find places, but a rough formation was kept; and still riding at speed, the English horsemen drove at the French. At ten yards' distance the French threw in a close and murderous volley which brought down nearly every fourth horse or man. But the rush of galloping horsemen was not checked, and in a moment cavalry and infantry were joined in one mad *mêlée*. At last the French broke and fled. Le Marchant himself rode and fought like a private soldier in the charge. When the French broke he drew rein and commenced to call back his dragoons. He saw a considerable mass of French infantry draw together, and a handful of the 4th Dragoons prepare to charge them. He joined the little band of cavalry, and with brandished sword rode at their head and fell, shot through the body, under the very bayonets of the French.

It was five o'clock when the battle began; before six o'clock the French left was destroyed. This is the fact which made a French officer describe Salamanca as "the battle in which 40,000 men were beaten in forty minutes." But the battle was not quite over yet. Marmont, riding in fierce despair to where the fight was raging, eager to remedy his blunder, had fallen desperately wounded, and been carried off the field. Bonnet, his successor, too was wounded; the command fell into the hands of Clausel, a cool and resourceful soldier. At one point only the British attack had failed. Pack's Portuguese brigade had

been launched at the French Arapiles. But the advantage of ground was with the French. By some blunder the Portuguese were led against a shoulder of the hill almost as steep as a house-roof. "The attack," says Sir Scott Lillie, "was made at the point where I could not ascend on horseback in the morning." The French met the Portuguese, too, with a sort of furious contempt, and drove them back in wreck, and, for a moment, the British line at this point was shaken. Wellington in person brought up Clinton's division, and the French, grown suddenly exultant and coming on eagerly, were driven back.

Night was now falling on the battlefield, but the long grass, parched with the summer heat, had caught fire, and night itself was made luminous with the racing flames as they ran up the hill-slopes and over the level, where the wounded lay thick. Clausel, with stubborn courage and fine skill, was covering the tumult of the French retreat, while Clinton was pressing on him with fiery energy. Here is Napier's picture of the last scene in this great fight:—"In the darkness of the night the fire showed from afar how the battle went. On the English side a sheet of flame was seen, sometimes advancing with an even front, sometimes pricking forth in spear-heads, now falling back in waving lines, anon darting upwards in one vast pyramid, the apex of which often approached yet never gained

the actual summit of the mountain; but the French musketry rapid as lightning sparkled along the brow of the height with unvarying fulness, and with what destructive effects the dark gaps and changing shapes of the adverse fire showed too plainly; meanwhile Pakenham turned the left, Foy glided into the forest, the effulgent crest of the ridge became black and silent, and the whole French army vanished as it were in the darkness."

The French were saved from utter destruction by a characteristic Spanish blunder. They could pass the Tormes at only one of two points—Alba de Tormes, where Wellington had placed a strong Spanish force, and Huerta. Wellington, riding with the foremost files, reached Huerta, and found it silent and empty. The French had gone by Alba de Tormes, which the Spanish general in charge had carelessly abandoned! "The French would all have been taken," wrote Wellington afterwards, "if Don Carlos had left the garrison in Alba de Tormes as I directed, or if, having taken it away, he had informed me it was not there." As it was, the French found the ford open, and pushed their retreat with such speed, that, on the day after the fight, Clausel was forty miles from Salamanca.

Wellington overtook the French rear-guard on the 23rd, and there followed a memorable cavalry exploit, one of those rare instances in which steady squares have been crushed by a cavalry charge.

The heavy German horse, riding fast with narrow front up a valley, found the French in solid squares of infantry on the slope above them. The left squadron wheeled without breaking their stride, and rode gallantly at the nearest square. The French stood firm and shot fast, but the Germans charged to the very bayonet points. A wounded horse stumbled forward on the face of the square, and broke it, and in a moment the horsemen were through the gap, and the square was destroyed. A second square and a third were in like manner shattered. These fine horsemen, that is, in one splendid charge destroyed three infantry squares and captured 1400 prisoners! Wellington described this charge as "the most gallant he ever witnessed."

Salamanca was a notable fight and an overwhelming victory. Wellington himself would have selected Salamanca as the battle which best proved his military genius. If not so history-making as Waterloo, or so wonderful, considered as a mere stroke of war, as Assaye, it was the most soldierly and skilful of all Wellington's battles. He certainly showed in that fight all the qualities of a consummate captain—keen vision, swift resolve, perfect mastery of tactics, the faculty for smiting at the supreme moment with overwhelming strength—all in the highest degree. In numbers the French were slightly superior; in artillery their superiority was great. Marmont's army was made up of war-hardened veterans, in that mood

in which the French soldiers are most dangerous, the exultant expectation of victory. Yet in little more than an hour that great, disciplined, exultant host, with leaders slain and order wrecked, was rolling in all the tumult and confusion of defeat along the road which led to Alba de Tormes. With some justice Wellington himself said, "I never saw an army receive such a beating." It reached the ford a mob rather than an army. All regimental formation had vanished. The men had lost their officers, officers had forgotten their men, soldiers had flung away their arms. The single purpose of the disordered multitude was flight. Salamanca certainly proves that Wellington knew how to strike with terrific force!

The British lost in killed and wounded 5200; the French loss was 14,000, of whom 7000 were prisoners. Three French generals were killed, four were wounded, two eagles, six standards, and eleven guns were captured. Three weeks after Salamanca Clausel could gather at Valladolid less than one half of the gallant host smitten with disaster so sudden and overwhelming on the evening of July 22.

The news of this great defeat reached Napoleon in the depths of Russia on September 2, and the tidings filled him with wrath. He declared that the unhappy Marmont had "sacrificed his country to personal vanity," and was guilty of "a crime." Failure, indeed, was, in Napoleon's ethics, the last

and worst of crimes, the sin that had never forgiveness. Napoleon's rage against Marmont, curiously enough, was only soothed by the perusal of Wellington's despatches describing the battle. Napoleon himself had turned the manufacture of bulletins into mere experiments in lying, and he knew that all his generals followed his example. He never, therefore, believed the accounts given by his generals of their operations. But when he read Wellington's despatch he said, "This is true! I am sure this is a true account; and Marmont, after all, is not so much to blame!"

The effect of the victory in Spain was far-reaching and instant. Joseph fell back in haste towards Madrid. Soult had to abandon the siege of Cadiz, surrender the fertile plains of Andalusia, and sullenly gather his columns together for retreat northwards. Wellington himself marched on Madrid. The moral effect of driving Joseph from his capital must be immense, and decided the English general's tactics. On the night of August 11 Joseph abandoned the city, on the 12th Wellington entered it, amid a tumult of popular rejoicing. On the 13th the Retiro, with its garrison, over 2000 strong, surrendered. It was the chief arsenal yet remaining to the French in Spain, and contained 180 guns and vast military stores. It shows Joseph's feeble generalship that he left such a prize to the English.

Wellington now seemed at the height alike of

fame and of success. In a single brief campaign he had captured two great fortresses, overthrown a powerful army, an army commanded by a famous French marshal; he had driven Joseph in flight to Toledo, and had occupied Madrid in triumph. But in reality Wellington's position was most perilous, and the peril grew every hour more menacing. Soult was marching from Andalusia; from every province the French columns were gathering towards Valencia. If the armies of Soult, Joseph, and Suchet united, they would form a host thrice as great in scale as that under Wellington's command. An expedition from Sicily, indeed, under Lord Bentinck, was to have landed at Alicante, on the eastern coast of Spain, so as to hold Suchet engaged, and make a combination so dangerous impossible. But Bentinck chose to attempt a meaningless adventure in Italy instead, and the English Cabinet lacked energy sufficient to compel him to carry out the plan arranged. Bentinck took 15,000 good soldiers into Italy, where he accomplished nothing. Thrown into the east of Spain, he might have changed the course of history. "Lord William's decision," wrote Wellington, "is fatal to the campaign, at least at present. If he should land anywhere in Italy, he will, as usual, be obliged to re-embark, and we shall have lost a golden opportunity here."

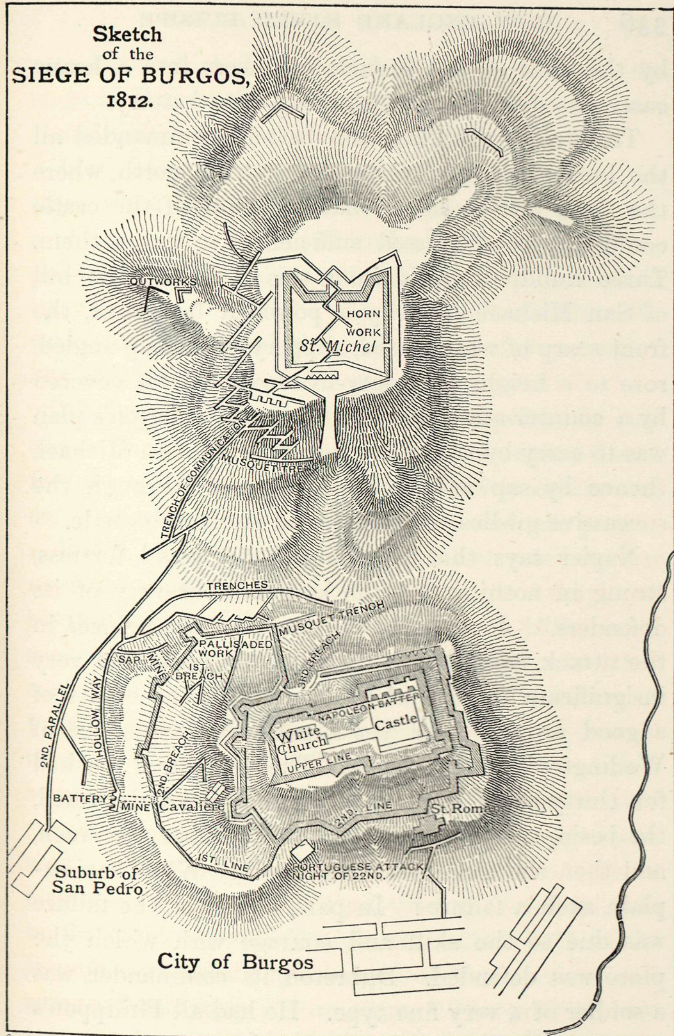
Wellington, however, calculated on outstripping

the French armies in speed, and beating them if met in equal numbers, or evading a battle if their numbers were overwhelming, until, by discord amongst the commanders and hunger in the ranks, the French hosts were driven once more asunder.

CHAPTER XXVI

CLIMAX AND ANTI-CLIMAX

MEANWHILE Burgos was the next great place of strength the French held in the north, and Wellington resolved to assail it. It commanded the French line of communications with the Pyrenees. Its capture would enable Wellington to cut himself loose from Lisbon as a base, and to find a new sea base on the northern coast. On September 1 Wellington left Madrid, Clausel falling back before him; on the 19th he reached Burgos. The castle of Burgos stood on the summit of an oblong conical hill, close to the base of which flows the Arlanzon. There were three concentric lines of defences. The first, running round the base of the hill, consisted of an old escarp wall, modernised and strengthened. Next, higher up the slope, came a complete field retrenchment, palisaded and formidably armed. Higher still came another girdle of earthworks. There are two crests to the hill; on one stood an ancient building called the White Church, which had been transfigured into a modern fortress; on the second and higher crest stood the ancient keep of the castle, turned



from Napier's "Peninsular War. *Walker & Boutall sc.*

by the skill of the French engineers into a heavy casemented work called the Napoleon battery.

The fire of the Napoleon battery commanded all the lower lines of defence save to the north, where the slope was so sharp that the guns of the castle could not be depressed sufficiently to cover them. Three hundred yards from this face rose the hill of San Michael, held by a powerful hornwork, the front scarp of which, hard, slippery, and steep-angled, rose to a height of twenty-five feet, and was covered by a counter-scarp ten feet deep. Wellington's plan was to carry by storm the hornwork on San Michael, thence by sap and escalade to break through the successive girdles of defence, and storm the castle.

Napier says that Burgos was "a small fortress, strong in nothing but the skill and bravery of its defenders." Jones, who took part as an engineer in the attack, says that it "would only rank as a very insignificant fortress when opposed to the efforts of a good army." And yet Burgos represents one of Wellington's rare failures. The siege was pushed for thirty-three days, five assaults were delivered, the besiegers suffered a loss of more than 2000 men, and then the siege was abandoned! What can explain such a failure? In part, no doubt, the failure was due to the skill and courage with which the place was defended. Dubreton, its commander, was a soldier of a very fine type. He had all Philippon's genius for defence, and added to it a fiery valour in

attack to which Philippon had no claims. In the siege of Burgos the sallies were almost as numerous —and quite as fierce—as the assaults.

Lord Londonderry, however, gives the key to the story when he says that the castle of Burgos "was a place of commanding altitude, and, considering the process adopted for its reduction, one of prodigious strength." It was the disproportion betwixt the means of attack and the resource for defence which explains the failure of the siege.

Wellington, in a word, was attempting to pull down Burgos, so to speak, with the naked hand. His siege train consisted of three 18-pounders and five howitzers. There was not even, as Jones puts it, a half-instructed miner or a half-instructed sapper to carry out operations. For the few guns employed by the besiegers there were not enough balls, and a sum of money was paid for every French shot that could be picked up and brought to the batteries. Probably every second ball fired at Burgos was in this way a French derelict discharged at its original owners. On the evening of October 6, Jones records "there remained only forty-two rounds of 24-pounder shot." The siege must have stopped from sheer lack of ammunition, but that the batteries were able to fire back at the French the bullets which the French had already discharged at them. As Jones sums up the story of the siege: "The artillery was never able to make head against the fire of the

place; the engineers, for want of the necessary assistance, were unable to advance the trenches; and the garrison were hourly destroying the troops without being molested themselves." And yet this siege without guns and without engineers, a mere effort of almost unarmed valour, would have succeeded but for the advance of the French armies for its relief. A great prize was thus missed. In Burgos lay the artillery and stores of the whole army of Portugal. Its capture would have left the French without the power to undertake a siege anywhere.

The plan of the siege was to carry by sap, or mines, or escalade, rather than by gun-fire, each of the lines in succession, turning the guns of the captured line against the one next to be attacked. Even with such inadequate appliances Burgos ought to have offered no unconquerable difficulty to the troops that had stormed Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajos. But, for one thing, Wellington did not employ in the siege the soldiers who had performed those feats. The attacking force at Burgos consisted of Portuguese troops and of the 1st and 6th divisions, composed chiefly of young or sickly troops. Wellington himself said afterwards that his fault at Burgos was that "I took there the most inexperienced instead of the best troops." It may be added that time was a decisive element in the siege. Souham, with 30,000 troops, hovered near, only waiting for reinforcements

to come up to fall on Wellington; while Soult, moving from Andalusia, threatened his communications with Portugal.

Wellington's first step was to assault the great hornwork on San Michael. It was a skilfully constructed work, with a sloping scarp 45 feet high, heavily armed and covered by the fire of the castle. The assault was delivered on the night of September 19; the resistance was desperate. At one point the assault failed, and the British lost more than 400 men. But the 79th, led by Major Somers Cocks, broke in, and the place was carried, the garrison fighting its way through and escaping. On the night of September 22 an attempt was made to escalade the exterior line of works, and it failed. The wall was 23 feet high; the Portuguese who shared in the attack hung back. The British escalading party, made up of detachments from the 79th and the Guards, raced up their ladders bravely, but were in numbers quite inadequate to their task. They were driven back with great loss, and their leader, Major Lawrie of the 79th, was left dead in the ramparts. Lawrie shone in pluck, but failed in conduct. As Wellington put it, "He paid no attention to his orders, notwithstanding the pains I took in writing and reading and explaining them to him twice over. Instead of regulating the attack as he ought, he rushed on as if he had been the leader of a forlorn hope. He had my instructions

in his pocket; and, as the French got possession of his body and were made acquainted with the plan, the attack could never be repeated."

A mine was next driven under the ramparts and exploded on the 29th, and an imperfect breach formed. A party of the 1st division tried to storm it, and failed. Part of the storming party missed the breach in the dark, found the wall uninjured, and returned, reporting no breach existed. A sergeant and four men, however, found the true breach, mounted its crest, the defenders falling back in panic. The men of Badajos, they believed, were upon them. Discovering at last that the attacking party consisted of only five soldiers, the French rallied, drove their assailants down the breach, and the brave sergeant and his comrades returned with streaming wounds, to tell of their failure. On October 4 another mine was exploded, a new breach effected, and a party of the 24th, under Lieutenant Holmes, instantly charged through the smoke, scrambled over the ruins of the breach, and gained the parapet. The old breach at the same moment was assaulted by another detachment under Frazer, and so swift was Frazer's leading, and so gallantly was he supported, that this breach too—though strongly guarded—was carried. On the next evening, however, a strong party of French leaped from the upper line of defence, charged down with great speed and resolution, caught the English unawares, drove them out, and destroyed the lodg-

ment they had made. Only with great slaughter was the position re-won. On the night of the 7th, again, the French made a daring sortie, in repelling which there fell one of the finest soldiers in the army, Major Somers Cocks. On the 11th another mine was sprung, a breach formed, and the outer line carried. On the 18th a desperate attempt was made to carry the second line by escalade. The attack was gallant, and for a moment success seemed won. Then, in overpowering numbers, the French rallied, and drove back their assailants.

The siege of Burgos, as we have said, was really an attempt to pull down stone walls, gallantly held and formidably armed, with the naked hand. Yet, in spite of the many failures of the siege, Wellington would undoubtedly have captured Burgos but that the army of the north had by this time reinforced Souham. Soult had effected a junction with the army of the centre under Jourdan, and Wellington ran the imminent risk of being assailed by forces nearly treble his own. On October 21 the siege was raised. In the darkness of night the British army filed under the walls of the castle, and crossed the bridge of the Arlanzon, which lay directly beneath the guns of Burgos. The wheels of the English artillery were bound with straw, orders were given only in whispers, and, noiselessly almost as an army of ghosts, the troops crossed the bridge. Some Spanish horse, however, found that silent march so

close to the frowning guns of Burgos too trying for their nerves. They broke into a gallop; the sound of their hoofs woke the castle. The guns opened fire but in the darkness soon lost their range, and did little harm.

Then began that tragical retreat from Burgos to Ciudad Rodrigo, a chapter of war written in characters almost as black as those which tell the story of the retreat to Corunna. The retreat lasted from the night of October 21, when Wellington's troops defiled in silence across the bridge under the guns of Burgos, to November 20, when, ragged, footsore, with discipline shaken and fame diminished, and having lost 9000 men killed, wounded, or "missing," it went into cantonments around Ciudad Rodrigo. In its earlier stages the retreat had, so to speak, two branches. Wellington was falling back in a southerly line from Burgos to Salamanca; Hill was retreating before Soult westwards from Madrid to the same point. After a junction was effected the combined army fell back from Salamanca to Ciudad Rodrigo. The course of the famous retreat may be thus compared roughly to the letter Y, with Burgos and Madrid representing the tips of the extended arms, Salamanca as the point of junction, and Ciudad Rodrigo the base. The whole route of Wellington's troops, by the road they traversed from Burgos to Ciudad Rodrigo, is less than 300 miles; the time occupied in traversing it was nearly five weeks.

The marches were short, the halts long. And yet the British army came perilously near the point of mere dissolution in the process.

The secret of the sufferings and losses of the march may be told in half-a-dozen sentences. The weather was bitter; the rain fell incessantly; the rivers ran bank-high. The route lay through marshy plains with a clayey subsoil. The troops toiled on "ankle-deep in clay, mid-leg in water," oftentimes barefooted, till strength failed. The British commissariat broke hopelessly down. For days the troops fed on acorns and chestnuts, or on such wild swine as they could shoot. Many of Wellington's troops had marched from Cadiz; many were survivors from the Walcheren expedition, with the poison of its bitter fever yet in their blood. So sickness raged amongst them. Wellington's staff worked badly. There was no accurate timing of the marches. A regiment would stand in mud and rain, knapsack on back, for hours, waiting for some combination that failed.

The retreat, too, was marked by a curious succession of tactical mischances to the English. Souham was pushing Wellington back always by a flanking movement round his left; and river after river was lost by the accident of a mine failing or of a bridge being neglected. Twice in this campaign, it must be remembered — after the storming of Ciudad Rodrigo and of Badajos, that is—the British troops had got completely out of hand, and had plunged

into furious license. This had shaken the authority of the officers and loosened the discipline of the men. And in this way the excesses of Ciudad Rodrigo and of Badajos helped to produce the disorder and horrors of the retreat from Burgos. The British soldier in retreat is usually in a mood of sullen disgust, which makes him a difficult, if not a dangerous, subject to handle. At Torquemara were huge wine-vaults, and the British rear-guard fell on these with a thirst and recklessness which turned whole regiments for the moment into packs of reeling and helpless drunkards. It is said that 12,000 British soldiers were at the same moment in a state of sottish drunkenness. This might have led to some startling disaster but for the circumstance that the pursuing French army got slightly more drunk than even the English. Under such conditions it is not to be wondered at that the disastrous siege of Burgos, and the yet more disastrous retreat from it, cost Wellington 9000 men.

Wellington's difficulties, it is to be noted, were created by his very success. When he seized the capital and marched on Burgos, he was thrusting at the very heart of the French power, and this produced a hurried concentration of the French armies from every part of Spain. This was the political and strategic result for which Wellington made his stroke. He brought up Soult from Andalusia, Caffrelli from the north, Suchet from

Catalonia, and so delivered these provinces. But the military result was a concentration before which, since his stroke at Burgos had failed, he had to fall back.

In the retreat curious terms were established betwixt the pursuing French cavalry and the files of the British rear-guard. The effervescence of battle betwixt them had vanished, there remained only its flat and exhausted residuum. They exchanged jests as well as sword-strokes and bayonet-thrusts. The French horsemen would ride beside the heavily-tramping British infantry—"sometimes almost mixing in our ranks," as an officer who was present writes, or near enough to bandy wit in bad Spanish. Every now and again the French horse would make a sudden charge; there would be a chorus of shouts, a crackle of angry musketry. A score of stragglers would be carried off, a dozen slain or wounded would be stretched on the muddy road, but the retreat never paused.

Costello, in his "Adventures of a Soldier," gives many details of the sufferings of the rank and file as they trudged along the muddy roads, most of them barefoot, or halted at night under the pelting showers without fire or food. The officers suffered equally with the men. Costello draws a touching picture of one gallant youth, Lord Charles Spencer, only eighteen years of age, during one of the halts. The gallant lad was faint with hunger, trembling

with cold and weakness. "He stood perched upon some branches that had been cut down for fuel, the tears silently running down his cheeks for very weakness. He was waiting while a few acorns were roasted, his only meal. More than one rough soldier brought from his knapsack some broken fragment of biscuit and offered it to the exhausted youth. In such scenes as those supplied by the retreat," says Costello, "lords find that they are men, and men that they are comrades."

The retreat was marked by some brilliant strokes of soldiership on both sides. At Venta del Pozo Halket's Germans and the 11th and 16th Dragoons, in a gallant sword-fight, drove back a mass of French horsemen much stronger than themselves in number. The Douro was turned by the French with a feat of daring rare even in this war. A regiment of the German brigade had destroyed the bridge at Tordesillas, and held in strength a tower at some little distance from the site of the ruined bridge. In the bitter winter night sixty French officers and sergeants, headed by an officer famous for his exploits, named Guingret, made a small raft, on which they placed their clothes, and, each man carrying his sword in his teeth, swam across the turbid and ice-cold river, pushing their raft before them. On reaching the farther bank they raced, naked as they were, at the tower and carried it. The spectacle of sixty naked Frenchmen, sword in hand, suddenly emerging

from the river and the darkness, and charging furiously at them, was too much for the astonished Germans! The tower was abandoned, and the passage of the French across the river secured.

At Salamanca the junction of Hill raised Wellington's forces to 50,000 British and Portuguese troops, with 12,000 raw Spaniards. But Souham's columns had joined those of Soult, the latter being in command of the whole. The French had thus a host of 90,000 veteran soldiers, 12,000 being cavalry, and 120 guns. Wellington held both the Arapiles, and offered battle. The ground was classic, and Wellington hoped he might repeat on Soult the stroke which had destroyed Marmont. Soult, as a matter of fact, repeated Marmont's fatal turning movement past Wellington's right, striking at the British communications. But he was less rash than Marmont, and Wellington's terrible smiting power was better understood. So Soult moved slowly round the English right in a wide curve beyond the reach of attack. But the curve was too wide! "Marmont," says Napier, "closing with a short, quick turn, a falcon striking at an eagle, received a buffet that broke his pinions and spoilt his flight. Soult, a wary kite, sailing slowly and with a wide wheel to seize a helpless prey, lost it altogether." Wellington, watching Soult's movement, threw his army rapidly into three columns, crossed the Junguen, and, in order of battle, with his artillery and cavalry disposed as a