

Another gallant soldier of the Peninsula, Leith Hay, describes not so much the defect in the method of French attack as the limit in the fighting quality of French troops. "In mounting steeply defended by troops," he says, "in making attacks in large bodies where a great crisis is at issue, in forcing on under fire until all difficulties but the personal, the close conflict with his opponent, has been overcome, the French soldier appears to be unequalled. But when perseverance has placed him on equal ground, when he apparently has obtained a chance of successfully terminating his attack, he becomes no longer formidable, and appears paralysed by the immediate presence of his opponents—a strange and inexplicable result of so much gallantry, such gaiety, so much recklessness of danger. It is only to be accounted for by the supposition that the physical composition of the Frenchman does not permit the effervescence to subsist beyond a certain exertion, that, if unchecked, might have continued buoyant, but, being resolutely met, becomes depressed and vanquished."

Wellesley had certainly shown in these first contests with the French that he was not "frightened beforehand;" and thrice in the contest of Vimiero his soldiers had met in line and crushed the attack of the French in column. British methods thus had been fairly tried against French methods, and the result was written in blood-red characters on the field at Vimiero.

Dalrymple hesitated betwixt Burrard's policy and Wellesley's for a whole day, but decided to advance on the 23rd. At midday on the 23rd, however, when the British were about to move, a cluster of French horsemen, escorting a flag of truce, rode into the lines. It was Kellerman with a proposal for an armistice until a convention should be drawn up for the evacuation of Portugal. Dalrymple welcomed the proposal. It seemed to promise the fruits of victory without the perils of another battle. Wellesley, with a more soldierly instinct, wished to press on without pause. Junot, he believed, would not have proposed a convention if he had any hope of holding Portugal.

Dalrymple, however, had much more of the caution of age than of the energy of youth. He accepted the French proposals, and what is known as the Convention of Cintra followed. The French were to evacuate Portugal, and, with all their artillery, arms, and baggage, were to be transported in British ships to France. One article of the Convention stipulated that plunder was not to be carried off by the French; but to persuade a French army to surrender its booty was a feat beyond the ingenuity of British diplomacy. The French had stripped churches, art galleries, palaces, and warehouses of everything portable, and were loaded with booty. The troops who had limped naked into Lisbon proposed to sail from it with baggage enough to load a fleet of transports. Junot himself demanded five transports for his own

“private property.” With much distracted shrieking, and some actual scuffling, the French were compelled to disgorge much of their plunder, but they yet contrived to carry off a vast amount of booty.

The Convention of Cintra gave Portugal, with its capital and all its strong places, into the hands of the British, and Junot's troops, that had entered Lisbon as conquerors, were convoyed ignobly in British transports back to France. But in Great Britain itself the news of the Convention was received with angry disgust. It called forth, indeed, a louder explosion of wrath than if the entire British army had been driven to re-embark, or had even been destroyed! At Baylen, Spanish peasants had compelled a French marshal and his army to surrender as prisoners; at Cintra, British generals had allowed a beaten French army to march off with what seemed to be the honours of war and the plunder of a country.

A court of inquiry, consisting of seven British generals, sat at Chelsea, and spent six weeks taking evidence on the subject. Wellesley, Burrard, and Dalrymple were practically put on their trial. Six generals approved and one disapproved of the armistice; four generals approved of the Convention, three disapproved. The report of the court of inquiry dwells with wide-eyed astonishment on “the extraordinary circumstances under which two new commanding generals arrived from the ocean and joined

the army, the one during, and the other immediately after, a battle, and these necessarily superseding each other, and both the original commander, within the space of twenty-four hours." The world still shares that wonder of the six major-generals who formed the court of inquiry. The inquiry, however, made it clear that Wellesley had been fatally hampered by the elderly and leisurely generals put over him, and he emerged from the trial with reputation undamaged.

The Convention, with all its defects, was undoubtedly a blow to the French, a substantial advantage for the British. Napoleon summed up the situation in a sentence: "I was going," he says, "to send Junot before a council of war, when, fortunately, the English tried their generals, and saved me the pain of punishing an old friend."

CHAPTER VI

MOORE AND NAPOLEON

BETWIXT the Convention of Cintra and the appearance of Napoleon in person with his veterans in Spain there was a curious pause in the great drama of the Peninsular War. The French had fallen back to the Ebro. Joseph, a king without subjects and without a capital, could plan nothing and do nothing. There were still nearly 80,000 French soldiers at his disposal, and there was really no force in Spain that could have stood before his stroke. But the new King of Spain was haunted by the sense of a nation in revolt, a nation in which, in noble and in peasant alike, there was no other feeling towards him but that of furious hate. "Prudence," he wrote apologetically to his imperious brother, "does not permit three corps, the strongest of which is only 18,000 men, to separate to a greater distance than six days' march, in the midst of 11,000,000 people in a state of hostility." The English, it is true, held Portugal; but the British mind cannot interest itself in two subjects at once; and English public opinion was much more intent on discovering who ought to

be hanged for the Convention of Cintra than on the question of what ought to be done to push the French out of Spain. The British army in Portugal had lost its three generals, and had not yet gained a fourth. Spain itself was a bewildered and bewildering tangle of follies, hatreds, jealousies, distracted ambitions, and semi-idiotic dreams.

The British Cabinet, indeed, had begun to organise, on a more rational plan, its agents in Spain. A single responsible agent was appointed to each province, with Stuart at Madrid as chief of the civil agents. But nothing could infuse method or sanity into Spanish affairs. A Central Junta existed; it passed decrees requiring itself to be addressed as "Majesty," and granting spacious titles and generous salaries to all its members. But it exercised no real control over the provincial juntas. Stuart described it, after long experience, as "never having made a single exertion for the public good." No provincial junta would assist another, or permit its troops to march out of its own boundaries. Sometimes, indeed, the juntas were trembling on the point of civil war amongst themselves; sometimes they were dazzled by wild visions of foreign conquest. The only art in which they shone was the art of infinite and intolerable delay. The single active sentiment they cherished towards their ally, England, was an ardent desire for its gold.

Spanish generals were worthy of Spanish juntas.

"They knew," says Napier, "so little of war, that before their incapacity was understood, their errors, too gross for belief, contributed to their safety." They were all equally independent, equally ignorant, and equally unreliable. "No one general," says Napier, "knew what another had done, was doing, or intended to do;" and there was no error possible in war of which they were not guilty. And yet juntas and generals—and, it is painful to add, the British Cabinet — shared in the most ridiculous expectations of what was about to happen. The French, every one believed, were in retreat. Victorious Spaniards would soon be marching through the Pyrenees. France was to be invaded. The part the English were to play in this imaginary drama was to be that of mere benevolent spectators. When Moore's army entered Spain, its officers were told repeatedly by the Spanish, "We are obliged to our friends the English; we thank them for their goodwill. We shall escort them through France to Calais; the journey will be pleasanter than a long voyage. They will not have the trouble of fighting the French, and we shall be pleased to have them as spectators of our victories!"

Spain, in fact, was a realm of dreams—of rose-tinted dreams, with a strain of lunacy running through them. Only Cervantes could have done justice to the pride, the follies, the distractions, the lunatic

hopes, the yet more lunatic ambitions, that filled Spain with their fever at this moment.

There remained one keen, strong, masterful brain that was under no illusion about Spanish affairs, and that had a perfectly clear plan of action in relation to them. Napoleon understood perfectly the shock which the surrender at Baylen and the defeat at Vimiero had given, not merely to his fame, but to his power. The rising in Spain was a lesson to the whole Continent, with very mischievous suggestions. In vain had he overthrown kings if it were shown that the peoples could overthrow him. Austria, Prussia, Italy, might learn that lesson and apply it. The Spanish conflagration must be trampled out thoroughly, and the time for doing it was brief. For if the war in Spain were prolonged, Prussia might rise, Austria sullenly betake itself again to arms, and the Continent catch fire!

Napoleon's plan was to march into Spain an irresistible military force. There were 500,000 troops, familiar with victory and in the highest state of efficiency, under the French eagles on the Continent. He drew from these eight great corps-d'armée, numbering in all more than 200,000 men. They included his best troops, with the far-famed and invincible Guard itself. They were led by his most trusted marshals—Ney and Soult, Victor and St. Cyr, Mortier and Lannes. These vast and disciplined columns moved steadily towards the Pyrenees, form-



ing such a tempest of war as had never yet burst over Spain. With that curious attention to minute and apparently insignificant detail which characterised Napoleon, he took pains to kindle the imagination of his veterans as they entered on this new campaign. As they marched through the chief cities they were feasted and entertained; flowers, by his orders, were flung on the tramping battalions; theatrical representations cheered them when they halted at night. He directed his Minister of War to have songs composed to be sung to his troops having for their theme "the liberty of the sea." The soldiers must be persuaded that their bayonets were to avenge Trafalgar, and they were to overthrow the fleets of "perfidious Albion" on the plains of Andalusia or in the wild mountain-passes of Asturia! "You must have three kinds of songs made," Napoleon added gravely, "so that the soldiers may not hear the same songs twice."

Napoleon, moreover, took care to educate public opinion, and to "educate" it in characteristic fashion by deceiving it. On November 19—four days, that is, before the battle of Tudela was fought—he wrote to his Minister, Champigny: "Send off an intelligent courier who will spread the report that Spain has submitted, or is on the point of submitting, completely; that 80,000 Spaniards are already destroyed," &c., &c. Invention, in a word, was to outrun history.

Napoleon had many of the arts and much of the temper of a great stage-manager; but, it may be added, he was decorating with the tinsel of a playwright the terrors of a thunderbolt. These troops, the victors of Austerlitz and of Friedland, directed by the matchless skill and urged by the vehement will of the greatest soldier of his generation, seemed sufficient to overrun twenty Spains. The echoing passes of the Pyrenees were filled with the ceaseless flow of infantry, cavalry, and artillery, a living flood of armed men, glittering with steel, that threatened to submerge Spain as the ancient flood once overwhelmed the inhabited earth. The truth is, Napoleon aimed not merely to stamp out the insurrection in Spain; he wished to startle and overawe the imagination of the world in the process. There was to be something supernatural in the scale and swiftness of his campaign. His blow was to have the impact and the resistlessness of one of the great forces of Nature. All the nations of Europe were to look on and watch the fate which overtook the one nation which dared to lift its hand against the imperial eagles of France.

Napoleon's own rhetoric had a roll as of drums in it, especially when describing his intention as to the wickedly intruding English. "When I shall show myself beyond the Pyrenees," he said, "the leopard in terror will plunge into the ocean to avoid shame, defeat, and death." The "leopard," however, proved

a beast of disappointing temper. It somehow omitted to plunge into the ocean when French bayonets came sparkling through the Pyrenees. As a matter of fact, it was those very bayonets that, in the long-run, hurried back—and in sadly reduced numbers—through the Pyrenees under the stroke of that much-abused leopard's paw!

As a matter of sober history, however, all Napoleon's haughty purposes about Spain might have been realised but for the daring resolve of one English soldier. The armies and generals of Spain were to Napoleon only what chaff is to the flail; they were scattered before his march as grainless husks are driven before a hurricane. But Moore's heroic thrust at Napoleon's communications arrested the march of the French legions and saved Spain—perhaps even saved the Continent as well as Spain.

Moore divides with Wellington the glories of the Peninsular War. It is true Moore commanded in only one campaign. He fought only one battle in the Peninsula, a battle in which he lost his own life. But Wellington would probably have had no opportunity for those six immortal campaigns which drove the French across the Pyrenees and helped to destroy Napoleon, but for that audacious march of Moore, which stayed the rush of Napoleon on Southern Spain, and wrecked the whole plan of his Spanish campaign.

Napoleon crossed the Spanish frontier on Novem-

ber 3; on the 8th he reached Vittoria, and his armies were put in instant movement. The Spanish forces were grouped along the line of the Ebro and over a distance of 200 miles. They formed four armies. Palafox, with 40,000 men, was on the French right, covering Tudela; Castanos was opposite the French centre; Blake, with 40,000 men, covered the Asturias, while as a reserve near Burgos was the army of Estremadura. The Spanish generals, scattered over a wide area of country, without concert with each other, and with something less than 100,000 men, had to oppose Napoleon, who occupied a central position, and was able to put 160,000 men into the battlefield. The result of such a campaign betwixt such combatants was certain.

Napoleon's plan was to march on Burgos, breaking the Spanish line in two, then wheel round on either flank, push one Spanish wing into the sea and the other to the Pyrenees. Soult at Gamonal broke through the Spanish centre, slew 2500 Spaniards and captured Burgos—and all this within fifty hours of leaving Bayonne! Victor at Espinosa destroyed Blake, and that general on November 12 reached Reynosa with 7000 fugitives, "without artillery, without arms, without spirit, and without hope," as Napier tersely puts it. Soult seized Santander, Lefebvre marched on Valladolid, and the north of Spain was overrun.

Napoleon then let loose his magnificent cavalry

over the plains of Leon and Castile, and Castanos fell hastily back from Madrid. On November 23, with 45,000 men, he was hopelessly overthrown at Tudela. Spain was now prostrate, and Napoleon marched straight on Madrid. The Somosierra pass had to be forced, a steep and wild ravine held by 12,000 men and sixteen guns, a position that ought to have been impregnable. Napoleon carried it by one of the most remarkable feats in even his wonderful career. A huge column of French infantry was drawn up to storm the ravine, barred by an army with its artillery. The fire of the skirmishers filled the steep and narrow valley with smoke, a smoke made denser by the eddying mists rolling down from the mountain summits. Napoleon suddenly arrested the infantry, and sent forward the Polish light cavalry of his Guard. At full gallop, with bent heads and plumes blown backward, the gallant horsemen raced up the steep and rugged ascent. The fog concealed them until they broke, a torrent of rushing and armed men, on the astonished Spaniards. The battery was carried, the pass cleared, and 12,000 men yielded an impregnable position to the charge of a few squadrons of light horse.

On December 2 the French were before Madrid, on the 4th that city surrendered. Six weeks had proved sufficient to destroy the armed strength of Spain. Saragossa still stood, ready for a new siege; some 20,000 British troops were moving along the

Portuguese roads to the Spanish frontier ; but practically Spain was overthrown. And to an assemblage of notables in Madrid Napoleon announced, "I will drive the English armies from the Peninsula. There is no obstacle capable of resisting the execution of my will." He proposed to march, in person, straight on Lisbon, while his marshals overran Catalonia, Valencia, and Andalusia. Napoleon had at that moment more than 300,000 men on his muster-rolls in Spain. Madrid was in his hands ; he commanded all the great lines of communication. Before starting on his triumphant march he conferred a new political constitution on Spain, in which he abolished the Inquisition, reduced the number of convents by one-third, and cancelled all feudal rights. "If Spain," he announced, "did not prove submissive, he would give his brother another throne, and put the crown of Spain upon his own head." And there seemed no power that could prevent that surprising performance. But at this moment Moore steps on the stage and changes the course of history.

Moore had nominally 35,000 troops under his command, but they were scattered over a wide area. Many were sick ; he had less than 24,000 in hand when actually in front of the enemy. His instructions were to advance into Spain, enter into communication with the Spanish generals, and frame a common plan of operations with them. A hundred thousand Spanish soldiers, he was told, were in arms.

Burgos was to be the meeting-point of the allied forces. As a matter of fact, these Spanish armies, before Moore reached the scene of action, had vanished like shadows. Burgos was in the hands of the French. And when Moore, marching from Lisbon, with his troops moving along widely separated lines of road, reached Salamanca, he found himself in an open town, only three marches from the French armies, without so much as a Spanish picket to cover his front. Napoleon's tempest of war, too, by this time was sweeping from the Pyrenees towards Madrid.

Perhaps no general was ever before or since in a situation so trying. To advance was madness; to retreat without striking a blow seemed dishonour, a betrayal of Spain and a reproach to England. Moore found himself, too, in a sort of realm of Egyptian darkness. He could get no definite information as to the forces and movements of the enemy. Napoleon, it may be added, was almost as badly served, in spite of his vast and splendid cavalry, as Moore, and, under the belief that the English had fallen back on Portugal, moved straight on to Madrid, leaving his right flank open to Moore. Had he known Moore's position, he would certainly have turned and flung himself with overwhelming force on the British army.

Moore, however, with cool and deliberate daring, had resolved to abandon his communications with Por-

tugal and risk his fate in Spain. It galled his soldierly pride to have marched so far into the heart of Spain, to be within actual reach of the enemy, and yet strike no blow. He could, he reckoned, crush at least a single corps of the enemy, and then fall back to his ships across the Asturian hills. So he resolved to leap on Soult's corps. On December 16 he wrote: "If Marshal Soult is so good as to approach us, we shall be much obliged to him; but if not, we shall march towards him. It will be very agreeable to give a wipé to such a corps."

But presently a larger and yet more audacious policy shaped itself in Moore's brain. The British agents assured him that Madrid would hold stubbornly out against Napoleon, and Moore resolved to push on and strike at Napoleon's communications with France. He would throw himself, in a word, across the French line betwixt Bayonne and Madrid. "I see my situation," Moore wrote in his journal, "and nothing could be worse, for I have no Spanish army to give me the least assistance. Yet I am determined to try our fortune. We have no business here as things are; but being here, it would never do to abandon Spain without a struggle." "The movement I am making," he wrote again, "is of the most dangerous kind. I not only risk to be surrounded every moment by superior forces, but to have my communication intercepted with the Galicias. But I wish it to be known to the whole world that we do

not abandon the Spanish cause till long after the Spaniards have abandoned us." "I mean to proceed," he wrote again, "bridle in hand; for if the bubble bursts and Madrid falls, we shall have to run for it."

CHAPTER VII

THE RETREAT TO CORUNNA

MOORE knew by this time that Madrid had fallen, but that did not alter his plans. When Napoleon realised that the daring Englishman was striking at his communications, it was certain he would arrest the southward march of his armies and turn his whole strength on the puny and audacious foe that had attempted such a stroke. But this would—for the moment at least—save the whole south of Spain, and give it time to prepare for defence. It would arrest—if it did not wreck—Napoleon's whole campaign.

Seldom has a commander attempted a more desperate task than that to which Moore now addressed himself. He had an army equal to his own in numbers on his front, another on his left might cut him off from the sea. Napoleon himself, with an overwhelming force, marching at speed from Madrid, would break in upon his right flank. Moore's problem was, by the nicest adjustment of time, to push on far enough to bring upon himself Napoleon's rush, and yet, by nimbleness and speed, to evade that

great soldier's stroke and pluck his own army from destruction. He pushed on, therefore, to strike Soult at Sahagun; and yet, treating the forward march as really a movement of retreat, prepared stores in his rear on the roads leading to the sea-coast.

The effect of Moore's audacious policy was exactly what he calculated. Napoleon learned of Moore's advance on December 21, and acted with lightning-like swiftness of decision. He wrote to Josephine on the 22nd, "I am starting this moment to out-manceuvre the English, who appear to have received their reinforcements, and wish to play the swaggerers." To Ney he said more seriously, "Moore is now the only general fit to contend with me. I shall advance against him in person." "The day wherein we succeed in seeing these English," he added, "will be a day of jubilee for the French army. . . . Ah! that they might be met with to the number of 80,000 or 100,000 men instead of 20,000, that English mothers might feel the horrors of war! All the evils, all the plagues which can afflict the human race come from London!"

Fifty thousand French troops, with the cavalry of the Guard, were on the evening of the 22nd at the foot of the Guadarama hills. The range is wild and rugged; its ravines were choked with snow, and slippery with ice. A tempest, edged with sleet and black with rain-clouds, was scuffling over the frozen hill summits. The French advance-guard was driven

back by the mountain tempests, and the movement of the whole army arrested. "Men and horses," says Marbot, "were hurled over precipices; the leading battalions had actually begun to retreat."

But neither the deep snow nor the wild hills, nor the yet wilder tempest, could stay Napoleon's vehement purpose. He made his cavalry dismount, and the leading files to interlock their arms and press on in spite of snow and ice and blackness. Napoleon himself, with Lannes holding his arm on one side, and Duroc on the other, trudged with the leading files. The crest of the range was reached and crossed, though many men and animals died. On the 26th Napoleon had reached Tordesillas with the Guard and two divisions, having covered 100 miles in that tremendous march, and he wrote to Soult, "If the English pass to-day in their position they are lost." Still pushing furiously onward, he reached Valderas; but he was too late by exactly twelve hours! The English were across the Esla! So daringly had Moore held on to his position, so exactly had he calculated the speed and reach of Napoleon's stroke!

Moore had pressed on resolutely to attack Soult. He was slightly superior to the French in numbers, and believed he could shatter Soult's force and begin his retreat to the coast with the glory of having destroyed one of Napoleon's marshals almost in Napoleon's very presence. He proposed to make

a night-march to Carran, and there fall on Soult. At nine o'clock on the night of December 23 his troops were formed in two columns ready for the adventure. The track lay across a wide plain, thick with snow; a bitter tempest was blowing, yet the men were in the highest spirits. A great battle lay before them; and battle for the British soldier is a tonic. The right column had already fallen into quick step, when a dragoon came riding furiously up. He brought the news that Napoleon was in full march to cut off the British army. Moore arrested his impatient columns, and at dawn his divisions began to fall back.

Moore was now the pursued, not the pursuer. Soult was pressing eagerly on his rear, Napoleon thundering on his flank. On the 26th the Esla was crossed. It was a wild scene. Rain fell incessantly from the black skies; the river was rising; there was but a single clumsy boat, and an army had to cross, with all its baggage and followers. A ford was found, and infantry and artillery fought their way through the fast rising waters. Moore himself crossed by a bridge at another point, and before the long column was well over, the French cavalry were upon the hill and looking down on the scene.

The distance from Sahagun, the point at which Moore's retreat began, and Corunna, where he expected the British transports to be waiting for him, was, in a direct line, about 160 miles; the actual march

of the troops was probably about 220 miles. The retreat began on December 25. Corunna was reached on January 12. Measured thus by either distance or time, the retreat does not seem a very formidable thing. Napoleon, with 50,000 men, marched from Madrid to Villapando, 164 miles, in seven days. Moore in eight days of actual marching only covered 150 miles.

When translated into the cold terms of an itinerary, the story, indeed, is soon told. On the 26th the Esla was crossed. On the 27th Benevente was reached, and the columns halted for two days. On the 30th the headquarters were at Astorga, and a junction was effected with Baird, the combined forces at this point numbering 25,000 men. Moore had announced he would stand and fight at this point, but Soult, pressing on the British rear, was now superior in numbers to Moore, and the British general feared he might slip past his left flank and cut him off from Corunna. Junot, with the very troops which had fought at Vimiero, was moving on his right shoulder from Burgos. Lefebvre was striking at his communications from Salamanca, and betwixt Junot and Lefebvre, Napoleon was coming up like a tempest. Moore, in a word, was within a crescent-like curve of hostile armies, more than five times as numerous as his own, and all moving upon him by lines which resembled the radii of a circle converging to its centre.

On December 30 he fell back from Astorga. On January 1 Napoleon reached that place, and 80,000 French troops with 200 guns were concentrated there. It is a proof of Napoleon's energy that within ten days of learning Moore's strategy, and in the depth of winter, he had carried so great an army across 200 miles of mountainous country and in the wildest weather. But it is also a dramatic justification of Moore's strategy that he had drawn a hostile force so formidable into a hilly corner of Spain, thus staying its southward rush. The French columns which crowded Astorga would have been marching on Lisbon but for the English general's skilful and audacious strategy. It is a proof, again, of the perfection of Napoleon's military art, that he and Soult, marching through wild country and wild weather, and from widely separated points, the one traversing over a hundred, the other over two hundred miles of difficult roads, yet had effected their junction at the agreed point and the agreed moment with something like mathematical exactness.

At Astorga Napoleon surrendered the pursuit of the English to Soult. The adroit Englishman had evaded him, and the whole concentration of Napoleon's columns, planned with such skill and urged with such fire, had failed! Napoleon relieved his feelings privately by much angry rhetoric. Thus on December 31 he writes to Joseph: "My vanguard is near Astorga; the English are running away as fast as they