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RUSSIA'S SEA-POWER

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PAST AND PRESENT

OR THE

RISE OF THE RUSSIAN NAVY

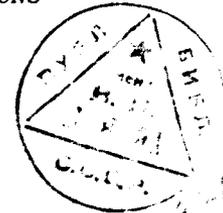
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WITH MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS



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PREFACE.

FOUR years ago it occurred to me that a historical sketch of the rise of the Russian Navy might be useful, in view of the growing interest displayed in what the authors of the Address of the House of Lords to Queen Anne in 1708 aptly termed "the sea affair." Pressure of other work then prevented me from doing more than accumulate notes bearing upon the subject. Now that public attention is directed to the great naval efforts being made in Russia, and to their connection with the recent supremely important step taken in the

Far East, I trust that the publication of this little book will be deemed opportune.

I cannot claim to have exhaustively treated a large and somewhat intricate subject. I have, however, endeavoured to set forth clearly the main facts connected with the history of the Russian Navy since its inception by Peter the Great, as well as their bearing upon the affairs of Europe during nearly two hundred years. This has involved reference to military operations, and has entailed a degree of condensation by which some of the following pages may seem to be overweighted. History is not a strong point with the British people; and although many able writers are now seeking to elucidate the wonderful story of the British Navy, few among us are

familiar with the bare outline of the events which have raised the semi-civilised and practically inland State governed by Peter the Great to a dominant position in the affairs of Europe.

In this remarkable development, sea-power has inevitably played a great part; but the process has differed essentially from that which has accomplished the building up of the British Empire.

In the one case, maritime instincts and aptitudes, inherited from seafaring races, combined with almost unrivalled geographical advantages, made the British Islands into a veritable centre of sea-power. The maritime history of England covers a period of nineteen hundred years, and the differentiation of the Royal Navy into a regularised

force, apart from a population constantly exercising its natural instincts of fighting on the sea, dates back for four hundred years. That Navy, built up from and supported by national maritime resources in the widest sense of the word, and trained in successive contests with the naval strength of Spain, Holland, and France, succeeded in long years of struggle in establishing its supremacy. Partly by direct conquest, partly by reason of the security which the command of the sea conferred upon a people naturally tending to expand, and wholly by the brilliant achievements of the Royal Navy, the British Empire, as we now understand the phrase, was created.

In the other case, an inland people, as they attained national consolidation, instinctively felt the need of maritime

communications, and forced their way to the sea, which could be reached only in the half-frozen Baltic, the doubly land-locked Black Sea, and the remote North Pacific. Territorial conquests from Sweden and from Turkey, together with the subjugation of sparse tribes owning nominal allegiance to China, procured for Russia a seaboard in all respects inferior to that possessed by other great Powers. Having attained that seaboard, it was necessary to build up a navy, which, unlike that of Great Britain, was thus an artificial creation. In the Baltic, the new Russian fleet found itself in conflict with the wasted navy of Sweden, and later in the South with the moderately effective forces of Turkey, already supposed to be tottering to a fall. Naval experience of some sort could thus be derived, but such

experience was not comparable to that gained by the British Navy in the stubborn conflict with Holland and the prolonged contest with France and her various allies. In warfare on the high seas, the Russian Navy has as yet played no part ; nor has it in the past directly helped to build up the Empire.

The fundamental difference in the conditions of the development of Great Britain and Russia seems to account, in some measure, for the mutual antagonism which has grown up during the last half of this century. To us, the exercise of all that is implied by maritime power has during hundreds of years been bound up with our national existence. We accept it as a matter of course, and we are, on that account, perhaps unable to realise that another

great nation, in proportion to its advance in civilisation and material development, experiences needs precisely similar to those which in our case are abundantly satisfied. In obedience to the dictates of a universal law, the Russian people have sought to obtain an open seaboard. This inevitable movement—the basis of Russian policy for two hundred years—has profoundly influenced the course of events. At the present moment, it is hardly too much to say that the antagonism between Great Britain and Russia is the principal factor in the European situation, supplanting the *vendetta* assumed to exist between France and Germany.

When two nations are mutually estranged, it is generally possible to assign a definite and a sufficient cause.