. This is practically the system adopted by every other Navy in the world except the American Navy."

The American people are proud of their Navy, but when over a hundred lives have been lost in turret explosions they begin to think that something must be wrong, and the outspoken attacks of an influential Service journal confirming this belief are not reassuring.

## CHURCH SERVICES.

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