screen, marched his whole force round the French left, and reached the Valmusa, beyond the curve of Soult's sweep. That astonished commander at nightfall found the adroit Englishman outside his columns! Wellington held the main road, while the French were floundering along the country tracks. A low-lying fog and blinding rain-showers made the landscape obscure; but Wellington had achieved the feat of carrying his army across the front of the largest French force ever gathered in one mass in the Peninsula, an army having two guns for every one the English possessed, and with 12,000 of the finest cavalry in the world!

The French suffered almost as much in pursuit as the English in retreat, and the mere failure of means of subsistence made it impossible for them to hold their forces together for many days. Soult's great army broke up, and the memorable campaign of 1812 ended. Wellington issued a circular-letter to the commanding officers of battalions rebuking in bitter sentences the disorders which arose in the retreat from Burgos. "The officers," he declared, "had lost all command of their men," and this was due to their "habitual inattention to their duty." "Discipline," he wrote, "had suffered in a greater degree than he had ever witnessed, or even read of, in any army; and this without the excuse of special hardships." "No army," he said, "had ever made shorter marches in retreat, had longer rests, or been

so little pressed by a pursuing enemy." In that famous memorandum Wellington lost his usual cool judgment and clear vision of facts. The army had suffered more than he knew; perhaps more than he cared to know. "At one time," says the regimental record of the 44th, "the men were without biscuit for eleven days, and received only one small ration of beef." As showing the losses in the retreat, a sergeant of the 7th company came up to his captain and reported, "Sir, the mule and camp-kettles are lost; but as I am the only man of the company left, it is not of much consequence." Wellington's censures, too, lacked discrimination. Some regiments—notably the Light Division and the Guards—had borne themselves like good soldiers in the retreat. But Wellington's chief defect in dealing with his soldiers lay in lack of sympathy, and a too ready indulgence in cold and sword-edged censure.

That a campaign which began with the storming of Ciudad Rodrigo and of Badajos, and included the triumph of Salamanca and the entrance into Madrid, should have ended in the retreat from Burgos seems such an anti-climax as can be scarcely paralleled in history. It was a profound disappointment to English public opinion, and brought on Wellington himself a tempest of angry criticism. For a time the real scale of the marvellous success Wellington had achieved was obscured. Yet, as Wellington

himself, who always talked in sober prose, claimed, it was the most successful campaign in which a British army had for a century been engaged. Wellington had never more than 60,000 effective soldiers under his command; the French had more than four times that force. But Wellington had captured the two great frontier fortresses, overthrown Marmont, entered Madrid in triumph, delivered the whole south of Spain, captured the French arsenals in Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajos, Salamanca, Madrid, Astorga; taking —if Seville and the lines before Cadiz be included— no less than 3000 guns, and he had sent 20,000 French soldiers as prisoners to England.

And all this, it is to be noted, had been done practically without any help from the Spanish armies. That Hill, indeed, had to fall back from Madrid was owing to the deliberate disloyalty of the Spanish general Ballesteros, a betrayal which even the Spanish Junta found it necessary to punish by dismissal and imprisonment. Had Wellington, indeed, captured Burgos, there lay before him a very glittering possibility. Marching westward, and gathering up the forces of Ballesteros and the troops from Alicante, he would have confronted Soult with 100,000 men, and have inflicted upon him a defeat more shattering than that Marmont suffered at Salamanca—a defeat that might well have driven the French from Spain. This would have been the natural and shining climax of the campaign of

1812. The disloyalty of Spanish generals, the blunders of the Spanish Junta, and the utter failure of co-operation and help from Spain generally, spoiled this great scheme and gave to history the anti-climax of Burgos.

CHAPTER XXVII

A GREAT MOUNTAIN MARCH

VITTORIA is the true and decisive climax of the Peninsular campaigns. Behind it are five years of changing struggle, a curiously chequered story of advance and retreat, of triumph and of disaster; shining threads of victory interwoven with black threads of calamity and hardship. If those years had seen the glories of Talavera and of Salamanca, of Busaco and of Badajos, they had also seen the black days of the retreat to Torres Vedras, and the later retreat after the failure at Burgos. But no reflux of fortune dims the glory of Vittoria. "In this campaign of six weeks," says Napier, "Wellington marched with 100,000 men 600 miles, passed six great rivers, gained one decisive battle, invested two fortresses, and drove 120,000 veteran troops from Spain." But Vittoria did even more. It shook the crown from the brow of Joseph. It finally overthrew Napoleon's whole plans about Spain; the plans on which he had practically staked his throne, and for which he expended, first and last, not less than half a million men. It gave a new complexion to the

struggle which, on the Continent, Russia and Austria and Prussia were now waging against Napoleon. It cast the blackness of swift-coming invasion on the soil of France itself.

Negotiations on the Continent were at that moment trembling betwixt peace and war. Napoleon had just secured the extension of an armistice to August 16, and it seemed probable that the armistice would result in a peace—a peace which would have enabled Napoleon to pour a new flood of veterans into the Peninsula. The news of Vittoria reached the camps of the opposing Powers on June 29. "The impression on the Allies," says Sir Charles Stewart, "was strong and universal, and produced, in my opinion, a resumption of hostilities."

Wellington himself has described the scene at Dresden when the story of Vittoria reached that city. Stadion, the Austrian Minister, received the letter bringing the news at midnight. As soon as he had read the letter he went immediately along the corridors of the château, knocking at the doors of kings and Ministers, and "calling them all (with some very *bruyante* expressions of joy) to get up, for he had good news from Spain. They soon assembled, and seeing that it was a blow that in all probability would deliver Spain, the Austrians took their line, and hostilities recommenced." Napoleon's agents themselves deplored "the fatal influence" Vittoria exerted on the negotiations with Austria

and Russia. Peace at that moment would have given to Napoleon a new lease of Imperial power; Vittoria robbed him of that chance.

For once, as the Vittoria campaign began, nearly every condition of the war was on Wellington's side. In Great Britain itself party divisions for the moment, at least, were hushed, and the only accusation the Opposition had to bring against the Ministry was that Wellington had not been adequately supported in Spain. It is evidence, too, both of the stubborn and enduring strength of Great Britain, and of the degree in which her command of the sea nourished her resources, that after nearly twenty years of wasting strife she was able to maintain the war on a scale exceeding anything previously attempted. In 1813 the population of Great Britain was only 18,000,000, whilst that of the French Empire was 42,000,000. But England—leaving out of count her fleet—maintained an armed force in Europe of 800,000 men. She spent in that year £107,000,000 sterling, £11,000,000 of this sum going as subsidies to her Continental allies, and £39,000,000 being raised as a loan at 5½ per cent. England is essentially a domestic, peace-loving nation, impatient of debt, chary of taxation, preoccupied with commerce and manufactures. But the Peninsular war proves that, when need arises, England can wage battle on a scale, and sustain it with an energy, never exceeded, and not often paralleled, in history.

Wellington spent the winter and early spring which followed the retreat from Burgos in far-reaching preparations for the great campaign which was to destroy French power in the Peninsula. He sternly restored the discipline of his own troops, drew large reinforcements from England, reorganised his commissariat, lightened the burdens and made more effective the equipment of his soldiers, and so prepared an army which, in fighting efficiency, has never been surpassed in the history of war. It is a significant detail of the preparations for the campaign that every British infantryman carried in his knapsack three pairs of shoes, with an extra pair of spare soles and heels! Wellington, in a word, intended to win rather by the legs of his soldiers than by their bayonets. Wellington's Portuguese troops, too, hardened by Beresford's iron discipline, and equipped by Wellington's sleepless care, reached a high degree of efficiency. Wellington, moreover, was now in supreme command of the Spanish troops. A more desperate command never taxed the patience of a general. Wellington himself described, in his own blunt speech, the state of the Spanish armies. "There is not a single battalion or squadron in the Spanish armies," he wrote, "in a condition to take the field; there is not in the whole kingdom of Spain a depôt of provisions for the support of a single battalion in operation for one day; not a shilling of money in any military chest. To move them forward at any

point now, against even inconsiderable bodies of the enemy, would be to ensure their certain destruction." But the magic of Wellington's genius quickly created a new order in even the distracted chaos of Spanish military affairs. Native valour and fine qualities of patient endurance were never lacking to the Spanish private; and Wellington, by degrees, gave the Spanish troops discipline, steadiness, and a reasonably effective equipment. So the spring of 1813 found Wellington with an army 70,000 strong, 40,000 of them being British, in a splendid state of efficiency and in the highest mood of courage.

There were still 230,000 French troops in Spain, but they were scattered diagonally across the Peninsula, from the Asturias on the north-west to Valencia on the east coast. The shadow of Napoleon's disasters in Russia, it may be added, lay with the chill and blackness of an eclipse on the French armies, and 20,000 veteran troops had already marched back through the Pyrenees to strengthen Napoleon in the fighting on the Elbe and the Rhine. The ablest French captain, Soult, had been driven from Spain by the suspicions and hate of Joseph, and was now commanding the Imperial Guard in Germany. The French army in Spain, hardy, brave, well-officered, familiar with war, and splendidly equipped, was thus left a body without a brain, an army without a general, and opposed to it was one of the greatest soldiers history has known!

Napoleon, amid the crowding disasters of his own struggle on the Continent, yet found time to plan the strategy of his armies in Spain. He warned Joseph that he must, for the moment, forget that he was a Spanish king, and remember only that he was a French general. "Hold Madrid and Valladolid," he wrote, "only as points of observation. Fix your headquarters, not as monarch, but as general of the French forces, at Valladolid." It is a curious proof of the genius for war possessed in equal measure by Napoleon and by Wellington to note how clearly Napoleon foresaw the movements which would be most dangerous to the French in Spain, and how exactly Wellington—as though he could read the inside of Napoleon's brain—adopted those very movements! "It would be fatal," Napoleon said, "if Suchet on the east coast and Clausel on the north were entangled in local struggles." The fate of the French depended on Joseph being able to concentrate the armies of the south, of the centre, and of Portugal at any one point.

But it was exactly these fatal conditions which the genius of Wellington imposed on the French. He fastened Suchet to the eastern coast by despatching Murray with an expedition against Tarragona. Murray was a poor general, and emerged from the campaign entangled in the uncomfortable process of a court-martial; but the mere presence of the British on the eastern coast cancelled Suchet, with over

65,000 good troops, as a factor in Joseph's campaign. In Biscay, again, Clausel, who had 40,000 troops under his command, was paralysed by the scale and energy of the guerilla warfare which Wellington kindled about him.

There remained only the army of the centre under Joseph. It stretched in a curve from Toledo to Zamora, through Madrid, guarding the central valley of the Douro, and covering the great road from Madrid through Burgos and Vittoria to France. The Douro itself, with its rugged banks and deep stream, made a direct attack on the French position almost impossible. The French right was covered by the wild and trackless hills stretching from the Tras-os-Montes to the sources of the Esla. On their left lay a war-wasted district, where a great army could find no subsistence, and would be exposed to flank attack as it marched. And yet, under these difficult conditions, Wellington's soldierly brain had already framed an audacious strategy destined to drive the French armies — marshals and generals and soldiers—in all the disorder of flight through the Pyrenees.

Wellington shrouded his designs in profoundest secrecy. By a pretence of aggressive movements he fixed Joseph's attention on his left, where Hill was stirring, and on his front, where he himself had gathered a formidable force. Meanwhile Graham, with 40,000 men, crossed the Douro within Portu-

guese territory, and was pushing at speed in a wide circle through the Tras-os-Montes, thus turning the French right and striking at Joseph's communications. This strategy violated one of the canons of war. Wellington was dividing his forces in the face of a concentrated and powerful enemy. He was launching an army, too, with all its artillery and baggage, into a tangle of trackless hills, gashed with deep defiles and swift mountain torrents, where it would seem that only goats could pass. But genius overrides rules. Graham, in some respects, seemed very unsuited for the leadership of an expedition which, in daring and hardship, almost rivals Suwarroff's march over the St. Gothard in 1799 or Napoleon's passage over the Alps in 1800. "He is a very fine old man," wrote Larpent in that year, "but does not look quite fit for this country work." Graham, it is true, was sixty-eight years old, and was a soldier by accident rather than by training. But he had all the stern energy of the Scottish character, and his soldiers were in a mood of fighting temper which hardship could not cool nor perils daunt.

The French, though in their ranks were veterans who had toiled through the snows of St. Bernard with Napoleon, counted the wild and hilly region on their right impassable for the passage of an army. It was shaggy with forests, horrent with snowy peaks, scored deep with leaping mountain torrents. Three great rivers had to be crossed; hill-crests, white with

winter snows or buffeted with angry winds, had to be surmounted, and many a mountain pass, that never before had echoed to the tramp of disciplined battalions, had to be threaded. But Graham's hardy columns pressed on with tireless energy. Where horses could not draw the guns, men hauled them by hand; where wheels could not pass, the artillery was lowered with ropes down cliff-sides, and dragged up to the wind-whipped summits.

Soon the whole crest of the mountains between the Ebro and the sea was in their possession. Graham began his march on May 16; on the 31st he had reached the Esla; and so completely were the French deceived, that not till the 18th, when Graham made his appearance far on their flank, did the French guess Wellington's strategy. The strong position on the Douro in an instant became worthless, and in the confusion of hurried retreat the French fell back towards Burgos. Madrid was abandoned. Burgos and Valladolid followed. Joseph, indeed, proposed to offer battle on the high plains round Burgos. He had an army of 55,000 men, with 100 guns; and here, if anywhere, he might strike a blow for the crown of Spain. Burgos was the key of the north of Spain, the last stronghold held by the French south of the Ebro. It was here that, in the last campaign, an English army had suffered disaster.

But the fierce and eager march of Wellington's left wing under Graham never ceased, and almost with-

out a shot being fired each strong position held by the French was turned. Graham by this time was across the Esla, and pressing tirelessly onwards towards the Ebro. The Esla was crossed on May 31, and the passage offered a wild scene. The ford was uncertain, the water nearly chin deep, the bottom a mere quarry of rough and sliding stones, and many lives were lost. But nothing could check the torrent of war flowing with far-heard tumult through the deep valleys towards the Ebro. If Graham succeeded in crossing that river in advance of Joseph, his communications with France would be broken. On the night of June 12 Joseph abandoned Burgos, first laying great mines to blow up the castle. These were fired with fuses calculated to bring about an explosion after a delay of hours, and, it was hoped, just as the eager British van reached the town. But the fuses proved too quick, and the mines, charged with a thousand shells, exploded while the last battalions of the French rear-guard were defiling through the town. The hills round Burgos shook to the deep blast, the wave of reverberating sound swept over fifty miles of space. Graham's troops, far off in the hills, paused in their march for a moment as they caught the faint yet deep and sullen roar of the explosion. The castle was wrecked, but 300 French infantry were also destroyed instantly by the explosion.

It is curious to remember that this tremendous

blast of sound awoke—it is not easy to understand why—a history-making purpose in Wellington's brain. He told Croker long afterwards, "When I heard and saw this explosion (for I was within a few miles, and the effect was tremendous), I made a sudden resolution"—(with emphasis)—"*instanter*—to cross the Ebro and endeavour to push the French at once to the Pyrenees." The mind has its puzzles, and no one can tell why, stirred by the blast that wrecked Burgos, the vague half-shaped and half-unconscious plan of a great campaign lurking in the cells of Wellington's brain should have suddenly crystallised into clear resolve. Perhaps the sound of the great explosion, and the sight of Burgos tumbling into ruins, made Wellington suddenly conscious both of the power of his own movement and of the severity with which it was pressing on the French. "All about me," he says, "were against my crossing the Ebro." But Wellington, almost with a breath, reached the point of audacious resolve. Thus, when some nameless French engineer put his match to the fuse in the mine at Burgos, he was touching a line of intellectual forces which thrilled through Wellington's brain, and in their after effects helped to shake down the throne of Napoleon.

"Dubreton's thundering castle," which had mocked Wellington's power eight months before, thus disappeared like a dream. Hill and Wellington were pressing on the French front, and still Graham's

hardy untiring columns were pushing their resolute march past the French right. The tumult of retreat broke out afresh in Joseph's army. But pursuit was swifter-footed even than flight. Down the left bank of the Ebro now came Graham at speed. Still backward the French were thrust, till, in all the whirl of breathless retreat, their crowded divisions, burdened with the plunder of a kingdom, eddied into the shallow little oblong valley of Vittoria. Wellington had obtained all the results of a dozen battles almost without firing a shot, and by mere force of skilful and audacious strategy.

Leith Hay declares that Wellington's turning march past the French right, which preceded Vittoria, was "the most masterly movement made during the Peninsular war." As an incidental advantage it gave to Wellington all the northern and western sea-coast of Spain. Portugal became unnecessary as a base, and the British found safe and easy communication with their ships in every harbour on the coast of Biscay. But the chief merit of this fine strategy was that it gave Wellington the advantage of a dozen victories with scarcely the loss of a life. It swept the French back to the Spanish frontier. And Joseph, burdened with the plunder of a kingdom, his troops disorganised by a hurried and unexpected retreat, had to risk the chances of a great battle to escape being driven in wild wreck through the passes of the

Pyrenees. The battle of Vittoria is the natural and calculated climax to the strategy which thus, in six weeks, had driven Joseph's army across nearly 200 miles of strong positions into a narrow valley amongst the hills of Biscay.

CHAPTER XXVIII

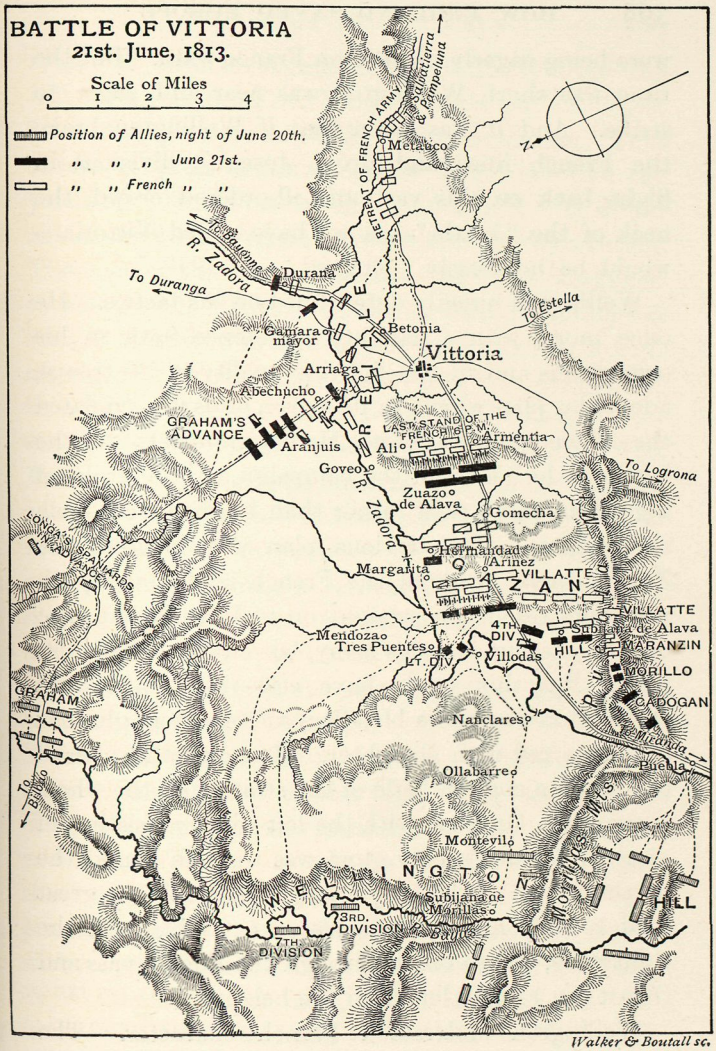
THE ROUT OF VITTORIA

VITTORIA is a shallow valley about eight miles broad and ten miles long, lying within steep fences of girdling hills. The town itself is at the eastern end of the valley. A wall of rugged hills—the Puebla range—bounds it on the south; a parallel range serves as a wall to the north. To the east, where Vittoria stands, these ranges meet in a sort of apex, while a range of hills called the Morillas serves as a western base to the triangle of hills, within which lies the scene of the great battle. The Zadora, a narrow stream with deep banks, bisects the triangle, running from Vittoria in the east straight down to the base of the western hills, then swinging round at right angles to the southern range, and finding an escape through a deep and wild defile which breaks the angle where the Morillas and the Puebla ranges meet; thence it flows into the Ebro. The valley has, roughly, the shape of a bottle, with the town of Vittoria as the cork. The royal Madrid road runs from the Puebla pass up the left bank of the Zadora to Vittoria; thence it forms the

main road to Bayonne and to the Pyrenees. This constituted Joseph's line of retreat.

Joseph's army, 70,000 strong, filled the valley with the glitter of arms. Their first position was on a low ridge that crossed from north to south in front of the village of Arinez, and commanded the valley of the Zadora with its seven bridges. So confident were the French in the overmastering fire of their guns, that they did not break down these bridges—a fatal blunder. A second and loftier range, on which stood the village of Gomecha, stretched from the Zadora to the Puebla range; and still higher in the rear rose the town of Vittoria itself.

Behind the French lines was the plunder of fifty provinces, vast convoys of waggons and carriages, the whole court equipage of Joseph, camp-followers, Spanish officials, the wives and mistresses of French officers, &c. A French prisoner after the battle said to Wellington, "Le fait est, Monseigneur, que vous avez une armée, mais nous sommes un bordel ambulant!" Loud, distracted, and far-heard was the tumult of men and horses and carriages hurrying with dust and clamour eastward, along the great causeway which runs towards the Pyrenees into France. The French, it must be remembered, had been plundering Spain with French method and thoroughness for more than five years, and they were now practically submerged beneath their own booty. Convoys laden with the accumulated plunder of a hundred cities


BATTLE OF VITTORIA
21st. June, 1813.
Scale of Miles
0 1 2 3 4
Position of Allies, night of June 20th.
,, ,, ,, June 21st.
,, ,, French ,, ,,
RETREAT OF FRENCH ARMY
To Salvatierra & Pompeluna
Metauco
To Bayonne
R. Zadora
Durana
To Duranga
To Estella
Gamara mayor
Betonia
Vittoria
Arriaga
Abechucho
GRAHAM'S ADVANCE
Aranjuis
LAST STAND OF THE FRENCH IN M.
Ali
Armentia
To Logrona
Goveo
R. Zadora
Zuazo de Alava
Gomecha
Hermandad
Margarita
Arinez
VILLATTE
Z A N
VILLATTE
Subijana de Alava
4TH DIV.
HILL
MARANZIN
Mendoza
Tres Puentes
LT. DIV
Villodas
MORILLO
CADOGAN
GRAHAM
Nanclares
To Miranda
Puebla
Ollabarre
To Orduna
Montevil
WELLINGTON
Subijana de Morillas
3RD DIVISION
Bayas
7TH DIVISION
HILL
Walker & Boutall sc.

were being eagerly pushed on France-ward. But the time was short, Wellington was near and eager to strike. And it was plain that if Wellington broke the French lines and drove Joseph's divisions in flight back on this vast and ill-ordered crowd, the neck of the "bottle"—as we have called Vittoria—would be hopelessly "plugged."

Wellington quickly determined on his tactics. He once more, with a haughty confidence both in his own genius and in the fighting quality of his troops, adopted a plan which, in its excess of daring, violated the canons of military art. He determined to win the battle, as he had won the campaign, by the stroke of a great captain's skill rather than by the actual push of bayonets. The obvious plan was to cross the Zadora, break through the French centre, and push with fiery resolution straight on to Vittoria, thus not only shattering Joseph's army, but cutting off his left wing. But this would have cost 10,000 men, and Wellington counted a bloodless victory more glorious than one red with slaughter. He made the plan of the battle a copy in little of the strategy of the whole campaign. Graham, with the left wing, consisting of 18,000 men and twenty guns, was to push round the northern wall of the hilly triangle and seize the great road to Bayonne in Joseph's rear. Hill, with the right wing, was to break through the Puebla pass and thrust the French left from the heights.

Wellington understood French character. The

sound of Graham's guns rolling sullenly over the hills, and past the French right, would put an almost irresistible pressure on the French imagination. That thrust at their communications would act like the prick of a lancet on the nerve of a limb. It would shake the whole French army almost into dissolution. Then when the French centre had been weakened to sustain the fighting on either flank, Wellington himself, with the British centre, would break through on their front, and drive Joseph's whole army back in ruin on Vittoria. And if Graham actually succeeded in seizing the great road to Bayonne, the French retreat would be flung aside on to the marshy roads to Salvatierra. It was audacious strategy. It meant that, in the presence of an enemy of equal strength and holding a central position, Wellington divided his forces and attacked at three remote and independent points, in country so wild and rugged that no communication could be maintained betwixt the British columns.

June 21, the day of battle, was a Sunday—the longest summer day of the year. It illustrates the uncertainty of history that the experts contradict each other flatly as to the manner on which that day of fate dawned. Napier, who was not present, says, "The morning was rainy and heavy with vapour." Leith Hay, who was present, riding in Wellington's staff, says, "The morning was extremely brilliant; a clearer or more beautiful atmos-