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THE FRENCH NAVAL MANŒUVRES OF 1891.—A PRÉCIS
OF AN ARTICLE IN THE "REVUE DES DEUX
MONDES."

Prepared by Commander H. GARBETT, R.N.

THE writer of the above article, who is evidently well acquainted with his subject, commences by commenting on the complete revolution in naval tactics brought about by the modern battle-ship, with its complex armament of heavy and quick-firing guns, torpedoes, and, above all, by the ram.

He points out how the rapidity of action of the present day has especially modified the conditions of naval war; for one thing, the squadrons of the second line, which were formerly armed at leisure after the opening of hostilities, must be ready from henceforth to put to sea with as little delay as possible, to replace or reinforce the ships of the first line, which should be able to meet the enemy on the day war is declared. Hence a system of mobilization of the Naval Reserves analogous to that of the Army, which necessitates the maintaining of but a few men on board the ships which the exigencies of the Budget will not permit being kept fully equipped.

The different types of vessels which constitute the actual fleets are the product of theoretical ideas often pushed to an extreme; at one time huge steel-clad monsters armed with a few heavy guns have been the favourites, then opinion has veered towards ships of great speed with a handier and more numerous armament, affording a much greater rapidity of fire. The result is, he tells us, that the navies of the great Powers are composed of ships very dissimilar, as to the respective merits of which there still exists considerable difference of opinion.

To discover the best method of utilizing these different units of battle, the most logical plan is to place them in face of certain hypotheses resembling the objectives which war might present, and to make them carry out, as far as possible, the operations which these hypotheses allow.

The first great French naval manœuvres took place in 1886, when Admiral Aube was Minister, their object being to establish the rôle which torpedo-boats could play in a naval war on the high sea.

Since that time, France and the great maritime Powers have, every summer, mobilized a certain number of ships in the Reserve and attached them temporarily to the permanent squadrons with the view of studying the problems of war at sea. These manœuvres, besides being an excellent training for the Officers and crews, have also been the means of thoroughly testing the matériel and, above all, the machinery of the ships.

It is, perhaps, in this that the principal interest of the manœuvres dwells, and on this point the experience acquired has been considerable. For, as far as the actual conduct of hostilities is concerned, it is certain that for several reasons the manœuvres can only present a very imperfect image of the reality.

In the first place, it is impossible to make the conditions such as they would be in actual warfare, because it would be uncivil to one's neighbours to choose any among them for the imaginary belligerents; the operations, therefore, have to take place in waters other than those which would be the actual theatre of war. Then it is not possible to simulate the "offensive"; to assume the offensive means for a fleet to steam full speed on a given point, which would be unsuitable for tactical manœuvres.

It is not less difficult to devise a plan in which the principal squadron has to remain on the defensive, because the interests of the defence may often best be served by taking the offensive in order to forestall the adversary's blow. All evidence goes to prove, for example, that the best defence of our coasts, as far as our squadron is concerned, is to advance to meet the enemy's fleet, and to endeavour to surprise and destroy him by superior forces. To impose on a certain number of ironclads the duty of cruising before a coast in order to fight an enemy on the supposition that he will attack them is to make a dangerous mistake, of a nature to deceive public opinion.

In reality, such will never be the rôle of our naval forces; we have the coast batteries and our mobile defences, which have been created precisely because our battle-ships cannot be everywhere at the same time in sufficiently strong force, and the object of which is to guard against all surprise while our fleet tries to engage the enemy.

How could one expect a squadron, whatever its speed or composition might be, to proceed fast enough from Cape Creuse to Nice, from Toulon to Corsica, or the coast of Provence to Algeria, in order to meet at a given time an enemy at sea and able to appear unexpectedly wherever it might seem best to him?

This was brought well into notice during the manœuvres of 1888, when Admiral Alquier, tied down by his orders, was cruising between Cette and Villefranche, while Admiral O'Neill, who had the advantage in speed, appeared successively before our maritime towns; these latter, believing that their security lay in the counter-movements of the defending squadron, raised a loud outcry because Admiral Alquier did not always arrive in time to protect them. It is impossible to manœuvre two squadrons, the one against the other, without giving to one an objective which it will be the mission of the other to thwart. A scheme of operations ought then to be chosen sufficiently vague to prevent anybody's susceptibilities being wounded, but sufficiently defined at the same time to give scope to tactical combinations.

We have insisted, says the writer, on the preceding considerations, because the public have a marked tendency to draw from naval

manœuvres strategical conclusions, when it is only necessary to look for lessons of a tactical nature; it is a study of the method of employing the different units of battle, and nothing more.

The writer next calls attention to the large scale on which mobilization has been attempted this year: more than a hundred vessels, of which forty were ironclads and cruisers, were concentrated, fully equipped, in the Mediterranean and northern ports.

Those of the ships which were in the Reserve had their crews completed by two classes of the Naval Reserves, and it was the first time that these men had been called upon to serve their full period of twenty-eight days at sea.

He next calls attention briefly to the sources from which the Naval Reserves are drawn, viz., the Inscription Maritime and voluntary enlistment.

The Inscription Maritime places at the disposal of the Navy all the male coasting population, from the age of eighteen to fifty, fishermen, from father to son, for the most part. The inscripts arrive on board our men-of-war already familiarized with the dangers of the profession, and, what is no less important, insensible to seasickness. In return for this obligatory duty, the naval inscripts have the free monopoly of the coast navigation, of the fisheries, and in a general way of the exploitation of the products of the sea. Subject to a stoppage on account of their pay as seamen of the State, or in the merchant service, they acquire, at the end of twenty-five years at sea, the right to a pension, which is paid by the "Caisses des Invalides de la Marine."

In time of peace, the inscripts are subject to a period of seven years' obligatory service, five of which are on active service, after which they pass to the Reserve, and can only be called out by a decree of mobilization.

The Inscription Maritime, which is at the same time the prop of our merchant navy, has been subjected recently to lively attacks. Even in the Parliament there has been formed a certain current of opinion against this institution, now two centuries old; its exclusive mechanism and privileges seem out of accord with the principle of equality for all, in face of the obligation of military service. Objections have been made that the Inscription Maritime applies to nearly 118,000 men, when the Navy only needs about 50,000 men to man all the fleet, and it is concluded, therefore, that it maintains outside military service a large number of men that it does not know how to employ.

One hundred and eighteen thousand men is a round number, from which, however, it is necessary to deduct the inscripts who may be embarked on the ships of the great maritime companies, ships which in time of war would be equipped for service as auxiliary cruisers, or as transports, as well as the seamen who may be absent from France in our sailing ships. On the day of a general levy, the Inscription Maritime would not furnish more than about 30,000 men, a Reserve indispensable for filling the vacancies in our ships, and for assuring the supplies of coal in our harbours, as one would not, indeed, impose this

laborious work upon the already worn out crews of ships returning from sea or from battle.

A Mixed Commission, presided over by one of the Senators, M. Lenoël, has been deputed to study the question, and has arrived at the conclusion to maintain the Inscription Maritime, basing their recommendation on a recognition of the truth of the maxim that "seamen can only be made at sea."

"The Inscription Maritime, then, only furnishes two-thirds of the effective forces of the Navy, from 20,000 to 35,000 men (on the peace footing).

"The continued multiplication of the engines with which our ships-of-war are provided, the complexity of modern guns and torpedoes, &c., have necessitated the creation of specialists, who are trained on board school-ships. These special acquirements require a certain amount of education, which is not always to be found among the sturdy but poor population of our coasts. The rude life of a fisherman, who fights all his life against the elements to win his daily bread, is well fitted to make valiant hearts and good seamen, but leaves little leisure for going to school.

"In order to provide for the recruiting for these special duties, which are called for by the exigencies of our modern fleets, the Navy admits volunteers who enter for a period of from five to nine years, young men from the interior who choose to serve at sea, attracted by the advantages offered for the special duties in view of which they engage themselves.

"It is from this second source that the Navy draws upon for its torpedo-men, gunners, and almost all its mechanical, engineering, and Paymaster's staffs.

"The volunteers who quit the Service at the end of the period of their engagement complete the ten years which they owe for active military service in the Reserve of the Fleet, and are liable to be called out for twenty-eight days on the same conditions as the Army Reservists. At the end of their ten years they cease to form part of the Navy, and are merged in the Territorial Army."

The mobilization and the following manœuvres have already been described in the last number of this Journal, but a few additional details may be added from the account given by the writer of this article before proceeding to the lessons which he draws from them.

He states that the two classes of Reservists who were called out on the 22nd of June numbered about 3,700 men. Those who belonged to the maritime arrondissements of Cherbourg and Brest were embarked at those ports on board ships in the Reserve temporarily commissioned for the occasion; the Reservists of the arrondissements of Lorient, Rochefort, and Toulon were ordered to the latter port to complete the strength of the Mediterranean Squadron, and to commission the ships in Reserve there to be mobilized.

The Mediterranean Fleet has, for some time past, been composed of three divisions of three ironclads each, with a variable number of large cruisers, torpedo-cruisers, and smaller vessels. For reasons of economy, the two first divisions are the only ones kept fully manned;

the third division and the larger cruisers being only partially manned.

The squadron includes, in addition, a division of the Reserve, formed of three ironclads and three cruisers, which also only carry about two-thirds of their proper complements.

In the order of their arrival, the 1,300 Reservists sent to Toulon were embarked on board the ships of the 3rd Division and the cruisers of the squadron, after that on the ships of the Reserve Division.

On the 23rd June, at 11 A.M., the Mediterranean Squadron had received its Reservists, and weighed, in accordance with an order received from Paris. On the following day the Reserve Division also put to sea, so that in forty-eight hours after the Decree calling out the Reserves had been issued, a fleet of twelve ironclads in addition to cruisers and the vessels of the "defence mobile" were ready to meet the enemy.

On the morning of the 25th the fleet returned to Salins-d'Hyères and Vice-Admiral Duperée found himself the next day at the head of a fleet of sixty vessels, the most imposing concentration of naval forces which had taken place in France since the Crimean War.

The writer bears testimony to the zeal and spirit shown by the Reservists, and states that they very rapidly picked up the details of the Service, and mastered the improvements wrought in the implements of warfare since their discharge into the Reserve. Qualified and earnest men, they gave proof that their embarkation will bring to the ships a solid contingent of robust arms and willing hearts.

With regard to the rules in accordance with which the Umpires were to be governed, it has since transpired that, of the six hours during which the attacking force were to remain before any fortified place without interruption before it could be considered captured, three must be in daylight, and the force must also be superior to the land and sea forces opposed to them. To arrive at this end, a numerical coefficient of troops was given for the land defence of certain ports; in order to establish the superiority or otherwise of the defence, this coefficient was added to the coefficients of the ships taking part in the defence, and then compared with the total of the coefficients of the attacking ships.

The defending fleet had to watch a line some 90 miles long between Barcelona and Majorca; this was effected by the battle-ships in line ahead, steering a course between the Formentera and Ilobégat Lighthouses, but not approaching either coast nearer than 30 miles. At 15 miles east of the ironclads, the 1st Light Division (the "Tage" and "Forbin") cruised on a line parallel to that of the squadron, and stretching from the coast of Majorca to 25 miles in the offing, while to the westward the 2nd Light Division (the "Sfax" and "Couleuvre") cruised similarly between the coast of Spain and 25 miles in the offing. The ships are reported to have kept their stations very well, in spite of the night being very dark, and the weather stormy and squally, circumstances very unfavourable for their work; moreover their lights were masked.

It seems probable that the attacking fleet would have successfully run the gauntlet without being observed, as it kept close under the Majorca Coast, but for the fact that the sea was too rough for the torpedo-boats, which about 2 A.M. on the morning of the 9th burnt blue lights, to show they could no longer keep up with the larger ships; this signal was observed by the "Tage" and "Forbin," and the former immediately steamed off to acquaint Admiral Puech. The breeze was fresh from the north-east, and as morning broke both fleets had to detach their torpedo-boats under convoy to seek shelter. On receiving the report from the "Tage," Admiral Puech steered to the north-east, so as to intercept the enemy, sending the "Tage" on ahead again to regain touch with them; both squadrons were at this time steering nearly parallel courses, but out of sight of each other. Unfortunately, during the morning an accident occurred to the cruiser's port engine, obliging her to proceed with a single screw, so it was not until 3.50 P.M. that she again sighted the enemy, being herself observed at the same time by the latter. Admiral des Essarts, finding he was discovered, decided to make for Ajaccio; he would thus be able to take advantage of his superiority in speed to attempt operations against that place, as he had every reason to believe that the defending fleet was well in his rear. Admiral Puech, judging from the enemy's course at sunset that Ajaccio was his objective, decided on steering N. 70° E. until daylight, but as the speed of the "Tage" was now considerably reduced, and both the "Forbin" and "Falcon" in difficulties with their boilers, he was unable to keep touch with him. He, however, arrived off Ajaccio about an hour after the enemy had opened fire, and the latter consequently had to make off to the northward; having the advantage in speed, Admiral des Essarts made good his escape, with only the loss of the "Lapérouse," which ship, having fallen astern during the night, was captured. Not having time to operate against the coast of Provence, Admiral des Essarts contented himself with steering such devious courses during the evening as enabled him to baffle any attempt at surprise by Admiral Puech's torpedo-boats, and at midnight the operations came to an end.

The writer considers the conditions of the defence very unfavourable, and that this must always be the case where a squadron has to cover a large channel and yet avoid dispersing its forces far, for fear of being taking at a disadvantage. In spite of the bad weather and the absence of the moon, Admiral Puech nevertheless discovered the approach of the enemy, and kept touch with him, thanks to the "Tage," which was able to develop a speed of 18 knots for a sufficiently long time, thus affording a signal confirmation of the importance of the rôle which cruisers will play in a naval war.

Of the ships mobilized in the northern ports nothing need be said; they did not cruise at sea together, but carried out their drills quite independently. The ships commissioned there, however, formed a grand total of 7 battle-ships, 6 cruisers, and 22 torpedo-boats between the two ports.

If we add to these numbers the Mediterranean ships and those of

the Northern Division which went to the Baltic, we shall find that the Navy had in commission at the same time, and ready for action, 22 battle-ships, 4 armoured gunboats, 18 cruisers, 5 despatch torpedo-vessels, and 54 torpedo-boats.

This is a considerable force, and it may be convenient to estimate the results. Out of the twenty-two battle-ships thus commissioned, only one, the "Marengo," is an old ship; she dates from 1869, all the others have been built during the last fifteen years. We can discuss the value of the different types to which they belong, and which represent, on the one hand, the incessant modification of the conditions demanded by our battle-ships, and, on the other, the scale of the progress realized in the metallurgy and the construction of machinery. But we must remember that all these ships would make a good figure in a naval battle.

Our mobilized battle-ships were, perhaps, less well prepared for working continuously without their machinery breaking down. The ships commissioned from the second category of the Reserve had, for the most part, to be handled with engines with which the men who had been embarked on board them had no practical experience, however much they might have mastered them theoretically.

This is an inconvenience inherent to reserves, to which we shall return.

With regard to the eighteen mobilized cruisers, we must not entertain too high illusions with regard to them. We will here give some details about those commissioned for the manœuvres:—

	Date of Launch.	Displacement.	Speed.	Guns.
			knots.	
1. Duguay-Trouin	1877	3,300	16·0	10·6" (and under)
2. Forfait	1879	2,300	14·2	15·6"
3. Lapérouse	1877	2,300	14·7	15·6"
4. Nielly	1880	2,300	15·2	15·6"
5. Desaix	1868	1,600	14·2	4·1"
6. Dupetit-Thouars	1874	1,900	15·2	10·6"
7. Fabert	1874	1,900	14·9	8·6"
8. Éclaireur	1877	1,700	15·2	8·6"
9. Sfax	1884	4,502	16·7	16·6" (and under)
10. Cécile	1888	5,800	19·4	16·6"
11. Tage	1888	7,000	19·2	16·6" "
12. Carcouf	1888	1,850	20·5	4·6"
13. Forbin	1888	1,850	20·6	4·6"
14. Lalande	1888	1,880	20·8	4·6"
15. Condor	1885	1,280	17·5	5·4"
16. Épervier	1886	1,280	17·3	5·4"
17. Faucon	1887	1,280	17·0	5·4"
18. Vautour	1889	1,280	17·0	5·4"
19. Darout	1889	3,000	(?)	6·6"

The first eight are wooden ships, built without compartments, and were nearly all engaged in the operations against Formosa, and whose speed now is more than a knot less than that attained at the trials. They have still some value on account of their armament, but they can no longer be considered as scouts for an ironclad squadron, for which service a higher speed than 16 knots is required. The seven last ones on the list, not including the "Davout," which has yet to undergo some of her trials, have realized good speeds in smooth water, but their small tonnage will not allow of their steaming against even a moderate gale or sea. These vessels, to give them their proper name, are torpedo-cruisers, and were built when that weapon stood in high favour.

Under the idea that the smallest vessel armed with torpedoes could sink the most powerful ironclad, we strove, continues the writer, to give the highest possible speed to vessels of the smallest possible dimensions, losing sight of the fact that high speeds can only really be maintained by large vessels, and, the larger the vessel is, the better is she able to combat the force of the sea and wind, without being brought to a stand-still. No ship of less than 3,000 or 4,000 tons is to-day considered capable of maintaining a speed of more than 16 knots, and these are the dimensions of the new 2nd-class cruisers at present building in England, and which are intended to have a trial speed of 20 knots. Without pretending that our torpedo-cruisers are valueless, they do not come up to the expectations which were formed of them when they were laid down in 1886. Their engines and boilers are very fragile, and consequently wanting in resisting power, as, although expected to develop a very large horse-power, their dimensions have been reduced to a minimum, in order that they may be crammed into the confined space allotted to them. The result is we hear only too often of the breaking of piston-rods and of leaky boilers on board these vessels.

There remain the "Cécile" and the "Tage," which steam admirably, but of these again it may be said that their dimensions are too large and their net cost too high, when it is considered that their only protection is an armoured deck. We do not speak of the "Sfax," as she only has a speed of 16 knots.

Besides the "Davout," there are two other cruisers, the "Alger" and the "Jean-Bart," undergoing their trials, and there we have all the cruisers the French Navy actually possesses for doing the scouting work for her armoured fleets. We must demand the immediate completion of the five protected cruisers, the three 1st-class and the four 2nd-class cruisers now under construction in the dockyards. They should all be afloat in about a year, and we should then possess twenty cruisers worthy of the name; it would be a grand step in the right direction, and one heavy weight the less off the minds of our Squadron Commanders.

Frigates! was the cry of Nelson, and it is also the cry of our Admirals, who all demand that in our fighting fleet we should have as many cruisers at least as there are battle-ships, and never has the need of rapid scouts for our armoured squadrons been more pressing.

As battle-ships cannot pretend to keep up a greater speed than from 15 to 16 knots, and require also to be very careful of their coal, lest they should find themselves out of fuel when the moment for action has come, an ironclad squadron requires very swift, vigilant scouts to scour the sea, to discover and keep touch with the enemy, and, at the same time, to maintain constant communication with the Admiral. Without scouts, a squadron moves in the dark, and may fall unawares across a superior force, or else let a weaker enemy shoot past at a short distance by taking advantage of the night.

Rules for this important vedette service are now being codified, and the new tactics practised by the Mediterranean Squadron, but there are not sufficient cruisers to carry them out properly. We do not doubt but that Parliament will patriotically sanction a suitable addition to the fleet of vessels of this class.

The writer next proceeds to go into the question of the ships in reserve, a question which he considers must be settled by Parliament.

There are three classes of the Reserve; in the first, the ships lie in the roads with most of the Officers and about two-thirds of the crews on board, ready for sea with the exception of the provisions which would deteriorate by being kept long in the store-rooms; every three months these ships weigh for a cruise in the offing and to fire their guns; they ought to be ready to put to sea in forty-eight hours, for no matter what destination. Theoretically, the first class is very nearly completely equipped and manned; there is only one drawback, it costs too much; so that up to last year, with the exception of ships making their trials, there was not one single vessel in this class.

The second class is formed of the coast-defence ships, the older ironclads, and the unattached cruisers. They have a Commander, a small number of Officers, half the engine-room staff, and a fourth of the normal crew; these, however, are not considered as embarked, but as on shore service.

The third class comprises the very old wooden cruisers and transports; these ships are nearly completely dismantled, and are looked after by a provisional Commander and a small number of men.

The second class is, for the time, by far the most numerous; it ought only to be composed of wooden ships or those of inferior speed, or those fitting out for distant stations. It will be so in the future, as from henceforth all modern ships not in commission are to be placed in the first class.

In view of the complicated construction and machinery of the battle-ships and cruisers, the writer emphasizes the necessity of maintaining on board these ships a sufficiently numerous and permanent staff, who will be thoroughly acquainted with all the details of the bulkheading, pipes, valves, &c. He considers it indispensable that the engines should be frequently worked, so that the engineers who will be in charge should be completely familiarized with them.

It is to comply with these "desiderata" that the Reserve Division of the Mediterranean Squadron has been created this year. The vessels composing it are placed on the footing of the First Reserve. Under the command of a Rear-Admiral and annexed to the Mediterranean Squadron the division weighs frequently with the fleet and takes part in the manœuvres. The results have been so satisfactory that the Minister of Marine has provided in the Budget of 1892 for constituting a second Reserve Division. We shall then have the best part of our battle-ships in the Mediterranean ready to drop into line in forty-eight hours, and there is no doubt that ultimately the same measure will be applied to the Northern Fleet.

Without expatiating on the technical lessons which can be drawn from the manœuvres in the Mediterranean, there is one fact, continues the writer, which has made a deep impression on everybody; that is, that for the most part the torpedo-boats were unable to follow the battle-ships at a speed of 12 knots even in moderate weather.

He traces the torpedo-boat movement in France, giving to Admiral Aube the merit of the impulse for the construction of these vessels. He is of opinion that their small stowage of coal and water, the excessive fatigue imposed on Officers and men, where sleep and repose are impossible, the impossibility often of cooking, make it necessary to replenish them and to be changing their crews every three or four days; and that the manœuvres have proved once more that torpedo-boats are not fit to be attached to a squadron on a permanent footing: if it should go to sea for more than three or four days, they cease to be an accession of strength and become a worry and an "impedimentum." He considers that on the coast their rôle has lost none of its importance; they are valuable watch-dogs, which, while they remain within reach of shelter, where they can find repose and renew their stores, will know how to drive off hostile cruisers; but the breakdowns which have occurred among them show that there are weak points in their organization. For torpedo-boats, even more than for the large ships, it is necessary that the personnel called upon to serve in them in time of war should be continually embarked in time of peace for real exercise, in the minimum proportion of at least one complete crew for two boats.

He quotes the results of the English torpedo-boat manœuvres of this year as confirming the opinions formed by French Officers from their own experience of the seaworthiness of these craft; pointing out that every time the English torpedo-boats, which were supposed to have a speed of from 19 to 20 knots, were chased by the torpedo-catchers with a nominal speed of 2 knots less, they were invariably captured, which would seem to indicate that the boats rarely went more than 16 knots at sea. The torpedo itself, so terrible if it strikes its object, is a projectile far more uncertain than that from a gun; in the English manœuvres, although the torpedoes were all of the latest pattern, only one in eight seems to have struck the mark.

The writer next expresses doubts as to the speed which ships in the Reserve, commissioned off-hand with a staff new to the machinery,

would be able to maintain. The cruisers "Iapérouse," "Desaix," and "Dupetit-Thouars," commissioned under these conditions, were unable to maintain their estimated speed on account of the difficulty of keeping steam. The ironclads did better, but he points out that the English Northern Squadron this year, although composed of new ships, when steaming full speed for a night were unable to maintain a higher speed than from 13 to 14 knots, and the stokers had to be reinforced by men from the deck. This, in his opinion, was due to two causes, first, that the ships were very dissimilar in size, tonnage, and construction, the cruisers ranging from 1,800 to 6,000 tons, while the torpedo-catchers were only 735 tons. Ships so different have not the same qualities at sea, and cannot develop the same speed, although the conditions are identical. The second cause was the impossibility of relieving the stokers sufficiently often from want of men. In England, as with us, when ships have to steam full speed, it is necessary to employ half the stokers to feed the fires instead of one-third, and yet there are not arms enough.

We must therefore insist that due provision is made for the needs of the furnaces, and that our squadrons be made occasionally to steam full speed for at least twenty-four hours, so that we may know what speed they may be depended upon to keep up.

The lessons then to be drawn from this year's manœuvres are: the increasing importance of the rôle of the scouts, and the urgency for us to immediately construct the fleet of cruisers which we need; a definite condemnation of small cruisers; the almost exclusive limitation of the action of torpedo-boats to coast defence; the uncertainty of the efficacy of auto-mobile torpedoes, and the necessity of making decisive experiments at sea with these expensive weapons; the maintenance in as complete a state of equipment as possible of the ships of the second line, and the formation of homogeneous reserve squadrons; also the increasing, if necessary, of our effectives in view of the requirements of the stoke-holes.

The writer concludes his article by describing the visit to and inspection of the fleet by the Ministers of Marine and Foreign Affairs, as well as by a certain number of Senators and Deputies belonging to the newly created Parliamentary Commission on the Navy. "For three or four years past, our Navy," he says, "has been sharply criticized by certain journals, who have tried to sow distrust with regard to our naval 'matériel,' and to cast discredit on the administration of the Navy, and that with an unheard-of violence of language. This press campaign has all the more surprised public opinion, as until lately the Navy had enjoyed, on the contrary, a considerable amount of popularity in France; people have recalled the glorious pages which have been added to our history since its reconstitution, marvellously effected at the close of the wars of the First Empire; its solid organization, which permitted it to contribute materially to the national defence in 1870; finally, the expedition to China has shown that our sailors have thoroughly mastered their duty.

"Fourteen years after our defeats, Courbet and his squadron have

been the first to restore the prestige of victory to the flag of the Republic.

"If one believed the statements of some journals, statements which found an echo in Parliament and the Commission on the Budget, our Navy had lost all title to the confidence of the country, and found itself without the means of showing a front to the duties which lie upon it."

In face of the persistence with which these attacks were renewed, the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies nominated lately a double Parliamentary Commission for the Navy, such as already existed for the Army.

It was to the members of this Commission that the invitation was given by the Navy that they should go and examine the different units of the large fleet assembled for the annual manœuvres, and be initiated into their different uses in the squadron.

The Senators and Deputies who responded to the invitation were eagerly welcomed; everybody understood that it was an excellent thing that Members of Parliament, called daily to discuss the bases of our naval establishment, should place themselves *en rapport* with the squadron, where all the questions in connection with the personnel and matériel are constantly studied and tested.

On the 12th of July the whole force weighed and exercised off the Hyères Islands, fleet evolutions which were extremely interesting to the guests of the squadron.

At 7 A.M. on the 13th July the squadron weighed to return to Toulon, the fleet making a sham attack on the harbour.

After some skilful evolutions in the Bay of Hyères, the squadron formed in line ahead, the "Formidable" leading; there were thirty ships in the column, and each was flanked by two torpedo-boats.

We shall not speak here of the firing, both on board the ships and from the shore batteries, as the squadron steamed towards the harbour's mouth. That which more particularly struck the seafaring public, who were present in crowds at this imposing *coup-d'œil*, was the entry of the ships into the harbour.

In less than three quarters of an hour the thirty ships, who followed each other at a distance of some 400 yards from mainmast to mainmast, had entered the harbour in spite of the smoke from the guns, and taken up their moorings, not ceasing their fire until the head of the line of buoys was reached. This brilliant evolution shows the safety felt in the *coup-d'œil* by the Commanders of the squadron, and the confidence which the Commander-in-Chief had in his Captains.

We have not been afraid in the course of this article to profit by the occasions which have offered themselves to make certain digressions, in order to bring to the light the circumstances in which our Navy may find itself placed in face of eventualities which may affect it.

Without having to consider it as menacing, it is certain that the war for which we are preparing ourselves without ceasing in order

better to stave it off will see one of its first stages developing itself in the Mediterranean.

It is probable our fleet will have the honour of firing the first shot, and one can foretell that the reverberation will be considerable. If the result of our first engagement at sea should be favourable to us, the solidity of certain alliances existing or eventual will be singularly shaken.

A naval victory will in any case lighten the rude assault which our frontiers will have to sustain, by obliging our enemies to cover a large sea front which is open to our blows.

Mark the object for which the fleet is continually working, where the highest confidence reigns from the top to the bottom of the hierarchical ladder; this confidence arises from the excellent training; each one knows himself to be capable of the effort expected of him by his chief, and, in addition, our Officers have tested under all conditions the qualities of the ships that they will have to take under fire.

It seems to us well to say this, because this aim does not suppose any preconceived idea of aggression, and also because we have known for too long what unavowable and unavowed ambitions are working to systematically calumniate our Navy, which, silent and resigned, nevertheless prepares itself to play the grand rôle which is reserved for it in the national defence.