

## The Naval Manœuvres.

BY AN IMPERIAL OBSERVER.

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A short summary of the general scope of the Naval Manœuvres free from technical points will, I think, interest many readers who have found it difficult to follow and connect the long reports of correspondents. I hope by my impartial treatment of the subject to leave no room even for conjecture as to the ship or the fleet which was made infallible and invincible by my presence. I am glad to find that on this occasion there are much fewer such ships than usual, and I have therefore freely corrected my impressions by those of others. I propose to deal only with the general movements of the fleets, the Admiralty scheme, and the result as determined by the decision of the umpires. Four fleets were engaged. The A Fleet under Admiral Fitzroy's immediate command, the B Fleet under Admiral Dale, were both red, with Admiral Fitzroy in supreme command of both red fleets. The C Fleet under Admiral Seymour's immediate command, and the D Fleet under Admiral Drummond were both blue, with Admiral Seymour in supreme command of both blue fleets.

On Friday, August 3rd, the fleets were to begin the operations at 9 p. m. On the morning of that day they moved to take up their assigned stations. These were fixed in latitude and longitude so that the several fleets at their points of starting were at fixed distance from Belfast. Thus of the Red Fleets, A (Admiral Fitzroy) from Falmouth moved to a point 383 miles from Belfast. B (Admiral Dale) from Berhaven moved to a point 405 miles from Belfast measured round the north coast of Ireland. The motive for fixing these exact distances was that Belfast was supposed to represent Gibraltar, and the distances reduced proportionately for all the fleets represented the space that the A Fleet if at Malta would have to move to meet the B Fleet there, and the space which the B Fleet would have to cover to meet the A Fleet at Gibraltar. Similarly the C Fleet (Admiral Seymour) moving from Queenstown was placed at a point where the 50th parallel latitude crosses the 9th meridian of longitude, and so occupied a position distant from Belfast proportionate to the others, such as a French fleet at Toulon would hold; while the D Fleet (Admiral Drummond), from the Shannon, took up a position which, on the same principle, represented Brest.

Each of the Blue Fleets C and D (French) were assumed to represent a fighting strength inferior to each of the English Fleets. As the va-

lues were necessarily purely conventional, the lists of vessels making up the several fleets which have been given in all the papers need not be repeated. They are in consequence of this valuation irrelevant. The problem then was as follows: Just as two French fleets placed at Toulon and Brest would be nearer to one another and to Gibraltar than two English fleets placed at Plymouth and Malta, so the two Blue Fleets placed off the Shannon and at the junction of the 9th meridian and 50th parallel were round the opposite sides of the coast of Ireland nearer to one another and to Belfast than the two Red Fleets placed as recorded above. If therefore the two Blue Fleets could take advantage of their position to effect a junction in the neighbourhood of Belfast, they would represent a strength of about fifty, more or less according to the completeness of the concentration. They would be placed between the two English fleets, and if they could succeed in engaging one of the Red Fleets before the other came up, they would represent a force as against it alone of about fifty to thirty. If the Blue Fleets sacrificed every other consideration to effecting their junction, it would be impossible for the Red Fleets to prevent it. In fact, whilst Admiral Dale's fleet ('B' red) was following Admiral Drummond's ('D' blue) round the west and north coast of Ireland. Admiral Seymour's ('C' blue) moving along the south and east coast would be between Admiral Fitzroy ('A' red) and Belfast.

Admiral Seymour in fact arranged for the junction of his two fleets at the earliest possible moment consistent with some concealment by darkness of his actual movement. Moving up through the St. George's Channel and the Irish Sea, he effected his junction with Admiral Drummond in the North Channel at 3 o'clock on Sunday morning. Moving northwards the combined Blue Fleets met Admiral Dale's 'B' Red Fleet off the Maidens. Both fleets were drawn up to oppose his passage into Belfast Lough. In order to represent the effective power of a strong fleet to prevent another running past them, the rules prescribe that ships shall be deemed to have taken refuge in neutral territory if they pass within less than a mile of the five fathom line on a neutral coast. Further they prescribe that a ship shall not pass within eight cables' length of a hostile ship. Admiral Seymour's fleet being drawn up so that none of the hostile fleet could pass between it and the Maidens without violating one or both of these rules, it was impossible for Admiral Dale consistently with the rules to push his way past the superior fleet into Belfast Lough. Nevertheless, ignoring this fact, Admiral Dale made a

running fight of it which lasted for an hour. At the end of that time he had reached safety within Belfast Lough. The rules prescribe that a fleet which has been in action within 4,000 yards for two hours with another fleet having an adequate superiority is to be considered as captured. From the position of the hostile fleets it would have been impossible for Admiral Dale to escape an action carried out for this length of time after he had begun his attempt to reach Belfast had he not violated the two other rules I have named. On all these grounds Admiral Seymour at once claimed to have captured the whole of Admiral Dale's fleet, and the umpires have decided in his favour.

It is obvious that these manœuvres can be made of no use unless strict rules are laid down and strictly interpreted. On the other hand, it is equally obvious that in actual warfare things would not have happened in this way. Either Admiral Dale, finding it impossible to run past the hostile fleets, would have retired northwards after suffering a greater or less amount of loss and inflicting a certain amount of loss upon his opponent, or he would at most in his attempt to run past the hostile fleet have considerably damaged his enemy before his whole fleet had been captured. As it was, Admiral Seymour, convinced that, according to the rules, he need no longer treat Admiral Dale's fleet as a force to be reckoned with, shortly after Admiral Dale's fleet had entered Belfast Lough steamed southwards to engage Admiral Fitzroy, whose fleet was now reported to be approaching from that quarter.

Admiral Dale, not realizing his actual situation, followed closely on the heels of the Blue Fleets and despatched the cruiser *Latona* to warn Admiral Fitzroy of all that had taken place. Apparently *Latona* made her way successfully through the hostile fleet, being chased without effect by blue cruisers. It seems difficult to think that she can, any more than the rest of Admiral Dale's fleet, have escaped capture by the rules in entering Belfast, so that strictly speaking she was in no condition to deliver her message. But by the time she slipped past, the Blue Fleet was moving south and in no such condition to stop all passage through them as they were when blocking Dale's entrance into Belfast through one of the narrowest parts of the North Channel. The point is interesting, because it is obvious that if communication can be established by cruisers through an intercepting fleet between two fleets lying outside it, there is a much greater possibility of their combining their operations and getting the intercepting fleet between two fires.

TO BE CONTINUED.