Dutch in objecting to pay the old-established mark of respect to the Engh\*sh flag was quite reason enough in the eyes of most Englishmen, and probably of most Dutchmen also, to justify hostilities which other reasons may have rendered inevitable. The remarkable thing about the Dutch wars is that in reality what England gained was the possibility of securing an absolute command of the sea. She came out of the struggle a great, and in a fair way of becoming the greatest, naval power. It is this which prompted Vice-Admiral P. H. Colomb to hold that there are various kinds of command, such as “ absolute or assured,” “ temporary,” “ with definite ulterior purpose,” &c. An explana­tion that would make all these terms intelligible would be voluminous and is unnecessary here. It will be enough to say that the absolute command—of which, as Colomb tells us, the Anglo-Dutch wars were the most complete example—is nothing but an attribute of the nation whose power on the sea is paramount. It exists and may be visible in time of peace. The command which, as said above, expresses a definite strategical condition is existent only in time of war. It can be easily seen that the former is essential to an empire like the British, the parts of which are bound together by maritime communications. Inability to keep these communications open can have only one result, viz. the loss of the parts with which communication cannot be maintained. Experience of war as well as reason will have made it evident that inability to keep open sea-communications cannot be limited to any single fine, because the inability must be due either to incapacity in the direction of hostilities or insufficiency of force. If Great Britain has not force enough to keep open all the communications of her widely extended empire, or if—having force enough—she is too foolish to employ it properly, she does not hold the command of the sea, and the empire must fall if seriously attacked.

The strategic command of the sea in a particular war of campaign has equal concern for all maritime belligerents. Before seeing what it is, it will be well to learn on high authority what it is not. Mahan says that command, or, to use his own term, “ control of the sea, however real, does not imply that an enemy’s single ships or small squadrons cannot steal out of port, cannot cross more or less frequented tracts of ocean, make harassing descents upon unprotected points of a long coast-line, or enter blockaded harbours. On the contrary, history has shown that such evasions are always possible, to some extent, to the weaker party, however great the inequality of naval strength ” (*Influence of Sea-Power on History,* London, 1890, p. 14). The Anglo-French command of the sea in 1854- 1856, complete as it was, did not enable the Allies to intercept the Russian ships in the north-western Pacific, nor did that held by the Federals in the American Civil War put an early stop to the cruises of the Confederate vessels. What the term really does imply is the power possessed from the first, or gained during hostilities, by one belligerent of carrying out considerable over- sea expeditions at will. In the Russian war just mentioned the Allies had such overwhelmingly superior sea-power that the Russians abandoned to them without a struggle the command of the sea; and the landing in South Africa (1899-1902), more than six thousand miles away, of a large British army without even a threat of interruption on the voyage is another instance of unchallenged command. In wars between great powers and also between secondary powers, if nearly equally matched, this absence of challenge is rare. The rule is that the command of the sea has to be won after hostilities begin. To win it the enemy’s naval force must be neutralized. It may be driven into his ports and there blockaded or “ masked,’’ and thus ren­dered virtually innocuous; or it must be defeated and destroyed. The latter is the preferable, because the more effective plan. As was perceptible in the Spanish-American War of 1898, as long as one belligerent’s fleet is intact or at large the other is reluctant to carry out any considerable expedition over-sea. In fact, the command of the sea has not been secured whilst the enemy

continues to have a “ fleet in being ” (see Sea-Power).

In 1782 a greatly superior Franco-Spanish fleet was covering the siege of Gibraltar. Had this fleet succeeded in preventing

the revictualling of the fortress the garrison would have been starved into surrender. A British fleet under Lord Howe, though much weaker in numbers, had not been de­feated and was still at large. Howe, in spite of the odds against him, managed to get his supply-ships in to the anchorage and to fight a partial action, in which he did the allies as much damage as he received. There has never been a display of higher tactical skill than this operation of Howe’s, though, curiously enough, he owes his fame much more to his less meritorious performance on the 1st of June. The revictualling of Gibraltar surpassed even Suffren’s feat of the capture of Trincomalee in the same year. In 1798 the French, assuming that a temporary superiority in the Mediterranean had given them a free band on the water, sent a great expedition to Egypt. Though the army which was carried succeeded in landing there, the covering fleet was destroyed by Nelson at the Nile, and the army itself was eventually forced to surrender. The French had not perceived that, except for a short time and for minor operations, you cannot separate the command of the Mediterranean or of any particular area of water from that of the sea in general. Local command of the sea may enable a belligerent to make a hasty raid, seize a relatively insignificant post or cut out a vessel; but it will not ensure bis being able to effect anything requiring considerable time for its execution, or, in other words, anything likely to have an important influence on the course of the war. If Great Britain has not naval force enough to retain command of the Mediterranean she will certainly not have force enough to retain command of the English Channel. It can be easily shown why it should be so. In war danger comes less from conditions of locality than from the enemy’s power to hurt. Taking up a weak position when confronting an enemy may help him in the exercise of his power, but it does not constitute it, A maritime enemy’s power to hurt resides in his fleet. If that can be neutralized his power disappears. It is in the highest degree inprobable that Great Britain could attain this end by splitting up her fleet into fragments so as to have a part of it in nearly every quarter in which the enemy may try to do her mischief. The most promising plan—as experience has often proved—is to meet the enemy when he shows himself with *a* force sufficiently strong to defeat him. The proper station of the British fleet in war should, accordingly, be the nearest possible point to the enemy’s force. This was the fundamental principle of Nelson’s strategy, and it is as valid now as ever it was. If Great Britain succeeds in getting into close proximity to the hostile fleet with an adequate force of her own, her foe cannot obtain command of the sea, or of any part of it, whether that part be the Mediterranean or the English Channel, at any rate until he has defeated her. If he. is strong enough to defeat her fleet he obtains the command of the sea in general; and it is for him to decide whether he shall show the effectiveness of that command in the Mediterranean or in the English Channel.

In the smaller operations of war temporary command of a par­ticular area of water may suffice for the success of an expedition, or at least will permit the execution of the preliminary movements. When the main fleet of a country is at a distance—which it ought not to be except with the object of nearing the opposing fleet—a small hostile expedition may slip across, say the English Channel, throw shells into a coast town or burn a village, and get home again unmolested. Its action would have no sort of influence on the course of the campaign, and would, therefore, be useless. It would also most likely lead to reprisals; and, if this process were repeated, the war would probably degenerate into the antiquated system of “ cross-raiding,” discarded centuries ago, not at all for reasons of humanity, but because it became certain that war could be more effectually waged in other ways. The power in command of the sea may resort to raiding to expedite the formal submission of an already defeated enemy, as Russia did when at war with Sweden in 1719; but in such a case the other side cannot retaliate. Temporary command of local waters will also permit of operations rather more considerable than mere raiding attacks; but the