

A GREAT PUBLIC SERVANT

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

THE death of Admiral Mahan deprives the United States of a man whom it is no exaggeration to call a great public servant. Admiral Mahan belonged in that limited class of men whose honorable ambition it is to render all the service in their power to the cause which they espouse, and who care to achieve distinction and reward for themselves only by the success with which they render this service to the cause. He emphatically belonged among those invaluable workers, the only ones whose work really adds to the sum of mankind's achievement, of whom Ruskin spoke when he said that the only work worth doing was that done by the men who labored primarily for the sake of the labor itself and not for the fee. The great statesmen, soldiers, sailors, the great artists and scientists, the great explorers and engineers, all come in this class. They must pay some heed to the material reward, for they must live; but their first thought is for the work itself, and the work is their joy and delight; and, as a matter of fact, the pecuniary reward of these men, who achieve the greatest and most useful work of their generation, is shamefully inadequate when compared with the similar reward of the men of the money market. Goethals, Dewey, Edison, Saint-Gaudens, John Hay, William James, Winslow Homer, Richardson, Marcus Symonds, Peary, Remington, Mark Twain, Howard Pyle, John Burroughs—these men, and others like them, are the Americans who in the last quarter-century have been the true Americans, the Americans whose achievements in the sum will in future years bulk largest in the

total of our National achievement during their generation. High among the men of this type stood Admiral Mahan.

I first met Mahan many years ago when he was a junior officer doing his best to found the War College at Newport. Our navy was then at its nadir, being inferior to the navies of either Spain or Chile. Those of our countrymen who were not absorbed in pure money-getting—a pursuit not only indispensable but ennobling as a means to life, and utterly deadening as an end of life—were apt to take the sentimental-pacifist view of international relations; and neither class offers good material out of which to build true National greatness. It was at this unpropitious time that Mahan began his labor to educate the American people to a knowledge of one group of their real needs. The first thing was to educate the navy itself. A governmental branch which is utterly neglected by the Nation at large tends to wither. Naval officers whose ships, when compared with those of contemporary European nations, were almost as obsolete as triremes, and who never had a chance to train themselves to handle modern weapons and instruments, grew disheartened and careless. Thirty years ago the average American citizen did not feel a much keener interest in the American navy than the present Administration at Washington feels. Mahan's task was to educate the naval officers first and the ordinary citizen next.

The War College and all that sprang therefrom were the first rewards of the work done by Mahan and by the Sampsons, Tay-

lors, Evanses, Wainwrights, Schroeders, Winslows, and all the other fine naval officers to whom the revival of the navy was due. Slowly the effect broadened until the average American began to awake. Yet in his case the effect was partly reflex, for Mahan's really great success came in Europe, and especially in England, before it came here. The American public took him at his true worth only with reluctance, and after educated and far-seeing Englishmen had hailed him with relief and enthusiasm as the man of genius who was able to bring home to the minds of the people as a whole truths to which they would not listen when told by less gifted men. In dealing with our naval officers, in working for the navy from within the navy, Mahan was merely one among a number of first-class men; and many of these other first-class men were better than he was in the practical handling of the huge and complicated instruments of modern war. But in the vitally important task of convincing the masters of all of us—the people as a whole—of the importance of a true understanding of naval needs, Mahan stood alone. There was no one else in his class, or anywhere near it.

His first great book, "The Influence of Sea Power upon History," at a leap touched the high level which we connote when we describe a book as a classic. In this book he showed that combination of two great qualities which no other man of like eminence ever possessed in so high a degree; for the book could have been written only by a man steeped through and through in the peculiar knowledge and wisdom of the great naval expert who was also by instinct and training a statesman to whom the past and the present in all international matters of profound importance were open books whose inmost meaning he had mastered. Admiral Mahan was the only great naval writer who also possessed in international matters the mind of a statesman of the first class. His interest 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.

He wrote on the War of 1812, and on some naval phases of the Civil War; and what he wrote of the former ought to have

taught the pacifists, and the short-sighted citizens generally, of this country what apparently nothing but the actual experience of terrible disaster will ever teach them. However, there was not in what he dealt with in our wars the large dramatic incident which was necessary in order to draw out his best power of narration. The lack was supplied in the wars that Great Britain waged against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. The greatest admiral of history was the foremost figure in these naval wars; and he and the fighting in which he took part were portrayed by the master hand of the greatest naval writer in history when Mahan published his two books, one dealing generally with these wars and one specifically with the life of Nelson. These two books are in one way less noteworthy than his "Influence of Sea Power upon History," for their importance consists more in their treatment of the purely military than of the political problems. But he handled these problems in such masterly fashion, his style was so clear and vivid, and his taste and his judgment were both so good that these works probably marked the high water of his popularity and influence.

Later, the very fact that he had thus produced a profound effect upon contemporary thought and action prevented his further successes from being of such striking character. But his "Types of Naval Officers" was a study of the utmost value to all men who have to deal with serious military affairs on the ocean; and in 1910 he published a little volume on "America's Interest in International Conditions" which is of really capital importance to-day in view of the world war now waging. This book shows extraordinary insight into the then actually existing tendencies at work to produce the present gigantic contest.

Admiral Mahan's writings should be read by all who care for that kind of history in which events of real significance are treated with scientific insight and with literary power and charm. They should be studied with especial care by all Americans who desire to know what the real interest of their country demands in the way of thought and action from her sons and daughters.