

THE LEADING IDEAS OF BRITISH POLICY

It is necessary for any one who would understand the leading ideas of British policy to run over in his mind the long roll of our mighty dead—from Alfred the Great downwards. Only then will he understand how deep-rooted and persistent is the imperial instinct of the English nation. It is older than the English Parliament, and about as old as the English language or any other of the oldest things that are essentially English. It is exemplified in our earliest annals by the Northumbrian and Mercian forerunners of Alfred, and by his descendants from Edward the Elder to Edgar the Peaceful. It was gratified by the wars and conquests of our foreign rulers from William the Conqueror to Richard Cœur de Lion. In Edward III we see the most conspicuous of these early imperialists. Edward III, besides continuing an old and a mistaken policy of continental aggrandizement, turned his thoughts to sea-power. He claimed, and for a time he secured, the 'dominion of the narrow seas', which since his time has been regarded as vital to the prosperity and safety of these islands; though more than a century elapsed from his death before England was sufficiently united and self-confident to follow out his naval policy with resolution and success. It was under the Tudors that she began consistently to behave as though 'her future lay upon the water'.

Throughout the last four hundred years, which is the