which forged a community among them. Without such a focus, the invisible man of the Caribbean, his culture, and his way of life, remain in large measure obscure, despite the excellent efforts of the author.

State University of New York,
Binghamton

Dale W. Tomich


Seager claims that his biography of Alfred Thayer Mahan treats his subject exhaustively—"warts and all," but curiously enough the manuscript minimizes the "and all." Animus pervades this major work; rarely has historical biography concentrated on follies and foibles so much as this one. The resultant portrait is close to caricature, an outcome which precludes authoritative answers to certain crucial questions of interest to historians. Was Mahan a great man? What accounts for his remarkable vogue and extraordinary influence? Seager is strong on the details of Mahan's life, but he is less convincing when he analyzes Mahan's work and when he treats the historical context of his subject's activity as a naval officer, naval historian, and naval publicist.

During his career afloat, Mahan served on occasion in Latin American waters, developing a distaste for the people there which apparently never left him, and also gaining a powerful appreciation of the strategic-commercial significance of the Gulf–Caribbean region. His belief that this area was as important to the United States as the Mediterranean Sea to Britain converted him to early and constant advocacy of an isthmian canal and of appropriate defenses against possible European penetration. During the war with Spain in 1898 he helped shape naval strategy in the Caribbean as a member of the Naval War Board, an advisory group to the secretary of the navy. Mahan expressed himself regularly on the Latin American policy of the United States from 1899 to 1914, supporting the activist initiatives of his friend Theodore Roosevelt.

However flawed in some ways, this biography is of great utility to those interested in the nation's role in international affairs from the 1890s to the First World War, Mahan having played a leading role in shaping American attitudes and even policies. Seager's exhaustive research on details should allow future writers to concentrate on analyzing and interpreting data rather than on its collection. All future work on Mahan must stem from this biography.

Washington, D.C.

David F. Trask


Piault is a well-known religious writer, who, in this book, combines his passion for God with his passion for Mexico. The Mexican he finds to be "instinctively theological," conditioned by a long historical identity with God. Piault uses a