

NAVAL HISTORY OF GREAT BRITAIN.

BRITISH AND FRENCH FLEETS.

In the number of line-of-battle cruisers, the abstract of the British navy for this year agrees precisely with that of the last; but, in commissioned ships of the line, the former shows a trifling superiority.¹ There is also, in the whole number of vessels, an increase of 51; but the total of commissioned cruisers, the best criterion of improvement, is not proportionably affected. The number of ships and vessels, the result of captures from the French, Dutch, and Spaniards, appears considerable.² On the other hand, the loss sustained by the British navy during the year 1796, and which, with the exception of one vessel, and that of a very small class, captured, and three accidentally burnt, happened through bad weather, far exceeds the loss of any similar period since that memorable year for hurricanes, 1780. The loss of life, too, as will appear by the proper list,³ was afflictively severe. Among the acquired line-of-battle ships are four that were purchased, while building, of the East India Company; and the whole of the seven new frigates, two of which averaged 1000 tons each, were built of fir.

By an Admiralty order, dated on the 20th of June, 1796, the complements of the different classes of frigates in the British navy were fixed on a new scale, as follows:—

Class in Abstracts.	Men and Boys.	
	Establ.	Net. ⁴
<i>Z</i> and <i>A</i> 38 gun-frigate	284	281
<i>B</i> and <i>C</i> 36 „ 18-pdr. . . .	264	261
<i>D</i> „ „ 12-pdr. . . .	240	237
<i>E</i> and <i>F</i> 32 „ 18-pdr. . . .	254	251
<i>G</i> „ „ 12-pdr. large	240	237
<i>H</i> „ „ „ small	215	212
<i>I</i> 28 „	195	193
<i>K</i> 24 „	155	153

¹ See Appendix, Annual Abstract, No. 5.

² See Appendix, Nos. 1, 2, 3.

³ See Appendix, No. 4.

⁴ Deducing the widows' men.

The number of commissioned officers and masters, belonging to the British navy at the commencement of the year, was

Admirals	24
Vice-admirals	38
Rear-admirals	35
” superannuated 27.	
Post-captains	483
” superannuated 23.	
Commanders, or sloop-captains	282
Lieutenants	2038
” superannuated 26.	
Masters	451

and the number of seamen and marines, voted for the service of the year, was 120,000.¹

As soon as the royalists in La Vendée were subdued, and Spain was on the eve of becoming an ally in the war, France bent her serious thoughts upon the invasion of England ; in which attempt she was to be assisted by the fleets of Holland and Spain. A close intimacy subsisted between Vice-admiral Truguet, the French minister of marine, and General Hoche, who was to command the army destined to be employed in the expedition ; and, as is not invariably the case in combined operations, both the admiral and the general entered alike heartily into the cause, and concurred in all the principal details of the gigantic plan which their united labours had prepared.

Before, however, the plan was finally settled, a secret committee was summoned to meet at the house of the Director Carnot. Here it was discovered, that the state of the treasury would not admit of the plan's being adopted to its full extent. It was therefore resolved to confine the expedition, “for the present,” to a descent upon Ireland ; a country whose disaffected inhabitants would, it was known, greet the invaders with joy, and yet whose capture by France would be inflicting a blow upon England, of which she might never recover.

In the summer of 1796 two agents, from the secret Executive Directory of the Society of United Irishmen, repaired to Paris, and held several conferences with the members of the French Directory ; from whom the former received renewed assurances of the most prompt succour in men, arms, and munitions of war. The republican government offered to send 25,000 men ; but the Irish directory expressed themselves satisfied with 15,000. As soon as matters were nearly ripe, Lord Edward Fitzgerald and

¹ See Appendix, No. 5.

Mr. Arthur O'Connor feigned a journey to Germany, and having traversed that country, had an interview, by appointment, with General Hoche, at Bâle in Switzerland. Here the traitors and the French general finally arranged their plan of proceedings.

According to Vice-admiral Truguet's plan, the Brest fleet was to have a double destination. The 15 two-deckers, of which with the *Océan* (late *Peuple*) and *Invincible* three-deckers, and two others repairing in the harbour, it was then composed, were first to escort to the coast of Ireland a strong division of Hoche's troops, distributed on board the fleet, consisting, besides those 15 line-of-battle ships, of 12 frigates and several transports.

The debarkation effected, Vice-admiral Villaret Joyeuse, to whom the naval command of the expedition had been intrusted, was to detach himself, without loss of time, with the eight best sailing line-of-battle ships of the fleet, and hasten to the Isles of France and Bourbon. There he was to embark the black troops, which the agents of the Directory, who had gone out in Rear-admiral Sercey's frigate-squadron, had, after enfranchising all the slaves in the colony, been directed to organize. These troops Admiral Villaret was to carry to the succour of Tippoo Saib; and, having landed the men, was to co-operate with Rear-admiral Sercey in doing all possible mischief to the British factories and commerce on the coasts of Malabar and Coromandel. After this M. Villaret and his eight sail of the line and five or six frigates would probably pass to the aid of the Dutch, who had already paid over to the hands of the French minister of marine the sum of 1,200,000 francs, as the estimated cost of equipping the squadron which France had promised should, in conjunction with a Dutch squadron, attempt the recapture of their late eastern possessions.

The seven sail of the line expected at Brest under Richery, and the five which M. Villeneuve was bringing from Toulon, would amply replace the eight carried off by M. Villaret, and were to transport to Ireland the remainder of the troops attached to the expedition. As, however, M. Villaret saw nothing but India, and General Hoche nothing but Ireland, there was a want of harmony between the two chiefs; and Hoche, as possessing the greatest interest with the government, got M. Villaret removed from the naval command, and Vice-admiral Morard-de-Galles appointed in his stead.

It was the intention of M. Truguet, that the expedition should leave Brest before the end of October, or the beginning of November at the latest; but General Hoche, being desirous to trans-

port the whole of his troops in one trip, preferred waiting the arrival of the two daily-expected squadrons.

On the 5th of November M. Richery, having gained intelligence that a British squadron, whose force, if he had been informed of it, he would have found to consist of only seven sail of the line (one a three-decker) and two frigates, was cruising about 90 miles to the south-west of Belle-Isle, considered it too hazardous to attempt entering Brest: he therefore, with his seven two-deckers and three frigates, put into Rochefort. Here the French admiral remained until information reached him, that Sir Roger Curtis had returned into port with his squadron. Thus left at liberty to proceed, M. Richery, on the 8th of December, got under way with five of the best-conditioned of his line-of-battle ships and his three frigates; and, on the morning of the 11th, passing barely in sight of Sir John Colpoys's fleet, and chasing away his frigates stationed off the mouth of the harbour, the French admiral anchored in Brest.

Two only of M. Richery's five ships, the *Pégase* (late *Barrae*) and *Révolution*, were in a state soon to put to sea again: and these were ordered to be refitted, and have their troops (600 each) and stores embarked within 24 hours, it being the determination of General Hoche not to wait any longer for the arrival of M. Villeneuve.

The chief point of debarkation was to be Bantry bay; in which three different anchorages were chosen, to be used according to the state of the weather. If the wind blew from the eastward, which was out of the bay, the fleet was to anchor in Bear haven, situated between Great-Bear island and the main. If the wind blew from the westward, the fleet was to descend the bay to its bottom, and anchor, one division between the eastern extent of Whiddy island and the main, and the other directly athwart the entrance of Glengary harbour. If, in addition to a favourable wind, the weather should be moderate, the whole fleet was to anchor at the entrance of the river Cumbola. Should any unforeseen circumstances prevent the fleet from entering Bantry bay, it was to proceed to the mouth of the river Shannon, and there effect the debarkation. Every captain in the fleet was provided with a large chart of the intended scene of operations, on which the different anchorages, as well in Bantry bay as at the mouth of the Shannon, were clearly marked out. In short, every precaution had been taken, by the able officer who then presided over the French marine, to prevent any failure in the naval part of the expedition.

On the 15th of December, the day on which the *Pégase* and *Révolution* were to have been ready, the fleet got under way from the road of Brest, and anchored in front of the goulet, between Camaret and Bertheaume bays. Here Vice-admiral Morard-de-Galles awaited the arrival of two ships; and, while he is doing so, we will give a description of the whole of the force placed under his command. It consisted of the

Gun-ship.

80	Indomptable . . .	{	Vice-admiral Morard-de-Galles.
		{	Commodore Jacques Bedout.
	Droits-de-l'Homme . . .	{	Rear-admiral François-Joseph Bouvet.
		{	Commodore Jean Raimond La Crosse.
	Constitution . . .	{	Rear-admiral Joseph Marie Nielly.
		{	Commodore Louis L'Héritier.
	Pégase . . .	{	Rear-admiral — Richery.
		{	Captain Clement Laronier.
	Nestor . . .	{	Commodore Chas.-Alex.-Léon Durand-Linois.
	Révolution . . .	„	P.-René-M.-Et. Dumanoir-le-Pelley.
	Fougueux . . .	„	Esprit-Tranquille Maistral.
74	Trajan . . .	„	Julien Le Ray.
	Mucius . . .	„	Pierre-Maul. Jul. Querangal.
	Tourville . . .	Captain	Jean-Baptiste Henry.
	Pluton . . .	„	Jean-Marie Lebrun.
	Eole . . .	„	Joseph-Pierre-André Malin.
	Wattigny . . .	„	Henri-Alexandre Thévenard.
	Cassard . . .	„	— Dufay.
	Redoutable . . .	„	— Moncoussu.
	Patriote . . .	„	— La Fargue.
	Séduisant . . .	„	— Dufossey.

Frigates, *Scévola* (rasé), *Impatiente*, *Romaine*, *Immortalité*, *Tortue*, *Bellone*, *Bravoure*, *Charente*, *Cocarde*, *Fraternité*, *Résolue*, *Sirène*, and *Surveillante*.

Brig-corvettes, *Affronteur*, *Atalante*, *Mutine*, *Renard*, *Vantour*, and *Volteigeur*.

Transports, *Nicodème*, *Fille-Unique*, *Ville-de-Lorient*, *Suffren*, *Justine*, *Alle-gro*, *Expériment*; and

Powder-vessel, *Fidèle*, a frigate armed en flûte.

So that the expedition was composed of 17 ships of the line, 13 frigates, six corvettes, seven transports, and a powder-ship, in all 44 sail of vessels. On board of each line-of-battle ship were 600 troops. The *Scévola* carried 400; each of the frigates 250; the six corvettes 300 between them; three of the transports 450 each; three others 300 each, and one (a horse transport) 50; making a total of 16,200 men, that is, rank and file, or, including officers of all ranks, at least 18,000. But some of the English accounts represent the number at 20,000, and others as high as 25,000. In addition to the troops, which consisted of both cavalry and infantry, the fleet carried a quan-

tity of field-artillery, besides ammunition and stores of every description. The commander-in-chief of the land forces, as already mentioned, was General Hoche, having under him, among other general officers of note, Generals Grouchy, Borin, and Humbert.

On the 16th, in the forenoon, just as the *Pégase* and *Révolution* were descried coming through the goulet, the French fleet at anchor in Camaret bay began getting under way, with the wind from the eastward, and consequently as fair as it could blow. At 4 P.M., which at this season of the year is nearly dark, all the ships were under sail, and steering for the passage du Raz, the route which had been selected by M. Morard-de-Galles, in spite of the dangers it presented, the better to conceal his movements from the British admiral cruising off Ushant; and whose fleet had that morning been counted from the look-outs at 30 sail great and small; so the French accounts state, but the number appears to have been greatly overrated.

Contrary, as it would appear, to the directions of the minister of marine, all the French admirals, except Richery, embarked on board frigates: the two commanders-in-chief were in the *Fraternité*; Rear-admiral Bouvet, with the second in command of the troops, in the *Immortalité*; and Rear-admiral Nielly in the *Résolue*. Finding the darkness coming rapidly on and the wind growing variable, M. Morard-de-Galles resolved not to attempt the passage du Raz, and accordingly signalled his fleet to steer for the passage d'Iroise, or that directly in front of the port. Owing to the darkness, few of the ships saw the signal, or the alteration which the *Fraternité*, the better to mark the admiral's intention, had made in her course. The consequence was, that the greater part of the fleet entered the narrow passage du Raz; while the remainder followed the admiral through the wide opening of l'Iroise, hoping to rejoin their companions soon after rounding the *Saintes*.

Several circumstances, besides the darkness and the partial change in the course, conspired to disorganize the fleet at its departure from port; a fleet of ships, by the composition of their crews and the lumbered state of their decks, ill prepared at best to encounter difficulties of any kind. Besides the guns fired and lights shown by the *Fraternité*, to denote the change in her course, the corvette *Atalante* was directed to stand into the middle of the fleet, and there fire guns to enforce the signal of the commander-in-chief. While this was doing, guns were heard, and rockets and blue lights seen, in various directions.

Part of the guns proceeded from the *Séduisant* 74, which had struck on the Grand Stevenet rock, near the entrance of the passage du Raz; and which ship, in the course of the night, was entirely lost, with her captain, several other officers, and about 680 out of her 1300 in crew and passengers. Other guns, with some rockets, proceeded from a British frigate, and contributed in no small degree to add to the confusion which prevailed in the French fleet.

This was the 44-gun frigate *Indefatigable*, Captain Sir Edward Pellew; who, having under his orders the 38-gun frigate *Révolutionnaire*, Captain Francis Cole, 36-gun frigates *Amazon* and *Phoebe*, Captains Robert Carthew Reynolds and Robert Barlow, and hired armed-lugger *Duke of York*, commanded by Mr. Benjamin Sparrow, had been directed to watch the Brest fleet, and communicate every movement to Vice-admiral Colpoys, at his rendezvous about eight leagues to the westward of Ushant. On the 11th, when Sir Edward descried, as already related, the squadron of M. Richery entering the road, he despatched the *Amazon* to England and the *Phoebe* to the admiral. On the 15th, at 3 h. 30 m. p.m., although he had been chased several times by a line-of-battle ship and five frigates stationed in Bertheaume bay, Sir Edward was close enough in to discover the French fleet coming through the goulet, and immediately sent the *Phoebe*, who had since rejoined, to Vice-admiral Colpoys.

On the 16th, at daylight, having stood off and on during the night, the *Indefatigable* and *Révolutionnaire* made sail on a wind towards Brest; and at noon, when Saint Mathias point bore from the *Indefatigable* east by north and Ushant north by east, the two frigates again got a sight of the French fleet, which had now anchored between Camaret and Bertheaume bays. At 3 h. 30 m. p.m., on seeing the fleet get under way, Sir Edward despatched the *Révolutionnaire* to the admiral, and, with the *Indefatigable* alone, continued at his post, having, at 4 h. 15 m. p.m., the *Bec du Raz* bearing south by east half-east. The *Indefatigable* now managed to keep just a-head of the French fleet on its way out, and was sometimes within half-gun shot only of the leading ship. At 7 p.m. she began firing guns and sending up rockets; at 7 h. 30 m. hove to, and at 8 h. 30 m., having observed several of the French ships haul close round the *Saintes*, filled and made all sail to the north-west.

On losing sight of the enemy a few minutes afterwards, the *Indefatigable* fired half and quarter minute-guns, burnt blue

lights, and hoisted a light at each mast-head. At midnight she hauled by the wind to the southward; and, at 6 h. 30 m. A.M. on the 17th, Sir Edward sent the lugger with despatches to Falmouth, and shortly afterwards proceeded thither himself. The Brest fleet and its memorable proceedings on this occasion now claim our exclusive attention.

On the 17th, at daybreak, Rear-admiral Bouvet, having cleared the passage du Raz, found himself in company with only nine sail of the line, six frigates including his own, and one transport. He therefore opened his despatches, as directed in the case of separation, and by them learnt, that he was to make Mizen Head on the coast of Ireland, and cruise off there during five days, when a frigate would join him with fresh instructions. Making sail, about noon, with this destination in view, the rear-admiral did not proceed straight to Cape Clear, lest he should encounter the British fleet, but steered to the westward, and continued sailing in that direction until daylight on the 19th, when he altered his course to north. Shortly afterwards his advanced frigate signalled 16 vessels; which proved to be part of the expedition, and at noon joined company. Rear-admiral Bouvet now had under his command 15 sail of the line, 10 frigates including the *Scévola*, three corvettes, and five transports. The missing line-of-battle ship was the *Nestor*, and the missing frigates, the *Fraternité*, *Cocarde*, and *Romaine*.

On the 20th the weather was extremely foggy. On the 21st at 7 h. 30 m. A.M., the advanced frigates gained a sight of Duresey island, and shortly afterwards of Mizen Head. Having arrived off the entrance of Bantry bay, the rear-admiral made the signal to prepare to anchor. By this time several pilot-boats, mistaking the fleet for British, had got among the leading frigates, and were detained by the orders of the admiral, who thus found himself provided with pilots for almost every ship in his fleet. M. Bouvet now learnt that, for three days, no ship had appeared off the coast, and that the only force at anchor in Cork harbour consisted of six frigates.

During the whole of the 21st, and a part of the 22nd, the fleet beat against a fresh easterly wind, and made very little way. Finding this to be the case, the rear-admiral, at 4 P.M., anchored his frigate a little to windward of the eastern extremity of Great Bear island, and was soon joined by eight ships of the line, a second frigate, four corvettes, and one transport. The remainder of the ships, their captains having been signalled to act according to their own discretion, kept under way, and at

daylight on the 23rd were not to be seen by the ships at anchor.

During the whole of this day and night it blew hard from the eastward, and there was a heavy sea in the bay; but on the next day, the 24th, the wind moderated, not sufficiently, however, in rear-admiral Bouvet's opinion, for the ships to weigh: they therefore continued at their anchors. A council of war, held this day on board the *Immortalité*, decided that the 6000 troops on board the ships present should be disembarked; and General Grouchy, now the commanding officer of the land-forces, made a formal requisition to that effect to Rear-admiral Bouvet.

Although he had received no instruction on that head, to guide him in case of separation, the rear-admiral immediately despatched a corvette to reconnoitre the coast; and, on learning that there was a creek near at hand, where several boats might land together, he got under way with his ships. This was at 4 P.M., and consequently too late to effect much at this season of the year. Moreover the wind and sea began to get up, and the pilots pronounced that a storm was brewing. The ships thereupon re-anchored; and at night the gale came on so violently from the eastward, that the frigates pitched fore-castle under.

On the 25th the gale increased. Several of the line-of-battle ships drove from their anchors and stood out to sea. One of them, the *Indomptable*, ran foul of the *Resolue*, and carried away all the frigate's masts. In the evening the *Immortalité*, having parted one cable, was obliged to cut the other, to save herself from going on shore. On clearing the bay, the frigate could do nothing but scud, and continued, for three days, running before the wind.

On the 29th the wind moderated, and became fair for returning to Bantry bay, from which the *Immortalité* then bore south-west distant about 20 leagues. Apprehensive, however, that he should find none of his ships there, and having only a few days' provisions on board, Rear-admiral Bouvet steered for Brest, and on the 1st of January at 1 A.M. entered the road; where he was joined the same day by the *Indomptable* 80, and the *Fougueux*, *Mucius*, *Redoutable*, and *Patriote* 74s.

We have already mentioned that, on the 20th of December, the *Nestor* 74, and *Fraternité*, *Romaine*, and *Cocarde* frigates were sailing in company. At this time, as appears by their journals, they were very near to the division of Rear-admiral Bouvet; but each admiral was concealed from the other's view by the thick fog that prevailed. The violent wind, which dis-

persed that fog, separated those four ships in spite of all their endeavours to keep together; and on the next day, the 21st, when nearly in sight of the coast of Ireland, the *Fraternite* found herself almost under the guns of an English frigate (described as “un vaisseau rase”), which she at first took for the *Romaine*. As soon as the mistake was discovered, the *Fraternite* made all sail, closely pursued by the frigate; and from whom her escape appeared doubtful, until darkness enabled her to alter her course.

This chase had carried the *Fraternite* to a great distance from the Irish coast: and, now that the admiral wished to return, the wind blew violently from the eastward. After beating about until the morning of the 29th, the *Fraternite* obtained a shift of wind in her favour, and stood towards Bantry bay. In her way thither, the frigate met the *Revolution*, in company with the *Scévola* rase; whose crew and passengers the 74 was occupied in removing, to save them from perishing in the vessel, which, unable from age and weakness to withstand the violence of the gale, was then in a sinking state. The two mortified commanders-in-chief now learnt that not a ship of their fleet remained in the bay: they persevered, however, in steering towards it, until, on the second day, Captain Dumanoir sent to inform the admiral that, with so many hands as he now had on board (upwards of 1600), his provisions would not hold out much longer. This determined the two chiefs, on board of whose frigate a part of the *Scévola*'s crew had also been received, to return home.

On the 8th of January, at 7 A.M., in latitude 51° north, longitude 13° 11 west from Greenwich, the wind at north-east, the *Fraternite* and her consort fell in with, and immediately tacked away from, the British 32-gun frigate *Unicorn*, Captain Sir Thomas Williams, and 36-gun frigate *Doris*, Captain the Honourable Charles Jones; from whom the 32-gun frigate *Druid*, Captain Richard King, had just parted company, along with the French transport *Ville-de-Lorient*, captured the preceding evening. This precipitate flight of the French 74 and frigate brought with it an evil little suspected by the two commanders-in-chief on board the latter. Eleven ships belonging to their fleet were at that very time to windward, chasing the *Unicorn* and *Doris*; and which ships the *Revolution* and *Fraternité* might also have discovered, had the latter continued a short time longer upon the course they had been steering.

On the next morning, the 9th, the *Unicorn* and *Doris* again