behind breastworks, and strengthening a second mountain line of extraordinary natural strength. At first the activity plainly visible among them induced Wellington to apprehend a renewed attack. But he speedily understood that the cautious French Marshal had decided to remain strictly on the defensive. For himself, he would have willingly done the same, and waited at least for the capitulation of Pamplona. But political considerations, connected with events in Germany, came into play, and pressure from ministers at home urged him to some serious aggressive demonstration. He was not to be tempted to risk a catastrophe by pushing forward into the triangle which, with its apex at Bayonne, the left extremity at the entrenchments of St Jean, enclosing the debouches of the eastern passes, and the right resting on the tidal estuary of the Bidassoa, formed a receding angle with easy inner lines of intercommunication, which might well become a fatal trap. But, yielding to that political pressure, he resolved upon a feat which Soult, with all his experience of his antagonist, expected even less than the passage of the Douro.

Soult had been somewhat uneasy as to his left and centre, strongly entrenched and formidably posted as they were. But having taken all ordinary precautions, he scarcely gave further thought to the safety of his right. Moreover, like Wellington, he had the custom of gauging the temperament and character of an adversary, and he dismissed the idea of the patient strategist, who had often baffled him, risking anything so obviously hazardous. As a skilful soldier he had reason for over-confidence, and to that Wellington trusted much. The mountain called the Grand Rhune runs in a south-westerly direction, in a succession of heights, each with a name of its own,

gradually sinking towards the Irun road. These heights were to be attacked simultaneously with the passage of the river, below the broken bridge of Behobia. Having once gained a footing on the northern bank, the enemy's own works and positions would be turned against them. On the right the attack would be made from Vera, where roads from the Spanish side lead to the *puerto* of that name. Between Vera and Behobia, where the river skirts the ridge, there were certain well-known fords. But below Behobia it seems to have been believed, even by the natives, that there were no means of passing. Naturally the passage had never been attempted before. There was a broad tidal estuary; with the rapid flow of the tide the water rose fifteen feet; at low water a wide space of soft sand was left bare on either bank. But while the army was inactive certain Spanish boatmen, while apparently fishing, had been sounding the bottom. Three fording places had been discovered which were pronounced practicable. It is greatly to the credit of these patriots that none turned traitor, when he had invaluable information to sell and might have asked his own price. On the night of the 6th the final dispositions were made. Again the elements were on the side of the allies. A tremendous thunderstorm broke from the Guipuzcoan hills, driving a drenching rain down on the French bivouacks. The peals of the thunder drowned all other sounds when the crest of San Marcial was being armed with heavy guns. The heads of seven columns told off to as many passages had been kept carefully under cover. At seven o'clock the opening of the cannon fire gave signal for the simultaneous advance. The storm had not cooled the air, and the morning was unusually sultry. The tide was at the lowest, and the three columns attacking below Behobia had to toil across the

broad expanse of sand. Reille was in command of the forces opposed to them, holding double lines crossing the sandhills. The advanced line had been entrusted to Maucune, an experienced veteran and one of the heroes of Salamanca, with 5000 good soldiers. Yet he was so little prepared for an attack that his guns did not open till the assailants had waded to the middle of the stream. Reille hastily sent forward supports, but he was taken equally by surprise and had no time to rally his detached working parties. The landing was effected, the forward line was forced, and its defenders were followed up to the Croix des Bouquets, a sandy eminence, and the key of the positions. Fortunately, trusting to the estuary in front, supposed to be impassable, there and there only the fortifying had been neglected. Nevertheless, with the advantage of ground, Maucune with the supports offered determined resistance. But the impetuosity of the allies would not be denied, and the French were soon in full retreat from their last defensible position. Soult had been with D'Erlon's corps at Espalette—half-way between the Nive and the Bidassoa—when he was roused from his slumbers by the roar of the cannon from San Marcial. Throwing himself into the saddle, after some delay, owing to a false attack on D'Erlon, he galloped towards Hendaye, to find his lines already in possession of the enemy. The passage had literally been effected against time and tide, for a check or prolonged delay must have ended in a grand disaster.

Yet the safety of the isolated left depended on the result of well-devised combinations elsewhere. It will suffice to give a brief summary of these. The entrenchments on the heights opposite the fords of Biriatu and Bildox, while assailed from the front, were turned on their left and abandoned. The defenders were falling

back in extreme confusion when Soult, coming up with reserves, restored some sort of order. The fighting on the side of Vera had been more stubborn, as it well might be. The Grand Rhune was an almost impregnable fortress, where splintered crags and beetling precipices were so many natural bastions and scarps; there the French had been working industriously for a month, and engineering science had done its utmost to assist Nature. Thither some of the defenders of the heights to the left had withdrawn, and there Clausel had concentrated eight regiments in a position that seemed assured. The rugged flanks had been retrenched, and each angle was protected by abatis, and commanded by musketry fire. Redoubts and retrenchments were carried by the light division, while Giron's Spaniards, pressing forward on the right front, were only stopped at the foot of inaccessible crags, crowned by a rude edifice called the Hermitage. The evening closed in with dense fog, and when night fell, though the Spaniards kept up a harmless fire, Clausel was still in his rock citadel. When the fog lifted on the following morning, Wellington had come up to reconnoitre the mountain. He pronounced it unassailable from the front or the west, but deemed it practicable to attack it from his right, simultaneously with the works at the camp of Sarre. There was fierce fighting, the French hurling down rocks on the heads of the assailants; but before night Giron had established a battalion on the eastern flanks of La Rhune. The position was insecure — perhaps untenable — but during the night Clausel thought it wise to withdraw, evacuating at the same time the works before Sarre. On the evening of the 9th the allied armies were established in cantonments in France. With losses comparatively slight they had stormed a series of positions, which, as a distinguished officer said,

men ought to have defended for ever. For in an almost unbroken succession of defeats the French had become utterly disheartened and demoralised.

The army took up its new positions with head-quarters at Vera. Hill commanded the right, with the Spaniards of Morillo and Mina. Beresford had the centre, occupying Maya and the mountain ranges from the Rhune to the Mandale. The left from the Mandale to the Bidassoa mouth was entrusted to Sir John Hope. That distinguished officer, who had succeeded to Moore after the battle of Corunna, now took the place of Sir Thomas Graham, who had gone home invalided. His was the most responsible post, for if there were immediate danger it threatened the left wing. In the event of an attack and a repulse, the fords over the estuary might be unavailable. Yet all precautions were taken; the troops were kept busy entrenching themselves; and beside the fords above Behobia, two pontoon bridges and a bridge of boats were thrown across the river. But Soult had no idea of immediately resuming the offensive. It seems clear that Suchet, who apparently bore him an old grudge, had knowingly deceived him as to the relative strength of the opposing forces in Catalonia and Valencia. In any case all projects for effecting a junction were finally disposed of by the passage of the Bidassoa, and the approach of winter. It is certain that Suchet had good reason for saying that the pass of Jaca, by which Soult was to have debouched on Aragon, could not have been made practicable for the transport of cannon. With the storms that might be expected in November it would be blocked.

Consequently Soult, though he had rightly urged that the genius of the French lay rather in attack than in passive resistance, was constrained to acquiesce in the

inevitable. He made immense preparations for the defence, and indeed he had been occupied with them since his defeats in the Pyrenees, three months before. It was a broad and comprehensive scheme, indicated by the physical features of the country; and its only defects were beyond his control, for his troops were scarcely adequate to maintain, with a prudent regard to contingencies, that far-reaching system of works, from the entrenched camp at St Jean Pied de Port to that other formed before Bayonne. Reille still commanded on his right, and again upon double lines covering St Jean de Luz. Clausel faced the allied centre, resting on the Little Rhune as an advanced post, and holding the formidable ridges to the north of it. D'Erlon was in the old positions he had occupied when the cannonade of San Marcial roused Soult at Espalette. Behind these lines was a base of entrenched camps stretching from Bayonne towards St Jean Pied de Port, and Foy had been ordered down to Bidarray on the Nive, where he could act, in case of need, in either direction. Soult did all that man could do in the circumstances, and he appears to have won the affections of his generals and to have been seconded with unusual loyalty. Nevertheless his difficulties were great. The Emperor's attention was concentrated on Germany, and he had scarcely a thought to spare for Spain. There was no hope of veteran reinforcements, and the conscripts came slowly forward. The finance department turned a deaf ear to appeals for money; the merchants of Bayonne, fearing for their town, provided for some immediate expenses, but Bordeaux, further removed from the seat of operations, could not be persuaded to follow the example. In fact, Southern France, weary of the war, was almost ready to welcome invasion. The problem was how Soult was to feed

his men, and he could not possibly feed his horses. When forage gave out, they were sent back towards the interior, so that he was deprived for the time of his cavalry and his artillery teams.

Soult's position was difficult enough, but that of the allies was infinitely worse. For the most part they occupied bleak mountain ranges, exposed to all the violence of the winter storms. There was an exhausted country behind them, and the difficulties of transport were tremendous. Forage at first was absolutely wanting, and the horses, with the scanty grazing, were reduced to skeletons. The cattle, driven up from great distances, dropped and died by hundreds on the roads. An unusually stormy season had kept the transports off the coasts, and the disembarkation of stores was rare and precarious. As for money, Wellington was even more embarrassed than Soult, and he had to appeal, and not in vain, to the soldierly spirit of his men, not only to endure privations, but to submit to stoppages of pay. The commissary service was for ever a trouble to him; and all through this time of terrible suffering it was notorious in the army that commissaries in league with contractors were making fortunes out of the general misery. The Government pack mules were often laden with luxuries, to be sold for private advantage at famine prices.

While the soldiers of both the armies were half starved, the garrison and townsfolk of Pamplona had been reduced to more dire extremities. Moreover, scurvy was raging within the walls. The governor had held out as obstinately as General Rey at San Sebastian, and with as little regard for humanity, so far as the citizens were concerned. Towards the end of the month he had endeavoured to make terms, but Carlos D'España,

by Wellington's instructions, would hear of nothing save unconditional surrender. It came to that on the last day of October, when the capital of Navarre was finally given over. It had been rumoured in the besieging lines that the governor meant to imitate Brennier at Almeida—to blow up the fortifications and force his way out. The breaking out being impossible made the cases totally different, and the Spaniard summarily intimated to the Frenchman that if he destroyed anything it should be at his peril, and he and the garrison would be put to the sword. Assuredly the threat could not have been carried out, but it sufficed to salve the governor's honour.

The fall of the fortress left Wellington free to act. Political motives again urged him forward, for each post brought fresh news of French disasters in Germany. Moreover, it was no slight consideration that he might bring his men down from among the summits of the Pyrenees to regions less exposed and a more clement climate. Already pickets had been snowed up between Roncesvalles and Maya in gorges which it seemed scarcely necessary to guard, and the relieving parties had driven bullocks before them, to test the snow cornices overhanging the abysses. Wellington had only waited to move till Pamplona was in his possession. The surrender had been delayed some days beyond his expectations, and had been followed by torrential rains. But by the 7th November the weather had cleared. His first idea had been to turn the French left by way of Roncesvalles through St Jean, but on second thoughts he had abandoned it from strategical considerations. As Soult could operate more rapidly on inner lines, unnecessary odds would have been given in his favour. Now it was decided boldly to attack the centre, for strong as the positions were, they were always open to flank assaults, and the fighting when

the Bidassoa was passed had shown the deterioration of the French *moral*. On the 7th the commander-in-chief met the chiefs of the divisions of the right and centre at Urdax, whence the opposite heights of Ainhoa could be closely reconnoitred. Then all the arrangements were made. These heights were to be carried; the army was to be advanced to the rear of the French right, and the attack was to be made by columns of division, each led by the general commanding, and forming its own reserve. Again the rains came down, and the battle was postponed to the 10th, but on that day 90,000 men were ranged in order of battle, and, what was remarkable, considering the state of the mountain tracks, ninety-five guns were ready for the action. Hill led the right; Beresford came next to him, on the right of the centre; Giron with the Andalusians was on Beresford's left. Baron Alten and Longa were to attack the little La Rhune. Cotton's cavalry were to support the centre, and further to the left Freyre with his Gallicians was to descend from the ridge of Mandale towards Ascain, to be in readiness to act according to circumstances. On these corps was to fall the brunt of the fighting. Hope was to play a subordinate, though an important, part.

At six o'clock Wellington was, with Sir Lowry Cole, at the head of Cole's column, on a sloping ridge above the village of Sarre. In a valley to the west was Giron, in another to the right was Le Cor. Facing the column was a formidable redoubt on the culminating point of the ridge. As soon as the light served, the signal was given. Five-and-twenty field-pieces opened their fire; the enemy's pickets were driven in with a rush, and the column charged up towards the redoubt covered, by a heavy fire from the horse artillery, which had been brought up within 300 yards. For an hour the French

showed no signs of wavering, but when they saw the Spaniards in their rear, and the red-coated infantry coming forward with scaling ladders, they turned and fled precipitately, and their flight involved the abandonment of a redoubt on the right. Wellington rode up to the captured works, to be greeted as usual with vociferous cheering. Thence he could see and direct the further operations. The strongly-fortified village with the low heights beyond were carried, and Cole halted to breathe his men and await further orders.

Alten in the meantime, with the light division, had literally rushed the little La Rhune, emerging from a ravine at the foot of the greater mountain, within 300 yards of the French entrenchments. There the enemy made no stand, and the labours of months were given away with scarcely a shot or blow. The redoubts clustered in the rear were abandoned with as little fighting, and those positions were won almost simultaneously with these which were stormed by Cole. Wellington had waited till Clinton, following D'Armagnac on the right of the Nivelle, was well forward. Then he crossed the river with the 3d and 7th Divisions, and so the battle in the centre was decided. These divisions, with the 6th, had assured their positions in rear of Soult's right.

Reille, on the allied left, had been holding two advanced positions in front of Urogne. Both had been taken early in the day, and there the battle continued to rage all along the line, with slight advantage to either side. Yet Hope had accomplished all that was asked of him, for he had given full occupation to Reille and his reserves. Twenty-five thousand French had been detained there, none had been sent from the camp of Serres to the aid of Clausel, when making his stand

with only 16,000 men against converging attacks by superior numbers. Villatte, in occupation of the camp at Serres, covered the retreat of Reille to St Jean de Luz. There the French general made no long halt, but, having broken down the bridges on the Lower Nivelle, withdrew during the night to Bidart on the Bayonne road. The results of the day were another heavy blow to Soult, and the beaten generals indulged in angry recrimination. Soult declared that he had relied so confidently on the strength of the central works, that he might have counted on the allies losing 25,000 men in forcing them, if they did not fail after all. He said that had Clausel concentrated on the main position, he must have maintained it. As for Clausel, he complained that he had fought hard for five hours, and that no help had been sent him, either from the camp at Serres or St Jean de Luz. There seems to have been justice in the complaint, for Soult was evidently deluded into believing that Hope's advance was seriously meant, instead of being merely a feint and distraction. And on the other wing, Foy was as much out of the battle as Grouchy was to be at Waterloo. Foy had been ordered to attack Mina by the Gorospil Mountain, and was away beyond reach of recall when urgent messages were sent from D'Erlon.

It had rained heavily through the night, and the morning of the 11th was misty. When the haze had cleared, and Wellington had trustworthy information, the orders were given for a general advance. Hope forded the Nivelle with his infantry, while the bridges were being hastily restored to permit the passage of the horses and guns. Beresford moved forward in the centre on parallel lines, and Hill on the right made painful progress along flooded roads to attempt the fords at

Ustaritz and Cambo. But Foy had come down to defend the passages, and with the rains in the mountains the river was in heavy flood. On the 11th, Soult had rallied his forces in a line of camps, extending from Ustaritz to the coast at Bidart. But warned, perhaps, by the former day's experiences of the danger of fighting such adversaries on too extended a front, he fell back next morning on the ridge before Bayonne, with his right at Anglet on the Biarritz road, and his left in the entrenched camp which had been in course of construction since the disaster of Vittoria had driven Joseph out of Spain.

CHAPTER XXIII

BATTLES OF THE NIVELLE AND SURRENDER OF EASTERN FORTRESSES

December 1813—April 1814

HAD the weather and other circumstance been favourable, Wellington would have immediately followed up his success and struck again while the enemy was demoralised. His troops were in the highest spirits, overflowing with confidence and eager to press onward. When they had rushed down from bleak bivouacs and scanty rations in the Pyrenees, they had looked forward to comfortable quarters in the rich provinces of Southern France. But for a week from the 11th it rained incessantly, and the country, deep in clay and water, was virtually impracticable. The royal roads—those leading from Bidart and St Jean Pied de Port to Bayonne—were in possession of the French. So long as the river was flooded the fords were impassable. There was nothing for it but to go into cantonments. They commenced on the sea, behind Biarritz, and were carried to the river at Arcangues; from thence they were thrown back, almost at a right angle, along the left bank to the villages opposite Cambo. The troops were chafing at the delay and the prolongation of their privations, and were threatening to give trouble. Already on the morrow of the battles on the Nivelle, even the British

had begun to break out in such excesses as had followed the storm of the Spanish fortresses. These had been summarily checked by the sharp discipline of the provost-marshal. But the Spaniards, used to guerrilla warfare, and with a long series of atrocities to avenge, had broken lose from all restraint. Mina's battalions were in open mutiny. Determined that the French should have no cause of complaint, Wellington sent those turbulent auxiliaries back to their own country, although that strong measure was bitterly resented and his army was unseasonably weakened.

In cantonments he was in some anxiety for his right flank. Soult had ordered the construction of a *tête-de-pont* at Cambo, and Foy, with command of the passage, might venture on an offensive movement. Hill was ordered to make demonstrations, but on his advance the French officer in charge anticipated his purpose by breaking down the entrenchments and blowing up the bridge. Thus, in the meantime, Wellington was reassured as to any danger of attack by Foy. It was Soult who now entertained apprehensions, for the mountain rivers subside suddenly as they rise, and the Nive, when the water is low, is fordable in many places. And he knew that Wellington had every inducement to effect the passage, in order that he might regain his liberty of action and replenish his magazines. As it was, he could only wait behind works, with his cavalry and trains of artillery paralysed. However, in the beginning of December, the weather began to mend, and on the 8th the allies moved out of their cantonments. They were excited at the prospect of action, and, moreover, there was news from the north to exhilarate them. The French had evacuated Hanover; the Dutch had declared independence. Soult had, of course, made his dispositions for defending the

Nive, but the inaction of the allies had lulled him into temporary security, and in some measure he was taken by surprise. Reille held the Lower Adour, covered by inundations, and aided by gunboats. He was *à cheval* on the road leading to Biarritz from Hope's head-quarters at St Jean de Luz. His left, under Clausel, extended to the Nive, also partially protected by swamps and overflow. Beyond the Nive was another entrenched camp, and the passages at Ustaritz, and higher up at Cambo, were held respectively by D'Armagnac and Foy, D'Erlon being in command of the whole. Hill was instructed to cross at Cambo, and Beresford, with Clinton's division, at Ustaritz. Meantime Hope and Alten were to drive in the outposts before Bayonne, and prevent the detachment of supports to the real points of attack. The operations succeeded perfectly. Neither at Cambo nor Ustaritz was there more than desultory resistance; the enemy were driven back from the right bank, and the allies were soon in possession of the road from St Jean Pied de Port. But the heavy marching had delayed the rears of the columns, and D'Erlon had time to establish himself firmly on a range of heights parallel to the Adour. There he was joined by Soult, and they were prepared to offer battle; but already the short day was drawing to a close, and the allies bivouacked on the ground they had secured. On the left, Hope, with three divisions and a handful of cavalry, had given full occupation to double his numbers. He had fought his way up to the front of the entrenched camp, but towards nightfall he drew back, according to his instructions. When his troops returned to their quarters, they had been twenty-four hours under arms.

Wellington appears not to have apprehended an immediate counter-stroke. His forces were in two divisions,

arrayed in separate orders of battle, and separated by the river, yet he was already throwing a bridge of communication across the river below Ustaritz. But Soult had decided to concentrate for the counter-attack, and was only hesitating on which side to strike. Partly owing to false information as to the allied dispositions, he resolved to break out upon Hope, but on that side he had really fair prospects of victory. Hope's wearied troops had withdrawn to St Jean de Luz, and the ridges, centring in the plateau of Barouillet in front of the camp, were only weakly held. On the key of the position at Barouillet there was but a single brigade, and the supports were far in the rear. The light division was at Arcangues, two miles to the right, but the connection was only maintained by slight and scattered posts. Between Arcangues and Barouillet was a broad valley, almost undefended, as it was believed the enemy could never attempt it, being menaced from the positions on either flank. Soult's first intention was to have launched his united force on that ill-defended opening. For some unexplained reason, and unfortunately for himself, he changed his mind, and the attack was delivered in two columns. Reille advanced along the main road to Barouillet; Clausel attacked on the side of Arcangues and Bussussary. Soult was aware of his numerical superiority, but had he realised the diffusion and exhaustion of the allied forces, and the extreme difficulty of bringing up their guns, he must have pressed home his attacks and almost certainly succeeded. As it was, the ground was desperately disputed by the allies, while feeble succours only arrived at critical moments when each station of vantage was on the point of being lost. Hope, with his staff, had galloped to the front, and his gigantic figure was to be seen everywhere

in the foremost of the battle, encouraging his men and rallying the battalions in supreme indifference to his own safety. Yet fresh field batteries were for ever being brought up from Bayonne, and the French had forced their way through the woods of Barouillet, where they were checked by a timely charge on their left flank, and hurled back with the loss of some hundreds of prisoners. That sharp repulse saved the situation; the brigade of guards arrived from St Jean de Luz, and Wellington, who had hurried over from his right wing, rode on to the field. When night fell, little had been lost or gained. But the 1st Division, which had come up from its cantonments, relieved the troops that had borne the brunt of the battle. At Arcangues, Clausel's attack had been comparatively weak, though there was sharp, desultory fighting, but he had succeeded in occupying the plateau of Bussussary, though he had failed to dislodge the light division from its other positions. Soult was deeply mortified by the result, for he had once more been foiled by far inferior numbers when fighting with everything in his favour. And during the night there came another shock to the *moral* of his forces, for two German regiments went over to the allies. It was a question between military honour and patriotism, but recent events in Germany had absolved them from allegiance to Napoleon.

On the 11th the conditions had changed. Wellington, when he left Hill's quarters, realising the state of affairs, had ordered three divisions to follow. So Clausel had been kept in check, and there had been no renewal of the onslaughts on Barouillet. On the contrary, his troops had been withdrawn and concentrated in expectation of a counter attack. When that did not come off, Soult in the afternoon resumed the offensive. It was unexpected,