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978-1-107-64555-4 - The Lees Knowles Lectures on Military History for 1947:

The Influence of Sea Power on the History of the British People

Admiral Sir W. M. James

Frontmatter

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ON THE HISTORY OF THE
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BY

ADMIRAL SIR W. M. JAMES, G.C.B.



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PREFACE

In the sailing era we could not wage war unless we won and held the command of the sea-lines of communication for the safe passage of troopships to disputed areas; to-day we cannot survive for more than a few weeks, let alone wage war, if that command is wrested from us and our flow of seaborne imports of food and raw materials ceases. The destructive power of war weapons and the speed of advance into battle have been continually increasing since the beginning of the century, but the merchant ship, on which our existence depends, still circumnavigates the world at a relatively slow speed.

From Tudor times the protection of the merchant ship, outward bound with troops or homeward bound with cargoes, has been the responsibility of the Royal Navy, but this responsibility was shared with the Royal Air Force in the last war. We cannot foretell what weapons will attack our trade routes in the next war and therefore what weapons we will require to defend them. If, however, we are to survive a future war, our weapons for commanding the sea routes must be capable of warding off all forms of attack, whether by surface vessel, submarine, mine, aeroplane or 'push-button' weapons. We must, as in the past, be able to exercise sea power.

The main theme of these lectures is that throughout history four elements have conferred the power to control

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PREFACE

the sea routes—merchant ships, bases, weapons and skilled men to wield those weapons—and that we have emerged victorious from ten major maritime wars because our enemies have lacked one of these elements. It is in the fourth element—leadership and fighting qualities—that we have on most occasions shown considerable superiority, and it was for this reason that I chose ‘Nelson’ as the subject of one lecture. For though he far outshone his contemporaries and predecessors they, too, were men of high moral courage, skilled strategists and tacticians, and could draw loyal and devoted service from their officers and men. Great fleets manœuvring in battle to the orders of one man, who can lose a war by one mistake, will probably never be seen again, but we will have need of men of the same character and personality as the Admirals of the great sail and steam fleets whatever weapons emerge from the scientific laboratories.

W. M. J.

April 1948