

THE EVOLUTION OF SEA-POWER

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The Evolution of Sea-Power by P. A. Silburn

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BY

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PREFACE

THIS work has been inspired by the following passage, which appears in the preface of that great work *The Influence of Sea-Power upon History*: "Historians generally have been unfamiliar with the conditions of the sea, having as to it neither special interest nor special knowledge, and the profound determining influence of maritime strength upon great issues has consequently been overlooked."

It is not with any presumptuous ambition of endeavouring to meet the want for a history of sea-power, or any hope of being able to rectify the omission of the historians of the past so rightly deplored by Admiral Mahan in the passage quoted above, that this work has been undertaken, but rather it is an earnest endeavour to place before the public an outline of the growth of sea-power, the use that has been made of it in peace as well as in war, and the all-important part that it has taken in placing nations in the order and situation they occupy to-day.

The definite object proposed in this work is an examination of the growth of sea-power from that of the Phoenicians to that of the maritime nations of the present day, placing in relief the part sea-power has taken in the delimitation of territory among the races of the world, the determining influence it has exercised in the rise of republics, kingdoms, and empires, an attempt to show, where such is possible, the disaster which inevitably follows the neglect of the general principles of sea-power.

The efficiency attained in all departments of human progress has been brought about by the lessons derived from the history of the past, and although this applies with equal truth to the growth and efficiency of navies, yet little or no attention has been paid to the principles govern-

ing their existence, and it is mainly due to Admiral Mahan that these principles have been detected and inquired into.

The neglect of giving due weight to sea-power as a determining factor in the destiny of nations cannot with justice be laid to the blame of the historians, for if they are to chronicle events faithfully, they cannot digress into the causes of particular effects; nor are the results of sea-power sufficiently obvious to be seized upon with ease, the effect being often removed from the cause by long periods of time and then hidden by intervening events. By many historians the relationship between Portuguese sea-power and the result of the naval battle of Lepanto would not be detected. The cause was in the Indian Ocean; the effect was felt in the Mediterranean. Many land battles are recorded as decisive events in the history of nations; in numerous instances there is confusion of cause and effect owing to the dense over-growth that has occurred in intervening years. Marathon was not decisive; Salamis was. The Metaurus was prepared by Roman sea-power; Trafalgar made Waterloo possible; and thus to lay bare the principles of sea-power we have to trace back from the effect to the cause.

But whilst the writings of Admirals Mahan and Colomb have inspired the theme of this work, it is the growing indifference of a large section of the people of the British Empire towards the navy which has created their vast domain and the efficiency of the Service by which not only the Empire is kept intact, but the very independence of the United Kingdom secured, that finally determined its publication. This book has been written in the faint hope and fervent prayer that it may be of some slight service in seconding the efforts of those who are fighting to keep the British sea-sense healthy and strong, to hand down to our descendants inviolate the great estate built up by our ancestors and added to by ourselves solely through the instrumentality of British sea-power.

P. A. SILBURN.

DURBAN, NATAL,
30th October 1911.

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