

own army enabled him to spare. This offer, CHAP. XI.  
however, notwithstanding the poverty of their  
own resources, was declined, and the assistance  
received from the British general was limited to  
arms and ammunition.

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Since his arrival at Oporto, Sir Arthur Wellesley had been actively employed in endeavouring to procure the necessary means for moving the stores, baggage, and provisions, with a view to the immediate commencement of operations. Though, in this respect, he had not been altogether unsuccessful, yet it was judged more prudent to march on Lisbon, by the coast, in order to keep up a communication with the fleet of victuallers and store-ships, which were directed to follow the movements of the army. As this, however, was liable to continual interruption, from the state of the weather, the dangers of the coast, and the operations of the enemy, it was judged prudent that the army should be accompanied by a supply of such articles as were of more immediate necessity, that it might be rendered as independent as possible of the contingencies of war or weather.

Before quitting the Mondego, Sir Arthur

CHAP. XI. Wellesley left instructions for the corps of Ge-

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neral Acland to proceed along the coast, and form a junction with the army. For the information of Sir John Moore, he also left a statement of his opinions as to the most advantageous employment of the force under his command, to be delivered to that officer on his arrival. Sir Arthur strongly recommended that his corps should be marched on Santarem, to narrow the communications of Lisbon; and, if necessary, to operate to the southward of the Tagus, in order to cut off the retreat of the French army through the province of Alentejo.

Aug. 9.

On the ninth of August, the advanced-guard of the army moved onward from the Mondego, and reached Leiria on the tenth. On the eleventh, it was followed by the main-body, which, on the thirteenth, advanced to the neighbourhood of Batalha. Before proceeding further, it may be well to give a slight sketch of the distribution of the French army, at the moment when hostilities, with a new and more formidable enemy, were about to commence.

Aug. 13.

When intelligence first reached Marshal Junot, of the landing of a British army, he anticipated that its first movement would be on the

Zezeze and the Tagus, in order to effect a separation between the corps of Loison and the capital. General Delaborde, therefore, was immediately detached from Lisbon, with two brigades of infantry, about six hundred cavalry, and five pieces of artillery, with directions to proceed by Villa Franca, Rio Mayor, and Condieiros, with a view to watch the motions of the British general, and cover the advance of Loison, with whom he was directed to effect a junction. Learning, however, that Loison had already crossed the Tagus without opposition, and that Sir Arthur Wellesley was advancing by the road along the coast, he proceeded to Alcobaça, with the view of retarding, as much as possible, the progress of the British army.

Loison, with a force of about eight thousand men, was advancing rapidly from Abrantes, in expectation of effecting a junction with the corps of Delaborde at Leiria. The sufferings of his army, during his march through Alentejo, are described to have been dreadful. Wherever they went, the towns and villages were deserted. The heat was unusually great; and numbers of the soldiers sank exhausted, from privations which it was found impossible

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Aug. 6.

CHAP. XI. to supply. All stragglers were destroyed; and many, suffering from excessive thirst, died of drinking stagnant and unwholesome waters, to which the natives had directed them. The occupation of Leiria by the British, had disappointed the calculations of the French generals; and Loison was obliged to make a considerable detour before he could effect his intended junction with Delaborde, who, remaining unsupported in front of the enemy, was liable to sustain the attack of his whole force.

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Junot was at Lisbon, with such force as he deemed sufficient to control the inhabitants, busied in making every practicable provision for the defence of the capital. The garrison was ordered to be withdrawn from Setubal; and instructions were issued for the immediate abandonment of all the French posts to the south of the Tagus, with the exception of Palmela.

Such was the relative position of both armies, when Sir Arthur Wellesley had to encounter new difficulties in the conduct of the Portuguese authorities. Before the army commenced its march from the Mondego, it had been demanded, by General Bernardin de Freire, that the

force under his orders, should be furnished with supplies by the British commissariat, a proposal most unreasonable in itself, and one to which, in the circumstances of the army, it was impossible to accede. It was, therefore, met by Sir Arthur Wellesley with a strong remonstrance; and the unreasonableness of the demand was represented to de Freire in its true colours. For some time there was reason to hope that the explanations of the British general had been received with tacit acquiescence. But this was not so. When the army reached Leiria, the demand was renewed even more peremptorily than before, accompanied by the threat, that unless it was complied with, the Portuguese forces should instantly separate themselves from the British, and advance to Santarem, by way of Thomar.

Sir Arthur Wellesley did everything in his power to change the resolutions of de Freire. He represented the strong impolicy of withdrawing himself from the British army, and the dangers to which he must necessarily expose his troops by adhering to his projected scheme. He urged him to relinquish it by all that was dearest and most sacred to a soldier and a patriot;

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CHAP. XI. and conjured him not to compromise his own

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honour, and the safety of his country, by violating, on so flimsy a pretext, the engagements into which his government had already entered. In part only were these remonstrances successful. De Freire consented to remain safe, though inglorious, at Leiria, instead of prosecuting his original design of advancing to Santarem. This at least was something gained; yet it cannot be questioned, that the presence of the Portuguese army would have carried with it a moral influence and support, perhaps, in such circumstances, even more valuable than a large accession of mere military force.

The truth we take to be, that, at the period in question, the zeal and heartiness of England in their cause, were the object of considerable doubt with the patriots of the Peninsula. She had not then impressed, on the continental nations, the character she has since borne of a great military power. On land, her warlike operations had generally been undertaken for some limited and petty object, and conducted on a small and inadequate scale. It was imagined too, by the allies of England, that her interference in their behalf, proceeded rather from some underhand

motive of individual advantage, to be secured by their co-operation, than from hearty and zealous adoption of their cause, or disinterested anxiety for their liberation. They knew that should adverse circumstances occur, the English could always find—and they doubted not their intention of seeking—a refuge in their ships. It was familiar too, as a proverb in the mouths of all Europe, that the English were a great maritime power, but insignificant on shore. The truth of this aphorism has since been tested; yet we should take but a partial and imperfect view of the difficulties which Sir Arthur Wellesley, at the very outset of his operations, was called on to combat and surmount, were we to pass unnoticed the moral impression of our character and objects, which induced the patriots to receive our offers of assistance with jealousy and distrust.

That the Portuguese authorities were influenced by such motives, it seems impossible to doubt. It was probably calculated by the Junta, that, whichever of the parties might be successful in the approaching contest, it was more for their advantage to possess an army fresh and uncrippled, in order to reap the full benefit of vic-

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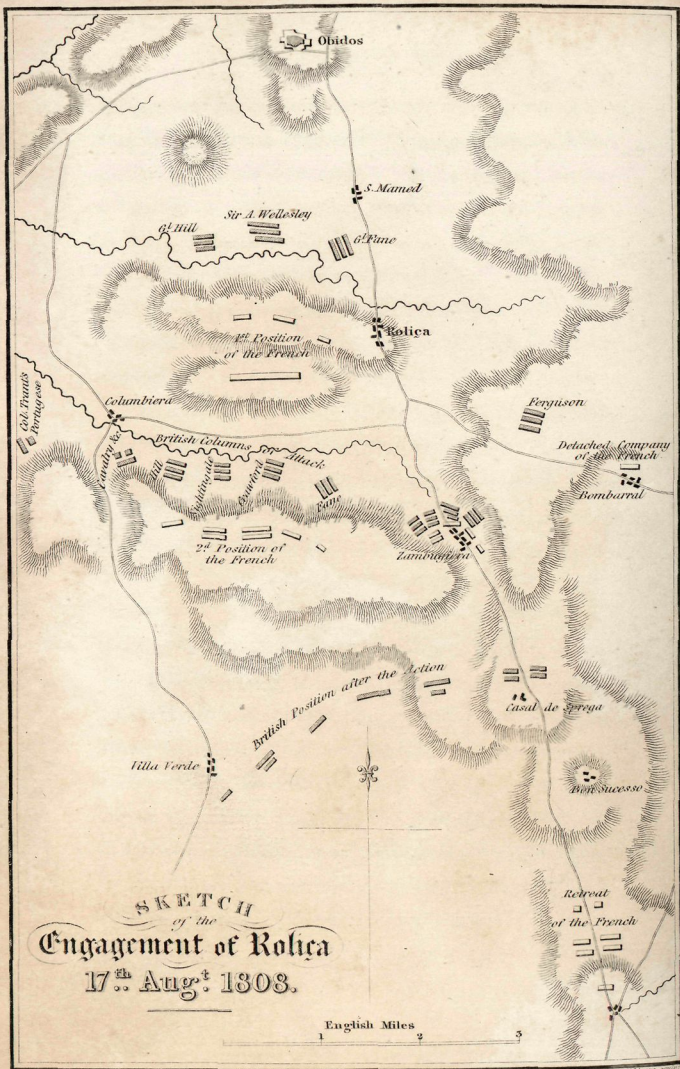
CHAP. XI. tory, or repair the consequences of defeat. It may be supposed, therefore, that de Freire was glad of a plausible excuse for remaining at Leiria, while two more powerful combatants were about to try the fortune of battle. It was even with difficulty, that he consented to place one thousand four hundred infantry, and two hundred and fifty cavalry, at the disposal of the British general.

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Aug. 14. On the fourteenth, the English entered Alcobaca, from which the enemy had retired on the preceding night, and on the following day moved onward to Caldas. At Brilos, a village in the neighbourhood, the first blood was shed. The post was attacked by some companies of riflemen of the sixtieth and ninety-fifth regiments, who carried it with trifling resistance on the part of the enemy, whom they incautiously pursued for several miles. The detachment, however, was in turn attacked by a superior force, which endeavoured to cut off their retreat; and it was only by the prompt assistance of General Spencer that this object was defeated. The loss of the British is stated in the official returns to have amounted to twenty-six killed, wounded, and missing.







SKETCH  
of the  
**Engagement of Roliça**  
17<sup>th</sup> Aug<sup>r</sup> 1808.

English Miles 1 2 3

On the same day, the army reached Caldas, and the advance, under Brigadier-General Fane, moved on to Obidos, and drove the enemy's piquets from the town. General Delaborde, in the meantime, had retired to a position in front of Roliça. The heights on which this village is situated form the boundary of a valley commencing at Caldas, and about three leagues in extent. Nearly in the centre stand the town and old Moorish fort of Obidos; and every favourable post on the high ground, on either side of the valley, was occupied by detachments of the French army. The main body was posted on a plain, which overlooked the valley as far as Obidos.

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On the morning of the seventeenth, Sir Arthur Wellesley advanced to the attack. Columns were sent out on either flank; and, on the approach of these, Delaborde, without offering resistance, fell back to the heights of Roliça, where he again placed his army in position.

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The ground thus occupied was strong; and having been closely reconnoitred by Sir Arthur Wellesley, he made immediate preparation for attack. His army, with this view, was formed into three columns. The right, consisting of twelve

CHAP. XI. hundred Portuguese infantry, and fifty Portuguese cavalry, was intended to turn the left flank of the position, and penetrate into the mountains in the rear. The left, consisting of Major-General Ferguson's and Brigadier-General Bowes's brigades of infantry, three companies of riflemen, and about forty cavalry, British and Portuguese, was destined, under command of General Ferguson, to ascend the hills at Obidos, in order to turn the posts which the enemy still held on the left of the valley, as well as the right of his position at Roliça. This corps was likewise directed to watch for the approach of Loison, who was known to be in the neighbourhood, in order to prevent the junction of his force with that of Delaborde. The centre column, commanded by Sir Arthur in person, and consisting of Major-General Hill's, Brigadier-General Nightingale's, Brigadier-General Crawford's, and Brigadier-General Fane's brigades, with four thousand Portuguese light infantry, and the main body of the British and Portuguese cavalry, was ordered to assemble in the plain, and attack the front of the position.

Such was the order of attack. It was morn-

ing, and a calm and quiet beauty seemed to linger on the scene of the impending conflict. The heights of Roliça, though steep and difficult of access, possessed few of the sterner and more imposing features of mountain scenery. The heat and droughts of summer had deprived them of much of that brightness of verdure which is common in a colder and more variable climate. Here and there the face of the heights was indented by deep ravines, worn by the winter torrents, the precipitous banks of which were occasionally covered with wood; and below, extended groves of the cork-tree and olive; while Obidos, with its ancient walls and fortress, and stupendous aqueduct, rose in the middle distance. To the east the prospect was terminated by the lofty summit of the Monte Junto, and on the west by the Atlantic.

As the centre column commenced its advance towards the steep acclivity in front, the enemy gave no demonstration of hostility; and all was still and peaceful, as when the goat-herd tended his flock on the hilly pastures, and the peasant went forth to his labours, carolling his matin song in the sunrise. Such was the scene about to be consecrated in the eyes of posterity by the first

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CHAP. XI. considerable outpouring of British blood, in a cause as pure, just, noble, and generous, as any of which history bears record.

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The position of the enemy could only be approached in front by narrow paths, winding through deep and rocky ravines, and surrounded by masses of brushwood, in which Delaborde had stationed his light infantry. Till reaching the bottom of the heights, the British troops were protected by the cork and olive woods from the fire of the enemy's artillery. But in their ascent, the troops had to encounter a resistance, which became at every stage of their progress more fierce and vehement. A heavy fire was opened on the assailants from the brushwood on either flank, and at every point at which they became exposed to the action of artillery, a shower of cannon-shot came sweeping down the ravines with terrible effect.

Even in these difficult and disheartening circumstances, no symptoms of confusion were manifested in the British columns. The advance of General Nightingale's brigade was led by the twenty-ninth regiment, with singular bravery and resolution. They beheld themselves suffering from attacks which it was impossible to re-

pel; but the high discipline of the regiment enabled it to surmount every obstacle; and, under every disadvantage, they kept on their way steady and unbroken. The Honourable Lieutenant-Colonel Lake, by whom it was commanded, fell, as the head of the column reached the summit of the hill, and became exposed to a heavy and destructive fire from the vineyards occupied by the enemy. The grenadier company of the twenty-ninth were in the act of forming, when a French battalion, after pouring in a volley, advanced to the charge, and succeeded in overpowering the small but gallant body, which had already crowned the heights. This success was temporary. The remainder of the regiment came up; and, supported by the ninth regiment, the colonel of which was also killed, they drove back the enemy, and succeeded in maintaining their position, against every effort to regain possession of the heights.

The success thus gallantly achieved was rendered more decided by the brigade of General Hill, which had already formed on the heights, and the appearance of the column of General Ferguson, which at first had taken a wrong direction, but was now observed to be traversing

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CHAP. XI. the right flank of the enemy's position. Delaborde's situation had now become one of extreme peril; and he was too skilful a general not at once to perceive the necessity of immediate retreat. Precipitately abandoning his position, he retired to the village of Zambugeira, where he again made demonstration of resistance. From this, by a most gallant charge, he was driven by General Spencer.

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The loss of the French, in this engagement, was six hundred killed and wounded; among the latter of which was their brave and skilful leader. That of the English was somewhat less. It is stated by the official returns to have amounted altogether to four hundred and eighty-two. The force of Delaborde, in the action, is known to have amounted to five thousand men.\*

Such are the details of the first action fought

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\* The force of the enemy was estimated by Sir Arthur Wellesley at six thousand men, which tallied exactly with the statement of a French officer, wounded in the action. Reasons, in our judgment, satisfactory, have induced us to make a lower estimate. The number actually in the field, is stated, by Thiebault, to have been only nineteen hundred men. Foy makes it two thousand two hundred men. Neither are entitled to credit. It is truly said, by Colonel Napier, that such puerile misstatements can only tend to throw ridicule on a deed of arms, in itself honourable to the talent of the general, and the discipline and courage of his army.



by British troops in the great cause of the Peninsula. It is memorable, as affording the earliest opportunity of displaying, on a new scene, the spirit, gallantry, and discipline of English soldiers; and perhaps not less so, as constituting one of those rare occasions, in which the judgment and prudence of the greatest general of the age may fairly be called in question. It is now admitted, we believe, by all military men, that the attack on the front of the second position at Roliça, was injudicious. The columns of General Ferguson and Colonel Trant were alone sufficient to have dislodged the enemy, who must instantly have retired on their appearance. It is indeed difficult to conceive how Sir Arthur Wellesley, the reinforcement of whose army depended on contingencies beyond his control, with a force barely equal to make head against the combined army of his opponents, should, in such circumstances, have been so rashly lavish of the lives of his soldiers. They were brought into action with every possible disadvantage, and fought for an object which a skilful general could unquestionably have obtained without bloodshed.

It is probable that Sir Arthur Wellesley was

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CHAP. XI. unprepared for the obstinate and vigorous resistance which the enemy opposed to the columns of Hill and Nightingale; and that his object was to press Delaborde in his retreat more closely than could otherwise have been done. If so, he paid the penalty of his miscalculations. It cannot be doubted that the sight of seventy English prisoners, sent in triumph to Lisbon, must have produced an injurious moral influence on the minds of the people, and have led them to give credit to the exaggerated rumours which it was the policy of the enemy to set afloat.

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The numbers of the troops on both sides, actually engaged, were nearly equal. Before the appearance of the columns of Trant and Ferguson, the enemy had already been dislodged from his position; and the brigades of Hill and Nightingale were in a condition, unaided, to have driven him from the village of Zambugeira. Considering the disadvantages under which they fought, and the magnitude of the obstacles overcome, the achievement was one unquestionably highly honourable to the troops.

The talent shewn by Delaborde, throughout his operations, must be admitted, by all parties, to have been very great. His chief object

was to retard the advance of the English army, in order to gain time for a junction with Loison ; and the union of boldness and skill, by which his manœuvres for this purpose were conceived and executed, is, unquestionably, indicative of a highly-gifted commander.

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Driven from the village of Zambugeira, Delaborde retired with his army, by the road to Torres Vedras. It was the intention of Sir Arthur Wellesley to have lost no time in following the enemy ; but having learned that the expected reinforcement under General Acland was in the offing, he changed his resolution, and moved onward by the coast road, in order to cover the landing of the troops, and receive supplies from the shipping.

On the eighteenth, the army halted at Lourinha. On the nineteenth, it moved onward to Vimiero ; and on the twentieth, was joined by the brigade of General Anstruther ; and the landing of the remainder of the corps was effected, with some difficulty, in the course of the night. Delaborde could not oppose the debarkation, but sent on his cavalry, in hopes of attacking the troops on their march. This was foreseen. A detachment, under General

Aug. 18.

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CHAP. XI. Spencer, was stationed at Lourinha for their protection, and no annoyance was attempted by the enemy.

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It was known at head-quarters, that a junction had taken place between the corps of Delaborde and that of Loison, on the eighteenth, and that their united force was concentrated in position at Torres Vedras. The enemy daily sent forward patrols of cavalry into the neighbourhood of the British army; and their superiority in that arm was too decided to admit of opposition. Of the position occupied by the French army, Sir Arthur Wellesley could learn nothing, except that it was very strong, and accessible only by a long and difficult defile.

Under these circumstances, he had formed the resolution of advancing rapidly along the coast-road to Mafra, and thus turning the position of Torres Vedras. By this movement, he calculated on forcing the hostile army to an immediate retreat, and on enjoying an opportunity of attacking Loison and Delaborde in a new position, before they should gain time to occupy it with advantage. To this plan of operations many objections have been stated. It has been said that the flank and rear of the army, when in

march, would have been exposed to the chance of attack from an enemy greatly superior in cavalry, and one not likely to be deceived by any boldness of manœuvre. The road to Mafra, for about six leagues, runs nearly parallel to a steep and rocky coast, and passes through a series of defiles, which afford no spot on which an army could form in order of battle. Had an attack been made, therefore, in such circumstances, on the army, lengthened out in a long column on the march, it cannot be doubted, that it must have contended with the enemy, under a mass of almost insurmountable disadvantages.

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On the other hand, it may be urged that before the French general could have received intelligence of the contemplated movement, the British army would have been considerably advanced on their march. That the country intervening between the direct road to Mafra, and that by which Junot, on the morning of the twenty-first, was marching on Vimiero, was of a character extremely difficult and almost impervious, and that failing in the object of attacking the British army on the march, the only alternatives which remained, were those of carrying the formidable position of Mafra, under every disadvantage, or of falling

CHAP. XI. rapidly back, by the Cabeça de Montichique, with the view of covering the capital. In either case, the difficulties of the enemy would have been prodigiously increased. Considering the character and circumstances of the armies, it is more than improbable that an attack on the position of Mafra, which did not admit of being turned, would have been attended with success. And in the attempt to cover Lisbon, the proximity of a hostile capital, the population of which would probably be roused into acts of aggression by the near hope of deliverance, must have added exceedingly to the perils and embarrassment of Marshal Junot.

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When we consider, too, that the plan in question was the deliberate adoption of a general, who has never since been known to commit his army, by any flagrant error of calculation, we shall probably be disposed to admit the conclusion, that the operation in question was founded on sound data, and that had it been carried into execution, the acquisition of Lisbon might have been effected with smaller loss, and with circumstances more honourable to our arms, than by the more timid policy which led to the convention of Cintra.

On the evening of the twentieth, however, a frigate, on board of which was Sir Harry Burrard, arrived in Marceira Bay. Sir Arthur Wellesley, thus suddenly superseded in command, lost no time in reporting to that officer the situation and circumstances of the army, and the plan of operations which it had been his intention to pursue. Of the latter, Sir Harry Burrard expressed his disapprobation. He directed the cessation of any active movements, until the army should have been still further increased by the arrival of Sir John Moore, which might be expected in a few days.

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Against this unfortunate decision of his superior, Sir Arthur, in vain, remonstrated. He assured him that the army was already fully equal to cope with that of the enemy; that, situated as it then was, an engagement was inevitable, and that the only consequence of present inaction, would be that of yielding to the enemy the privilege of choosing the moment of attack, while the greatest disadvantage would accrue from the sudden assumption of a line of operations merely defensive. Sir Arthur likewise stated his decided conviction, that the corps of Sir John Moore would more beneficially contribute to the

CHAP. XI. common cause, by marching on Santarem, and  
1808. thus narrowing and obstructing the communica-  
August. tion and retreat of the French army, than by unit-  
ing itself to a force already fully adequate to all  
the purposes it was intended to effect. Of the  
consequences to be dreaded from any demon-  
stration of vacillation or timidity, Sir Arthur  
also spoke strongly, but in vain. Sir Harry  
Burrard remained fixed in his decision ; and the  
order, which had already been issued to the  
army for resuming their march, was counter-  
manded. Instructions were likewise despatched  
to Sir John Moore, directing him to move down  
in his transports to Marceira Bay, which had  
been determined as the point of debarkation for  
his troops.

Such were the measures adopted by Sir Harry  
Burrard on the assumption of his brief command.  
That they were timid and injudicious cannot be  
denied. Yet, while we condemn the decision by  
which the projects of a greater military genius  
were at once overthrown, let us not be unjust,  
and blend our dispassionate regrets with the se-  
verity of personal censure. Thrown accidentally  
and unawares into what could only be considered  
as a situation of transient command, it was per-



haps scarcely to be expected that his measures should be marked by the confidence and boldness of purpose, which might have contributed so greatly to the success of the campaign. It was certainly not unnatural, that a person so situated should be unwilling to incur the responsibility of directing operations, of the propriety of which, and the chances of success which they afforded, he could form but a partial and imperfect judgment. Called summarily to decide in difficult and unexpected circumstances, Sir Harry Burrard will probably be considered to have decided wrong; yet he unquestionably decided to the best of his judgment. Fault, therefore, can be attributed only to those who sacrificed the interest of their country, by placing a man of narrow capacity, yet of honest intentions, in a situation for which he was manifestly unfit. That officers of such acknowledged talent and pretensions as Sir John Moore and Sir Arthur Wellesley, should have been superseded in command by Sir Hew Dalrymple and Sir Harry Burrard, is a tolerably convincing proof that the selection of military leaders, was, in those days, regulated by principles very different from that of *detur digniori*.

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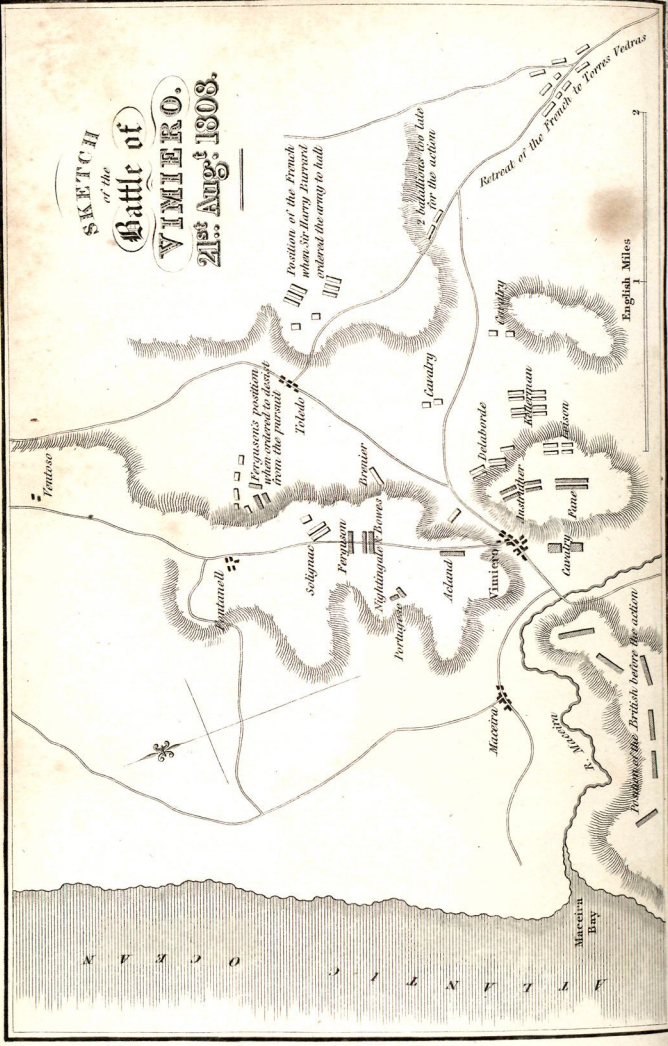
CHAP. XI. Early on the morning of the twenty-first, Sir  
1808. Arthur Wellesley visited the advanced posts,  
August. but could discern no sign of an approaching  
enemy. About seven o'clock, however, a cloud  
of dust was observed in the extremity of the  
horizon, slowly moving towards the position of  
Aug. 21. the British; and at eight o'clock a strong body  
of the enemy's cavalry was observed on the  
heights to the southward. In a short time a  
strong column of infantry appeared on the road  
from Torres Vedras to Lourinha; and it became  
evident that a general engagement was on the  
eve of taking place between the armies.

The village of Vimiero stands in a valley, watered by the little rivulet Maceira, at the eastern extremity of a high mountainous range, which extends westward to the sea. In front of the village is a hill of inferior altitude, terminating in a plateau of considerable extent, and commanded from several points. On the left is another strong ridge of heights, stretching to the eastward, and terminating on the right in a deep ravine. Over these heights passes the road to Lourinha, through the villages of Fontanel and Ventoso.

Such were the more prominent features of the



**SKETCH**  
of the  
**Battle of**  
**VIMERO.**  
21st Aug: 1808.



ground. It was thus occupied by Sir Arthur Wellesley: Six brigades were stationed on the mountain to the westward of the village. The advanced-guard, under General Fane, and the brigade of General Anstruther, with six pieces of artillery, occupied the plateau. The cavalry and reserve of artillery were posted in the valley, between the heights, ready to support the troops on the plateau, should that part of the position be attacked. The Lourinha road was guarded by the Portuguese troops and a small body of riflemen. The ground having been taken up on the previous evening, rather with a view to temporary convenience than military defence, a piquet only had been stationed on the ridge to the westward. As it was obvious, however, from the enemy's demonstrations, that the left and centre were about to become the chief theatres of conflict, the brigades of Generals Ferguson, Nightingale, Acland, and Bowes, were successively moved from the mountain on the west to the heights on the Lourinha road, in order to strengthen what was evidently the most vulnerable part of the position.

At nine o'clock the action commenced. Marshal Junot had formed his army in two divisions.