

WATERLOO.

NAPOLEON'S LAST CAMPAIGN.

Lecture Delivered by Captain A. H. Lee, R. A., in the "Victoria Rifles" Armory Hall, Friday Evening, Nov. 22nd, 1895.

The Lecture Was Illustrated Throughout by Numerous Maps, Plans, and Photographic Views Thrown on the Screen by a Stereopticon.

(Continued from the issue of December 15th.)

JUNE 16th.—From this point of the campaign an inexplicable lassitude seemed to come over Napoleon, and he whose movements were wont to be almost bewildering in their lightning rapidity, now became a laggard. On the night of the 15th he sat up with Ney, talking politics, till 2 a.m. at Charleroi, and though it was daylight before 4 a.m., it was not till four hours later that Napoleon issued his first orders for the day. Grouchy, at Fleurus, had many hours before reported the gathering of masses of Prussians on the slopes of Ligny, and Napoleon's old soldiers were amazed at the unaccountable delay which was enabling Blucher to marshal his army undisturbed.

About 8 a.m. Napoleon issued his orders, dividing his army into two wings and a reserve. The left wing, 41,000 strong, was placed under Ney's orders. The right wing, 58,000 strong, was placed under Grouchy. The reserve, consisting of the imperial guard, was kept at Napoleon's personal disposal.

At 8.30 a.m. Grouchy was ordered to march and occupy Sombreffe, pushing away the enemy if there, and then to advance on Gembloux. Napoleon was in manifest ignorance of the strength of the Prussian force that had assembled at Ligny. At the same hour Ney was ordered to advance and occupy Quatre Bras, and then to continue his advance, arriving at Brussels at 7 a.m. on the 17th. By these orders Napoleon showed that he did not in the least realize the situation, and expected little or no opposition. He had, in fact, quite decided in his own mind that the English and Prussians would separate as he advanced, and retire toward their respective bases, and so leave open the road to Brussels. He could not believe that the loyal co-operation between Wellington and Blucher would be maintained in the face of serious danger; he expected that each would look out only for himself, and in this as in nearly all his actions in this campaign, he altogether underrated his opponents. He was inflated with the most sublime confidence, and did not even think it worth while to hurry his movements. Not content with his previous loss of precious time, he spent the remainder of the morning of the 16th talking politics with his generals, and it was not till nearly noon that he rode to Fleurus, and mounting to the top of a windmill to the north of the town, scanned the Prussian position at Ligny.

He now appeared to realize for the first time, although he could hardly believe his eyes, that the Prussians were assembled in full force to oppose him, and indeed by this hour Blucher had collected the whole of his army except Bulow's corps, 85,000 men in all, on his previously chosen battlefield of Ligny. Napoleon now, shortly before 2 p.m., sent an order to Ney to sweep away any hostile force at Quatre Bras and then,

instead of marching on to Brussels, to move to his right and fall on the left flank and rear of the Prussians, whom he, Napoleon, was about to attack at Ligny. By this order he showed that he still did not in the least realize the obstacles that Ney had in front of him. Let us see what these were.

The orders for concentration issued by Wellington at the ball had not yet had time to mature, and though the British divisions were on the march to Quatre Bras, none had arrived by noon. The small force that held Quatre Bras the night before had been reinforced by Perponcher's brigade from Nivelles at 5 a.m. and by the Princes of Orange with some more troops at 6 a.m., bringing up the total strength to 7,000 infantry and sixteen guns, but no cavalry. The Prince of Orange, as senior officer on the spot took command and prepared for a desperate defence of the cross roads. Ney saw he could not therefore hope to gain Quatre Bras without serious fighting, and consequently waited until he could bring up his rearmost troops. He was also, like everyone else, waiting for orders from Napoleon, but received none till nearly noon.

Wellington had left Brussels with his staff between 7 and 8 a.m., and rode towards Quatre Bras, where he arrived about 11. Having surveyed Ney's position and approved the Prince of Orange's dispositions to meet the attack that was not then threatening, he rode off down the Namur road to confer with Blucher. He found the latter, about 1.30, at the mill of Bussy, on the heights between Ligny and Bry, and it was here that they decided on their future plan of campaign.

It is interesting to note that at this same moment Napoleon was reconnoitering the Prussian position in the plain below, and was confidently assuring his generals that Wellington and Blucher would never hold together, when above him at the mill of Bussy, and within sight, the two allies were engaged in making their gallant compact to hold together at all costs, and deciding on their final scheme for his destruction.

Both Wellington and Blucher believed that practically the whole French army was before them at Ligny, and Wellington promised, if he were not seriously attacked at Quatre Bras himself, to come to Blucher's aid. It is recorded that Wellington strongly disapproved of Blucher's order of battle and expressed his opinion to Sir Arthur Hardinge in his usual blunt manner, "If he forms like that, all I can say is he will be damnably hammered."

After their famous and solemn compact to hold together and to block the way to Brussels, at all costs, had been concluded at this historic mill, Wellington rode back to Quatre Bras, arriving there at 2.20. There we will leave him for the present and return to Ligny and Blucher.

Let us now examine the battle field of Ligny and the dispositions of the two armies that had been marshalling there all the morning, and were now opposite to each other.

Ligny and the other small villages forming the Prussian front are in the valley of the Ligny stream, which is very small and sluggish. Behind the ground slopes gently up to Bry and Sombreffe. The position was a bad one, being too extended, and the reserves being all exposed on the slopes behind the main line. The high ground on the French side also commanded a full view of the Prussian position which was very exposed to artillery fire, from points indicated on the map. It was a lovely country, however, with peaceful hamlets and smiling cornfields, soon to be the scene of a conflict of unparalleled ferocity.

Napoleon's plan of attack was to throw his weight on the Prussian right, so as to cut Blucher off from Wellington and to drive him back towards Liege.

Just as the church clock of St. Amand struck half past two, Napoleon gave the signal (three cannon shots) for Vandamme to fall on. The latter advanced against the Prussian right, and soon the action became general all along the line from Ligny to St. Amand. The French advanced with the greatest gallantry, and several times drove the Prussians from the villages, but on attempting to emerge and mount the slopes they were smitten by the artillery fire from the heights behind, and the Prussians, speedily reinforced, as often regained the villages. In Ligny the fighting was especially bloody and desperate. The French artillery fire soon set the thatched houses on fire, but for three hours the fight surged backwards and forwards through the burning streets. No quarter was asked or given, and stern bloody hand-to-hand fighting, with all the deadly hatred of the two nations fully aroused, was the order of the day.

At 5.30 the French had captured St. Amand, but were struggling for Ligny, whilst on the left there had been very little but skirmishing. Blucher was determined whatever happened, not to allow his right to be forced, and the whole afternoon he kept moving troops from his centre to his right to prevent this. This did not escape Napoleon's observant eye, and seeing that Blucher's centre was now dangerously weak, he determined to call up his reserve, the guard, and to launch them at the right of the village of Ligny, thus piercing Blucher's centre and driving his right wing towards Ney, who he hoped was already advancing from Quatre Bras to intercept it. In pursuance of this plan he moved up Lobau's corps and the guard, 23,000 men in all, and about 6 p.m. was on the point of launching them at the enemy when a most disturbing incident forced him to counter-order the advance.

Some three miles away on the rising ground to the southwest appeared the advanced guard of a large force, apparently heading for Fleurus. Was it Ney, or was it the English? Until Napoleon could ascertain this he must keep back his reserve to meet emergencies. Soon after the officer sent by Napoleon returned and reported that this mysterious force was the French 1st corps, under General D'Erlon, and belonging to Ney's command. No sooner had it appeared, however, than it as suddenly disappeared, none knew whither. As a matter of fact it was in compliance with a peremptory order from Ney, who was hard pressed himself at Quatre Bras, and was incensed at D'Erlon leaving him without orders.

This "D'Erlon incident" is one of the strangest blunders in military history, and every cause, including treachery, has been ascribed to it. Sifting, how-