

enemy; the uniforms seldom reached the soldier's back; the gold disappeared in the gaping pockets of corrupt officials. Enough British arms were sent into the Peninsula to well-nigh equip the entire population. Yet, says Napier, "it is a fact that from the beginning to the end of the war, an English musket was rarely seen in the hands of a Spanish soldier."

The typical Spaniard, of course, had, and has, many virtues and not a few vices. Punctuality is an unknown grace with him; delay a habit; improvidence a law. He is curiously patient under privations, but to insult he has the alarming sensitiveness of a modern chemical explosive. Insult, indeed, stings him more deeply than injury, and hate is a more enduring spring of action than the sense of duty or the enthusiasm kindled by a noble cause. Nothing can well be more gaping than his credulity, nothing more jealous than his suspiciousness; and his vanity is on a scale which rivals even his credulity or his jealousy. The Spanish Juntas believed they could overthrow Napoleon without any help from England; nay, they succeeded, at the very end, in persuading themselves that they had performed this surprising feat!

The various provincial councils, taught by many disasters, were at last persuaded that, if Spain was not to remain a mosaic of spluttering and unrelated revolts, the scattered and local insurrections must be knitted into some common scheme of war. So they joined in appointing a Central Junta, which held its sessions

at Aranjuez. Spain has produced, and survived, more forms of bad government than perhaps any other country of Europe; but probably the worst instrument of government that ever emerged, even in Spanish history, was this Central Junta. It consisted of thirty persons, twenty-eight of them being priests or nobles. Its members spent much time in discussing the titles by which they were themselves to be adorned and the salaries they were to receive. Then, having re-established the Inquisition and appointed sundry saints to the command of various armies—both saints and armies being about equally invisible to the eye of secular common sense—the members of this remarkable Junta felt they had done enough for the salvation of Spain. Their remaining energies were spent in demanding huge supplies, for which no use could be found, from Great Britain, and in perplexing as much as possible the operations of British generals.

But, with all its defects, the Spanish outbreak gave England the opportunity of meeting the all-conquering legions of France in the shock of land-battle under the most favourable conditions; so it marks a new stage in the great struggle with Napoleon.

## CHAPTER IV

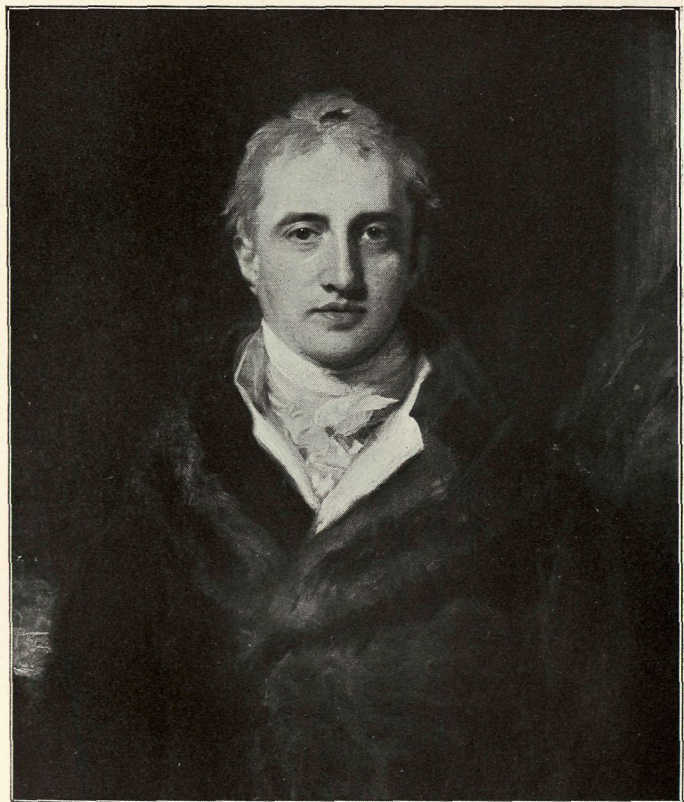
### A NEW FIELD OF WAR

THE Peninsula, the stage on which this new act in the great drama was to be played, is, roughly, a square 500 miles on each face, washed by the sea on all sides save on the eastern half of its northern face, where it is united to France; the Pyrenees, with their lofty peaks, their wild defiles, and their deep valleys, standing as a barrier betwixt France and Spain.

Portugal is—again roughly—a strip 100 miles wide along the Atlantic sea-board, the western face of the great square of the Peninsula. A tangled skein of hills parallel with the sea-coast forms the dividing-line betwixt Spain and Portugal. Portugal was thus an ideal base for operations against the French in Spain. It lay along the western flank of Spain, open to the sea along its whole extent, its coast-line pierced by three navigable rivers—the Douro, the Tagus, and the Guadiana—while the barrier of eastern hills formed a shaggy screen, behind which a tempest of war could be gathered, to burst north or south on the bewildered French as

might be judged best. The first step was obviously to drive the French out of Portugal, and make that country the base of British operations.

A strange succession of blunders, however, marked, on the British side, the opening stages of the Peninsular War. There were at the moment 120,000 French troops in the Peninsula; beyond the Pyrenees were 400,000 veterans, the victors of Jena and of Friedland, ready to be hurled by the overwhelming military genius of Napoleon on any intruder in Spain itself. In that country there was a wide-spread and distracted guerilla warfare, but practically no regular army. Napoleon was by no means disposed to under-rate his enemies. He took the Spanish revolt, when he had once seen its scale, quite seriously; and, to quote Napier, "the conqueror of Europe was as fearful of making false movements before this army of peasants as if Frederick the Great had been in his front." Yet Napoleon's sober estimate of the whole body of insurrectionary forces in Spain was, that it was incapable of beating 25,000 French in good position. "The Spanish," he said, "are the merest canaille." "Spain," he declared again, "had only some 15,000 soldiers left, with some old blockhead to command them." When stepping on to such a field against such an enemy, and with allies so despicable, England might be expected to concentrate its whole strength on the task, and to commence operations with clear plans and on a great scale.



THE MARQUIS OF LONDONDERRY (VISCOUNT CASTLEREAGH)

*From the painting by SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE, P.R.A., in the National  
Portrait Gallery*



But this was by no means the case. More than 10,000 good troops, under Moore, were lying idle in their transports in a Swedish port; 10,000 more were being wasted in Sicily. Yet another small army, under General Spencer, was practically derelict in the Mediterranean. There remained a force of some 9500 men about to sail from Cork for a raid on the Spanish colonies; and this modest body of troops was now placed under the command of Sir Arthur Wellesley for operations in the Peninsula. Castlereagh had at least one faculty of a statesman, the gift of choosing fit instruments, and, by a flash of genius, he had selected Wellesley for this important command.

His Indian fame marked him out as the natural leader of the English expedition to the Peninsula—an expedition intended to drive the French out of Portugal, and use that country, with its long stretch of sea-coast, as the base of operations against the French in Spain.

But the British Cabinet, while despatching this expedition under a leader so competent and for a purpose so clear, took two steps admirably calculated to defeat their own designs. They divided their forces by sending 10,000 men under Spencer to Cadiz, and they despatched Sir Harry Burrard to supersede Wellesley, and Sir Hew Dalrymple to supersede Sir Harry Burrard. Thus the great struggle in the Peninsula was begun, on the English side, with divided forces and under distracted leadership.

On July 12, 1808, the expedition under Sir Arthur Wellesley sailed from Cork. Hill, Craufurd, Fane, Bowes, Ferguson, were in command of brigades. The troops included some regiments destined to win great fame in the Peninsula—the 50th, the 71st, the 91st, the 95th, &c. Wellesley himself pushed on ahead in a fast frigate to Corunna and put himself in communication with the Galician Junta. He was told bluntly that Spain wanted English money and arms, but not English soldiers. Thence he sailed to Oporto, where it was arranged that 5000 Portuguese troops should join him as soon as he landed, near the mouth of the Tagus.

For seventy miles north of Lisbon Rock, the Portuguese coast is one of the most unfriendly in the world. The rivers have shallow, impracticable bars; the coast is rocky; a terrific surf rolls ceaselessly in from the Atlantic. But a little north of where the Peniche peninsula juts out from the mainland, like the bulbous nose from a drunkard's face, the river Mondego offers an uncertain and perilous landing-place. Here the first British soldiers in the Peninsula were landed. The weather was fine, yet the breakers rolled shoreward so heavily that it took Wellesley five days to land his troops and supplies, and it was clear that, if a south wind arose, retreat by the sea would be cut off. Spencer joined him before the landing was completed, bringing the army up to 12,300 men. The Portuguese reinforcements proved almost



as unreal as Falstaff's men in buckram. Freire, the Portuguese general, had indeed an uncertain number of men under his flag, and promptly drew 5000 stands of arms from Wellesley for their use; but he refused to join the British in any combined operation, and actually demanded that the English general should feed his troops!

Wellesley, with characteristic composure, left Freire out of his calculations, and addressed himself to the task of driving Junot—who had 25,000 good troops against his 12,300—out of Portugal. He must hold to the coast in order to keep near his supplies; he must strike at Lisbon, the seat of Junot's power. He pushed on, therefore, southward by a road running parallel with the coast to Leira. Junot had despatched two of his divisional generals, Loison and Laborde, moving by separate lines, to meet and crush the invader. On August 11 Wellesley found Laborde before him at Obidos. On the 15th the first skirmish took place. Some companies of the 95th and 60th found some strong French pickets in their front, closed roughly upon them, and drove them headlong. Having got the French on the run, the British followed with reckless valour, till they found themselves charging Laborde's whole force, and were called off with a loss of twenty-seven men and two officers. "The affair," says Wellesley, "was unpleasant, because it was quite useless, and was occasioned contrary to orders, solely by the im-

prudence of the officer and the dash and eagerness of the men." But the incident at least proved the ready, if somewhat hot-headed, fighting quality of the British rank and file.

Laborde fell back to Roliça. Loison was at Alcoentre. Roliça, Alcoentre, and Lisbon formed roughly the three points of an isosceles triangle. If Laborde drew towards Lisbon, he was abandoning Loison; if he kept his communications with Loison, he ran the risk of being cut off from Lisbon. He must fight; and on August 17 at Roliça took place the first serious combat of the Peninsular War.

Roliça was a village standing on a high tableland, rising from the floor of a valley sharply defined by lines of parallel hills. Laborde held the village strongly; but a mile in its rear was a precipitous ridge called Zambugeira, three-quarters of a mile long, uniting the lateral hills and forming a strong second position for the French. Wellesley's plan was to thrust his left—consisting of two brigades of infantry, with six guns and some Rifles, under Ferguson—along the crest of the lateral hill, till the village was turned, then the French must fall back or be cut off. A smaller force under Trant moved to turn the French left; Wellesley himself with the main body of the British advanced on Laborde's centre. Laborde was quickly pushed from Roliça, but, covering himself with a heavy fire of artillery, he fell back to his second line. Wellesley proceeded to

thrust him from this by exactly the same tactics, Ferguson moving on the crest of the hill past the French right, Hill and Nightingale pressing on his front. Here came the gallant and costly blunder of the day.

Laborde's front was of singular strength. Three steep watercourses, shaggy with ilex bushes, slippery with waterworn rocks—ravines for goats rather than paths for troops—seamed the steep front of the hill. The 9th and 29th were launched against the position before Ferguson's turning movement had made itself felt. The English leaders, that is, were too eager, and the English privates, it may be added, were quite as eager as even their generals. The attacking regiments were to have moved up the right-hand ravine, but the centre watercourse seemed to lead most directly upon the enemy's position, and, with the instinct which takes a British soldier by the shortest road to his foe, the two regiments plunged into this ravine. It rose sharply, was rough with broken rocks, and so narrow that, in places, only three men could move abreast. Their officers leading, the red-coats swarmed eagerly up. The ravine, as it reached the crest, narrowed to a mere crack. In the bushes that formed a screen at its head the French riflemen lay thick.

Colonel Lake of the 29th was leading, an officer of brilliant promise. Suddenly a hundred red jets of flame shot out of the bushes; many of the British fell, amongst them Lake. As the 29th charged past

their dying colonel, he was still calling, "Forward! Forward!" The English broke through to the crest, breathless and disordered, and before they could re-form a French battalion ran forward with great courage, delivered a shattering volley, and broke clean through the half-formed 29th. A regiment rent asunder by the impact of a hostile charge is usually ruined; some sixty men of the 29th, including its Major, were, as a matter of fact, made prisoners. But the gallant 29th, fighting hand to hand in irregular clusters, held their ground stubbornly until the 9th coming up the ravine and charging with great fury, the crest was won, though Stewart, the colonel of the 9th, shared Lake's fate.

By this time Ferguson was turning Laborde's right, the 5th had come up the true ravine on the left front of the French, and Laborde yielded the fight. Marching all night, he fell back on Loison, leaving the Torres Vedras road and Lisbon uncovered.

Roliça is not merely the first, it is also the most typical fight of the Peninsula. The French excelled in nimbleness of tactics, the British in dogged and straightforward fighting. The struggle, it may be added, was, for the numbers engaged, singularly bloody. The number of troops actually thrown into the contest on both sides did not exceed 5000; yet the English loss reached nearly 500, the French exceeded 600. Well-nigh every fourth man in the forces actually engaged was killed or wounded.

## CHAPTER V

### VIMIERO AND THE CONVENTION OF CINTRA

WELLESLEY would have moved direct on Lisbon, but in the evening news came that General Anstruther, with his brigade, and a fleet of storeships, had anchored off Peniche. To cover their landing, Wellesley moved towards the coast, and took up a position at Vimiero. Junot, on his part, gathering up all his available strength, marched at speed from Lisbon, drew under his standards the divisions of Loison and Laborde, and on the 19th reached Torres Vedras, nine miles distant from Vimiero, where Wellesley stood. The French general was so strong in cavalry that he was able to draw his horsemen like a screen across his front, and conceal his own strength and movements from Wellesley's keen eye. On the 20th, however, the British general had formed his plans. He would push betwixt Junot and the sea-coast, and cut him off from Lisbon. But at this moment Sir Harry Burrard, commander No. 2, arrived off the coast, and Wellesley had to suspend his movements and take his superior officer's instructions.

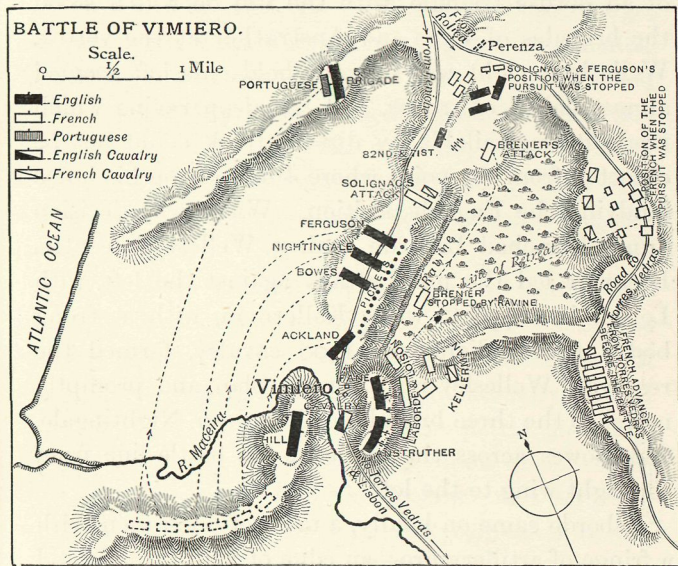
Burrard was a gallant soldier but a poor general.

He was old, his imagination was frozen, the situation was strange, the responsibility great, and he told Wellesley bluntly he would not stir till Moore arrived with reinforcements. Wellesley urged that Junot, if not attacked, would certainly attack, and would thus be able to choose the time and place of battle which best suited himself. But nothing moved Burrard, and Wellesley returned to his camp in disgust. Junot, however, settled the question of strategy. He had to choose betwixt victory over the British or revolt at Lisbon, and the time for choice was of the briefest. At the very moment Burrard arrested Wellesley's movement, Junot was marching to attack the English. All night he pushed through the long defile that led to Vimiero; at seven o'clock on the morning of the 21st he was within four miles of the British position; at ten o'clock the fight of Vimiero was raging.

The news that Junot was moving was brought about midnight to Wellesley, who—it is an amusing detail to learn—was found, with his entire staff, sitting back to back on a long table in the rough quarters he occupied, “swinging their legs.” Wellesley took the news coolly, and refused to disturb his troops. The French, he guessed, after a long night march, would not attack at once, but would wait till morning.

At Vimiero a range of hills from the north, hitherto running parallel to the coast, curves round at a sharp angle, and runs almost due west to the sea-board.

The river Maceira breaks through the range at the very angle of the curving hills. Vimiero stands in front of the gap in the hills made by the river; in front of Vimiero, again, is a lower and isolated hill. This hill formed Wellesley's centre, and was held by



Fane's and Anstruther's brigades. On the heights in their rear was the reserve under Hill. The ridge swinging sharply round to the west formed the British right, and was held by the brigades under Craufurd, Ferguson, Bowes, Nightingale, and Acland; the left,

which consisted of a line of steep hills, with a sudden valley like a trench running at their base, was lightly held by the 40th regiment and some pickets.

Junot, a fine though impulsive soldier, saw Wellesley's battle-line before him: it formed the two sides of an obtuse triangle, with the hill on which stood the brigades of Fane and Anstruther at the vertex. Wellesley's right was strongly held; his left seemed almost naked of troops, and the deep ravine which made it unassailable by direct attack could not be detected from the point where Junot sat on his horse studying the English position. With swift decision Junot launched Laborde against Wellesley's centre. Brennier led the main attack against the left, with Loison in support; while Kellerman, with a strong body of grenadiers and 1300 cavalry, formed the reserve. Wellesley read Junot's plan, and promptly marched the three brigades of Ferguson, Nightingale, and Bowes across the angle of his battle-line from the right wing to the left.

Laborde came on boldly, a mass of 6000 men, with a fringe of artillery fire—an edge of white smoke and darting flame—running before his columns. On the crest of the hill stood the 50th in line, with some Rifles. The 86th, the leading French regiment, plunged into the fight with fine courage, and the Rifles, who were thrown out as skirmishers, fell back before them. The 50th, standing grimly in line,



grew impatient at seeing the Rifles fall back. The steady line began to vibrate with passion, an angry shout went up—"D—n them! Charge, charge!" Fane rode to and fro before his men to steady them. "Don't be too eager, men," he said coolly. But when the solid mass of the French column was visible over the crest, he gave the word to charge, and the 50th went forward with great vehemence. The French, a veteran regiment, for a moment stood firm, and the bayonets clashed together with a far-heard ring. But the 50th were not to be denied, and after a moment's fierce wrestle, the French were driven in wild confusion and with much slaughter down the slope.

A still more vehement attack on the centre was made by Kellerman's grenadiers. They were choice soldiers, splendidly led, and they mounted the hill at the quick-step with loud cries, and actually pushed back the 43rd, which stood in their path. Rallying, however, the 43rd ran in again upon the French, slew 120 grenadiers with the bayonet, and sent the whole mass whirling in dust and confusion to the bottom of the hill. A single company of the 20th dragoons constituted Wellesley's cavalry, and these were now sent at the broken French. As they rode at the gallop past Wellesley, his staff involuntarily clapped their hands in admiration. It was a handful of horsemen charging an army! Taylor led the charge, and, pushing too fiercely into the broken

infantry, was slain. The handful of English horsemen, riding eagerly in pursuit, were in turn charged by an overwhelming force of French cavalry, and almost destroyed.

The French attack on the British left fared even worse than that on the centre. The first column, under Brennier, found itself barred by the deep ravine which formed a natural ditch in front of the British position; the second column, under Solignac, marched in a wide curve round the head of the ravine, and climbed the hill with speed, expecting to take the British in reverse. But the French general had underestimated Wellesley's tactics. Three British brigades, under Ferguson, Nightingale, and Bowes, stood drawn in steady lines across his path; a fourth, under Craufurd, was within striking distance of his flank.

Ferguson, a fiery Scotch soldier, attacked instantly and with resolution. The 36th, 40th, and 71st formed his line, and with one long level line of shining bayonets they closed on the enemy. Here again the French for a moment stood firm; and in a bayonet charge pushed home, where soldier closes on soldier along a wide front, the slaughter is quick and deadly. The foremost rank of the Frenchmen fell, to quote the words of an actor in the fight, "like grass before the mower;" 300 French grenadiers slain by the bayonet were counted afterwards lying along the slope where the lines met. Solignac himself fell

wounded, his column was broken into fragments, six of his guns were captured, and Ferguson, leaving the 82nd and 71st to guard the captured guns, pressed eagerly on in pursuit.

Suddenly on his flank out of the smoke-filled ravine emerged a solid French column, coming on at the quick-step, with drums beating, and officers, sword in hand, urging their men forward with fiery gestures. It was Brennier's brigade, that had at last found its way across the ravine. The 82nd and 71st, taken by surprise, for a moment were flung back and the guns recaptured. But rallying, the British charged afresh, drove back the French, re-took the guns, Brennier himself being made a prisoner.

The French were now defeated at every point. Ferguson's lines were closing round Solignac. Wellesley knew that Junot's last reserves had been flung into the fight, while one-half the British army had not been engaged. The road to Torres Vedras was left open by the retreat of the French, and they could be cut off from Lisbon. But at this juncture Sir Harry Burrard, who had come on the scene of the battle some time before, but who had not interfered with Wellesley's movements, chose to assume command, and ordered all pursuit of the enemy to cease. Ferguson, with Solignac's broken regiments under his very hand, was called back; the movement along the Torres Vedras road was arrested.

In vain Wellesley urged pursuit. "Sir Harry,"



he said, "now is your time to advance. The enemy are completely beaten. We shall be in Lisbon in three days." But Burrard held that enough had been done. A French army had been overthrown, with the loss of thirteen guns, several hundred prisoners, and nearly 3000 killed and wounded. Wellesley, indeed, saw that Junot might be not merely defeated, but destroyed; but he failed to move Burrard's colder and more timid nature, and he turned away, saying to his aide-de-camp, "Well, then, there is nothing for us soldiers to do here except to go and shoot red-legged partridges!" Burrard's contribution to the battle was that single unhappy order which arrested the British pursuit and left the victory incomplete. The next morning Sir Hew Dalrymple appeared on the scene, and Burrard's brief and ignoble command ended. The astonished British army had thus undergone three changes of commander within twenty-four hours!

Vimiero is memorable, not merely as being the first battle in the Peninsular War, but as the first in which the characteristic tactics of the French and the English were tried, and on an adequate scale, against each other. Croker, in his "Journal," tells how Wellesley spent the last night before embarking for the Peninsula with him. Wellesley fell into a deep reverie, and was rallied on his silence. "Why, to tell the truth," he said, "I was thinking of the French that I am going to fight. I have not seen them since

the campaign in Flanders, when they were capital soldiers, and a dozen years of successes must have made them better still. They have beaten all the world, and are supposed to be invincible. They have, besides, it seems, a new system, which has outmanœuvred and overwhelmed all the armies of Europe. But no matter. My die is cast; they may overwhelm me, but I don't think they will outmanœuvre me;—in the first place, because I am not afraid of them, as everybody else appears to be; and secondly, because if what I hear of their system of manœuvres be true, I think it a false one against troops steady enough, as I hope mine will be, to receive them with the bayonet. I suspect that all the Continental armies were more than half-beaten before the battle was begun. I, at least, will not be frightened beforehand."

Wellesley had guessed the flaw in French tactics. They uniformly attacked in column, and such an attack, if pushed resolutely home, is, except against troops of the highest quality, overwhelming. The narrow front of the column gives it the rending power of a wedge; its weight and mass supply almost irresistible momentum. The column, too, with the menace of its charge and its massive depth of files, impresses the imagination of the body against which it is launched, and overthrows it more by moral than even physical pressure. But Wellesley knew the British soldier. Whether from mere defect of

imagination, or from native and rough-fibred valour, British soldiers would meet coolly, in slender extended line, the onfall of the most massive column. And if in such a conflict the line stands firm, it has a fatal advantage over the column. Its far-stretching front of fire crushes the head, and galls the flanks of the attacking body. One musket, in a word, is answered and overborne by the fire of ten; and under such conditions the column almost inevitably goes to pieces.

Napier, a soldier familiar with battle, paints in vivid colours the experiences of a column met by steady troops in line. "The repugnance of men to trample on their own dead and wounded, the cries and groans of the latter, and the whistling of cannon-shots as they tear open the ranks, produce disorder, especially in the centre of attacking columns, which, blinded by smoke, unsteadfast of footing, bewildered by words of command coming from a multitude of officers crowded together, can neither see what is taking place, nor advance, nor retreat, without increasing the confusion. No example of courage can be useful, no moral effect produced by the spirit of individuals, except upon the head, which is often firm, and even victorious, when the rear is flying in terror."

Marshal Bugeaud has described, from the French standpoint, the same scene: "About 1000 yards from the English line," he says, "the men become excited, speak to one another, and hurry their march; the column begins to be a little confused. The English

remain quite silent, with ordered arms, and from their steadiness appear to be a long red wall. This steadiness invariably produces an effect on the young soldier. Very soon we get nearer, shouting 'Vive l'Empereur! en avant! à la bayonette!' Shakos are raised on the muzzles of the muskets, the column begins to double. The agitation produces a tumult; shots are fired as we advance. The English line remains still, silent and immovable, with ordered arms, even when we are only 300 paces distant, and it appears to ignore the storm about to break.

"The contrast is striking; in our inmost thoughts each feels that the enemy is a long time in firing, and that this fire, reserved for so long, will be very unpleasant when it does come. Our ardour cools. The moral power of steadiness which nothing shakes (even if it be only in appearance) over disorder which stupefies itself with noise, overcomes our minds. At this moment of intense excitement the English wall shoulders arms, an indescribable feeling roots many of our men to the ground; they begin to fire. The enemy's steady concentrated volleys sweep our ranks; decimated, we turn round, seeking to recover our equilibrium; then three deafening cheers break the silence of our opponents; at the third they are on us and pushing our disorganised flight. But, to our great surprise, they do not push their advantage beyond a hundred yards, retiring calmly to their lines to await a second attack."