

THE ISTHMUS AND SEA POWER.

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 fulfillment, 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 traveler might now and again penetrate from one to the other, but it was impossible to maintain by land the constant exchange of 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 then only typified that future greater family of nations, which one by one have since been bound 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 fulfillment to a far distant future.

The story of his actual achievement is sufficiently known to all readers, and need not here be repeated. 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 for the time insoluble. 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 had so long 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 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 have since 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 Admiral's Bay. 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 was, with its repeated lading and unloading, before the days of steam, it presented 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 partially, though most incompletely, realized the vision of Columbus; and thus, after many fluctuations, and despite the immense expansion of these latter days, partial and incomplete, his great conception still 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 must inevitably tend. Here the direction of least resistance was clearly indicated 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 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 drift-wood 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 that island people in whom commercial enterprise and political instinct were so happily blended. 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 powers 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 freely invoked to forbid this nation from extending its power and necessary enterprise into and beyond the seas, to which on every side it has now 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 have never 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 sufficiently attested 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, and the dawn of a new era 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 are now so 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 is now to some extent imposed 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 could then have been said to her, as it is now 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 claim 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 has never since 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 English navy as an organized force date also from his short rule; and it was he who, in 1653, 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 San 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 has so long 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 un-speculative 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 pretense, 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 dispatched in the right direction to look for fortune, — by sea, not by land.

The great aim of the Protector was checked by his untimely death, which perhaps also definitely frustrated a fulfillment, in the actual possession of the Isthmus, that in his strong hands might have been feasible. His idea, however, remained prominent among the purposes of the English people, as distinguished from their rulers; and in it, as has before been said, is to be recognized the significance of the exploits of the buccaneers, during the period of external debility which characterized the reigns of

the second Charles and James. With William of Orange the government again placed itself at the head of the national aspirations, as their natural leader; and the irregular operations of the freebooters were merged in a settled national policy. This, although for a moment diverted from its course by temporary exigencies, was clearly formulated in the avowed objects with which, in 1702, the great Dutchman entered upon the War of the Spanish Succession, the last great act of his political life. From the Peace of Utrecht, that closed this war in 1713, the same design was pursued with ever-increasing intensity, but with steady success, and with it was gradually associated the idea of controlling also the communication between the two oceans by way of the Isthmus. Of this, the best known instance, because of its connection with the great name of Nelson, was the effort made by him, in conjunction with a land force, in 1780, when still a simple captain, to take possession of the course of the San Juan, and so of the interoceanic route through Lake Nicaragua. The attempt ended disastrously, owing partly to the climate, and partly to the strong series of works, numbering no less than twelve, which the Spaniards, duly sensible of the importance of the position, had constructed between the lake and the mouth of the river.

Difficulties such as were encountered by Nelson withstood Great Britain's advance throughout this region. While neither blind nor indifferent to the advantages conferred by actual possession, through which she had elsewhere so abundantly profited, the prior and long-established occupation by Spain prevented her obtaining by such means the control she ardently coveted, and in great measure really exercised. The ascendancy which made her, and still makes her, the dominant factor in the political system of the West Indies and the Isthmus resulted from her sea power, understood in its broadest sense. She was

the great trader, source of supplies, and medium of intercourse between the various colonies themselves, and from them to the outer world; while the capital and shipping employed in this traffic were protected by a powerful navy, which, except on very rare occasions, was fully competent to its work. Thus, while unable to utilize and direct the resources of the region, as she could have done had it been her own property, she secured the fruitful use and reaped the profit of such commercial transactions as were possible under the inert and narrow rule of the Spaniards. The fact is instructive, for the conditions to-day are substantially the same as those of a century ago. Possession still vests in states and races which have not yet attained the faculty of developing by themselves the advantages conferred by nature; and control will still abide with those whose ships, whose capital, whose traders support the industrial system of the region, provided these are backed by a naval force adequate to the demands of the military situation, rightly understood. To any foreign state, control at the Central American Isthmus means naval control, naval predominance, to which tenure of the land is at best but a convenient incident.

Such, in brief, was the general tendency of events until the time when the Spanish colonial empire began to break up, in 1808-10, and the industrial system of the West India islands to succumb under the approaching abolition of slavery. The concurrence of these two decisive incidents, and the confusion which ensued in the political and economical conditions, rapidly reduced the Isthmus and its approaches to an insignificance from which the islands have not yet recovered. The Isthmus is partially restored. Its importance, however, depends upon causes more permanent, in the natural order of things, than does that of the islands, which, under existing circumstances, and under any circumstances that can as yet be fore-

seen, derive their consequence chiefly from the effect which may from them be exerted upon the tenure of the Isthmus. Hence, the latter, after a period of comparative obscurity, again emerged into notice as a vital political factor, when the spread of the United States to the Pacific raised the question of rapid and secure communication between our two great seaboard. The Mexican War, the acquisition of California, the discovery of gold, and the mad rush to the diggings which followed, hastened, but by no means originated, the necessity for a settlement of the intricate problems involved, in which the United States, from its positions on the two seas, has the predominant interest. But, though predominant, ours is not the sole interest; though less vital, those of other foreign states are great and consequential; and, accordingly, no settlement can be considered to constitute an equilibrium, much less a finality, which does not at once effect our preponderating influence, and also insure the natural rights of other peoples. So far as the logical distinction between commercial and political will hold, it may be said that our interest is both commercial and political, that of other states almost wholly commercial.

The same national characteristics that of old made Great Britain the chief contestant in all questions of maritime importance — with the Dutch in the Mediterranean, with France in the East Indies, and with Spain in the West — have made her also the exponent of foreign opposition to our own asserted interest in the Isthmus. The policy initiated by Cromwell, of systematic aggression in the Caribbean, and of naval expansion and organization, has resulted in a combination of naval force with naval positions unequalled, though not wholly unrivaled, in that sea. And since, as the great sea-carrier, Great Britain has a preponderating natural interest in every new route open to commerce, it is inevitable that

she should jealously scrutinize every proposition for the modification of existing arrangements, conscious as she is of power to assert her claims, in case the question should be submitted to the last appeal.

Nevertheless, although from the nature of the occupations which constitute the welfare of her people, as well as from the characteristics of her power, Great Britain seemingly has the larger immediate stake in a prospective inter-oceanic canal, it has been on her part tacitly recognized, as on our side openly asserted, that the bearing of all questions of Isthmian transit upon our national progress, safety, and honor is more direct and more urgent than upon hers. That she has so felt is plain from the manner in which she has yielded before our tenacious remonstrances, in cases where the control of the Isthmus was evidently the object of her action, — as in the matters of the tenure of the Bay Islands, and of the protectorate of the Mosquito Coast. Our superior interest appears also from the nature of the conditions which will result from the construction of a canal. So far as these changes are purely commercial, they will operate to some extent to the disadvantage of Great Britain; because the result will be to bring our Atlantic seaboard, the frontier of a rival manufacturing and commercial state, much nearer to the Pacific than it now is, and nearer to many points of that ocean than is England. To make a rough general statement, easily grasped by a reader without the map before him, Liverpool and New York are at present about equidistant, by water, from all points on the west coast of America, from Valparaiso to British Columbia. This is due to the fact that, to go through the Straits of Magellan, vessels from both ports must pass near Cape St. Roque, on the east coast of Brazil, which is nearly the same distance from each. If the Nicaragua Canal existed, the line on the Pacific equidistant from the two cities named

would pass, roughly, by Yokohama, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Melbourne, or along the coasts of Japan, China, and eastern Australia, — Liverpool, in this case, using the Suez Canal, and New York that of Nicaragua. In short, the line of equidistance would be shifted from the eastern shore of the Pacific to its western coast, and all points of that ocean east of Japan, China, and Australia, for example, the Hawaiian Islands, would be nearer to New York than to Liverpool.

A recent British writer calculates that about one eighth of the existing trade of the British Islands would be unfavorably affected by the competition thus introduced. But this result, though a matter of national concern, is political only in so far as commercial prosperity or adversity modifies a nation's current history; that is, indirectly. The principal questions affecting the integrity or security of the British Empire are not seriously involved, for almost all of its component parts lie within the regions whose mutual bond of union and shortest line of approach are the Suez Canal. Nowhere has Great Britain so little territory at stake, nowhere has she such scanty possessions, as in the eastern Pacific, upon whose relations to the world at large, and to ourselves in particular, the Nicaragua Canal will exert the greatest influence.

The chief political result of the Nicaragua Canal will be to bring our Pacific coast nearer, not only to our Atlantic seaboard, but also to the great navies of Europe. Therefore, while the commercial gain, through an uninterrupted water carriage, will be large, and is clearly indicated by the acrimony with which a leading journal, apparently in the interest of the great transcontinental roads, has lately maintained the singular assertion that water transit is obsolete as compared with land carriage, it is still true that the canal will present an element of much weakness from the mili-

tary point of view. Except to those optimists whose faith in the regeneration of human nature is so robust as to reject war as an impossible contingency, this consideration must occasion serious thought concerning the policy to be adopted by the United States.

The subject, so far, has given rise only to diplomatic arrangement and discussion, within which it is permissible to hope it may always be confined; but the misunderstandings and protracted disputes that followed the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, and the dissatisfaction with the existing status that still obtains among many of our people, give warning that our steps, as a nation, should be governed by some settled notions, too universally held to be set aside by a mere change of administration or caprice of popular will. Reasonable discussion, which tends, either by its truth or its evident errors, to clarify and crystallize public opinion on so important a matter, can never be amiss.

This question, from an abstract, speculative phase of the Monroe Doctrine, took on the concrete and somewhat urgent form of security for our trans-isthmian routes against foreign interference towards the middle of this century, when the attempt to settle it was made by the oft-mentioned Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, signed April 19, 1850. Great Britain was then found to be in possession, actual or constructive, of certain continental positions and of some outlying islands which would contribute not only to military control, but to that kind of political interference which experience has shown to be the natural consequence of the proximity of a strong power to a weak one. These positions depended upon, indeed their tenure originated in, the possession of Jamaica, thus justifying Cromwell's forecast. Of them, the Belize, a strip of coast two hundred miles long, on the Bay of Honduras, immediately south of Yucatan, was so far from the Isthmus proper, and so little likely to affect the canal question, that the American nego-

tiator was satisfied to allow its tenure to pass unquestioned, neither admitting nor denying anything as to the rights of England thereto. Its first occupation had been by British freebooters, who "squatted" there a very few years after Jamaica fell. They went to cut logwood, succeeded in holding their ground against the efforts of Spain to dislodge them, and their right to occupancy and to fell timber was afterwards allowed by treaty. Since the signature of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, this "settlement," as it was styled in that instrument, has become a British "possession," by a convention with Guatemala contracted in 1859. Later, in 1862, the quondam "settlement" and recent "possession" was, by royal commission, erected into a full colony, subordinate to the government of Jamaica. Guatemala being a Central American state, this constituted a distinct advance of British dominion in Central America, contrary to the terms of our treaty.

A more important claim of Great Britain was to the protectorate of the Mosquito Coast, — a strip understood by her to extend from Cape Gracias á Dios south to the San Juan River. In its origin, this asserted right differed little from similar transactions between civilized man and savages, in all times and all places. In 1687, thirty years after the island was acquired, a chief of the aborigines there settled was carried to Jamaica, received some paltry presents, and accepted British protection. While Spanish control lasted, a certain amount of squabbling and fighting went on between the two nations; but when the questions arose between England and the United States, the latter refused to acquiesce in the so-called protectorate, which rested, in her opinion, upon no sufficient legal ground as against the prior right of Spain, that was held to have passed to Nicaragua when the latter achieved its independence. The Mosquito Coast was too close to the expected

canal for its tenure to be considered a matter of indifference. Similar ground was taken with regard to the Bay Islands, Ruatan and others, stretching along the south side of the Bay of Honduras, near the coast of the republic of that name, and so uniting, under the control of the great naval power, the Belize to the Mosquito Coast. The United States maintained that these islands, then occupied by Great Britain, belonged in full right to Honduras.

Under these *de facto* conditions of British occupation, the United States negotiator, in his eagerness to obtain the recession of the disputed points to the Spanish-American republics, seems to have paid too little regard to future bearings of the subject. Men's minds were also dominated then, as they are now, notwithstanding the intervening experience of nearly half a century, by the maxims delivered as a tradition by the founders of the republic, who deprecated annexations of territory abroad. The upshot was that, in consideration of Great Britain's withdrawal from Mosquitia and the Bay Islands, to which, by our contention, she had no right, and therefore really yielded nothing but a dispute, we bound ourselves, as did she, without term, to acquire no territory in Central America, and to guarantee the neutrality not only of the contemplated canal, but of any other that might be constructed. A special article, the eighth, was incorporated in the treaty to this effect, stating expressly that the wish of the two governments was "not only to accomplish a particular object, but to establish a general principle."

Considerable delay ensued in the restoration of the islands and of the Mosquito Coast to Honduras and Nicaragua, — a delay attended with prolonged discussion and serious misunderstanding between the United States and Great Britain. The latter claimed that, by the wording of the treaty, she had debarred herself only from future acquisitions of

territory in Central America; whereas our government asserted, and persistently instructed its agents, that its understanding had been that an entire abandonment of all possession, present and future, was secured by the agreement. It is difficult, in reading the first article, not to feel that, although the practice was perhaps somewhat sharp, the wording can sustain the British position quite as well as the more ingenuous confidence of the United States negotiator; an observation interesting chiefly as showing the eagerness on the one side, whose contention was the weaker in all save right, and the wariness on the other, upon whom present possession and naval power conferred a marked advantage in making a bargain. By 1860, however, the restorations had been made, and the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty has since remained the international agreement, defining our relations to Great Britain on the Isthmus.

Of the subsequent wrangling over this unfortunate treaty, if so invidious a term may be applied to the dignified utterances of diplomacy, it is unnecessary to give a detailed account. Our own country cannot but regret and resent any formal stipulations which fetter its primacy of influence and control on the American continent and in American seas; and the concessions of principle over-eagerly made in 1850, in order to gain compensating advantages which our weakness could not otherwise extort, must needs cause us to chafe now, when we are potentially, though, it must sorrowfully be confessed, not actually, stronger by double than we were then. The interest of Great Britain still lies, as it then lay, in the maintenance of the treaty. So long as the United States jealously resents all foreign interference in the Isthmus, and at the same time takes no steps to formulate a policy or develop a strength that can give shape and force to her own pretensions, just so long will the absolute control over any probable contingency of the future rest

with Great Britain, by virtue of her naval positions, her naval power, and her omnipresent capital.

A recent unofficial British estimate of the British policy at the Isthmus, as summarized in the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, may here have interest: "In the United States was recognized a coming formidable rival to British trade. In the face of the estimated disadvantage to European trade in general, and that of Great Britain in particular, to be looked for from a Central American canal, British statesmen, finding their last attempt to control the most feasible route (by Nicaragua) abortive, accomplished the next best object in the interest of British trade. They cast the onus of building the canal on the people who would reap the greatest advantage from it, and who were bound to keep every one else out, but were at the same time very unlikely to undertake such a gigantic enterprise outside their own undeveloped territories for many a long year; while at the same time they skillfully handicapped that country in favor of British sea power by entering into a joint guarantee to respect its neutrality when built. This secured postponement of construction indefinitely, and yet forfeited no substantial advantage necessary to establish effective naval control in the interests of British carrying trade."

Whether this passage truly represents the deliberate purpose of successive British governments may be doubtful, but it is an accurate enough estimate of the substantial result, as long as our policy continues to be to talk loud and to do nothing, — to keep others out, while refusing ourselves to go in. We neutralize effectually enough, doubtless; for we neutralize ourselves, while leaving other powers to act efficiently, whenever it becomes worth while.

In a state like our own, national policy means public conviction; else it is but as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. But public conviction is a very

different thing from popular impression, differing by all that separates a rational process, resulting in manly resolve, from a weakly sentiment that finds occasional hysterical utterance. The Monroe Doctrine, as popularly apprehended and endorsed, is a rather nebulous generality, which has condensed about the Isthmus into a faint point of more defined luminosity. To those who will regard, it is the harbinger of the day, incompletely seen in the vision of the great discoverer, when the East and the West shall be brought into closer communion by the realization of the strait that baffled his eager search. But, with the strait, time has introduced a factor of which he could not dream, — a great nation midway between the West he knew and the East he sought, spanning the continent he unwittingly found, itself both East and West in one. To such a state, which in itself sums up the two conditions of Columbus's problem; to which the control of the strait is a necessity, if not of existence, at least of its full development and of its national security, who can deny the right to predominate in influence over a region so vital to it? None can deny save its own people; and they do it, — not in words, perhaps, but in act. For let it not be forgotten that failure to act at an opportune moment is action as real as, though less creditable than, the most strenuous positive effort.

Action, however, to be consistent and well proportioned, must depend upon well-settled conviction; and conviction, if it is to be reasonable, and find expression in a sound and continuous national policy, must result from a careful consideration of present conditions in the light of past experiences. Here, unquestionably, strong differences of opinion will at first be manifested, both as to the true significance of the lessons of the past, and the manner of applying them to the present. Such differences need not cause regret. Their appearance is a sign of attention aroused; and, when

discussion has become general and animated, we may hope to see the gradual emergence of a sound and operative public sentiment. What is to be deprecated and feared is indolent drifting, in willful blindness to the approaching moment when action must be taken; careless delay to remove fetters, if such there be in the constitution or in traditional prejudice, which may prevent our seizing opportunity when it occurs. Whatever be the particular merits of the pending Hawaiian question, it can scarcely be denied that its discussion has revealed the existence, real or fancied, of such clogs upon our action, and of a painful disposition to consider each such occurrence as a merely isolated event, instead of being, as it is, a warning that the time has come when we must make up our minds upon a broad issue of national policy. That there should be two opinions is not bad, but it is very bad to halt long between them.

There is one opinion, — which it is needless to say the writer does not share, — that, because many years have gone by without armed collision with a great power, the teaching of the past is that none such can occur; and that, in fact, the weaker we are in organized military strength, the more easy it is for our opponents to yield our points. Closely associated with this view is the obstinate rejection of any political action which implicitly involves the projection of our physical power, if needed, beyond the waters that gird our shores. Because our reasonable, natural — it might almost be called moral — claim to preponderant influence at the Isthmus has heretofore compelled respect, though reluctantly conceded, it is assumed that no circumstances can give rise to a persistent denial of it.

It appears to the writer — and to many others with whom he agrees, though without claim to represent them — that the true state of the case is more nearly as follows: Since our nation came into

being, a century ago, with the exception of a brief agitation about the year 1850, — due to special causes, which, though suggestive, were not adequate, and summarized as to results in the paralyzing Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, — the importance of the Central American Isthmus has been merely potential and dormant. But, while thus temporarily obscured, its intrinsic conditions of position and conformation bestow upon it a consequence in relation to the rest of the world which is inalienable, and therefore, to become operative, only awaits those changes in external conditions that must come in the fullness of time. The indications of such changes are already sufficiently visible to challenge attention. The rapid peopling of our territory entails at least two. The growth of the Pacific States enhances the commercial and political importance of the Pacific Ocean to the world at large, and to ourselves in particular; while the productive energies of the country, and its advent to the three seas, impel it necessarily to seek access and outlet by them to the regions beyond. Under such conditions, perhaps not yet come, but plainly coming, the consequence of an artificial waterway that shall enable the Atlantic coast to compete with Europe, on equal terms as to distance, for the markets of eastern Asia, and shall shorten by two thirds the sea-route from New York to San Francisco, and by one half that to Valparaiso, is too evident for insistence.

In these conditions, not in European necessities, is to be found the assurance that the canal will be built. Not to ourselves only, however, though to ourselves chiefly, will it be a matter of interest when completed. Many causes will combine to retain in the line of the Suez Canal the commerce of Europe with the East; but to the American shores of the Pacific the Isthmian canal will afford a much shorter and easier access for a trade already of noteworthy proportions. A weighty consideration also is involved

in the effect upon British navigation of a war which should endanger its use of the Suez Canal. The power of Great Britain to control the long route from Gibraltar to the Red Sea is seriously doubted by a large and thoughtful body of her statesmen and seamen, who favor dependence, in war, upon that by the Cape of Good Hope. By Nicaragua, however, would be shorter than by the Cape to many parts of the East; and the Caribbean is much more easily safeguarded against distant European states than the line through the Mediterranean, which passes close by their ports.

Under this increased importance of the Isthmus, we cannot safely anticipate for the future the cheap acquiescence which, under very different circumstances, has in the past been yielded to our demands. Already it is notorious that European powers are betraying symptoms of increased sensitiveness as to the importance of Caribbean positions, and strengthening their grip upon those they now hold. Moral considerations undoubtedly count for more than they did, and nations are more reluctant to enter into war; but still, the policy of states is determined by the balance of advantages, and it behooves us to know what our policy is to be, and what advantages are needed to turn in our favor the scale of negotiations and the general current of events.

If the decision of the nation, following one school of thought, is that the weaker we are the more likely we are to have our way, there is little to be said. Drifting is perhaps as good a mode as another to reach that desirable goal. If, on the other hand, we determine that our interest and dignity require that our rights should depend upon the will of no other state, but upon our own power to enforce them, we must gird ourselves to admit that freedom of interoceanic transit depends upon predominance in a maritime region — the Caribbean Sea — through which pass all the approaches to the

Isthmus. Control of a maritime region is insured primarily by a navy; secondarily, by positions, suitably chosen and spaced one from the other, upon which as bases the navy rests, and from which it can exert its strength. At present the positions of the Caribbean are occupied by foreign powers, nor may we, however disposed to acquisition, obtain them by means other than righteous; but a distinct advance will have been made when public opinion is convinced that we need them, and should not exert our utmost ingenuity to dodge them when flung at our head. If the Constitution really imposes difficulties, it provides also a way by which the people, if convinced, can remove its obstructions. A protest, however, may be entered against a construction of the Constitution which is liberal, by embracing all it can be constrained to imply, and then immediately becomes strict in imposing these ingeniously contrived fetters.

Meanwhile, no moral obligation forbids developing our navy upon lines and proportions adequate to the work it may be called upon to do. Here again the crippling force is a public impression, which limits our potential strength to the necessities of an imperfectly realized situation. A navy "for defense only" is a popular catchword. When, if ever, people recognize that we have three sea-

boards, that the communication by water of one of them with the other two will in a not remote future depend upon a strategic position hundreds of miles distant from our nearest port, at the mouth of the Mississippi, they will also see that the word "defense," already too narrowly understood, has its application at points far away from our own coast.

That the organization of military strength implies provocation to war is a fallacy, which the experience of each succeeding year is now refuting. The immense armaments of Europe are onerous; but, nevertheless, by the mutual respect and caution they enforce, they present a cheap alternative, certainly in misery, probably in money, to the frequent devastating wars which preceded the era of general military preparation. Our own impunity has resulted, not from our weakness, but from the unimportance to our rivals of the points in dispute, compared with their more immediate interests at home. With the changes consequent upon the canal, this indifference will diminish. We also shall be entangled in the affairs of the great family of nations, and shall have to accept the attendant burdens. Fortunately, as regards other states, we are an island power, and can find our best precedents in the history of the people to whom the sea has been a nursing mother.

A. T. Mahan.

AFTER — THE DELUGE.

THE sombre tints of Grayhead were slightly suffused by a pink light sifting from the west through the clear air. The yachts in the harbor lay idly beneath the mellow influences of the passing of the summer day, — idly as only sailboats can lie, a bit of loose sail or cordage now and then flapping inconsistently in a breath of wind, which seemed

to come out of the west for no other purpose, and to retire into the east afterward, its whole duty done. On board, men were moving about, hanging lanterns, making taut here, setting free there, all with an air of utter peace and repose such as is found only on placid waterways beneath a setting sun. Occasionally an oar dipped in the still water,