

Mahan's *Life of Nelson*

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Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson is Britain's most famous and revered fighting seaman. More biographies have been written about him than any other figure in British history and they continue to appear with singular regularity. The standard professional study, however, remains that by Alfred Thayer Mahan, which was first published in two volumes in 1897. A revised one-volume "popular edition" was issued in 1899 and a similar two-volume version in 1900.¹ The biography was not Mahan's most famous book. Its sales never achieved the levels of *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783* (1890) or its sequel, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812* (1892). Nevertheless, Mahan regarded it as the capstone of his seapower studies. Thereafter, he determined, in a resolution which he soon broke, that he would confine himself to journal articles.

The biography brought together Mahan's belief in the importance of the individual in determining the course of history and his already well-known ideas on naval strategy and tactics. Nelson's story is familiar to the modern reader largely through this book, from which many more recent biographies are derived. Generally, Mahan's judgements have been confirmed. His characterization of Nelson as strategist and tactician, his sailing and battle descriptions and many of his anecdotes are repeated time and again with little variation. Only in the areas of his view of history, of his subjectivity when dealing with the admiral's domestic life and on relatively minor points of interpretation of particular events, do historians differ about the biography. In the main, the book has caused little public controversy. Immediately after its initial appearance, reviewers took Mahan to task for his treatment of Nelson's adulterous love affair with Emma Hamilton and arbitrary handling of the Neapolitan situation in 1798-1799. Although he found such criticism tiresome, Mahan did attempt to take it into account in the revised edition.

Mahan's view of history and its relationship to the biography is not easy to summarize. In some ways it is contradictory. Authorities like Robert Seager II² and William Livezey emphasize the religious element in Mahan's thinking.³ Seager stresses in particular the idea that since Mahan believed his inspiration came from God, history was a kind of revelation. Livezey would probably agree, however, with Donald Schurman's observation that Mahan could "believe that it was safe [both] to trust God and keep the powder dry" and that, in fact, Mahan's approach to history was just as utilitarian as was that of British Admiral and historian Colomb. Schurman suggests that, for Mahan, the purpose of history and, therefore, the basis of any philosophy of history which he may have had, was to influence policy makers. To this end, Mahan stressed the broader implications of naval activities as an instrument of national strategy.⁴ It is true that Mahan

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was a firm Christian of a rather right-wing, unbending kind who sometimes attributed historical actions to divine providence. In his writing, this may well have been a literary device based on his upbringing and not a statement of a consciously thought-out philosophy. In any case, it reflects the fact that when he was writing the Nelson biography between 1893 and late 1896, Mahan had still to attempt to formulate a coherent theory of history. Although implicit in the biography, his notion of "subordination," that details should be subordinate to the central idea, was first formulated for the benefit of the American Historical Association and presented in his Presidential speech to that august body in 1902.⁴ Like many historians and men of action, Mahan never philosophized about what he was doing until forced to do so. To muddy the issue further, Mahan sometimes spoke of history in dialectical terms: progress came through conflicting forces. Wars, therefore, brought moral and social progress. In the particular case of seapower, progress resulted from the clash of "the two great oppositions inherent in naval administration — civil versus military, unity of action against multiplicity of activities."⁵ In a similar vein, Mahan saw Nelson's character as a synthesis of personality opposites, thus reconciling the admiral's "genius" and patriotism with his liaison with Emma Hamilton and his repudiation of Cardinal Ruffo's amnesty agreement with the Neapolitan republicans and the subsequent execution of Carraciolo. Mahan blamed Nelson's moral lapse also on a head wound received at the Battle of the Nile and on the scheming Emma. It was an awkward and unconvincing explanation.

Perhaps the main point has been missed. The essence of Mahan's philosophy of history, if such it can be termed, was evolutionary. Despite the contradictions, and although in 1890 he disclaimed it, we can suggest that if Mahan were to be slotted into any particular school of history, the closest fit would be that of the nineteenth-century Whig-liberals. Although politically very conservative, he saw history as the story of progress. Mahan emphasized not only the importance of individual personality and action but also the interdependence of the individuals within a class (naval officers) which, he believed, was international and not confined to any particular society.' Likewise, the "tendency" of a period of history found its expression in personalities. Indeed, personalities embodied the "progress" which later would be recognized as characteristic of the period. Here was the rather contradictory coupling of the Whig notion of progress with the idea that great men are the forces of history, "although," Mahan cautioned, "they are not the sole agents [of change], but simply the most eminent."

As a serving officer of considerable experience, Mahan was very much concerned with the naval affairs of his own time. As an historian, he believed that the past could teach the future. "There is a very common impression," he wrote to Henry Cabot Lodge in May 1890, "that naval conditions are so changed, that they are practically obsolete for present usefulness. I believe that this feeling...is very erroneous."⁸ Mahan believed that history was an oracle from which to derive eternal principles of naval strategy, tactics and leadership. The approach was, then, didactic. The Nelson biography, like his other works, should be read in the light of its contemporary context, of Mahan's respect for the Royal Navy and his belief that the US Navy had stagnated since the Civil War, of the growth of navalism on both sides of the Atlantic, and of the nineteenth-century idea of progress, all of which seemed to confirm and to nurture Mahan's ideas on seapower and the need for their wide dissemination.

Mahan agreed with the great Whig historian T.B. Macaulay that "doctrines must be embodied before they can excite strong public feeling."⁹ Nelson's life was thus a tale for the instruction of the present generation. Nelson represented the epitome of naval leadership and the personification of what seapower was about. "Nelson embodies, and so gives tangible shape to the idea of British Sea Power," Mahan wrote to his publisher in 1897.¹⁰ Given this, Mahan's biography of Nelson fits nicely into the context of the growing awareness in the late nineteenth century of the problems caused by technological progress and increasing specialisation expressed in the establishment of staff schools and naval colleges which taught such things as "leadership." Leaders were not born but could be produced once the eternal truths were discovered, an idea not unknown today. "Types," Mahan said, "are permanent.""

In his seapower volumes Mahan had nowhere defined what he meant by the term. Instead, the nature of seapower was revealed by the unfolding of historical examples accompanied by commentary. Nelson himself had fallen heir to a "distinctive evolution of naval warfare...to which Nelson, under the peculiar and exceptional circumstances which made his opportunity, gave an extension that immortalized him."¹² Naturally, Mahan adopted an evolutionary pattern for the biography. In January 1897, he told his American publisher, John M. Brown, that "I have purposely omitted any attempt to summarize Nelson's character & c. thinking it more artistic to aim at producing the impression I seek by the gradual evolution of the book itself."¹³ The lessons to be learned from Nelson were, Mahan felt, self-evident, unveiling themselves as the narrative unfolded. And so the book built toward its grand climax: Nelson's death at Trafalgar. The hero's dying moments showed his character with absolute fidelity. "His death is an epitome of his life."¹⁴ To proceed any further, Mahan believed, "would be like a post-mortem, and in the contrast would approach bathos."¹⁵ In the final page of the biography, Mahan eulogised: "Wherever danger has to be faced or duty to be done, at cost to self, men will draw inspiration from the name and deeds of Nelson."¹⁶ Although he thought briefly of writing a separate article on the "Salient Characteristics of Nelson's Genius," he rejected the project as unnecessary."

Mahan's methodology was ideally suited to his subject and to his purpose. Biography, Mahan believed, should be a labour of love. His first objective was to get to know Nelson as intimately as possible given the limitations of the evidence. Emotional involvement on a personal and a professional level was the key: "I would no more attempt to write [a biography] of a man for whom I felt no warm admiration, than I would maintain friendship with one for whom I had no affection."¹⁸ Through attachment "little short of affection," Mahan hoped to present the admiral as flesh and blood to the reading public, professional and lay alike.¹⁹ This would be achieved through "a careful study of Nelson's voluminous correspondence, analyzing it, in order to detect the leading features of temperament, traits of thought, and motives of action."²⁰ Nelson's character would be revealed gradually "by such grouping of incidents and utterances...as shall serve by their joint evidence to emphasize particular traits, or particular opinions, more forcibly than when such testimonies are scattered far apart; as they would be, if recounted in a strict order of time."²¹ Hence, narrative and analysis were leavened with anecdote, not for its own sake but to illustrate the constitution of the hero. This was the essence of the "subordination" theory put into practice. Mahan's selection of anecdote was based on his

own Victorian sense of propriety and calculated to show that Nelson possessed the virtues of a late nineteenth-century upper-class gentleman. An unswerving dedication to duty, careful planning and imaginative daring, together with a Christian bearing, were the main qualities to be cultivated in a naval officer. Episodes which suggested that Nelson did not always behave in the appropriate manner, like that in which Lady Nelson held a basin into which Lady Hamilton was vomiting while the admiral abused his wife for her heartlessness, were omitted as irrelevant in depicting his true character.²² His sympathies "greatly enlisted on behalf of Lady Nelson," Mahan would have liked to omit all reference to the admiral's extramarital affair.²³ In the preface to the first edition, he acknowledged his use of Alfred Morrison's collection of Hamilton and Nelson letters, "upon which must necessarily be based such account of Nelson's relations with Lady Hamilton as, unfortunately, cannot be omitted wholly from a life so profoundly affected by them."²⁴ Nevertheless, it must be said that Mahan's total immersion in the letters and diaries of the admiral and his contemporaries, together with correspondence and interviews with relatives of those who had served with Nelson, led to an understanding of the professional life of his subject which was far more perceptive than had been achieved by earlier writers. Coupled with his strategic ideas and knowledge of battle tactics, these factors made Mahan's *Life of Nelson* his most vivid and readable work. It was here that Mahan's research laid the basis for many later studies of Nelson.

Mahan came to write the biography quite fortuitously. Orders to assume command of the cruiser *Chicago* in May 1893 led him to postpone a projected book on the War of 1812 and to turn to a life of Nelson as a natural follow-on to *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812* (1892). Since the book was published less than six months before his posting to sea-duty, Mahan had the events of the period fresh in his mind, as was his analysis of Nelson's campaigns and battles. He took to sea with him Nicolas' collection of Nelson's letters and as many Nelson biographies as he could lay his hands on. Command of a ship, however, was not conducive to scholarship. That September, referring to two proposed articles for *Harper's Monthly*, Mahan complained to Horace Scudder that "I am so hampered by my work of petty administration that I have little power to do intellectual work...It is not merely want of time, though there is that to some extent; but what I feel most is the mental weariness caused by sustained, yet disconnected, occupations."²⁵ Nevertheless, during *Chicago's* socially-demanding two-year cruise on the European Station, and despite an acrimonious feud with his commanding officer, Rear Admiral Henry Erben, Mahan found time to conduct interviews and do a great deal of documentary research. By the time *Chicago* decommissioned on 1 May 1895, he had written the story as far as the siege of Bastia in 1794. Thereafter, progress was rapid. The first volume was finished on 1 April 1896, the second by the first week of November. In March 1897, the first edition of *The Life of Nelson*, in two volumes, appeared in the bookshops.

Initial reactions were favourable. "It is a glorious book," gushed R.B. Marston, Mahan's London publisher. "You have brought Nelson to life again. As an Englishman and the first to read your book, I can perfectly safely thank you for it in the name of our whole nation."²⁶ Earl Nelson, who had also received an advance copy, thanked Mahan "for setting so nobly before the world all the power and achievements of England's Admiral."²⁷ Lord de Saumarez, grandson of one of Nelson's captains, judged the work "a master-

piece."²⁸ In May 1897, Mahan quite properly declined a proposal put to him by Colonel J.B. Sterling, editor of the *Journal* of the Royal United Service Institution, to accept an honorary commission in the Royal Navy. The following April, Mahan was honoured with an invitation by the Navy League of Great Britain to dine. In 1900 the Royal United Service Institution awarded him the Chesney Gold Medal in recognition of the bearing of his works *The Influence of Sea Power* and *The Life of Nelson* upon "the welfare of the British Empire, the strength of which is so essential to the cause of our English-speaking race, and of mankind in general."²⁹ The Chesney Gold Medal was the highest mark of esteem which could be bestowed by Britain's most influential defence lobby. Only on one other occasion has it been awarded to a foreigner, another American historian of the Royal Navy, Professor Arthur Marder in 1970.

The reviewers, too, were kind. *The Times'* naval correspondent, J.R. Thursfield, judged the book to have "no important rival...[T]his is the book to which all students of the hero of the Nile, of Copenhagen, and Trafalgar will turn, as his one authoritative, accurate, and adequate biography and psychology."³⁰ Privately, Thursfield told Mahan: "Henceforth, 'There is but one Nelson' for all of us, and that is the Nelson who lives in your pages."³¹ Even though almost all leading naval writers voiced similar enthusiasm for the work, they also alluded to Mahan's naive handling of the Hamilton and Neapolitan affairs. Spenser Wilkinson, the military correspondent of the *Tory Morning Post*, who in 1908 became the first Chichele Professor at Oxford, pointed out in an otherwise laudatory review that "The passionate attachment to Lady Hamilton is just what was to be expected from a man of Nelson's temperament."³² The Anglo-Irish jurist and "blue water" advocate, William O'Connor Morris, gently suggested that Lady Nelson's "somewhat cold, emotionless, and commonplace nature made her no fit helpmeet for a hero of his enthusiastic character." Morris believed, however, that the real importance of the book was as a distinguished American's expression of admiration for and understanding of British seapower. "It is worth a ship load of arbitration treaties," he wrote.³³

As is usual with the publication of any scholarly work, a few of the well-disposed reviewers, like Thursfield, Sterling and J.K. Laughton, all staunch admirers, drew Mahan's attention also to several minor factual mistakes and omissions. These gave Mahan some bother but caused no ill-feeling. "I fear the fault cannot be laid to the printers," he admitted in a letter of appreciation to Colonel Sterling, "as I diligently read all the first proofs *twice*, and the finals once."³⁴ A reading of the letters demonstrates that Mahan remained on excellent terms with the British navalists who reviewed both the first and second editions of the Nelson biography.³⁵ Mahan insisted, in a letter of instruction to John Brown, that the value of the book "as a biography" was not affected by the errors. "They dont touch the *man* and for the most part dont even concern him. All the same they *are* errors & must be changed."³⁶ And, of course, Mahan was correct. He was careful to so frame corrections and revisions that they caused no substantive change to his portrait. As a result, some new material concerned with the separation of Nelson from his wife and with the reason for withholding the Copenhagen medals was added to the revised version.

The biography received only a few unfriendly reviews, most from non-naval men that were dismissed as inconsequential.³⁷ The loudest, least understanding and only bitter attack on Mahan's defence of Nelson came from F.P. Badham, a classicist and amateur naval historian, in half a dozen polemical articles between 1897 and 1899. Badham

accused Mahan of partiality in his treatment of Nelson's political and personal behaviour at Naples in June 1799 and charged that he had ignored or overlooked a great deal of documentary evidence, some of it in the Italian language, which showed Nelson's actions to have been arbitrary and illegal. But Badham's argument and his handling of the evidence were often slipshod, weaknesses which Mahan and J.K. Laughton, who was widely regarded as Britain's leading naval historian, took full advantage of in defending the biography. Perusal of the new evidence convinced Mahan that nothing brought forward by Badham required fundamental alteration of his assessment of Nelson and the Neapolitan episode. Nevertheless, he did attempt to take the criticism into account. The revised edition, with eighteen additional pages of text, and an accompanying article on "The Neapolitan Republicans and Nelson's Accusers," both of which appeared in June 1899, caused Mahan "more trouble than any equal amount of result I have ever produced."³⁸ That did not end the controversy. Dissatisfied with the mild changes in the revised account, Badham renewed the attack. The squabble descended to the level of childish petulance before it fizzled out by the end of 1900. That October, a week before Trafalgar Day, Mahan declared in the *English Historical Review*: "That a man is a national hero, and is dead, does not disentitle him to the presumption of innocence until guilt is proved; nor is it partiality to declare positively that a great and honourable name has not been stained, accepting as proof his own assertion, unless this is rebutted by clear and tenable evidence."³⁹ In his autobiography, published in 1907, Mahan had the last word. Although he admitted that in the first edition of *The Life of Nelson* he had fallen "into two mistakes of some importance," he continued to insist that "while they were blemishes, and needed correction, they did not, and do not, to my mind affect the portrait — the conveyance of true personality."⁴⁰

By 28 June 1897, 5000 copies had been sold in Britain. A year later, however, sales had slumped. "I am sorry *Nelson* is not doing better," Mahan lamented to John Brown, "but it was a book that went with a rush at first, & I suppose there had to be a pause."⁴¹ Sales of the revised edition were similarly disappointing. He should not have been surprised. The Badham controversy, storm-in-a-teacup though it was, may, as Seager suggests, have cut into sales.⁴² Other factors may be significant. J.K. Laughton's *The Nelson Memorial: Nelson and His Companions in Arms* had appeared just a few months earlier.⁴³ Perhaps even more important, Mahan seems never to have been clear about the audience for whom the biography was intended. Although he felt that all his major ideas were gathered together in the Nelson biography, their message for governments and naval circles had already been made in the two Seapower volumes. Many of those who had purchased the earlier works would have felt no great compulsion to buy the new book. Priced at thirty-six shillings, the regular edition would be beyond the reach of many in the lower-middle class for whom it might be expected to have had some appeal.

The Life of Nelson was the culmination of Mahan's seapower studies only in that it linked the strategic and tactical considerations of the earlier works with Mahan's belief in the importance of the individual's leadership qualities. Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to gauge with any certainty the particular influence of Mahan's biography of Nelson, most leading navalists who reviewed the book in glowing terms did so not because it stated much that was new but because it brought together and confirmed the ideas which Mahan's earlier, and less readable, works had exposed. In that sense, the

book confirmed the doctrine of seapower. To Mahan, the message of the Nelson biography to the Royal Navy was straightforward. The great officers of the eighteenth century, he taught, had resurrected and reformulated the ancient and immutable principles of naval warfare; the task of the nineteenth century was to adapt those principles to modern material. "For the artist is greater than his materials, the warrior than his arms; and it is in the man rather than in his weapons that the navy of the eighteenth century wrought its final conspicuous triumph [at Trafalgar]."⁴⁴ Among navalists it was not quite that simple. The Nelson biography added weight to both sides of the argument within the bluewater school over weaponry and strategy. The so-called "historical" school popularised the idea of offensive defence, that the fleet should actively seek out the enemy and destroy it. The more cautious "material" school emphasised that firepower and technological progress required modification of old ideas of strategy and tactics.⁴⁵ Both schools looked in varying degrees to Mahan and to Nelson for guidance. Both agreed on the principles contained in the *Influence* books and that seapower strategy culminated when opposing fleets met in a battle of annihilation, the victor of which would command the oceans. Admiral "Jackie" Fisher, a leading advocate for the "material" school and father of the British *Dreadnought* battleship, believed that only superior numbers and technology could assure victory in a great naval battle. War should be fought with caution, not rashness — an essentially defensive doctrine. Nevertheless, he was fond of quoting, and misquoting, Nelson and consciously sought to find in Sir John Jellicoe a second Nelson who would annihilate the enemy in a new Trafalgar. The "historical" school, on the other hand, saw in Nelson the spirit of heroic risk taking and insisted that the new technology had not changed "the leading principles of Naval Warfare."⁴⁶ In 1902, Sir John Colomb cited Nelson's example to urge the adoption of "offensive defence" to "seek out and eliminate, or paralyse, the fleets, squadrons, or ships of the enemy in preference to using our naval power to directly guard our shores." British naval policy, he said, "cannot differ from the policy of an island a hundred years ago."⁴⁷ The division between the two schools was not always clear-cut. Indeed, sometimes both sides appealed to the same Nelson episode to justify the same course of action but from different standpoints. Admiral Fisher, for example, in 1905 suggested, mock-seriously, to "Copenhagen" the German fleet in Kiel. The preemptive strike stemmed both from the historical school's vision of Nelsonic daring and the material school's idea of Nelson's strategic and tactical foresight to destroy the enemy before it could gain numerical superiority.

The message contained in *The Life of Nelson* was not solely, nor even mainly, for the already converted. Neither was it aimed at converting to the navalist cause British Liberal politicians; Mahan had long since given up on that task. The real purpose of the Nelson biography was to put the gospel of seapower in such a way that it could be imbibed by the man-on-the-street and thus lend force to the arguments of the naval lobbies in both the US and Britain. Mahan believed that in the days of electoral politics, public opinion had to be moulded in the correct direction. "The sentiment of a people is the most energetic element in national action," he wrote in 1910.⁴⁸ "Correct public opinion," he thought, "promotes interest and induces intelligent pressure upon the representatives of the people, to provide during peace the organization of force... and it also tends to avert unintelligent pressure which, when war exists, is apt to assume the form of unreasoning and unreasonable panic."⁴⁹ "Correct" public opinion would also

ultimately produce a new national character. To Mahan, "national character" was the product of the accumulation of the character of individuals. A good utilitarian precept, correctly moulded it also meant the achievement of national efficiency, greater productivity and a widespread interest in and knowledge of maritime affairs. On several occasions, Mahan voiced his belief that the experience of the past could be used to influence public opinion. Naval circles in Britain were of the same view. Hence, Nelson was to be the role model for the ordinary man as well as for the naval officer. His example would, Mahan believed, popularize the notion of seapower.

Published at the height of the British naval revivalist movement, the biography's appearance coincided with the recently formed British Navy League's attempts to awaken the general public to the need for naval reform and rearmament. Part of this movement was the attempt to recreate a cult of Nelson, which had lain dormant since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and to establish Trafalgar Day as a public holiday in the new patriotic calendar, which included St. George's and Empire days and the celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Although Mahan's biography did not create the legend of Nelson's genius, it did add authority to efforts to re-establish in the public mind the figure of Britain's sea hero; that image was already being formed when Mahan's book appeared.

For many of the conservative upper classes, still wedded to the cult of amateurism and unsettled by the rapid pace of change, the Mahanian notion that technological progress could not replace sound leadership must have been profoundly comforting. The Nelsonian virtues of loyalty and duty to God and monarch, and their right to leadership, were part of the natural order for these men. It is not surprising that a considerable number joined the Navy League. Mahan certainly added his not inconsiderable authority to the often vague but broad upper-class idolatry of Nelson, which peaked in the League's 1905 Trafalgar centenary ceremonies.

The ruling orders themselves, however, were not firmly behind naval rearmament. Most Conservatives supported increased naval expenditure and the Navy League's efforts to educate correctly the general public. On the other hand, the Liberal party possessed a strong radical wing and even those leaders who supported the "bluewater" school voiced fears of what they perceived as a shrill jingoistic note in the League's campaign to create an instant Nelson tradition. And in the 1906 British general election, which gave the Liberals a massive victory, the voting population demonstrated that they were far more concerned with questions of social welfare than they were with battleships."

The message of leadership and duty which was taken to heart by much of Britain's ruling circle never got through to the bulk of the population, who remained as ignorant of Nelson as ever they had been. The disappointing sales figures suggest that outside of a restricted middle- and upper-class coterie, few people in Britain took much notice of the book. For the man-on-the-street who took any interest at all, seapower was counted in numbers of battleships. Admiral Fisher was a far more persuasive popular figure outside of the broad naval lobby than a mythological Nelson resurrected from the grave. Certainly, if one can judge from the experience of the British navalist movement as a whole, the drive to canonize Nelson, to which the book added weight, was a dismal failure. Several reasons can be adduced for this. The Nelson whose image was advanced by the Navy League was the moral, ruling-class Victorian portrayed in Mahan's biography. In the iconography of the late nineteenth century, Nelson was transformed

from a genuinely popular naval hero into a stereotypical muscular Christian. A great deal of evidence concerning the League-sponsored Trafalgar Centenary celebrations in October 1905 suggests that most of the working class were totally indifferent to that picture. The more human, dashing and somewhat rakish Nelson with whom the crowd had so clearly identified in his lifetime might have had much wider appeal. But the morality of that image was wrong. In any case, for the vast bulk of the British working population, economic arguments made more sense than any appeal to the heroic. Moreover, with Arthur Balfour's Conservative government about to collapse, and in the face of widespread industrial disturbances, the Navy League's efforts to resurrect Nelson were potentially so divisive of political and navalist aspirations that they received no official backing. The Admiralty even went so far as to refuse permission for a Royal Navy contingent to take part in the ceremonies. Navalists who joined the Mayor of Westminster and other dignitaries on the podium in Trafalgar Square did so as individuals with no official status. The whole affair, however, had a decidedly elitist tinge. The Nelson who was lauded was Mahan's stalwart Victorian, a remote figure of privilege. Excluded from participation in the ceremonies, the general public were simply spectators. What was meant to inspire awe merely entertained. Many who crowded into the Square on that day did so out of curiosity or in anticipation of a street party.

At the turn of the century, the reincarnated Nelson was essentially the upper-class hero described by Mahan. The biography helped to redefine the hero in light of what its author saw as current needs. He did not create the image but he did lend his authority to the figure who emerged in the 1890s. It is doubtful that the Badham controversy, painful as it was to Mahan, altered the perceptions of navalists, most of whom found confirmation of their concept of seapower in the biography. That notion had been articulated in Mahan's earlier works. While he was writing the biography, Mahan found himself at the centre of a burgeoning Nelson industry. Laughton, Thursfield, the Colomb brothers and the Navy League were also a part of that business, whose main aim was to persuade the politicians to increase Britain's naval strength. They achieved their goal when in 1908, confronted by a growing German naval menace, Asquith's Liberal administration embarked on a massive capital shipbuilding programme. And Mahan's depiction of Nelsonian strategy and tactics continued to dominate British naval thinking. Two years before the Great War, an Admiralty committee formed to consider tactics at Trafalgar confirmed both Mahan's analysis of the battle and the Royal Navy's belief that the issue of seapower would be decided by fleets of battleships using tactics little changed from Nelson's day. It also confirmed the Mahanian idea that leadership was more important than technological superiority. That notion cost the Royal Navy dearly at the Battle of Jutland four years later. The other goal of navalists, to create popular awareness of the need for the naval building programme, was never reached. There was some jingoistic support for increased naval expenditure expressed in the "We want eight and we won't wait" campaign of 1909, but for the most part domestic affairs ruled the day. The Nelson image, which it was hoped would be one tool with which naval support could be built, was not taken to heart by the working class, who constituted the mass of the British electorate. Until the outbreak of war in 1914, the Liberal government was sustained by its implementation of social welfare programmes, not by popular support for rearmament.

With that reservation in mind, however, it is true to say that Mahan's *Life of Nelson* was a timely and important addition to the navalist arsenal before the First World War.

NOTES

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1. A.T. Mahan, *The Life of Nelson: The Embodiment of the Sea Power of Great Britain* (2 vols., (Boston, 1897). There was a corrected second edition in one volume published in 1899, and a two-volume corrected edition in 1900.
2. Robert Seager II, *Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Man and His Letters* (Annapolis, 1977); and William E. Livezey, *Mahan on Sea Power* (1947; rev. ed., Norman, OK, 1980).
3. A thoughtful and provocative introduction to Mahan's life and work is D.M. Schurman, *The Education of a Navy: The Development of British Naval Strategic Thought, 1867-1914* (London, 1965), chap. 4. A conference on Mahan held at the US Naval War College resulted in a valuable collection of essays: John B. Hattendorf (ed.), *The Influence of History on Mahan: The Proceedings of a Conference Marking the Centenary of Alfred Thayer Mahan's The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (Newport, RI, 1991). For a complete list of Mahan's writings, see John B. Hattendorf and Lynn C. Hattendorf (comps.), *A Bibliography of the Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan* (Newport, RI, 1986).
4. See Schurman, *Education*, 74-75, and Seager, *Mahan*, chapter 16. Schurman suggests that Mahan formulated the idea of "subordination" in order to solidify his academic recognition.
5. Seager, *Mahan*, 451.
6. Livezey, *Mahan*, 29-32; and Schurman, *Education*, 70-71, agree that Mahan saw history as utilitarian.
7. A.T. Mahan, *Types of Naval Officers Drawn from the History of the British Navy* (London, 1902), x-xi.
8. Mahan to Henry Cabot Lodge, 19 May 1890, in Robert Seager II and Doris Maguire (eds.), *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan* (3 vols., Annapolis, 1975), II, 11.
9. Mahan to John M. Brown, 26 January 1897, in *ibid.*, II, 488.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Mahan, *Types*, x.
12. *Ibid.*, xi.
13. Mahan to Brown, 26 January 1897, in Seager and Maguire (eds.), *Letters*, II, 488.
14. Mahan to Brown, 31 January 1897, in *ibid.*, II, 489.
15. *Ibid.*
16. A.T. Mahan, *The Life of Nelson: The Embodiment of the Sea Power of Great Britain* ("popular" rev. ed., London, 1899), 742.
17. Mahan to Brown, 26 January 1897, in Seager and Maguire (eds.), *Letters*, II, 488.
18. A.T. Mahan, *From Sail to Steam: Recollections of Naval Life* (New York, 1907), 307.
19. *Ibid.*, 321.
20. Mahan, *Life of Nelson*, rev. ed., x.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Mahan to Brown, 17 December 1896, in Seager and Maguire (eds.), *Letters*, II, 477-478. See also Seager, *Mahan*, 436.
23. Mahan to Brown, 10 February 1897, in *ibid.* II, 491.
24. Reprinted in Mahan, *Life of Nelson*, rev. ed., xi.

25. Mahan to Horace Scudder, 12 September 1893, in Seager and Maguire (eds.), *Letters*, II, 153.
26. Quoted in C. Carlisle Taylor, *The Life of Admiral Mahan* (New York, 1920), 84.
27. *Ibid.*, 83.
28. W.D. Puleston, *The Life and Work of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, U.S.N.* (New Haven, 1939), 179.
29. Mahan to Duke of Cambridge, 10 July 1900, in Seager and Maguire (eds.), *Letters*, II, 691.
30. J.R. Thursfield, "Nelson," *Quarterly Review*, CLXXXVII (January 1898), quoted in Taylor, *Life of Admiral Mahan*, 82.
31. Quoted in Puleston, *Life and Work*, 173-174.
32. Spenser Wilkinson, "The New Nelson," *National Review*, XXIX (July 1897).
33. William O'Connor Morris, "Captain Mahan's Nelson," *Fortnightly Review*, 1 June 1897, quoted in Robert Seager II, "A Biography of a Biographer: Alfred Thayer Mahan," in Robert W. Love (ed.), *Changing Interpretations and New Sources in Naval History: Papers from the Third United States Naval Academy History Symposium* (New York, 1980.), 286; and Seager and Maguire (eds.), *Letters*, II, 512. Seager glosses over the warmth with which the work was greeted and puts undue stress on the two episodes for which Mahan's treatment was criticised.
34. Mahan to J.B. Sterling, 27 April 1897, in Seager and Maguire (eds.), *Letters*, II, 504-505.
35. Mahan to Brown, 26 and 27 April 1897; 10 September 1898 and 30 December 1898, in *ibid.*, II, 503-504, 593-594 and 621-622.
36. Mahan to Brown, 30 December 1898, in *ibid.*, II, 621-622.
37. See Seager, *Mahan*, 341.
38. A.T. Mahan, "The Neapolitan Republicans and Nelson's Accusers," *English Historical Review*, XIV (July 1899); and Mahan to J.R. Thursfield, 17 June 1899, in Seager and Maguire (eds.), *Letters*, II, 637. The "Badham contention" is discussed at great length in Seager, *Mahan*, 341-348; a complete list of the relevant articles is on 665-666.
39. A.T. Mahan, "Nelson at Naples," *English Historical Review*, XV (October 1900), 727.
40. Mahan, *From Sail to Steam*, 322.
41. Mahan to Brown, 10 September 1898, in Seager and Maguire (eds.), *Letters*, II, 593-594.
42. Seager, *Mahan*, 341.
43. John Knox Laughton, *The Nelson Memorial: Nelson and His Companions in Arms* (London, 1896).
44. Mahan, *Types*, 76.
45. For an excellent discussion of the "historical" and "material" schools, see Bernard Semmel, *Liberalism and Naval Strategy: Ideology, Interest, and Sea Power during the Pax Britannica* (Boston, 1986), chapter 9.
46. Vice-Admiral P.H. Colomb, *Naval Warfare; Its Ruling Principles and Practice Historically Treated* (London, 1895), 452.
47. Sir John Colomb, *British Dangers* (London, 1902), 17-18, quoted in Semmel, *Liberalism*, 136.
48. A.T. Mahan, *The Interest of America in International Conditions* (Boston, 1910), 167.
49. A.T. Mahan, "Lessons of the War with Spain," *McClure's Magazine* (February 1899), quoted in Livezey, *Mahan on Sea Power*, 30.
50. For the popular image of Nelson in the late eighteenth century, see Tom Pocock, *Horatio Nelson* (New York, 1988) and Gerald Jordan, "Admiral Nelson as Popular Hero: The Nation and the Navy, 1795-1805," in *New Aspects of Naval History* (Baltimore, 1985). On the failure of the Navy League to resurrect Nelson in the decade before the Centenary, see Gerald Jordan, "Admiral Nelson and the Concept of Patriotism: The Trafalgar Centenary, 1905," in William B. Cogar (ed.), *Naval History: The Seventh Symposium of the US Naval Academy* (Wilmington, DE, 1988).