

1916

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MERCANTILE WAR TO SUCCEED MILITARY WAR ?

[A review-article which appeared in the *Economic Journal* for March, 1916, on the "Report of a Sub-committee of the Advisory Committee to the Board of Trade on Commercial Intelligence with respect to measures for securing the position, after the War, of certain branches of British Industry" (Cd. 8181). It brought me an abusive letter from New Zealand, referring to "free traders *alias* pro-Germans," and enclosing a cutting from the *Auckland Star* for July 6, which ends with the assertion, "Even if the Allies gain an overwhelming triumph, the main purposes of the war will not have been achieved if we do not force the Germans to expiate their guilt by imposing on them, at least in the sphere of commerce, a sentence of outlawry and ostracism, to be maintained so long as may seem necessary for the safety and well-being of the rest of mankind."]

THIS report is signed "Algernon E. Firth, A. J. Hobson, Stanley Machin, E. Parkes, Albert Spicer," the last-named, however, appending a reservation indicating that he is not prepared to swallow the whole of the Protectionist proposals of his colleagues. The President of the Board of Trade publishes the document "without, of course, taking responsibility for any of its conclusions," which is a little like the conduct of the proverbial father who introduces his unattractive son to the schoolmaster with a hint about the unpleasant hereditary characteristics of the boy's mother's family. If the President did not select the Sub-committee, he must at any rate have selected the Committee.

Like many another modern politician, pathetically endeavouring to be "efficient" under the lash of the daily journalist, who despises thought because he has no time for it, the President has displayed an unfortunate readiness to start an inquiry how something is to be done without first asking whether it is desirable to do it.

Early in the present conflict the Board of Trade allowed itself