

British Battles

on Land and Sea.

After the battle of Oudenarde the generals of the Allies undertook an enterprise which, in the opinion of the French, was thought to be rash, self-sufficient and inconsiderate. This was the siege of Lisle one of the strongest towns of Europe. It was about a mile in length by three-quarters of a mile broad; and was then as now surrounded by wall, and bastions, with a pentagonal citadel on its north-west side, and a strong series of out works, constituting a fortress of the first class. Louis XIV. had taken it from the Spaniards in 1667, and under Vauban had completed the fortifications at great labour and expense, erecting the citadel, with five royal bastions and several half-moons. He enlarged it also by a suburb, added many new streets and built a good arsenal. The ditches were filled by the river Deule. He also had a causeway made, nearly twenty miles long, between Lisle and Ypres.

In 1708 it was provided with all necessaries, a store of ammunition, a strong garrison, which was further reinforced by twenty-one battalions of the finest infantry in France, under Louis Francois, the Marshal Duke de Boufflers. It was deemed the capital of French Flanders, though situated in a somewhat swampy plain; and the marshal commanding was an officer conspicuous among his comrades for the obstinacy and valour with which he defended more than one fortified place. His garrison mustered 15,000 bayonets.

It was against this city, covered by a field force of 100,000 men, that the Duke of Marlborough and Prince Eugene proposed to commence operations, and that, too, in the face of all the difficulties arising out of remote magazines, and perils likely to attend the transport of stores. When we state that their depot was Brussels, twenty-five leagues distant; that the stores, tools, &c., necessary at the very opening of the siege required fully 15,000 horses to convey them; and that the battering train when in motion covered fifteen miles of road, some idea of the risks attending its progress through a country chiefly possessed by the enemy may be formed; and when it is further stated that this prodigious train made good its journey without the loss of a single horse or man, "the genius of him who planned, not less than the vigilance of those who executed, the march will, we presume, receive from every reader the highest commendation. Yet such is the fact. Though the enemy were well aware of the very day when it was intended that the whole should set out, and saw the train more than once during its progress, such was the accuracy of Marlborough's calculations, that they were never able to hazard an attack."

The long convoy set out from Brussels on the 6th of August; and six days after came into the allied camp at Helchin, whither the duke had advanced, the army of the enemy was superior in force to that which was to cover the siege, and moreover, it commanded all the water communications with the nearest part of Holland.

There came from Brussels 120 pieces of cannon, 60 mortars and howitzers, and 4,000 wagons of powder and ball. The conduct of the siege was entrusted to Prince

Eugene, with fifty battalions of infantry, Marlborough taking upon himself the task of covering it.

On the 13th of August, Lisle was formally invested, on the morning of the 23rd, he crossed the Scheldt at Pottes; threw himself on the line of communication between the armies of the Dukes of Berwick and Vendome.

On the 30th they accordingly united in the plain between Grammont and Lessines; and on the 2nd of September were in position between Blandin and Willemeau, with 140 battalions and 250 squadrons, 110,000 men in all; while a corps of 20,000 had been left under the late Governor of Ostend, the Count de la Mothe, to cover Ghent and Bruges. The Duke was soon acquainted with this arrangement; and not doubting that the next movement would lead round the sources of the Marque, into the country between that river and the Dyle, to avert the threatened danger, he recrossed the Scheldt, and, marching in a direction nearly parallel to that pursued by the enemy, he arrived on the 4th September in a position which he had previously selected, having his right resting on the village of Noyelles, and on left Peronne. To prove that his anticipations were correct, Vendome had actually doubled round the Marque by the very route expected, and appeared in front of the Allies within the space of two hours after they had halted.

There he rested, and there for twelve days the two armies remained stationary—one covering the operations of the siege, the other seeking an opportunity for raising it.

While these movements were being made, Eugene had pressed the investment with all the vigour that inadequate resources and an imperfect engineer department would permit. The first parallel was opened on the 22nd of August, at eight o'clock in the evening, and from the 24th to the 27th batteries were in course of erection. On the 23rd the chapel, and on succeeding they raised it to its foundation; but the progress of the various parallels was not interrupted for a moment. The third was dug to the river on the 27th, and fresh batteries were armed over night.

On the morning of the 28th, the whole began to rain shot and shell against Lisle, and strove to effect a breach. Near the gate of St. Andrew there was a fortified mill, from the occupation of which the besiegers expected great advantages; and on the 29th it was taken at the point of bayonet; but so dreadful was the fire upon it from the town batteries, that the assailants were compelled to retire, leaving it full of killed and wounded. The same thing took place next day, on which Prince Eugene ordered it to be burned, an order the execution of which the enemy could not prevent.

By this time every battering-gun was mounted and in position; and their fire, besides subduing that of the enemy, effected a wide breach in the salient angle of the counterscarp of a hornwork. It was stormed that night, in spite of the most resolute defence made by the garrison, and a lodgment was fully effected. Fresh approaches were immediately pushed towards other portions of the work, which a furious sortie made on the night of the 10th of September seemed scarcely to retard.

(To be continued.)

The bayonet was first made in bayonne, in France; hence its name, and it was first used by the French army in 1671. It was successfully employed by them during the reign of William III, in an attack on the British 25th Regiment of Foot. It afterwards became generally recognized as an indispensable military weapon, and has been used on both sides in nearly all the great battle of Europe and America in which the British and other troops have been engaged for the last 150 years.