

head, and at Celerico Ney was at last deprived of the command of the 6th Corps, and replaced by Loison.

At Celerico Masséna was returned to the basis of operations, whence he had marched full of confidence for the conquest of Portugal. He was naturally unwilling to acknowledge his humiliating failure by at once re-crossing the frontier. He proposed a flank movement to Coria, which would have put his army in communication with those of the centre and the south. Moreover, it would have compelled Wellington to retrace his steps to the Tagus, and would have secured the four Spanish and Portuguese fortresses which were the fruits of the recent campaigns. In that scheme he was baffled by the opposition of Ney, who—jealousy apart—though almost unrivalled in handling troops in the field, was incapable of appreciating grand conceptions. Still Masséna had hoped to maintain himself for a time at Guarda, expecting some turn in the wheel of Fortune; but as Ney's perverseness had marred his first plan, so Wellington's celerity upset the second, and compelled him to release his hold on Portugal.

On the 1st of April the allies were again upon the Coa. The French occupied positions on the right bank on lines converging at an acute angle at Sabugal. Both flanks were covered by the Coa, for at Sabugal the river makes a sharp bend. The allies were on the opposite bank, parallel to the enemy's right. Trant and Wilson had passed below Almeida, threatening Rodrigo, as if the bulk of the army were to immediately follow. But Wellington had designed a movement from his right flank, which would have turned Reynier, separated him from his supporting corps to the southward, and driven him back upon the fortress. The allies passed the river at three points. Reynier was routed after a desperate

conflict, but the operation proved a partial failure owing to an accident which had precipitated the attack before the combinations had been carried out. Yet the soldiers fought so well that in the despatches Lord Wellington pronounced it 'one of the most glorious actions that British troops were ever engaged in.'

Masséna withdrew to Salamanca to recruit his army, having lost from 30,000 to 40,000 men in his disastrous campaign, and Almeida was invested by the allies. Lord Wellington, having expelled the invaders from Portugal, had two alternative schemes, to be adopted according to circumstances. The more daring was to enter Spain, to occupy Madrid, to sever the northern French army from that of Andalusia, and, having taken possession of the capital with its magazines and stores, to give a hand to the Catalonians and Valencians, to strengthen himself from the English then in occupation of Sicily, and to establish a fresh base on the Mediterranean. But that depended chiefly on cordial support from home, with the prompt despatch of considerable reinforcements, and partly on such hearty co-operation from the Spaniards as he had little reason to expect. Failing that, he was to revert to the more dilatory strategy to which he was actually constrained to have recourse, although the results at which he was aiming were farther deferred by the temporising policy of Beresford. In either case the recapture of Badajoz was an indispensable preliminary, and Beresford had been detached to Estremadura with 20,000 infantry and 2000 cavalry. Having made arrangements for investing Almeida, Wellington hurried to Elvas to direct Beresford's operations.

Beresford's instructions had been to cross the Guadiana, to drive back Mortier's corps, to relieve Campo Mayor, which was besieged, and to invest Olivenza and Badajoz.



The campaign opened well. Campo Mayor had been taken, though it was subsequently recovered, and Mortier's strength had been so weakened by garrisoning the fortress, and by battalions withdrawn to Andalusia by Soult, that he was in no condition to hold the line of the Guadiana. Had Beresford obeyed his orders, he would have occupied Merida, swept the country clear of the French foragers, cut off the supplies which were being poured into Badajoz, and, by at once proceeding to the investiture and bombardment of that fortress, diverted Phillipon from his elaborate preparations for defence. Yet he can hardly be fairly blamed for failing to grapple with difficulties which a general of extraordinary energy and initiative might have surmounted. The Portuguese, as usual, had broken their promises, and sent neither stores, shoes nor ammunition, land transport nor boats. He withdrew into winter quarters around Elvas, and Wellington returned to his army on the Coa. Mortier and Phillipon, who, like Wellington, were keenly alive to the supreme importance of Badajoz, spared neither energy in revictualling it nor ingenuity in rendering it impregnable.

During Wellington's brief absence, Almeida had been closely blockaded. But while ample supplies had been sent to Rodrigo, Almeida was indifferently provisioned. Unless promptly succoured, capitulation was inevitable. Masséna was already in a condition to bring relief. He had reorganised and re-equipped his army; he had received reinforcements; discipline had been restored, and on the 25th April he was before Rodrigo again determined to break the blockade. Wellington had arrived on the 28th, and immediately concentrated the main body of his army. The rivers which had hitherto protected his front were falling fast, and on the 2d of May

the French had their orders for a general advance. Rather than give up the siege, Wellington decided to offer battle.

The covering forces numbered 32,000 men, but there were only 1200 horse. They were distributed along a narrow plateau, five miles in length, defended in front by the deep and rapid Dos Casas, the left flank resting on Fort Conception, the centre opposite Almeida, the right secured by the village of Fuentes d'Oñoro, which gave its name to the sanguinary battle. As Masséna, for strategical reasons, dared not attack seriously from his right, Fuentes d'Oñoro was the key of the position.

The village lies in a valley, with hills on either side. The road to Ciudad Rodrigo passes through the main street. On one side were a morass and a wood, which made approach almost impossible. Surrounding the village were many stone enclosures offering advantageous cover for infantry; the upper village, on the edge of a steep ravine, formed a sort of citadel, and above all were a chapel and a few scattered houses, which were hastily barricaded and loop-holed for musketry. On the afternoon of the 3d May the attack began. It was vigorously repulsed, but when night fell the French were in possession of the lower hamlet, though the heights were still held by the English. On the 4th Masséna came up in person. With 45,000 men in line of battle, he made his dispositions to turn the allied right. As the onslaught was delayed till after dawn, his intention was penetrated. Wellington promptly extended his line to the right, though necessarily it was dangerously attenuated. Masséna, developing his attack, assailed it with solid columns of infantry, and availed himself of his overwhelming superiority of cavalry. The British bent and yielded. Then Wellington



ton saw it was necessary to concentrate again, to resume his former positions, and to crown a plateau commanding the low ground, which ran backwards towards the west, at right angles to the ridge of Fuentes d'Oñoro. Nothing could have been more delicate or perilous than the evolution, in face of an enemy numerically far superior and flushed with the conviction of victory. As a few days afterwards, at Albuera, our soldiers showed their steadiness and mutual reliance, and raw subalterns took the initiative and responsibility, behaving with the coolness of experienced veterans. The scattered and broken regiments fell into squares and small sections and mixed companies; always pressed by the enemy's infantry, charged incessantly by his curassiers and light cavalry, yet steadfastly persisting in the common purpose of gaining the commanding position, which stood out as a salient from the ridge of Fuentes. They fought their way to the place of vantage and held their own, while the key of Fuentes d'Oñoro was being fiercely disputed. Masséna sent forward fresh columns in support of those that were being shattered by the fire from the enclosures. Wellington, though hard driven to maintain himself in the village, nevertheless detached the best part of his reserves to assure himself of the heights. So the carnage went on till darkness parted the combatants, and it was greatly to the relief of the exhausted British that Masséna did not renew the battle with the dawn. Both sides claimed a victory, and for several days, while the armies rested on their arms, the immediate issues remained in suspense. Doubtless the French, with their advantages, would have attempted a decisive stroke had not Marmont, at the critical moment, superseded Masséna, as Wellington was superseded by Burrard at Vimeiro. They fell back, and the siege was main-

tained. The place was virtually won, and the garrison seemed to have no option but surrender at discretion. Then the gallant veteran in command—General Brenier, who had been taken prisoner at Vimeiro—with a rare combination of deliberation and decision, destroyed his stores, blew up his magazines and broke through the beleaguering lines with the greater part of his force, whereupon Marmont withdrew beyond the Agueda.

The capture of Rodrigo was the next immediate object, but the recovery of Badajoz was even more urgent. Leaving four divisions under General Spencer on the Azava river, and having learned that Soult had again invaded Estremadura, Lord Wellington hastened to the help of Beresford on the Guadiana with the 3rd and 7th Divisions.

Beresford's delays, whether inevitable or not, had given Soult time to restore affairs in Andalusia ; and expecting a junction with the corps under Drouet, he was again advancing to the succour of Badajoz. In the first days of May the allies had begun the investment, but with very inadequate appliances. Phillipon kept them constantly on the alert with a heavy cannonade and well-considered *sorties*, and much blood had already been fruitlessly shed, when the approach of Soult interrupted operations. Beresford, after consultation with the Spaniards, decided to fight a battle in front of the fortress, and the position of Albuera was deliberately chosen.

It was a ridge of four miles in length, traversing the road from Seville, and commanding that to Valverde in the rear, which would be the line of retreat in case of misfortune. The Albuera river ran in front, the ravine of a hill torrent behind. Beresford had carefully concerted operations. Blake had undertaken to occupy the ground



to the right on the forenoon of the 15th May. Of course he failed in his pledges. He appeared late in the day, and the last of his fagged troops were only straggling into their positions in the early morning. Soult, on his side, was acting with energy. In the afternoon the allied cavalry were forced back over the Albuera, abandoning the wooded heights in front. The possession of the woods enabled the Marshal to mask his operations. Inferior in force, but with an army of seasoned veterans, he had a great superiority in cavalry and artillery. On the morning of the 16th he rapidly developed his attack on the bridges below Albuera village, while at the same time, under cover of his cavalry, sending the mass of his infantry across the river, beyond the English right. Beresford, seeing that his flank was seriously threatened, sent an urgent message to Blake to change his front. The Spanish general, believing that Albuera was the real point of attack, at first refused; afterwards, when his eyes were opened, he ordered the evolution. But it was carried on with pedantic deliberation, till Beresford, galloping across in hot haste, assumed the direction himself. But the situation had been gravely compromised, and indeed the battle seemed lost. His mixed army was still in the act of changing its front, and the French columns were massed on his right on a line perpendicular to the deplorable confusion. The Spaniards, everywhere in disorder, began to give way, and Soult pushed the attack on Albuera, sending forward his reserves under cover of a tremendous fire from his artillery, which had now come into play. General William Stewart made a gallant attempt to restore the battle, hurrying up his brigade by columns of companies. As they crowned the crest, facing the grape and musketry, the French cavalry, sweeping round under the dense cover of a driving shower, charged

their rear with irresistible fury. The ranks were broken, and the Polish lancers followed up their success, spearing without mercy. As for the Spaniards, they kept their ground, firing indiscriminately on friend and enemy. Fortunately the 31st Regiment, which had not begun to deploy, held the hostile infantry in check, and General Lumley rode up to the rescue with the English horse. The Poles, in their turn, were ridden down by scores, and happily the rain-storm, which had concealed their deadly charge, veiled the scene of slaughter from Soult's observation. The British guns were brought up, and some Spanish regiments were moved forward.

Still the French came on again in overwhelming force, and the British ammunition was giving out. It is said that Beresford, with sufficient reason, already despaired of the battle, and had given orders for the retreat. Then Colonel Hardinge had a daring inspiration, and accepted a grave responsibility. Without communicating with the general, he ordered up a division and a brigade, which had not yet been brought into action, and staking everything on the issue, redeemed the fortunes of the day. Leaving the broken regiments to reform in their rear, the fresh troops came steadily forward to face the French, reinforced by all their reserves. The English were staggered by the storm of grape, till they had escaped it by mingling themselves with the masses of the enemy: their volleys poured in at point-blank range opened the way for their headlong bayonet charge, and the French, clustered together on the crest of the ridge, were hurled down into the ravine in dire confusion. Out of 6500 English, all but 2000 had been placed *hors de combat*. The loss of the French, though more doubtful, must have been far greater. The Spaniards, who looked on as judges of the lists, escaped comparatively scatheless, and



Blake afterwards, like La Peña at Barossa, absolutely refused to send assistance to our wounded. It was the most bloody battle of the war and the most useless. Soult and Beresford had carelessly exposed themselves to the hottest fire in front of their soldiers. When night closed in storm and torrents of rain, the wearied survivors in the British lines could barely furnish the indispensable guards and pickets. A fresh brigade came up before morning, but their position was still precarious in the extreme as at Fuentes d'Oñoro, and it was expected that the French would renew the conflict. Probably in his ignorance of the actual state of affairs, Soult decided otherwise, and having despatched those of his wounded who could bear the transit to Seville, he fell back next morning to Solano. Wellington in public always defended Beresford, grateful for his services in drilling the Portuguese. But he wrote in private, 'Such another battle would ruin us; I am labouring hard to set all right again.' Beresford knew that Wellington was coming up in force; he knew that two of the precious British divisions were not to be risked with impunity; he knew that the blockade of Badajoz could not be maintained, and that Elvas was in no possible danger.

## CHAPTER X

### THE STORMING OF CIUDAD RODRIGO AND BADAJOZ

May 1811—April 1812

THE second siege of Badajoz was resumed with the arrival of Wellington, though foredoomed to failure. Soult had taken up a flank position at Llerena, waiting for reinforcements to resume the offensive. Their arrival was only a question of time, for Badajoz was the primary object on both sides. On the 14th June Drouet had joined Soult; the same day Marmont had arrived at Truxillo. Wellington had held on at Albuera, hoping to tempt Soult to an action before the junction with Marmont. But Soult cautiously declined battle, and after the junction, when the united French armies comprised 70,000 men, with greatly superior artillery, Wellington withdrew behind the Guadiana. Badajoz was uncovered, and supplies were freely introduced. For several weeks Marmont remained with Soult, their cavalry foraging at large behind the screen of the fortress; but the resources of Estremadura were soon exhausted, and the armies separated. Marmont marched northward to attend to the victualling of Rodrigo, Soult returned to Seville, and Gerard, with the 5th Corps, remained at Zafra, to menace the enemy and strike on occasion. Wellington, on his side, leaving Hill to observe Gerard, turned his attention back to Rodrigo, and again shifted his headquarters to the Coa. From that central position he paralysed the far more powerful forces of the enemy. If Marmont



detached troops to operate elsewhere, he left Rodrigo open to the probabilities of capture. Reduced for the time to impotence, the inaction became intolerable. He rallied the corps of Souham and Dorsenne, and, having collected large convoys of supplies, moved forward to the relief of the threatened city.

Wellington's position on the left bank of the Agueda was far extended, and consequently weak. The post of El Bodon in the centre was really not tenable against an enemy in possession of the broad plains beneath, and Marmont menaced it with 60,000 men. He was strong in artillery, and stronger in cavalry. The English general, as in the Tagus valley before Talavera, had risked his army in ignorance of the actual strength of the enemy. There could be no farther misapprehension when the troops on the heights saw the French hosts deploying beneath them. But then it was too late for Wellington to fall back without sacrificing the 3d Division. His error in strategy, if error it was, was redeemed by a feigned display of confidence. In place of attempting to withdraw the division, under circumstances which must have led to its annihilation, he strengthened it with all the reserves he could command. The position was attacked in overwhelming force, and the assailants were repulsed with heavy loss. It seemed to be only a brief reprieve, but to the surprise of the defenders, instead of the attack being resumed next day, Marmont merely manœuvred his magnificent army below them, and they seemed to be assisting at a military parade on the *Champ de Mars*. Doubtless the Marshal was in some measure misled by the appearances of entrenching the ridge, as if the British were in force sufficient to hold it. But during the thirty-six hours in which Marmont held back, Wellington was busily con-

centrating and calling in his detachments, till he was really disposed to accept a battle. The Marshal learned afterwards, to his intense mortification, that for a day and a half the British had been at his mercy. Fortune never offered him such an opportunity again, and all that came of his overwhelming demonstration was the introduction of a convoy into the fortress.

Throughout the winter the warfare languished. The armies were kept apart by scarcity of provisions, and it was with extreme difficulty that the British could maintain themselves between the Agueda and the Coa. Moreover, it had been rumoured that Napoleon was coming to Spain in person, and bringing another army with him. The announcement that a Russian war had become almost a certainty suddenly changed the situation. Wellington, in place of retiring again to Torres Vedras, saw his way to carrying out the scheme he had ever had in contemplation. It was to seize on Ciudad Rodrigo as a stepping-stone to Badajoz. With Rodrigo again in friendly hands, he could with comparative safety assume the aggressive in Estremadura, but the capture of Badajoz was an essential preliminary. In early winter he commenced his preparations, and succeeded in thoroughly deceiving Marmont. He brought up a very inadequate siege train, giving out that he intended to repair and re-arm Almeida. As for cannon shot, a sufficiency was found in the ruins of the fortress. On the 8th January he began the investment, but as the place had recently been revictualled, Marmont never doubted that it was safe for several weeks. Wellington knew well that time was precious; there were no positions to cover the siege to the east of the Agueda; and though the enemy's works had been but partially dismantled, and the superiority of their batteries had not been shaken,



when the breaches were pronounced practicable he decided to precipitate the assault. The gallantry of the stormers failed before the main breach, but meantime the narrower side breach was forced, and the entrenchments of the defenders were taken in reverse after desperate hand-to-hand fighting. For two full days the fury of the soldiers raged unrestrained, and the inhabitants of a friendly city experienced the worst horrors of war. Not till the 26th did the news of the storming reach the French Marshal. It was a double blow, for he had not only lost the fortress but also his battering train, which prevented any speedy attempt to recover the place, and consequently left Wellington comparatively free to change the scene of operations from the Agueda to the Guadiana.

But the English general's first step was to put the battered fortress again in a position of defence. He set to work to repair the breaches, to fill up the trenches, and to gather in provisions. The place was necessarily confided to a Spanish garrison, and the governor received many wise injunctions which were duly neglected. Meantime Marmont had retired to Valladolid, and Wellington, who had been created an English earl, a Spanish duke and a Portuguese marquis, made Badajoz his immediate object. He had hoped to invest it in the early days of March, when the flooding of the northern rivers should enable him to withdraw the bulk of the British troops, leaving the observation of Marmont to his Peninsular allies. On the 5th March he handed over Rodrigo to Castaños. Within a week he was at Elvas, making his preparations for the new siege. But though the Portuguese, like the Spaniards, were lavish of compliments and honours, as usual they gave no substantial assistance. On the contrary, the jealousy of the Regency

threw serious obstructions in his way. No means of transport were provided to move the siege train and supplies from Elvas to Badajoz. Though the country behind him had latterly escaped ravage, neither municipality nor peasants would do anything except for ready money, and the military chest was almost exhausted. Again, as often before, he thought of renouncing his ungrateful task; for even his brother's support was failing, and Lord Wellesley was overruled in the Cabinet. Again he was spurred on by the hope that if he followed up the taking of Rodrigo by a second and more brilliant stroke, he might make himself so much master of the situation as to realise his far-reaching and far-sighted schemes. Yet the beginning of the investment was delayed for ten days, and the delay had infinitely increased the difficulties. The season of the rains had set in to flood the trenches, which had to be bottomed with sand bags; and the Guadiana, which flows between Badajoz and Elvas, by sweeping away or submerging the bridges, had nearly compelled him again to raise the siege. Moreover, Phillipon seeing that the expected siege was imminent, had been doing all that skill could devise to perfect his masterly preparations. A fortress, scarcely of the second rank, had been made extremely formidable. Redoubts and earthworks had been repaired or thrown up, and heavily armed; the castle and town were put in a complete state of defence; ample convoys had been introduced in the previous month, and the only shortcoming was in the store of ammunition. Yet, though powder was freely expended in every shape, there should be sufficient to serve. For Soult was rapidly advancing; before the assault was delivered he had already reached Llerena, having united the divisions of Drouet and Daricau, and Wellington must again force



the fighting with a politic disregard of life. Never, perhaps, in the history of sieges was there more terrible carnage in more confined space, than in the two hours which passed in fruitless efforts to storm the main breach.

The broad stream of the Guadiana forms the moat of Badajoz on the rock face. It is overhung by the massive Moorish castle, crowning a precipitous eminence. Opposite the castle on the right bank is the detached fort of St Christoval, connected by a covered way with the *tête-de-pont* of the only bridge. Elsewhere bastions, counterguards and ravelins had been constructed, with outworks on the spurs running out into the plain. Wellington, on the reports of his engineers, was compelled to set scientific rules at defiance, for there was neither a sufficiency of guns, sappers nor stores to conduct a siege in regular form. Time was pressing. It was resolved to begin by attacking the bastions on the east, where the masonry of the curtains was known to be weak. But as a preliminary, it was necessary to carry the outworks on the Picurina Hill and the battery of St Roque. On the former, the guns must be mounted which were to breach the bastions and curtains. On the night of the 17th March ground was broken. The work was carried on with infinite difficulty and heavy losses. The weather was unfavourable: sallies were made and repulsed; owing to the incomplete investment, the enemy were able to establish enfilading batteries on the right bank of the river, and these had to be taken: but, finally, at the second attempt the Picurina was stormed, after a desperate defence. On the morning of 5th April the breaches were pronounced practicable, and on both sides the intense excitement had culminated, for Soult's advanced guard was known to be at Llerena, and his arrival might be daily expected. Yet, on close examina-

tion, Wellington decided to delay till a third breach should be opened, and Phillipon turned each moment to account with an elaboration of original and deadly precautions. The parts were distributed to the various corps for simultaneous attacks on all sides of the *enceinte*; but, while the garrison's attention was diverted to many points, it was in the breaches that, as it was believed, the contest was to be decided.

The light and fourth divisions, who had been told off for the duty, had stolen out of the trenches. At ten o'clock the stormers were crowding to the brink of the glacis, where everything was veiled in profound darkness. In the unnatural stillness, broken only by the challenges and responses of the sentinels on the ramparts, the clocks in the city struck the hour. It was the signal for lowering the ladders into what was virtually an abyss, for there had been neither time nor means for battering the counterscarp. The French, in unbroken silence, had been anxiously on the outlook. A solitary signal shot was fired from the ramparts. Then the foremost assailants had barely time to realise the almost diabolical science of Phillipon's arrangements. The glacis had been mined, and the ditch in front of the breaches had been literally paved with shells communicating with the walls by powder-hoses. At the signal the great mine was fired, and the paving of shells simultaneously exploded. The lurid glare lit up the scene, showing the French sternly massed above the breaches, while for the moment, half-dazed by the shock and surprise, the stormers were holding back in horror. The heads of their columns had been literally annihilated. But the momentary alarm changed to passionate frenzy. Rank crowded forward on rank: again the foremost were clustering like bees on the ladders, and many leaped from the parapet into the black



abyss. Whether individuals willed to go onward or no, the surging mass was forced up to the breaches. In their valour or sheer desperation they must have made light of any ordinary obstacles; but Phillipon's attention to detail had effectually barred the passage. Not only had he retrenched the broken parapets with sandbags and fascines, but the breach had been closed up by *chevaux-de-frise* of sword blades, socketed in solid oak and secured by chains. No portable explosives could have made any impression. Yet the mad impetuosity of the men behind forced forward the leading files, that the blades might be buried in quivering flesh, leaving a slope of the dead and dying to be scrambled over. The foremost endeavoured to baffle that purpose by falling on their faces, only to be trodden under foot. These breaches, moreover, were enfiladed by flanking fires of shrapnel, while all the time the storm of musket-balls rained down from the bastions and the loop-holed houses. No human resolution could withstand in passive helplessness that pitiless cross-fire—the survivors of the stormers with the supports were crowded together in the ditch, nor could any persuasions of their officers induce them to renew the assault.

It may be imagined with what impatience Wellington awaited the reports of what was really a concert of almost desperate ventures. At ten he had taken up his position on a height from which he could best direct the course of operations. Thence he could see the entire *enceinte* of the town lit up by the blaze of cannon and musketry. No reliable intelligence reached him till he was told that the assault of the breaches had failed; that almost all the officers had been shot down, and that the men were straggling about in the ditch in blind confusion. He listened with stern composure, and, in ignorance of