and the allies were taken by surprise, but it led to nothing, though the losses were severe. It rained hard through the night, and neither side was eager for action. The day passed with some promiscuous skirmishing, and in the evening, as the upshot of the bloody sortie, Soult had withdrawn again to his entrenchments.

But the indefatigable Marshal had no idea of resting there. Resolved to try his fortunes against our right wing, where Wellington on the 9th had been with Hill in expectation, he passed a great body of his forces through Bayonne in the night. Hill was not unprepared, but nevertheless his position was critical. He defended a crescent line, four miles in length, between the Nive and the Adour, his centre resting at the village of St Pierre on the high road from St Jean Pied de Port. He had 14,000 men and fourteen guns, but for the time he was cut off from the rest of the army, for the Nive had risen with the rains and swept away the new bridge of communication. Against his 14,000 men Soult was bringing three times the number, while another division under Paris, with Pierre Soult's cavalry, was threatening his rear. The odds were heavy; nevertheless, they were rather apparent than real. For the ground before him was swept by his guns; it was impracticable for horsemen; and even the infantry could only approach in single columns. The attack was as vigorous as the defence was resolute; the slight allied line swayed backwards and forwards under the stress of the onset: as our shot and shell tore through the assailing columns, fresh combatants pressed forward to replenish the ranks; once D'Armagnac's leading brigade had actually pushed forward to the rear of our defences; and twice the defence was gravely imperilled by two English colonels withdrawing their regiments. But there was no faltering

in the courage of the rank and file, and these errors of judgment were promptly retrieved. The Portuguese fought in the front with signal gallantry, and Hill, who exposed himself as freely as Hope had done on the 8th, directed the operations with consummate skill, strengthening each threatened point to the utmost of his feeble means. Nevertheless, it was a welcome relief when, the bridge being restored, Wellington appeared on his left, leading back the three divisions. But by that time the day was virtually won, and Hill had all the honour. That battle was one of the most sanguinary of the war; Wellington, as he rode over the scene of the contest, declared he had never seen a field more thickly strewn with dead, and it was said that the causeway before St Pierre was literally running with blood, as it was covered with corpses.

Those five days of fighting on the Nive were the logical consequence of the passage of the Nivelle. Wellington could not suffer himself to be confined between those rivers, and the next step in his progress must be the passage of the Adour. Soult took prompt measures to obstruct the further advance. It was a question now of the defence of France, and both generals were bound to contest the rich districts from which they could draw supplies. Soult, for the moment, might be comparatively easy. Leaving a sufficient force in the camp at Bayonne, which besides was overlooked by the citadel, he established his headquarters at Peyrehorade on the Gave de Pau; Clausel was on the Bidouze, a tributary of the Gave, communicating on his left with General Paris and St Jean Pied de Port. Sundry posts were thrown forward to villages far in advance, and Soult was now on a new line facing the allied right, and compelling Wellington to make corresponding disposi-

tions. Soult might be easy for the moment, for he was defending navigable rivers, but circumstances would change with a change of the seasons, when those rivers would shrink and the shallows be passable. Nor was it possible for Wellington to take immediate action. The country was impracticable as ever: Bayonne must be invested or reduced: and when men were wanting for indispensable work he had weakened his army by sending back the Spaniards. As he wrote Lord Bathurst, in the invasion he meant to conciliate the people and act with justice and moderation. He had pledged himself not to levy requisitions, and so the difficulties of supply were as great as ever. There were differences with the admiral on the coast, for the wise measures as to navigation and the opening of St Jean de Luz to the ships of powers still in alliance with France interfered with naval prize money. A change of admirals settled these differences amicably, but the financial pressure was severe as before. Even the pay of the muleteers was long in arrear, and the commander-in-chief could not walk out of his lodgings without being beset by clamorous creditors. Moreover, when he had weakened himself by sending back the guerrilla bands, the veteran soldiers in his provisional battalions were being withdrawn for service elsewhere, notwithstanding his urgent protests.

Condemned thus to temporary inaction by circumstances he could not control, he had grave anxieties elsewhere. Soult had brought General Harispe, a member of an old Biscayan family, from Catalonia to the Basque Provinces, to call the peasants to arms for a partisan war. Morillo and Mina had aided his recruiting, by breaking back into the French valleys and committing savage atrocities. Harispe repulsed them,

but Wellington in the meantime had arrested his farther progress by more peremptory orders to the Spanish chiefs, and by stern warnings to the Basques. He warned the peasants that they must either be regular soldiers or non-combatants; if they chose to wage irregular war out of uniform, they would be shot or hung and their villages burned. In fact, he acted as the French marshals had acted in Spain, or as the Germans when, on the invasion of France, they were harassed by swarms of *francs-tireurs* in civilian dress.

A more serious affair was an adroit move of Napoleon, by which he sought to obtain the friendship or neutrality of Spain, and so secure the withdrawal of his armies in the south for service on his north-eastern frontier. He had extracted a treaty from the obsequious prisoner of Valançay, by which Ferdinand, on certain conditions, was to be sent back to his kingdom. The integrity of the Spanish Kingdom was recognised, and in consideration of the French evacuating Spain, Ferdinand was to procure the embarkation of the British allies. The scheme, which had been incubating some considerable time, seemed plausible. For the friction between the Regents and the Cortes had risen to such a pitch that Wellington had not only suggested to the home Government the contingency of withdrawing our troops, but even the possible propriety of declaring war upon Spain. However, when Ferdinand's confidential agent, the Duke of San Carlos, came to Madrid, he broached the proposals in an unfortunate hour for Napoleon. There was no counting on the instability of Spanish faction. After much secret discussion and intrigue, all parties came to a gratifying semblance of unanimity, and the decision of the Regency was patriotic and rational, though dictated, undoubtedly, by selfish considerations. The

Cortes would recognise no deed of Ferdinand done under constraint, nor would they enter on any negotiations for peace while the invaders still garrisoned their fortresses. So Napoleon's scheme for recruiting his northern army failed; and when he made heavy drafts subsequently on Suchet and Soult, he seriously weakened them without materially strengthening himself. During November nothing of importance had passed in Catalonia, although the intrigues connected with the abortive treaty of Valançay had done something to embarrass Clinton. The chiefs of the Spanish auxiliaries were looking towards Madrid, and more inclined to wait upon events than to give him efficient assistance. One well-devised stroke had failed, because Copons at the critical moment had interfered with the arrangements between his lieutenant and the English general. It might have been treachery or simply caprice, but Clinton, making head against Suchet, with forces largely composed of irregulars, was constrained to be content to block the passes and remain generally on the defensive. The dominating fact was, that all the time the British on the west or east of the Peninsula were finding occupation for nearly 20,000 veterans who, had they been liberated, might have repelled the invasion in the north.

And when Wellington was preparing for a farther advance, the final evacuation of the Peninsula was imminent. Suchet had held to Catalonia with admirable tenacity, but he had been already weakened by the withdrawal of 10,000 men and many pieces of artillery. Still determined to make the best of things, he had proposed the dismantling of Barcelona, merely holding on to the citadel and Monjuich. That wise suggestion was rejected till too late. When it was accepted, the allies were blockading Barcelona. In the

meantime, having appointed Habert to command in Lower Catalonia, and entrusted the Lower Ebro to General Robert, the Governor of Tortosa, he had retired with the rest of his attenuated army to Gerona. While these measures were in progress, Clinton had planned an attack on Molino del Rey, which must have been delivered with damaging effect if Copons again had not failed to co-operate. But treachery accomplished what arms had failed to effect.

The victories in Germany and of Wellington in the west had made it clear that the French ascendancy was to be ended. Those Spaniards who had cast in their lot with the invaders began to tremble for the consequences. Among the most trusted members of Suchet's staff was a certain Van Halen, a Spaniard, but of Flemish descent. This man, whose courage and subtlety were equal to his treachery, conceived the idea of abusing the French Marshal's confidence, and betraying the garrisons to the south of the Llobregat. He placed himself in communication with Eroles and Copons. He forged despatches—he was even acquainted with the secret sign which intimated to Suchet's subordinates that the despatches were genuine—and passing southwards under a flag of truce, interviewed successively the governors of the garrisons. He professed to be the bearer of messages, averring that the Treaty of Valançay had been signed; that the fortresses were to be given over, and the garrisons to march into France. Each detail that might infer plausibility or carry conviction was carefully worked out. He only failed with Robert at Tortosa, through an accident and the arrival of a genuine despatch. Unfortunately for the French, Robert was slow of action, and did not promptly arrest the traitor. For the garrisons of Lerida, Mequinenza and Monzon successively fell into the snare, though the

two more important places were victualled and stored for two months' defence. Those strongholds were surrendered, the garrisons marched out, followed up by Eroles; they were surrounded in the rocky gorges through which the road runs from Lerida to Barcelona, and consented to lay down their arms on conditions which were shamefully violated. Clinton's forces had assisted in the seizure as an act of legitimate war against armed enemies in the field, but he had held aloof from all the previous intrigues, and had been no party to the agreement or its infraction.

After that the result was a foregone conclusion, and events followed an inevitable course. Suchet dismantled Gerona, with the minor Catalonian fortresses, and withdrew to Figueras. On the 19th March the liberated Ferdinand returned to his dominions, promising everything, with the intention of keeping no embarrassing pledges. He arrived in General Clinton's camp on the 30th March, and thence proceeded to Valencia. Suchet re-passed the Pyrenees at last, leaving a single division in Figueras. Clinton had orders to break up his army; but owing to various causes his departure was delayed till, in the middle of April, he embarked at Tarragona. The last combat in the bloody and protracted struggle was a sally of Habert from Barcelona while the troops were embarking. Like a more important battle in southern France, it was a needless sacrifice when the war was over. But Habert was blameless, for the news of the general peace only arrived some days afterwards. By that peace, Barcelona, Tortosa, Figueras and four smaller places were handed back to the Spaniards. Had it not been for Van Halen's treachery, Suchet would have held to the last all that was best worth keeping in the north-eastern provinces, and it must be admitted that

that skilful and resourceful Marshal, though discomfited, withdrew with the honours of war. The only fortress that still displayed the tricolour was the negligible Santona, on the coast of Biscay.

CHAPTER XXIV

BATTLE OF ORTHES AND SUBMISSION OF BORDEAUX

February, March 1814

SOULT had been more seriously weakened than Suchet, though left to stem the tide of invasion. The Emperor had reluctantly withdrawn two infantry divisions and one of cavalry. With 14,000 men locked up in Bayonne, and deducting the defenders of St Jean Pied de Port, the Marshal could only muster some 40,000 veteran combatants. So much had circumstances altered that he suggested abandoning a regular system of defence, and waging such a *partida* war on the frontiers as the Spaniards had carried on against the French. Clausel and Harispe, natives of those parts, were the men best fitted to direct it. For himself, he desired to be relieved and transferred where his services would be more useful. His suggestions were not accepted, and he loyally set himself to repel, or at least obstruct, the allied advance on the Garonne.

During January, Wellington had been active in preparation, and his position had sensibly improved. Reinforcements had reached him, the military chest had been replenished, and he had been forming depôts in the towns on the coast. Again he could venture to employ and terrorise the insubordinate Spaniards, as he could assure them pay and rations. French Royalists from the southern provinces had been coming into his camp,

and finally the Duc d'Angoulême had arrived there. Though he could not altogether credit their sanguine assurances, nor would he commit himself to a rash descent on Bordeaux, yet he might entertain good hopes of substantial aid from Bourbon partisans. It was clear that the commercial classes were wearied of the war, and eager to welcome deliverance in any shape. The traders of Bayonne entered into underhand dealings with him, even undertaking to cash his bills; and when Soult commenced covering works at Bordeaux, he met with passive resistance from the wealthy citizens. It had been Wellington's policy to encourage commerce on the coast, and he would have been even more successful had he not been crossed by his Government. As it was, supplies were flowing in, and the small French traders were facilitating his operations.

In numbers, and notably in veterans, he was far superior to Soult. He had 70,000 good Anglo-Portuguese, and there were 30,000 Spaniards. But the blockade of Bayonne involved a deduction of nearly three times the strength of the garrison; for, situated as it was, astride on the rivers, he must be prepared to repel a sortie in force from any one of three sides. He decided not to pass the Upper Adour, where the French Marshal had his headquarters at Peyrehorade, but to cross the river with his left wing below Bayonne, and simultaneously to press Soult back by steadily turning his left, operating on the slopes of the Pyrenees and among the upper waters of the Gaves. The second operation was sure, if slow. As to the former, it must seem to the enemy so difficult, if not altogether impracticable, that he felt good assurance of effecting it successfully, remembering the passages of the Douro and Bidassoa.

By the middle of February the snows had almost gone

from the lower ranges of the mountains. On the 14th Hill set his divisions in motion, passed the Joyeuse, surprised Harispe and drove him back. Then Harispe established himself on the heights of La Montagne, where he was strengthened from the centre, and by General Paris recalled from his march towards the north. The same day Mina began the blockade of St Jean Pied de Port, and Sir William Stewart, with the 2d Division, supported by Morillo after some sharp fighting arrived on the Bidouze. There was a corresponding movement from the right of the centre. Next day the bridges that had been broken were repaired. Hill crossed the Bidouze and forced Harispe beyond the Gave de Mauleon. There no time was given him to destroy the bridges; the stream was forded besides, and in the night he withdrew again behind the Gave d'Oleron. Harispe was again reinforced, and took up an exceedingly strong position on the heights of Sauveterre. But when Soult heard of the succession of repulses over ranges and rivers that were eminently defensible, he sent orders that Sauveterre was also to be abandoned. Destroying all the bridges on the Adour, he left Bayonne to its own resources, and retiring behind the Gave de Pau, removed his headquarters to Orthes.

These operations had effectually diverted the Marshal's personal attention from Bayonne, and the guard of the lower river was left to the garrison. A corvette was moored below the town, and the river was regularly patrolled by gunboats. The natural difficulties of crossing were so great that the generals in Bayonne might well be careless. At the spot selected for Wellington's bridge, the Adour was 270 yards in width; the rush of the ebbing tide was at the rate of seven miles an hour. The use of ordinary pontoons was impossible, and it was

not easy for ships fit for the purpose to be brought up from the sea. The river mouth, six miles below the town, is blocked by a labyrinth of shifting sand-bars, over which the tides and surf break with extreme violence On the other hand, here, as at the Douro, the allies were favoured by the winding of the river. For the scene of operations was masked from the town, partly by a bend of the Adour, and partly by the famous wood of pines, which comes down to the water on the southern bank.

At midnight on the 22d Hope set the troops in motion. Diverging from the road at Anglet, they stole silently past the front of the hostile entrenchments, and although delayed by a gun falling into a ditch, at daylight they were among the sandhills at the mouth of the river. Then the guns were mounted in a battery on the bank, the pickets on the right of the entrenched camp were driven in, and meanwhile, as concerted, demonstrations from Anglet and at Urdains diverted the attention of the garrison. Never dreaming of the danger which threatened him, General Thouvenot had neglected to guard in any force the right bank of the river.

It had been arranged that the British gunboats at the river mouth, with the *chasse-marées* which were to form the bridge, were to pass the bar simultaneously with the appearance of the troops. The wind being adverse they were unable to approach it. Yet Hope determined to persevere with the crossing. His guns opened on the French gunboats with destructive effect, and the rocket-batteries, then a novel invention, not only did deadly execution, but spread panic among the French seamen. Meanwhile a party of the Guards had crossed in a pontoon, carrying a hawser with them. The remaining pontoons were coupled, formed into rafts and hauled across; but the process was slow, and when barely 600

of the Guards, with one of the rocket batteries, had been landed, the rush of the tide stopped operations. News of the landing had reached the citadel, and two regiments were sent to attack. But there was a heavy flanking fire from the left bank; the rockets were as demoralising to the soldiers as to the sailors, and they beat a precipitate retreat.

The passage went forward slowly but steadily. On the morning of the 24th the sails of the flotilla were seen. The wind had changed, and become more than favourable, for it was blowing half a gale from the bay, and the surf was breaking wildly upon the bars. The first attempt was made towards the ebb, and failed, with some lamentable casualties. When the water was deepening again the weather had become worse—nevertheless the squadron dashed gallantly at the breakers, led by the boats of the British men-of-war. Pilotage there was next to none at first, for the experts were all abroad as to the surroundings. There were many accidents, and not a few valuable lives were lost, but when the navigable channel was struck at last, one by one the *chasse-marées* were brought into calm water at the point where they were to be formed into a bridge. Moored stem to stern with anchors and old guns, they were further secured by three cables stretched across as a foundation for the elastic planking which would yield to the rush of the stream and yet be strong enough to bear up the cannon. This marvellous work of rough-and-ready engineering was secured from fire-craft by a boom above, and the boom again was guarded by the gunboats.

Having assembled 6000 men on the right bank on the 25th, Hope moved on to complete the investment. After some lively skirmishing, with considerable loss on both sides, he established himself *à cheval* on the ridge

of St Etienne, running at right angles to the northern works of the fortress. Thus the investment was completed, though there were no slight difficulties in signalling and maintaining communications between three distinct investing corps divided by navigable rivers.

At Orthes Soult was to make his last stand in stemming the invasion setting directly northward. There he held the last of the strong natural positions on the parallel ridges of the mountain streams. Above, his fortified posts on the Gaves had been successively turned nearer to the sources. Below, the Adour had been bridged and Bayonne was invested. Now the course of Wellington's operations was bringing his severed wings again into communication. Hope was to establish a permanent bridge at the Port of Landes. But the great length of the allied front had compelled the commander-in-chief to bring up Freyre and his Gallicians. This he had done with no little reluctance, for his apprehension was that the vindictive licence of the Spanish levies would excite a peasant rising or *Jacquerie* in his rear, and he had written to Freyre, 'Maintain the strictest discipline; without that we are lost.' Hitherto, and afterwards, thanks to his stern discipline and liberal payments for all supplies, the sympathies of the population had been for the most part with the invaders. The allies paid in ready money for everything. Soult, as he lost his magazines one after the other, was compelled to enforce requisitions, and his military chest was empty. Moreover, demoralisation had been making rapid progress in his ranks, and many of the fugitives who had straggled after his various defeats were sheltered by the peasants and failed to rejoin their colours. Yet he had still 35,000 veterans, besides the conscripts, with him at Orthes, and though their *moral*

had suffered, and with the mortifications of constant retreat they had lost much of their old dash and self-confidence, they had seldom fought more stubbornly than in the battle which takes its name from the town.

Soult faced the Gave from heights commanding the bridge of Orthes and fronting the road from Peyrehorade towards the west. That bridge, solid as the grand structures on the Tagus, had been blocked with mason work, but its strength had resisted the efforts of the engineers to blow it up. All the other bridges were in ruins, and the fords above the town, doubtful and indifferent at best, were strictly guarded. The Marshal had drawn in his detachments. Beresford crossed at Peyrehorade, which Foy had abandoned; the 6th and Light Divisions passed at Berenx, where a pontoon bridge had been thrown over in the night of the 26th, and Picton with the 3d Division yet higher up. Hill was to menace the bridge of Orthes, and, if practicable, force the fords on the Upper Gave, cutting the enemy off from the road to Pau. Soult had arranged his main battle on the ridge facing Beresford and Picton. The position seemed protected from a front attack by the nature of the flanking ridges of the swamps and marshes in the bottoms of the gorges. From a conical hill in the centre, crowned with heavy batteries, Soult could observe all the hostile operations, save where they were masked by a corresponding eminence within the allied lines, which was the look-out station of Wellington. The front being unassailable, Beresford was to turn the French right, where his success would cut the French off from Bordeaux, as Hill was to intercept their retreat to Pau, where the combination would throw them back on the barren Landes. But Beresford met with unexpected difficulties. He took the village of St Bois on the extreme right of the

enemy, and so far made his ground good. But the only issue was through a narrow pass, and whenever he attempted to emerge or deploy, the head of the column was crushed by a converging cannonade, and hurled back in confusion by furious bayonet charges. For three hours the fighting went on; Picton on the other flank had done no better, and it was clear that the attack had failed, as it seemed likely the battle would be lost. Then Wellington, with one of his flashes of inspiration, changed his tactics. Abandoning the attempt to turn the enemy's right, he ordered up three divisions to assail the hill between their right and centre, on Foy's left flank. The 52d Regiment, which had been held in reserve behind the look-out hill, was ordered to cross the marsh below, ascend the ridge beyond, and take in rear the French who were holding the mouth of the gorge at St Bois. The stroke proved decisive. The 52d, knee-deep or waist-deep in mud, struggled through the swamp which had been deemed impassable under a galling fire, and charging the assailants of St Bois, threw them into confusion, while batteries brought forward on the advancing spurs sent shot and shell through the disordered masses. Wellington seized the opportunity to pass Beresford's battalions through the disputed gap and form them beyond in fresh order of battle. Picton pushed forward with the 3d and 7th Divisions, and the wings of the army were united. Meanwhile Hill had forded the river and was confronting Clausel. But Soult, seeing that his centre was forced and his wings were turned, gave orders for a retreat. He directed it, as usual, in masterly fashion, for one of the Marshal's chief merits was that he never lost coolness or firmness in misfortune. But the country behind him was broken, it was traversed by several unbridged torrents, and necessarily the disorder soon

became great. On the left Hill kept the fugitives literally on the run, and the result, in place of being merely discomfiture, might have been annihilation, had not Wellington received a contusion which prevented his pressing the pursuit. As it was, the French losses in killed and wounded were very considerable; many prisoners were taken, and the conscripts, for the most part throwing away their arms, scattered beyond recovery. One result was that Soult lost his remaining magazines. The seizure of Mont Marsan followed the occupation of Orthes, and Aire was taken by Hill after another sanguinary combat.

Heavy rain continued to fall after these battles. The rivers were still flooded; the bridges were to be repaired, and everything conspired to delay operations. Soult, forced against his will in the direction of Bordeaux by Hill's corps, had time to deliberate. He was naturally inclined to turn towards the east, where he might hope for succours from Suchet, although, whether from jealousy or otherwise, he was but indifferently seconded by his brother Marshal. Consequently he decided to cling to the spurs of the Pyrenees, although he left Bordeaux with its disaffected citizens open to the allies, and ascending the valley of the Adour he took the road to Tarbes and Toulouse. Meanwhile the allies took possession of Pau, establishing their hospitals in the picturesque old capital of Bearn. A more important acquisition was that of Bordeaux. After the battle of Orthes, the city sent a deputation and invitation to Wellington at St Jean de Luz. The partisans of the Bourbons were in the ascendant; the Duc d'Angoulême was escorted thither by Marshal Beresford; the mayor divested himself of the tricolour scarf, mounted the white cockade, and handed