

Killery Bay,

an anchorage which was universally pronounced to be almost ideally adapted for the shelter of a large fleet of modern warships. Killery Bay is about ten miles long, and nowhere more than a mile wide. There is a good depth of water to within less than three miles of the head of the bay and to within a stone's-throw of the shore on either side. The holding is good, and the entrance is so narrow and so intricate that, although it presents no difficulty in the day-time to ships of the largest size handled with the skill which is characteristic of the Royal Navy, it would not be at all easy for a torpedo-boat or any other hostile craft to navigate, or even to find, it at night. Besides, the entrance could, if necessary, be protected with perfect ease and complete security. We left the bay, as we entered it, in single column line ahead, the second division, led by the Anson, the flagship of Rear-Admiral Adeane, going out first, and the first division following. I cannot better give an idea of the extreme narrowness of the entrance than by saying that in the narrowest part a rabbit on one shore would have been well within the range of an ordinary shot-gun fired from the port side of the quarter-deck of this ship, while at the same moment another rabbit on the other shore would not have been beyond the range of a rabbit rifle fired from the star-board side. As soon as we were clear of the entrance the battleships formed in double column line ahead, a division of cruisers being stationed on either flank. In this order, varied occasionally by the dispersion of the cruisers for scouting purposes to extreme signalling distance, we have since continued, and, though the war has now lasted two days, we have done nothing else, and have seen nothing whatever of the enemy.

I am not at liberty to say what course we have taken, what is our present position, what course we are now taking, or what purpose we have in view. However, it will not be long, I suppose, before our purpose is disclosed by the course of events, and then perhaps I shall have an opportunity of explaining and commenting on it, though it is only too likely that the state of ignorance in which the Admiralty have resolved to keep all correspondents during the manoeuvres may lead to much inevitable misunderstanding, and some involuntary misrepresentation.

In a former letter I mentioned the difficulty experienced by the flagship in getting its signals taken in and answered by some of the ships stationed at a distance. This difficulty has again been more than once experienced since we left Killery Bay, especially in the case of night signals transmitted by means of the flashing lantern, that admirable and invaluable instrument which the navies of the world owe to Admiral Colomb. It is not the lantern itself which is in fault. The principle of this lantern, which was, I believe, first suggested by an officer in the Austrian service and was adopted for naval use by Admiral Colomb, is the transmission of long and short flashes corresponding to the long and short symbols of the Morse code, and the method is simple, rapid, and, with properly trained signalmen, perfectly effective. But it not infrequently happens that signalmen told off for service in the mobilized ships are either imperfectly trained or have become rusty for want of practice. It is sometimes the case, moreover, that the staff of signalmen is insufficient. In 1889 I had to report that the Mersey, then one of the fastest cruisers attached to Admiral Baird's squadron, had only one fully-trained signalman on board. As it is obvious that a signalman cannot be kept continuously on duty, it is certain that in such a case the signal department of the ship could not be worked satisfactorily and efficiently at all times. I do not know whether any of the cruisers attached to this squadron are as badly off as the Mersey was in 1889, but to judge by results I should think that some of them very possibly might be. This deficiency in the signal department is a serious evil in any case, and might in some cases be a fatal one. It not only impairs the mobility and smartness of the fleet, but it often brings innocent men into trouble. It is not very pleasant for an officer of the watch to have his name indicated to the whole fleet, as has more than once happened in the last two days, for a fault which may not be his at all, and it is rather hard for a ship to be censured because she happens to be supplied with a signalman who is not up to his duties. I am inclined to think, from what I have heard and seen, that the methods in use at the School of Signalling now established by the Admiralty are too theoretical and not sufficiently practical. It looks as if a man might be passed as a trained signalman who is capable of doing many things which are not ordinarily required in the signal department of a man-of-war, but who has not been taught to keep an alert and vigilant look-out, and to take in ordinary signals rapidly and accurately. It should be the foundation of a signalman's training to see flags as soon as they are hoisted, to read the semaphore as easily as if it were the common alphabet, to see the flashing lantern as soon as its screen is lifted, and to take in its message as soon as he has answered its summons. If a man cannot do this, he is an inefficient signalman, even though he may be a first-class telegraphic operator. Signals on board ship are not transmitted by telegraph, but by flags, by the semaphore, and the Morse code. Another cause of delay in the transmission and reception of signals is the insufficient supply of the flags required for the purpose to ships other than the flagships. A complicated signal often requires the use of duplicate flags in distinct but simultaneous hoists. A ship not supplied with a sufficiency of duplicates is forced in such a case to make a shift with diminutive flags supplied for the use of boats, and these flags are quite inadequate for the purpose, being indistinguishable at any considerable distance. All these are points which call for the serious attention of the authorities. Year by year I have noticed the same faults and listened to the same complaints from officers of the signal department. The whole system of flag signals has been recast, simplified, and improved during the last two or three years, and, so far as its material appliances are concerned, there is now little ground for complaint, unless indeed it be in the too tardy adaptation of the best electrical appliances to the flashing lantern for the purposes of distant signalling. The fault now rests mainly with the personnel of the signal department, especially in mobilized ships where the signalmen are generally too few in number, and in some cases at least manifestly incompetent. There seems to be in some quarters a tendency to underrate the importance of rapid and accurate signalling, to suppose that the rating makes the signalman, who has to learn the very rudiments of his practical duties after he has joined his ship. It is not easy to explain on any other hypothesis the slackness of signalling which is always more or less observable in some of the ships of the large fleets assembled for the annual manoeuvres.