

**THE MERCHANT MARINE: "A
NECESSITY IN TIME OF WAR; A
SOURCE OF INDEPENDENCE AND
STRENGTH IN TIME OF PEACE"**

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The Merchant Marine: "A Necessity in Time of War; A Source of Independence and Strength in Time of Peace" by William S. Benson

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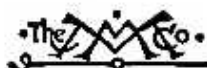
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WILLIAM S. BENSON

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THE MERCHANT MARINE

"A NECESSITY IN TIME OF WAR; A
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STRENGTH IN TIME OF PEACE."

BY

REAR ADMIRAL WILLIAM S. BENSON, U. S. N.

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This study in American History was written for the non-competitive program of the Knights of Columbus to encourage investigation into the origins, the achievements and the problems of the United States; to interpret and perpetuate the American principles of liberty, popular sovereignty and government by consent; to promote American solidarity; and to exalt the American ideal.

INTRODUCTION

Through the long period I have spent in the naval service of the United States I have carefully studied the mercantile side of the nation's ocean service, not only because it is of vital importance to the country's safety as an auxiliary of the Navy, but also because it is an instrument essential to the nation's wealth and to her usefulness among the peoples of the world.

My responsibilities as Director of Naval Operations during the World War brought me in close touch with the danger to which this country was exposed, in consequence of her lack of an adequate merchant marine. As our Allies also were anxious to get our soldiers to Europe, our need in this instance was supplied by their vessels. The consequences which will attend our neglect of the merchant service, should our safety demand the transport of great bodies of troops across the Atlantic or Pacific, when no friendly ally is at hand to assist with its vessels, are not pleasant to contemplate. At present there is no lack of vessels, but their existence now is no assurance for our possible need at an indefinite and we trust distant future time when our rights may again have to be preserved by resort to arms.

Constant protection can come only from an ample navy and a permanent merchant marine, under our own

flag. A merchant fleet of adequate size for our peace time commerce, manned by American citizens whose loyalty will keep them at their posts when danger comes, and whose experience will equip them for higher office in our non-combatant fleet when it serves as an auxiliary to our navy, is not a mere instrument of commerce—it is a necessity.

But the wealth of the nation also demands an adequate merchant marine. The vast sum heretofore and still paid foreign vessels for transporting American products to foreign countries, if paid to American vessels would itself be a great addition to our national assets. This, however, is but one aspect of the matter in its relation to our commerce. In addition to the freight money paid foreign owners, we place in their custody as an open book, all the "secrets" of that part of our foreign trade carried in their ships, for the manifests which form a part of the ship's papers contain in great detail information concerning our imports, our exports and our customers. If a citizen wishes to understand what this means and what folly it is to permit it, let him consider what he would think of a great department store employing the delivery wagons of a competing establishment for the delivery of its sales, thereby entrusting to its competitor the names of the buyers, a full description of the goods, and their prices! In addition to this folly, another disadvantage from dependence on a foreign merchant fleet occurs when there is a shortage of tonnage, for preference is naturally given by the foreign vessel to carrying the commerce of its own ports, not only from a possible sense of loyalty, but at times from a desire