

those powers, and they were compelled to accept of peace upon the terms of declaring war against England ;—and thus in 1806 all Europe was, by the famous “Berlin Decrees” of Napoleon, banded in deadly strife against England single-handed. The general impression at that time in England and elsewhere was, that the French army was invincible, and that the attempt to stay their Emperor from attaining to universal dominion was utterly hopeless. No doubt this was the opinion of Bonaparte himself, and his army, at the time. I well remember the intense excitement which was then almost universal, even in the remote Highlands of Scotland, against Bonaparte.

Preparations for an invasion of England were then going forward on a large scale in France. Bonaparte collected an army of some 300,000 on the nearest points to England, while all the French harbors nearest the English Coast were filled with large boats, lighters and other crafts, intended to carry this army across the channel. The troops in the mean time were for two or three months daily exercised in embarking and disembarking into and out of those crafts, so as to learn to take the least possible time in landing on the opposite shore whenever the hour would come. While these preparations were being carried on in France, the people were not idle on the English side. The isle of Great Britain, from “Land’s End” in the South to “John o’ Groat’s” in the North, was turned into a vast military camp. Every person capable of bearing arms was armed, clothed and drilled. Every man was provided with three days’ provision and sixty rounds of “ball cartridge,” and was ready to start at an hour’s warning—day or night. Who can ever forget the grim enthusiasm that smouldered amongst us in those days ; ever ready to burst into a fiery flame of patriotism ; with its stern songs :—

“Ho! Bonaparte comes o’er the sea,  
Threatens you and threatens me;  
He’ll only lose his breath!  
For let him come or let him send,  
Our Island is his journey’s end:  
He never back again shall bend.  
But quickly find his death!”

There were no telegraph lines in those days, but there were lines of signals on the highest mountains throughout the whole land. These signals could be seen from one another in the daytime. But these signal places were also provided with large quantities of combustible matter which was to be set on fire should the invasion be effected in the night time. There were, however, two preliminaries which Bonaparte required to secure before he attempted a landing on English ground with any prospect

of success: the first was, two or three days of fine weather and fair wind; the second, a complete command of the channel for three or four days. The fair weather might be looked for in a reasonably short time, but the command of the channel was a very different matter.

Since the “battle of the Nile,” which was fought a short time before this, no ship of France dared venture out from the protection of their fortifications; and indeed they were not at all times safe even under the shadow of their Land Batteries. There was, however, a large number of French ships-of-war lying in different ports, which, if got together, would muster a squadron superior to anything the British could in a short time get together to oppose them; the British fleet being scattered in all parts. Bonaparte set himself about getting his ships together.

The ships in the Mediterranean ports were ordered to steal out and sail to the West India Islands, and (knowing that the British Squadron would follow them) the French were directed to return to Europe, join the French and Spanish fleets which were lying in Brest and Cadiz harbors; and the combination thus joined, amounting to upwards of forty ships of the line, was to sail immediately for the Channel and cover the embarkation and landing of the French troops on the shores of Kent.

The French fleet effected their escape out of the Mediterranean ports, sailed to the West Indies, with Nelson in chase. When he arrived at the West Indies the French had departed on their way back. Then, and not till then, did Nelson discover the *ruse*, and penetrate into the design of the enemy. From the West Indies he despatched fast sailing crafts with intelligence of these things to the British Government. One of these crafts outsailed the enemy, and the Government sent a fleet of fifteen line-of-battle ships under command of Sir Robert Calder to intercept them. Calder brought the French to action. The French had twenty-one ships-of-the-line, the English fifteen. Darkness put an end to the battle. Three of the French ships were taken and many disabled. They got into the French harbor, and joined a French fleet that was lying there, but did not come out during the battle, (although the disparity of the two squadrons was so great, and another French fleet was lying within hearing of the roar of cannon!) The English people were far from satisfied at the issue of the contest. Calder had to appear before a court-martial. Nevertheless the damage inflicted on the enemy’s fleet was the means of frustrating the design of an invasion.