

*The Influence of Sea Power upon History. 1660-1783.* By Captain A. T. MAHAN, U.S.N. Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1893.—vi, 557 pp.

*The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire. 1793-1812.* By Captain A. T. MAHAN, U.S.N. Two volumes. Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1893.—vi, 380, 428 pp.

Captain Mahan has done more than write a new book upon naval history. He has even done more than write the best book that has ever been written upon naval history, though he has done this likewise; for he has written a book which, to use a somewhat objectionable phrase, may be regarded as founding a new school of naval historical writing. Now that the egg has been made to stand on its end, of course we are all astounded that nobody ever thought of making it do so before. It seems almost incredible, when we think of the immense part played by naval power in history, that no historian should ever yet have treated it at length from the philosophic standpoint; yet this is literally the case. There have been innumerable books that were mere annals of naval warfare, and there have been a few excellent histories dealing with naval strategy and tactics, or detailing the actual deeds accomplished by the fleets of some given power or in some given war or series of wars; but until Captain Mahan in these two books revolutionized the study of naval history, no one had attempted to show exactly how naval power made itself felt in the struggles between the different races and nationalities of mankind, nor exactly how far-reaching its influence had been and was likely to be upon the destinies of the great master races. This Captain Mahan has done and has done admirably. His books are not only remarkable because of the philosophic standpoint from which they are written, because of his grasp of the subject and his familiarity with all the facts bearing upon it, great and small; but they are remarkable also for the beauty of their style and for the skill with which he has subordinated the lesser to the main points of interest. While showing his thorough acquaintance with detail, he has never for a moment permitted that detail to absorb more than its proper amount of attention. His books possess to an eminent degree that virtue which so few histories do possess, but which all great histories must possess, the quality of being readable.

At the outset of his first volume Captain Mahan gives a good proof of the way in which he grasps the salient features of any case.

This is where he deals with the effect of the Roman sea power upon the second Punic War. For over two thousand years the campaigns of Hannibal have proved one of the most attractive themes to historians of every kind ; yet few writers have given proper weight to what was undoubtedly the chief cause of their failure — that is, to the fact that the Romans possessed control of the seas. Both Hannibal and the armies that reinforced him were obliged to march in long circuits overland at the cost of frightful losses, before they could come into contact with their foe in his own home, while this foe was able to harass the Carthaginians and their home dependencies at will, and to prevent any important assistance coming to Hannibal direct from Africa or from the friendly Macedonian king, — and all merely because the Carthaginian navies were no longer able to stand up in fair fight against the Roman.

In his first volume Captain Mahan covers a little over a century of warfare, beginning with the final wars waged by Tromp and De Ruyter against the English, and ending with the struggle of the American Revolution. He paints on a large scale, dealing not with single ship actions, but with the grand strategy of the war, and with the great battles between opposing fleets. He shows conclusively what many historians have felt, but what few have been able to point out clearly, the enormous influence during this century of the naval supremacy of England upon the course of history. Without this supremacy the continents of North America and Australia would now be peopled by a mixture of various white races, speaking many different tongues, instead of by the great English-speaking peoples ; while India and South Africa, if under white rule at all, would be under the rule of whites who would not speak English.

One of the strongest features of Mahan's book is the way in which he shows that mere commerce-destroying is not of decisive weight in the result of a great war. It is a valuable adjunct to other operations, but it is only an adjunct. It may greatly irritate and annoy an enemy, but it can only seriously cripple him if the commerce-destroying is carried on with the help of great fighting fleets. This is a lesson that we in America especially need to learn. We are very apt to think that all we need to do, as far as our fleet is concerned, is to build fast cruisers to harass an enemy's merchantmen ; whereas we need to have the lesson taught again and again, and yet again, that we must have a great fighting navy, in order to hold our proper position among the nations of the earth, and to do the work to which our destiny points. If we decline

to be taught this lesson by the hundred examples given in Captain Mahan's book, we should nevertheless learn it from our civil war. The Alabama and the other Confederate privateers caused great annoyance to the North, but did not in any appreciable manner diminish its power for offensive or defensive warfare, or dishearten its people; whereas the fighting fleets of the Union, by their strict blockade of the Southern coasts and by their feats of arms in the South Atlantic, the Gulf and the Mississippi, played an enormous part in bringing about the final overthrow of the Confederacy.

Captain Mahan's second work is in some ways even more interesting than his first. He has not, of course, the chance to develop a new idea of first-rate importance, for this idea has already been developed in his first volume, and it only remains for him to elaborate and make it more clear; but he deals with the most striking portion of all naval history, with the campaigns of that greatest of all sea captains, Admiral Lord Nelson.

Captain Mahan's volumes are already accepted as the standard authorities of their kind, not only here, but in England and in Europe generally. It should be a matter of pride to all Americans that an officer of our own navy should have written such books.

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