after the storming of the Spanish fortresses. There is something like grim satire in the proclamations by which he invited the citizens who had succeeded in saving themselves to return and trust to the mercies of soldiers who, reeking with their kinsfolk's blood, had been guilty of unmentionable atrocities.

Nor can anything be more suggestive of the terrors of such a war than the fact that not only many of the citizens did come back to their desolated homes, but that Soult made himself relatively popular. It seems not improbable that he was aiming at the succession to the Braganzas, and ere long there were not a few influential Portuguese who were far from unwilling to forward his candidature. They had lost confidence in English support; they were weary of anarchy, bloodshed and invasion, and would have welcomed a firm hand at the helm. Nor were his aspirations irrational, but the crown of Portugal could only be the reward of the occupation of the capital and the expulsion of the English. Lisbon was 200 miles from the Douro, but Cradock was enfeebled to the last degree, and the only troops to obstruct the advance were some corps of ill-disciplined Portuguese and partisans. But the jealousies or incompetency of the Marshal's colleagues again, as on many other occasions, upset the plans that had been devised by the genius of the Emperor. Victor, as has been said, had been instructed to co-operate with Soult. After the victories in Estremadura and La Mancha he remained inexplicably inactive. But Lapisse with his division had been directed to maintain the communications between the armies, and that was all-important. He advanced to threaten Ciudad Rodrigo. He found in his front Sir Robert Wilson, with a battalion of the Lusitanian Legion and a few irregular levies. That able and daring partisan,

with no reliable force, played a masterly and most judicious game of bluff. Lapisse, forgetting or ignoring his instructions, after a variety of futile demonstrations, turned southward to join Victor with his 10,000 men. Even that unexpected accession of strength failed to stir Victor to action, but it left Soult in isolation and destitute of intelligence. He dared not risk the movement upon Lisbon which had been contemplated. He sent a detachment to relieve Tuy and recover his artillery. Meanwhile, Franceschi was detached to push into the country to the southward, and that general would have been more successful had he not been opposed by Trant, for the Portuguese at first were panic-stricken. But Soult's most important operations were to the eastward, to keep open a line of retreat. Caulaincourt was sent thither with the cavalry, and Loison, of Lisbon notoriety, was in command of the infantry column. Laborde, who had distinguished himself at Roliça, followed afterwards in support. The central point on that side was the bridge over the Tamega at Amarante—the Tamega flows into the Tagus from the north. If the bridge were secured and held, retreat would be comparatively easy. The bridge was the scene of one of the most romantic episodes of the war. The Portuguese fully realised the essential importance of the position. Their batteries concentrated a converging fire on the passage; moreover, the western arch had been mined, and a wire was attached in readiness to explode the mine. To venture on the bridge seemed certain death. Colonel Brochard of the engineers devised a scheme which was only made possible by the over-confidence of the defenders. Powder casks draped in grey cloth were rolled forward by sappers shod with felt and in similarly coloured clothing. The train was laid, the powder was fired, the wire was snapped and the

mine was flooded. Loison was left master of the disputed pass, and the Marshal reckoned with misplaced assurance on an unobstructed march in case of necessity.

Meantime, his politic leniency had been bearing fruit. Petitions, which appear to have been spontaneous, had been addressed to him, inviting him to take over the government, and hinting that he might aspire to the vacant throne. He had actually raised several native battalions. What his real intentions were must always be doubtful. He declared that he merely met these advances in the desire to establish the peaceful supremacy of the French. The Emperor accepted his subsequent explanations with the ambiguous answer that he could only remember the day of Austerlitz. But when all seemed tolerably fair sailing, the situation changed. A formidable conspiracy broke out at his headquarters, and Sir Arthur Wellesley landed at Lisbon. The return of the new actor to the scene of his former triumphs assured Soult that he must face a daring and resourceful antagonist; moreover, it indicated that England was in earnest and intended to meet invasion by attack.

If Soult was alarmed and on the alert, Cradock had some reason to complain. He had done excellent work with inadequate means in the face of no ordinary difficulties, and he was summarily and unceremoniously superseded. But the wisdom of the new selection was justified at once, for the enthusiasm in Portugal was extraordinary. And Sir Arthur started with advantages which Cradock never enjoyed. He brought reinforcements, and in particular, four regiments of cavalry. The exertions of Beresford, Wilson and Trant had already drilled the Portuguese army into some efficiency. Yet Wellesley was confronted by the dilemma which had embarrassed his predecessor. It was desirable to deal promptly with

Soult, who occupied the second city in the kingdom and had overrun the richest province. Yet no immediate danger was apprehended from that Marshal, for the march from Oporto to Lisbon was obstructed by flooded rivers and formidable defiles. Besides, Wellesley, as afterwards in the Talavera campaign, under-estimated his enemy's strength. To Victor, on the contrary, the road to Lisbon lay comparatively open; the only difficulty was the Tagus, and the Tagus could be forded or ferried. Cuesta might have given Victor occupation in Spain, but Cuesta notoriously detested the English, and was not to be trusted. Victor had 30,000 effectives; Soult was supposed to have 20,000 —he really had considerably more; and the numbers of the united British and Germans were barely 22,000. Still the British general, with Lisbon and the sea for a base, had the commanding advantage of a central position. Something must be risked, and he decided that there was time to deal with Soult without serious danger from Victor. The expulsion of Soult would not only recover northern Portugal, but probably, and as it proved, liberate Gallicia. He believed that Silveira still held the bridge of Amarante, which was the keystone of his original idea. Beresford was directed to cross the Tamega there, and thence move on Oporto along the northern bank of the Tagus. Meanwhile Wellesley carried on the operations already begun by Cradock. Detaching a body of Portuguese to Alcantara, with orders to defend the passage of the Tagus, and blow up the bridge in case of Victor's advance, by the 5th of March he had concentrated his army at Coimbra. It numbered 25,000, but of these more than a third were Portuguese. While at Coimbra, the news that Silveira, repulsed by Loison, had lost Amarante

compelled him to modify his plans. His idea had been, by uniting Beresford's corps to the Spanish and Portuguese, to interpose a formidable army between Soult and Tras os Montes, forcing him either to fight when assailed both in front and rear, or to fall back upon the Minho and Tuy. Now, on the 16th May, Beresford was still despatched to distract the French Marshal's attention and act upon the upper Douro, by way of Viseu and Lamego. But the direct attack was to be made on Oporto by his own army from Coimbra. With the bulk of his forces he followed the direct road. The left wing, under General Hill, was to take the coast road, and turn the right flank of the French, which rested on the Lake of Ovar. From information received, he had reason to believe the lake had been left unguarded, although it extended for twenty miles behind the enemy's lines. The manœuvres of both wings were entirely successful. Loison, in place of holding to the passage, had weakly fallen back before Beresford, and both flanks of the French were turned. Meantime the main army had attacked Franceschi, and it was only by an accident, of which he made masterly use, that the French general withdrew in safety to Oporto.

He brought his troops into the city, destroying the bridge of boats, for the British were pressing hard on him. The Marshal, overwhelmed with anxiety, had already resolved on retreat. The conspiracy, to which allusion has been made, had been discovered. It aimed at nothing less than the subversion of Napoleon's autocracy, and proposed to replace Soult, who was staunch to the Emperor, by Gouvion St Cyr. D'Argenton, who was at the head of it, had been in repeated communication with the British headquarters. In fact his last

visit had been to Coimbra a few days before, when he had invited British co-operation and offered an armistice. Unfortunately for him, when arrested, English passports were found upon him. His guilt was clear; indeed, he confessed it. Although he firmly refused to betray his accomplices, he told all he knew of the English strength and plans. Happily, and thanks to Sir Arthur's shrewd precautions, that was very little. Nevertheless, Soult learned that he had the whole of the English army in front of him; and he learned it at the critical moment when his confidence in all his subordinates was shaken. The citizens were excited by the approach of their friends. The insurgents of the country were closing in on him from behind. Ten thousand of his veterans were under him in Oporto, but his lines of defence were drawn out from Amarante nearly to the river mouth. Knowing already that his flanks were turned or seriously threatened, retreat became more urgent than before, but he had to recall his outposts from the lower Douro. Not a moment was lost in directing his guns and military train upon Amarante; but sending orders to Loison—of whose mistakes and misadventures he was still in ignorance—to draw in his detachments, he determined to remain in Oporto over the 12th, in order to give that general time to carry out his instructions.

He might well believe his position assured. Before him was the broad and bridgeless river in flood, and every boat upon it had been carefully secured. But the fortunes of war depend on trivial chances. A barber brought about the capture of Oporto, as a pedlar afterwards saved Soult from capitulation. The barber, eluding the vigilance of the sentinels, had crossed to the southern bank in his skiff. Wellesley, coming to

the front, was surveying the situation from the heights of Sarco whither the bishop had withdrawn when his city was being sacked. Being at a sharp bend of the river, these heights were not visible from the town. The English general saw no soldiers on the opposite side, but in the distance, through clouds of dust, columns in retreat were to be distinguished. No time was to be lost, if the passage were possible. And beneath him, on the other bank, was an unfinished building, which seemed to have been planned for a *tête de pont*, if the Tagus could be bridged. It would shelter a considerable force, and to the west there was a *pleine terre*, which could be swept by musketry and artillery fire. The question was how to throw the head of a column across? There was the skiff, and Colonel Waters volunteered to accompany its owner. Colonel Waters, among many dashing actions, was famous afterwards for a daring escape, when, being refused his *parole*, he was lashed to a gun-carriage. The Duke knew him so well, on that occasion, that he ordered his baggage to be brought along, saying that Waters will be sure soon to rejoin us. A third adventurer was the Prior of Amarante, and the three returned with some capacious boats in tow. 'Let the men embark,' said the general, brusquely, when someone suggested difficulties. The guns, as they were dragged up to the heights, successively opened fire, covering the crossing as well as the improvised outworks, but a considerable time had elapsed before the French took the alarm. Then they swarmed from the town, preceded by clouds of skirmishers, but the British forlorn hope had been rapidly reinforced, and the guns mounted on the commanding eminence dominated the fire of the hostile cannon. In the confusion, the citizens, left to themselves, brought their boats over to the suburb

where the pontoon bridge had been destroyed. So there were simultaneous attacks on the centre and away to the left, while General Murray had passed the river some miles higher up and was descending the northern bank. Soult had been fairly taken by surprise ; believing that the urgent danger must be on the lower Douro, he had established his quarters in a house away to the west end of the city. When he awoke to the reality, the surprise was complete. All that was left was to direct and facilitate the retreat, and had it not been for the inaction of Murray, who contented himself with looking on as column after column of the enemy swept past, discomfiture must have ended in crushing disaster. The dusk found the British in possession of the French quarters, with the incredibly slight loss of 20 killed and 100 wounded.

Sir Arthur was compelled to delay for a day, while he refreshed his troops, exhausted by hard marching and fighting, and waited for his baggage and ammunition train. Soult withdrew in perfect order, rallying to him the force he had detached to the west. Beresford had seized on Amarante almost simultaneously with the surprise of Oporto, and both Soult and Wellesley believed that the retreat of the French was open. Sir Arthur, when he was able to move, had lost touch of the French, but he presumed that they were falling back upon Amarante. Had he realised the circumstances, the wisdom of pressing them hard would probably have overridden all other considerations. For Soult found himself in an almost desperate situation. He had relied upon Loison's tenacity, and Loison had failed him. He was between the Tagus and Sierras, believed to be impassable. His choice seemed to lie between surrender or attempting to force the Tamega

against Beresford, with Wellesley coming up on his rear. At that moment the unpatriotic Spanish pedlar interposed. He offered to guide the Marshal by a track leading over the Sierra de Catalina to Guimaraens. Soult lost not a moment in taking his decision. Deaf to the murmurs of the disaffected and the desponding, he destroyed his guns with the greater part of his ammunition, and, following the pedlar, plunged into the mountains. At Guimaraens he had the good luck to meet with Loison; the cavalry he had detached to Braga had joined him during the previous night, and consequently he had rallied his whole army in the lightest marching order. Making sure that the British would take the main road to Braga, he resolved to avoid that town. Again he threw himself into the mountains to the right, leading his troops along break-neck goat paths, but gaining nearly a day by the unexpected movement. Till he found himself safe in Orense on the 19th, there was incessant fighting in front and rear; Portuguese and Spaniards were driven from a succession of bridges and precipitous defiles, where skilful and determined resistance would have given time for Sir Arthur to bring him to battle under desperate conditions. In person he took the direction of his rearguard, and Loison, who had distinguished himself by his atrocities, led the advance; he was assured that Loison, of all men, dare not surrender. But if Soult's own advance on Oporto had been characterised by exceptional humanity, in his retreat he rivalled the cruelties of Loison. The pursuers could track him by the smoke of burning villages, and the peasantry were mercilessly butchered. The inhuman outrages were as savagely avenged. Exhausted by constant alarms, fatigues and hunger, the soldiers fell

out of the ranks by hundreds, although they must have known that their fate was to be mutilated and murdered. He brought 19,000 men back to Orense, having lost his guns, his stores and his baggage. He left 6000 men behind, half having been captured in hospital, and the other half slaughtered on the march. Yet that he saved so much was infinitely to his credit as a general, for on the Souza river he was in far more desperate case than Dupont at Baylen or Junot after Vimeiro.

CHAPTER VII

INVASION OF SPAIN, VICTORY OF TALAVERA AND SPANISH DEFEATS

May—December, 1809

THE operations that preceded the final evacuation of Gallicia by the French must be briefly dismissed, and with some disregard for chronology. On the 20th May Soult had brought his troops to Orense, but on the following day they were again in motion. The Gallicians, moved to energy at last by the destruction of their villages and the capture of their cattle, had been giving Ney and the 6th Corps infinite trouble. Romana, although no great general, was an honest patriot, and a man of decision and action. Gallicia is the wildest province of Spain, and the most dangerous campaigning ground for a regular army. The Spaniards, greatly assisted by English squadrons off the coast, had taken Vigo and other strong places, and were beleaguering Lugo. Romano and his colleague, the Conde Noroña, had seemed to multiply themselves; now they were at the head of an army, now in flight, now taking refuge on a British vessel to reappear elsewhere, but always eluding pursuit and fanning the flames of the insurrection. When Soult brought his broken army to Orense, Ney had become disgusted with the desultory warfare. His soldiers were thoroughly disheartened. They had spared nothing, to the church vestments which made coverings for their *tentes d'abri*, and every sentiment and superstition

of the Gallegans had been roused to ferocity. Nowhere, and not even after the guerrilla warfare first broke out, was the war carried on more mercilessly. It was said—and the southern General Barrios claimed credit for the deed, although Napier doubts the fact—that in revenge for the indiscriminate massacres of the peasantry he had drowned 500 French prisoners in cold blood. But in that ruthless war a single detail, however atrocious, signifies little. In any case, after the disastrous retreat of Soult and the mortifying failure of Ney, both Marshals were in the worst of humours. Always jealous, they now came near to an open quarrel, and that rupture, with the manœuvres of Wellesley against Victor, not only saved the Gallegan armies from the impending catastrophe which nothing but the jealousy of the French generals could have averted, but caused the final evacuation of the province.

Wellington, when he had turned north to deal with Soult, had never lost sight of Victor. Had he failed in striking a swift and decisive blow in the north, and had Victor followed up his victory over Cuesta, the position of the English general must have been dangerous in the extreme, though he had always his base of Lisbon to fall back upon. But Providence seemed to be fighting for the English and the patriots. Lapisse had made one fatal mistake when he severed the communications between the 1st and the 2d Corps, and the inaction of Victor is simply inexplicable. Even jealousy would scarcely have induced him to play fast and loose with his reputation, and it seems not unreasonable that Napoleon, who was frequently mistaken in the choice of his instruments, should have abused him after his Peninsular failure for a *bête, sans talents et sans tête.*

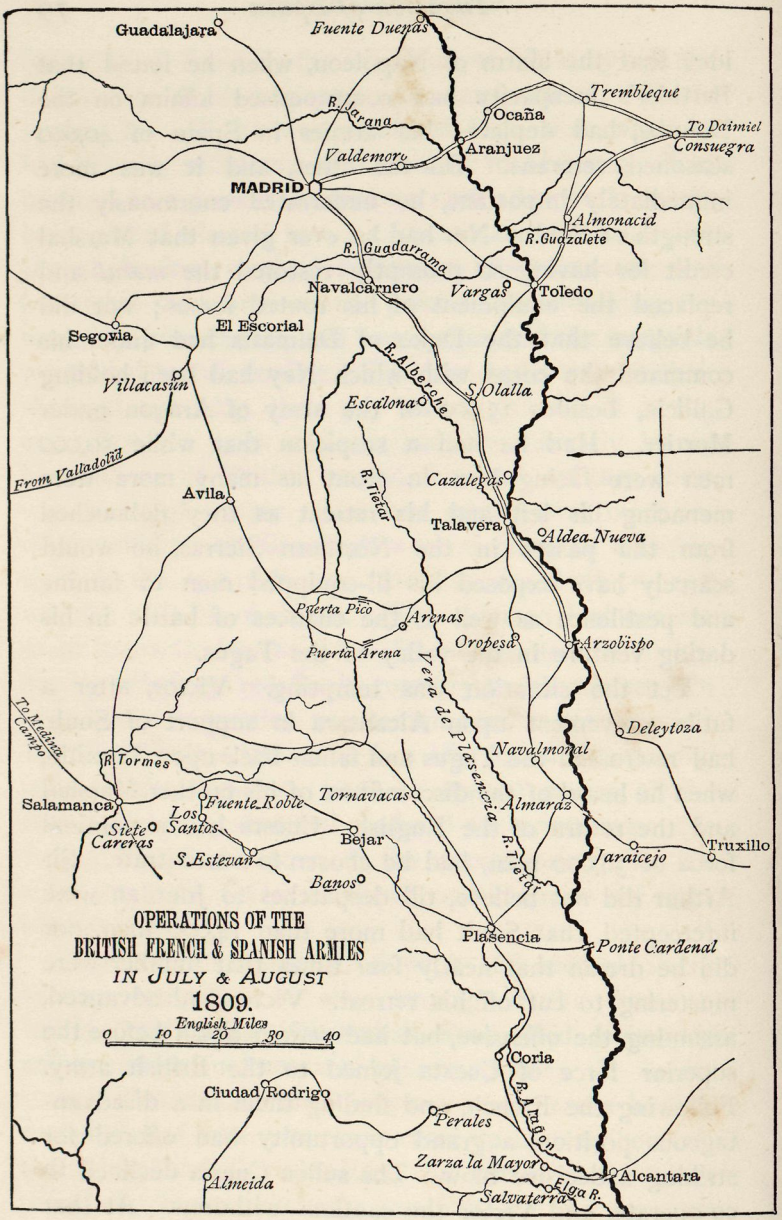
Sir Arthur, as we have seen, had been prevented from

following up Soult by the condition of his army and the deficiencies of his transport and commissariat. Sorely against his will, he was paralysed for a time, when he had leisurely withdrawn with his army to Abrantes. Had he been in a position to make a swift advance, he might have placed himself between Victor and Madrid. But though he had received important reinforcements, and knew that more were on the point of disembarking, the mortality from disease had been great, and the hospitals were filled to overflowing. The men had worn out their shoes in marching, their pay was hopelessly in arrear, and when the junta at Cadiz had been literally laying by millions of British money, our own military chest was well-nigh empty. Nor was money ever more indispensable, for the Spaniards were as chary of assisting us as in the case of Moore. Most serious of all, perhaps, was the attitude of Cuesta. The old man had become more impracticable than ever, for he resented Sir Arthur having acted against Soult, contrary to his advice. To offer him a suggestion was tantamount to its rejection. His forces were scattered in face of a formidable enemy, between the Guadiana and the central passes of the Morena, and he absolutely refused to concentrate. Sir Arthur dared not move, in the apprehension that his allies might be beaten in detail, and his rear and right left uncovered.

Moreover, then—as all through the critical forthcoming campaign—he was groping in the dark, so far as trustworthy information went, and frequently acting under unfortunate misconceptions. It seems strange that among the insurgents whose cause he had espoused, and who were everywhere up in arms between the Minho and the Guadiana, he could never obtain reliable intelligence. On the one hand, he had never an

idea that the alarm of Napoleon, when he found that Berthier's incapacity had compromised affairs on the Danube, had depleted his armies in Spain of 40,000 seasoned veterans. On the other, and it was more immediately important, he underrated enormously the strength of Soult. Nor had he ever given that Marshal credit for having so promptly restored the *moral* and replaced the equipment of his routed forces; nor did he believe that the Duke of Dalmatia had under his command the corps with which Ney had been holding Gallicia, besides 15,000 of the army of Aragon under Mortier. Had he had a suspicion that while 50,000 men were facing him in front as many more were menacing his left and his retreat as they debouched from the passes in the Northern Sierras, he would scarcely have exposed his ill-equipped men to famine and pestilence as well as the chances of battle in his daring venture in the valley of the Tagus.

Yet the situation was tempting. Victor, after a futile movement upon Alcantara in support of Soult, had re-crossed the Tagus and fallen back upon Truxillo, when he heard of the discomfiture of his brother Marshal and the return of the English. Cuesta had a nominal force of 38,000 men, had he chosen to concentrate. Sir Arthur did not believe, till despatches to Jourdan were intercepted, that Soult had more than 14,000 men, nor did he dream that nearly four times that number were mustering to cut off his retreat. Victor had advanced, assuming the offensive, but had retired again before the superior force of Cuesta joined to the British army. Following the French, and finding them in a disadvantageous position, a grand opportunity had offered for striking a decisive blow. The sullen Cuesta declined to co-operate, and Victor the cautious withdrew. At that


Guadalajara
Fuente Duenas
Trembleque
R. Jarama
Ocaña
To Daimiel
Consuegra
Aranjuez
Valdemoro
MADRID
Almonacid
R. Guadarrama
R. Guadalete
Navalcarnero
Vargas
Toledo
El Escorial
Segovia
R. Alberche
Villacasin
Escalona
S. Olalla
From Valladolid
R. Tietar
Cazalegas
Avila
Talavera
Aldea Nueva
Puerta Pico
Arenas
Oropesa
Arzobispo
Puerta Arena
Vera de Plasencia
To Medina Campo
Deleytoza
R. Tormes
Navalmoral
Salamanca
Fuente Roble
Tornavacas
Almaraz
Los Santos
Siete Carreras
Bejar
R. Tietar
Truxillo
S. Estevan
Jaraicejo
Banos
OPERATIONS OF THE
BRITISH FRENCH & SPANISH ARMIES
IN JULY & AUGUST
1809.
English Miles
0 10 20 30 40
Plasencia
Ponte Cardenal
Coria
Ciudad Rodrigo
R. Alagon
Perales
Zarza la Mayor
Alcantara
Almeida
Salvaterra
Elga R.

time Victor was unsupported, for the corps of Joseph and Sebastiani were distracted by the operations of Venegas in La Mancha. A few days later, having effected his junction with the army from Madrid, Victor became the assailant in turn. The Spanish vanguard was only saved from a rout by the gallantry of Albuquerque, and Cuesta beat a precipitate retreat to the Alberche. With difficulty Sir Arthur prevailed on him to recross that river, and the allies took up strong positions at Talavera. There, in the bloody battle of the two days, they were assailed by the united French armies. The British had 18,000 men in the field: the French numbered 48,000. The British bore the whole brunt of the fighting, for they had little more than passive aid from their allies. The Spaniards, who held the town and the heights behind heavily-armed batteries, simply secured our right like some profound ravine or precipitous mountain. Jourdan directed the chief attack on our left, but he gave timely warning of his dispositions by attempting it at first with inadequate forces. The carnage on the slopes of that flanking hill was terrible, and they were contested with fluctuating fortunes. But the critical moment came at noon on the second day, when Victor ordered a simultaneous charge along the whole of his front. The British line was nearly broken at the centre, when a fierce bayonet charge hurled the enemy down the hill. The intoxication of that success nearly proved fatal. The Guards, following up the fugitives too fast, fell among the French reserves, between their field batteries. There was a violent recoil, and the tide came surging back again. But Sir Arthur's prescience had foreseen that possibility: a fresh battalion had been rapidly moved up, and, with the second line of Cotton's cavalry, received the shattered files of the Guards, giving