

Sir Arthur now returned to England, and for a short time sat once more in the House of Commons, which, as well as the House of Lords and the King, acknowledged in the most flattering terms, the importance of his services.

The fatal campaign under Sir John Moore, with the general ill success of our military expeditions, had almost determined the ministry to desist from further operations in the Peninsula, when the famous memorandum of Sir Arthur Wellesley, on the Defence of Portugal, induced a change of policy, and a strong force was dispatched under Sir Arthur's command to carry out the project.

Sir Arthur arrived in the Tagus on the 22nd of April, and leaving a Portuguese corps, amounting to 7,000 men, and four British regiments to defend the capital, and placing bands of soldiers to intercept the march of Victor, in case he should make an attempt on Lisbon, he removed his head-quarters on the 1st of May to Pombal, and on the following day to Coimbra. Soult displayed a truly courageous firmness, as well as talents of the highest order, and in spite of the able manner in which Wellesley turned his positions, he was enabled, after smart skirmishes at Albergaria, Grijon, and Cavalhos, in all of which he was worsted, to escape to Oporto, having been assisted in his flight by a number of fortunate accidents, which saved him from destruction. As soon as he had reached the city, he commenced destroying the floating bridge over the Douro, and completed his task just before the British came up on the 12th of May. The celebrated passage of the Douro, and the complete defeat of Soult which followed, are among the most masterly exploits of the campaign. Soult made a precipitate retreat, with loss of artillery, baggage, plunder, and a fourth of his army.

Sir Arthur was now brought into contact with Cuesta, the Spanish general, a man of mediocre capacity, raised by accident to a position he was wholly incompetent to fill. No reliance could be placed on such a man, and, in fact, he declined to attack Victor at Talavera under circumstances of advantage. Sir Arthur, however, insisted on advancing, and threw himself on the French army, consisting of 50,000 men, led by Joseph Buonaparte in person, while the Spaniards disgracefully fled from the scene of action. During the flight Sir Arthur narrowly escaped being made prisoner. Happening to be in a house which was attacked by a party of French, he had barely time to mount his horse and ride away. This was the second narrow escape he had met with; for on the preceding day, a three-pound shot passed just over his head and struck a tree, under which he was standing. The sudden attack of the French surprised and threw into some confusion the 87th and 88th regiments, the retreat of which Wellesley

directed in person. General Hill, assuming the command of the 29th, charged bravely on the foe, and after a sanguinary and confused conflict (for the night was quite dark), drove the French from their dearly-bought vantage ground. Night brought about a suspension of the combat, but it was renewed in the morning, by an attack on the heights at five o'clock, continued without intermission till nine, when the French retired, and for the three hours succeeding, both armies, by a sort of tacit understanding, suspended hostilities. Between them ran a small stream, to which, overpowered by thirst and fatigue, the troops on both sides repaired to refresh themselves. Courtesies were interchanged and hands pressed in friendship that in a few minutes afterwards wielded weapons against each other in deadly feud. The next attack was on the British centre. It was repulsed with great slaughter, and ten guns were captured; but the French rallied and renewed the assault, though with the same ill-success. The carnage was fearful, and the dry grass accidentally igniting, many of the wounded perished in the flames. At length the French were driven back to Malines, with the loss of twenty pieces of cannon and four standards.

On the 29th, the light brigade, consisting of the 43rd, 52nd, and 95th Rifles, arrived at Talavera, having travelled in 26 hours, in heavy marching order, the astonishing distance of 62 miles, under a burning sun, and through a district where water was scarce. This feat, quite unparalleled in military annals, was performed with the loss of only 17 stragglers left behind. General Crawford's standing orders for the light division, so effective on this occasion, and throughout the war, are well known.

Powerful reinforcements from France, which augmented the French army under Joseph to 65,000 men, headed by the most experienced of Napoleon's generals, compelled Sir Arthur, now created Viscount Wellington of Talavera, and of Wellington, in the County of Somerset, and Baron Douro of Wellesley, to retire into Portugal, the military defences of which were already arranged for such a contingency. Massena followed, and after reducing Ciudad Rodrigo, the French overtook the crippled but undaunted English army on the ridge of Busaco, where was fought that famous battle, which added another laurel to the wreath of Wellington.

This great victory did not induce the English general to pause in his retreat, and Massena, strong in his superior force, continued to advance, but after a pursuit of 200 miles found himself opposed by the stupendous lines of Torres Vedras, acknowledged to be the most amazing defences that military science ever constructed. Behind these lines the English army enjoyed every comfort, while the French were famishing before them. At