

The Invincible Armada of Spain

Philip meditated vengeance on England. For this purpose he fitted out the most formidable naval armament that ever rode on the ocean. The project was no less than the complete subjugation of England, and the establishment of the religion of Rome throughout all Europe. The crisis of Protestantism had come. Should England, should the rising colonies of this New World, should all Europe and Asia smile under the benign auspices of the cross, or groan beneath the usurpations of Rome? The vast empire of Philip was roused to strike a fatal blow. The noise of preparation sounded in every part of his dominions. "In all the ports of Sicily, Naples, Spain, and Portugal artificers were employed in building vessels of uncommon size and force," naval stores collected, provisions amassed, armies levied, and plans laid for fitting out such a fleet as had never before been seen in Europe. Ministers, generals, admirals, men of every craft and name, were employed in forwarding the grand design. Three years elapsed in the stupendous preparation. Who could doubt that such preparations, conducted by officers of such consummate skill, would finally be successful? Confident of success, and ostentatious of their power, they had already denominated this armament the Invincible Armada. The time for the actual invasion drew near. Troops from all quarters were assembling, from Italy, Spain, Flanders, Austria, the Netherlands, and the shores of the Baltic. One general burst of enthusiasm pervaded every nook and corner of the empire. Princes, dukes, nobles, men of all ranks and conditions, equally embarked their fortunes, lives, and honours in an enterprise so promising of wealth and glory, and so calculated to engage their religious enthusiasm. And further to cherish the general infatuation, the Pope had fulminated a fresh bull of excommunication against Elizabeth, declared her deposed, dissolved her subjects from their oath of allegiance, and granted a plenary indulgence to all who should engage in the invasion. All were elated with the highest hopes of success. And who could doubt that in a few short weeks English power would be prostrate and English Protestantism no more? But follow on a little, and behold the hand of Him who keepeth Israel as the apple of his eye. This formidable armament had been consigned to the command of the Marquis of Santa Croce, a sea officer of great reputation and experience; and who should dare whisper a doubt that such an armament, under such a commander, should not annihilate the reformed religion from the face of the earth. But mark its progress. The moment the Invincible Armada is ready for sea, the admiral is seized with fever and dies. And by a singular concurrence the vice-admiral meets the same fate. The fleet is delayed. England gains time. An inexperienced admiral is then appointed. The fleet sails, (1588) the next day meets a violent tempest which scatters the ships; some are sunk, and others compelled to put back into port. Again they are all at sea, and are descried approaching the shores of England, with fresh hopes in the prosecution of their enterprise. The English admiral sees the Armada, "coming full sail towards him, disposed in the form of a crescent, and stretching the distance of seven miles from the extremity of one division to that of the other." Never had so mighty a fleet rode the ocean before, and never, perhaps, the confidence of man so positive of success. Protestantism was, in anticipation, annihilated. These vessels brought the implements of torture by which the stern heretics of England were to pay the price of their defection from Rome. The writer has seen, in Queen Elizabeth's armoury in the Tower of London, the thumb-screws, fetters, battle-axes, boarding-pikes, and the invincible banner, which were taken as spoils from the Armada. But behold the hand of God here. Just as the lion, sure of his prey, was about to pounce on the lamb, Heaven

interposes. The firmness and courage of the English were less remarkable than the temerity and confusion of the enemy. The elements fought for the righteous case.

The fire, the wind, and the tempest, were so many angels of death to the boasted invincibility of the Spaniards. The destruction of this vast and formidable armament was effected almost without human agency. Deus flavit et dissipantur. The visionary scheme of Philip vanished like the summer's cloud. Never was a project more wisely planned; never preparations more ample, or hopes of success raised higher. Very slight obstacles were anticipated to the landing of the entire invading army on the coast of England; and it was confidently expected that a single battle would decide the fate of England and of Protestantism for ever. Yet Heaven does not permit a single Spaniard to step foot on English soil; the invaders sustain but slight damage of loss in any way, while in a very little time the ocean is strewn with the corpses of their proud invaders, and with the wrecks of their noble vessels.

[Return to Gallery Writings](#)