

ALFRED THAYER MAHAN

THE INTEREST OF
AMERICA IN SEA POWER,
PRESENT AND FUTURE

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A. T. Mahan

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Power, Present and Future**

PREFACE

Whatever interest may be possessed by a collection of detached papers, issued at considerable intervals during a term of several years, and written without special reference one to the other, or, at the first, with any view to subsequent publication, depends as much upon the date at which they were composed, and the condition of affairs then existent, as it does upon essential unity of treatment. If such unity perchance be found in these, it will not be due to antecedent purpose, but to the fact that they embody the thought of an individual mind, consecutive in the line of its main conceptions, but adjusting itself continually to changing conditions, which the progress of events entails.

The author, therefore, has not sought to bring these papers down to the present date; to reconcile seeming contradictions, if such there be; to suppress repetitions; or to weld into a consistent whole the several parts which in their origin were independent. Such changes as have been made extend only to phraseology, with the occasional modification of an expression that seemed

to err by excess or defect. The dates at the head of each article show the time of its writing, not of its publication.

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A.T. MAHAN.

November, 1897.

THE UNITED STATES LOOKING OUTWARD

August, 1890

Indications are not wanting of an approaching change in the thoughts and policy of Americans as to their relations with the world outside their own borders. For the past quarter of a century, the predominant idea, which has asserted itself successfully at the polls and shaped the course of the government, has been to preserve the home market for the home industries. The employer and the workman alike have been taught to look at the various economical measures proposed from this point of view, to regard with hostility any step favoring the intrusion of the foreign producer upon their own domain, and rather to demand increasingly rigorous measures of exclusion than to acquiesce in any loosening of the chain that binds the consumer to them. The inevitable consequence has followed, as in all cases when the mind or the eye is exclusively fixed in one direction, that the danger of loss or the prospect of advantage in another quarter has been overlooked; and although the abounding resources of the country have maintained the exports at a high figure, this flattering result has been due more to the superabundant bounty

of Nature than to the demand of other nations for our protected manufactures.

For nearly the lifetime of a generation, therefore, American industries have been thus protected, until the practice has assumed the force of a tradition, and is clothed in the mail of conservatism. In their mutual relations, these industries resemble the activities of a modern ironclad that has heavy armor, but inferior engines and guns; mighty for defence, weak for offence. Within, the home market is secured; but outside, beyond the broad seas, there are the markets of the world, that can be entered and controlled only by a vigorous contest, to which the habit of trusting to protection by statute does not conduce.

At bottom, however, the temperament of the American people is essentially alien to such a sluggish attitude. Independently of all bias for or against protection, it is safe to predict that, when the opportunities for gain abroad are understood, the course of American enterprise will cleave a channel by which to reach them. Viewed broadly, it is a most welcome as well as significant fact that a prominent and influential advocate of protection, a leader of the party committed to its support, a keen reader of the signs of the times and of the drift of opinion, has identified himself with a line of policy which looks to nothing less than such modifications of the tariff as may expand the commerce of the United States to all quarters of the globe. Men of all parties can unite on the words of Mr. Blaine, as reported in a recent speech: "It is not an ambitious destiny for so great a country as ours to

manufacture only what we can consume, or produce only what we can eat." In face of this utterance of so shrewd and able a public man, even the extreme character of the recent tariff legislation seems but a sign of the coming change, and brings to mind that famous Continental System, of which our own is the analogue, to support which Napoleon added legion to legion and enterprise to enterprise, till the fabric of the Empire itself crashed beneath the weight.

The interesting and significant feature of this changing attitude is the turning of the eyes outward, instead of inward only, to seek the welfare of the country. To affirm the importance of distant markets, and the relation to them of our own immense powers of production, implies logically the recognition of the link that joins the products and the markets,—that is, the carrying trade; the three together constituting that chain of maritime power to which Great Britain owes her wealth and greatness. Further, is it too much to say that, as two of these links, the shipping and the markets, are exterior to our own borders, the acknowledgment of them carries with it a view of the relations of the United States to the world radically distinct from the simple idea of self-sufficingness? We shall not follow far this line of thought before there will dawn the realization of America's unique position, facing the older worlds of the East and West, her shores washed by the oceans which touch the one or the other, but which are common to her alone.

Coincident with these signs of change in our own policy there

is a restlessness in the world at large which is deeply significant, if not ominous. It is beside our purpose to dwell upon the internal state of Europe, whence, if disturbances arise, the effect upon us may be but partial and indirect. But the great seaboard powers there do not stand on guard against their continental rivals only; they cherish also aspirations for commercial extension, for colonies, and for influence in distant regions, which may bring, and, even under our present contracted policy, already have brought them into collision with ourselves. The incident of the Samoa Islands, trivial apparently, was nevertheless eminently suggestive of European ambitions. America then roused from sleep as to interests closely concerning her future. At this moment internal troubles are imminent in the Sandwich Islands, where it should be our fixed determination to allow no foreign influence to equal our own. All over the world German commercial and colonial push is coming into collision with other nations: witness the affair of the Caroline Islands with Spain; the partition of New Guinea with England; the yet more recent negotiation between these two powers concerning their share in Africa, viewed with deep distrust and jealousy by France; the Samoa affair; the conflict between German control and American interests in the islands of the western Pacific; and the alleged progress of German influence in Central and South America. It is noteworthy that, while these various contentions are sustained with the aggressive military spirit characteristic of the German Empire, they are credibly said to arise from the national temper

more than from the deliberate policy of the government, which in this matter does not lead, but follows, the feeling of the people,—a condition much more formidable.

There is no sound reason for believing that the world has passed into a period of assured peace outside the limits of Europe. Unsettled political conditions, such as exist in Haiti, Central America, and many of the Pacific islands, especially the Hawaiian group, when combined with great military or commercial importance as is the case with most of these positions, involve, now as always, dangerous germs of quarrel, against which it is prudent at least to be prepared. Undoubtedly, the general temper of nations is more averse from war than it was of old. If no less selfish and grasping than our predecessors, we feel more dislike to the discomforts and sufferings attendant upon a breach of peace; but to retain that highly valued repose and the undisturbed enjoyment of the returns of commerce, it is necessary to argue upon somewhat equal terms of strength with an adversary. It is the preparedness of the enemy, and not acquiescence in the existing state of things, that now holds back the armies of Europe.

On the other hand, neither the sanctions of international law nor the justice of a cause can be depended upon for a fair settlement of differences, when they come into conflict with a strong political necessity on the one side opposed to comparative weakness on the other. In our still-pending dispute over the seal-fishing of Bering Sea, whatever may be thought

of the strength of our argument, in view of generally admitted principles of international law, it is beyond doubt that our contention is reasonable, just, and in the interest of the world at large. But in the attempt to enforce it we have come into collision not only with national susceptibilities as to the honor of the flag, which we ourselves very strongly share, but also with a state governed by a powerful necessity, and exceedingly strong where we are particularly weak and exposed. Not only has Great Britain a mighty navy and we a long defenceless seacoast, but it is a great commercial and political advantage to her that her larger colonies, and above all Canada, should feel that the power of the mother country is something which they need, and upon which they can count. The dispute is between the United States and Canada, not the United States and Great Britain; but it has been ably used by the latter to promote the solidarity of sympathy between herself and her colony. With the mother country alone an equitable arrangement, conducive to well-understood mutual interests, could be reached readily; but the purely local and peculiarly selfish wishes of Canadian fishermen dictate the policy of Great Britain, because Canada is the most important link uniting her to her colonies and maritime interests in the Pacific. In case of a European war, it is possible that the British navy will not be able to hold open the route through the Mediterranean to the East; but having a strong naval station at Halifax, and another at Esquimalt, on the Pacific, the two connected by the Canadian Pacific Railroad, England

possesses an alternate line of communication far less exposed to maritime aggression than the former, or than the third route by the Cape of Good Hope, as well as two bases essential to the service of her commerce, or other naval operations, in the North Atlantic and the Pacific. Whatever arrangement of this question is finally reached, the fruit of Lord Salisbury's attitude scarcely can fail to be a strengthening of the sentiments of attachment to, and reliance upon, the mother country, not only in Canada, but in the other great colonies. These feelings of attachment and mutual dependence supply the living spirit, without which the nascent schemes for Imperial Federation are but dead mechanical contrivances; nor are they without influence upon such generally unsentimental considerations as those of buying and selling, and the course of trade.

This dispute, seemingly paltry yet really serious, sudden in its appearance and dependent for its issue upon other considerations than its own merits, may serve to convince us of many latent and yet unforeseen dangers to the peace of the western hemisphere, attendant upon the opening of a canal through the Central American Isthmus. In a general way, it is evident enough that this canal, by modifying the direction of trade routes, will induce a great increase of commercial activity and carrying trade throughout the Caribbean Sea; and that this now comparatively deserted nook of the ocean will become, like the Red Sea, a great thoroughfare of shipping, and will attract, as never before in our day, the interest and ambition of maritime nations. Every

position in that sea will have enhanced commercial and military value, and the canal itself will become a strategic centre of the most vital importance. Like the Canadian Pacific Railroad, it will be a link between the two oceans; but, unlike it, the use, unless most carefully guarded by treaties, will belong wholly to the belligerent which controls the sea by its naval power. In case of war, the United States will unquestionably command the Canadian Railroad, despite the deterrent force of operations by the hostile navy upon our seaboard; but no less unquestionably will she be impotent, as against any of the great maritime powers, to control the Central American canal. Militarily speaking, and having reference to European complications only, the piercing of the Isthmus is nothing but a disaster to the United States, in the present state of her military and naval preparation. It is especially dangerous to the Pacific coast; but the increased exposure of one part of our seaboard reacts unfavorably upon the whole military situation.

Despite a certain great original superiority conferred by our geographical nearness and immense resources,—due, in other words, to our natural advantages, and not to our intelligent preparations,—the United States is wofully unready, not only in fact but in purpose, to assert in the Caribbean and Central America a weight of influence proportioned to the extent of her interests. We have not the navy, and, what is worse, we are not willing to have the navy, that will weigh seriously in any disputes with those nations whose interests will conflict there with our

own. We have not, and we are not anxious to provide, the defence of the seaboard which will leave the navy free for its work at sea. We have not, but many other powers have, positions, either within or on the borders of the Caribbean, which not only possess great natural advantages for the control of that sea, but have received and are receiving that artificial strength of fortification and armament which will make them practically inexpugnable. On the contrary, we have not on the Gulf of Mexico even the beginning of a navy yard which could serve as the base of our operations. Let me not be misunderstood. I am not regretting that we have not the means to meet on terms of equality the great navies of the Old World. I recognize, what few at least say, that, despite its great surplus revenue, this country is poor in proportion to its length of seaboard and its exposed points. That which I deplore, and which is a sober, just, and reasonable cause of deep national concern, is that the nation neither has nor cares to have its sea frontier so defended, and its navy of such power, as shall suffice, with the advantages of our position, to weigh seriously when inevitable discussions arise,—such as we have recently had about Samoa and Bering Sea, and which may at any moment come up about the Caribbean Sea or the canal. Is the United States, for instance, prepared to allow Germany to acquire the Dutch stronghold of Curaçao, fronting the Atlantic outlet of both the proposed canals of Panama and Nicaragua? Is she prepared to acquiesce in any foreign power purchasing from Haiti a naval station on the Windward Passage, through which pass our

steamer routes to the Isthmus? Would she acquiesce in a foreign protectorate over the Sandwich Islands, that great central station of the Pacific, equidistant from San Francisco, Samoa, and the Marquesas, and an important post on our lines of communication with both Australia and China? Or will it be maintained that any one of these questions, supposing it to arise, is so exclusively one-sided, the arguments of policy and right so exclusively with us, that the other party will at once yield his eager wish, and gracefully withdraw? Was it so at Samoa? Is it so as regards Bering Sea? The motto seen on so many ancient cannon, *Ultima ratio regum*, is not without its message to republics.

It is perfectly reasonable and legitimate, in estimating our needs of military preparation, to take into account the remoteness of the chief naval and military nations from our shores, and the consequent difficulty of maintaining operations at such a distance. It is equally proper, in framing our policy, to consider the jealousies of the European family of states, and their consequent unwillingness to incur the enmity of a people so strong as ourselves; their dread of our revenge in the future, as well as their inability to detach more than a certain part of their forces to our shores without losing much of their own weight in the councils of Europe. In truth, a careful determination of the force that Great Britain or France could probably spare for operations against our coasts, if the latter were suitably defended, without weakening their European position or unduly exposing their colonies and commerce, is the starting-point from which to

calculate the strength of our own navy. If the latter be superior to the force that thus can be sent against it, and the coast be so defended as to leave the navy free to strike where it will, we can maintain our rights; not merely the rights which international law concedes, and which the moral sense of nations now supports, but also those equally real rights which, though not conferred by law, depend upon a clear preponderance of interest, upon obviously necessary policy, upon self-preservation, either total or partial. Were we so situated now in respect of military strength, we could secure our perfectly just claim as to the seal fisheries; not by seizing foreign ships on the open sea, but by the evident fact that, our cities being protected from maritime attack, our position and superior population lay open the Canadian Pacific, as well as the frontier of the Dominion, to do with as we please. Diplomats do not flourish such disagreeable truths in each other's faces; they look for a *modus vivendi*, and find it.

While, therefore, the advantages of our own position in the western hemisphere, and the disadvantages under which the operations of a European state would labor, are undeniable and just elements in the calculations of the statesman, it is folly to look upon them as sufficient alone for our security. Much more needs to be cast into the scale that it may incline in favor of our strength. They are mere defensive factors, and partial at that. Though distant, our shores can be reached; being defenceless, they can detain but a short time a force sent against them. With a probability of three months' peace in Europe, no maritime power

would fear to support its demands by a number of ships with which it would be loath indeed to part for a year.

Yet, were our sea frontier as strong as it now is weak, passive self-defence, whether in trade or war, would be but a poor policy, so long as this world continues to be one of struggle and vicissitude. All around us now is strife; "the struggle of life," "the race of life," are phrases so familiar that we do not feel their significance till we stop to think about them. Everywhere nation is arrayed against nation; our own no less than others. What is our protective system but an organized warfare? In carrying it on, it is true, we have only to use certain procedures which all states now concede to be a legal exercise of the national power, even though injurious to themselves. It is lawful, they say, to do what we will with our own. Are our people, however, so unaggressive that they are likely not to want their own way in matters where their interests turn on points of disputed right, or so little sensitive as to submit quietly to encroachment by others, in quarters where they long have considered their own influence should prevail?

Our self-imposed isolation in the matter of markets, and the decline of our shipping interest in the last thirty years, have coincided singularly with an actual remoteness of this continent from the life of the rest of the world. The writer has before him a map of the North and South Atlantic oceans, showing the direction of the principal trade routes and the proportion of tonnage passing over each; and it is curious to note what deserted regions, comparatively, are the Gulf of Mexico, the

Caribbean Sea, and the adjoining countries and islands. A broad band stretches from our northern Atlantic coast to the English Channel; another as broad from the British Islands to the East, through the Mediterranean and Red Sea, overflowing the borders of the latter in order to express the volume of trade. Around either cape—Good Hope and Horn—pass strips of about one-fourth this width, joining near the equator, midway between Africa and South America. From the West Indies issues a thread, indicating the present commerce of Great Britain with a region which once, in the Napoleonic wars, embraced one-fourth of the whole trade of the Empire. The significance is unmistakable: Europe has now little mercantile interest in the Caribbean Sea.

When the Isthmus is pierced, this isolation will pass away, and with it the indifference of foreign nations. From wheresoever they come and whithersoever they afterward go, all ships that use the canal will pass through the Caribbean. Whatever the effect produced upon the prosperity of the adjacent continent and islands by the thousand wants attendant upon maritime activity, around such a focus of trade will centre large commercial and political interests. To protect and develop its own, each nation will seek points of support and means of influence in a quarter where the United States always has been jealously sensitive to the intrusion of European powers. The precise value of the Monroe doctrine is understood very loosely by most Americans, but the effect of the familiar phrase has been to develop a national sensitiveness, which is a more frequent cause of war than material

interests; and over disputes caused by such feelings there will preside none of the calming influence due to the moral authority of international law, with its recognized principles, for the points in dispute will be of policy, of interest, not of conceded right. Already France and Great Britain are giving to ports held by them a degree of artificial strength uncalled for by their present importance. They look to the near future. Among the islands and on the mainland there are many positions of great importance, held now by weak or unstable states. Is the United States willing to see them sold to a powerful rival? But what right will she invoke against the transfer? She can allege but one,—that of her reasonable policy supported by her might.

Whether they will or no, Americans must now begin to look outward. The growing production of the country demands it. An increasing volume of public sentiment demands it. The position of the United States, between the two Old Worlds and the two great oceans, makes the same claim, which will soon be strengthened by the creation of the new link joining the Atlantic and Pacific. The tendency will be maintained and increased by the growth of the European colonies in the Pacific, by the advancing civilization of Japan, and by the rapid peopling of our Pacific States with men who have all the aggressive spirit of the advanced line of national progress. Nowhere does a vigorous foreign policy find more favor than among the people west of the Rocky Mountains.

It has been said that, in our present state of unpreparedness,

a trans-isthmian canal will be a military disaster to the United States, and especially to the Pacific coast. When the canal is finished, the Atlantic seaboard will be neither more nor less exposed than it now is; it will merely share with the country at large the increased danger of foreign complications with inadequate means to meet them. The danger of the Pacific coast will be greater by so much as the way between it and Europe is shortened through a passage which the stronger maritime power can control. The danger will lie not merely in the greater facility for despatching a hostile squadron from Europe, but also in the fact that a more powerful fleet than formerly can be maintained on that coast by a European power, because it can be called home so much more promptly in case of need. The greatest weakness of the Pacific ports, however, if wisely met by our government, will go far to insure our naval superiority there. The two chief centres, San Francisco and Puget Sound, owing to the width and the great depth of the entrances, cannot be effectively protected by torpedoes; and consequently, as fleets can always pass batteries through an unobstructed channel, they cannot obtain perfect security by means of fortifications only. Valuable as such works will be to them, they must be further garrisoned by coast-defence ships, whose part in repelling an enemy will be co-ordinated with that of the batteries. The sphere of action of such ships should not be permitted to extend far beyond the port to which they are allotted, and of whose defence they form an essential part; but within that sweep they will always

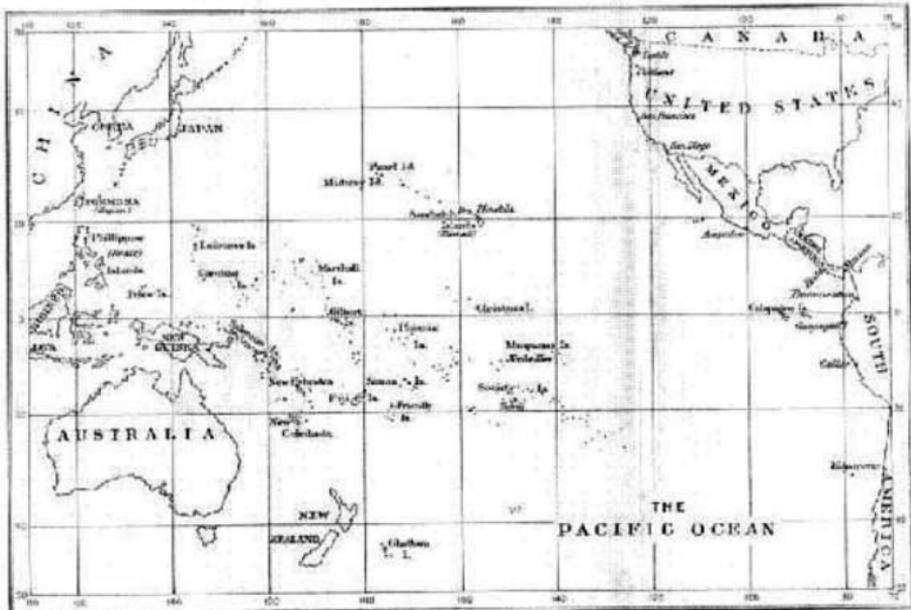
be a powerful reinforcement to the sea-going navy, when the strategic conditions of a war cause hostilities to centre around their port. By sacrificing power to go long distances, the coast-defence ship gains proportionate weight of armor and guns; that is, of defensive and offensive strength. It therefore adds an element of unique value to the fleet with which it for a time acts. No foreign states, except Great Britain, have ports so near our Pacific coast as to bring it within the radius of action of their coast-defence ships; and it is very doubtful whether even Great Britain will put such ships at Vancouver Island, the chief value of which will be lost to her when the Canadian Pacific is severed,—a blow always in the power of this country. It is upon our Atlantic seaboard that the mistress of Halifax, of Bermuda, and of Jamaica will now defend Vancouver and the Canadian Pacific. In the present state of our seaboard defence she can do so absolutely. What is all Canada compared with our exposed great cities? Even were the coast fortified, she still could do so, if our navy be no stronger than is designed as yet. What harm can we do Canada proportionate to the injury we should suffer by the interruption of our coasting trade, and by a blockade of Boston, New York, the Delaware, and the Chesapeake? Such a blockade Great Britain certainly could make technically efficient, under the somewhat loose definitions of international law. Neutrals would accept it as such.

The military needs of the Pacific States, as well as their supreme importance to the whole country, are yet a matter

of the future, but of a future so near that provision should begin immediately. To weigh their importance, consider what influence in the Pacific would be attributed to a nation comprising only the States of Washington, Oregon, and California, when filled with such men as now people them and still are pouring in, and which controlled such maritime centres as San Francisco, Puget Sound, and the Columbia River. Can it be counted less because they are bound by the ties of blood and close political union to the great communities of the East? But such influence, to work without jar and friction, requires underlying military readiness, like the proverbial iron hand under the velvet glove. To provide this, three things are needful: First, protection of the chief harbors, by fortifications and coast-defence ships, which gives defensive strength, provides security to the community within, and supplies the bases necessary to all military operations. Secondly, naval force, the arm of offensive power, which alone enables a country to extend its influence outward. Thirdly, it should be an inviolable resolution of our national policy, that no foreign state should henceforth acquire a coaling position within three thousand miles of San Francisco,—a distance which includes the Hawaiian and Galapagos islands and the coast of Central America. For fuel is the life of modern naval war; it is the food of the ship; without it the modern monsters of the deep die of inanition. Around it, therefore, cluster some of the most important considerations of naval strategy. In the Caribbean and in the Atlantic we are confronted

with many a foreign coal depot, bidding us stand to our arms, even as Carthage bade Rome; but let us not acquiesce in an addition to our dangers, a further diversion of our strength, by being forestalled in the North Pacific.

In conclusion, while Great Britain is undoubtedly the most formidable of our possible enemies, both by her great navy and by the strong positions she holds near our coasts, it must be added that a cordial understanding with that country is one of the first of our external interests. Both nations doubtless, and properly, seek their own advantage; but both, also, are controlled by a sense of law and justice, drawn from the same sources, and deep-rooted in their instincts. Whatever temporary aberration may occur, a return to mutual standards of right will certainly follow. Formal alliance between the two is out of the question, but a cordial recognition of the similarity of character and ideas will give birth to sympathy, which in turn will facilitate a co-operation beneficial to both; for if sentimentality is weak, sentiment is strong.



HAWAII AND OUR FUTURE SEA POWER

[The origin of the ensuing article was as follows: At the time of the Revolution in Hawaii, at the beginning of 1893, the author addressed to the "New York Times" a letter, which appeared in the issue of January 31. This, falling under the eye of the Editor of the "Forum," suggested to him to ask an article upon the general military—or naval—value of the Hawaiian group. The letter alluded to ran thus:

To the Editor of the "New York Times":—

There is one aspect of the recent revolution in Hawaii which seems to have been kept out of sight, and that is the relation of the islands, not merely to our own and to European countries, but to China. How vitally important that may become in the future is evident from the great number of Chinese, relatively to the whole population, now settled in the islands.

It is a question for the whole civilized world and not for the United States only, whether the Sandwich Islands, with their geographical and military importance, unrivalled by that of any other position in the North Pacific, shall in the future be an outpost of European civilization, or of the comparative barbarism of China. It is sufficiently known, but not, perhaps, generally noted in our country, that

many military men abroad, familiar with Eastern conditions and character, look with apprehension toward the day when the vast mass of China—now inert—may yield to one of those impulses which have in past ages buried civilization under a wave of barbaric invasion. The great armies of Europe, whose existence is so frequently deplored, may be providentially intended as a barrier to that great movement, if it come. Certainly, while China remains as she is, nothing more disastrous for the future of the world can be imagined than that general disarmament of Europe which is the Utopian dream of some philanthropists.

China, however, may burst her barriers eastward as well as westward, toward the Pacific as well as toward the European Continent. In such a movement it would be impossible to exaggerate the momentous issues dependent upon a firm hold of the Sandwich Islands by a great, civilized, maritime power. By its nearness to the scene, and by the determined animosity to the Chinese movement which close contact seems to inspire, our own country, with its Pacific coast, is naturally indicated as the proper guardian for this most important position. To hold it, however, whether in the supposed case or in war with a European state, implies a great extension of our naval power. Are we ready to undertake this?

A.T. MAHAN, *Captain, United States Navy* .

NEW YORK, Jan. 30, 1893.]

The suddenness—so far, at least, as the general public is concerned—with which the long-existing troubles in Hawaii

have come to a head, and the character of the advances reported to be addressed to the United States by the revolutionary government, formally recognized as *de facto* by our representative on the spot, add another to the many significant instances furnished by history, that, as men in the midst of life are in death, so nations in the midst of peace find themselves confronted with unexpected causes of dissension, conflicts of interests, whose results may be, on the one hand, war, or, on the other, abandonment of clear and imperative national advantage in order to avoid an issue for which preparation has not been made. By no premeditated contrivance of our own, by the cooperation of a series of events which, however dependent step by step upon human action, were not intended to prepare the present crisis, the United States finds herself compelled to answer a question—to make a decision—not unlike and not less momentous than that required of the Roman senate, when the Mamertine garrison invited it to occupy Messina, and so to abandon the hitherto traditional policy which had confined the expansion of Rome to the Italian peninsula. For let it not be overlooked that, whether we wish or no, we *must* answer the question, we *must* make the decision. The issue cannot be dodged. Absolute inaction in such a case is a decision as truly as the most vehement action. We can now advance, but, the conditions of the world being what they are, if we do not advance we recede; for there is involved not so much a particular action as a question of principle, pregnant of great consequences in one

direction or in the other.

Occasion of serious difficulty, indeed, should not arise here. Unlike the historical instance just cited, the two nations whose interests have come now into contact—Great Britain and the United States—are so alike in inherited traditions, habits of thought, and views of right, that injury to the one need not be anticipated from the predominance of the other in a quarter where its interests also predominate. Despite the heterogeneous character of the immigration which the past few years have been pouring into our country, our political traditions and racial characteristics still continue English—Mr. Douglas Campbell would say Dutch, but even so the stock is the same. Though thus somewhat gorged with food not wholly to its taste, our political digestion has contrived so far to master the incongruous mass of materials it has been unable to reject; and if assimilation has been at times imperfect, our political constitution and spirit remain English in essential features. Imbued with like ideals of liberty, of law, of right, certainly not less progressive than our kin beyond sea, we are, in the safeguards deliberately placed around our fundamental law, even more conservative than they. That which we received of the true spirit of freedom we have kept—liberty and law—not the one or the other, but both. In that spirit we not only have occupied our original inheritance, but also, step by step, as Rome incorporated the other nations of the peninsula, we have added to it, spreading and perpetuating everywhere the same foundation principles of free and good

government which, to her honor be it said, Great Britain also has maintained throughout her course. And now, arrested on the south by the rights of a race wholly alien to us, and on the north by a body of states of like traditions to our own, whose freedom to choose their own affiliations we respect, we have come to the sea. In our infancy we bordered upon the Atlantic only; our youth carried our boundary to the Gulf of Mexico; to-day maturity sees us upon the Pacific. Have we no right or no call to progress farther in any direction? Are there for us beyond the sea horizon none of those essential interests, of those evident dangers, which impose a policy and confer rights?

This is the question that long has been looming upon the brow of a future now rapidly passing into the present. Of it the Hawaiian incident is a part—intrinsically, perhaps, a small part—but in its relations to the whole so vital that, as has been said before, a wrong decision does not stand by itself, but involves, not only in principle but in fact, recession along the whole line. In our natural, necessary, irrepressible expansion, we are come here into contact with the progress of another great people, the law of whose being has impressed upon it a principle of growth which has wrought mightily in the past, and in the present is visible by recurring manifestations. Of this working, Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus, Egypt, Aden, India, in geographical succession though not in strict order of time, show a completed chain; forged link by link, by open force or politic bargain, but always resulting from the steady pressure of a national instinct,

so powerful and so accurate that statesmen of every school, willing or unwilling, have found themselves carried along by a tendency which no individuality can resist or greatly modify. Both unsubstantial rumor and incautious personal utterance have suggested an impatient desire in Mr. Gladstone to be rid of the occupation of Egypt; but scarcely has his long exclusion from office ended when the irony of events signalizes his return thereto by an increase in the force of occupation. Further, it may be noted profitably of the chain just cited, that the two extremities were first possessed—first India, then Gibraltar, far later Malta, Aden, Cyprus, Egypt—and that, with scarce an exception, each step has been taken despite the jealous vexation of a rival. Spain has never ceased angrily to bewail Gibraltar. "I had rather see the English on the heights of Montmartre," said the first Napoleon, "than in Malta." The feelings of France about Egypt are matter of common knowledge, not even dissembled; and, for our warning be it added, her annoyance is increased by the bitter sense of opportunity rejected.

It is needless here to do more than refer to that other chain of maritime possessions—Halifax, Bermuda, Santa Lucia, Jamaica—which strengthen the British hold upon the Atlantic, the Caribbean, and the Isthmus of Panama. In the Pacific the position is for them much less satisfactory—nowhere, perhaps, is it less so, and from obvious natural causes. The commercial development of the eastern Pacific has been far later, and still is less complete, than that of its western shores. The latter when

first opened to European adventure were already the seat of ancient economies in China and Japan, furnishing abundance of curious and luxurious products to tempt the trader by good hopes of profit. The western coast of America, for the most part peopled by savages, offered little save the gold and silver of Mexico and Peru, and these were monopolized jealously by the Spaniards—not a commercial nation—during their long ascendancy. Being so very far from England and affording so little material for trade, Pacific America did not draw the enterprise of a country the chief and honorable inducement of whose seamen was the hope of gain, in pursuit of which they settled and annexed point after point in the regions where they penetrated, and upon the routes leading thither. The western coasts of North America, being reached only by the long and perilous voyage around Cape Horn, or by a more toilsome and dangerous passage across the continent, remained among the last of the temperate productive seaboard of the earth to be possessed by white men. The United States were already a nation, in fact as well as in form, when Vancouver was exploring Puget Sound and passed first through the channel separating the mainland of British America from the island which now bears his name. Thus it has happened that, from the late development of British Columbia in the northeastern Pacific, and of Australia and New Zealand in the southwestern, Great Britain is found again holding the two extremities of a line, between which she must inevitably desire the intermediate links; nor is there any

good reason why she should not have them, except the superior, more urgent, more vital necessities of another people—our own. Of these links the Hawaiian group possesses unique importance—not from its intrinsic commercial value, but from its favorable position for maritime and military control.

The military or strategic value of a naval position depends upon its situation, upon its strength, and upon its resources. Of the three, the first is of most consequence, because it results from the nature of things; whereas the two latter, when deficient, can be supplied artificially, in whole or in part. Fortifications remedy the weaknesses of a position, foresight accumulates beforehand the resources which nature does not yield on the spot; but it is not within the power of man to change the geographical situation of a point which lies outside the limit of strategic effect. It is instructive, and yet apparent to the most superficial reading, to notice how the first Napoleon, in commenting upon a region likely to be the scene of war, begins by considering the most conspicuous natural features, and then enumerates the commanding positions, their distances from each other, the relative directions, or, as the sea phrase is, their "bearings," and the particular facilities each offers for operations of war. This furnishes the ground plan, the skeleton, detached from confusing secondary considerations, and from which a clear estimate of the decisive points can be made. The number of such points varies greatly, according to the character of the region. In a mountainous, broken country they may be very many; whereas

in a plain devoid of natural obstacles there may be few, or none save those created by man. If few, the value of each is necessarily greater than if many; and if there be but one, its importance is not only unique, but extreme,—measured only by the size of the field over which its unshared influence extends.

The sea, until it approaches the land, realizes the ideal of a vast plain unbroken by obstacles. On the sea, says an eminent French tactician, there is no field of battle, meaning that there is none of the natural conditions which determine, and often fetter, the movements of the general. But upon a plain, however flat and monotonous, causes, possibly slight, determine the concentration of population into towns and villages, and the necessary communications between the centres create roads. Where the latter converge, or cross, tenure confers command, depending for importance upon the number of routes thus meeting, and upon their individual value. It is just so at sea. While in itself the ocean opposes no obstacle to a vessel taking any one of the numerous routes that can be traced upon the surface of the globe between two points, conditions of distance or convenience, of traffic or of wind, do prescribe certain usual courses. Where these pass near an ocean position, still more where they use it, it has an influence over them, and where several routes cross near by that influence becomes very great,—is commanding.

Let us now apply these considerations to the Hawaiian group. To any one viewing a map that shows the full extent of the Pacific Ocean, with its shores on either side, two striking circumstances

will be apparent immediately. He will see at a glance that the Sandwich Islands stand by themselves, in a state of comparative isolation, amid a vast expanse of sea; and, again, that they form the centre of a large circle whose radius is approximately—and very closely—the distance from Honolulu to San Francisco. The circumference of this circle, if the trouble is taken to describe it with compass upon the map, will be seen, on the west and south, to pass through the outer fringe of the system of archipelagoes which, from Australia and New Zealand, extend to the northeast toward the American continent. Within the circle a few scattered islets, bare and unimportant, seem only to emphasize the failure of nature to bridge the interval separating Hawaii from her peers of the Southern Pacific. Of these, however, it may be noted that some, like Fanning and Christmas Islands, have within a few years been taken into British possession. The distance from San Francisco to Honolulu, twenty-one hundred miles—easy steaming distance—is substantially the same as that from Honolulu to the Gilbert, Marshall, Samoan, Society, and Marquesas groups, all under European control, except Samoa, in which we have a part influence.

To have a central position such as this, and to be alone, having no rival and admitting no alternative throughout an extensive tract, are conditions that at once fix the attention of the strategist,—it may be added, of the statesmen of commerce likewise. But to this striking combination are to be added the remarkable relations, borne by these singularly placed islands,

to the greater commercial routes traversing this vast expanse known to us as the Pacific,—not only, however, to those now actually in use, important as they are, but also to those that must be called into being necessarily by that future to which the Hawaiian incident compels our too unwilling attention. Circumstances, as already remarked, create centres, between which communication necessarily follows; and in the vista of the future all discern, however dimly, a new and great centre that must largely modify existing sea routes, as well as bring new ones into existence. Whether the canal of the Central American isthmus be eventually at Panama or at Nicaragua matters little to the question now in hand, although, in common with most Americans who have thought upon the subject, I believe it surely will be at the latter point. Whichever it be, the convergence there of so many ships from the Atlantic and the Pacific will constitute a centre of commerce, interoceanic, and inferior to few, if to any, in the world; one whose approaches will be watched jealously, and whose relations to the other centres of the Pacific by the lines joining it to them must be examined carefully. Such study of the commercial routes and of their relations to the Hawaiian Islands, taken together with the other strategic considerations previously set forth, completes the synopsis of facts which determine the value of the group for conferring either commercial or naval control.

Referring again to the map, it will be seen that while the shortest routes from the Isthmus to Australia and New Zealand,

as well as those to South America, go well clear of any probable connection with or interference from Hawaii, those directed toward China and Japan pass either through the group or in close proximity to it. Vessels from Central America bound to the ports of North America come, of course, within the influence of our own coast. These circumstances, and the existing recognized distribution of political power in the Pacific, point naturally to an international acquiescence in certain defined spheres of influence, for our own country and for others, such as has been reached already between Great Britain, Germany, and Holland in the Southwestern Pacific, to avoid conflict there between their respective claims. Though artificial in form, such a recognition, in the case here suggested, would depend upon perfectly natural as well as indisputable conditions. The United States is by far the greatest, in numbers, interests, and power, of the communities bordering upon the eastern shores of the North Pacific; and the relations of the Hawaiian Islands to her naturally would be, and actually are, more numerous and more important than they can be to any other state. This is true, although, unfortunately for the equally natural wishes of Great Britain and her colonies, the direct routes from British Columbia to Eastern Australia and New Zealand, which depend upon no building of a future canal, pass as near the islands as those already mentioned. Such a fact, that this additional great highway runs close to the group, both augments and emphasizes their strategic importance; but it does not affect the statement just made, that

the interest of the United States in them surpasses that of Great Britain, and dependent upon a natural cause, nearness, which has been admitted always as a reasonable ground for national self-assertion. It is unfortunate, doubtless, for the wishes of British Columbia, and for the communications, commercial and military, depending upon the Canadian Pacific Railway, that the United States lies between them and the South Pacific, and is the state nearest to Hawaii; but, the fact being so, the interests of our sixty-five million people, in a position so vital to our part in the Pacific, must be allowed to outweigh those of the six millions of Canada.

From the foregoing considerations may be inferred the importance of the Hawaiian Islands as a position powerfully influencing the commercial and military control of the Pacific, and especially of the Northern Pacific, in which the United States, geographically, has the strongest right to assert herself. These are the main advantages, which can be termed positive: those, namely, which directly advance commercial security and naval control. To the negative advantages of possession, by removing conditions which, if the islands were in the hands of any other power, would constitute to us disadvantages and threats, allusion only will be made. The serious menace to our Pacific coast and our Pacific trade, if so important a position were held by a possible enemy, has been mentioned frequently in the press, and dwelt upon in the diplomatic papers which from time to time are given to the public. It may be assumed that it

is generally acknowledged. Upon one particular, however, too much stress cannot be laid, one to which naval officers cannot but be more sensitive than the general public, and that is the immense disadvantage to us of any maritime enemy having a coaling-station well within twenty-five hundred miles, as this is, of every point of our coast-line from Puget Sound to Mexico. Were there many others available, we might find it difficult to exclude from all. There is, however, but the one. Shut out from the Sandwich Islands as a coal base, an enemy is thrown back for supplies of fuel to distances of thirty-five hundred or four thousand miles,—or between seven thousand and eight thousand, going and coming,—an impediment to sustained maritime operations well-nigh prohibitive. The coal-mines of British Columbia constitute, of course, a qualification to this statement; but upon them, if need arose, we might hope at least to impose some trammels by action from the land side. It is rarely that so important a factor in the attack or defence of a coast-line—of a sea frontier—is concentrated in a single position; and the circumstance renders doubly imperative upon us to secure it, if we righteously can.

It is to be hoped, also, that the opportunity thus thrust upon us may not be viewed narrowly, as though it concerned but one section of our country or one portion of its external trade or influence. This is no mere question of a particular act, for which, possibly, just occasion may not have offered yet; but of a principle, a policy, fruitful of many future acts, to enter upon which, in the fulness of our national progress, the time

now has arrived. The principle being accepted, to be conditioned only by a just and candid regard for the rights and reasonable susceptibilities of other nations,—none of which is contravened by the step here immediately under discussion,—the annexation, even, of Hawaii would be no mere sporadic effort, irrational because disconnected from an adequate motive, but a first-fruit and a token that the nation in its evolution has aroused itself to the necessity of carrying its life—that has been the happiness of those under its influence—beyond the borders which heretofore have sufficed for its activities. That the vaunted blessings of our economy are not to be forced upon the unwilling may be conceded; but the concession does not deny the right nor the wisdom of gathering in those who wish to come. Comparative religion teaches that creeds which reject missionary enterprise are foredoomed to decay. May it not be so with nations? Certainly the glorious record of England is consequent mainly upon the spirit, and traceable to the time, when she launched out into the deep—without formulated policy, it is true, or foreseeing the future to which her star was leading, but obeying the instinct which in the infancy of nations anticipates the more reasoned impulses of experience. Let us, too, learn from her experience. Not all at once did England become the great sea power which she is, but step by step, as opportunity offered, she has moved on to the world-wide pre-eminence now held by English speech, and by institutions sprung from English germs. How much poorer would the world have been, had Englishmen heeded the cautious

hesitancy that now bids us reject every advance beyond our shore-lines! And can any one doubt that a cordial, if unformulated, understanding between the two chief states of English tradition, to spread freely, without mutual jealousy and in mutual support, would increase greatly the world's sum of happiness?

But if a plea of the world's welfare seem suspiciously like a cloak for national self-interest, let the latter be accepted frankly as the adequate motive which it assuredly is. Let us not shrink from pitting a broad self-interest against the narrow self-interest to which some would restrict us. The demands of our three great seaboards, the Atlantic, the Gulf, and the Pacific,—each for itself, and all for the strength that comes from drawing closer the ties between them,—are calling for the extension, through the Isthmian Canal, of that broad sea common along which, and along which alone, in all the ages prosperity has moved. Land carriage, always restricted and therefore always slow, toils enviously but hopelessly behind, vainly seeking to replace and supplant the royal highway of nature's own making. Corporate interests, vigorous in that power of concentration which is the strength of armies and of minorities, may here withstand for a while the ill-organized strivings of the multitude, only dimly conscious of its wants; yet the latter, however temporarily opposed and baffled, is sure at last, like the blind forces of nature, to overwhelm all that stand in the way of its necessary progress. So the Isthmian Canal is an inevitable part in the future of the United States; yet one that cannot be separated from other

necessary incidents of a policy dependent upon it, whose details cannot be foreseen exactly. But because the precise steps that hereafter may be opportune or necessary cannot yet be foretold certainly, is not a reason the less, but a reason the more, for establishing a principle of action which may serve to guide as opportunities arise. Let us start from the fundamental truth, warranted by history, that the control of the seas, and especially along the great lines drawn by national interest or national commerce, is the chief among the merely material elements in the power and prosperity of nations. It is so because the sea is the world's great medium of circulation. From this necessarily follows the principle that, as subsidiary to such control, it is imperative to take possession, when it can be done righteously, of such maritime positions as contribute to secure command. If this principle be adopted, there will be no hesitation about taking the positions—and they are many—upon the approaches to the Isthmus, whose interests incline them to seek us. It has its application also to the present case of Hawaii.

There is, however, one caution to be given from the military point of view, beyond the need of which the world has not yet passed. Military positions, fortified posts, by land or by sea, however strong or admirably situated, do not confer control by themselves alone. People often say that such an island or harbor will give control of such a body of water. It is an utter, deplorable, ruinous mistake. The phrase indeed may be used by some only loosely, without forgetting other implied conditions of adequate

protection and adequate navies; but the confidence of our own nation in its native strength, and its indifference to the defence of its ports and the sufficiency of its fleet, give reason to fear that the full consequences of a forward step may not be weighed soberly. Napoleon, who knew better, once talked this way. "The islands of San Pietro, Corfu, and Malta," he wrote, "will make us masters of the whole Mediterranean." Vain boast! Within one year Corfu, in two years Malta, were rent away from the state that could not support them by its ships. Nay, more: had Bonaparte not taken the latter stronghold out of the hands of its degenerate but innocuous government, that citadel of the Mediterranean would perhaps—would probably—never have passed into those of his chief enemy. There is here also a lesson for us.

It is by no means logical to leap, from this recognition of the necessity of adequate naval force to secure outlying dependencies, to the conclusion that the United States would need for that object a navy equal to the largest now existing. A nation as far removed as is our own from the bases of foreign naval strength may reasonably reckon upon the qualification that distance—not to speak of the complex European interests close at hand—impresses upon the exertion of naval strength by European powers. The mistake is when our remoteness, unsupported by carefully calculated force, is regarded as an armor of proof, under cover of which any amount of swagger may be indulged safely. An estimate of what is an adequate naval force for our country may properly take into account the happy

interval which separates both our present territory and our future aspirations from the centres of interest really vital to European states. If to these safeguards be added, on our part, a sober recognition of what our reasonable sphere of influence is, and a candid justice in dealing with foreign interests within that sphere, there will be little disposition to question our preponderance therein.

Among all foreign states, it is especially to be hoped that each passing year may render more cordial the relations between ourselves and the great nation from whose loins we sprang. The radical identity of spirit which underlies our superficial differences of polity surely will draw us closer together, if we do not set our faces wilfully against a tendency which would give our race the predominance over the seas of the world. To force such a consummation is impossible, and if possible would not be wise; but surely it would be a lofty aim, fraught with immeasurable benefits, to desire it, and to raise no needless impediments by advocating perfectly proper acts, demanded by our evident interests, in offensive or arrogant terms.

THE ISTHMUS AND SEA POWER.¹

June, 1898

For more than four hundred years the mind of man has been possessed with a great idea, which, although by its wide diffusion and prophetic nature resembling one of those fundamental instincts, whose very existence points to a necessary fulfilment, first quickened into life in the thought of Christopher Columbus. To him the vision, dimly seen through the scanty and inaccurate knowledge of his age, imaged a close and facile communication, by means of the sea, that great bond of nations, between two ancient and diverse civilizations, which centred, the one around the Mediterranean, the birthplace of European commerce, refinement, and culture, the other upon the shores of that distant Eastern Ocean which lapped the dominions of the Great Khan, and held upon its breast the rich island of Zipangu. Hitherto an envious waste of land, entailing years of toilsome and hazardous journey, had barred them asunder. A rare traveller now and again might penetrate from one to the other, but it was impossible to maintain by land the constant exchange of

¹ The Map of the Gulf and Caribbean, p. 31, will serve for geographical references of this article.

influence and benefit which, though on a contracted scale, had constituted the advantage and promoted the development of the Mediterranean peoples. The microcosm of the land-girt sea typified then that future greater family of nations, which one by one have been bound since into a common tie of interest by the broad enfolding ocean, that severs only to knit them more closely together. So with a seer's eye, albeit as in a glass darkly; saw Columbus, and was persuaded, and embraced the assurance. As the bold adventurer, walking by faith and not by sight, launched his tiny squadron upon its voyage, making the first step in the great progress which was to be, and still is not completed, he little dreamed that the mere incident of stumbling upon an unknown region that lay across his route should be with posterity his chief title to fame, obscuring the true glory of his grand conception, as well as delaying its fulfilment to a far distant future.

The story of his actual achievement is sufficiently known to all readers, and need not be repeated here. Amid the many disappointments and humiliations which succeeded the brief triumphant blaze of his first return, and clouded the latter years of his life, Columbus was spared the pang of realizing that the problem was insoluble for the time. Like many a prophet before him, he knew not what, nor what manner of time, the spirit that was in him foretold, and died the happier for his ignorance. The certainty that a wilderness, peopled by savages and semi-barbarians, had been added to the known world, would have been a poor awakening from the golden dreams of beneficent glory as

well as of profit which so long had beckoned him on. That the western land he had discovered interposed a barrier to the further progress of ships towards his longed-for goal, as inexorable as the mountain ranges and vast steppes of Asia, was mercifully concealed from his eyes; and the elusive "secret of the strait" through which he to the last hoped to pass, though tantalizing in its constant evasion, kept in tension the springs of hope and moral energy which might have succumbed under the knowledge of the truth.

It fell to the great discoverer, in his last voyage, to approach the continent, and to examine its shores along the region where the true secret of the strait lay hidden,—where, if ever, it shall pass from a dream to a reality, by the hand of man. In the autumn of 1502, after many trials and misadventures, Columbus, having skirted the south side of Cuba, reached the north coast of Honduras. There was little reason, except in his own unaccountable conviction, for continuing thence in one direction rather than in the other; but by some process of thought he had convinced himself that the sought-for strait lay to the south rather than to the north. He therefore turned to the eastward, though the wind was contrary, and, after a hard buffet against it, doubled Cape Gracias á Dios, which still retains its expressive name, significant of his relief at finding that the trend of the beach at last permitted him to follow his desired course with a fair wind. During the next two months he searched the entire coast-line as far as Porto Bello, discovering and examining

several openings in the land which since have been of historical importance, among others the mouth of the San Juan River and the Chiriqui Lagoon, one of whose principal divisions still recalls his visit in its name, Almirante Bay, the Bay of the Admiral. A little beyond, to the eastward of Porto Bello, he came to a point already known to the Spaniards, having been reached from Trinidad. The explorer thus acquired the certainty that, from the latter island to Yucatan, there was no break in the obdurate shore which barred his access to Asia.

Every possible site for an interoceanic canal lies within the strip of land thus visited by Columbus shortly before his death in 1504. How narrow the insurmountable obstacle, and how tantalizing, in the apparent facilities for piercing it extended by the formation of the land, were not known until ten years later, when Balboa, led on by the reports of the natives, reached the eminence whence he, first among Europeans, saw the South Sea,—a name long and vaguely applied to the Pacific, because of the direction in which it lay from its discoverer. During these early years the history of the region we now know as Central America was one of constant strife among the various Spanish leaders, encouraged rather than stifled by the jealous home government; but it was also one of unbroken and venturesome exploration, a healthier manifestation of the same restless and daring energy that provoked their internal collisions. In January, 1522, one Gil Gonzalez started from Panama northward on the Pacific side, with a few frail barks, and in March discovered Lake Nicaragua,

which has its name from the cacique, Nicaragua, or Nicarao, whose town stood upon its shores. Five years later, another adventurer took his vessel to pieces on the coast, transported it thus to the lake, and made the circuit of the latter; discovering its outlet, the San Juan, just a quarter of a century after Columbus had visited the mouth of the river.

The conquest of Peru, and the gradual extension of Spanish domination and settlements in Central America and along the shores of the Pacific, soon bestowed upon the Isthmus an importance, vividly suggestive of its rise into political prominence consequent upon the acquisition of California by the United States, and upon the spread of the latter along the Pacific coast. The length and severity of the voyage round Cape Horn, then as now, impelled men to desire some shorter and less arduous route; and, inconvenient as the land transport with its repeated lading and unloading was, it presented before the days of steam the better alternative, as to some extent it still does. So the Isthmus and its adjoining regions became a great centre of commerce, a point where many highways converged and whence they parted; where the East and the West met in intercourse, sometimes friendly, more often hostile. Thus was realized partially, though most incompletely, the vision of Columbus; and thus, after many fluctuations, and despite the immense expansion of these latter days, partial and incomplete his great conception yet remains. The secret of the strait is still the problem and the reproach of mankind.

By whatever causes produced, where such a centre of commerce exists, there always will be found a point of general interest to mankind,—to all, at least, of those peoples who, whether directly commercial or not, share in the wide-spreading benefits and inconveniences arising from the fluctuations of trade. But enterprising commercial countries are not content to be mere passive recipients of these diverse influences. By the very characteristics which make them what they are, they are led perforce to desire, and to aim at, control of these decisive regions; for their tenure, like the key of a military position, exerts a vital effect upon the course of trade, and so upon the struggle, not only for bare existence, but for that increase of wealth, of prosperity, and of general consideration, which affect both the happiness and the dignity of nations. Consequently, in every age, according to its particular temperament and circumstances, there will be found manifested this desire for control; sometimes latent in an attitude of simple watchfulness; sometimes starting into vivid action under the impulse of national jealousies, and issuing in diplomatic rivalries or hostile encounter.

Such, accordingly, has been the history of the Central American Isthmus since the time when it became recognized as the natural centre, towards which, if not thwarted by adverse influences, the current of intercourse between East and West inevitably must tend. Here the direction of least resistance was indicated clearly by nature; and a concurrence of circumstances, partly inherent in the general character of

the region, partly adventitious or accidental, contributed at an early date, and until very recently, to emphasize and enlarge the importance consequent upon the geographical situation and physical conformation of this narrow barrier between two great seas. For centuries the West India Islands, circling the Caribbean, and guarding the exterior approaches to the Isthmus, continued to be the greatest single source of tropical products which had become increasingly necessary to the civilized nations of Europe. In them, and in that portion of the continent which extended on either side of the Isthmus, known under the vague appellation of the Spanish Main, Great Britain, during her desperate strife with the first Napoleon,—a strife for very existence,—found the chief support of the commercial strength and credit that alone carried her to the triumphant end. The Isthmus and the Caribbean were vital elements in determining the issue of that stern conflict. For centuries, also, the treasures of Mexico and Peru, upon which depended the vigorous action of the great though decadent military kingdom of Spain, flowed towards and accumulated around the Isthmus, where they were reinforced by the tribute of the Philippine Islands, and whence they took their way in the lumbering galleons for the ports of the Peninsula. Where factors of such decisive influence in European politics were at stake, it was inevitable that the rival nations, in peace as well as in open war, should carry their ambitions to the scene; and the unceasing struggle for the mastery would fluctuate with the control of the waters, which, as in all maritime regions, must depend mainly

upon naval preponderance, but also in part upon possession of those determining positions, of whose tenure Napoleon said that "war is a business of positions." Among these the Isthmus was chief.

The wild enterprises and bloody cruelties of the early buccaneers were therefore not merely a brutal exhibition of un pitying greed, indicative of the scum of nations as yet barely emerging from barbarism. They were this, doubtless, but they were something more. In the march of events, these early marauders played the same part, in relation to what was to succeed them, as the rude, unscrupulous, lawless adventurers who now precede the ruthless march of civilized man, who swarm over the border, occupy the outposts, and by their excesses stain the fair fame of the race whose pioneers they are. But, while thus libels upon and reproaches to the main body, they nevertheless belong to it, share its essential character, and foretell its inevitable course. Like driftwood swept forward on the crest of a torrent, they betoken the approaching flood. So with the celebrated freebooters of the Spanish Main. Of the same general type,—though varying greatly in individual characteristics, in breadth of view, and even in elevation of purpose,—their piratical careers not only evidenced the local wealth of the scene of their exploits, but attested the commercial and strategic importance of the position upon which in fact that wealth depended. The carcass was there, and the eagles as well as the vultures, the far-sighted as well as the mere carrion birds

of prey, were gathering round it. "The spoil of Granada," said one of these mercenary chieftains, two centuries ago, "I count as naught beside the knowledge of the great Lake Nicaragua, and of the route between the Northern and Southern seas which depends upon it."

As time passed, the struggle for the mastery inevitably resulted, by a kind of natural selection, in the growing predominance of the people of the British Islands, in whom commercial enterprise and political instinct were blended so happily. The very lawlessness of the period favored the extension of their power and influence; for it removed from the free play of a nation's innate faculties the fetters which are imposed by our present elaborate framework of precedents, constitutions, and international law. Admirably adapted as these are to the conservation and regular working of a political system, they are, nevertheless, however wise, essentially artificial, and hence are ill adapted to a transition state,—to a period in which order is evolving out of chaos, where the result is durable exactly in proportion to the freedom with which the natural forces are allowed to act, and to reach their own equilibrium without extraneous interference. Nor are such periods confined to the early days of mere lawlessness. They recur whenever a crisis is reached in the career of a nation; when old traditions, accepted maxims, or written constitutions have been outgrown, in whole or in part; when the time has come for a people to recognize that the limits imposed upon its expansion, by the political wisdom of

its forefathers, have ceased to be applicable to its own changed conditions and those of the world. The question then raised is not whether the constitution, as written, shall be respected. It is how to reach modifications in the constitution—and that betimes—so that the genius and awakened intelligence of the people may be free to act, without violating that respect for its fundamental law upon which national stability ultimately depends. It is a curious feature of our current journalism that it is clear-sighted and prompt to see the unfortunate trammels in which certain of our religious bodies are held, by the cast-iron tenets imposed upon them by a past generation, while at the same time political tenets, similarly ancient, and imposed with a like ignorance of a future which is our present, are invoked freely to forbid this nation from extending its power and necessary enterprise into and beyond the seas, to which on every side it now has attained.

During the critical centuries when Great Britain was passing through that protracted phase of her history in which, from one of the least among states, she became, through the power of the sea, the very keystone and foundation upon which rested the commercial—for a time even the political—fabric of Europe, the free action of her statesmen and people was clogged by no uneasy sense that the national genius was in conflict with artificial, self-imposed restrictions. She plunged into the brawl of nations that followed the discovery of a new world, of an unoccupied if not unclaimed inheritance, with a vigor and an initiative which gained ever-accelerated momentum and power as the years rolled

by. Far and wide, in every sea, through every clime, her seamen and her colonists spread; but while their political genius and traditions enabled them, in regions adapted to the physical well-being of the race, to found self-governing colonies which have developed into one of the greatest, of free states, they did not find, and never have found, that the possession of and rule over barbarous, or semi-civilized, or inert tropical communities, were inconsistent with the maintenance of political liberty in the mother country. The sturdy vigor of the broad principle of freedom in the national life is attested sufficiently by centuries of steady growth, that surest evidence of robust vitality. But, while conforming in the long run to the dictates of natural justice, no feeble scrupulosity impeded the nation's advance to power, by which alone its mission and the law of its being could be fulfilled. No artificial fetters were forged to cramp the action of the state, nor was it drugged with political narcotics to dwarf its growth.

In the region here immediately under consideration, Great Britain entered the contest under conditions of serious disadvantage. The glorious burst of maritime and colonial enterprise which marked the reign of Elizabeth, as the new era dawned when the country recognized the sphere of its true greatness, was confronted by the full power of Spain, as yet outwardly unshaken, in actual tenure of the most important positions in the Caribbean and the Spanish Main, and claiming the right to exclude all others from that quarter of the world. How brilliantly this claim was resisted is well known; yet, had

they been then in fashion, there might have been urged, to turn England from the path which has made her what she is, the same arguments that now are freely used to deter our own country from even accepting such advantages as are ready to drop into her lap. If it be true that Great Britain's maritime policy now is imposed to some extent by the present necessities of the little group of islands which form the nucleus of her strength, it is not true that any such necessities first impelled her to claim her share of influence in the world, her part in the great drama of nations. Not for such reasons did she launch out upon the career which is perhaps the noblest yet run by any people. It then could have been said to her, as it now is said to us, "Why go beyond your own borders? Within them you have what suffices for your needs and those of your population. There are manifold abuses within to be corrected, manifold miseries to be relieved. Let the outside world take care of itself. Defend yourself, if attacked; being, however, always careful to postpone preparation to the extreme limit of imprudence. 'Sphere of influence,' 'part in the world,' 'national prestige,'—there are no such things; or if there be, they are not worth fighting for." What England would have been, had she so reasoned, is matter for speculation; that the world would have been poorer may be confidently affirmed.

As the strength of Spain waned apace during the first half of the seventeenth century, the external efforts of Great Britain also slackened through the rise of internal troubles, which culminated in the Great Rebellion, and absorbed for the time all the energies

of the people. The momentum acquired under Drake, Raleigh, and their associates was lost, and an occasion, opportune through the exhaustion of the great enemy, Spain, passed unimproved. But, though thus temporarily checked, the national tendency remained, and quickly resumed its sway when Cromwell's mighty hand had composed the disorders of the Commonwealth. His clear-sighted statesmanship, as well as the immediate necessities of his internal policy, dictated the strenuous assertion by sea of Great Britain's claims, not only to external respect, which he rigorously exacted, but also to her due share in influencing the world outside her borders. The nation quickly responded to his proud appeal, and received anew the impulse upon the road to sea power which never since has been relaxed. To him were due the measures—not, perhaps, economically the wisest, judged by modern lights, but more than justified by the conditions of his times—which drew into English hands the carrying trade of the world. The glories of the British navy as an organized force date also from his short rule; and it was he who, in 1655, laid a firm basis for the development of the country's sea power in the Caribbean, by the conquest of Jamaica, from a military standpoint the most decisive of all single positions in that sea for the control of the Isthmus. It is true that the successful attempt upon this island resulted from the failure of the leaders to accomplish Cromwell's more immediate purpose of reducing Santo Domingo,—that in so far the particular fortunate issue was of the nature of an accident; but this fact serves only

to illustrate more emphatically that, when a general line of policy, whether military or political, is correctly chosen upon sound principles, incidental misfortunes or disappointments do not frustrate the conception. The sagacious, far-seeing motive, which prompted Cromwell's movement against the West Indian possessions of Spain, was to contest the latter's claim to the monopoly of that wealthy region; and he looked upon British extension in the islands as simply a stepping-stone to control upon the adjacent continent. It is a singular commentary upon the blindness of historians to the true secret of Great Britain's rise among the nations, and of the eminent position she so long has held, that writers so far removed from each other in time and characteristics as Hume and the late J.R. Green should detect in this far-reaching effort of the Protector, only the dulled vision of "a conservative and unspeculative temper misled by the strength of religious enthusiasm." "A statesman of wise political genius," according to them, would have fastened his eyes rather upon the growing power of France, "and discerned the beginning of that great struggle for supremacy" which was fought out under Louis XIV. But to do so would have been only to repeat, by anticipation, the fatal error of that great monarch, which forever forfeited for France the control of the seas, in which the surest prosperity of nations is to be found; a mistake, also, far more ruinous to the island kingdom than it was to her continental rival, bitter though the fruits thereof have been to the latter. Hallam, with clearer insight, says: "When Cromwell declared

against Spain, and attacked her West Indian possessions, there was little pretence, certainly, of justice, but not by any means, as I conceive, the impolicy sometimes charged against him. So auspicious was his star, that the very failure of that expedition obtained a more advantageous possession for England than all the triumphs of her former kings." Most true; but because his star was despatched in the right direction to look for fortune,—by sea, not by land.

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