posting all his artillery on the hill opposite that held by his foe, so as to sweep its flanks and crest with a heavy fire.

In the early dawn a single gun boomed sullenly from the French lines. It was the signal! The battle instantly reawoke. The French battalions dashed from the shelter of the trees in the valley, and swarmed up the front and flanks of the hill, while twenty-two guns scourged with fire its crest. The 29th were lying down in line, slightly below the summit; Wellington himself stood by the colours of the regiment, watching the eagerly ascending French. Just as the French infantry reached the crest, and their own guns necessarily ceased firing, the 29th leaped up, a long, steady line, curving with the shape of the hill; their muskets fell to the level, and a dreadful and rolling volley rang out. Then with a shout, the right wing of the 29th and the entire battalion of the 48th flung themselves on the French, and drove them with fierce bayonet-thrusts down the hill into a muddy stream at its base, whose sluggish current was choked by the bodies of the slain and reddened with their blood.

But on either flank of the hill the French were eagerly climbing. The English officers restored their line, and charged the French again and yet again, driving them down the slope. Still the Frenchmen, re-forming their columns, came on as gallantly as ever. Hill himself reckoned that the position was

assailed by two French divisions, numbering not less than 7000 each. The stubborn English, however, though outnumbered overwhelmingly, clung to the hill. Time after time, some officer, with bared head and brandished sword, gallantly leading a cluster of the 29th or of the 48th, would run forward and drive back the French in their immediate front. The British fell fast, Hill himself was wounded. At last the French, their fierce energy outworn, gave way. They had lost in forty minutes' desperate fighting more than 1500 men; their formation seemed to crumble; their shaken battalions ebbed in confusion down the hill.

Then followed nearly three hours' curious pause in the battle. The French generals were in council. Jourdan, Joseph's military adviser, urged that the French should fall back, and wait till Soult made himself felt on Wellington's communications. The British must then retreat, and then would come the French opportunity. Even if Ney had not yet come up from Astorga with his corps, Soult with 40,000 men could be at Placencia by July 30, ready to strike at Wellington's line of retreat. To fight on the 28th or 29th was to throw away a great strategical advantage. But Joseph was trembling for his capital. Victor was sore with defeat; his blood was heated with the fight. He urged that the fatal hill should be attacked a third time, and that Sebastiani should assault the British centre and right at the same time.

If that combination failed, he said, they might give up making war!

Wellington, during this pause in the fight, sat on the summit of the fiercely contested hill, watching the French lines. Donkin came up to him as he sat, with an alarming message, sent in by Albuquerque, who was in command of the Spanish cavalry. Cuesta, the warning ran, was "betraying" his ally. Wellington listened to the message with imperturbable coolness. "Very well," he answered; "you may return to your brigade!" What Cuesta might, or might not, do could not shake the British general's iron coolness. Perhaps he thought no "betrayal" could be more mischievous than Cuesta's "assistance!"

Meanwhile, a sort of "truce of God" was established betwixt the rank and file of the two armies. They were parched with thirst, and the rivulet at the foot of the hill beckoned them. The men crowded on each side to the water's edge; they threw aside their caps and muskets, and chatted to each other in broken French, and still more fragmentary English, across the stream. Flasks were exchanged, hands shaken. Then the bugle or the rolling drum called the men back to their colours, and the fight awoke once more.

Eighty guns broke into fire from the French lines. On the French left a great column, like some broad, majestic human river, edged with glittering steel, flowed out of the wood, surged swiftly forward, and

broke in a sort of spray of flame on the British centre. This was held by Campbell's division, with Mackenzie's brigade in support. The regiments there had watched the long fight on the British left till their temper had risen to something like fury. They broke into loud shouts as the French came on, —the shout that moved Turenne's admiring wonder when he first saw English soldiers move into battle— met their foes with fiery courage, crumpled up their front, scourged their flanks with angry volleys, and drove them back in confusion with the loss of ten guns.

A new attack on the British left was meanwhile being organised. Villatte's division, with two regiments of light cavalry in support, was crossing the British front to join in the attack, and Wellington sent at them Anson's cavalry brigade, consisting of the 23rd Light Dragoons and the 1st German Hussars. Gallantly rode the two regiments. The ground seemed level before them; their enemy was in clear sight. The British infantry regiments cheered the horsemen as they swept past. Several lengths in front of the 23rd, Colonel Elley, conspicuous from the colour of his horse, a beautiful grey, led. Suddenly it was discovered that in the low brushwood through which the cavalry were now galloping, gaped a sharp and deep ravine. Elley reached it first, going at speed; to check his horse or turn was impossible. He rode straight at the

great ditch. His gallant horse leapt it; then Elley turned with a warning gesture to check his men. But the galloping line was now on the edge of the ravine. Some leaped it; some tumbled into it; others scrambled through it and over it. And broken thus into clusters, the horsemen dashed at the French squares, rode through their fire, flung themselves furiously on the French light cavalry beyond, and shattered them with their charge.

The Germans reached the edge of the fatal ravine a few moments later than the British. The accepted tradition is that their Colonel, Arentschild, a war-wise veteran, reined in on the brink of the ditch, saying, "I will not kill my young mans," while the hotter-blooded 23rd crashed through the ravine and rode on to attack an army in position. The "History of the King's German Legion," however, refutes that story. The ravine in front of the hussars, it says, was from six to eight feet deep and from twelve to eighteen feet wide, and the Germans rode at it as resolutely as the dragoons themselves, but with not quite the same speed, and having crossed, they did not expend themselves in attempting an impossible feat. The fiery English dragoons were by this time racing past the front of the French squares upon the brigade of chasseurs in their rear, which, as we have seen, they broke. But, in turn, they were assailed by a regiment of Polish lancers, and only scattered groups reached the British line again.

It was a mad charge, as heroic as Balaclava. Out of a little over 400 dragoons, no less than 207 men and officers were left on the field; of the German hussars, only thirty-seven fell, and these figures show how unequal were the risks dared by the two regiments. The dragoons had joined just three weeks before, and the morning after the battle they could only assemble 100 men on parade. But the charge was not wasted. It arrested the march of Villatte's division, and prevented it joining the attack on the British left.

The attack on that hill was raging afresh by this time, but with no better success than at first. In the British centre, however, the French gained an advantage, which, for a moment, seemed fatal. Lapisse fell with great resolution on Sherbrook's division, his attack being heralded by a dreadful artillery fire. The Guards met the French eagerly, broke them, tumbled them back, and pushed fiercely on their rear. There was no holding the Guards in hand. They pushed recklessly on, themselves disordered with the ardour of their advance, till, suddenly, on front and flank, the French batteries opened on them an overpowering fire. The broken Guards reeled; the French reserves came eagerly into the fight. The Guards, as they fell back, jostled roughly on the Germans in support, shook their formation, and, for a moment, the British centre was completely broken. No less than 500 of the Guards had fallen.

It was the critical moment of the fight; and then it was seen for how much, in war, a great general counts.

Wellington had watched the too eager pursuit of the Guards; he knew what would surely follow, and while the Guards were still in the rapture of their onfall, he had set the 29th in movement from the hill they had held so long, to cover the gap in the centre made by the too rash advance of Sherbrook's men. At the last moment, Wellington halted the wasted and scanty lines of the 29th, and took forward the 48th instead. That famous regiment came up, a long and steady line, as the Guards and Germans were being driven back in tumult and disorder. The 48th wheeled steadily back by companies, and let the broken mass sweep past them; then falling swiftly into line again, they moved forward, pouring on the French swift and repeated volleys, while the Guards and Germans instantly rallied behind them. Lapisse himself had fallen, mortally wounded, and his column drew sullenly back. The great fight was over.

If we omit the fighting on the 27th, the struggle on the 28th may be condensed into Napier's terse sentences: "30,000 French infantry vainly strove for hours to force 16,000 British soldiers, who were, for the most part, so recently drafted from the militia that many of them still bore the distinctions of that force on their accoutrements." And they failed! The slaughter was cruel. The British lost in killed

and wounded, 6200 men and officers—not far short of one-third of their whole number. The loss of the French reached 7400. The Spanish claimed to have lost 1200 in killed and wounded, but these figures included the losses of the 26th and 27th, and even then were doubtful. Cuesta, indeed, had arranged on the 29th to shoot sixty officers and 400 men of his own troops for the crime of running away the previous day. With great trouble Wellington persuaded him to be content with shooting six officers and forty men, by way of encouraging the others.

As night fell, the grass on the slopes of the hills where the battle had raged took fire. It was long, dense, and very dry; the red flames ran, a broad front of dancing fire, over the fields where the dead and wounded lay thickly. The British were utterly exhausted. The men were without food; they had borne the strain of battle for many hours. In the middle of the fight, indeed, a soldier addressed Wellington himself, and said, "It was very hard they had nothing to eat," and asked they might be allowed to go down and fight, "for when they were fighting they forgot their hunger!" But when the fight was over, hunger awoke again with cruel keenness. At nine o'clock on the morning after the battle, for example, the 29th, with waving colours but with wasted lines, marched slowly down from the hill they had held. They had practically fought on that rough summit for two

days, and it was strewn with the bodies of 186 officers and men from its ranks.

But just at that hour, Craufurd's Light Division, consisting of the 43rd, 52nd, and 95th regiments, marched into the British camp. In twenty-six hours these three regiments had covered sixty-two miles, under an almost intolerable sun, each man carrying from fifty to sixty pounds weight on his back. And in that amazing march only seventeen men fell out of the ranks! They met thousands of Spanish fugitives on the road, and were told incessantly that the English were defeated and Wellington slain, &c. Yet, without pause or break, these gallant regiments pressed on to join their comrades, and reached the scene of the battle in perfect fighting order.

Each soldier, it must be remembered, carried a musket, 80 rounds of ammunition, a greatcoat, a blanket, a knapsack, with kit, canteen, haversack, bayonet, &c. ; a load which, over a distance so great and in a time so short, might have taxed the carrying capacity of a horse. Many of the men, it is to be added, were faint with hunger; all endured extreme anguish from thirst and heat.

Much controversial ink has been shed as to the exact facts of this famous march, but the truth seems to be at last proved beyond reasonable doubt. The march was made practically in two sections. A march of twenty-four miles ended at Oropeso

on the forenoon of July 28, having been completed before the news of battle reached the regiments. When the tidings came, they immediately resumed their march, pressed on, with a brief halt, all night, and reached Talavera before noon on the 29th. They were short of food and water; the heat was excessive; the men were heavily burdened, yet they covered sixty-two miles in twenty-six hours.

French rhetoric turned Talavera into a victory for the French arms. A bulletin was issued announcing that the English had been cut up and destroyed. But Napoleon had written too many bulletins to believe one of them—especially one written in French. "Truth," he wrote indignantly to Joseph, "is due to *me!*"—whatever economy of truth might be practised in the case of others! He had Wellington's and Joseph's accounts of the battle, and he implicitly believed the English version. Wellington said he had captured so many guns; Joseph denied the French had lost any; and Napoleon told Joseph bluntly he believed Wellington. Victor himself declared to an English officer taken prisoner, that, much as he had heard of the fighting quality of the British soldier, he could not have believed that any men could have been led to attacks so desperate as some he had witnessed made by the British at Talavera.

CHAPTER XIV

MASSENA AND WELLINGTON

THE stern and bloody fight of Talavera, with the movements that preceded and followed it, decided Wellington's whole after policy in the Peninsula. He had tested Spanish soldiership, and would never again risk a campaign in dependence on Spanish allies. Cuesta, as far as the English were concerned, though he had ample supplies in hand, would neither give food to the living nor help to bury the dead. When Wellington marched to meet Soult, now threatening his rear, Cuesta took charge of the English wounded. But twelve hours afterwards there came a whisper that Victor was advancing. The English wounded, in defiance alike of good faith and humanity, were at once abandoned, and Cuesta and his troops, with all the tumult and confusion of a herd of cattle broken loose, came tumbling, as if for safety, on Wellington's track.

The English general abandoned his ammunition and stores to provide carriages for the wounded Cuesta had left; and that surprising general in-

stantly produced vehicles sufficient to carry off Wellington's jettisoned stores as plunder, though he declared he had none for the service of the brave men who had been wounded in fighting for Spain. "We are worse off," wrote Wellington, "than in a hostile country. Never was an army so ill-used. We were obliged to lay down our ammunition, to unload the treasure, and to employ the cars in the removal of our sick and wounded."

Wellington evaded Soult by an adroit movement. He crossed the Tagus at Arzobispo, marched down the left bank of the river, and seized the bridge at Almarez, thus interposing the broad stream of the Tagus betwixt himself and the enemy, and barring Soult's advance. With monumental stupidity, Cuesta now wanted to stand and fight while the French armies, in overwhelming numbers, were closing upon them. He had not generalship enough to understand the peril of the crisis: 90,000 French veterans were converging on the allies; Cuesta's troops, it was highly probable, would run at the first shot, and Wellington would thus be left with some 18,000 troops to meet the shock of well-nigh 100,000 veteran soldiers. The fate of the Peninsula hung by a thread. Wellington sternly told Cuesta he might do as he pleased, but the English army would fall back. "That decision," says Napier, "saved the Peninsula. What could Wellington have done with 17,000 starving troops, encumbered with the terror-

stricken Spaniards, against the 70,000 French, that would have stormed their position on three sides at once?"

So the English general fell back on Badajos and Elvas, standing on guard there to defend Portugal, and preparing for the overwhelming forces which he felt sure Napoleon would soon concentrate against him, but leaving the Spanish generals to their own absurd tactics, and Spanish juntas to their own ignoble squabbles. "Until some great change shall be effected in the conduct of the military resources of Spain and in the state of her armies," he wrote, "no British army can attempt safely to co-operate with Spanish troops in the territories of Spain. No alliance can protect her from the results of internal disorders and national infirmity." "If we can maintain ourselves in Portugal," he wrote again, "the war will not cease in the Peninsula; and if the war lasts in the Peninsula, Europe will be saved." And to that task, with iron resolve and luminous, far-reaching sagacity, Wellington devoted himself.

Napoleon, meanwhile, had triumphed once more on the Continent. Wagram had been fought and won. Austria had been struck down, and the Treaty of Vienna gave to the French Emperor a mastery on the Continent more haughty and absolute than ever. The first use Napoleon made of his victory over Austria was to pour new armies into Spain. Once more the passes of the Pyrenees rang to the

tread of disciplined columns and the roll of artillery, as the victors of Wagram poured into Spain, eager, in Napoleon's own phrase, "to drive the terrified leopard into the sea." The new forces included 17,000 of the Imperial Guard. On July 15, 1810, the French armies in the Peninsula had risen to 370,000 men and 80,000 horses. Spain was submerged under a hostile deluge. The Spanish armies had practically ceased to exist. Wellington's scanty forces guarding the Portuguese frontier, scarcely reaching 30,000 men, alone lifted themselves above the devastating flood. It was loudly rumoured that Napoleon was coming in person to complete the conquest of the Peninsula; and had he come, with his imperious will and amazing mastery of the art of war, it is difficult to believe that even Wellington could have stood in his path. The course of history might have been permanently changed.

But Spain was for Napoleon a hateful field of war. He abhorred it. Fighting Spanish armies was like fighting ghosts. They were intangible and unkillable! On the Spanish side it was a campaign of assassinations rather than of battles, "and Napoleon," says Jomini, "hated a population which included so many fanatics." But Napoleon devoted to the conquest of Spain, or rather to the destruction of the English in Spain, his choicest troops and his best general. Massena came to Spain to take up the task in which so many French marshals had failed.

We have Wellington's testimony that Massena had "the best military head of all Napoleon's generals." He was now old, idle, self-indulgent; but he was still, when roused, the victor of Zürich and of Rivoli, stubborn, resourceful, dangerous, with the fighting courage of an angry bear. He had won new fame in the great battles just fought in Germany, and was certainly the greatest master of war, next to Napoleon himself, France possessed.

Napoleon, it is to be observed, held that, by expending such vast armies and employing such famous generals in the conquest of Spain, he was conferring imperishable benefits on that country, and was entitled to award himself some generous compensations. He appropriated, for this purpose, Spain up to the left bank of the Ebro. This huge slice of unhappy Spain, Napoleon explained to the bewildered Joseph, must be annexed to France, "as an indemnity for the money, and for all that Spain has cost me up to this present moment." A procession of massacres and a felonious attack on national freedom were thus, for the first time in history, transfigured into a title for almost weeping gratitude on the part of the nation thus vivisected!

The new French armies in Spain were grouped into three divisions. The army of the south, under Soult, numbered 73,000 men; Massena was chief of the army of Portugal, having under him Regnier, Ney, and Junot, and the cavalry of Montbrun, a

total force of nearly 87,000. Joseph himself commanded the army of the centre, a force of 25,000 men. Drouet's corps, 24,000 strong, stretched from Vittoria to Valladolid, but was destined to aid the operations of Massena, as were the corps of Serras and of Bonnet. Massena thus had 86,000 men under his immediate command, and could draw for reinforcements on 50,000 more. To meet this gigantic force, Wellington had a mixed force of less than 80,000, of which only 25,000 were British.

The huge forces Napoleon thus set in operation in the Peninsula seemed irresistible. But, for one thing, these forces were fatally divided. No French general really trusted another, or was loyally bent on helping him. Joseph was almost as poor as the fabled King of Brentford, and he and Soult found in Andalusia an irresistible temptation. It was the one as yet unplundered province in Spain. Now that Spanish armies had practically vanished, like so much wind-blown chaff, the province seemed to lie defenceless, and it promised almost illimitable booty. Napoleon realised that the Peninsula was unconquered while the English held a single square mile of its soil. "There is nothing dangerous in Spain," he said, "but the English;" and he was too good a soldier not to understand the folly of committing half his armies to what was a mere irrelevant adventure. But the predatory instinct was supreme in Napoleon's own mind, as well as in the imagination of the marshals trained

in his school, and Soult, with 70,000 men, was allowed to march to the south of Spain.

Andalusia proved an easy prey. Seville fell on February 1, almost without a blow, its ridiculous junta flying, with loud, distracted screams, elsewhere. On February 3 Soult wrote with exultation to Berthier, "One might consider the war as almost ended." Only Cadiz remained to be besieged. But an English force had entered Cadiz; English ships swept its shores with their guns, and Cadiz, as a matter of fact, proved impossible of capture. All Spain at that moment, however, seemed in the hands of France. There only remained the sandy peninsula on which Cadiz stands, and which Graham was now holding with soldierly resolution, and the rugged hills betwixt the Tagus and the Atlantic, where Wellington stood on guard.

But the invasion of Andalusia was a strategic blunder which went far to wreck Napoleon's plans. It divided the French strength in Spain. The task of conquering Andalusia was trifling; the business of holding it was stupendous. "Our soldiers," says Lanfrey, "seemed to hold Andalusia; but in reality it was Andalusia which held them." Wellington's quick brain grasped the blunder of his opponents. "The French will soon discover," he wrote, "that they are not strong enough to blockade Cadiz and to attack us in Portugal at the same time."

While Spanish armies practically vanished in this

fashion from the stage, an obstinate, cruel, and almost universal guerilla warfare broke out, which proved of infinite mischief for the French. "Spaniards," Hill wrote, "often fight longer than they are expected to do when they get behind a wall." The typical Spaniard, it may be added, fights longest when he gets behind a bush or a rock. His genius, that is, lends itself to planless partisan warfare. He is patient, hardy, furtive, careless of method, strongly swayed by personal passion; and the same Spaniards who ran like sheep when ranked in battalions, recovered all their valour when they became wandering guerillas. Innumerable bands of partisans arose. They captured the French convoys, intercepted their couriers, slew their stragglers, cut off their detachments, and maintained a wasting and ferocious warfare that cost the French more lives than all the pitched battles fought with Spanish armies. The French system of living by plunder both created the guerillas and gave them their opportunity. Every new village plundered sent a swarm of angry partisans to the hills; and, as the French could only subsist by plunder, their widely scattered detachments gave the guerillas ample opportunity for revenge. It not seldom took a regiment to convoy a despatch from one French general to another. When Massena sent Foy on a special mission to Paris from the lines at Torres Vedras, three infantry battalions had to escort his messenger as far as the Pyrenees.

The most ferocious cruelty was practised by the guerillas on the French, and these were only too eager to pay back their tormentors in kind. Soult, when in Andalusia, issued a proclamation announcing that as no regular Spanish army existed, the war was to be regarded as closed, and all Spaniards found in arms should be shot as mere banditti. The Spanish Regency replied with a counter-decree, declaring that for every Spaniard thus shot three Frenchmen should be hanged, and three more for every house burned. When the authorities on either side were discharging such dreadful decrees at each other, it may be imagined with what ferocity war was carried on by countless bands of self-constituted guerillas. As a result of this partisan warfare, French authority practically ceased outside their own camps.

Massena set his huge columns in motion in the beginning of June. His first task was to seize the two great frontier fortresses of Ciudad Rodrigo and Almeida. Ciudad Rodrigo was defended with obstinate courage by its governor, Harrasti, a gallant Spaniard. Wellington watched the siege from the hills of Beira, his outposts being so near the French lines that they could hear the sounds of musketry fire from the walls of the besieged city. The most earnest appeals were made to Wellington for succour. Massena taunted him with abandoning his allies; the British soldiers themselves, watching how gallantly the fortress held out, were almost mutinous in their

eagerness to advance. But Wellington's stern coolness never wavered. Better to lose a fortress than to lose a campaign! He knew that a single disaster, or even a victory too dearly bought, would bring him agitated orders from the English Cabinet to abandon Portugal. After the tragedy of the Walcheren expedition, Ministers could not afford to risk the loss of another army. So Wellington looked on while Ciudad Rodrigo fell, and by doing so he showed himself to be a consummate general.

Marbot gives a picturesque account of the siege from the French side. Ney, he says, had drawn up a column of 1500 volunteers as a storming party, when one of the engineers expressed a fear that the breach was not practicable. Thereupon, he says, "three of our soldiers mounted to the top of it, looked into the town, made such examination as was useful, and fired their muskets, rejoining their comrades without being wounded, although this bold feat was performed in broad daylight." This incident proves miraculously bad shooting on the part of the Spaniards, but the spectacle of that act of cool and desperate valour kindled the 1500 volunteers to flame. They were already sweeping like a torrent up the breach, when the Spanish flag fluttered down. Ciudad Rodrigo had surrendered!

CHAPTER XV

THE FIGHT ON THE COA

CRAUFURD, with the Light Division, was on the Coa, watching the French operations, with strict injunctions not to fight beyond that river. Craufurd's task was to encourage the besieged Spaniards, bridle French plundering parties, and collect supplies for the British throughout the very plain on which Ney's forces were encamped. It was a difficult and daring task, but one which exactly suited Craufurd's genius. Both soldiers and general were of the highest fighting quality. The Light Division in warlike fame is worthy to stand beside Cæsar's Tenth Legion or the Old Guard of Napoleon; while Craufurd was of an impatient and heady valour which made him accept, with something like rapture, risks from which a more prudent leader would have shrunk. He had under his command a single British division, consisting of 4000 infantry, 1100 cavalry, and 6 guns. Within two hours' march of him were 60,000 French. Yet Craufurd held to the farther bank of the Coa—the French bank, that is—sent out his pickets with cool audacity towards

the enemy's lines, and played that daring game for three months, standing ready for instant combat, but sternly warned by Wellington to withdraw the moment the French moved. Craufurd, in a word, with a weak division, stood for long months at the bayonet's point, so to speak, of 60,000 French infantry, all hardy and active soldiers, under generals trained in Napoleon's school; and kept his perilous post unharmed. So alert, so vigilant, so audacious was Craufurd's generalship!

The French moved at last. A tempest of rain was scourging the British position as the morning of July 24 broke. The British troops, after the invariable custom of the Peninsula, had been under arms for an hour before daybreak, and the dripping soldiers were about to be dismissed, when the French in solid columns were reported to be advancing. Ney, with 30,000 infantry and cavalry and thirty guns, was coming on, in fact, at speed. The French advance stirred Craufurd's fighting blood. He could not bring himself to cross the river without a conflict: and instead of promptly retiring, sent forward his cavalry and guns. The odds were overwhelming against the English, and the position unfavourable in the highest degree for them. They had, in retreating, to descend from the crest of a ravine—a crest which might be instantly occupied by thirty French guns—and to cross the Coa by a single narrow bridge. Craufurd's position was a mile in advance of