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October.

place for embarkation. Hitherto, however, the defence had been well and fortunately conducted; and the fire of the gun-boats and from the island was so well directed, that great part of the enemy's stores and their heavy artillery had not yet been able to come through the pass of La Pena. By daybreak on the 24th, the French had brought their approaches within 400 yards, immediately opposite the north-east tower. That morning an express arrived from Cadiz, with orders for Colonel Skerret to embark his brigade; a council of war was held, but not for the purpose for which such councils under such circumstances are usually convened; . . . a right spirit prevailed among the British officers, and they determined that the place should not be abandoned. To go once in his life, as Colonel Skerret had done, to the relief of a besieged town, and see its imminent distress, without bearing part in its defence, was sufficient grief for a brave and generous man; the French had insulted and vilified him for not having done at Tarragona what no want of will prevented him from doing; opportunity was now given him of showing them his real character, and he did not fail to improve it.

On the night between Christmas eve and Christmas day, the French broke ground opposite the east tower at 400 yards distance, and on the following night they strengthened their approaches at all points, and advanced 150 yards nearer to the east and north-east towers. At both points they opened a fire from a number of wall-pieces, and fired musketry and wall-pieces through pyramids of earth-sacks from the summit of one of the hills. Thence they poured their bullets over the whole town, but the men were so well covered that little hurt was done. The fire of the garrison was equally brisk and more successful; . . . it was not, however, possible to prevent the enemy from advancing in works, carried on upon the perfect rules of

art; and in case it should be found impossible to maintain Tarifa, final arrangements were made for the order of retreat, and signals established with the island, to signify when the island was to fire on the breach, the suburbs, and on the town, so that our troops might be saved from any error in the possible confusion, and as much loss as possible inflicted on the assailants.

A heavy fire was opened on the 29th from two batteries; one bore upon the flotilla boats, which were then at anchor in the eastern bay, and they were fain to cut their cables and put to sea. This battery then threw shot and shells to almost every part of the island. The men received little hurt, for they were at work at the traverses; but two of the female inhabitants of the town, who had taken refuge there, were wounded, one losing a leg, and several horses and mules were killed. The other was a breaching battery planted in the valley, nearly opposite the Retiro tower, at three hundred yards distance. By the evening a breach about five feet wide was made to the right of this tower. The eastern tower was as yet untouched, but the enemy approached it by sap within fifty yards. Some of the inhabitants were killed and wounded in the course of the day retreating to the island. The men suffered little, for they were ordered to keep under cover. Their spirit was manifested upon an occasion which might have led to the worst consequences. One of our artillery officers spiked two guns; the troops were exceedingly indignant when it was whispered among them, and they expressed their discontent at the apprehension of being made to abandon the town, without having a fair set-to with the enemy. General Copons appeared highly enraged when he was informed of what had been done; and the temper which both Spaniards and English displayed at this circumstance

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CHAP. taught them how well each might rely upon the other in this
 XL. their common cause.

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 enlarged to three and twenty yards, and about noon a flag of
 truce arrived; . . . it was a service of danger to carry it, the day
 being so foggy, that the flag could scarcely be seen. General
 Leval, who commanded the besieging troops, summoned the
 governor, saying, "that the defence made by the fortress under
 his command had sufficiently established that fair name which is
 the basis of military honour; that in a few hours the breach
 would be practicable, and that the same honour which had
 prompted him to resistance, imposed it now as a duty upon him
 to spare the lives of a whole population, whose fate was in his
 hands, rather than see them buried amid the ruins of their
 town." Copons answered in these words: "When you propose
 to the governor of this fortress to admit a capitulation, because
 the breach will shortly be practicable, you certainly do not
 know that I am here. When the breach shall be absolutely
 practicable, you will find me upon it, at the head of my troops
 to defend it. There we will negotiate." After receiving this
 reply, the French renewed their fire upon the breach, but most
 of the balls passed through it into the houses which stood
 opposite.

The French repulsed in an assault. Preparations were now made on both sides for the assault,
 and at eight on the following morning the enemy advanced from
 their trenches in every direction. 2000 of their men moved by
 the bed of the river in front of the breach; the 87th regiment
 flanked the breach to the north and south, leaving two com-
 panies in reserve to bayonet the assailants if they should leap
 the wall. This, however, was not much to be apprehended; for
 the town is built in a hollow, and in that part the wall on the

inside was fourteen feet lower than on the out. The breach opened into a narrow street, which had been barricaded on each side, and was well flanked and secured with *cheveaux de frize*, for which the iron balconies, commonly used in Spanish towns, furnished ready and excellent materials. When Colonel Gough saw them advancing, he drew his sword, threw away the scabbard, and ordered his band to strike up the Irish air of *Garry-Owen*. The men immediately cheered, and opened their fire. The 47th, who lined a wall which descended from the south-east tower, and flanked the enemy's columns, did the same, and the carnage made among the enemy was such, that they halted for a moment, as if dismayed, then ran to the edge of the breach. This they saw was impracticable, and hurrying off under the wall, they made a dash at the portcullis. Here the barricade was impenetrable, and finding themselves in a situation where courage could be of no avail, and where they were brought down by hundreds, they fled. Colonel Gough seeing them fly, bade his band strike up *St. Patrick's day*, and the men were so inspirited, that it was scarcely possible to restrain them from pursuing the fugitives up to their very trenches*.

The enemy suffered severely in their flight; hand-grenades from the houses were thrown upon those who fled by the wall, in hope of security, and a six-pounder on the north-east tower flanked them. The two leading officers of the column remained under the wall, and were taken prisoners. A flag of truce was soon sent, to ask permission to bury the dead. About 500 had fallen; and it was a miserable sight to see the wounded crawling under the breach: about forty, many of whom were officers,

* "Colonel," said one of the 87th, the regiment which took the eagle at Barrosa, "Colonel, I only want to *taich* 'em what it is to attack the *Aiglers*."

CHAP. were brought into the town. On the part of the garrison ten
 XL. were killed and seventeen wounded.

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January.

*Effects of a
 storm on
 both parties.*

The old year was now terminated with triumph and rejoicing at Tarifa, but the new one came in with mourning. A dreadful storm of wind and rain came on from the eastward, and two Spanish gun-boats, full of fugitives from the town, were wrecked under the guns of the island. Two and forty persons perished. The inhabitants, who were huddled on the eastern side of the island, were overwhelmed by the surge, all lost their property, and many of them their lives. Many more perished by the storm than had fallen in repelling the assault. The weather, however, brought with it some compensation to the Spaniards for this destruction; the few shells which the enemy threw during the day fell dead, giving proof that their ammunition had suffered, and neither that day nor the next did they make any farther attempt on the breach, nor move any of their guns to batter a more assailable point. During the night of the first, the wind blew up many of the tents on the island, and exposed the men to the storm. On the second, the rain increased, and the wind fell; in the course of the ensuing night, a party sallied, and found the lower trenches of the enemy so flooded by the rains, that their piquets had abandoned them. Some deserters now came in, and declared that two regiments had refused to assault the breach a second time; that the sufferings which they endured from the weather had excited a mutinous expression of discontent among the foreigners in their army, and that Victor had, in consequence of these things, thought it necessary to send for Soult, who was arrived, and now at the convent of La Luz. Other deserters confirmed this account, and added, that there were about 1000 sick, and that the swelling of the rivers cut off their supplies, and was likely to cut off their retreat.

The besieged did not rely too confidently upon their good fortune, and these favourable tidings, which all appearances, as far as they could, seemed to corroborate. Ballasteros, with 2000 of his best troops, embarked at Algeziras, to assist in the defence of Tarifa; but the weather prevented him from sailing, and the commander seeing that the enemy were removing their guns higher up, and expecting that another breach would be made, applied to General Colin Campbell for a reinforcement. The light companies of the 9th regiment were immediately dispatched, and landed in the course of the day, and in the following night farther succours arrived. Toward evening, a column of the enemy was seen advancing from La Luz, and a deserter brought intelligence that they proposed to attack at the same time the town, the island, and St. Catalina, . . . a conical hill on the land side of the isthmus, which was occupied as an outwork to the island; if they failed in these simultaneous attacks, they meant to raise the siege. About an hour after night had closed, they approached close to the eastern wall, and poured a fire of musketry into the town; the whole of the garrison immediately repaired to their alarm posts, and the guards on the wall returned their fire with good effect. It was intended only for a feint, and the enemy presently withdrew. About midnight, the garrison were again called out by a firing on all sides of the town; the firing suddenly ceased, and a little before daybreak, it was discovered that the enemy had retreated during the darkness. When morning opened, nothing but their rear guard was in sight; the light troops pursued them as far as the river Salado, . . . memorable as the place where the Moors made their last great effort for the conquest of Spain, and where they received from the allied armies of Castille and Portugal one of the greatest and most important defeats which history has recorded.

The French buried their cannon and left behind them great

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 1811. part of their stores, and what they attempted to remove, the weather and the state of the roads compelled them to abandon upon the way. Their loss was computed at not less than 2500 men, . . a number exceeding that of the garrison. The siege had continued seventeen days; the wall in front of the town was but a yard thick, and incapable of bearing heavy artillery; a breach had been open in it for seven days. Here for the first time, the French learned in what manner Englishmen could defend stone walls, and Lord Wellington was about to show that they could attack them with the same spirit and the same success.

*G. Hill
 occupies
 Merida.*

General Hill, after his surprisal of the French at Arroyo Molinos, had returned to his cantonments in Alentejo watching an opportunity for a second blow. Toward the end of December, he made a rapid movement upon Merida in the hope of surprising them there also, but this was in part frustrated by the accident of falling in with a detachment which was on a plundering excursion, and which retreating with great skill and bravery before our advanced guard, gave the alarm. Upon this, the enemy evacuated the city, leaving unfinished the works which they were constructing for its defence, and abandoning a magazine of bread and a considerable quantity of wheat. The British general, then hearing that Drouet was collecting his troops at Almendralejo, marched upon that town: but the French had retired, leaving there also a magazine of flour; the state of the weather and of the roads, which were daily becoming worse, prevented General Hill from pursuing; having, therefore, cleared this part of Extremadura of the French (for they retreated to the south), he cantoned his troops in Merida and its vicinity, and waited for other opportunities and a fairer season.

*Attempt to
 carry off
 Soult.*

The Guerrillas failed about the same time in an attempt which, if it had proved successful, would in the highest degree have gratified the vindictive spirit of the Spaniards. Zaldivar

laid an ambush for Marshal Soult, and if a goatherd had not apprised him of his danger, that able commander would have been at the mercy of men as merciless as himself. A successful achievement by D. Julian Sanchez perhaps induced Zaldivar to undertake this well-planned, though less fortunate, adventure. That chieftain, soon after the relief of Ciudad Rodrigo, formed a scheme for driving off the cattle, which had been introduced into the city, and were driven out every morning to graze under the guns of the place. He not only succeeded in taking the greater part of them, but made the governor, Regnauld, prisoner, who with a small escort had crossed the Agueda, thinking himself perfectly safe, within sight of the fort and under its guns. About the same time an accident occurred, which showed the gratitude as well as the enterprise of the Spaniards. Colonel Grant, of the Portuguese army, who had on many occasions distinguished himself, was surprised at El Aceuche, and made prisoner. D. Antonio Temprano, who commanded a squadron of hussars, obtained intelligence that he had passed through Oropesa, on the way to Talavera; "and because," he said, "of the singular estimation in which this officer deserved to be held for his services," he determined, if it were possible, to rescue him: for this purpose he placed an ambush within shot of Talavera during five successive days; and on the fifth, succeeded in delivering Colonel Grant and a Portuguese officer, his companion in misfortune, at a time when they both expected to be consigned to hopeless captivity.

That Temprano's detachment should have remained five days so near a populous city like Talavera, and no information be given to the French garrison, is one of the many proofs which were daily occurring, how entirely the Spanish people hated the government which Buonaparte was endeavouring to force upon them. Meantime, even from Madrid, in spite of

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Oct. 15.

*Col. Grant
rescued by
the Guer-
rillas.*

*State of
feeling at
Madrid.*

CHAP. the vigilance of a French police, and the rigour of a military
XL. government, which, knowing itself to be detested, sought only
1811. to maintain itself by fear, the inhabitants found means of send-
ing not only intelligence, but even supplies, to their brethren in
arms. It is related in one of the Spanish journals, as a proof
of the patriotism of the capital, and the confidence which the
Spaniards there placed in each other, that a lady gave into the
hands of a carrier, whom she met in the street, and had never
seen before, a large bundle of lint and bandages, for the nearest
military hospital of her countrymen, and it was accordingly de-
livered to the Junta of Leon, to be thus disposed of. Romana's
army was clothed by contributions from Madrid.

The ambition of the French government has been at all
times well seconded by the activity and talents of its subjects,
and by that lively interest, which more than any other people
they feel for the glory of their country; but its policy has always
been counteracted by other parts of the French character. While
the Intrusive Government and the generals upon every occasion
reminded the Spaniards that they were orthodox Roman ca-
tholics like themselves, and that the English were heretics,
endeavouring thus, by raising religious animosities, to excite
disunion between them and their allies, they could not refrain
from outraging the feelings of the Spaniards, by the grossest
mockery of all things which were held sacred. Masquerades were
given at Madrid on the Sundays in Lent, and the people were
shocked at seeing masks in the characters of nuns, friars, and
clergy in their surplices, in the public places of promenade, and
at the theatre. They were still more offended at beholding one
in episcopal habits, and another with a cope, and the other
habits of the altar. At Albarracin and Orihuela, the French
gave balls, and exhibited a bull-fight on Holy Thursday, the
cost of which they levied upon the villages round about. "The

robbery," said the Spaniards, "can surprise no one after our long experience of their insolence and rapacity; but that which wounds to the quick a feeling and pious soul, is the atrocious and sacrilegious insult which these wretches offer to human nature, and to the religion of that God whom they profess to adore. Common banditti commit murder after robbery, .. but to suck the blood of a victim, to expose him to a thousand torments, and to compel him after all to outrage religion, the only consolation and hope which he has left, and to make him with his last tears deplore the most sacrilegious of their excesses, this is peculiar to Buonaparte and his soldiers."

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The conduct of the French in other respects was such as heightened this feeling of abhorrence; every where the people groaned under their exactions, their cruelties, and their intolerable insolence. It seemed as if it were the wish of Buonaparte and his ferocious agents utterly to depopulate a country which they found it impossible to subdue. Dreadful as war always is, no ordinary war could have brought upon any nation such complicated miseries. It was impossible for those even who would have been contented to bow, like bulrushes, before the storm, to obtain security by any course of conduct; the orders of the Intrusive Government were met by counter orders from the legitimate authority; and they who obeyed that authority were, on the other hand, exposed to the penalties enacted in the Intruder's name. Buonaparte and his wicked agents expected to govern Spain by terror, little thinking, when the plan of usurpation was laid, that the character of the nation would compensate for the imbecility of its rulers; that his system of terror would be met by counter terrors; and that the people for whom he proclaimed there was no safety but in obedience would, on their part, proclaim that obedience, when carried farther than mere passive and inevitable submission to

*State of the
country.*