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978-0-521-08279-2 - The Politics of Naval Supremacy: Studies in British Maritime
Ascendancy

Gerald S. Graham

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THE POLITICS OF
NAVAL
SUPREMACY

THE WILES LECTURES
GIVEN AT QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY
BELFAST, 1964

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THE POLITICS OF NAVAL SUPREMACY

STUDIES IN BRITISH MARITIME
ASCENDANCY

BY

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To
C. M. G.

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PREFACE

The old historians wrote on a wide and generous scale, partly perhaps because they lacked our resources and techniques. Historians of the present age have exploited the mountains of new materials, and refined their techniques, but at the cost of breaking up the comfortable unity that history once provided. Microanalysis of a department, a policy or a tribe is usually accepted as scientific research; by contrast, the 'broad sweep' may be regarded as a hazardous and unscientific indulgence in popular generalization. Yet it is the broad treatment that the Wiles Trust enjoins its lecturers to undertake.

Well aware of the risks that follow acceptance of so candid an instruction, I propose to examine the consequences and limitations of British naval supremacy chiefly within the framework of nineteenth-century politics. Admirals with their fleets, wrote Sir John Fortescue, were 'mere weapons wielded in the hands of the statesman'. Certainly naval history, in the complete sense, cannot be divorced from political and diplomatic history; in the nineteenth century, foreign policy and naval strategy were inseparable.

The Indian Ocean claims particular attention simply because the imperial centre of gravity shifted eastward after the Napoleonic Wars, from the West Indies and the Newfoundland fisheries beyond the Atlantic towards India and China. International rivalries in the Pacific obviously deserve more than perfunctory reference, but until the voluminous records have been winnowed I lack the knowledge to attempt an interpretation of events in that vast, intractable expanse.

Apart from minor alterations the lectures have been printed

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as delivered, with the exception of a few paragraphs on the Bagdad railway in chapter III, which I have added as a kind of epilogue to the story of the European *Drang nach Osten*. If the footnotes seem unduly elaborate, at least their length and number may be explained by the compulsion of time; much material which I regarded as relevant was driven out of the text owing to the exigencies of the lecture-hour.

I am very grateful to W. N. Medlicott and Sir Llewellyn Woodward whose wisdom, especially within the field of European diplomacy, was so generously and warmly given. My old friend Commander John Owen has once again helped me with his great nautical learning, and saved me from many a solecism. Various colleagues have come to my aid with their specialized knowledge, and I am indebted to J. R. Alden, C. R. Boxer, M. E. Howard, A. N. Ryan and Ch. Verlinden for critical advice on particular points. Traditional practice and personal pride forbid that I should make them responsible for the errors that inevitably reveal themselves after publication. Two members of my seminar, Ian Steele and John Kendle were good enough to help me with the exacting tasks of checking references and reading proofs. To my hosts, the Committee of the Wiles Trust, the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Michael Grant, and the Professor of Modern History, Michael Roberts, at the Queen's University, Belfast, I should like to express my deep thanks for their constant consideration and generous hospitality.

G. S. G.

Lennoxvale, Belfast
23 May 1964