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XXXVIII.

1811.

June.

*The lower
town taken.*

evening of the 21st he assaulted the lower town; three breaches had been made, and with all its defences, it was in the course of an hour in his hands, at the cost of about 500 men. It is said that the same means for insuring success had been provided here as at Fort Olivo*. With the exception of a small number, all the Spaniards were put to the sword in the town, at the port, in the houses, and in pursuit. . . to the gates of the upper town; only 160 prisoners were taken, most of whom were wounded; no more than these were spared, while the number of bodies which the French collected and burnt amounted to 1350. Suchet then held forth a threat which he had now shown, that the troops whom he commanded were capable of carrying into effect: "I fear much," said he, "that if the garrison wait for the assault in their last hold, I shall be forced to set a terrible example, and intimidate Catalonia and Spain for ever by the destruction of a whole city!"

*Suchet's
threat.*

Sarsfield, who was slightly wounded in this action, embarked immediately to join Campoverde and act in the field; this he did without informing Contreras of his intention, and at a moment when his presence was more needful than it had been at any former time. An officer was appointed to succeed him as soon as his departure was known; but before that officer could repair to his post, the enemy had forced it, and were masters of the mole. Ten years had not quite elapsed since that port had been a scene of proud rejoicing, the King and Queen of Spain having visited it to inspect the works at the mole, which having

*The mole at
Tarragona.*

* Contreras insinuates as much in his account of the siege. I have heard it asserted as a thing believed by those who had the best opportunity of forming a true opinion; but the assertion was not supported by direct evidence, as in the case of Fort Olivo.

been commenced in the year 1790 were then on the point of completion. The quarries being near at hand, an enormous stone had been prepared for this occasion, on which an image of Neptune, ten feet high, was placed, with one hand reining the dolphin on which he stood, with the other holding his trident. The huge mass was raised by the exertions of three hundred men, and let down into its place in the sea, Neptune descending with it as into his own empire, amid the sound of music, and the festive discharge of artillery, and the exulting acclamations of myriads of beholders. The beach which on that day had been lined with happy multitudes was soon to become the scene of the most atrocious tragedy in this whole dreadful war.

The Junta of Tarragona were now so indignant at the conduct of Campoverde, whose futile movements at this crisis were as injurious as his inactivity, that they enclosed to him his own proclamation, issued at the time of his departure, wherein he had promised to relieve them in the course of a few days. Three weeks had now elapsed; he had been reinforced with 4000 Valencian troops on whom he had not counted when that promise was made; and there was a general outcry against his unfitness for the command. Eroles alone acted with the spirit which the exigence required, and succeeded in capturing a convoy of 500 laden mules between Mora and Falset, and cutting off part of their escort. Wherever his services were most needed, there he was always to be found, . . . seeking as little to aggrandize as to spare himself, his single object being the deliverance of his country. The magazines at Reus were not so well provided but that the loss of these supplies would have been felt by the besiegers, if the city had been defended after the manner of Gerona. But the Geronans were commanded by a man of the old heroic stamp, and they had no base examples to discourage them; whereas the garrison and the people of

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verde's
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*Ill beha-
viour of the
Spanish
frigates.*

Tarragona saw nothing in the conduct of their leaders and their countrymen but what was disheartening. While the gun-boats and launches of the British squadron were employed every night, and all night long, in annoying the enemy's working parties, there were two Spanish frigates which remained quiet spectators. While the English were removing women, children, and wounded in their transports to Villa Nueva, those frigates would not receive on board their wounded countrymen who were sent off to them; and these poor creatures were left to lie without assistance of any kind in the boats which brought them off, till relief was sent them from the British ships. This heartless disregard of all duty called forth strong remonstrances from General Doyle as well as from Captain Codrington; and it was not till above 2000 people had been removed in our transports, that the positive orders of Contreras, and the threat of General Doyle, that the captain of one of their frigates should be put under arrest if he refused to receive the wounded, compelled them to act as if they had some sense of honour and humanity. Had the Spaniards in the fortress and in the field displayed as much spirit and alacrity as was manifested by the British ships in their aid, Contreras has declared that Tarragona could not have been taken.

*Col. Skerret
arrives with
British
troops.*

Suchet meantime pushed his attacks vigorously against the only remaining defences of the city, aware that he had no time to lose, and that if preparations were made for defending the streets and houses, a war of that kind might detain him till efficient succours should arrive by sea. Sir Edward Pellew, who had just taken the command of the Mediterranean fleet, was hastening with all speed to assist the besieged; and when the enemy's batteries for forming a breach were almost completed, a detachment of 2000 British troops under Colonel Skerret arrived from Cadiz in the bay. He landed with his

engineers, and they perceived how ill the front which the French threatened was able to withstand such batteries as would presently be opened against it. There was but one point now at which a disembarkation could be effected, and that point was flanked by the enemy. The disembarkation would nevertheless have been made, and these troops would have saved Tarragona, or fallen in its defence, if Contreras had not recommended that they should co-operate with Campoverde from without: their presence, he thought, might goad that general on to action, and give reasonable hope of some decisive success in the field, from which alone he looked for deliverance. Besides, he said, the garrison was numerous enough; and as soon as the enemy should have opened their trenches, and begun to batter in breach, he had determined to abandon the place, thinking it of more importance to preserve 7000 fine troops, than to defend the ruins of Tarragona. Skerret, therefore, met Eroles, who came from Campoverde; and they agreed with Doyle and Codrington, that the best plan would be for a sally to be made from the town with 4000 men, and Skerret at the same time to land and join in it. But when they came to consult with Campoverde himself and with Sarsfield, doubts and difficulties were started; other schemes were proposed, discussed, and rejected, and at length a written project of Campoverde's was assented to. He had just before required 3000 of the best troops from the garrison: Contreras said, he would not commit such an error as to send them: he sent, however, one of the regiments which had been specified. Meantime, precious hours were let pass unprofitably by the Spaniards, and the French the while were unremittingly active in their operations.

On the 28th, a breach had been made between two bastions capable of only two, or, at the most, three men abreast. That afternoon there was a strong cannonade: it ceased, and a

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dispatch came off from Contreras to the squadron, saying that the British guns had silenced the enemy's batteries, that very little harm had been done to the place, and that the breach was nothing; yet he said, knowing the city was not tenable, he had determined upon leaving it with the garrison next day. While the British officer was reading this dispatch, the enemy were seen from the ships storming the breach, and in half an hour the place was carried. The Spaniards, disheartened by all the previous events of the siege, .. betrayed by some, and by others deceived and disappointed, .. abandoned themselves now: they were seized with a sudden panic; .. and there is nothing to alleviate, nothing to mingle with and modify the horror where-with the ensuing tragedy will be regarded as long as the history of these times shall be held in remembrance. The scene was shameful as well as shocking. Instead of maintaining the breach, as the people of Gerona had done when suffering under disease and famine; instead of attempting to cut their way through the enemy, which at one time had less wisely and less generously been intended, the soldiers fled. Without the satisfaction of selling their lives dearly or the sense of duty to console them in death, they suffered themselves to be butchered without resistance. Some of the officers tried every means to rally their men, but such efforts were in vain; that moral discipline had been neglected by which Zaragoza and Gerona have rendered themselves for ever worthy of admiration. The governor of the place, Gonzalez, with a handful of brave men, defended himself till the last, and fell. Contreras was wounded and taken prisoner. The last effort was made before the cathedral, whither a multitude of Spaniards had betaken themselves; some in the vain hope that the sanctity of the place might protect them, some that they might die before their altars, and some to avail themselves of the vantage ground afforded by the ascent, which is by a flight

of threescore steps. The conquerors made their way up under a destructive fire; and their fury, according to Suchet, knew no bounds, till upon entering the cathedral they beheld nine hundred wounded lying on the pavement. Their bayonets, he says, respected them; and he commends what he calls this trait of humanity. Little was shown elsewhere; but the carnage was chiefly among the inhabitants. Many thousands who had got over the ramparts or through the embrasures, or through the gate of St. Antonio, fled along the beach. The French field artillery and the batteries opened a fire upon this mixed and flying multitude on one part; and on another the cavalry charged among them, sabring the women and children, and trampling them down.

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Mémoires,
2. 105.

These execrable conquerors kept up a heavy fire upon the landing-place, where women and children stood grouped together, crowding to the British boats; and they endeavoured to sink the boats that were employed in this service of humanity. Suchet stated in his official account that four thousand men were killed in the city, and a thousand sabred or drowned in endeavouring to make their escape, .. "a horrible massacre had been made," he said, "with little loss on the side of the conquerors; the terrible example which he had foreseen had taken place, and would be long remembered in Spain!" From the Spaniards and from our own officers we learned what was the nature of this example, which, because it was threatened, must be believed to have been predetermined! More than six thousand unresisting persons were butchered; old and young, man and woman, mother and babe: and when the enemy had satiated their thirst for blood they turned to the perpetration of crimes more damnable than murder. In the streets and in the churches they violated women who had escaped their first fury, only to suffer now worse horrors before they died. Nuns and wives, and

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widows in the hour when they were widowed, girls and children, were seized on by these monsters, . . . and, retaining their cruelty when rage and lust were palled, they threw many of these victims, and of the wounded Spaniards, into the burning houses.

There were officers in this accursed army whose hearts revolted at the wicked service in which they were engaged, and who at all times redeemed themselves as far as they could by acts of individual humanity. What little mercy was shown at Tarragona, . . . little indeed it was, . . . was owing to such men. But General Suchet was of the school of terrorists*; his intention

* There was a town called Bedouin in the department of Vaucluse, which contained about 500 houses and some 2000 inhabitants: they had a good trade in silk, and the place was flourishing. In the month of May, 1794, the tree of liberty which had been planted without this town was cut down during the night. Fearing in those dreadful times the consequence of this act of individual indiscretion, the townsmen themselves informed the deputy Maignet of it, an ex-priest, who was then upon a Robespierrean mission in the department. This availed nothing in their favour: he issued a decree proscribing not only the people of Bedouin, but of the surrounding communes also, and condemned the town to be burnt. An officer, by name Suchet, commanded the battalion which accompanied Maignet's commission to execute this decree. Sixty fathers of families, after the mockery of a revolutionary trial, were put to death, those who were spared being placed at the foot of the scaffold during the execution. Suchet then gave the word for setting fire to the town, and it was burnt to the ground. The church was the only building which was not destroyed by the flames, and that was demolished by means of gunpowder. Such of the inhabitants as had fled were hunted out in their retreats by the soldiers of the detachment, and shot like wild beasts. The answer of Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety to the report of this transaction was, *Le Comité est satisfait de la conduite de Maignet.*

Prud'homme, Hist. des Erreurs, des Fautes, et des Crimes commis pendant la Revolution Francaise, t. 2. 170—176.

I know not whether the Suchet of Tarragona was the Suchet of Bedouin. If he was not, then has France produced two monsters of the name instead of one.

was to intimidate Catalonia and the whole of Spain by this terrible example ; and on the following morning he ordered the Alcaldes and Corregidores from the surrounding country to be brought together and led through the streets of Tarragona, that they might see the bodies which were lying there, and report to their countrymen what they might expect if they dared attempt resistance to the French ! If, indeed, at any time it were possible to intimidate such a people as the Catalans, who in all ages have shown the same invincible resolution, it would have been now, when the last bulwark of the province had fallen. By some strange imprudence the greater part of their ammunition had been deposited there, and very little remained in those parts of the country which were yet free. There still remained in the field the remains of an army which they had clothed and armed at their own cost, as well as raised among themselves ; and which, often as it had been defeated, had nevertheless shown a braver countenance to the enemy, and inflicted upon him greater loss than any other in the Spanish service. The general, however, held a council of war at Cervera ; the usual course when a commander wishes to shift from himself the ignominy of the measures which he is prepared to take. It was proposed to abandon the province, as if farther resistance were hopeless. Eroles was not present ; and though Sarsfield, who was the first to give his opinion, declared that any one who should vote for such an abandonment would be a traitor to his country, and that he and his division would stand or fall with the principality, he received only a faint and false support from Campoverde, and was consequently outvoted ; and an aid-de-camp of the general was sent to inform Captain Codrington that they were on their march to Arens there to embark, leaving their horses on the beach. Codrington replied, that having brought the Valencians thither for a special service, he felt himself bound in duty to

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Contreras,
p. 72.Campoverde
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take their division on board, and return them to the general and kingdom by which they had been spared ; but that he would not embark the army of Catalonia, and thus make himself a party concerned in the abandonment of a province which he was sent to protect. Upon receiving this answer, Campoverde determined upon marching into Aragon, . . not upon any brave attempt, but for the chance of making his way into some safer country ; a determination which so dismayed the Valencians, that nearly 2000 of them dispersed, as well knowing how much better they could shift for themselves individually than they were likely to fare in such an undertaking. The commander now began to perceive that as the English would not take away his army by sea, neither would the troops follow him by land ; and there was a general call that Eroles should take upon himself the command. But Eroles, who acted always from a worthier motive than ambition, replied to the Junta of generals, who would have conferred it upon him in obedience to the voice of the people, that as long as any of those who were his superior officers remained in the principality, he must decline it ; but that whenever, in pursuance of the resolution which had been taken, they should pass the boundaries, he would then, however unwillingly, take upon him that duty, rather than see his country thrown into the worse anarchy which must otherwise ensue.

*Eroles re-
fuses to
leave it.*

*General
Lacy ar-
rives to take
the com-
mand.*

That anarchy began already to be felt. The superior Junta at Solsona were left to learn as they could the resolution that had been taken of withdrawing the army which they had raised and provided ; and deserters were already collecting in bands and acting as guerrillas, or as banditti, as opportunity invited. But the Junta, when they laid their situation (dissembling nothing) before the British admiral, assured him that they would persevere in the contest, because they knew that the Catalans