James II., from having so long and so gloriously filled the office of Lord High Admiral while Duke of York, was perfectly aware of the requirements of the navy ; and du­ring his short reign he paid great attention to increasing its efficiency. He also especially directed inquiries into the question of the durability of timber for the construction of it, and carefully accumulated both materials and stores for its maintenance. It is not a little curious that it was pro­bably the attention which the monarchs of the line of Stuart had bestowed on the naval service, which enabled it so triumphantly to resist the persevering attempts of Louis XIV. to recover for them the throne of their an­cestors.

Though England was at the Revolution possessed of an efficient fleet, manned by experienced seamen, who had all the confidence arising from a series of naval triumphs, it must be remembered that for a long period no opposition to her naval superiority had been anticipated from any other power than Holland ; and consequently the fleets of England were composed of ships which had many of them been built to adapt them to this service, for which small dimensions and light draughts of water were essential qualifications, on account of the shoalness of the Dutch coast.

William was too cautious a monarch to have neglected so important a means of national defence, as was the navy when engaged with such an ambitious and energetic oppo­nent as Louis XIV. ; and we find that the naval force was considerably increased, both numerically and. in dimensions, during his reign. But the triumphs of our armies under Marlborough having for a time diverted the attention of the nation from naval affairs, it fell into decay during the reign of his successor.

When Louis XIV. determined to dispute with England for the sovereignty of the seas, he was not only without a navy, but without the means of forming one. The mili­tary and commercial marine of France had ceased to exist. The sanguine temperament of the monarch, and the wis­dom of his minister Colbert, removed all obstacles ; com­merce began to flourish on the quays, merchant-vessels to crowd the ports ; dock-yards, harbours, and shipping appear­ed simultaneously to start into existence ; and the nation, which almost for centuries had been essentially military, felt constrained to turn its energies to commerce and to the sea. A navy which in. 1661 consisted of some four or five small vessels, in little more than ten years bearded and baffled the combined fleets of Holland and of Spain, and asserted the sovereignty of the Mediterranean. In 1681 her fleets consisted of 115 line-of-battle ships, manned by 36,440 men, with 179 smaller ships, the crews of which amounted to 3037 men ; and in 1690 a fleet of eighty-four vessels of war, out of which three were of a hundred guns and upwards, and ten others were above eighty-four guns, with twenty-two fire-ships, was cruizing in the British seas. It is true that these mighty armaments failed in fulfilling the ambitious designs of Louis. But the severity of the struggle, which at length ended in the annihilation of his hopes, and in our triumphant assertion of our naval supe­riority, must always serve as an example of the danger we may incur by too great confidence in that superiority.

We have the following comparison between the French and British ships of about this period, from an official con­temporary paper, by a gentleman of the name of Gibson : “ Our guns being for the most part shorter, are made to carry more shott than a French gunn of like weight, there­fore the French guns reach further, and ours make a bigger hole. By this the French has the advantage to fight at a distance, and wee yard-arm to yard-arm. The like advan­tage wee have over them in shipping; although they are broader and carry a better saile, our sides are thicker, and better able to receive their shott ; by this they are more subject to be sunk by gunn shott than wee."

The paper also complains much of the injudicious ma­nagement of our shipping, by which it says, “ many a fast sayling shipp have come to loose that property, by being over-masted, over-rigged, over-gunned (as the Constant Warwick, from twenty-six gunns, and an incomparable sayler, to forty-six gunns and a slugg), over-manned (vide all the old shipps built in the parliament time now left), over-built (vide the Ruby and Assurance), and haveing great tafferills, gallarys, &c., to the making many formerly a stiff, now a tender-sided shipp, bringing thereby their head and tuck to lye too low in the water, and by it takeing away their former good property in steering, sayling, &c. The French by this defect of ours make wart with the sword (by sending no small shipps of warr to sea, but clean), and wee, by cruseing in fleetes, or single shipps foule, with bare threates.”

Charnock draws some curious parallels between the state of the two navies of France and England during the earlier half of the eighteenth century, which may be summed up in a few words. That when the French took an English ship, it was seldom admitted into their navy ; or, if admitted, it was only at a much lower rating, as, for instance, the Pem­broke, a sixty-four in our service, became a fifty-gun ship in theirs. That in cases when an English fleet was in chase of a French fleet, it was ships which were British built which fell into our possession ; but that almost on every oc­casion the French ships could evade ours. That the losses sustained in the French navy by foundering at sea, or by wrecks, were principally those ships which had been taken from us. That, on the contrary, the favourite ships in our fleets were those which had been taken from the French, and the instances in which French ships in our service were ever recovered possession of by them were extremely rare ; we as far excelling them in all that related to the ma­nœuvres and management of ships as they did us in designing them.

In consequence of the little attention bestowed upon the navy during the land-triumphs of Marlborough, it was found absolutely necessary, at the commencement of the reign of George I. that vigorous measures should be taken to re- establish it. Much pains were bestowed during this and the succeeding reign of George II. to improve its efficiency. The dimensions and the armament of the ships composing it underwent frequent revisals, and many valuable acces­sory improvements were made. Still it was evident that the perfect seamanship of the officers, and the undaunted valour of their crews, were frequently rendered nugatory by the superior qualities of the ships of their opponents, and the nation reaped little more than empty honour from the contests in which she engaged ; the heavy sailers of England being unable to prevent her colonies and her commerce from suffering severely from the attacks of the light squadrons of her enemies. The naval commanders of England were constant in their complaints of the comparative inferiority in speed, in stability, and in readiness of manoeuvring, of the ships under their command.

In a letter from Sir George (afterwards Lord) Rodney, dated the 31st May 1780, to Mr Stephens, the secretary of the Admiralty, is a passage which proves in a remarkable degree the truth of the above statement. “Nothing could induce them (the French fleet), to risk a general action, though it was in their power daily. They made, at different times, motions which indicated a desire of engaging, but their resolution failed them when they drew near ; and as they sailed far better than his majesty’s fleet, they with ease could gain what distance they pleased to windward.”

One great cause of the inferiority of our ships arose from the practice which prevailed during the first half of the eighteenth century, through a mistaken idea of economy, of “ rebuilding” old ships, so that, in fact, the forms and dimensions of the previous century passed down in many