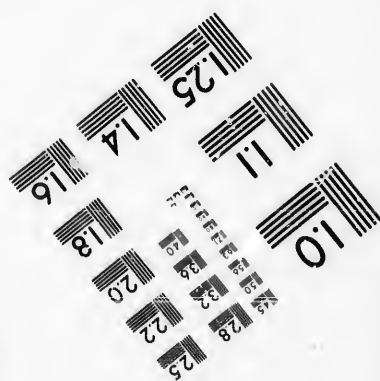
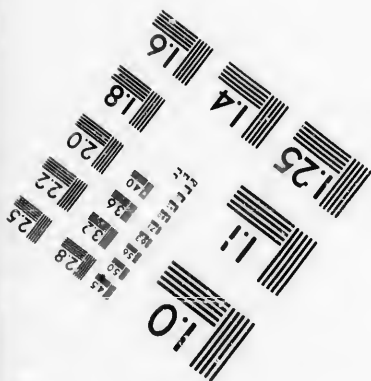
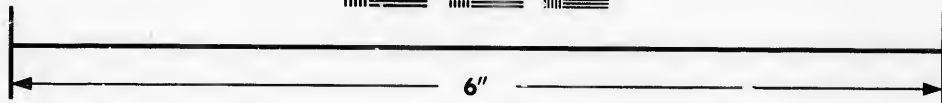
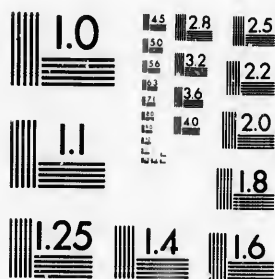


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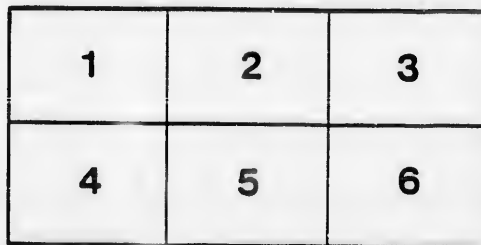
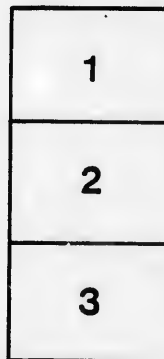
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ON COLONIAL DEFENCE.

A PAPER BY

CAPTAIN J. C. R. COLÓMB (LATE R.M.A.)

Read before the ROYAL COLONIAL INSTITUTE, on 28th June, 1873.

His Grace the Duke of MANCHESTER in the Chair.

My Lord Duke and Gentlemen,—Though this subject has direct reference to the Colonies, it is necessary to observe that “Colonial Defence” cannot be considered as an abstract question, any more than that “National Defence” can be limited in its meaning to the defence of the United Kingdom. The full force of this assertion is not, however, generally understood.

When we get frightened on the subject of what is falsely termed “Our National Safety,” but one idea is prevalent in the minds of nine people out of ten, to the exclusion of all other considerations; it is this:—guarding the soil of the British Islands against invasion.

In time of profound peace we like to talk of “our vast Colonial Empire, our extended commerce, and interests in every part of the globe.” It sounds big and grand, and, perhaps, some vainly imagine that big swelling words must frighten away aggression; but when danger, real or supposed, threatens, and the nation is alarmed, we habitually forget that “England with her colonies is still a giant amongst nations, and that without them she would be a dwarf,”* and exhibit practically our disbelief in the “giant” by seeking refuge in the “arms of the dwarf.”

Look back a few years, and by past events test the truth of this assertion. Take the panic of 1859 and its results. We were in a state of wild alarm. We imagined that France threatened our safety, nay, our existence. We took fright at her successful armies, and her powerful fleets, capable of transporting those armies. We stedfastly shut our eyes to the fact that the possibility of the invasion of England involves, as a natural consequence, the possibility of investment, the cutting of the Imperial lines of communi-

* *Vide* Sir E. Sullivan on “Our Economic Catos.”

cation, and attacks upon "our vast Colonial Empire, our extended commerce, and interests in every quarter of the globe;" we, in short, forgot everything except our personal safety, and instead of taking measures for defending the Empire, we were satisfied with taking measures for defending the hedge-rows of England.

Again, we owe change in our military system to the last panic. We are told by the Government of the day that England (the dwarf) is now better prepared to resist an attempted invasion than during any past period of her history. How has this result been attained? By rendering her colonies and possessions (which swell the dwarf into the giant) less capable of resisting attack. The military policy has been to disarm the giant in order to arm the dwarf.

I must, however, here observe that I do not argue against the pressing necessity which existed for defending the Imperial base of operations by withdrawing the insufficient garrisons formerly maintained in the colonial outposts; on the contrary, I was one of the first to advocate the withdrawal of the few regular troops quartered in certain colonies and possessions,* as a necessary part of a scheme of Imperial defence; but that scheme did not propose to leave the question of the defence of our colonies and possessions in the air, as has been done. What appears objectionable in the military policy pursued is, that it has been confined to the narrow limits of the defence of the Imperial base, to the exclusion of all considerations for the safety of our Imperial communications, the security of our Colonies, and the maintenance of our power in distant possessions.

I therefore venture to assert that before these troops were withdrawn, before the question of military re-organisation was practically dealt with, it was the duty of statesmen to cast their eyes beyond the shores of "Happy England," to look beyond the "streak of silver sea," and to face this truth, viz., that the security of the United Kingdom against invasion is but a part of the great question of "National Defence." It is now nearly five years since, at the Royal United Service Institution,† I endeavoured to draw attention to this fact, in these words:—"The defence of the United Kingdom against invasion is an object of primary importance, but to suppose that this is the one thing needful in the matter of national defence, is a grievous error. We are bound to look to the general welfare of the Empire. The sources of our

* For the purpose of concentrating them at certain strategic and Imperial positions.

† "Lectures on the Distribution of our War Forces," 1869.

greatness are the possession of India, and our commercial prosperity. Our commercial prosperity is in direct proportion to the freedom with which we can carry on trade with our Colonies and other countries. Commerce is in fact the link that binds together the several interests of the scattered territories comprising the Empire. . . . Bearing this in mind, let us suppose that the view which limits national defence to the protection of Great Britain and Ireland against invasion be practically adopted, and that the whole resources of the country have been wholly and exclusively directed to rendering the *soil* of the British Isles secure, and that this object has been fully attained, what would our position be in time of aggressive war on the part of one or more great powers? Does it not stand to reason that, as the object of all aggressive war is either to acquire territory, or to weaken, if not destroy, the power of the nation against which war is made, the easiest and the safest mode is adopted to carry out these objects: under the circumstances we have supposed, therefore, an enemy would naturally confine his efforts to destroying our commerce and our power in India, leaving the British Isles to watch his proceeding with impotent dismay."

If the heart and citadel of the Empire is alone protected, will it "surprise us to hear" that, when the Empire is attacked, our enemy prefers cutting our unprotected communications and appropriating our undefended colonies and possessions, to a direct assault upon a "small island bristling with bayonets?"

In the celebrated article in the *Edinburgh Review* it is written:—"Steam applied to navigation has done at least as much for a defending as for an invading Power; even the stores of coals needed for marine locomotion are principally ours; and while by the aid of this powerful agent the ships of both nations may scour the coasts with favourable weather at from twelve to fifteen or sixteen miles an hour, the railways which gird the land, to say nothing of the telegraphs, may in all weathers carry the armies which are to guard it and their *materiel* from point to point at twenty, thirty, or forty." *

Now these are the utterances of a master mind, but it is passing strange that it never seems to have occurred to the writer that we cannot limit the field of operations of an opposing fleet. If our enemy's fleets can scour the coasts of "Happy England" at from twelve to fifteen or sixteen miles an hour, they can scour the coasts of "Unhappy Colonies and Possessions" at the same rate, where

* "Germany, France, and England." *Edinburgh Review*, 1870.

their operations will not be hampered by the presence of any army at all. Even the stores of coal needed for marine locomotion, "though principally ours," are conveniently situated at commanding points along the Imperial roads, and by being for the most part totally neglected and undefended, afford a guarantee that the enemy's fleets shall not be inconvenienced by want of fuel in a raid upon "our vast Colonial empire, our extended commerce, and interests in any part of the globe."

It is said that a certain bird when hard pressed in its flight buries its head in the sand, and finds imaginary security because it ceases to see the near approach of danger; and the present policy pursued by this country in the matter of defence appears to me to be somewhat analogous. Our Imperial Eagle, whose wings cover the seas, buries her head in the sands of the defended shores of England, and blinding her vision of danger with a few men, guns, volunteer reviews, and autumn manœuvres, her statesmen bid her believe that she is safe!

This is one side of the picture; let us glance briefly at the other. It is not many years ago since our defensive measures were based upon an exactly opposite principle, and one equally dangerous to the safety of our Empire. Our armies and our fleets were scattered indiscriminately over the face of the globe, while the United Kingdom (the Imperial base of operations) was left destitute of any power of resistance. All our war force was exhausted on means for the direct defence of our Colonies and distant possessions, to the exclusion of all considerations relative to the security of the Imperial base.

The defenceless state of the British Islands at the time of which I speak, can best be pictured by recalling the concluding words of the celebrated letter of the Duke of Wellington, in which he showed the ease with which these islands could be carried by assault: "I am bordering on seventy-seven years passed in honour. I hope that the Almighty may protect me from being a witness of the tragedy, which I cannot persuade my contemporaries to take measures to avert." We were then as oblivious to the truth that the capture of the citadel involved the downfall of the Empire as we are now blind to the fact that the security of that citadel is no guarantee for the safety of *twenty-nine-thirtieths* of British territory, or for the protection of the lives and properties of *four-fifths* of Her Majesty's subjects.*

* The area of the United Kingdom is about one-thirtieth of the total area of the British Empire, and the population less than one-fifth.

In avoiding Scylla we have encountered Charybdis. Where, then, is the true channel through which the Empire may safely pass, defying attack? Many may think, with the Government of the day, that this question may be solved by saying to our Colonies and possessions—Arm yourselves; it is every man's duty to defend his hearth and home. Do as we have done in England, raise volunteers, create what military forces you please, do as we have done, and our Empire is safe! Now, let us consider whether this be a true solution of the problem. In the first place, it is not possible to lay down a general rule of self-reliance and self-defence applicable to all Colonies and possessions alike. The power of resistance of each fragment of the Empire can only be measured by a comparison between its population, its geographical position, and natural defensive advantages, and those of its possible enemy. It is simply ridiculous to tell any one of our West Indian islands to be self-reliant, and to trust to its citizens to resist the war power of the United States. If this general rule is the basis of our plan of Imperial defence, and is to be applied, it means in plain English that in the unhappy event of a rupture with America, we offer that nation peaceable and quiet possession of 100,000 square miles of territory, and make over the lives and properties of 1½ millions of British subjects!

I fear it would not be difficult to find what are termed "advanced thinkers" in the country—nay, in Parliament, and seated on Government benches—who would not think this a very great national calamity. Possibly such persons might argue that the United States would allow the money value of these territories as a set-off in the final balance-sheet of American claims of indemnity for expenses caused by war. It is therefore necessary to observe that the loss of the West Indies affects the safety of Canada. First, by increasing the resources of the United States; secondly, by securing to that power the command of the Western Atlantic—thus rendering it impossible for Imperial forces to create a diversion in favour of Canada, in the hour of trial, by blockade and attack on the southern and eastern shores of America.

It follows, therefore, that the general and indiscriminate application of the policy of fragmentary self-reliance and self-defence, though possible to Canada as a direct means of frontier defence—besides involving the loss of other possessions—is the most certain method of ensuring she shall be left in her struggle unaided and alone.

Similar arguments apply with equal force to other Colonies and

possessions elsewhere; but as it is impossible to deal with this great question in a short paper, I think I have said enough to show that this general rule of "self-reliance" fails to solve the problem of Imperial defence. The question, therefore, remains—What are the general principles on which the defence of the Empire must be based?

Before we can give a reply worthy of the name, it is essential that we should understand what is the Empire, and what is vital to its existence. Speaking generally of its geographical position, it consists of ten groups of territory separated by long sea distances. The British Islands, British North America, the West Indies, the West Coast of Africa, the Cape, the Mauritius, Australasia, Hong Kong, the Straits' Settlements, and India.

This is a rough sketch of the ground to be defended. Now to quote from a work by Sir C. Pasley, written in 1808.* "The strength of an empire composed of several islands or possessions, divided from each other by the sea, will be further modified by the geographical position of its respective parts. The strength of an empire of any kind, whether insular or continental, will be greater or less, with equal resources, in proportion to the facility with which its several parts can afford each other mutual assistance when attacked, and to the difficulty which an enemy may find in supplying and supporting his invading force."

This able exposition of a great military truth brings to light two great principles:—

1. That it is of vital importance that the safety of the Imperial communications be secured.
2. That it is essential to the military strength of the empire that forces created or existing for the defence of one portion be not so constituted as to preclude the possibility of using them in the defence of another.

If the Imperial communications are not secured, our enemy can make it *physically* impossible for the several parts to afford "mutual assistance when attacked." On the other hand, although they may be tolerably safe, if the military forces of each part are by law so constituted as to preclude the power of moving them to another, we ourselves render it a *moral* impossibility for the several parts to afford "mutual assistance when attacked." In the one case the enemy cripples the necessary power of concentration; in the other we save him the trouble by doing it ourselves. What then becomes of the military value of forces constituted as our militia

* "The Military Policy and Institutions of the British Empire."

and volunteers are, at home or in the Colonies, when weighed in the Imperial scales ?

If the empire is to be defended at all we must apply, on a large scale, the ordinary and common military principle applicable to the defence of all territory, large or small.

The fundamental principle is briefly this: The success of all operations of war, whether defensive or offensive, depends upon the disposition of force in such a manner as will best secure the base of operations, and ensure safety and freedom of communication. It is useless to do one without the other, for in the one case neglect of the rule must lead to a "lock-out," in the other the "lock-up" of military force. Our former disposition of our force risked the "lock-out" of military force by rendering the capture of the base possible: our present plan endangers, nay courts, the "lock-up" of military force at the base by leaving our communications exposed, and our outposts undefended.

In the late war we saw first of all an attack upon the advanced positions on the lines of communication; next the cutting of the lines of communication; and lastly, as an inevitable consequence, Paris fell.

The United Kingdom is our Imperial base. The Imperial main lines of communication are:—

1. To British North America across the North Atlantic.
2. To the West Indies.
3. To India, China, and Australasia by the Mediterranean.
4. To India, China, and Australasia round the Cape.
5. From Australasia and the Pacific round Cape Horn.

The Imperial base can be reduced in two ways:—

1. By direct assault: invasion.
2. By indirect means: investment.

It is curious—I trust I may be forgiven for saying it—that while the possibility of invasion is not generally disputed, I believe I happen to be the only individual who believes in investment; at least I know of no other who has for eight years tried to force on public attention the fact that the certainty of investment, partial or complete, follows the *possibility* of invasion as surely as night follows day.

Consider for one moment on what the presumption of possible invasion rests. It rests on this—the loss, temporary or permanent, of the command of the waters surrounding the British Islands. But remember that the lines of communication *all* radiate from these waters; the loss, therefore, of our command *here* cuts every one of the imperial lines; and what is this *but* investment ?

The statesman who could, in a magazine, speak complacently of an opposing force "scouring our coasts at twelve, fifteen, or sixteen miles an hour," must surely have forgotten that the heart of the Empire thus cut off from its sources of supply must cease to beat. Hardly a mile could be so traversed in triumphant defiance without injury, in a greater or less degree, to some artery or nerve, producing in some far-off member of the body politic of Empire results more or less disastrous. It might be but a nervous tremor produced by a temporary disarrangement of the free course of trade, or it might be paralysis caused by a prolonged interruption of the vital power of communication. The question of results is but a question of time.

As regards the safety of communications, it must be borne in mind that the greatest danger to which they can be exposed is that which threatens the greatest number at one and the same time. Geographically speaking, this can only happen at the point of convergence or radiation, which in our case is the Channel.

The Royal Commission of 1859 discarded the Channel Fleet as a first line of defence against invasion, because "Were an undue proportion of our fleet tied to the Channel," our enemy's "would be proportionably set free, to the great danger of our colonies and to the injury of a commerce which becomes of more vital importance with every step of national progress." But I desire to observe that, though it may not be our first line of defence against invasion, it is our first line of defence against investment, and, further, the front of our first line of colonial defence. Of what avail is it if our Colonies, though protected in their own immediate neighbourhood, are "locked out" from the mother country by a force in the Channel, against which we are unable to contend? Of what use is it protecting our commerce on distant seas if it is to be destroyed within sight of the shores of England? Surely, in reckoning up our means of defence, we should not forget that if our enemy confines his operations to an attack on our communications, and we are unprepared to resist it, the forces we have created for the special purpose of repelling invasion will be after all but a harmless host of spectators of a ruin they are powerless to avert.

I do not for a moment underrate the immense importance and absolute necessity of being prepared to render invasion impossible by purely military forces. If we are not so prepared we stake the fate of the Empire on, perhaps, a single naval engagement. A temporary reverse at sea might (by the enemy following up his advantage) be converted into final defeat on land, resulting in a total overthrow of all further power of resistance. It is necessary

for the *safety of the Channel* that invasion be efficiently guarded against, so that should our home fleet be temporarily disabled we may, under cover of our army, prepare and strengthen it to regain lost ground, and renew the struggle for that which is essential to our life as a nation, and our existence as an empire—the command of the waters of the United Kingdom.

We are all so keenly alive to the necessity of rendering invasion impossible, that this part of the subject may now be dismissed. I may also pass from the front of the first line of colonial defence with the remark, that the fleet required to maintain it must not be confused nor mixed up with the cruising force necessary for the safety of the distant lines of communication. To hold our supremacy of the Channel we require a force composed of vessels adapted to the combined action of fleets and of a strength equal to that which may possibly be brought against it. This remark also applies to the protection of the line of communication passing through the Mediterranean. But on more distant seas, for the protection of such lines, a special class of cruisers, capable of keeping at sea for long periods of time, is required; the strength of this patrolling force on each line being in proportion to the value of the line, and to the force against which it may have to contend. The fleets necessary for the safety of the Channel and Mediterranean are not adapted to the protection of distant lines, nor are the vessels suited to the defence of those lines of any value as a reserve force to be called in to aid in the defence of the Channel and Mediterranean.

But the defence of our communications is not secured by the mere presence of sufficient naval force at home or in the Mediterranean; for as there are two modes of attack on the United Kingdom, so there are two ways in which our lines of communication may be destroyed—1st. By direct attack on the point of convergence. 2nd. By a variety of attacks on one or more lines at points far removed from the place where they all meet. Assuming provision for meeting the first to have been made, I will now deal with the means to be adopted to meet this other mode of attack; and this is the most interesting portion of my subject.

Communications, whether sea or land, whether long or short, *can only be secured by a firm grasp of the points which command them.* The greater the extent of the line, the greater is the number of defended points necessary for its safety. In order to cut a line of communication, the first thing to be done is to seize the point which commands it, and in defending a line the point which commands it is the last to surrender. Such points are the minor bases of operation of forces acting in defence of the line. The relative im-

portance of such points to the line, and to each other, can only be estimated by the circumstances of their geographical position and their distance from the main base from which the line springs.

There is this difference, however, between the defence of sea as compared with land communications. Naturally in the second, a purely military force only is required, but in the case of sea lines the employment of a purely military as well as a purely naval force is necessary. The navy furnishes the patrolling or skirmishing force, while the army secures to it its bases or arsenals. To leave the naval force responsible for the protection of its base would be to tie its hands. It would be "using the fleet to maintain its arsenals, instead of the arsenals to maintain the fleet."* Some years ago a governor of an eastern Colony proposed to leave such places almost exclusively to naval protection, and the late Sir John Burgoyne thus speaks of the value of the proposition: "Under the system proposed, a small squadron, with 3,000 or 4,000 troops in eastern seas in time of war, would take the Mauritius and Hong Kong, and destroy the naval arsenal and means at Trincomalee, if it did not capture the whole island of Ceylon."†

The force thus alluded to might be Russian or that of some other power. In any case, how would the loss of Ceylon affect our military position in India? Is it likely that aggression would stop there? Might it not gather strength, and might not Ceylon be a convenient base of operation for an attack on Australasia? If, therefore, we trust the protection of our lines exclusively to a purely naval force, by imposing on our fleets the defence of the points which command them, we risk, nay we court a general attack, not on England, not on the Channel, but on "our vast Colonial empire, our extended commerce, and interest in every quarter of the globe."

It is now time to ask what are these points? and, in an attempt to reply, I will take each line separately:—

1. The line to Canada. The only point here is a terminal one—it is Halifax.

2. To the West Indies. Here we have Bermuda, the Bahamas, Jamaica and Antigua. The strategic value of Bermuda is in some degree understood. The military value of the Bahamas was fixed by Sir John Burgoyne.‡ Jamaica, from its central position and capacious harbour, is of considerable importance. I add Antigua for two reasons—(1) because Jamaica is far too leeward to be of

* Vide Defence Commission Report, 1859.

† See Appendix to "Life of Field Marshal Sir J. Burgoyne."

‡ Ibid.

value as a coaling station or arsenal for cruisers acting in the defence of communications to the Eastern Islands; such vessels would burn a great quantity of fuel in steaming up to their station from Jamaica against the trades; (2) vessels bound for the greater Antilles and Gulf of Mexico generally pass between Antigua and Guadaloupe.

3. To India, the East, and Australasia, by the Mediterranean. The points here are Gibraltar, Malta, Aden, Bombay, Cape Comorin,* and King George's Sound on the main line, with Trincomalee, Singapore, and Hong Kong on its northern branch.

Of all the Imperial roads this is the most difficult to defend, owing to its want of continuity. The most commanding position—the Isthmus of Suez—is not in our possession. Here our line can be most easily cut, and here we have least power to prevent the contingency. So long as the canal is neutral or in the hands of a neutral power, so long is it at the disposal of friend and foe alike. Were it in the hands of our enemies, it is only open to them and not to us. To make this line safe, the occupation by military force of the Isthmus might, under certain conditions, be a necessity. Are we prepared for that?

Supposing it to be neutral, it must be remembered that if purely naval power cannot be entirely relied on for the local protection of our outposts, neither can it be relied on to prevent the entry into the Nile of vessels of our enemy, and once there they would have the whole of our Eastern possessions at their mercy, unless we have a force sufficient to blockade the Red Sea. But as the necessity for the existence of such a force rests on the possibility of our direct communications being cut somewhere between the Red Sea and the English Channel, it is important to consider how our fleets in the East could exist, without adequate means of supply and repair, independent of our home resources.

Such considerations as these point to the absolute necessity of having a commanding and strongly-defended great naval arsenal in the Eastern hemisphere. Here we might have ships and stores in reserve; here should be the great base of naval operations in peace and war for all our Eastern fleets. Is it safe to assume that the resources of Portsmouth, Chatham, and Plymouth would be equal to the task of supplying our war fleets throughout the world

* Although there is not now any harbour of importance at Cape Comorin, those who have read the paper on "Indian Harbours" by General Sir A. Cotton, will understand the strategic importance of the position, and the possibility of creating a harbour at "Colachul" in its vicinity.

at such time with ships, stores, and means of repair? Can we dream of private firms during maritime war, taking contracts to maintain, in a state of efficiency, war fleets 6,000 and 10,000 miles off?

With the development of the resources of India, Australia, New Zealand, and a host of smaller possessions, the necessity for securing their roads increases; so also increase the power of providing and supporting adequate means of defence.* With a Russian sea-board on the one hand, and an American sea-board on the other, it cannot be said that by their remoteness from us they are removed from danger of attack: nor must it be forgotten that the very fact of their distance from us adds to our difficulties in defending them, unless by a judicious combination of Imperial resources—to which India should contribute a large proportion—we render the fleets for their defence independent to a large extent of home support.

If naval protection without military protection be productive of danger to the Empire, great disaster may also be expected to result from attempting to hold distant possessions by military force, if that force might be completely isolated and locked out from its sources of supply and reserves for want of the naval protection of its communication with the Imperial base. If it be asked what we have done to guard against the possible isolation of our army in India? the reply is, we have abolished the Indian navy and substituted nothing in its place! Though India supports the army necessary for its safety, it contributes nothing† towards a fleet for the protection and security of the communications of the army, without which it cannot exist.

Two circumstances have lately occurred to threaten our command of this direct route—the opening of the Suez Canal, and the removal of the restrictions placed upon Russian power in the Euxine. We agreed to the latter on *moral* grounds. But if on moral grounds we have practically shown our sympathy with the desire of Russia to accumulate physical force in the Black Sea, we should extend our sympathy to India and our Eastern Colonies, and be careful that it takes an equally practical form, by the creation of a naval arsenal adapted to the probable requirement of the defence of their communications: thus balancing the power of resistance with the increased power of aggression which our “moral sympathy” has so generously provided.

* The total value of exports and imports of India, Ceylon, and Australasia is about four-fifths of the total value of exports and imports of the United States.

† The contribution of £31,627 per annum from the Indian Government, on account of the expense of a fleet on Indian stations, is practically nothing.

To attempt to determine the exact site for such a reserve naval arsenal for the Eastern portion of the Empire would be beyond the scope of this paper, but considerations respecting climate, and its effects on stores, &c., point to some port of Australia as best adapted for the purpose. The strategic importance of Bombay, however, cannot be overlooked. It must be borne in mind that the appliances, such as docks and machinery for repairs, &c., would be available for our commercial fleets in peace; and hence that Imperial resources expended to provide for the contingency of war, could not be regarded as money thrown away in peace.

4th line: To India and the East, and Australasia, round the Cape. Here the points are Sierra Leone, Ascension, St. Helena, Simon's Bay, the Mauritius, and King George's Sound.

5th line: From Australasia and Vancouver's Island, round Cape Horn. Here we have Sierra Leone, Ascension, the Falkland Islands, and Sydney. These points are, however, valueless for the defence of the line between Vancouver's Island and Australia, but a commanding position for this part of the line has been offered to the Government—the Fiji Islands. It remains to be seen whether the Government accepts the offer. It is a position of great importance from an Imperial strategic point of view. The Hydrographer of the Admiralty thus speaks of it: "The Fijis lie nearly in the direct track from Panama to Sydney, and if a steamer touched at one of them for coal she would only lengthen her voyage about 320 miles, or one day's run, in a distance of 8,000 miles. In like manner, in the voyage from Vancouver's Island to Sydney, the touching at Fiji would lengthen the distance 420 miles in a voyage of 7,000. An intermediate station between Panama and Sydney will be most desirable—indeed, if the proposed mail route be carried out it is indispensable. In the above statement I have confined myself to answering questions referred to me by the Colonial Office; but, on looking into the subject, I have been much struck by the entire want of Great Britain of any advanced position in the Pacific Ocean. We have valuable possessions on either side, as at Vancouver's Island and Sydney, but not an islet or a rock in the 7,000 miles that separate them. We have no island on which to place a coaling station, and where we could ensure fresh supplies."

A comparison between the value of our property passing and repassing in the vicinity of these islands with that of other nations, will show that we have a vastly greater interest in maintaining freedom of communications in that district than any other power. It therefore follows that the military value of the position to any

other maritime power is greater when regarded as a means of aggression than as necessary for purposes of defence. But to us its possession is vital as a rallying-point of defence, though of small value as a base for offensive operation. On the principle, therefore, of "defence not defiance" the military arguments for the annexation of the Fijis should meet with the approval of the Government.

This very hasty sketch of the ground to be defended must necessarily be subject to modification and alteration on more accurate and minute survey. It must be regarded only at present as an attempt to apply general principles to the Empire as a whole.

In the selection of the points the following conditions should be fulfilled—1. They must be in our possession, and on or near a line of communication. 2. They should possess natural advantages, such as safe and commodious shelter for the war and commercial fleets, easy of access, and capable of defence. 3. They should be as far as possible the natural rendezvous at all times of vessels passing and repassing along the line, and the chief, if not the only, coaling station of the district they command.

Too much attention cannot be paid to the selection of the coaling stations of the Empire. They should be under our control. Take for example the West Indies. The great coaling station in that district—St. Thomas—is not in our possession. The consequence is, that were we engaged in hostilities in that quarter, a large portion of our force would be necessarily employed in the blockade—so far as our enemy is concerned—of this point, and would be so much deducted from the force available and required for other purposes.

It is possible at first sight Sierra Leone and Ascension may not appear to be of Imperial value, or to fulfil these conditions. 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; and

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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 cannot, 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 "parsimony." By war ministers it is used alternately to lull 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 realise that the command of the

sea can only be maintained by a scientific combination of three things—strategy, purely military 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 *Powhattan*, the *Niagara*, the *Iroquois*, the *Keystone*, and the *San 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.”*

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

* “My Adventures Afloat,” by Admiral Semmes.

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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 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 depôts along the Imperial lines should be efficiently and thoroughly defended; that they should not be selected at haphazard, 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,* 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 American 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 active demand for tonnage to all parts of the world. It is indeed to us a home picture—the only one we trust to have for many years to come—of the widespread evils of war in modern days. But it is a picture quite unique in its nature, for the nation to which these seventeen fine ships belong has a navy perhaps second only to Great Britain, and the enemy with which she has to cope is but a schism from herself, possessed of no port that is not blockaded, and owning not more than five or six vessels on the high seas. The tactics with which the Federals have to combat are without precedent, and the means to enable them successfully to do so have not yet been devised."

It is as well to remark, that at the time this was written the naval force of the Federals consisted of about 700 ships and some 40,000 men! Yet it was not equal to preventing the interruption of American commerce in distant seas, although it maintained 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 *revised* 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."—*Vide* "My Adventures Afloat," by Admiral Semmes.

strict blockade of the enemy's ports. Now Singapore was a neutral port, and therefore afforded protection to the Federal vessels; but where are the available ports likely to be neutral, along our lines, to afford protection to our commercial fleets under similar circumstances? The natural rendezvous of commercial fleets are in our possession, and could only afford protection in proportion to their means of defence.

By securing bases of operation for our war fleets, we also provide safe refuge for our traders at places where it is most required. If ever we are in real danger of invasion, we shall be actually engaged in a naval war; we shall not have the excuse that the tactics we have then to combat "are without precedent;" but we may bitterly regret that the means "to enable us successfully to do so have not been devised," not from lack of power, but from want of will.

While it is essential to guard the strategic points from capture by military force, it is equally necessary to secure their resources from destruction by bombardment from the sea; and in many instances military force would be—from natural circumstances and situation—powerless to prevent such a contingency. The destruction of certain coal depôts might be accomplished in a few hours by a single ship with very few guns; and heavy requisitions, on pain of instant bombardment, might be hastily levied on a fleet of merchantmen in harbour by "an intelligent maritime Uhlan" in the shape of an insignificant cruiser, even in the presence of military force. This danger can in several instances only be met by port defence vessels, and torpedoed. A very small local force, if trained and provided with these weapons, would meet the requirement. But where are the weapons? Where is the force? It will be too late to await the outbreak of war to provide the weapons and to train the force, for an attack on our coal depôts at the strategic points will not be the last, but the first act in the drama of future war. The means for their destruction are always at the disposal of any maritime power, but the measures for their adequate defence take much time to develop. A single cruiser bringing her guns to bear on one of our coal depôts, would in a few hours paralyse the action of our fleet for months.

It is not possible here to enter more fully into details respecting the defence of the Imperial roads, which is the first, and can be made the strongest line, of Colonial defences. In no way can our Colonies and possessions be so efficiently protected as by a firm command of their communications, for with the exception of Canada and India they would thus be exempted from the possi-

bility of attack, and unless Canada and India are to be cut off from succour and support, their communications must be held, come what may.

The lines of Colonial defences may be thus summarised :—

1. The defence of their communications, which involves fortifying the Imperial strategic points, and the existence of a purely naval and a purely military force; the one equal to the task of keeping open the roads between the points, the other sufficient to secure those points from capture in the necessary absence of the fleet.

2. The interior line of sea-defence, which must provide against the destruction, by bombardment from the sea, of naval resources at the strategic points in cases where that object cannot be secured by land batteries and military force. It also includes similar provision for the protection of Colonial mercantile ports to prevent their commercial reduction by enormous requisitions.

3. The defence of the soil of all Colonies and places not necessary to the Empire as military and strategic positions.

Having thus briefly viewed the nature of our requirements, it is desirable to draw some practical conclusions as to how they can best be met.

The communications of the Empire being the common property of all its component parts, each portion, according to the use it makes of them, has a direct interest in their defence, and should contribute to that object.

The forces intended for the defence of the communications must be Imperial, and not Colonial. They must be prepared to act at any point on the Imperial lines where they may happen to be required. Naval Colonial forces created under the Naval Defence Act of 1865 are only of value, and that to a very limited extent, to meet the necessities of the second or interior line of Colonial defence.

The forces necessary for the defence of the Imperial communications should be under the control of one directing head. As military force is necessary to the support of naval power, and as in our case military force is in its turn dependent upon naval power, the distribution of the one must have reference to that of the other. If, therefore, the military force is under the control of one department, and the naval force under that of another, the defence of our communications is, to use a homely phrase, "between two stools." In vain might our "Admiralty" despatch fleets to distant seas, if the bases of their operation are not secured by the "War Office;" equally valueless would be the distribution of military force for the protection of those places by the War Office, if the

Admiralty do not keep the communications between them open. Unless there be a war minister responsible for, and controlling the general principles which should govern the action of each department, nothing but confusion can result when the Imperial communications are in danger.

If the Colonies are really in earnest in matters relating to their defence, it is time they should combine to force on the attention of the Imperial Parliament the neglected state of the Imperial roads, and the necessity for devising adequate means for their security. They must, however, be prepared to bear their fair share of the burden.

If the mind of the mother-country is morbid, and, from dwelling continually on the terrors of invasion, has lost the power of comprehending the consequences of investment, it is time her young and vigorous offspring should awaken her to a true sense of her position.

A Royal Commission to inquire into the defence of the Imperial communications, if properly constituted on an Imperial basis, would lead to most important results. It may be taken as a certainty that such a Commission would recommend the permanent strengthening of the great strategic points, which it would be in a position accurately to define. It might possibly determine the just limits of Imperial and Colonial responsibilities in the question of defence.

With the creation of Imperial fortresses commanding the Imperial roads would grow up a feeling of common security. They would be links in the chain which binds together the military forces of our Empire: stepping-stones by which those forces can cross to afford mutual assistance and support.

Such a Commission, and such measures, might prepare the way for a Federation of the war forces of the Empire, which is essential to its safety. It would be easier in a given time to collect forces from all parts of the Empire at a given point now, than it was to concentrate the military forces in the United Kingdom on any particular place on the coast line sixty years ago. It is singular that when science has done, and is doing, so much to increase our power of concentration, Imperial policy should be undoing her work by persisting in the creation of local forces which it is impossible to move, and all this at a time when concentration is the great principle of attack, and the power of concentration is the great principle of defence. Though by nature and by science we possess all the physical means necessary for the concentration of military forces, we have neglected to turn them to account, and further, by limiting the action of military forces to the particular

portions of the Empire where they are raised, we wilfully destroy the necessary power of resisting concentrated attack by a combination of Imperial resources, which is in these days the true source of strength.

It is only in maintaining the second line of Colonial defences that local forces are of real value, but it is the duty of the Empire to see that they are provided with the means and weapons to enable them to act. For the first and third lines they are of no avail, so long as the necessary power of concentration at the weakest point is absent. It is military necessity, and not constitutional law, which determines where the greatest power of resistance is to be applied.

While we acknowledge and applaud the principle, that it is every man's duty to defend his home, it is to be regretted that our ideas of its practical application are lamentably indistinct. The mother country has put her own construction on the word "home," in applying the principle of calling into existence military forces which can only be used to put up her shop shutters and to bar her doors. She calls on her children to adopt her definition of its meaning and to follow her example, and some have done so. But who among the armies thus organised, for what she is pleased to call "home defence," can determine the exact distance from a man's home at which the obligation ends? Who can draw the magic circle which is to include the territorial area of his duty to die for his country? Home is something more than an abstract idea having reference only to locality; its foundations are laid in common interests, sympathy, and affection. A "silver streak of sea" cannot divide these interests, nor can miles of ocean sever the strong ties of affection and of sympathy. Hence it is that, from whatever quarter of the Empire a cry for help comes—wherever the British flag waves over Englishmen struggling on their own ground for all they hold dear—it is there our home is in danger, there is the rallying-point of forces created for its defence.

While we boast of armed hosts here and in the Colonies, whose proud motto is "home defence," they must "survey the Empire" to "behold our home."

At the conclusion of the reading, the President said he had to express the thanks of the society to Captain Colomb for his able and patriotic Paper. He only regretted that there had not been more Fellows present to hear it read. They would, however, have the advantage of circulating the Paper in the *European Mail*

to all the Colonies. He confessed that as to the policy the Paper indicated, and the measures suggested, he strongly agreed with Captain Colomb, but they must look for the execution of these measures to be carried out by the action of the Colonies themselves. He feared that the House of Commons was too restricted in its policy and measures to look at such a wide question as this. He thought they must look to the Colonies to get this policy adopted and enforced. He hoped that as the Colonies grew in wealth and strength they would see in what their true interests lay. They should not rest satisfied until federation had been achieved, and then the Colonies should insist upon their right in mutually contributing to the defence of the empire, and after this was done, in controlling the disposition of the forces they had helped to maintain. He meant shortly to visit Canada, and was glad that on this the last meeting of the year so patriotic and able a Paper had been read, which would no doubt be circulated in Canada before he arrived there. The vote of thanks to Captain Colomb was then unanimously carried.

Mr. FREDERICK YOUNG regretted that the extremely valuable Paper just read had been presented under circumstances which rendered it impossible for them to do it justice by discussion. It would not do to let the Paper go forth to the world without its being quite understood that, though no doubt acceptable in many points to the meeting, it would have been fully discussed if time had admitted.

Colonel ALCOCK, referring to the recent events on the Gold Coast, deprecated the Governmental action which had deprived the native population of obtaining means of defence, and now, consequent on this, famine and serious after wars were imminent. He might add that the reason we lost the Ionian Islands was simply because the Greeks, not being encouraged to take part in their own defence, had no means of entering into military affairs, and sent their young men to prepare for the Civil Service in Italy. They all came back Carbonari, and thus it was that these beautiful islands had been lost.

