

can. . . . They are abhorred by everybody ; they have carried off everything, and then maltreated and beaten the inhabitants. There could not have been a better sedative for Spain than to send here an English army." The same day he writes to Josephine : "I have been for several days pursuing the English, but they fly in terror." Again, on January 1, 1809, he wrote to Fouché : "The English have abandoned the Spaniards in a shameful and cowardly manner. We are pursuing them hotly. . . . The English, it appears, have sent for 10,000 horses, so as to escape more quickly. Have all this shown up in the newspapers. Have caricatures made, and songs and popular ditties written. Have them translated into German and Italian, and circulated in Italy and Germany." Napoleon was determined to celebrate, at least, a literary triumph over his enemies !

Moore now divided his army ; his light companies under Craufurd took the road to Vigo, while he himself fell back to Villefranca. On January 6 he reached Lugo and turned to face Soult. The Frenchman, however, shrank from closing with his enemy till Victor, who was coming up with 20,000 men, should join him. On the 8th Moore made a night march to Valmeda. On the 10th the columns reached Betanzos. On the 12th the British looked down from the summits of the hill near Corunna, only to find the bay empty.

During this retreat of eighteen days it will be seen

that Moore's forces actually halted four days, and it seems difficult to understand how a British army, unshaken by defeat and splendidly led, should practically have fallen into ruin in a period of time so short. But the march from Sahagun to Corunna was, for suffering and horror, like a tiny section of the Moscow retreat. The track lay through the savage Asturian hills. It was winter-time. Tempests raged almost incessantly. Every stream was swollen, every ravine was choked with snow. The troops were without shelter; and it may be frankly admitted that British troops do not shine in the virtues required in a retreat. The men grow sullen and reckless. Discipline vanishes. The British private would rather stand in his tracks and die facing the enemy than tramp, perhaps with bleeding feet and hungry stomach, to escape him.

At Valderas and Benevente the troops discovered great vaults stored with wine, and wild scenes of drunkenness took place, and still more fatally affected discipline. At Astorga the British columns found the town occupied by the wreck of Romana's army—a mass of worn-out wretches, half-naked and more than half-starved, fermenting with disease of every kind; and this helped to shake still further the morale of the British troops themselves.

But the toil of the marches, along roads knee-deep in mud, or through wild passes choked with snow, the incessant rain, the bitter cold, the exhaustion of

hunger, taxed human strength and endurance to the breaking-point. The marches were sometimes pushed with unwise energy. More than once no halt was made during the short, bitter, winter day, and the long black winter night that followed, and scores of men fell dead in the staggering ranks, killed by pure fatigue. The country in some places was most difficult, and an officer who shared the horrors of the retreat has described the extraordinary sight witnessed in one wild and gloomy valley which had to be passed. "Thousands of the red-coats," he says, "were creeping like snails up the ascent before us, their muskets slung round their necks, and clambering, with both hands, as they hauled themselves up." "I looked round when we had hardly gained the highest point of those slippery precipices, and saw the rear of the army winding along the narrow road. I saw their way marked by the wretched people who lay on all sides, dying from fatigue and cold. Their bodies reddened in spots the white surface of the ground." Now and again a tableland had to be crossed, over which the tempest raved with unchecked fury, and the toiling columns were almost buried in snow; their track was strewn with the dead and the dying. "The long day," says the writer we have already quoted, "found us still pushing on; the night caused us no halt."

Little groups of soldiers—often with women and children amongst them—sat huddled together in the

snow with bent heads, waiting for death. The troops that limped into Corunna were gaunt, bent, ragged, many literally blind with fatigue and hardship. Napier, afterwards the historian of the Peninsular War, shared in the sufferings and heroism of this retreat. "I marched," he says, "for several days with bare feet. The days and nights were filled with scuffling tempests of sleet and snow." Napier had only a jacket and a pair of linen trousers for clothes. "My feet," he says, "were swelled, and bled at every step in such a manner that General Craufurd, who saw me in that state, turned his head away."

Yet the blackness of this retreat was lit up with gleams of splendid heroism. The rear-guard, under the tonic of perpetual battle, maintained their discipline unbroken. They passed whole nights under arms in snow and rain. Twice they made forced marches of forty miles across savage country and muddy roads. Seven times they closed in desperate conflict with the pursuers. Yet they lost fewer men than any other part of the army!

Courage, indeed, was a quality which never failed even the stragglers. More than once, when the French cavalry were amongst them, they turned upon them under some leader chosen at the moment, fell into rough order, and drove off the French horsemen with slaughter. A British army in the worst horrors of retreat, when every military virtue seems to have perished, instantly feels the summons to

battle as an inspiration. The stragglers, somehow, crystallise into regiments. The sick forget their pains. Discipline asserts its ancient magic, and what, an hour before, seemed a procession of limping and ragged fugitives, becomes suddenly a formidable and by no means uncheerful army. At Lugo, Moore turned at bay, and the process instantly brought the stragglers back to the ranks and restored authority to the officers. The men forgot hunger, cold, and sickness, and became jesting and hardy soldiers again. Soult refused to fight, and when the retreat began once more, with new hardships, the sullen troops fell afresh into disorder.

The part taken by the cavalry under Paget in this retreat was very gallant. They faced with cheerful courage and tireless hardihood the vastly superior French cavalry which pressed on the British rear, and never failed to overthrow them in the actual shock of the charge. Some of the cavalry exploits on the British side were singularly brilliant. Thus, on December 26, Paget turned on the French horsemen near Mayorga. The French cavalry made their appearance on the summit of a steep hill, and seemed about to ride down on the British stragglers beneath. Paget sent two squadrons of the 10th Hussars at them. The slope of the hill was sodden with rain, and in places thick with snow. Colonel Leigh, of the 10th, rode boldly with his first squadron up the face of the hill, and men and horses were blown

when they reached the crest. With great coolness Leigh halted his men to give them breath, dressed his line—all under sharp fire—and then rode straight in on the French, who were foolish enough to receive the charge while halted. These two squadrons of Hussars actually killed and captured of the French a number exceeding their own entire force.

Again, on the 29th, at Castro Gonsalo, some 600 French cavalry of the Guard pushed across the river on the British pickets. Colonel Otway, who commanded the rearmost posts, drew his pickets together, numbering at first only sixty men, and coolly faced the French. As other pickets fell in, and Otway's force grew, he suddenly rode at the leading French squadron, overthrew it, slaying its captain, and then fell back before the main body of the French could reach him. The plain was covered with stragglers, baggage-mules, &c., and if the French cavalry could have broken through that thin screen of British horse, they would have wrought enormous mischief. Paget had placed the 10th Hussars under cover of some houses, and when the French had advanced into the plain, these rode out at a gallop, charged and broke the enemy, drove them back to the river, riding furiously in their tumbled ranks, and slaying almost at will. Their commander, General Lefebvre-Desnouettes, was captured. "At this moment," says Marbot, "the Emperor came up. Imagine his wrath at hearing that not only had his favourite regiment

undergone a repulse, but that its commander remained in the hands of the English." Marbot adds that the English refused to exchange the captured general, as they wished to exhibit in London as a captive "one of the commanders of the Imperial Guard of France."

Moore lost 4000 men in the marches and hardships of those eighteen days. It is an expressive proof of the severities endured, that when the Royals reached Batanzos they only mustered with the colours nine officers, three sergeants, and three privates. The rest had dropped on the road. But it is a sufficient demonstration that whatever were Moore's losses in this disastrous retreat his men never lost their fighting quality, that when the much-enduring columns marched over 14,000 strong into Corunna, they had not lost a gun or a flag to the enemy.

Paget, perhaps, is the most gallant figure in the black landscape of the retreat to Corunna; but Craufurd, though a sterner, is quite as heroic a figure in the march made by the light troops to Vigo. The Rifles furnished the rear-guard of this body, and these valiant, hardy, but self-willed veterans found in Craufurd a leader of fiercer temper than even their own, and his stern will held them together with iron severity and vigour. Craufurd knew that the safety of the column depended upon its discipline, and he enforced it with ruthless energy, shooting or hanging defaulters under the very muskets of the

attacking French. Nothing tired him. Nothing daunted him. The feeling betwixt the Rifles and Craufurd was, on both sides, an odd compound of dread, anger, and affection. "The Rifles," says one who tells the story from the ranks, "being always at his heels, he seemed to think them his familiars. If he stopped his horse, and halted to deliver one of his stern reprimands, you would see half-a-dozen lean, unshaven, shoeless, and savage riflemen, standing for the moment leaning upon their weapons, and scowling up in his face as he scolded; and when he dashed the spurs into his reeking horse, they would throw up their rifles upon their shoulders and hobble after him again."

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIGHT AT CORUNNA

A PAUSE of three days occurred after Moore's footsore soldiers limped into Corunna. The British transports had not made their appearance, and had to be summoned from Vigo. Soult's troops were almost as much exhausted as the British, and it was not until the 14th that there were any signs of the French onfall. Moore filled up the interval with some grim preparations for embarkation. More than 4000 barrels of gunpowder were stored in the magazine outside Corunna, and on the 13th this huge mass of explosives was blown up. The earth shook under the blast of the explosion, a wave of sound rolled with the majesty of thunder up the trembling hills and far over the quivering sea. The waves ran back from the beach. Into the blue sky shot a gigantic column of smoke, a black and mighty pillar that seemed to run beyond human vision into the azure depths. Then this aerial column wavered and broke; and back to earth rushed a tempest of stones and fragments of iron and wood, killing many persons.

Next all the foundered cavalry and artillery horses were shot. No less than 290 horses of the German Legion alone were in this way destroyed; and of the horses of the 15th Hussars, 400 strong when they entered Spain, only fifteen were left. Betwixt a cavalryman and his horse the tie becomes very close, and the German dragoons and the English hussars expressed their feelings about the slaughter of their horses in characteristic fashion—the hussars by loud and energetic swearing, the German dragoons by not a little sentimental weeping.

On the 14th the transports reached the bay, and Moore at once embarked his baggage, his sick, and his artillery. On the 16th, as the French still seemed reluctant to attack, Moore determined to ship his whole force. At noon he mounted his horse and rode off to visit his outposts, having given orders that the embarkation was to begin at four. At this moment the French columns were seen moving on the slopes of the hills looking down on Corunna. They were about to attack. As Moore gazed steadfastly at the huge columns coming into sight, his face lit up. The tragedy of the retreat was not to close without the stern rapture of battle and of victory.

Soult had 20,000 troops and a strong artillery; Moore had only 14,500 men, with nine light pieces—six-pounders. The French occupied a range of steep and rocky hills stretching in a curve from the Mero to the St. Jago road. This range constitutes the true

defence of Corunna, but Moore had not troops enough to hold it. He fell back upon a lower and shorter range of hills nearer the town. The two ranges are not strictly parallel; they resemble, indeed, the two sides of a triangle, with the river Mero as a base. The inner side of the triangle, held by the British, does not actually meet the range on which the French stood. A valley running clear down to Corunna broke the British line near the vertex of the triangle. Beyond the valley rises an isolated hill, a prolongation of the hilly ridge held by the British. Immediately opposite the gap in the British front the hill held by the French rises to a rocky crest, and to the summit of this Soult had dragged eleven heavy guns. With these he could scourge the valley, rake the whole front of the British line, which approached the French obliquely, and could sweep the shoulder of the British position, only 1200 yards distant, which looked down on the valley.

This rocky crest with its heavy battery, held by Mermet's division, formed Soult's left; his centre was occupied by Merle's division, his right by Delaborde's. On the British side, Hope's division formed the left and centre; Baird's division, holding the hill under the stroke of Soult's great battery, constituted Moore's right. The isolated hill beyond the valley was held by the 28th and 91st, while a thin chain of rifle pickets stretched across the little valley betwixt the hill and Baird. Betwixt Soult's great battery

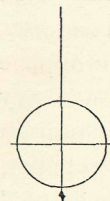
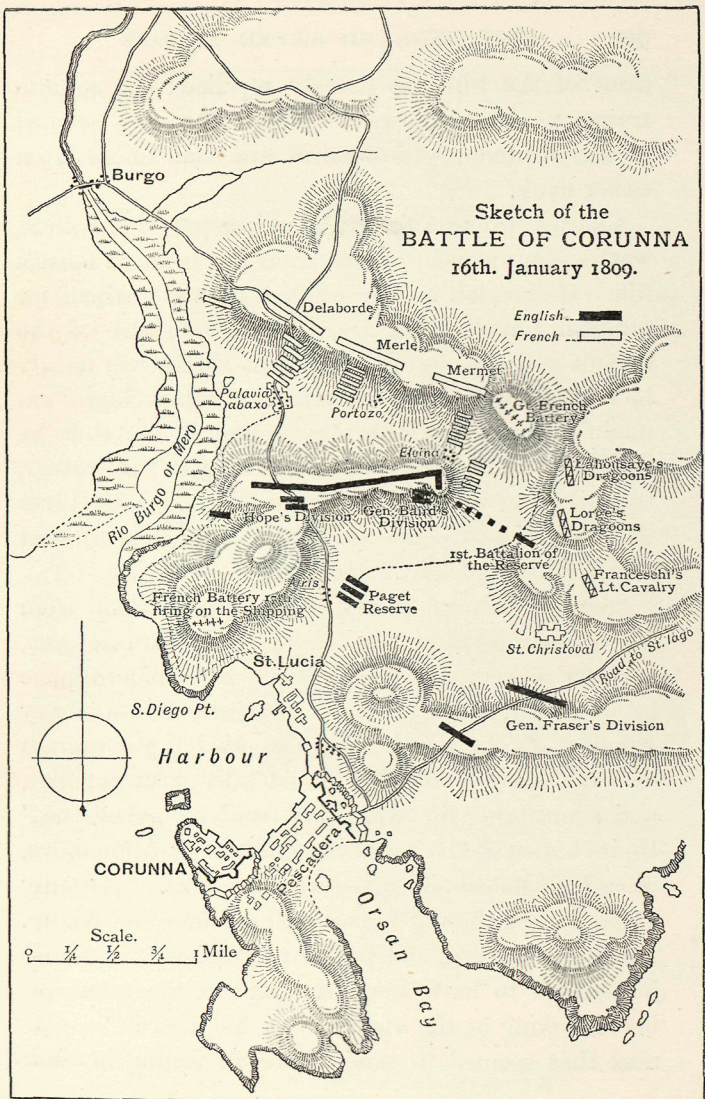
and Baird's hill was the village of Elvina, held as an outpost by the pickets of the 50th.

The British line, looked at from Soult's position, was pierced by what seemed a fatal gap—the valley betwixt Baird and the isolated hill held by the two regiments named. Soult attacked simultaneously along the whole British front, but the strength of his onfall was really flung on Baird. The great battery on the rocky crest we have described scourged Baird's hill with a tempest of shot. Then a heavy column of infantry came at the double down the slope of the French position, its officers, with brandished swords, leading, the men sending up a tumult of shouts, "Tuez! tuez!" ("Kill! kill!"). The British pickets were thrust in an instant out of Elvina. The French column, as it came on, broke into two. One column attacked the English hill boldly in front, the second brushed aside the rifle pickets which formed a screen across the valley, and tried to turn the shoulder of the hill, so as to take Baird's position in reverse.

The apparent gap in the English line, however, was in reality a death-trap for the French. The column that broke into it found itself scourged with a deadly musketry fire on both flanks. From the isolated hill, the 28th and 91st, reinforced by Paget's division, poured incessant volleys; from the 42nd on Baird's hill, drawn up at right angles to the British front, a fire as close and deadly rolled. The attack on the

Sketch of the
BATTLE OF CORUNNA
 16th. January 1809.

English... [thick black line]
 French... [thin white line]



Scale.
 0 1/4 1/2 3/4 1 Mile

front of the hill was fiercely repelled; the column trying to force its way through the gap seemed to shrivel under the dreadful fire that smote it on either flank.

Charles Napier, afterwards the conqueror of Scinde, was in command of the 50th on the front of Baird's hill. He has left a description of the fight, which, for mingled humour and fire, and as a picture of the tumult and distraction of a great battle, can hardly be excelled in English literature. Charles Napier has made history; but this description shows that he could also have written it as brilliantly as his brother, the historian of the Peninsular War. Napier gives us a sort of verbal photograph of Moore's bearing at this stage of the fight. He says:—

“I stood in front of my left wing on a knoll from whence the greatest part of the field could be seen, and my pickets were fifty yards below, disputing the ground with the French skirmishers, but a heavy French column, which had descended the mountain at a run, was coming on behind with great rapidity, and shouting—‘En avant, tue, tue! en avant, tue!’ their cannon at the same time, plunging from above, ploughed the ground and tore our ranks. Suddenly I heard the gallop of horses, and turning, saw Moore. He came at speed, and pulled up so sharp and close, he seemed to have alighted from the air, man and horse looking at the approaching foe with an intentness that seemed to concentrate all feeling in their



SIR CHARLES NAPIER

From a lithograph after a drawing by SMART



eyes. The sudden stop of the animal—a cream-coloured one with black tail and mane—had cast the latter streaming forwards, its ears were pushed out like horns, while its eyes flashed fire, and it snorted loudly with expanded nostrils. My first thought was, 'It will be away like the wind;' but then I looked at the rider, and the horse was forgotten! Thrown on its haunches, the animal came sliding and dashing the dirt up with its forefeet, thus bending the General forward almost to its neck; but his head was thrown back, and his look more keenly piercing than I ever before saw it. He glanced to the right and left, and then fixed his eyes intently on the enemy's advancing column, at the same time grasping the reins with both his hands, and pressing the horse firmly with his knees; his body thus seemed to deal with the animal, while his mind was intent on the enemy, and his aspect was one of searching intensesness beyond the power of words to describe. For a while he looked, and then galloped to the left without uttering a word!"

As a companion picture to Moore, Napier describes the general in command of his own division—Lord William Bentinck—ambling up on a quiet mule through the heavy fire and chatting with Napier, mule and general seeming equally indifferent to the flying bullets and the falling men. Bentinck, adds Napier, began discoursing on things in general "with more than his usual good-humour and placidity."



"I remember saying to myself," writes Napier, "this chap takes it coolly, or the devil's in it!"

When Bentinck and his mule ambled off, Napier, whose temper was of the fieriest, took the 50th forward, drove the French out of Elvina, fought his way up to the base of the crag from which Soult's great battery was thundering, and with some thirty privates attempted to storm it. Bentinck, however, had ordered back the main body of the regiment, Napier's little group was destroyed, and he himself taken prisoner by the French.

Meanwhile Hope had roughly flung back the columns attacking the British left and centre; the columns which had assailed Baird's hill were recoiling in confusion, and Moore saw that the moment had come for a counter-stroke. He was bringing up Paget's division to storm the great battery, and so thrust back Soult's left and tumble his line in ruins into the Mero. But at that moment Moore himself was struck down. A cannon-shot smote him on the left shoulder, carrying away part of the collar-bone and leaving the arm hanging by the flesh. Moore was hurled from his horse by the stroke, but his eager spirit was fixed on the conflict raging in front of him, where the Black Watch was at that moment driving back the French column. The stricken general raised himself up on his right elbow, not a line in his face altering, and eagerly watched the struggle. Some soldiers of the 42nd ran up to carry Moore to the

rear. Hardinge, his aide-de-camp, proceeded to unbuckle his sword, but that seemed to touch the dying man's honour. "I had rather it should go out of the field with me," he said. Hardinge, noting Moore's absorption in the battle and indifference to his own wound, expressed a hope that he would recover. Moore turned his head round for a moment, looked composedly at the dreadful wound, and said, "No, Hardinge; I feel that to be impossible."

As the soldiers carried him off the field he repeatedly made them halt and turn, that he might watch the fight. A much-attached servant met the little group and broke into tears. "My friend," said Moore to him with a smile, "this is nothing!" The scene in the room where Moore died was almost as pathetic as that in the cockpit of the *Victory* when Nelson met his fate. The dying soldier said to Colonel Anderson, "You know, Anderson, I have always wished to die this way." "I hope," he said again and again, "the people of England will be satisfied; I hope my country will do me justice." Then he would ask, "Are the French beaten?" Moore's thoughts turned presently to the youthful soldier who had commanded the reserve, and had shown a resolution, a coolness, and a mastery over his soldiers which no veteran could have surpassed. "Is Paget in the room?" he asked. He was told "No." "Remember me to him," he whispered; then with emphasis, "Remember me to him. He

is a fine fellow!" Only once his voice broke, when giving a last message for his mother. "I feel myself so strong," he said again, "I fear I shall be long dying." But he was not. Death came with merciful swiftness. As night fell, while the thunder of the battle grew ever fainter in the distance, Moore's gallant spirit passed away.

Moore's death arrested and made imperfect the victory the British had won. Baird, his second in command, had been severely wounded, and Hope assumed direction of affairs. If the British reserves had been thrown frankly into the fight, it can hardly be doubted that Soult would have been—not merely defeated, but destroyed. But Hope held that enough had been done for glory. He forbore to press the retiring French columns, marched his own regiments under cover of night to the shore, and embarked them swiftly and without confusion, Hill's brigade holding Corunna to cover the embarkation. When morning came Soult discovered that the British army had vanished, and he advanced slowly over the scene of the battle of the previous day. Some of the French guns opened fire on the transports, but a British seventy-four thundered angrily back in reply, the fire ceased, and, with bellying sails, the transports drew off from the coast of Spain, with the wreck of Moore's gallant but ill-fated force.

Baird had been wounded by a grape-shot which struck him high on his left arm and shattered the

bone. He walked with unchanged brow into Corunna, and, when the surgeons decided that the arm must be removed out of the socket, he sat, leaning his right arm on a table, without a sigh or groan while, with the rough surgery of the period, that dreadful operation was performed! It must be admitted that the standard of hardihood in the soldiers of that age was high.

The story of Moore's burial has been made immortal in Wolfe's noble lines, but severe historical accuracy is not usually characteristic of poetry. It is not true that "no useless coffin enclosed his breast." He was not buried "darkly, at dead of night." A grave was dug for the dead soldier on the ramparts by some men of the 9th Regiment; his body was wrapped in a military cloak and blanket, and laid in a rough coffin, and at eight o'clock in the morning, just as the transports were drawing off the shore, Moore was buried. Still his lonely tomb stands on the ramparts of Corunna. Southward are the wild and lofty hills across which, with so much suffering, he had brought his army. Nearer is the low range where he turned at bay and overthrew his pursuers. Above his grave stands a monument, reared by the hands of Frenchmen, bearing the brief and soldierly inscription, "John Moore, leader of the English armies, slain in battle, 1809."

Moore, some one has said, is known only because "a poet of a single song sang him an immortal

dirge;" but this is an absurd estimate. If Wolfe had never written his famous lines, Moore, by force of character and the scale of his achievements, would have lived long in English memory. He had, perhaps, every quality of a great soldier save one. He lacked hopefulness. His courage was, it is true, serenely heroic. In personal character he had a touch of Tennyson's Sir Galahad. He was noble-minded, with a haughty scorn of falsehood and of meanness, and a devotion to duty which knew neither limit nor flaw. He had a curious faculty for touching the better nature of those about him. No man could be base or selfish while under his influence. His standard in soldiership was singularly high, and his mastery of the science of war has not often been surpassed in British military records. But he was over-anxious. He lacked the iron steadfastness which is unmoved by the shock of disaster. His very sense of responsibility sometimes shadowed his clear intellect. He seemed to fail in the sense of perspective;—smaller difficulties that were near, that is, sometimes hid from him great advantages which were distant. Yet amongst the gallant soldiers who have fought and died for the honour of England, there is no loftier and more lovable figure than that of Sir John Moore.