

**GILLIAT  
EDWARD**

THE ROMANCE  
OF MODERN  
SIEGES

**Edward Gilliat**

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*The Romance of Modern Sieges / Describing the personal adventures,  
resource and daring / of besiegers and beseiged in all parts of the world:*

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**PREFACE**

These chapters are not histories of sieges, but narratives of such incidents as occur in beleaguered cities, and illustrate human nature in some of its strangest moods. That “facts are stranger than fiction” these stories go to prove: such unexpected issues, such improbable interpositions meet us in the pages of history. What writer of fiction would dare to throw down battlements and walls by an earthquake, and represent besiegers as paralysed by religious fear? These tales are full, indeed, of all the elements of romance, from the heroism and self-devotion

of the brave and the patient suffering of the wounded, to the generosity of mortal foes and the kindness and humour which gleam even on the battle-field and in the hospital. But the realities of war have not been kept out of sight; now and then the veil has been lifted, and the reader has been shown a glimpse of those awful scenes which haunt the memory of even the stoutest veteran.

We cannot realize fully the life that a soldier lives unless we see both sides of that life. We cannot feel the gratitude that we ought to feel unless we know the strain and suspense, the agony and endurance, that go to make up victory or defeat. In time of war we are full of admiration for our soldiers and sailors, but in the past they have been too often forgotten or slighted when peace has ensued. Not to keep in memory the great deeds of our countrymen is mere ingratitude.

Hearty acknowledgments are due to the authors and publishers who have so kindly permitted quotation from their books. Every such permission is more particularly mentioned in its place. The writer has also had many a talk with men who have fought in the Crimea, in India, in France, and in South Africa, and is indebted to them for some little personal touches such as give life and colour to a narrative.

# CHAPTER I

## SIEGE OF GIBRALTAR (1779-1782)

The position of the Rock – State of defence – Food-supply – Rodney brings relief – Fire-ships sent in – A convoy in a fog – Heavy guns bombard the town – Watching the cannon-ball – Catalina gets no gift – One against fourteen – Red-hot shot save the day – Lord Howe to the rescue.

Gibraltar! What a thrill does the very name evoke to one who knows a little of English history and England's heroes! But to those who have the good fortune to steam in a P. and O. liner down the coast of Portugal, and catch sight of the Rock on turning by Cabrita Point into the Bay of Algeciras the thrill of admiration is intensified. For the great Rock lies like a lion couched on the marge of the Mediterranean. It is one of the pillars of Hercules: it commands the entrance to the inner sea.

From 712 to the beginning of the fourteenth century Gibraltar was in the hands of the Saracens; then it fell into the hands of the Spaniards. In 1704, the year of Blenheim, a combined English and Dutch fleet under Sir George Rooke captured the Rock from the Marquis de Salines, and Gibraltar has since then remained in the possession of the English, though several attempts have been made to wrest it from us. Before we follow Captain Drinkwater

in some details of the great siege, a few words must be said about the Rock and its defences as they then were.

The Rock itself juts out like a promontory, rising to a height of 1,300 feet, and joined to the Spanish mainland by a low sandy isthmus, which is at the foot of the Rock about 2,700 feet broad. On a narrow ledge at the foot of the north-west slope lies the little town, huddled up beneath the frowning precipice and bristling batteries excavated out of the solid rock. At different heights, up to the very crest, batteries are planted, half or wholly concealed by the galleries. All along the sea-line were bastions, mounted with great guns and howitzers, and supplied with casemates for 1,000 men. In all the fortifications were armed with 663 pieces of artillery. Conspicuous among the buildings was an old Moorish castle on the north-west side of the hill: here was planted the Grand Battery, with the Governor's residence at the upper corner of the walls. Many caves and hollows are found in the hill convenient both for powder magazines and also for hiding-places to the apes who colonize the Rock. The climate even at mid-winter is so mild and warm that cricket and tennis can be played on dry grass, wherever a lawn can be found in the neighbourhood, as the writer has experienced. But at Gibraltar itself all is stony ground and barren rock; only on the western slope a few palmettos grow, with lavender and Spanish broom, roses and asphodels.

In 1777 a good opportunity seemed to be offered for Spain to recover the Rock from England. The North American colonies

had seceded, and the prestige of Britain had suffered a severe blow. The fleets of France and Spain, sixty-six sail of the line, were opposed by Sir Charles Hardy's thirty-eight, but with these he prevented the enemy from landing an invading army on the English shore. But Spain was intent on retaking Gibraltar, and had already planted batteries across the isthmus which connects the Rock with Spain.

General Elliot, the Governor of Gibraltar, had a garrison 5,382 strong, 428 artillerymen, and 106 engineers. Admiral Duff had brought his ships – a sixty-gun man-of-war, three frigates, and a sloop – alongside the New Mole. All preparations were made to resist a siege. Towards the middle of August the enemy succeeded in establishing a strict blockade with the object of reducing the garrison by famine. There were not more than forty head of cattle in the place, and supplies from Africa were intercepted by the Spanish cruisers. In November the effects of scarcity began to be felt, though many of the inhabitants had been sent away. Mutton was three shillings a pound, ducks fourteen shillings a couple; even fish and bread were very scarce. General Elliot set the example of abstemious living, and for eight days he lived on 4 ounces of rice a day. The inhabitants had for some time been put upon a daily ration of bread, delivered under the protection of sentries with fixed bayonets. But even with this safeguard for the week there was a scene of struggling daily. Many times the stronger got more than their share, the weaker came away empty-handed, and eked out a wretched existence on



leeks and thistles. Even soldiers and their families were perilously near starvation. So that a listless apathy fell on the majority, and they looked seaward in vain for a help that did not arrive.

It was not until the 15th of January, 1780, that the joyful news went round the little town of a brig in the offing which bore the British flag.

“She cannot pass the batteries!”

“She is standing in for the Old Mole! Hurrah!”

That brig brought the tidings of approaching relief, and many a wet eye kindled with hope.

But the look-out on Signal Point could see the Spaniards in Algeciras Bay preparing for sea eleven men-of-war to cut off the convoy. Again the hopes of the garrison went down. They did not know, neither did the Spaniards, that Admiral Sir George Rodney, an old Harrow boy, was escorting the convoy with a powerful fleet of twenty-one sail of the line. He quickly drove the eleven Spaniards into headlong flight, but before rounding into the bay he fell in with fifteen Spanish merchant-men and six ships of war, which became his prize.

Then for a time the town and garrison enjoyed themselves frugally, and life became worth living. But on the departure of Rodney the Spaniards tried to destroy the British vessels in the bay with fire-ships.

It was on a June night that the fire spread, and the gleam shot across the water, lighting up Algeciras and the cork forests that clothe the mountain-side. Then the alarm was given. The

*Panther*, a sixty-gun man-of-war, and the other armed ships opened fire on the assailants; officers and men sprang into their boats and grappled the blazing ships, making fast hawsers, and towing them under the great guns of the Rock, where they were promptly sunk.

Again the blight of ennui, sickness, and famine came on the little garrison; but in October a cargo of fruit came just in time to save them from scurvy. In March, 1781, the want of bread became serious: biscuit crumbs were selling for a shilling a pound. "How long?" was the anxious cry that was felt, if not expressed in words. Had England forgotten her brave men?

On the 12th of April, to the joyful surprise of all, a great convoy was signalled, escorted by a strong fleet. Every man, woman, and child who could walk came out upon the ramparts and gazed seawards with glistening eyes. At daybreak, says the historian of the siege, "Admiral Darby's much-expected fleet was in sight from our signal-house, but was not discernible from below, being obscured by a thick mist in the Gut. As the sun rose, however, the fog rose too like the curtain of a vast theatre, discovering to the anxious garrison one of the most beautiful and pleasing scenes it is possible to conceive. The ecstasies of the inhabitants at this grand and exhilarating sight are not to be described; but, alas! they little dreamed of the tremendous blow that impended, which was to annihilate their property, and reduce many of them to indigence and beggary."

For this second relief of the garrison stung the Spaniards into

the adoption of a measure which inflicted a large amount of suffering on the citizens. They at once began to bombard the town with sixty-four heavy guns and fifty mortars. All amongst the crowds in the narrow, winding streets, through the frail roofs and windows, came shot and shell, so that one and all fled from their homes, seeking cover among the rocks. This was the time for thieves to operate, and many houses were rifled of their contents. Then it was discovered that many hucksters and liquor-dealers had been hoarding and hiding their stocks, and a fire having broken out in a wine-shop, the soldiers tasted and drank to excess. Then in a few days the discipline became relaxed; many of the garrison stole and took away to their quarters barrels of wine, which they proceeded to stow away, to their own peril and ruin. At length General Elliot was compelled to issue orders that any soldier found drunk or asleep at his post should be shot.

What surprises us in our days of long-distance firing is the strange fact that a man with sharp vision could see one of the cannon-balls as it came towards him. One day, we are told, an officer saw a ball coming his way, but he was so fascinated by it that he could not move out of the way. Another day a shot fell into a house in which nearly twenty people were gathered together: all escaped except one child. On another occasion a shot came through the embrasures of one of the British batteries, took off the legs of two men, one leg of another, and wounded a fourth man in both legs, so that "four men had seven legs taken off and wounded by one shot." A boy who had been posted on

the works, on account of his keenness of vision, to warn the men when a cannon-ball was coming their way, had only just been complaining that they did not heed his warnings, and while he turned to the men this shot which did all this hurt was fired by the enemy. A large cannon-ball in those days weighed 30 pounds, others much less. The author remembers Admiral Colomb telling the Harrow boys in a lecture that a Captain of those days could carry two or more cannon-balls in his coat-tail pocket; the balls of modern guns have to be moved by hydraulic machinery. Yet it is astonishing how much damage the old cannon-balls could inflict, lopping along like overgrown cricket-balls as they did.

Sometimes incidents happened of an amusing character.

One day a soldier was rummaging about among the ruins of a fallen house, and came upon a find of watches and jewels. He bethought him at once of a very pretty Spanish girl who had coquetted with him in the gardens of the Alameda.

“Now, let me see,” he murmured to himself, “how can I put this away safe? Little Catalina will laugh when she sees them there jewels, I’ll be bound! Humph! I can’t take this lot to quarters, that’s sartin! Them sergeants, as feel one all round on return from duty, will grab the lot.”

So he walked on, musing and pondering over his weighty affair.

As he was passing the King’s Bastion a happy thought struck him.

“By George, sir!” he said to himself, “it’s just the very thing.

Who would think of looking for a watch inside a gun?" and he chuckled to himself.

It was high noon; the sentinel seemed half asleep. The soldier tied up his prize in his handkerchief, took out the wad of the gun, and slipped his treasure-trove into the bore of the cannon, replacing the wad carefully. That evening he met Catalina, and managed to inform her that he had a pleasant surprise for her, if she could come to the King's Bastion.

Her dark eyes glanced mischievously.

"No, not in the evening, I thank you, Jacko. I will come to-morrow, an hour after sunrise."

"Very well, Catalina; I see you do not trust me. To-morrow, then, you shall come with me to the King's Bastion, and see with your own eyes how rich I can make you."

Catalina understood enough English to laugh heartily at her lover's grave and mysterious words.

"He has stolen a loaf and a bottle of wine," she thought in her simplicity.

However, Catalina did not disappoint Jack, and together they paced towards the semi-circular platform of the King's Bastion.

Jack was a very proud man as he tried to explain to his lady-love what a surprise was in store for her: he touched her wrists to show how the bracelets would fit, and her shapely neck to prove the existence of a splendid necklace, and Catalina began to believe her boy.

But as they came out upon the gun platform, Jack stopped

suddenly, and uttered a fearful oath.

“O dios!” cried the maid, “what is there to hurt, Jacko?”

“Don’t you see? Oh, Catalina, the game is up! That devil of a gunner is wiping out the bore of his gun!”

Jack ran up, and, seizing the man by the arm, said: “I say, mate, if you have found a parcel in that gun, it’s mine! I put it in last night. I tell you it’s mine, mate! Don’t you try to make believe you have not seen it, ’cos I know you has.”

The gunner stared in open-mouthed astonishment at the speaker. At last he said, with a touch of sarcasm:

“What for do you think I am wiping out her mouth, you silly! You must have slept pretty sound not to know that them gunboats crept up again last night.”

“The devil take them! Then, where’s that gold watch of mine and them jewels? I put ’em for safety in that fool of a gun.”

“Oh, then, you may depend upon it, my lad, that the watch-glass has got broke, for we fired a many rounds in the night.”

“What for you look so to cry?” asked little Catalina in wonder.

“Oh, come away, sweetheart. You’ll get no rich present this year; them Spaniards have collared ’em all. O Lord! O Lord!”

On the 7th of July the Spaniards at Cabrita Point were seen to be signalling the approach of an enemy. As the mists melted away, the garrison could see a ship becalmed out in the bay. Fourteen gunboats from Algeciras had put out to cut her off; on this, Captain Curtis, of the *Brilliant*, ordered three barges to row alongside, and receive any dispatches she might have on board.

This was done just before the leading Spanish gunboat got within range; then came a hideous storm of round and grape shot as the fourteen gunboats circled round the *Helma*.

But Captain Roberts, though he had only fourteen small guns, returned their fire gallantly. The English sloop was lying becalmed about a league from the Rock, and the garrison in Gibraltar could do nothing to help her. They looked every minute to see the *Helma* sink, but still she battled on against their 26-pounders.

Then, when hope seemed desperate, a westerly breeze sprang up; the waters darkened and rippled round the *Helma*, her canvas slowly filled out, and she came away with torn sails and rigging to the shelter of the Mole.

In September, 1782, a grand attack was made by the Spaniards with ten men-of-war, gunboats, mortar-boats, and floating batteries. They took up their position about 900 yards from the King's Bastion. Four hundred pieces of the heaviest artillery were crashing and thundering, while all the air was thick with smoke. General Elliott had made his preparations: the round shot was being heated in portable furnaces all along the front, and as the furnaces were insufficient, huge fires were lit in the angles between buildings on which our "roast potatoes," as the soldiers nicknamed the hot shot, were being baked.

But the enemy's battering-ships seemed invulnerable. "Our heaviest shells often rebounded from their tops, whilst the 32-pound shot seemed incapable of making any visible impression

upon their hulls. Frequently we flattered ourselves they were on fire, but no sooner did any smoke appear than, with admirable intrepidity, men were observed applying water from their engines within to those places whence the smoke issued. Even the artillery themselves at this period had their doubts of the effect of the red-hot shot, which began to be used about twelve, but were not general till between one and two o'clock." After some hours' incessant firing, the masts of several Spanish ships were seen to be toppling over; the flag-ship and the Admiral's second ship were on fire, and on board some others confusion was seen to be prevailing. Their fire slackened, while ours increased. Then, as night came on, the gleams spread across the troubled waters; the cannonade of the garrison increased in rapidity and power. At one in the morning two ships were blazing mast-high, and the others soon caught fire from the red-hot shot or from the flying sparks. The light and glow of this fearful conflagration brought out the weird features of the whole bay: the sombre Rock, the blood-red sea, the white houses of Algeciras five miles across, the dark cork forests, and the Spanish mountains – all stood out in strange perspective. Amid the roar of cannon were fitfully heard the hoarse murmurs of the crowds that lined the shore and the screams of burning men. Sometimes a deep gloom shrouded the background of earth and sea, while gigantic columns of curling, serpent flame shot up from the blazing hulls.

Brigadier Curtis, who was encamped at Europa Point, now took out his flotilla of twelve gunboats, each being armed with



a 24-pounder in its bow, and took the floating batteries in flank, compelling the Spanish relieving boats to retire.

Daylight showed a sight never to be forgotten: the flames had paled before the sun, but the dark forms of the Spaniards moving amongst the fire and shrieking for help and compassion stirred all the feelings of humanity. Some were clinging to the sides of the burning ships, others were flinging themselves into the waves. Curtis led his boats up to the smoking hulks in order to rescue some of the victims. He and his men climbed on board the battering-ships at the risk of their lives, and helped down the Spaniards, who were profuse in their expressions of gratitude.

But as the English thus worked for the rescue of their enemies, the magazine of one of the Spanish ships blew up with a crash at about five o'clock, and a quarter of an hour after another exploded in the centre of the line. Burning splinters were hurled around in all directions, and involved the British gunboats in grave danger. In the Brigadier's boat his coxswain was killed, his stroke wounded, and a hole was forced through the bottom of the boat. After landing 357 Spaniards, the English were compelled to retire under the cover of the Rock, leaving the remainder to their dreadful fate. Of the six ships still on fire, three blew up before eleven o'clock; the other three burned down to the water's edge.

Thus ended the attempt to take the Rock by means of floating castles. The loss sustained by the Spaniards was about 2,000 killed, wounded, and taken prisoners; whereas the losses in

the garrison were surprisingly small, considering how long a cannonade had been kept up upon the forts: 16 only were killed; 18 officers, sergeants, and rank and file were wounded. Yet the enemy had been firing more than 300 pieces of heavy ordnance, while the English garrison could bring to bear only 80 cannon, 7 mortars, and 9 howitzers; but even for these they expended 716 barrels of powder.

As Admiral Lord Howe was sailing with a powerful fleet to the help of Gibraltar, he heard the news of General Elliot's splendid defence. On the night of the 18th of October, 1782, a great storm scattered the French and Spanish ships; and soon after the delighted garrison saw Lord Howe's fleet and his convoy, containing fresh troops and provisions, approaching in order of battle. The blockade was now virtually at an end. The siege had lasted three years, seven months, and twelve days. Since then no attempt has been made to capture Gibraltar.

## CHAPTER II

# DEFENCE OF ACRE (1799)

Jaffa stormed by Napoleon – Sir Sidney Smith hurries to Acre – Takes a convoy – How the French procured cannon-balls – The Turks fear the mines – A noisy sortie – Fourteen assaults – A Damascus blade – Seventy shells explode – Napoleon nearly killed – The siege raised – A painful retreat.

Napoleon Bonaparte had crushed all opposition in Central and Southern Europe, but there was one Power which foiled him – Great Britain.

The French Government compelled Spain and Holland to join in a naval war against England, but Jervis and Nelson broke and scattered the combined fleets.

Bonaparte had conceived a bitter hatred against the only Power which now defied the might of France, and was causing him “to miss his destiny.”

“I will conquer Egypt and India; then, attacking Turkey, I will take Europe in the rear.” So he wrote. In the spring of 1798 he set out for Egypt, reducing Malta on the way, and just eluding Nelson’s fleet.

He had got as far as Cairo when he heard of Nelson’s victory in Aboukir Bay, where his French fleet was destroyed.

But Bonaparte, undaunted, pressed on to attack Syria. He stormed Jaffa, and put the garrison to the sword. Not content with this cruelty, he marched the townsfolk, to the number of 3,700, into the middle of a vast square, formed by the French troops. The poor wretches shed no tears, uttered no cries. Some who were wounded and could not march so fast as the rest were bayoneted on the way.

The others were halted near a pool of dirty, stagnant water, divided into small bodies, marched in different directions, and there shot down. When the French soldiers had exhausted their cartridges, the sword and bayonet finished the business. Sir Sidney Smith, a Captain commanding a few ships in the Levant, hearing of these atrocities, hurried with his ships to St. Jean d'Acre, which lies north of Jaffa, on the north end of the bay which is protected on the south by the chalk headland of Carmel, jutting out like our Beachy Head far into the sea.

Sir Sidney arrived in the *Tigre* at Acre only two days before Bonaparte appeared. On the 17th of March he sent the *Tigre's* boats by night to the foot of Mount Carmel, and there they found the French advanced guard encamped close to the water's edge. The boats opened with grape, and the French retired in a hurry up the side of the mount.

The main body of the army, hearing that the sea-road was exposed to gun-fire from British ships, went round by Nazareth and invested Acre to the east. A French corvette and nine sail of gun vessels coming round Mount Carmel, found themselves close

to the English fleet, and seven of them were made prizes, manned from the ships, and employed to harass the enemy's posts.

The French trenches were opened on the 20th of March with thirty-two cannon, but they were deficient in balls. The French General, Montholon, tells us how they made the English provide them with cannon-balls. It reminds us of our own plan at Jellalabad. He says that Napoleon from time to time ordered a few waggons to be driven near the sea, on sight of which Sir Sidney would send in shore one of his ships and pour a rolling fire around the waggons. Presently the French troops would run to the spot, collect all the balls they could find and bring them in to the Director of Artillery, receiving five sous for each ball. This they did, while laughter resounded on every side. The French could afford to be merry. Under Bonaparte they had become the masters of the greater part of Europe. Nothing seemed impossible to them under that military genius. Here they were besieging a little trumpery Syrian town, which they calculated they could take in three days; "for," said they, "it is not so strong as Jaffa. Its garrison only amounts to 2,000 or 3,000 men, whereas Jaffa had a garrison of 8,000 Turks."

On the 25th of March the French had made a breach in the tower which was considered practicable. A young officer with fifteen sappers and twenty-five Grenadiers, was ordered to mount to the assault and clear the tower fort; but a counter-scarp 15 feet high stopped them. Many were wounded, and they hastily retired. On the 28th a mine was sprung, and they assaulted again;

but “the Turks exerted themselves so far on this occasion,” writes Sir Sidney, “as to knock the assailants off their ladders into the ditch, where about forty of their bodies now lie.” Montholon writes: “The breach was found to be too high by several feet, and Mailly, an officer of the staff, and others were killed. When the Turks saw Adjutant Lusigier fixing the ladder, a panic seized them, and many fled to the port. Even Djeddar, the Governor, had embarked. It was very unfortunate. That was the day on which the town ought to have been taken.”

Early in April a sortie took place, in which the British Marines were to force their way into the French mine, while the Turks attacked the trenches. The sally took place just before daylight, but the noise and shouting of the Turks rendered the attempt to surprise the enemy useless; but they succeeded in destroying part of the mine, at considerable loss. The Turks brought in above sixty heads, many muskets and entrenching tools. “We have taught the besiegers,” writes Sir Sidney, “to respect the enemy they have to deal with, so as to keep at a greater distance.” On the 1st of May the enemy, after many hours’ heavy cannonade from thirty pieces of artillery brought from Jaffa, made a fourth attempt to mount the breach, now much widened, but were repulsed with loss.

“The *Tigre* moored on one side and the *Theseus* on the other, flank the town walls, and the gunboats, launches, etc., flank the enemy’s trenches, to their great annoyance. Nothing but desperation can induce them to make the sort of attempts they

do to mount the breach under such a fire as we pour in upon them; and it is impossible to see the lives, even of our enemies, thus sacrificed, and so much bravery misapplied, without regret. I must not omit to mention, to the credit of the Turks, that they fetch gabions, fascines, and other material which the garrison does not afford from the face of the enemy's works."

By the 9th of May the French had on nine several occasions attempted to storm, but had been beaten back with immense slaughter. On the fifty-first day of the siege the English had been reinforced by Hassan Bey with corvettes and transports; but this only made Bonaparte attack with more ferocity, having protected themselves with sand-bags and the bodies of their dead built in with them. It was a touch and go whether the French would not fight their way in. A group of Generals was assembled on Cœur-de-Lion's Mount, among whom Napoleon was distinguishable, as he raised his glasses and gesticulated. At this critical moment Sir Sidney landed his boats at the mole and took the crews up to the breach armed with pikes. The enthusiastic gratitude of the Turks – men, women, and children – at sight of such a reinforcement is not to be described. The few Turks who were standing their ground in the breach were flinging heavy stones down on the heads of the advancing foe, but many of the French mounted to the heap of ruins in the breach so close that the muzzles of their muskets touched and their spear-heads locked.

Djezzar Pasha, on hearing that so large a force of the English were fighting in the breach, left his seat, where, according to

Turkish custom, he was sitting to distribute rewards to such as should bring him the heads of the enemy, and coming behind our men, the energetic old man pulled back his English friends with violence, saying, "If any harm happen to the English, all is lost."

A sally made by the Turks in another quarter caused the French in the trenches to uncover themselves above their parapet, so that the fire from our boats brought down numbers of them. A little before sunset a massive column came up to the breach with solemn step. By the Pasha's orders a good number of the French were let in, and they descended from the rampart into the Pasha's garden, where in a very few minutes their bravest lay headless corpses, the sabre proving more than a match for the bayonet. The rest, seeing what was done, fled precipitately. The breach was now practicable for fifty men abreast. "We felt," says Sir Sidney, "that we must defend it at all costs, for by this breach Bonaparte means to march to further conquest, and on the issue of this conflict depends the conduct of the thousands of spectators who sit on the surrounding hills, waiting to see which side they shall join."

With regard to the cutting off of heads by the Turks, one day, when out riding, Sir Sidney questioned the superior metal of the Damascus blade, when Djezzar Pasha replied that such a blade would separate the head from the body of any animal without turning the edge.

"Look!" said the Pasha; "this one I carry about with me never fails. It has taken off some dozens of heads."



“Very well, Pasha,” said Sir Sidney. “Could you not give me ocular proof of the merit of your Damascus, and at the same time of your own expertness, by slicing off, *en passant*, the head of one of the oxen we are now approaching?”

“Ah, q’oui, monsieur, c’est déjà fait;” and springing off at a gallop, he smote a poor ox as it was grazing close to the path, and the head immediately rolled on the ground. A Damascus sabre regards neither joints nor bones, but goes slicing through, and you cannot feel any dint on the edge thereof.

On the 14th of May Sir Sidney writes to his brother: “Our labour is excessive: many of us have died of fatigue. I am but half dead, and nearly blinded by sun and sand. Bonaparte brings fresh troops to the assault two or three times in the night, and so we are obliged to be always under arms. He has lost the flower of his army in these desperate attempts to storm, as appears by the certificates of former services which we find in their pockets. We have been now near two months constantly under fire and firing. We cannot guard the coast lower down than Mount Carmel, for the Pasha tells me, if we go away, the place will fall, so that the French get supplies from Jaffa to the south. I sent Captain Miller in the *Theseus* yesterday to chase three French frigates off Cæsarea; but, alas! seventy shells burst at the forepart of Captain Miller’s cabin, killing him and thirty-two men, including some who jumped overboard and were drowned.” The ship got on fire in five places, but was saved. By the 16th of May Bonaparte had lost eight Generals and most of his artillerymen – in all

upwards of 4,000 men. The Turks were becoming quite brave and confident. They boldly rushed in on the assaulting columns, sabre in hand, and cut them to pieces before they could fire twice. But they were struck with terror at the thought of the mines which they imagined might blow up at any time, and could not be forced to remain on the walls or in the tower. However, the knowledge which the garrison had of the massacre at Jaffa rendered them desperate in their personal defence.

In the fourteenth assault General Kleber led his victorious troops to the breach. It was a grand and terrific spectacle. The Grenadiers rushed forward under a shower of balls. Kleber, with the gait of a giant, with his thick head of hair and stentorian voice, had taken his post, sword in hand, on the bank of the breach. The noise of the cannon, the rage of the soldiers, the yells of the Turks, were all bewildering and awful.

General Bonaparte, standing on the battery of the breach, looking rather paler than usual, was following the progress of the assault through his glass, when a ball passed above his head; but he would not budge. In vain did Berthier ask him to quit this perilous post – he received no answer – and two or three officers were killed close to him; yet he made no sign of moving from the spot. All at once the column of the besiegers came to a standstill. Bonaparte went further forward, and then perceived that the ditch was vomiting out flames and smoke. It was impossible to go on. Kleber, in a great rage, struck his thigh with his sword and swore. But the General-in-Chief, judging the obstacle to

be insurmountable, gave a gesture and ordered a retreat. After this failure the French Grenadiers absolutely refused to mount the breach any more over the putrid bodies of their unburied companions. Bonaparte for once seems to have lost his judgment, first by sacrificing so many of his best men in trying to take a third-rate fort; and, secondly, because, even if he had succeeded in taking the town, the fire of the English ships must have driven him out again in a short time.

One last desperate throw was made for success by sending an Arab dervish with a letter to the Pasha proposing a cessation of arms for the purpose of burying the dead. During the conference of the English and Turkish Generals on this subject a volley of shot and shells on a sudden announced an assault; but the garrison was ready, and all they did was to increase the numbers of the slain, to the disgrace of the General who thus disloyally sacrificed them. The game was up after a siege of sixty days: in the night following the 20th of May the French army began to retreat. But as they could not carry their guns and wounded with them, these were hurried to sea without seamen to navigate the ships, in want of water and food. They steered straight for the English ships, and claimed and received succour. Their expressions of gratitude to Sir Sidney were mingled with execrations on their General for his cruel treatment of them. English boats rowed along the shore and harassed their march south. The whole track between Acre and Gaza was strewn with the dead bodies of those who had sunk under fatigue or from their wounds. At Gaza Bonaparte

turned inland, but there he was much molested by the Arabs. The remnant of a mighty host went on, creeping towards Egypt in much confusion and disorder.

Sir Sidney Smith had thus defeated the great General of France, who grudgingly said: “This man has made me miss my destiny.” In the hour of victory Sir Sidney was generous and humane, for he had a good heart, good humour, and much pity. Nor did he forget the Giver of all victory, as the following extract from a letter testifies:

*“Nazareth, 1799.—* I am just returned from the Cave of the Annunciation, where, secretly and alone, I have been returning thanks to the Almighty for our late wonderful success. Well may we exclaim, ‘the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.’ – W. S. S.”

# **CHAPTER III**

## **THE WOUNDED CAPTAIN IN TALAVERA (1809)**

Talavera between two fires – Captain Boothby wounded – Brought into Talavera – The fear of the citizens – The surgeons' delay – Operations without chloroform – The English retire – French troops arrive – Plunder – French officers kind, and protect Boothby – A private bent on loot beats a hasty retreat.

Captain Boothby, of the Royal Engineers, left behind him a diary of his experiences in Spain during part of the Peninsular War in 1809. It will help us to understand how much suffering war inflicts, and how much pain we have been saved by the inventions of modern science.

He tells us he had been provided with quarters in Talavera, at the house of Donna Pollonia di Monton, a venerable dame. She was the only person left in the house, the rest having fled to the mountains in fear lest the French should come and sack the city; for in the streets those who remained were shouting in their panic, "The French have taken the suburbs!" or "The British General is in full retreat!" or "O Dios! los Ingleses nos abandonan!" ("O God! the English are deserting us!"). The fact was that Wellesley was not sure if he could hold his ground at

Talavera.

Captain Boothby went out one morning towards the enemy's position; he was brought back in the evening on a bier by four men, his leg shattered by a musket-ball. The old lady threw up her hands when she saw him return.

"What!" she exclaimed, while the tears ran down her cheeks. "Can this be the same? This he whose cheeks in the morning were glowing with health? Blessed Virgin, see how white they are now!"

She made haste to prepare a bed.

"Oh, what luxury to be laid upon it, after the hours of pain and anxiety, almost hopeless, I had undergone! The surgeon, Mr. Bell, cut off my boot, and having examined the wound, said:

"Sir, I fear there is no chance of saving your leg, and the amputation must be above the knee."

"He said the operation could not be performed until the morning, and went back to the hospital.

"I passed a night of excruciating pain. My groans were faint, because my body was exhausted with the three hours' stumbling about in the woods. Daylight was ushered in by a roar of cannon so loud, so continuous, that I hardly conceived the wars of all the earth could produce such a wild and illimitable din. Every shot seemed to shake the house with increasing violence, and poor Donna Pollonia rushed in crying:

"They are firing the town!"

"No, no," said I; 'don't be frightened. Why should they fire

the town? Don't you perceive that the firing is becoming more distant?"

So the poor lady became less distraught, and watched by him with sympathizing sorrow. But at length, finding the day advancing, his pains unabating, and no signs of any medical help coming, he tore a leaf from his pocket-book, and with a pencil wrote a note to the chief surgeon, Mr. Higgins, saying that, as he had been informed no time was to be lost in the amputation, he was naturally anxious that his case should be attended to. The messenger returned, saying that the surgeon could not possibly leave the hospital. He sent a second note, and a third, and towards ten o'clock a.m. the harrassed surgeon made his appearance.

"Captain Boothby," said he, "I am extremely sorry that I could not possibly come here before, still more sorry that I only come now to tell you I cannot serve you. There is but one case of instruments. This I cannot bring from the hospital while crowds of wounded, both officers and men, are pressing for assistance."

"I did but wish to take my turn," said the Captain.

"I hope," he added, "that towards evening the crowd will decrease, and that I shall be able to bring Mr. Gunning with me to consult upon your case."

"Will you examine my wound, sir," said Boothby, "and tell me honestly whether you apprehend any danger from the delay?"

He examined the leg, and said:

"No, I see nothing in this case from which the danger would be increased by waiting five or six hours."

There was nothing for it but patience.

“I taxed my mind to make an effort, but pain, far from loosening his fangs at the suggestion of reason, clung fast, and taught me that, in spite of mental pride, he is, and must be, dreadful to the human frame.”

Mr. Higgins came to him about three o'clock, bringing with him Mr. Gunning and Mr. Bell, and such instruments as they might have occasion for.

Mr. Gunning sat down by his bedside, and made a formal exhortation: explained that to save the life it was necessary to part with the limb, and he required of him an effort of mind and a manly resolution.

“Whatever is necessary, that I am ready to bear,” said the Captain.

Then the surgeons, having examined his wound, went to another part of the room to consult, after which they withdrew – to bring the apparatus, as he imagined. Hours passed, and they did not return. His servant, Aaron, having sought Mr. Gunning, was told that he was too much occupied. This after having warned him that there was no time to be lost!

“Go, then,” said the Captain to Aaron – “go into the street, and bring me the first medical officer you happen to fall in with.”

He returned, bringing with him Mr. Grasset, surgeon of the 48th Regiment.

After examining the wound, Mr. Grasset declared that he was by no means convinced of the necessity of the amputation, and



would not undertake the responsibility.

“But,” said the wounded man, “I suppose an attempt to save the leg will be attended with great danger.”

“So will the amputation,” he replied. “But we must hope for the best, and I see nothing to make your cure impossible. The bones, to be sure, are much shattered, and the leg is much mangled and swollen; but have you been bled, sir?”

“No,” said Captain Boothby.

Mr. Grasset conceived bleeding absolutely necessary, though he had already lost much, and at his request he bled him in the arm.

He guessed that Mr. Gunning’s departure proceeded from his conviction that a gangrene had already begun, and that it would be cruel to disturb his dying moments by a painful and fruitless operation.

As he had taken nothing but vinegar and water since his misfortune, his strength was exhausted, and the operation of bleeding was succeeded by an interval of unconsciousness. From this state he was roused by some one taking hold of his hand. It was his friend Dr. FitzPatrick.

“If I had you in London,” said he with a sigh, “I might attempt to save your limb; but amid the present circumstances it would be hopeless. I had been told that the amputation had been performed, else, ill as I could have been spared, I would have left the field and come to you.”

“Do you think you are come too late?” asked the Captain.

He said "No"; but he dissembled. At that time Boothby was under strong symptoms of lockjaw, which did not disappear until many hours after the operation. The doctor took a towel, and soaking it in vinegar and water, laid it on the wound, which gave much relief. He stayed with him till late, changing the lotion as often as needed. The operation was fixed for daylight on the morrow.

The patient passed another dismal night. At nine o'clock next morning FitzPatrick and Miller, Higgins and Bell, staff-surgeons, came to his bedside. They had put a table in the middle of the room, and placed on it a mattress. Then one of the surgeons came and exhorted him to summon his fortitude. Boothby told him he need not be afraid, and FitzPatrick said he could answer for him. They then carried him to the table and laid him on the mattress. Mr. Miller wished to place a handkerchief over his eyes, but he assured him that it was unnecessary; he would look another way.

"I saw that the knife was in FitzPatrick's hand, which being as I wished, I averted my head.

"I will not shock the reader by describing the operation in detail, but as it is a common idea that the most painful part of an operation lies in sundering the bone, I may rectify an error by declaring that the only part of the process in which the pain comes up to the natural anticipation is the first incision round the limb, by which the skin is divided, the sensation of which is as if a prodigious weight were impelling the severing edge. The sawing of the bone gives no uneasy sensation; or, if any, it is

overpowered by others more violent.

“‘Is it off?’ said I, as I felt it separate.

“‘Yes,’ said FitzPatrick, ‘your sufferings are over.’

“‘Ah no! you have yet to take up the arteries.’

“‘It will give you no pain,’ he said kindly; and that was true – at least, after what I had undergone, the pain seemed nothing.

“I was carried back to my bed much exhausted. Soon hope returned to my breast; it was something to have preserved the possibility of yet being given back to happiness and friendship.”

For some time after the operation his stomach refused sustenance, and a constant hiccough was recognized by the surgeons as a fatal prognostic.

His faithful friend, Edmund Mulcaster, hardly ever left his bedside. General Sherbrooke came to see him often, and evinced the most earnest anxiety for his welfare. They wrote to his friends for him, and to his mother. This last he signed himself.

In the night of the 30th, by the perseverance of Mulcaster, he managed to retain some mulled wine, strongly spiced, and in the morning took two eggs from the same welcome hand. This was the “turn.” The unfavourable symptoms began to subside, and the flowing stream of life began to fill by degrees its almost deserted channels.

On the 2nd of August some officers, entering his room, said that information had been received of Soult’s arrival at Placentia, and that General Wellesley intended to head back and engage him.

“If the French come while we are away, Boothby,” said Goldfinch, “you must cry out, ‘Capitaine anglais,’ and you will be treated well.”

On the 3rd of August his friends all came to take leave of him. It was a blank, rugged moment. Mr. Higgins, the senior surgeon, was left behind to tend the wounded.

The mass of the people of England is hasty, and often unjust, in its judgment of military events. They will condemn a General as rash when he advances, or revile him as a coward when he retreats. News of the battle of Talavera had been announced by the trumpet of victory. The people of England expected the emancipation of Spain. Now were they cast down when told that the victors had been obliged to retire and leave their wounded to the mercy of a vanquished enemy.

If Lord Wellington knew the strength and condition of the force under Soult, it would be hard to justify his conduct in facing back. In Spain, however, it was impossible to get correct information. The Spaniards are deaf to bad news and idiotically credulous to all reports that flatter their hopes. Thus the rashness of Lord Wellington in placing himself between two armies, Soult and Ney, the least of whom was equal to himself, may be palliated.

The repulse and flight of the French after the Battle of Talavera restored confidence to the fugitive townsfolk. They left the mountains and re-entered Talavera. The house was again filled with old and young, who strove to wait on the Captain. But

soon the evacuation of the town by the British awoke their fears; but with thankfulness let us record that a British officer, wounded and mutilated, was to the women of the house too sacred an object to be abandoned.

The citizens of Talavera had clung to the hope that at least their countrymen would stay and protect them; but on the 4th, seeing them also file under their windows in a long, receding array, they came to the Captain – those near his house – beating their breasts and tearing their hair, and demanded of him if he knew what was to become of them.

Boothby sent Aaron to take a message to the Colonel left Commandant by General Wellesley, but he came back saying that the Colonel was gone, having given orders that those in the hospitals who were able to move should set off instantly for Oropesa, as the French were at hand. The sensation this notice produced is beyond all description. The Captain lay perfectly still; other wounded men had themselves placed across horses and mules, and fruitlessly attempted to escape. The road to Oropesa was covered with our poor wounded, limping, bloodless soldiers. On crutches or sticks they hobbled woefully along. For the moment panic terror lent them a new force, but many lay down on the road to take their last sleep.

Such were the tales that Aaron and others came to tell him. He tried to comfort them, and said the French were not so bad as they fancied. Still, his mind was far from being at ease. He thought it possible that some foraging party might plunder him and commit

excesses in the house, or on the women, who would run to him for protection, however uselessly. The evening of the 4th, however, closed in quietness, and a visit from the senior medical officer, Mr. Higgins, gave him great comfort.

The 5th of August dawned still and lovely. A traveller might have supposed Talavera to be in profound peace until, gazing on her gory heights, he saw they were covered with heaps of ghastly slain. The tranquil interval was employed in laying in a stock of provisions. Pedro argued with him.

“But, signore, the Brencone asks a dollar a couple for his chickens!”

“Buy, buy, buy!” was all the answer he could get from the Captain.

Wine, eggs, and other provender were laid in at a rate which provoked the rage and remonstrance of the little Italian servant.

About the middle of the day a violent running and crying under the windows announced an alarm. The women rushed into his room, exclaiming, “Los Franceses, los Franceses!” The assistant surgeon of artillery came in.

“Well, Mr. Steniland,” said the Captain, “are the French coming?”

“Yes,” he answered; “I believe so. Mr. Higgins is gone out to meet them.”

“That’s right,” said Boothby.

In about an hour Mr. Higgins entered, saying, “I have been out of town above two leagues and can see nothing of them. If they

do come, they will have every reason to treat us with attention, for they will find their own wounded lying alongside of ours, provided with the same comforts and the same care.”

On the 6th, reports of the enemy’s approach were treated with total disregard. Between eight and nine o’clock the galloping of horses was heard in the street. The women ran to the windows and instantly shrank back, pale as death, with finger on lip.

“Los demonios!” they whispered, and then on tiptoe watched in breathless expectation of seeing some bloody scene.

“They have swords and pistols all ready,” cried Manoela, trembling.

“How’s this?” cried old Donna Pollonia. “Why, they pass the English soldiers. They go on talking and laughing. Jesus! Maria! What does it mean?”

Presently Mr. Higgins came in. He had ridden out to meet the French General, and had found that officer full of encomiums and good assurances.

“Your wounded are the most sacred trust to our national generosity. As for you, medical gentlemen, who have been humane and manly enough not to desert your duty to your patients (many of whom are Frenchmen), stay amongst us as long as you please. You are as free as the air you breathe.”

The town owed much to Mr. Higgins!

To prepare for the approaching crisis, to ride forth and parley with the enemy and persuade him that he owes you respect, gratitude – this is to be an officer of the first class. Throughout

Mr. Higgins displayed the character of no common man.

We should say something of the household among which the Captain was placed.

Servants and masters and mistresses in Spain associate very freely together, but the submissive docility of the servants keeps pace with the affability with which they are treated. First after Don Manoel and Donna Pollonia came Catalina – a tall, elegant woman of forty, a sort of housekeeper held in high estimation by the señora. Then come two old women, Tia Maria and Tia Pepa “tia” means “aunt”); then Manoela, a lively, simple lass, plain and hardy, capable of chastising with her fists any ill-mannered youth. Then the carpenter’s daughters, two pretty little girls, often came to play in his room – Martita, aged about ten, and Maria Dolores, perhaps fifteen, pensive, tender, full of feminine charm. These fair sisters used to play about him with the familiarity and gentleness of kittens, and lightened many an hour.

Well, it was not all plain sailing, for stories of pillage and plunder came to their ears. Three troopers had gone to the quarters of his wounded friend, Taylor, and began coolly to rifle his portmanteau.

Taylor stormed and said he was an English Captain.

“Major, ’tis very possible,” said they; “but your money, your watch, and your linen are never the worse for that; no, nor your wine either!” and the ruthless savages swallowed the wine and the bread which had been portioned out as his sustenance and comfort for the day.



Feeling that such might be his case, Boothby put his money and watch in a little earthen vessel and sent it to be buried in the yard; then calling for his soup and a large glass of claret, he tossed it off defiantly, saying to himself, "You don't get this, my boys!"

Next morning they heard that the French infantry were coming, and the town was to be given up to pillage, as so many of the citizens had deserted it.

The women came to him. "Shall we lock the street door, Don Carlos?" they said.

"By all means," said he. "Make it as fast as you can, and don't go near the windows."

Soon they heard the bands playing, and the women rushed to the windows, as if to see a raree-show, forgetting all his injunctions.

Soon after thump! thump! thump! sounded at the door.

"Virgin of my soul!" cried old Pollonia, tottering to the window. "There they are!" But, peeping out cautiously, she added, "No, 'tis but a neighbour. Open, Pepa."

"You had better not suffer your door to be opened at all," said the Captain.

But Pepa pulled the string, and in came the neighbour, shrieking:

"Jesus! Maria! Dios Santissimo! The demons are breaking open every door and plundering every house; all the goods-chests – everything – dragged out into the street."

"Maria di mi alma! Oh, señora!"

The crashing of doors, breaking of windows, loud thumpings and clatterings, were now distinctly heard in all directions. All outside seemed to boil in turmoil.

Ere long, thump! thump! at their own door.

But it was only another neighbour. Pepa pulled the string, and in she came. Her head was piled up with mattresses, blankets, quilts, and pillows. Under one arm were gowns, caps, bonnets, and ribbons. Her other hand held a child's chair. Add to all this that her figure was of a stunted and ludicrous character, and she came in puffing and crying under that cumbrous weight of furniture. They could not resist laughing.

"For the love of God, señora," she whined, "let me put these things in your house."

She was shown up into the garret. Others followed after her.

But soon there was a louder knocking, with a volley of French oaths. The house shook under the blows.

"Pedro, tell them in French that this is the quarter of an English Captain."

Pedro cautiously peeped out of the window.

"Dios! there is but one," said Pedro, "and he carries no arms. Hallo, sair! la maison for Inglis Captin! Go to hell!"

This strange language, and his abrupt, jabbering way of talking, forced a laugh out of his master.

"Ouvrez la porte, bête!" shouted the Frenchman. "I want some water."

"Holy Virgin!" cried Pollonia. "We had better open the door."

“No, no, no!” said Boothby. “Tell him, Pedro, that if he does not take himself off I shall report him to his General.”

Pedro had not got half through this message, when suddenly he ducked his head, and a great stone came in and struck the opposite wall.

“Il demonio!” groaned the women, as they, too, ducked their heads.

Then the fellow, who was drunk, just reeled off in search of some easier adventure.

Pedro had hardly finished boasting of his victory when the door was again assailed.

“Oh,” said Pollonia, “it’s only two officers’ servants;” and she shut the window.

“Well, what did they want?” asked the Captain.

“They wanted lodgings for their masters, but I told them we had no room.”

“And have you room, Donna Pollonia?”

“Yes; but I didn’t choose to say so.”

“Run, Pedro, run and tell those servants that there is plenty of room. Don’t you see, señora, that this is the best chance of preserving your house from pillage?”

They returned – one a Prussian lad who spoke French very ill. The Captain’s hope that these fellow-lodgers would prove gentlemen lent him a feeling of security.

Little Pedro was watching the motions of the two servants like a lynx.

“Signore,” said he, “those two *diavoli* are prying about into every hole and corner.”

On this Aaron was sent to dig up the watch and money and bring the wine upstairs.

Soon after in came Pedro, strutting with a most consequential air.

“The French Captain, signore,” said he.

There followed him a fine, military-looking figure, armed cap-à-pie, and covered with martial dust. He advanced to the bedside with a quick step.

“I have had the misfortune, sir, to lose a limb,” said Boothby, “and I claim your protection.”

“My protection!” he replied, putting out his hand. “Command my devoted services! The name of an Englishman in distress is sufficient to call forth our tenderest attention.”

The Captain was a good deal affected by the kindness of his manner. Kindness can never be thoroughly felt unless it be greatly wanted.

He begged he would visit him sometimes, and he promised to bring a friend.

Señora Pollonia was charmed with M. de la Platière, who, with his young friend Captain Simon, often came in for a chat.

Alas! they had to go away after a few days’ stay, but de la Platière wrote his name in chalk on the door, in the hope that it might discourage any plunderers.

One day Boothby was suddenly aroused by the appearance in

his room of an officer whom he had seen before, but did not much like.

“Eh, Capitaine, comment ça va-t-il? Ça va mieux! Ha! bon!”

Then he explained that the blade of his sword was broken. “As prisoner of war,” he said, “you will have no use for a sword. Give me yours, and, if you will, keep mine. Where is yours?”

“It stands,” said Boothby, “in yonder corner. Take it by all means.”

“Je vous laisserai la mienne,” he said, and hurried off.

Boothby wished his sword in the Frenchman’s gizzard, he was so rough and rude.

One afternoon Pedro rushed in, excited, and said: “The General himself is below, sir!”

“Bring him up, Pedro.”

Quickly he ushered in an officer of about the age of five-and-thirty. He was splendidly dressed, of an elegant person, his face beaming with good nature and intelligence.

He came up to the bed, and without waiting for the form of salutation, seated himself in a chair close to the pillow, and laying his hand on Boothby’s arm, he said, in a mild and agreeable voice:

“Ne vous dérangez, mon ami! Solely I am here to see if I can possibly lighten a little the weight of your misfortune. Tell me, can I be useful to you? Have you everything you want?”

For all these kind inquiries the Captain expressed his gratitude, and added, “I have really nothing to ask for, unless you could send me to England.”

“Ah! if you were able to move, Captain, I could exchange you now; but by the time you will have gained strength to travel you will be at the disposal of the Major-General of the army.”

That visit gave much comfort and hope.

In the evening de la Platière and Simon returned with the news that Sir Arthur Wellesley had met with disasters.

“Taisez-vous, mon cher,” said Simon. “It may have a bad effect on his spirits.”

But he insisted on hearing all they knew, and while they were talking a French soldier walked calmly up into the room, and coming up to the foot of the bed, stood before his officers, astounded, petrified.

When, after sternly eyeing him a while, they sharply demanded his business, his faculties returned, and he stammered out:

“Mon Capitaine, I – I – I took it for a shop! I beg pardon.” And off he went in a hurry. But what would he have done if he had found the English officer alone?

On October 1 Captain Boothby was allowed to go out on crutches. He says: “The sense of attracting general observation hurried me. The French soldiers who met me expressed surprise at seeing the success of an amputation which in the hands of their field surgeons was nearly always fatal. The Spaniards were most sympathizing. ‘What a pity!’ ‘So young, too!’ ‘Poor young Englishman!’ were pathetically passed along the street as he hobbled by.”

In July, 1810, Captain Boothby was exchanged with a French prisoner and returned to his father and mother in England.

This gives us the kindlier side of war; but there is another side.

In the prison of Toro were some French soldiers kept by the Spaniards. Nothing could be worse than the cruelty under which these Frenchmen suffered. In their prison was a cell, with a window strongly barred, and covered by an iron shutter pierced with small holes. The dungeon was about 10 feet square and 5 feet high. At the furthest end was a block of stone for a seat, with an iron collar for the neck, fixed by a short chain in the wall. Another chain was passed round the body. The poor wretches were chained in one position all day, which often hurried them to a miserable death. Their food was a little bread and water.

It is easy, however, to bear any amount of suffering when you know the time will soon come when you will be free.

It is not so easy to bear a whole lifelong penalty for having dared to fight for one's country. One would think that a national gratitude would rescue our wounded soldiers from a life of beggary or the workhouse. Yet after every war how many one-armed and one-legged soldiers or sailors are pitifully begging along our streets and roads!

There is no animal so cruel as man. *Corruptio optimi pessima.*

From a "Prisoner of France," by Captain Boothby. By kind permission of Messrs. A. and C. Black and Miss Boothby.

# **CHAPTER IV**

## **THE CAPTURE OF CIUDAD RODRIGO (1812)**

A night march – Waiting for scaling-ladders – The assault – Ladders break – Shells and grenades – A magazine explodes – Street fighting – Drink brings disorder and plunder – Great spoil.

After Talavera Sir Arthur Wellesley became Lord Wellington; he was opposed by Soult, Marmont, and Masséna. On the 1st of January Wellington crossed the Agueda, and advanced to the assault of Ciudad Rodrigo, which had to be hurried on because Marmont was advancing to its relief. Fortunately, we have descriptions from more than one eyewitness of the siege. Ciudad Rodrigo is built on rising ground, on the right bank of the Agueda. The inner wall, 32 feet high, is without flanks, and has weak parapets and narrow ramparts. Without the town, at the distance of 300 yards, the suburbs were enclosed by a weak earthen entrenchment, hastily thrown up.

It was six o'clock on the evening of the 19th of January. The firing on both sides had slackened, but not ceased. The chiefs were all bustle and mystery. They had had their instructions. Soon the 5th and 77th were ordered to fall in, and halted on the



extreme right of the division. Whilst the men hammered at their flints the order was read to the troops. They were to take twelve axes in order to cut down the gate by which the ditch was entered. The 5th Regiment were to have twelve scaling-ladders, 25 feet long, to scale the Fausse Brage, clear it of the enemy, throw over any guns, and wait for General M'Kinnon's column in the main attack.

“Whilst waiting in the gloom for the return of the men sent for the ladders, we mingled in groups of officers, conversing and laughing together with that callous thoughtlessness which marks the old campaigner.

“I well remember how poor McDougall of the 5th was quizzed about his dandy moustaches. When next I saw him, in a few short hours, he was a lifeless and a naked corpse.

“Suddenly a horseman galloped heavily towards us. It was Picton. He made a brief and inspiring speech to us – said he knew the 5th were men whom a severe fire would not daunt, and that he reposed equal confidence in the 77th. A few kind words to our commander and he bade us God-speed, pounding the sides of his hog-maned cob as he trotted off.”

Major Sturgeon and the ladders having arrived, the troops again moved off about half-past six. The night was rather dark, the stars lending but little light.

They were enjoined to observe the strictest silence. It was a time of thrilling excitement as they wound their way by the right, at first keeping a distance of 1,200 yards from the town,

then bending in towards the convent of Santa Cruz and the river. The awful stillness of the hour was unbroken save by the soft, measured tread of the little columns as they passed over the green turf, or by the occasional report of a cannon from the walls, and the rush and whizz of its ball as it flew past, or striking short, bounded from the earth over their heads, receiving, perhaps, most respectful, though involuntary, salaams. Every two or three minutes a gun was fired at some suspicious quarter.

They had approached the convent and pushed on nearer the walls, which now loomed high and near. They reached the low glacis, through which was discovered a pass into the ditch, heavily palisaded with a gate in the centre. Through the palisades were visible the dark and lofty old Moorish walls, whilst high overhead was the great keep or citadel, a massive square tower, which looked like a giant frowning on the scene. The English still were undiscovered, though they could distinguish the arms of the men on the ramparts, as they fired in idle bluster over their heads.

Eagerly, though silently, they all pressed towards the palisades as the men with hatchets began to cut a way through them. The sound of the blows would not have been heard by the enemy, who were occupied by their own noises, had it not been for the enthusiasm, so characteristic of his country, which induced a newly-joined ensign, fresh from the wilds of Kerry, to utter a tremendous war-whoop as he saw the first paling fall before the axes. The cheer was at once taken up by the men, and, as they instantly got convincing proofs that they were discovered – the

men on the walls began to pepper them soundly – they all rushed through the opening. In the ditch the assailants were heavily fired on from rampart and tower. The French tossed down lighted shells and hand-grenades, which spun about hissing and fizzing amongst their feet. Some of these smashed men's heads as they fell, whilst others, exploding on the ground, tossed unlucky wretches into the air, tearing them asunder. Seldom could any men have passed three or four minutes more uncomfortably than the time which was consumed in bringing in and fixing the ladders against a wall, towards which they all crowded.

Amongst the first to mount was the gallant chieftain of the 5th, but the love they bore him caused so many of the soldiers to follow on the same ladder that it broke in two, and they all fell, many being hurt by the bayonets of their own comrades round the foot of the ladder.

“I was not one of the last in ascending,” writes an officer of the 77th, “and as I raised my head to the level of the top of the wall, I beheld some of our fellows demolishing a picket which had been stationed at that spot, and had stood on the defensive.

“They had a good fire of wood to cheer themselves by, and on revisiting the place in the morning, I saw their dead bodies, stripped, strangely mingled with wounded English officers and men, who had lain round the fire all night, the fortune of war having made them acquainted with strange bed-fellows.

“Our ascent of the ladders placed us in the Fausse Brage – a broad, deep ditch – in which we were for the moment free from

danger.

“When about 150 men had mounted, we moved forward at a rapid pace along this ditch, cowering close to the wall, whilst overhead we heard the shouts and cries of alarm. Our course was soon arrested by the massive fragments and ruins of the main breach made by our men, and here we were in extreme danger, for instead of falling into the rear of a column supposed to have already carried the breach, we stood alone at its base, exposed to a tremendous fire of grape and musketry from its defences.

“For a minute or two we seemed destined to be sacrificed to some mistake as to the hour of attack, but suddenly we heard a cheer from a body of men who flung down bags of heather to break their fall, and leaped on them into the ditch.

“It was the old Scots Brigade, which, like us, having been intended as a support, was true to its time, and was placed in the same predicament as we were.”

On the appearance of the 94th the fire of the garrison was redoubled, but it was decided by the officers that it was better to die like men on the breach than like dogs in a ditch, and so, with a wild “Hurrah!” they all sprang up, absolutely eating fire. The breach must have been 70 feet wide, and consisted of a nearly perpendicular mass of loose rubbish, in which it was very difficult to obtain a footing.

The enemy lost no time. They pointed two guns downwards from the flanks and had time to fire several rounds of grape, working fearful destruction on the British. On the margin of

the breach were ranged a quantity of shells, which were lighted and rolled down on them; but they acted rather as a stimulus to push up, and so avoid their explosion. The top of the breach was defended by a strong body of the garrison, who maintained a heavy fire of musketry, and hurled down hand-grenades and fire-balls. However, a night attack, with all its defects, has the advantage of concealing from the view much of danger and of difficulty that, if seen, might shake the nerve.

But there was no time for hesitation, no choice for the timid. The front ranks were forced onwards by the pressure of those in the rear, and as men fell wounded on the breach, there they lay, being trodden into and covered by the shifting rubbish displaced by the feet of their comrades. Some few, more lucky, when wounded fell or rolled down the slope into the ditch, and they added by their outcries to the wildness of the scene. The enemy's resistance slackened, and they suddenly fled. Some guns they left behind in their panic.

It was now seven o'clock; the breach was carried, and the town virtually ours. About that time a wooden magazine placed on the rampart blew up, destroying our General and many with him, as well as a number of the garrison. Patterson of the 43rd and Uniacke of the 95th were of the number.

"I distinctly remember the moment of the explosion and the short pause it occasioned in our proceedings – a pause that enabled us to hear the noise of the attack still going forward near the little breach. I met Uniacke walking between two men. One

of his eyes was blown out, and the flesh was torn from his arms and legs.

“I asked who it was. He replied, ‘Uniacke,’ and walked on.

“He had taken chocolate with our mess an hour before!

“At this time a gigantic young Irish volunteer attached to our regiment, observing a gallant artilleryman still lingering near his gun, dashed at him with bayonet fixed and at the charge.

“The man stepped backwards, facing his foe; but his foot slipping, he fell against the gun, and in a moment the young Irish fellow’s bayonet was through his heart. The yell with which he gave up the ghost so terrified B – that he started back, the implement of death in his hands, and, apostrophizing it, said, ‘Holy Moses! how aisy you went into him!’ This saying became celebrated afterwards through the whole division.

“Colonel McLeod caused Lieutenant Madden of the 43rd to descend the small breach with twenty-five men, to prevent soldiers leaving the town with plunder. At eleven o’clock I went to see him. He had very judiciously made a large fire, which, of course, showed up the plunderers to perfection. He told me that no masquerade could, in point of costume and grotesque figures, rival the characters he stripped that night.”

Well, to go back to the storming party. The men who lined the breastwork having fled, our men dropped from the wall into the town and advanced in pursuit. At first they were among ruins, but gradually made their way into a large street which led nearly in a straight line from the principal breach to the *plaza*, or square.

Up this street they fought their way, the enemy slowly retiring before them. At about half the length of the street was a large open space on the left hand, where was deposited the immense battering train of “the army of Portugal.”

Amongst this crowd of carriages a number of men ensconced themselves, firing on the British as they passed, and it required no small exertion on their part to dislodge them. In the meantime many of the French ahead of them had entered the square, for which place our fellows pushed on with as many men as they could lay hands on, formed without distinction of regiment, into two or three platoons. For the great proportion of the men who had started with the column had sneaked off into the by-streets for the purpose of plundering – a business which was already going on merrily.

As they reached the head of the street, which entered the square at one angle, and wheeled to the left into the open space, they received a shattering volley, which quickly spoiled their array. The French were drawn up in force under the colonnade of the cathedral, and we were for the moment checked by their fire.

At length, when they were meditating a dash at the fellows, they heard fire opened from another quarter, which seemed to strike the French with a panic, for on our men giving a cheer and running forward, they to a man threw away their arms as if by word of command, and vanished in the gloom like magic.

It was the Light Division who entered the square by a street leading from the little breach, and their opportune arrival had

frightened away the game which had been brought to bay, leaving the pavement of the square littered with arms and accoutrements.

But now begins a part of the story which does not reflect much credit on our fellows. When the men had sipped the wine and brandy in the stores which they plundered, most extreme disorders began, which it was impossible to check. A whole division could not have restored order.

Three or four large houses were on fire – two of them were in the market-place – and the streets were illuminated by the flames.

The soldiers were growing very drunk, and many of them for amusement were firing from the windows into the streets.

“I was myself talking to the barber Evans in the square, when a ball passed through his head. This was at one o’clock in the morning. He fell at my feet dead, and his brains lay on the pavement. I then sought shelter, and found Colonel McLeod with a few officers in a large house, where we remained until the morning.

“I did not enter any other house in Ciudad Rodrigo. If I had not seen it, I never could have supposed that British soldiers would become so wild and furious.

“It was quite alarming to meet groups of them in the streets, flushed as they were with drink, and desperate in mischief, singing, yelling, dealing blows at man, woman, or child like so many mad things loose from Bedlam.

“In the morning the scene was dismal and dreary. The fires



were just going out; all over street and square were lying the corpses of many men who had met their death hours after the town had been taken.

“At eleven o’clock I went to look at the great breach. The ascent was not so steep as that of the small one, but there was a traverse thrown up at each side of it on the rampart. I counted ninety-three men of the Third Division lying dead on the rampart between the traverses. I did not see one dead man on the French side of those traverses.

“I saw General McKinnon lying dead. He was on his back just under the rampart. He had, I think, rushed forward and fallen down the perpendicular wall, probably at the moment of receiving his mortal wound. He was stripped of everything except his shirt and blue pantaloons; even his boots were taken off.

“There were no others dead near him, and he was not on the French side either. It is said that he was blown up, but I should say not. There was no appearance indicating that such had been his fate. Neither his skin nor the posture in which he was lying led me to suppose it. When a man is blown up, his hands and face, I should think, could not escape. McKinnon’s face was pale and free from the marks of fire. How strange! but with his exception I did not see a man of the Third Division who had been stripped.”

Besides possession of the fortress, the whole of Masséna’s battering-train had become prize, as well as an immense quantity of light artillery which Marmont brought against us on the retreat

from El Boden.

The fortress was so well supplied with warlike stores that not an article of any kind was wanting, in spite of the great expenditure during the siege.

What would not the French and English say now?

Ciudad invested, bombarded, stormed, and taken in twelve days! and this it cost Masséna fifty-one days to do, sixteen of which he was bombarding the town. Every part of the proceeding seems to have astonished the garrison, as in erecting works, opening batteries, etc., they were always a day or two out in their calculations.

The George and Dragon had nearly disappeared from the King's colours by a shell passing through it, but "the men were splendid" in attack, and followed their leaders unto death.

# **CHAPTER V**

## **THE STORMING OF BADAJOS (1812)**

Rescue of wounded men – A forlorn hope – Fire-balls light up the scene – A mine explodes – Partial failure of the English – Escalade of the castle – Pat's humour and heroism – Saving a General – Wellington hears the news – The day after the storm.

Badajos is situated on the left bank of the Guadiana, which is about 400 yards broad and washes one-fourth of the enceinte. The defences along the river are confined to a simple and badly flanked rampart, but on the other sides there are eight large and well-built fronts with covered way. The scarp of the bastions is more than 30 feet in height. In advance of these fronts are two detached works, the Bardeleras and the Picurina, the latter being a strong redoubt 400 yards from the town. As the bombardment went on for some days, preparing a breach for an assault, incidents were few; officers sometimes strolled round to explore for themselves.

One writes: "One day I saw two men stretched on the ground. One was dead, a round shot having passed through his body; the other had lost a leg. His eyes were closed; he seemed to be quite dead. An adventurous Portuguese – one of our allies – was

beginning to disencumber him of his clothes.

“The poor man opened his eyes and looked in the most imploring manner, while the villain had him by the belt, lifting him up. I ran forward and gave the humane Portuguese a sharp blow with my blunt sabre, so that with a yell he threw himself down by the side of the soldier whom he was stripping, thinking his last hour had come.

“Soon after I saw a heavy shot hopping along and kicking up the dust. It struck one of our soldiers on the hip, and down he went, motionless.

“I felt confident that the wounded man was not dead, and I begged that some of his comrades would carry him off to the rear. They were retiring under a heavy cannonade. Two soldiers, at the risk of their lives, rushed back and brought him in, or he would have been starved to death between our lines and the ramparts of the town. His hip was only grazed and his clothes untorn; but, of course, he was unable to walk, and seemed to feel much pain, for he groaned heavily.

“Towards the end of the siege the weather became beautiful. One day I call to mind the enemy scarcely fired a shot. All our troubles were forgotten, and two or three of us amused ourselves by reading a novel in the trenches.”

The garrison of Badajos fired every morning for a few days before the grand assault a certain number of rounds, as if for practice and to measure the ground.

On the 6th of April a long order was issued relative to the

position the troops were to occupy. The day was fine, and all the soldiers in good spirits, cleaning themselves as if for a review.

“About two o’clock I saw poor Harvest. He was sucking an orange and walking on a rising ground, alone and very thoughtful. It gave me pain, as I knew he was to lead the forlorn hope. He said, ‘My mind is made up, old fellow: I am sure to be killed.’”

At half-past eight that night the ranks were formed and the roll called in an undertone. The division drew up in deep silence behind a large quarry, 300 yards from the breaches. They had to wait long for ladders and other things.

At ten a very beautiful fire-ball was thrown up from the town. This illuminated the ground for many hundred yards. Two or three more followed, showed a bright light, and remained burning some little time.

The stillness that followed was the prelude to one of the strangest scenes that could be seen. Soon after ten a little whisper went round that the forlorn hope were stealing forward, followed by the storming parties, composed of 300 men.

In two minutes the division followed. One musket shot (no more) was fired near the breaches by a French soldier who was on the look-out. Still our men went on, leisurely but silently. There were no obstacles. The 52nd, 43rd, and 95th closed gradually up to column of quarter distance. All was hushed; the town lay buried in gloom. The ladders were placed on the edge of the ditch, when suddenly an awful explosion took place at the foot of the breaches, and a burst of light disclosed the whole scene.

The very earth seemed to rock and sway under their feet. What a sight!

The ramparts stood out clear, crowded with the enemy. French soldiers stood on the parapets, while the short-lived glare from the barrels of powder and stuff flying into the air gave to friends and foes a look as if both bodies of troops were laughing! A tremendous fire now opened upon the English, and for an instant they were stationary; but the troops were no ways daunted. The ladders were found exactly opposite the centre breach, and the whole division rushed to the assault with amazing resolution. The soldiers flew down the ladders into the ditch, and the cheering from both sides was loud and full of confidence. Fire-balls were rising, lighting up the scene. The ditch was very wide, and when they arrived at the foot of the centre breach eighty or ninety men were clustered together. One called out, "Who will lead?"

Death and the most dreadful sounds and cries encompassed all. It was a volcano! Up they went: some killed, others impaled on the bayonets of their own comrades, or hurled headlong amongst the crowd.

The chevaux-de-frise atop looked like innumerable bayonets. "When I was within a yard of the top I felt half strangled, and fell from a blow that deprived me of all sensation. I only recollect feeling a soldier pulling me out of the water, where so many men were drowned. I lost my cap, but still held my sword. On recovering, I looked towards the breach. It was shining and

empty! Fire-balls were in plenty, and the French troops, standing upon the walls, were taunting us and inviting our men to come up and try it again. What a crisis! what a military misery! Some of the finest troops in the world prostrate – humbled to the dust.”

Colonel McLeod was killed while trying to force the left corner of the large breach. He received his mortal wound when within three yards of the enemy. A few moments before he fell he had been wounded in the back by a bayonet of one of our men who had slipped. It was found out afterwards that the woodwork of the cheval-de-frise was heavy, bristling with short, stout sword-blades and chained together. It was an obstacle not to be removed, and the French soldiers stood close to it, killing every man who drew near. To get past such obstacles by living bodies pushing against it up a steep breach, sinking to the knees every step in rubbish, while a firm and obstinate enemy stood behind – it was impossible.

Round shot alone could have destroyed these defences, which were all chained together and vastly strong. Had it not been for this, the divisions would have entered like a swarm of bees. It was fortunate that Lord Wellington had made arrangements for assaulting the town at other points.

“Next morning I was searching for my friend Madden. At last I found him lying in a tent, with his trousers on and his shirt off, covered with blood, and bandaged across the body to support his broken shoulder, laid on his back and unable to move. He asked for his brother.

“‘Why does he not come to see me?’

“I turned my head away, for his gallant young brother was amongst the slain. Captain Merry, of the 52nd, was sitting on the ground, sucking an orange.

“He said: ‘How are you? You see that I am dying: a mortification has set in.’

“A grape-shot had shattered his knee. He had told the doctor that he preferred death rather than permit such a good leg to be amputated.”

## **Escalade of the Castle**

General Picton with the Third Division was ordered to attack the castle by escalade. The castle was an old building on the summit of a hill about 100 feet high, on the north-east of the town.

At about ten o'clock on the night of the 6th of April, 1812, the Third Division advanced in that profound silence that rendered the coming storm more terrific. Our men were not perceived until they arrived at a little river not very distant from the works, when they distinctly heard the entire line of the French sentries give the alarm, and all the guns of the garrison opened at once.

Volley after volley of grape-shot was fired upon our troops as they advanced; fire-balls rose, and showed the enemy where they were. They quickened pace and got so close under the wall that the guns could not bear upon them, but the fire-balls burned so



vividly that they were enabled to direct their musketry upon the assailants, and hurl with fatal precision every kind of missile.

The ladders were placed, the troops cheered and swarmed up, and nothing was heard but mingled cries of despair and shouts of victory. Several ladders broke down under the weight, and men were precipitated on the heads of their comrades below.

“The ladder I mounted was, like many others, too short, and I found that no exertion I could make would enable me to reach the embrasure or descend. In this desperate state, expecting immediate death from the hands of a ferocious Frenchman in the embrasure, I heard a voice above call out:

“‘Mr. — , is that you?’

“‘Yes!’ I shouted.

“The same voice cried out: ‘Oh, murther! murther! What will we do to get you up at all, at all, with that scrawdeen of a ladtherr? But here goes! Hould my leg, Pat!’ and, throwing himself flat on his face in the embrasure, he extended his brawny arm down the wall, seized me by the collar with the force of Hercules, and landed me, as he said himself, ‘clever and clane,’ on the ramparts.

“In the same manner five more were landed. Thus did this chivalrous soldier, with noble generosity, prefer saving the lives of six of his comrades at the risk of his own to the rich plunder which everywhere surrounded him. And this was Tully O’Malley, a private in my company, one of the ‘ragged rascals.’ Well, I found myself standing amongst several French soldiers, who were crowding round the gun in the embrasure. One of them

still held the match lighted in his hand, the blue flame of which gave the bronzed and sullen countenances of these warriors an expression not easily forgotten.

“A Grenadier leaned on the gun and bled profusely from the head; another, who had fallen on his knees when wounded, remained fixed in astonishment and terror. Others, whose muskets lay scattered on the ground, folded their arms in deep despair. The appearance of the whole group, with their huge, bushy moustaches and mouths all blackened with biting the cartridges, presented to the eye of a young soldier a very strange and formidable appearance.

“‘Don’t mind them boys, sorr,’ said Tully. ‘They were all settled jist afore you came up: and, by my soul, good boys they were for a start – fought like raal divils, they did, till Mr. S – and the Grenadiers came powdering down on them with the war-whoop. Och, my darlint! they were made smiddreens of in a crack, barring that big fellow you see there, with the great black whiskers – see yonder – bleeding in the side, he is, and resting his head on the gun-carriage. Ah! he was the bouldest of them all. He made bloody battle with Jim Reilly; but ’tis short he stood afore our Jim, for he gave him a raal Waterford puck that tumbled him like a ninepin in a minute; and, by my own sowl, a puck of the butt-end of Jim’s piece is no joke, I tell you! He tried it on more heads than one on the hill of Busaco.’

“Away then flew Tully to join his company, forming in double-quick time to oppose the enemy, who were gathering in

force at one of the gates of the citadel.”

They had already opened a most galling fire of musketry from this dark gateway, which was warmly returned by our men, who, under Lieutenant Davern, charged up to the massive gate. This, however, the French closed, so little impression was made. At last a number of the light infantry of the 74th and 85th helped each other to climb up on the archway over the gate, and thence they fired down so unexpectedly that a general panic seized the enemy, and they fled in confusion, followed by many of our men, who now dashed through the gateway.

Here Captain C – came upon Major Murphy, of the 88th, quite exhausted and unable to move from loss of blood, as he had not been able to bind up his wound. This he did for him, and they moved on. One more bayonet struggle in the castle, and the French again fled, leaving the place literally covered with dead and wounded, several of them being officers, whose long narrow-bladed sabres with brass scabbards instantly changed masters.

One officer who was wounded made several thrusts at the sturdy Ranger who was trying to disarm him, but had awkwardly caught the sharp sword-blade in his hand, and was so angry at being cut that he was preparing to rush upon his antagonist. However, the Frenchman unbuckled his waist-belt and threw away his sword.

But Pat was angry, and was not now satisfied with the sword only, for, perceiving a handsome silver-mounted calabash, or flask, by the officer's side, he coolly transferred it to his

own shoulders, after first taking a copious swill. Then, gravely addressing the wounded man, said, while reloading his piece:

“Now, my tight fellow, ye see what ye lost by your contrariness.”

“Ah! monsieur, je suis grievement blessé: rendez-moi mon calabash, je vous prie.”

“Grieving for your calabash! Is that what you mane?” said Pat. “Why, then, I’ll tell you what, my boy: no man shall say that Pat Donovan ever deprived either friend or foe of his little dhrop of dhrink – so there ’tis for you!”

“Grand merci! grand merci!” murmured the officer.

“Oh, don’t bother about axing mercy from me,” said Pat; “but take my advice and keep roaring out ‘Mercy! mercy!’ to all our fellows as they come up to ye, and, by Gor! they’ll not take the least notice of you.”

“Ah! merci! merci! Mais c’est fait de moi! c’est fait de moi!” repeated the poor wounded young French officer.

Fatal presentiment! One hour afterwards the Irishman returned and found him lying on the same spot; but the gallant fellow was at rest, “where the wicked cease from troubling.”

As we were occupied in disarming and securing the prisoners Captain C – happened to capture and save the life of the Colonel commanding the artillery in the citadel at the very moment our men were pursuing him at the point of the bayonet.

He threw himself upon the Captain, and finding he understood French, entreated he would save him from our

infuriated soldiers; but this he found it extremely difficult to do, as each successive group, on perceiving his large gold epaulettes and orders, evinced a strong anxiety to make further acquaintance with him. Upon one occasion the Captain was obliged to use his sword to protect him from a few of the 60th, who advanced upon him in rather a suspicious and business-like manner.

The poor Colonel was in a state of violent agitation, and kept a firm hold of his protector's arm through all the changes of the fight, until they met a field-officer of the British artillery, to whom he gave him in charge.

The Frenchman wanted to bring C – to the bomb-proof, where his baggage was secured, to give him some tokens of his gratitude, and overwhelmed him with thanks; but duty called, and he left him with the field-officer, who, he heard afterwards, reaped a rich reward for his small service.

The first rays of a beautiful morning showed the incredible strength of Badajos, and how dearly the capture of it had cost us. The gallant hearts that beat with devoted bravery the night before now lay in the cold grasp of death. Silence had succeeded to the dreadful din of arms, and rendered more awful the contemplation of this fearful scene of death and suffering and desolation.

A vast number of the enemy lay dead in a heap close by the spot where our men were forming, and while they gazed on these unhappy victims of a fierce and deadly fight, they were not a little astonished to observe a very young French officer who lay

amongst them, and whom they thought to be dead also, slowly and cautiously raise himself up; then, after looking about him with a wild stare, he coolly walked over to the other side where the prisoners were standing and delivered himself up!

This wily hero had not been wounded, nor had he received the slightest scratch, but, being more frightened than hurt, he lay concealed in this manner until all fear of danger, as he thought, was over and gone.

It excited a good deal of merriment amongst our men, but the French curled their moustaches, gave him a hearty “Sacre!” and their deep contempt.

## **Another Account**

“I was on a hill with the medical staff during the night of the assault of Badajos. For two hours we watched the fire, the bursting of shells and hand-grenades. Then the wounded began to arrive, and we were busy.

“Lord Wellington rode up with his staff, and soon after a staff-officer came up at a gallop, shouting, ‘Where is Lord Wellington?’

“‘There, sir.’

“‘My lord, I am come from the breaches. The troops after repeated attempts, have failed to enter them. So many officers have fallen that the men, dispersed in the ditch, are without leaders. If your lordship does not at once send a

strong reinforcement they must abandon the enterprise. Colonel McLeod, of the 43rd, has been killed in the breach.'

"A light was called for and instantly brought, and Lord Wellington noted the report with a steady hand. His face was pale and expressed great anxiety. In his manner and language he preserved perfect coolness and self-possession. General Hay's brigade was ordered to advance to the breaches.

"You may think that it was nervous work hearing this.

"Our General had wisely planned two extreme attacks by escalade on the castle by the Third Division and on the south side of the town by the Fifth Division, and on Fort Pardoleros by the Portuguese. It was known that Soult was within a few leagues. Marmont had pushed his advanced Dragoons as far as the bridge of boats at Villa Velha; the river Guadiana was in our rear.

"It was a crisis, and we wondered what thoughts were passing through the mind of our gallant chief as he sat motionless on his horse.

"Presently another staff-officer galloped up, out of breath.

"General Picton – has – got possession of – the castle, sir.'

"Who brings that intelligence?" exclaimed Lord Wellington.

"The officer saluted and gave his name.

"Are you certain, sir – are you positively certain?"

"I entered the castle with the troops. I have only just left it. General Picton in possession. He sent me.'

"Picton in possession! With how many men?"

"His division.'

"It is impossible to describe to you the change this news produced in the feelings of all around. A great sigh of relief could almost be heard.

"Return, sir, and desire General Picton to maintain his position at all hazards.'

"Having dispatched this messenger, Lord Wellington directed a second officer to proceed to the castle to repeat his orders to General Picton.

"Next morning at dawn I set out to visit the breaches. I was just thinking of two friends, Major Singer and Captain Cholwick, of the Royal Fusiliers, both of whom had been with me two evenings before. I was wondering how they had fared in the assault when I met some Fusiliers and asked for Major Singer.

"We are throwing the last shovels of earth upon his grave, sir.'

"Is Captain Cholwick safe?" I inquired.

"In the act of climbing over that palisade he was wounded, fell into the water, and we have seen nothing of him since.'

"That did not make me disposed to be very cheerful.

"I found the great breach covered with dead from its base to its summit. Many were stripped. Amongst them I recognized the faces of many well known to me. In climbing up the breach my feet receded at every step in the débris, so as to make my progress slow and difficult. Behind the chevaux-de-frise a broad and deep trench had been cut, into which our men must have been precipitated had they succeeded in surmounting this huge barrier. Above was a battery of 12-pounders completely



enfilading the great and the small breach, near to each other. No wonder we failed there to enter.

"I next visited the castle, at the bottom of whose walls, nearly 40 feet high, were lying shattered ladders, broken muskets, exploded shells, and the dead bodies of many of our brave men. Amongst the dead I recognized the body of the gallant Major Ridge, of the 5th Regiment, lying near the gate that leads to the town, in forcing which he had fallen, riddled with balls.

"I met a soldier of the Connaught Rangers, overpowered by excitement and brandy. The fellow looked at me suspiciously, and appeared disposed to dispute my passage. He held his loaded musket at half present, and I was prepared to close with him; but fortunately flattery succeeded. He allowed me to pass.

"Soon after entering the town a girl about nine years of age implored my protection, 'por el amor de Dios,' for her mother.

"A number of soldiers of a distinguished regiment were in the house, armed, and under the influence of every evil passion. Alas! I was powerless. I met a man of the 88th dragging a peasant by the neck, with the intention of putting him to death – so he declared – in atonement for his not having any money in his pockets! I appealed to the gallantry of his corps, and saved the life of his victim."

The town had now become a scene of plunder and devastation. Our soldiers and our women, in a state of intoxication, had lost all control over themselves. These, together with numbers of Spaniards and Portuguese, who had come into the city in

search of plunder, filled every street. Many were dispossessed of their booty by others, and these interchanges of plunder in many cases were not effected without bloodshed. Our soldiers had taken possession of the shops, stationed themselves behind the counters, and were selling the goods contained in them. These were, again, displaced by more numerous parties, who became shopkeepers in their turn, and thus continual scuffling and bloodshed was going on.

In addition to the incessant firing through the keyholes of the front doors of houses as the readiest way of forcing the locks, a desultory and wanton discharge of musketry was kept up in the streets, placing all who passed literally between cross-fires. Many of our own people were thus killed or wounded by their own comrades.

An attempt was made next day to collect our soldiers. The troops, however, that were sent into the town for that purpose joined in the work of plunder.

We may feel shocked at the excesses which our soldiers committed after the storming of such towns as Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajos. Folk sitting by their quiet firesides may wonder how sane men can be so dead to the higher and better feelings of humanity; but when the fever of war is followed by the poison of drink, it is no wonder if the minds of rude men are thrown off their balance. War is a most awful thing to witness, and many officers have declared to the writer that, had they known what war meant in all its dreadful reality, they would not have been

so eager in their youth to join the army. All the more reason is there that every youth in our islands should be compelled by law to learn the use of the rifle, that when the time comes – as come it will – when an invader shall set foot upon our shore, we may not be helpless and unarmed. Perhaps it is necessary that we should sometimes hear the horrid truth about war; we may thus be stimulated to use a little self-denial for our country's security, when we realize that life is not made up of games and money-making, and when we can see what our fatherland would be to us, devastated by a savage enemy, with farms and barns blazing, women and children starved to death, towns sacked and plundered, and the honour of old England trodden beneath the foot of a foreign invader. The story of these sieges has many lessons – military, ethical, and economic. Let us at least learn one – the duty that is incumbent upon all of us, men and boys, to defend mother and wife and child.

# CHAPTER VI

## A PRISONER IN ST. SEBASTIAN (1813)

The *coup de grâce* – The hospital – A cruel order – An attempt at escape – Removed to the castle – The English at the breach – Many are wounded – French ladies sleep in the open – A vertical fire – English gunners shoot too well – A good sabre lightly won.

Colonel Harvey Jones, R.E., has left us an interesting account of the siege of St. Sebastian by the British forces. The town, situated close to the French frontier, just south of the Pyrenees and by the sea, contains 10,000 inhabitants, and is built on a low peninsula running north and south. The defences of the western side are washed by the sea, those on the eastern side by the river Urumea, which at high-water covers 4 feet of the masonry of the scarp. The first assault in July failed. Colonel Jones was wounded and taken prisoner.

His diary begins: “After witnessing the unsuccessful attempts of Lieutenant Campbell, 9th Regiment, and his gallant little band to force their way on to the ramparts, and their retreat from the breach, my attention was soon aroused by a cry from the soldier who was lying disabled next to me:

““Oh, they are murdering us all!”

“Looking up, I perceived a number of French Grenadiers, under a heavy fire of grape, sword in hand, stepping over the dead and stabbing the wounded. My companion was treated in the same manner. The sword, plucked from his body and reeking with his blood, was raised to give me the *coup de grâce*, when, fortunately, the uplifted arm was arrested by a smart little man – a sergeant – who cried out:

“Oh, mon Colonel, êtes-vous blessé?” and he ordered some men to remove me.”

They raised the Colonel in their arms and carried him up the breach on to the ramparts. Here they were stopped by a Captain of the Grenadiers, who asked some questions, then kissed him, and desired the party to proceed to the hospital.

They met the Governor and his staff on the way, who asked if the Colonel was badly wounded, and directed that proper care should be taken of him.

After descending from the rampart into the town, as they were going along the street leading to the hospital, they were accosted by an officer who had evidently taken his “drop.” He demanded the Englishman’s sword, which was still hanging by his side.

The reply came: “You have the power to take it, but certainly have no right to do so, as I have not been made a prisoner by you.”

This seemed to enrage him, and with great violence of manner and gesture he unbuckled the belt and carried away the sword.

Upon reaching the hospital, the Surgeon-Major was very kind in his manner. After he had enlarged the wounds, according

to the French system, and then dressed them, the Colonel was carried across the street and put into a bed in one of the wards of the great hospital, which a soldier was ordered to vacate for his use. This man returned later in the day for his pipe and tobacco, which he had left under the pillow.

In the course of the morning they were visited by the Governor, who made inquiries as to their wounds, and whether they had been plundered of anything; for a great number of English soldiers had been taken, and were lodged in the town prison. The only persons permitted to visit them were some staff-officers, a few Spanish ladies, and a Spanish barber. From the former the Colonel was made acquainted with all that passed in the British lines – at least, as far as the French could conjecture. Although boats arrived nightly from Bayonne, the other side of the frontier, bringing shells, medicine, charpie, or lint, engineers, etc., the garrison remained in great ignorance of the movements of the two armies. Soult kept sending word that he would soon come and raise the siege; thus, by promises of immediate relief, he kept up the spirits of the garrison. He also rewarded the gallantry of particular defenders during the assault and in the sorties by promotion, or by sending them the decoration of the Legion of Honour. In the French Army there seemed to have been a system of reward for good and gallant conduct by promotion into the Grenadiers or Voltigeurs, which had an excellent effect. A French soldier was extremely proud of his green, yellow, or red epaulettes. They were badges

of distinguished conduct and only those who had shown great gallantry in action were admitted into their ranks. What with the success attendant upon the sorties and the numerous decorations which had been distributed among the officers and privates, such a spirit of daring had been created that the idea of a surrender was scouted by all.

After the stones had been extracted which had been blown into his leg and thighs by the bursting of shells and grenades, the Colonel was enabled to move about and get into the gallery running round the courtyard of the hospital, and into which all the doors and windows of the rooms respectively opened. It was the only place where they were allowed to breathe the fresh air.

One day, whilst sitting in the gallery, he observed a table placed in the balcony below him, on the other side of the courtyard. Soon he saw an unfortunate French gunner laid upon the table. They amputated both his arms, his hands having been blown off by an accident in one of the batteries. In the course of the morning, whilst conversing with the surgeon who had performed the operation, he told the Colonel that he had acted contrary to his instructions, which were never to amputate, but to cure if possible. When he was asked for the reason of such an inhuman order having been issued, his reply was that the Emperor Napoleon did not wish numbers of mutilated men to be sent back to France, as it would make a bad impression upon the people.

“You must be a bold man to act in opposition to this order.”

He replied: "Affairs are beginning to change, and, moreover, it is now necessary that the soldiers should know they will be taken proper care of in the event of being wounded, and not left to die like dogs. We send as many as we can at night to Bayonne by the boats; thus we clear out the hospitals a little."

In conversations with many of the officers they detailed acts committed by their soldiers in Spain so revolting to human nature that one refuses to commit them to paper. A *chef de bataillon* once asked him how the English managed with their soldiers when they wanted them to advance and attack an enemy.

The reply was simply, "Forward!"

"Ah! that way will not do with us. We are obliged to excite our men with spirits, or to work upon their feelings by some animating address; and very often, when I have fancied I had brought them up to the fighting pitch, some old hand would make a remark which in an instant spoilt all I had said, and I had to begin my speech all over again."

The Colonel asked how they managed to provision their men when they went out on expeditions that lasted ten or twenty days.

The answer was: "Our biscuits are made with a hole in the centre. Each biscuit is the ration for a day. Sometimes twenty are delivered to each soldier, who is given to understand that he has no further claim on the commisariat for those days."

"But it is impossible for the soldier to carry twenty."

"We know that very well, but he has no claim; and how he lives in the meanwhile we do not ask. Perhaps he lives on the



country.” In other words, he steals!

In the hospital he was attended by a Spanish barber. As he could speak Spanish fluently, they had a good deal of talk. The barber used to tell all he heard and saw of what was passing both inside and outside the fortress. When he learnt that the Colonel was an engineer, he offered to bring him a plan of all the underground drains and of the aqueduct.

The attendant, although a good-natured man, kept a sharp eye on the barber; so it was a difficult matter for him to give anything without being detected.

At last, one morning when preparing to shave him, he succeeded in shoving a plan under the bedclothes. The Colonel seized the earliest opportunity of examining it, and from the knowledge he had before acquired of the place he soon mastered the directions of the drains, etc. From that moment his whole attention was fixed on the means of making his escape.

He knew that the hospital was situated in the principal street, the ends of which terminated upon the fortifications bounding the harbour. If once he could gain the street he had only to turn to the right or left to gain the ramparts, and so make his escape from the town in the best manner he could.

One evening just at dusk, when the medical men took leave of them for the night, one of them left his cocked hat on the bed. As soon as the Colonel noticed this he put it on his head, hurried downstairs, and made direct for the great door; but he found it so completely blocked up by the guard that, unless by

pushing them aside, it was not possible to pass undiscovered. He therefore retreated upstairs in despair, and threw the hat down on the bed. Scarcely had he done so when in rushed the doctor, asking for his *chapeau*.

They were more than once visited by the crews of the boats which arrived nightly from France. The sight of the prisoners seemed to afford the Frenchmen great gratification, but there was nothing in their manner which could in any way offend.

Very unexpectedly one evening the Governor's aide-de-camp came to the prison and told the officers to prepare immediately to go to France.

A Portuguese Captain, one of the party of prisoners, was dreadfully in fear of being sent there, and with great warmth of manner told the aide-de-camp that Lord Wellington would soon be in possession of the place, and if the prisoners were not forthcoming he would hold the Governor answerable in person.

It is supposed that the aide went and reported this conversation to the Governor, as he did not return for some time, and then told them it was too late to embark that night, as the boats had sailed. They were never afterwards threatened to be sent away.

About the middle of August the garrison began to flatter themselves that the siege was turned into a regular blockade, and that they would be relieved by the successes of Marshal Soult. Their spirits ran high, their hopes were elated.

The 15th of August, the birthday of Napoleon, was observed as a day of rejoicing among the garrison, and at nightfall the letter

“N” of a very large size was brilliantly lighted up on the face of the donjon.

When the operations of the second siege began a Captain who visited the Colonel kept him *au fait* of all that was going on. One day a Spanish Captain who had sided with the French came into the hospital – it was on the evening of the assault. He was wringing his hands, tearing his hair, and swearing he had heard the shrieks of his wife and daughters, and had seen his house in flames. The French officers took the poor man’s outcries with great merriment, and the Spaniard must have bitterly regretted the day when he deserted the English. The French officers did not fail to taunt him with having done so, and ridiculed his frantic actions.

In the course of the next day Colonel Jones was asked if he would like to speak with a corporal of sappers who had been made prisoner during the sortie.

To his surprise, a fine, tall youngster, a stranger to him, walked into the ward, dressed in a red jacket. Now, blue was the colour when the Colonel was taken prisoner.

“When did you join the army, corporal?” he asked.

“Yesterday morning, Colonel. I was put on duty in the trenches last night, and in a few minutes I was brought into the town by the enemy.”

“I could not help laughing, though he wore a rueful expression,” says the Colonel.

One morning a Captain of artillery, whom he had never before

seen, came into the ward and commenced conversing about the siege. He observed that the whole second parallel of the British trenches was one entire battery, and if there were as many guns as there were embrasures, he said, “we shall be *joliment fouettés*.”

The Colonel’s reply was: “Most assuredly you will. Depend upon it, there are as many guns as embrasures. It is not our fashion to make batteries and stick logs of wood into the embrasures in the hope of frightening the enemy.”

He made a grimace, and with a shrug of the shoulders left the ward.

Next morning the surgeon came, as usual, to dress the wounds. This was about half-past seven. All was still, and he joyously exclaimed, as he entered:

“So, gentlemen, we have another day’s reprieve!”

In about half an hour afterwards, whilst Colonel Jones was under his hands, the first salvo from the breaching batteries was fired. Several shot rattled through the hospital and disturbed the tranquillity of the inmates. The instrument dropped from the surgeon’s hands, and he exclaimed, “*Le jeu sera bientôt fini!*” Then very composedly the good doctor went on with his work.

The opening of the batteries made a great stir amongst all hands. A hint was given the prisoners to prepare to be removed into the castle. A private hint was given to the Colonel to be *sage* on the way up, as the Captain of the escort was *méchant*, and that it would be better to be quiet and orderly.

This, perhaps, was intended to deter any of them from

attempting to escape. The wounded prisoners were moved in one body up the face of the hill to the entrance of the castle. Under the Mirador battery they were exposed to a sharp musketry fire. Some of the party were wounded, the Portuguese Captain severely.

A building on the sea-side, which had been constructed for a powder magazine, was now converted into their hospital, the interior being fitted up with wooden beds. In the area surrounding the building were placed the unwounded prisoners. As the number of wounded from the ramparts increased, the hospital filled rapidly, and to prevent the fire from the English batteries being directed upon them some of the prisoners were desired to hoist a black flag on the roof. While they were doing so the Colonel told the French officer that it was labour in vain, as the British had learnt that this building was their great depot for powder, and so hoisting a flag would be regarded as a ruse to preserve their ammunition. Little benefit did they get from the ensign. After the capture of the island Santa Clara, hardly could anyone move about that part of the castle opposite to the island without the risk of being hit. Grape and shrapnel swept the whole of the face, and it was only at night that fresh water could be fetched from the tank.

The garrison had a fixed idea that the assault would take place at night, so each morning they rose with happy faces – another twenty-four hours' reprieve!

On the 31st of August, when the first rattle of musketry was

heard in the castle, an inquiring look pervaded each countenance; but no one spoke. As the firing continued and the rattle grew and grew, little doubt remained as to the cause. Every soldier seized his musket and hurried with haste to his post. The Colonel was then ordered not to speak or hold converse with the unwounded prisoners outside. One French officer asked him if he thought that the English prisoners would remain quiet if an assault of the breach should take place, adding, "If they were to make any attempt they would all be shot."

Colonel Jones replied: "Do not fancy you have a flock of sheep penned within these walls. Happen what may, shoot us or not, you will be required to give a satisfactory account of us when the castle is taken."

From the commencement of the assault until the rush into the castle upon the capture of the town, not the slightest information could they obtain as to the state of affairs at the breach. The period that intervened was to the prisoners one of the most anxious and painful suspense. At last the tale was told by the awful spectacle of the interior of the hospital.

In an instant the ward was crowded with the maimed and wounded. The amputation-table was in full play, and until nearly daylight the following morning the surgeons were unceasingly at work.

To have such a scene passing at the foot of one's bed was painful enough. Added to this the agonizing shrieks and groans and the appearance of the sappers and Grenadiers who had been

blown up by the explosion in the breach, their uniforms nearly burnt off, and their skins blackened and scorched by gunpowder – all this was truly appalling. The appearance of these men resembled anything but human beings. Death soon put an end to their sufferings, and relieved all from these most distressing sights. Of all wounds, whether of fractured limbs or otherwise, those caused by burns from gunpowder seemed to produce the most excruciating pain.

In the rear of the donjon was a small building, in which was stored much gunpowder. Shells were falling fast and thick around it, so a detachment of soldiers was sent to withdraw the ammunition. This dangerous service they were performing in a most gallant manner, and had nearly completed their work, when some shells fell into the building, exploded the barrels that remained, and blew the building, with some of the soldiers, into the air, not leaving a vestige to show that such an edifice had stood there.

There were three French ladies in the garrison. They were on their way to France when the investment took place. These ladies were permitted to enter the hospital, and were allowed a small space at one end of the wooden bedsteads. There they were for several days and nights. The only water they could obtain to wash in was sea-water. As the number of the wounded increased, some of the officers who were lying upon the floor were loud in their complaints that madame and her daughters were occupying the space which properly belonged to them. They succeeded in

getting the ladies turned out, to find shelter from shot and shell where best they could!

The day the castle capitulated Colonel Jones went in search of his fair companions, and found them, nearly smoke-dried, under a small projecting rock.

One of the young ladies was extremely pretty. Shortly after the siege she was married to the English Commissary appointed to attend upon the garrison until sent to England. The change from the hospital to the naked rock relieved them from witnessing many a painful scene, as the amputating-table was placed near their end of the ward.

After the capture of the town a heavy bombardment of the castle took place, by salvos of shells from more than sixty pieces of artillery. There were only a few seconds between the noise made by the discharge of the mortars and the descent of the shells. Those of the mutilated who were fortunate enough to snatch a little sleep and so forget their sufferings were awakened by the crash of ten or a dozen shells falling upon or in the building, whose fuses threw a lurid light through the gloom. The silence within, unbroken save by the hissing of the burning composition, the agonized feelings of the wounded during those few moments of suspense, are not to be described. Many an unlucky soldier was brought to the table to undergo a second operation. The wretched surgeons were engaged nearly the entire night. Rest was impossible. You could not choose but hear. The legs and arms were thrown out as soon as amputated, and fell on



the rooks.

It was not an agreeable sight. Those who vote for war do not realize these little details in the programme. War, they say, breeds heroes.

It is but justice to the French medical officers to state that their conduct during the whole period of their harassing and laborious duties was marked by the greatest feeling and kindness of manner, as well as by skilful attention to the relief of all who came under their hands.

The unfortunate prisoners who were not wounded had been placed in the area round the hospital, and being without cover, suffered at every discharge.

The Colonel exerted himself to obtain a few pickaxes and shovels to throw up some sort of splinter-proof, but it was in vain he pleaded, and in the end fifty were killed or wounded out of 150.

From the surgeons and hospital attendants they experienced great kindness. Their diet was the same as that of the French wounded soldiers. Their greatest luxury was three stewed prunes!

The effects of the vertical fire on the interior of the castle were so destructive that, had it been continued six hours longer, the garrison would have doubtless surrendered at discretion. They had lost all hope that Soult could relieve them.

Everybody now sought shelter where best he could among the rocks. Still, no nook or corner appeared to be a protection from the shrapnel shells.

A sergeant of the Royals, standing at the foot of a bedstead, was struck by a ball from a shrapnel shell, and fell dead while talking. An Italian soldier, while trying to prepare some broth for dinner, was blown into the air – soup, bowl, and all!

The excellence of the British artillery is well known. Nothing could surpass the precision with which the shells were thrown or the accuracy with which the fuses were cut. During the siege our men in the British trenches little heeded the lazy French shells which were thrown into our batteries. From the length of the fuses sufficient time was often allowed before they burst to put themselves under cover; and when they did burst, the splinters flew lazily around. But when the sound of an English shell was heard in the castle, or when the men stationed in the donjon cried, “Garde la bombe!” everybody was on the alert. Touching the ground and bursting were almost simultaneous, and the havoc from the splinters was terrible. It appeared to be of little avail where a man hid himself: no place was secure from them.

A French officer of Engineers, who was very badly wounded, kindly lent the Colonel some of the professional books which were supplied to him. Many were works which he had never been able to procure. Much pleasure and instruction did he derive from their perusal. He found out that the French Engineers were supplied with them by the Government, and their Generals also with the best maps of the country.

One day the Colonel was called to the door of the ward by a French officer, who exclaimed, as he pointed to a large convoy of

English transports coming in under full sail: “Voilà les fiacres qui viennent nous chercher!” (“There are the cabs coming to fetch us.”) It was a most cheering and beautiful sight – the cabs that were sent to fetch us home!

When Colonel Jones was told, shortly after, that he was no longer a prisoner, he began to look round for the best sword in the castle to replace the one which that rude French Captain had taken from him.

He discovered a handsome sabre belonging to a wounded staff-officer, so he sent and desired that it might be taken down from the place where it was hanging, as he wanted such a weapon.

“I have it still by me. It was the only sword I wore until the end of the war, and often, when at the outposts with a flag of truce, have I seen the French officers regard the eagles on the belt with anything but a gratified look.

“In 1815 I was quartered at Paris, being engineer in charge of the fortifications on Mont-Martre. There I frequently saw several of the St. Sebastian officers, and from my old friend the Chirurgien-Major I received many visits.

“We both agreed that, though the tables were turned, our present position was far more agreeable than when our acquaintance began in St. Sebastian.”

From Muswell’s “Peninsular Sketches.” Henry Colburn, publisher.

# CHAPTER VII

## JELLALABAD (1842)

Position of the town – Sale's brigade rebuilds the defences – A sortie – Bad news – A queer noise – A ruse that did not succeed – The only survivor comes in – Story of a massacre – The earthquake – The walls are down – Are rebuilt – English magic – Pollock comes – Fight outside – The peril of Lady Sale.

In November, 1841, the English Resident at the Afghan Court of Cabul was treacherously assassinated. General Elphinstone, who was left in command of the English troops, being in feeble health, attempted to leave the country with his 4,500 troops and three times that number of camp followers. On the 11th of March, 1842, Akbar Khan with a large army attacked General Sale at Jellalabad.

Jellalabad is a walled town on the right bank of the Cabul River. The upper end of the valley is very fertile and picturesque, studded with forts and villages, but all round the city it is sandy and arid. Snow mountains close in the valley on all sides.

South of Jellalabad, at a distance of 1,200 yards, is a low range of limestone hills, and on the south-west other low hills command the town at 200 yards' distance. All round the walls were houses, mosques, old forts, gardens, and trees – in fact, every species of

cover that an enemy could desire.

The walls of the town were 2,100 yards in extent, all in ruinous condition, and in many places not more than 9 feet high, and easily scaled. Through breaches in the wall laden cattle and droves of asses went in and out daily.

Into this town on the evening of the 12th of November, 1841, wearied, footsore, hungry, short of ammunition, Sale's brigade entered, to undertake the desperate task of defending it against the whole power of the country, the people of which not only hated us as invaders, but regarded us as infidels to be rooted out.

At a distance of 600 miles from our own frontier, with the formidable defiles of the Khyber Pass to cross, what would be our condition if Runjeet Sing should refuse to allow another army to traverse his territories?

In the meantime these ruinous walls were better than the open plain; so, after viewing the fortifications, Sale marched the brigade in, and the inhabitants fled out at the other side as we entered.

It was decided to hold the whole town and try to make it defensible. Our supply of provisions was so low that the troops had to be put on half, and the camp followers on quarter, rations. As to ammunition, we had only 120 rounds per man. We set to work and collected grain, flour, pulse, and food of all sorts which had been left behind, and in a few hours supplies for several days had been gathered in.

As parts of the walls had no parapets and the sentries were

quite exposed, hundreds of camel saddles were ranged, two deep and two high, for the sentries to kneel behind.

The next day many thousands of the enemy came swarming round and set fire to the grass huts and sheds on the eastern side. Some of them seemed to be bent on getting into a small mosque near the town, so a party of sappers, under Major Broadfoot, were sent to see what it contained.

They discovered a quantity of carbine ammunition, which proved to our men a timely and welcome supply. From dusk till midnight they kept firing on our sentries with wild yells. Then they withdrew, and the troops could snatch some rest.

At early dawn Sale determined on a sortie, and all were aroused without sound of bugle. Seven hundred infantry and two guns, commanded by Colonel Monteath, were ordered to sally out at sunrise and attack the Afghans. There were some 6,000 Afghans waiting to meet them in the rocky hills at the south-west angle of the city, but they did not resist long, and the cavalry rolled them over and pursued the fugitives, while Abbot's guns ploughed through them wherever they massed together.

By ten o'clock it was all over. The panic was so great that they deserted the forts, and we secured all the grain and fodder.

Two great results followed this fortunate victory: it gave the garrison a little breathing-time, and we had a few days of uninterrupted quiet to repair our walls and destroy cover.

The people of the valley now adopted the usual Oriental policy of trying to keep well with both parties, and sent in donkey-loads

of flour, wheat, etc.

Working parties were told off to clear away the rubbish, to destroy houses outside, and to build parapets on the walls; for with the enemy's marksmen so near, no one could look over the walls or show a cap without getting a shot through it.

"Jellalabad" means "the abode of splendour," but our men found it squalid and mean. There were two main streets, crossing each other at right angles; the rest were narrow, filthy lanes. The mountain tribes have fair complexions and the Grecian type of face. They are believed to be the descendants of the Greeks left by Alexander the Great. All their implements and household utensils are totally different from those used by the Afghans.

As soon as the enemy was driven off by our sortie the troops set to work on the defences. No one was allowed to be idle. Officers and men, with spade, pickaxe, bill-hook, or mining tools in hand – all were at work from daybreak to sunset.

Parties of the enemy hovered about, but never dared to molest us. Strong detachments of cavalry were sent out every day to protect our grass-cutters.

On the 21st of November the garrison received bad news. The little fort of Pesh Bolak (half-way between Jellalabad and the Khyber) had had to be evacuated, and Captain Ferris had been seen going over the mountains away to Peshawar in hasty retreat.

Then from Cabul they heard that our troops there were shut up by the insurgents in their fortified cantonment, that there was a general rising of the whole country, and the roads were closed

against messengers.

Every night now parties of the enemy used to creep round and fire at our sentries. At twelve o'clock on the night of the 28th there was a tremendous report, like the firing of a heavy gun. The alarm was sounded, and in two minutes every man was at his post. Seaton was Captain of the day, so he hurried off to learn what all the row was about. He found Sale and his staff in the west gate, looking earnestly in the direction of the enemy, and discussing with the heroic Havelock the probabilities of an attack. It was a bright moonlight night; everything visible near or far. All at once some one called out:

“Here they come, sir! Don't you see those two dark columns of men 500 yards off?”

Ah! yes. Every one saw them clearly enough.

“I looked a little, and then laughed right out. The General called to me in his short, sharp way:

“Seaton, what is it, sir?”

“General, where is the back wall of the old fort?”

“Eh! eh! what! what!” said he testily.

“Why, General, you sent me out yesterday to destroy the back wall of that old fort behind which the enemy used to muster. The clay was too hard for us, so, as the wall was just over a sunk road, and the bank below the wall soft, I threw a dam across the lower part of the road and turned in yon little stream. I guess it has softened the bank, and the wall has fallen with a slap into the water and produced the explosion. The columns of men are



only the shadows of the north and south walls.' So we all had a hearty laugh."

Seaton was on guard every third day. Though the duty was hard, it was comparatively a day of rest. During the night officers visited the guards and sentries every two hours, and made the sentries report everything they had seen or heard. They patrolled the streets, too, every two hours, and the picket in the centre of the town sent patrols to each gate every hour during the night. Every day, when not on special duty, he went out with a large working party to destroy the old walls and houses outside the town, to fell and cut up the trees, and to bring them in for firewood.

The enemy had some capital marksmen, and several of our men were shot through the loopholes. Sale now thought it time to put a stop to this, for they cut off our supplies and we had only thirty days' food in store. So he quietly waited until noon, when the enemy would be thinking more of food than fighting, and a column of 1,100 infantry was formed in the west street. All the cavalry that could be mustered, with two of Abbott's guns, assembled in the south street. They had a tough job at first. The Afghans stood bravely and poured in a heavy fire; but the moment the cavalry and guns appeared on the plain clear of Piper's Hill the whole body of the enemy fled in every direction. Many were drowned in the river.

During the pursuit Captain Oldfield, who commanded the cavalry, as he galloped up to a party of the fugitives, saw one man

suddenly stop, throw off his turban, tear off his clothes, wrap his waist-cloth round his loins and attempt to personate a Hindoo, calling out, "Shah bash, Angrèz!" ("Well done, English!"). But our troopers were not to be deceived: the Hindoo gentleman was instantly cut down.

Doubtless if the Afghans had possessed the needful tools they might have succeeded in their plan of cooping us in and starving us out.

It was to Major Broadfoot's firmness and foresight that the brigade was mainly indebted for its honour and safety. When they were first sent out, Broadfoot was ordered to proceed without his tools. This he respectfully but firmly declined to do, and by his manly representations he carried his point, and was allowed to take them.

They returned at dusk, very hungry and tired. Our loss had been small, our gain great, and a further result was that provisions at once began to flow in. People flocked to the gates to sell flour, grain, and vegetables. But the officers were all so poor that very few of them could purchase anything. The soldiers and camp-followers were still worse off. The commissariat officer had now six weeks' food in store, but would the treasure-chest hold out? Copper coinage had nearly disappeared.

The New Year, 1842, opened ominously, and brought more evil tidings. A letter from Cabul, from Pottinger, told them of the murder of the Envoy, that Ghusnee was besieged, and the whole country in insurrection.

But our garrison was not dismayed. All scouted the idea of any great disaster happening to our troops at Cabul, and our works were pushed on with increased vigour. Provisions kept coming in, and the surplus was carefully stored.

On the 9th of January a letter from General Elphinstone was brought in by a horseman, ordering Sale to retire with his brigade to Peshawar.

It was a crushing, humiliating blow, spreading a gloom over every heart; but when Sale's determination was made known – to hold Jellalabad until the Cabul force arrived – the men's confidence in their commander was greater than ever.

The greatest harmony existed between the European and native soldiers, and there was but one mind in the garrison – to defy the Afghans and to redeem as far as possible the reverses of the Cabul force. They had no money, they were short of ammunition, and had not too much food; but there was no thought of giving way.

On the 13th of January Seaton was on guard at the south gate when, a little after twelve o'clock, some one came rushing along the passage leading to the guardroom. The door was burst open, and Lieutenant B – threw himself into Seaton's arms, exclaiming: "My God, Seaton! the whole of the Cabul army has been destroyed!"

"What! man, are you mad? The whole army?"

"All but one – Dr. Brydon! We saw from the top of the gateway a man riding on an old pony. He seemed to be wounded;

he was bending over the pommel. We sent two horsemen out to bring him in – it was Dr. Brydon. He could not speak at first. Then he murmured: ‘The only survivor of Cabul army! – all killed.’”

After thinking this over in silence for a minute or two, they went outside and saw Sale and his staff at the Cabul gate hoisting up the colours, a sign to any poor fugitive who might have escaped. A hearty cheer went up as they looked on their country’s glorious colours. Their spirits were still high.

Instantly the cavalry rode out. About four miles from Jellalabad they found the bodies of three of Brydon’s companions – Lieutenant Harper, Collyer, and Hopkins – all terribly mangled.

At night lights were hung out over the Cabul gate, and two buglers were put on duty in the south-west bastion to sound the advance every quarter of an hour, in hope that some poor fugitive might hear it and be saved.

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