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ERRATUM.

Page 410, for *verme*, read *berme*.

HISTORY OF THE

CHAPTER XXXIII.
1810.

HISTORY

OF THE

PENINSULAR WAR.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CATALONIA. MEQUINENZA AND TORTOSA TAKEN. EXPEDITIONS ON THE COASTS OF BISCAY AND OF ANDALUSIA. GUERRILLAS.

WHILE Lord Wellington detained in Portugal the most numerous of the French armies, defied their strength and baffled their combinations, events of great importance, both military and civil, were taking place in Spain.

The command in Catalonia had devolved upon Camp-Marshal Juan Manuel de Villena, during the time that O'Donell was invalided by his wound. He had to oppose in Marshal Macdonald a general of higher reputation and of a better stamp than Augereau. Augereau had passed through the revolutionary war without obtaining any worse character than that of rapacity; but in Catalonia he manifested a ferocious and cruel temper, of which he had not before been suspected. Every armed Catalan who fell alive into his hand was sent to the gibbet: the people were not slow at reprisals, and war became truly dreadful when cruelty appeared on both sides to be only the exercise of vin-

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*Marshal
Macdonald
succeeds
Augereau.*



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1810.

Von Staff,
296.

Siege of
Mequi-
nenza.

dictive justice: it was made so hateful to the better part of the German soldiers, and to the younger French also, whose hearts had not yet been seared, that they sought eagerly for every opportunity of fighting, in the hope of receiving wounds which should entitle them to their dismissal, or, at the worst, of speedily terminating a life which was rendered odious by the service wherein they were engaged.

The force under Macdonald's command consisted of 21,000 men, including 2000 cavalry, and of 16,500 employed in garrisons and in the points of communication; the army of Aragon also, which Suchet commanded, was under his direction. They could not in Catalonia, as they had done in other parts of Spain, press forward, and leave defensible towns behind them: it was necessary to take every place that could be defended by a resolute people, and to secure it when taken. After Lerida had been villainously betrayed by Garcia Conde, Tortosa became the next point of importance for the French to gain, for while that city was held by the Spaniards, the communication between Valencia and Catalonia could not be cut off. Tarragona and Valencia were then successively to be attacked, but Mequinenza was to be taken before Tortosa was besieged. This town, which was called Octogesa when the Romans became masters of Spain, which by the corrupted name of Ictosa was the seat of a bishop's see under the Visigoths, and which obtained its present appellation from the Moors, was at the present juncture a point of considerable importance, because it commanded the navigation of the Ebro, being situated where that river receives the Segre. It was now a decayed town with a fortified castle; the works never had been strong, and since the Succession-war had received only such hasty repairs as had been made, at the urgent representations of General Doyle, during the second siege of Zaragoza. These preparations had enabled it to repulse the enemy in three several

attempts after the fall of that city. It had now, by Doyle's exertions, been well supplied with provisions, but every thing else was wanting; the garrison consisted of 700 men, upon whose discipline or subordination the commander, D. Manuel Carbon, could but ill rely. He himself was disposed to do his duty, and was well supported by some of his officers.

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1810.

Six days after the betrayal of Lerida the French Colonel Robert was sent with three battalions to commence operations against this poor fortress; he tried to force the passage of a bridge over the Cinca, which was so well defended, that it cost him 400 men. Between that river and the Ebro, Mousnier's division approached so as to straiten the place, and a bridge of boats was thrown across the Ebro, and a tete-du-pont constructed to cut off the besieged from succour on that side. The operations were conducted with little skill or success, till at the expiration of a fortnight Colonel Rogniat came to direct them. Carbon then found it necessary to abandon the place, and retire into the Castle; to this he was compelled less by the efforts of the enemy than by distrust of his own men, who now becoming hopeless of relief, took every opportunity of deserting. His only armourer had fled, so had his masons, his carpenters, and his medical staff, the latter taking with them their stores. Four of the iron guns had burst, . . . two brazen ones were rendered useless; and the Castle, which the people looked upon as impregnable, was not only weak in itself, but incapable of long resistance, had it been stronger, for want of water: there was none within the works; it was to be brought from a distance, and by a difficult road. The governor represented to the captain-general that his situation was truly miserable; that the best thing he could do, were it possible, would be to bring off the remains of the garrison; but they were between the Ebro and the Segre, and the

May 18.

June.

CHAP. banks of both rivers were occupied by the enemy. A force of
 XXXIII. at least 3000 men would be required to relieve him . . . whereas
 1810. 500 might have sufficed if they had been sent from Tortosa in
 June. time.

*Mequinenza
 taken.*

This dispatch was brought to Villena by a peasant who succeeded in swimming the Segre with it; and an attempt accordingly was made to relieve the Castle, but it was made too late. General Doyle, whom the Junta of Tortosa had addressed entreating him to continue his services to Mequinenza, asked and obtained the command of the succours, and was on the way with them, when they were met by tidings that the garrison had surrendered. The course of the Ebro from Zaragoza was now open to the enemy, and they prepared immediately to besiege Tortosa. If Suchet had known the state of the city at this time, he might have won it by a coup-de-main. The suspicions of the people had been re-inflamed by the betrayal of Lerida; the fall of Mequinenza excited their fears; and an insurrection was apprehended, to prevent which Villena requested Doyle to hasten thither, and act as governor till the Conde de Alache, D. Miguel de Lili y Idiaquez, should arrive. This nobleman had displayed such skill and enterprise in the painful but fortunate retreat which he made with a handful of men after the wreck of the central army at Tudela, that it was thought no man could be more adequate to the important service for which he was now chosen.

June 8.

*Lili appointed to
 the command in
 Tortosa.*

*Vol. i.
 731—735.*

Tortosa.

Tortosa stands upon the left bank of the Ebro, about four leagues from the sea; it is on the high road by which Catalonia communicates with the south of Spain. Before the Roman conquest the Ilercaones had their chief settlement here, and the place was called after the tribe Ilercaonia; Dartosa was its Roman name, which either under the Goths or Moors passed into

the present appellation. It was taken from the Moors* by Louis le Debonnaire, during the life of his father Charlemagne, after a remarkable siege, in which all the military engines of that age seem to have been employed. The governor whom he left there revolted, called in the Moors to his support, and they took it for themselves. It was conquered from them by Ramon Berenguer, Count of Barcelona, in the middle of the twelfth century; and in the year following was saved from the Moors by the women, who took arms when the men were almost overpowered, rallied them, and animated them so that they repulsed the entering enemy: in honour of this event a military order was instituted, and it was enacted that the women of Tortosa should have precedence of the men in all public ceremonies. During that revolt of the Catalans which was one of the many and great evils brought upon Spain by the iniquitous administration of Olivares, Tortosa declared early for the provincial cause; but it was reduced to obedience soon and without violence, and the city, which then contained 2000 inhabitants, was secured against any sudden attack. Marshal de la Mothe besieged it in 1642, and effected a breach in its weak works: he was repulsed in an assault with considerable loss, and deemed it necessary to raise the siege. Six years afterwards the French, with Schomberg for their general, took it by storm, . . the bishop and most of the clergy falling in the breach. It was retaken in 1650. In the Succession-war this place was gladly given up to the allies by the people, as soon as the capture of Barcelona by Lord Peter-

CHAP.
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July.

* The importance which was at that time attached to it led the Archbishop Pierre de Marca to remark *cujus momenti sit Dartosa in bello Hispaniensi; quæ cum sita sit in trajectu Iberi, latam aperit viam ad faciendam irruptionem in reliquis Hispaniarum regiones, unde ex hujus urbis deditioe ingens Maurorum Sarracenorumque metus.* Marca Hispanica, 294.

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July.

borough enabled them to declare their sentiments. The Duke of Orleans took it in 1708 by a vigorous siege, and through the want of firmness in the governor; had it held out two days longer, the besieging army must have retired for want of supplies. Staremburg almost succeeded in recovering it by surprise a few months afterwards; and in 1711 he failed in a second attempt. From that time the city had flourished during nearly an hundred years of internal peace; the population had increased to 16,000; the chief export was potash; the chief trade in wheat, which was either imported hither or exported hence, according as the harvest had proved in the two provinces of Catalonia and Aragon. But during this long interval of tranquillity, while the city and its neighbourhood partook the prosperity of the most industrious province in Spain, the fortifications, like every thing upon which the strength and security of the state depended, had been neglected, and were falling to decay.

Preparations for the siege of that city.

This place, which could only have opposed a tumultuous resistance if the French had immediately pursued their success, was soon secured against any sudden attack by Doyle's exertions. He had given up his pay in the Spanish service to the use of this province, and the confidence which was placed in him by the people and the local authorities, as well as by the generals, gave him influence and authority wherever he went. Every effort was made for storing and strengthening the city, while the enemy on their part made preparations for besieging it in form. Mequinenza was their depot for the siege: from thence the artillery was conveyed to Xerta, a little town two leagues above Tortosa on the Ebro, which they fortified, and where they established a tetedu-pont: another was formed at Mora, half way between Mequinenza and Tortosa; the navigation of the river was thus secured. The roads upon either bank being only mountain paths, which were practicable but for beasts of burthen, a military road was