

THE GREAT WAR

The declaration of war against Germany, followed as it was by similar action against Austria-Hungary, was preceded by a sequence of events so remarkable in their character that if any British writer had made any such forecast in times of peace he would have been written down as a romantic optimist.

Owing to a series of fortunate circumstances, the British Fleet—our main line of defence and offence—was fully mobilized for war on the morning before the day—August 4th, 1914, at 11 p.m.—when war was declared by this country, and we were enabled to enter upon the supreme contest in our history with a sense of confidence which was communicated to all the peoples of the British Empire. This feeling of assurance and courage furnished the best possible augury for the future.

When the British peoples awoke to the fact that they owed it to themselves and their past to join in humbling another tyrant, they gained confidence in the task which confronted them from the glorious record of the past achievements of those who, relying upon command of the sea, had crushed in the dust the mightiest rulers that had ever tried to impose their yoke on humanity.

Since the first mariner risked his life in a canoe and travelled coasts for his pleasure or his business, Britain has acquired half the sea-borne traffic of the world. She relies on her Navy to fill the grocer's shop, to bring flour and corn to her great cities, and to keep any possible enemy at a distance. So successfully has the British Navy done its work that many generations of Englishmen have grown up without hearing the sound of a gun fired in anger. Every other nation in Europe has heard the tramp of foreign soldiery in the lifetime of men still living and felt the pain and shame of invasion.

Five times in the history of England the British Navy has stood between the would-be master of Europe and attainment of his ambition. Charles V., Philip II. of Spain, Louis XIV. of France, and Napoleon—all aspired to universal domination. Each of these Sovereigns in turn was checked in his soaring plans by British sea power.

Glancing back over the record of naval progress during the earlier years of the twentieth century we cannot fail to recognize that, in spite of many cross currents and eddies of public opinion, fate had been preparing the British peoples, all unconsciously, for the arbitrament of a war on the issue of which would depend all the interests, tangible and intangible, of the four hundred and forty million subjects of the King—their freedom, their rights to self-government, their world-wide trade, and that atmosphere which distinguishes the British Empire from every other empire which has ever existed.

His Majesty, the King, sent an inspiring message to Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, as representing the whole Navy, and it was communicated to the officers

and men of the squadrons in all parts of the world.

"At this grave moment in our National history I send to you, and through you to the officers and men of the Fleets of which you have assumed command, the assurance of my confidence that under your direction they will revive and renew the old glories of the Royal Navy, and prove once again the sure shield of Britain and of her Empire in the hour of trial."

GEORGE R.I.

Admiral Sir John Jellicoe's reply to the King's message was as follows:—

"On behalf of the officers and men of Home Fleet, beg to tender our loyal and dutiful thanks to your Majesty for the gracious message, which will inspire all with determination to uphold the glorious traditions of the past.

(Signed) Commander-in-Chief

Home Fleet.

Sir John Jellicoe, on whom the eyes of the nation are fixed, is one of the most distinguished admirals of the sea service. He has wide sea experience, is a splendid administrator, and is at the same time a man of cool and determined judgment.

The Relative Standing of the British and German Navies

The relative strength of the British and German navies at the moment when the war was declared is of historical interest.

The appended particulars have been prepared from "Fighting Ships, 1914," and brought up-to-date by the inclusion of two Turkish battleships and the two Chilean destroyer leaders, which were purchased on the outbreak of hostilities by the British Government.

All the German Navy, except one Dreadnought Battle Cruiser, two Armoured Cruisers and a few Light Cruisers, were concentrated in the North Sea.

	British Navy	German Navy
Super-Dreadnoughts	14	None.
Dreadnoughts	18	16
Pre-Dreadnoughts	40	20
Battle Cruisers	10	5
Armoured Cruisers	34	9
Cruisers	15	6
Light Cruisers	87	37
Destroyers	227	152
Torpedo-boats	109	45
Submarines	75	36
Minelayers	7	3
Repair Ships	3	—