

In the morning there was such a fog, and the smoke in consequence hung so, that nothing could be seen; but about nine o'clock a gentle sea-breeze began to clear the mist, and the sun soon shone forth. Sir Thomas Graham, having completed the arrangements with Sir James Leith, left him to command the assault, and crossed the Urumea to the batteries of the right attack, from whence all might be distinctly seen, and orders for the fire of the batteries immediately given, according to circumstances. Sir James held it as an article of his military belief that British troops could not fail in any thing which they undertook. He now took the opinion of the chief engineer, Sir Richard Fletcher, as to the spot from whence he could best overlook and direct the desperate service of the day; the place they fixed on was upon the beach, about thirty yards in advance of the debouche from the trenches; and there, without any cover or protection whatever, they both took their stand; for it was a maxim with him that however brave the troops, and however devoted the officers, the example of those in command was, beyond every thing, essential.

About eleven o'clock the advanced parties moved out of the trenches, and the enemy almost immediately exploded two mines, for the purpose of blowing down the wall to the left of the beach, along which the troops were advancing to the breach; the passage between the wall and the water was narrow, and they expected, by the fragments of masonry which would be thrown down, to obstruct the line of march. This intent failed; but about twenty men were crushed by the ruins of the wall. The garrison, as on the former assault, were perfectly prepared; and from the Mirador battery, and the battery del Principe, on the castle hill, they opened a fire of grape and shells upon the columns. The forlorn hope, consisting of an officer and thirty men, fell to a man; the front of the columns which followed were cut off, as by one shot; and the breach,

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CHAP. when the assailants reached it, was presently covered with their
 XLIV. bodies ; many of those who were ascending it were thrown down
 1813. by the bodies of those above them, the living, the wounded,
 and the dead, rolling together down the ruins. From the
August. Mirador and Prince batteries, from the keep of the castle,
 from the high curtain to the left of the breach, and from some
 ruined houses in front, about forty yards distant, which were
 loop-holed and lined with infantry, a concentrated fire was kept
 up ; a line of intrenchment had been carried along the nearest
 parallel walls ; this was strongly occupied, and it entirely swept the
 summit of the breach ; and, in addition to all this, the horn-work
 flanked and commanded the ascent. The tower of Amezquita,
 on the left of the breach, was the only available point of
 defence which had not been manned ; overlooked it could not
 have been by such engineers as those who conducted the defence :
 undoubtedly they considered the means which they had provided
 to be more than sufficient, and that no courage, however
 desperate, could in the face of them carry a breach which,
 upon all rules of art, was actually impracticable. That every
 art of defence which science and experience could devise would
 be practised was expected ; it was known, also, that the garrison
 were as little deficient in confidence as in numbers, and that
 they had stores in abundance ; but if there had been even a
 suspicion that the ground at the point of attack was what it
 was now found to be, it is certain that the assault, under such
 circumstances, would never have been ordered.

Nothing, in fact, could have been more fallacious than the
 external appearance of the breach. Up the end of the curtain
 it was as accessible, quite to the terre-plein, as it seemed to
 be ; but there the enemy's situation was commanding, and the
 ascent itself was exposed to the horn-work : but this was the
 only point where it was passable, and there only by single files.
 Except on this point, there was a perpendicular fall from

fifteen to twenty-five feet in depth, along the back of the whole breach, extensive as it was. Houses had been built against the interior of the wall ; these were now in ruins ; and there was no way of descending, except here and there by an end wall which remained standing ; but the very few who could by this means get into the streets were exposed to an incessant fire from the opposite houses. During the suspension of the siege, every possible preparation had been made by the enemy, with the advantage of knowing the point which would be attacked ; so that they had a great number of men covered by intrenchments and traverses in the horn-work, on the ramparts of the curtain, and in the town itself opposite the breach. The most determined courage was displayed by the troops, who were brought forward in succession from the trenches to this place of slaughter. Military duty was never discharged with more entire devotion than it was at this time both by officers and men. No man outlived the attempt to gain the ridge. The slope of the breach afforded shelter from musketry ; but the nature of the stone rubbish rendered it impossible for the working parties to form a lodgement there, notwithstanding their utmost exertions, and the troops were exposed to the shells and grape from the batteries of the castle ; and on the way to the breach so severe and continuous a fire was kept up, that Sir James Leith was obliged to send directions for removing the dead and the dying from the debouches, which were so choked up as to prevent the passage of the troops.

A plunging shot struck the ground near the spot where Sir James was standing, rebounded, struck him on the chest, and laid him prostrate and senseless. The officers near thought certainly that he was killed ; but he recovered breath, and then recollection, and resisting all entreaties to quit the field, continued to issue his orders. Sir Thomas Graham meantime accepted the offer of a part of Major-General Bradford's

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*Sir James
Leith
wounded.*

CHAP. Portugueze brigade to ford the river and assist in the assault.
 XLIV. The advance of a battalion under Major Snodgrass, and of a
 1813. detachment under Lieutenant-Colonel M'Bean, was made rapidly
 and firmly, under a very heavy fire of grape, along the beach
 and over a creek knee-deep. They got over, but not without great
 loss, and bore their part in what Sir Thomas Graham began now
 to think was an all but desperate attempt: and desperate it must
 have proved, if, upon consulting with Colonel Dickson, who com-
 manded the artillery, he had not ventured to direct that the
 guns should be turned against the curtain. A heavy fire was
 immediately directed there, passing only a few feet above the
 heads of our own troops, and it was kept up with a precision
 of practice beyond all example. The troops who were employed
 in the assault were astonished at hearing the roar of cannon
 from behind them; they saw the enemy swept from the curtain;
 a few of their own men were brought down also by the first
 discharge: the second made the intent fully intelligible; its
 effect upon the enemy was visible, and a great effort was then
 ordered to gain the high ridge at all hazards.

*Sir Richard
 Fletcher
 slain.*

At this time a shell burst near Sir James Leith, tore off the
 flesh of his left hand, and broke the arm in two places; still he
 continued to give directions, till, fainting from loss of blood, he
 was carried from the field. Major-General Hay succeeded to
 the command. Almost immediately afterwards, and nearly on
 the same spot, Sir Richard Fletcher, talking to General Oswald,
 was killed by a musket-ball, which struck him in the spine of
 the neck. This was a great loss to his friends and his country:
 he was of such amiable qualities, as well as of such sterling
 worth, that no man was ever more respected and loved; and
 that his professional talents were of the highest order had been
 shown by the lines of Torres Vedras.

*The city
 taken.*

As Sir James Leith was carried through the trenches to the
 rear, he met the remaining part of his division pressing forward

to execute his orders; and the men of the 9th regiment, recognizing their general, promised him not to desist from their exertions until the place should be taken. Just as they arrived at the breach, a quantity of cartridges exploded behind one of the traverses of the curtain; the fire of the artillery had occasioned this; and it caused some confusion among the enemy, who already apprehended that the tide of fortune was turning against them. The narrow pass was now gained and maintained; hats were waved from the *terre-plein* of the curtain; the troops rushed forward, and drove the enemy down the steep flight of steps near the great gate leading from the works into the town. The troops on the right of the breach about the same time forced the barricadoes on the top of the narrow line wall, and found their way into the houses that joined it. In many places it was necessary to apply scaling-ladders before the men could get down. At the centre of the main breach, there was an excavation below the descent, and a barricado at some feet farther back; here, therefore, any who should have descended would have been inclosed as a mark for the enemy, till the way was cleared for them by a flanking fire from a round tower on the right, which took the French in reverse. The French themselves were inclosed in a barricado between that tower and the right breach, and their dead lay there heaped upon each other. The contest was still maintained from barricadoes in the streets, and by firing from the houses; till between four and five in the afternoon, the enemy were driven from their last defence in the town, except the Convent of S. Teresa, and retired into the castle. By that time the town was on fire in many places; and, to add to the horrors of a place taken by assault, the vindictive enemy fired upon it from their upper defences, and rolled their shells into it.

About three in the afternoon, the day, which had been

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CHAP. sultry, became unusually cold; the sky was overcast, and between
 XLIV. the blackness of the sky, the rain, and the smoke, it was as dark
 1813. as a dusky evening; but when darkness would in its natural
 course have closed, the town was in flames. A dreadful night
 of thunder, and rain, and wind, succeeded; and it was made far
 more dreadful by man than by the elements. It is no easy task
 for officers, after the heat of an assault, to restrain successful
 troops who are under no moral restraint; and on this day so
 many officers had perished that the men fancied themselves
 exempt from all control. They sacked the place, and gave way
 to such excesses, that if the French could have suspected the
 state of drunkenness to which men so excellently brave in action
 had reduced themselves, they might very probably have retaken
 part of the town, if not the whole. The loss of the assailants
 amounted to nearly 1600 British and 800 Portugueze killed and
 wounded; 700 of the garrison were made prisoners.

*The French
 defeated in
 their at-
 tempt to re-
 lieve it.*

On the morning of the assault the French made a second effort for the relief of S. Sebastian's. Three divisions of Spaniards, under General Freyre, occupied the heights of S. Marcial on the left of the Bidassoa, and the town of Irun, thus covering the road to the besieged fortress. The position was exceedingly strong, the front and the left being covered by the river, and their right resting on the Sierra de Haya. They were supported by the first division of British infantry, under Major-General Howard, and by Lord Aylmer's brigade on the left, and in the rear of Irun; and by Longa's division near the Sierra in rear of their right. Still farther to secure them, Lord Wellington, knowing that during the 29th and 30th the enemy were assembling a large force at Vera, moved two brigades of the 4th division to the left of the Sierra, and occupied the heights on the right of that mountain, between the convent of S. Antonio and Vera; and Lezaca with a Portugueze brigade, to prevent it from being turned in

that direction. On the 30th also he moved Major-General Inglis's brigade to the bridge of Lezaca, and gave orders for the troops in the Puertos of Etchalar, Zugarramundi, and Maya, to attack the enemy's weakened post in front of their positions.

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Before daylight on the 31st the enemy crossed the Bidassoa with a very large force, two divisions by a ford in front of the left of the Spaniards, while a third, under protection of batteries which they had thrown up during the night, were constructing a bridge over the river, about three quarters of a mile above the high road. The two divisions immediately attacked the Spaniards along the whole front of their position on the heights of S. Marcial. The attack was made with that confidence which the French had always felt when the Spaniards were opposed to them in regular action; but the boldness with which they commenced it was ill maintained; for the Spaniards waited firmly till the assailants had nearly reached the summit of the steep ascent, then charged them with the bayonet whilst in column, and instantly broke them. As often as the French repeated the attack, so often were they driven back, some of them even across the river, where many in their haste lost the direction of the ford and perished. The division which had been pushed across the Bidassoa to protect the construction of the bridge, made a subsequent attempt on the right of the Spaniards, with no better success. But as the course of the river was immediately under the heights on the French side, and a considerable bend in that part of the stream was flanked by their batteries, the Spaniards could not prevent the pontooners from completing their work; and in the afternoon the enemy marched over a considerable body, which, with the divisions who had crossed at the fords, made another desperate attack upon the Spanish position. Lord Wellington, who pronounced the conduct of the Spaniards on this day to have been equal to that of any troops whom he had ever

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seen engaged, appeared in front of their line, at the moment when the French advanced to this last attack. He was received with loud and repeated shouts, and the men, proud of supporting in his sight the character which they felt that they had this day deserved, again beat back the assailants. They showed themselves indeed so capable of defending their post without assistance, that the two British divisions were not brought into action, the nature of the ground being such that they could not be employed on the flanks of the enemy's corps. When the French were at length convinced that all their efforts were in vain, they took advantage of a violent storm and the darkness which came on with it, to retire hastily from this front. Many took to the river in their fear, to sink or swim if they should miss the fords; and in this attempt so many were seen to perish, the river being swoln by the storm, that latterly the fugitives crowded to the bridge, and at last pressed upon it in such numbers, that it sunk beneath their weight, and most of those who were passing at the moment were lost.

About the same time that the enemy commenced their operations on this side, a very strong body of their infantry crossed the Bidassoa, in two columns, by the fords below Salon, in front of the position occupied by the 9th Portugueze brigade. Major-General Inglis moved with his brigade to their support, and finding he could not maintain the heights between Lezaca and the river, withdrew to those in front of the convent, protecting there the right of the Spanish army, and at the same time the approach by Oyarzun to S. Sebastian's. Major-General Kempt meantime moved a brigade of the light division to Lezaca, by which he kept the enemy in check; and the Earl of Dalhousie was directed likewise to support Major-General Inglis, but being engaged at the Puerto de Zugarramundi, he could not begin his march till late in the afternoon, nor arrive before the ensuing

morning, when the operations were at an end. For the enemy, when they found that Major-General Inglis was in a position from which they could not dislodge him, and knew that they had completely failed at the heights of San Marcial, felt that their situation on the Spanish side of the Bidassoa was becoming every moment more critical, and retired during the night. But the river had then so risen, and was still rising so fast, that the rear of their column was obliged to cross by the bridge at Vera: and to effect this, they attacked the posts of the light division about three in the morning. If a sufficient force could have been spared for guarding this point, a very considerable part of Soult's army might have been taken. The bridge was not wide enough for more than three or four to pass abreast, and a continual fire was poured upon it from the walls of a neighbouring convent, so that they were believed to have lost not less than a thousand men in passing. The loss of the allies on this day amounted to 400 killed, about 2060 wounded, and 150 missing, nearly 1600 of these being Spaniards. The brunt of the action had fallen upon them; and in this respect it was a day of great importance, because it made the French feel their own growing inferiority, and apprehend that St. Marcial would teach the Spaniards the same confidence in themselves which the Portuguese had learned at Busaco. Among the British officers who fell was Captain Douglas of the 51st; he is thus mentioned in a work wherein so many crimes have been recorded, because his brother officers bore this testimony to him, that he was the only man they knew of whom they could truly say there was nothing in him in the slightest degree approaching to a vice. The men of his company carried him off the field, made his grave carefully, and gave him a soldier's burial with all the marks of respect which they could bestow.

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