



## (6) THE ARMADA

**A**LTHOUGH we may find it difficult to understand the full force of this statement, viewing Spain as she is to-day, in the sixteenth century she occupied a place in the world comparable to the place Rome had held before. Philip II. ruled as despot over an empire which might well have provided him with the foundations for world dominance. With reason, he set out to realise that ambition. In his time he was a Napoleon and a Hitler.

Like the later dictators, it was his good fortune to come to power over a people strengthened in spirit by democratic freedom enjoyed before. He found at his disposal the hardihood of a people who had fought consistently, and in the end successfully, against Mohammedan incursions since the days when Abderrahman conquered Iberia and crossed the Pyrenees. He showed, as Napoleon showed after him, that a nation is never so dangerous to its neighbours as when the energy of its free spirits is channelled by the dictatorial direction of a single mind. Spain was rich, powerful in arms, Philip was ambitious, and the rot that follows such men had not yet set in.

### England was Anxious

There was more than a little reason for England's Queen Elizabeth, and Elizabeth's admirals, to watch with some anxiety Spain's preparations for further conquests. Britain had no empire. Scotland was still a separate nation. Ireland was inconveniently Irish. The last of Britain's possessions in France had just been lost. The nation's finances were rickety and Elizabeth's parsimony forced her admirals to depend to a shameful extent on their own pockets to fit, maintain, and fight those little ships that held off the Armada. And against her was raised all the spiritual might of a Church which regarded her as a heretic.

The defeat of the Armada decided between Philip and Elizabeth, between Spain and Britain. It decided Trafalgar, and it decided Dunkirk. It decided the size and speed of the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth. It decided the number of barges concentrated now in the river mouths of the Netherlands. It decided many other things.

### Before the Armada Sailed

There was a good deal of political and ecclesiastical manoeuvring before the

Armada sailed, but the key to it all was Philip's holy zeal to conquer England for Catholicism. England supported the Dutch against him, when he wanted to Catholicise Holland as he had already done Belgium. England ravaged his treasure convoys on the seas, made mock of his power in his own ports, held him up to personal ridicule, singed his beard. England had to go.

His plan of campaign was simple. In the north the Duke of Parma, an able military strategist and a clever administrator, had sufficient troops to maintain the attack against Holland while he summoned all the available man-power to invasion points along the coast about Calais and Dunkirk. From home ports a powerfully equipped Armada of big ships should sail to clear the Channel of English resistance and escort Parma across to the mouth of the Thames.

Under Howard of Effingham, it became the task of the English admirals to prevent this union.

### In the Invasion Ports

When the two fleets met, Parma was waiting with a huge army, reinforced by more than 20,000 troops from Italy, Austria, Germany, and Aragon. Rafts had been built to carry them, and ships to swell the numbers of the Armada sent from Spain to escort them.

One hundred and fifty ships sailed as the Armada under the Duke of Medina Sidonia. Against them England could sail no more than 36 naval vessels. To reinforce this fleet she commissioned merchant ships, most of them armed voluntarily by their owners, assisted by the peoples of the various seaports.

Actually, 191 ships were collected, but their aggregate tonnage was only 31,985, in comparison with the aggregate tonnage and greatly heavier armament of the 60,000 tons of Spanish ships. The Dutch, friends in adversity, contributed 60 ships.

On May 20, 1588, the Armada sailed but was dispersed by storm and driven back into the ports of Biscay and Galicia. Howard, with Drake, sailed out to see for himself the results of this misadventure, found that the Armada was inactive in harbour, and returned to England after patrolling the Channel for some days, with Hawkins watching off Scilly.

### Elizabeth's Meanness

Elizabeth, thinking that the Armada had been completely incapacitated, and having a close eye for the national accounts, ordered Howard to disperse his fleet. Howard, however, had a close eye for the national security, and disobeyed these orders, although disobedience meant that he and his fellow admirals had to bear personally a great part of the expense of maintaining the ships. Even after the battle Elizabeth so shrewishly queried the accounts that the sick and wounded were inadequately attended, the men were half starved, and the admirals half ruined. The statesmen fared no better than the admirals. Burghley and Walsingham, Elizabeth's brain trust, were abused freely and publicly.

But the fleet remained intact, although poorly munitioned and provisioned, and it was ready on July 19 when word came to the bowling green. The Armada had sailed on July 12 and reached the Channel without obstruction or observation by the English. When the game of bowls was finished, the English fleet was warped out against the wind, and Howard brought his ships up to meet the Armada on Saturday, July 20. When he saw Howard coming out to meet him, Medina decided to make off to contact Parma. He intended to fight a strictly defensive action, bending his way steadily across to the coast at Dunkirk or Calais.

### Hit-and-run Tactics

In the running fight that followed some of the best Spanish ships were captured, many others damaged. Thoroughly

outnumbered and outweighed, Howard held his ships off to peck and bite at the enemy. Then the Armada came to anchor in Calais roads on July 27. During those days Howard's initial fleet had been reinforced by ships led into action by Raleigh, Cumberland, Oxford, and Sheffield. The gentlemen of England were laying hands on whatever ships were available, arming them, manning them, and sailing out to see where they could strike a blow. A fleet of Dutch ships kept Parma in check.

Stalemate seemed to be developing when Howard decided to send fireships among the Spanish fleet. He could not well attack where the Spaniards lay close at anchor. He could not grapple and board because of their heavy armament and the number of troops they carried. But the fire sent them scurrying and they re-assembled off Gravelines with difficulty on July 29.

There they were attacked and there they were roundly beaten, until at the end of the day the English had exhausted their ammunition. But they had done enough. Medina decided to make off with the wind up the Channel in the hope of rounding into the Atlantic above Scotland, and beating back to Spain where he would have more sea room to dodge these waspish enemies.

### "God Blew with His Winds"

It was a disaster that he should be forced to flee, and a disaster for Parma that the Channel should be closed against him; but the crowning disaster came with the wind and the weather on the Armada's homeward journey. When Howard left them off the Forth the Spanish still had 120 ships. When they returned finally to Spain they had fifty-three.

The rest had either been wrecked or had put into ports in Ireland. What the sea did not take the Irish did. Whatever religious sympathies they had with Spain were forgotten either in fear for their lives from the threats of the English garrison, or in desire for easy plunder.

Thirty ships had been sunk or taken in the Channel. Calderon made contact with the body of the fleet under Medina on August 23. They were then some hundred and fifty miles west-north-west of Cape Wrath. By September 14 this force of 52 or 53 ships (authorities disagree on the exact number) had cleared the coast of Ireland and was safe.

About 70 ships were still to be accounted for.

### Few Survived

There is a legend that the many thousands of men aboard these ships remained as a racial influence where they landed in Ireland. It is not true. Some few were saved and were taken as captives to England—a mere handful. The rest were drowned, or plundered by the coastal folk, and put to death. They starved and thirsted, and the wind blew them always into the land. They would send boats ashore for water, and the boats' crews would be slain. They would draw off again and try and make the open sea, and again the winds would defeat them, and the rocks along that wild Atlantic coastline of Ireland. If they were wrecked, and any survived the

(Continued on next page)

## INDEX

All-Round Sportsman .....	23	Letters .....	6, 18
Aunt Daisy .....	44-46	Listening .....	13
Blitzkrieg Reporting .....	14	Programmes:	
Books .....	19	Commercial .....	50-55
Boxing Notes .....	25	National .....	26-39
Czech Looks Back .....	17	Overseas .....	56
Decisive Battles .....	2	Puzzles .....	24
DX Notes .....	56	Sinews of War .....	3
Earthquakes are Wonderful ....	10	Things to Come .....	8
Editorial .....	6	Throne of Nelson .....	15
Extracts from Talks .....	7	Troubled Waters .....	22
"For Me, No War" .....	12	Underground .....	16
Fuhrer Chaplin .....	20	War Diary .....	2-5
In the Programmes .....	9	Women .....	40-43
Lessons in Morse .....	16	ZB News .....	47-49