

CHAPTER I.

Naval Requirements in the Far East, with Estimates.

The late war has shown once again that the British Empire depends for its existence on the safety of its sea communications. Sea power has saved the Empire as on many occasions before, but in this case it has also saved the cause of the Allies and of civilization.

It may be assumed that the recognition of this fact will lead to the determination that the maintenance of British sea supremacy will be the guiding principle of our statesmen in the future.

2. The war has imposed a crushing financial burden on the Empire, and especially on the Mother Country ; and, although many countries are suffering under the same heavy burden, and the naval menace of our late enemies has ceased to exist, a navy of very considerable proportions will still be required if the British Empire is to maintain its sea supremacy.

3. War experience has shown very clearly the immense capabilities given by modern weapons for the destruction of, or interference with, sea communications. Our late enemies used many of these weapons illegitimately, but even if measures are found in the future to prevent such illegitimate means of naval warfare it is still possible to cause great havoc to trade without infringing the tenets of international law.

4. The trade of New Zealand is dependent on the security of her sea communications. Her distance from neighbouring countries is a very great safeguard against invasion, but it cannot be said that invasion is impossible. The greatest immunity in this respect and the only protection to sea-borne trade is given by the naval forces of the Empire.

5. Whilst the final decision of war must depend on the result in the main theatre, wherever that may be, the presence of strong naval forces in Far Eastern waters is necessary to ensure the safety of the sea communications from the outset, and to act as a deterrent to other forms of attack, should the conditions render them possible, as might be the case. The inevitable numerical weakness of the military forces due to the small population increases the importance of naval defence.

6. It is not possible to consider the naval requirements of New Zealand without taking account also of the naval requirements of the Pacific and Indian Oceans as a whole. The question is one of co-operation between the naval forces of the Empire stationed in Far Eastern waters. Sea communications in Indian and Chinese waters, as well as in the remainder of the Pacific, are matters of concern to the people of New Zealand and Australia ; and, conversely, the safety of sea communications in the South Pacific and in China are of interest to the people of India. Similarly the safety of the bases at Colombo and Singapore is vital to New Zealand and Australia ; and the safety of Sydney and other naval bases in the South Pacific, and of Singapore and Colombo, is of the greatest importance to India. Even the prosperity of South Africa is associated, though in a lesser degree, with this question, whilst Canada is greatly concerned in the matter.