disputing each foot of the ground. Meantime the remaining divisions of Clausel and Reille had to yield in the centre, though for long the tide of battle fluctuated, with varying fortunes and frightful bloodshed.

On the right the Portuguese showed distinguished gallantry, and the Spaniards, to whom the position in front had been entrusted, fought well and stood firmly. Yet it was the heroism of the 40th Regiment which saved the situation there, when the French column, flushed with success, threatened to carry all before it. Soult had been foiled, and he was prompt to recognise it, by sending back his guns, the wounded and great part of his baggage to St Jean Pied de Port. But much was yet to happen before he could extricate himself, and it was a bare chance that saved him from absolute disaster.

On the 29th the armies kept their positions in quiet, but Wellington's anxieties were ended. No longer severed by the Sierras, the allied army had become a united force. Soult had likewise been gathering up his scattered divisions, but his difficulties were great. Again he had to acknowledge the qualities of the allies and their commander, for he had been out-manœuvred, and his best troops had been fairly beaten by a force of half their number. And not the least depressing consideration was, that the Portuguese and even the despised Spaniards had scarcely been surpassed in steadfastness and courage by the British. But he was not the man to throw up the game because the fate of war had gone so far against him. Foiled in his attempt to relieve Pamplona, he now turned his attention to the succour of San Sebastian by operating against the allied left, and at the same time effecting one of his masterly changes of front in face of the united enemy.

His artillery and cavalry had already marched for the

Lower Bidassoa. His object now was to draw off the bulk of his army in the same direction. He strengthened D'Erlon, who had come down the valley of the Lanz to Ostiz with 18,000 men, and who was ordered to march on the 30th by Etulain upon Lizasso. Clausel was to follow, and was to be followed in turn by Reille, who in the meantime with his weakened force, but supported from behind by Foy, was to protect the movement and maintain the positions in front of the allies. Then, with superior forces, Soult hoped to crush Hill, whose advance was threatening his right. The consequence was the sharp affair of Buenza, and there Soult was so far successful. He turned Hill, forced him back with considerable loss, thus opening a new and shorter line of retreat to the Lower Bidassoa, by the pass of Doña Maria, leading to San Estevan. Or at San Estevan he might seize the road from the east to Tolosa, and, effecting his junction with Villatte, raise the siege of San Sebastian. In that scheme he counted without the British light division, of whose movements he was in ignorance, and also without the prompt action of Wellington, who had penetrated his designs. Soult had counted on Reille's positions being practically impregnable. The English general determined to storm them. The operations were admirably conceived, and carried out with the most determined courage. Picton turned the right from behind heights which the French had just abandoned, while Lord Dalhousie was acting against their left. The central attack was as brilliant as it was successful, and the French, notwithstanding superior numbers, were driven from post to post. The village of Sauroren was stormed, the face of the mountain was scaled. The decisive victory was due to the sudden shock delivered by General Inglis with 500 men of the 7th Division. Break-

ing the regiments covering Clausel's right, and seizing on the ridges beyond the Lanz, he severed the French line at the centre, throwing the division on the flank and rear of the main body. Repulsed from the crest, Reille's soldiers broke and dispersed. The bulk of them fled up the Lanz valley, the others sought the protection of Foy, who had no time to come to the rescue. Keeping to the heights, he retired into the mountains, and Wellington pressed the pursuit till dark, when it was arrested at Olague, beyond Ostiz.

By that unexpected defeat Soult was gravely imperilled. The choice of plans was no longer open to him; his sole consideration was to save his army by leading it across the Doña Maria pass to San Estevan and calling in Clausel. He marched all the night, but early on the 31st the rear-guard under D'Erlon was brought to action on the summit of the pass. The formidable ground was held with resolution, but the 2d and 7th Divisions would not be denied, and again the fugitives were dislodged. Meantime Wellington, moving through the pass of Vellate upon Irutita, was thus turning their new position at San Estevan. Byng had already reached Elisondo, capturing a great convoy of stores and ammunition. Soult was surrounded in a narrow valley; Graham was on the march to seize upon the exits on the side of Vera and Echallar; Byng had re-possessed himself of the pass of Maya, and Hill was advancing by Almandoz. A crowning catastrophe seemed inevitable, the rather that Soult was ignorant of the imminence of the peril. Wellington gave strict orders for silence, and forbade any lighting of fires; he placed himself in a commanding position, whence he could scan each movement of the enemy, who seemed to be still unsuspicious. Then occurred one of those trivial incidents

which influence the fortunes of war. Some of our marauding soldiers, straggling in defiance of orders, were taken by the French scouts. Unhappily the alarm was thus given, and half an hour afterwards, from his post of observation, Wellington saw the enemy's columns moving out of San Estevan.

They had been saved for the time, but the situation was eminently critical. Instead of taking the road to Echallar, which led to the Col de Maya, Soult pressed forward to Yanzi, where a narrow bridge spanned a deep torrent bed. Had Wellington's instructions been carried out, the bridge, with the gorges beyond, would have been held by Longa with his Spaniards, and the light division under Alten would have come up in time to support them. But Longa had delayed, Alten had gone astray, and Soult's scouts informed him that the way was open. Alten was late, but yet his division arrived on the heights as Reille's column was defiling along the passage beneath the precipices. He had done all that man could do to retrieve a mistake. He had marched through the mountains for forty miles and for nineteen hours, in overpowering heat, without halting the division. The sufferings of the soldiers had been great, and many had dropped and been left behind, succumbing to sunstroke and exhaustion. It was a strange position. The French were within musket-shot from the rocks above, but the precipices prevented the antagonists from coming to close quarters. To the right the British had descended on the low ground near the bridge, where their riflemen found cover in the brushwood. The bridge was taken, cutting off all retreat, though the French made desperate efforts to recover it. Meantime the plunging fire from the heights turned the road and the river-bed into a horrible shambles. It is said that the assailants held

their hands, or fired with averted eyes, in sheer disgust at the butchery of men who could not retaliate. Beyond the bridge two ways branch off. That leading to Vera and the Lower Bidassoa was followed by the troops who had extricated themselves from the gorge, while the greater part of those who had been caught in the defile escaped by way of Echallar. The rout was complete, yet had Wellington's combinations succeeded, the enemy would have had no choice but general surrender. Soult had rallied the wreck of the army, which had sought safety on the side of Echallar, in a strong position between the town and the pass of the same name. Forced from his first line of defence, he retired to a second, only to be driven thence. After that second unavailing stand, his army was in full retreat for France. Suchet was still on the seaboard of Catalonia, but beyond that all that remained to the late masters of Spain were the beleaguered fortresses of Pamplona and San Sebastian.

CHAPTER XXI

FALL OF SAN SEBASTIAN

August, September 1813

THOSE battles of the Pyrenees had lasted for nine days, and besides skirmishing, there had been ten regular engagements. The losses on both sides had been severe. Those of the French were concealed, and have never been reliably stated, but whole divisions had shrunk to skeletons. D'Erlon, for example, had come to Ostiz with 18,000 men; when he re-passed the Bidassoa, there was barely a third of that number with the colours. It may be remembered that the turning point of the brief but bloody campaign was the daring and intelligent action of General Inglis in the fighting around Sauroren. By seizing on the ridges between Reille and Soult's right, and separating the forces of Foy from the main body, he relieved the overwhelming stress on Hill, and upset Soult's second plan of operations. Now the allies were re-established in all those frontier positions from Roncesvalles westwards from which they had been forced nine days previously. They occupied them in greater strength than before; and the French had been so thoroughly beaten and demoralised, that there was no immediate fear of their resuming the offensive. It might have been supposed that Wellington would have followed up his successes while the enemy were in dismay and con-

fusion. But he adhered to his persistent plan of risking nothing rashly when such vast issues were at stake. Various weighty considerations, military and political, deterred him from an immediate invasion of France. Once committed to a campaign in France, he was bound, for prestige's sake, to persevere, and any serious reverse must have been ruinous. Soult for the moment was almost at his mercy, but he knew not what was passing in Germany. Our allies there were not to be trusted; they might patch up a separate peace, and then Napoleon might send his liberated veterans to the south. The allied troops, after tremendous exertions, had need of repose, and if they had suffered less than the French, yet all his battalions were depleted. Their shoes had been worn out on the rocks of the Pyrenees, and their ammunition exhausted by constant fighting and skirmishing. Besides that, he had to assure himself on the new sea base he had adopted after the victory of Vittoria. The great roads in the Basque Provinces and Navarre, as well as those in Catalonia, were still blocked by fortresses in occupation of the enemy. The repulse of Soult involved, sooner or later, the surrender of San Sebastian and Pamplona; but to assure his ground, and secure his communications, these fortresses must be reduced.

The more pressing object was the capture of San Sebastian, for it was within reach of possible succour, and indeed Soult did make one final effort for its relief. While the war had been running its course in the mountains, the blockade had been maintained, though the heavy guns had been taken from the batteries and embarked. On the 3d of August, the garrison and besiegers heard alike of Soult's defeat, and preparations were pushed forward on both sides for a renewed attack. Nothing was neglected by the commandant that energy

or engineering skill could effect. As for Graham, he was impatiently expecting the return of his guns and the arrival of fresh artillery and ammunition from England. They came soon, and there was a busy scene in the little cliff-locked harbour of Passages; but when the allies set themselves to recommence the siege, the place was stronger than before. Operations began on the 24th, and the besieged immediately met them with a sortie. The batteries opened fire on the 26th. The plan now adopted was to level the towers flanking the great breach, and to connect it with the second breach; to open another to the left, and, warned by the former experiences, to demolish a demi-bastion flanking the whole. On the 30th Lord Wellington pronounced the breaches practicable, and named eleven on the next morning for the assault, when the tide would be ebbing towards its lowest. Appearances are deceptive, and the breaches might have been pronounced virtually impracticable. To a certain point the ascent was easy, but above and behind was a sheer drop of 20 feet, and among the burned houses was a high wall, loopholed for musketry, and with travises at either end. The tower immediately commanding the great breach had been mined and charged with twelve hundredweight of powder, and at the salient angle by which the stormers must pass in single file, there were counter mines ready charged for an explosion. Guns were in position to rake the breaches, and the Mirador battery belched its fire on the open ground over which the assailants crossed to the attack. The slope of the breach gave fair protection from musketry, but soon the approaches were so choked by the dead and dying that it became necessary to clear away the bodies. The forlorn hope had fallen to a man, with its gallant leader. Sir James Leith, who commanded the

stormers, repeatedly and severely wounded, had nevertheless refused to withdraw, though ultimately he was borne back on a stretcher, still encouraging the advancing soldiers. Graham took his stand by the side of Leith in a position fully exposed to the fire. A man of the firmest resolution, he declared he was determined to succeed this time, even if he sent his last companies to the breaches. He was in anxious consultation with Sir Richard Fletcher, and with Colonel Dickson of the Artillery. They decided to open a heavy cannonade on the curtain, although the shot passed close over the stormers. When the fire began, some of our stormers were killed, but the veterans soon recognised its purpose. For immediately the discharges from the hostile batteries slackened and the curtain that crowned the breaches was swept clear of its defenders. Again the assailants crowded forward, only to be brought up again by the insurmountable obstacles. According to all rules of the game of war the attack had failed, and ought to have ceased. But then chance came in, and fortune turned in favour of the stormers. Already the chambers at the salients had been prematurely exploded; the mine at the great breach had failed altogether, for an accidental shot had severed the sausage; and now there was a grand explosion behind the curtain. A depôt of ammunition and combustibles had blown up, spreading death and destruction all around. Panic-stricken for the moment, the French fled back. The fortifications were enveloped in blinding smoke. Seizing the occasion, the stormers rushed forward, passed the perilous defile, and formed among the crumbling houses. Scaling ladders were fortunately at hand, and they descended into the streets, where desperate hand-to-hand fighting ensued among the barricades. Meantime the Portuguese had forded the

Urumea, waist deep, below our Chofre batteries, and forced their way through the lesser breach on the right. The town was taken, and the garrison withdrew to the citadel on Monte Orgullo, retaining only besides their outwork at the Convent of Santa Theresa. Had our success been steadfastly followed up, probably the capitulation would have been immediate. But the soldiers had broken loose from restraint; already they were drunk with blood as well as liquor, and the worst atrocities of the invaders are said to have been equalled if not surpassed at the sack of this Spanish town by the allies. The only extenuation is that it had become more French than Spanish. Two or three days of mad excess had elapsed before Graham could get the troops in hand again. Then the outlying convent was stormed, and a concentrated fire of vertical shell was rained upon the citadel from three sides. The garrison was short of food, water and ammunition. There was scarcely shelter in the casemates for the soldiers off duty; the helpless non-combatants and prisoners were absolutely unprotected from the rain of death. At last General Rey hung out the white flag, and with a garrison reduced to a third of the original strength marched out with the honours of war. The allies had lost 2500 men, and more than two-thirds of their officers had been killed or crippled. The most serious loss was that of Sir Richard Fletcher, but the gifted engineer had lived long enough to do his country invaluable service.

Immediately before the fall of the fortress, Soult had made a half-hearted effort for its relief. He could hardly have hoped that the attempt would succeed against his watchful antagonist, but the allies were still scattered along an extended line, and he longed to do something to retrieve his reputation. Doubtless

he felt that fortune had dealt hardly with him, for the skill of his previous strategy has seldom been impeached. His invincible greatness under defeat and discouragement is unquestionable. Already he was reorganising his broken battalions, as the stragglers began to rejoin the colours. The Spaniards, who spared no Frenchmen they came across, did him good service to the south of the Bidassoa as recruiting officers. And from France he was being reinforced by 30,000 conscripts, who would, at least, be serviceable in strengthening the reserves. But in devising fresh schemes of offence he had to consider his reduced means, which made it impossible to attempt again the relief of Pamplona, hardly as that fortress was known to be pressed. He decided, therefore, to act on the side of San Sebastian, and advance on the allied left by the road of Irun. Wellington held both banks of the Bidassoa down to Vera, and from thence to the sea the river divided the hostile pickets. But below the broken bridge of Behobia on the Irun road the Bidassoa is a tidal estuary: the only points of attack were then believed to be certain fords above the bridge, and at Vera, where the *tête-de-pont* was occupied by the allies. Could Soult make his way to Oyarzum, which is seven miles to the south of the Bidassoa on the great southern highway, the siege must be raised. That main road runs through a broad valley; there are precipitous spurs on the west, jutting out into the Bay of Biscay, while to the east and parallel to the river is the long ridge of San Marcial. That ridge was the key of the position, for over its eastern shoulder came roads that joined the royal highway at Oyarzum. Soult had meant to attack on the 30th, but, as it happened, the attack was deferred to the 31st, the very day of the assault on San Sebastian.

He had taken every precaution to keep his intentions secret, but, nevertheless, Wellington, from observations and otherwise, had become suspicious of them. Three divisions of Spaniards under Freyre, supported by British infantry, held San Marcial. His left was on the mountain overhanging the harbour of Passages, and knowing that the French had been assembling in force before Vera, he strengthened his guards upon the heights in that direction. Reille was charged with the storming of San Marcial; thence he was to press on to Oyarzum, leaving a reserve to form a junction with Clausel's columns coming up from Vera. While Reille was engaged in carrying the ridge, Foy was to throw bridges across the river lower down, and move straight upon Oyarzum with the artillery and cavalry.

Reille began the combat at day dawn in full assurance, for he knew he was opposed only by Spaniards. However, the Spaniards fought with unexpected courage, and charging down hill with the bayonet, repeatedly broke and forced back the assailing columns. But they could not prevent the French pontonniers from constructing the bridges, and in the afternoon they were again attacked simultaneously in front and on the flank. At that moment Wellington rode up, to be greeted with deafening cheers. The Spaniards charged again, and literally hurled the French down into the river. So fierce was their onslaught that many of the fugitives were drowned, and several of the boats which came to the rescue were overloaded and sunk. Clausel had been simultaneously foiled at the fords below Vera by the Portuguese, supported by Generals Inglis and Kempt, and Inglis had established himself in a position so strong that the French recognised they could not dislodge him. D'Erlon, on the extreme left, had been menaced by

columns from Echallar and Maya, and sent messages to Soult, suggesting that it seemed to be Wellington's purpose to turn their left and descend the Nive valley to Bayonne. So when preparing on the following day to renew the attack on San Marcial, D'Erlon's intelligence, which seemed probable enough, reached Soult, with the news of Clausel's failure. He heard at the same time of the fall of San Sebastian. In any case, having been repulsed all along the line, his troops on the left of the Bidassoa were seriously endangered. Fortunately Foy had not yet passed the river, and orders were sent to Clausel to re-cross immediately. But there had been one of those torrential storms which so often preceded or accompanied the Peninsular battles. The Bidassoa was swelling fast, and Clausel could only cross by the bridge of Vera. His division passed that narrow bridge, under fire with heavy loss, and had there been sufficient strength to head them back they must have laid down their arms. Soult's strenuous efforts had been all in vain, and he resumed his former positions and the defensive. Reflections on his last attempt must have been disheartening; choosing his points of attack, so far as was possible, 45,000 French soldiers had been driven back by barely more than a fifth of their number. What gave cause for even graver consideration was that the brunt of the victorious fighting had fallen upon Portuguese and Spaniards. The Portuguese, under Beresford's training, had for long fought shoulder to shoulder with the British in staunch solidarity; now the Spaniards were acquiring confidence with discipline, and seemed likely to prove equally trustworthy. Napoleon and Wellington between them had turned the guerrillas into soldiers.

Events of importance had been passing in Eastern

Spain, although there Wellington's grand efforts were but indifferently seconded. There the commanders had been changed seven times in the course of fifteen months. The thoughts of Lord William Bentinck, perhaps the most capable of those generals, were rather turned towards Sicily and Italy, whereas Wellington regarded it as of supreme importance that the efforts of England should be concentrated on the Peninsula. The effect of Vittoria, as has been pointed out, had compelled Suchet to fall back on Catalonia. He had evacuated Aragon, which he had ably administered, and the heroic city of Zaragoza was again in Spanish hands. After the failure before Tarragona, the Anglo-Sicilian army had returned to Alicante, but the French almost simultaneously had retired from Valencia. The French were in retreat, but Lord William was desirous that they should be prevented from dismantling the strong works of Tarragona. Having entered Valencia on the 9th of July, he despatched a corps to Tarragona by sea under Sir William Clinton. Clinton disembarked at the Col de Balaguer, to the south of the city, and having been joined there by Lord William with the advance guard of the main body, they proceeded to invest the fortress. It was believed that the destruction of the fortress was contemplated, and that Suchet might come up to cover the operation. Yet information was conflicting, and it was doubtful whether he did not intend to continue his retreat. Lord William, fearing to be attacked at a disadvantage, deferred landing his battering-train, lest he might risk such a failure as that of Sir John Murray. He was daily expecting the arrival of the Duque del Parque and of Sarsfield with his Catalans. The delay may have been prudent, but it gave Suchet time to collect a greatly superior force.

He advanced rapidly, and Lord William hesitated to hazard a battle. On the night of the 15th August he abandoned his lines, and at daybreak the garrison saw nothing of the besiegers. Suchet had saved the garrison, and had leisure to blow up the fortifications, though the work was done with so much precipitancy that many of the guns, with great quantities of stores, fell into the hands of the allies.

Suchet fell back on the Llobregat, and in the beginning of September had established his headquarters at Villafranca. Then Soult, in grave anxiety after the fall of San Sebastian and the losses sustained in attempting its relief, with the dubious prospect of replenishing his ranks with a levy of raw conscripts, proposed that Suchet should join him with his veterans, marching through southern France. Then the united armies might advance to the succour of Pamplona. That proposal was soon recognised by both to be impracticable. Suchet urged that he would be followed up by the Anglo-Sicilians, and the departments of France which were left defenceless would be ravaged. He suggested, by way of compromise, that he should march up the northern bank of the Ebro to meet Soult, debouching from Jaca. Suchet would bring his guns; Soult would come with infantry and cavalry. But before even risking so much, Suchet must have reinforcements for his garrisons, and, above all, he must dispose of the Anglo-Sicilians.

The Anglo-Sicilians were posted at Villafranca and in the surrounding villages, their advance guard holding the pass of Ordal, half-way between the main body and the French positions on the Llobregat. Lord William was over-confident in the strength of the pass; but there Suchet surprised the defenders at midnight on the 12th. Though there was a surprise, the pass was obstinately

defended, but before Lord William could hurry up in support, all the positions had been carried. He decided therefore on a retreat, and accomplished it in safety, though with considerable loss. Had Suchet pressed his advantage, the result might have been more serious, for the allies could have made no stand in ruined Tarragona, and would have been assailed to great disadvantage in threading the defile of Balaguer.

Immediately afterwards Lord William, on learning the defection of Murat, embarked for Sicily, and then the command devolved upon Clinton. Clinton had much to undertake, with inadequate means. He had to guard against Suchet withdrawing his garrisons, and to occupy him so that he should do nothing to assist Soult. As the preliminary, he resolved to restore the defences of Tarragona and to re-establish it as a place of arms and his basis of operations. Had Suchet shown his earlier ardour and sagacity, or had he realised the relative weakness of his adversary, he might have regained even more than he had lost. He had 25,000 hardened soldiers under his hand. The Anglo-Sicilians numbered only half as many, and though there were 11,000 Spaniards besides, half starved and in rags, they had broken loose from all restraint. But the startling successes of the allies in the north-west, and the determined fighting at Ordal, seem to have paralysed him. He was content again to withdraw to the Llobregat, and again the allied headquarters were at Villafranca, while the armies were observing each other and waiting on events.

CHAPTER XXII

PASSAGES OF THE BIDASSOA AND NIVELLE

October, November 1813

WELLINGTON had been anxiously watching those operations in Catalonia. He was inclined to take the command there in person, to reduce the fortress, drive Suchet into France, and so accomplish the deliverance of the Peninsula, could he have previously secured the frontier of the north-western Pyrenees. But Pamplona—and Santona as well—held out. So long as Pamplona was still in French occupation, a regular invasion of France was impossible or at least undesirable. The weeks that elapsed after the surrender of San Sebastian were passed in apparent inactivity. The allies had resumed their former positions looking down from the commanding heights on the French valleys, and across to the positions that were held by the enemy. But from any point of view the delay was inevitable. The troops were being rested and re-organised, and every week came transports from England, bringing recruits to fill the gaps in regiments that had been literally cut to pieces, with ammunition and other supplies to replenish the exhausted stores. On their side the French were equally active. Reservists and conscripts had been sent to the front. Everywhere from St. Jean Pied de Port to Hendaye they were busy with pick and spade, entrenching themselves