

CHAP. were not better in their kind than the guns, nor did the shells
 XXXVII. fit them better; and these wretched brass pieces failed so fast
 1811. under the heavy firing which was required, that iron guns were
 ordered from Lisbon.

June.

*Unsuccess-
 ful attempts
 upon Fort
 Christoval.*

On the 6th of June the breach in Fort Christoval was reported practicable; it appeared to be so from the trenches; and at the following midnight a storming party of 180 men, conducted by Lieutenant Forster of the Royal Engineers, who had examined the breach the preceding night, moved towards it. The palisades had been destroyed by the battery; the counterscarp at that spot was only four feet deep; the advance therefore easily descended into the ditch and reached the foot of the breach, where they discovered that, since evening closed, the enemy had removed the rubbish, and that the escarp was standing clear nearly seven feet high. The advance, after it had in vain endeavoured to get over this obstacle, might have retired with little loss: but the main body had now entered the ditch; and in that spirit of mad courage which attempts impossible things they tried with ladders fifteen feet long, which had been sent for mounting the breach with, to escalate the front scarp of the fort where it was twenty feet high; in this they persisted for an hour, while the garrison showered down upon them shells, stones, handgrenades and combustibles at pleasure, and almost as a sport; nor did they retire till they had lost twelve killed and ninety wounded, more than two-thirds of their number, Forster being among the slain. Not disheartened by this, the besiegers renewed the attempt three nights after; they were provided with ladders of sufficient length; but the enemy were now on the alert, and had strongly garrisoned the fort: the officer who conducted the advance was killed on the glacis, and the officer in command immediately on descending into the ditch: and it could not be ascertained, from the report of the

survivors, whether they had attempted a breach which, having, as on the former occasion, been cleared, had been rendered impracticable, or whether their efforts had been misdirected against the face of a demibastion which had been much injured, and might in the night easily be mistaken for a breach: but in one or other of these blind endeavours they persisted desperately under a tremendous shower of the most destructive missiles, till after an hour's perseverance, when forty had been killed and an hundred wounded, the remainder were ordered to retire.

That night's failure determined Lord Wellington to raise the siege. It had manifestly become hopeless for want of means; and the next morning an intercepted letter from Soult to Marmont was brought in, dated the 5th, and saying that he was ready to begin his march, effect a junction, and complete the object of their wishes. "If they lost no time," he said, "they might reach the scene of action before the English reinforcements arrived, and Badajoz would be saved." By other communications, Lord Wellington knew that Drouet's corps had marched from Toledo, and would probably join Soult that very day, and that Marmont might be expected at Merida in a few days; for this general, after having patrolled on the 6th to Fuentes d'Onoro and Navedeaver, as a reconnoissance, and to cover the march of a convoy to Ciudad Rodrigo, began his march the next day to the south, by way of the Puerto de Baños and Placencia: he crossed the Tagus at Almaraz, an important point, where the French, having re-established the bridge, had covered it by strong batteries. In consequence of this information Lord Wellington began to move the stores to the rear, as soon as darkness had closed. The whole loss had been nine officers and 109 men killed, twenty-five officers and 342 men wounded and prisoners: but the numerical inadequately represents the real loss in those operations for which men are either selected for their

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The siege
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*Junction of
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*The allies
take a posi-
tion within
the Portu-
guese fron-
tier.*

skill, or adventure in the hope of distinguishing themselves. On the 12th the siege was finally raised; but the blockade was still maintained, and Lord Wellington posted his army near Albuhera to cover it and to hold in check an enemy who would not again venture upon giving battle, unless with an overpowering force. The French, however, had now collected all their troops from the two Castilles, except a small garrison at Madrid, all the remains of Massena's army, and all their force from Andalusia, except what was sufficient for Sebastiani and Victor to keep up a show of inactive strength within positions where experience had now fully shown that no vigorous attack was to be apprehended. Thus they brought together a greater force than the allies could oppose to them; and though Lord Wellington was not so inferior in numbers as to have felt fear, or even doubt, concerning the issue of an action, the relative resources of the allies in men, as those resources were then managed, were not such that they could afford to win a second battle of Albuhera. The blockade therefore was raised after Marmont and Soult had effected their junction: the enemy entered Badajoz, and the allies, recrossing the Guadiana, took up a line within the Portugueze frontier. There the corps from the north, under Sir Brent Spencer, joined them. It had crossed the Tagus at Villa Velha by a floating bridge, carrying about twenty horses at a time. The spirit of our light division at this time was such that the men would suffer any thing on a march rather than be seen straggling; and in this movement two men, when ascending the hills to Niza, carried that spirit so far that they actually died of heat in the ranks. The whole army being thus united, a position was chosen in which battle would have been given if the French had attempted to enter Portugal: it was on the heights behind Campo Mayor, and the troops were bivouacked on the Caya in readiness to occupy it: their line extended from Arronches to Jurumenha, that of the enemy from

Merida to Badajoz. But though the French had brought together not less than 70,000 men including 8000 cavalry, while the cavalry opposed to them were only 3500, and the whole force not more than 56,000, they contented themselves with making a reconnoissance in considerable strength. One body of their horse got in the rear of a piquet of the 11th light dragoons: the situation was ill chosen; the regiment had arrived from England but a few days before; the men, therefore, were inexperienced in such service, and ignorant of the ground: they mistook the enemy for Portugueze; and every man, sixty-nine in number, except the lieutenant in the advance, was taken. This was the only advantage they could obtain. Another body at the same time failed in an endeavour to ascertain the position and number of the allies: their intention was perceived; the main body of the troops was concealed from them behind the hills; and after some hours' manœuvring, some skirmishing, and some firing from Campo Mayor, the guns of which fortress flanked the front of Lord Wellington's position, they desisted from their baffled attempt.

Soult affected to regret that a general action had not been brought on. He magnified the merit of the defence of Badajoz, saying, that it would be cited in military history as one of the most memorable exploits of its kind; and he magnified the importance of the junction of the two armies on the Guadiana, calling it one of the most marked events of the war in Spain. This general had a more than common interest in blazoning forth a success which covered his late defeat. "Thus," said he, "the signal victory which was gained at Albuhera has been ascertained in favour of the imperial army: the main object which I had in view was then accomplished, that of making a diversion in favour of Badajoz, and enabling that fortress to prolong its resistance. It is now evident that the battle of Al-

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*Soult boasts
of his suc-
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buhera gained us at least twenty days, during which we were enabled to make arrangements for bringing up new reinforcements, and the army of Portugal was able to take part in the operations: thus the second object which I had in view in making my first movement has been also accomplished; and the troops which fought at Albuhera have not ceased a single day to act upon the offensive against the enemy." Beyond all doubt Marshal Soult was one of the ablest generals of his age: his operations at this time were ultimately successful, but his earnestness to prove that he had gained a victory at Albuhera only shows how deeply he felt the defeat.

The French government were elated with an advantage which came seasonably after the various disgraces that the French arms had suffered in the peninsula. "The English," said they, "are again to learn, and by a mighty thunderbolt . . . (the raising of the siege of Badajoz is a presage of it), that they cannot with impunity leave the element of which they have usurped the empire." The English, however, had long been accustomed to hear of these thunderbolts, and to defy the more tangible weapons of the enemy. Soult said, in his official account, "that they appeared to have given up Spain entirely, and to be concentrating themselves for the defence of Lisbon: they felt their inability to support the contest; and every thing," he added, "induced him to think that when the army of reserve should have arrived upon Almeida, they would feel the impossibility even of maintaining themselves at Lisbon." While the enemy threw out these boastful anticipations, Lord Wellington remained in his position, watching their movements, and certain that they could not long subsist the force which they had brought together.

*Blake's
movements.*

Before the allies retreated across the Guadiana, a plan had been arranged between General Blake and Lord Wellington, that

the former should make a movement into the county of Niebla, distract the enemy's attention by threatening their rear, and take advantage of whatever favourable opportunity this concentration of the French forces might give him. Accordingly the Spaniards set out on the 18th from Jurumenha, and on the 22d reached Mertola, . . . the distance is about 110 miles, . . . but it was a most exhausting march in the midst of summer, through a dry country, for troops half of whom were barefoot, and whose commissariat was in the most deplorable state. The provisions were never sufficient to allow full rations; and though the Spaniards supported fatigue and hunger with their characteristic patience, men will not continue to undergo such privations without a strong hope that some adequate success will recompense them; and Blake had unhappily acquired the character of being an unfortunate leader.

From Mertola, he embarked his artillery for Ayamonte. The horse swam the Guadiana, the men crossed it by a temporary bridge of boats; and after resting two days to refresh the troops, he marched against Niebla. Niebla is an old town, which had fallen to such decay, that its population at this time did not exceed an hundred persons: its walls, however, were less dilapidated than its houses, and the French had repaired its castle so as to render it a post of respectable strength, from whence they domineered over the surrounding country. Blake found it stronger than he expected: he attempted an escalade in the night with ladders, which were too short, as well as too few, for the success of the enterprise; consequently the attempt failed, though the garrison did not consist of more than 300 men. He remained three days before the place, which gave the French governor of Seville time to take the field against him, and make some prisoners before his army could reach the mouth of the Guadiana, and re-embark for Cadiz. Great numbers of his men

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He fails at
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deserted during this ill-conducted expedition. Blake possessed considerable talents, but the good which those talents might have produced, when he was called to the Regency, was in great measure frustrated by his jealousy of the English. At Albuhera he seemed to have overcome this unworthy feeling; but it returned upon him, and Lord Wellington remarked, in his public dispatches, that neither General Castaños nor himself had received any intelligence from him since he began his march from Jurumenha.

*The French
armies se-
parate.*

This movement, therefore, which might have greatly annoyed the enemy, and of which such expectations had been raised, that it was at one time reported and believed Blake had actually entered Seville, ended only in the diminution of the army and of the general's reputation. But Lord Wellington had taken his measures too wisely to suffer any other evil than that of disappointed hope from this failure. He knew that the enemy could not possibly long continue to subsist their forces when thus concentrated; and accordingly, as he expected, they broke up from the Guadiana about the middle of July, having fortified the old castles of Medellin and Truxillo to strengthen their hold upon Extremadura. Soult returned to Seville; and Marmont, re-crossing the Tagus at Almaraz, went again to his command in the north. Lord Wellington then moved his whole army to the left, and cantoned them in Lower Beira, where he remained, waiting till time and opportunity should offer for the blow which he was preparing to strike.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MEASURES OF THE FRENCH IN ARAGON. MANRESA BURNT. FIGUERAS SURPRISED BY THE CATALANS. SIEGE AND CAPTURE OF TARRAGONA BY THE ENEMY, AND RECAPTURE OF FIGUERAS. CAMPOVERDE SUPERSEDED BY GENERAL LACY.

BOTH in Portugal and in Andalusia the French had at length encountered a resistance which, with their utmost efforts, they were unable to overcome : but their career of success continued longer in the eastern provinces, where their operations were conducted with more unity of purpose, and where Great Britain afforded only a precarious and inefficient aid to the best and bravest of the Spaniards.

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No sooner had Tortosa fallen, than Marshal Macdonald began to prepare at Lerida for laying siege to Tarragona. The arrival at Barcelona of a convoy of ammunition and grain from Toulon relieved him from all anxiety on that point, and left him at leisure to direct his whole attention to this great object, which in a military view would complete the conquest of Catalonia, . . any other Buonaparte was incapable of taking. Tortosa was to be the pivot of the intended operations against Tarragona first, and after its fall, which was not doubted, against Valencia ; and to facilitate these operations, Col de Balaguer was put in a state of defence, and Fort Rapita which commanded the mouth of the Ebro. These measures had been

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The Pyrenean provinces administered in Buonaparte's name.

taken when General Suchet received orders from Paris to undertake the siege, and was at the same time informed that Lower Catalonia was to be under his command. Early in the preceding year, this general had been told that he must raise in his government of Aragon means both for the pay and subsistence of his troops, France being no longer able to support such an expense; and that while he was to communicate as before with the *E'tat-major* of the army concerning military affairs, he was to receive instructions upon all matters relating to the administration, police, and finances of the country, from the Emperor alone. It was evident, therefore, that Buonaparte was as little disposed to keep faith with his brother, King Joseph, as he had been with his ally Charles IV., and Ferdinand his invited guest, but that it was his intention to extend the frontier of France from the Pyrenees to the Ebro; and in fact from that time all orders of the government in that part of the Peninsula were issued in his name. The faithful Spaniards cared not in which name it was administered, acknowledging neither, and detesting both: if they had any feeling upon the subject, it was a sense of satisfaction that their unworthy countrymen in the Intruder's service should be deprived of the shallow pretext with which they sought to excuse their treason to their country. At first this change appeared to increase the difficulties of Suchet's situation, who while he looked only to a temporary occupation of the province, would without scruple have supplied himself by force, regardless in what condition he might leave it to those who should succeed him, or what sufferings he might bring upon the inhabitants. But regarding himself now as fixed in a permanent command, it behoved him to adopt measures which, . . . if any thing could have that effect upon the Aragonese, might gradually reconcile them to subjection, by giving them the benefit of