

Sir Edward Grey's statement caused a sensation in a crowded House. He proceeded,—

"The element of uncertainty is when this rebuilding of the fleet must be done. The first necessity therefore is to take stock of the plant available in the country. That the Admiralty has done. The capacity of Great Britain for building the hulls and the propelling machinery of battleships and the manufacture of the largest guns is considerably in excess of that of Germany. A doubtful point is the comparative capacity to provide gun-mountings. The Admiralty has now arranged with the manufacturers to provide such an increase that in a few months a similar advance will be made in this branch."

Dealing with the diplomatic relations between Britain and Germany Sir Edward Grey insisted on the good results of King Edward's visit to Berlin. Proceeding, he said,—

"Two things might produce a conflict between the two nations. The first is an attempt by Britain to isolate Germany; the second is the isolation of Britain in an attempt by any continental Power to dominate and dictate the policy of Europe. There is no reason to apprehend either contingency. European Powers are spending half their revenue in preparations to kill each other. The extent of this expenditure has become a satire reflecting upon civilisation, but Britain must be prepared to defend her national existence under conditions imposed by their own generation. I am glad that the colonies, such as New Zealand, recognise that their national existence is one with ours."

"The only possible basis of agreement as to limitation is an acknowledgment of British naval superiority. In January I made our information regarding the acceleration of building operations in Germany known to Germany, adding that they must not be surprised if the British estimates increased. Germany's verbal, but quite definite, declaration that they would have thirteen Dreadnoughts at the end of 1912 disposes of any extreme apprehension regarding 1910-1911."

"The four British hypothetical Dreadnoughts proposed to be built is not intended as a limitation of the next naval programme. National security shall have the benefit of any doubt."

I place that before honourable members to show that the convening of this Conference by the British Government is more than justified by the words out of the mouth of the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and I do not myself know anything that could be more convincing, anything more calculated to enable the people of this country, whatever their views may be, to realise the importance of this matter than the words of a man in the position of Secretary for Foreign Affairs in Great Britain. I do not believe any member of this House or the people of the country, whose business it may not be to examine closely into the position, can on reading an utterance of that kind overestimate what is meant by this Imperial Conference. Here I want to put on record also in connection with this matter the opinion of a man outside Parliament, of a man in the Old Country who was leader of a very large section of the people, on a point upon which a smaller section in this country appear to entertain a different opinion, the opinion of one who regards this matter as one of vital importance to the future preservation of Great Britain and also to the future preservation of the peace of the world. I refer to the written statement of Mr. Robert Blatchford.

An Hon. MEMBER.—Oh!

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—It is not a laughing matter.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—You are hard pushed for evidence.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—Nothing of the kind. I am going to put his own words on record, because I honestly believe, myself, that with the best of intentions a section of the community of this country is mistaken in the view they take regarding this matter, which I believe to be as vital to their interests as individuals as it is to any other interests in this or any other portion of the British Empire. The statement I refer to is headed "The Presence of a Great Danger," and is as follows:—

"Let me put the position once more as I see it. Germany is the greatest military Power in the world. She has made it evident—so evident that even the Liberal Cabinet have seen it—that she means to be the greatest naval Power in the world."

"To attain her end she will shrink from neither trouble nor expense. She has a genius for organization, and leaves nothing to chance. Her rulers do not talk: they act. They do not make the fatal mistake of confusing words and facts. The astounding progress made by Germany during the last ten years is proof of this contention. A year ago we were told that our naval power was overwhelming, and that Germany never could compete, because she had not the means; we could always build faster than she. But to-day we are not sure that we can build as fast."

"Seeing what I see of the German methods, and knowing what I know of British methods, I cannot help feeling that the Germans, by their superior unity, by their closer secrecy, by their more direct and single purpose, and by their national capacity and training for organization, have stolen a march upon us, and will very soon leave us behind, unless we wake up and realise the gravity of the danger."

"Now look at our side of the water. We are disunited; we are untrained; we are overconfident; we are strongly averse to war; we are still more strongly attached to our own ease and freedom. We do not want to fight, we do not want to pay; we do not want to worry. We are full of words; and we have not learnt that words are not deeds, and that figures are not facts."

"The German people are a military people. They are a nation of drilled men. Only a drilled man can appreciate the importance of that factor in the sum."

"Germany, bent upon any great national enterprise, works like a machine."

"I am convinced that the German nation is more efficient for war than the British nation; that the German administration is more efficient for war than our administration; and that Germany means war."

"Now, if such a nation as Germany means war, it will tax all our resources to meet her."