



SIR WILLIAM NAPIER

*From an engraving (after a miniature) in the Life of SIR WILLIAM NAPIER,
edited by H. A. BRUCE, M.P. By permission of MR. JOHN MURRAY*

through the face. "I could not die better," he gasped as the blood ran from his shattered mouth, "than at such a moment."

George Napier gives a realistic sketch of the manner in which Ney's column was met and broken. "We were retired," he says, "a few yards from the brow of the hill, so that our line was concealed from the view of the enemy as they advanced up the heights, and our skirmishers fell back, keeping up a constant and well-directed running fire upon them; and the brigade of horse-artillery under Captain Hugh Ross threw such a heavy fire of shrapnel shells, and so quick, that their column, which consisted of about 8000 men, was put into a good deal of confusion, and lost great numbers before it arrived at a ledge of ground just under the brow of the hill, where they halted a few moments to take breath, the head of the column being exactly fronting my company, which was the right company of our brigade, and joining the left company of the 43rd, where my brother William was with his company. General Craufurd himself stood on the brow of the hill watching every movement of the attacking column, and when all our skirmishers had passed by and joined their respective corps, and the head of the enemy's column was within a very few yards of him, he turned round, came up to the 52nd, and called out, 'Now, 52nd, revenge the death of Sir John Moore! Charge! charge! huzza!' and waving his

hat in the air, he was answered by a shout that appalled the enemy, and in one instant the brow of the hill bristled with 2000 British bayonets. My company met the head of the French column, and immediately calling to my men to form column of sections, in order to give more force to our rush, we dashed forward; and as I was by this movement in front of my men a yard or two, a French soldier made a plunge at me with his bayonet, and at the same time his musket going off, I received the contents just under my hip and fell."

The struggle, Napier adds, occupied about twenty minutes; in that brief space of time this huge French column was driven from the top to the bottom of the mountain like a parcel of sheep. "I really did not think it possible," he says, "for such a column to be so completely destroyed in a few minutes as that was. When we got to the bottom, where a small stream ran between us and the enemy's position, by general consent we all mingled together searching for the wounded. During this cessation of fighting we spoke to each other as though we were the greatest friends, and without the least animosity or angry feeling."

The killed and wounded amongst Wellington's forces at Busaco amounted to 1200; but of the enemy 6000 fell. Massena before the battle said, "I cannot persuade myself that Lord Wellington will risk the loss of a reputation by giving battle;

but if he does I have him. To-morrow we shall effect the conquest of Portugal, and in a few days I shall drown the leopard." French generals, from Napoleon downwards, it is to be noted, were always going to "drown" or otherwise slay or put to flight the "Leopard." That mythical animal, however, as we have seen, had a surprising habit of surviving!

Marbot, with a frankness unusual in French literature, says of Busaco "it was one of the most terrible reverses which the French army ever suffered." In a sense the military results of Busaco are not great, but its moral effect was of the utmost importance. It proved the steadiness of the Portuguese soldier under British leadership. It showed that though Wellington, as a matter of strategy, was in retreat, he was strong enough to meet the French in frank battle and beat them, and Busaco gave a new and exultant confidence to public opinion, both in England and Portugal. Wellington himself summed up the result by saying, "It has removed an impression which began to be very general, that we intended to fight no more, but to retire to our ships; it has given the Portuguese a taste for an amusement to which they were not before accustomed, and which they would not have acquired if I had not put them in a very strong position."



CHAPTER XVII

THE LINES OF TORRES VEDRAS

ON the night which followed the battle, the British looked down from the heights they had so valiantly kept on their foemen's camp. The whole country beneath them glowed with countless fires, showing thousands of shadowy forms of men and horses, mingled with piles of arms glittering amidst the flames. There seemed all the promise of a yet more bloody struggle on the following day. Massena, indeed, at first meditated falling back on Spain, and, as events turned out, it would have been a happy stroke of generalship had he done so. All through the 28th he feigned to be making preparations for a new assault on the hill. Already, however, his cavalry were being pushed along a mountain path past the British left, and his infantry columns quickly followed. Massena was turning Wellington's flank, and bent on reaching Coimbra before him.

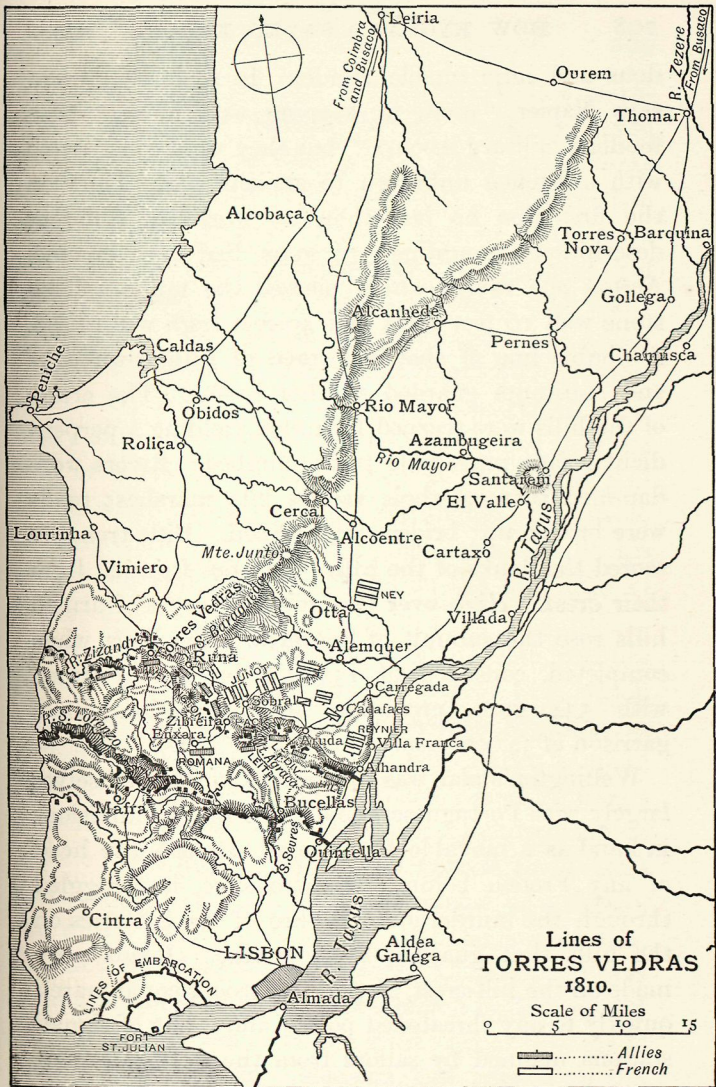
Wellington, out-marching his opponent, reached Coimbra first, and thence fell back towards Torres Vedras, pushing before him an immense multitude of

the inhabitants of the district. He meant to leave nothing behind him but a desert. The French reached Coimbra on October 1, with the provisions intended to last them till they reached Lisbon already exhausted. On October 4 Massena renewed his pursuit of Wellington. Then Trant, commanding an independent force of Portuguese, performed what Napier calls "the most daring and hardy enterprise executed by any partisan during the whole war." He leaped upon Coimbra the third day after Massena had left it, captured the Frenchman's depots and hospitals, and took nearly 5000 prisoners, wounded and unwounded, amongst them a marine company of the Imperial Guards. And while Massena's tail, so to speak, was thus being roughly trampled on, his leading columns came in sight of the armed and frowning hills of Torres Vedras, an impregnable barrier behind which Wellington's army had vanished. Massena had not so much as heard of the existence of these famous lines until within two days' march of them!

The keen forecasting intellect of Wellington had planned these great defences more than a year before. A memorandum addressed to Colonel Fletcher, his chief engineer officer, dated October 20, 1809—almost exactly a year to a day before these great defences brought Massena's columns to a halt—gave minute orders for the construction of the lines. But the conception must have taken shape in Wellington's brain long before that date.

Lisbon stands at the tip of a long peninsula formed by the Atlantic on one flank and the Tagus, there a navigable river, on the other. Across this peninsula two successive lines of rugged hills—the farthest only 27 miles from Lisbon—stretch from the sea to the river. Wellington turned these into concentric lines of defence; with a third on the very tip of the peninsula, and intended to cover the actual embarkation of the British forces, if they were driven to that step. The outer line of the defence, a broken irregular curve of hills 29 miles in length, stretches from Alhandra on the Tagus to the mouth of the river Zizandre on the coast. The second line, some eight miles to the rear of the first, is 24 miles long, and reaches from Quintella on the Tagus to where the St. Lorenzo flows into the Atlantic. These hills are pierced only by narrow ravines, and, with their tangled defiles and crescent-like formation, lent themselves readily to defensive works. The second line in Wellington's original plan was that which he intended to hold, the first line was merely to break the impact of Massena's rush. But under the incessant toil of the English engineers the defences of even the outer line became so formidable that Wellington determined to hold it, having the second line to fall back upon if necessary.

The lines of Torres Vedras were probably the most formidable known in the history of war. Two ranges of mountains were, in a word, wrought into a stupen-



**Lines of
TORRES VEDRAS
1810.**

Scale of Miles
0 5 10 15

..... Allies
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Walker & Boutall sc.

dous and impregnable citadel. In scale they were, says Napier, "more in keeping with ancient than modern military labours;" but they were constructed with a science unknown to ancient war. Thus on the first line no less than 69 works of different descriptions, mounting 319 guns, had been erected. Across one ravine which pierced the range a loose stone wall 16 feet thick and 40 feet high was raised. A double line of abattis formed of full-grown oaks and chestnuts guarded another ravine. The crests of the hills were scarped for miles, yielding a perpendicular face impossible to be climbed. Rivers were dammed, turning whole valleys into marshes; roads were broken up; bridges were mined. Rifle-trenches scored the flanks of the hills; batteries frowned from their crest. High over this mighty tangle of armed hills rose the summit of Soccorra. The lines, when completed, consisted of 152 distinct works, armed with 534 guns, providing accommodation for a garrison of 34,000 men.

Wellington's plan was to man the works themselves largely with Portuguese, keeping his English divisions in hand as a movable force, so as to crush the head of any French column if, perchance, it struggled through the murderous cross-fire of the batteries on the hills that guarded every ravine. Roads were made on the hill-crest, so that the troops could march quickly to any threatened point; and a line of signal-stations, manned by sailors from the fleet, ran from

hilltop to hilltop, so that a message could be transmitted from the Atlantic to the Tagus in seven minutes. For more than a year these great works had been in course of construction. No less than 7000 peasants at one moment were at work upon them. The English engineers showed magnificent skill and energy in carrying out the design, and many soldiers who had technical knowledge were drawn from the British regiments and employed as overseers. So solidly were the works constructed, that many of them to-day, more than eighty years after the tide of battle broke and ebbed at their base, still stand, sharp-cut and solid. Wellington thus wrote in long-enduring characters the signature of his strong will and soldierly genius on the very hills of Portugal.

The scale and the scientific skill of these lines are perhaps less wonderful than the secrecy with which they were constructed. British newspapers were as indiscreet and British gossip as active then as now; French spies were as enterprising. And it seems incredible that works which turned a hundred square miles of hills into a vast natural fortress could have been carried out with the noiselessness of a dream, and with a secrecy as of magic. But the fact remains, that not till Massena had reached Coimbra and was committed beyond recall to the march on Lisbon, did he learn the existence of the great barrier that made that march hopeless. Massena had trusted to the

Portuguese officers on his staff for information as to the country he had to cross; but as they had accepted service under the French eagles, they naturally had never visited the district held by the British, and knew nothing of what the British were doing. When he turned fiercely upon his Portuguese officers, they urged this in self-excuse. But they had failed to warn Massena of the existence of the hills themselves. "Yes, yes," said the angry French general. "Wellington built the works; but he did not make the mountains."

Massena spent three days in examining the front of Wellington's defences, and decided that a direct attack, with his present forces, was hopeless. But his stubborn, bear-like courage was roused, and he resolved to hold to his position in front of Wellington till reinforcements reached him. It became a contest of endurance betwixt the two armies, a contest in which all the advantages were on the side of the British. Their rear was open to the sea; ample supplies flowed into their camps. The health of the men was good, their spirits high. They looked down from their hill-fortress and saw their foe waging a sullen warfare with mere starvation. For six desperate and suffering weeks Massena stood before Wellington's lines. The French had raised plunder to a fine art; they could exist where other armies would starve. And Massena's savage and stubborn genius shone in such a position as that in which he now

stood. He kept his men sternly in hand, maintained sleepless watch against the British, and sent out his foraging parties in ever greater scale and with ever wider sweep. To maintain thus, for six hungry and heroic weeks, 60,000 men and 20,000 horses in a country where a British brigade would have perished from mere famine in as many days, was a great feat. Massena's secret lay in diligent, widespread, and microscopic plunder—plunder raised to the dignity of a science, and practised with the skill of one of the fine arts; and Massena added the ruthlessness of an inquisitor to the skill of a great artist in robbery. "All the military arrangements are useless," wrote Wellington, "if the French can find subsistence on the ground which they occupy." And Massena very nearly spoiled Wellington's plans by the endurance with which, in spite of famine and sickness, he held on to his position in front of the lines of Torres Vedras.

The long weeks of endurance were, of course, marked by perpetual conflicts betwixt the foraging parties and pickets of the two armies. A curiously interesting picture of this personal warfare is given in Tomkinson's "Diary of a Cavalry Officer." The British cavalry patrols carried on a sort of predatory warfare with the enemy's parties on their own account. They looked on them as game to be hunted and captured; and the British private went into the business with characteristic relish, and performed really surprising

feats. A sergeant and a couple of dragoons would bring in a "bag" of a score of French infantry with great pride. On the other hand, there was a constant stream of desertions on both sides of the lines. That the French stole to the lines where they knew that at least food awaited them was not strange; but the British desertions were almost as numerous and much more mysterious.

Wellington himself was puzzled by it. "The British soldiers," he wrote to Lord Bathurst, "see the deserters from the enemy coming into their lines daily, all with the story of the unparalleled distresses which their army were suffering, and with the loss of all hope of success in their enterprise. They know at the same time that there is not an article of food or clothing which they need which is not provided for them; and that they have every prospect of success; yet they desert!" In the French camp there was neither food nor hope; within the British lines there were both. Yet every night the astonished British officers had to report desertions. "The deserters," Wellington adds, "are principally Irishmen;" but they were not all Irishmen. The truth is, the average British private hates inaction. He is hungry for incident and movement. He found weeks spent in camp monotonous, and he deserted by way of variety.

The logic of starvation proved at last too strong for even Massena's stubborn courage, and on Novem-

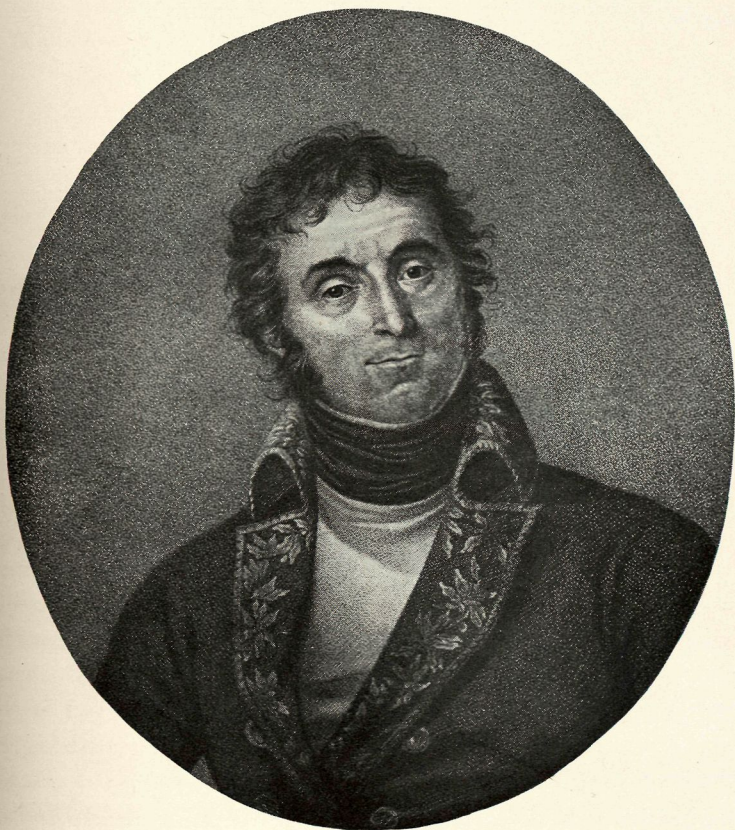
ber 15 he fell back reluctantly to Santarem, having lost more than 6000 men, principally by starvation, in front of Torres Vedras. Wellington pushed out cautiously in pursuit, but at Santarem Massena turned grimly round on his pursuers. He now held a strong position with supplies in his rear; and by holding Santarem he still seemed to threaten Lisbon, and so put a mask over the face of his own defeat. Wellington, on the other side, was not disposed to engage in active operations. The winter was bitter, the rivers flooded, the roads impassable. And so the memorable campaign of 1810 came to an end with two great armies confronting each other, but neither willing to strike. But all the honours and the substantial results of the campaign were with Wellington. Napoleon's confident strategy had gone to wreck on the lines of Torres Vedras.

CHAPTER XVIII

MASSENA'S FAILURE

MASSENA, as we have seen, held on to his position at Santarem till March 5, 1811—for four dogged, much-enduring months, that is; a prodigy of endurance. Foy meanwhile was sent to explain the situation to Napoleon in person, a moderate-sized division being necessary to convoy him safely across Spain to the Pyrenees. Napoleon's pride was stung by the Spanish disasters, and his masterful genius quickly framed a new and yet more spacious strategy for his generals. Bessières, with 12,000 of the Imperial Guard, entered Spain; Drouet, with 10,000 men, marched to join Massena; Soult was instructed to abandon the siege of Cadiz, and, with his whole available force, march to join hands with Massena. This would give that general a force of 70,000 men, sufficient, it was hoped, to overwhelm Wellington.

Soult was the most dangerous element in this combination, and Wellington planted Hill at Abrantes to bar his junction with Massena. But Napoleon's new combination, like all previous plans, was at first post-



MARSHAL ANDRÉ MASSENA

From an engraving after the painting by BONNE-MAISON



poned, and finally wrecked, by mere angry discords of purpose betwixt his generals.

Soult was more anxious to strengthen himself in his own province, where he maintained semi-royal state, than to succour Massena; nevertheless he marched to the banks of the Guadiana, captured Olivenza on January 22, and began the siege of Badajos.

This great frontier fortress was of the utmost strategic value to Wellington. If it fell into the hands of the French, any invasion of Spain by the English became impossible, while the junction betwixt Massena and Soult was made easy. Badajos was held by a Spanish garrison commanded by Menacho, a veteran of approved loyalty and courage. Menacho was unfortunately slain in a gallant sally on March 2, and his successor, Imas, a knave as well as a coward, promptly sold the city to the French. The walls were still unbreached, the garrison was 8000 strong; Beresford, with 12,000 men, was pushing at speed to raise the siege, and was within three days' march. And on March 11, with the letter announcing swift-coming relief in his hand, Imas opened the gates to the French. Wellington pronounced the loss of Badajos the sorest disaster which had yet befallen the British, and it was certainly a great and all-important success for the French. The Spaniard who betrayed Badajos to the French stipulated that he should march out by the breach "to protect his honour." But no breach existed; he had, as Welling-

ton said afterwards, "to make the breach himself out of which to march."

Massena by this time found it impossible to cling longer to Santarem. The country within a radius of fifty miles was a wasted and silent desert. "Nearly ten thousand square miles of country," says Colonel Jones, "remained for five months with scarcely an inhabitant. The wolves, conscious of security, prowled about, masters of the country, reluctantly giving way to the cavalry patrols which occasionally crossed their track." The French army must move, or die of mere starvation and of the diseases bred of starvation. According to Napoleon's plan, Massena was to cross the Tagus and march to join Soult; but Wellington barred every road that led southward, and held the river so strongly that the attempt to cross was vain. Massena then determined to make a flank march to the Mondego—thus moving apparently from Soult—cross that river, press at speed along its farther bank, then turn westward again to Guarda; thence to Ciudad Rodrigo, where his communications would be restored and his forces could be reorganised for a new march to Lisbon.

With the art of an old soldier, Massena effected the first part of this retreat. Leaving Santarem on March 5, he covered his movements with such skill that he gained a clear four days' advance on Wellington. The British, however, came keenly

on his track; Picton, with the third division, being pushed constantly forward to turn Massena's flank, and prevent that westward sweep which was to bring him to Ciudad Rodrigo. Ney covered the French rear-guard with all the skill of a great captain, showing a daring and a resource which he scarcely exceeded eighteen months afterwards, when covering the retreat of Napoleon's shattered columns from Moscow. Picton, whose division was employed in pushing continually past the flank of the French rear-guard, writes that Ney's movements afforded a perfect lesson in the tactics of retreat. "Moving at all times upon his flank, I had an opportunity of seeing everything he did, and I must be dull in the extreme if I have not derived much useful knowledge from such an example."

But it was an army of 35,000 men pursuing one of 60,000. The track, through difficult country, offered a hundred strong situations for defence; and, with a soldier of Ney's fierce and daring temper covering the retreat, almost every day witnessed some gallant stroke of soldiership on both sides. The French, it may be added, destroyed the country through which they passed, with a ferocity bred of hate and anger, and not merely for the sake of making pursuit difficult. Villages and towns were burned, convents were sacked, the peasantry slain. The track of the retreating army was black with ruin and red

with fire and blood. "Nothing," wrote Picton, "can exceed the devastations and cruelty committed by the enemy during the whole course of his retreat." Massena's last marches in Portugal, in a word, were marked by an outburst of inhuman savagery worthy rather of African tribes than of civilised soldiers. Wellington describes the French retreat as made dreadful "by a barbarity seldom equalled and never surpassed."

It is impossible to give in detail the stern and bloody combats bred of a pursuit so keen and a retreat so stubborn and skilful. At Pombal, on March 11, the French attempted to hold an ancient castle which covered the bridge. The riflemen of the Light Division, however, leaped on the castle with so fierce a charge that the French were swept out of it as by a whirlwind, and the bridge was carried so swiftly that, although it was mined, the broken French had not time to blow it up. At Redhina, on March 12, Ney made a resolute stand with 5000 infantry and a strong force of artillery, in order to give time for Massena's guns and baggage to pass through a long mountain defile. Ney's front was so determined that Wellington brought up his main body for the attack. The Light Division went forward with great spirit to turn Ney's right, and an advance was made along the whole British front; but Ney, timing his movements with the coolest accuracy, vanished through the defile just in time



MARSHAL NEY

From an engraving after the painting by GERARD

