

**ENGLAND IN THE
MEDITERRANEAN; A STUDY OF THE
RISE AND INFLUENCE OF BRITISH
POWER WITHIN THE STRAITS, 1603-
1713. IN TWO VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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England in the Mediterranean; A Study of the Rise and Influence of British Power Within the Straits, 1603-1713. In Two Volumes. Vol. I by Julian S. Corbett

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JULIAN S. CORBETT

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ENGLAND IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

VOL. I.

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PREFACE

THE substance of the present work has been given during the past year partly in lectures before the Senior and the Flag Officers' War Courses at Greenwich, and partly in the Ford Lectures on English History for 1903 at Oxford. It is now presented in a complete form on the not inappropriate occasion of the tercentenary of the capture of Gibraltar.

In its present shape it is designed in some measure as a continuation of the volumes in which I endeavoured to trace the development of the fleet and the naval art, and the history of naval operations under the Tudors. In approaching the Stuart period, however, it seemed wiser to restrict the field. There can be little doubt that much that is repellent in our naval histories is due to the vast arena they attempt to fill. In the effort to be complete they swing us to and fro from end to end of the earth, till we lose the sense of continuity, fail to seize any underlying principles, and sink bewildered in a chaos of facts with no apparent connection and no defined progression. It is in the seventeenth century that this complexity begins to make itself felt, and discretion therefore suggested the desirability of seeking a leading line of development, and following it with as little distraction as possible.

During the Stuart period two such lines present themselves—the one our struggle for maritime supremacy with

the Dutch, and the other the rise of our Mediterranean power. Both exactly cover the period in question—from the death of Elizabeth in 1603 to the Peace of Utrecht in 1713—and both would serve. But there can be little doubt as to which is the more closely woven into the matter in hand, and which is of the deeper and more lasting interest. The struggle with the Dutch, though at the time it absorbed most of the attention and the heaviest effort, was, after all, but an episode in our naval history. It was an episode, it is true, of the gravest import, but with the wisdom of fuller experience we can now see that from the essence of things it could only have ended in one way. In the Mediterranean, on the other hand, we have to deal with a question that is always open, with history that we are living to-day, and with conditions which continued and remain the most vital preoccupation of the higher naval strategy.

Once to grasp the Mediterranean point of view is to be dominated by its fascination. It gives us a light by which we see the British Empire standing on the same base as did the greatest empires of the past, and buttressed by the inviolability of her oceanic position more strongly than the most enduring of them all. No less inspiring a thought could embolden a student to relate the history of the Stuart navy without touching the Dutch wars or the foundation of our oversea dominions. For this is what has been attempted except in so far as those two secondary aspects of the time modified or influenced what I venture to regard as the primary and central movement. The method has at least the advantage of affording us a fresh point of view. It is from the standpoint of the struggle with Holland and our colonial expansion that naval historians, and indeed others, have almost universally depicted the time, and it should be no matter of surprise if, viewed from the Mediterranean, it assumes

an aspect in some points so startling in its novelty as to arouse a suspicion of mirage. Events which seemed but the most trifling episodes appear as links in a mighty chain, reputations that stood high sink low, and others almost forgotten lift their heads, while judgments that have long passed into commonplace seem on all sides to demand revision.

Yet I cannot doubt that any one who can frankly clear himself of the insular standpoint and view the scene from the ancient centre of dominion will see it much as I have endeavoured to paint it, and will feel that, seen from any other side, its true proportions must be missed and half its fascination lost. Nor is this all. For I am bold to hope that by this means he will find in Stuart times a lamp that will light up much that is dark in later ages, that will even touch Nelson with a new radiance, and perhaps reveal more clearly why it is that our Mediterranean Fleet stands to-day in the eyes of Europe as the symbol and measure of British power.

The attempt to show how largely the position of England in Europe depended on the possibilities of fleet action in the Mediterranean necessarily involves the carrying along of an enormous weight of military and diplomatic history—history, moreover, that for the most part is only to be found in its relation to naval pressure in the correspondence of generals, ministers, and diplomatists. The majority of historians have ever ignored the naval influence except where now and then their attention is aroused by the thunder of a great battle. But, more often than not, the important fact is that no battle took place, and again and again the effort to prevent a collision is the controlling feature of widespread political action. As a rule, what did not happen is at least as important as what did, and it is perhaps mainly due to overlooking this truth that history has so largely ignored the sweeping

change in the European system which accompanied the appearance of Great Britain in the Mediterranean.

So long as we have the sure hand of Dr. Gardiner to guide us the difficulty is not so great. Indeed I cannot adequately express my sense of obligation to his great work. But where it ends the chance of error in the mass of undigested correspondence that takes its place becomes almost overwhelming. Much guidance to authoritative sources is, however, fortunately at hand in the 'Dictionary of National Biography,' which has infinitely lightened the labour, and particularly the articles of Professor Laughton, in which he has practically re-written the whole of our naval history in a way that few but naval students can adequately appreciate. My debt is also great to Mr. Firth, who is carrying on Dr. Gardiner's unfinished task, and who has generously placed at my disposal some invaluable material he has unearthed. Much too is owing to the works of Mr. Oppenheim and Mr. Tanner, whose 'Calendar of the Pepys MSS.' in Magdalene College, Cambridge, I have been permitted to use in proof by the kind consent of the Navy Records Society.

Finally my thanks are particularly due to Colonel Sir George Sydenham Clarke, K.C.M.G., R.E., from whose inspiring suggestions the idea of this work sprung, and whom I must gratefully call 'the only begetter of these ensuing' pages.

J. S. C.

November 1903.

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MAP TO ILLUSTRATE BRITISH ACTION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN
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