

The fall of Almeida followed that of Rodrigo in due course. It was precipitated by a catastrophe, for the great powder magazine blew up, shattering the works of defence and destroying the bulk of the ammunition. The arrangements for the inevitable capitulation were facilitated by the treachery or timidity of the Portuguese Sub-Governor. So far Masséna was still the favourite of Fortune, and the way into Portugal lay open before him, obstructed by nothing save natural obstacles.

The genius of Wellington had considered and made the most of these, but the choice of routes lay with Masséna, and Wellington's immediate plans must be regulated on those of the enemy. The first point cleared up was that nothing was to be apprehended from Andalusia; it was known certainly that Reynier after trifling with Hill, had united his corps to Masséna's main army. So the forces mustered for the concentrated attack fell little short of 70,000 men, with reserves of somewhat inferior strength scattered between Almeida and Bayonne. To these, after a junction with Hill, who had received orders to march northward immediately, Wellington could only oppose a mixed force of English and Portuguese, mustering between 50,000 and 60,000. As for reserves, they rested simply on the precarious chance of receiving reinforcements from home, and he knew that defeat falling short of disaster would be tantamount to peremptory orders for embarkation. Instead of following the direct road by the left bank of the Mondego, which would have given him the advantages of a richer and more open country, Masséna decided for turning the heights behind Celerico by way of Vizeu, and the mountainous roads to the northward. He distributed scanty rations for fourteen days, and only

French soldiers could have been trusted to husband these. Disciplined marauders as they were, they understood the necessities of self-restraint. But everything depended on prompt action, and he wasted time. The delays would have been even more serious had not Wellington's edicts of destruction been indifferently carried out. He made another mistake which might have been disastrous. He detached his artillery and transport train by the northward road, with an escort so slender as to leave it practically defenceless. Trant, with his Portuguese, attacking in a gorge, threw the head of the straggling march into dire confusion. Had he followed up his success, the invading army must have lost its guns and ammunition. The misfortune was only averted by the dashing 'bluff' of the French commander, and by Masséna's illustrious reputation. Trant could not believe that the experienced soldier would have sent his artillery train into the mountains almost absolutely unguarded.

Masséna's leading battalions pressed close upon the British rearguard, with frequent skirmishing, till brought up before the ridge of Busaco. Busaco is a range of almost precipitous heights, eight miles in length, sloping down on the south to a ford on the Mondego, and connected to the north with another Sierra by rugged and impracticable country. Wellington, who, as has been said, felt constrained on political grounds to offer battle, selected it as the scene of action. The allied forces, passing the Mondego, were in the act of taking up their positions when the French, under Ney and Reynier, approached the base of the mountain. Ney, with his military instinct, saw at a glance that the English preparations were only in progress. He sent to Masséna on the 26th of September to urge immediate assault. But Masséna

was ten miles in the rear. He did not reach the scene of operations until mid-day, and then, after distributing the troops he had brought with slow deliberation, he proceeded to make a leisurely survey. After hesitation and consultation he came to a resolution. Ney has been severely blamed by Marbot and others for urging Masséna to attack, and afterwards taxing him with temerity. But in fact then, as perhaps afterwards before Torres Vedras, the opportune moment had gone by. Hill with the 3d Corps had now crossed the Mondego, and was holding the weakest position to the British right, and thence to the northward all the heights were crowned with brigades in commanding positions and batteries advantageously posted.

Nevertheless, Ney characteristically persevered, and the battle began before daybreak on the 27th September. The French formed in five columns of attack, and never did they display more dauntless courage or more wonderful agility than when scaling the steeps of that 'iron ridge.' Column after column, arriving breathless on the heights, established its broken head on the crest, to be shattered by a withering musketry fire at close range, and to be hurled downwards again by fierce bayonet charges. The combatants got inextricably mixed among the cliffs and the bushwood, till at last the British bugles sounded the recall. Had the cliffs been nearly sheer, the assailants would have been sheltered till they faced the musketry. But natural salients jutted out here and there, and on these the field batteries were established. So the scaling columns were enfiladed by storms of grape that drove along the faces of the cliffs. Even the dogged courage of Ney at last succumbed, and in the afternoon, as the fire slackened, the assailants withdrew. The loss of the French was heavy, probably amounting to nearly 5000.

That of the allies was computed at 1300, and Wellington, comparatively cheaply, had won his political and material success. Perhaps one of the most important results was that it stimulated the *moral* of the Portuguese. In their first pitched battle with the enemy they had borne a creditable part in a glorious victory.

Masséna had no thought of renewing the onslaught. He could not turn Busaco on the left, for the British held the fords, and would anticipate him in crossing the river. But he had heard from a Portuguese gardener of a hill-road to his right, said to have been unknown to him and neglected by Wellington. The fact being that Wellington had entrusted its defence to Trant, and that Trant, by a stupid blunder of the Portuguese general, had been prevented from occupying it in sufficient force. Marbot declares that he had pressed his personal knowledge of it on Masséna, and that had the Marshal taken his advice in time, Busaco might have been turned and the butchery avoided. Be that as it may, Masséna tardily adopted the route, and when his army had cleared the narrow defiles, and opened out on the plain between the Sierra and the sea, its safety was ensured by its superiority in cavalry.

Wellington had fought Busaco *en parenthèse*, as it were, and now he reverted to his plan and his retreat. Evidently Masséna, though he knew nothing of the lines of Torres Vedras, should have hesitated to follow. His surest game would have been to strengthen himself on the Tagus, to occupy Oporto, the rich northern province, and maintaining communications with Spain to wait on events, with reinforcements and support from Andalusia. But feeling his reputation compromised, he was eager to retrieve his check and to hasten the embarkation of Wellington and his army.

There was no little consternation in Coimbra when

the inhabitants learned that the victorious allies were still falling back, and that the consequence of the victory was to be the evacuation of their city. No time was given for preparation or lamentation. As the retreat poured through Coimbra, it was swollen by a general exodus of the panic-stricken citizens. Every beast and vehicle was pressed into the service to carry away what effects could be saved. The ranks were broken by the mob of fugitives; all discipline was relaxed, and the soldiers became riotous. When the light division had passed the bridge and entered the narrow defile of Condeixa, it was actually choked and paralysed by the crush; and for hours it was at the mercy of the French, had they charged home in earnest. But when the division had been extricated, order was restored, and Wellington's wise severity brought the riotous soldiery to reason. Thenceforth the retreat was conducted in as orderly fashion as the painful circumstances admitted, for droves of sheep and cattle still encumbered the roads.

On the other hand, Masséna, having resolved on pursuit, again neglected opportunities. Not only did he waste precious days in Coimbra, but he indulged his soldiers in licence. The stores found in the town, if carefully husbanded, might have fed his army for weeks. But they were pillaged and squandered, and when the march was resumed his commissariat was as poorly provided as before. And in the second week of October the allied army was entering the lines of Torres Vedras.

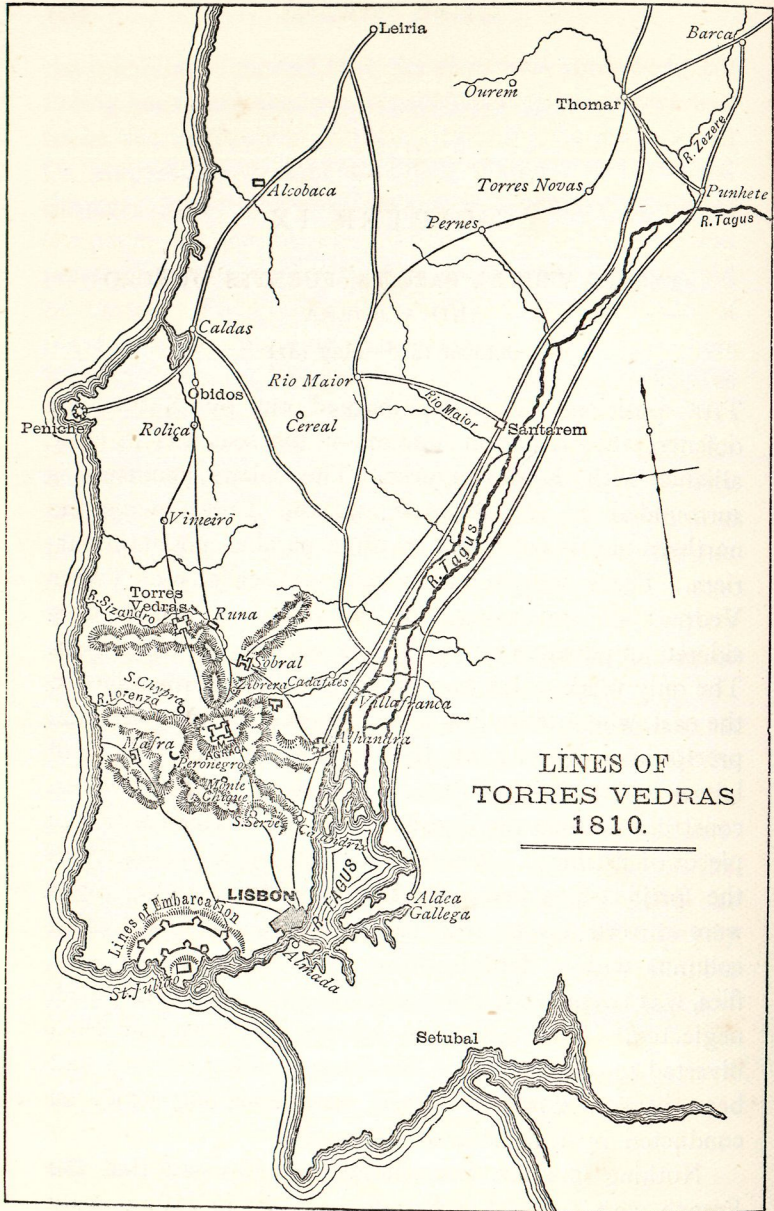
CHAPTER IX

TORRES VEDRAS, BAROSSA, FUENTES D'ONORO AND ALBUERA

October 1810—May 1811

THE position had been marked out by Nature for defence, when a nation supreme on the seas was in close alliance with the Portuguese. The oblong peninsula is surrounded by the Atlantic and the Tagus, while the northern face is protected by three parallel mountain barriers. These are the famous lines—miscalled—of Torres Vedras; all are strong, but the first was merely considered an advance work, and the second is the strongest. The only weak point was on an extent of three miles to the east, where there is a level between the river and the precipitous descent of the mountains. Science and labour had assisted Nature. Sixty-nine works had been constructed along the line, and they were armed with 320 pieces of artillery. Where there seemed a possibility of the fortifications being forced, redoubts at right angles were thrown up to the rear to sweep the penetrating columns with a flanking fire. The length, as the crow flies, was twenty-five miles, and no precautions had been neglected. Hills had been scarped, streams had been diverted to submerge the low-lying country, bridges had been broken down or mined, and signalling could be conducted by a system of telegraphs.

Nothing is more remarkable than the fact that the French, with their many friends and spies in Lisbon, were



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left in absolute ignorance of these preparations. Nothing was known of them at headquarters in Paris, and Masséna had almost run his head against the works when he heard accidentally of their existence from a captured peasant. It is the opinion of Thiébauld and Marbot that he might have attempted immediate attack with fair prospects of success. That is more than questionable. In any case, for a fortnight he waited and hesitated. Then he made up his mind for the assault. But Ney, who, as at Busaco, differed from the Marshal, flatly refused to obey both his verbal and written orders. The insubordination, for which he ought to have been promptly superseded had Masséna been more sure of his position, was reasonable, if not justifiable. Wellington had set the soldiers to work, assisted by great bodies of labourers, and each day had added to the strength of the fortifications. It is barely possible they might have been taken in the *élan* of a rush, but the French liked them less the longer they contemplated them. Their historians admit that the scare was so great, that each seam of earth turned up by the spade was assumed at once to be a trench or a battery.

Masséna's alternate hesitation and impetuosity had betrayed him into a situation which became more embarrassing day by day. He had fondly contemplated a rapid march on Lisbon, which would have given effect to the Emperor's instructions by driving the British into their ships. He found himself before a fortified camp, made impregnable to storm and never to be reduced by blockade. Meantime his own straits were severe. He had wasted the stores taken in Coimbra and Leiria. The Portuguese irregulars were pressing on his outposts everywhere, cutting his communications and capturing his convoys. Above all, Trant, by a dashing feat of

arms, had seized on Coimbra, with the sick and wounded in his hospitals and the garrison left for their guard. There he lost 5000 men. Mortifying as it might be to his soldierly pride, there was nothing for it but retreat—the confession of failure—and then, as afterwards, from his next positions, the retreat was conducted in most masterly fashion. First deceiving Wellington as to his intention, then keeping him continually mystified as to his lines of march, he retired to Santarem on the Tagus, where he established his headquarters. Then the situation was reversed. Wellington, on following, found himself stopped by the river backed up by strongly-fortified heights held by a host of resolute veterans, where an attack was not to be lightly hazarded, and Masséna had no mind to throw away his advantages and come down to offer battle.

Weeks dragged away in comparative inactivity. Masséna's anxieties were in no way diminished. The connection with France was made so precarious by the guerrillas and Portuguese that Foy, who had been sent to Paris for instructions, only returned to Santarem with extreme difficulty. He brought a repetition of the Emperor's peremptory orders to persist in the subjugation of Portugal and the expulsion of the British. Supplies were promised. Drouet, Count d'Erlon, had been ordered forward in support with the 9th Corps, and Masséna was assured of the co-operation of the army of Andalusia. In fact a great convoy, with an escort of 5000 men, had already left Castille under General Gardanne. But communications had been so successfully interrupted that Gardanne was in absolute ignorance of where Masséna was to be found. Wandering aimlessly hither and thither, he actually retraced his steps when within a march of the Zezere River, leaving the bulk of his stores and many of

his men in the hands of the Partidas. Drouet did arrive at last, bringing half the number of troops expected. But he put forward his pretensions to independent command, which by some strange oversight were well founded; he could only be flattered into acquiescence with Masséna's plans; he was tampered with by Ney, and finally he lent his influence to the malcontents. For from Ney and the generals of division downwards the whole army was eager to return to Spain. Soult, who might have hurried forward to Torres Vedras, had been carrying out a brilliant little campaign on his own account. In the words of Napoleon, Soult won him a fortress and lost him a kingdom. At last Masséna's resolution and obstinacy gave way. Sacrificing the elaborate preparations he had been making for re-crossing the Tagus, he broke up his camp, again by his adroitness gained a start on his watchful adversary, and resumed the retreat to the Spanish frontier. His decision was probably accelerated by the news that formidable reinforcements from England were landing at Lisbon. It was on the 6th of March he commenced his movements to the rear—as it happened, on the very day after Graham had saved the battle of Barossa.

To revert to affairs in Spain. Before Masséna's retreat, his outposts had actually heard the sound of Soult's cannonading, but no help had come to him from that quarter. Consequent on the interruption of communications, it was only in the end of December that Soult had received his orders to advance to Masséna's aid. He answered that he could not spare a sufficient force to penetrate the Alemtejo; nevertheless, on the 2d January, he had assembled an army of 20,000 men to operate against the frontier fortresses. On the 6th he had passed the bridge at Merida,

Mendizabel, who commanded the Spaniards, withdrawing before him. Lord Wellington, who had foreseen Soult's movement, through Romana who was then in his camp and who was Mendizabel's superior, had warned that general to concentrate behind the Guadiana. But Mendizabel was equally headstrong and incapable. He shut up 4000 of his best soldiers in Olivença, a place of no strategical importance and incapable of defence. After a short siege the governor capitulated, giving Soult great stores of provision with many guns. He had already defeated Mendizabel at the Gebora, taking 8000 prisoners. Meantime Gazan's division had routed Ballesteros, and the Spaniards having lost 12,000 men by death, wounds, capture and desertion, at last crossed the Guadiana as a disorderly mob. Mendizabel, with several thousand fugitives, sought refuge under the guns of Badajoz, and on the 26th Soult proceeded to invest that fortress, formidable from its strength, but indifferently provisioned.

Victor, with 20,000 men, had been maintaining the blockade of Cadiz. With a garrison numerically superior, and including a strong British and Portuguese contingent, it was obvious that operations would be contemplated by the beleaguered to break the besieging lines, extending for no less than five-and-twenty miles. The British were commanded by the veteran General Graham—the Spaniards by Manuel de La Peña. The plan of the allies was to embark their forces, and, landing at Tarifa, countermarch upon Victor's covering camp at Chiclana, to the north-east of his lines. Co-operating with a corps from the city, they had hoped to take the Marshal by surprise. The expedition, though well devised, was grossly mismanaged. In the first place, Graham, to secure cordial co-operation, contrary to his instructions,

ceded the chief command to the Spaniard, and was only too obedient to La Peña's insane orders. Then the elements were against the allies. In place of landing at Tarifa they were driven on to Algeiras. When they did disembark, forgetting that the design was to effect a surprise, La Peña went out of his way to attack Medina-Sidonia, but turned back to the direct line of march on hearing that the town was entrenched. It is true that surprise was, in any case, impossible. Victor had seen the embarkation from his works, and penetrated its intention. He had gathered 10,000 of his best troops into Chiclana, and was patrolling the roads to the east. Fully expecting to find Victor prepared, Graham urged on La Peña the propriety of bringing up the troops by easy stages so that they might come fresh to the inevitable battle. La Peña brought them into presence of the enemy fagged and half-famished after a fifteen hours' march, when many stragglers had fallen out of the ranks. So they reached the Cerro de Puerco, the 'Hogback,' better known in English history as the heights of Barossa. Barossa is a low ridge, with the Atlantic cliffs on its left, overlooking a high and rolling plateau covered on the right by the forest of Chiclana. In front was a pine wood running up the slopes of Bermeja, which blocked the space between the sea and the Almanza creek. Under cover of the Chiclana pines Victor kept his troops, anxiously watching the movements of the allies. Graham saw at once the importance of Barossa, and would have stopped his advance there, thus occupying the key of the position. Held by British troops, nothing could have been attempted on the Bermeja, and the allies, having given a hand to Zayas on the Santi Petri river, which flows into the Almanza river, several miles above its issue, would have been massed in assured positions on

Victor's flank. But La Peña ordered him to march through the wood to the Bermeja, and Graham, against his judgment, stretched discipline so far as to obey. Still, he never doubted that these Barossa heights would be occupied in force by the Spaniards. To his intense astonishment, looking back from the wood, he saw La Peña descending from the uplands, leaving behind but two or three battalions. Victor hastened to profit by the blunder. Keeping three battalions in reserve, he launched all his available troops on the position; the heights were carried, the guns and baggage were taken; the broken Spanish regiments, mingled with the camp followers, were in headlong flight. Lautour Maubourg with his horsemen were between the British and the sea, while a column, led by Laval, was rapidly advancing on their left. The battle seemed lost, and the British sacrificed. Retreat would have been fatal. Then the gallant veteran had what Napier defines as rather an inspiration than a resolution. He determined, with his weary troops, to storm the heights manned by soldiers who had come fresh into action. Animated by the very extremity of the peril they realised, the British wheeled about and charged up the hill. There was no attempt at regular formation. They rushed onwards in two mixed masses, one led by General Dilkes, the other by Colonel Wheatley. The musketry fire they faced was incessant and murderous. The field guns swept the ground with a storm of grape and canister. The hand-to-hand fighting was desperate, and the issue would have been doubtful had not the generals commanding the French Grenadiers fallen simultaneously, mortally wounded. The shattered columns in vain endeavoured to form again under the deadly discharges of the British artillery, and their reluctant discomfiture was completed by a charge of our handful of horsemen.

It sounds incredible, but La Peña did nothing to succour the allies who had saved him from destruction. Eight hundred Spanish cavalry—and they were led by an Englishman—never unsheathed a sabre, though Ruffin, when crossing bayonets with Dilkes, had left his flank entirely exposed. And when the battle was over, and nightfall brought temporary security, he would send no food to the famished Englishmen, and even refused assistance to bury the dead. Happily Victor made no demonstration of renewing the attack. Declining all further intercourse with his wretched commander, next day Graham collected his wounded and crossed the Almanza into the Isla. La Peña followed, and Victor resumed his positions in the lines, where he was soon afterwards joined by Soult, returning from his campaign in Estremadura. But there can be little question that, had Graham been in command, and had the Spaniards been ordinarily loyal in their co-operation, the expedition would have raised the siege of Cadiz.

The national cause was even more shamefully compromised in that Estremadura campaign, for there treachery supervened on cowardice and incapacity. After routing the armies of Mendizabel and Ballesteros, Soult had pressed the siege of Badajoz. It was bravely defended by Rafael Menacho, an old companion-in-arms of Alvarez of Gerona fame. When the place was summoned it was virtually safe, for news had just arrived of the retreat of Masséna and of the approach of a powerful relieving army. The breach was not yet practicable; there was a numerous garrison, and provisions were plentiful, while the beleaguering force was reduced to 14,000. Unfortunately Menacho had been mortally wounded, and one, Imaz, had succeeded him in command. When the letter reached Imaz he lost not a moment in selling the

fortress while it was still marketable, and he was able to make the better bargain that he was the first to communicate to Soult reliable information from Portugal. Punctilious on the point of honour, he stipulated that he should march out through the breach, but the breach had to be enlarged to give him passage. As for Soult, when he rode in at the gate, looking up at the works and frowning embrasures, he remarked dryly, 'There never was fortress so strong but that a mule load of gold could enter.' Immediately afterwards he received intelligence of the battle of Barossa. Confiding Badajoz to a strong garrison under General Phillipon, a distinguished officer of engineers who set to work at once on the dilapidated defences, he promptly returned to Seville.

Meanwhile Masséna was conducting a masterly retreat, though it was characterised by shameful atrocities. He scrupled at nothing to delay the march of Wellington who was following closely, and to cover the retreat of his rear-guard, pressed by the British columns. Towns and villages were indiscriminately fired, and the partisans when they fell into his hands were butchered. His march was facilitated by a sufficiency of provisions, whereas the pursuers were reduced to great extremities. At one time Pack's Portuguese actually went four days without food, and not a few perished of sheer starvation. He availed himself of each strong position in the passes to delay the pursuit, but these were successively and deliberately turned by Wellington, who crowned the heights and out-flanked the defenders. It should have been his object to avoid fighting, and he would have done so, had it not been for the insubordinate obstinacy of Ney, who, by loitering repeatedly, provoked engagements. Indeed, he could not count on the obedience of any one of his generals. At Miranda the troubles came to a



Donnerstag, pinx.

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Marshal Masséna.



