

the gutters ran with blood. Still they came doggedly on, and Napoleon saw that his one chance was to crush the British before he himself was crushed by the allied forces. He therefore brought into action the whole of his reserve and launched it in two great columns upon the British centre. It was about half-past seven that a deserter came flying along the British line, shrilly shouting "La garde vient ! La garde vient !" They had as yet borne no part in the battle ; fresh and unwounded, with the prestige and the experience of a hundred victories, the Old Guard came forth to its last conflict. They were grizzled veterans all, yet in the prime of life, for men became war-hardened fast beneath the eagles of Napoleon. Here were some who as raw conscripts had dashed with the youthful Bonaparte across the bridge of Lodi, or had seen Desaix seal victory with his blood upon the field of Marengo. Over six thousand strong, the most famous and most experienced soldiers whom the modern world has known came forth beneath the eye of their great leader, to sweep away the obstinate handful that barred his way to the capital of Belgium. Far on the British right stood the 52nd Oxfordshire Light Infantry, brigaded with the Seventy-first and the Ninety fifth under Major-General Sir Frederick Adam, in the division of Lord Hill. They had been charged to keep open the line of communications with Hal, but seeing that Napoleon was trying to break through the British line, and not to outflank it, they moved up, so as to take in flank any charge of the French. The Oxfordshire was at this time, according to Napier, "A regiment never surpass<sup>d</sup> in arms since arms were borne by men." They had suffered severely from shell fire and were burning with the desire to retaliate. With the charge of the Old Guard their chance came. They were under the command of their colonel, a tall, ruddy-faced man, the graceful symmetry of his athletic form marred only by a wound which had rendered his right arm shorter than his left. That wound he got in the hot *melée* at Ciudad Rodrigo, and he did not forget to whom he owed the debt. As the Guard came grandly on, the Colonel of the Oxfords, abandoning all hide-bound traditions, took upon himself the responsibility of executing a change of formation from which a weaker man would have shrunk. He gave the order "Right shoulders forward !" and the 52nd, cutting loose from its supports, swung round, fired a volley into the shoulder of the advancing column and charged. It was a risky move. Had the French been backed by the cavalry, whom they had flung away earlier in the day, they could have caught the 52nd unsupported and in five minutes have trampled it out of existence. As it was the veterans of France yielded to the withering fire, to the resistless charge of the British infantry. Fighting desperately, the Guard was swept for three-quarters of a mile right across the line of fight, to dissolve at last in a chaos of struggling fragments. The work of destruction was completed by the British Guards and by the Prussians. Napoleon's last effort had failed ; there remained for him now only six years of his