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**English Seamen in the Sixteenth  
Century Lectures Delivered at  
Oxford Easter Terms 1893-4**

James Anthony Froude

# Imprint

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## LECTURE I

### THE SEA CRADLE OF THE REFORMATION

Jean Paul, the German poet, said that God had given to France the empire of the land, to England the empire of the sea, and to his own country the empire of the air. The world has changed since Jean Paul's days. The wings of France have been clipped; the German Empire has become a solid thing; but England still holds her watery dominion; Britannia does still rule the waves, and in this proud position she has spread the English race over the globe; she [Pg 2] has created the great American nation; she is peopling new Englands at the Antipodes; she has made her Queen Empress of India; and is in fact the very considerable phenomenon in the social and political world which all acknowledge her to be. And all this she has achieved in the course of three centuries, entirely in consequence of her predominance as an ocean power. Take away her merchant fleets; take away the navy that guards them: her empire will come to an end; her colonies will fall off, like leaves from a withered tree; and Britain will become once more an insignificant island in the North Sea, for the future students in Australian and New Zealand universities to discuss the fate of in their debating societies.

How the English navy came to hold so extraordinary a position is worth reflecting on. Much has been written about it, but little, as it seems to me, which touches the heart of the matter. We are shown the power of our country growing and expanding. But how it grew, why, after a sleep of so many hundred years, the genius of our Scandinavian forefathers suddenly sprang [Pg 3] again into life—of this we are left without explanation.

The beginning was undoubtedly the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Down to that time the sea sovereignty belonged to the Spaniards, and had been fairly won by them. The conquest of Granada had stimulated and elevated the Spanish character. The subjects of Ferdinand and Isabella, of Charles V. and Philip II., were extraordinary men, and accomplished extraordinary things. They stretched the limits of the known world; they conquered Mexico and Peru; they planted their colonies over the South American continent; they took possession of the great West Indian islands, and

with so firm a grasp that Cuba at least will never lose the mark of the hand which seized it. They built their cities as if for eternity. They spread to the Indian Ocean, and gave their monarch's name to the *Philippines*. All this they accomplished in half a century, and, as it were, they did it with a single hand; with the other they were fighting Moors and Turks and protecting the coast of the Mediterranean from the corsairs of Tunis and Constantinople. [Pg 4]

They had risen on the crest of the wave, and with their proud *Non sufficit orbis* were looking for new worlds to conquer, at a time when the bark of the English water-dogs had scarcely been heard beyond their own fishing-grounds, and the largest merchant vessel sailing from the port of London was scarce bigger than a modern coasting collier. And yet within the space of a single ordinary life these insignificant islanders had struck the sceptre from the Spaniards' grasp and placed the ocean crown on the brow of their own sovereign. How did it come about? What Cadmus had sown dragons' teeth in the furrows of the sea for the race to spring from who manned the ships of Queen Elizabeth, who carried the flag of their own country round the globe, and challenged and fought the Spaniards on their own coasts and in their own harbours?

The English sea power was the legitimate child of the Reformation. It grew, as I shall show you, directly out of the new despised Protestantism. Matthew Parker and Bishop Jewel, the judicious Hooker himself, excellent men as they were, would have written and preached to [Pg 5] small purpose without Sir Francis Drake's cannon to play an accompaniment to their teaching. And again, Drake's cannon would not have roared so loudly and so widely without seamen already trained in heart and hand to work his ships and level his artillery. It was to the superior seamanship, the superior quality of English ships and crews, that the Spaniards attributed their defeat. Where did these ships come from? Where and how did these mariners learn their trade? Historians talk enthusiastically of the national spirit of a people rising with a united heart to repel the invader, and so on. But national spirit could not extemporise a fleet or produce trained officers and sailors to match the conquerors of Lepanto. One slight observation I must make here at starting, and certainly with no invidious purpose. It has been said confidently, it has been repeated, I believe, by all modern writers,

that the Spanish invasion suspended in England the quarrels of creed, and united Protestants and Roman Catholics in defence of their Queen and country. They remind us especially that Lord Howard of Effingham, who was Eliza [Pg 6] beth's admiral, was himself a Roman Catholic. But was it so? The Earl of Arundel, the head of the House of Howard, was a Roman Catholic, and he was in the Tower praying for the success of Medina Sidonia. Lord Howard of Effingham was no more a Roman Catholic than—I hope I am not taking away their character—than the present Archbishop of Canterbury or the Bishop of London. He was a Catholic, but an English Catholic, as those reverend prelates are. Roman Catholic he could not possibly have been, nor anyone who on that great occasion was found on the side of Elizabeth. A Roman Catholic is one who acknowledges the Roman Bishop's authority. The Pope had excommunicated Elizabeth, had pronounced her deposed, had absolved her subjects from their allegiance, and forbidden them to fight for her. No Englishman who fought on that great occasion for English liberty was, or could have been, in communion with Rome. Loose statements of this kind, lightly made, fall in with the modern humour. They are caught up, applauded, repeated, and pass unquestioned into history. It is time to correct them a little. [Pg 7]

I have in my possession a detailed account of the temper of parties in England, drawn up in the year 1585, three years before the Armada came. The writer was a distinguished Jesuit. The account itself was prepared for the use of the Pope and Philip, with a special view to the reception which an invading force would meet with, and it goes into great detail. The people of the towns—London, Bristol, &c.—were, he says, generally heretics. The peers, the gentry, their tenants, and peasantry, who formed the immense majority of the population, were almost universally Catholics. But this writer distinguishes properly among Catholics. There were the ardent impassioned Catholics, ready to be confessors and martyrs, ready to rebel at the first opportunity, who had renounced their allegiance, who desired to overthrow Elizabeth and put the Queen of Scots in her place. The number of these, he says, was daily increasing, owing to the exertions of the seminary priests; and plots, he boasts, were being continually formed by them to murder the Queen. There were Catholics of another sort, who were papal at heart, but went [Pg 8]

with the times to save their property; who looked forward to a change in the natural order of things, but would not stir of themselves till an invading army actually appeared. But all alike, he insists, were eager for a revolution. Let the Prince of Parma come, and they would all join him; and together these two classes of Catholics made three-fourths of the nation.

'The only party,' he says (and this is really noticeable), 'the only party that would fight to death for the Queen, the only real friends she had, were the *Puritans* (it is the first mention of the name which I have found), the Puritans of London, the Puritans of the sea towns.' These he admits were dangerous, desperate, determined men. The numbers of them, however, were providentially small.

The date of this document is, as I said, 1585, and I believe it generally accurate. The only mistake is that among the Anglican Catholics there were a few to whom their country was as dear as their creed—a few who were beginning to see that under the Act of Uniformity Catholic doctrine might be taught and Catholic ritual [Pg 9] practised; who adhered to the old forms of religion, but did not believe that obedience to the Pope was a necessary part of them. One of these was Lord Howard of Effingham, whom the Queen placed in his high command to secure the wavering fidelity of the peers and country gentlemen. But the force, the fire, the enthusiasm came (as the Jesuit saw) from the Puritans, from men of the same convictions as the Calvinists of Holland and Rochelle; men who, driven from the land, took to the ocean as their natural home, and nursed the Reformation in an ocean cradle. How the seagoing population of the North of Europe took so strong a Protestant impression it is the purpose of these lectures to explain.

Henry VIII. on coming to the throne found England without a fleet, and without a conscious sense of the need of one. A few merchant hulks traded with Bordeaux and Cadiz and Lisbon; hoys and fly-boats drifted slowly backwards and forwards between Antwerp and the Thames. A fishing fleet tolerably appointed went annually to Iceland for cod. Local fishermen worked the [Pg 10] North Sea and the Channel from Hull to Falmouth. The Chester people went to Kinsale for herrings and mackerel: but that was all—the nation had aspired to no more.

Columbus had offered the New World to Henry VII. while the discovery was still in the air. He had sent his brother to England with maps and globes, and quotations from Plato to prove its existence. Henry, like a practical Englishman, treated it as a wild dream.

The dream had come from the gate of horn. America was found, and the Spaniard, and not the English, came into first possession of it. Still, America was a large place, and John Cabot the Venetian with his son Sebastian tried Henry again. England might still be able to secure a slice. This time Henry VII. listened. Two small ships were fitted out at Bristol, crossed the Atlantic, discovered Newfoundland, coasted down to Florida looking for a passage to Cathay, but could not find one. The elder Cabot died; the younger came home. The expedition failed, and no interest had been roused.

With the accession of Henry VIII. a new era [Pg 11] had opened – a new era in many senses. Printing was coming into use – Erasmus and his companions were shaking Europe with the new learning, Copernican astronomy was changing the level disk of the earth into a revolving globe, and turning dizzy the thoughts of mankind. Imagination was on the stretch. The reality of things was assuming proportions vaster than fancy had dreamt, and unfastening established belief on a thousand sides. The young Henry was welcomed by Erasmus as likely to be the glory of the age that was opening. He was young, brilliant, cultivated, and ambitious. To what might he not aspire under the new conditions! Henry VIII. was all that, but he was cautious and looked about him. Europe was full of wars in which he was likely to be entangled. His father had left the treasury well furnished. The young King, like a wise man, turned his first attention to the broad ditch, as he called the British Channel, which formed the natural defence of the realm. The opening of the Atlantic had revolutionised war and seamanship. Long voyages required larger vessels. Henry was the first prince to see the place which [Pg 12] gunpowder was going to hold in wars. In his first years he repaired his dockyards, built new ships on improved models, and imported Italians to cast him new types of cannon. 'King Harry loved a man,' it was said, and knew a man when he saw one. He made acquaintance with sea captains at Portsmouth and Southampton. In some way or other he came to know one Mr. William Hawkins, of Plymouth, and held him in especial esteem. This Mr. Haw-

kins, under Henry's patronage, ventured down to the coast of Guinea and brought home gold and ivory; crossed over to Brazil; made friends with the Brazilian natives; even brought back with him the king of those countries, who was curious to see what England was like, and presented him to Henry at Whitehall.

Another Plymouth man, Robert Thorne, again with Henry's help, went out to look for the North-west passage which Cabot had failed to find. Thorne's ship was called the *Dominus Vobiscum*, a pious aspiration which, however, secured no success. A London man, a Master Hore, tried next. Master Hore, it is said, was given to cosmography, [Pg 13] was a plausible talker at scientific meetings, and so on. He persuaded 'divers young lawyers' (briefless barristers, I suppose) and other gentlemen — altogether a hundred and twenty of them — to join him. They procured two vessels at Gravesend. They took the sacrament together before sailing. They apparently relied on Providence to take care of them, for they made little other preparation. They reached Newfoundland, but their stores ran out, and their ships went on shore. In the land of fish they did not know how to use line and bait. They fed on roots and bilberries, and picked fish-bones out of the ospreys' nests. At last they began to eat one another — careless of Master Hore, who told them they would go to unquenchable fire. A French vessel came in. They seized her with the food she had on board and sailed home in her, leaving the French crew to their fate. The poor French happily found means of following them. They complained of their treatment, and Henry ordered an inquiry; but finding, the report says, the great distress Master Hore's party had been in, was so moved with pity, that he did not punish them, but [Pg 14] out of his own purse made royal recompense to the French.

Something better than gentlemen volunteers was needed if naval enterprise was to come to anything in England. The long wars between Francis I. and Charles V. brought the problem closer. On land the fighting was between the regular armies. At sea privateers were let loose out of French, Flemish, and Spanish ports. Enterprising individuals took out letters of marque and went cruising to take the chance of what they could catch. The Channel was the chief hunting-ground, as being the highway between Spain and the Low Countries. The interval was short between privateers and pirates.

Vessels of all sorts passed into the business. The Scilly Isles became a pirate stronghold. The creeks and estuaries in Cork and Kerry furnished hiding-places where the rovers could lie with security and share their plunder with the Irish chiefs. The disorder grew wilder when the divorce of Catherine of Aragon made Henry into the public enemy of Papal Europe. English traders and fishing-smacks were plundered and sunk. Their [Pg 15] crews went armed to defend themselves, and from Thames mouth to Land's End the Channel became the scene of desperate fights. The type of vessel altered to suit the new conditions. Life depended on speed of sailing. The State Papers describe squadrons of French or Spaniards flying about, dashing into Dartmouth, Plymouth, or Falmouth, cutting out English coasters, or fighting one another.

After Henry was excommunicated, and Ireland rebelled, and England itself threatened disturbance, the King had to look to his security. He made little noise about it. But the Spanish ambassador reported him as silently building ships in the Thames and at Portsmouth. As invasion seemed imminent, he began with sweeping the seas of the looser vermin. A few swift well-armed cruisers pushed suddenly out of the Solent, caught and destroyed a pirate fleet in Mount's Bay, sent to the bottom some Flemish privateers in the Downs, and captured the Flemish admiral himself. Danger at home growing more menacing, and the monks spreading the fire which grew into the Pilgrimage of Grace, Henry suppressed [Pg 16] the abbeyes, sold the lands, and with the proceeds armed the coast with fortresses. 'You threaten me,' he seemed to say to them, 'that you will use the wealth our fathers gave you to overthrow my Government and bring in the invader. I will take your wealth, and I will use it to disappoint your treachery.' You may see the remnants of Henry's work in the fortresses anywhere along the coast from Berwick to the Land's End.

Louder thundered the Vatican. In 1539 Henry's time appeared to have come. France and Spain made peace, and the Pope's sentence was now expected to be executed by Charles or Francis, or both. A crowd of vessels large and small was collected in the Scheldt, for what purpose save to transport an army into England? Scotland had joined the Catholic League. Henry fearlessly appealed to the English people. Catholic peers and priests might conspire against him, but,

explain it how we will, the nation was loyal to Henry and came to his side. The London merchants armed their ships in the river. From the seaports everywhere came armed brigantines and sloops. The fishermen of the West left their [Pg 17] boats and nets to their wives, and the fishing was none the worse, for the women handled oar and sail and line and went to the whiting-grounds, while their husbands had gone to fight for their King. Genius kindled into discovery at the call of the country. Mr. Fletcher of Rye (be his name remembered) invented a boat the like of which was never seen before, which would work to windward, with sails trimmed fore and aft, the greatest revolution yet made in shipbuilding. A hundred and fifty sail collected at Sandwich to match the armament in the Scheldt; and Marillac, the French ambassador, reported with amazement the energy of King and people.

The Catholic Powers thought better of it. This was not the England which Reginald Pole had told them was longing for their appearance. The Scheldt force dispersed. Henry read Scotland a needed lesson. The Scots had thought to take him at disadvantage, and sit on his back when the Emperor attacked him. One morning when the people at Leith woke out of their sleep, they found an English fleet in the Roads; and before they had time to look about them, Leith was on [Pg 18] fire and Edinburgh was taken. Charles V., if he had ever seriously thought of invading Henry, returned to wiser counsels, and made an alliance with him instead. The Pope turned to France. If the Emperor forsook him, the Most Christian King would help. He promised Francis that if he could win England he might keep it for himself. Francis resolved to try what he could do.

Five years had passed since the gathering at Sandwich. It was now the summer of 1544. The records say that the French collected at Havre near 300 vessels, fighting ships, galleys, and transports. Doubtless the numbers are far exaggerated, but at any rate it was the largest force ever yet got together to invade England, capable, if well handled, of bringing Henry to his knees. The plan was to seize and occupy the Isle of Wight, destroy the English fleet, then take Portsmouth and Southampton, and so advance on London.

Henry's attention to his navy had not slackened. He had built ship on ship. The *Great Harry* was a thousand tons, carried 700 men,

and was the wonder of the day. There were a dozen others [Pg 19] scarcely less imposing. The King called again on the nation, and again the nation answered. In England altogether there were 150,000 men in arms in field or garrison. In the King's fleet at Portsmouth there were 12,000 seamen, and the privateers of the West crowded up eagerly as before. It is strange, with the notions which we have allowed ourselves to form of Henry, to observe the enthusiasm with which the whole country, as yet undivided by doctrinal quarrels, rallied a second time to defend him.

In this Portsmouth fleet lay undeveloped the genius of the future naval greatness of England. A small fact connected with it is worth recording. The watchword on board was, 'God save the King'; the answer was, 'Long to reign over us': the earliest germ discoverable of the English National Anthem.

The King had come himself to Portsmouth to witness the expected attack. The fleet was commanded by Lord Lisle, afterwards Duke of Northumberland. It was the middle of July. The French crossed from Havre unfought with, and anchored in St. Helens Roads off Brading [Pg 20] Harbour. The English, being greatly inferior in numbers, lay waiting for them inside the Spit. The morning after the French came in was still and sultry. The English could not move for want of wind. The galleys crossed over and engaged them for two or three hours with some advantage. The breeze rose at noon; a few fast sloops got under way and easily drove them back. But the same breeze which enabled the English to move brought a serious calamity with it. The *Mary Rose*, one of Lisle's finest vessels, had been under the fire of the galleys. Her ports had been left open, and when the wind sprang up, she heeled over, filled, and went down, carrying two hundred men along with her. The French saw her sink, and thought their own guns had done it. They hoped to follow up their success. At night they sent over boats to take soundings, and discover the way into the harbour. The boats reported that the sandbanks made the approach impossible. The French had no clear plan of action. They tried a landing in the island, but the force was too small, and failed. They weighed anchor and brought up again behind Selsea Bill, [Pg 21] where Lisle proposed to run them down in the dark, taking advantage of the tide. But they had an enemy to deal with worse than Lisle, on board their own ships,

which explained their distracted movements. Hot weather, putrid meat, and putrid water had prostrated whole ships' companies with dysentery. After a three weeks' ineffectual cruise they had to hasten back to Havre, break up, and disperse. The first great armament which was to have recovered England to the Papacy had effected nothing. Henry had once more shown his strength, and was left undisputed master of the narrow seas.

So matters stood for what remained of Henry's reign. As far as he had gone, he had quarrelled with the Pope, and had brought the Church under the law. So far the country generally had gone with him, and there had been no violent changes in the administration of religion. When Henry died the Protector abolished the old creed, and created a new and perilous cleavage between Protestant and Catholic, and, while England needed the protection of a navy more than ever, allowed the fine fleet which Henry had left to fall [Pg 22] into decay. The spirit of enterprise grew with the Reformation. Merchant companies opened trade with Russia and the Levant; adventurous sea captains went to Guinea for gold. Sir Hugh Willoughby followed the phantom of the North-west Passage, turning eastward round the North Cape to look for it, and perished in the ice. English commerce was beginning to grow in spite of the Protector's experiments; but a new and infinitely dangerous element had been introduced by the change of religion into the relations of English sailors with the Catholic Powers, and especially with Spain. In their zeal to keep out heresy, the Spanish Government placed their harbours under the control of the Holy Office. Any vessel in which an heretical book was found was confiscated, and her crew carried to the Inquisition prisons. It had begun in Henry's time. The Inquisitors attempted to treat schism as heresy and arrest Englishmen in their ports. But Henry spoke up stoutly to Charles V., and the Holy Office had been made to hold its hand. All was altered now. It was not necessary that a poor sailor should have been found teaching [Pg 23] heresy. It was enough if he had an English Bible and Prayer Book with him in his kit; and stories would come into Dartmouth or Plymouth how some lad that everybody knew – Bill or Jack or Tom, who had wife or father or mother among them, perhaps – had been seized hold of for no other crime, been flung into a dungeon, tor-

tured, starved, set to work in the galleys, or burned in a fool's coat, as they called it, at an *auto da fé* at Seville.

The object of the Inquisition was partly political: it was meant to embarrass trade and make the people impatient of changes which produced so much inconvenience. The effect was exactly the opposite. Such accounts when brought home created fury. There grew up in the seagoing population an enthusiasm of hatred for that holy institution, and a passionate desire for revenge.

The natural remedy would have been war; but the division of nations was crossed by the division of creeds; and each nation had allies in the heart of every other. If England went to war with Spain, Spain could encourage insurrection among the Catholics. If Spain or France [Pg 24] declared war against England, England could help the Huguenots or the Holland Calvinists. All Governments were afraid alike of a general war of religion which might shake Europe in pieces. Thus individuals were left to their natural impulses. The Holy Office burnt English or French Protestants wherever it could catch them. The Protestants revenged their injuries at their own risk and in their own way, and thus from Edward VI.'s time to the end of the century privateering came to be the special occupation of adventurous honourable gentlemen, who could serve God, their country, and themselves in fighting Catholics. Fleets of these dangerous vessels swept the Channel, lying in wait at Scilly, or even at the Azores—disowned in public by their own Governments while secretly countenanced, making war on their own account on what they called the enemies of God. In such a business, of course, there were many mere pirates engaged who cared neither for God nor man. But it was the Protestants who were specially impelled into it by the cruelties of the Inquisition. The Holy Office began the work with the *autos da fé*. The [Pg 25] privateers robbed, burnt, and scuttled Catholic ships in retaliation. One fierce deed produced another, till right and wrong were obscured in the passion of religious hatred. Vivid pictures of these wild doings survive in the English and Spanish State Papers. Ireland was the rovers' favourite haunt. In the universal anarchy there, a little more or a little less did not signify. Notorious pirate captains were to be met in Cork or Kinsale, collecting stores, casting cannon, or selling their prizes—men of all sorts,

from fanatical saints to undisguised ruffians. Here is one incident out of many to show the heights to which temper had risen.

'Long peace,' says someone, addressing the Privy Council early in Elizabeth's time, 'becomes by force of the Spanish Inquisition more hurtful than open war. It is the secret, determined policy of Spain to destroy the English fleet, pilots, masters and sailors, by means of the Inquisition. The Spanish King pretends he dares not offend the Holy House, while we in England say we may not proclaim war against Spain in revenge of a few. Not long since the [Pg 26] Spanish Inquisition executed sixty persons of St. Malo, notwithstanding entreaty to the King of Spain to spare them. Whereupon the Frenchmen armed their pinnaces, lay for the Spaniards, took a hundred and beheaded them, sending the Spanish ships to the shore with their heads, leaving in each ship but one man to render the cause of the revenge. Since which time Spanish Inquisitors have never meddled with those of St. Malo.'

A colony of Huguenot refugees had settled on the coast of Florida. The Spaniards heard of it, came from St. Domingo, burnt the town, and hanged every man, woman, and child, leaving an inscription explaining that the poor creatures had been killed, not as Frenchmen, but as heretics. Dominique de Gourges, of Rochelle, heard of this fine exploit of fanaticism, equipped a ship, and sailed across. He caught the Spanish garrison which had been left in occupation and swung them on the same trees—with a second scroll saying that they were dangling there, not as Spaniards, but as murderers.

The genius of adventure tempted men of [Pg 27] highest birth into the rovers' ranks. Sir Thomas Seymour, the Protector's brother and the King's uncle, was Lord High Admiral. In his time of office, complaints were made by foreign merchants of ships and property seized at the Thames mouth. No redress could be had; no restitution made; no pirate was even punished, and Seymour's personal followers were seen suspiciously decorated with Spanish ornaments. It appeared at last that Seymour had himself bought the Scilly Isles, and if he could not have his way at Court, it was said that he meant to set up there as a pirate chief.

The persecution under Mary brought in more respectable recruits than Seymour. The younger generation of the western families had grown with the times. If they were not theologically Protestant, they detested tyranny. They detested the marriage with Philip, which threatened the independence of England. At home they were powerless, but the sons of honourable houses—Strangways, Tremaynes, Staffords, Horseys, Carews, Killebrews, and Cobhams—dashed out upon the water to revenge the Smithfield mas [Pg 28] sacres. They found help where it could least have been looked for. Henry II. of France hated heresy, but he hated Spain worse. Sooner than see England absorbed in the Spanish monarchy, he forgot his bigotry in his politics. He furnished these young mutineers with ships and money and letters of marque. The Huguenots were their natural friends. With Rochelle for an arsenal, they held the mouth of the Channel, and harassed the communications between Cadiz and Antwerp. It was a wild business: enterprise and buccaneering sanctified by religion and hatred of cruelty; but it was a school like no other for seamanship, and a school for the building of vessels which could out-sail all others on the sea; a school, too, for the training up of hardy men, in whose blood ran detestation of the Inquisition and the Inquisition's master. Every other trade was swallowed up or coloured by privateering; the merchantmen went armed, ready for any work that offered; the Iceland fleet went no more in search of cod; the Channel boatmen forsook nets and lines and took to livelier occupations; Mary was too busy [Pg 29] burning heretics to look to the police of the seas; her father's fine ships rotted in harbour; her father's coast-forts were deserted or dismantled; she lost Calais; she lost the hearts of her people in forcing them into orthodoxy; she left the seas to the privateers; and no trade flourished, save what the Catholic Powers called piracy.

When Elizabeth came to the throne, the whole merchant navy of England engaged in lawful commerce amounted to no more than 50,000 tons. You may see more now passing every day through the Gull Stream. In the service of the Crown there were but seven revenue cruisers in commission, the largest 120 tons, with eight merchant brigs altered for fighting. In harbour there were still a score of large ships, but they were dismantled and rotting; of artillery fit for sea work there was none. The men were not to be had, and, as Sir

William Cecil said, to fit out ships without men was to set armour on stakes on the seashore. The mariners of England were otherwise engaged, and in a way which did not please Cecil. He was the ablest minister that Elizabeth had. He saw at once that on the navy the [Pg 30] prosperity and even the liberty of England must eventually depend. If England were to remain Protestant, it was not by articles of religion or acts of uniformity that she could be saved without a fleet at the back of them. But he was old-fashioned. He believed in law and order, and he has left a curious paper of reflections on the situation. The ships' companies in Henry VIII.'s days were recruited from the fishing-smacks, but the Reformation itself had destroyed the fishing trade. In old times, Cecil said, no flesh was eaten on fish days. The King himself could not have license. Now to eat beef or mutton on fish days was the test of a true believer. The English Iceland fishery used to supply Normandy and Brittany as well as England. Now it had passed to the French. The Chester men used to fish the Irish seas. Now they had left them to the Scots. The fishermen had taken to privateering because the fasts of the Church were neglected. He saw it was so. He recorded his own opinion that piracy, as he called it, was *detestable*, and could not last. He was to find that it could last, that it was to form the special discipline of the [Pg 31] generation whose business would be to fight the Spaniards. But he struggled hard against the unwelcome conclusion. He tried to revive lawful trade by a Navigation Act. He tried to restore the fisheries by Act of Parliament. He introduced a Bill recommending godly abstinence as a means to virtue, making the eating of meat on Fridays and Saturdays a misdemeanour, and adding Wednesday as a half fish-day. The House of Commons laughed at him as bringing back Popish mummeries. To please the Protestants he inserted a clause, that the statute was politicly meant for the increase of fishermen and mariners, not for any superstition in the choice of meats; but it was no use. The Act was called in mockery 'Cecil's Fast,' and the recovery of the fisheries had to wait till the natural inclination of human stomachs for fresh whiting and salt cod should revive of itself.

Events had to take their course. Seamen were duly provided in other ways, and such as the time required. Privateering suited Elizabeth's convenience, and suited her disposition. She liked daring