

CHAPTER XVI.

Campaign of 1812 in the Peninsula.—Siege of Ciudad Rodrigo.—Siege of Badajoz.—Difficulties of Lord Wellington.—Advance into Spain.—Battle of Salamanca.—Siege of Burgos.—Retreat from Burgos.—Invasion of Russia.—Smolensk and Borodino.—Conflagration of Moscow.—Retreat of the French.—Pursued by the Russians.—Continual battles.—Horrors of the Retreat.—Destruction of the French army.—Napoleon's flight.

“How vast will the events of our day appear to those who shall be at a sufficient distance from them to see their real magnitude.” Thus thought Francis Horner in December, 1812.* Nearly half a century has passed since the author of this History trusted with “undoubting mind” the new promise of the time that the nations should be free, that his country should be safe. Journalism, in which he then took a humble part, was generally exultant; and the more so, when evil forboders were confident and clamorous. The imaginations of the young and ardent were, however, then too powerfully stirred by the great incidents of the war, to see the essential connexion of one event with another,—how the persistence of the sagacious captain of the Peninsula had roused the resistance of Russia to the all-grasping tyranny of France; how the deliverance of Germany was kindled by the fires of Moscow. We now see clearly, what was then only dimly seen, that Eighteen hundred and twelve was the inevitable “beginning of the end,”—that the end would have been Universal Empire if England had quailed. The great image, whose brightness was excellent, whose form was terrible, whose head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay, was smote upon his feet, and they were broken to pieces: “Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor; and the wind carried them away that no place was found for them.” †

On the 1st of January, 1812, lord Wellington announced to lord

* *Memoirs*, vol. ii. p. 137.

† Daniel, chap. ii. v. 33, 34. We quote the words of the prophet, not with the least reference to their theological interpretation, but as presenting a grand image of a sudden ruin, when the heterogeneous extremities of a gigantic fabric were shivered.

Liverpool that he proposed to make an attack upon Ciudad Rodrigo. He was about once more to undertake an offensive war in Spain. He was about to lead his army, in the depth of winter, from their cantonments on the Coa, to make a sudden rush upon the strong fortress of Ciudad Rodrigo; and then, if successful, to make a similar assault upon Badajoz. The time was favourable for so bold an enterprise. Napoleon, contemplating the possibility of a war with Russia, had withdrawn sixty thousand troops from Spain. The French marshals, who had separate commands, and were each jealous of the other, were carrying on distinct operations in various provinces, without any paramount unity of plan. The emperor wrote to them precise and peremptory instructions which often were impossible to carry into effect. Their correspondence with king Joseph at Madrid, with each other, and with their own generals, whose divisions were spread over a large extent of country to obtain subsistence, were constantly intercepted by bands of Guerillas, who stopped the couriers, and often cut off the communications for successive weeks. It was difficult, if not impossible, to find a Spaniard who would undertake, for any bribe, to carry a despatch, much less to become a spy. Wellington, apparently inert in his winter quarters, had made all the preparations in his power for the reduction of the two great fortresses that were essential to the progress of a successful campaign. He was still without the necessary means of carrying on a regular siege, but he organized all the resources within his reach, and relied upon the valour of his troops to accomplish what he had not the means otherwise of performing. He wanted abundant artillery; he wanted officers and men experienced in the attack and defence of fortified places. Colonel Jones, one of his most skilful engineers, says that his comrades in the Peninsular war were not more advanced in the art of taking towns than the soldiers of Phillip II. To attack places by battering them in breach at a great distance, and then to hazard all in trusting to the bravery of the storming parties, who were unprotected by works, was the system pursued in the British armies. It was the system, says colonel Jones, of the sieges of the Low Countries, under the duke of Alba and the prince of Parma. We may add, that it was the system of the first siege by Englishmen in which we hear of cannon being used—that of Harfleur. Shakspeare makes Henry exclaim—

“Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more.”

The like cry might have gone through the ranks on those terrible nights when Craufurd led his division to the ramparts of Ciudad Rodrigo, and Picton scaled the walls of the castle of Badajoz.

Marmont had withdrawn a large portion of the garrison from Ciudad Rodrigo, in the confidence that Wellington would not move out of his quarters in an inclement season. The country was covered with snow. The means of transport were insufficient. The Despatches of our untiring general show how he was occupied in collecting carts, and ordering their loading with engineering stores and with shot and shells. His perplexities were great with Portuguese and Spanish carters and muleteers. "What do you think," he wrote to lord Liverpool, "of empty carts taking two days to go ten miles on a good road!"* At last, the preparations were complete. Part of Wellington's army passed the Agueda on the 8th of January. The same day Ciudad Rodrigo was invested; and an external redoubt on a hill was stormed and taken. On the 13th and 14th two convents outside the walls were surprised and carried by assault. Two breaches having been effected on the 19th,—and Marmont being known to be advancing to relieve the garrison,—orders were given to storm that evening. Wellington had arranged all the necessary dispositions for the assault. At seven o'clock three columns under the direction of general Picton, and a fourth column under general Craufurd, marched towards the breaches; whilst a false attack was made by the Portuguese brigade, commanded by general Pack, on the other side of the river. This became a real attack. Picton's division, which attacked on the north, where the chief breach had been made, was twice repulsed before it could penetrate into the town. Craufurd attacked the smaller breach, and was successful; but he was mortally wounded. General Mackinnon, who had led his brigade to the assault, was blown up by the explosion of one of the French magazines on the ramparts. In less than half an hour from the time of the attack the garrison surrendered. The capture of Ciudad Rodrigo was amongst the most brilliant actions of the British army. Their coolness and firmness overcame every obstacle presented by a brave and skilful enemy. It is painful to relate that the troops disgraced their victory by the most frightful excesses. They set fire to some houses; they sacked others with a pitiless fury. They were mad with excitement and with drink. In the capture of Ciudad Rodrigo a thousand of the British and Portuguese were killed and wounded.

In six weeks from the fall of Ciudad Rodrigo, the army of the Allies was on its march southward from the Coa to the Guadiana. It would have been sooner on its march had the means of transport been more effective, and the roads more practicable. Time

* "Despatches," vol. viii. p. 536.

was of the utmost importance to Wellington, and secrecy in his plans was not less important to be preserved. He was to attack a place for the deliverance of which three French armies might have been expected to co-operate. His own counsels were well kept; but he had to endure the most vexatious delays from the ignorance and obstinacy of the Portuguese authorities. At Evora he could not obtain a single carriage, and he was thus obliged to postpone the investment of Badajoz for several days beyond the term he had assigned. In the meantime, general Philippon, the French commander, had become aware of the approach of the allied army, and had applied himself to strengthen the works, and to prepare the most deadly means of defence. On the 16th of March, the Guadiana was crossed by Wellington, and Badajoz was invested. On the 26th the Pecurina, a strong fort in advance of Badajoz, was taken by storm. The Pecurina became a position for firing on the works of the town. Regular parallels were formed, and batteries were established to fire upon every assailable point. Forty-eight pieces of artillery were in constant play; and the sap against the outward works was steadily advancing. The corps of Royal Sappers and Miners was then being organized; but at Badajoz they had not assumed the dignity of that name, but were called "Royal Military Artificers."* There were of this corps only a hundred and fifteen, of all ranks, present at this siege. It was the 6th of April before three breaches were practicable, so as to justify the assault. On that evening eighteen thousand men were ready to march to the attack. The night set in dismally, as if to draw a curtain over the sanguinary deeds that were then to be done. The darkness was so great, that at ten o'clock, when the columns began to advance for an assault upon all points at once, they could not be seen at twenty paces distant. The men advanced, most of them with each a sack of hay on his back to throw into the ditch to diminish its height. Some carried ladders. They were at the foot of the glacis when a sudden explosion was succeeded by an avalanche of fiery missiles which descended into the ditch, where the English columns appeared to be in the midst of a volcano. Great was the destruction; but the undaunted men rallied, and again hurried to the breaches. Again they are encountered with bursting shells, hand grenades, and exploding powder barrels. The summit gained, they are met by a *chevaux-de-frise* formed of sabre blades. At each of the three breaches were the same ter-

* See Quartermaster Conolly's interesting history of the "Royal Sappers and Miners," 1857.

rible defences. At the breach of the bastion of the Trinity, the struggle endured for two hours, when three thousand of the besiegers were killed or disabled. One who was present has described "the horror and grandeur of the scene" during two hours: "The constant explosion of shells, mines, and trains of powder; the vivid illuminations caused by the light-balls thrown every five or ten minutes; the incessant peals of musketry and roar of cannon, added to the huzzas of our fine fellows, all united, formed a scene only to be compared to Pandemonium."* At midnight Wellington was watching the terrible scene which was passing. His face was pale, when an officer came to inform him how ill the attack was proceeding. He was anxious, but he was cool. He calmly gave his orders that the troops should be formed again for a fresh assault. But another officer came to say that the division under the orders of Picton, which had been charged to escalade the castle, had taken it. On another side Walker's brigade had also scaled the walls and entered the town. Again were the other divisions led to the attack of the breaches. The defence was feebly conducted after this reverse which the besieged had sustained. The French troops became disorganized. The British advanced to the breaches with the confidence of victory, and found that resistance had ceased. At six in the morning general Philippon capitulated; the garrison surrendering without conditions. The loss of the British and Portuguese was estimated at five thousand men. "When the extent of the night's havoc was made known to lord Wellington, the firmness of his nature gave way for a moment, and the pride of conquest yielded to a passionate burst of grief for the loss of his gallant soldiers." † He had more still to endure. He had in some degree to be mixed up with the disgrace of the enormities which these soldiers committed, after the town was in their power, during two days and two nights. But there can be no doubt that he endeavoured to restrain their excesses, however ineffectually. On the day after the assault, he issued an Order which says, "It is now full time that the plunder of Badajoz should cease The Commander of the Forces has ordered the Provost Marshal into the town, and he has orders to execute any men he may find in the act of plunder, after he shall arrive there." A Spanish historian, Count Toréno, says "the exhortations of the officers were powerless; and lord Wellington himself was menaced with the bayonets of the soldiers,

* "Supplementary Despatches," vol. vii. p. 311—Letter of Colonel Jones (then Major).
† Napier

who prevented him entering the place to restrain their disorders."* What he could not prevent he severely punished.

On the 13th of April lord Wellington began his march back to the north, with the main body of his army. On the 22nd he was at Penamacor. From this place he wrote a very remarkable letter to lord Liverpool, which explains some of the difficulties with which he had to contend. He should have been in Andalusia, he says, at this moment, at the head of forty thousand men, and should have obliged Soult to withdraw from thence, if Don Carlos de España had acted as he was desired, in respect to Ciudad Rodrigo. That place was now safe. He should determine upon his line of operations during the summer, when Ciudad Rodrigo should have been fully provisioned, and when he should have intelligence of the state of Marmont's preparations to endeavour to take it by other means beside blockade. "When I say I shall determine upon the line of operations which I shall follow, I ought to add, provided I shall have money to follow any operations at all." The Treasury and the Commissary-in-chief had disapproved of his sanctioning bargains for importing specie from Gibraltar, for bills to be granted at a more disadvantageous rate of exchange than the market rate of Lisbon. For a small difference in the percentage the government left the army to starve. The engagements for the payment for meat for the troops it was thought could not be met. "If we are obliged to stop that payment, your lordship will do well to prepare to recall the army, as it will be quite impossible to carry up salt meat, as well as bread, to the troops from the sea-coast." † If the evidence of the indecision and supineness of the government were not conclusive, we could with difficulty believe that after the tremendous loss incurred in the capture of Ciudad Rodrigo and of Badajoz, no measures whatever were taken to send Wellington reinforcements. There were then sixty-five thousand regular troops at home. ‡ It was at that period perfectly clear that there would be war between France and Russia, and that if any decisive effort was ever to be made in the Peninsula the time had arrived for strengthening the hands of the one general who had sagacity and firmness to hold his ground, and to achieve great triumphs, with the smallest means. There seems to have been a constant desire to let lord Wellington experiment upon the possibility of obtaining the maximum of success with the minimum of power.

But lord Wellington went on his course, in no wise disheartened even by neglect and coldness,—by evil prognostications in England,

* Quoted in Brialmont, tome i. p. 469.

† "Supplementary Despatches," vol. vii. p. 318.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 512.

and by violent jealousies in Spain,—but most of all, by being promised assistance which never came. Lord William Bentinck was to have come from Sicily, with a large body of troops, and to have landed on the eastern coast of Spain, so as to have drawn off some of the French armies that were gathering round the Allies. “We are to find money as we can,” writes Wellington on the 15th July, at the most economical rate of exchange; and then comes lord William Bentinck to Gibraltar, and carries off four million of dollars, giving one shilling for each more than we give; and, after all, he sends his troops upon some scheme to some part of Italy, and not to the eastern coast of the Peninsula, as ordered by government, and arranged with me.”* Surely the fortitude which could meet such disappointments and difficulties with an equal mind is as greatly to be admired as the military skill which, by an union of boldness with caution, could encounter great risks and achieve victory in the face of danger. Wellington had advanced into Spain on the 13th of June. On the 17th he appeared before Salamanca; had been received in the town with great enthusiasm; and on the 29th had captured the forts by which the interior of the place was defended. Marmont expected that these forts would have detained Wellington fifteen days. They were taken on the fifth day. For the first fortnight of July the French army and the Allied army were on opposite banks of the Douro—Marmont on the northern bank; Wellington on the southern. It was a singular interval of rest in that eager warfare. The French and English soldiers bathed together in the stream, or swam over each to the opposite bank, and talked and interchanged civilities as comrades rather than as deadly foes. On the 16th, two of Marmont’s divisions crossed the Douro; and Wellington concentrated his army on the Guareña, an affluent of the Douro. There were various manœuvres of Marmont till the 20th; by which he established his communications with king Joseph and the army of the centre, which was advancing from Madrid to join him. On that day he crossed the Guareña, and advanced towards the Tormes, Wellington closely following his movements. At one time the French and English were moving in parallel lines, within half cannon shot of each other. On the 21st, lord Wellington wrote to lord Bathurst, that the enemy’s object was to cut off his communication with Ciudad Rodrigo and Salamanca; that he had no superiority of numbers over the single army that was opposed to him; that the French possessed double his own force of artillery; that the army of the king was expected to join that of Marmont. “I have therefore determined to cross the

* “Despatches,” vol. ix. p. 288.

Tormes, if the enemy should, to cover Salamanca as long as I can; and, above all, not to give up our communication with Ciudad Rodrigo; and not to fight an action unless under very advantageous circumstances, or it should become absolutely necessary.”*

On the 21st of July, both the hostile armies crossed the Tormes. Wellington took up a position with his left resting on the southern bank of the river, and his right on one of the two hills called Dos Arapiles. The battle fought on the next day is thus sometimes called the battle of Salamanca, and sometimes the battle of Arapiles.† On the morning of the 22nd, the contest was begun with some sharp skirmishing. The French had been in motion since daybreak. By their first movements they gained a great advantage in obtaining possession of the more distant Arapiles. They there established a battery, which commanded the road to Ciudad Rodrigo. At this point, which commanded a view of the various operations of the field, Marmont placed himself. Wellington, in the same manner, saw from a height behind the village of Arapiles, to which he had moved, the evolutions of the French, which went on till two o’clock in the afternoon. At that hour, under cover of a heavy cannonade, Marmont “extended his left, and moved forward his troops, apparently with an intention to embrace, by the position of his troops and by his fire, our post on that of the two Arapiles which we possessed, and from thence to attack and break our line, or at all events to render difficult any movement of ours to our right. The extension of his line to his left, however, and its advance upon our right, notwithstanding that his troops occupied very strong ground, and his position was well defended by cannon, gave me an opportunity of attacking him.”‡ These are the plain words of a business-like narrative. Words describing the same circumstances, which have all the fire of poetry, move the heart as with a trumpet: “Marmont’s first arrangements had occupied several hours, but as they gave no positive indications of his designs, Wellington, ceasing to watch them, had retired from his Hermanito; but when he was told the French left was in motion, pointing towards the Ciudad Rodrigo road, he returned to the rock, and observed their movements for some time with a stern contentment. Their left wing was entirely separated from the centre; the fault was flagrant; and he fixed it with the stroke of a thunderbolt. A few orders issued from his lips like the incantation of a wizard.”§ Pakenham’s division, which was on the extreme right, was directed

* “Despatches,” vol. ix. p. 298.

† These hills were also called the Hermanitos.

‡ Despatch to Earl Bathurst, July 24.

§ Napier.

with two brigades of artillery and some squadrons of cavalry, against the left of the French. The divisions of Cole and Leith, and the divisions of Clinton and Hope, were sent against the French front. The Portuguese brigade of Pack was to retake the more distant Arapiles which the French had occupied. When Marmont saw all these troops come spontaneously to surprise him in the midst of his evolutions, he comprehended the extent of his error, and sought to repair it, by ordering his left to fall back immediately on the centre. "The time was passed; for Wellington, remembering the fine manœuvres of Frederick at Rosbach, and of Napoleon at Austerlitz, had sent half of his troops to engage the left wing, whilst the other half engaged the centre." * The left wing of the French made a disorderly retreat towards their right, leaving three thousand prisoners. Their centre was driven in; but their right remained unbroken. Marmont had been wounded; and general Clausel, who had joined him with his reinforcements, took the command. He rallied the scattered French; formed them into a new position; and made a determined stand, until a fresh attack ordered by Wellington, compelled them to abandon the ground, and to retreat towards Alba de Tormes. Night stopped the pursuit. The victory of Salamanca was one of the triumphs of genius—of its power instantly to seize the opportunity—to watch, and to wait, and then to strike—the power of taking the flood-tide which leads on to fortune. In Wellington this power was not a sudden impulse. It was the concentrated effort of a mind which had previously calculated all the circumstances of his own position and of that of his adversary. "Late in the evening of this great day," says Napier, "I saw him behind my regiment then marching towards the ford. He was alone. The flush of victory was on his brow, his eyes were eager and watchful; but his voice was calm and even gentle." On the morning of the 23rd three battalions of the French rear surrendered to the British Cavalry, who had come up with them. "The battle of Salamanca was incontestably the most decisive that the Allies had then fought in the Peninsula. It established the reputation of the British army, and especially manifested, beyond the possibility of doubt, the brilliant qualities of its general—a solid judgment, a coup d'œil prompt and certain, a vigorous execution, and a rare skilfulness in moving his troops. Thibaudean has said with truth, that the day of the Arapiles marked the end of the French occupation of Spain." †

Napoleon received the news of the battle of Salamanca on the 2nd of September, when he was at Ghiast, about twenty miles from

* Brialmont, tome ii. p. 32.

† *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Borodino. He was enraged against Marmont, the unfortunate duke of Ragusa. Wait, he said to the minister at war, till his wounds are cured, and his recovery is nearly complete; and then ask him, why did he offer battle without the orders of his Commander-in-chief? Why did he not ask for orders as to his conduct, dependent as that ought to have been on the general system of my armies in Spain? "His insubordination has caused all these disasters." * Having entered upon the greatest enterprise of his ambitious career, the emperor of the French thus attempted to regulate the most distant movements of the great machinery with which he had thought to govern the world. This letter was written five days before the battle of Borodino, and twelve days before Napoleon entered Moscow. The intelligence which he had received would also have reached, at the beginning of September, the emperor Alexander. That it would have produced a sensible influence upon the determination of the Russians to resist their invaders, there can be no doubt. The duke of Wellington in later years said, "Salamanca relieved the whole south of Spain at once; changed the character of the war there; and was felt even in Russia." † The indignation of Napoleon against Marmont was in the proportion in which he felt that the moral effects of Wellington's victory were damaging to the prestige of his power. It appeared to him a gloomy presage. It was hailed throughout Germany and in other parts of Europe as the dawn of a new era.

The official account of the victory of Salamanca reached London on the 15th of August. On the 19th, lord Liverpool wrote to lord Wellington to offer his congratulations. He says, "I have never in my life seen anything equal to the enthusiasm which the knowledge of this event has excited throughout the town, and throughout every part of the country from which accounts of its reception have yet been obtained." The news of Wellington having entered Madrid on the 12th of August arrived in London on the 6th of September. On the 17th the triumphant general writes to his friend colonel Malcolm in England, "I am among a people mad with joy for their deliverance from their oppressors. God send that my good fortune may continue, and that I may be the instrument of securing their independence and happiness." ‡ There was a cloud coming over that bright day. He was without money, for drafts upon the English Treasury could not be realized at Madrid. No reinforcements had reached him, to fill up the gap of his loss at Salamanca. Clausel's army in the north had been large-

* "Letters to Joseph," vol. ii. p. 256.

† "Quarterly Review," vol. xcii. p. 526.

‡ "Supplementary Despatches," vol. vii. p. 384.

ly reinforced. Soult, Suchet, and king Joseph might form a junction in the south, and come upon him with forces three times as great as his own. To linger at Madrid was impossible. Leaving two divisions in the capital, Wellington marched on the 1st of September for Valladolid; and, continuing his northward movement, on the 19th entered Burgos. The castle of Burgos, a place of great natural strength, had been carefully fortified, and had a garrison of two thousand men. It was immediately invested; the possession of the fort being absolutely necessary for the security of Wellington's army. For a month the siege proceeded with very doubtful success. Breaches were effected in the first line of works; but the garrison made sorties and occasioned great loss. A breach by mining was also made in the second line; and, on the 18th of October, orders were given to storm it. The attack failed. The army of the north and the armies of the south were advancing to raise the siege. To continue the investment of Burgos would have been fatal. On the 21st, Wellington retired in good order to Placentia. His rear was repeatedly attacked, but there was no serious engagement. The sufferings of the army from the difficulty of obtaining provisions were immense. Their disorganization was proportionate. The failure at Burgos—according to Wellington's own account, written with the noble candour that was ready to acknowledge mistakes—was chiefly caused by one circumstance; he took there the most inexperienced instead of the best troops; and he had not sufficient means of transport. "I see," he says, in a letter to lord Liverpool, "that a disposition already exists to blame the government for the failure of the siege of Burgos. The government had nothing to say to the siege. It was entirely my own act. In regard to means, there were ample means, both at Madrid and Santander for the strongest fortress. That which was wanting at both places was means of transporting ordnance and military stores to the place where it was desirable to use them." By the middle of November the Allied forces were in their old stations within the frontiers of Portugal. Wellington's head quarters were at Ciudad Rodrigo. The campaign of 1812 in the Peninsula was at an end. There will be six months of apparent inaction; and then the results of another campaign, after five years of incessant struggle, will cause the British general's labour and anxiety to be properly appreciated.

The eternal friendship between Napoleon and Alexander which had been sworn at Tilsit, was threatened to be dissolved by causes of which the two emperors at first took little heed. Princes might submit to the Continental decrees of France, but nations were

more difficult to persuade or to coerce. The Russian people, and especially the Russian landholders, who were deprived of the usual markets for the produce of their estates, compelled the government to issue a ukase by which commodities were to be introduced into Russian ports unless they should appear to belong to subjects of Great Britain. This restriction was easy to be evaded, and the trade between the two countries became really opened. Napoleon was haughty and indignant. But Alexander dared not impose any severer law upon his subjects; and he had now the support of Bernadotte, the Crown Prince of Sweden, who also refused to submit to the dictator, who had seized and confiscated fifty Swedish merchantmen, on the ground of their contraband trade with England. In March, 1812, a treaty of alliance was signed between Russia and Sweden. Napoleon had been gradually collecting large bodies of troops on the Vistula. He had levied the conscription of 1812, although that of 1811 was only just completed. It was clear that an offensive war was in preparation. At the beginning of May, the Russian minister at Paris presented an official note, to the intent that the differences between the governments might be easily settled if the French troops were withdrawn from Pomerania and the Duchy of Warsaw, where they were evidently stationed to threaten the Russian frontier. Bonaparte said he would not be dictated to by any foreign sovereign, and he sent the ambassador his passports. On the 9th of May he left Paris, with his Austrian empress. At Dresden he received the homage of his tributary princes; and there, too, came the emperor of Austria and the king of Prussia, to offer their contingents for the invasion of Russia. Splendid were the ceremonials with which the vassals did fealty to their liege lord. The numbers of the confederated army which, on the 24th and 25th of June, passed the Niemen, the boundary of the Russian empire, have been variously stated. The lowest estimate places them at half a million of men. A detailed return, extant in the French War-office, gives the numbers as 651,358 infantry, cavalry, artillery, and engineers; 187,121 horses, and 1372 pieces of ordnance. To meet this mighty force, the Russian armies only comprised 254,356 men.* But there was something stronger than these mighty masses of invaders,—the determination of the Russian people to resist to the last extremity. It was in this spirit that the officers and soldiers of Alexander's army held that to ruin the invader they must retire before him into the heart of Russia without giving battle, and, destroying every thing before him in their retreat, to leave nothing but ravaged fields, so

* These returns are in Sir Robert Wilson's "Invasion of Russia," p. 10 and p. 21.

that the modern Pharaoh and his hosts should perish in the immensity of the void, as the ancient Pharaoh perished in the waters.*

The French armies entered Lithuania without encountering any opposition. They ravaged the country, feeding their horses on green corn; and when the main bodies left it, entirely devastated, they left behind them a hundred thousand men, dead, or in hospitals, or marauding in scattered parties through the districts where the locusts who had passed over had left nothing to be consumed. On the 16th of August they were under the walls of Smolensk, about two hundred and eighty miles from Moscow. The Russians were there in force, and a great battle took place. When the French entered the city it had been evacuated, and they found only burning ruins. The Russians continued their retreat towards Moscow, Napoleon following them. On the 7th of September was fought the sanguinary battle of Borodino. The sun had risen with extraordinary brilliancy, and Napoleon hailed it as the twin sun of Austerlitz. The fighting lasted two days. On each side there were forty thousand killed and wounded. Each army imagined itself lord of the field; but the Russian army continued its retreat to Moscow. †

On the 14th of September before day dawn, the Russian troops commenced filing through the city. They were soon accompanied by all the inhabitants and populace who could find any means of conveyance. "The incidents and the whole scene of the evacuation of a great capital may be conceived better than described. The Russians, however, have preserved so much of their nomad habits, that they were much more quickly packed and equipped for their emigration than the inhabitants of any other European city would have been. The army, indeed, since the first day's retreat from Smolensk, had been accompanied by a wandering nation. All the towns, villages, and hamlets were abandoned as the columns appeared. The old and infirm, the women and children were placed with the moveable effects, and the 'Dii Penates,' on their kabitgas or telegas—one and two horse carts which no peasant is without." ‡ On the same day Napoleon arrived at Moscow with his guards, and was astounded at the solitude which reigned everywhere. "His feelings had been excited to the highest degree of pride and glowing expectation. He had anticipated his reception by a submissive magistracy and humbled people, imploring clemency; and dreamt that in the palace of the Czars he would have it

* Thiers, tome xiii. p. 403.

† Wilson, "Invasion of Russia," p. 130 to 155.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

in his power to promise pardon, protection, and peace to themselves and their sovereign."*

Napoleon took up his residence in the suburb of Moscow. He had commanded his soldiers to bivouac outside the city, but at night many entered, and sought in plunder and riot some compensation for their long endurance of severe privations. That very night the alarm of fire was given in various quarters. The great bazaar with its ten thousand shops was in a blaze. The Crown magazines, with vast stores of wine and spirits, were in a blaze. Not a fire-engine, not a bucket, could be procured. They had all been carried off. The next day the French emperor transferred his quarters to the Kremlin. Day after day the astonished soldiers saw the canopy of smoke and flame spreading over the city of a thousand domes and minarets. On the 21st, the Russian army was established within twenty-five miles of Moscow. They knew that the progress of their invader had been stayed. The conflagration went on, till, of forty thousand houses in stone, only two hundred escaped; of eight thousand in wood, five hundred only were standing; of sixteen hundred churches, eight hundred were consumed. † The Kremlin itself, on the 16th, had become uninhabitable, and Napoleon left it to take up his quarters outside the city. A furious wind carried showers of sparks far and near. On the 20th, when Napoleon returned, a heavy rain had extinguished the flames, but only one tenth of the city was left unconsumed. Only those provisions had escaped being burnt which were left in the cellars of the houses. What was the cause of this terrible destruction? Was it the resolved purpose of a patriotic devotion producing a havoc more awful than any event which history records; or was it accident? There can be no doubt that it was part of the same determined system of resistance which had driven the whole population from the burning villages on the road from Smolensk, and had led forth the inhabitants of Moscow, with the exception of the miserable thousands who were unable to move, to seek for other shelter than in the homes of the devoted city. Rostopchin, the governor of Moscow, "could neither deny nor adopt the act." But that he had a strong conviction of what was public virtue may be gathered from the fact, that he afterwards set fire with his own hands to his magnificent palace in the village of Woronow, when a division of the French were approaching on the 4th of October, and that he affixed upon a pillar these ominous words: "The inhabitants of this property, to the number of seventeen hundred and twenty, quit it at your approach, and I voluntarily set the

* Wilson, "Invasion of Russia," p. 167.

† Wilson, p. 172.

house on fire that it may not be polluted by your presence. Frenchmen, I abandoned to you my two houses at Moscow, with their furniture and contents, worth half a million of roubles. Here you will only find ashes." * The French evacuated Moscow on the 19th of October. Snow had begun to fall. An early winter was setting in.

Adequately to describe the incidents of that terrible destruction of the French Grand Army, which occurred from the 19th of October to the 13th of December, when a miserable remnant re-crossed the Niemen, would require a volume—as indeed several separate volumes have been written on that fearful catastrophe. The march of the French was a succession of battles with the pursuing Russians. The troops were skilfully led; their courage rarely failed, even when starving and perishing by the way side with the extremity of cold. Clouds of Cossacks hung upon their path, leaving them not an hour's safety. The most popular narrative, that of the Count de Ségur, has been held to contain many exaggerations. That of sir Robert Wilson has many striking details of horror, amidst a critical military view of the operations of the Russians in which he is not sparing of blame. There is a brief account by Desprez, the aide-de-camp of king Joseph, who was sent to Napoleon to propitiate his anger against his brother, and against Marmont, for the defeat at Salamanca. The emperor kept him at Moscow, and when the evacuation took place, he accompanied the division of marshal Mortier, till it reached Wilna, where the French had staid till the 16th of December, when the Russians were coming upon them. The aide-de-camp, in a letter to king Joseph, dated from Paris, on the 3rd of January, says that the army when he quitted it was in the most horrible misery. For a long time previously the disorder and losses had been frightful; the artillery and cavalry had ceased to exist. The different regiments were all mixed together; the soldiers marching pell-mell, and only seeking to prolong existence. Thousands of wandering men fell into the hands of the Cossacks. The number of prisoners was very great, but that of the dead exceeded it. During a month there were no rations, and dead horses were the only resource. The severity of the climate rendered hunger more fatal. † The truth could not be wholly hidden, even by Napoleon. He could not conceal that of four hundred thousand Frenchmen who had crossed the Niemen in May, with the persuasion of their invincibility, not twenty thousand had returned to the Vistula. The destruction could not be concealed from the bereaved families who mourned their sons and their husbands. On the 3rd of Decem-

* Wilson, p. 180.

† "Letters to King Joseph," p. 245.

ber, the emperor issued his twenty-ninth and last bulletin, which made France and the world comprehend, in some degree, how the invasion of Russia had ended. For the first time he then spoke of his retreat; he avowed such part of his misfortunes as he could not wholly deny; he attributes his calamities to the severity of the weather. On the 5th, in the middle of the night, he quitted his army at Smorgoni, travelling in a sledge, accompanied by Caulaincourt, a Polish interpreter, his mamlook Rustan, and a valet. He arrived in Paris on the night of the 18th of December.