fleet was when the enemy was seen was to be the order of battle; that no time was to be wasted in forming a precise line; that the attack was to be made in two bodies, of which one, to be led by the second in command, Collingwood, was to be thrown on the rear of the enemy, while the other, led by Nelson himself, was to take care that the centre and van should not come to the assistance of the ships cut off. Nelson was careful to point out that “ Something must be left to chance. Nothing is sure in a sea fight beyond all others ”; and he left his captains free from all hampering rules by telling them that “ No captain can do very wrong if he places his ship alongside that of the enemy.” In short the execution was to be as circumstances should dictate, subject to the guiding rule that the enemy’s rear was to be cut off and a concentration of superior force on an inferior sought for.

The uncertainties of naval warfare in the days of sailing ships were fully shown at Trafalgar. The allies, having left Cadiz on the 2oth of October, were 33 sail of the line strong, one of the fleet having been left behind. They sailed in five squadrons. Three were nearer the land than the other two. The leading squadron of the three was commanded by the Spanish admiral, Álava; Villeneuve followed; and the French admiral, Dumanoir, commanded the rear. The other two squadrons of six ships of the line each, commanded by the Spanish admiral, Gravina, and the French admiral, Magon, were parallel with, and outside of the three. All headed for the Straits of Gibraltar in the westerly breezes, which had become very light. The British fleet of 27 sail in two divisions also headed for the Mediterranean. During the night of the 2oth-21st of October several movements were made to gain position, and there was an inevitable tendency to straggle among vessels which did not all sail equally well and were moving in light winds. On the early morning of the 21st the allies were some twelve miles off Cape Trafalgar. The British fleet was some ten or twelve miles out at sea to the west of them. Seeing that a battle would now be forced on him, Villeneuve ordered his whole fleet to turn so as to bring their heads on Cadiz. He was painfully aware that the incomparably more expert British fleet would not be content to attack him in the old-fashioned way, coming down in a parallel line and engaging from van to rear. He knew that they would endeavour to concentrate on a part of his line. But Villeneuve was too conscious of the inexperience of his officers and men to think it possible to make counter movements with them. It has been said that the French and Spanish ships which had taken part in the late cruise to the West Indies and back must be considered as trained in the same sense as the British. But apart from the fact that these vessels formed little more than a half of the allied fleet, the comparison is childish. It could only have occurred to writers who, wishing to exalt the glory of Trafalgar, forget that the superior quality of the British fleet, the fruit of foresight, of good sense, and the strenuous work of a people, was itself the best of all claims to honour. A hasty cruise across the Atlantic and back was no equivalent for years of training. The blockades maintained by the British fleet had made it difficult for the allies to obtain stores and their ships were ill fitted. Their crews contained a minute proportion of men bred to the sea, and as they had to be taught the elements of seamanship on the few occasions when they got to sea, their gunnery was neglected. There was valour in the allied fleet, but there was neither skill nor confidence. Moreover the very light wind then blowing rendered manoeuvring all but im- possible for the most expert crews. Villeneuve could do nothing more than order his fleet to turn so as to bring the ships’ heads on Cadiz, to form the line, and await the enemy’s attack. He, however, left his captains free to act for the best when the battle had begun, by telling them that whoever was not under fire was not at his post. The movement of conversion ordered at 6 o’clock a.m. was not executed till about 10 o’clock, and it was ill done. The three squadrons nearest the shore turned first, the rear beginning, to leave room for the others. Thus Dumanoir now led the van and Älava followed Villeneuve.

The two squadrons of Gravina and Magon, which had been outside, fell in behind Älava. No accurate line was formed. The allies drifted rather than sailed into a curve of some five miles long, stretching from north to south, concave on the west side, and more pronounced at the southern than at the northern end. Their ships did not follow one another, but were in many cases two, and in some cases three, abreast in groups. To some extent this was to their advantage, as the effective range of fire of the artillery of the day was barely 1200 yds., and as the power of concentrating the fire of guns out of ports was limited, the danger to an assailant bearing down was not great during his approach. The peril was that he would be engaged with two or three enemies when he had broken into the line, and this risk was increased by the accidental group formation of the allies.

The confidence and promptitude of the British fleet presented a marked contrast to the passivity of the allies. When in the early morning the enemy was seen to the east, Nelson’s fleet was in two divisions, somewhat scattered—his own of 12 sail of the line being to the westward and windward in the light breeze from W.N.W.; Collingwood’s of 15 sail being to leeward and east. At 6.40 the signal was made to form the order of sailing and prepare for battle. The enemy’s movement of conversion was already seen, and it was obvious that unless he were rapidly stopped he might reach Cadiz Bay in safety. A few minutes before 7 o’clock the signal to bear up, No. 76, was made by Nelson. Much discussion has arisen as to whether this was an order to bear up together, or in succession; the first if exactly executed would have caused the British ships to approach the enemy in a line abreast (side by side) since all would have turned at once; the second would have caused them to approach in a line ahead (one after the other) since they would have turned successively. The discussion is in reality futile, because the want of wind rendered it impossible to arrange exact formations, because it had been decided that no time should be wasted in dressing the line, and because Nelson’s flagship, the “ Victory ” (100), and Collingwood’s flagship, the “ Royal Sovereign ” (100), were quick-sailing vessels, and both admirals moved at the best attainable speed. The slow ships could not keep up with them. The two squadrons went down heading to north of east, Collingwood to the right and leeward, Nelson to the north and windward, in two bodies without exact formation, according to the speed of the ships. Collingwood headed for the centre, and the pronounced curve at the south end of the allied line caused the ships of his division to come into action in a close approach to a parallel with the enemy. The “ Royal Sovereign ” was the first British ship to break into the enemy’s line, which she did about midday and astern of Álava’s flagship the “ Santa Ana.” She was alone for a few minutes, but the ships of Collingwood’s division, as they sailed into the curve, were mostly able, by steering to the right, to get into action very soon after their admiral. Nelson’s division was headed by himself to cut through the enemy between his van and centre, and to bar his road to Cadiz. It was certainly in a nearer approach to a line ahead than Collingwood’s. After making a demonstration at the allied van, he broke into their line astern of the “ Bucentaure ” (100), the flagship of Villeneuve.

The exact movements of all the ships engaged could only be given in a very detailed account of the battle, but the main lines of the action are already indicated. To the allies it appeared that the British fleet assailed them in two lines converging on their centre, and that it then carried out a eoncen- tration on this part of their line. Though this is too simple— or too bald—a statement of the case, it docs not go far from the truth. The allied formation was broken in two, and though the rear part was kept well in play by Collingwood’s division, the severest blows fell on the central sections.

The battle, which began at midday, was terminated «about fiver Eighteen of the allies were taken. Their van, after long remaining quiescent, made a futile demonstration, and then sailed away. The four van ships which escaped with