

# Extract from *The Story of God's Dealings with Our Nation* Volume 2

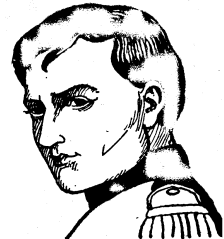
## War With France (1793)

As the French had renounced<sup>1</sup> all their treaties it was clear that Britain would be provoked into fighting to protect her interests and to prevent the French from over-running the Low Countries. In fact the French declared war on Great Britain first and the fifteen years of peace that Pitt had hoped for in which to achieve his aims were not granted to him.

## Conduct Of The War

As part of his policy of saving money, Pitt had cut down on spending on defence. Defences were therefore not as adequate as they might have been. However, it was thought that the French, being disorganised by the revolution, would be easily defeated. Britain was fighting alongside, Holland, Prussia, Spain, Sardinia, and Austria. This alliance lacked a strong leader and did not work together effectively. These mistakes and problems led to difficulties and defeats.

The French fought desperately to retain their new “freedom.” The soldiers of the coalition had no such motivation. The French found an outstanding leader, Napoleon Bonaparte and the allies had no one to match him. The French, far from being defeated, advanced to the Rhine. The coalition broke up as Holland was conquered by the French and Prussia and Spain made peace. Sardinia was defeated by the French and Austria was invaded. The Spanish and Dutch fleets were now at the service of the French. The Austrians made peace with France and in 1797 only Britain was left to challenge revolutionary France. There had been some successes on the British side. Lord Howe had defeated the French fleet on the “Glorious First of June” in 1794 and the Spanish fleet (on the side of the French by this time) was defeated by Jervis and Nelson<sup>2</sup> at Cape St. Vincent in 1797.



*Napoleon*

## Britain Alone (1797)

In England, people made preparations for an invasion by Napoleon and his army. The militia<sup>3</sup> was drilled, beacons were made ready on the hill tops and a strict watch was kept for the first sign of an invading force. Not only did Britain now face France alone, there were also other serious problems which could easily lead to defeat. There was a danger of rebellion in Ireland, encouraged by the French. There were also two mutinies in the navy.

## Mutiny

Conditions in the navy were so bad that it is surprising that a mutiny had not broken out before. Many of the men were forced to serve in the navy having been brought in by press-gangs. Some were prisoners sent to serve in the navy because of the war. Food on board was poor and in short supply, living conditions were appalling, discipline was very harsh, and the pay for all this was very low. In spite of this the nation was very proud of the navy and was shocked when the mutinies

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1 The treaties had been made by the government of the king. The revolutionary government declared that it did not consider itself bound by those treaties since it had not made them.

2 Nelson was one of our great naval heroes.

3 Part-time defence volunteers, successors to the train-bands and the *fyrd*. See Volume 1 Chapter 4, “Alfred Organises Defence and the Navy” p. 31.

occurred.

The first mutiny began at Spithead. The admiralty negotiated with representatives of the mutineers. When the mutiny was brought to an end with promises of improvements in conditions, the men at once asked to be allowed to go and fight the enemy. Another mutiny then broke out in the fleet which was anchored off the Nore in the mouth of the Thames. The mutineers blockaded the river and made demands which were not so reasonable as those of the Spithead mutineers. This mutiny was suppressed rigorously. The leaders were revolutionary agitators of the type so feared at the time. They were hanged and the mutiny came to an end. An attack by the French while these mutinies were going on could have had serious consequences. However, it was only when the mutinies were over that the Dutch fleet (now in the service of France) left harbour and sailed into the channel. The Battle of Camperdown followed and the Dutch fleet was completely defeated, the men who had joined in the Nore mutiny fighting very bravely. The victories of The Glorious First of June, Cape St. Vincent and the Battle of Camperdown "...kept up the spirit of the nation."<sup>4</sup> England was now fighting for her own safety, and this strengthened the hand of the government. No Englishman, however sympathetic to the ideas of the French revolutionaries, could really wish the French to be successful in invading England. The defeat of the Dutch fleet put to an end the immediate danger of an invasion; in any case Napoleon's thoughts were elsewhere.

## **Napoleon And Egypt**

Napoleon Bonaparte was born on the island of Corsica. He had risen by means of his military skill to the command of the French army that successfully invaded Italy. Napoleon inspired great loyalty and devotion in his soldiers. He succeeded very well as a commander because he moved his troops quickly from one place to another and was very good at sudden attacks. This completely put out his enemies whose commanders were used to more old fashioned military tactics. He now made it his aim to attack England by means of cutting her off from her trade in India before attempting an invasion of England herself. He decided to do this by capturing Egypt. He evaded Nelson at first but, after he had landed his troops in Egypt, Nelson discovered Napoleon's fleet at anchor in Aboukir Bay. Nelson destroyed almost the whole fleet in the Battle of the Nile (1797). This left Napoleon's army trapped in Egypt.

## **Income Tax (1798)**

In order to meet the expenses of war, Pitt introduced an income tax.<sup>5</sup> He had great difficulty in persuading Parliament to agree to this. This was because the members themselves and those who voted for them would have to pay most of the tax. It was also very unpopular because those who paid it did not like having to make public the size of their income. Pitt only persuaded the members to agree to the tax by promising that it would be removed when the war ended.

## **The Second Coalition**

Once again, after the Battle of the Nile, Austria, Russia, Turkey and Naples decided to form a coalition with England in an attempt to defeat France. The idea was to restore the Bourbon kings to the throne of France and recover all the land that had been conquered by the French. For a time this coalition was successful. Then things began to go wrong. An English expedition to the Netherlands failed. Nelson "...wasted time and lost honour at the corrupt court of Naples."<sup>6</sup> The British commanders of the fleet in the Mediterranean relaxed and Napoleon was able to take advantage of

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4 Gaskoin, C.J.B., *The Hanoverians* (London, n.d.) p.145.

5 An income tax is a tax levied in proportion to the tax payers income. A very low income earner would pay little or no tax. High incomes would attract high tax payments.

6 Gaskoin, C.J.B., *The Hanoverians* (London, n.d.) p.149.

the situation and slip back into France. Here he overthrew the government and made himself First Consul – a title borrowed from the old Roman Republic.<sup>7</sup> This was exactly what Burke had predicted would happen. Napoleon himself did not care about liberty. He said “It is necessary that we should always talk of liberty, equality and justice... but never grant any liberty whatever.”<sup>8</sup> After becoming First Consul, he led his army to a victory over the Austrians and the Second Coalition dissolved at once.

### **Britain Alone Again**

Britain was now facing France alone once more. The measures she adopted for defence angered the neutral powers<sup>9</sup> greatly. They included searching neutral ships and seizing anything bound for France that could possibly be contraband of war: that is anything that could be used in the war against Britain. There were also the so-called paper blockades. These were blockades of French ports. A blockade was normal during war time. The neutral powers would expect British ships to be guarding French ports and preventing them entering. Instead, since there were not enough British ships to spare to blockade France, the ports were simply *declared* to be blockaded. Then if a neutral ship was caught making towards a blockaded port it was captured and held.

At Napoleon’s suggestion, the neutral powers, Denmark, Sweden and Russia, formed an Armed Neutrality to resist the way the British were using their supremacy of the sea. The situation was grave but it was at this moment that a great victory was won over the Danish fleet at the Battle of Copenhagen (1801). It was during this battle that Nelson put the telescope to his blind eye in order not to see the signal to retreat which had been given by the Admiral Sir Hyde Parker.

### **Egypt And India**

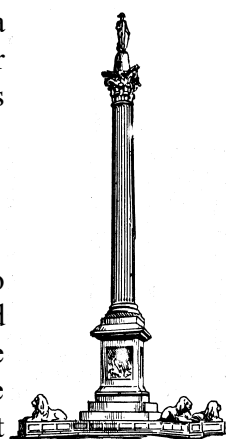
The French forces left by Napoleon in Egypt were defeated at the Battle of Alexandria and Napoleon’s soldiers were rounded up. In this way the threat to India was removed. With this threat gone and British naval supremacy established again, the British government decided to open negotiations for peace.

### **Peace Of Amiens (1802)**

A peace treaty was negotiated and signed but it proved to be no more than a temporary truce. The treaty did not mention the threat that France posed to her neighbours by occupying land in North Italy, Holland and up to the Rhine. As this was the main cause of the war, war soon broke out again.

### **The Napoleonic War (1803-15)**

Napoleon was not a sailor. His plans for invading Britain therefore ran into difficulties that he did not experience on the mainland of Europe. He assembled an army to invade Britain that was so large it could not even get on board the ships that were to carry it across the channel in a single tide. Since three whole days of calm weather without the British fleet in sight would be needed to get this huge force across the channel, the only thing to do was to lure the British so far away that the British fleet could not return before the invasion force reached



Nelson Monument  
in  
Trafalgar Square, London

7 Napoleon considered himself the heir to Caesar and Charlemagne and wanted to rule over an European Empire dominated by France. As well as the coronation in Paris during which he took the crown from the Pope and crowned himself, he also crowned himself again with the Iron Crown of Lombardy, a great symbol of European Empire, which had been worn by Charlemagne, Otto the Great and other European rulers.

8 Quoted in Unstead, R.J., *The Rise of Great Britain* (London, 1963) p.170.

9 Neutral powers were those countries not involved in the war.

its destination. Nelson, however, was not deceived and Napoleon's plans led ultimately to the Battle of Trafalgar at which the combined Spanish and French fleets were not only defeated but virtually wiped out. It was at Trafalgar that Nelson hung out the famous signal "England expects that every man will do his duty." Britain was now safe from invasion but a price had been paid: Nelson lost his life in the battle.

## **Napoleon Conquers Europe**

Napoleon continued his conquest of Europe until by 1806 he was in control of all Europe to the west of Russia. The things that Pitt had planned at the beginning of his ministry seemed ruined by Napoleon's success. "Roll up that map of Europe" said Pitt a few days before his death in 1806, "it will not be wanted these ten years." Only Britain remained unconquered and safe from the French army. The greatest land-power (Napoleon's France) and the greatest sea-power (Britain) now faced each other. Since it was obvious that Napoleon could not defeat Britain on the sea, he decided on a way of defeating Britain by strangling her trade.

## **The Continental System**

Britain was the first nation to become a great manufacturing producer. The nations of the continent had become dependent on British manufactured goods. Napoleon decreed that British goods found anywhere in Europe would be seized. He also banned any trading between British ports and European ports. Any ship found to be engaged in such trade was to be seized. This arrangement was known as the Continental System. Although British trade was damaged, the damage was by no means fatal. Supplies of hardware, textiles and other articles normally imported from Britain began to become scarce in Europe. It became clear that Napoleon's tactic would not ultimately succeed. Both Russia and Scandinavia were not controlled by Napoleon's armies. They both had coastlines with ports through which British goods entered Europe. Napoleon's victory over the Russians at Friedland in 1807 led to a treaty (the Treaty of Tilsit) which brought Russia into the continental system. The Czar of Russia also agreed to persuade the Scandinavian countries of Sweden and Denmark, along with Portugal, to join. The British responded by sending a fleet to Denmark and demanding that the Danes should hand their fleet over to them until the war ended. This the Danes refused to do. The British then bombarded the Danish port of Copenhagen for three days and took the fleet anyway. This action, although high handed to say the least, probably shortened the war considerably.



*Infantry man  
Peninsular War  
1808-1814*

## **The Peninsula War**

When Napoleon's army began to invade Portugal, the Portuguese sent to the British for help. A British force was sent under Sir Arthur Wellesely (afterwards the Duke of Wellington) and the French were driven out of Portugal. The combined British and Portuguese forces with the help of Spanish Nationalists then turned to the task of driving the French out of the whole of the Peninsula. This was a long and difficult task but Wellington was achieving it when something happened elsewhere in Europe which greatly helped him.

## **Napoleon At Moscow (1812)**

The Russians, whose winters are very severe, were suffering a great shortage of the good woollen cloth they were used to importing from Britain. The Continental System was costing them dear and Czar Alexander<sup>10</sup> therefore broke away from it. Napoleon could not endure this. If Russia traded with Britain, so would other countries and his whole scheme would collapse. He needed to get his army to Russia at once to compel the Czar to keep to the Continental System.

### **Retreat From Moscow**

Napoleon had to make up an army to fight in Russia from French troops already stationed in other parts of Europe. He had to withdraw a large number of troops for this purpose from the Peninsula, which was a great help to Wellington. He also used Prussian and Austrian troops. The force which set off to Moscow in 1812 was of 600,000 men. The Russians could not fight such a force and so they retreated from the advancing French army, destroying all crops and anything that could provide food or help for the invaders as they went.<sup>11</sup> When Napoleon reached Moscow in September he found he could do very little. The government of Russia was not there for him to negotiate with and supplying his army was difficult. In October he therefore set off again back westwards. The terrible Russian winter set in. The Russians hampered his retreat and again made sure that no crops or useful shelter were left for his soldiers to use. Once again Napoleon deserted his army<sup>12</sup> and hurried out of Russia, leaving his poor soldiers to struggle home as best they might. Only one tenth of his army survived the ordeal.

### **Fourth Coalition**

This was the end of the Continental System. Wellington's men now outnumbered Napoleon's in the Peninsula. Wellington was able to defeat them in Spain and cross into France itself. Prussia, Russia and later Austria formed a coalition against Napoleon and defeated him at the Battle of Leipzig (1813) driving the French back beyond the Rhine. The following year Britain joined these three countries in a treaty in which they promised to work together so that Napoleon could not defeat them one by one or make separate treaties with them. Napoleon abdicated and was banished to the island of Elba off the coast of Italy. Louis XVI's brother became king of France with the title Louis XVIII.

### **Waterloo (1815)**

The allies held a conference at Vienna to decide how to resettle the map of Europe after the war. At the conference great differences of opinion began to appear between the delegates. Napoleon followed all this from Elba. He decided that the veteran French soldiers who were returning from prisoner of war camps would certainly fight for him if he decided to escape. He thought too that since the allies were not agreeing very well at Vienna he might, after all, be able to fight them one at a time. He escaped, landed in France and Louis XVIII at once fled from Paris. Napoleon's old soldiers flocked to join him. It does not seem to have troubled them that he had been prepared to leave his men to die in Egypt or Russia. His personality was such that they would follow him anywhere. However, the allies did not leave their alliance. Instead they stood firm. An army of troops from the allied nations, commanded by Wellington, met Napoleon's army at Waterloo in Belgium where they thoroughly defeated him. This time Napoleon was banished to St. Helena off the African coast where he could not so easily escape.

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10 This Czar became a Christian, his conversion occurring during the conflict with Napoleon and the withdrawal from Moscow. You can read his story in Masters, P., *Men of Destiny* Revised edition (London, 1989)

11 This is known as a "scorched earth" policy and has been used by the Russians before and since.

12 He had done this in Egypt.

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