had an overwhelming superiority. Before the battle was engaged he had brought 20,000 combatants into line, and to face the fire of his heavy guns we had only a few light field-pieces. For when the fleet had at last come into the bay, the bulk of our artillery was embarked with the best of the few serviceable horses. On the other hand, thanks to Spanish negligence, our men had an unexpected stroke of good fortune. The muskets, battered and rusted on the march, were replaced with new pieces found in the arsenal, and there was an ample supply of the ammunition which happily was failing with the enemy. At two in the afternoon of the 16th, Soult ordered a simultaneous advance. Moore's dispositions were imperatively dictated by the nature of the ground. The infantry was solidly aligned in a front stretching from Elvina on the right to the bank of the Mezo river. But Baird at Elvina was raked by the great battery on the ridge to his right front, and further to his right the French cavalry was out-flanking him. However, the horsemen, who could scarcely act on such ground, were also held in check by Fraser's division and Paget's reserve. Between Baird and the Mezo was Hope's division. The fighting was fiercest at Elvina, and there our losses were most severe. But at nightfall the doubtful contest there had been decided in our favour, though the gallant leader of the division had been seriously wounded. The attacks of the other French columns had equally failed. Foy on their right made but feeble resistance when Hope assumed the offensive, and on their left our skirmishers, followed closely by supports, were actually threatening to take in reverse the formidable battery on the hill.

The victory nobly retrieved the reputation of the army, somewhat imperilled by the disorders of the hurried

retreat. But it was dearly bought by the death of Moore, struck from his horse by a cannon shot when watching the fight at Elvina. He was buried by torchlight in a bastion of the citadel, and the volley over the grave was fired by the guns of the enemy. The command devolved on Sir John Hope, who, resisting the temptation to complete Soult's discomfiture, wisely turned his attention at once to the embarkation. Ere daybreak two of the divisions were on board, while the third, which held the citadel and carried the operations on, quietly embarked in course of the afternoon.

Up to a certain point it seems that Moore's generalship was irreproachable. He could hardly have formed magazines on his line of retreat, from the difficulty of filling them. Yet, had his temperament been sanguine, the upshot might have been very different. In place of writing to Cradock for empty transports, he would rather have pressed for reinforcements. The victors of Corunna would have won a more decisive battle, and hurled Soult back into the Gallician defiles. With supplies pouring into Corunna and Ferrol from the sea, we should have held another position like Torres Vedras, and escaped a temporary eclipse of prestige and false imputations of timid faithlessness. But no soldier could have desired a nobler death than that of Moore, and his chivalrous opponent did him ample justice. Almost simultaneously with the battle of Corunna, nominal hostilities ceased between Britain and Spain, and a formal treaty of alliance was concluded with the Supreme Junta.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SIEGE OF ZARAGOZA AND AFFAIRS IN PORTUGAL

December 1808—May 1809

THE heroic and obstinate defence of Zaragoza was the second obstacle which upset the French plans. Fifteen thousand fugitives from Tudela had sought refuge there, and had the victory been promptly followed up, possibly the place would have fallen. As it was, the reduction of that bulwark of the east was an object of supreme importance. Moncey began the siege operations, to be replaced by Mortier, who resigned the command to Junot finally superseded in turn by Lannes. On the 20th December the French began to close in. It was no light task they had undertaken. Thirty-five thousand men, exposed to incessant alarms from irregulars swarming in the mountains, were to contain a garrison half as numerous again and to storm a city exceptionally defensible. The defence of Zaragoza continually reminds us of the siege of Jerusalem by Vespasian. There were the fanatics excited by the monks, corresponding to the Zealots. There were the armed peasants from the hills, answering to the Idumeans of John of Gischala. There were the regular soldiers under Palafox and St Marc, and there were the citizens who fought manfully for their homes, but who were, nevertheless terrorised by their more desperate comrades. There were the same feats of reckless courage, similar ferocity, and the same indescribable horrors. Patriotism inspired the defence, but it was patriotism under a reign

of terror. St Marc was an excellent general,and St Genis an engineer of rarely adaptive genius. But it was monks of the lowest orders—men of the people—who coerced the constituted authorities, and directed the resistance. The French were in front and there were gibbets behind, daily garnished with fresh batches of suspects. For the faintest breath of suspicion was a death sentence, and the timid found it safer to fight than to flinch.

The city was girdled on one side by the Ebro, and guarded on the other by ancient walls. But its real strength was in the massive solidity of its buildings, and in the stupendous convents and public edifices, which seemed to have been constructed with a view to this crisis. It would speedily have succumbed to the tremendous bombardment had it not been virtually fire-proof, and almost bomb-proof. Massive blocks of buildings were divided by broad thoroughfares, and each of these was raked by batteries. All the outer doors and lower windows of the houses were built up, the walls were loopholed and the roofs barricaded. So the siege resolved itself into a struggle of the engineers, and the Spaniards had found a Cohorn to confront the French Vauban. The talents of Lacoste had been appreciated by Napoleon, but perhaps St Genis, a Zaragozan by birth, showed the higher qualities of inventive genius. For he adapted his plans to his means, and regulated his operations by circumstances. It was a dramatic climax to the protracted struggle in which they played the leading parts, that those great engineers fell almost simultaneously.

Palafox has had the chief honours of the defence; yet there are few characters in history as to whom we are more puzzled. Both French and English authorities are in absolute antagonism. Some present him as the chivalrous hero, others as a mere puppet and a cowardly sensualist.

He is praised by the Frenchman Lejeune, and bitterly censured by Napier. Of course the truth lies between these extremes. Like all the chief Spanish commanders he was no general; and his feebler will bent to the ferocious energy of Tio Gorge, and the fanatics who were the elect of the dregs of the populace. St Marc was the soul of the strategy and St Genis inspired the engineering. Yet had Palafox not been a patriot and a man of courage, he must have lost his place and probably his life.

The weather fought at first against the Zaragozans. They had reckoned upon the winter frost and cold to carry death into the French lines. As it happened, the winter was one of the mildest on record, and the muggy fogs rising each morning from the river valley masked the operations of the sappers. So the siege they had hoped would have been raised went on, but the prolonged resistance had a double effect. On the one hand, like the victory of Baylen, it flattered the national vanity as it kept up the national spirit, and encouraged in England a delusive faith in Spanish determination. But calmer reflection led to depressing conclusions. Zaragoza and Gerona, which behaved almost more heroically, proved to be altogether exceptional instances. No serious efforts were made to succour either city, though each night the French were kept on the alert when they saw from their leaguer the signal bonfires blazing along the uplands.

The trenches had been pushed forward; the attacking columns had been alternately successful and repulsed; all the outlying positions had been carried with the great convent of St Joseph, which projected from the walls like a Titanic bastion. On the 10th of January the bombardment began, to go on uninterruptedly to the end. On the 23d Lannes took over the command, communicating his own fiery energy to the operations.

After a contest for every foot of ground, the assailants mastered the ramparts, making them their first line of defence, yet even then their troubles were only beginning. Each house, with the ingress blocked, the stairs destroyed, and its own store of hand grenades and ammunition, had become a separate fortress. They were the flanking works of the convents and public buildings, which were so many formidable citadels. Each broad thoroughfare, being searched by the fire of raking batteries, could only be crossed under cover of travises or by subterraneous galleries. Above ground work was impossible in the day, when each roof and steeple was occupied by the deadly marksmen who had come down from the Sierras. Mine met mine, and appalling explosions were of hourly occurrence. When the stormers rushed forward to occupy a shattered house, they were shot down to a man. Then Lacoste betook himself to adjusting his charges of powder so that only one side of the house should fall. With powder the besiegers were amply supplied; it was with explosions of some 3000 lbs. that they breached their way into the massive convents. A glance at one of these affairs may suffice to give an idea of the rest. It is borrowed from the graphic narrative of the artistic Lejeune. The scene was the convent of St Francis. The explosion destroyed half the building, choking with *débris* the subterraneous chambers in which many families had taken refuge. The French rushed in through blinding clouds of dust, and in the old Gothic church and through the side chapels a desperate hand-to-hand combat ensued, when soldiers and peasants were mingled with monks and women. The grenadiers followed the defenders up the stairs to renew the fighting on the roofs, where quarter was neither given nor asked, and the grotesque gargoyles

were belching out the blood that flowed from the gutters in the lead.

The French pillaged anything that fire or powder had spared, not so much for the sake of plunder as for protection from bullets and the weather. The folios from the monkish libraries were easily built up as breast-works; the varnished canvases from altars and chapels made excellent protection against the rain, and the parchment leaves torn from precious manuscripts were spread between the sleepers and the damp ground. Repeatedly the despondent soldiers were on the point of mutiny, and had any of their generals but Lannes or Soult been in command, it is doubtful whether the siege would not have been raised. But Lannes sustained the spirit of his men by keeping them actively employed, and by representing the desperate case of the besieged. Nor would it have been easy to exaggerate that. Only the stronger of the famished garrison were fit for duty; famine had brought epidemics in its train; malignant typhus was raging, and the mortality was greatest among the women and children, who had been confined for weeks in pestilential cellarage. The corpses filled the cellars and choked the streets; fortunately the colder weather preserved them, so that they could be made useful for barricades, when the defenders were too feeble to tear up the heavy paving stones. Surrender had become a matter of necessity, and it had become possible through the death of the democratic chiefs. Yet there were still stubborn enthusiasts who refused to yield, and the negotiations had to be conducted with craft and secrecy. Fair terms were granted, considering the desperate circumstances. And even the French, who were naturally resentful of that ruthless strife, were moved by pity when they saw some 12,000

sickly and starving tatterdemalions, survivors of a force of four times that number, limp painfully out of the city to lay down their arms.

The embarkation of Moore's army had complicated the situation in Portugal, the base of the British operations in the Peninsula, and the surrender of Zaragoza discouraged Spain, as it set free 25,000 French soldiers. Sir John Cradock was in command at Lisbon. His position had always been difficult; the forces at his disposal were numerically weak; he was subordinated to the authority of the civilian envoys; for months he had no communication with the War Office; his instructions were not only indefinite but conflicting, and he was drifting in circumstances which could not have been foreseen. The justice he deserved has scarcely been done him. Wellington was a soldier of genius, Moore was a soldier of talent, Cradock was a soldier of capacity and resource. Had affairs then been directed by a timid man or a blunderer, undoubtedly Portugal must have been evacuated. Cradock had barely 10,000 men with which to garrison the frontier fortresses and to secure Lisbon, which was the point of supreme importance. Even when he received reinforcements he could never put half that number in the field, and the long frontier he was supposed to defend was easily assailable by an enterprising enemy. He had efficient irregular leaders in Wilson and Trant, but their undrilled Portuguese levies were in no way reliable. There was sedition, with something like anarchy, in Oporto, nor was the condition of Lisbon much more reassuring. The central Government there was at open enmity with the turbulent Bishop of Oporto and his delegates. Cradock's instructions were, in case of necessity, not only to embark his troops but to carry off the Portuguese fleet and the contents of the

arsenals. While events were in suspense he made extraordinary efforts, not only to send succours to Moore, but regiments to strengthen the garrison of Cadiz, thus establishing, according to the desires of the Cabinet, a second base of operations in the south of Spain, from which the British might direct the defence of Andalusia. The succour never reached Moore, since he had severed his communications with Portugal; the vanity and jealous imbecility of the Spanish Junta baulked the other scheme, and the negotiations of Frere and the energetic Sir George Smith were fruitless. Moreover, the French interest was always strong in the south, and there were traitors in the Spanish Council. The troops sent out on these missions returned or were recalled when Cradock needed every man at his disposal. For as reverse followed reverse, invasion became certain in the north of Portugal, and imminent in the west. It was known that Soult meant to pass the Minho. Victor, with the first corps, was in Estremadura, threatening Badajoz, which was even less prepared to stand a siege than the Portuguese frontier fortress of Elvas. The division of Lapisse was to operate between, menacing Ciudad Rodrigo and Almeida. The utmost Cradock could do was to concentrate troops and efforts for the defence of the capital, with the always probable alternative of evacuation. The preparations in case of the worst were perhaps unnecessarily ostentatious. The Portuguese, not unnaturally, were alarmed and excited at the prospect of being abandoned. The Englishmen were insulted, and an outbreak was not improbable. Cradock took his precautions carefully. The forts of Lisbon were strongly garrisoned, and, adopting the schemes of Junot's staff officers in somewhat similar circumstances, he secured the commanding heights of Saccavem without the city. In fact, in

some degree, he anticipated Wellington's idea by entrenching himself in a Torres Vedras on a smaller scale.

But just when it seemed certain that evacuation must become an accomplished fact, the tension was suddenly relieved. The English Government, which had seriously contemplated abandoning Portugal before the impending French advance, changed its policy, and simultaneously the Portuguese authorities became more hopeful and conciliatory. Despatches reached Cradock announcing that he was to be speedily reinforced. Generals Sherbrooke and Mackenzie brought their divisions to Lisbon, raising the effectives to 14,000 men. The Portuguese had offered the command of all their troops to an English officer. After Wellesley had declined the appointment, General Beresford was selected. He landed at Lisbon, was gazetted a Portuguese marshal, and lost no time in taking all necessary measures for training and disciplining excellent raw material. His task was the easier that he had only to have recourse to the admirable military polity which had fallen into disuse. Briefly, the whole fighting strength of the country was to be brought under arms as regulars, militia or reserves. The reforms were carried out with promptitude and some severity, and the ultimate results were eminently satisfactory. Indeed, any trouble mainly arose from the system of placing Englishmen in command, which from cautious beginnings was gradually extended. Yet the wisdom of that measure was conspicuously and immediately shown in the firm resistance to the French advance in the districts south of the Douro.

Cradock had no lack of advisers as to the strategy to be adopted. Oporto, the second city in the kingdom, was immediately threatened by Soult. The danger from Victor was somewhat less pressing, yet he might any day

advance from Estremadura on Lisbon. The junta and the Bishop of Oporto were naturally clamorous for help. The central authorities were solely concerned for Lisbon. Mr Frere actually proposed that Cradock should take the initiative, and move forward to the assistance of the Spaniards. To the suggestions of Marshal Beresford he was bound to give more serious consideration. Beresford was all for a daring game. He averred that there was time enough to beat Soult and save Oporto, and yet return southward to intercept Victor. It cannot be doubted that Cradock was only simply prudent in declining to imperil Lisbon on the chance of saving Oporto. He could not trust Cuesta, who was supposed to be holding Victor in check. Events speedily justified his sagacity. Soult passed the Minho, and took Oporto by storm; Victor routed Cuesta at Medellin; Sebastiani scattered the army of La Mancha at Ciudad Real, and had these generals, who had been joined by Lapisse, combined to press their successes, even brilliant victory in the north might have been succeeded by fatal disaster.

# CHAPTER VI

## THE SURPRISE OF OPORTO AND SOULT'S RETREAT

March—May 1809

THE Duke of Wellington made two remarks to Lord Stanhope which throw an interesting light on Soult's invasion of Portugal. He said that Soult, next to Masséna, was the most formidable antagonist to whom he had been opposed in the Peninsula, and that Napoleon, when far removed from the scene of war, would nevertheless insist on directing even the movements of a battalion. Perhaps the Duke of Dalmatia had never shown greater military capacity, whether in advance or retreat. Although naturally not anticipating the incredible, he suffered himself to be surprised by the passage of the Douro. The Emperor, in anticipation of the embarkation of the British, before leaving Valladolid sent Soult a valedictory despatch. In that he assumed the loyal co-operation of Victor and Lapisse, to whom he sent simultaneous instructions. Soult's orders were peremptory. He was to invade immediately, and he was timed almost to a day in the stages from the frontier, by way of Oporto, to Lisbon. No account was taken of possible difficulties—of the season, of the condition of the country, of the contingencies of serious resistance. The despatch reached the Marshal when he was in no condition for prompt obedience. It is true that both Corunna and Ferrol were in his hands; the one had yielded upon honourable terms, and the other had been betrayed. He had

enrolled part of the regular Spanish garrisons in his own army, and the stores of the arsenals, supplied by England, were at his disposal. But his soldiers had suffered on the march, and been demoralised by defeat. They were sickly, half-famished, shoeless and footsore. The gun-carriages had been shaken to pieces in the Gallician defiles, and powder was still scarce, even when the Spanish magazines had been emptied. Immediate obedience being out of the question, he moved southward to St Jago di Compostella, where he halted to recruit and reorganise. The nominal strength of his corps was nearly 50,000 men, but what with detachments and other deductions he could barely muster half that number.

It was the 1st of February before he was in a position to set out, and he decided for the shortest road to Oporto. He hoped, by descending the northern bank of the Minho, to pass it near the mouth, where the fortified Spanish town of Tuy was faced by a Portuguese fortress. Both, of course, were dilapidated, and the French easily made themselves masters of Tuy. But as the month was February the Minho was in raging flood, and Soult was foiled by the gallant defence the Portuguese militia opposed to his passage. The check, with the consequent delay, proved to be of supreme importance. Before he established a base at Oporto, Cradock's attenuated battalions had been reinforced, and the spirit of the patriots had risen accordingly.

Meantime, Soult was in a dilemma. In any case he had to retrace his steps and cross the Minho somewhere in its upper course. The natural difficulties were formidable: the tributaries of the river, running south-west, flowed between parallel ranges of sierras; the roads were impracticable for guns, and scarcity of provisions enforced celerity of movement, for the Gallicians, pillaged by both

French and English, had driven their remaining cattle to the mountains. When hours were precious, with characteristic promptitude he came to an original and audacious resolution. He determined to advance, severing himself absolutely from his base till he could re-establish communications after the capture of Oporto. He left Tuy behind, in charge of General Martinière, with a slender garrison of 500 sound men and 1000 invalids. There he left the greater part of his guns and ammunition, pressing forward with his forces in perilously light marching order. He could not count on an unopposed march, although he calculated on the instability of the patriots in holding even the strongest positions. Nor was his confidence misplaced. Romana, who had rallied another army, was acting in conjunction with the Portuguese under Silveira. Neither general, though they had all the advantages of ground, made any creditable stand; both were routed with great slaughter, and the French passed the river. Their march along the southern bank might have been contested at every step, but they were suffered to thread a succession of defiles with impunity. The Portuguese, who occupied Braga in some strength under Freire, gave orders to their general instead of accepting them, refused to retire when prudence advised retreat, and ended by murdering their unfortunate commander. In fact, three Portuguese generals within as many weeks fell victims to the ferocity and suspicions of their troops. On the 27th February Soult was before Oporto, where great preparations had been made to receive him, though the approaches had been left practically undefended. The bishop, who was even less of a strategist than a churchman, leaving the passes open, had gathered upwards of 40,000 combatants for the defence. Many of them were regular troops, and the peasants of those districts who

had responded to his appeals were as good fighting material as the Aragonese, who had so gallantly defended Zaragoza. His dispositions were faulty, not to say absurd. He had fortified and entrenched a long line of sandhills, bending in an arc around the north of the city. Several hundred pieces of cannon had been mounted, and the men who held the trenches were resolute and even desperate. They foresaw all the horrors of this second invasion. The lines were weakened by being unduly prolonged; nevertheless, the position was formidable. Had the bishop acted up to his brave words, and fanned the enthusiastic patriotism of his flock, notwithstanding mistakes, the result might have been more fortunate. But in the hour of peril he withdrew to those convent-crowned heights on the southern bank, which Wellington used to very different purpose. Leaving the command to his subordinates, from thence he looked on passively at the calamities he had done his utmost to invite. Soult's dispositions, on the contrary, were masterly as they were dashing. Had he been defeated, or even held in check indefinitely by forces doubling his own, who could have fallen back, as at Zaragoza, upon a line of streets, he might have sacrificed his army. The very evening of his arrival, although his men were fagged, he made a feint against either flank of the works on the sandhills, at the same time holding back his centre, with strong reserves behind. The double feint answered its purpose. In the night the Portuguese were busy shifting reinforcements to the threatened points. Moreover, as at Zaragoza, the elements fought against them. A tremendous thunder-storm burst in the darkness. The defenders mistook the artillery of the skies for that of the French, and opened an answering fire from all their batteries, backing it up with incessant discharges of musketry. Kept idly on the

alert, they wasted ammunition and, what was no less important, squandered nerve and strength. The French were up and stirring with the dawn. The feints were renewed on either flank; they were insisted upon but not pressed, till the concentrated and serious assault had cut the Portuguese communications in the centre. Then the French generals of division, closing in on either side, drove the defenders back into the city, except those who took flight towards the sea. Oporto was connected with its suburb on the southern bank by a single bridge of boats. Soult's strategy had been directed to seizing this passage, and so cutting off the retreat. The victorious French columns entered pell-mell with the fugitives; the panic-stricken citizens made a rush *en masse* for the bridge; the mob of men, women and children were choking the narrow passage, when a panic-stricken squadron of Portuguese horse came charging headlong down the main street, trampling under hoof all who were in the way. The chains of the boat-bridge snapped under the excessive strain, and the nearest pontoon was sunk. In the mad rush to escape hundreds were hurled into the water, and the Douro was choked with corpses. It is said that the French, struck with horror at the sight, exerted themselves nobly to save the drowning; but it is certain that the city was given up to all the horrors of a sack, although the excesses of the soldiers could scarcely have been worse than those of the British at Badajoz and San Sebastian. Houses were gutted and fired; women were violated; and neither age nor sex was spared in the indiscriminate massacre. Whether from policy or humanity, in the march on Oporto, Soult had treated the peasantry with exceptional leniency. Now, as soon as possible, he got his men under command, but he was no more master of the immediate situation than Wellington