

LAST INTERVIEW WITH THE LATE WILLIAM T. STEAD

Editor Who Perished in the Titanic Shed Light on the British-German "War Scare" and Its Cause

Because Germany, backed by her allies of the Triple Alliance, is building many battleships, English statesmen have become alarmed. Recent advices from London say that Great Britain's naval estimates for the coming year will exceed \$250,000,000, an increase of nearly \$50,000,000 over 1912. This may be construed as an admission that England sees the menace of a growing German navy and for purposes of peace must ever exceed it in strength. It was along these lines that the late William T. Stead was interviewed in London before he started on his fatal voyage on the Titanic. Recent developments in the Balkans, which threatened to precipitate a general European war a short time ago, have caused speculation concerning the attitude of the great Powers in the event of an international conflict. While it is admitted that Germany, Austria and Italy, united by the Triple Alliance, would be opposed by Great Britain, France and Russia, drawn together by mutual interests, it is conceded that the question of peace or war will always rest largely with the British and German governments. The situation therefore makes the interview of special interest and value at the present time.

WILLIAM T. STEAD, long famous as the editor of the Review of Reviews, was regarded as an authority on international questions and was especially conspicuous as an advocate of the peace movement. The interview I secured with him in London just before the fated voyage of the Titanic embodies the last expression of his views on British-German relations and its publication at a time when war and rumors of wars are current is of unusual interest and importance.

At the time Mr. Stead went into the whole subject of the supposed enmity between Germany and Great Britain and discussed the reason of their present naval rivalry. He also explained why, although a man of peace, he believed in England's maintaining the strongest navy in the world. Incidentally he threw some light on the question of what might happen in a European conflict by repeating statements that had been made to him by an statesman with whom he had discussed the questions of peace and war. And these statements are astonishing.

In the course of my talk with Mr. Stead he began by saying that he had felt inclined to condemn Italy's seizure of Tripoli as unjust and, through peace societies and in other ways he endeavored to secure the reference of the questions at issue to the Hague tribunal. The conversation then turned to the question of the alleged ill feeling between England and Germany, its cause and its probable result.

Mr. Stead, who was in excellent spirits and full of vivacity, spoke very earnestly on this topic, walking up and down his office and occasionally stopping to emphasize some point. He was especially strong in his condemnation of what he called yellow journal methods, and was evidently convinced that certain English and German newspapers were largely responsible for stirring up enmity between the two countries.

"If one were to believe what appears in some of these newspapers," he remarked, "the conclusion would be reached inevitably that British ill feeling toward Germany is deeply rooted and that the two nations regard each other with coolness and suspicion if not with positive hatred. On the other hand, there are plenty of sane people in both countries who are convinced that there is absolutely no foundation for such an idea."

"What are the arguments of both sides? In the first place let us take the anti-German view expressed in this country. Those who are clamoring for conscription in England and urging an aggressive attitude toward Germany are convinced that the Germans are bent on attacking England, conquering us and breaking up the whole British Empire. To keep out the Germans they say we must raise an enormous standing army. Ask them why Germany is so anxious to conquer England and why English people should dislike the

Germans and they will tell you it is because of commercial rivalry.

"Of course nobody can dispute that Germany has developed wonderfully in the last twenty-five years, the value of her imported raw and semi-manufactured materials having risen from \$352,000,000 to \$1,057,000,000, while her exports of manufactured goods have increased from \$380,000,000 to \$1,143,000,000. In mining and agriculture she has also made marvellous advances. Keeping pace with this national progress the physique and intelligence of the German people have been constantly raised by improved systems of education and the beneficial side of compulsory military service. More than a century of constant struggling with the forces of nature and the disabilities of a central European position have made the German people into a highly educated, well organized military nation of over 60,000,000 souls.

"This wonderful rise of Germany as a manufacturing country has naturally brought her into conflict with England. Markets which were once controlled exclusively by English manufacturers have been successfully invaded by Germany. We even find German cutlery competing in England with cutlery made in Sheffield. Superior as a linguist, the German drummer is pushing German commerce in lands where English trade was formerly supreme. Thousands of young Germans, moreover, find employment in commercial lines in England, and as they usually work for lower salaries and compete with young Englishmen this has served to excite some ill will.

"At the same time it must be admitted that American goods are selling extensively in England and our colonies, and we have an increasing number of Americans entering our business fields. But there is no suggestion made by our jingos that this should be a pretext for war with the United States. Germany's commercial competition may be an unpleasant economic fact, but if it is conducted fairly there is no good reason for regarding it as an excuse for war.

"There are some English writers who find still another reason for Germany's supposed hostility to England. That is a desire for expansion. Germany, they say, with an increasing population, is hampered in and cannot form colonies because there is no country left to colonize. To provide means of subsistence for the German people and careers for the rising generation new countries and more trade, they argue, are necessary. If England were only disposed of Australia, India and the colonies of Holland and France would lie at the Kaiser's feet.

"Alarmed by such arguments, many Englishmen have become convinced that the enormous development of the German navy that has taken place in recent years is aimed at England alone. They are sure that if war should break out and disaster should befall the British

navy, England, having no enormous standing army, would be helpless. While on this account there has been some demand for conscription, supported by Lord Roberts and others, still the general sentiment of the country is against this form of national defence. Although I am a man of peace, nevertheless I firmly believe in England maintaining the strongest fleet in the world."

I asked Mr. Stead how he accounted for the prevalence of the so-called German war scare among Englishmen.

"I think," he replied, "one of the chief reasons for its existence is the determination of a certain number of people to deny that there is any danger at all. In my opinion it is largely due to the naval rivalry between the two countries. I believe, however, that if we were in the position of the Germans we should try to have as big a fleet as they are trying to get, for the reason that the Power which has a small fleet is practically a hostage in the hands of

any Power having a larger one. It is different with armies, because the topography of a country has much to do with its defence. But a Power whose navy surpasses that of another Power has that Power completely at its mercy."

"Do you think the Germans are increasing their navy with any idea of eventually attacking England?" was asked.

"No," replied Mr. Stead. "I am convinced that the Germans are not building a big fleet with any such intention, but simply because they do not want to be at England's mercy. At the same time they are far more in our power at the present time and more dependent upon England's good will than some years ago, because they have given such a large hostage to keep the peace."

"The present German navy, although it is growing and becoming more formidable, could nevertheless be bitten

off at one bite by the British navy. Germany, in fact, has far more to fear from England with the fleet which she now has than when she had none. Then we could not touch her, but now we have something to attack. The Germans fully recognize this and say, 'We are like a crab that is growing its shell, and as soon as we have our shell fully grown we shall not be nervous at all.' But it may be asked, when will the shell be grown? My reply is, when Germany has a navy strong enough to make England think twice before she attempts to wipe it out of existence."

"The commercial point of view must also be considered," Mr. Stead continued. "The Germans say, 'We have a great overseas commerce and the whole trade has practically to go through what is virtually an English canal—the English Channel—or around the Shetlands, and has to run the gauntlet of what might be called a series of English naval positions stretching 400

miles along the coast. England, too, possesses at the present moment a fleet which is twice as big as our own.' It is natural, therefore, that the Germans should feel that if they once have a fleet which, without being equal to the entire English navy, will nevertheless be equal plus one to whatever fighting strength the English Government might send against it on short notice, they will be in a much more independent position.

Although a Man of Peace He Was an Earnest Believer in the Policy of a Big Navy for England

"It must be remembered that our English naval force is denuded of a great part of its strength through the vessels being scattered in different parts of the world, while the Germans have practically all their ships at home. Consequently they reckon that after they have reached a certain degree of naval strength, while they will not be able to overcome us, they will be able to look with a certain amount of equanimity upon a fight. Their whole aim, in short, is to restore the balance of power.

"Now this is a perfectly reasonable view and I do not think that the Germans are increasing their navy with any definite idea of invading England, seizing our colonies or destroying our fleet. They are simply strengthening themselves in order to keep us out of the temptation of swooping down suddenly on Kiel and wiping out their fleet. That is the German point of view."

"How do you regard the English side of the argument?" I asked Mr. Stead.

"That, of course, is an entirely different matter," he replied. "While it is perfectly natural for the Germans to wish to have a fleet which can face the enemy at their gates, we can never forget that the British Empire practically depends upon the British fleet; that the British people are fed from overseas and that all our manufactures are kept at work by raw materials coming over the sea. For us, therefore, our actual predominance of power at sea means life or death. We cannot, in fact, exist as an independent nation unless we are lords of the sea, although not necessarily in an offensive sense."

"Again, there is the German army, the most powerful fighting machine in the world, with roughly speaking ten trained men to one imperfectly trained British soldier. We do not mind this as long as we have the command of the sea, but whenever that is lost we have to fall back upon compulsory military service, and even then we could not be so secure as we are now when we have the command of the sea. Supposing we armed and drilled every able bodied man in Great Britain, nevertheless, if Germany managed to get command of the sea she could starve us into submission."

"England in that event would be in the position of a beleaguered fortress with no food and there would be no need for invading us. We should have to surrender to avoid dying of starvation. Therefore for us it is absolutely necessary to maintain not merely a navy as strong as that of Germany, but one so much more powerful that after sending out eighteen battleships and other vessels to our overseas stations we can still have such a supremacy of strength as to render it quite out of the question for the Germans to challenge our predominance in our own seas. This being our position we fully determined that when the Germans started to build ships we must, for the sake of our national existence, build two ships to their one."

"Isn't it a fact that the British Government a few years ago tried to induce Germany to slow down on this naval competition?" I suggested.

"Yes," said Mr. Stead, "it is true that diplomatic representations were made, but nothing came of them. The matter was also brought up at The Hague conference. I had a talk with Herr von Buelow and other German statesmen, and explained the English view to them. I told them that England had a certain

degree of supremacy over the German navy and wanted it to be guaranteed by an international agreement to the effect that no Power would spend any more money on its navy than was being expended at that time. They said: 'That's all right for you, but not for us.'

"I quite expected that answer and could only add that the present status quo would be maintained, and if it could be maintained by an international agreement both countries would save millions of money which would otherwise be spent. 'If you won't enter into this agreement,' I said, 'both countries will spend so much money in naval competition that in the course of a few years, when we have spent many millions, their position will be exactly what it was at the start.' I am against all kinds of expenditures for army or navy but we know very well that for England it is a matter of life and death, and we shall spend our last penny rather than sacrifice what we consider to be the indispensable condition of our national safety."

"Why is it," I asked Mr. Stead, "when there is such a thorough understanding of the respective positions of the two countries, that a constant agitation exists in England concerning the increase of the German navy?"

"The explanation is simple," he replied. "When the Liberal party came into power its leaders were pledged to lower rates of taxation and also to reduce armaments, which latter they asserted could be arranged by international agreement. When this was found to be impossible and the idea of reducing the navy was found to be unpopular, an agitation was started to call attention to the rapidly increasing German navy and the German armaments. And it is impossible to do otherwise when you are dealing with the mass of the people. This did not tend to promote good feeling between the two countries, and there has been a further danger in the situation because we have a large element in England in favor of conscription."

"Now, no nation has ever adopted conscription before being invaded, because the curse of it is so great that the people naturally object to it. Consequently, the advocates of the conscription idea have to hold up the scarecrow of a German navy devastating and annexing England in order to gain approval for their scheme. Thus we have had a conflict of opinion in England, with the big navy men trying to break down the opposition of the little navy men and the conscriptionists trying to force conscription on the country."

"The real state of German feeling on this subject was clearly expressed by an eminent German statesman. In explaining Germany's position to me he said:

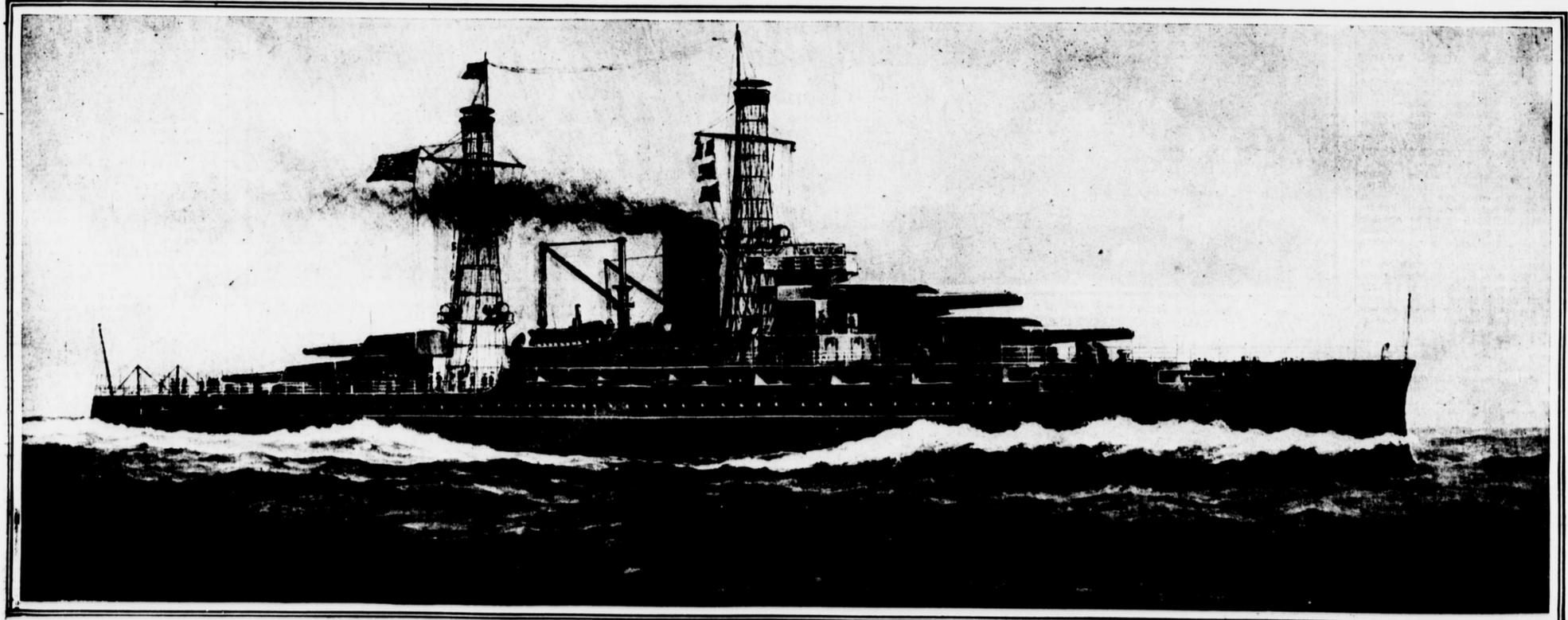
"We don't want to invade England but to keep England within bounds England is getting too big for her boots and we want to have a navy large enough to make England pause whenever she wants to quarrel with any other Power, because our navy will always be in the market."

For several years Mr. Stead took a foremost part in sending delegations of representative Englishmen to Germany and bringing over to England delegations of Germans, the idea being to promote good will between the two countries. Parties of German mayors, editors, clergymen and others visited England and were given a cordial reception. English editors, civic officials and clergymen afterward returned the visit and were cordially greeted in Germany. Delegations of workmen also exchanged visits. In discussing this movement, which he said had been attended with great success, Mr. Stead remarked:

"When we went to Germany we had a splendid time, and were cordially re-

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UNITED STATES BATTLESHIP PENNSYLVANIA, MOST POWERFUL DREADNOUGHT OF ALL THE NATIONS' NAVIES



As designed the new United States battleship Pennsylvania ranks as the most powerful dreadnought built, building or authorized by any of the great naval Powers. Even her immediate predecessors, the Oklahoma and Nevada, which are admittedly the most pro-

fectly protected ships yet planned, will be outclassed. Her principal dimensions are: Length over all, 625 feet, beam, 97 feet, and draught, 29 feet, on a displacement of 21,000 tons on trial, which is but two-thirds of her full load displacement of 32,500 tons. She is 3,500 tons larger than the Nevada.

The Pennsylvania's armament consists of twelve 14 inch guns mounted in four turrets on the centre line of the ship. With three guns in each turret there is a fore and aft fire of six guns and a broadside fire of the whole battery. There is a torpedo defence battery of twenty-two five inch

guns, which are carried mostly on the main deck about twenty-two feet above the water line. In addition there are four submerged 21 inch torpedo tubes and numerous machine and quick fire guns. The armor consists of a main belt eighteen feet deep and fourteen inches

thick, extending below the water line, with transverse bulkheads athwartship at either end of the belt. The barbette armor is fourteen inches in thickness and the sloping port plates of the turrets are eighteen inches thick, with a roof of five inch armor plate. The speed of the ship is to be a trifle greater than that of her predecessors,

or about twenty-one knots, obtained by a somewhat enlarged engine and boiler plant, although the firing of the hull lines by the extra forty feet of length will go far to offset the increased load. Another important feature is the larger fuel supply, with its resultant increase in radius of action. The building of this ship will occupy

three years. The cost of the hull, machinery and equipment will be \$7,250,000 and that of the armor \$3,000,000 more. To these two figures, making a total of over \$10,000,000, must eventually be added the cost of the guns, which will approximate \$1,000,000, thus making the total cost of the vessel over \$11,000,000.