

"Londres, et tous les gens s'ont dit
"avoué que jamais l'Angleterre n'avait été
"si près de sa perte."

I have given Napoleon's own words, because they show the true state of the case, on on both sides, in a few lines, better than any other account I have read, and because it is a game that might be played again, and with advantages in favour of the assailant.

It was not carried out precisely as Napoleon describes it, but the idea was sufficiently adhered to as to confirm him, by its success, in the sagacity of his design. What a wonderfully daring scheme of naval strategy it was for those days of sailing vessels, requiring four months of sea voyaging in face of an enemy who had the "dominion of the sea" at the time. The alarming point about it to us now is, that under such almost impossible circumstances, it virtually succeeded; the British Government was fully deceived, and the French naval force was eventually massed in the Bay of Biscay, in superior strength to the British force there at the time.

Future naval wars will probably be full of such strategic combinations. With proper pre-arrangements, steam navies can be assembled from different ports, one or two months' voyage distant, at an appointed place on an appointed day. Part of Napoleon's scheme, which he does not allude to in the above memorandum, gives us an idea as to the advantages steam now affords towards an invasion of England. He had to give considerable latitude to his naval commander-in-chief, Villeneuve, and his final instructions he offered him two or three alternatives, in case of his being unable to carry out the main proposal. One of these was, to raise the blockade of Brest, and land the military force there on the north coast of Ireland, and immediately proceed north of Scotland, raise the blockade of Texel, and then go on to Boulogne. One may presume, from the indications on the map of the channel I have before mentioned, that part of the Brest expedition would have landed in the Bristol Channel, and part of the Texel expedition on the east coast. And if the naval works at Antwerp had been completed as he proposed, that would probably have been the point of departure of a more powerful expedition to the east coast of England.

He would not require to construct an Antwerp now, nor to build transports; there are some half-a-dozen ports in the north of Europe which would now supply merchant steamers large enough for his whole Army, and powerful enough to assemble from each port at a given distant rendezvous, and then move together to any point on the east coast or west coast of England. Neither would he have to locate the troops for the expedition at the ports of departure; if the military stores and provisions are embarked beforehand, the men, and even the horses, could be brought by rail way from the interior at the time for the departure. A scheme of ocean strategy which, in 1805, required two years' preparation by Napoleon, could now be arranged in two months, with less difficulty than one on land. What advantages have we gained since 1805 to counterbalance these of the enemy? None on the sea. We cannot expect to have more energetic commanders, nor, in all probability, shall we be so powerful at sea again; and we certainly are not likely to have a more wide-awake Ministry. But we can do this, which will counterbalance all the enemy has gained,—we can make his landing on the coast, and his advance from it, as dangerous an undertaking as the passage over the sea was formerly.

It was quite true, as Napoleon says, Great Britain was congratulating herself that her enemy's naval forces were securely shut up, and apparently *hors de combat*, and was fixing her whole attention on guarding her shores from the immense force and flotilla that had been gradually assembling immediately opposite to them. The shouts of that force, on the appearance of their Emperors as if for instant action, seen and almost heard from the English shores, may be said to close the first act of the drama of 1805.

The Second Act.

The second act opens with the escape of two French squadrons from their blockaded ports, one from Rochfort of 6 liners under Admiral Missesey in January, and one from Toulon of 11 liners under Admiral Villeneuve in March. The action of the plot now begins.

Great consternation of English government busily employed watching Boulogne, at this unexpected flight of 17 French liners into mid ocean, to reappear nobody knew where. Perhaps at Alexandria, perhaps in the West Indies, perhaps in the East Indies, perhaps in Ireland; certainly not in the Channel: nobody in England apparently (except Lord Keith) thought of that possibility.

The Rochfort squadron was first heard of in the West Indies; Admiral Lord Cochrane with six liners was immediately sent in pursuit; but the whereabouts of the Toulon squadron was a most alarming puzzle to the British Government. The natural supposition was that it had gone to unite with the other squadron; but with an enemy like Napoleon anything was possible. Egypt and India beyond it were known to be still looked at with longing eye. Napoleon took care to foster the alarm he had calculated on; he massed an army at Trentum in South Italy, and got Spanish vessels moved, as if for a fresh Egyptian expedition: he published false news of operations by the French in the East Indies and the Cape, and part of Villeneuve's work was to threaten the British colonies in the West Indies, and even to take St. Helena. So that as he expressed it himself, Great Britain would find herself attacked at once in Asia, Africa, and America: and would thus be compelled to send her fleets from the shores of England to the rescue.

It is fearful to think what would have been the British anxieties, had the Suez Canal been then in existence. The whole land forces of the country would hardly have been enough to stop the man who had already conquered Egypt with 25,000 men, from appearing some day at Bombay.

Then to add to the general alarm Nelson with his 10 liners who had been watching Toulon for two years, disappeared also: this was perhaps a greater cause of anxiety to Napoleon than to the British Government; it was bad enough to know that Nelson was off any port, but not to know where he was at all, moved even the indomitable Emperor. The Admiralty would doubtless in their distraction have done exactly what Napoleon wished them to do, dispatch another Fleet after Villeneuve, if they had not been relieved from their distress, by news from Nelson himself; that after a month's fruitless search through the Mediterranean, he had ascertained that Villeneuve had picked up 6 Spanish and 1 French liner at Cadiz, and gone westward; and that he was about to follow them. So did our great seaman earn the laureate's crown of praise:—

"O shaker of the Baltic and the Nile,
O saviour of the silver coasted Nile."

In all his calculations, which were daily written throughout his coronation tour, Napoleon slighted the notion that even Nelson with ten ships worn out with two years cruising, would follow across the Atlantic eighteen fresh ones. His daily correspondence with his Minister of Marine at this time, published by Damas, his close calculations of all contingencies, every mile of the way to the West Indies and back, every day Villeneuve would require, and the close agreement of them with the result, give one an insight into the foundation of his power. He had victuals prepared for Villeneuve at several of the ports where he might touch on his return; and to the expostulations of his Minister, he returned an answer which the British war department might take to heart: "This is not a time for ridiculous economy— in such a war it is only ignorance, not to have plenty of provision, which keeps well."

The scene now changes to the West Indies. Nelson perceived very soon after his arrival there, by the action of the French fleet, that their return to Europe was imminent; and for the first time the real origin of all these sea movements occurred to him. Now in this part of the drama, it must be allowed that the French have some reason to complain, as they have done, of the unhandsome treatment of their cause by fortune. Villeneuve was 35 days from Spain to the West Indies, Nelson was only 25 days; on the return voyage, Villeneuve was 54 days from the West Indies to Spain, Nelson was only 36. But the unkindest cut was the vessel that Nelson sent home to warn the Admiralty of his discovery of the plot; it had apparently been captured from the French, and was, like many of their vessels, a model sailor, and therefore selected for this great international race across the Atlantic. The "Carioux" started 16 days after Villeneuve, and got to Europe 15 days before him: it was certainly hard that their own science of shipbuilding should be made the means of their defeat. Mars and Minerva had led their favourite Napoleon triumphantly over the terra firma of Europe, and now sat on the prows of the French flagship; Neptune sulking at the general incapacity of the British Government to rule the surface of his domain, was appressed by the noble sacrifice of his dear son Nelson, and held on to the stern of the Spanish liners while he showed the "Cronus" a head.

The last scene of this act lies in London. The First Lord of the Admiralty is discovered fast asleep in bed on the morning of the 9th July, 1805, worn out no doubt with watching Boulogne and wondering what had become of Villeneuve. He opened his despatches in bed with regret at having to begin his official day so early; and finds one from Nelson which had been lying by his side all night, informing him that by the time he was reading that letter, Villeneuve would probably be entering the Channel with a force sufficient to sweep Cornwallis and Keith before him, and terrify Napoleon over to Dover. What an awakening to the real light of the case, for the hitherto benighted First Lord devoting day and night to watching Boulogne! With the danger, however, came the pluck to meet it; he then had there, unwashed, unbreakfasted, unshaved, sent off the orders to Cornwallis to intercept Villeneuve if possible; and Neptune relenting at this revulsion, which Napoleon himself could hardly believe, Sir R. Calder was at Cape Finisterre, with 15 liners, by the 15th July.

(To be Continued.)