

0502

197-13



A LETTER

FROM THE

RIGHT HON. LORD VISCOUNT MELVILLE,

TO THE

RIGHT HON. SPENCER PERCIVAL,

RELATIVE TO

The Establishment of a Naval Arsenal

AT NORTHFLEET.

---

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR S. BAGSTER, 81, STRAND.

Price Two Shillings and Six Pence.

TO THE  
RIGHT HON. SPENCER PERCIVAL.

---

*WIMBLEDON.*  
*5th March, 1810.*

SIR,  
IMPRESSED with a sense of the urgent necessity of the Measure of Establishing an extensive Naval Arsenal at Northfleet, I am anxious to state to you the most prominent circumstances which have brought me to a decided conviction, that there is a criminal neglect on the part of His Majesty's Servants, every hour that there is any longer delay, in considering and acting upon the Information which has been laid before His Majesty, respecting this great National Object. I shall briefly explain to you, the reasons which, in consequence of the importance I attach to the Subject, have impelled me to address you at the present moment.

It is not to be expected, that, amidst your other various and extensive Avocations, you can be minutely acquainted with the details connected with this Subject. You are however informed, that, in virtue of the Patent under the Royal Sign Manual, bearing date the 8th of January, 1805, a Commission was appointed to investigate and report upon the whole of the Conduct of the Civil Administration of the Navy, which had not undergone any systematic Investigation since the period, at the close of the 17th

B

Century, when the Duke of York was Lord High Admiral. The Commissioners, appointed under this Patent, immediately commenced their labours, and, between the 8th of January 1805, and the 8th of March 1808, they presented to His Majesty no less than Fifteen voluminous Reports.

At the close of the last Session of Parliament, in pursuance of a Motion to that effect, Statements were laid before the House of Lords, by the Council Board, and the Board of Admiralty, of the Proceedings which had been held by them, respectively, in consequence of those Reports. With the exception of the 8th, 14th, and 15th, they are all printed, and on the Table of the House of Lords; the other three are neither presented, nor printed; and, by the Statements from the Council and Admiralty Boards, it appears that they had not been acted upon in any material degree.

Upon an attentive perusal of those Reports, which had been produced, it appeared to me that the Suggestions of the Commissioners of Naval Revision had not been duly attended to, in so far as no means had been provided for an ulterior and final Revision of those Reports, after they had undergone the Test of Experience. I took the first opportunity which offered, of stating that Opinion to the House of Lords, concluding with a Motion in the following words:—"That an humble Address be presented to His Majesty, " to request that His Majesty will be graciously pleased to direct, " that there be laid before this House an account of any, and what " steps have been taken, in addition to those already communi- " cated to this House, towards carrying into execution the several " rules, regulations, and proposals, contained and recommended

" in the 1st, 2d, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, and " 13th Reports of the Commissioners of Naval Revision."

Upon this Motion Lord Mulgrave moved the previous Question, so that it remains open to me at any time, to bring the Subject of these Reports again under the consideration of the House, either in the same, or in any other form I may think most expedient.

In the observations, with which I prefaced the Motion before mentioned, I made no allusion whatever to the Reports which had not been produced, it being understood that I intended, on a future day, to move for their production. But, in moving the previous Question, these three Reports were alluded to, by the First Lord of the Admiralty, in such a manner, as left with me, and with others who heard him, a conviction, that any Motion for the production of them would certainly be resisted; and I could not collect, from any thing stated, that there was any intention of acting upon them immediately, or within any definite period. Indeed from the observations made, tending to affect the accuracy of the Estimate of the expence of the Arsenal at Northfleet, and of the period when any material benefit would result to the Public from the execution of it, I felt myself seriously alarmed as to the fate of those Reports, the more so, as, although the Statement given in by the Admiralty at the close of the last Session, was not very encouraging, it certainly gave greater hopes, than the Statements of the First Lord of the Admiralty did, at the time to which I have alluded. The words of the Statements from the Board of Admiralty, as to the 15th Report, are as follows; (that Report and the 14th being mentioned together:)-" These two Reports were referred by

“ a Committee of Privy Council, to the Lords Commissioners of  
 “ the Admiralty, on the 8th September 1808, and their Lord-  
 “ ships, in their Memorial of the 13th of that Month, humbly  
 “ represented to His Majesty, that, when circumstances would  
 “ admit, it was their purpose to take those Reports into their con-  
 “ sideration. It is to be remarked, that the Enquiries and Inves-  
 “ tigations which have since taken place on the Subjects, are not  
 “ of a nature to be laid before Parliament, without detriment,  
 “ until the Proceedings may be further advanced. It is also neces-  
 “ sary to state, that a purchase has been made of some land, in  
 “ the neighbourhood of Northfleet, part of which is held to be  
 “ convertible towards the formation of the projected new Arsenal ;  
 “ and the same has been approved by His Majesty’s Order in  
 “ Council, of the 7th December, 1808.”

At a later period (the first day of this Session of Parliament)  
 it was reported to me, (for I was not present,) that a Noble Earl,  
 (St. Vincent,) had put this question to the First Lord of the  
 Admiralty—“ Whether it was intended to carry into execution the  
 plan of establishing a Wet Dock at Northfleet; as, without it, half  
 our Fleet, in the event of a Peace, would be rotting in our  
 Harbours?”—And that he had received for answer that, “ He (Lord  
 Mulgrave) doubted how far it was regular to answer a question  
 asked under the circumstances of a discussion upon another Subject;  
 but he had no objection to state that the object, alluded to, had not  
 escaped the attention of the Board of Admiralty. Whether the  
 plan would be carried into execution, he could not, at present,  
 say, as a variety of considerations, appertaining to the Subject, must  
 necessarily come under consideration.”

Although this answer is not certainly in all respects quite so  
 discouraging as that I have alluded to, as having dropped in my own  
 presence, I cannot disguise from you that, with the anxiety I  
 entertain on the Subjects of those Reports, and the opinions I have,  
 of their essential Importance to the best Interests of this Country,  
 I cannot resist the Impulse I feel to call upon you to take this  
 Subject into your own most serious consideration.

Having already stated the deep Responsibility which, in my  
 judgment, attaches to the neglect of those Interests, I make no  
 apology for addressing myself to you. The business of the Country  
 must necessarily be committed to the charge of different Depart-  
 ments, but there can be no division of Responsibility. You are  
 selected by His Majesty as his Minister; and I make no doubt  
 that, on accepting that Office, you did it, with a full determina-  
 tion to assume the authority which belongs to the Situation, and  
 which is necessary to the faithful discharge of its functions. The  
 Country can never be served by a Government of uncontrolled  
 Departments. But, even if I were to look to you only in the  
 Character of the Minister of Finance, I could not address myself  
 with so much propriety to any other Individual.

I have never heard any person surmise an objection to the  
 Establishment of the Naval Arsenal at Northfleet, except on the  
 ground of the supposed expence of it. In that view, among  
 others, I wish to press it strongly upon your attention.

I have addressed you without any reserve, because the Im-  
 portance of the Subject demands it: and, in doing so, no person

who knows the confidence I repose in your worth, honor, and regard for the real Interests of your Country, will impute to me any intention of deviating from those Sentiments of Regard, and personal Esteem, which are inseparable from my feelings respecting you.

In addition to what I have stated, there is another forcible reason which induces me to make the present appeal to you. The materials I possess certainly afford to me sufficient Information, to have enabled me to state my Sentiments, in the shape of a Motion in the House of Lords; but, in doing so, I must have laboured under manifold disadvantages, from the Resolution, taken by His Majesty's Ministers, to withhold from the eye of Parliament, the Report of the Commissioners of Naval Revision, on the Subject of Northfleet Arsenal. Under such circumstances, every assertion I might have made, and every quotation I might have cited, founded on the opinion of those Commissioners, must have rested on my own Authority, divested of the means of establishing the authenticity of what I stated. I am in a very different predicament when I appeal to His Majesty's Minister. You are in possession of all the Reports, and if I assert any fact, or endeavour to establish any proposition, by a reference to the 15th Report, you have the immediate means, within your own power, to examine the truth of every assertion, and the accuracy of every quotation.

Before proceeding to a more minute explanation of the Proposition with which I wish to impress you, it is necessary I should guard against the effects of a mysterious Insinuation, which has been thrown out, as if there were some reason, why this Subject

should not be discussed, nor any information respecting it given either to Parliament, or the Public. I can only express my Astonishment that such an Idea should exist in any rational mind. If an anxious attendant on the sick bed of a Friend were desirous to restrain a Physician from communicating the nature, and extent of the Malady, I can devise an Apology for such a conduct, in the anxiety not to disturb the repose, or excite the apprehensions of the Patient, and the humanity of the motive would be admitted as some palliation of the Reserve, especially if the case were a desperate one. But, in withholding Information in the present instance from the view of the Public, I can conceive no justification, from any Analogy to the case I have just put. The case in question, I thank God, is not desperate, and it is impossible to figure a Reason for the concealment, unless there exists any where a desire to delay the immediate contemplation of the danger, because the means of averting it are supposed to be either expensive, or inconvenient. I shall not permit myself to impute to any set of Public Men so unwarrantable a disposition, but the attempt is not more unwarrantable than it is nugatory. No such secret exists, or can exist. The Commissioners of Naval Revision have never felt the propriety of any such concealment, and they never practised it. A great Naval Authority has, in his place in the House of Lords, announced the importance of the object, and the danger of delay. There is not an Officer in His Majesty's Navy, nor the Commander of the smallest trading Vessel in the Kingdom, who is not in possession of this secret, and of the existing dangers which I have undertaken to detail to you. For my own part, I cannot be guilty of such gross affectation, as to pretend that I am not fully informed upon it. It is more than two years, since I read every word of the 15th Report,

and I am in possession of extracts from the most important parts of it, and shall in the sequel have occasion to refer you to such Passages as I may think material to elucidate the Proposition I mean to enforce. I rather suspect there prevails some misapprehension on this Subject, arising probably from the Board of Admiralty (in their Return to the House of Lords, in the Month of March last) having mentioned, in one Sentence, the 14th and 15th Reports, and having expressed themselves in the following terms. "That, when circumstances would admit, it was their purpose to take those Reports into their consideration;—It is to be remarked that the Enquiries, and Investigations, which have since taken place upon the Subjects, are not of a nature to be laid before Parliament, without detriment, until the proceedings may be farther advanced." It is probable the idea, meant to be conveyed by these words, must allude to something in the 14th Report, on the Subject of Naval Timber; and I shall be more able to form an opinion on that point, before I address you in another Letter on that Subject; and I am not in the smallest degree apprehensive that any eagerness I may entertain, will ever lead me into any indiscretion, detrimental to those important Public Interests, which it has always been the pride and pleasure of my life to promote, by every exertion in my power. With regard to the 15th Report, on the Subject of a new Naval Arsenal at Northfleet, I pledge myself to this assertion, that no detriment could arise to the Public, from the promulgation of it at the Market Place of every Town in the Kingdom. Much good, on the contrary, would result from its publicity. By it, every thinking man in the Kingdom, would feel that the British Navy, the pride, the glory, and the safety of the Country, required that we should make every sacrifice, to place it

in all respects in a state of permanent security. If, by explaining and enforcing the object of such requisite sacrifices, I can rouse such a sentiment in the Public mind, the satisfaction I shall derive from the reflection of it, will gladden every remaining hour of my life.

The following short statement will remind you of the Establishment of the different Royal Dock Yards now existing in the Kingdom. They are six in number, Deptford, Woolwich, Chatham, Sheerness, Portsmouth, and Plymouth.

Age of the present Dock Yards.

Deptford was built in the reign of Henry VIII. under whose sway, History tells us, this Country possessed the first Fleet composed of Ships of War, belonging to the King: although I have heard that some archives, recently discovered in the Tower, prove the existence of a Fleet of that kind, in the reign of the preceding Monarch, Henry VII.

Deptford.

Woolwich Yard was formed under the auspices of the same Monarch.

Woolwich.

Chatham was founded by Queen Elizabeth, where the Gun Wharf now is, and where there was only one small Dock; but that being too confined a spot, it was removed about the year 1622, to its present situation.

Chatham.

Sheerness was formed in the reign of Charles II.

Sheerness.

Portsmouth by Henry VIII. being the third Dock Yard founded by him.

Portsmouth.

Plymouth.

Plymouth by William III. about the year 1691, and in 1693 money was voted by the House of Commons for completing it.

Augmentation of the Navy since Henry VIII.

The progressive advance of our Navy, will appear by attending to the following recital of its Tonnage at different periods, from the reign of Henry VIII. to the present time.

	Year.	Tons about,
At the death of Henry VIII.	1547	12,400
Edward VI.	1553	11,000
Mary	1558	7,000
Elizabeth	1603	17,100
James I.	1625	19,400
Rebellion	1641	22,400
Charles I.	1649	uncertain
At the Restoration*	1660	57,460
Death of Charles II.	1685	103,558
Abdication of James II.	1688	101,900
Death of William III.	1702	159,000
Anne	1714	167,170
George I.	1727	170,860
George II.	1769	321,200
On 31st December, 1788		413,660
————— 1806		776,000
————— 1809		800,000

Since the last new Dock Yard was formed

Thus it appears, that, notwithstanding the vast increase of our Navy, not a single Dock Yard has been added to it since the reign

\* Cromwell is known to have paid great attention to the Navy.

of William III. about a hundred and nineteen years ago, at which time the Tonnage of the Naval Force of this Kingdom amounted to near 160,000 Tons; it is now near 800,000 Tons, or about five times as large.

And when we attend to the limited state of our Navy in those ancient times, compared with the number of Dock Yards provided for its accommodation, we must be ashamed to confess that, even then, more attention was paid to those great national interests, than we can boast of at the present period, when every man is under the necessity of acknowledging that not merely our prosperity, but our existence as a Nation, depends on the preservation of our maritime Superiority.

It is true that some Enlargements have been made to our Yards, within the space of time I am speaking of. Some few Docks and Slips have been added, and some Storehouses built; but these additions have by no means kept pace with the augmentation of our Navy, and, unfortunately, in other very important respects, (as I shall presently have occasion to shew,) our Dock Yards have, of late years, become less fit for the purposes of the Navy, than they were even at the time, when our Navy was upon a very small scale, both in point of number, and in size of Ships, and its wants more easily provided for, than they can be at present.

I now proceed to call your attention to the consideration of the material defects which attend our present Dock Yards, as the most forcible ground for inducing you to apply the only effectual remedy, by the Establishment of a new and extensive Naval Arsenal.

Want of sufficient depth of water in the Royal Harbours.

The first great defect is the want of a sufficient depth of water in the vicinity of the present Dock Yards, a defect which is the more alarming, from the consideration that the same causes, which have combined to produce it, continue to operate, and to produce their highly injurious effects in an accelerated degree.

The want of a sufficient depth of water, at all the principal Dock Yards, has been ascertained by the Surveys and Reports of Messrs. Rennie, Mylne, Huddart, and Jessop, able Engineers, and by Documents and Reports obtained from various authentic sources, as well as by a comparison, in many cases, of Soundings, recently taken, with those laid down on ancient Maps of authority, all together forming a body of concurring Evidence, not only of the present deficiency of depth of water, but also of the alarming fact of the Harbours becoming rapidly more shallow, so as to threaten speedily the *total unfitness for large Ships*, of no less than *three* out of the *four Eastern Yards* of this kingdom; namely, those of Deptford, Woolwich, and Chatham.

Causes.

This gradual decay of the Royal Harbours of this Kingdom, and their diminution of depth of water, are imputable to various causes: 1st. To the Mud brought down by Floods—2d. To the deposition of Sand, and the Mud from the Tides—3d. To the numerous mooring Chains which intersect our Harbours, and catch the leaves and vegetable Substances brought down by the Rivers which run into them—4th. To the accretion of matter from decayed vegetables—and lastly to the Embankment of the Mud Lands around or near the Harbours, thus diminishing the quantity of water which

flows in, or ebbs out of the Harbours, which of course occasions a decrease of its velocity, and thereby renders it less able to remove, or scour away the Sand, Mud, and Gravel (so deposited), when it ebbs out of the Harbours.

It would occupy more of your time than necessary, were I to enter into a minute description of the degree in which each of the above causes has operated for many years past, and still is operating, to the decay of the Royal Harbours of this kingdom. I have therefore confined myself to the general result of the whole, declaring at the same time that any statement of mine will appear feeble in proportion as you examine the subject more minutely, as it is elucidated by the Commissioners of Naval Revision, who have never failed to refer to the authorities by which their opinions are supported.

The inconveniences I have detailed, could not fail, occasionally, to attract the attention of those immediately connected with the Naval Administration of the country; and if you wish to collect more minute information on the subject, I would refer you not only to the Fifteenth Report of the Commission of Naval Revision, but to the various proceedings which at different times have taken place at the Board of Admiralty, the Navy Board, the Trinity House, and in short to all the great Naval and Maritime authorities in the country. Indeed I can figure to myself no other reason why some further attempts at a remedy have not been made, unless it has arisen from the conviction of a truth, which I am afraid cannot be controverted, namely, that the disease is so bad, that nothing

Bad consequences.



less than the radical remedy I am now urging, can be adopted, with the hopes of any satisfactory result. I could adduce many proofs of the probability of this conjecture. I shall content myself with stating only one, which is this:—I am credibly informed, that, in regard to the declension of the depth of water, at Portsmouth, so long ago as the year 1796, a complete survey of the Harbour at that place was taken, in consequence of Orders from the Navy Board, by three eminent Civil Engineers, who, in their Report on the subject, after giving their opinion on some of the more minute defects, state as follows:—“ Having said all that appears necessary on “ the points which were most immediately referred to our consi- “ deration, we now beg leave to call your attention to a subject “ more extensive, and we think of importance to the welfare and “ effective existence of the Port, as a Harbour for the Royal Navy. “ On the examination of Plans, with Soundings, formerly taken, and “ comparing them with the Soundings more recently ascertained, “ we find an alarming fact, that, partly from artificial, and partly “ from natural causes, the Harbour is in a gradual state of decline.”

They then proceed to point out the means which should, in their opinion, be taken to remedy the defects alluded to, but the Commissioners of Naval Revision state that they were surprised to find by the Report of Mr. Rennie, who they thought it right to send to Portsmouth to view that Dock Yard, that, though the defects in question had been reported by three of the most eminent Civil Engineers in the Kingdom, to be of importance to the welfare and effective existence of the Port, as a Harbour for the Royal Navy, yet that *unfortunately more than ten Years had been suffered to*

Instance of neglect with respect to Portsmouth Harbour.

*elapse, without any steps having been taken to remove those inconveniences, or to improve the Harbour!*

The above statement is an apt illustration of the conjecture I have ventured to surmise, and it affords a melancholy picture of that despondency to which I have alluded; but, it would be infatuation to shut our eyes to the truth, and to indulge ourselves in a criminal repose, when so great a danger is impending over the most essential interests of the country. It shall not be my fault if such a pernicious apathy any longer prevails, especially when it is recollected that the mischiefs already experienced are not stationary, but daily increasing, and, unless effectually remedied, will continue to do so, until the means of building, fitting out, and repairing our ships of war, become impracticable, and our navy is rendered totally inefficient.

The very pernicious consequences arising from the want of depth of water in our Royal Harbours, are numerous and important—whether considered as relating to the great expences they give rise to, or the delay which they occasion in the Equipment of our ships for service at sea. No ships of the line, fitted out either at Deptford; Woolwich, Chatham, or Portsmouth, can receive their stores on board, without first proceeding to a considerable distance from each of those Ports. Those fitted out at Deptford and Woolwich, must go to Long Reach, Northfleet, or Gravesend, in order to lie in sufficient depth of water to admit of their receiving their guns, stores; and provisions, on board: those fitted out at Chatham, must pro-

Expence and Delay, occasioned by the insufficient depth of water in the Royal Harbours.

ceed to Gillingham : and those fitted out at Portsmouth, to Spit-head, for that purpose.

When Ships are fitting out,

In order, therefore, to supply ships, fitting out for sea, with their guns, stores, and provisions, those articles must first be put on board lighters, and other small craft, to carry them to their respective ships, from which they are afterwards to be hoisted on board : sometimes the weather is such as not to admit of those small vessels going off to the ships, and, when they do reach them, the wind and sea are frequently so high as to make it unsafe to venture alongside, for the purpose of delivering their cargoes on board the ships in want of the supplies they contain : but, even in the most moderate weather, and under the most favourable circumstances, the stores are subject to damage and waste, in being thus loaded and unloaded, and transported from place to place in small Vessels.

The cost of the numerous Craft necessary to convey them from the Dock Yards : from the Ordnance Wharfs : and from the Victualling Premises : the money expended in keeping those Vessels in repair : the expence of Wages and Victuals for their Crews : all these circumstances combined, though not capable of being accurately estimated, create a constant annual expenditure to a very great amount.

But, besides these unavoidable expences, arising from the want of sufficient depth of water in the Royal Harbours of this kingdom, the depredations to which the Public Stores of every description are exposed, is another great disadvantage attributable to the same cause.

When Ships are first fitted out, their complements of Officers and Men are rarely complete ; they are generally, indeed, very deficient in their proper numbers : regular Watches, therefore, cannot always be kept, and the facility of Embezzlement is thus rendered the greater, when the Ships are receiving their Stores on board, at a considerable distance from the Dock Yards.

To such an extent, indeed, have depredations of this nature been carried, that I can state, from indisputable authority, that Ships, fitted out and supplied with all their Stores from the Magazines in the River, and which ought to have lasted them eight months at sea, have, on their arrival at the Nore, stood in need of fresh supplies, the whole of their first stock having been made away with.

No person who has read the description given by Mr. Colquhoun, of the Thefts practised by the River Pirates, both upon public and private Property, will be surprised at the accounts of these depredations. It is true that since the formation of the West Indian, the London, and other Docks, private Property on the River, has been, in a great measure, secured against them ; but is it not lamentable that the public Property should still be exposed to the full force of their operation ?

In consequence also of the removal of Ships from the different Dock Yards, to the situations where the depth of water is sufficient to admit of their taking in their Stores, before they are complete in all their Works, it is necessary to send Articles, of various descriptions, for the use of the Workmen, who are from time to time to be em-

ployed in completing the Works of the Ships, and these are also exposed to every species of Embezzlement.

A great deal of the time of the Workmen is thus lost in going to, and returning from, Ships laying at such considerable distances from the Dock Yards: the Ships' Boats employed in fetching Stores, or on other Services, connected with the Dock Yards, owing to the same circumstances, are liable to accidents; and opportunities are offered to the Seamen for desertion.

But, though these pernicious consequences are numerous, and the waste of Money and public Property great, yet those evils are probably not of so much real prejudice to the Country, as the loss of Time, in the Equipment of Ships in time of War—an inconvenience that cannot fail to be seriously felt, every time that there is a pressing emergency for their services at sea.

The inconveniences attendant upon the want of sufficient depth of water in the Harbours contiguous to the Dock Yards, hitherto noticed, relate to Ships *fitting out*; but those also which arise when Ships come into Port, to be docked, or paid off, equally deserve to be mentioned.

When Ships come into Port to be docked, repaired, or paid off.  
Deptford and Woolwich.

Before Line of Battle Ships can proceed either to Deptford or Woolwich, they must remain, for a considerable time, at Gravesend, or in the vicinity, in order to be cleared of their heavy Stores, which must be sent in lighters and small craft to the Dock Yards, subject to all the inconveniences already noticed; and even after this has been accom-

plished, the Ships are sometimes detained many weeks for a favorable wind, before they can, with safety, proceed up the River.

At Chatham, Ships of the Line must not only in like manner Chatham. have their Guns and Stores taken out of them, before they can come up to the Dock Yard, but they must be dismantled before they can be taken into Dock; nor can large Ships ever be docked there in Neap Tides; and 1st and 2d Rates only in high Springs; and, even then, the Docks are so shallow that large Ships are obliged to be forced into them, and 1st and 2d Rates are required to be raised several feet out of the water, before they can be put into the Docks.

At Portsmouth, large Ships must be lightened whilst lying at Portsmouth. Spithead, by the removal of their Guns and Stores, before they can come into Harbour; and, even then, it is only in favorable Weather that they can cross the Bar.

When Ships therefore are to be docked, or paid off; at any of these Ports, the same evils and inconveniences are liable to arise, which occur in their outfit; with the additional one of the expence incurred for the Wages and Victuals of their Crews, while kept in a manner unemployed; and when it is considered that the cost of the Wages and Victuals of the Crew of a 74-gun Ship, *for one week*, is not less than between five and six hundred pounds, some idea may be formed of the amount of what must be wasted, when a *whole Fleet* is to be paid off, and when the delay, occasioned by the circumstances which have been detailed, in getting the Ships ready for that purpose, is not uncommonly *a month or five weeks*.

On these occasions, the Crews, being anxious to return on shore, after a long period of service at Sea, and elated with the prospect of some relief from their labours, are rarely to be prevailed upon, to exercise that degree of care and attention in unrigging their respective Ships, which a due regard to the preservation of the Public Stores would require; much riot and confusion generally ensue, and the Stores receive considerable damage.

In addition to these disadvantages, there is another arising from the same cause, which cannot be stated in more forcible terms, than those used by the Navy Board in a letter dated 9th June, 1806, to the Secretary to the Lords of the Admiralty, as follows, " We must beg you will be pleased to draw their attention to the want of depth of water in the several King's Ports: this consideration has prevented our giving the Ships more depth, as we could not but be aware (even without the examples of the many French Ships which have been taken) that increased depth of Hold would give the Ships more stability, and enable them to carry their Ports higher, provided they are not loaded with increased weights. If the Ships of the first and second rate be deepened, generally, the difficulty of docking them, and laying them up in a state of Ordinary, must be increased."

Such being the principal disadvantages which attend the want of sufficient depth of water in the Royal Harbours of this Kingdom, at Deptford, Woolwich, Chatham, and Portsmouth, it is only necessary to remark, farther, on this Subject, that, though Plymouth Sound has not depth of water enough to enable large Ships to

Plymouth.

anchor there, with safety, in blowing weather, yet that in Hamoaze, where Ships are fitted out, the water is sufficiently deep to admit of their receiving their Stores, &c. on board: and as the Dock Yard is situated close to Hamoaze, the same inconveniences are not experienced in fitting out, and paying off Ships at Plymouth, in so great a degree as at the other Yards.

At Sheerness, the depth of water in the Harbour is ample; but as the Yard is on so confined a scale, and the bad quality of the subsoil forms a fatal obstacle to its enlargement, that Arsenal, though, from its Situation, it must always be useful, for the Refit of small Vessels, must ever remain of little, or no service, as a Refitting Yard for large Ships.

Sheerness.

Although the want of sufficient depth of water may be reckoned the greatest, and the most alarming, of the defects of the present Dock Yards, and the least capable of remedy, it is by no means the only one, which renders them quite inadequate to the purposes of the Navy, on its present extended scale.

In various parts of their Reports, and particularly in the 8th, the Commissioners of Naval Revision have stated, that it is of great advantage to the Public, to have the Work, necessary to the support of our Navy, performed in the Dock Yards. The quality is better, and (where it is carried on under proper Regulations) the Cost is much less than is paid to Contractors: but, hitherto, a very great part has been provided in that least beneficial way.

Works performed in the Yards, better in quality, and, (when conducted under proper Regulations) cheaper than by Contract.

Much discussion has at different times taken place, and much

difference of opinion has prevailed, respecting the quality of Ships built by Contract :—but I believe it to be now generally admitted, that the Ships, built by Contract, are rarely found to be equal in durability, to those constructed in His Majesty's Yards.

When your convenience may admit (which I trust will be at an early period) of your entering into a minute examination of this Subject, you will find that the Commissioners of Naval Revision have given various Statements, shewing what a *small* portion of the Ships is built, and of the Stores is manufactured in the *Dock Yards*, and what a *large* portion is made *out of the Yards*, by *Contract* or *otherwise*.

From these Statements it appears, that, in fact, only a *small part* of the labour, necessary for the support of the British Navy, is carried on *in the present Dock Yards*.

Inadequacy of the present Yards.

In War.

They have not been found equal, during eighteen years, to the supply of more than about *one half* of the *Line of Battle Ships* built in this Kingdom, for the support of the Navy: only about *one fifth* part of the Ships of War, of all *other descriptions*, and *not even all the repairs*. They have, on an average of three years, furnished only about *one half* of the Cables and Cordage, made for the use of the Navy: only about *one sixth part* of the Anchors: *none* of the Canvas for Sails, and not more than one-fourth part of the workmanship employed in making them; and, with respect to the articles of small consumption, nearly the whole of them have been furnished by Contractors, or private Merchants, and Dealers.

It may, however, be advanced by persons of little foresight, that, although our wants are great in time of War, yet that they may be considerably lessened in time of Peace; and that therefore, when Peace arrives, we shall not have occasion for so great an addition to our Naval means, as that proposed to be adopted. Without entering into general reasoning upon the evil tendency of suffering *any thing* connected with our Navy, to depend upon *temporizing expedients*, you may rest assured there are such convincing proofs of the inadequacy of the means which we now possess, for laying up and securing our Navy, even in time of Peace, that I am not certain whether, of the two, and supposing *both* unattainable, the establishment of a new Naval Arsenal, with capacious Wet Docks, is not even more necessary with a view to Peace, than for the purposes of War.

One head of the 15th Report, is devoted to the consideration of this question; and, after stating the unprecedented difficulties which Government experienced, even at the Peace in 1802, in the endeavour to provide safe accommodation for the Fleet, on its being paid off on that occasion, the Report proceeds to give detailed statements of the number of Line of Battle Ships and Frigates, which could be safely moored in ordinary at each of the Dock Yards, and, by a comparison of those numbers with the strength of the Navy at the time the Commissioners made their Report, the result shews that (even supposing an establishment of 20 Sail of the Line, 50 Frigates, and 100 Sloops, were to be kept in Commission in time of Peace) yet that Moorings would still be wanting for 97 Line of Battle Ships, and 88 Frigates, besides for about 150 Sloops, and 200 Gun Brigs, and other small Vessels.

In Peace also.

Want of Room in the present Harbours to secure the Fleet in time of Peace.

I am, however, borne out by the best authority in stating, that this computation of our wants, alarming as it may be regarded, is too moderate, and that if the numbers of Ships (which in fact we should not know where to place in safety against another War) were reckoned at 130 Line of Battle Ships, 100 Frigates, and 450 Sloops, Gun Brigs, and small Vessels—Total 680—they would not be over-rated.

Reasons why Falmouth, Milford Haven, Southampton Water, and Langstone Harbour, are objectionable for Mooring Ships.

I am aware it has been suggested that Bays or Harbours may be found in different parts of the Coasts of this Kingdom, capable of containing, by a proper distribution, the greater part, if not the whole, of the Ships which our present Harbours are inadequate to admit. I have heard Falmouth, Milford Haven, Southampton Water, and Langstone Harbour, named: but, let the Advocates for these Places reflect for a moment upon the Evils that would arise from our Navy being detached, and locked up, in different Creeks and Bays at a distance from one another, beyond the reach of proper Officers to inspect and take care of them and their Stores; or upon the expence of forming new Establishments at all these places; as well as that of fitting out the Ships, moored there, with Jury Masts, &c. and navigating them round to the Dock Yards, when they are to be repaired; and then perhaps navigating them back again, when their Repairs are complete. Let them reflect upon the Wear and Tear to which the Ships would be exposed in riding at such a place, for instance, as Milford Haven, with a heavy Swell of Sea, and where, in all probability, they would be swamped; and lastly, let them consider this fact, namely, that the expence of the necessary Mooring Chains, &c. to attach the Ships to, and of Ordinary Men to put on board them, would amount to *considerably more than the construction of the Wet Docks proposed at Northfleet!!*

The next point, to which I have to request your consideration, is the difficulty at some, and the absolute impossibility at others, of improving our present Yards, so as to enable the necessary Works to be there carried on, upon a footing equal to the present Exigencies of the Naval Service.

When the Commissioners of Naval Revision entered upon the consideration of this part of the business, committed to their investigation, they found it necessary to visit most of the Royal Dock Yards, and some of the Manfactories and Building Yards of private Individuals, and were forcibly struck with one great difference between them.

In the Works of Private Individuals, they found all the great modern Improvements in Mechanics adopted, and Steam Engines in common use.

In the public Dock Yards, with the exception of some works at Portsmouth, they found matters generally carried on as they had been, more than a Century ago; the Work performed by the natural force of Men, and of Teams of Horses, without aid from artificial Powers.

Backward state of improvement in which the Royal Yards are, compared with the Manfactories of private individuals.

This defect in the Royal Dock Yards was easily to be accounted for.

The Royal Dock Yards having been constructed at periods prior to the late improvements in machinery, many expensive Buildings were erected, and Slips formed in them, without judicious Arrangement, and without any view to such Discoveries; and these would be found, in

Reasons why the recent mechanical improvements cannot be introduced into the present Dock Yards, with advantage.

many respects, unfit for the reception of Steam Engines and Machinery, and would not admit of the advantageous Use of Iron Railways, or other Contrivances, since invented, for the Abridgement of Labor.

At the same time, therefore, that the advantage was obvious, which the Public might derive from the use of Machinery, the difficulties, attending the introduction of it into the present Dock Yards, were equally evident; and a very minute enquiry into the state of the existing Dock Yards became necessary, in order to ascertain, whether it would be most for the benefit of the Public, to make alterations in them, or to have an entire new Dock and Arsenal, in the most eligible Situation, so constructed as to afford all the Advantages that can be had from Mechanical Powers, and good Arrangement.

This Subject is fully investigated and discussed in one of the heads of the 15th Report, and the general Result of what is there stated, in detail, is summed up in the following paragraph:—

“ Thus it appears, that the disadvantages under which the present Dock Yards labor, cannot be wholly removed;—that, though no doubt considerable Improvements might be made in them, yet that, in many cases, the expence incurred would exceed the benefit likely to arise:—and that the Situations in which some of them are placed, would not admit of their being improved and enlarged, to the extent that the magnitude of the Navy requires, either for the purposes of War or of Peace.

“ On these grounds therefore (even supposing it were a matter of

“ choice between improving and enlarging the present Yards (subject still to those inconveniences which are irremediable) and that of forming a new one, in a Situation, and on Principles, altogether free from those disadvantages) the Commissioners state, that they would have no hesitation in preferring the latter: but, that, in the present case, (in which, after enlarging and improving the existing Dock Yards, to the full extent of which they are capable, at any expence that it would be consistent with prudence to incur, they would not, even then, be rendered fit for the reception in time of Peace, or for the fitting out and maintaining in time of War, of a Navy, equal to combat the growing power of our enemies,) they look upon the formation of a new Dock Yard, as imperiously demanded.”—They then proceed,

“ We are far however from meaning, that a new Dock Yard should be considered as superseding, in any degree, the utility of the Western \* Yards.

“ We think, on the contrary, that it would be wise, gradually, and as the works carrying on there will admit of it, to improve and enlarge them, as far as those advantages can be communicated to them, without incurring expence beyond the value of the object likely to be gained; and, with these views, we have inserted in the Appendix, the Report of Messrs. Mylue, Jessop, and Huddart, respecting the improvements which may be made at Portsmouth Harbour, and a letter from Mr. Whidby, respecting the

\* Portsmouth and Plymouth.

“ means of forming a more convenient Victualling Yard at Ports-  
 “ mouth, as well as the Report of Messrs. Rennie and Whidby;  
 “ relative to the improvement of Plymouth Sound.

“ But, we consider a *new Dock Yard* to be indispensably neces-  
 “ sary to supply the place of such \* of the *Eastern Yards*, as are  
 “ *even now* unfit for *most* of the purposes for which the use of a  
 “ Dock Yard is required, and are daily becoming *less adequate than*  
 “ *they were formerly*, to serve the purpose of our Navy, even if it  
 “ did not require more extensive means for its support, than it  
 “ did a Century ago. But, considering the increase which has taken  
 “ place in the Navy of this Kingdom within the last Century—the  
 “ magnitude to which it has now arrived—and the additional means  
 “ which will, in future, be required to support it ;—considering also  
 “ how small a portion of those means the present Yards afford—and  
 “ the vast additional Expence, and numerous other disadvantages,  
 “ which attend the present practice of making up for the deficiency  
 “ of those Yards, by having recourse to Contractors, for so large  
 “ a part of the wants of the Navy, we have no hesitation in de-  
 “ claring our opinion, that, on every ground of true Policy, Pru-  
 “ dence, and Economy, no time should be lost in the Construction  
 “ of a new Dock Yard, of the first Magnitude, in the most  
 “ eligible Situation.”

As I trust with confidence, that the details, with which I have  
 troubled you, are calculated to produce irresistible conviction to  
 your mind, that the Establishment of a new Naval Arsenal, is

\* Deptford and Woolwich.

indispensably necessary, it will strengthen this conviction to know,  
 that, if every defect I have hitherto stated, as belonging to the  
 existing Dock Yards, could be remedied, there is *one* other defect  
 that nothing, short of the power of controlling the Elements, can  
 remove; I allude to the original injudicious selection of the Situa-  
 tions of the respective Dock Yards, in consequence of which they  
 always have been, since the sizes of our Ships have been increased, and  
 ever must be, very inconvenient for the purposes of our Naval Service.

Present Dock Yards  
 improperly placed on  
 the Lee shore.

It is certainly of considerable importance, that, in every Country,  
 the Dock Yards should be situated on the *Weather Shore* of the  
 Land, in respect of the prevailing Winds; that is, in such situations,  
 that the Winds, which are most common, should blow *off* shore,  
 instead of *on* the Land.

When a Ship is recently fitted out, and ready for sea, it is of  
 great consequence that she should not be detained in Port for want  
 of a fair Wind, nor be rendered liable to Accidents, in getting under  
 weigh, upon a Lee shore,

It is computed that, in this Country, the westerly winds usually  
 prevail eight or nine months, out of the twelve: our Dock Yards,  
 therefore, should have been constructed in such Situations, as that  
 those winds would blow *off* shore: instead of which, however, no  
 less than four of the Dock Yards, viz. those of Chatham, Sheerness,  
 Portsmouth, and Plymouth, are placed in the very opposite Situa-  
 tions, with the prevailing Winds *on* Shore.

Of all Situations that could be chosen for a Dock Yard, the Lee



side is reckoned the worst. The loss of a little time in getting to a Harbour, when a Ship wants repair, is of much less importance, than when she is fitted out, ready for sea. On a Lee Shore she is always liable to Accidents; on the Weather Shore of the Land she is always ready to proceed to sea, without fear of Accident, or Detention; whereas, the disadvantages, here spoken of, have often been exemplified at the Ports above mentioned.

Inconveniences attending the bad Situations of Deptford and Woolwich Yards.

Woolwich has the prevailing winds across it, and Deptford alone, of all the Dock Yards in the Kingdom, is on the Weather Shore; but, any advantage to be derived from that circumstance, in other places, is, at Deptford, entirely lost—from its inland situation—from the want of sufficient depth of water—from its distance from the Sea—and from the intricacy of the Navigation so far up the River Thames. These circumstances render Spring Tides, and particular Winds necessary, to admit of large Ships, or even Frigates and small Vessels being moved, either from thence or Woolwich, with safety; so that when Ships arrive at Sheerness for repairs, it is very common to send two or three gangs of Shipwrights and Caulkers down to that Yard, from Deptford and Woolwich, for the purpose of expediting the Works at Sheerness, and thus, though at an additional expence, prevent the loss of time which would otherwise be occasioned, by bringing the Ships up the River, and running the risk of their being detained there by contrary Winds.

Nor is this to be wondered at, when it is considered that Ships (as I am informed) cannot sail from Woolwich, with the wind to the northward of N. W., or to the southward of S. W. by W., and that

consequently there are only *seven* points of the compass out of the *thirty-two*, from which the wind can blow, that will enable a Ship to leave that port. At Deptford this inconvenience is still worse, for the wind must blow from between the points of W. N. W. and S. W. by W. to enable a Ship to sail down the River from thence, which are only *five* points of the compass out of the *thirty-two*.

Thus it appears that, unless the Wind blows from one of the Points within the narrow limits I have mentioned, no Ship can get down the River from either Deptford or Woolwich; and it is well known that many instances have occurred of Ships having been detained a month, six weeks, or even two months at a time, whereas at Northfleet a Ship could never be detained a single day owing to the same cause.

In consequence of Ships not being able to beat out of the narrow part of the River, it has happened, that, on pressing emergencies, Stores have been sent round from the River to Portsmouth by Land, instead of by Water, the comparative expence of which must be obvious to every one.

I cannot exemplify the serious consequences attendant upon the necessity of waiting for certain winds, in order to move down the River, from Deptford and Woolwich, in a more forcible manner than by stating the following circumstance. The stores, which, with a foresight, characteristic of Lord Barham, had been prepared for the supply of Lord Nelson's fleet, in expectation of the Battle of Trafalgar, were detained in the River, by adverse Winds, for near a month

Delay, occasioned thereby, in dispatching Stores to the Fleet after the Battle of Trafalgar,

after the period when they were shipped, namely on the 26th October, 1805. The accounts of that glorious victory arrived on the 6th November, and it was not until the 25th following that the wind was fair to admit of their going down the river; whereas, if these Stores had been shipped at Northfleet, they could have been dispatched immediately.

which could not have arisen at Northfleet.

Chatham.

Similar disadvantages to those before mentioned, in respect of distance from the sea, and difficulty of navigation, make Chatham Yard very inconvenient for the purpose of refitting Ships, when dispatch is most required. They would be less felt, if that Yard were to be confined entirely to the building of Ships, or giving them large repairs.

Sheerness.

Sheerness, besides being on the Lee shore, is very much exposed to the north east wind; and, owing to that circumstance, received very considerable damage in the boisterous weather about two years ago; in the Reparation of which very tardy progress seems to have been made.

Portsmouth.

At Portsmouth, ships are very frequently wind-bound, and must wait for particular winds, either to leave the Harbour, or to come into it from Spithead.

Plymouth.

At Plymouth, the Navigation of the Harbour is intricate, and so much exposed to South Westerly, and Southerly Winds, that, when they prevail, the Swell in the Sound is such, that no ship can lie there in safety. Cawsand Bay is open to Easterly winds, where Ships, when overtaken by such winds, frequently drag their anchors, and are driven on shore; and it is difficult, except in particular Winds, for ships to go in, and come out of Hamoaze.

These seem to be the principal defects in the present Dock Yards, arising from their situations; and though perhaps they are not quite of so much consequence as those occasioned by the want of depth of water in the Harbours, yet, as they are of a nature which render some of the Yards very unfit for the general purposes of the Navy, they are doubtless so far of importance as to demand the most serious attention, in considering the necessity of a complete new Naval Arsenal, not liable to such obvious inconveniences.

The defects of the present Dock Yards being pointed out, and the absolute necessity for a new Naval Arsenal being, I trust, satisfactorily established, the next point for consideration is the Situation where it should be placed. Many reasons combine to render a new Dock Yard more necessary on the Eastern side of the Kingdom, than on the Western. Portsmouth and Plymouth, or the Western Yards, have not only a greater depth of water: are not only in their present state much more complete Dock Yards than those on the Rivers Thames and Medway: but, they are more capable of Improvement: whereas, two of the Eastern Yards, namely Deptford and Woolwich, must, of necessity, in a few years be given up, even if no substitute should be provided, on account of the water becoming daily more shallow, for, although between forty and fifty thousand pounds have lately been expended in removing the Mud, I understand little advantage has been gained, as it accumulates nearly as fast as it is taken up. This circumstance therefore forms one strong reason in favor of the Construction of a Yard in the River Thames, but in a more convenient part of it, than where Deptford and Woolwich are situated.

Reasons for thinking Northfleet the most proper situation for the new Naval Arsenal.

Ever since the year 1765, attempts have, at different times, been made to find out a proper spot for one on the *Eastern side* of this Kingdom, but, till lately, without success; and, if a new Dock Yard has so long been deemed advisable for this Kingdom, by those who have had the best means of judging of its interests in Naval matters, how much more necessary is it now rendered—when the Eastern Yards of this Kingdom have become so much less fit than they were formerly for the purposes of the Navy—when the dominions of France have been extended so far to the northward—and when our enemies have completed, such great works as those at Antwerp, with a view to raise and augment their Navy.

This last circumstance recently so much alarmed the Administration, at the Head of which you, Sir, now are, as to induce them to advise His Majesty to send, with a view to the destruction of these works, the most powerful armament that ever sailed from the Ports of this country. The attempt having failed, I do not mean here to dwell upon it, in any other view than to enforce the additional necessity of an immediate attention being paid to the completion of an object, which, of all others, is best calculated to counteract any pernicious consequences which may be supposed to attach to our enemies being in the unrivalled possession of the Scheldt. All these considerations concur to prove the necessity of the formation of an extensive and powerful Naval Arsenal at Northfleet.

Advantages of the Situation of Northfleet.

The particular advantages of that situation may be thus described: that, without being situated so far up the Thames, as to be subject to the inconveniences to which Deptford and Woolwich are

liable, from the intricacy of the Navigation of that river, it is far enough from its mouth, to be sheltered from the effects of stormy weather; that, it is on a weather shore, in respect of the prevailing winds in this country; that there is sufficient depth of water to admit of Ships of the largest size sailing to or from it, with all their guns and stores on board, with any wind, if not too strong; that an abundant stream of excellent water flows through the land in question, and in the most convenient and desirable part of it; that there will be plenty of good Brick earth, after leaving enough of the excavated soil to raise the ground allotted for buildings to a sufficient height above the level of spring tides; that the subsoil is of the most desirable kind for making good foundations for Docks and Buildings; that it is not so far from the Metropolis, as to render larger Vessels necessary to bring the stores from thence, than what are now used in carrying them to Deptford and Woolwich, that the situation is extremely healthy, and in the midst of a fertile productive country; that, from the natural advantages of the surrounding ground, it is capable of a strong defence, both on the side of the river and on that of the land, thus not only being in a well-protected place itself, but forming an advanced Military Protection, to the Capital; that the extent of the level ground is such as to allow of the Arsenal being made, on as large a scale as can now be desired, with the capacity for further increase hereafter, if ever it should be thought necessary; and lastly, that the shape of the peninsula is perhaps the most desirable and convenient for the purpose of general arrangement, that could be wished for.

Economical considerations.

While I am thus endeavouring to bring under your view the various particulars which merit attention in the consideration of this great national object, you will not suppose that I have overlooked a prominent feature which naturally presents itself; namely the great expenditure which such a Work will necessarily require. At the same time (though it may appear strange when talking of Millions) I have no hesitation in stating, that I consider this as a very subordinate consideration in the decision of such a plan. The magnitude of the sum, whatever it may be, is certainly a just ground for examining the Subject in every view, and for digesting and arranging the execution of it, in the most economical manner, found to be consistent with the object of securing to the Public, the benefits, of which it is deprived, so long as the execution of this work is delayed.

This question, however, appears to me to stand on a different footing from any other in which the expenditure of Public Money is involved. A nice balancing of expence is the duty of every Minister of Finance, when he is at liberty to exercise an option, but that is not the case in the present instance. The security of our Navy, or in other words the existence of our Country, depends in a great measure on the decision which is formed on this great national concern. I have no hesitation in stating the question in those forcible terms; for I must totally deceive myself, if its importance can be conveyed in any terms too strong for the occasion.

Amidst all their other Investigations, the question of expence did not, of course, escape the attention of the Commissioners of Naval Revision, as you will perceive, on an accurate examination of their

Report on this part of the Subject, and I make no doubt that the result of such an Investigation will be a conviction in your mind, that the object of economy will go hand in hand, with the attainment of all the other important advantages which I have stated.

It was once in my contemplation to have entered into a detailed discussion of this Topic, but I found it impossible to do so, without extending this Letter to a most inconvenient length. It would have been necessary to have minutely examined the comparative expence, and durability of Ships of the Line, and of all other Classes built in a Royal Arsenal, constructed with all the advantages of modern Improvements for the saving of Labor, contrasted with a similar expenditure, both in the present Dock Yards, and in those of private Individuals; and it would have been necessary to have estimated, in like manner, the immense saving on almost every other Article manufactured for the use of the Navy of this Kingdom.

Some of these heads of saving have been investigated by the Commissioners of Naval Revision, and I shall therefore, in the first place, observe, on their authority, that there is reason to expect, that, supposing the expence of the New Dock Yard at Northfleet, to amount to between *Five and Six Millions*, a saving, to that extent, will be effected every fifteen years, on such of the items of Naval Expenditure as they have estimated; but, there are numerous other very important Articles of comparative economy, which, though not estimated minutely by those Commissioners, are mentioned by them, in general terms, as forming the basis of considerable additional savings, beyond those which they have com-

prized in their statement. Among these, the advantages to be derived from mooring Ships in Wet Docks, instead of in open Roadsteads, as at present, are most forcibly urged; and I have no doubt you will find that the saving, which would result from the proposed Wet Docks, in rendering unnecessary the expence, which *must otherwise* be incurred, for Moorings and Bridles for fastening the Ships, and the wages and victualling of the men to take care of them (none of whom are ever good Seamen) cannot be stated; if all circumstances are considered, at much *less than Three Millions more.*

And if to the above savings, be added those which would be gained in wear and tear, and every other item before fully enumerated, in the fitting out, and the dismantling of Ships going on, or returning from Service, when performed within the Walls of a well-arranged Naval Arsenal, capable of containing His Majesty's Ships in ordinary, as well as those which come into Harbour for repair; with Storehouses for the reception of all that they have to deposit, and all that they want to be supplied with; and Docks capable of receiving them, with all their Guns and Stores on board, at every tide, and of being emptied again, without even waiting for the tide; with a depth of water capable of enabling them to approach it at all tides, whether spring or neap, and situated on a weather shore, to which they could approach without fear; with large deposits of Timber, Stores, Anchors, &c. &c. &c. suited to the various rates and wants of His Majesty's Ships:—If, Sir, these advantages be compared with the present inconvenient and expensive mode of fitting out, rigging, and storing Ships in the open Harbours, or Rivers, by means of Lighters, to carry the necessary supplies

from the Dock Yards, to the Ships lying at a distance from them; exposed to all descriptions of pirates; with the crews maintained on board at an heavy expence, waiting for the taking out or receiving their Stores; the destruction of public property that ensues, the wear and tear of the tackle, the loss of rigging, sails, &c. &c.; and, if these items of comparative economy be duly appreciated (in looking to the economical management of the present current expence of the Navy, which does not now fall far short of Twenty Millions per annum), and be added to those savings which admit of more accurate estimation, I think that any objection which may be supposed to exist against the gradual expenditure of between Five and Six Millions, in the course of about as many years, for the permanent possession and enjoyment, for ages to come, of all the great advantages which I have enumerated, cannot seriously, or with justice, be entertained.

Indeed, it is almost impossible that any previous estimate can be formed, of the savings which must result from a steady system of regularity and arrangement, in so great a concern as the Navy of Great Britain, and, therefore, it is the reverse of a well-considered economy, to deny to the administration of such a concern, every accommodation requisite for carrying on the building and repairing of our Fleet, without the necessity of having recourse to the present expensive expedients.

I am aware, that, upon this branch of the Subject, every thing I can say is liable to the trite observation, that all estimates are fallacious, and that the execution never corresponds with the previous estimate, either in respect of expence, or time. To such an objection I can only oppose these facts;—that the great works lately car-

ried on, at an immense expence, by the enterprize of individuals, in the construction of the West India, the London, the East India, and other Docks, were executed for *very nearly* the sums at which they were estimated; and further that, in *those* estimates, the usual addition of *ten per Cent. only* was made for *incidental expences*; whereas, *double that sum*, namely, *twenty per Cent.* has been added for contingencies, and *included in the Estimate of the Construction of the Naval Arsenal at Northfleet.*

I cannot however leave this topic without observing, that, in point of dispatch and economy, much depends on the mode of carrying on great works of this nature; and, Sir, it will be your peculiar duty, to consider and decide in what manner this important national object may be accomplished, in the most *substantial*—the most *economical*—and the most *speedy* manner.

It is too well known, and too much admitted, to need the production of further proof, that all the present Public Boards are so fully occupied, as to make it impossible for them to undertake the management of a work of this extent. It becomes therefore a point for consideration and discussion, not whether the superintendance of the execution of these works, shall be entrusted to the Navy Board, or to a selection of temporary Commissioners; but, whether it should be entrusted to the management of persons employed *solely* by Government (and who would have the power of laying out the money which may be voted for carrying on the works, either under the eye of Parliament, or of the executive Government), or whether it would not be better to *encourage a Public Subscription for the purpose*, and to commit the Superintendance of the

execution of the works, to a certain number of Directors, chosen partly by the Subscribers, and partly by Government. If this mode were adopted, and proper Arrangements made, as to the pecuniary Concerns going hand in hand with the progressive Advancement of the Works, no doubt need be entertained of their being finished within the time limited, supposing it to be five or six years; and, in proof of the reasonableness of that expectation, the instances of the West India Docks, London Docks, India Shipping Docks, and others, may again be adduced;—but, these, it is to be observed, were executed under the Superintendance of Persons *interested* in their *speedy* Completion for Use.

I have been led into this train of observation, in consequence of a communication made to me of a Plan which had been in contemplation for the execution of this Work, by a Subscription of Individuals, by the means of which Government would be relieved from the necessity of advancing the Capital!—would in a great measure avoid the risk of bad workmanship in the execution of the Plan agreed upon:—and would ensure the *speedy completion* of that Plan, a point which is of *more importance* than any other, as it *materially affects the question of expence, as well as Dispatch.* A proposal of this nature seems worthy of your attention, so far as to enquire into the Terms, Security, and general Advantages of it, compared with the adoption of any other means for the Execution of the Works in question. I do not pretend to be a judge of its minute details, but you would have an opportunity of judging for yourself, as of course those who would embark their capital in the concern would have recourse to you, if the Business were supposed to be under serious consideration.

If, Sir (as I trust will be the case), your judgment should decide in favor of that line of conduct, which I am sure must be your inclination, in every thing you conceive to be essential to the Interests of your Country; I take the liberty of urging you, in the most earnest manner, to admit of no suggestions leading to procrastination. If the measure is as important as I conceive it to be, there cannot be one good reason assigned, why the Naval service of the country should lose the benefit of it, one hour longer than is absolutely unavoidable.

In addition to all the general topics which might be urged in support of a speedy decision and a dispatchful Execution, there are peculiar circumstances which enforce the propriety of no unnecessary delay.

Besides the investigation of the general utility of the Measure in question, the Commissioners of Naval Revision have gone so far as to arrange, with the able assistance they have called to their aid, the whole detail, and almost every minute circumstance that can render the Plan perfectly complete in the accommodation requisite to secure to the public all the benefits which have been pointed out, as likely to flow from the adoption of this measure. If any procrastination now takes place, it will be followed by an immediate apathy, and if ever the consideration of it is renewed, at any future period, all the information which has been collected will be scattered and gone, and perhaps that assistance irrecoverably lost, which is now at command to advise and direct the execution.

It ought further to be recollected that, if the radical remedy which

has been pointed out, for the cure of so many inconveniences and evils, is postponed, absolute necessity will compel you to expend great sums, annually, on the present Dock Yards, in order to prevent the Naval service actually coming to a stand, in consequence of most of these Yards becoming unfit for use. Every shilling so expended, at Deptford and Woolwich in particular, would be an absolute Waste of the public Money, as soon as the new Arsenal should be carried into execution, which *must*, undoubtedly, be the case at no very distant period.

The Commissioners of Naval Revision have indeed recommended the Preservation and Improvement of the Western Yards, for the performance of the Naval Services, to which those Yards are peculiarly applicable, and in that view some expenditure may be necessary, in order to render them fit for the permanent beneficial purposes pointed out for the Occupation of them, and such Expenditure, systematically made, will be highly useful and praiseworthy; but, that is a very different thing from the expenditure of large sums, for the purposes of temporary expedients, dictated by necessity, in consequence of the delay of the Arsenal at Northfleet. Every expenditure of this last description becomes ultimately useless, and does not admit of any substantial justification.

When on this topic, I cannot refrain calling your attention to the following Letter from the Commissioners of Naval Revision, to the Lords of the Admiralty, which is a proof of the mischief of creeping on from one delay to another, and the impropriety of neglecting those precious years, which pass by us in such rapid succession.

“ OFFICE OF NAVAL REVISION,  
“ 14th March, 1808.

“ MY LORDS,

“ The Report which we have prepared on the  
“ Subject of a new Dock Yard at Northfleet, having been one of the  
“ measures, undertaken at the desire of the First Lord of the Admiralty  
“ in 1805, we think it right to transmit to your Lordship, a draft of  
“ what we propose to take the earliest opportunity of laying before  
“ His Majesty, as the result of our enquiries, and our full conside-  
“ ration of that important Subject, in order (if Government should  
“ concur in opinion with us, that the plan we have recommended  
“ should be carried into effect with as little delay as possible)  
“ that you may have it in your power to take such measures, in  
“ due time, as you may, on a consideration of what we have stated,  
“ deem to be proper, or necessary, *this being the particular time of*  
“ *the year, when workmen must be engaged for carrying on any*  
“ *great work during the ensuing summer months, and therefore a*  
“ *few weeks delay might subject Government to additional expence,*  
“ *or perhaps to the loss of the whole year.*

“ We have the honor to be, &c.

(Signed)

- “ BARHAM,
- “ JOHN FORDYCE,
- “ ROGER CURTIS,
- “ WM. DOMETT,
- “ AMBROSE SERLE.”

“ Admiralty Board.”

I only remark on this document, that it is two years since it was written.

But, Sir, if you do not feel disposed to sanction the Construction of a Naval Arsenal, upon the extensive scale which others have thought desirable, surely you must be convinced of the urgent necessity of taking such measures as will prevent a diminution of those means for supporting our Navy, which we now possess, by the formation of an Arsenal, upon a diminished scale; sufficient, at least, to fill up the place of those Yards, which, as I have before observed, you will soon be compelled to abandon; and, this may be done consistently with the further Enlargement of the plan, if it should hereafter be judged desirable.

In the formation of the plan recommended by the Board of Revision, its parts have been so arranged, that the whole operations of the building and repairing Vessels of War, should be carried on in the most systematic and economical manner, but, that the work should be capable of being executed, gradually, as the wants of the Service should demand. In case therefore His Majesty's Government should resolve on the adoption of this plan, it may be executed in such a manner, as to be of essential use as a Dock Yard, without completing the whole of the works immediately.

It would probably be necessary that the Entrance Bason, with the Lock that is proposed to communicate with the Thames, as also the great Wet Dock, and the Bason and Lock adjoining Greenhithe, should be executed at once; but, no more of the Dry Docks, (which I understand are very expensive) need be formed, than what Government may think necessary for immediate use.



Some of the Slips might also now be made, and the others delayed till wanted.

In like manner, part of the Storehouses and other Buildings might be raised, and others added afterwards.

The Mast and Boat Ponds might also be made on a moderate scale, and only a certain number of the Mast and Boat Store Houses.

The Timber Field might be only in part occupied, and the Iron Railways laid on it; part of the Sawpit, and Seasoning Sheds, suitable to the number of Slips and Dry Docks, might be built at first, and the rest added afterwards. Thus, the works might be carried on, progressively, as wanted, and each part might be gradually executed, without materially interrupting the operations of the Dock Yard; and I am persuaded that the advantages, and conveniences of this plan will be found such, as to induce those, by whom the Naval affairs of this Country are conducted, to press its speedy completion, soon after they shall have tried and experienced its benefits, upon a limited scale, which will be found not only to produce great Economy in the building and fitting out of Ships, but also afford a facility of effecting these purposes, far beyond any thing that has hitherto been experienced in any of His Majesty's Dock Yards.

I find it necessary here to stop short; my mind is eager on this Subject, and the suggestions that spring from it crowd upon me so fast, that I think it right to relieve you with an assurance that I remain, with perfect Esteem, and Regard,

SIR,  
Your obedient and  
humble Servant,  
(Signed) MELVILLE.

0527

