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C. W. Crawley

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THE QUESTION OF GREEK INDEPENDENCE

*A Study of British Policy in the
Near East, 1821–1833*

BY

C. W. CRAWLEY, M.A.

Fellow of Trinity Hall, Cambridge



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P R E F A C E

MORE than one hundred years have passed since the death of George Canning and the destruction, in time of peace, of the Turkish and Egyptian fleets in the Bay of Navarin. That ‘untoward event’ was a landmark in the creation of modern Greece from small and precarious beginnings, and the five years which elapsed before a King was found and a boundary fixed for the new State have often been treated as a mere postscript to the story of the revolt. Such a treatment has a certain justification in the history of Greece. But Navarin was a landmark also in the decline of Turkey during the nineteenth century, and may be taken as the beginning of a different chapter.

From another point of view, the years 1828 to 1833 were a turning-point in the relations of England and Russia, and cannot be ignored if we are to understand the development of a temper which ultimately led to the Crimean War, persisted through the crisis of 1878 and came to the surface at frequent intervals until circumstances brought about a short-lived alliance from 1907 to 1917. It may safely be said that Englishmen, for two or three generations, were pro-Turkish because anti-Russian, and for no other reason. The ‘conversion’ of British diplomats and statesmen was almost completed between the Battle of Navarin in 1827 and the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi in 1833. In the official world, a definite change can be traced during those five or six years in the views of Stratford Canning, Aberdeen and Palmerston, and in others a hardening of views already held. The ‘conversion’ of the British public followed; it was attempted, with only moderate success, during the thirties, and was achieved much more completely during the fifties, of the last century. Among those who influenced opinion by books and articles, it is enough to mention the names of David Urquhart and John McNeill.

This episode in the story of British policy in the Near East has

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been comparatively neglected, and for an obvious reason—it falls mainly between the death of Canning and the beginning of Palmerston's career at the Foreign Office. The biographers of Canning treat it merely as the unworthy sequel to an unfinished stroke of genius; the biographers of Palmerston are plunged at once into the affairs of Belgium, and pick up the Eastern problem with Egypt already in the foreground. But Canning's legacy to his successors was a policy, brilliant indeed, but hazardous and perhaps not fully thought out to a conclusion: while Palmerston inherited a situation already developed to a point where his decision could hardly be in doubt. A connecting link may be found in Stratford Canning, who seems to have been already both the strongest influence upon our policy in the Levant and the most faithful mirror of the gradual development of opinion. This book is an attempt to fill the gap, or rather to show that the 'gap' has a structure of its own, which must be brought into relief for the sake of due proportion. The interest is focussed mainly on Greece, and I have thought it not irrelevant to relieve a mainly diplomatic narrative by a few glimpses of the turbulent stream of Greek politics and guerilla warfare. But the point of view remains in London throughout, in an attempt to understand the problem of British policy.

That policy up to the death of Canning has been set forth at length in Professor Temperley's *Foreign Policy of Canning*; but I found it impossible to make the later period intelligible without some account of the earlier years, 1821–7, based on independent study of the printed materials and a few MSS, selecting a rather different emphasis from that of the biographer and illustrating more in detail the play of forces upon the scene of action. For the period after Canning's death, I have relied upon my own researches among public records and printed sources. Two books cover some of the same ground—Mr Stanley Lane-Poole's *Life of Lord Stratford de Redcliffe* and Professor Alison Phillips' *War of Greek Independence*—but one is biography and the other centres in Greece. There are foreign studies based on French, Austrian, Prussian and Russian records, but there is no clear account of the Duke of Wellington's policy.

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My thanks are due to Mr J. R. M. Butler, of Trinity College, Cambridge, for the first suggestion which led me to an interest in the Near East: to Mr F. F. Urquhart of Balliol College, Oxford, for helpful criticism: to Professor Temperley for much encouragement, and for advice which, if not always followed, has been always appreciated: to Mr P. W. Duff, of Trinity College, Cambridge, for his careful reading of the proofs: and lastly to my wife, who has lightened much of the labour of preparing this book for the press.

C. W. CRAWLEY

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