

CHAP. the regular soldier, and half the ration of provisions, and are
 XL. clothed at their own expense. This body is composed wholly of
 1812. married men, or of widowers having children, these being the
 April. only persons exempted from the conscription: such men were
 naturally anxious and desirous of returning home, whenever,
 by means of favour or of corruption, they could obtain leave;
 in the interval of the campaign, their places were supplied by
 others of the same class; two-thirds at least of the whole number
 consisted of such raw recruits, and the others had not been ex-
 exercised one day since they were disbanded in the spring of the
 preceding year.

*Marmont
 deterred by
 a feint from
 assaulting
 Almeida.*

Marmont did not know how weak a force could be brought
 into the field rather to observe his movements than to oppose
 them; but he knew that Ciudad Rodrigo was ill-stored with
 provisions, and that the injury which Brennier had done to the
 fortifications of Almeida when he abandoned that place had
 been insufficiently repaired. Advancing, therefore, from Sala-
 manca with about 20,000 men, including 1,200 cavalry, he sum-
 moned Ciudad Rodrigo: the Spaniards had made so little pro-
 gress in repairing the works, that he might probably have car-
 ried it by escalade; but the French had now lost something of
 their confidence; he was afraid of committing himself, and
 leaving one division to blockade it, proceeded with the rest of
 his army towards Almeida. Colonel Le Mesurier commanded
 in that fortress, and its safety depended much more upon the
 character of its commander than upon its own strength or that of
 the garrison, which consisted entirely of militia. Trant, arriving
 with his division upon the Coa just at this time, and receiving
 intelligence there of the enemy's movements, proceeded without
 delay to occupy the position of the Cabeço Negro, which Lord
 Wellington had occupied during Massena's operations against
 Almeida; the French were already arriving before that place,

and it was with difficulty that a corps of between 7 and 800 Spaniards under D. Carlos d'España escaped their close pursuit and effected a junction with this body of Portuguese. It was of great consequence to communicate with Colonel Le Mesurier now. Trant, though exposed to the fire of the French advanced posts, effected this, and during a short interview, they agreed upon the course to be pursued in case Almeida should be seriously threatened; and also, that during the night an attempt should be made to impose upon the French by making show as of a considerable force upon the left bank of the Coa. Accordingly, fires were kindled to the right and left of the position; and the enemy, deceived by this easy stratagem into a belief that a corps of British troops was present, gave up their intention of assaulting the fortress; they only threw forward a reconnoitring party upon the glacis, which the Governor drove back with loss.

Had Marmont assaulted the place, he might probably have captured it, and would have found there a battering train, which would have enabled him to break ground before Ciudad Rodrigo. On the following morning he withdrew, and leaving Almeida in the rear proceeded to Sabugal, where he established his head-quarters: it was now at his option either to advance upon the Tagus by Castello Branco, or by Guarda upon the Mondego and Celorico; but his operations had neither been well concerted, nor were they vigorously pursued. His advanced guard followed the first hussars, who had been left under Major-General Alten in front of Ciudad Rodrigo, through Lower Beira, but at a distance; and they entered Castello Branco, that officer having fallen back thither, and retiring from thence before them with Brigadier-General Le Cor's brigade of militia which had been stationed there. The hospital and the stores were removed beyond the Tagus. The enemy did not cross the

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April.

*Advance of
the French
to Castello
Branco and
their re-
treat.*

CHAP. river in pursuit, and when Alten and Le Cor recrossed, the
 XL. French retreated, evacuating the city two days after they had
 1812. taken possession of it.

April.

*Marmont
 attempts to
 surprise the
 Portugueze
 at Guarda.*

Meantime, Bacellar, who had removed his head-quarters to Celorico, instructed Trant and Wilson to occupy Guarda, relying upon Dumouriez' erroneous opinion of the advantages of a position which Lord Wellington afterwards pronounced to be the most treacherous one in Portugal. They, though they were not at that time aware of the defects of the ground which they were ordered to take, would far rather have moved behind the Mondego, from whence the magazines at Celorico might have been better protected. The French were dispersed over a large extent of country for the purpose of procuring provisions, and for plunder; but Marmont, having collected about 10,000 of his men and half his cavalry, on the evening of the day on which his advanced guard retired from Castello Branco, advanced upon Guarda, expecting to surprise the Portugueze divisions there. An hundred men under a Captain and two Lieutenants had been stationed about half a mile in front of the town, on the Sabugal road. Marmont himself advancing with 500 cavalry, surprised and captured the out picquet of the party, and pushed on within 200 yards of the city, but hearing the drums beat to arms and being unsupported by infantry, he thought it prudent to fall back upon his main force. The Portugueze, who at that moment could have offered little resistance even to a less formidable enemy, soon drew up on the outside of the town, towards the danger; it was just at daybreak, and they ascertained the great superiority of the French in time to commence their retreat. Guarda being untenable, and the troops having only rations for the present day, and depending upon Celorico for supplies which would now be cut off, Trant, therefore, in concurrence with Wilson's opinion, resolved to retire behind the

Mondego, which was about six miles distant. Two battalions were continued in position, while the remainder retired through the town, and took up ground in its rear unobserved by the enemy; but no sooner were the whole set in motion than the French cavalry followed, threatening to charge the columns. The ground for about five miles was entirely open; but a regiment was successively halted in echelle for the protection of the troops in march, and by this means the movement went on in perfect order, till the moment when all danger seemed to be at an end.

Immediately before the road to Celorico reaches the Mondego, it descends a sloping ground, much broken and covered with wood. The enemy's horse was by this time pressing them close; Trant, therefore, halted his rear-guard of one battalion within the wood, about an hundred yards from the summit of the hill, where they could not be attacked by cavalry, and where by making a stand, they might have gained time for the rest of the troops to ford the river and form on the opposite side. But it had not ceased raining for some hours, and when they were ordered to fire upon some of the French who dismounted, and were firing their carabines upon them, very few of the firelocks went off; the men instantly lost confidence, and every one thought to escape unnoticed by favour of the ground. Trant presently found himself with not more than an hundred men besides the officers of his staff and of the regiment. The panic which these fugitives spread was increased by the small party of Portugueze cavalry, which having been employed thus far in watching the enemy, retreated with too much precipitation through the rear-guard, glad to find themselves in comparative safety among the trees; and some of them escaping to the main body, it was supposed from their report that the whole of the rear-guard had been cut off. All efforts of the officers were in

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*Flight of
the Portu-
gueze mili-
tia by the
Mondego.*

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vain; they took to flight; the enemy's cavalry descended the hill unopposed, and made about 200 prisoners without killing or wounding a single man. Five colours were lost in this rout, the bearers having either hid them in the wood, or thrown them into the Mondego; and a few men were drowned in hurrying over the river. Some of the fugitives hastened to Celorico declaring that the enemy were in full pursuit, and continuing their flight, they spread the same report all the way to Coimbra. It had this ill effect at Celorico that the officer in charge of the depôt there set it on fire, concluding hastily, that what these persons reported as eye-witnesses, must to its whole extent be true. But night had closed opportunely for the Portugueze; their officers succeeded in rallying them beyond the river, and the French did not attempt to pass, waiting till the morning: during the night Marmont received unwelcome tidings that Badajoz had fallen, and that Lord Wellington was on his way to the north; he therefore retraced his steps towards Sabugal, concentrated his army there, and then commenced his retreat upon Salamanca, raising the blockade of Ciudad Rodrigo. The enemy in this expedition had robbed and murdered the inhabitants as usual; but they derived no advantage from it whatever, having attempted more than they could execute, and leaving unattempted what they might have achieved.

*Marmont
 retreats.*

Marshal Beresford noticed the conduct of the militia in the severest terms; and it is worthy of remark, that the order which contained this censure found its way into the *Moniteur*, . . . of so much consequence was it deemed at Paris to depreciate the Portugueze soldiers now when the French had begun to find them formidable. An *alferes* and two serjeants were brought to trial at Coimbra, for cowardice, and for spreading fearful and false reports upon their flight: they were condemned to death and executed. The Porto militia regiment in which the panic

had begun was deprived of its colours till it should recover its character in the presence of the enemy; two other regiments which had lost theirs were not to have them restored till, in like manner, they had effaced the stain of their late conduct; and the Penafiel militia, which had lost one and preserved the other, was ordered to deposit that other with the *Camara* of their town till they should have approved themselves worthy to be intrusted with it again. As this was the only instance in which the Portuguese had disgraced themselves since their military establishment had been reformed, it was treated with the greater severity.

Lord Wellington, as soon as he heard of Soult's retreat, had put his army in motion toward the Beira frontier. He established his head-quarters at Fuente Guinaldo; the troops were cantoned between the Agueda and the Coa; and though the magazines at Celorico had been destroyed, those beyond the Douro sufficed for their supply. Here, therefore, they rested awhile to recruit their strength. Their means of transport were employed in provisioning Badajoz, and Lord Wellington prepared to follow up the brilliant successes of the campaign.

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April.

Lord Wel-
lington re-
turns to
Beira.

CHAPTER XLI.

MARQUIS WELLESLEY RESIGNS OFFICE. OVERTURES OF PEACE. MURDER OF MR. PERCEVAL. NEGOTIATIONS FOR FORMING A NEW ADMINISTRATION. SIR ROWLAND HILL'S SUCCESS AT ALMARAZ. BATTLE OF SALAMANCA.

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XLI.
1812.

*Marquis
Wellesley
resigns
office.*

*Restrictions
on the Re-
gency ex-
pire.
Feb. 13.*

THE year which had commenced thus auspiciously for the British arms was distinguished also by important events both at home and on the continent, . . . events which materially affected the conduct and the issue of the war. Early in the year Marquis Wellesley resigned the seals of his office: he could not prevail upon his colleagues in the cabinet to place such means at the disposal of Lord Wellington as might enable him to follow up his advantages with every human certainty of complete success; and he was impatient of continuing in a subordinate station to Mr. Perceval, whom he seems to have estimated far below the standard of his worth. The seals were put into the Earl of Liverpool's hands till a successor should be appointed. At this time the restrictions on the Regency were about to expire, and the Prince addressed a letter to his brother the Duke of York, saying how much it would gratify him if some of those persons with whom the habits of his public life had been formed would strengthen his hands and constitute a part of his government; and authorizing him to communicate his wishes to Lord Grey, who would make them known to Lord

Grenville. "The national faith," said the Prince, "has been preserved inviolate towards our allies; and if character is strength, as applied to a nation, the increased and increasing reputation of his Majesty's arms will show to the nations of the continent how much they may still achieve when animated by a glorious spirit of resistance to a foreign yoke. In the critical situation of the war in the Peninsula, I shall be most anxious to avoid any measure which can lead my allies to suppose that I mean to depart from the present system. Perseverance alone can achieve the great object in question; and I cannot withhold my approbation from those who have honourably distinguished themselves in the support of it. I have no predilections to indulge, . . . no resentments to gratify, . . . no objects to attain but such as are common to the whole empire."

It was not likely that this communication to the two joint leaders of the opposition would bring them to act in concert with Mr. Perceval, whom having tried and proved, the Prince would not now have abandoned. Earl Grey had said, in the debate on the address, "he should feel unhappy if he departed from that house without declaring that he retained all the opinions which he before held on subjects of great magnitude, . . . opinions confirmed by experience and the evidence of facts, . . . opinions which he should ever be ready to maintain and defend, the system that had been adopted having been, in fact, the source of almost all our present and impending calamities." Lord Grenville's language on the same occasion had been to the same purport: "The framers of the Prince Regent's speech," he said, "were the very men who by their obstinate blindness had brought the country to the brink of ruin, and who, in the midst of the distresses they themselves had occasioned, still held the same flattering and fallacious language. He would protest against a continuance of those measures which had brought such calamities on the

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1812.

February.

Communication from the Prince to the leaders of opposition.
Jan. 7.

CHAP. country, . . . calamities so real and momentous, that they must
 XLI. soon press themselves with irresistible force on their lordships'
 1812. attention, whether or not they were willing to give them the
 February. consideration they deserved. People might choose to close
 their eyes, but the force of truth must dispel the wilful blind-
 ness ; they might choose to shut their ears, but the voice of a
 suffering nation must sooner or later be heard. He still retained
 his objections to every part of the system which he had so often
 condemned ; he still deprecated that wanton waste of money and
 of all the public resources, when it was more necessary than ever
 to husband them with the most provident care."

*Reply of
 Lords Grey
 and Gren-
 ville.*

The two lords framed their reply to the Duke of York's communication in conformity with these declared opinions : " No sacrifice," they said, " except those of honour and duty, could appear to us too great to be made, for the purpose of healing the divisions of our country, and uniting both its government and its people. All personal exclusion we entirely disclaim ; we rest on public measures ; and it is on this ground alone that we must express, without reserve, the impossibility of our uniting with the present government. Our differences of opinion are too many and too important to admit of such an union : . . . they embrace almost all the leading features of the present policy of the empire." Then touching upon the state of Ireland, " We are firmly persuaded," they said, " of the necessity of a total change in the present system of government in that country."

The great body of the nation dreaded at this time nothing so much as any change in the ministry which would bring the despondents into office ; they therefore regarded this refusal of the Prince Regent's overture with the greatest satisfaction : but it gave offence to others of that party, who looked upon themselves with some reason as having been included

in the overtures, and were of opinion that they ought to have been consulted before such an answer was returned; there might have been a distribution of loaves and fishes; and though the two lords were not hungry, they were:.. this the public learned from their complaints. The seals of the foreign department were now accepted by Lord Castlereagh, who while out of office, instead of entering into opposition, had supported the measures of a cabinet whose general course of policy he approved, and in whom the ministry, if they gained little accession of strength in public opinion, obtained an active and useful colleague, on whose intrepidity and honour and straight-forward integrity they could rely.

Lord Boringdon, however, thought proper to move in the House of Lords for an address to the Prince Regent, requesting that he would endeavour to form a cabinet which might effectually call forth the resources of the empire. "The motion was founded," he said, "on his deep sense of the alarming evils which threatened the safety of the nation, and on the imperative necessity of obtaining an efficient administration capable of averting them;.. for the darkest and most gloomy prospects now surrounded us; dangers were pressing upon us on every side, and at this same time the means of averting them were weakened." The Catholic question was largely introduced in the ensuing debate; a party in Parliament using that question as a means for harassing the administration, while men of worse intentions but far greater foresight employed it as an engine by which they expected to separate Ireland from England, eradicate the Protestant Church in one country, and finally subvert the constitution of the other. But the public looked with much more interest to the opinions concerning the war expressed by those who, notwithstanding their late refusal of office, were supposed to be expectant of it; and upon this point Earl Grey's sentiments seemed to have undergone some modification. "Cer-

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*March.**Lord Boringdon's
motion.
March 19.*