MAHAŃ ON NAVAL WARFARE
The Writings of
Rear Admiral Alfred T. Mahan

The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783.
The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812. 2 vols.
Sea Power in Its Relations to the War of 1812. 2 vols.
The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future.
The Life of Nelson, the Embodiment of the Sea Power of Great Britain. 2 vols.
Types of Naval Officers.
Retrospect and Prospect.
Lessons of the War with Spain, and other Articles.
The Problem of Asia, and Its Effect upon International Policies.
Some Neglected Aspects of War.
Naval Administration and Warfare.
The Interest of America in International Conditions.
Naval Strategy.
The Major Operations of the Navies in the War of American Independence.
The Harvest Within.
Rear Admiral Alfred T. Mahan, U. S. N.
ALFRED THAYER MAHAN

In his volume of reminiscences, "From Sail to Steam," Rear Admiral Mahan gives us his father's opinion and his own later judgment regarding his choice of the navy as a life work. "My father told me he thought me less fit for a military than for a civil profession, having watched me carefully. I think myself now that he was right; for though I have no cause to complain of unsuccess, I believe I should have done better elsewhere."1

The father, Dennis Hart Mahan, was a graduate of West Point, in later life a distinguished professor of engineering at the Military Academy, and thus well qualified to weigh his son's character and the requirements of a military career. The verdict of both father and son, moreover, may appear borne out by the fact that, while the name of Mahan is more widely known today than that of any other American naval officer, his fame rests, not on his achievements as a ship or fleet commander, but as a great naval historian and student of naval warfare.

Whatever the apparent wisdom of the choice at the time, it was in the event fortunate both for himself and for the naval profession. His long and varied service as an officer afloat and ashore gave him an invaluable background for the study of

1 "From Sail to Steam," p. xiv.
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naval history and international affairs. On the other hand, his writings have brought home to every maritime nation the importance of sea power, and have stimulated in his own profession an interest in naval history and naval science which has helped to keep it abreast the progress of the age. This direct bearing of his professional experience upon his writings adds significance to the details of his life in the navy.

Alfred Thayer Mahan entered the Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland, September 30, 1856. Born at West Point, September 27, 1840, he was at the time of his entrance but three days above sixteen. Like many another candidate for the navy, he solicited his own appointment, obtaining it finally through the influence of Jefferson Davis, who had studied under his father at West Point, and was at this time Secretary of War. Having attended Columbia College for two years preceding, the boy was permitted — by a concession of which this is believed to be the only instance in the annals of the Academy — to omit the first year’s work and enter with the “Youngster” class, or “class of ’55 date,” according to the nomenclature then used. Up to the year 1851 the midshipmen’s course had consisted of five years at sea followed by one at the Academy. Mahan entered in the autumn after the graduation of the last class under the old scheme; and it was to the more mature, “sea-going” character of former classes that he attributes the total absence of hazing in his day. The practice was “not so much reprobated as ignored.” It came in
later, when the Academy was moved to Newport during the Civil War, and "new ideals were evolved by a mass of schoolboys, severed from those elder associates with the influence of whom no professors nor officers can vie."  

In the dusty files of Academy registers for that period one may read the names of boys famous in later years. George Dewey was a class ahead of Mahan; Schley and Sampson were respectively one class and two classes behind. On graduation, Dewey stood fifth in a class of fifteen; Mahan second in a class of twenty, with a record apparently very close to the leader's; and Sampson stood first. In his last year the future historian was first in seamanship, physics, political science, and moral science, third in naval tactics and gunnery, fourth in "steam engine," and fifth in astronomy and navigation. The year before he had excelled in physics, rhetoric, and Spanish. The details are noteworthy chiefly as they show the subjects of the old-time curriculum, in which so-called practical branches were less predominant than they are today. Of Mahan's class, which numbered forty-nine at the time of entrance, twenty-nine had dropped back or resigned before the end of the course.

After a cruise in South American waters in the old frigate Congress, Mahan at once received his commission as lieutenant, August 31, 1861, and soon afterward an appointment as second in command of the steam corvette Pocahontas, then in the Potomac flotilla. It illustrates the rapid promotion

1 "From Sail to Steam," p. 55.
of those war-time days that each member of his class received similar advancement in the first year of the war. In the Pocahontas he came under fire in the attack on Port Royal, and afterward spent many weary months in blockade duty, first in the Pocahontas off the south Atlantic coast, and later in the Seminole off Sabine Pass, Texas. This latter station, Mahan remarks, "was a jumping-off place, the end of nowhere." "Day after day we lay inactive — roll, roll." The monotony was broken by a pleasant eight months at the Naval Academy in Newport and a "practice cruise" to England in the Macedonian; and in the last year of the war he saw more varied service on the staff of Rear Admiral Dahlgren, again on the Atlantic coast blockade.

Commissioned lieutenant commander in 1865, Mahan passed the ensuing twenty years in the customary routine of alternate sea and shore duty. In 1867–1869, a long cruise in the steam frigate Iroquois to Japan, via Guadeloupe, Rio, Cape Town, Madagascar, Aden, and Bombay, gave opportunity, unusual even in the navy, to see the world, and brought him to Kobe in time to witness the opening of new treaty ports and the last days of medieval Japan.

In 1885, when he had reached the rank of captain and was forty-five years of age, he had yet had little opportunity to display the distinctive talents which were to win him permanent fame. Partly, perhaps, in consequence of a book by his pen entitled "The Gulf and Inland Waters" and published two years before, but more likely as a result of the shrewd
estimate which naval officers form regarding their fellows in the service, he was requested at this time to give a series of lectures on naval history and tactics at the Naval War College, then just established at Newport, Rhode Island. His acceptance of this duty marks a turning point in his career.

The call reached him in the Wachusett off the west coast of South America. It was nearly two years later, in August, 1886, when he took up his residence at the college, succeeding Rear Admiral Luce as president. A change of political administration in the meantime had brought about a less favorable policy toward this new departure in naval education, with the result that, to quote Mahan again, the college "was reefed close down, looking out for squalls at any moment from any quarter," for the next four or five years. It bears evidence to his tact and tenacity, and it was not the least of his accomplishments for the navy, that he piloted the institution safely through this crucial period, with scant appropriations or none at all, in the face of a hostile Secretary of the Navy and a lukewarm service.

After seven years devoted chiefly to the War College, Mahan went to sea for the last time as commander of the cruiser Chicago in the European squadron. At this time "The Influence of Sea Power upon History" had already been published, and the volume on the French Revolution and Empire was nearly ready for the press. Upon requesting postponement of sea duty until its completion, he was informed by his superior in the
Bureau of Navigation that it was "not the business of a naval officer to write books." The remark was narrow, for the naval or any other profession would soon stagnate without the stimulus of free discussion and study, which finds its best outlet through the press; and it showed slight recognition of the immense value to the navy and the nation of Mahan's writings. Still it was well for the author that he made this last cruise—his only experience with a ship of the new fleet. If the importance of his first book was not realized at home—and it is stated that he had great difficulty in finding a publisher—it was fully recognized abroad. His arrival in England was taken as an opportunity to pay a national tribute of appreciation, of which the degrees conferred by both Oxford and Cambridge were but one expression. There is a slightly humorous aspect to the competition of American universities to award similar honors upon his return.

Retiring in 1896 after forty years of service, he was recalled to act as a member of the Naval War Board from May 9, 1898, until the close of the War with Spain. His fellow members were Rear Admiral Montgomery Sicard and Captain A. S. Crowninshield. This board practically controlled the naval strategy of the war. Of its deliberations and the relative influence of its members we have no record; but the naval dispositions were effective, and, aside from the location of the "Flying Squadron" at Hampton Roads as a concession to the fears of coast cities, they are fully approved by Mahan in his writings.
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His choice a year later as one of the American delegates to the first Peace Conference at The Hague was eminently fitting in view of his thorough knowledge of international relations and the rules governing naval warfare. In determining the attitude of the American delegation, he took a strong stand against any agreement that would contract our freedom of action with regard to the Monroe Doctrine, and against immunity of private property at sea. The arguments against this latter policy he afterward stated effectively in print and in a memorandum to the Navy Department. With the fulfillment of this duty, his public services, aside from his work as a writer, came to a close.

In the navy, as in other walks of life, an incompatibility is often assumed — and often unjustly — between mastery of theory and skill in practice, between the thoughtful student and the capable man of action; and there is no denying that among his contemporaries this assumption was current with regard to Mahan. While a conclusion is difficult in such a matter, the case may well rest on the following statement by a friend and fellow officer: “Duty, in whatever form it came, was sacred. Invariably he gave to its performance the best that was in him. That he distinguished himself pre-eminently on shipboard cannot be claimed. Luck or circumstances denied him the opportunity of doing things heroic, and his modesty those purely spectacular. As a subordinate or as captain of a single ship, what he did was well done. No further proof of his qualities

1 See pp. 328-341.
in this respect is needed than the fact that, at the outbreak of the Civil War, when finishing his midshipman's cruise, he was asked by a shipmate, an officer who expected a command, to go with him as 'first lieutenant.' To his colleagues of the old navy this invitation was the highest form of professional approval. The fates decreed that the wider field should not be his wherein, as commander-in-chief of a fleet in war time, he could have exhibited the mastery he surely possessed of that art with which his name will forever be indissolubly linked."¹

From the same source may be taken a passage of more intimate portrayal. "In person Mahan was tall, spare, erect, with blue eyes, fair complexion, hair and beard originally sandy. He respected the body as the temple of his soul, and he paid it the homage of abstemious living, of outdoor games and abundant exercise. In manner he was modest to excess, dignified, courteous. Reticent in speech with people in general, those who enjoyed the rare privilege of his intimacy knew him to be possessed of a keen sense of humor and a fund of delightful anecdotes. To such friends he was a most charming companion, so different from the grave, self-contained philosopher he appeared to the rest and less favored of his acquaintance. His home life was ideal."

The lectures delivered at the Naval War College were the basis of "The Influence of Sea Power

upon History.” The author tells us how the central idea came to him in the library of the English Club at Lima, Peru, while reading Momsen’s “History of Rome.” “It suddenly struck me . . . how different things might have been could Hannibal have invaded Italy by sea, as the Romans often had Africa, instead of by the long land route.” A year later, when he returned to the United States, the plan of the lectures was already formed: “I would investigate coincidentally the general history and the naval history of the past two centuries with a view to demonstrating the influence of the events of the one upon the other.” Written between May and September of 1886, and delivered as lectures during the next four years, the book was carefully revised before its publication in the spring of 1890.

This book exerted at the time, and has continued to exert, a widespread influence; and while its author’s reputation has been increased by his later writings, it remains his best known and greatest work. One reason for this is that it states his fundamental teaching, and in a form easy to grasp. The preface and the first chapter, which cover but eighty-nine pages, survey rapidly the rise and decline of great sea powers and the national characteristics affecting maritime development. The rest of the book, treating in detail the period between 1660 and 1783, reinforces the conclusions already stated.

Timeliness also contributed to its success. The book furnished authoritative guidance in a period of transition and new departures in international affairs. For nearly twenty years, under Bismarck,
Germany had been consolidating the empire established in 1871. When William II ascended the throne in 1888, the ambitions of both ruler and nation were already turned toward colonial expansion and world power. A German Admiralty separate from the War Office was established in 1889; Heligoland was secured a year later; the Kiel Canal was nearing completion. In England, the Naval Defense Act of 1889 provided an increase of seventy ships during the next four years. The rivals against whom she measured her naval strength were still France and Russia. In the United States, Congress in 1890 authorized three battleships, the first vessels of this class to be added to the American navy. During the following ten years the rivalry of nations was chiefly in commercial and colonial aggrandisement, marked by the final downfall of Spain’s colonial empire and a greatly increased importance attached to control of the sea.

For the nations taking part in this expansion, Mahan was a kind of gospel, furnishing texts for every discussion of naval policy. “After his first book,” says a French writer, “and especially from 1895 on, Mahan supplied the sound basis for all thought on naval and maritime affairs; it was seen clearly that sea power was the principle which, adhered to or departed from, would determine whether empires should stand or fall.” ¹

To Great Britain in particular the book came as

¹ “La Maîtrise de la Mer,” Auguste Moireau, Revue des Deux Mondes, October, 1902.
a timely analysis of the means by which she had grown in wealth and dominion. This was indeed no discovery. Nearly three centuries earlier Francis Bacon had written, "To be master of the sea is an abridgment [epitome] of monarchy . . . he that commands the sea is at great liberty, and may take as much and as little of the war as he will." ¹ Before and after Bacon, England had acted upon this principle. But it remained for Mahan to give the thesis full expression, to demonstrate it by concrete illustration, and to apply it to modern conditions. "For the first time," writes the British naval historian, Sir Julian Corbett, "naval history was placed on a philosophical basis. From the mass of facts which had hitherto done duty for naval history, broad generalizations were possible. The ears of statesmen and publicists were opened, and a new note began to sound in world politics. Regarded as a political pamphlet in the higher sense — for that is how the famous book is best characterized — it has few equals in the sudden and far-reaching effect it produced on political thought and action." ²

Germany was not slow to take to heart this interpretation of the vital dependence of world empire on sea power. The Kaiser read the book, annotated its pages, and placed copies in every ship of the German fleet. ³ It was soon translated not

¹ "Of Kingdoms and Estates."
² "The Revival of Naval History," Contemporary Review, November, 1917. While the term "political pamphlet" suggests the influence of the book abroad, it is obviously inappropriate in describing its purpose and method of treatment.
only into German but into French, Japanese, Russian, Italian, and Spanish. This and later works by the same author were perhaps most diligently studied by officers of the Japanese navy, then rising rapidly to the strength manifested in the Russian war. "As far as known to myself," writes Mahan, "more of my works have been done into Japanese than into any other one tongue." 1 The debt of all students of naval warfare is well expressed by a noted Italian officer and writer,—"Mahan, who is the great teacher of us all." 2

What has been said of "The Influence of Sea Power upon History" applies in varying degrees to the sixteen historical works and collections of essays which appeared in the ensuing twenty-five years. While extending the field covered by the earlier book, they maintained in general its high qualities. The most important of these, "The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire," covers the period from 1793 to 1812. This and the studies of the American Revolution and the War of 1812 form with his first book a continuous historical series from 1660 to 1815. The "Life of Nelson" and "Life of Farragut" are standard professional biographies of these two commanders, who, if we accept Mahan's opinion, rank respectively first and second among naval leaders. The best of his thought on contemporary naval warfare is gathered up in his "Naval Strategy," published in 1911. Based on lectures

1 "From Sail to Steam," p. 303.
2 "Captain Romeo Bernotti," letter to the editor, April 25, 1918.
first delivered in 1887, and afterward frequently expanded and modified to meet changing conditions, this book, while invaluable to the professional student, lacks something of the continuity and clearness of structure of the historical works.

The authoritativeness of these writings, it may be repeated, was strengthened by the author's technical equipment and long years of practical experience. Moreover, as Mr. Roosevelt has said, "Mahan was the only great naval writer who also possessed the mind of a statesman of the first class."¹ His concern always was not merely with the facts of history but with the "logic of events" and their lessons for today.

Following his retirement, Admiral Mahan wrote more frequently and freely on problems of the present and future. Of the subjects treated, some were distinctly professional—the speed and size of battleships, the size, composition, and disposition of fleets, modifications in the international codes affecting naval warfare, naval events in contemporary wars. Others entered the wider field of world politics, voicing the author's sincere belief in American colonial expansion and active participation in world affairs, in the need of a navy sufficient to make our influence felt, in the limitations as well as the usefulness of arbitration, in the continuance of force as an important factor in international relations.

In such discussions, he wrote without the slightest trace of jingoism or sensation mongering; and it

¹ "A Great Public Servant," The Outlook, January 13, 1915.
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would be a fanatic advocate of immediate disarmament and universal arbitration who would deny the steadying and beneficent effect of his opposition, with its grip on realities and steadfast respect for truth. Whatever he wrote was not only backed by firm conviction but inspired by the highest ideals.

His style naturally varied somewhat with the audience and the theme. His historical writings have been justly described as burdened with qualifications, and marked by a laborious fullness of statement, which strains the attention, while it adds weight and dignity to the presentation. This in general is true of the histories; but there are many passages in these where the subject inspires him to genuine eloquence. In the “Life of Nelson” and “Types of Naval Officers” there is little of the defect mentioned, and there are few more entertaining volumes of naval reminiscence than “From Sail to Steam.” “The besetting anxiety of my soul,” writes the author himself, “was to be exact and lucid. I might not succeed, but my wish was indisputable. To be accurate in facts and correct in conclusions, both as to application and expression, dominated all other motives.” ¹ One might dispense with reams of “fine writing” for a page of prose guided by these standards.

On December 1, 1914, Rear Admiral Mahan died suddenly of heart failure. A month before, he had left his home at Quogue, Long Island, and come to Washington to pursue investigations for a

¹ “From Sail to Steam,” p. 288.
history of American expansion and its bearing on sea power. His death, occurring four months after the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, was perhaps hastened by constant study of the diplomatic and military events of the war, the approach of which he had clearly foreseen, as well as America's vital interest in the Allied cause. It was unfortunate that his political and professional wisdom should have been lost at that time.

His work, however, was largely accomplished. By his influence on both public and professional opinion, by prevision and warm advocacy, he had done much to further the execution of many important naval and national policies. Among such may be mentioned the peace-time concentration of fleets in preparation for war, the abandonment of a strictly defensive naval policy, the systematic study of professional problems, the strengthening of our position in the Caribbean, the fortification of Panama. "His interest," writes Mr. Roosevelt, "was in the larger side of his subjects; he was more concerned with the strategy than with the tactics of both naval war and statesmanship." In this larger field his writings will retain a value little affected by the lapse of time.

 Allan Westcott.

United States Naval Academy,
June, 1918.
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PART I

NAVAL PRINCIPLES
MAHAN
ON NAVAL WARFARE

PART I: NAVAL PRINCIPLES

1. THE VALUE OF HISTORICAL STUDY

The history of Sea Power is largely, though by no means solely, a narrative of contests between nations, of mutual rivalries, of violence frequently culminating in war. The profound influence of sea commerce upon the wealth and strength of countries was clearly seen long before the true principles which governed its growth and prosperity were detected. To secure to one’s own people a disproportionate share of such benefits, every effort was made to exclude others, either by the peaceful legislative methods of monopoly or prohibitory regulations, or, when these failed, by direct violence. The clash of interests, the angry feelings roused by conflicting attempts thus to appropriate the larger share, if not the whole, of the advantages of commerce, and of distant unsettled commercial regions, led to wars. On the other hand, wars arising from other causes have been greatly modified in their conduct and issue by the control of the sea. Therefore the history of sea power, while embracing in its broad sweep all

1 “The Influence of Sea Power upon History,” pp. 1–2, 8–10.
that tends to make a people great upon the sea or by the sea, is largely a military history; and it is in this aspect that it will be mainly, though not exclusively, regarded in the following pages.

A study of the military history of the past, such as this, is enjoined by great military leaders as essential to correct ideas and to the skillful conduct of war in the future. Napoleon names among the campaigns to be studied by the aspiring soldier, those of Alexander, Hannibal, and Caesar, to whom gunpowder was unknown; and there is a substantial agreement among professional writers that, while many of the conditions of war vary from age to age with the progress of weapons, there are certain teachings in the school of history which remain constant, and being, therefore, of universal application, can be elevated to the rank of general principles. For the same reason the study of the sea history of the past will be found instructive, by its illustration of the general principles of maritime war, notwithstanding the great changes that have been brought about in naval weapons by the scientific advances of the past half century, and by the introduction of steam as the motive power. [The pages omitted point out lessons to be drawn from galley and sailing-ship warfare. — Editor.]

Before hostile armies or fleets are brought into contact (a word which perhaps better than any other indicates the dividing line between tactics and strategy), there are a number of questions to be decided, covering the whole plan of operations throughout the theater of war. Among these are the proper
function of the navy in the war; its true objective; the point or points upon which it should be concentrated; the establishment of depots of coal and supplies; the maintenance of communications between these depots and the home base; the military value of commerce-destroying as a decisive or a secondary operation of war; the system upon which commerce-destroying can be most efficiently conducted, whether by scattered cruisers or by holding in force some vital center through which commercial shipping must pass. All these are strategic questions, and upon all these history has a great deal to say. There has been of late a valuable discussion in English naval circles as to the comparative merits of the policies of two great English admirals, Lord Howe and Lord St. Vincent, in the disposition of the English navy when at war with France. The question is purely strategic, and is not of mere historical interest; it is of vital importance now, and the principles upon which its decision rests are the same now as then. St. Vincent's policy saved England from invasion, and in the hands of Nelson and his brother admirals led straight up to Trafalgar.

It is then particularly in the field of naval strategy that the teachings of the past have a value which is in no degree lessened. They are there useful not only as illustrative of principles, but also as precedents, owing to the comparative permanence of the conditions. This is less obviously true as to tactics, when the fleets come into collision at the point to which strategic considerations have brought them. The unrelenting progress of mankind causes continual
change in the weapons; and with that must come a continual change in the manner of fighting, — in the handling and disposition of troops or ships on the battlefield. Hence arises a tendency on the part of many connected with maritime matters to think that no advantage is to be gained from the study of former experiences; that time so used is wasted. This view, though natural, not only leaves wholly out of sight those broad strategic considerations which lead nations to put fleets afloat, which direct the sphere of their action, and so have modified and will continue to modify the history of the world, but is one-sided and narrow even as to tactics. The battles of the past succeeded or failed according as they were fought in conformity with the principles of war; and the seaman who carefully studies the causes of success or failure will not only detect and gradually assimilate these principles, but will also acquire increased aptitude in applying them to the tactical use of the ships and weapons of his own day. He will observe also that changes of tactics have not only taken place after changes in weapons, which necessarily is the case, but that the interval between such changes has been unduly long. This doubtless arises from the fact that an improvement of weapons is due to the energy of one or two men, while changes in tactics have to overcome the inertia of a conservative class; but it is a great evil. It can be remedied only by a candid recognition of each change, by careful study of the powers and limitations of the new ship or weapon, and by a consequent adaptation of the method of using it to the qualities it possesses,
which will constitute its tactics. History shows that it is vain to hope that military men generally will be at the pains to do this, but that the one who does will go into battle with a great advantage, — a lesson in itself of no mean value.
2. "Theoretical" versus "Practical" Training

A Historical Instance

There have long been two conflicting opinions as to the best way to fit naval officers, and indeed all men called to active pursuits, for the discharge of their duties. The one, of the so-called practical man, would find in early beginning and constant remaining afloat all that is requisite; the other will find the best result in study, in elaborate mental preparation. I have no hesitation in avowing that personally I think that the United States Navy is erring on the latter side; but, be that as it may, there seems little doubt that the mental activity which exists so widely is not directed toward the management of ships in battle, to the planning of naval campaigns, to the study of strategic and tactical problems, nor even to the secondary matters connected with the maintenance of warlike operations at sea. Now we have had the results of the two opinions as to the training of naval officers pretty well tested by the experience of two great maritime nations, France and England, each of which, not so much by formulated purpose as by national bias, committed itself unduly to the one or

2 In a preceding passage the author shows that American naval thought has been preoccupied with problems of material.—Enrroa.
the other. The results were manifested in our War of Independence, which gave rise to the only well-contested, wide-spread maritime war between nearly equal forces that modern history records. There remains in my own mind no doubt, after reading the naval history on both sides, that the English brought to this struggle much superior seamanship, learned by the constant practice of shipboard; while the French officers, most of whom had been debarred from similar experience by the decadence of their navy in the middle of the century, had devoted themselves to the careful study of their profession. In short, what are commonly called the practical and the theoretical man were pitted against each other, and the result showed how mischievous is any plan which neglects either theory or practice, or which ignores the fact that correct theoretical ideas are essential to successful practical work. The practical seamanship and experience of the English were continually foiled by the want of correct tactical conceptions on the part of their own chiefs, and the superior science of the French, acquired mainly by study. It is true that the latter were guided by a false policy on the part of their government and a false professional tradition. The navy, by its mobility, is pre-eminently fitted for offensive war, and the French deliberately and constantly subordinated it to defensive action. But, though the system was faulty, they had a system; they had ideas; they had plans familiar to their officers, while the English usually had none — and a poor system is better than none at all. . . .
What is Practical?

It was said to me by some one: "If you want to attract officers to the College, give them something that will help them pass their next examination." But the test of war, when it comes, will be found a more searching trial of what is in a man than the verdict of several amiable gentlemen, disposed to give the benefit of every doubt. Then you will encounter men straining every faculty and every means to injure you. Shall we then, who prepare so anxiously for an examination, view as a "practical" proceeding, worthy of "practical" men, the postponing to the very moment of imperative action the consideration of how to act, how to do our fighting, either in the broader domain of strategy, or in the more limited field of tactics, whether of the single ship or of the fleet? Navies exist for war; and the question presses for an answer: "Is this neglect to master the experience of the past, to elicit, formulate, and absorb its principles, is it practical?" Is it "practical" to wait till the squall strikes you before shortening sail? If the object and aim of the College is to promote such study, to facilitate such results, to foster and disseminate such ideas, can it be reproached that its purpose is not "practical," even though at first its methods be tentative and its results imperfect?

The word "practical" has suffered and been debased by a misapprehension of that other word "theoretical," to which it is accurately and logically
opposed. Theory is properly defined as a scheme of things which terminates in speculation, or contemplation, without a view to practice. The idea was amusingly expressed in the toast, said to have been drunk at a meeting of mathematicians, "Eternal perdition to the man who would degrade pure mathematics by applying it to any useful purpose." The word "theoretical," therefore, is applied rightly and legitimately only to mental processes that end in themselves, that have no result in action; but by a natural, yet most unfortunate, confusion of thought, it has come to be applied to all mental processes whatsoever, whether fruitful or not, and has transferred its stigma to them, while "practical" has walked off with all the honors of a utilitarian age.

If therefore the line of thought, study and reflection, which the War College seeks to promote, is really liable to the reproach that it leads to no useful end, can result in no effective action, it falls justly under the condemnation of being not "practical." But it must be said frankly and fearlessly that the man who is prepared to apply this stigma to the line of the College effort must also be prepared to class as not "practical" men like Napoleon, like his distinguished opponent, the Austrian Archduke Charles, and like Jomini, the profuse writer on military art and military history, whose works, if somewhat supplanted by newer digests, have lost little or none of their prestige as a profound study and exposition of the principles of warfare.