

LETTER XV.

Peninsular War in 1812, fourth Campaign—Capture of Ciudad-Rodrigo by the Allies—Surrender of Badajos—Retreat of Marshals Soult and Marmont—Battle of Salamanca—The Allies enter Madrid—The French abandon the Siege of Cadiz—Lord Wellington fails in the Siege of Burgos, and retreats to Frey nada. Nov. 1812.

Of the highly momentous transactions which took place on the continent of Europe in the course of this memorable year, those in the Spanish peninsula, though inferior in point of political importance to some others, will nevertheless claim our first notice, and the present letter shall be confined to a review of them.

Towards the close of the preceding year, the town of Tariffa, in the province of Andalusia, garrisoned by a thousand British infantry, with a detachment of artillery, under the command of colonel Skerrat, and a body of Spaniards, was invested by the French with an army of ten thousand men commanded by marshal Victor. A breach being made in the wall, the enemy advanced to the assault on the 31st of December, but they were received with so much intrepidity, that, after a considerable loss, they were obliged to retreat. They continued to fire against the breach, and another attack was expected, when on the 5th of January their columns were seen retiring, having left behind them their ammunition, artillery, and stores. This defence conferred great honour on the garrison and its commander, who held out with only eighteen hundred men behind a weak wall against a marshal of France.

Lord Wellington, having made his dispositions for reducing the frontier fortresses occupied by the enemy, now crossed the Agueda, and on the 8th of January invested Ciudad-Rodrigo, while general Hill, advancing from Morida, compelled Druet to retire from his position, leaving behind him his stores and ammunition. Badajos was thus reduced to the utmost extremity, the country lying between the Tagus and the Guadiana cleared of the enemy, and the communication between Soult and Marmont intercepted. The siege of Ciudad-Rodrigo was now vigorously pressed; and on the 19th an attack was made in five separate columns, which proved successful at every point. After a desperate conflict, the garrison, which consisted of seventeen hundred men, besides officers, surrendered, thus placing in the hands of the allies the heavy train of the French artillery, with great quantities of ammunition and stores. The British army, however, sustained a severe loss on this occasion in the death of some of its best officers. Major-general Makinon fell at the head of his storming party, being blown up by the explosion of a magazine, and Crauford, an officer of the same rank, was mortally wounded in his approach; besides these, many other brave men fell in the dangerous service. The total loss of the British, from the commencement of the siege to the termination of the assault, amounted to thirteen hundred and ten men in killed and wounded. Marmont was surprised at the speedy reduction of so defensible a town; for in the space of ten days the allies succeeded in recovering a fortress, which, when in a state of weakness, and garrisoned by Spaniards, resisted for a whole month the efforts of general Massena, supported by an army of a hundred and ten thousand men. Marmont, who had stationed his army on the Tagus to support the operations in Valencia, had calculated on being in time for the relief of Ciudad-Rodrigo, by the 29th of January. He had advanced to Salamanca with a large army, collected from the north and centre of Spain, when he was surprised and mortified by the news of its fall. After a fruitless attempt to allure his antagonist to a battle, he placed his army in cantonments along the Tormes.

After an interval of tranquil observation, during which lord Wellington received from England the gratifying intelligence of the grant of an earldom

and an additional pension, he moved towards the Guadiana, and invested Badajos. When the siege had been carried on for three weeks, the garrison witnessed with apprehension and dismay those preparations for a general assault which had lately been so effectual. Breaches had been made in two of the bastions; and to divide the attention of the enemy, a third was effected before, the process of storming commenced. Lieutenant-general Picton was ordered to scale the walls of the castle, while Colville and Bernard conducted those divisions which were expected to force their way through the breaches. It was now the 6th of April, and a feigned attack was proposed to be made on the left, which was to become a real one if a favourable occasion should be offered. The principal fortress was defended by vigorous but fruitless exertions. So powerful were the obstacles to the ascent of the breaches, that the troops, after considerable loss, were obliged to retire. The brigade of major-general Walker, being encouraged to make an effectual assault, proceeded to a bastion in which no opening had been made, and took it by escalade. Orders were now given for a renewal of the discontinued attempt, but it was rendered unnecessary by a cessation of resistance, and in the morning the governor consented to a surrender. The garrison, which at first consisted of five thousand men, had lost twelve hundred in killed and wounded in the previous operations, besides suffering severely in the assault. The loss on the part of the allies, also, was dreadfully severe. During the siege, and in the assault, they lost more than a thousand men, besides near four thousand wounded.

By the speedy reduction of this important fortress, lord Wellington once more baffled his opponents. Marmont, after in vain attempting to surprise Ciudad-Rodrigo and Almeida, penetrated into Portugal as far as Castello-Branco, where he no sooner learned the result of the siege of Badajos, than he commenced a precipitate retreat. Soult, who had reached Villa Franca, fell back with equal haste, pursued by the British cavalry under sir Stapleton Cotton. On the 11th of April, the dragoons under major-general la Marchant charged the vanguard of the French with such impetuosity, that he drove them with the utmost confusion into Leereña, where the main army was posted. On the same day Soult evacuated the place, and thus the province of Estremadura was entirely freed from the enemy. The British commander, following up these successes, detached general Hill to destroy the bridge of Almarez, which was almost the only communication below Toledo by which a large army could cross the Tagus. This bridge was strongly defended on either side by works which the enemy had thrown up; and it was moreover protected by the neighbouring castle and redoubts of Mirabeto. The extreme badness of the roads retarded this enterprise, but, on the 19th of May, the British carried by escalade the works on the left bank of the river. The enemy made an effort to escape over the bridge, but their comrades on the other side destroyed it, and fled with precipitation towards Naval Mora. Many of the fugitives, whose escape was thus intercepted, perished in the stream, and three hundred were taken prisoners. When Marmont heard of the movement upon Almarez, he moved to the south-east as far as fort Veras, where the intelligence of its success induced him to retrace his steps, and again occupy himself in fortifying the convents of Salamanca.

The caution of lord Wellington now became less scrupulous as that of Marmont increased. He crossed the Agueda in quest of the enemy, and advanced to the Tormes. The marshal retreated, leaving a garrison at Salamanca, in fortified colleges and monasteries. When he found that a siege had been commenced, he despatched a detachment to take a forward position; and when this had been repulsed, an attempt was made to secure a communication with the troops in the city by the left bank; but this scheme was also baffled by the vigilance of the besiegers. Major-general Clinton with the sixth division was then ordered to reduce the forts, in which, after some delay occasioned by an accidental scarcity of ammunition, he succeeded. In storming one of the forts, major-general Bowes was wounded. He retired for surgical aid, and hastening back to head his troops to the assault,

relief of Burgos, and after sustaining a spirited repulse, appeared in great force, on the 19th, in the vicinity of the besieged fortress. On the 21st, advices were received, that an army of seventy thousand men, under the command of mareschal Soult, of Suchet, and king Joseph, were fast approaching the passes against general Hill, whose force was totally inadequate to oppose them. This intelligence induced lord Wellington to raise the siege of Burgos, to retire towards the Douro, recall his troops from Madrid, and give directions to general Hill to proceed northward to join him. He moved upon Salamanca, where he hoped to establish himself; but Soult advancing from Madrid, and uniting his forces with Souham, obliged him to continue his retreat. On the 24th of November, he fixed his head-quarters at Freynada, on the Portuguese frontier, after a masterly retreat before an army of ninety thousand men, against which he could oppose only fifty-two thousand. The campaign might have had a far different issue, had it not been for the miserable jealousy of Balasteros, who was arrested by order of the cortes, and banished to Ceuta. The retreat of lord Wellington, however, like most other retreats when pressed by a superior force, was characterized by disorder and rapine, notwithstanding the utmost efforts of the commander, who indignantly complained in his public orders of "a want of discipline, greater than that of any army which he had ever served, or of which he had ever read"

LETTER XVI.

Resommencement of Hostilities between France and Russia, 1812—Immense Preparations of Napoleon for the Campaign—Retreat of the Russian Army from the Vistula to the Dwina—Advance of the French Army to Smolensko—Conflagration of the Town—Battle of Borodino—Napoleon pushes his Army on to Moscow—The Russians set Fire to the City—Dreadful Proceedings there—Distress to which the French Army is reduced for Want of Supplies—Napoleon sues for an Armistice, but in vain—The grand Army commences its Retreat—pursued by the Russians—Annihilation of the French Army.

HAVING pursued the narrative of the fourth peninsular campaign to its termination, I shall now, my dear Philip, revert to the affairs of the north of Europe, where the contest between France and Russia attracted the attention and involved the interests of all the continental powers. Almost from the commencement of the year 1812, the eyes of all Europe had been directed towards a new scene which was opening in the north, and which gave rise to a variety of political conjectures. For some time the two powerful emperors, who from the treaty of Tilsit had maintained a state of strict amity and alliance, now exhibited indications of misunderstanding and even of approaching hostilities.

The appointment of a French general to the Swedish succession had apparently formed an indissoluble union of interests between Sweden and France; but circumstances arose which broke this connexion. In the month of February, 1812, the emperor Napoleon had seized upon Swedish Pomerania; and this unprovoked aggression incited the crown-prince to assert the independence of his expected throne. The dispute between Russia and France originated chiefly in the commercial restrictions which the continental system, established by the French emperor, had imposed upon Europe. The emperor Alexander, indignant at the ruin of the trade of his empire, disdained any longer to submit to the restraints of a system, which, though planned solely for the impoverishment of Great Britain, was highly injurious to his subjects, destructive to the commerce of the continent, and wholly unprecedented in the annals of the world.

A train of negotiations now commenced between Russia, Sweden, and England, and also between the two former powers and France. While the political affairs of Europe were thus in a state of suspense and uncertainty, speculative politicians amused themselves and others with numerous and

various conjectures. By some, a new continental system was fully expected; by others, it was considered as a case of the highest improbability that Russia should hazard a war with the French emperor, who would be supported by Austria and the confederation of the Rhine. It was alleged that Russia, by engaging again in a war with France, would be stopped in her progress towards the conquest of European Turkey, and even lose all that she had recently gained in that quarter. It was observed, that two more campaigns would bring the Russian armies to the shores of the Propontis, and the gates of Constantinople; and the inference was, that it could not be expected that Russia would sacrifice her hopes of conquest for the barren and dangerous glory of a war with France.

In regard to Sweden, it was considered as highly absurd to suppose that the crown-prince should engage in a war against the French emperor. Besides, it was deemed very improbable that Napoleon should provoke a war with Russia, since by such a proceeding he would ruin his cause in Spain and Portugal, and lose the finest countries in Europe for the conquest of morasses and deserts. The event, however, turned out contrary to all these sage speculations; and the reasonings and conjectures of the cabinets of St. Petersburg, Stockholm, and St. Cloud appeared to be widely different from those of news-writers and political pamphleteers. The great features of national relations and interests are in general sufficiently conspicuous; but the resolutions of courts and the results of cabinet counsels often depend on the dispositions and passions of men, on the particular views which monarchs and their ministers have of the state of affairs, and on various other circumstances which lie beyond the reach of public inspection.

The emperors of France and Russia were known to be men of widely different characters. Alexander, beneficent and pacific, might be ranked among the few princes whose virtues adorn an hereditary throne, and promote the prosperity and happiness of mankind. Napoleon, enterprising and turbulent, nurtured in camps, skilful in tactics, and inured to war, which seemed to be his element, was by nature and education admirably fitted for scenes of confusion and carnage, and for disturbing the peace of the world. The support of the continental system, contrived for the purpose of annihilating the commerce of Great Britain, and drying up the sources of her wealth, was the favourite object of the ruler of France. The overthrow of this system was evidently the interest of Russia, Sweden, and Prussia: but the resources of Sweden were inconsiderable, and Prussia was in vassalage to France. Russia was the only power that could take the lead in an attempt of that nature, in which, however, she was certain of being supported by Great Britain. The emperor of the French, with the forces of Prussia and those of the confederation of the Rhine at his command, and with every reason to expect the assistance of Austria, might probably suppose that his appearance in the field, with so vast a display of military strength, would intimidate Russia into a compliance with his demands; or, calling to mind the ensanguined fields of Austerlitz and Friedland, he might flatter himself that one successful campaign, or one decisive victory, would enable him to dictate the conditions of peace.

But whatever might be the views and expectations of the emperor of France, he began very early in the spring of this year to move numerous bodies of troops into the interior of Germany. The Russian monarch, in the mean while, prepared to meet the impending storm; and after issuing a declaration of war, put his armies in motion, and by an imperial ukase, dated the 23d of March, 1812, ordered a levy of two men in five hundred throughout his extensive dominions. During the months of February, March, and April, great numbers of French troops were continually marching through Germany; and being joined by the contingents of the Rhenish confederation, proceeded towards the Vistula, after placing garrisons in the principal cities and fortresses of Prussia. Preparatory to the great contest which was about to commence, the emperor of the French concluded treaties of alliance with Prussia and Austria, by which these two powers engaged to assist him

he perished in the fruitless attempt. The flames being now seen to rise from the largest fort, and a breach appearing in another, the commandant of the former entreated a delay of some hours, for the adjustment of a capitulation. Lord Wellington refused to listen to this request, and gave orders for an assault unless an immediate surrender should be made. The storming commenced, on which the garrison gave themselves up as prisoners of war. When the allies entered the town and observed the excellence of the fortifications, they expressed great surprise at the shortness of the siege, which had not continued beyond ten days.

Lord Wellington now put his army in motion against Marmont, but the latter retired behind the Douro, destroyed the bridges, and concentrated his forces at Tordesillas. His rear-guard stationed at Rueda was attacked by the British cavalry under sir Stapleton Cotton, and driven in great confusion upon the main body. The British general now menaced the Spanish capital; on which Marmont, who had received a reinforcement under general Bonnet, which gave him a superiority of numerical force, extended his right wing as far as Toro, restored the bridge at that place, and ordered a part of his army to cross the river, as if to turn the left wing of the British. But, hastily recalling them, he pushed on rapidly to Tordesillas, crossing at that point, and succeeded in turning the flank of the allies at Castrogon. This brilliant movement re-established his communication with Madrid and with the army of the centre. Lord Wellington, having made dispositions for the retreat and junction of his different divisions, now took up a position in which he offered battle, which Marmont thought it expedient to decline, but, disdaining to wait for some reinforcements that were hastening to him, he persevered in his manœuvres on the British flanks.

A series of skilful movements now ensued on both sides until the 21st of July, when the allied army was concentrated on the Tormes. On the same day the French crossed the river, and appeared to threaten Ciudad-Rodrigo. On the two following days, Marmont had recourse to a variety of evolutions to distract the attention of the British general from his real plan, which was to enclose the allies in their position on a peninsula formed by the river, and to cut off their retreat. He threatened their left, which he found well provided with the means of defence, while their other flank, where the real attack was expected, presented a no less formidable resistance. In aiming to surround the British, he extended and weakened his own line, and lord Wellington, watching the progress of this error, seized the favourable moment of striking the decisive blow. His arrangements were soon made, and no time lost in executing them.

Major-general Pakenham, at the head of the third division, commenced a bold attack on the flanks of the enemy's left, in which he was supported by brigadier-general Bradford's brigade, by the fourth and fifth divisions, and by the cavalry under sir Stapleton Cotton in front. The French, though finely posted, and supported by cannon, were overthrown. Against their centre, on the hill of the Arapiles, general Pack's attempt was at first unsuccessful, but the fifth division, after its success on their left, changed its front, and attacking their centre, drove it from the hill with precipitation. The right wing of the French, being joined by the fugitives, maintained a show of resistance, but it was attacked both in front and flank, and driven in confusion from the field. The pursuit was continued until night, and renewed on the following morning, when the French rear-guard was overtaken, attacked, and put to flight, the cavalry leaving the infantry to their fate. Three whole battalions surrendered, and large quantities of stores, baggage, and ammunition fell into the hands of the allies. Eleven pieces of cannon, two eagles, and six stand of colours were taken; five generals, three lieutenant-colonels, one hundred and thirty officers of different ranks, and seven thousand privates were made prisoners. On the part of the allies, the loss was about seven hundred killed and four thousand wounded. Major-general la Marchant, a brave and skilful officer, was among the killed. Lieutenant-generals Leith and Cole and major-general Alton were wounded. Sir Stapleton Cotton was fired upon at

night, by mistake, by a British soldier, but happily his wound did not prove fatal. On the part of the enemy, Marmont and Bonnet were both wounded, and the command of the fugitive army devolved upon general Clausel, who for some time made a stand on the Douro; but on the approach of the allies, he crossed that river, abandoned Valladolid, and continued his retreat upon Burgos. Thus terminated the battle of Salamanca, in which lord Wellington obtained a complete victory over an army superior to his own in numbers, and commanded by one of the most skilful of the French mareschals. On this memorable occasion the Portuguese bravely seconded the British troops; but the Spaniards had scarcely any concern in the contest, as they lost only two of their number.

Lord Wellington now resolved to engage the central army, should king Joseph have the courage to meet him, and compel him to quit the capital. Leaving a force, therefore, under general Paget to watch the motions of the enemy, the British commander advanced with the main body of his army towards Madrid. King Joseph, who with twenty thousand men under his command had reached Segovia, hearing of the defeat of Marmont, hastily retreated through Madrid to Almanza, a position from which he could communicate with either Suchet or Soult. On the 12th of August, the allied army entered the capital. The Reteiro, garrisoned by fifteen hundred men, immediately surrendered, and Gaudalaxara was, at the same time, taken by the army of Empecinado. At this time intelligence reached lord Wellington, that an army of British and Neapolitan troops from Sicily, under the command of general Maitland, with some Spaniards from Majorca, had arrived at the port of Alicant. Expectations were consequently formed that this force, uniting with the patriots of Murcia and Valencia, might favour the operations of the grand army by a powerful diversion; but, unfortunately, the defeat of general O'Donnel by the French troops under Harispe, combined with other reverses, disabled the Spaniards from acting, and, in a great measure, deranged the plan of the campaign.

Aware that their losses had been aggravated by a want of concert, the generals who commanded the armies of France now endeavoured to co-operate with the view of retrieving them. On the 24th of August, Soult abandoned the siege of Cadiz, and began to evacuate the province of Andalusia, for the purpose of uniting his forces with those of king Joseph and mareschal Suchet, for the recovery of the capital. The French troops in Biscay also evacuated that province, and joining the wreck of Marmont's army under Clausel, moved in the direction of Burgos, to watch the British troops destined for the siege of that place. By thus threatening Madrid and reinforcing Burgos, they hoped to compel the British either to fight at a disadvantage, or to retreat. They had strongly fortified the latter place, and made it the centre of their operations in the north of Spain. On the 1st of September, lord Wellington quitted Madrid, and advanced to Valladolid, the enemy retiring before him across the Pnyerga. He pursued them to Burgos, through which city they retired during the night of the 17th, leaving a strong garrison in the castle. Preparations were immediately formed by the allies for besieging this strong fortress; and as the heavy artillery had not arrived, recourse was had to the slow and uncertain process of sapping. On the 11th of October, a mine was successfully sprung; the breaches were instantly stormed and the lines escaladed, and part of the British army actually entered the works; but the fire from the garrison was so heavy, that after sustaining some loss they were compelled to retire. Preparations were then made for renewing the assault; but at this critical period the British army had to encounter a series of disappointments. They had been led to calculate on the support of a Gallician army, thirty thousand strong, in the highest state of order and equipment; whereas this army was found to consist of only ten thousand undisciplined troops. General Ballasteros, instead of obeying the orders of lord Wellington to harass the retreat of Soult into Valencia, made an appeal to the Spanish army and the nation, against the cortes, who had invested lord Wellington with the chief command. A French army under Souham approached for the