

**FRANCE AND THE
CONFEDERATE NAVY,
1862-1868: AN
INTERNATIONAL EPISODE**

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France and the Confederate Navy, 1862-1868: An International Episode by John Bigelow

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AND 43744
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BY
JOHN BIGELOW

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PREFACE.

At one stage of our civil war it seemed as though its fate was to be decided less by the belligerents than by the national powers on the other side of the Atlantic. The insurgents, in their desperation, were ready to make any sacrifice to secure their independence. They offered to Spain, as the price of recognition, to guarantee to her the possession of Cuba; to France, they offered to guarantee Maximilian's sovereignty in Mexico, and for the loan of a squadron of the emperor's navy several millions of dollars in cotton; while to England they offered yet greater temptations. It was even rumored that a restoration of British supremacy in the insurgent states would not have been esteemed too high a price to pay for the overthrow of the government at Washington. It was in one of these paroxysms of desperation that the agents of the Confederate States managed to tempt the Emperor of the French to authorize the construction in the dockyards of France of several vessels of war for the Confederate navy more formidable than any then afloat.

Had these vessels reached the coast of America, the territory of the United States might possibly now be under two or more independent governments; or, if under one, a widely different one from that under which we are now living or from any which our fathers designed for us. The history of that conspiracy and of the means by which the calamities with which it was so big were averted, invite the reader's attention in these pages.

The somewhat peculiar structure of this story requires a word of explanation. It has no pretension to the dignity of a history. The order in which events are presented is not such as the Muse of History would adopt; but it is the order in which they were disclosed to the writer. If this course has no other advantage, it spares me the necessity of treating events which are still in the crucibles of controversy and criticism; it allows me to confine my testimony to events of which I am in some respects the most competent surviving witness, and to present them in the order in which they were disclosed to me and to the government I represented. As the course of history is determined as well by what is not known as by what is known, I feel that I may render quite as substantial service by testifying to those matters only that fell within the sphere of my own observation and by implication of those which were concealed from me, as by a more ambitious

work, which would involve the treatment of many matters of which I had no personal knowledge; of many which are still only partially disclosed, and of which others are competent to deal with as well or better than myself. I begin my story, therefore, with the beginning of my acquaintance with the plans of the Confederate States to procure ships of war in France, instead of beginning at the beginning of their operations there a year or more before, which would have been the historical order, and I proceed to throw such light as I have upon subsequent events only as it reached me. It is by following this order of development, which reveals what was not known as well as what was known by the Federal government from time to time, that its policy can be comprehended and the acts and omissions of its agents correctly appreciated. I venture to believe, therefore, that the lack of artistic merit in its arrangement will not impair whatever value, if any, this statement would otherwise have as a contribution towards a history of one of the most critical periods of our national existence.

The writer has endeavored to so perform what has seemed to be his duty, in a way to reopen no old wounds, to awaken no slumbering animosities, nor to shorten the mantle of charity which the wise and good of both sections of our country since the war have been diligently weaving over common errors and shortcomings.

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