the nature of the obstructions, ordered forward a fresh brigade. Half an hour elapsed, and then he heard from Picton that the general's feigned attack had become a real one ; that the castle had been taken by escalade, and that the 3d Division were within the walls. Very soon followed the intelligence that the bastion of San Vincente, at the other extremity of the French works, had been stormed by Walker. With the town taken and their rear exposed, after some severe desultory fighting, the garrison abandoned the defence of the breaches. A part under the governor withdrew across the river to San Christoval, where they surrendered on the following morning. The British were in possession, but they had paid dearly for their success : the tale of killed and wounded was little short of 5000. Then ensued horrors and atrocities which surpassed those at Rodrigo. There was more reason for them, although no excuse, for the soldiers remembered the campaign of Talavera, when the Spaniards, concealing stores of grain, had done nothing to mitigate the sufferings of their allies. Maddened with bloodshed and afterwards with wine, the soldiery broke loose from all control, many commissioned and non-commissioned officers lost their lives in endeavouring to save the victims of drunken barbarity, and to restrain the mad impulses to incendiarism which went the length of setting matches to the powder-magazines. Even as Wellington rode through the streets the inebriates held up wine bottles, shouting, 'Old boy, will you drink? The town's our own, hurrah!' Not till the third day of the saturnalia could the provosts-marshal begin to make examples, nor were the regiments mustered and re-organised under military discipline till the intoxicated and incapable riotors had succumbed to the reaction from excess.

CHAPTER XI

OPERATIONS IN ARAGON AND CATALONIA

May 1810—June 1811

THE capture of the fortresses marked an important epoch in the war, although had it happened in the previous autumn, as Lord Wellington had hoped, the results might have been immediately decisive. If circumstances again prevented him from following up his success, a great shock had been given to French military prestige, and that of the British soldiery had been proportionately heightened. Moreover, now that he held both the western keys of Spain, he could exercise a commanding influence on the strategy of his adversaries. For the fact must never be lost sight of, that the expulsion of the invaders was absolutely due to the action of the British armies. It has been established conclusively by the Wellington despatches and by such careful English historians as Napier; it has been confirmed indirectly by such accomplished French writers as Ségur and Thiebault, Marbot and Lejeune, and their evidence is all the more effective that it is given incidentally or reluctantly. If their statements have often to be received with mistrust, and with large allowance for mortification and *esprit de corps*, the truth is to be read between the lines; nevertheless it would be unjust not to admit that the brave but undisciplined levies of the Peninsulars played an important subsidiary part. Like the *chulos*, who draw the bull away from the *matador* in

the ring, they were perpetually distracting the French from the main attack. They could hold a fortress with heroic resolution. When their armies were scattered with terrible slaughter, they joined again next day like the pieces of the fabulous worm slashed by the sword of the knight-errant, apparently no whit the worse, and full of courage and confidence as before. Above all, the *partidas* and guerrillas swarmed like hornets around the hostile lines. Many a gallant Frenchman fell in that inglorious mountain skirmishing. Forts were surrendered because convoys were cut off. Able combinations were upset because despatches were captured, and the incessant drain and arduous service discouraged the troops, as it drove men to desertion or into the hospitals. For it must be remembered that many of Napoleon's soldiers were foreign conscripts, detesting the duties in which they were engaged; and even his veterans got weary of living by marauding, and of the monotonous revolutions in the vicious circle where cruelties provoked merciless reprisals.

So in the unwelcome suspension of activity after the storm of Badajoz, we may give a cursory glance to what had been going on elsewhere since Gerona succumbed before Christmastide in 1809. As Talavera had temporarily diverted invasion from Andalusia, so the daring though unfortunate adventure of Moore had permanently freed Gallicia from the foreigners. They never gained a footing there again, for though fresh schemes for overrunning the province were entertained, they were baulked by the activity of the British in Portugal. The Gallicians had more than their share of English money and supplies, and they were supported by our frigates and cruisers off the coast. But with Spanish selfishness, in their narrow, local patriotism

they gave no effective help to the national cause. In Lower Leon, and on the plains of Old Castille, the powerful French cavalry terrorised the country. The border towns refused aid from the insurgents, in the certainty that if the garrisons were expelled they would be soon re-taken. The main lines of communication from Irun to the capital, or to Salamanca, were powerfully held by strong detachments between the garrisons, and were safe from the Spanish regulars, though ceaselessly troubled by the partisans. Through them regular correspondence was kept up between the British ships in the Bay of Biscay and the guerrillas, who were virtually masters of the wild passes through the Pyrenees where they bound Navarre and the western districts of Aragon. On the other side they were in constant intercourse with the chiefs who made their strongholds in the Sierras of the Guadarama and Guadalaxara, who had innumerable spies and agents within Madrid, and who, with their accurate intelligence, could be so daring in their enterprises that they once very nearly captured the usurper when feasting within a couple of leagues of his capital.

There was but a single province in the north or east where the invaders had secured a tolerably firm footing. The energies of the warlike and hardy Aragonese may have been partly exhausted by the desperate defence of Zaragoza; but if guerrillas were still numerous in the mountains, the military skill and wise administration of Suchet had brought the old kingdom of Aragon into something like submission. No doubt his exactions were severe; that was really inevitable in the circumstances; but his troops were kept thoroughly in hand. There was method in his stern *régime*, and he tolerated no gratuitous outrages. Though the passes to Pamplona and the

French frontiers were held by some of the most enterprising guerrilla leaders, it is said he could trust his convoys to Spanish guards. He had mastered successively the strong places of Tortosa and Tarragona, the local centres of the national defence, and perhaps he might have given more prompt effect to the Emperor's orders by achieving at once the conquest of Valencia. The reduction of that semi-tropical province, hitherto scarcely touched by the ravages of war, would have opened up to the French rich sources of supply, making their operations comparatively independent of the dangerous transit through Catalonia But the Emperor had reckoned on his receiving assistance from the army of Catalonia, and that was what the Marshal commanding there was seldom either willing or able to give.

In fact, next to the genius of Wellington and the indomitable courage of the troops he led to victory, the Peninsula was chiefly indebted for its deliverance to the obstinate defence of the Catalonians. Gerona had surrendered in the beginning of December 1809, but the consequent discouragement had been scarcely momentary, for the patriots were enthusiastic over the heroism of the defence. A few weeks before, Augereau had superseded St Cyr, who withdrew into two years of oblivion and neglect, and who complained bitterly in his memoirs that the Emperor had withheld hearty support. Unjustly, surely, for Napoleon had the uncontrolled choice of his lieutenants, and he was not the man to sacrifice his schemes to personal animosities. The truth was that St Cyr had manœuvred with admirable skill, and, as we have seen, his talents were so highly appreciated by his comrades-in-arms that the conspirators in northern Portugal, when plotting the autocrat's overthrow, had thought of St Cyr as his most capable successor. St Cyr had struck

heavy blows in Catalonia, but he had failed to follow them up. The irregulars, instead of being kept 'on the run,' had always time to recover heart, to rally, and to close in again. With the fire and dash of a Napoleon he might possibly have stamped out the conflagration. As it was, the fires continued to spread, and the desultory warfare, which never led to anything decisive, became more and more disheartening. St Cyr was glad to go, and Augereau was slow to come. When the imminent arrival of the former general at Perpignan at last put irresistible pressure on Augereau, he came to urge ill-considered, irregular warfare, and to meet marauding with marauding. The weakness of the French position, with its incessantly interrupted communications, was the difficulty of victualling Barcelona, the retention of which was indispensable. With its garrison and the great civil population the city was in continual straits. So much so, that even the ruthless Spanish partisans would wink occasionally at the introduction of food, in pity for their suffering country-folk. Augereau, during his brief period of authority, did little more than maintain the defence of Barcelona. But the old '*routier*,' who was always in dire need of food, and who had to make the war support itself in a devastated country, indulged his famished soldiery in unlimited licence. The horrors of the internecine struggle were aggravated, if that were possible. Not only was no quarter given, but no tortures were spared when there was time to inflict them. The consequence was that when Macdonald replaced Augereau French operations were more paralysed than before. Macdonald was a stern disciplinarian and a man of humanity besides. Shocked at the condition in which he found his forces, and at the villainous fashion in which they were pillaging the peasants, he issued draconic

orders of the day, and set the provosts-marshal to work. But he had no magazines, and the soldiers had no rations. They had to choose between undisciplined disobedience and starvation, and naturally they were still insubordinate and mutinous. While endeavouring to feed them and bring them under military control, it was all the Marshal could do to keep a hold on the province entrusted to him.

He had been ordered to co-operate with Suchet and the army of Aragon in the reduction of the border strongholds. Macdonald was more loyal to the common cause, and more free from petty jealousies than most of his brother marshals, but mainly his co-operation became a question of feeding his men. Hostalrich had fallen, and Suchet had captured the important city of Lerida when Macdonald took over the command in Catalonia in May 1810. Then Suchet's immediate object was to take Tortosa, which, as it commanded the navigation of the Lower Ebro, was a preliminary to his transporting a siege-train to undertake the investment of Tarragona. Tortosa was a place of great strength, sufficiently garrisoned and amply supplied. It kept open the communications between Valencia and Catalonia. Consequently many efforts were made to relieve it, and the operations were protracted by the weakness of the assailants and the covering forces. When Suchet withdrew troops from Aragon, the partisans stirred up the country he had subjugated, and he must send back detachments to suppress the risings. When Macdonald was reluctantly persuaded to lend a division to assist in the siege, or to undertake with a feeble force the indispensable duty of covering the investment, there was a course of sharp bargaining beforehand as to the magazine destined for the subsistence of either general. But Tortosa yielded at last to Suchet's skill and perseverance; the Spanish connections between Catalonia and Valencia

were severed, while on the other hand the French in Aragon had secured an open passage into Catalonia. The next step was to get possession of the central fortress of Tarragona, which would open up the roads from Barcelona by the coast, from Zaragoza by the Lower Ebro, and by Lerida to Valencia.

The capture of Tarragona was a great triumph for Suchet, as it was perhaps nearly equally discreditable to its numerous native defenders, and to the British warships, which failed to lend aid at the critical moment. Moreover, undertaking the siege at all was a crucial test of Suchet's high moral courage. When the hopes of the Catalonians were at the lowest, a splendid exploit had reanimated their courage. Figueras, one of the strongest fortresses in Europe, was the gate of Perpignan, on the high road to Barcelona. The natural strength of its castle, on a hill commanding the town, its formidable batteries, its ample magazines, where stores were accumulated as a base of supply, had lulled the French into false security. The garrison in the castle was not strong; it was weakened, besides, and tired out by flying expeditions into the mountains; the commandant had become so neglectful of ordinary precautions that he had even suffered the palisades to be hewn up for firewood. The daring partisan Roviro, who for months had been hovering around and molesting the foragers, conceived the idea of surprising the place. Some of his countrymen, acting as storekeepers in the castle, were in regular communication with him by signals or messengers. He seized the occasion when the greater part of the garrison, returning after a prolonged foray, had gone to bed exhausted. He stole down from the hills at the head of 500 men, with 3000 more following closely behind. His friends in the castle threw open a postern; most of the

garrison were taken in their slumbers; with a few shots and a passing scuffle all was over. In the lower town were 500 Italians, under an Italian colonel. It seems absurd to blame them, as they have been blamed by experts, for not straightway attempting to recover the citadel. The colonel kept his head, and did the wisest thing in the circumstances. Sending off an express with the news to Gerona, he withdrew his men in good order; they rallied upon the supports that his message had brought, and the consequence was that no time was lost in laying siege to the lost fortress, Baraguay d'Hilliers, the Governor of Gerona, coming up with all his available men. The alarm was general. Macdonald sent at once to Suchet, urging him to give up the siege of Tarragona, and to send back the 7th Corps, which had been lent. Mathieu, the Commandant of Barcelona, was as seriously preoccupied. He wrote that if Figueras were not immediately recovered, Barcelona could not be retained. Suchet, under that concerted pressure, turned a deaf ear to all appeals and remonstrances. He was a zealous soldier, an ambitious man, and he meant to win the marshal's baton, which depended on the conquest of Valencia. He did not send back to Macdonald the men he could not have spared, for as it was, with his prolonged lines of communication, the *partidas* pressing upon them from either side, the powerful Valencian army in the field, and the British squadron hovering off the harbour, his means were altogether inadequate to his object. At one time of soldiers serving in his lines barely 12,000 were fit for duty, whereas the garrison could muster nearly 17,000. Had Contreras, who commanded, been an Alvarez, the result might have been different. He seems to have been honest and staunch, but he was jealous and hot-headed. He got rid of Sarsfield,

his more talented lieutenant, actuated by malice or pure jealousy, and he was equally unreliable and inefficient in seconding any measures undertaken for his relief. On the 21st June the storming of the lower town only increased the anxieties of Suchet's position. He had failed in four successive assaults on the upper city; his communications were cut; his convoys had been captured; and what was even more serious, his base in Aragon was menaced by the combination of formidable *partidas*. He could only avert crushing disaster by achieving immediate success. He tried again, and on the 28th the upper town was stormed; excepting a few hundreds who were saved in English ships, all those of the population who escaped massacre were carried into captivity. The city was sacked and burned in scenes of horror that almost surpassed those at Rodrigo and Badajoz.

CHAPTER XII

OPERATIONS BEFORE THE CAMPAIGN OF SALAMANCA

May 1812

HAVING possessed himself of Rodrigo and Badajoz by the skill with which he had masked his plans, and his startling audacity when they were ripe for execution, Wellington had suddenly reversed the situation. Now, in place of standing watchfully on guard, with a line enfeebled by its indispensable extension, he could impose his strategy on his enemies in the field he had opened for his operations. He would gladly have drawn Soult into a battle, but the caution of the French Marshal would not risk one where defeat must be disastrous. It might have been supposed that, striking while the iron was hot, Wellington would have followed him up into Andalusia. Officers and soldiers in our army were full of fight and eagerly expecting the order to advance. Seville must have almost certainly been retaken, and the fall of Seville would have been the signal for raising the siege of Cadiz. The Murcian army would have gained heart, the regulars and irregulars garrisoning the Sierras would have descended everywhere on the French communications, and the invasion must have recoiled from the southern provinces with infinite lowering of the French prestige. It was a brilliantly enticing prospect, but unfortunately

Spanish indolence and self-sufficiency had made the realisation impossible. Wellington's first consideration was to secure the fruits of his victories and maintain the advantages he had so dearly won. The breaches of Badajoz were still open, and its works had been shattered by the bombardment. There and at Elvas the magazines had been emptied, and provisions were already running short. That might have been got over, because the crippled fortresses would have been in immediate rear of the march of the army. But the northern road from Salamanca to Lisbon would have been left open to the enterprise of Marmont. Had Wellington's advice been heeded in that quarter, the road would already have been effectually closed. He had been at the pains to draw up for Castaños, who was Captain-General of Gallicia as well as of Estremadura, detailed suggestions for his action in every possible contingency, including that which actually occurred. They were ignored by the headstrong but lethargic Spaniard ; Carlos d'España neglected the bridges before Rodrigo, which he had been instructed to break down, and moreover the rivers were subsiding with the advance of the season. Little had been done to repair or re-victual the fortresses, and Marmont might easily have mastered them had the British troops been withdrawn. Already he had been busy replacing his battering train, and with Almeida practically an open place after the destruction wrought by the explosion of the magazine, he would have recovered the train he had lost, and turned the heavy guns against Rodrigo. Consequently Wellington was inevitably delayed while taking measures to remedy that culpable neglect.

Meanwhile, the time for operating hopefully in Anda-

lusia had been slipping by. It had been the wish of the English general to march upon Seville before the early southern harvest was ripe, so that if Marmont crossed Estremadura to threaten his flank, the French might find no sustenance in the fields or granaries of the north. Now, similar reasons induced him to deliver the attack upon Marmont in place of on Soult, for the harvests of Castille are reaped a full month later than those of Andalusia or even of Estremadura; and if he should inflict a crushing defeat on Marmont's army of Portugal, it would lead infallibly to the capture of Madrid, and, indirectly, to the evacuation of Andalusia.

Although the Marquis Wellesley, succumbing to Percival and his followers, had resigned office, the political difficulties had rather increased than diminished. It is true that the tragic assassination of the prime minister had brought Lord Liverpool, instead of Lord Wellesley, into power, but the weakness of the new Cabinet was Wellington's strength. They grudged him money, they trembled before the vociferous denunciations of the Whigs, who were hopeful of storming the Treasury benches. But the lustre of Lord Wellington's achievements had already made him a power, and as mail-coaches, wreathed in laurel and placarded with flaming announcements of victory, went galloping over the length and breadth of the land, he was being idolised as the national hero. While successful, the Cabinet did not dare to throw him over. Yet all the time he knew that his credit depended on a course of victories, and that in case of discomfiture he would be readily sacrificed. In fact, politics constantly trammelled his strategy, till in his triumphant renown he could set them at defiance. We have seen that he fought at Busaco on purely

political grounds; and knowing the conditions under which he directed the warfare, we the more admire the moral courage with which he hazarded so much at Talavera, at Rodrigo and at Badajoz. But if Wellington, with his great position and fame, with an authority that was locally irresponsible, with his iron patience and indomitable force of character, was often cautious almost to timidity, and only venturesome when circumstances seemed imperative, we can understand and sympathise with the feelings of his subordinates. Next to discouragements from home, and the apathy or contumacy of his Spanish allies, his greatest anxiety was the way his generals, when in independent command, shirked their responsibilities in critical emergencies. There was no one in whom he trusted more absolutely than in Hill; it was Hill who was detached as chief of the divisions which were to maintain communications between the Coa and the Guadiana; it was Hill who devised the dashing affair in which Gerard was routed and his forces were annihilated. Yet the Duke said afterwards, when Lord Hill was Commander-in-Chief in England, that he had always been his most valued general of division, but that his fault was the morbid fear of responsibility. All the more noteworthy was the noble action of Hardinge at Albuera, when as a simple colonel he saved the battle on the turn of the tide by boldly disobeying Beresford's orders. Men like Picton or Crauford, inclined to throw themselves gratuitously into the hottest fire, and head in person the stormers who were recoiling from a barely practicable breach, would falter before a decision that might have made their fortune when the adversary had obviously blundered. Napoleon, with all his impatient superiority, made generous allowance for daring failures, and

thereby scored many of his startling successes. But there Wellington was helpless, and we have seen how leniently he spoke of Beresford after the bloody and fruitless victory of Albuera. Yet even Wellington could not have screened him, had not Hardinge turned the day. Any general knew well that a signal reverse, in the temper of his country, would strip him of all the reputation he had won; that he would certainly be court-martialled probably condemned; and that, in any case, as the victim of popular clamour, he would be doomed for the future to mortifying obscurity. So that, in the course of complicated operations, which were necessarily diffuse, Wellington could only reckon with confidence on the developments he actually directed in person, and he might see his plans disconcerted at any moment by his most loyal and trustworthy followers. It was fortunate that these honest, though unhappy, mistakes were counterbalanced by the inveterate jealousies of the Frenchmen. Masséna's invasion of Portugal was seriously obstructed by the insubordination of Ney, his equal in rank, and Ney was backed up by Reynier and Drouet. The battle of Fuentes d'Oñoro might have been a defeat for the British had Bessières acted cordially with Marmont when the marshes which covered our right had been crossed, and our battalions were retiring in confusion, embarrassed by the mob of non-combatants. So Soult, though perhaps with better reason, had held back from co-operating in an advance with the army of Portugal, in disobedience of Napoleon's definite instructions.

Having failed to force Soult to fight, and decided on attacking Marmont in Castille, Wellington's primary object was to force the latter Marshal to battle. Time was of essential importance, for Marmont was confi-

dently expecting succour, and yet troops from the other corps could not undertake long marches till the reaping of the crops facilitated their commissariat arrangements. There were other inducements to immediate and offensive action in the plains. A victory would open the way to Madrid. In the event of repulse and defeat Wellington could still fall back upon the frontier fortresses. Whether he succeeded or failed, by drawing French reinforcements to Castille he would relieve the pressure on the Spaniards elsewhere, and though driven to depend chiefly on his own genius and army, facilitating distractions by their regulars and guerrilla chiefs was ever his secondary purpose. There were other considerations which encouraged and decided him. Hitherto the French had possessed a great superiority in cavalry and field artillery; to that they owed many of their victories when the Spaniards rashly descended from the mountains into the plains. Now several regiments of horse had been ordered back to serve in the Russian campaigns; others had been used up by hard fighting and long marches. Some of the field batteries had been captured, and all were in indifferent condition. On the other hand, Wellington was stronger in the cavalry arm than he had ever been, and his well-horsed batteries left little to desire.

But to strike at Marmont effectively he must be cut off from the army of the north, and what was of far greater importance, from the army of the south. The French were as fully alive to that as the English general. Yet they dared not concentrate prematurely, for the possession of Rodrigo and Badajoz had given Wellington the incalculable advantage of threatening them all from his central position. No one of the marshals knew in what quarter the storm might burst

and none with his personal advancement in view was disposed to make sacrifices to secure a comrade. Yet the French, appreciating the energy of their adversary, had taken obvious precautions. Not only the magnificent bridge of Alcantara, but other bridges over the Tagus, had been mined and blown up. Such as had been spared were old and narrow, to be approached through precipitous streets and by almost impracticable mountain roads. Virtually the only easy passage was at Almaraz, where the Tagus was crossed by the royal road from Truxillo to Talavera, and even there for the shattered stone bridge one of pontoons had been substituted. The passage had been deliberately and scientifically fortified, and the French were so confident in the natural and artificial strength of Almaraz, that, making it a place of arms, they had stored great magazines there. The Sierra in front, overhanging the river, was a natural bulwark, traversed here and there by some path only used by the hillmen and shepherds. The sole practicable breach was by the defile of Mirabete, through which the road from Truxillo was carried. The crest of the Col was crowned by an ancient castle, which had been repaired and armed with heavy guns, and other works had been constructed to close the gorge beneath, which the castle commanded. At Almaraz itself, about a league distant, a *tête-de-pont* on the left bank was covered by a redoubt called Fort Napoleon. Both these works were dominated and enfiladed by Fort Ragusa on the opposite bank.

To Hill was entrusted the conduct of the daring and doubtful operation. With the facilities of defence and the difficulties of attack, all depended on surprise. Were any warning given, Hill's column would become a forlorn hope, destined to be surrounded and over-