

them leisure to re-form. It was the enemy's last effort, and, with nightfall, he withdrew from the field. Our loss was very heavy: killed, wounded and missing numbered nearly 6000. Yet, though the victory brought no immediate results, the moral effects were perhaps commensurate with the heavy losses. For it not only confirmed the French rank and file in their convictions of the fighting qualities of the British soldier, but it assured the marshals, who had served their apprenticeship under Napoleon, that they dare take no liberties with the Sepoy-General. Nor was the influence of Talavera less appreciable with the English politicians who professed to believe in the invincibility of the Great Emperor, though for the time it added venom to their diatribes.

The victory brought no immediate results. Sir Arthur, had he wished it, could not advance. Cuesta, with a superfluity of beasts of burden, refused the slightest assistance. The townspeople of Talavera gave nothing to the starving soldiers, though, as it proved afterwards, there were provisions for three months' sustenance concealed in the city, to be unearthed by the less scrupulous French. It was then, according to Napier, that our soldiers began to nurse that hatred of their churlish allies, which led to the horrors of Badajoz and St Sebastian. A day or two were necessarily devoted to making arrangements for the wounded. The improvised hospitals were overcrowded, and numbers of the sick and mutilated were groaning on straw in the streets. A few days after the battle came intelligence that Soult had forced the northern passes, which Sir Arthur had unavoidably confided to the sole custody of the patriots. They had abandoned almost impregnable positions without firing a shot, and

the leading columns of the enemy were already in the rich plains of Plasencia. When the northern army effected its junction with Jourdan and Victor, Talavera became untenable and retreat unavoidable. After the usual wearisome squabbles with Cuesta, Sir Arthur undertook to march against Soult—still estimating the strength of that general at barely 14,000 men—entrusting Talavera and his hospitals to the defence of Cuesta, and receiving the promise of the Spaniard that, in the event of his retiring, waggons would be provided for all the sick who could be moved.

Sir Arthur, reinforced since the battle, was marching with 18,000 men against, as he imagined, a far weaker force. On the 2d August he received three sensational pieces of news. Intercepted letters told him that Soult's army must be over 30,000; that already that Marshal had interposed between him and the bridge of Almaraz, the sole passage to Portugal on the Lower Tagus; and lastly, that as Joseph was returning in force, Cuesta proposed to evacuate Talavera and to join him. Expostulations with the impracticable Spaniard proved vain, and nothing but the promptest action could save him from being crushed between the converging armies of the enemy. There was but one possible course to pursue—to withdraw behind the Tagus by the bridge of Arzobispo, a short distance below Talavera, where he could await events in an unassailable position in the Sierras which overhang the southern bank of the river. Meanwhile, Crauford's brigade was sent off by a forced march to seize the bridge at Almaraz, if yet there were time. As matter of fact, that passage was secured, and communications were kept up with Deleitosa, where Sir Arthur had established his headquarters. It was a commanding

position, but the usual embarrassments occurred. The troops were on shorter rations than ever. Cuesta, who had posted himself to defend Arzobispo, was surprised during the noonday siesta; he saved most of his men by a hurried flight, but he lost the greater part of his baggage and artillery. Victor re-entered Talavera, where he behaved to our wounded with chivalrous generosity. His proceedings were in strong contrast to those of Soult, who was wasting and burning in the plain of Plasencia. Meanwhile, affairs had been going ill for the Spaniards in La Mancha, where Venegas, having been foiled in an attempt on Toledo, had concentrated in Aranjuez. With the troops at his command, he might have pushed forward to occupy Madrid, when Joseph and Jourdan had marched to the succour of Victor. But there can be little question that the Central Junta, while actually nominating civil officers to take charge of the capital, in their selfish jealousy, alike of the British and Cuesta, had given Venegas secret instructions not to be over-active, and to take care of his army. As for Cuesta, on his side, he had deceived his brother general by assuring him that the British were to advance, when he knew they had resigned themselves to retiring. When Venegas had at last decided to attack, the French anticipated him. After for some time offering a resolute defence at Aranjuez, the favourite summer retreat of the Spanish kings on the Tagus, surrounded by enchanting gardens, adorned with noble statuary and rare exotics, he was forced to the battle of Almonacid, and utterly routed. But the pursuit was not mercilessly followed up as at Medellin, and he rallied the wrecks of his army in the passes of the Morena.

The victor of Talavera was raised to the peerage as

Viscount Wellington of Talavera and of Wellington in Somersetshire. Another incident of importance supervened. Mr Frere, for a brief space, was replaced by the Marquis Wellesley. Mr Frere's conduct has been very differently appreciated by admiring men of letters and the military critics. The former sympathise with his romantic enthusiasm for the Spanish cause, and praise him for his eagerness to advise and readiness to accept the responsibilities of his counsels. The others, and apparently with better reason, condemn the presumption which forced his advice on such soldiers as Moore and Wellesley, when writing at a distance from the seat of war and in Napoleon-like ignorance of the immediate circumstances. The Marquis believed and trusted in his brother. He also tendered military suggestions, but at once assented to his brother's decisions. Before Talavera his brother had warned the Junta that as his troops were starved, and as Cuesta wantonly threw obstacles in his way, his mind was made up to fall back into Portugal. His foraging parties had actually been plundered; his magazines had been emptied to supply the Spaniards; and his ally had denied him a single mule team when he had the means of transporting a pontoon bridge from one river to another. The Junta had at length summoned courage to supersede Cuesta, when he anticipated destitution by resignation. Eguia, who succeeded temporarily as his second in command, was perhaps more incapable, and quite as impracticable. An agent of the Junta came with false and absurdly reassuring promises; but Sir Arthur had learned how far they were to be trusted. He announced his intention of carrying out his threats. His brother suggested that, by way of compromise, he might fall back from the heights on the Tagus to positions behind the Guadiana. The answer was that the line of the Guadiana, with

its fords and shallows, was relatively indefensible; that the Spaniards, if they showed ordinary skill and resolution, were strong enough to maintain the barriers between the Upper Tagus and the Central Morena; and that, withdrawing to Badajoz and Elvas, where he could nourish his troops from the fertile Alemtejo, he could still threaten the flank or rear of any French army invading Andalusia. To Badajoz, accordingly, he withdrew.

Almost simultaneously England committed itself to the disastrous Walcheren expedition. It has been said that had that money been thrown into the scales in Spain, the turning of the balance might have been anticipated by four years. That seems questionable, although undoubtedly our limited military strength could not have been squandered to worse purpose. But the truth of the dictum of Henri Quatre was realised both by Napoleon and Wellington—that the strength of Spain was in the fact that weak armies were inadequate for her subjugation, and that strong armies could not be fed. While Wellington rested in observation on the Portuguese frontier, both French and Spaniards were in dire straits. The French exactions had never been more ruthless or the military edicts more atrocious than under Kellerman, the Governor-General of what the French called Northern Spain. And in Western and Northern Spain the ranks of the ill-fed and ragged Spanish regulars had been weakened by innumerable desertions. But the men only deserted to reappear in desultory bands. Then began the guerrilla warfare, which was so potent to harass and wear out the enemy. It began in Aragon, which had been swept by Suchet, and where the convoys, carrying plunder northward to France and coming back with munitions and coin, offered the most tempting field of operations. An entire detachment might be told off to escort a single

courier ; letters of supreme importance were intercepted, and as the whole country, for fear or friendship, was in league with the guerrilla chiefs, the most trivial French movement, when known in advance, must be protected by a powerful military demonstration.

The successes of the guerrillas, following the defeats of the regulars in the field, should have indicated to the Junta the true lines for conducting the defence. Moreover, Lord Wellington before retiring had warned them against hazarding their troops in pitched battles, though his advice, acting as an irritant, had the reverse of the effect he intended. The Duke del Parque had won some creditable victories in Leon ; the French had been repulsed from Astorga ; they had retired from Salamanca, and it was taken as a significant confession of their discomfiture that Jourdan had been replaced by Soult as major-general of their armies. The Duke del Parque undertook to push his advantages if the Junta would make an effective diversion from La Mancha. Moreover the Madrileños, driven to despair by oppression, were imploring the Junta to make an energetic effort for their liberation. Consequently the Junta came to the insane resolution of confronting the French *en campagne ruse*, though Soult had 70,000 men at his disposal.

The number of their own troops, when collected at the foot of the Morena, fell short of 50,000. Passing over three men who, though no great strategists, had far superior credentials—Castaños, Romana and Albuquerque—they summoned Arizaga from Lerida to replace Eguia. His sole claim seems to have been that he had once been commended in despatches when serving under the gallant but incapable Blake. Having made their choice of a general, the Junta began by deceiving him. They assured him that he might count on an immediate

British advance, and that Albuquerque had been ordered up with the army of Estremadura. But Areizaga's overweening self-confidence needed no such encouragement. Without waiting for further news of the promised support, he led his undisciplined host across the plains of La Mancha. He would listen to no warnings from foreigners in his camp, and indeed the Junta had given peremptory orders to fight. Neglecting all reasonable precautions, he is said only to have realised the measure of his temerity when from the church tower of Ocaña he saw the French closing in upon him. His soldiers fought well; the artillery is said to have been excellently served; but repulse, as usual, was followed by abject panic. The fugitives from Ocaña and Alba de Tormes again sought refuge among the precipices of the Morena. As a consequence the Duke del Parque was driven from his position in the open plains of Old Castile; the French were again free to threaten Portugal alike by way of Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz; and Lord Wellington, withdrawing from the neighbourhood of the latter fortress, took up a new position on the Portuguese Tagus.

Meanwhile important events had been passing in Catalonia. That province, singularly defensible, with its warlike population, who took to their hills when their towns were occupied, always persisted in an independent war, with more hindrance than help from the Supreme Junta. Even the adjacent kingdoms of Aragon and Valencia were seldom disposed to act in unison. Had the British rendered timely or efficient assistance, had the troops that were kept idle in Sicily been embarked on a fleet under command of Lord Collingwood, the results of the struggle would have been very different. As it was, the French were everywhere hard pressed, and St Cyr, Augereau and Macdonald were suc-

cessively baulked, if not absolutely baffled. The resistance of the strong places was heroic, but fortress after fortress was suffered to fall into the hands of the enemy. On the 6th of May, the besiegers under Verdier had begun the third siege of Gerona. Not till the 11th December did the town surrender, after a defence as desperate and perhaps as skilful as that of Zaragoza, though from circumstances it was conducted more in accordance with humanity and the rules of civilised war. The great fame of Palafox may have been but ill-deserved; there can be no question as to the deserts of Alvarez. The gallant veteran, who had been constrained to give over Monjuich under the base ascendancy of the shifty Godoy, nobly effaced any stain on his reputation. Suffering from prolonged strain, he was seized by nervous fever, and delirium spared him the pain of signing the articles of surrender. The fall of Gerona assured the invaders' communications between Perpignan and their Spanish base at Barcelona.



CHAPTER VIII

FALL OF THE FRONTIER FORTRESSES AND BATTLE OF BUSACO

January—September 1810

THE victories of Ocaña and Alba de Tormes left the invaders at liberty to renew the designs on Andalusia which had been suspended since the capitulation of Baylen. The invading corps were replenished from the French dépôts. On their side, the Junta seemed paralysed. In their alarm they offered the leading of their armies to Romana, whom they had removed in their jealousy from the command in the north-west. Romana refused, although he remained with the troops in Estremadura and took timely measures for securing Badajoz. Then they recalled Blake from Catalonia, but meantime the incompetent Areizaga retained his post. It is needless to dwell in detail on their futile and feeble operations. They had men enough at their disposal—the province of Jaen furnished even more than its quota, and the barrier of the Morena might have been made impregnable. But Areizaga's insane temerity had been succeeded by a cold fit of timidity and diffidence. The strongest positions in hill gorges are only of service when held firmly as part of an organised system. The heights were crowned; the passes were turned, and the French in several columns passed down on Andalusia. The Junta, in not unreasonable panic, resolved to abandon Seville and take refuge in Cadiz. The populace of Seville rose in in-

dignation, and it was with difficulty that the members of that discredited body saved themselves. Had the direction of affairs been left to them, Cadiz would have been no place of safety. They had taken no precautions; it was weakly garrisoned and practically undefended. The French had realised the importance of occupying it, and the combined advance was swift. But at that critical moment Albuquerque came to the rescue. That general had always been under a cloud. The Junta is said to have been jealous of his high rank and his great popularity, both with the people in his own province of Estremadura and with his soldiers. Perhaps, too, they resented the persistency of Frere in always pressing his paramount claims. Napier avers that the real objection was a mistress known to be in relations with the French. Wellington, questioned as to him by Lord Stanhope when they were discussing Spanish generals, was content to shake his head in significant silence. Yet it is certain that now, as on previous occasions, he acted with equal prescience and decision. Neglecting the contradictory orders of his panic-stricken civil superiors, he pushed from Cordova for Cadiz by forced marches, won the race with the enemy by a bare neck, at once bringing the men indispensable for the defence and raising the courage of the desponding garrison. Had his pursuers attacked immediately, his gallant dash might have been fruitless. Though they should have had spies enough among their many Andalusian sympathisers, it is said that they could not credit the abject incapacity of the Junta in neglecting the defence. Be that as it may, they had recourse to a siege, fortifying a long crescent line of circumvallation stretching from sea to sea, on the north of the isle of Leon, which is divided by a shallow channel from the mainland, and which

connects itself with the sea-girt city by a narrow neck of sand. Albuquerque, appointed both military and civil chief by the Regency which replaced the Junta, whose scattered flight had been virtual suicide, lost not a moment in putting the island and city in a state of defence. Batteries were shifted from the sea front to the land side, field works were thrown up along the channel, and the dilapidated forts were repaired. Albuquerque had saved Cadiz, but he was the victim of the squabbles between the Regency and the Junta at Cadiz. In vain he asked for food and clothes for his troops, though the magazines were filled with grain and bales of English cloth; in vain he sought to recruit his exhausted and depleted regiments from the ranks of idle citizens. In short, Wellington was never worse treated. Before the end of February he had resigned in disgust, and accepting the appointment of ambassador to England, is said to have died here of mortification and a broken heart. Meanwhile English and Portuguese troops had arrived from Lisbon; seamen had been landed from the warships, and there had been some smart affairs at outlying forts. But the siege dragged and seemed likely to be prolonged indefinitely. The fortifications had been so far strengthened that Victor declined to hazard a general attack, and the Regency never summoned energy enough to make a serious effort to break the blockade.

The operations before Cadiz languished, thanks in great measure to the British neglect of sea power. We had a commanding fleet in the Mediterranean, and the troops in Cadiz and in Sicily might have been advantageously employed in menacing the French garrisons and communications along the coasts, and, in especial, in giving effective support to the indomitable resistance of the Catalonians. Napoleon, in sanguine mood, began to

hope that the struggle was well-nigh terminated, and decided on a supreme effort to expel the English from the Peninsula. Wellington was alive to the impending danger. He realised both his strength and his weakness, but he never despaired of ultimate success. He knew the numerical superiority of the veteran army opposed to him. He had learned how little confidence was to be placed in the Spanish levies still in the field. He was gravely embarrassed by the machinations and intrigues of the Council of Regency at Lisbon. On the other hand, the patriotic spirit of the Portuguese had been roused; their regulars, and even their militia, under Beresford, had been largely increased, and the English officers who had won their confidence, had brought them into tolerable discipline. Wellington had attained an ascendancy which confirmed his high local military rank, and even the Regents and the malcontents were compelled to reckon with him. Above all, perhaps, he had now a friend in the Cabinet on whom he could count, for the Marquis Wellesley had replaced Mr Canning as Foreign Minister. Nevertheless, he was compelled to act with extreme caution, and he guided in his difficult strategy by political as well as military considerations. Busaco, for example, was to be a battle fought for political exigencies. He said repeatedly that if he seemed to throw away a single battalion, the English troops would be withdrawn from Portugal. Yet if his own moral responsibilities were weighty, and if he had a hand of most delicate cards to play, he trusted much to the jealousies of the French marshals for deranging the plans of their nominal chief; nor was he mistaken there, as events were soon to show.

Meantime he discovered the qualities of a rare military genius by conceiving a great and far-reaching plan, which foresaw all possible contingencies. And more than genius

was needed to carry it out, for it demanded as well indomitable patience and inexorable will, tempered by tact and discretion. He cherished no illusions as to repelling the irresistible French advance and pushing the warfare into Spain. He simply prepared for scientific obstruction, which should culminate in forcing the enemy to fall back : and in the last resort he had arranged for a place of refuge, unsuspected by the enemy, by his allies and by his own officers.

He had retired from Badajoz, when its safety had been temporarily secured by Romana, and had taken up a position to the north of the Tagus, with his headquarters at Viseu. Necessarily in ignorance as to the French plans, he had nevertheless come to the conclusion that the advance would be made from the north, by way of Ciudad Rodrigo. General Hill, with a mixed force of English and Portuguese, was detached to the Alemtejo to watch the movements of the enemy on the side of Spanish Estremadura, though serious invasion, by way of Badajoz and Elvas, was for various reasons extremely improbable. As it happened, Hill's task was a light one, for Soult's Andalusian army was preoccupied, not only by the lingering siege of Cadiz, but by operations in Murcia and the mountains of Jaen.

The obstacles to the French advance from Salamanca, besides the numerous rivers flooded in the spring, were the fortresses of Ciudad Rodrigo and Almeida. Rodrigo, on the Spanish frontier, was but a fortress of the third rank, but it was defended by Herrasti, a determined veteran of unimpeachable patriotism, and might be expected to offer a serious resistance. Almeida, the Portuguese bulwark, with its old Moorish walls, was still weaker ; but the garrison was resolute and commanded by an Englishman, Brigadier Cox. The garrisons of both places

well understood that each day of protracted resistance was of importance. They knew nothing of what was being done behind the famous lines of Torres Vedras. But the proclamation of Wellington, as Captain-General, had been published, intimating his scheme of defence. It was in accordance with the ruthless principles of war and the exigencies of a situation apparently almost desperate. It exacted enormous sacrifices in the cause of patriotism, enforcing them by heavier penalties. The French advance was to be made through scenes of desertion and devastation. Mills were to be destroyed, bridges broken down, granaries emptied, homes broken up, towns and villages alike evacuated. In fact the invaders were to be starved out, or to trust for supplies to their transport. And as we know that in private life Wellington was affectionate and tender-hearted, we may conceive that the necessity for such orders seemed imperative.

In April the storm broke on the frontiers. The French had already cleared the way and covered their right flank by the recapture of Astorga and the dispersion of the patriots in Leon. Towards the end of the month they appeared before Ciudad Rodrigo and summoned it. Shortly afterwards it was announced that Masséna had been appointed general-in-chief of the army of Portugal, with supreme command of all the forces between the Tagus and the Bay of Biscay. No one of Napoleon's marshals bore a more illustrious reputation than the old revolutionary hero. But hardship and dissipation rather than years had told on the victor of Zurich and the defender of Genoa, who had been styled by his master 'the spoiled child of Fortune.' Fortune is only favourable to those who snatch at her favours. Masséna had grown sluggish if not irresolute. Afflicted with gout and rheumatism, he had directed his corps at

Wagram from a carriage and four. He was grasping and sensual as Junot, without Junot's lavishness. He brought a favourite mistress into Portugal, insulted even the easy morals of his fellow marshals by her presence, and frequently regulated his movements to suit the lady's convenience. Moreover, he was regarded with jealousy by Ney, detested by Regnier, and disliked by Junot as the most favoured candidate in the running for the crown of Portugal. Once again the Emperor had made an unfortunate choice.

Under ordinary circumstances the Spanish fortress might have held out until relieved. Nothing could have been more determined than the defence; the artillery was admirably served, and the governor was ably seconded by Juan Sanchez, the dashing chief of guerrilla cavalry. When his services became useless, Sanchez saved the bulk of his horsemen by a sally, in which, not content to cut his way through, he actually charged back on the besieging squadrons. Soon afterwards the breaches were declared practicable, and surrender was inevitable unless succour came speedily.

Never, perhaps, was Wellington more sorely tried, and never did he better justify his *sobriquet* of the Iron Duke. He had advanced avowedly for the relief of the place. Romana was urging him and offering to co-operate. The Regency in Lisbon was still more pressing. Masséna, longing to bring him to battle, was taunting him in proclamations with cowardice and treachery to his allies. Indeed, his outposts on the Agueda were so near that they could hear the rattle of musketry on the ramparts. Above all, the gallant Herrasti was urging him with pathetic appeals. But his plans for Portugal's salvation must not be impaired, and his resolution was unshakable. He would not indulge Masséna by fighting

under disadvantages, where defeat was almost certain and victory would have been scarcely a gain. Herrasti capitulated on honourable terms which were broken, and the French crossing the Agueda proceeded to invest Almeida.

Previous to the fall of Rodrigo, the enemy's operations had been hampered and the spirits of the garrison raised by the near presence of Crauford with the light division and some Portuguese battalions. Availing himself of the precipitous banks and flooded condition of the Agueda, only passable at certain bridges, with a rare combination of skill and caution he had maintained a feeble line of defence, within a short league of an overwhelming hostile force whose pickets were exchanging musket shots with his own. As the river went down, his position became more dangerous, if not untenable. In prudence he should have withdrawn behind the Coa, and Lord Wellington had charged him on no account to risk an engagement beyond that river. Nevertheless he waited and an engagement was forced on him. His dispositions showed none of the skill which had characterised his protracted strategy. The division was only saved by the courage of the men and the excellent conduct of the chiefs of battalions. As it was, the greater part of it would never have threaded the narrow passage of the solitary bridge had it not been for the abstention of Montbrun with his heavy cavalry. That general refused to take orders from Ney, when a charge would have changed retreat to a massacre. Yet jealousies were not confined to the French. Picton rode up while Crauford was in his worst difficulties; but acting, as he said, and as was certainly true, in conformity to Wellington's general orders, he declined to order up the 3d Division.