

It is therefore necessary to draw attention to the fact that the Imperial roads round the Cape and round Cape Horn cross each other at a point on the Equator about 23 deg. W. If a comparatively small circle with that centre be described on a mercantile chart, it will be found to include the path of nearly all vessels passing along those roads. It therefore follows that the defence of the sea area so included is of the greatest importance to Australasia and Eastern and Pacific possessions, and that it would be useless to distribute force for the protection elsewhere of the commerce of those places unless we can command that small area. But we cannot maintain a patrol at these Imperial cross roads without bases of operation from which that force can draw supplies: we have no choice, therefore, but to adapt Sierra Leone and Ascension to the purpose of fulfilling this Imperial requirement. It is further essentially necessary for the safety of Australia and the East, that these points should not fall into other hands, and if we do not adopt measures for their defence, there is nothing to prevent such a contingency.

Now, though the Imperial strategic points I have named are numerous, I think it will be found difficult, even on close inspection, to reduce the number without risk to the safety of the Imperial lines. It must be remembered that a point near a line of communication, if not secured to our own use by means of defence, is placed more or less at the disposal of our enemy. The position we abandon, because we have others in its neighbourhood, may be of vast strategic importance to the power having none. The immense and Imperial importance of the great majority of strategic points named, I think, be much doubted, and therefore for purposes of illustrating general principles require no further remark. We have seen that military garrisons are required to prevent their capture by assault. Where are they to come from? What provision has the Empire made for the safety of positions which command her roads?

It is our boast that we are at last secured from invasion, because we have 100,000 regular troops at home. But when we are threatened with invasion, we are in imminent peril of investment. As the regular army is the only military force we can move, it clearly follows that, if 100,000 or any large proportion of that number of regular troops are necessary to guard against invasion, no force is available for garrisons of places on which the safety of our communications depends. We should have to choose, at such a time, between risking invasion or courting investment, partial or complete. When this argument is used, it is generally met by the assertion that we have, or shall have, a powerful fleet, and therefore shall command the sea. Now the "command of the sea" is a vague term, conveying no precise meaning to the mind. It is, from its vagueness, most valuable to mystify constituencies, or to confuse the conception of our true military requirements, both in times of "panic" and intervening periods of "parimony." By war ministers it is used alternately to full the awakened consciousness of military weakness, or as an argument for the reduction of military force. To most people it means something purely naval. To some it conveys the idea of covering the seas with numerous fleets; to others, the possession of a few ships more powerful than those of our neighbours. Few realize that the command of the sea can only be maintained by a scientific combination of three things—strategy, purely mili-

tary force, and purely naval power. The command of the sea is nothing more nor less than the command of the Imperial roads, the securing of the first lines of Colonial defences.

It is important to bear in mind that the more war fleets rely on machinery and artificial motive power, the more necessary are fixed bases of operation to their action, and the greater must be the resources of those bases. Hence it is that, as the science of naval warfare advances the necessity for developing these resources at the great strategic points, and for efficiently protecting them, will probably increase.

But "an ounce of fact is worth a pound of theory;" and while others dwell on the political results of the exploits of the *Sumter* and *Alabama*, it is desirable not to lose sight of the lesson in Imperial defence the cruise of these vessels teaches. Captain Semmes, writing on board the *Sumter*, in the West Indies, remarks: "The enemy has done us the honour to send in pursuit of us the *Powhatan*, the *Niagara*, the *Iroquois*, the *Keystone*, and the *Sao Jacinto*." Not one of these vessels ever caught her, and if we read on we shall see the reason. "The Mona passage being the regular track of U. S. commerce, it was looked upon as almost a certainty that at least one cruiser would be stationed for its protection." The supposed certainty, however, was a delusion. Months afterwards we find Captain Semmes exclaiming, "Where can all the enemy's cruisers be, that the important passages we have lately passed through are all left unguarded?" And then he sarcastically adds, "They are off, I suppose, in chase of the *Alabama*." Again he said: "The sea has its highways and byways, as well as the land. . . . If Mr. Welles had stationed a heavier and faster ship—and he had a number of both heavier and faster ships—at the crossing of the thirtieth parallel, another at or near the equator, a little to the eastward of Fernando de Noronha, and a third off Bahia, he must have driven me off, or greatly crippled me in my movements. A few ships in the other chief highways, and his commerce would have been pretty well protected. But the old gentleman does not seem to have thought of stationing a ship anywhere." (a)

It is impossible that anyone carefully studying the cruise of the *Sumter* and *Alabama*, can avoid the conclusion that we have had to pay £3,200,000, not so much for letting the *Alabama* escape, but as compensation to the United States for damage directly resulting from the vague notion the head of their naval department had respecting the "command of the sea," and his utter incapacity as a sea strategist. All the naval force of the United States was powerless to arrest a single ship in her progress, simply because it was applied without reference to general principles which guide the distribution of force for the protection of communications.

It is important to observe that there is no proportion between the force used in the interruption of sea communications, as compared with the amount of force required to secure them. To cripple the action of a single steamer we find it acknowledged, by one who ought to know best, that several cruisers would be required at certain points. A regular attack upon sea communications, therefore, involves the employment of an enormous force in their defence; and as the stations and positions are necessarily fixed, so must bases of operation be at

(a) "My Adventures Afloat," by Admiral Semmes.

hand to supply the wants of that defending force.

There is, however, another lesson we may learn from the cruise of the *Alabama*, which, if we profit by, is well worth £3,000,000 to our Empire. It is the value of coal to offensive and defensive operations at sea. We find considerations regarding the consumption and supply of coal constantly regulating and limiting the action of the *Sumter* and *Alabama*. While we congratulate ourselves that "even the stores of coal needed for marine locomotion are principally ours," we must remember that they are only ours so long as we protect them from destruction by bombardment or from capture by assault. It is therefore of paramount importance that our coal depots along the Imperial lines should be efficiently and thoroughly defended; that they should not be selected at haphazard, or or situated at places in the possession of any foreign power when it can possibly be avoided.

The closing scene of the career of the *Alabama* is, however, yet more instructive to those who have the defence of the empire at heart. True, she was sunk near to our own coast, almost in English waters, by the guns of the *Kearsage* but if we would know what it was that forced her within the range of those guns we must carry our thoughts far away to the Indian Ocean. In the far east we find Captain Semmes writing as follows: "My ship will have to go into dock to have much of her copper replaced, now nearly destroyed by constant cruising, and to have her boilers overhauled and repaired, and this can only be done in Europe." And so to Europe the *Alabama* came. Defective and without adequate means of repair, she was no longer able to efficiently fulfil her mission, nor quite free to choose the fields of her action, so dragging her damaged boilers and dilapidated hull down the Indian Ocean, round the Cape and up the broad Atlantic, (a) she sought refuge and repair in a French port. The rest of her story is soon told. Denied the means necessary to restore her to her original efficiency as a ship of war, and with defective ammunition, she was compelled to engage an antagonist, whose challenge she was from her condition neither fit to accept nor able to avoid. In seventy minutes she was sunk. For want of means of repair in the Eastern hemisphere she lies beneath the waters of the English Channel, silently warning us to profit by the lessons she has taught.

There is one other popular view respecting the command of the sea to which it is necessary to refer. It is that the command of the sea can be secured by the blockade of our enemy's coast. The experiences of the American war throw some light upon this argument. In the *Singapore Times* of December 9, 1863, we read: "From our shipping list it will be seen that there are no fewer than seventeen merchantmen at present in our harbours. Their gross tonnage may be roughly set down at 12,000 tons. Some of them have been lying here now upwards of three months, and all this at a time when there is no dulness in the freight market; but, on the contrary, an

(a) "On May 2, we recrossed the Equator into the northern hemisphere . . . and ran up to our old tollgate, where, as the reader will recollect, we halted on our outward passage and used the passports of so many travellers. The poor old *Alabama* was not now what she had been then. She was like the wearied fox-hound, limping back after a long chase, footsore and longing for quiet and repose."—"My Adventures Afloat," by Admiral Semmes.