

The projected invasion of the Old Pretender in 1708 was undertaken with too small a force, and at the wrong point. No landing was attempted, the appearance of Admiral Byng, with the English fleet having sufficed to send the French squadron of thirty-two vessels back to France.

Next comes the plan of invasion projected by Napoleon in 1805, which will assuredly form the ground work of any future plan for the invasion of England. England's strength lay on the sea in her fleet; France's on land in her army. How was the struggle to be carried on? Obviously a naval war must be changed into operations by land, if France was to use her strength to the best advantage.

There were two ways of carrying into practice this theory—the indirect and the direct; the first led to military occupation of the countries of England's allies; the latter to the invasion of her colonies, of Ireland, or of England—London being the objective in the latter case.

The first plan had been steadily followed by Napoleon, 1800 to 1812, by the occupation of Vienna, Berlin, Madrid, Moscow; and what did it lead to? St. Helena!

In like manner, an invasion of Ireland would be but to grapple with a side issue, avoiding the main point, and so fail of permanent effect. Certainly, had he decided to act simply on the defensive against England, he could have operated effectively in Ireland on the offensive. Thirty or forty thousand men under a general of the caliber of Masséna, thrown into Ireland, would soon have put an end to British subsidies to the allies.

The Directory had held this view, and on the 15th of December, 1796, had embarked at Brest General Hoche, fresh from the pacification of La Vendée, on seventeen ships of the line and thirteen frigates, a force destined for the occupation of Ireland. At the landing in Bantry Bay a storm threw the French ships in confusion, carrying the flag-ship, with Hoche on board, back to La Rochelle. Thereon the expedition was regarded as a failure. The attempt was to be renewed in the autumn of 1797. But the Dutch fleet, which was to have transported the invading army, was so badly beaten by Admiral Duncan at Camperdown that it quickly sought a refuge on its own shores.

It is possible that these failures set Napoleon against any attempts to invade Ireland. He saw that the only infallible way to destroy England's power was by the invasion of England. England had been isolated by the treaty of Lunéville. The first consul at once ordered the assembly of 100,000 men, and the construction of a flotilla of small vessels of light draft at Boulogne. Then came the peace of Amiens. On the 13th May, 1803, however, the war broke out afresh. Public opinion, more than his own inclination for the task, now drove Napoleon to take decided measures toward the invasion of England, which had become a rooted idea in France. His preparations were postponed till, in 1805, they were near realization. They were twofold in character—military and political. The first to secure success, and the second to secure abstention from foreign interference.

Now, what did Napoleon in 1805? What do we, at the present time, understand by the success of an invasion of England? A lasting conquest like that of William of Normandy? Certainly not!

Success would consist in—

1. The transport and landing of an invading army.
2. The destruction of the British forces.
3. The occupation of the capital as center of the material as well as the intellectual wealth of the country.
4. A quickly concluded peace, under such conditions as would make it impossible for England to resume the war for a long time.

There was but one way for England to render this success impossible—by annihilating the invading army during the passage or in the attempted landing of the force. The first steps taken must be to blockade the French and Dutch harbors, to render impossible the preparations for the passage of the channel, or at least to hinder them as much as possible.