over the keys; the Imperial Governor, General L'Huillier, withdrew with his insufficient garrison, and when the fortress of Blaye in the Gironde surrendered, the great southern port was re-opened to British commerce. The royalists of Bordeaux had taken a bold resolution, to which Wellington had at last consented with reluctance, for Napoleon was still negotiating with the allied sovereigns, and it was far from certain that he would be compelled to abdicate.

CHAPTER XXV

THE BATTLE OF TOULOUSE, AND CLOSE OF THE WAR

March, April 1814

SOULT had a double motive for moving eastwards along the Pyrenees. He hoped to join hands with Suchet, and, ignorant of Beresford's advance on Bordeaux, he desired to draw the allies after him and to prevent the apprehended revolt in favour of the Bourbons from spreading towards the north. But though undaunted by his defeats he resumed the offensive, he believed Wellington to be stronger than he really was, imagining that Beresford was still with him. The English general, on his side, was also in doubt, suspecting that Soult might have been reinforced from Catalonia. In reality the armies were then nearly numerically equal, though Wellington had reluctantly called up more Spaniards, besides sending for his heavy cavalry, who had hitherto been quartered in Spain. Soult, having sent back most of his baggage to Toulouse, made demonstrations against the right flank of the allies. Wellington ordered two divisions to the support of Hill, and made Aire for the moment the pivot of his operations. Soult, having felt the forces in front of him, and misdoubting the capabilities of his own positions, withdrew on the night of the 14th March to Lambege, and after a temporary halt on the following day,

retired upon Vic Bigorre. On the 17th Wellington had drawn in his detachments and been joined by the heavy horse and the artillery from Spain. Next day his army moved on in three columns, the right by Conchez, the centre by Castelnau, the left by Plaisance. The French retreated again, leaving a rearguard among the hills and vines in front of Vic. Thence they were driven by Picton with his 3d Division, and before morning the enemy's rear had closed up on the main body at Tarbes. There, on the heights behind the town, they were found in order of battle on the morning of the 20th. Soult was determined to dispute the allied advance, although he had already decided to rest upon Toulouse, and was covering the southern road leading thither by St Gaudens. The allies lost no time in attacking, nor did they meet with very serious resistance, although they fought at a certain disadvantage, as their corps were separated by the Adour. Clinton, with Wellington, turned the French flank on the left. Alten, with the light division, mastered the rising ground in the centre, while Hill, on the other bank of the river, attacked the town by the high road, forced his way down the main street, and charged victoriously up the hill beyond. But when his soldiers topped the crest, they saw the troops that had fled before them quietly ascending a parallel range, which was held by formidable reserves in heavy masses. Picton halted, for there was no attempting that position till the column coming from Rabastens had made a corresponding advance. But the night came down while operations were in suspense, and long ere morning Soult had resumed the retreat.

He reached Toulouse on the 24th, and, thanks to a renewal of the rains which impeded the pursuit, he

had gained three days upon his pursuer. He turned the advantage to the best account in strengthening works which were already strong. Toulouse had been selected as the chief southern arsenal, partly from its strategical position on the Upper Garonne, at the centre of several radiating roads, and partly from its great natural advantages. The city was encircled by massive walls on which the heaviest guns could be mounted; it was girdled on the west by the rapid Garonne, while on the north and east a broad moat was formed by the canal of Languedoc. The remaining side was scarcely more vulnerable, for beyond the suburbs defended by outworks were fortified hills flanking the approaches to the canal, and marshes which were often overflowed by the Ers river.

On March 27th the allies were on the left of the Garonne, opposite the city. Next day an unsuccessful attempt was made to throw a pontoon bridge across above the town and below the junction of the Arriége. The object was either to induce Soult to evacuate the place, or at least to cut him off from communication with Suchet. An attempt made elsewhere some days afterwards was unsuccessful. Hill had actually crossed when it was found that the roads were in such wretched condition that attack from that side was impracticable. Consequently the corps was brought back, and Wellington turned his attention to bridging the river below the town. The pontoons were laid down on the 31st, and no serious effort was made to obstruct the passage. The great danger was from the swiftness of the swollen current, and after Beresford had passed with three divisions, the pontoons were temporarily removed. Soult might have been tempted to attack when the army was divided; but he had resolved to remain on

the defensive in the city, and he set soldiers and citizens to work on entrenchments between the canal and the Ers, in preparation for the assault he expected on his front. The news he received on the 7th of the entry of the allied sovereigns into Paris made no change in his purpose. Sending his cavalry out to observe the enemy, he continued busily engaged on his defences. It was not till the 8th that the waters subsided sufficiently to admit of the pontoons being replaced, when Freyre's Gallicians and the Portuguese artillery passed over. They were accompanied by Wellington in person, who carefully examined the situation from a height five miles from Toulouse. His columns were still separated by the Ers; there were no pontoons to bridge it, and it became an object to seize on the bridge near the city. That was dashingly accomplished by Colonel Vivian with his hussars; at the same time orders were given for moving the pontoons over the Garonne to a point higher up, in order to facilitate communications, and the great attack was to come off on the morrow, Easter Sunday, 10th April. For seventeen days Soult had been preparing.

His positions encircled three sides of the city, while on the south his left was entrenched in the suburb of St Cyprien, whence supports could be sent when needed—as they subsequently were—across the great bridge connecting the suburb with the town. The south, otherwise the weakest point, was found to be effectually defended by the marshes as it was covered by the Ers. The attack was therefore delivered on the north and east, although there the fortified positions were strongest. As for the north, it was virtually impregnable, for the canal, with its embattled and retrenched bridges, was within musket-shot of the ramparts. The east front

was a ridge, two miles in length, covered by the unfordable and bridgeless Ers, with plateaux to right and left, named respectively the Calvinet and St Sypiére. The French right rested on the latter, and between them two roads led into the suburbs, both crossing the canal. The battle began unfortunately. The Spaniards, assailing the Calvinet, were repulsed with loss; a second attempt ended in a regular rout, and disaster was only averted by Wellington hurrying up with Ponsonby's dragoons and some reserve artillery. Further to the right, Picton had been directed to make a feigned attack on the bridge of Jumeaux, at the junction of two canals. He forced the bridge, and with reckless disregard of orders, assailed under a withering fire works that could only be carried by escalade. The division lost 400 men, and thus the attacks from Calvinet to the river had only resulted in sanguinary failure. It seemed that the battle was lost, and Soult had a great opportunity had he promptly assumed the offensive. His successes, and the strength of his entrenchments at St Cyprien, enabled him to withdraw the whole of Taupin's division, besides another brigade, to reinforce his battle on the Mont Rave, where Beresford was attacking to the east. That general had been executing a flank movement over swampy ground and under heavy fire. He was compelled, for the time, to leave his guns behind, yet the French refused the opportunities he inevitably offered. He advanced between the Ers and the fortified heights bristling with batteries till without a single gun he gained his objective, and was forming his men beneath the positions he was to storm. When scarcely yet in formation, he was charged down hill by the French, but they were checked and appalled by an unexpected discharge

from a rocket battery. Two British brigades took advantage of the panic, gained the crowning plateau, carried the redoubts with the bayonet, and General Taupin fell at the front while attempting to rally his men.

Then came a brief pause. Soult was calling up his reserves, and Beresford bringing up his artillery. At two in the afternoon, Pack and Douglas, with the Portuguese and Highland brigades, rushed from the hollows in which they had been concealed, and carried the French defences all along the line from the Colombette redoubt to the Calvinet. Strengthened by reserves, and backed up by tremendous artillery fire, the French returned to the assault, and one redoubt was regained, but the remains of the Highlanders made good the hill till relieved by the advance of the 6th Division, when the French finally withdrew. Beresford had at last got up his guns and was marching along the ridge that had been mastered. Picton was again threatening the bridge of Jumeaux ; the Spaniards, having re-formed, were making a fair show of offence, with the light division ready to support them. Then Soult, declining further contest, fell back, abandoning the heights of Mont Rave with the works beyond the canal. He still retained two fortified advanced posts, but in the dead of night he evacuated the city, defiling within range of the allied guns, but suffering scarcely any further loss. Next day Lord Wellington entered Toulouse, amid general rejoicings and acclamations. Not a few of the citizens were partisans of the Bourbons. Most were weary of the war, and all, without exception, congratulated themselves on having escaped the horrors of siege or storm. That same evening came the envoys from Paris announcing the abdication of the Emperor. Their

journey had been delayed by treachery or blundering, and the battle that had cost so many gallant lives had been fought when there was peace between the nations.

Unfortunately the battle of Toulouse was not the last of the bloodshed. Notwithstanding assertions to the contrary, it has been demonstrated conclusively that Soult fought in ignorance of the abdication. No such excuse can be made for Thouvenot's idle sally from Bayonne. Technically, and in strict formalism, it might be justified; in reality he knew more than enough to have made him hold his hand. The emissaries from Paris, passing through Bordeaux on their way to Toulouse, had sent intelligence of the peace to Hope before Bayonne. It was unfortunate that Hope, standing too rigidly on military etiquette, did not send formal notice to the French governor, without awaiting instructions from the commander-in-chief. But he caused the news to be transmitted to the enemy's advanced pickets, in the expectation that further operations would be suspended. Thouvenot either discredited, or professed to discredit it; it may be suspected that he hoped to find the besiegers off their guard—as he actually did—though it is more charitable to assume that he set it down for a *ruse* of war. In any case, very early on the morning of the 14th April, two deserters came from the town to the British lines on the north. They announced that the garrison were getting under arms, and preparing for a sortie in great force. Some time was lost in finding an interpreter, and then General Hay, who was in command of the outposts, would seem to have disbelieved the men, for he took no additional precautions. Happily General Hinuber, commanding the Germans and the reserves of the Guards, took the matter more seriously, and got all his troops under arms. At three

o'clock the French, with feints and alarms, disturbed the lines on the left of the Adour and the south of the city; and almost simultaneously there came an eruption from the citadel, sweeping away the chains of posts on the hillsides, and surging into the village of St Etienne, on the Bordeaux road. For a time the surprise carried all before it; but two circumstances restored the battle. The first was the determination of Forster of the 38th, who held doggedly to a fortified house in the village; the second, the readiness of General Hinuber, who promptly advanced, rallied the broken parties of the 5th Division, and recovered the village.

The line of the allies had been pierced at the centre, but to the right the action had gone even worse for them. There they were posted to exceptional disadvantage, for the pickets and advanced guards were separated from their main body by a road running parallel to the line of supports. In places it was time-worn into a deep hollow way, in others it was shut in by high garden walls. Beyond and on the city side was an enclosed labyrinth of gardens, paddocks and vineyards. These were fiercely disputed hand-to-hand, though the besiegers were being steadily forced back by overwhelming superiority in numbers. The darkness was intense; as the supports came up, they were guided to the several scenes of action by the flashes from the muskets, and meantime the citadel from seventy cannon was directing undiscriminating fire on those fitful flashes. The shells and fire-bombs set houses and the fascine stores on fire, and the French gunboats, dropping down the stream, opened on the exposed flanks of the allies. And the misfortunes of the night were not at an end, for a crowning mishap was in store for the unfortunate general. It was a striking illustration of the chances, and

what may be called the 'flukes,' of war. Hope had hurried forward to the front. Knowing the ground, but groping in the darkness, he had plunged into the hollow way, in ignorance that it was held by the French. A man of gigantic stature, he was heavily mounted. A discharge swept the road; horse and man went down; the horse was killed, and Hope, shot through the arm, was pinned by his leg under the fallen animal. His aide-de-camp, a nephew of Sir John Moore, and Captain Herries were in close attendance, and made gallant efforts to extricate their chief. A second volley laid both prostrate, and all three were carried prisoners into Bayonne. But with the breaking of day the allies could see each other and rally, to roll back their assailants with irresistible vigour. These left behind them nearly 1000 men, and the loss of the besiegers was little less. A few days afterwards hostilities had ceased with the arrival of a regular intimation of the convention.

Colonels Cooke and St Simon had reached Toulouse the very day of Wellington's entry. The envoys hurried on to Soult's camp and informed the Marshal of the abdication of his master and the end of the war. It is certain that Soult must have believed their report, but in natural mortification he was in no mood to acquiesce, and he was loath to accept the inevitable by precipitately laying down his arms. Besides, he was still snatching at a last chance, for he had no recent intelligence from Suchet. Accordingly he dallied by making overtures for an armistice, which Wellington rejected on incontrovertible grounds; though, understanding and sympathising with the feelings of the Marshal, he left him time for further reflection. So far as Suchet was concerned, Soult's hopes and doubts were soon set at rest. Colonel St Simon found Suchet

at Narbonne and in a reasonable frame of mind. To the last he had fought manfully against untoward circumstances, but his military strength was broken. The wrecks of the armies of Aragon and Catalonia—all the men he had been able to bring out of Spain—barely numbered 12,000. The rest were locked up in half-a-dozen fortresses, doomed to speedy capitulation. He was disappointed, besides, by the news from Toulouse, for Soult had confidently assured him that he could maintain himself in that city. Suchet called a council of his superior officers, and it was decided without a dissentient voice, to send in their adhesion to the new *régime*. The decision necessarily reacted on Soult. The dies were cast and the war was over. Already the allies were closing in upon him with gentle but irresistible pressure. Reluctantly he laid down his arms, recognising the Provisional Government, and on the 19th April the convention for the suspension of hostilities brought the Peninsular campaigns to a close. He had the consolation of knowing that it was a surrender with honour, and that he had been vanquished gloriously. He had protracted a determined struggle through nine most anxious months, disputing each inch of ground, inspiriting his soldiers under a succession of defeats and retreats exceptionally trying to the fiery French temperament. They fought as fiercely under the walls of Toulouse as in the passes of Navarre or on the banks of the Bidassoa, and that is the best tribute to the qualities of their general. And they had good reason for their faith. Through all the reverses his constancy never failed, his able combinations changed quickly with the unexpected, and his sagacious brain was never at fault. Driven back upon the defensive, and standing resolutely at bay, his fore-

sight had taken all possible precautions, nor as the tide of invasion flowed forward did he for a moment relax his efforts. He had forced labour to assist science in strengthening the natural defences; he had anticipated that use of spade and pickaxe which was carried beyond perfection in the American Civil War, and with his entrenched camps and skilful combinations had almost equalised the odds which were greatly against him.

All that is incontrovertibly true, and all is the glorification of the genius of Wellington. Soult was great in defeat, but, after all, his is a record of failures. The last long act of the sanguinary drama, in which Wellington pushed him back from Pamplona to Toulouse, was only the triumphant finale of an unbroken series of successes. From the day when he landed in Portugal with his 9000 men, leading almost a forlorn hope against the 24,000 of Junot, he was often forced to fall back, but he never faltered. *Tant bien que mal* we have sketched the story of his difficulties and his triumphs, and to recapitulate would be only vain repetition. But, as Napier sums it up, he inspired or personally directed the operations which won nineteen pitched battles, besides innumerable combats, made or sustained ten sieges, took four great fortresses, twice expelled the French from Portugal, and preserved al the Spanish strong places in the south. When the war began, Napoleon had well-nigh succeeded in reducing Europe to the condition of the Roman Empire under the Cæsars, as De Quincey has described it—a prison-house guarded by the legions, where no one could escape the autocrat's resentment or elude his tyrannical caprices. Vaulting ambition overleaped itself. He failed in attaining the summit of his aspirations, thanks to the snows of Russia, the sierras of Spain—above all,

to the persistent resistance of Britain, as free-handed with her subsidies as she was lavish of her blood. But it was Wellington, with his unbroken career of victory, who animated the martial spirit of the nation, whose patient tenacity, never risking a catastrophe which must have discredited him, held timid Cabinets to a consistent purpose, and who, as much a man of destiny as Napoleon, is the immortal hero of the emancipation of the Peninsula.

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