

CHAP.

XLV.

1813.

December.

December, Lord Wellington moved the troops out of their cantonments. The preceding day had brought intelligence that Hanover was delivered from the French . . . and that the Dutch also had risen against their oppressors, and asserted their independence. With this news to encourage them, at which even the French people appeared to rejoice, because it gave them a hope of peace, which could only be obtained by the total defeature of Buonaparte's ambitious schemes, the allies recommenced their operations on the morrow. Sir Rowland, with the right of the army, was to cross at Cambo, and Beresford to support him by passing Sir Henry Clinton's division at Ustaritz: the bridges at both places had been destroyed. The river, dividing into two branches, forms an island of considerable extent opposite Ustaritz; our piquets had previously occupied this, and here a pontoon-bridge was thrown across during the night. The bridge at Cambo had been hastily and insufficiently repaired, so that very few succeeded in getting over its broken slope. There were fords above and below; the lower was good enough for cavalry, but ten men were drowned in attempting it; the upper one, therefore, was chiefly used by the infantry, . . . and it was no easy passage, the left bank being steep, and the water rising at the time, in consequence of renewed rain. At both places, however, it was effected with little opposition, and the enemy were immediately driven from the right bank. The troops, advancing then through swampy meadow-land and very deep roads, soon found themselves on the high road from St. Jean de Pied-de-Port; and the French retired skirmishing, being followed and pressed; those opposite Cambo were nearly intercepted by Sir Henry Clinton. The enemy now assembled in considerable force upon a range of heights running parallel with the Adour, keeping Ville-Franche upon their right; and they kindled fires, as if intending to remain there. A galling

fire was kept up from the detached houses of this village ; but houses, village, and heights were carried by the 8th Portuguese regiment, the 9th Caçadores, and the light battalions of the 6th division ; and the French, after one or two hasty volleys, retired. The advance of the allies had been so much impeded by the condition of the ground, that by this time evening had closed ; and Lord Wellington contented himself therefore with the possession of the ground that he occupied.

This had been a day of great fatigue for the left wing of the army. At one in the morning the drums had beat to arms ; and, after a most toilsome march through heavy rain, the first division, under Major-General Howard, was assembled by day-break at the Plateau of Barouillet, in advance of Bidart. At dawn the rain ceased ; and the 5th division, under Major-General Hay, supported by the 12th light dragoons, was seen crossing the valley which separates the hilly ground of Biaritz from that of Bidart ; its right in communication with the first, and its left extending to the sea-coast. At eight o'clock the whole line of light troops commenced their fire ; those of the enemy contested every hedge and bank which afforded them shelter, and from whence they could take deliberate aim ; but a fire of shells from the artillery, who posted themselves on the eminences along the whole line, assisted greatly in dislodging them. The whole line gradually advanced, and the enemy retreated before them to Anglet, not venturing to await their approach. About one the first division gained the heights on the right of the chaussée, opposite to Anglet, the light infantry driving the enemy down the slopes to their intrenched camp. The 5th division made equal progress, sweeping the country between Anglet and the sea as far as the banks of the Adour ; and occupying with its light infantry the Bois de Bayonne, a large pine wood which covers the whole space on

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the left of that river, between the intrenched camp and the sea. General Alten, meantime, made a corresponding advance with the light division, between the left wing and the Nive; they drove the enemy from behind the deep morass which covered their advanced posts in front of Bassussarry, and compelled them to retreat to their intrenched camp near the Chateau de Marrac, . . . that castle to which, in the first act of this great drama, Ferdinand had been decoyed by Buonaparte.

As the movements on this side were intended only to favour the operations on the right, Sir John Hope's instructions were to return to his cantonments, and to commence retiring thither at six in the evening, unless a countermand should arrive. It began again to rain heavily in the afternoon; and the troops, supposing they were to remain on the ground which they had gained, lighted, not without difficulty, their bivouac fires; but the weather was far too bad for them to remain in such exposed situations; and at the appointed time they began their march back toward their several cantonments, the 5th division forming the rear guard. By this time it was quite dark; even the main road had been completely broken up by the passage of artillery, and of so many troops; the hollow ways were knee-deep in mud: one little drummer stuck fast in it, and was obliged to be lifted out, and carried for some distance by two soldiers; many of the men were so completely exhausted, that they sunk down by the way-side; and before they reached the place of rest, they had been little less than four and twenty hours on foot, and during the greater part of that time in a heavy winter's rain.

On the morning of the 10th, Sir Rowland found that the enemy on his side had retired into their intrenched camp, on the right of the Nive. He established himself, therefore, in the position intended for him, with his right on the Adour, his left on the heights of Ville-Franche, above the Nive, and his

centre across the chaussée at the village of St. Pierre. Marshal Beresford's troops were again drawn to the left of the Nive; and Sir Rowland communicated with the centre of the army, by a bridge which had been laid over that river. Morillo's division was placed at Urcuray, and Colonel Vivian's brigade of light dragoons at Hasparren, to watch Paris's movements, who, upon the passage of the Nive, had retired toward St. Palais.

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Thus the allied army formed a sort of crescent, which was intersected by a river, and along which the communications were exceedingly bad. On any part of this bending line Marshal Soult could direct an attack with his main force; and, if he should be repulsed, there was a secure retreat for him within his intrenched camp. Supposing, therefore, that the allies would have their principal strength on the right of the Nive to support Sir Rowland, he left just troops enough to occupy the works opposite to that General's position, and with the rest of his army moved at daybreak against Sir John Hope, expecting to overpower the left wing by numbers. The 5th division occupied the Plateau of Barouillet, having General Campbell's Portuguese brigade in its front, on the high road. Baron Alten, with the light division, was posted at Arcangues, about two miles to the right. Both were on strong ground; but there was no defensive connexion between them, except along a range of hills, which projected too much to be occupied otherwise than by small posts; and between Barouillet and Arcangues there is a broad valley, which was left almost without defence, because it was thought that Marshal Soult would not attempt to advance in this direction, with posts of such strength upon either flank.

The enemy advanced in two strong columns; one by the great road attacked the posts of the 5th division, and drove them back upon their support on the Plateau of Barouillet.

CHAP. The other, coming forward by the Plateau of Bassussarry,
 XLV. threw out a strong line of *tirailleurs*, supported by battalions,
 1813. against the light division at Arcangues; but the main body
 pushed on a little way beyond the left flank of the light
 division, and sent forward columns to attack the right of the
 5th, denoting thus an intention of penetrating between, and in
 rear of the two divisions. Soult knew not at how great advantage
 he had taken the allies: the 5th division had been separated
 during the last night's dismal march, the ammunition mules
 were not forthcoming, and when the piquets were driven in,
 there was hardly a round left. There was nothing to be done
 but to hold their ground as well as they could, till more
 troops and ammunition should arrive. Not more than eight or
 ten guns could be brought into action, because of the nature
 of the ground, . . . there being a low thick wood to the right, and
 close to the road; and on the left a rugged heath, intersected
 with gullies and ravines. The French brought more pieces
 into play, and served them with more than usual vivacity; for
 they knew their own great superiority of numbers, and were
 elated with the hope of getting to S. Jean de Luz, which was
 the great depôt of the allies. Sir John Hope, who was, with
 his staff, in the thickest of the fight, encouraging the troops by
 his example, received a severe contusion on his shoulder, and
 a hurt on his leg; and a ball went through his hat: . . . it was
 believed that, at one moment, nothing but his extreme gallantry
 saved the troops from utter confusion. Major-General Robin-
 son, who commanded the second brigade of this division, was
 severely wounded, and carried off the field. The contest still
 continued, ebbing and flowing, till the enemy pushed through
 the wood in front of Barouillet, and through a large field and
 orchard on its right, in such force, as to drive back Campbell's
 Portugueze brigade, and Robinson's, which supported it; and,

penetrating thus beyond the front of the position, they were rapidly following up their success, when a Portugueze battalion on the left flank boldly moved forward on the road, and wheeled into the rear of the wood; at the same time, the 9th British regiment, under Lieutenant-Colonel Cameron, which was on the extreme right, faced about, and, uniting with the Portugueze, charged the French columns in their rear, . . . a movement as unexpected as it was bold and well-timed. It gave the enemy a severe check at this point, and some hundred prisoners were taken. This was between two and three in the afternoon. By this time a considerable number of troops had arrived in detail; the brigade of guards, who had been ordered from S. Jean de Luz to support the 5th division, arrived just after the enemy had been thus checked; and Lord Wellington, hastening from the right wing where all was quiet, came to the scene of action. He was very much exposed this day, and unavoidably so, for there was no eminence from whence the whole field could be seen; the wood intercepted the sight, and it was necessary for him to ride from point to point. The enemy, checked though they had been, persisted in the action, and it continued till night-fall; the firing gradually ceasing as the evening closed, and the troops, after very severe loss on both sides, remaining on the ground which they had occupied in the morning. The remainder of the left wing having been brought up from its cantonments, the first division relieved the fatigued troops; and the 7th took post in rear of the position, to support either of the defensive corps.

Meantime the attack upon the light division at Arcangues had been maintained with great animation and perseverance. The enemy were repulsed in all their efforts to dislodge these troops from their defences of the churchyard and the chateau; but they retained at night the Plateau of Bassussarry, in the im-

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CHAP. mediate front of Arcangues, which joins that of Barouillet,
 XLV. before the mayor's house. The issue of the day had greatly
 1813. disappointed Marshal Soult, whose utmost efforts had been
 completely defeated by a comparatively small part of the
 allied forces, and with great loss. He suffered a farther loss
 during the night. There were with him the two German
 regiments of Frankfort and Nassau Usingen; every possible
 means had been taken for concealing from their officers the
 state of affairs in Germany; nevertheless, they discovered that
 Germany had thrown off the yoke. The French government
 had been apprehensive of this, and, in consequence, had
 recently altered its conduct towards them; instead of being
 treated with disrespect, as men who had no government which
 could protect them, they now found themselves the objects of
 marked attention; and were newly clothed, and received pay
 up to the last six months, when a year and half's was due to
 the greater part of the French army. Marshal Soult, however,
 under various pretences, had long kept them in the rear. But
 in the action of this day they were in advance, in Villatte's
 division; and that General being severely wounded, the di-
 vision was for a while without any special commander: the
 officer in command of the Nassau regiment was a Bavarian,
 but had been educated in Hanover, and for some years in the
 Hanoverian guards. Not only had the news from Germany
 reached him, but means had also been found for conveying
 to him the orders of his sovereign; he now took advantage of
 the first opportunity which had offered, and proposed to the
 Colonel of a French regiment, that his corps, with the two
 Nassau battalions, and one of the Frankfort, should occupy a
 height a little in advance of where they then were. The advice,
 though proposed with a view of going over to the allies, offered
 some feasible advantage, and was agreed to without sus-

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Two Ger-
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pcion. As it was growing dark, and the roads were intricate, it was farther proposed, that the battalions should file to their ground by different routes. The German officers were apprized of the intention, except those of the second Frankfort battalion, to which no communication could be made, its commander being badly wounded in the action. A Frankfort officer now made his way to the outposts of our 4th division, in the centre of the allies, and announced the intended defection, requiring a General officer's word of honour that they should be well received, and sent to Germany: no General being on the spot, Colonel Bradford gave his word; means were immediately taken to apprise the three battalions, and they came over in a body, 1300 men; the French not discovering their intention till just when it was too late to frustrate it. On the morrow the Colonel wrote to General Villatte, thanking him for the attentions which he had received whilst under his command; but stating that in obedience to their King's orders, his troops had quitted the service of France to return to that of their own country. Their women and their sick, who were left behind, he commended to the General's humanity; and said that his brother officers and himself freely gave up their personal baggage in performing an act prescribed by their duty. This officer seems to have united a just moral feeling to a proper sense of military honour; and he rejoiced that he had been able to bring off these battalions, without being compelled to fire on the French, in company with whom they had served so long.

In the morning the 5th division was brought a little forward, beyond the wood, and the advanced skirmishers were soon within forty or fifty yards of each other; the light troops drove in the enemy's piquets, and the most advanced sentries were again pushed forward to their own line. On this side, and also at

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CHAP. Arcangues, there was some skirmishing during the forenoon,
XLV. but with little advantage on either side: about noon the
1813. firing was suspended, the weather brightened, unarmed parties
December. were sent out to cut wood for cooking, and the men received
their rations. But about two there was a stir in the enemy's
lines; they were seen cutting gaps in the fences for the passage
of artillery; presently they attacked in great force, along
the Bayonne road, driving in the piquets, and the hill in front
of Barouillet again became the scene of contest. The soldiers
who had gone in front to cut fuel ran hastily back when they
heard the cry of "to arms," that they might get themselves armed
and accoutred; and the French, seeing them run toward the
rear, thought they had taken panic, and set up loud cheers, as
if they had now only to pursue their favourable fortune. But
the whole left wing was promptly formed in perfect order. A
feint attack was made upon Arcangues, to cover a serious
one upon the Plateau of Bassussarry. Lord Wellington's orders
were, that the piquets, in case of any serious effort, should be
withdrawn from the hill in front, but that the position in front
of Barouillet should be maintained; great efforts were made,
and the enemy every where were repulsed, Sir John Hope, as
on the yesterday, encouraging his men wherever there was
most danger: during these two days he was struck three
times; and all his staff had either themselves or their horses
wounded: Lord Wellington is said to have requested that he
would consider of what consequence he was to the army, and
not expose himself so much. When darkness closed, the two
armies were in the same position which they had occupied on
the preceding night.

The fifth division, which, after one day's severe exertion in
the worst weather, had borne the heat of the action in the two
following ones, was relieved by the first, as soon as it became