

**THE
AMERICAN REVIEW
OF REVIEWS**

November, 1919

p. 637

**A GERMAN
ARRAIGNMENT OF TIRPITZ**

CAPTAIN PERSIUS, well known as a free-spoken critic of the German High Command, recently issued a pamphlet entitled "How Tirpitz ruined the German Fleet." A translation of this by Captain F. C. Bowen, published in the current *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, is timely and interesting as a revelation of some of the cardinal causes of the German defeat and of the subsequent revolution. The first point of the indictment deals with Tirpitz's failure to understand and cope with "the powerful mass of inflammable matter which had been accumulating during the course of the war among the ratings and stokers through the conduct of those who were set over them."

Even before the war there were many complaints as to unjust and unworthy treatment issuing from the ranks of warrant officers, petty officers, and stokers. They were just complaints. Ever since William the Second's accession to the throne Prussian militarism had laid ever more powerful hold on the navy. The haughty lieutenant, "whom none can imitate," is in a large measure blamable for the discontent of the men. No candid man will maintain that the navy was difficult to handle. On the contrary, it was an easy task to lead and to satisfy this splendid material. It was only necessary to show a little sympathy, to make the men feel that they were of the same flesh and blood as the officers, and they were at once touchingly willing and loyal, ready to suffer any hardships, ready to sacrifice their health—yes, even their very lives.

In addition to this, there was "the failing trust in our army," the irritation aroused by Tirpitz's interference with matters of organization that were really outside his province, and the depressing monotony of life and Prussian discipline in harbor, without the inspiration of active service.

But the gravest charge made against the Admiral is in regard to naval construction. Tirpitz was building Dreadnoughts when he should have been concentrating on submarines, and what is worse, was building them with less displacement than the British, less strongly armed, and of lower speed. Thus, in the battle off the Skagerrack "Had visibility been good, and had there been a resolute chief on the side of the enemy, the result would, according to all human calculation, have been disastrous for us." As it was:

Off the Skagerrack our fleet was preserved from disaster through the clever leadership of Admiral Scheer and the unskillful handling of the British fleet under Admiral Jellicoe, bad visibility working in our favor also. Had visibility been good and had there been a resolute chief on the side of the enemy, the result would, according to all human calculations have been disastrous for us. The British guns, with their much



WHAT AMERICAN SHIPBUILDING DID TO TIRPITZ, THE GERMAN SUBMARINE CHIEF
From the *Central Press Association* (Cleveland)

greater range, would have completely annihilated our less powerfully armed ships. The losses sustained by our fleet were enormous, in spite of the fact that luck was on our side, and on June 1, 1916, it was clear to all intelligence that this fight would and must be the only one to take place. Those in authority have often openly admitted this!

In regard to submarine warfare, Captain Persius declares:

Tirpitz never realized the power of the submarine. In 1914 he said to the American correspondent, von Wiegand: "Before the war I did not think that our submarines could remain away from their base for more than three days at a time, believing that the crew must by then be in a state of exhaustion." So that it was learnt during the war for the first time that submarine crews could remain for weeks at a time—seven—at sea! It is clear that, as the capabilities of the boats were not tested during peace-time no proper appropriation of them could be made in time of war, and no correct judgment formed of their needs as regards provisioning, etc. . . . From August, 1914, to March, 1916, when he was dismissed from office, Tirpitz collected only 80,455 tons of submarine material at our docks. He argued that that was all the docks were capable of dealing with. Contrary to this, the dockmasters have announced that at that time an almost unlimited number of submarines could have been built.

Nevertheless, Tirpitz was the most violent agitator in favor of unrestricted submarine warfare, and resigned in March, 1916, because this policy, ultimately adopted in February, 1917, was considered premature by the Supreme Command. The trouble was that at neither date, according to Captain Persius, were there sufficient submarines to ensure effectiveness; and neither Tirpitz nor his successor took any strong steps to speed up construction. Not till von Scheer became Chief of the Admiralty Staff in September, 1918, were an adequate number put in commission, when 333 were laid down.

Many people will be astonished at the number I have named—333. During the course of the

TIRPITZ

Many people will be astonished at the number I have named—333. During the course of the war many fantastic rumors were current among us in regard to the number of our submarines. One heard of our possessing many hundreds, nay, even thousands. The number of boats ready for use at the front never reached the number 150, even reckoning in large, medium-sized, and small altogether. The submarines placed on order by Herr von Capelle at the dockyards would, if building were still continued, only be ready for use in 1919 and 1920—as far as the large boats are concerned.